

NEW ZEALAND IN THE 1880s : SOME UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

(Summary of a paper read to the Wellington Branch of ARANZ, 17 March, 1982)

The historian can help the archivist by sharing his awareness of the kinds of questions that the current state of his field is likely to be throwing up. This brief discussion of New Zealand in the 1880s will doubtless be somewhat idiosyncratic but I am confident that my familiarity with the concerns of the world-wide community of social historians will be reflected in the kinds of question I am asking. To make my points succinctly, and at the risk of seeming brash, I propose to be pretty quick at offering hypotheses and interim answers to my questions.

My first question: What kind of an animal is this? I am far from happy with the current popular picture of our 1880s as a pretty thin bleak interlude between the exhilaration of 'Vogelism' in the 1870s and the excitement of 'Liberalism' in the 1890s. The conventional label is 'the Black Eighties', the significant happening is 'the Exodus'. A gleam of hope for the future is provided by the first fumbling ventures into refrigeration.

I identify the reality as quite a different animal, with a lived experience pervaded by a prevailing optimism. I see this as a decade of new farms, new homes and gardens, new villages, new ventures and businesses. Frozen meat and the Exodus affected a minority who concerned themselves with the outside world. Most contemporary New Zealanders spent most of their time looking after and bettering themselves within a pretty limited local mental framework. The collective psychology of the time is well caught in the 1940 reminiscences (*Manawatu Times*, 12 October 1940) of John Joseph Murphy, who around 1882 had helped found the new Rangitikei bush settlement of Colyton:

We then thought that we were going to have a country village, similar to the villages of the Old Country. We had a store, two churches, a hall, a blacksmith and a post office. Then came Hermann Williams who purchased land and established the first saleyards. Our stock sales were look upon as the most prosperous of the times. A hotel was then built and things prospered for a few years.

For Colyton, and many other rural settlement, the 1880s were years of optimism and building up - the decline was to come a decade or so later.

If my sketch is nearer the truth than the conventional account, why has the popular mind gone so far astray? I believe it is largely because the Old World's agenda has over-awed us as we shaped our story. We have answered the queries of the British mind, while leaving matters which should nag the New Zealand mind as glaring unanswered questions. Exports of frozen meat and dairy produce loom large, because they went onto British tables, but we know too little about how we managed to feed ourselves. Our 1880s may have provided little news from the *London Times* - no land war, no gold rushes, no big Vogel loans - but they were not barren ground in our social history.

It was indeed a major achievement of these years that the colonists fed, housed and warmed themselves to a standard unsurpassed by any comparable contemporary community, and incomparably better than village Britain. With a population moving rapidly beyond the half million mark, this was no mean achievement for a young colony. How, for example, was roast beef aplenty set daily before West Coast gold diggers, North Auckland kauri bushmen, Thames quartz miners, Wellington and Auckland townsmen? No large cattle herds grazed anywhere near these districts. It is easier to discover how medieval London was fed, than Westport or Wellington of the 1880s.

matu
keen
gards
of me
system
the P.

It
pretat
ones,
and el
the 18
we ent
not ur
than 1
report
in the
beginn
networ
1880s
estab
to 74
rather
contin

T
small
self-
matte
vario
rival
villa
uncor
local
Coun
World
den
the
fruit
their
world
vill
the
cent

of
gold
ber
lev
king
thou
prov
new
world

NEW ZEALAND IN THE 1880s : SOME UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

(Summary of a paper read to the Wellington Branch of ARANZ, 17 March, 1982)

The historian can help the archivist by sharing his awareness of the kinds of questions that the current state of his field is likely to be throwing up. This brief discussion of New Zealand in the 1880s will doubtless be somewhat idiosyncratic but I am confident that my familiarity with the concerns of the world-wide community of social historians will be reflected in the kinds of question I am asking. To make my points succinctly, and at the risk of seeming brash, I propose to be pretty quick at offering hypotheses and interim answers to my questions.

My first question: What kind of an animal is this? I am far from happy with the current popular picture of our 1880s as a pretty thin bleak interlude between the exhilaration of 'Vogelism' in the 1870s and the excitement of 'Liberalism' in the 1890s. The conventional label is 'the Black Eighties', the significant happening is 'the Exodus'. A gleam of hope for the future is provided by the first fumbling ventures into refrigeration.

