



Book Review: *Augustus Koch – Mapmaker*

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Rolf Brednich: Augustus Koch – Mapmaker, published by Steele Roberts, Wellington, New Zealand, 123 pp. (large format), EUR 61.93, 2015.

Augustus Koch was a German-born artist and cartographer who spent most of his working life in New Zealand. Apart from a brief entry in Una Platts' *Nineteenth Century New Zealand Artists*, he is almost unknown today. I had heard of him as the artist who accompanied Ferdinand Hochstetter on his epic explorations of the central North Island in 1859, but few of his illustrations seemed to have survived. With this book, Rolf Brednich has put him back in the historical record with a thoroughly researched biography, illustrated by a selection of Koch's cartoons, drawings and maps.

The basic outlines of Koch's life come from two autobiographical manuscripts, written for his family, that are now held in the National Library of New Zealand. Born into a middle class German family, he studied at the Royal Academy of Art in Berlin. His student years coincided with widespread political upheavals, and during the riots in 1848 he defended the barricades against the Prussian army. His cartoons, published in revolutionary news sheets, brought him to the notice of the authorities. He was advised to leave Berlin and spent the next 8 years as a sailor on merchant ships, travelling the world. Meeting his future wife on an emigrant ship travelling to New Zealand, he set himself up in Auckland in 1858 as a freelance artist and draftsman. Soon afterwards he was engaged by Hochstetter to make a pictorial record of his expedition through the central North Island.

It was believed that most of the illustrations of the expedition produced by Koch had disappeared, but by a wonderful coincidence they were recently discovered by researcher Sascha Nolden in an archive collection in Basel, Switzerland. Nolden has contributed the chapter on the Hochstetter expedition, illustrated by some of Koch's drawings, unseen in New Zealand for over 150 years.

Later in 1859 Koch was offered the post of chief draftsman for the newly established Hawke's Bay Provincial Council, based in Napier, where he stayed for a decade. When the central government undertook expansionary construction projects in the early 1870s, he joined the Public Works Department in Wellington as a senior draftsman and stayed in that position until he was made redundant in 1887 as part of cutbacks during the long depression. In his memoirs Koch says very little about these years as a cartographer – the bulk of his working life – and few of his maps have been previously identified. Rolf Brednich has assiduously searched map collections and archives throughout New Zealand and managed to identify an impressive number of maps bearing Koch's name. There are probably more that are unsigned. The second half of the book consists of colour reproductions of a selection of Koch's maps, showing the variety of work he undertook. It includes maps of roads, railways, construction projects and new town subdivisions from all over the country. Koch's skill in design and lithography was clearly recognised by his superiors because he was responsible for a number of coloured maps intended for public display, including Stewart Island, county boundaries, proposed railways, shipwrecks, lighthouses, and a geological map of New Zealand displayed at the 1873 Vienna exhibition.

After losing his job in 1887, Koch must have had a difficult time as he still had a growing family to support. He undertook whatever work he could pick up, including illustrations for books, most notably White's *Ancient History of the Maori*, Mackay's *Manual of Grasses*, and the *Transactions of the New Zealand Institute*. He was involved in the artistic life of Wellington and was secretary of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts for many years.

Because of the need to reproduce maps, this is a large format publication, slightly larger than A3, that needs to be examined on a table. The publisher, Steele Roberts, has done an excellent job of design and colour printing. This is a book to treasure – it has put Augustus Koch back on the map as

a significant nineteenth century artist and cartographer. But I can make a confident prediction that this is not the final word on Koch because more of his illustrations are likely to be identified now that we recognise his importance.