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AN HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF SETTLEMENT AND
LANDSCAPE APPRAISAL IN THE MANAWATU

1840-1891

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfilment
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Abstract

In historical geography the relationship of human agency to landscape change in the settlement process of colonial lands is an important factor. The analysis of perception and image in the development of new landscape scenes is useful in that it attempts to understand subsequent human activities by looking at the attitudes of individuals and groups to a particular environment. In so doing the desire for change is explored. The use of an Official/Popular approach to settlement and landscape appraisal offers some particular insights into the process of deforestation and land development in the nineteenth century Manawatu. Between 1840 and 1891 the bush landscape of the area, a feature which dominated hundreds of thousands of hectares, was removed. This reflected a desire on the part of not only the settlers for cleared farming lands, but also appraisals on the part of both Provincial and Central Government which favoured rural settlement. The active support given settlement schemes by Government, in particular from 1870, helped fulfil Official appraisals that the bushlands could be successfully occupied and developed.

The appraisals of the forest lands from both Official and Popular stances represented a bias which favoured rural settlement. Subsequently, the main settlement period from 1870 was marked by major land clearance operations and with it large scale timber wastage. Overall the forest was considered enormous, its timber almost inexhaustible, and a barrier to successful settlement. This attitude was sustained even when the forest vegetation had been largely replaced by the domesticated scene.

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