I identify the reality as quite a different animal, with a lived experience pervaded by a prevailing optimism. I see this as a decade of new farms, new homes and gardens, new villages, new ventures and businesses. Frozen meat and the Exodus affected a minority who concerned themselves with the outside world. Most contemporary New Zealanders spent most of their time looking after and bettering themselves within a pretty limited local mental framework. The collective psychology of the time is well caught in the 1940 reminiscences (*Manawatu Times*, 12 October 1940) of John Joseph Murphy, who around 1882 had helped found the new Rangitikei bush settlement of Colyton:

We then thought that we were going to have a country village, similar to the villages of the Old Country. We had a store, two churches, a hall, a blacksmith and a post office. Then came Hermann Williams who purchased land and established the first saleyards. Our stock sales were look upon as the most prosperous of the times. A hotel was then built and things prospered for a few years.

For Colyton, and many other rural settlement, the 1880s were years of optimism and building up - the decline was to come a decade or so later.

If my sketch is nearer the truth than the conventional account, why has the popular mind gone so far astray? I believe it is largely because the Old World's agenda has over-awed us as we shaped our story. We have answered the queries of the British mind, while leaving matters which should nag the New Zealand mind as glaring unanswered questions. Exports of frozen meat and dairy produce loom large, because they went onto British tables, but we know too little about how we managed to feed ourselves. Our 1880s may have provided little news from the *London Times* - no land war, no gold rushes, no big Vogel loans - but they were not barren ground in our social history.

It was indeed a major achievement of these years that the colonists fed, housed and warmed themselves to a standard unsurpassed by any comparable contemporary community, and incomparably better than village Britain. With a population moving rapidly beyond the half million mark, this was no mean achievement for a young colony. How, for example, was roast beef aplenty set daily before West Coast gold diggers, North Auckland kauri bushmen, Thames quartz miners, Wellington and Auckland townsmen? No large cattle herds grazed anywhere near these districts. It is easier to discover how medieval London was fed, than Westport or Wellington of the 1880s.

mate
keen
gard
of pe
system
the F

pretat
ones,
and e
the li
we en
not u
than
repor
in th
begin
netwo
1880s
estab
to 74
rathe
conti

small
self-
matte
varit
rive
vill
uncor
local
Coun
Worl
deve
the
frui
the
wor
vil
the
cent

of
jol
bot
lex
King
the
pro
new
world

There were other important colonial achievements of the 1880s. One was the maturing of a new indoor/outdoor life-style, of horse racing, A & P shows, 'good keen men' in the wilds, tea meetings, picnics, pianos, brass bands, competitive gardening, and voracious reading. Another accomplishment was the firm establishment of major national institutions founded in the 1870s, such as the national school system, the county councils, the New Zealand Railways, a national telegraph system, the Press Association, the Police Force.

It was, I would contend, a burgeoning world. What are the most useful interpretative patterns for grasping and expounding all this human endeavour? They are ones, I believe, that link society with geography. In my *The Farthest Promised Land* and elsewhere I have proposed several such patterns. Are they of use in unravelling the 1880s? Let us look at the pattern of 'the Village and the Globe'.¹ I believe we entered the 1880s very much a village world - a world of local self-sufficiency not unlike medieval England. That is why the 1881 colonial census recorded no fewer than 131 grain mills, and 127 brick, tile and pottery works. The 1891 census reported fewer of these 'factories' for a considerably larger population. Apparently in these industries the 1880s saw the peak in local village production and the beginning of larger scale regional factories, made possible by the growing railway network and coastal steamship fleet. Other concerns, however, multiplied in the 1880s - coach building and painting works, for example, from 49 to 108, printing establishments from 106 to 142, and butter and cheese factories from virtually nil to 74. There is evidence that the growth was mainly by spread among the villages, rather than by competing workshops in larger centres. Clearly the village economy continued to be potent.

