

The History of New Zealand House, London

Alexander Turnbull Library MS Papers-1628

Chapter One - The Early Days

It was not until the year 1852 that the New Zealand Constitution Bill was passed through the House of Commons. Then followed the creation of the Provinces and the election of Provincial Councils. After some delay, the Governor convened the General Assembly at Auckland in 1854, thus bringing New Zealand's first Parliament into existence. Although the Provinces had established Agents in the Old Country to recruit and despatch settlers, the General Government does not seem to have appointed a special "home" representative until 24th January 1860, when John Morrison was gazetted "Government Agent for the Colony of New Zealand" at a salary of £600 p.a., with offices at No. 3, Adelaide Place, King William Street, in the City of London. During Morrison's tenure of office a number of interesting events occurred. In 1863 Crosbie Ward, Postmaster-General of the Colony, was the first of a succession of Ministers who visited London from time to time on special missions - in many cases using Morrison's office as a Headquarters during their sojourn...

Reader Gilson Wood, then Colonial Treasurer next came on the scene, in 1864, but for some reason he used as his London address the Westminster Palace Hotel, instead of making his Headquarters with Morrison in the City. Probably he preferred to remain in the vicinity of Whitehall. Wood's main task was to raise a loan... for £3,000,000... "for defraying the cost of suppressing the present rebellion, for the introduction of settlers from Australia and Great Britain, and for other public purposes"... From the loan proceeds Morrison received money for the purchase of Arms and telegraphic materials, from which we deduce that his job was largely that of an Indent and Shipping Agent... Reader Wood was further charged with the organising of a system of "Emigration to the Northern Island of the Colony", and in June he appointed Archibald Clark (late of Auckland) as Agent in Scotland. W. S. Grahame (also of Auckland) and John Morrison were constituted a "New Zealand Emigration Board" (using Morrison's address) to take charge of emigration from England and Ireland. Their activities were somewhat short-lived, however, as owing to the difficulty encountered in raising enough by way of loan on the London market, and also the further difficulty of providing land for settlers, the Agents were instructed by the Government in November 1864 to suspend operations. The Board closed down in March 1865, and Clark returned to Auckland the same year, his Scottish agency having ceased to function. Morrison, in the meantime, made it his business to send to New Zealand periodical reports on the state of the Money Market in London, and to transmit copies of prospectuses of new Loan Issues.

In 1865, in the course of his varied assignments, Morrison was called upon to procure and ship to the Colony 46 nautical miles of cable for "Cook's Strait Submarine Telegraph". He called for tenders, and accepted that of Mr W. T. Henley at an inclusive price of £26, 508. For the purpose of delivery and laying the cable the chartering of a special ship was involved, and Morrison hired from Shaw Savill & Co. "The first-class clipper ship 'Weymouth' of 830 tons register, noted for her rapid passage"; the cost of hire was £2,500 - half of which was to be paid on arrival of the ship at Wellington, and the remainder upon the cable being successfully laid. Morrison attached great importance to this stipulation, and in spite of much opposition, insisted on its inclusion in the contract, so that the Government "might securely rely upon all possible aid from the officers and crew of the vessel on behalf of Shaw Savill & Co.". It so happened that, owing to an accident during the laying, the cable broke, but it was eventually successfully laid, and telegraphic communication between North Island and South Island established in August 1866.