

Extracts from
MACKAY'S OTAGO ALMANAC, 1868

Narrative of Events, 1867

Upwards of six years have now elapsed since the discovery of gold in Otago, which event must long continue to be considered as the chief distinguishing landmark, from which to commence its career of any importance as a Province. Previous to that period, like the other provinces of New Zealand, its progress had been slow as compared with that of the past six years ; still, its pastoral and agricultural interests had been of steady growth, and formed a suitable groundwork upon which speedily to improve by the fortuitous golden shower which unexpectedly came upon it—eclipsing for a time the most important of all our previous interests. The first three years showed a steady and satisfactory yearly increase of the precious metal ; but, unfortunately, the past three years have shown a decrease as marked, whereas the exports of wool have shown, year by year, an increase even more striking than the produce of the precious metal, even in the three years of greatest mining prosperity; and this year the value of the wool produce of Otago is considerably greater than that of gold.

The squatter has acted as the harbinger or forerunner of the agriculturist. For a time the miner set aside the claims of both, although he became their best friend in lavishly contributing golden treasure in return for the stock of the squatter, and the produce of the farmer.

JANUARY—The second annual Volunteer Encampment took place at the Kaikorai, from, Saturday, the 29th ult., to Tuesday, 1st inst.—from 250 to 300 men being accommodated in tents on the ground. The tedium of camping out during a storm, which carried away the majority of the tents, being relieved by Divine service, concert, ball and public dinner, held during the short campaign, which closed with a review by His Honor the Superintendent. A bazaar was held in the Provincial Hall in aid of the building fund of St. Joseph's (Roman Catholic) Church from the 2nd to the 8th inst. when a very handsome amount was realised—probably little short of £1,000.

The annual report of the Benevolent Institution showed a total income for the year of £2,025; 429 persons having met with out-door relief, besides 61 persons admitted to the Asylum since its opening in April previous.

FEBRUARY.—H.M.S. "Brisk" arrived at Port Chalmers with his Excellency Sir George Grey, Governor of New Zealand, on the evening of the 13th instant—this being his Excellency's fourth visit to Otago, and the first since his second appointment. Landing on the following morning, the cortege proceeded to Dunedin; and during the month spent in the Province, the receptions given throughout were worthy of Royalty itself. Ten days were spent in Dunedin amid scenes of daily festivity, consisting of processions, illuminations, fetes, regattas, concerts, theatres, balls, levees, reviews, &c., &c., and on the 23rd his Excellency left for a grand Provincial tour, visiting in succession Waikouaiti, Oamaru, Lakes Wanaka and Wakatip, the Dunstan, Tuapeka, Balclutha, South Clutha, Tokomairiro, and Taieri, travelling in all over six hundred miles during an absence of nineteen days.

MARCH.—The old hospital buildings having been removed the site was secured as a public market place, and Municipal Corporation offices. Mr. James Howorth, the first Crown Solicitor of Otago, which office he held from 1856-65, died on the 13th instant, at the age of seventy-five.

APRIL—The Grocers' Early Closing Association entered with renewed energy upon their labors by the establishment of a Mutual Improvement Society and course of public lectures, and so great was the success in shortening the hours of labor, that drapers and other branches of business signified a desire to embrace like advantages. The Association was, therefore, a few months later, extended in its sphere, under the title of the "United Early Closing Association."

The gold escort service of the Province, with the exception of the Tuapeka and Wakatip districts, was this month undertaken by Cobb and Co.'s Coaches, at a yearly cost of £800. Owing to the pecuniary embarrassments of the Municipal Council of Dunedin, very considerable reductions were made upon the working staff hitherto employed.

MAY.—The third annual report of the Otago Acclimatisation Society showed that much had been accomplished during the past year, in carrying out the worthy objects aimed at by the Society, which had met with much greater support from the general public than on any previous year. Operations were therefore pursued with vigor as evinced by the following returns of animals introduced into the various districts of the Province, according to their suitability for acclimatisation purposes : 40 pheasants, 23 guinea-fowl, 52 Australian magpies, 6 blackbirds, 4

thrushes, 4 skylarks, 2 Australian owls, 4 laughing jackasses, 35 black swans, 200 medical leeches, &c., &c. Exchanges of native birds and seeds were also despatched throughout Europe, the Australian and other British Colonies and large orders for English birds and small game were forwarded to Britain, many of which have since arrived, and have been scattered throughout the Province.

JUNE.—A poll was taken throughout the entire Province on the 1st inst., to ascertain the popular feeling regarding the recent withdrawal of goldfields control from the Provincial Government ; the result of the plebiscite was a majority in favor of Provincialism of 8,126 votes. Question—Are you desirous that the management of the Goldfields of Otago should be conducted by the Superintendent and Provincial Council? Yes, 8,304 ; no., 178.

JULY.—The present proved a severe winter season in the inland districts of the Province, where heavy snow storms and severe frosts were experienced; the waters of the Clutha fell to a lower level than for several years previous, which fortunately enabled miners in snowed up districts to find a profitable field of operations on the lower banks of the river.