The increase in printeries was undoubtedly linked with the multiplication of small local newspapers. These provided mouthpieces for a strong spirit of local self-assertion, as neighbouring villages competed and jockeyed for position in such matters as communications, church polity, sporting and social fixtures, as well as in various areas of industrial and commercial competition (the Patea/Hawera/Normanby rivalry is a good example). Besides trying to outdo their neighbours, these villagers frequently 'took on' provincial and national authorities, and not uncommonly came off best. School committees, for example, overrode Education Boards, local church meetings paid scant attention to bishops, Road Boards refused to bow to County Councils. These villagers were lively characters, from a diversity of Old World backgrounds, and they found plenty to argue about as they shaped their rapidly developing world. We will never really understand our 1880s until we have explored the dynamics of these villages. Probably the prevalent village 'rows' will prove fruitful in exposing these dynamics. What were the more characteristic grouping in these conflicts? Old settlers v. newcomers? English v. Scots v. Irish? Godly v. worldly? Locals v. provincials? What were the characteristics of different types of villages? How did they change as the generations passed? My own impression is that the liveliness of Victorian times commonly gave place to stolidity in the early 20th century.

And then there was 'the Globe' - the widespread awareness of the Old World, and of other new countries, especially Australia and the U.S.A. The globe was continually jolting the village with new ideas, new programmes, new gadgets. Easy movement between village and globe provided our colonial villagers with a good flow of levanters and imposters, both the seedy and the melodramatic. Like Huckleberry Finn's King and Duke, they at least added colour to life. More serious and significant, though, was the developing tussle between 'village' programmes, and larger scale provincial, national and global ones, as matters of technology, economics of scale, new techniques in commerce and administration, sought to 'modernise' the colonial world.

We turn to another of my organising patterns, the Feldon to Arden movement.² American visitors as late as the early 1870s were hard put to it to find New Zealand examples of what they termed 'backwoodsmen'. But by the mid '70s our great bush settlement era was getting into its swing. Through to the end of the century and beyond, widespread communities of 'bush whackers' and 'bush settlers' rapidly subdued great reaches of forest in both islands. To get this era into perspective, let us compare it with two other great 'Anglo-Saxon' forest-felling achievements - the clearing of England's woodlands in the Middle Ages, and the felling of the great forests of the North East U.S.A. in more recent times. What strikes one immediately is the difference in pace - the Anglo-Saxons took over 1,000 years to clear their England, the American enterprise took two centuries, beginning seriously around the mid 17th century. Ours took about 40 years - due mainly to the smaller area involved and the use of post-industrial technology (especially railways and steam sawmills). This breakneck speed is one reason why this enterprise has so largely slipped from our national memory - to the great loss of our 1880s. We jolt from gold rushes and Vogel boom to the rise of developed 'refrigerated' farming. Somewhere about 15 years of blood and sweat has gone missing. So, while the log cabin looms large in the American story, the almost equally ubiquitous punga whare of our bush pioneers has somehow disappeared into an interstice of history.

What parallels does the Anglo-Saxon experience suggest? Those early medieval settlers moved into untamed forest country, with some resistance from earlier inhabitants. For both forest clearance and defence they found communal ways the best. Do we have in our bush clearance era, as it faced similar problems, a regression to ways reminiscent of the medieval manor? Should our military settlements, special settlements, small farm associations, blockhouses, etc., be seen as paralleling an earlier English response to wild country and hostile men? Did our forests accentuate a brief move back to primitive industrial and economic arrangements - subsistence farming with local grain milling, brewing, tanning, smithying, etc?

Let us carry our comparison into another area - the matter of wayfaring by land and water. The *Manawatu Evening Standard* of 11 June 1931 reports that John Kebbells (1840-1931)

stated that when he first journeyed from Wellington to the Manawatu district, it was in his father's schooner right up the river from Foxton to Moutoa. He remembered wheat being brought through the Manawatu Gorge in large Maori canoes to the mills along the Manawatu River. The cargo was kept off the bottom of the canoe by struts placed across it lest it got wet, and the men in charge of the craft used poles more often than paddles in what must have been remarkably skilful navigation of a difficult river.

