

## Department of Lands & Survey – Record Group Finding Aids Binders

Archives NZ Reference ARNZ 22499 W5657 22499 Box 99 LS 1

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### Introduction

The Lands Department dates from 1858 when a Secretary for Crown Lands was appointed, and the Survey branch from the appointment of a Surveyor-General in 1876, but lands and survey administration began with the establishment of Crown Colony government. A Surveyor-General was appointed by Hobson in 1841 to superintend surveys and assist in settling land claims.\*

\* Governor Fitzroy started land office annexed to Surveyor General's Department 1844 – see Minutes of Executive Council 22 Mar 1844. All land communications to be made through Colonial Secretary

The Colonial Secretary initially administered crown land until a Commissioner of Crown Lands was appointed in 1849. On the conclusion of Crown Colony government, the post of Surveyor-General, which had in effect only jurisdiction over New Ulster was abolished, and the Provinces took over surveys. The General Government retained control of lands, appointing Commissioners of Crown Land for each province. Initially they were responsible to the Colonial Secretary and after 1858 to the Secretary to Crown Lands. They were expected to work closely with the provincial governments. The General Assembly passed land legislation which gave the provinces limited powers to frame their own land regulations, and implement them through Land Boards, with the Commissioners of Crown Land as ex officio chairman. Subsequently, provinces had their own particular land acts passed by parliament as they became more conscious of their needs and problems.

Such was the position when the provinces were abolished in 1876, though a number of minor developments had previously taken place in central administration. An ephemeral post of Chief Surveyor to the General Government was appointed in 1864 to survey land confiscated during the Maori war. While later, after the crown's pre-emptive right over maori land purchase had ended and machinery was created for the individualisation and registration of maori titles, several Inspectors of Surveys were appointed in 1867 to examine legal surveys before they were submitted to the Native Land Court. Perhaps more significant was the formation of an Immigration Department to administer part of the borrowing and development programme initiated by Vogel. It was established in 1870 and attached to the Lands Department in 1872, where it stayed until 1913. Concurrently, the administration of goldfields, limited as it was to supervising Provincial activities, was brought into the department. It was organised into a separate branch in 1877 before being constituted separately as the Mines Department the following year.

Abolition of the provinces brought a reorganisation of both lands and survey administration. Land Boards continued to function with members appointed by the crown, but increasingly administration tended to be centralised and made uniform. A Surveyor-General was appointed to form a new survey department, while provincial survey offices were in due course closed. General administration was integrated into one body styled the Lands and Survey Department, though maintaining separate specialist functions. The political head was the Minister of Lands and the senior professional officer the Secretary. In fact, the Surveyor-General held the post of Secretary for Crown Lands concurrently from 1878 to 1906. At district office level the posts of Commissioner of Crown Lands and Chief Surveyor usually remained separate. Probably the most significant immediate result of provincial abolition was the integration of survey administration. Land regulations were not made uniform until the early nineties. Some provincial surveys were inaccurate and had to be re-triangulated by specially appointed Deputy Inspectors of Survey. All the provincial surveys were thereafter linked up to form a national system.

A more profound change took place after abolition in the field of land policy, though this was not directly associated with it. A reorientation occurred, increasing emphasis came to be placed on facilitating land settlement by liberalising terms of purchase and lease, and correspondingly less maximising revenues. Land legislation on one hand successively liberalised terms upon which crown land could be taken up, and tightening the conditions on which the other holdings were occupied, developed and farmed. By implementing these settlement tenures the department came to have a large and growing tenantry, whose activities had to be superintended. The culmination of such liberalisation came with the Land Acts of 1892 and 1894, and they initiated a period of intensive bushland settlement. This accelerated settlement only declined when all accessible first class land was occupied between 1910 and 1920.

Organisational changes show an increasing orientation towards settlement and development. An ephemeral Forests and Agricultural Branch functioned between 1885 and 1889. It managed state forests and provided information to farmers and although it was abolished in the retrenchment campaign of the late eighties, its work was subsequently carried on first by the Agriculture Department founded in 1893, and then a departmental Forest Branch formed in 1896.

Perhaps land settlement of a different order was also contemplated; for an obscure and curious body, which appears to have been organised within the departments, existed between 1871 and 1877. It was the Confiscated Lands Department, which was created to administer land confiscated from the Maoris during the sixties, for military and ordinary settlement. It was formed as a kind of embryo within the department for expansion once the policies it was designed to implement proved successful. It was hoped to sell land not required for military settlers, to help recoup the cost of the war. Notwithstanding the good quality of some of it, the land proved to be almost unsaleable in the mid-seventies, forcing the abandonment of the scheme. Confiscated land was thereupon treated as ordinary crown land and the embryo department abolished.

