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SUPPLY AND DEMAND IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT:  
PATEA DISTRICT, 1872-1917.

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of  
Arts in History at Massey University.

Edward Martyn Clifford  
March 1975

PREFACE

'Local government' is "that element of the whole structure of government which is concerned essentially with the administration of affairs of a peculiarly local significance."<sup>1</sup> The definition given in An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, broad as it is, identifies certain local institutions as being outside the sphere of local government. These bodies include education authorities, domain boards and cemetery trusts.<sup>2</sup> I, however, deviate from this interpretation to include such institutions within the scope of a local government study. Domain boards, cemetery trusts and education authorities, like other units of local government, owe their origin, powers and functions to some New Zealand statute and, thus, cannot be omitted on that count. Also, in many instances, domain boards or cemetery trusts, and territorial local authorities, such as county and borough councils and town boards, were one and the same. This, in itself, suggests that domain and cemetery management was an integral part of the local government system. Domains, cemeteries and schools were facets of the social environment to be provided by local authorities, and cannot be divorced from local government as such.

In the past, local government has not attracted a fraction of the attention from history and political science researchers that central government has. This lack of interest is partially attributable to previous treatment of local government topics by commentators and researchers. Those studies that have been made in the field of local government in New Zealand have been primarily concerned with the powers and functions of local authorities. This has tended to establish a stereo-typed picture of local authorities as dull, almost lifeless, parochial administrative institutions, levying rates on the community in order to perform fundamental but monotonous tasks such as road and footpath formation and maintenance, and the provision of drainage facilities. A chapter or two on local government is invariably found in local histories, which, while important to a total understanding of any country's history, tend to be very parochial and often tedious. Thus, the local government section is usually, likewise, 'bogged down' in local details concerning

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1. A.H. McIntock (ed.), An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, three volumes, Wellington, 1966, I, p.841.

2. *ibid.*

roads and bridges, reservoirs and rubbish dumps. Only recently have researchers<sup>3</sup> turned to another aspect of local government, that is, the personalities involved in local government institutions.

This thesis combines something of both approaches in an examination of local government within a particular geographical area. While the study revolves around the functions and powers of various local bodies, the dominant theme running through the thesis is the question of demand and response. What did the settlers demand of their local authorities, and what was the nature of the response they received from those institutions? Did certain needs receive priority, and how effective were local authorities in catering for these needs and aspirations? Naturally, a certain amount of local detail has to be included in such a study, but whenever appropriate, local developments have been placed in a New Zealand-wide context. This relationship between colonial trends in local government and the situation in one particular region of the colony is reinforced by the treatment of a number of ideas which, while contributing to the central theme, are also worthy of individual consideration. These include centralization and decentralization of governmental administration, the local government 'system' of 1876, local government and the 'long depression', 'the administrative revolution' during the 1890s, town-country relations, local government reform, and personalities. These ideas provide a framework within which to discuss settler aspirations and demands, and the local bodies' responses to these.

A much greater amount of research into local government in different areas of the colony is needed before an adequate evaluation of local government in New Zealand could be attempted. In the past, critics of New Zealand local government have been too ready to base their conclusions on evidence found in official government sources, without examining the evidence to be found in the country's newspapers, and in individual local authorities' archives. The viewpoint of the centre has

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3. K.C. McDonald, City of Dunedin: A Century of Civic Enterprise, Dunedin, 1965; Peter T. Faid, "North Otago - The Electors and the Elect. A Study of Local Government", unpublished M.A. thesis, Canterbury University, 1967; G.W.A. Bush, Decently and In Order. The Government of the City of Auckland, 1840-1971; the Centennial History of the Auckland City Council, Auckland, 1971; K.M. Mooney, History of the County of Hawke's Bay, Part 1, Napier, 1973.

tended to overshadow that of the periphery. Only time and a large amount of research can correct this imbalance.

The Patea area was not chosen for this thesis for any reasons of familiarity to the writer, but as the result of approaches made by the Patea County Council to Massey University for a student to engage in historical research into the county's administration. The writer took up the suggestion, but broadened the topic to include, not only county government, but also other units of local government within the district. This approach permits more meaningful conclusions to be drawn as to settler demands and local authority responses, and also to relations between the various local bodies within the area. A study of more than one local government institution allows a recognition of trends within, and attitudes to, local government, with more relevance to the situation over the entire country.

Certain features in the history of the Patea, or southern Taranaki region, however, mark this area as interesting and worthy of intensive study. These features include the fact that the area was confiscated from the Maori by the Government in the 1860s, an action which impeded the district's development; the division of responsibility for the area's administration between two provincial governments; and the constitution within the district of most of the different units of local government, both territorial and ad hoc, provided for by New Zealand law.

The area used in this study coincides with the Patea County boundaries at any particular point in time after the constitution of the county in 1876. For discussion of the area during the provincial period, the Patea-Waverley district, as defined by Bremer, has been used. This includes all that territory between Kai Iwi and Hawera, seaward of the Confiscation Line. For definition of the district's boundaries after 1876, readers should refer to figures 1 & 3 within the text.

The area of the County of Patea, as originally constituted, was approximately 1344 square miles. With the separation of the district north of the Manawapou River in 1881, Patea County was reduced to approximately 1150 square miles. By 1917, the county's area had been whittled down to 626 square miles.

Population figures for the district are difficult to ascertain because of the uncertainty of the area to which the figures pertain.

During the 1860s, the population of the Patea district was almost entirely made up of soldiers. By 1870-71, the population was estimated to be between 250 and 550 people. In 1881, Patea town had a population of 840. Patea geographical county's population was recorded in 1886 as being 2861; 3046 in 1901; and 5153 in 1915.<sup>4</sup>

The period covered in this thesis, 1872 to 1917, was chosen partly because it was over that period that the 'rise and fall' of the original local bodies within the Patea district, the road boards, occurred. The constitution of the Patea East, Patea West, and Hawera Road Boards in 1872 marked an important step in the local government history of the area, and the merging of the last of the road districts into the county in 1917 ended an era in the district's local government. To make such a study finish at 1917, with the end of road board administration in the district, seemed a more appropriate point than, for example, 1900, a year with little relevance to the subject, other than the fact that it marked the turn of the century. Time did not permit a longer period to be studied, and 1917 ends a convenient forty-five year span.

A note about the use of certain place names in the text will help to clarify any confusion readers might have. Prior to 1876, the township now known as Waverley was called Wairoa. Presumably the existence of two Wairoa's in the North Island prompted the western town to change its name. In April 1881, the town of Carlyle became officially known as Patea. This was to eliminate any confusion concerning the town's correct title. In the text, the use of these place names depends upon the period in which they are referred to; that is, Wairoa is used when referring to Waverley before 1876, and Carlyle is used when referring to Patea prior to 1881.

The bulk of the thesis is based on material derived from primary sources, such as local authority minute books, letter books and other records. The abundance of such sources held by the various local bodies in the Patea district made the writer's task much easier. The availability of local body records is essential to an adequate investigation of any local government institution, and an attempt must be made to ensure the preservation of as many of these sources as possible. The growing interest being shown in local body centenaries

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4. These figures include the population of Patea borough and Waverley township.

throughout New Zealand is helping to highlight the value of local government sources and the need to preserve these manuscripts. The retention of records of now defunct local bodies by other local authorities and libraries is an important aspect of this preservation process. The possession of road board and harbour board records by the Patea County Council was invaluable to the writer's research.

Newspapers were used to provide an indication of the rate-payers' reaction to their local authorities, and to supplement the minutes of local body meetings. Editorial and correspondence columns provided an insight into settler attitudes to local administration, as well as giving some indication of ratepayers' interest in local government affairs. Unfortunately, many of the volumes of the Patea Mail, or the Patea County Press, as it was known after 1888, were not available for perusal because of General Assembly Library policy. However, this handicap was partially overcome by the existence of scrapbooks of newspaper clippings concerned with local government, held in the archives of some of the local bodies in Patea.

A number of the minute and letter books used were unpaginated. These particular books have been identified in the bibliography, while in the footnotes they can be recognized by the fact that only the date of the minute or letter is recorded, instead of both the date and the page number.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AJHR	<u>Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives</u>
NZ Gazette	<u>New Zealand Gazette</u>
NZS	<u>New Zealand Statutes</u>
PD	<u>Parliamentary Debates</u>
EH	<u>Evening Herald</u>
HS	<u>Hawera Star</u>
PCP	<u>Patea County Press</u>
PM	<u>Patea Mail</u>
HTB	Hawera Town Board
PBC	Patea Borough Council
PCC	Patea County Council
PERB	Patea East Road Board
PHB	Patea Harbour Board
PWRB	Patea West Road Board
WTB	Waverley Town Board

INTRODUCTION

One of the main causes of the late outbreak was the division of authority which existed in the district.

Memorandum by Fox, 1 Nov. 1869,  
AJHR, A.-4.

Two, usually incompatible, tendencies were in operation in New Zealand politics and administration from the late 1860s. The combined force of these two opposing factors culminated in 1876 in the demise of those semi-federal institutions, the provincial governments.<sup>1</sup> This "unholy alliance", for the provinces at least, comprised the principles of centralization, as shown by a gradual absorption of provincial functions by the central government, and of decentralization, as depicted in the steady transfer of provincial powers and responsibilities to lesser, both in size and function, but more numerous administrative authorities.

The physical configuration of the new colony had been an important determinant in prompting the British Parliament to pass the New Zealand Constitution Act in 1852, which established six provinces under local legislatures, and a General Assembly to attend to colonial affairs. Physical distance and the consequent lack of adequate communications, together with the distinct social particularities of the settlements, ruled out the possibility of creating one centralized administrative system for New Zealand; thus the responsibility for government in the localities was assigned to the provinces. Their major role was to be that of colonization agency, opening up the land for settlement by migrants recruited by the provincial authorities. But just as the main settlements were isolated from each other, so were their respective colonization procedures. Uniformity was not a strongpoint of early New Zealand government, and the field of local government was no exception. No guidelines had been laid down by central authorities for administering to the inevitable social and economic demands of the settlers, as the diversity of "systems" show. Powers and functions of local authorities differed from province to province, and the New Provinces Act, 1858, only compounded the problem.

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1. Other factors were also important in the abolition of the provinces. See W.P. Morrell, The Provincial System in New Zealand, 1852-76, second revised edition, Christchurch, 1964, pp.270-85.

All earlier attempts to provide a basic pattern for local government throughout the colony had failed dismally. The Municipal Corporations Act, 1842, met with the disapproval of the British Parliament, while the Municipal Corporations Ordinance, 1844, the Public Roads and Works Ordinance, 1845, and the Constitution Act, 1846, succumbed to the inaction of the colonial authorities. The legislation relating to municipalities carried the stigma of English inheritance. The Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 proved hardly appropriate to the circumstances of a newly-settled colony with a European population of only eleven or twelve thousand.

Amongst the great diversity in local government, there stood one principle common to all the provinces: to utilize locally-derived revenue locally. But even this attitude was to cause rifts within provinces. Settlers in Hawke's Bay, Wanganui, Southland and other out-lying districts interpreted the word "local" differently from their counterparts in and near the provincial capitals. The "Compact of 1856" assigned the revenue from the sale of land to the provinces, supposedly to be utilised in the improvement of the local areas from which it was derived, along with the responsibility for the administration of those lands. But it was here that a major dilemma arose for the provincial authorities. The greater share of the Land Fund from the sale of waste lands was derived from the out-lying districts, but it was the more densely-populated areas of the provinces which warranted, and usually were granted, the largest proportion of revenue for public works, particularly roads and bridges. In most instances, the deprived inhabitants were not slow in voicing their dissatisfaction, and agitating for separation from the existing provinces. The New Provinces Act, 1858, ostensibly relieved some of this discontent;<sup>2</sup> at the same time helping to undermine the provincial system.

Intra-provincial discontent and the consequent proliferation of the provinces, the over-indulgence of the provincial authorities in a spate of borrowing in the early 1860s with all its repercussions, and the inconsistent nature of administrative development throughout New Zealand, brought into play the two opposing tendencies of centralization and decentralization. The year 1867 can be heralded, to all intents and purposes, as the opening year of the "campaign", albeit unintentional, to squeeze that element of

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2. Hawke's Bay, Southland, and Marlborough were not backward in taking advantage of this legislation.

semi-federalism out of colonial politics.

The gross indebtedness of the provinces led the colonial government in Wellington to forbid any further borrowing on their part after 1867; an action which, in preventing one undesirable trend, gave birth to another: "log-rolling".

Although the effectiveness of provincial colonization programmes varied depending on the resources available, immigrants flowed in steadily. They had come looking for better opportunities in the new land, but more often than not had been "seduced" by a distorted, if not false, picture of colonial life sold to them by "immigrant-hungry" provincial agents, who were often as unfamiliar with colonial conditions as their recruits. Increased population demanded some devolution of powers and functions from the provincial authorities to more localized institutions. Each provincial government made provision for such decentralization in its own time and in its own manner, and thus, to a certain extent, sowed the seeds of its own destruction. It was to be these decentralized units of administration which were eventually to supplant the provinces.

As the colony's population increased, and small settlements were planted throughout the provinces, there developed a distinctive division of interests between town and country. The town dwellers desired streets and footpaths, drainage systems, and recreational facilities. The rural settler needed access to his property, and at least a formed main road by which his supplies and produce could be conveyed. The frequent neglect on the part of provincial authorities to supply even these basic services aroused cries for separation.

The necessity for some form of separate organization for the towns had been realised as early as 1842 by the proposers of the Municipal Corporations Bill, who wrote in the preamble:

Whereas it is necessary that provision should be made for the good health and convenience of the inhabitants of towns and their neighbourhood, [sic] and whereas the inhabitants themselves are best qualified as well by their more intimate knowledge of local affairs as by their more direct interest therein, effectively to provide for the same, and whereas the habit of self-government in such cases hath been found to keep alive the spirit of self-reliance and a respect for the laws and to prepare men for the due

exercise of other political privileges, be it therefore enacted ....<sup>3</sup>

Municipalities were constituted in the main settlements. However, it was only in 1867 that the central government provided for the consolidation of previous legislation, mostly provincial, concerning urban areas. The Municipal Corporations Act of that year made it possible for residents of any existing city, town, or district with more than 250 householders within a certain area to receive municipal institutions upon the presentation of a petition to that effect.<sup>4</sup> Despite the permissive nature of the statute, towns were no longer largely confined to, and dependent upon, provincial legislation. The Act included a set of model by-laws to guide the municipal councils in the performance of their functions, for example, in the provision of streets, sewerage systems, lighting, a water supply, market-places, charitable institutions, pounds, and recreational facilities.<sup>5</sup>

A similar measure for rural local government was also debated by the House of Representatives in 1867. This Local Government Bill<sup>6</sup> included the provision that up to thirty per cent of the revenue from land sales was to be expended within the district in which the land had been sold. The central government was prepared to grant a 2:1 subsidy on road board rates up to the value of 1s. in the £. Provincial governments were to be given the authority to constitute counties from one or more road districts; the counties, unlike the road boards, being able to anticipate their revenue by borrowing. Although the validity of provincial laws regulating the activities of the boards and councils was in question, the House rejected this measure as an attempt to relegate the provinces to a minor place in administrative affairs.

Local government continued almost as haphazardly and unfettered as before. The County of Westland Act, 1867,<sup>7</sup> gave that former district

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3. Cited in Hon. W.E. Parry, "Early Urban Government in New Zealand," New Zealand Journal of Public Administration, III, 2, 1940, p.13.

4. NZS, 1867, p.257.

5. *ibid.*, pp. 343-72.

6. Information in this paragraph drawn from PD, 1867, 1, pp. 307-330, 383-408.

7. NZS, 1867, pp. 375-77.

of Canterbury most of the powers of the provinces, save that of legislation. This Westland also received when it was granted provincial status in 1873.<sup>8</sup> Across the Southern Alps the Timaru and Gladstone Board of Works was set up by an Act of Parliament<sup>9</sup> in 1867 to co-ordinate the work of four road boards and a municipal council. Three years later, the Kaikoura Road and Education Board in Marlborough province held its inaugural meeting.<sup>10</sup> Single-purpose local administrative bodies were also springing up throughout the colony: education boards, harbour boards, river conservation boards, cemetery trusts, sanitary boards.

However, from beneath this veneer of independence and diversity was to gradually emerge a definite trend towards decentralized units of local government. The provinces, partly through their own efforts, were being relieved of a growing number of functions, which was to make them increasingly dispensable.

As well as delegating former provincial responsibilities to smaller, "on-the-spot" units, the central government took over certain duties previously within the provinces' domain. In 1870 Vogel's Immigration and Public Works scheme relieved the provinces of some of their responsibilities in the sphere of colonization. The inability of all but the wealthiest of the provinces, Canterbury and Otago, to effectively fulfil their colonizing role and the consequent loss of this function, strengthened colonial opinion as to the futility of the further existence of such obsolete and superfluous governmental units. The application of Vogel's development policies to the New Zealand situation aided considerably the process of releasing the main settlements from their naturally-enforced seclusion, and of arousing a previously dormant "colonial consciousness" in the European settlers. The extinction of the provincial system seemed imminent, but when it arrived the politicians in Wellington had not devised a comprehensive local government scheme to succeed it. They failed to take advantage of a "clean slate" to legislate afresh to avoid at the outset the implementation of a system which could, and did, lead to a proliferation of local authorities.

