

HOLDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF NEW ZEALAND

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The National Archives of New Zealand is the repository for all archives of the central government of New Zealand. It does not take responsibility for local body or private archives except those of Governors and Ministers of the Crown.

New Zealand first came under the official influence of the British Government in 1833 when James Busby was appointed British Resident and was placed under the control of the Governor of New South Wales. Letters which he received from local residents have survived and are held in the National Archives. They are a mine of information about the early riotous days of pre-settlement New Zealand.

The firm establishment of Crown Colony Government dates from 1840 with the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, whereby Maori Chiefs ceded their sovereignty to Queen Victoria and in return were guaranteed the continued possession of their lands. This Treaty has considerable sentimental associations for New Zealanders, and, while it is recognised as being in the possession of the National Archives it is at present on display in the Alexander Turnbull Library.

Like all Crown Colonies the first Governors held the reins of government in their hands and for fifteen years or so almost everything of importance in New Zealand seems to be documented in their papers. With the introduction of responsible government in 1856, however, the picture began to change, and the governor was gradually left to deal only with those matters which were either specifically exempt from the control of the local ministers or were of Imperial importance. Eventually he became little more than the channel of communication between the British and the New Zealand Governments. New Zealand is fortunate that the archives of the Governor have been so uniformly well-ordered right from the beginning and that they have survived practically intact.

The Colonial Secretary was the Governor's Chief Executive. He exercised, at least till about 1858, a sort of overriding control over all officials of the central government. He received reports from and issued instructions to Resident Magistrates, Customs Officials, Protectors of Aborigines, Harbour Masters, Surveyors and Commissioners of Crown Lands. After the establishment of the Provinces in 1854, even Superintendents had to take some notice of his authority. Here in these papers which are fairly complete are documented a vast wealth of information and detailed account of life in early New Zealand. The archives of the Colonial Treasurer and of the Executive Council have also survived and have been transferred to Archives custody.

There were various attempts at constitution-making in New Zealand. The first of these resulted in the establishment from 1848 to 1852 of the Provinces of New Ulster and New Munster, each complete with a Lieutenant-Governor, Executive Council and Colonial Secretary, under the control of the Governor-in-Chief, aided by his Civil Secretary. The archives of these bodies were carefully preserved by the Colonial Secretary and eventually found their way into the National Archives. In 1854, six Provinces were established (these were later increased to ten), each with its own elected Provincial Council and elected Superintendent. The story here is not quite so happy. When, in 1876 the Provinces were abolished, their records were generally handed over, rather carelessly, to the local

Lands Offices. Some had already been destroyed but, after a number of vicissitudes, those remaining eventually found their way into the Archives.

New Zealand was largely colonised by the exertions of the New Zealand Company, which functioned from 1840 to 1850. A Principal Agent was responsible to the Governor and the Board of Directors in London, for the administration of his own settlement at Wellington, as well as for the oversight of Resident Agents situated in New Plymouth, Nelson, Otago and Canterbury. When the Company ceased to operate the records of the local agents were handed over to the Lands Offices and these have been preserved intact. In England, the Colonial Office took possession of the Company's records, but through the good offices of Dr T. M. Hocken, the duplicate copies of despatches to the Secretary of the Company were donated in 1909 to the New Zealand Government. Dr Hocken was also instrumental in procuring the duplicate despatches of the Governor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Both of these have proved invaluable for research purposes, as they include enclosures most of which had not been otherwise preserved in New Zealand.

The archives of the oldest departments have on the whole been well preserved. The most notable exceptions are those of the department of Maori Affairs. Most of the inwards correspondence received first by the Protector of Aborigines from 1840 and later by the Native Office, up to 1891, was burned in a fire which destroyed Parliament Buildings in 1907. It is fortunate that bundles of special files, relating to land blocks and important events, were housed in a separate building and survived.

From about 1858, the Central Government began a process of differentiation of function. Numbers of separate departments were set up. More and more functions were taken over from the Colonial Secretary and as the 19th century progressed into the 20th, the process developed still further.