Other administrative changes include a lithographic office which was operated between 1876 and 1901, when it was transferred to the Government Printing Office. Tourist centres at Rotorua and Hanmer Springs were managed from the early eighties until taken over by the Tourist Department on its inception in 1901. During the retrenchment campaign, the abolition of the Public Works Department was contemplated, and as a preparatory step road works were transferred to the department, only to be transformed into an ephemeral Road and Bridges Department in 1901. A separate audit branch responsible for examining the accounts of district offices functioned between 1892 and 1908. In 1906 a Drainage Branch was established to develop crown swampland for settlement.

The last significant task undertaken by the department during the period covered by Archives holdings was soldier resettlement after World War One. The government did its utmost to provide farms and suitable crown land for ex-servicemen. During the period the last areas of undeveloped economically valuable crown land was taken up. The period covered by the archives date from the establishment of the department as an administrative body doing what might be considered an ad hoc task of making crown land available for settlement, to a more settled time when it turned to routine duties of managing the crown's reserves and leases, together with modest redevelopment and marginal land schemes. During the pioneering period, however, it occupied an important place in New Zealand life.

#### History of the Archives

The history of the Lands & Survey Department archives is uneventful apart from a disastrous fire in 1952. The fire at the Hope Gibbon's building destroyed all Land Department yearly numbered files from 1858 to 1894, except for about eight feet of charred salvaged material. Fortunately some papers had been carried forward on to subsequent straight number and subject files, but a substantial quantity of important archives was lost. The registers to the records serves to give some indication of what was there. Apart from this the department has looked after its records well and they are therefore largely complete.

The Dominion Archivist, Dr Scholefield, took pains to find early land records, especially those relating to the New Zealand Company, and impress on the department the importance of preservation. The department responded favourably. A quantity of published material was collected during the 1920s and also in the late 1940s. The first steps toward an appraisal of departmental records were taken in January 1951 in a circular memorandum instructing officers in the appraisal and disposal of records to conserve office space, and appending a comprehensive schedule of records which could be destroyed. It noted that records of historical value should be preserved and in due course transferred to Archives. Arrangements were made in February and March 1952 for Archives Officers to undertake a survey in which to base a disposal programme. This was the year of the Hope-Gibbons fire. The disposal programme centred more in district offices and from this time a steady trickle of district records came into Archives.

The first significant transfer of head office records took place in November 1960. It was a heterogeneous, but substantial group of records. It included: Old Land Claim case files; several printed volumes of Maori deeds; some Naval and Military land claims; record book of authorities for Native Surveys; Jackson's Bay Inquiry papers; index to townships; registers of grazing and small grazing runs; record book of Special Settlement Associations; record book of Improved Farm Settlements; confiscated Lands Department records; Immigrants Land Act records; register of soldiers' holdings; departmental circulars; registers of staff; Scenery Preservation Act papers; Wanganui River Trust records; and sundry oddments. In April of the following year, a further substantial quantity was transferred: eight feet of files salvaged from the Hope Gibbon's fire; the combined Land and Survey straight number system 1894-1908; the new straight number system 1908-1913; the yearly number system 1904-1914; a quantity of registered subject files concerning legislation, conservation land offered for sale and the miscellaneous series; and papers of the Naval Military and Volunteer Land Claims 1890-1910.

In February 1963 and December 1966 the Survey Board, which was serviced by officers of the department, transferred some of its correspondence and papers. In July 1968 departmental manuals were received, and in May 1969 a quantity of maps of counties, census districts, rivers and drainage districts, and miscellaneous items. Between May 1969 and August 1971 a number of blocks of registered subject files were taken over covering the administration of reserves, and land and soldier settlements, grazing runs and miscellaneous matters. Maps from the Statutory Division were transferred in October 1971, and the Office Solicitors Lands Scales Court briefs in July 1973.