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8. *ibid.*, 1873, pp. 131-34.

9. *ibid.*, 1867, pp. 379-82.

10. J.M. Sherrard, Kaikoura. A History of the District, Kaikoura, 1966, p. 300.

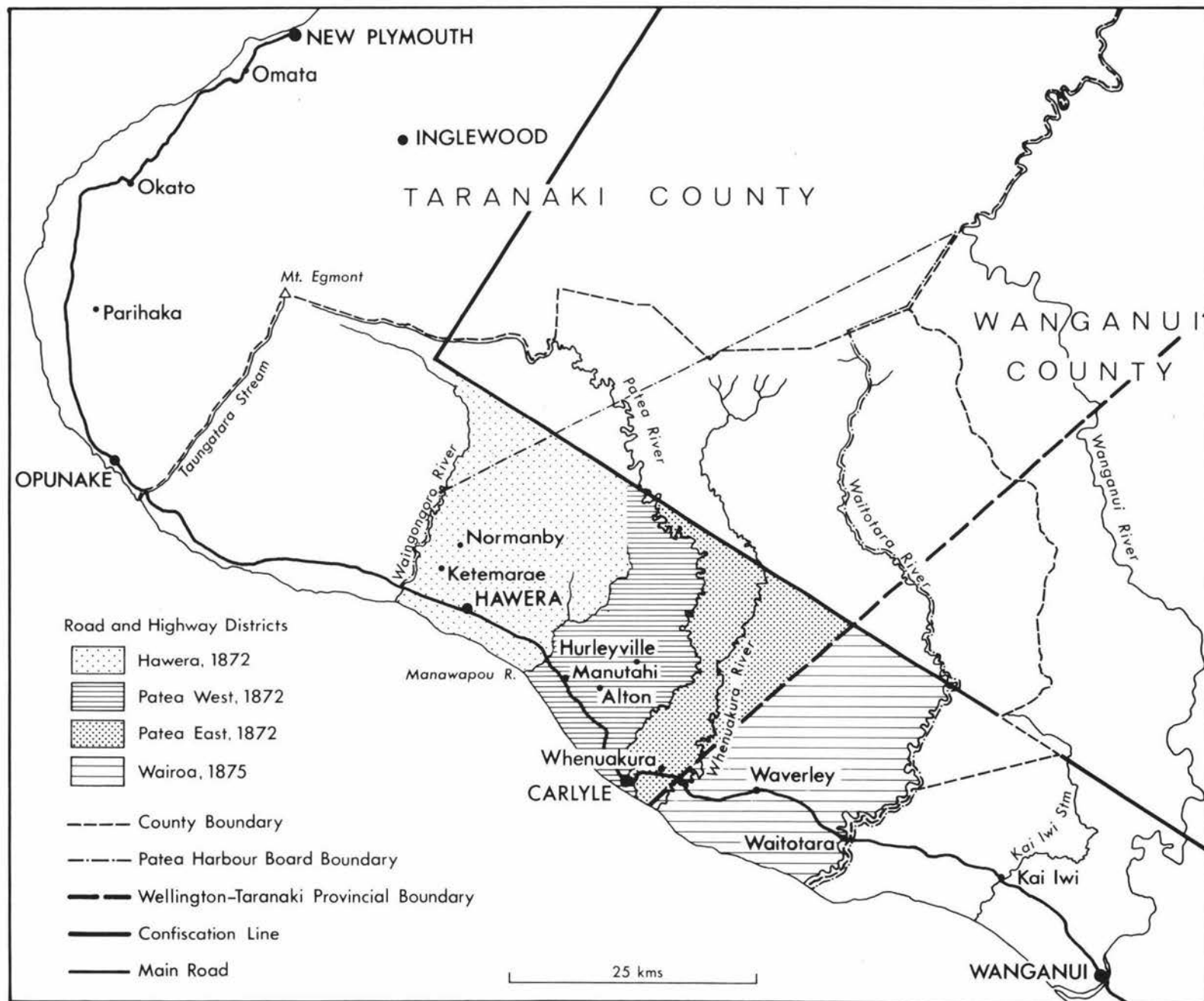


FIG. 1. PATEA COUNTY, 1877

The problems of local government under the provinces were exemplified and even accentuated in the case of the Patea district. This area, extending from the Waitotara River northwards to the Waingongoro Stream, was probably unique among out-lying districts in that it was plagued not by one, but by a combination of problems and reverses.

The provincial boundaries drawn in 1853 divided the Patea district between the provinces of Wellington and New Plymouth,<sup>11</sup> thus placing the area at the extremity of both provinces. In addition to the neglect that this isolation from the provincial capitals entailed, the portion of the district to the north-west of the Patea River was but a very small area of the most impoverished of the six original provinces, Taranaki. This province had proved "impotent" in its role as colonizer; a condition no less attributable to the Maori disturbances prevalent there in the 1860s and to the retaliatory confiscation of tribal lands by the central government in 1864, as to the general inefficiency of its provincial administration. Combined, these factors acted to retard the intensive settlement of the entire province, but especially that of the Patea district.

Events subsequent to the purchase by the colonial government of the Waitotara Block, between the Kai Iwi Stream and the Waitotara River, from the Wanganui Maoris, and to the sale of sections to settlers in October, 1864, provided the central government with a pretext for confiscating the Patea district. The move by settlers to take up their land provoked the defiance of the Ngati Ruanui tribe, which was immediately deprived of its lands through the New Zealand Settlements Act, 1863. Apart from the expropriation of the Maoris' land, the confiscations dispossessed the provincial governments of vital revenue from the Land Fund as the general government controlled all confiscated land until it was sold or returned to the Maoris. Eight years elapsed before a significant amount of these lands was opened for sale, and thus was restored to the control of the provinces.

The Hauhau uprisings led by Titokowaru, which followed closely on the confiscations in the later 1860s, not only discouraged prospective settlers from taking up land in the district, but also caused a significant out-migration of European inhabitants, some to take temporary

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11. Renamed Taranki as from 1 January, 1859; NZS, 1858, p.280.

refuge in Wanganui or Nelson, others never to return. A delay in the distribution of land grants to military settlers had meant many grantees left the district at the expiration of their term of service, while others on receiving their land, sold it to speculators. Thus, much land was left unoccupied. Settlers were not attracted to the lands originally set aside for military settlement because of the provincial authorities' inability and reluctance to provide public works.<sup>12</sup> During these years of virtual neglect by the provinces, the Patea district settlers were obliged to look to the colonial government for local development.

With an end to the uprising in 1869-70, the central government proceeded to sponsor the re-settlement of the Patea district by "subsidising" the ferry services over the Waitotara and Whenuakura Rivers, and by having an adequate coach road between Wanganui and Patea prepared by Volunteers and the Armed Constabulary.<sup>13</sup>

Several attempts during the late '60s to goad, through petitions, the Wellington Provincial Council into forming an adequate dray track between Patea and Wanganui had made little headway against attitudes such as that expressed by the Provincial Secretary to the council in 1868;

My own opinion is that you will commit an act of very great injustice towards the rest of the Province if you ever contribute a single farthing towards opening up districts in which the lands have been either confiscated, given away, or acquired from the natives by direct purchase.<sup>14</sup>

The responsibilities of the respective provincial and central governments were ill-defined and invited evasion; a course all too readily seized upon by Wellington and Taranaki officials.

Although much of the confiscated land was unavailable for settlement until after 1873, the advent of peace and a measure of security saw the return of many of the voluntary exiles and others to take up land in the countryside or to settle on sections in the newly-formed town of

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12. Ione M. Bremer, "The Early Development of the Patea-Waverley District: A Study of the Problems of Settling Confiscated Land", unpublished M.A. thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1962, p.34.

13. AJHR, 1870, A.-4, p.14.

14. EH, 23 May 1868; cited in Bremer, p.166.

Carlyle, near the mouth of the Patea River. This increase in numbers afforded strength and confidence to settlers dissatisfied with the ineffectiveness and neglectful attitude of the provincial governments in Wellington and New Plymouth, and emboldened them to agitate even more vigorously for separation. This local movement was to reach its zenith in 1872-73, and although not directly appeased the settlers were consoled by a growing suspicion that the provinces' "day of judgement" was near at hand.

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## CHAPTER TWO

INITIAL DEMANDS AND RESPONSES, 1872-75

It is the old question of provincial neglect of the out-settlements, only intensified in the case of Patea.

- Weekly Herald, 4 May 1872.

The Europeans' Taranaki of the late 1860s and early '70s comprised little more than several small colonial and military settlements, sometimes strung together by a "main road" fit only for foot or horse traffic, but more often linked only by coastal tracks. The settlements and the limited area of farmland which surrounded them clung to a coastal fringe of open land, one to five miles in width, stretching between Wanganui and New Plymouth.<sup>1</sup> The English immigrants to Taranaki, predominantly from the West Country, had cleared areas of the plain of the dense growth of fern, flax, and toitoi; but the native bush of the interior remained practically untouched.<sup>2</sup> The Maori difficulties, together with the poor public works and immigration record of the provincial government, were largely responsible for the undeveloped state of the province, compared with districts such as the Hutt Valley, and even the Waikato, both former bush-clad areas.<sup>3</sup> Taranaki had to await the full implementation of Vogel's development schemes to significantly increase its population, improve its roads, and bridge its numerous rivers. The settlers in the more neglected districts of the province, in particular Patea, attempted to accelerate development, albeit locally, through public meetings, petitions, and parliamentary Bills.

The colonial settlements of New Zealand were not only isolated externally from one another, but they were also populated by socially-isolated individuals who had experienced no firmly-established social ties with their fellow immigrants prior to embarkation. Internally the early communities lacked social cohesion and a sense of identity.<sup>4</sup> It

1. O.J. Hawken Papers (unpaginated).
2. W.H. Skinner, Reminiscences of a Taranaki Surveyor, New Plymouth, 1946, p.26.
3. G.C. Petersen, "Pioneering the North Island Bush", in Land and Society in New Zealand. Essays in Historical Geography, ed. by R.F. Watters, Wellington, 1965, pp.67-69.
4. Ian S. Thynne, "Towards a Possible Change in 'Local' Government in New Zealand", New Zealand Journal of Public Administration, XXXVV, 1, 1973, p.31.

therefore remained for the new settlements to establish a feeling of community and identity among their inhabitants through social and political institutions.<sup>5</sup> But perhaps one of the most effective promoters of community among people was the possession of a common grievance such as that experienced by the settlers in the Patea district in the early 1870s. Their grievance was against the provincial authorities in Wellington and New Plymouth.

The development of a spirit of community within the Patea area was not significantly affected either way by the Maori disturbances of the later '60s. The settler population at the time was too small and widely-dispersed to justify the title of "community", or even "settlement". Only the Wairoa settlers presented anything resembling a united defence against Maori aggression, and succeeded. Their next conflict was not a largely unsupported skirmish over land, but a united district's struggle against provincial indifference and neglect, and for essential public facilities.

The Waitotara and Patea Reinstatement Loan Fund of £10,000 was established by Resolution of Parliament<sup>6</sup> in 1869 to assist the reconstruction of farms plundered by the Hauhau rebels. Although using the loans to develop their individual holdings, most settlers saw the scheme as complementary to the provision of public works by governmental authorities whether central or provincial. The settlers required access to their properties and improved arterial roads between settlements for the movement of produce and supplies. Wanganui was the nearest port to the district to which stock could be driven for export. Thus, an adequate highway between the two localities was essential. The coach road opened in February 1870 was welcomed by the Patea and Wanganui settlers, but the poorly constructed highway soon deteriorated, along with the patience of the settlers.

Provincial sectionalism or localism was rampant throughout the early 1870s. Settlers in out-lying districts began to realize that they were getting a "raw deal" from the provincial officials, and that they would be better off running their own affairs. The problems of an

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5. *ibid.*

6. Journal of the House of Representatives, 1869, pp. 207-208.

administratively-divided district far from the decision-makers in the provincial capitals, and further handicapped by a land confiscation policy, were sufficient to ensure that the Patea district joined the list of areas which, disenchanted with their provincial governments, had agitated for separation, including North and South Canterbury, and Poverty Bay; not to mention the more successful separatists in Hawkes Bay, Marlborough, Westland, and Southland.

The residents of the Patea district were drawn together by their unanimity as to the need to alter the existing local government situation in 1872. They differed somewhat as to the best remedy for their troubles. Some Taranaki settlers suggested annexation to Wellington.<sup>7</sup> But this proposal was quashed by a Carlyle separation meeting which advocated a county system for the confiscated area.<sup>8</sup> Following similar meetings held throughout the district, a petition was drawn up and presented to Parliament, asking that the central government assume direct control of the Patea district.<sup>9</sup> The seventy-seven petitioners claimed that they had "never received the smallest benefit from either Provincial Government", and that locally-derived revenue was not being spent locally by the authorities.<sup>10</sup> The settlers requested that legislation granting self-government to out-lying districts, and thus depriving the provincial governments of excessive powers, be passed. However, the Petitions Committee of the House of Representatives was swayed by the evidence presented to them by Wellington and Taranaki provincial officials, and resolved not to offer an opinion on the proposed separation.<sup>11</sup> Despite this reversal, the separatist agitation continued unabated. In 1873 that portion of the Patea district within Wellington province joined with Wanganui and Rangitikei in expressing its dissatisfaction with the Wellington administration, through a petition signed by 1,108 inhabitants.<sup>12</sup> The petitioners prayed for separation in order to escape from "ruinous schemes of which they do not approve, and from which they can derive no advantage."<sup>13</sup> The petition charged the provincial government with neglect, particularly of the river and port of Wanganui, and with indulging in unnecessary

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7. Weekly Herald, 27 April 1872; cited in Bremer, p.178.

8. Weekly Herald, 11 May 1872; cited in Bremer, p.179.

9. AJHR, 1872, I.-1.

10. *ibid.*

11. *ibid.*, 1872, H.-12.

12. *ibid.*, 1873, J.-4.

13. *ibid.*

borrowing. The signatories anticipated, to some extent, the local government "system" instituted after the abolition of the provinces in showing:

That a Municipal Corporation exists in the Town of Wanganui, and the country districts possess throughout a system of Road Boards; that your petitioners require an efficient and inexpensive mode of local administration to discharge the more general functions which pertain to a system of County Government.<sup>14</sup>

The petition was ordered to be printed, but progressed no further. However, the arguments expressed in that document provided the basis for the "Wanganui, Rangitikei and Patea Shires Bill" introduced by John Bryce, MHR for Wanganui, in 1873.<sup>15</sup> Bryce, in the second reading debate, spoke out for the abolition of the North Island provincial institutions, and for the transference of their functions, other than legislative, to Shire Councils of nine members each. The attack on the Bill was spear-headed by Bunny, MHR for Wairarapa and Wellington provincial secretary, and the measure was defeated, twenty-five votes to eleven.<sup>16</sup> Thereafter, the separatist movement in the Patea district was subdued; probably as the result of Vogel's forecast in 1874 of the imminent abolition of the provincial governments.<sup>17</sup>

The Patea district's under-representation in the governments in Wellington and New Plymouth was a cause-and-effect factor in these governments' indifference towards, and neglect of, the district. The cause of the out-lying area could not be effectively forwarded in the councils because of the lack of representation there. The Taranaki area of Patea did not receive separate representation until late in 1873, when it was permitted to return two members in a council of fifteen dominated by the north Taranaki region.<sup>18</sup> A third councillor was returned from 1874.<sup>19</sup> But it was only in these last years of provincial administration that Patea was able to make itself heard in the Council Chambers in New Plymouth on matters directly affecting the progress of the district, especially

14. *ibid.*

15. PD, 1873, 14, p.662.

16. *ibid.*, p.678.

17. *ibid.*, 1874, 16, pp.464, 890-95.

18. Taranaki Provincial Council Ordinance, 1873.

19. Taranaki Provincial Council Ordinance 1873 Amendment Ordinance, 1874, cl.1.

concerning roads and education.<sup>20</sup>

The district south of the Whenuakura River was at no time given separate representation in the Wellington Provincial Council. The area was a part of the Wanganui district returning three members in a council of thirty-three until 1869,<sup>21</sup> when it formed a small portion of the Waitotara and Kai Iwi electorate with but one representative in a twenty-five strong body.<sup>22</sup>

Although the hopes of the separatists were not realized, the feelings engendered by their protests against the provincial authorities prompted the latter to take conciliatory action. The Taranaki council devolved certain of its responsibilities on Boards of Commissioners elected by owners and occupiers of land within the Patea district. The out-lying area south of the Waingongoro Stream was divided into three road districts [Fig. 17] in which the boards had the power:

to construct and maintain roads streets causeways bridges  
fences drains culverts sewers and other like public works ...  
and for that purpose to contract with and employ such persons  
as they think fit.<sup>23</sup>

This concession to localism came fourteen years and twenty-two road districts after the necessary legislation had been passed.<sup>24</sup> The Patea district received a £50 Crown grant for the year 1871-72.<sup>25</sup> Had the district already been divided into road districts, the grant would have been considerably larger than that awarded to less isolated areas of the province.<sup>26</sup> This differentiation between road districts in isolated areas and those in more accessible localities can explain the provincial governments' reluctance to create road districts in the Patea area.