This heavy dependence on waterways is strongly reminiscent of Medieval England, and should provide a range of parallels. Oxford, at the limits of Thames navigation, is reminiscent of our Cambridge, at the limits of Waikato navigation. Our Bulls, growing at the lowest ford/upper limit of coastal shipping, has many medieval English parallels. Both communities had districts with stronger links across narrow seas than with adjacent lands (e.g. Cornwall/Brittany; Nelson/Manawatu; West Coast/Victoria). Our 1880s statistics confirm the great importance of coastal shipping. Thus in 1882 less than 800 vessels were cleared for overseas, against nearly 16,000 clearances coastwise, and the coasters took out over five times the tonnage of the overseas sailings. This must have given the colonists quite different 'mental maps' to ours. There was as yet no 'main trunk' thinking. I imagine the central New Zealand settlers of the 1880s thought of themselves as living around a 'central New Zealand lake' - with their little ships criss-crossing between Patea, Wanganui, Foxton, Motueka, Tataranui, Mapua, Otaki, Bulls, Opunake, Picton, Blenheim, Nelson. The larger vessels ventured beyond the 'lake' to Auckland, the West Coast, and through Cook Strait to the eastern ports.

And that is how the copious supplies of roast beef were brought to all those unlikely places we listed earlier. Between October and December 1886 the Wanganui

INWARDS.

	Date	Name of Ship	Tonnage		Crew		Whence	Voucher Nos. for			No. of Re- turnals	Remarks
			Sailing	Steam	Sailing	Steam		Light Dues.	Pilot Dues.	Port Charges		
	1889	R.F. 189										
1	1	Manawa Port Manifest					Melbourne Cluff					
2	"	Murray	90		16		Edison 753					
3	"	Cornwall	283		16		Edison 756					
4	"	Heard	370		25		Edison 757					
5	"	Kennedy	174		16		Hall 758					
6	"	Herbert	123		16		Gray 759					
7	"	Orati	138		15		Wellington 760				✓	
8	"	Manawa	288		16		Edison 761					
9	"	Manawa	110		16		Edison 762					
10	"	Manawa Port Manifest					London & Wellington				✓	
11	"	Manawa	205		21		Edison 763					
12	"	Kanaka	286		16		Edison 764					
13	"	Orati	188		15		Edison 765				✓	
14	"	Kennedy	174		16		Edison 766					
15	"	Murray	90		16		Edison 767					
16	"	Cornwall	353		25		Edison 768					
17	"	Cornwall	283		16		Edison 769					
18	"	Manawa	174		16		Edison 770					
19	"	Orati	138		15		Edison 771				✓	
20	"	Herbert	123		16		Edison 772					
21	"	Kanaka	286		16		Edison 773					
22	"	Edison	296		25		Edison 774				✓	
23	"	Orati	63		9		Edison 775					
24	"	Kanaka	286		16		Edison 776					
25	"	Manawa	110		16		Edison 777					
26	"	Manawa	112		16		Edison 778					
27	"	Murray	90		16		Edison 779					
28	"	Orati	138		15		Edison 780				✓	
29	"	Kanaka	288		16		Edison 781				✓	
30	"	Herbert										
31	"	Orati										
32	"	Kennedy										
33	"	Murray	90		16		Edison 785					
34	"	Kennedy	174		16		Edison 786					

Tide surveyor's report book, Westport, recording
inwards shipping 1-18 April 1889. (C-WP6/1, p.1 :
National Archives, Wellington)

NEW ZEALAND CONSTABULARY FORCE.

DIARY OF DUTY AND OCCURRENCES at Okarito Station.

DATE.	RANK AND NAME.	DUTY: Specifying the Nature and Duration, and, in referring to Mounted Men, Number of Miles.	OCCURRENCES: Offences reported; Steps taken; Arrival at and Departure from Station of Strangers; Condition of Horses, &c., &c.
21.2	Const. M. Donovan	Tuesday 21 st February 1882 Office duty 9. to 10. am Left for Gillespies beach at 1. pm to bring horse home from Gillespies	Const. Donovan at Gillespies beach
22.2	Const. M. Donovan	Wednesday February 22 nd 1882 Const. Donovan returned from Gillespies beach with his horse that was left there sick on the 19 th instant, Taking the Agricultural returns at Lake Taupo 2 to 8. pm Town duty 10. to 11. 30. pm	NH Const. Donovan taking statistics at Lake
23.2	Const. M. Donovan	Thursday February 23 rd 1882 Office duty 9. to 10. am Town duty 10. to 11. am Left for Lake Taupo at 1. pm returned at 9. pm serving a summons on Clerk for abusive language to John M. Donald	Const. Donovan serving summons at Lake Taupo
24.2	Const. M. Donovan	Friday Const. Donovan, stationed at Okarito (Westland) collected agricultural statistics as part of his duties in February 1882. (P. Okol/3 : National Archives, Wellington) Town duty 11. to 12. pm in charge of station 2. to 4. pm Town duty 6 to 8 and 10 to 11 pm	NH