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Archives NZ Reference ARNZ 22499 W5657/101 LS 6

Land Department 1858-1876 Lands and Survey 1876- Archives Holdings 1858-

List of Series (Described within a series of Record Group Finding Aids Binders)

Registry

Surveyor-General and Secretary for Crown Lands 1876-1891; 1891-

[1] Registered files of Surveyor-General and Department of Lands & Survey 1876-1891; 1891-1914; 1914-

[2] Inward Letters of Secretary for Crown Land 1858-1891

[3] Registers of Inward Letters of Surveyor-General & Department of Lands & Survey 1876-1908

[4] Registers of Inward Letters of Secretary for Crown Lands 1858-1891

[5] Indexes of Surveyor-General 1876-1908

[6] Indexes of Secretary for Crown Lands 1858-1891

[3]-[6] Still with Lands and Survey

[7] Outward Letterbook of Secretary for Crown Land 1877

[8] Outward Circulars of Surveyor-General and Department of Lands & Survey 1876-1945

Office Papers

Surveyor-General 1877-1912

[12] Surveyor-General's Work Diary 1877-1882

[13] Record Books of Native Land Surveys 1881-1913

[14] Authorities for Expenditure 1894-1895

Secretary for Crown Land 1862-1953

[20] Papers relating to Goldfield Administration 1862-1876

[21] Orders in Council setting aside reserves 1869

[22] Special Settlement Records 1871-1903

[23] Registers of Rents of Leases under Deferred Payment System 1877-1882

[24] Maori Deeds 1877-1882

[25] Records of Financial Arrangements with local authorities 1881-1890

[26] Records of Pastoral Leases 1881-1922

[27] Records of Papers presented to Parliament 1882-1912

[28] Statistical Return 1884-1922

[29] Cash Book of Advances to Settlers 1886-1895

[30] Registers of Small Grazing Runs 1886-1921

[31] Land for Settlement Act, Land Sales Maps, Pamphlets and Plans 1893-1926

[32] Record Book of Improved Farm Settlements 1894-1912

[33] Account Book for Road-Making payments under Lands for Settlement Act 1901-1911

[34] Register of Returned Soldiers' Holdings 1916-1930

Transcript of index: [www.nzpictures.co.nz/pandoraresearchANZ-LS34-1.pdf](http://www.nzpictures.co.nz/pandoraresearchANZ-LS34-1.pdf)

[35] Office Solicitors Papers concerning land sales litigation 1943-1953

[36] Miscellaneous

[37] West Coast Regional Development Files

## Branches

- [53] Forests and Agricultural Branch 1885-1889
- [54] Accountant 1892-1893
- [55] Audit Branch 1892-1908
- [56] State Forest Branch 1899-1909
- [57] Ministers Office 1908

## Deposited Archives

- [60] Confiscated Lands Department, Inward Letters 1871-1877
- [61] Confiscated Lands Department, Register and Index to Letters 1870-1877
- [62] Confiscated Lands Department, Outward Letters 1875-1877
- [63] Ormond Military Grants Act 1878, 1879-1881
- [64] Jackson's Bay Inquiry Commission 1879
- [65] Naval and Military Land Claims Commission 1882
- [66] Naval Military Settlers and Volunteer's Land Acts 1889, 1891 & 1892, 1889-1896
- [67] Royal Commission on the Otarahanga and Ruataniwha North Blocks 1890
- [68] Wanganui River Trust 1892-1940
- [69] Naval and Military Land Claims Commissions 1896 & 1910
- [70] Scenery Preservation Commission 1903-1938
- [71] Royal Commission on Land Settlement and Tenure 1905
- [72] Manawatu Land Drainage Commission 1908
- [73] Timber and Timber-building Industries Commission 1909
- [74] Rangitaiki Drainage Board 1910-1920
- [75] Wanganui River Trust Domain Board 1910-1949
- [76] Kauri Gum Industry Commission 1914
- [77] Royal Commission on the Hauraki Mining District 1914
- [78] Royal Commission on the Nelson, Marlborough & Westland Mining District 1914
- [79] Wanganui River Reserves Commission 1916
- [80] Departmental Solicitor's Papers 1943-1950

## Appendices

- [A] Notes on the confiscated land records
- [B] List of lands open for selection 1894-1907 (LS-W)
- [C] List of officials of the Lands Department and the Survey Department
- [D] Notes on land sale plans
- [E] Note on survey regulations
- [F] List of Lands and Survey publications – Crown Lands Guides
- [G] Crown Land Administration Work Index
- [H] Supplementary series... Land 1840-1930

## District Offices

Auckland (held Auckland), Blenheim, Christchurch, Dunedin, Hamilton, Hokitika, Invercargill  
(see Record Group Finding Aid Binder LS volume 3)

Napier, Nelson, New Plymouth, Wellington (see Record Group Finding Aid Binder LS volume 4)