Despite this move by provincial officials to localize some administrative responsibilities in the Patea area, the constitution of road boards within the district was to prove no guarantee of more effective

20. EH, 20 January 1875, p.2, cc.5-6.

21. Wellington Provincial Council Representation Readjustment Act, 1868.

22. Bremer, p.163.

23. Taranaki Roads and Bridges Ordinance, 1858, cl.33.

24. Taranaki Roads and Bridges Ordinance, 1858.

25. Taranaki Provincial Government Gazette, 1871, XIX.

26. Payments to Provinces Act, 1871, cl.13.

public works projects. Like many other "trail-blazing" local authorities throughout the colony, the Hawera, Patea East, and Patea West Road Boards found their proposed activities handicapped by a lack of funds. The restriction on rating Crown and Maori lands<sup>27</sup> meant that in a confiscated area such as southern Taranaki the rateable acreage of land was greatly reduced. The rates decided upon by the inaugural general meetings of settlers in the two northern road districts were the minimum leviable: 1d. an acre.<sup>28</sup> If they had to rate themselves, they did not intend penalizing themselves excessively. The settlers wanted civilization at the smallest possible cost to themselves. The Patea West Road Board, for instance, could not depend on revenue much in excess of £150, comprising rates, fines, fees, capitation grants, and other subsidies.<sup>29</sup> This amount had to be stretched to cover the cost of the most fundamental construction work: road and footpath formation.

While the Hawera and Patea West Road Boards struggled on with insufficient finance, the Patea East Road Board remained inactive for at least the first two years after its constitution. The district's boundaries had been gazetted in June 1872,<sup>30</sup> but a board of commissioners was not appointed, nor a rate struck that year or the next.<sup>31</sup> The failure of the Taranaki Provincial Superintendent to impose a rate on the district or to appoint three commissioners and two auditors in the event of this not having been carried out by a general meeting of electors before July of each year,<sup>32</sup> testifies to the continuing indifference with which the district was held by provincial officials. Later evidence suggests that a local governing body for the Patea East Road District became reality only in December 1875, when a board meeting appointed a secretary and resolved to "prepare a draft of Rules to be observed in the conduct of business of the Board at all future meetings".<sup>33</sup> But almost immediately the board appears to have receded once more into virtual redundancy, which is possibly attributable to a local tradition of indifference and inefficiency combined with a lack of finance. The Patea Mail suggested that

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27. Taranaki Roads and Bridges Ordinance, 1858, cl.50.

28. Taranaki Provincial Government Gazette, 1872, XX, 23, p.99.

29. *ibid.*, 1873, XXI, , p.2.

30. *ibid.*, 1872, XX, 12, pp.49-50.

31. *ibid.*, 1872, XX, 24, p.107; *ibid.*, 1873, XXI, 13, p.79.

32. Taranaki Roads and Bridges Ordinance, 1858, cl.15.

33. PERB Minute Book I, 28 December, 1875.

The Patea East (or 26th) Road Board appears to find very little scope for the exercise of its functions, as we are informed that the Board has held but two meetings since its election.<sup>34</sup>

A later report stated that

the business done was of a very unimportant nature, the freezing process to which that body has recently been subjected, in consequence of the delay in calling the required general meeting having prevented any late action.<sup>35</sup>

By 1874 the settlers in the Wellington portion of the Patea district had renewed feelings of injustice and neglect. However, on this occasion their dissatisfaction was not with the provincial council in Wellington but with the Wanganui-Waitotara Highway Board in Wanganui. This shift of attention from the large and distant to the small and local exemplifies a colonial-wide process which was gradually easing the provinces out of their former position. Colonists were restless for the formation of smaller and more local administrative authorities; institutions which were readily accessible, and with which they could identify. Self-government through the provinces had sufficed those original immigrants clustered in and near the six isolated, but individually-compact settlements. They were close to the centres of power, the provincial councils. Nevertheless, population dispersal was a matter of course. Many of the new arrivals were being "channelled" away from the major centres of population into smaller settlements which were springing up along the New Zealand coast. From these outposts, the frontier was pushed back in ever-widening arcs. The pioneer found himself isolated and remote from a seemingly indifferent audience of provincial officials. Although a moving frontier potentially increased the provincial spheres of influence and control, partiality and inadequate financial resources increasingly prevented provincial governments from devoting sufficient attention to their out-lying districts. Decentralization of provincial functions followed. To the new immigrants of the later 1860s and the '70s scattered throughout the provinces, "provincialization" or identification with a particular province was not important; but localization was. The vision of the New Zealand settler had become focussed more on his immediate environment. It was as though each colonist had become mesmerised by his own importance, and that of his

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34. PM, 19 February 1876, p.2, c.5.

35. *ibid.*, 8 November 1876, p.2, c.3.

immediate neighbours. The interests of each district, it was believed, could best be served by those most intimately connected with the particular locality. The inability of the provinces to mould their inhabitants into a united group was to mean that the picture of New Zealand as a colony comprising nine or ten administrative divisions became increasingly obscured by an image of tens of small but growing social, political, and administrative centres all looking towards a centralized unit of government.

It had become an acknowledged feeling by the 1870s that the smaller the decentralized unit of administration the greater chance the inhabitants had of gaining necessary facilities.<sup>36</sup> The acceptance of this situation by the Wanganui-Waitotara Highway Board resulted in a relatively untroubled delegation of responsibility for the board's two northern-most wards to a newly-created Wairoa Highway Board.<sup>37</sup> [Fig.17] The size of the existing district stretching sixty miles from Wanganui to Wairoa, and the consequent isolation of its northern reaches, explain the separation moves.

By the end of 1875, the four road and highway boards which were to form the basis for rural local government in the Patea district had been launched on their not entirely progressive careers. The eventual success of having wrested important functions from the provincial governments, and of localizing them, initially led settlers to expect and to forecast great achievements from their road boards. The editor of the Evening Herald wrote in 1875 that

Road Boards should have large powers, we admit, and with increased responsibility and duties, it might follow that a more appropriate name could be given. But even now those Boards could discharge the functions of provincialism which do not properly belong to the General Government. There is nothing to apprehend in the summary execution of the provinces. If we look to our own province, we see that, apart from works being carried out by the General Government, the Road Boards are doing nearly everything in the way of colonization, and doing it almost entirely out of local taxation. Give to these bodies land endowments and tolls, and they will maintain the

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36. *ibid.*, 26 July, 1876, p.2, c.6.

37. Wellington Provincial Government Gazette, 1875, p.51.

main roads and extend district roads with greater results than have ever yet been accomplished.<sup>38</sup>

Such high hopes were certainly not to be realized in the inaugural years of the road boards, because of the meagre financial resources available to them. On many occasions their activities were conditional on the payment, in full or in part, for bush felling and road formation by the affected settlers.<sup>39</sup> This was additional to rates already levied. The continuing neglect of the Patea area by New Plymouth hampered the road boards. They could form district roads, but without adequate arterial roads linking the settlements over which produce and supplies could be moved, the area could not progress. The delay in opening the Mountain Road between Hawera and New Plymouth for foot and horse traffic was a major point of concern to the settlers and their representatives.<sup>40</sup> The road which brought southern Taranaki within "a few hours" of New Plymouth was eventually opened in April 1875<sup>41</sup> after more than two years construction work. But only ten months later, the Hawera Road Board was calling for tenders to carry out "very necessary repairs on the Mountain Road."<sup>42</sup>

The accessibility of the local boards meant that they were inundated with letters from settlers requesting assistance in gaining access to their properties. Board members attempted to treat each request fairly, but sooner or later they were bound to arouse the anger of some local residents. The Patea East Road Board received a letter from one John Duncan which it "treated with silent contempt because of its low-born indignation and slang."<sup>43</sup> On another occasion a Hawera Road District ratepayer was forcibly removed from the annual meeting after having made some "ultra-platitudinarian" comments about the manner in which the commissioners exercised their functions.<sup>44</sup>

With the first sections having been sold in 1870, the town of Carlyle had assumed by 1875 the appearance of a typical small colonial settlement. The main thoroughfare was adorned by two hotels, two banks, a newspaper office, courthouse, post office, Immigration Barracks, a bakery, a surgery, and upwards of fifteen stores and offices.<sup>45</sup> The town

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38. EH, 13 March 1875, p.2, c.2.

39. PM, 15 March 1876, p.2, c.7.

40. EH, 7 April 1875, p.2, c.7.

41. *ibid.*, 9 April 1875, p.2, c.6.

42. PM, 26 February 1876, p.2, c.4.

43. PERB Minute Book I, 2 October 1876.

44. PM, 13 December 1876, p.2, c.4.

45. A.J. Tyrrell-Baxter, "Copy of Articles written for the Patea and Waverley Press at the time of the Borough Jubilee, 1931", pp.2-3.

which had been proclaimed as such in 1872,<sup>46</sup> came under the administration of the Patea West Road Board until 1875, but by the very nature of society this "marriage" was destined for divorce.

One of the most prominent aspects of the 1870s in New Zealand history is the growth of towns. Influenced largely by Vogelite development, the growth of urban centres throughout the colony continued apace. Towns, particularly the smaller provincial ones, were developing as service centres for their gradually expanding hinterlands. Although the progress of these towns was dependent to a large extent on the rural areas, their inhabitants were becoming more readily recognizable through their distinctive occupations, demands and interests, as a different type of colonist. These were New Zealand townsmen.

The growth of towns in the '70s effected a simultaneous growing-apart of the two basic groups of colonists; the town dweller and the country settler. Despite their economic entanglement, these two entities were separated by their differing social, and on occasions, economic interests. In most instances their initial disagreements were settled by institutional compromises.<sup>47</sup> Town dwellers believed that their needs were such that there came a time when they could no longer be satisfied by the administration of an indifferent provincial council or a rural-oriented road board. In such cases the urban settlers commonly resorted to agitation for the constitution of their own local administrative body to deal with matters peculiarly urban: sanitation, water supply, drainage, and footpaths.

In answer to the prayer of the inhabitants of Carlyle in 1875, the town was granted town district status; the inaugural meeting of the town board being held late that same year. Twenty miles to the north-west of Carlyle the smaller town of Hawera also qualified for town district status. A public meeting held in mid-October had determined the town boundaries,<sup>48</sup> followed later by "demonstrations" by residents for the constitution of a town board.<sup>49</sup>

The town districts were treated as the urban equivalent of the road districts, and like the latter the towns found it difficult to raise the finance necessary for even the most primitive of public services.

46. Taranaki Provincial Government Gazette, 1872, XX, 25, p.109.

47. R.J. Shaffer, "Woodville: Genesis of a Bush Frontier Community, 1874-87", unpublished M.A. thesis, Massey University, 1973, p.40.

48. HTB Minute Book, 22 February 1876.

49. PM, 26 February 1876, p.2, c.6.

The immediate concern of the residents of the two towns was for streets and footpaths. The Carlyle Town Board responded almost immediately, for by February 1876 that town was "able to boast of decent side walks". Both boards received a grant-in-aid of £100 from the provincial coffers, and the Carlyle Town Board's financial statement in February 1876 showed potential rates to total over £146, though only half of this had been collected at that time. The Hawera Town Board had greater financial difficulty, being forced to charge residents half the cost of forming and gravelling footpaths outside their homes. The board came under fire from the press virtually from its first meeting. The Patea Mail warned that

the rate was fixed at the monstrously high sum of 2d in the £, which will yield the munificent sum of £50, or just enough to pay the Town Clerk's salary, and the assessors fees and expenses for their labours in making the assessment.

... it now appears that the ratepayers, or rather their representatives are afraid to tax themselves. By the course adopted by the Board, its usefulness will be impaired and it will be a laughing stock to all other Boards in the Colony. What on earth can be done with £50? Would it not have been better if the Board were never created, and the ratepayers saved the payment of the absurd rate, which will be expended in paying the nurse to cradle the fondling.

The Hawera Town Board's balance sheet in May 1876 showed a rate revenue of £52.18s. 1d. from property valued at £5,348.<sup>50</sup>

The limited amount of finance available to the local authorities throughout the colony bred a definite disinclination among these minor institutions to go beyond, or even fulfil, their most elementary responsibilities. Like their parent body, the provincial council, the town and road boards shied clear of costly undertakings. There was much confusion among members and ratepayers as to the division of functions between local, provincial, and central government. Most ratepayers were not unduly concerned however, as long as their demands were met. Two days after the sale of the Otoia-Opaku Block, north of Carlyle, in October 1876, "A Purchaser at the Late Sale" wrote of the need to open Ball Road in order to divert an increasing amount of traffic from the Garsed Road. He advised that the government or road board should take immediate action in the matter. Earlier in the year the question of the party responsible for the repair of the stretch of main road between the Patea bridge

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50. The above paragraph is based on information from PM, 9 19 23 26 February, 8 March, 16 December 1876. References to the Hawera Town Board can also be found in HTB Minute Book, 29 May, 2 October 1876.

PLATE I      Hawera, c 1870s

"It cannot be denied that ... the streets are in a wretchedly primitive condition, unmetalled, unformed, overgrown with long grass and weeds.... One of the first duties of the new council will be to remedy this condition of affairs....

- Hawera Star, 23 January  
1882.

(Winzenberg Collection, Alexander Turnbull  
Library)



and the Carlyle town boundary had provoked much controversy in the town. Neither the town board nor the government would accept responsibility for the "disgraceful", and "absolutely dangerous" state of the road. The board considered that "it was monstrous that the Government should force the maintenance of nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile of main road upon a newly-formed and struggling Board", and that the government be asked to repair the road "as the revenue of the Board is insufficient to undertake such work." The central government would seem not to have obliged for the town board was censured three months later by a resident for having requested the Taranaki Provincial Council to hand over £200 voted for the erection of a gaol at Carlyle, to the board for repairing the main road. The settler condemned the board for interfering in a matter affecting the whole district in order to benefit just one portion of it.<sup>51</sup>

In the political atmosphere of favouritism and jobbery developing throughout the colony, it was not surprising to hear accusations of the existence of such also in the realms of small town politics and administration. The most common claim against those in positions of responsibility was that of using their position for their own advantage. The Carlyle Town Board received its first taste of such accusations from a sarcastic newspaper editor in June 1876, who wrote:

During the past bad weather, the mud pond in front of this office, and of our neighbours' houses, has been in excellent condition, and unwary pedestrians crossing it have not been bogged much deeper than the tops of their boots. Should heavy rain set in something better may be looked for, and a few inches more arrived at. As to the promised clay, gravel, or whatever other material is applied to render the part passable, it seems as far off as ever. It is a great pity that we have not a member of the Board residing in the row, for the present swamp would, in that case, quickly be a thing of the past. It is true that the Chairman is a neighbour but no mud deposit was laid down opposite his door.<sup>52</sup>

Another resident complained that the sections of the town requiring improvements were those left out by the board.<sup>53</sup> However, generally the bulk of the ratepayers appear to have been quite satisfied with the performance of their representatives in the board's inaugural year.

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51. References in this paragraph were derived from PM, 9 19 February, 5 26 April, 6 May, 28 October 1876.

52. PM, 21 June 1876, p.2, c.3.

53. *ibid.*, 14 June 1876, p.2, c.6.

Most criticism came from the rather "anti-Town Board Chairman" editor of the Patea Mail, and not from the majority of ratepayers. The continuity of personnel between the 1875-76 and the 1876-77 boards,<sup>54</sup> despite a contested election, provides a sound indicator of public feeling. The new proprietor of the local newspaper summed up the board's performance, writing that

there is no doubt that, on the whole, the Town Board during its existence has deserved well of the ratepayers, and its affairs are in a most creditable condition.<sup>55</sup>

Environmental functions were not the sole concern for the town boards of New Zealand. Personal services were also quick to press their claim for equal attention in the urban environment of colonial New Zealand. Health, welfare, and education attracted the most concern and finance, though of course these demands were not confined to the towns alone.

The reasonably rapid congregation of colonists into the towns in the '70s increased the problems associated with maintaining an acceptable standard of sanitation in the settlements. The responsibility for overcoming health problems connected with populated areas rested with the Local Boards of Health throughout the country, under the direction of a Central Board.<sup>56</sup> In the majority of cases the local boards were the existing local territorial bodies. These authorities were required to inform Wellington of the outbreak of any infectious diseases, and to take both preventive and remedial measures. Town life in the colony with its primitive or non-existent sewerage systems, impure drinking water, domestic animals and poor food hygiene accounted for the ever-present threat of epidemics. A typhoid fever scare harassed the colony in 1875-76, and although the Patea district was thought to be free of the danger, the Patea Mail warned the town board, as the local health authority, to ensure all necessary precautions were taken to avoid an outbreak. The police added to their already versatile role by being appointed Inspectors of Nuisances by many of the boards. The Sergeant of Police at Carlyle reported to the town board that:

It seems that there is no drainage whatever to a number of houses, neither is there any place appointed for a rubbish depot, to which people can convey refuse of any kind...