Yeoma
ship.
Lytt
Coa
are
War
im
Can
thr
und
langpilgr
look
trave
circu
the d
New Z
Coast
The c
Waima
1881,
resea
out fson v
sugge
fores
to Ar
lacks
Theinit
work
impr
fa
far
for
ter
ned
Zea
re
ye
tan
an
ove
or
way
13Zea
on
thr
labe
of c
of a
unde

*part from
the*

Yeoman reported nearly 1,700 cattle, over 10,000 sheep and nearly 1,000 pigs being shipped from the local port to places such as Wellington, Greymouth, Onehunga and Lyttelton. In *Hansard* for 15 June 1886 (p.494) a speaker reported that 'the West Coast...is almost wholly dependent upon Wanganui for its supplies of fat stock, which are shipped to the different West Coast ports'. In the *N.Z. Farmer* of June 1889, the Wanganui correspondent reports their West Coast market glutted - but they expect improvement when winter snows in the Alpine passes stem the flow of stock from Canterbury. Over this same period the flow of fat stock from the fertile Patea coast through the little ports of Patea and Waitara makes a fascinating story. Any detailed understanding of our economic development in the 1880s awaits the unravelling of the largely unexplored coastal shipping story.

*may
each*

Wayfaring on land in medieval England was rich in its variety - pedlars, tinkers, pilgrims, friars, minstrels, knights, herbalists, jugglers, thieves. We might well look for parallels in the rich variety on our roads of the 1880s - swaggers, drapers, travelling correspondents, horticulturists, 'book friends', revivalists, pedlars, circuit preachers, tinkers. Let us concentrate on one specially significant group - the drovers, who handled the flow of stock for the daily feeding of over half a million New Zealanders. In 1880 James Gear reported 400 cattle a month being driven down the Coast to feed Wellington³, supplementing those we have seen being brought in by sea. The opening of new country called for massive stock movements. With the opening of Waimate Plains, Hawera County's sheep numbers rose from 5,400 in 1880 to 20,300 in 1881, with much of the growth provided by long droves from Hawkes Bay. English researchers have mapped their main stock routes for recent centuries. Our 1880s cry out for similar maps.

*ing
quar*

Let us return to forest clearance, to see what questions arise from the comparison with North-East U.S.A.⁴ As well as the differences in pace that we have noted, I suggest that important contrasts arise from the American story being one of initial forest settlement followed by a movement onto grasslands - the opposite to our Feldon to Arden movement. Our bush settlements thus have a dimension this American story lacks - their social and economic interaction with the earlier Feldon communities. The significance of this is as yet little explored.

*ran
and
like*

The work of American historians on the shift in the forest settlements from an initial subsistence economy to a later market economy suggests parallels for us. Their work would suggest that we look for experimenters who pioneered the shift, and that important in this story will be merchants (such as our Chew Chong and Newton King); fairs (e.g. our A & P Shows, Horticultural Shows); farm periodicals (such as the *N.Z. Farmer* and John Ballance's *Yeoman*). The American historians have found that the search for marketable commodities formed a complex story, with various false starts and interim solutions. In researching our 1880s bush settlements I have come across experiments with products as varied as hops, honey, jam, grain, horses. A peculiarly New Zealand development was the export of edible fungus, the 'Taranaki Wool', to China. The final solution for many districts was, of course, dairy produce. There is much yet to be told of the origins of this industry. For these perishable and easily contaminated products, it was no mean feat to attain to the necessary standards of care and cleanliness at every stage of production, manufacture and transport to local and overseas markets. Much remains to be told about key experimenters such as W.K. Hulke of Taranaki, and about how the people's movement of co-operation found its stumbling way to success. This pioneer dairy work was one of the major achievements of our 1880s.