The archives of the Justice Department and of the Army Department, dating respectively from 1858 and 1859, are reasonably complete, so also are the archives of the Immigration Department set up in 1871, for the purpose of developing planned immigration. Many districts and towns were settled by national groups of people and thus this Department's archives provide a particularly interesting insight into the early settlement of New Zealand.

Unfortunately, however, numerous fires seem to have afflicted New Zealand archives, even up to the present day. The most serious losses have occurred for the most part amongst the records of the later decades of the 19th century. In 1952, the archives of the Lands Department, from 1858 to 1894, were destroyed. Also lost were the archives of the Marine Department, up to 1913, those of the Labour Department from the 1890s to quite recent times and large quantities of inwards letters and files of the Ministry of Works from 1871 to the earlier decades of this century. True, many of these records were salvaged from the wreckage and were dried out with the aid of a dry cleaning establishment and a timber drying kiln but the loss to New Zealand historical research is irreparable.

Moreover, not all losses have been caused by fire. Many of the earlier records of departments have simply disappeared. This is especially true of the records of departments such as Health, Education, and Island Territories that were formed towards the end the 19th century. I have always felt that these losses could probably be attributed to the change in the recording system that took place in 1913. On the recommendation of the newly

appointed Public Service Commissioner, most departments ceased to register their incoming letters by the "yearly numbers system" and adopted a subject classification system, commonly called the "three number system". Perhaps as the older records became obsolete they no longer fitted into the current system and were quietly got rid of.

Records created under the new system do seem on the whole to have been better cared for and many of the older subject files of departments have been transferred to Archives custody. These include records of the Health Department, Forest Service, Lands and Survey, Industries and Commerce, Customs, Navy and Army Departments. Almost all of the Island Territories records relative to Samoa, have been received since Samoan Independence in 1962. These, together with archives of the British Consul, Samoa from 1860 to 1916 and the archives of the German Colonial Administration from 1900 to 1914, form a very useful source for research into Samoan history. There are many scholars who have taken advantage of these records.

Some effort has also been made to preserve archives accumulated by local representatives of the Central Government, such as the Magistrates and Judges of Supreme Courts, Goldfield Wardens, Customs officials and Lands Officers, but on the whole these are either still retained in departmental custody, or have been deposited, under the Archives Act, with local libraries and museums.

Like most countries of Colonial origin, New Zealand has tried to secure copies of records held in Archives in Britain and other countries. As a member of the Australian Joint Copying Project, copies of archives of the Colonial Office, War Office and Foreign Office have been procured on microfilm. Archives of the Governor and the Colonial Secretary of New South Wales relative to New Zealand, have been filmed, as has also correspondence between American consuls in New Zealand and the South Pacific, with the State Department, Washington. Archives of the French Ministry of Marine, relative to the Nanto-Bordelaise Company's operations at Akaroa and relations with Roman Catholic missionaries at the Bay of Islands, have also been copied.

Private archives held in the National Archives, include the papers of Richard John Seddon, Prime Minister from 1893 to 1906, of Sir Thomas Gore Browne, Governor from 1854 to 1861 and of William Pember Reeves, first Minister of Labour in 1892.

The National Archives is also concerned with the preservation of old films and in association with the National Film Library has had copied a number of old films, which are of interest either because of the information they contain or because they show developments in film making.

The worst features of the New Zealand archival scene are the losses caused by the series of fires in records rooms, beginning with the loss of some archives of the Governor in 1848, right through to the destruction of most of the older records of the Post Office, as late as 1961. The continued lack of space for the storage of archives, right up to 1961, meant that the Archives was powerless to do much to prevent these tragedies. But with the provision of space originally designed for a Records Centre but inevitably used to house archives, in 1961, the National Archives has been able to do much more to ensure the preservation of the archives of the Government and it is now true, of its Head Offices, at least, that the greater proportion of the older records of the Government are now safely in the custody of the National Archives.