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54. *ibid.*, 5 January 1876, p.2, c.4; 7 June 1876, p.2, c.1.

55. *ibid.*, 20 May 1876, p.2, c.2.

56. Public Health Act, 1872.

Not only that, but there are many dwellings where families reside, to which there are no cesspools or closets attached, and where these are provided, in some cases they are placed in disgusting proximity to wells.

The March meeting of the town board approved the site chosen by the Reserves Committee as a rubbish dump. Other than this measure, little else appears to have been done by the board at that stage in the way of sanitation. Presumably, there occurred no further epidemics about that time to arouse the residents to demand improved facilities and protection from health hazards.<sup>57</sup>

Connected to some extent with the question of maintaining a certain health standard in the community was the matter of straying animals within the town boundaries. In some districts this problem was a contributory cause of town-country antagonism, and of the often subsequent constitution of a town board.<sup>58</sup> In Carlyle, the attack on the inactivity of officials in curbing the nuisance was centred more on the aspect of damage to gardens and property. The New Plymouth-appointed poundkeeper did not appear to take his job seriously, nor did the town board act immediately in the matter, apart from threatening to impound straying stock.<sup>59</sup>

Hospitals and charitable aid were major preoccupations of Victorian local government institutions, but the same concern for the sick and destitute was not imported to New Zealand with the early immigrants. Provincial governments maintained the colony's hospitals in their characteristic unco-ordinated manner, with varying amounts of capital. The first money to be specifically appropriated by the Taranaki Provincial Council for the provincial hospital was £216 in 1869-70. The physical well-being of the settlers apparently did not warrant greater expenditure out of a total sum of £5,284 appropriated.<sup>60</sup> In 1872 the council devolved its responsibility for the hospital at New Plymouth on a hospital board.<sup>61</sup> By 1875 the provincial government was voting over £1,000 to the hospital and asylum, plus £100 to a "hospital committee, Patea".<sup>62</sup> The function of this committee is difficult to trace as the area was without a hospital until late in 1876, when local agitation was rewarded.

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57. All information in this paragraph was drawn from PM, 12 January, p.2, c.3; 2 February, p.2, c.3; 8 March 1876, p.2, c.6, unless otherwise footnoted.

58. Shaffer, p.40.

59. PM, 21 October 1876, p.2, c.3.

60. Province of Taranaki Appropriation Ordinance, 1869-70.

61. New Plymouth Hospital Ordinance, 1872.

62. Province of Taranaki Appropriation Ordinance, 1875.

The Patea Mail opened the campaign for a local hospital by urging local residents and/or the town board to push the proposal. The editor heaped scorn upon the provincial council vote for medical facilities in the Patea district, deeming it "utterly insufficient for the recent growing requirements", and "a sum so painfully and ludicrously out of all proportion that we wonder it could ever have been suggested." In August 1876, James Lett, a local settler, took up the initiative and called a public meeting to discuss the hospital question. A postponement, followed by a poorly attended meeting makes one doubt the interest of the settlers in the scheme. Those interested enough to attend were sorry that country settlers showed only "lukewarmness" towards the project despite the benefits they would derive from a local hospital. A provisional committee was formed and a motion passed that "in the interests of common humanity" a hospital should be established in the area. Their efforts were not in vain. The government granted the use of two Immigration cottages for hospital purposes, and a hospital was immediately established. Characteristically, the existing local authorities had remained in the background during the agitation for the erection of a hospital, unwilling to take on extra responsibilities.<sup>63</sup>

The revenue available to the Carlyle Town Board restricted its intervention in other fields as well, throwing the initiative for action on to private persons. A fire in April 1876 totally destroyed McGuire's store in Carlyle, but its occurrence subsequently stirred the community to action. The inevitable public meeting was called to discuss future action.<sup>64</sup> It was suggested that a fire brigade be formed with better equipment than buckets, saucepans, and a "meagre water supply".<sup>65</sup> One old resident attributed the birth of a fire brigade to this fire,<sup>66</sup> but if this was the case the organization was short-lived. A year later another meeting was called "to take into consideration the advisability of forming a Fire Brigade in Carlyle".<sup>67</sup> In August, 1879, the Patea Mail mentioned a well-attended meeting which formed the Carlyle Volunteer Fire Brigade and drew up rules and regulations.<sup>68</sup> The protection of property

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63. All references in this paragraph were derived from PM, 4 March, 17 May, 2 16 23 August, 28 October 1876.

64. PM, 26 April 1876, p.2, c.3.

65. Tyrrell-Baxter, pp.7-8.

66. *ibid.*

67. PM, 2 May 1877, p.3, c.2.

68. *ibid.*, 13 August 1879, p.2, c.4.

in Carlyle was obviously not an on-going process, but was resurrected when the need was greatest.

It was the practice that the government vest certain land reserves in the local governing institutions for public use. These reserves could be utilized as the sites for town halls and libraries, recreation grounds, or other public facilities. The "Englishness" of the southern Taranaki settlers soon showed itself through the communities' leisure activities. Both Hawera and Carlyle could boast a cricket club by 1876. These sports clubs pressed their claims to lease part of the town boards' reserves.<sup>69</sup> Each was successful, being granted leases at nominal rents. The boards recognized "the great benefits that accrue from an encouragement of wholesome outdoor sports, more particularly to the youthful population."<sup>70</sup>

The town authorities played some part in the provision of personal services, but one of the most fundamental of roles in the small colonial settlements of New Zealand was left initially in the hands of individuals, and then of the provincial governments; that was, education. The provision of education in the colony took a multiplicity of forms. The first half-yearly report of the Patea Education Board to the Taranaki Provincial Superintendent in December 1874, read:

The intention was to establish as complete a course of instruction as possible, so that residents in the district could obtain for their children, if necessary, a high class education without going to the expense of sending them to collegiate schools out of the province.<sup>71</sup>

Prior to the local board taking over control of educational functions, the Patea district's children were accommodated in three schools; Hawera, Carlyle, and Wairoa. The Carlyle establishment in July 1874 was described as

an old worm-out building, very much dilapidated, and totally unfit for the purpose, and with a meagre supply of books, and an almost total absence of school fittings, etc.<sup>72</sup>

The Hawera school was conducted in the "close, ill-ventilated, and very objectionable" Hawera Blockhouse.<sup>73</sup> Two years later, the number of schools had increased to seven with schools at Whenuakura, Kakaramea, Ketemarae, Manutahi, Carlyle, Hawera, and Wairoa. The annual report

69. PM, 25 March 1876, p.2, c.7; 3 May 1876, p.2, C4 HTB Minute Book, 20 March 1876.

70. HTB Minute Book, 20 March 1876.

71. PM, 14 July 1877, p.2, cc.1-2.

72. *ibid.*

73. *ibid.*

a rendezvous for entertainment and recreation; and a topic of immense interest to many parents. This latter point is illustrated by a petition from Kakaramea settlers soon after the local school had been constructed in 1876. The petitioners asked the board to make the school a full-time institution instead of a half-day one with the teacher spending the other half at the Manutahi school.<sup>82</sup> The board assented to their wish.

Although the Patea Education Board received much praise for its efforts, it also provoked some criticism, particularly through the handling of its finances. A "Ratepayer" from Kakaramea wrote to the Patea Mail expressing his annoyance at the board for increasing its secretary's salary by £25.<sup>83</sup> However, the Patea correspondent to the Evening Herald believed the increase justified on account of the numerous duties that official was required to perform.<sup>84</sup> On the whole, complaints from parents appear to have been quite infrequent, and satisfaction reigned.

The same could not be said of educational affairs across the boundary in Wellington province. One Wanganui newspaper editor wrote of the

utter hopelessness of effecting any improvement in the state of affairs.

Parents pay unwillingly, because they know the system is not worth the money, because they feel that a large proportion of the teachers are unfit to teach; because there is a chronic feeling of uncertainty that hardly anything is permanent even if it reaches mediocrity, and that the regulations of today may be superseded by a totally different set tomorrow.

We ardently espoused Mr Vogel's Education Bill of 1873 as a measure which, though far from complete, would lead to a comprehensive colonial system of education, and so supersede the vain and melancholy attempts to supply the educational wants of the country, which have been made piecemeal by the Provincial Councils.<sup>85</sup>

Later articles spoke of the "chaos" and the "inconsistent incongruities" within the Wanganui Education Board's management.<sup>86</sup>

The two and a half years between the constitution of the Patea Education Board and its supersession by a larger authority were years

82. PM, 3 May 1876, p.2, c.5.

83. *ibid.*, 18 March 1876, p.3, c.1.

84. EH, 22 March 1876, p.2, c.6.

85. *ibid.*, 9 January 1875, p.2, c.1.

86. *ibid.*, 22 February 1875, p.2, c.1.

of real progress for education in the Patea district. Local demands and aspirations were able to be satisfied by this decentralized unit of administration. The board laid the basis on which the machinery set up by the 1877 Education Act could build. It would seem from a cursory look at post-1877 education administration that with the retreat of the body responsible for education in the district to Wanganui, some of the isolation previously associated with provincial authorities returned to Patea. Much of the interest shown by householders in education during the brief interlude of the Patea Education Board seems to disappear after 1877. Evidence for this is shown in the poorly attended annual school meetings of householders. In 1880 the Carlyle meeting had to be postponed because of the initial lack of interested people.<sup>87</sup> Three years later, the Patea school committee chairman interpreted the small attendance as indicative of the parents' satisfaction with the existing state of affairs.<sup>88</sup> At the Kakaramea meeting there was "a miserable attendance", while at Whenuakura only five were present preventing any election of officers taking place.<sup>89</sup> The progress of educational facilities between 1874 and 1877 seems not to have been rivalled for many years in the Patea area.

The experience of the Patea district in the later 1860s and the early '70s, while being unique in some aspects, could well be typical in others of many of the out-lying areas in the colony. The Maori troubles and the government's confiscation policy were not felt in every part of New Zealand; nor was every other remote district divided administratively between two provinces, one of which happened to be the most financially unstable of the original six. But apart from these more unique problems, the Patea district went through a pattern of experiences no less familiar to other isolated areas of the colony. The influx of settlers into the area was accompanied by their demands for roads and bridges from central and provincial governments. The isolation from the provincial capitals, together with real or alleged provincial council neglect and indifference fostered a growing separation movement, which while not achieving its end, did extract concessions from the provincial governments in the form of provincial council representation and decentralized units of administration.

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87. PM, 22 January 1881, p.2, c.5.

88. *ibid.*, 24 January 1883, p.2, c.5.

89. *ibid.*, cc.5-6 .

These road boards struggled to satisfy demands for fundamental services made upon them by ratepayers, reluctant to rate themselves excessively but obliged to lend assistance, both financial and physical, to the boards. The growth of towns in the 1870s introduced a new dimension to settler society; the town-country relationship. The congregation of colonists in one place resulted in a new set of demands being forwarded. These townsmen had needs and aspirations distinct from those of their country neighbours. The town dweller demanded his own local governing body, the town board or municipal council, to forward the town's interests, and provide those features which were distinctly urban. Streets and footpaths headed the list of needs of the towns, just as roads and bridges were the foremost demands of the rural settler. In both cases, personal services filled only second place, with educational facilities being considered the most important, followed by the need for a local hospital.

The abolition of the provinces in 1876 introduced a new era in government in New Zealand, both centrally and locally. The centralization-decentralization process revolving around provincial government in the early '70s culminated in that system's extinction. The authorities which replaced the provinces were the counties: smaller in area and more numerous. New Zealand was about to enter a period of local government expansion which would consolidate the trend of creating a plethora of small parochial administrative units throughout the colony. However, initially the localities had the opportunity to test the effectiveness of the new local territorial and ad hoc bodies in catering for their needs and demands. The Patea district inhabitants found themselves in 1877 with two additional institutions through which they could extend their political experience, and on which they could rain criticism or praise depending on their particular social, economic, or political demands.

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## CHAPTER THREE

HIGHWAY, HARBOUR, AND HOSPITAL

It is ...mystically warlike in design, with charioteers, prancing steeds, mangled human corpses, and so on. On top of the central design is the motto 'Sociatis Laboribus', at bottom, 'Omnia Fortiter Vincimus' (With labours shared we conquer all things courageously).

- Description of the Patea County seal, Patea Mail, 18 April 1877.

The local government legislation introduced in 1876 to fill the gap left by the abolition of the provinces, and to attempt to alleviate many of the problems associated with government in the localities, was destined to create a number of its own difficulties, while accentuating existing ones. The formation of county councils and harbour boards was not able to entirely satisfy the settlers' parochialism and, in fact, helped to foster rivalries between groups of settlers. Discontent arose as both town and country settlers strove to ensure that their immediate interests were not overlooked to the advantage of the other. The response of the central government to demands from constituents to pass legislation dealing specifically with their local area was not always regarded as adequate. Once the particular local authority had been constituted, its response to the needs of the settlers likewise did not always gain the approval of all the ratepayers within its boundaries. Indeed, in the district Patea, intra-county or harbour district rivalry was as common as discontent between counties or harbour districts.

As the frontier receded, and with it the conditions which invariably destined the pioneers to identify closely with their neighbours, an important division within the settler community appeared. The man living in a flax whare and clearing the land to farm, and the tradesman and labourer in the small pioneer settlement supplementing his income by felling the bush and forming dray tracks and coach roads, began to draw apart as the towns developed. The settlers were no longer just "pioneers". They were now identifying as country settlers or town dwellers. Competition and disagreement between the constituents of these two interest groups grew.

Initially, the constitution of local government institutions was an attempt to overcome provincial government indifference and neglect. Progressively, it became more a bid to relieve and resolve social tension on the frontier. Town boards and borough councils, road boards and county councils were increasingly being provided by the state for the resolution of conflict between the rural and urban sections of the colonial society, as well as for the establishment of more uniform and efficient administration. However, the recognition of a certain section's individuality and distinction from another in the same district through the granting of town district, borough, road district or county status contributed to the self-awareness of that particular part of the district. Residents became increasingly jealous of their rights as townsmen, while country inhabitants made every effort to ensure their interests were not overlooked. Despite a continuing interdependence between the rural and urban environments of the colonists, these two distinct groups of settlers were alert to any development which might have conferred an advantage on the other. Thus, local authorities were seen as the remedy for town-country rivalry, but they were also to operate, unintentionally, as the foci of rural-urban discontent. This trend was to be especially apparent in ad hoc, or special-purpose, local government institutions such as harbour and hospital boards, which comprised a mixture of both interest groups. But even the county councils initially provided a context for disagreement between town and country, as well as between district and district.

In December 1876 the Patea Mail reported that "the people of the county will this day confide their local interests for a period of two years to nine gentlemen..."<sup>1</sup> and later that "everything passed off most quietly; there was a great deal of interest felt as to the result..."<sup>2</sup> This situation did not come, however, before the place of the urban area in the new county structure had been questioned. Earlier the local newspaper editor had commented that "the Counties Bill will throw all power into the hands of the country, for residents within township limits will really have no voice nor vote for the County representatives..."<sup>3</sup>

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1. PM, 27 December 1876, p.2, c.1.
  2. *ibid.*, 30 December 1876, p.2, c.4.
  3. *ibid.*, 7 October 1876, p.2, c.1.

His later plea "that the people of the townships are as much affected by the County Council as the residents in the rural districts, and therefore they should be entitled to the same privileges"<sup>4</sup> suggests a rural-oriented attitude to colonial life; a belief in the retention of a rural-based society. The growth of the towns possibly reminded the immigrants of the ugly industrial towns of England. The pioneers had experienced the effects of a growing urban environment in Britain, and many had emigrated in order to escape this phenomenon. The introduction of a county system of local government which threatened to extend the gap between town and country added to the disillusionment of the town dwellers, anxious but unable to settle in the country for financial reasons. One remedy suggested to offset this exclusion from rural affairs was to petition for municipal status for the townships. The Carlyle public were informed of the greater authority and influence exercised by a borough council to the benefit of the public. New Plymouth and Inglewood had been constituted boroughs, and the Patea Mail was confident that Carlyle had sufficient ratepayers to be similarly endowed.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately for the townspeople, Carlyle did not have the required number of inhabitants to be so constituted in 1876 and, in fact, had to wait until 1881 for municipal status, along with Hawera.<sup>6</sup> But their dissatisfaction was not to be the only voiced in connection with the Counties Act in an interminable struggle by colonists to ensure their needs and demands were adequately serviced.

The contest between north and south Taranaki did not end with the abolition of the provinces, but was continued during the establishment of the new county system. New Plymouth objected to the proposed boundaries for the two counties in Taranaki. The settlers in the north wished there to be only one county corresponding to the old provincial boundaries, or if there had to be two counties, that the division should come at the Waingongoro River, thus including the rich and yet unsold Waimate Plains in Taranaki County. The Patea district expressed its disapproval of such proposals through the newspapers and numerous public meetings. The Patea settlers wanted the Waimate Plains, and independence. 'Common Sense' alleged that "... we do not require to be in any way

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4. *ibid.*, 23 December 1876, p.2, c.2.