*land)
his
1*

Another feature of the American forest settlements which has interesting New Zealand parallels is the comparative absence of class conflict. Michael Katz's work on the American experience⁵ would suggest that conflict was subdued in both communities through the large number of settlers whose lives were involved with both capital and labour - especially independent yeoman farmers and independent artisans. The muting of class in New Zealand is particularly interesting because of the earlier development of a Gentry ideal in the initial Feldon settlements. By the 1880s a quiet shift was under way from a gentry dominance of rural life in the mid 19th century to a yeoman

dominance by the early 20th century. In the national politics of the '80s, Harry Atkinson forms an interesting transitional figure, only to be fully understood within this social context.

In the writings of American history a famous passage is Frederick Jackson Turner's description of the successive waves of frontiersmen marching westward through the Cumberland Gap - the Indian, the fur trader and hunter, the cattle-raiser, the pioneer farmer. We might illustrate the different shape and perspective of our frontier history by standing at a notable gap in our mountains - the Manawatu Gorge. Our John Kebbel quote showed us the Maoris of the 1850s skilfully poling their canoes through with cargos of Hawke's Bay wheat for the Kebbel flourmills on the lower Manawatu. The story is already a strong contrast to the American one. From the '60s on, the traffic is shaped by the squatters' flocks of sheep - an animal which was never of much significance in North America. First we see an annual migration of shearers, afoot and on horseback, drawn from the growing Wanganui/Rangitikei/Manawatu labour pool, to cope with the multiplying flocks of the Hawke's Bay and Wairarapa sheep kings. By the 1880s a strong east to west flow of surplus sheep from these flocks sets in, for depasturing on the new land being cleared throughout the stretch of country from North Taranaki to Horowhenua. As refrigeration gets under way the flow strengthens, with store sheep from the east moving to the fattening pastures of the west. By the end of the decade flocks totalling around 100,000 a year are clogging the gorge road. A two-way flow of labouring men on horseback becomes more complex as the rural economies mature on both sides of the ranges. Early in 1891 the railway through the gorge is opened. The gorge road tollkeeper's records for the next ten months have survived.⁶ These show that, despite rail competition, the road still carries 2,000 saddle horses and over 36,000 sheep over these months. Toll records for a four month period from September 1905 have also survived, and provide an interesting comparison.⁷ The flow of saddle horses has dwindled, with only 122 recorded for these four months, but 1,211 bicyclists make up a new type of traffic. The American experience may provide some useful parallels, but we may conclude that Turner's frontier thesis cannot be easily adapted to New Zealand of the 1880s.

Finally, some brief comments on the manuscript and archive materials needed for unravelling the story of our 1880s. For this important decade of agricultural and industrial beginnings, we have of course no Departments of Agriculture or Labour to monitor developments - they date from the following decade. And we will never have the census schedules, so invaluable to British and American researchers. We have a surfeit of some things - squatters' records and immigrants' shipboard diaries, for example. What we badly need more of are records of the makers of the yeoman countryside, of the inhabitants of the associated villages, and of wayfarers on the linking routeways - the records of small farmers, village artisans, storekeepers, drovers, harbour masters of the little ports, captains of coasters, shearers, commercial travellers, etc. Happily, they are slowly coming in, bringing with them, I have no doubt, new questions as well as answers.

Rollo Arnold
Victoria University of Wellington.

REFERENCES

1. Rollo Arnold, 'The Village and the Globe : Aspects of the Social Origins of Schooling in Victorian New Zealand', *ANZTES Journal*, 5, 2, (1976), pp.1-12.
2. Rollo Arnold, *The Farthest Promised Land*, Wellington, 1981, pp.260-326.
3. *AJHR*, 1880, E-3, p.17.
4. Good accounts of this may be found in
C.H. Danhof, *Change in Agriculture : the northern United States 1820-1870*, Cambridge, Mass., 1969, and Michael Williams, 'Clearing the United States forests : pivotal years 1810-1860', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 8, 1, (1982), pp.12-28.
5. Michael Katz, 'Social Class in North American Urban History', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 11, 4, (1981), pp.579-605.
6. Hans Olsson, 'Manawatu Gorge Records 1882-1907', Turnbull Library MS.
7. Ibid.