

Extracts from Mackay's Otago and West Coast Goldfields Almanac, 1869

Narrative of Events, 1868

January

Great excitement was occasioned throughout the colony by the information received of the wreck of the 'General Grant' at the Auckland Isles, and the arrival at Southland this month of the survivors of that ill-fated vessel, which left Melbourne for London on the 4th of May, 1866 with 59 passengers and a crew of 24. The 15 survivors of the wreck had lived upon these islands until rescued by the 'Amherst' on the 10th instant, and conveyed to Southland. A subsequent search amongst the islands was made, but no further survivors or other castaways were to be found. Stores of provisions, however, were left in case of a similar casualty.

February

This month will long be held in remembrance by the settlers of Otago, and the colony generally, as that in which occurred the great flood of 1868. Homesteads were washed away, and their inhabitants left house-less, barely escaping with their lives. At Totara, near Oamaru, the stream, usually small, rose so rapidly during the night that several dwellings were washed away before their sleeping occupants had time or opportunity offered to effect an escape, and nine persons thus perished. Two lives were also lost in the south, and considering the extent of the flood, and the immense amount of property destroyed, the wonder was that more human life was not sacrificed.

The annual meeting of the Otago Benevolent Institution took place on the 4th instant. The receipts during the year were reported at 13,480 14s 4d. The total numbers who had received relief during the same period were : 15 men, 87 women and 223 children.

March

The Government notified that henceforth whaling vessels visiting 'Port Otago for repairs would have all provincial port charges remitted.

April

The annual Colonial Rifle Match commenced at Wellington on the 27th inst., when for the third time, the champion belt was brought to Otago—Mr. W. Taylor (No. 2 Scottish Company) being the winner upon this occasion and upon their return a ball was given in the new Post Office (340 present) in honour of the Otago Representatives.

May

The foundation stone of the new First Church of Otago was laid by the venerable pastor of the congregation—the Rev. Dr. Burns, on the 29th inst. The contract price is 114,000, and the structure will in every respect prove a worthy memorial of the establishment of Presbyterianism in the province.

June

During the month the new Auckland gold-fields began to attract a large number of our digging population and surplus commercial men.

July

On the evening of the 17th inst. a fire broke out in the Commercial Sale Yards Rattray-street, and from their central position in the most valuable block of buildings in the city, this threatened to prove the most disastrous conflagration which had yet occurred in the colony ; but fortunately through the absence of wind, and the presence of a plentiful water supply, energetically applied by an efficient fire brigade, the fire was got under before having accomplished the anticipated results ; still some half dozen stores and their contents were completely burnt, and a great quantity of goods were also destroyed by hasty removal from premises in the neighbourhood. Several horses perished in the flames before they could be removed from the Commercial Sale yards.

August

On the 15th inst., a great marine disturbance occurred all along the east coast of New Zealand. At Oamaru the tide rose and fell 20 feet in a few minutes, and this was repeated five times within the space of twenty minutes. At Otago Heads a similar rise and fall was observed, and inside the inner Harbour the tide rose seven knots an hour, swinging the vessels and carrying away several buoys. For a distance of over ten miles up the Taieri river, a great rise and sudden reflux of the water was also observed.

September

The Provincial Engineer succeeded in producing from the famed Moeraki boulders a cement superior to the best Portland cement imported. The Otago Museum (New Post Office) was opened in the 15th instant.

October

The General Synod of New Zealand having met at Auckland, decided not to confirm the appointment of Dr. Jenner as Bishop of Dunedin, and requested him to withdraw his claim for the sake of peace. The new bridge over the Molyneux, at the Clutha Ferry, was opened by his Honor the Superintendent, in presence of a large concourse of spectators, on the 8th instant.

November

A public meeting, convened by his Honor the Superintendent, to take into consideration the serious condition of affairs in the North, took place opposite the Provincial Buildings on the 24th instant, but, owing to the introduction of party politics, the meeting terminated without attaining the object for which it was called.

December

An Intercolonial Volunteer Rifle Match between Otago and Victoria resulted in a victory to the former by 129 points. The Provincial Government offered D50 as a bonus to the first vessel which shall clear Otago Heads on a whaling cruise.

Extensive additions have been made upon the Braeside Brick Works, North-East Valley, now owned by Messrs. Hutchison and Co., who have introduced steam power in their manufacture, by which aid many thousands of bricks are produced daily. Mr. Lambert has arrived at great perfection in the production of Ornamental Vases, and other articles of pottery at the Water of Leith Brick and Tile Works.

The work of harbour reclamation has been constantly going on since February last, when the steam dredge "New Era" commenced operations, in forming a deep water channel from Rattray street jetty, raising hundreds of tons daily and depositing the stuff outside the training wall, which has been erected for its reception.

Prison labour is being employed to reduce the level of Pitt street. The Water of Leith bridge having been destroyed by the late floods, a new and handsome bridge has been erected of Oamaru stone. The permanent fittings in the Provincial Council Hall have been completed in a handsome and suitable style. Messrs. A. and T. Burt and- W. Wilson of the Dunedin foundry, are each manufacturing water-power engines displaying considerable ingenuity, and so reasonable in price as to suit many branches of trade in Dunedin ; the motive power is supplied from the Water Co.'s mains, and no doubt many will avail themselves of so valuable a labour-saving invention. Numerous flax dressing works have been erected throughout the Province, and no doubt its preparation for the Home market is yet destined to become a most important branch of local industry. Nearly five hundred miles of main road have now been formed throughout Otago, most of which is metalled, and district roads are being constructed with a rapidity which will speedily accomplish the requirements of settlement in the most distant corners of the Province.