AUGUST—A footpath or horse-track was formed about this time, skirting Dunedin bay from Anderson's Bay to Portobello Peninsula, the intention being eventually to widen the road for dray traffic, which would prove a great boon to the settlers of those districts.

SEPTEMBER—Several Chinamen having leased portions of swampy land in the North-East Valley District, speedily transformed the same into vegetable gardens, and competed in the early spring markets with their European neighbors.

OCTOBER.—The steam harbor dredge "New Era" was launched at Port Chalmers on the 29th instant. It will be remembered that the requisite machinery was procured from Britain several years ago at a cost of nearly £7,000. It has since been stored, and is now being fitted into the "New Era," at Rattray-street Jetty; and we trust that ere long its effect upon our noble harbor will prove the commencement of a new era in the position of Dunedin as a shipping port, which we yet hope to see visited by the largest class of steam and sailing vessels trading in the Southern seas.

NOVEMBER—An important sale of steamers, owned chiefly in this port, took place on the 6th inst., when the "Albion", the sole remaining steamer of the unfortunate and lately defunct Otago Steam Ship Company, was sold to Messrs. Cargills and McLean for £10,000, the original cost in Britain having been L33,000; the "William Misken," the property of the lately wound up Dunedin S.S. Co., was purchased by Captain McKinnon for £1,500; and the "Wainui" was withdrawn from sale, no suitable offer having been made for her purchase. The Harbor Company's new clipper steamer "Wallace" was launched from Mr. Wilson's foundry on the 11th inst., being the largest steamer yet built in New Zealand, and a companion in model to the S.S. "Bruce," procured from Britain for the same company about three years ago.

The present spring season has proved one continued series of rainfalls, which reached their highest point on the 24th inst., when severe floods were experienced throughout the entire province, nor up to the beginning of December had the heavy rainfall ceased, and fears were, in consequence, generally expressed that the crops suffer from lack of sunshine, although in early spring they appeared most promising.

DECEMBER—The Dunedin water works were opened on the 9th instant by his worship the mayor of Dunedin, the Hon. J. H. Harris—in the absence of his Honor the Superintendent. We have therefore at last the very great pleasure of congratulating the residents of Dunedin upon the completion of this great and most useful, as well as much-needed public undertaking, which will no doubt now prove a most successful one to the shareholders, despite unlooked for delays and increased expenditure. Over 500 services pipes were laid on previous to the opening of the works, and no doubt so soon as the benefits of a plentiful water supply are generally felt, the increase of applicants will be steady and constant.

Salt water baths have been erected at Pelichet Bay jetty, and in High-street the New Zealand Insurance Company has built elegant and commodious stone premises, while Mr. Gray has erected a large steam saw mill in the same street, on the site formerly occupied by the First Church.

The first Steam Flour Mill in Dunedin has been erected in Manor Place, Princes street south by Messrs. Anderson and Mouat, and forms a most solid, substantial, and commodious structure, in which are five pairs of stones for milling flour, and one pair for oatmeal, besides machinery for dressing pearl barley and rice.

A handsome stone residence has been erected on Church Hill, as a Manse for the Minister of the First Church; and Mr. John Jones has erected, of Oamaru sandstone, a large, handsome, and commodious residence at Fern Hill.

The project of bridging the Waitaki has been given up for the present, and new punts have recently been put on the Ferry by the Government. The Oamaru Jetty has been completed; the Main Road Line between the Dunstan and Lake Wakatip has been completed, and the new road line between Tokomairiro and Waitahuna will shortly be opened up for through traffic, when there will exist an excellent roadway the entire distance between Dunedin and Lake Wakatip. A road is also being formed from Beaumont Junction to Switzer's and Nokomai. The Main Road Line between Waikouaiti and Oamaru, Palmerston and the Dunstan, has also been formed and metalled in many portions. The Government subsidy of pound for pound, granted to District Road Boards, has been the means of effecting great improvements upon most of the district roads of the Province.

Several shipments of wheat were last season made to London from Oamaru, which yielded handsome returns compared with the low prices obtainable here, and no doubt more extensive markets than hitherto will have to be availed of for the disposal of our vastly increasing yield of cereal crops.

The Province has done more during the past year to establish a literature of its own than in any previous year; Park's Geography of New Zealand, Halliwell's Grammar, and Diack's Easy lessons in Phonography, having been compiled as class books for the use of schools while an old Otago settler has furnished "The Rambles of a Philosopher," or history of the early days of Otago, the first piece of music printed in the Province has also been published by Mr. West.

Out of the vote of £2,000 for "Encouragement of Manufactures," the Government have had under consideration the offering a bonus of £1,000 for the first fifty tons of sugar, from beet root, manufactured and grown within the Province; and a bonus of £500 to any person or company producing 20,000 bushels of marketable malt within the Province. Also, it has been suggested that encouragement should be offered to meat-curing, on a large scale. Increased attention is being paid to improvements in the breed of sheep, and to the preparation of wools for the Home market, owing to the recent fall in price and the necessity for producing a superior class of wools. In conclusion, when we consider the present depressed state of trade throughout New Zealand and the Australian Colonies generally, we have to congratulate the Province of Otago upon the permanence and growing stability of her trade and commerce.