

An Introduction to Archival Sources - Immigration

Introduction

During the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s, the Provincial Government and the General Government worked to encourage and organise settler immigration into Canterbury, as had the Canterbury Association and Nanto-Bordelaise Company before them. Between 1853 and 1876 some 61,000 immigrants arrived in the province, more than 37,000 of these being granted assisted passages by either the Provincial Government or General Government. The Government promoted and recruited immigrants in Britain, helped pay for their passage and provided temporary living quarters when they arrived.

Institutions

Canterbury Provincial Government

Between 1853 and 1876 New Zealand was ruled by a method of Government which included elements of a federal system. The archives of the provincial government in Canterbury provide an important record of life in the region during this period.

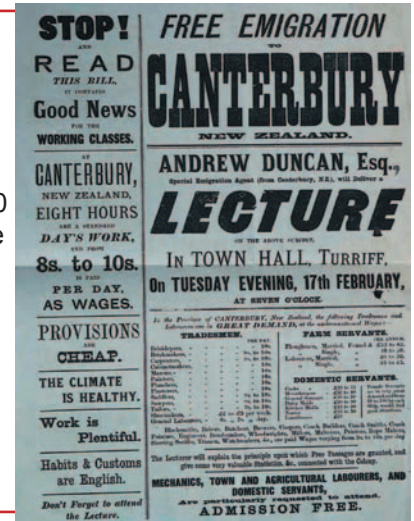
Representative government in the colony was granted in a decentralised form under the provisions of the New Zealand Constitution Act 1852, which established the Provincial Government of Canterbury (the boundaries of which stretched across the Alps to include the West Coast below the Grey River, known as 'West Canterbury'). This comprised an elected executive, in the form of the Superintendent and his executive council, and an elected legislature, the Provincial Council.

The provincial governments in the colony were given functions similar to those of local bodies in England: public works, immigration, education, public health, jails and police, but claimed for themselves other functions during their 25 years' existence. In the middle years of its existence the Provincial Government in Canterbury administered the province through the following bureaucracy:

The Provincial Secretary was the chief public servant reporting to the Superintendent, but by 1864 his department was helped by a separate Office of the Secretary for Public Works, and an officer responsible for the administration of the goldfields in West Canterbury. The three departments reporting directly to the Superintendent were therefore:

1. Provincial Secretary's Department
2. Office of Secretary for Public Works
3. Secretary for the Goldfields

The Immigration Department reported to the Provincial Secretary. In London an immigration agent help secure immigrants for the province.



General Government

The 1852 Constitution also established representative and later, responsible, government at a national level, by which the Governor acted on the advice of elected members of the national General Assembly. The General Government kept to itself control of a number of areas such as defence, justice and customs. As the spheres of administration of the general and provincial governments were not clearly set out, however, the 25 years in which this dual system was in place saw many disagreements between the General Government and the various provincial governments, and many changes in who could do what to whom.

Immigration was one of these areas of dispute and change. Until 1870 the administration of immigration into the colony was clearly in the hands of the provincial governments. Then the General Government passed the Immigration and Public Works Act in 1870 as part of the expanded programme of immigration and public works associated with the Colonial Treasurer, Julius Vogel. An Agent General was appointed in London over the agents acting for the various provinces. In 1871 it became compulsory for the provinces to put immigration under the control of the Agent General. Canterbury's immigration staff became employees of the General Government in 1872, and the provincial immigration officer became the General Government immigration officer for the province. However, the Provincial Government continued to be involved in immigration until the time of its demise.



CH287_CP 98, ICPS 943/1867 - Immigration Report

Records

The Canterbury Provincial Government Archives

These records form an extremely rich resource for the history of Canterbury in this period. The most useful sources in the Canterbury Provincial archives (CP) are three very large series:

1. Inwards Correspondence of the Provincial Secretary (ICPS) -1853-1877
2. Inwards Correspondence of the Secretary for Public Works (ICPW) – 1864-1877
3. Papers of the Provincial Council (PPC) - 1853-75

1. The Inwards Correspondence of the Provincial Secretary (ICPS)

The Provincial Secretary was the most important civil servant of the Provincial Government, and was its hub - especially from 1853-63 when there was no Secretary for Public Works. His inwards correspondence is a massive series (some 182 boxes) and it covers all possible facets of the Provincial Government's activities - immigration, education, charitable aid, health, public works (until 1864), goldfields, justice and so on.

2. The Inwards Correspondence of the Secretary for Public Works (ICPW)

This is also a very large series of correspondence and starts in 1864 when the first Secretary for Public Works was appointed. ICPW is the place to look for correspondence relating to any Provincial Government building activity - including railways, the Lyttelton rail tunnel, roads, bridges, public buildings, immigration barracks and so on.

3. Papers of the Provincial Council (PPC)

These are all the surviving papers presented to or created by the Canterbury Provincial Council in each of its 42 sessions. This series allows you to see just what the Provincial Council was doing - how it was spending its money, how policy was formulated and legislation enacted (called Ordinances). Regular reports on a variety of topics can be found in this series, and sometimes these cover the lifespan of the Provincial Government.

Other Important Series

Outwards Correspondence

There are outwards letterbooks containing copies of outwards correspondence from the Superintendent, the Provincial Secretary, the Secretary for Public Works, and the Secretary for Railways.

Inwards Correspondence of the Secretary for Railways (ICR)

For the years 1868-74 there was a separate correspondence system for the Railways Office.

Special Subject Files (SSF)

These are large files on particular subjects. They are made up of correspondence drawn from ICPS, ICPW and ICR, and were kept separate from their “mother” series - no doubt for ease of reference.

Further Archival Sources

There are within the archives of the Provincial Government many other relevant records relating to immigration and these are easy to access. Most of these are found within the series: Inwards Correspondence of the Provincial Secretary, as the Immigration Department reported to this official. Some relevant documents were taken out of this series and kept in Special Subject Files. Most documents relating to immigration in these series have been indexed. The list of immigration related documents can be browsed in chronological order (on our computerised finding aids or in hard copy) or searched by name of ship, person, topic, etc. Many are reports and letters relating to individual emigrant ships but others deal with the practical problems faced by the government in its administration of immigration into Canterbury.