5. *ibid.*, 7 October 1876, p.2, cc.1-2.

6. See later, p. 59.

attached to New Plymouth, distance and local requirements being entirely against it". Provincial administration, or mal-administration, had forewarned Patea of the dangers of large administrative units.<sup>7</sup>

The Wairoa settlers had also learnt that "the nearer we get to the seat of local government the better that body is likely to look after us...." They chose to be represented in the Patea County Council for its proximity, its promising prospects, and its control of a lower maintenance-cost main road than that of the proposed Wanganui County. Their only reservation concerned the proposed expenditure on deepening the Patea River channel to form a harbour. They certainly did not wish to subsidise a project of doubtful benefit to their immediate locality.<sup>8</sup>

However, the county boundaries as proposed by the Committee of the whole House of Representatives were adopted. Time was to show that social and economic needs could only be adequately satisfied through the work of even smaller and more numerous local bodies, but their resources were becoming so meagre as a result that eventual consolidation was the only recourse open to effective administration.

The major piece of local government legislation of 1876, the Counties Act, divided the colony into sixty-three separate areas administered by locally-elected councils, which could choose to assume full or partial powers given them by law. The county councils could spend their own revenue raised from rates, licence fees, fines, and government subsidies, or they could distribute their revenue amongst the road boards which were permitted to continue to exist beside the county councils. The franchise was on a property basis with plural voting of up to five votes depending on the value of the ratepayer's property.<sup>9</sup> The councils were entrusted with control of the main roads, whilst the road boards maintained district by-ways. Charitable institutions, recreational reserves, libraries, market-places, pounds, public works, and peddlers and hawkers could also be brought under the jurisdiction of the councils. The task of fulfilling such functions depended upon the wishes of the ratepayers and on their willingness to rate themselves to provide finance

7. This paragraph was based on PM, 29 July 1876, p.2, cc.5-6; 2 August 1876, p.2, c.6.

8. The above references were drawn from PM, 26 July 1876, p.2, c.6.

9. Ratepayers with property valued at less than £50 were entitled to one vote; £50-£99 = 2 votes; £100-£149 = 3 votes; £150-£349 = 4 votes; and over £350 = 5 votes; NZS, 1876, pp.162-63.

for these projects.<sup>10</sup>

The inaugural meeting of the Patea County Council on 4 January 1877 was to prove indicative of county council-road board relationships throughout New Zealand. A motion that the council enforce only certain sections of the Counties Act was lost on a division, seven votes to two.<sup>11</sup> The failure to achieve unanimity on this point was to exemplify subsequent disagreements between the two components of the rural government system as to their respective functions and responsibilities in catering for the needs of the settlers.

The need which took precedence over all others in rural local government matters in 1877, as it had earlier, was that for roads and bridges. In 1875 the Patea district had no "branch roads to speak of worthy of the name of road."<sup>12</sup> By 1877 the situation had not improved, largely because of the road boards "being in a state of suspended animation, comatose till the Counties' Act and other measures have become the law of the land...."<sup>13</sup> The new county council resolved to proclaim the main line of road between the Waitotara and Taungatara Rivers to be a county road.<sup>14</sup> Immediately, the council was deluged with requests for repairs to that highway. Meanwhile, Carlyle residents and their representatives urged the council to have the main road through the town repaired.<sup>15</sup> The council heard their pleas, and took prompt action.<sup>16</sup> But from then on, the responsibility for the maintenance of the main road within the boundary of a town district became a disputed subject. In June 1877 the two advocates of giving the county only partial powers were defeated on a motion that town boards should exercise sole control and management over all roads within their boundaries.<sup>17</sup> A year later, the council, after conferring with the Carlyle Town Board about the road through the town, resolved in committee to allow the board to take over control of the main road and to receive all associated rates and subsidies.<sup>18</sup> Apparently, the town authorities did not want this further

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10. For the Counties Act, see NZS, 1876, pp. 153-98.

11. PCC Minute Book I, 4 January 1877, p.2.

12. PM, 20 October 1875; cited in Bremer, p.169.

13. PM, 9 August 1876, p.2, c.2.

14. PCC Minute Book I, 6 February 1877, p.7.

15. PM, 7 February 1877, p.2, c.3; 24 February 1877, p.2, c.4.

16. PCC Minute Book I, 6 March 1877, p.18.

17. *ibid.*, 3 July 1877, p.49.

18. PCC Committee Minute Book, 5 June 1878. This report was not adopted.

responsibility and drain on their already-scarce financial resources, for two councillors tried again, unsuccessfully, to devolve the maintenance of the main streets in Carlyle, Hawera and Waverley onto their respective governing bodies.<sup>19</sup> At its October meeting, the council decided that it was willing to unconditionally hand over the main road through Waverley to the local board.<sup>20</sup> Three months later, the Waverley Town Board notified the Patea County Council of its willingness to take over the maintenance of the road in question provided the latter body put the road in "thorough repair", and granted the board the existing rates and a proportion of the subsidy for the future maintenance of the road.<sup>21</sup> Nothing eventuated despite the numerous resolutions made and letters written. The situation had reached a stalemate which was to last for thirty years, until in May 1909 the Waverley Town Board Minutes record a resolution "that the Town Board take control of the Main County Road through the Waverley Township from the Patea County Council...."<sup>22</sup> But this was just one instance of disputed responsibility and attempted evasion of additional obligations.

In November 1878 a County Council motion to revoke the resolution proclaiming the main road a county road was defeated six votes to three. The mover alleged that "the system of two local bodies having charge of roads in the same district" was costly and "liable to cause collision."<sup>23</sup> An amendment suggesting that the road boards be approached to ascertain upon what terms they would be willing to accept responsibility for the main line of road through their respective districts was also lost.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the county councils and the road boards continued to share the duty of providing highways and by-ways, however reluctantly. Although district roads and bridges were essentially the sole concern for the road boards, they were not able to fulfil every ratepayer's wishes. Many of the settlers aired their grievances through the local newspapers and, no doubt, caused the road board commissioners a certain amount of embarrassment. The Patea West Road Board came in for its share of criticism from dissatisfied, and often irate, settlers. The limited funds at the disposal of the board caused the commissioners to ask the particular

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19. PCC Minute Book I, 4 September 1878, p.141.

20. *ibid.*, 2 October 1878, p.147.

21. PM, 15 January 1879, p.2, c.5.

22. WTB Minute Book I, 13 May 1909, p.322.

23. PCC Minute Book I, 6 November, 1878, p.152.

24. *ibid.*

ratepayers concerned to assist with additional funds or with physical labour.<sup>25</sup> But, accused one settler;

That is the style of the Patea West Road Board Commissioners, is it? If they, themselves, require a track, they are entitled to it; but, surely, some of the other rate-payers are entitled to a track, without felling the timber a chain wide.<sup>26</sup>

The ratepayers, no doubt, felt themselves justified in their criticism as they were required to pay rates of 9d in the £ to the road board and 1s in the £ to the county council for 1877-78.<sup>27</sup> This amounted to a mere £298 10s 7d. for the board from general rates<sup>28</sup> which did not extend very far with bush to fell, roads to form and gravel, and existing tracks and bridges to maintain. In accordance with the Land Act, 1877, one-third of the price of any block of land disposed of under the deferred payment scheme was to be given to the county council or road board for public works within the block sold.<sup>29</sup> The boards had to continually remind the county council of its duty to hand over this revenue to the boards or at least spend it themselves in making roads through the land in question.<sup>30</sup> The amount accruing to the boards from this source varied considerably, and payment was often delayed. The Patea West Board's statement of proposed expenditure for 1878-79 showed a total of £433 16s., but by mid-1879 only £173 had been received in rates.<sup>31</sup> It is, therefore, not at all surprising that the most common reply to requests for access to properties was "the board have no funds at their disposal for the purpose of making a road."<sup>32</sup> The redundancy of the road boards was highlighted by the amount of road-making carried out by the settlers themselves, either at their own expense or through contracts with the local bodies. The old settlers record their efforts in felling this track and forming that road.<sup>33</sup> Robert Petch, a young Englishman who purchased 217 acres near Kakaramea in 1876, wrote:

25. PWRB Letter Book, 16 August 1877, pp.3-5.

26. PM, 25 August 1877, p.2, c.7.

27. PWRB Rate Book, 1877-92; PCC Rate Book, 1877-84.

28. PWRB Letter Book, 13 April 1878, p.55.

29. NZS, 1877, p.170.

30. PWRB Letter Book, 18 May 1878, p.61; 1 July 1878, p.68;

31. *ibid.*, 18 July 1878, p.70; 16 May 1879, p.106.

32. *ibid.*, 16 August 1877, pp.3-5; 12 December 1877, p.26; 12 March 1878, p.42; 15 October 1880, p.161.

33. For example, a family scrapbook in the possession of Mr H.J. Foreman, Alton, gives many of the names of the men who fell the various roads in the district.

I am just finishing a Contract I took of the Patea West Road Board for making a road a chain wide but took it too low and shall not make anything at it....<sup>34</sup>

Petch found life difficult on the frontier; a situation which was not improved by the slow progress made by the road board. In July 1877 Petch was confident that the board "will do something towards making me my road."<sup>35</sup> The tender for Petch Road, however, was refused because no deposit was made by the tenderer.<sup>36</sup>

The other road boards within the county also came under fire from discontented ratepayers. The Patea East Board members were considered fortunate in having "good roads to their homesteads", while the ratepayers were without roads that enabled them to reach their homes safely.<sup>37</sup> By 1880 the East Board could boast of 3 miles of formed roads, fourteen miles under construction, and thirteen to be commenced.<sup>38</sup> Three years later, the length of formed road had doubled, fourteen miles was under construction, and ten miles had yet to be started. With a mere eighty-eight rateable properties of a total annual value of under £6,000 yielding approximately £170 in rates,<sup>39</sup> it was little wonder development was slow. The shortcomings of a system of rural local government which retained "scores of petty Boards" were recognized throughout the country. But vested interests dominated the political scene and obliged the government in Wellington pass legislation which increased the parochialism of the colonists and prolonged the existence of these minute local bodies. Although road boards found it extremely difficult to cope effectively with their sole function of constructing and maintaining district roads, some commentators went so far as to suggest that the functions of the boards should be extended to include the management of charitable aid, hospitals, and education.<sup>40</sup> This wide range of responsibilities would act to check the "petty local spirit" of small local bodies.<sup>41</sup> Although this somewhat enlightened approach to local government administration was never

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34. Robert Petch to his father, 4 December 1877; Robert Petch Papers 1877.

35. *ibid.*, 14 July 1877.

36. *ibid.*, 18 September 1877.

37. PM, 20 June 1877, p.2, c.5.

38. PERB Rate Book, 1877-95, inside front cover.

39. *ibid.*

40. PM, 24 May 1876, p.2, c.1.

41. *ibid.*

a reality, some of a wider range of functions were entrusted temporarily to one type of territorial local institution: the county council.

The Counties Act of 1876 permitted the councils to become involved in the fields of hospitals and charitable aid.<sup>42</sup> Despite the permissive nature of the Act, the Patea County Council was obliged by the Government to assume control of the recently-established hospital facilities in Carlyle.<sup>43</sup> Suspect management of hospital affairs apparently contributed largely to the issuing of this directive from Wellington.<sup>44</sup> The subsequent history of the hospital under county management points to a reluctance on the part of the council to incur further expense in carrying out an essential social service. On three separate occasions within two years, the county council narrowly rejected motions proposing the closing of the hospital.<sup>45</sup> In August 1878 the council considered "that Government should bear the whole cost of maintaining the Hospital."<sup>46</sup> The council was continually asking the Government for assistance,<sup>47</sup> and on at least one occasion called public meetings throughout the county in an attempt to raise money by voluntary subscription for the hospital.<sup>48</sup> The administrators found it necessary for solvency to tighten up the entry regulations for patients. After July 1878, "no patient was to be admitted to the Hospital except he receive an order from one of the Councillors or the Resident Magistrate requesting a Doctor to examine him and if a fit patient for the Hospital to admit him."<sup>49</sup> The council also declined to pay the expenses of Patea County residents who deliberately entered Wanganui Hospital for treatment, and of Wanganui County inhabitants in Patea Hospital.<sup>50</sup> In spite of the financial stringency exercised by the council in hospital matters, a new hospital was erected in 1879 at a cost of £565 shared between the Government and the Patea County Council.<sup>51</sup>

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42. NZS, 1876, p.182.

43. PM, 5 May 1877, p.2, c.2.

44. *ibid.*

45. PCC Minute Book I, 5 February 1878, p.92; 6 November 1878, p.152; PM, 26 April 1879, p.2, cc.4-5.

46. PCC Minute Book I, 7 August 1878, p.138.

47. *ibid.*, 6 March 1877, 5 March 1878, 8 May 1878, 27 November 1878, 5 March 1879.

48. *ibid.*, 5 February 1878, p.92.

49. *ibid.*, 3 July 1878, p.133.

50. PCC Minute Book I, 5 March 1879, p.177; PCC Letter Book I (Outward), 8 March 1879, p.90.

51. PCC Letter Book I (Outward), 12 May 1879, p.156.

The building of these new premises, together with a determined effort on the part of the council to strike a balance between improvidence and parsimony in hospital administration, received the satisfied silence of the ratepayers. The shattering of this silence in February 1880 prompted the council to take immediate action to quell any criticism of their administration. They enquired into the state of the hospital and the management of the surgeon, Dr. A.C. Croft, to determine the validity of allegations that the hospital

partakes more of the nature of a gaol, where patients are carefully sustained upon bread and water (to reduce their physical and mental activity), so that their presence in the institution, when once they leave, need never be looked for again.<sup>52</sup>

The enquiry revealed an intolerable state of affairs, and on receiving an insolent reply from Croft by way of explanation,<sup>53</sup> the council dismissed him as from July 1880.<sup>54</sup> The excitement over, the hospital reverted to its secondary position in the scale of social and economic requirements of the inhabitants of the Patea district. Provided the institution remained open, economical and adequate, the settlers' satisfaction was apt to drift into indifference. However, the situation in the colony in the early '80s was to stir this indifference into activity.

Poor relief was invariably linked with medical institutions, which could account for the reluctance of local bodies to accept responsibility for either. However, in contradiction to Dr Sutch's statement concerning the local authorities' determination not to perform vital charitable and public health functions,<sup>55</sup> there exists evidence to suggest that this is too sweeping a generalization. Despite the permissive nature of the clause in the Counties' Act concerning charitable institutions and aid,<sup>56</sup> the Patea County Council carried out poor relief as if it was obligatory. In 1878-79 the council sent a blind patient in the local hospital to Christchurch Hospital for treatment,

52. PM, 7 February 1880, p.2, c.7.

53. *ibid.*, 10 April 1880, p.3, c.2.

54. PCC Letter Book I (Outward), 8 April 1880, p.335.

55. W.B. Sutch, "Local Government in New Zealand. A History of Defeat", Local Government in New Zealand, R.J. Polaschek (ed.), Wellington, 1956, p.33.

56. NZS, 1876, p.182.

paying all expenses.<sup>57</sup> The following year, a twenty-four year old blind pauper was the subject of a considerable amount of correspondence between the council and the Government. Although the council suggested that the Government should accept responsibility for Hudson, as the council had "neither funds nor institution for such purposes", the Government was deaf to the suggestion. The council sent Hudson to Wellington Hospital, and then to Christchurch for treatment. The Patea County bore the cost of the passage to, and maintenance at, the hospitals for the pauper. Those patients in the Patea Hospital who were temporarily unemployed did not receive such charity, being required to pay the standard fee of 2s a day. Yet another instance of charitable aid concerned a family in Hawera in 1881, the head of which was in Patea Hospital. The Resident Magistrate referred the case of this destitute family to the chairman of the council who instructed the Hawera councillors to look after the family and, if necessary, issue them with destitute rations of bread, meat, tea and sugar. The ratepayers appear to have accepted poor relief as a worthwhile social benefit to which some of their rates could be directed. Although the cases of charitable aid seem to have been infrequent, the county council performed this function responsibly, and with little dissension.<sup>58</sup>

In contrast to the limited amount of agitation for adequate public health facilities and charitable aid by the settlers in Patea County, the harbour issue was responsible for provoking an inordinate amount of discussion and controversy throughout the county. Prior to the 1870s, military supplies and men were taken ashore in boats, from the schooners which navigated the west coast, at any accessible landing point. The state of roads through the Patea district caused the settlers to agitate, as early as 1870, for the declaration of Patea as a port of entry,<sup>59</sup> although the first wharves were not constructed until 1872.<sup>60</sup> James Hirst's wharf could handle vessels of up to 400 tons, conveying goods such as flax, wool, flour, potatoes, timber, and livestock.<sup>61</sup>

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57. PCC Minute Book I, 2 October 1878, p.145.

58. All references in this paragraph, unless otherwise footnoted, were derived from PCC Letter Book I (Outward), pp. 333, 418, 430, 495, 521, 567.

