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## EARLY OTAGO SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

Address delivered by Mr. C. R. McLean (former Secretary, Otago Education Board) to members of the Otago Early Settlers' Association in the Dunedin Town Hall on 22nd March, 1957.

No doubt the suggestion that I should speak to you today about the early schools and teachers of Otago arose from the fact that last year the Otago Education Board celebrated its centenary.

It was in March 1856, just 101 years ago from now, that the Otago Provincial Council passed its first Education Ordinance--what we would call today an Education Act. That Ordinance created the Otago Education Board and gave power to create school districts and elect school committees and do various other things necessary for the establishment of an education system in the new settlement.

Although there was no Board, and there were no Committees, prior to 1856, it must not be thought that there were no schools. There were, in fact, several schools prior to 1856, the first of which was established in 1848, the year that the first settlers under the Otago scheme arrived.

Even before 1848 there were some teachers—missionaries and others—who gave part of their time to teaching in their own homes, chiefly among the Maoris at Waikouaiti.

But the first real school was the one erected in Dunedin in 1848. It was erected on a site on what was then the foreshore, and is now Lower High Street, about where Sargood, Son & Ewen's warehouse now stands. It was opened in September of that year, about six months after the settlers arrived, and, like many others established in those early days, it was both church and school.

Mr. James Blackie was the first teacher of the Dunedin School, and he was the first full-time trained teacher in Otago. He had been associated with the Rev. Thomas Burns as teacher in his parish of Portobello in Scotland, and he worked in the same capacity with Mr. Burns in Dunedin. Unfortunately he contracted tuberculosis and was forced to resign at the end of two years ; and he died in Sydney a short time after.

After that the School had several changes of teachers and they all worked under considerable difficulty. There was no compulsory attendance, and although 70 pupils had enrolled the average attendance during the first half-year was only 40.

By 1853 the number of pupils had increased to about 100, but it was calculated that there were 139 others in the neighbourhood between the ages of 4 and 14 who had not enrolled, and still more in the adjacent suburban districts. The work of the teacher at that

time was extremely difficult, for he had to teach 100 pupils divided into several classes, and the irregular attendance made any continuity of instruction impossible.

It was part of the plan of the founders of the settlement that one-eighth of all the proceeds from the sale of land to the settlers was to be set aside for the erection of schools and churches and for payment of the ministers and teachers. But unfortunately the land was not taken up as rapidly as expected, and the money available was no more than sufficient to erect the first Church and School and pay the salaries and expenses for the first two years.

This meant that there was no money for schools in other places, and, as schools had been promised to the settlers before they left Scotland, this caused some dissatisfaction. There was nothing for it but for the people to do something for themselves, and, of course, that is what they did.

In 1849 at least three private schools appeared—two in Port Chalmers and one at Halfway-Bush—what we now know as Wakari. Those at Port Chalmers had a comparatively short life, but other private schools sprang up from time to time to take their places. The school at Halfway-Bush, conducted by a Miss Dunlop, continued until 1858, when a public school was established in the district. By 1851 there was a school at North East Valley, near where the Botanical Gardens now are. About the same time there was a move for the erection of a proper church and school at Port Chalmers and this was erected and opened in 1852. In the same year the settlers at East Taieri set about raising funds for a school, and it was opened in 1853. Mr. Alexander Gebbie, who had been the first teacher at North East Valley, was also the first teacher at East Taieri. He married a Miss Peterson who had been the teacher of a girls' school in Walker Street, Dunedin, and he started on the munificent salary of £40 per annum.

The settlers at Green Island Bush were also on the move. In 1853 they erected their first school, and it appears to have been opened a few weeks before the one at East Taieri. Within another two or three years schools were established in the Tokomairiro and Clutha districts.

It was at this stage that the Education Board and School Committees came into existence, and you will see that a good many schools had already been established. There may have been others but that is all that I know of.