59. Bremer, p.183.

60. Taranaki Provincial Government Gazette, 1872, XX, 20, p.84.

61. *ibid.*

The increasing settlement of the district pointed to the need for improved shipping facilities, which in turn meant the delegation of responsibility for such improvements, and for their future management. The development of the '70s indicated the role that water transport could play in the colony's economy. The localism prevalent in the 1870s was highlighted also in the demand for improved harbours. Naturally enough, the settlers in Patea were reinvigorated in their pursuit of such an object by the report of the Colonial Engineer-in-Chief, John Carruthers, on the Patea Harbour in December 1875 in which he said that improvements were urgently required as the harbour was the only outlet for a district,

the natural fertility of which is not exceeded, if it is equalled by that of any district of equal area in New Zealand. The population is at present very small, settlement having been hindered by several causes of which the want of a harbour is the chief.<sup>62</sup>

In January 1876 the Patea settlers petitioned the Taranaki Provincial Superintendant for the constitution of a harbour board for Patea.<sup>63</sup> In reply the Superintendant informed the petitioners that the Provincial Executive would prepare a Bill to be presented to the Legislature during the coming session.<sup>64</sup> The Patea Mail, nevertheless, urged that in the absence of a special-purpose authority, the district's town and road boards unite "to take such action as may be necessary to prevent the valuable suggestions of the Colonial Engineer from falling to the ground."<sup>65</sup> But less than two weeks later, the same paper recorded that the Carlyle Town Board had discussed the report, but that was all they could do as they had no power or authority as a body to deal with harbour matters.<sup>66</sup> It was never suggested, as it had been in Wanganui in May 1876, that the board could form itself into a harbour board. The Wanganui ratepayers, however, decided overwhelmingly against the harbour board and borough council being one and the same.<sup>67</sup> A public meeting held in July 1876 resolved unanimously that the suggested improvements to the river were urgently required

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62. PHB Inward Correspondence. The Engineer-in-Chief, John Carruther's Report on the Patea Harbour, 5 December 1875; cited in Bremer, p.174.

63. PM, 5 February 1876, p.2, c.5.

64. *ibid.*

65. *ibid.*, 26 February 1876, p.2, c.2.

66. PM, 8 March 1876, p.2, c.3.

67. EH, 24 May 1876, p.2, cc. 4-6.

for district trade and that the Government be requested to carry out the work immediately.<sup>68</sup> The cause of a good harbour was unitive. The administration of that harbour was divisive.

On 31 October 1876 the Patea Harbour Board Act, together with thirteen similar acts, was passed.<sup>69</sup> But unlike the other acts, the Patea legislation aroused an immediate outcry among country settlers in the Patea district. The letter from "Country Settler" aptly conveys the feelings of his fellow settlers on the mode of forming the harbour board:

The cry of the Government in proposing Abolition of the Provinces was 'local Government', that is, local bodies were to have the power to tax or rate themselves, and to spend the money. What have we local in this abortion of a Harbour Act? The Government at Wellington nominate three; Carlyle Town Board sends three; and the whole of the settlers in the County (Carlyle excepted) send 'one', viz., the County Chairman. This is 'local Government' with a vengeance; the whole of the settlers in the County taxed, Carlyle Town Board and the Government at Wellington spend the money.<sup>70</sup>

Similar condemnatory letters were printed in the local press. The resignation of the local Member, Major Atkinson, was called for.<sup>71</sup> The outrage and sense of grievance of the rural population was such as to necessitate the passing of an amendment act.<sup>72</sup> Rural interests were protected by the re-formation of the board: one member appointed by the Governor, two elected by the Carlyle Town Board, one by the Patea County Council, and one by the ratepayers of each of the three ridings of Patea County.<sup>73</sup> This re-constitution of the harbour board represented the most important aspect of the amended Act to the ratepayers, whereas the parliamentary debate on the Amendment Bill was dominated by reasons for the need to "correct an error in the appropriation of land ... made for the harbour, and to provide for granting an additional endowment of some 200 or 300 acres...."<sup>74</sup> This, perhaps, is indicative of a lack of communication between the representatives

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68. PM, 29 July 1876, p.2, c.5.

69. NZS, 1876.

70. PM, 2 December 1876, p.2, c.6.

71. *ibid.*, 9 December 1876, p.2, c.4.

72. NZS, 1877, pp.121-23.

73. Patea Harbour Board Act 1876 Amendment Act, 1877, cl.2.

74. PD, 1877, 27, p.123.

and the constituents, the centre and the periphery. It also represents the struggle between the interests of the whole and those of one section; in this case, the Patea district versus the country settlers.

The mixed membership of ad hoc local authorities, the number of which rapidly increased in the immediate post-provincial period to cope with the functions left abandoned by the abolition of the provinces, provided a focus for the discontent of the various interest groups represented. Each group pushed for the protection and advancement of their interests within the jurisdiction of the local body, though the situation was not necessarily as selfish and biased as it might appear. Each ensured that its position, as represented on the board, was not grossly inferior, or its influence subordinate, to other represented groups. But this was only the case as long as the particular local authority, as a complete unit, was not challenged from outside. Then the local government institution usually became unanimous in defence of its position. Where the geographical area of jurisdiction of two or more local institutions coincided, it was not uncommon for these to campaign together for, or against, the issue at stake. This 'community' interest is reflected in the instance of the Patea County Council meeting, in September 1877, to draft a petition praying that the 'New Plymouth Harbour Board Ordinance, 1875' be repealed.<sup>75</sup> Such an action would re-direct the county's Land Fund from the coffers of the distant New Plymouth Harbour Board to those of the south Taranaki local bodies, to be expended to their advantage in opening the back country and improving the Patea harbour.<sup>76</sup> The petition succeeded in restricting the borrowing power of the northern harbour board to Taranaki County.

The Patea Harbour Board was empowered in 1878 to borrow to the extent of £10,000;<sup>77</sup> a sum sufficient to cover the cost of a breakwater on the south-eastern entrance to the river, but nothing more.<sup>78</sup> The board's initial funds of £2163 4s were derived from the sale of a portion of its land endowments,<sup>79</sup> and the board concerned itself for the first five months after its inaugural meeting on 2 March 1877 with the administration of the remainder of its reserve lands. Although

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75. PCC Committee Minute Book, 4 September 1877.

76. *ibid.*

77. Patea Harbour Board Act, 1878.

78. The tender accepted for the breakwater was £7373; PHB Minute Book I, 18 March 1878.

79. *ibid.*, 2 March 1877.

the board had John Thomson, later to become the board's engineer, make a survey of the river in July 1877, by October the settlers were showing dissatisfaction at the fact that no information had been made public on the river improvements.<sup>80</sup> The town residents, in particular, desired the immediate improvement of the river entrance in order to dispel the reputation of a dangerous harbour which allowed Wanganui merchants to extort excessive storage charges while their steamers waited for fine weather to put out for Patea.<sup>81</sup> On the other hand, farmers required harbour works to be carried out so as to avoid the need to drive stock long distances for shipment. Wanganui was the closest port suitable for cattle shipment, but the toll-bar at St John's Bush compelled many farmers to drive their cattle north to Waitara. Unlike the wool-growers and the businessmen of the Gisborne district who disagreed as to the degree of harbour efficiency required at Gisborne,<sup>82</sup> the town and country elements in the Patea district were united in the cause of a safe and efficient harbour, particularly in the light of the fact of the sub-standard roads and no railway in the area.

Improvements did eventuate, but in a piecemeal fashion because of the insufficient borrowing powers given the board. By the end of 1880, the harbour work completed included the breakwater to a length of 850 feet, and a guide pier, lighthouse, sheep and cattle wharf, plus other wharf extensions, altogether totalling £18,562.<sup>83</sup> Although the board resolved in July 1879, to impose a harbour improvement rate of 1s per ton on all goods through the port,<sup>84</sup> the improvements to the river allowed for a reduction in freight charges between Wellington and Patea from £2 10s to £1, with the prospect of a further reduction to 16s per ton when larger vessels could navigate the river.<sup>85</sup> The district had welcomed the visit in May 1878, of the renowned English marine engineer, Sir John Coode, during his tour of New Zealand harbours, at the invitation of the colonial government. Coode's report on the improvements required at Patea contained some recommendations which were already being acted upon by the time the report was made public

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80. PM, 6 October 1877, p.2.

81. *ibid.*, 11 May 1878; cited in Bremer, p.173.

82. W.H. Oliver & Jane M. Thomson, Challenge and Response; a study of the development of the Gisborne East Coast Region, Gisborne, 1971, p.161.

83. James Kenworthy, "Outline History of Patea Harbour", 8 February 1896, p.1.

84. PHB Minute Book I, 21 July 1879.

85. Kenworthy, p.1.

in June 1879.<sup>86</sup> The settlers were optimistic that the major portion of Coode's report would be acted upon in their best interests, but by the end of 1880 improvement work had ceased following several unsuccessful bids to raise essential finance for the work.<sup>87</sup> The colony was slipping into a depression which made borrowing difficult, particularly for extensive works on a small harbour.

The colonial pioneer knew what he wanted: civilization. This civilization meant adequate transport and communications, namely, roads, bridges and harbours. It also represented certain social amenities: schools, hospitals, recreational facilities. To aid the provision of these 'necessities', local administrative institutions were constituted. These bodies were to represent the interests of those inhabitants within their geographical boundaries. However, it was not uncommon for those interests as interpreted by the ratepayers and by the administrators to diverge, particularly in relation to financial affairs. Settlers had conceded the necessity of rating themselves as the most effective means of raising that revenue required to impose the characteristics of 'civilization'. But they were directed by localism, or parochialism, to ensure that the money they surrendered to their local authority did not venture outside the immediate locality, but was utilized for their own benefit. Self-interest governed all. Not only did localism prevail, but ratepayers closely scrutinised the levying of rates and tolls. Thus, when the Patea County Council erected a toll-gate on the Patea County end of the Waitotara bridge in retaliation for the alleged intention of the Wanganui County Council to remove their existing gate from St John's Bush to Kai Iwi or Waitotara, it was faced with the unanimous opposition of the south Patea district, including the three Waverley Riding representatives on the council. A special meeting of the council in December 1878 had decided that a toll should be established at the bridge to collect tolls on loads of gravel being taken out of the county; the charge to be £1 per load.<sup>88</sup> This was supposedly to restrict the export of scarce gravel reserves from the county, though this was not the reason given the Wanganui County Council later. A Collector of Tolls was appointed and took up his position in mid-January 1879.<sup>89</sup> Within a week, the collector had

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86. AJHR, 1880, E.-9. (Original manuscript held in the PCC Office, Patea.)

87. Kenworthy, p.1.

88. PCC Minute Book I, 17 December 1878, p.159.

89. PCC Letter Book I(Outward), 16 January 1879, p.35.

telegraphed the council explaining that "Contractors have hooked horses on toll-gate and pulled it down."<sup>90</sup> He was instructed to mend the gate immediately.<sup>91</sup>

However, generally the resentment of the public was manifest in less extreme forms, namely through public meetings and petitions. In an explanatory letter to its Wanganui counterpart, the Patea council complained of the volume of heavy traffic travelling over the Patea road from Wanganui, and only paying tolls to the Wanganui council. The Patea council believed it was now their turn to erect a toll-gate, but

considers that it has been forced into this position by the action of your Council, but the whole of the members are strongly opposed to tolls, and will only establish them in defence of the interests of the ratepayers of the County.

The letter continued:

To put the matter plainly if you will make your road free from our boundary to Wanganui we will erect no toll between Waingongoro and Waitotara.<sup>92</sup>

Public meetings held at Waverly and Waitotara in February condemned the action of the Patea County Council in no uncertain terms. Waitotara settlers were anxious lest the toll divert trade from their township to Nukumara or Maxwelltown on the other side of the river. They argued that the waggoners would pay the toll, but would also increase their freight rates. The Waverley meeting agreed that the southern part of the county would be affected the most, as it had business links with Wanganui. They were adamant that they should not have to pay tolls as well as rates. Certain members of the audience, one an ex-councillor, took the opportunity of the anti-council atmosphere to pass a motion that

this meeting is of opinion that it would be injudicious and suicidal of the Road Boards to merge their identity in that of the County Council, as the latter body does not at present inspire them with sufficient confidence to do so.

The ex-councillor went so far as to suggest the 'submergence' of the county council. Petitions circulated following the meetings were

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90. *ibid.*, 27 January 1879, p.38.

91. *ibid.*, 25 January 1879, p.37.

92. *ibid.*, 7 February 1879, pp. 50-1.

considered by the council, but before it could render satisfaction to the settlers, or further their antagonism, the Wanganui County Council made it clear that it had no intention of removing the St John's Bush gate. The Waitotara gate was dismantled, but the Patea County Council had the last word when a councillor recorded his happiness at the toll-gate resolution having been passed originally, for it had "been a means of waking up ratepayers to a sense of the power of the Council".<sup>93</sup>

The first years of the new local government 'system' in the late '70s proved to be years of a growing differentiation within colonial society. From the pioneer society emerged two distinct entities: townsmen and country settlers, and their differences were reflected through, and accentuated by, the local government institutions of post-provincial New Zealand. Sometimes, their interests clashed; sometimes, they coincided. Besides the town-country rivalry which developed in this period, there was the continuation of the trend of self-interest, of localism, which not only stirred inter-county antagonism, but also intra-county discontent. However, this latter condition was to show even more explicit results in the decade of the '80s, when 'hard times' swept New Zealand, followed by 'retrenchment'. The scarcity of finance for local development was largely responsible for the subdivision and re-subdivision of counties into more counties and even more road boards. Retrenchment can also account for the abandonment of former functions by local territorial bodies in the face of strong opposition and condemnation from ratepayers. The depression hit the local authorities hard. It also meant difficult times for local government employees; hence the high incidence of embezzlement by those officials. The 1880s were generally trying years for the local authorities as they attempted to satisfy public demands on an even more restricted revenue.

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93. References on this page, unless otherwise footnoted, were derived from PM, 19 26 February, 8 March 1879, p.2.

## CHAPTER FOUR

THE DEPRESSION OF THE '80s

Some assistance is urgently needed or ... the County will be entirely out of funds at the end of the financial year.

- Patea County Clerk to Major Atkinson, PCC Letter Book I, 17 February 1883.

The "long depression" which enveloped New Zealand in the latter decades of the nineteenth century affected everyone to some extent. Men and institutions alike struggled to maintain an existence amidst falling incomes and revenue. While no area of the colony escaped the economic collapse, the timing and intensity of the depression varied regionally. The performance of local authorities during these difficult times was directly related to the financial position of the central government and of the ratepayers, being dependent upon both for their revenue. Thus, local government action reflected the circumstances of the entire colony and of its immediate area of jurisdiction. Retrenchment, embezzlement, bankruptcy and separatism were all positive signs of depression, and their appearance helps to isolate the timing and intensity of the slump within a certain area more precisely. The examination of the depression in different regions of the country by researchers will eventually lead to the presentation of a more complete and accurate picture of the colonial depression. The Patea district is one of those areas.

By 1879 New Zealand found itself face-to-face with the phenomenon of commercial depression which had haunted the colony in the late 1860s, but which had been temporarily daunted by Vogel's creation of an artificial boom in the '70s. Although the experience of dull times and a falling standard of living, following upon a fall in export prices, was the common plight of the whole colony, the depression conditions were felt with varying intensity at different times and places between 1879 and the mid-1890s. South Island towns had been forewarned of a possible slump as early as 1877 through increasing unemployment, falling wages, and the subsequent discontent among recently-arrived, but disillusioned immigrants.<sup>1</sup> The advent of depression turned South

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1. W.H. Oliver, The Story of New Zealand, London, 1960, p.130.

Island success in the "pork-barrel" into failure and misery, for the public works programme had favoured the south. The condemnation of 'sweating' and 'land monopolists', particularly in the South Island, tends to colour the entire picture of depression throughout New Zealand. These issues were certainly the most important to emerge during the "hard times", reaching a climax between 1887 and 1890, but their portrayal should not be permitted to overshadow completely, possible variations in the depression theme. While improved communications and the abolition of the provinces had meant the increasing integration of the colony's economy, by the late 1870s regional economies still persisted. These economies, within which quite different conditions often existed,<sup>2</sup> were characterised by self-sufficiency. These features accounted for the variation in the intensity and timing of the depression throughout the colony.

The generalised course of events accepted by historians for the colonial-wide situation was a deepening of depression conditions as the 1880s wore on, to reach a high-point during Atkinson's last ministry, followed by the gradual abatement of the depression in the mid-'90s and the return of prosperity. Such circumstances were governed by the colonial economy and by the situation overseas, that is, by the colony's export prices and English creditors. These colonial trends tend to ignore the possible existence of pockets of variation in the colony. Such a deviation from the norm is revealed by local newspapers and local authority records to have occurred within Patea County during the 'long depression'. These sources imply that the southern Taranaki area was enveloped by depression during the second half of 1879, and because of additional reasons to those which are used to explain the colony's depressed conditions. They also point to 1883, and not 1889 or 1890, as the year the depression reached its nadir in south Taranaki. The smallness of the area involved in this example of variation should not be allowed to count against the significance of this disclosure, for further investigation could well show that these findings are, in fact, applicable to a wider geographical expanse, for example, the Taranaki provincial district. Despite the gradual disappearance of political particularism and economic distinctiveness in the later 1870s, the district, or constituency, became the contestant in the development

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2. Keith Sinclair, "The Significance of 'The Scarecrow Ministry', 1887-1891", Studies of a Small Democracy. Essays in Honour of Willis Airey, Robert Chapman and Keith Sinclair (eds.), Auckland, 1963, p.104.

politics field. The division of opinion over development issues shifted from the provinces to the districts. Each was an important component in the colonial system of politics and economics. Each is worthy of consideration for its idiosyncracies, as well as its analogies.

The provincial governments' legacy of neglect and indifference remained with the Patea district long after 1876. The repercussions of being a confiscated area continued to regulate the rate of settlement and progress of the district. Since 1873, confiscated lands had been released for sale very slowly, but by 1879, the extremely fertile Waimate Plains between the Waingongoro River and the Taungatara Stream had yet to be put on the market; the delay being due to disputed titles to the lands. Providing access through these unsettled, confiscated lands in the northern sector of the county helped keep the Patea County Council in straightened circumstances.<sup>3</sup> Although the council levied a high rate of 1s in the £ on the improved value, and received supplementary grants from government, it was faced with an estimated deficit of £2,074 for the year ending 31 March 1878.<sup>4</sup> Such a prospect prompted the council to derive as much as possible from other sources of revenue, and to avoid taking on additional costly responsibilities. One supplementary means of raising essential finance was to lease reserves vested in the council. Thus, 1877 and 1878 saw the council frequently request the Government to vest certain reserves in the former, so as to augment its funds, and to extend the time limit for the lease of recreation grounds, in order to make such a venture a paying proposition.<sup>5</sup> The increasing farming activities throughout the district involved local authorities in further expense, namely, in the control of straying stock. This problem was a very real one, particularly after the advent of refrigeration and the resultant intensification of farming activities. In August 1877 the Patea County Council recognized its responsibilities in this field by appointing the existing provincial poundkeepers to be county poundkeepers.<sup>6</sup> This action did not come, however, before the attention of the councillors had been drawn to the problem by ratepayers and travellers in the county.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, the straying stock problem was not confined

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3. Bremer, pp. 191-92.

4. PCC Committee Minute Book, 3 July 1877.

5. PCC Minute Book I, 4 September 1877, p.63; 6 November 1877, p.73. 8 May 1878, p.120.

6. *ibid.*, 7 August 1877, p.56.

7. PM, 2 May 1877, p.2, c.7; 9 May 1877, p.2, c.5.

to the rural districts, as the town boards were quickly reminded by offended residents.<sup>8</sup>

In the first two years of county council administration, the Patea County Council attempted to make the most of the limited financial resources and parliamentary lobbying powers to benefit its ratepayers. Rewards were offered to persons discovering good gravel in convenient places for county purposes.<sup>9</sup> The scarcity of suitable gravel within the county boundaries resulted in further expense in importing this road material from outside the district. The council petitioned the Government to push ahead with the construction of the Wanganui-Patea railroad for reasons of profit and economy. The line would relieve the main road of heavy traffic and, therefore, the ratepayer of a large annual expense.<sup>10</sup> The county inhabitants were generally satisfied with the council's performance in those initial years, but in the next five years the district experienced a recession during which individual settlers and local authorities found it increasingly difficult to remain solvent, some of the former, in fact, succumbing to bankruptcy. Misery and disillusionment were inevitable concomitants of the depression and resultant struggle of the local government institutions to carry out those functions demanded by the ratepayers. Local authorities were the immediate development agencies of government, dependent for finance on the local settlers and the central government, and thus, to a certain extent, were indicators of the economic position in the locality and in the colony. Their dependence on rates ensured that these institutions bore the brunt of ratepayer dissatisfaction for alleged inactivity or maladministration, which could place the very existence of the local body in jeopardy, as the Patea County Council was to learn in those difficult times. The economic situation of the Patea district, as reflected in the record of its local authorities, reached its lowest point during 1883-1884, after which time the force of the depression appears to have subsided in southern Taranaki. Thus, circumstances in this region dictated that it would feel the slump conditions at their height at an earlier date than has been suggested by many authorities for the colony as a whole.

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8. *ibid.*, 18 April 1877, p.2, c.4.

9. PCC Minute Book I, 4 September 1878, p.143; 1 October 1879, p.210.

10. *ibid.*, 8 May 1878, p.120.

By the early months of 1879, definite signs of progress were apparent in the district around Carlyle, Hawera and Waverley. Roads were being formed; some even metalled. Bridges had replaced punts and fords. Work on improving the Patea harbour was progressing, and the bush was being pushed back. The progress permitted the absorption of more than seventy-five immigrants in work in the district during April 1879;<sup>11</sup> hardly an indication of the unemployment and cut wages which were to affect the colonial economy within a matter of months. But the fall in export prices to which the slump is attributed was intensified in Taranaki by the effects of a reoccurrence of racial tension in mid-1879. Led by their prophets, Te Whiti and Tohu, the Maoris on the Waimate Plains expressed their resentment at the report of the West Coast Royal Commission of 1879, by crossing the Waingongoro and ploughing up the settlers' land.<sup>12</sup> The Volunteers were put in a state of readiness for a possible uprising. In July 1879 the Carlyle correspondent to the Wanganui Herald reported that

the number of men now out of employment here is very large, and all kind of work is now at a standstill. Business has not been so dull for sometime, and there are numbers here who must suffer considerably from the depression. Settlers are neglecting their homesteads, having to give so much time to drill, and are becoming exasperated at the present position of affairs.<sup>13</sup>

A week later, a well-attended public meeting at Carlyle resolved

that on account of the great depression prevailing in the district caused by the unsettled state of Native affairs, the Government be urged to commence the railway works as the only means of increasing commercial confidence and restoring trade to something like its former state.<sup>14</sup>

The unsettled atmosphere in the area also adversely affected the performance of Patea County Council business in that it further prevented the sale of land on the Waimate Plains, depriving the county of twenty per cent of the proceeds of such a sale. William Dale, the county chairman, applied for an advance from the Government on account of the land revenue in order to be able to maintain the highway through

11. PCC Letter Book I (Outward), 19 April 1879, p.143; 25 April 1879, p.149.

12. AJHR, 1880, G.-2.

13. Wanganui Herald, 8 July 1879, p.2, c.7.

14. *ibid.*, 17 July 1879, p.2, c.7.

the district. Dale informed Major Atkinson that because of the unrest, settlers had been unable to continue their usual farming activities for a considerable period, "consequently causing a great depression throughout the County, which was not the case in other districts."<sup>15</sup>

He went on:

If the Government wish the road through the County to be kept in proper order, in case they require it for defence purposes it is necessary for the Council to obtain funds from some other source than rates which are quite inadequate for the purpose....<sup>16</sup>

In 1878-79 the council had levied a rate of only 6d. in the £,<sup>17</sup> and thus, could only expect to receive half the amount collected for the previous year. With the existence of a dual system of rural government, the counties were not prepared to continue to rate as high as 1s in the pound on the improved value. The councillors did not wish to completely alienate the settlers, nor did they want to drain their own pockets through exorbitant rates. The road boards tended to follow a similar pattern of decreasing rates<sup>18</sup> until the introduction in 1882-83 of the new rating based on capital value,<sup>19</sup> which drastically reduced the amount levied in the £, but maintained the same amount of total rates received.

In addition to these statements and pleas for government assistance, other factors were important in conveying a picture of the Patea district experiencing depression conditions at their height in the years between 1879 and 1884. Retrenchment, abandonment of functions and a reluctance to accept additional responsibilities by local authorities, embezzlement, bankruptcy and separatism combined to reach a pinnacle in those five years.

Retrenchment practised by the central government often rebounded on local authorities, particularly when the economic measures involved withdrawal or reduction of subsidies. Such proposed retrenchment led the Patea County Council to communicate with the Government over the council's concern that the Government intended to withdraw local body subsidies. The council maintained that without the grants the main

15. PCC Letter Book I (Outward), 28 November 1879, p.250.

16. *ibid.*

17. PCC Rate Book, 1877-84.

18. PWRB Rate Book, 1877-92; PERB Rate Book, 1877-95.

19. The Rating Act, 1882.

roads could not be kept in order, especially as the railway had not been completed.<sup>20</sup> Despite the earnest plea, the House cut the subsidies and appropriated the balance of the counties' Land Reserve for colonial purposes. This action, together with the increase of heavy traffic on the Patea County roads caused by government contractors, placed the council in such a position as to make it impossible to maintain the main road, even if the highest rate allowable was levied.<sup>21</sup> An adequate highway was essential if for no other reason than defence.<sup>22</sup> The county council in these troubled times made frequent appeals to the Government to open up the back country and to make land available for settlement.<sup>23</sup> The difficulties facing the council in the maintenance of the main road were largely responsible for its reply to certain questions contained in a government circular to 'Local Governing Bodies' in May 1882.<sup>24</sup> The council suggested that the words 'and maintenance' be added to a clause in the Roads Construction Bill, which stated that the colony should bear the greater portion of the cost of construction of any main roads connecting two centres of population, and thereby benefiting the whole colony to a greater extent than the districts through which they passed.<sup>25</sup> The council also proposed that the less advanced areas of the country should qualify for larger subsidies, allocated according to their requirements and not to a rate criterion.<sup>26</sup> The council took immediate advantage of the provisions of the Roads and Bridges Construction Act, 1882, to resolve to apply to the government for £12,000 for the purpose of metalling all but one and a half mile of the twenty-seven mile stretch of main road between Waitotara and Manawapou.<sup>27</sup> Two and a half mile had never had any metal on it, while the remaining twenty-three miles had been coated with inferior gravel.<sup>28</sup> County Councils were becoming increasingly dependent for finance on the central administration to further their districts' interests. Thus, they were making themselves steadily more vulnerable to charges of obsolescence and redundancy.

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20. PCC Minute Book I, 2 June 1880, p.236; PCC Letter Book I (Outward), 8 June 1880, p.383.

21. PCC Letter Book I (Outward), 27 October 1880, p.479.

22. *ibid.*

23. PCC Minute Book I, 6 July 1881, pp. 286-87.

24. AJHR, 1882, A.-10.

25. *ibid.*, pp. 2,34.

26. *ibid* ,p.40.

27. PCC Minute Book I, 24 November 1882, p.321; PM, 5 January 1883, p.2.c.6.

28. PM, 5 January 1883, p.2, c.6.

In an effort to cut council expenditure, the Patea County Council made large reductions in the salaries paid to its officials. The clerk/collector/treasurer's salary was reduced by £80 to £170 per annum from 1 January 1881; he was only required to keep the county office open three days a week, instead of six as previously; and he was relieved of his duties as dog tax collector and registrar of brands. At the same time, the county engineer's salary was cut from £250 to £200.<sup>29</sup> The county chairman in 1881 received an annual honorarium of £25, only half the amount granted annually since 1877.<sup>30</sup> After J. Black, the county clerk since February 1877, had been dismissed for embezzling council funds in 1882,<sup>31</sup> the position of clerk/collector/ treasurer was advertised at a salary of £80 per annum;<sup>32</sup> a move which, while reducing office expenses significantly, could well have encouraged further embezzlement by a grossly underpaid official. According to the Patea Mail, the county was paying nearly £300 more in office expenses in 1881 than it was receiving in rates.<sup>33</sup> Even the councillors' travelling expenses were reduced from £1 10s. to £1. and then 10s. per meeting plus 6d. per mile return.<sup>34</sup>

The need to economize, together with the decreasing amount of business to transact, determined the council to meet quarterly instead of monthly, and a committee of four was constituted to carry on the essential work of the county and to report each quarter.<sup>35</sup> This innovation, however, was barely put into practice, presumably because of the emergence of a number of important issues, including embezzlement and hospital management. When the Patea East Road Board decided in August 1880, to meet only every other month, they, in fact, did so for more than three years.<sup>36</sup> Seven months later, the board again decided that it did not transact sufficient business to warrant holding more than one meeting every second month; a situation which prevailed till 1888.<sup>37</sup>

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29. PCC Minute Book I, 6 October 1880, pp. 252-53.

30. *ibid.*, 14 February 1881, p.268.

31. See later, p.64.

32. PCC Minute Book I, 4 October 1882, p.318.

33. HS, 3 February 1882, p.2, c.3.

34. PCC Minute Book I, 5 April 1882, p.309.

35. *ibid.*

36. PERB Minute Book I, 7 August 1880; 22 December 1883.

37. *ibid.*, 5 July 1884; 7 July 1888.

The Patea County Council met with sound criticism over their resolution in mid-1883 that the clerk's salary be further reduced to £65 per annum, which prompted the council to rescind the resolution three months later.<sup>38</sup> The critics believed such parsimony was a mistake, and that "If the Council desire to have their work done efficiently, they must pay something like a decent amount to keep a competent man...."<sup>39</sup> When the bank stopped giving credit to the council in February 1883, the council was compelled to resolve "that on account of the County's financial position the engineer receive notice that his services are no longer required", and "that at the earliest opportunity all the surfacemen on the County Road be discharged."<sup>40</sup> Against the advice of the engineer, all surfacemen appear to have been discharged, and the lack of visits of inspection by councillors, and of labour to carry out essential repairs, led to deterioration in the state of the county roads. This problem was aggravated by the Government's failure to make special provision in the general vote for assistance in metalling the main road through the Patea County. By February 1883, the Patea County Council had a bank overdraft of more than £1,400, which called for further retrenchment. The council threatened the Government with closure of the local hospital, and then "in an act of martyrdom" resolved not to draw any travelling expenses in the future. However, a letter to the Patea Mail from 'A Ratepayer', pointed out that the council's half-yearly balance sheet to 30 September 1883, showed a sum of £50 for the engineer's salary and £62 devoted to "Councillors' expenses, travelling allowance". The writer questioned the existence of an engineer, and complained that he was under the impression

that owing to the impecunious state of the county, its overdraft, and its roads in ruin, councillors were not going to dip into the rates to pay themselves! I must have been mistaken, but I cannot help thinking that £62 for half a year is pretty stiff.

If indeed, councillors did stop receiving reimbursement for their expenses in 1883, they resolved, early in 1884, that these allowances be restored to them from then on.<sup>41</sup>

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38. PCC Minute Book I, 6 June 1883, p.349; 5 September 1883, p.352.

39. PM, 18 June 1883, p.2, c.2.

40. PCC Committee Minute Book, 16 February 1883.

41. References in this paragraph, unless otherwise footnoted, were derived from PM, 16 March 1883, p.2, c.5; 18 June 1883, p.2, c.2; 16 February 1883, p.2, c.3; 21 February 1883, p.3, c.1; 23 January 1884, p.2, c.7; 4 January 1884, p.2, c.4.

Retrenchment was also demanded from other local bodies in the district. The Patea Borough Council, which had been constituted in October 1881,<sup>42</sup> came in for criticism over its failure to retrench, especially in office expenses. The residents demanded that the borough council follow a policy of economy, provided that street formation and maintenance was not shelved. They alleged that "the shrunken state" of the borough's finances was due largely to excessive engineering costs and office salaries. Despite the call to cut labour costs, the platform of one mayoral candidate in 1883 included a promise to the town's "working men" of "plenty of work all the year round" provided they voted him into office. 'Working Man' believed that "If Mr. Taplin can give us all employment at an expenditure of about £2,000 a year, he must be the best man for us working men, whatever he may be for the general run of ratepayers."<sup>43</sup>

The need to economise in local authority operations in the colony led territorial local government institutions to minimize their responsibilities as much as possible. This was achieved mainly through the abandonment of functions and refusal to commit themselves to additional responsibilities, especially those likely to involve considerable expenditure. The refusal of the Patea County Council in 1883 to take further responsibility for the management of the local hospital provided a major talking-point for settlers in the area, some of whom interpreted the move as irresponsible, and against the interests of the district.

In April 1882 the county council, having warned the Government that it would close the Patea Hospital if Wellington did not forward the necessary funds, postponed any decision on the matter, believing that the House was to consider legislating upon the subject of hospitals and charitable aid.<sup>44</sup> No legislation was enacted, nor did the Government forward the overdue subsidies for the hospital. The stoppage of bank credit in February 1883 prompted the council to warn the Government once more.<sup>45</sup> After several more threats, the council resolved, on 2 May 1883, that it would no longer accept responsibility for the hospital, and that the Patea Borough Council was the proper body to administer

42. *NZ Gazette*, 1881, p.1266.

43. References in the above paragraph were drawn from PM, 12 February 1883, p.2, c.2; 14 March 1883, p.3, c.2; 16 March 1883, p.3, c.1; 4 June 1883, p.2, c.7; 3 September 1883, p.2, c.6.