Every School Committee had the right to appoint two representatives to the Education Board. The first committee elected was at Green Island Bush. It was the first to appoint members to the board, and it is a matter of interest that one of those first Board members was Mr. William Martin, the grandfather of Mr. William Martin, a Vice-President of this Association. And another who was appointed very soon after was Mr. James Brugh, the father of the late Mr. W. R. Brugh, until recently President of this Association.

The first five schools to come under the control of the Otago Education Board—all in the Board's first year—were those at Dunedin, East Taieri, Green Island Bush, Port Chalmers and Tokomairiro. These were the first public schools, but others were in course of erection or were being planned, and you may be interested in a few of those established during the next few years. Public schools were established as follows :-1858 : Portobello, North East Valley, Anderson's Bay, Wakari, West Taieri, Inch Clutha, South Clutha, Warepa ; 1859: Moeraki Bush (now Otokia), Waihola ; 1860: North East Harbour, North Taieri, Waikouaiti, Goodwood ; 1861: Caversham. Those are just a few, but from this time onwards more and more schools were being established all over the province, until at the end of the provincial period in 1877 there were no fewer than 173 public schools under the control of the Board.

Then, as now, Otago was blessed with some very good teachers. Mr. Blackie was the only trained teacher in the district prior to 1856, and the schools of that period had to rely on some of the better educated people in the district to do the work. But the Provincial Government showed some foresight by sending to Great Britain for a number of teachers and these began to arrive in 1856, just when the public schools were being established.

The first two to arrive were Mr. Alexander Ayson, who became the teacher at Tokomairiro, and Miss Margaret Dods, who was appointed to the Dunedin School. The next were, Mr. Alexander Livingstone who became headmaster at Dunedin, Mr. Colin Allan who went to Port Chalmers, and Mr. John Hislop who was appointed to East Taieri. Another who arrived at the same time was Mr. Adam Wright who went to Green Island, but he was not one of those brought out by the Government.

Mr. John Hislop, later Dr. Hislop, will always find a place in the history of education not only in Otago but throughout New Zealand. After five years he became Secretary of the Education Board in succession to Mr. John McGlashan, the first secretary, and he was also appointed Inspector of Schools. He was the first inspector. At the end of the provincial period he became the first Secretary of the New Zealand Education Department. He played a very important part in shaping education policy in Otago and later in New Zealand as a whole.

Mr. Alexander Livingstone was brought out to be Rector of the High School when there was no High School for him to be rector of. The Dunedin Public School of which he became the headmaster was actually called the High School for a time, and he was installed as rector at a public ceremony in which the Superintendent of the Province took part ; but it was not until 1863—seven years later—that the first High School, the Otago Boys' High School, was established.

I wish I had time to tell you of various other matters of interest ; I would have liked to tell you about more of the old schools and teachers ; about the construction of the schools and the lack of convenience and equipment in them in comparison with our modern schools ; about the public examinations which were attended by large numbers of parents

and others before whom the children were called upon to answer questions ; and about the private schools, and various other things. The private schools, of which there were many, made an important contribution to the educational development of the province in those early years.

In conclusion, I want to say that I think our early teachers and administrators succeeded to a far greater extent than ever they could have realised. They met with tremendous difficulties and a good deal of criticism. As I told you earlier, a great many children didn't enrol, and others attended very irregularly. The roads in country districts were often impassable. In fact, in some places roads were non-existent, and the distance of some of the homes from school was considerable. In these circumstances some irregularity of attendance was not to be wondered at.

Notwithstanding these and all the other difficulties, our education system was laid on a sound foundation. When the provincial period came to an end the Otago system bore comparison with that of any other province, and was the envy of most. A great deal of the credit for that must undoubtedly go to our early teachers and all those who were responsible for founding our education system.

At any rate our early schools and teachers helped to produce men and women of fine character, and with grit and determination. And on this anniversary occasion it is well that we should remember them with gratitude, and honour them for their great achievements.