44. PCC Minute Book I, 8 March 1881, p.272; 5 April 1882, p.308.

45. PCC Committee Minute Book, 16 February 1883.

the institution.<sup>46</sup> Although the Government promptly forwarded some of the £517 it owed the county council, the council adhered to its decision to relinquish the management of the hospital.<sup>47</sup> This suggests, perhaps, that the council was glad of an opportunity to rid itself of a costly responsibility; a burden upon the council's finances, particularly since the Hawera district had separated from the Patea County, and Patea had become large enough to be constituted a borough. The borough council flatly refused to assume the management of the hospital; thus, the Government intimated its intention to close the institution.<sup>48</sup> This stirred the settlers into action, fearful that they might lose the hospital to Hawera. Both leading local bodies in the district having manifested reluctance to take decisive action in the interests of their ratepayers, a number of well-known residents took the initiative and called a public meeting in July 1883 to consider hospital matters. The meeting of 50 to 60 people resolved

that it is the duty of everyone in the district to do his utmost toward meeting the Government in any reasonable demand they make on us to keep the Hospital open.

A Hospital Committee was appointed to enquire into the procedure for forming Hospital Boards. A public subscription was opened, and local authorities were asked for contributions. The local churches were to have an annual 'Hospital Sunday Collection'.<sup>49</sup>

The entire Patea district was unanimous that the local hospital be kept open, but the responsibility for doing so was juggled between the Government, county council, borough council, and a proposed hospital board; an amalgam of all three. Ideas for raising the essential finance were also quite varied. Class consciousness was revealed in a suggestion from 'Workman' that the hospital be supported by voluntary contributions from employers, as they would have to care for their employees if there was no hospital. A Manaiia correspondent recommended that subscribers of one guinea to the hospital fund be entitled to recommend one patient for treatment. The editor of the Patea Mail suggested that perhaps a 'trifling rate of say 1d in the £' could be

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46. PCC Minute Book I, 2 May 1883, p.343.

47. PM, 3 April 1883, p.3, c.2; 2 May 1883, p.2, c.3.

48. PM, 2 July 1883, p.2, c.3; 6 July 1883, p.3, c.1.

49. References to the meeting found in PM, 13 July 1883, p.3, c.3; 18 July 1883, p.2, c.5-7.

levied for hospital maintenance.<sup>50</sup> By mid-August 1883, £157, including £50 from the borough council, had been subscribed. This sum was welcomed as a liberal response in view of the "hard times".<sup>51</sup> The Government had offered to pay half the maintenance and management costs.<sup>52</sup> Public opinion caused the Patea County Council to rescind its resolution that it subscribe nothing to the hospital fund until the Government paid its debt with interest.<sup>53</sup>

A Committee of Management was appointed, and took over the management of the hospital as the Patea Hospital Board from 1 December 1883.<sup>54</sup> At the end of its first year of management, the board reported that although it was out of funds, the year's management had been very economical and satisfactory. While treating the same number of patients as when the hospital had been under county council control, the material cost had been reduced from more than £560 to £309.<sup>55</sup> The board continued its management through the help of local donations<sup>56</sup> until a new hospital board was constituted under the Hospital and Charitable Institutions Act, 1885.<sup>57</sup>

The Patea County Council did not see itself as the appropriate administrative authority for hospital management and was grateful for the opportunity to unburden itself of the responsibility. But such was the economic pressure on the council that, in 1882, it had even contemplated devolving its major responsibility, the main road, on to the road boards. The council was prepared to vote the boards funds from time to time for expenditure on the road.<sup>58</sup> If accepted, this proposal could have deprived the council of any raison d'etre, and further intensified the agitation for the suspension of the Counties Act in the Patea district. In addition, the council intimated its willingness to relinquish control of the Waverley recreation ground in June 1883, having earlier refused to do so.<sup>59</sup> The same institution had not been slow to remind the newly formed Patea Borough Council in

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50. The above suggestions were drawn from PM, 2 July 1883, p.2, cc.3,6.

51. *ibid.*, 17 August 1883, p.2, c.3; 27 August 1883, p.2, c.5.

52. *ibid.*, 18 July 1883, p.2, c.4.

53. PCC Minute Book I, 7 November 1883, p.368.

54. Patea Hospital Board Minute Book I, 13 November 1883, pp.4-5.

55. PM, 12 January 1885, p.2, c.7.

56. Patea Hospital Board Minute Book I, 15 September 1884, p.19;  
12 January 1885, p.20.

57. NZS, 1885, pp. 157-58.

58. PCC Minute Book I, 4 January 1882, p.300.

59. *ibid.*, 6 June 1883; p.348; 6 November 1877, p.73.

1881 of that body's full responsibility for the Patea bridge, previously under county council jurisdiction.<sup>60</sup> In those increasingly difficult times, any move to pass on financial responsibilities was welcomed by local bodies.

While the development of the country areas of southern Taranaki was restricted somewhat by the depressed conditions, the towns continued to grow as though in defiance of economic trends. The growth of both Carlyle and Hawera was recognized by the grant of municipal status to both towns in 1881.<sup>61</sup> Carlyle residents were almost unanimous in their desire for the creation of a municipality, realizing the greater benefits which were to be had from a borough council as opposed to a town board.<sup>62</sup> One Hawera resident was led to write that "Strangers who visit Hawera are not very favourably impressed with the streets and footpaths. The sooner a borough is proclaimed the better."<sup>63</sup> Immediately following the gazetting of Hawera as a borough, the editor of the Hawera Star wrote:

It cannot be denied that, with one or two exceptions, the whole of the streets are in a wretchedly primitive condition, unmetalled, unformed, overgrown with long grass and weeds, and in some instances mere receptacles for the storm waters flowing from higher lands. One of the first duties of the new council will be to remedy this condition of affairs....<sup>64</sup>

The Carlyle Town Board commissioners appeared uncertain of their powers under Taranaki provincial legislation, and recognised that as borough councillors they could expect to collect a greater amount of revenue for urban development.<sup>65</sup>

The immediate impetus for the pursuit of municipal status in Carlyle was largely provided by the revelation of the need for extensive works to promote the town's advancement. A prominent local resident, G.F. Sherwood, wrote to the town board advising:

As the time has arrived when your Board should take into consideration the desirability of undertaking many important works for the further advancement of the town,

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60. PCC Letter Book I (Outward), 31 December 1881, p.614.

61. NZ Gazette, 1881, p.1266; 1882, p.5.

62. PM, 7 July 1881, p.3, c.3.

63. HS, 3 August 1881, p.4, c.1.

64. *ibid.*, 23 January 1882, p.2, c.6.

65. PM, 10 February 1881, p.3, c.4.

but which, owing to the limited means at your disposal you are debarred from undertaking, I venture to suggest that you convene a public meeting for the purpose of taking into consideration the following propositions:-

1. Water supply
2. Drainage
3. Street and pathway formation
4. Tree planting
5. Present position of town leases, with a view to their modification
6. The raising of a loan for the purpose of executing the first five mentioned objects.<sup>66</sup>

The board resolved to raise a loan for improvement purposes,<sup>67</sup> though no further action was taken until Patea had been declared a borough. The town was then able to raise a £5,000 loan for development, and employ a resident engineer.<sup>68</sup> This upsurge of progress stimulated the borough council to double the loan in order to allow for further street formation.<sup>69</sup> Enthusiasm generated by this advancement prompted the council to propose the installation of electric lighting in the town in 1882, though nothing more came of the suggestion.<sup>70</sup> The need for progress had brought about a change of status for the town of Patea, which in turn had urged the town to greater developments. A £10,000 loan, the construction of a town hall and council chambers in 1883, as well as the payment of nearly £400 in salaries to a clerk, mayor and engineer<sup>71</sup> does not appear to be any indication of depressed conditions. However, Patea residents were soon demanding a certain amount of financial caution be practised by their council, particularly with regard to engineering expenses.<sup>72</sup> The need for improvements to the town, and the enthusiasm stimulated in the residents by the granting of municipal status to Patea combined to initially override the effects of depression being felt elsewhere. The position of Patea at the terminus of the railway from Wanganui also acted to delay the full impact of the recession on the town. Once the line from Wanganui to New Plymouth had

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66. *ibid.*, 6 May 1880, p.3, c.1.

67. *ibid.*, 8 July 1880, p.2, c.4.

68. PBC Minute Book I, 9 January 1882, pp.30-31. The borough's first engineer was Edward Tregear, later to become the first Secretary of the Labour Department.

69. *ibid.*, 24 July 1882, p.86.

70. *ibid.*, 3 July 1882, p.83.

71. *ibid.*, 5 December 1881, p.14; 9 January 1882, pp.31-32.

72. See earlier, p.56.

been completed in 1885, Patea became just another station on that route, losing much of its attraction and beginning to feel the pull of the depression moving across the colony. The initial burst of development and progress as a borough being exhausted by the mid-1880s, Patea settled down to a more mundane existence, even tending towards stagnation.

Despite the fact that borough councils possessed more extensive powers and could expect a greater revenue than town boards, the former had to maintain a sense of proportion in their expenditure, particularly in those depression years of the '80s. It would appear that the Patea Borough Council was reluctant to accept further responsibilities, partly because of financial considerations and partly because of precedent. For instance, the council shelved an application for financial assistance from the local fire brigade, "as more urgent works were exercising demands upon Council finances". The local newspaper editor questioned that the provision of an adequate water supply for fire prevention purposes should take second place to the installation of a town drainage system. Following a threat from the brigade to disband, and a reminder from critics that in the event of the threat being carried out, fire protection would fall to the council, that body granted a nominal sum to the brigade.<sup>73</sup> A fire brigade official asserted "that the Council wished to get rid of us on the cheapest terms. Ratepayers will decide whether this was the point at which to commence economy." The brigade subsequently disbanded, the public having subscribed a meagre £2 1s. to their funds. Soon after, a public meeting resolved to form another brigade, this proposal being greeted with immediate success. Although it was suggested that the new organization be a borough institution maintained out of council revenue, this was not acted upon, the brigade becoming known as the "Patea Volunteer Fire Brigade". The borough council, perhaps feeling the effects of a period of free spending and of increasing depression, had managed to evade further responsibilities in the form of fire protection and firefighting.<sup>74</sup>

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73. PBC Minute Book I, 2 July 1883, p.206.

74. This paragraph was based on references from PM, 4 April 1883, p.2, c.4; 7 May 1883, p.2, c.2; 20 June 1883, p.2, c.7; 25 June 1883, p.2, c.7; 6 July 1883, p.2, c.6; 12 December 1883, p.2, c.4; 3 March 1884, p.2, c.4; 23 May 1884, p.2, c.2; 30 May 1884, p.2, c.4.

The circumstances of the Patea Harbour Board in the early and mid-'80s lends support to the argument that the south Taranaki area experienced its most trying times, economically, in those years rather than later in the decade, when some authorities<sup>75</sup> suggest the colonial economy was at its lowest ebb.

In January 1883, the editor of the local paper was moved to comment:

That sleepy body, the Harbour Board... is the most important body in the district, and the improvement of the harbour is a vital question. Yet, what chance is there of any work being done when even the Board are too indifferent to meet. Stagnation prevails everywhere, and on all sides the opinion is expressed that unless 'something' is done to the Harbour, times will be bad indeed. A nice prospect truly!<sup>76</sup>

Later, he reported that "business has never been so dull in Patea before." He saw the need to elect men pledged to the improvement of the river, which would re-invigorate the trade of the port and increase the harbour board's revenue. The harbour works should have first priority, and then "the town may safely be trusted to look after itself."<sup>77</sup> Some settlers believed that the only way to get the improvement works stopped in 1880, recommenced was to look to the government to pass a Bill which would enable the district to rate itself.<sup>78</sup> But the district could not achieve unanimity on this point. Like the 'Inner Harbour v. Breakwater with Outer Harbour controversy' which enveloped the Napier district from 1875 to the 1920s,<sup>79</sup> the Patea district was split over the question of which harbour work should be executed first; inner or outer. 'The Patea Harbour Guide Pier v. Outer Breakwater controversy' revolved around a question of finance: whether to make do with a less expensive guide pier for the time being, or to attempt to raise the finance for the much more expensive East and West Piers.<sup>80</sup> The latter work would have almost certainly required the harbour board to have been given rating powers; anathema to most country settlers. In September 1881 a special meeting of the harbour board resolved to recommend the withdrawal of the Patea Harbour Rating Bill, because the

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75. Oliver, p.136; W.B. Sutch, "The Long Depression", reprint of paper presented at 32nd Meeting, ANZAAS, Dunedin, 1957.

76. PM, 15 January 1883, p.3, c.3.

77. *ibid.*, 29 January 1883, p.2, cc.1-2.

78. *ibid.*

79. Gunter Warner, "The Napier Harbour Board: Administration and Politics", unpublished M.A. thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1958.

80. James Kenworthy, "Outline History of Patea Harbour", 8 February 1896.

board considered the improvements to be 'a colonial work'.<sup>81</sup> Nine months later, public meetings at Kakaramea, Manutahi and Whenuakura voted against being rated for harbour improvements. An opposite reaction at the Patea meeting could not alter the board's decision that it would be 'utter folly to proceed further'.<sup>82</sup> James Kenworthy, the chief spokesman for the advocates of the inner works, suggested that separate votes for town and country be taken on any loan proposals, in view of the lack of unanimity between the two sectors. He wrote:

In the present condition of affairs at Patea, and with the near prospect of a large trade in meat and dairy produce for the Home market, there is reason to believe that both town and country would separately agree to a moderate rate for a loan for harbour purposes, if only a satisfactory plan of works were submitted by the Harbour authorities.<sup>83</sup>

Country settlers were not prepared to be burdened with further local body rates or charges, and, thus, they resisted harbour rating Bills and increased wharf charges.<sup>84</sup> The harbour board lowered their charges in 1883 so as to attract more trade to the port, especially from the Waverley area.<sup>85</sup> Although trade may have increased, the Patea Harbour Board found itself running into financial difficulties. In August 1884, the board resolved to meet only quarterly.<sup>86</sup> The board went into overdraft while awaiting government compensation for erosion of board endowments and for land taken for railway purposes.<sup>87</sup> All revenue was to be put into the bank account to reduce the board's overdraft; only salaries and working expenses were to be paid.<sup>88</sup> By the beginning of 1885, the board had a credit of £9 and, thus, was able to destroy the joint and several promisory notes given by the members to assist the board out of its difficulties.<sup>89</sup> Further attempts by townsmen to persuade the board to urge the passing of a Bill giving it borrowing powers for harbour work were defeated for the time being.<sup>90</sup> The merchants in Patea supported any move for harbour improvements, because a safe port would mean that more trade could be attracted to

81. PHB Minute Book I, 5 September 1881.

82. *ibid.*, 17 June 1882.

83. PM, 16 April 1883, p.2, c.5.

84. *ibid.*, 14 March 1883, p.2, c.5.

85. *ibid.*, 13 April 1883, p.2, c.2.

86. PHB Minute Book I, 26 August 1884.

87. PM, 8 December 1884, p.2, c.4.

88. PHB Minute Book I, 25 November 1884

89. *ibid.*, 13 January 1885.

90. *ibid.*, 14 July 1885.

the port, instead of being diverted through Waitara and Wanganui. The farmers, however, had yet to experience the developments associated with refrigeration, and the difficult times they had been through made them cautious in their consideration of any scheme likely to take more money out of their pockets. The depression acted to accentuate town-country feeling and brought a halt to development work thought to be essential by some; a burden by others.

The depression made a significant impact on local government institutions attempting to carry out ratepayers' wishes. It also had a profound effect on individual local body officers and ratepayers. The Patea area provides several examples of a colony-wide practice, in the 1880s particularly, of local authority employees embezzling ratepayers' money. Newspapers reported instances of embezzlement of funds and theft of debentures occurring at Dunedin, Kaiapoi, Kumara, as well as at Patea.<sup>91</sup> There could well have been other illegalities which went undiscovered. Although the Patea County Clerk, Treasurer and Collector of Rates was found not guilty of embezzling £177 belonging to the county council, and the council's Dog Tax Collector had a charge of embezzling dog taxes to the value of £1 withdrawn after serving one month's imprisonment,<sup>92</sup> the incidents received a large amount of publicity and lowered the standing of the county council even further in the public eye. Great consternation was manifested at the fact that £1409 in revenue remained uncollected at the end of the 1881-82 financial year; a sum amounting to more than a year's total rates.<sup>93</sup> Such was the muddle in the council's finances that £20 was voted to the newly appointed clerk "to get the accounts of this Council in a thoroughly efficient form...."<sup>94</sup> This action, however, was not enough to immediately restore ratepayers' confidence in the council and stop public censure of its conduct.

Bankruptcy was also indicative of the difficult times. In the Patea district in 1883, no fewer than twenty-six bankrupts' names were recorded in the Patea Mail. Their occupations ranged from farmers to sawmillers, labourers to tradesmen, and storekeepers to publicans. In

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91. *ibid.*, 14 July 1885.

92. PM, 5 January 1883, p.2, c.3; 11 January 1883, p.3, c.2; 2 January 1883, p.3, c.2 (extract from Wellington Post).

93. PM, 9 May 1883, p.2, c.5; 8 June 1883, p.2, c.2.

93. Report by the Provincial District Auditor ..., p.5.

94. PCC Minute Book I, 4 April 1883, p.340.



FIG. 2. PATEA COUNTY ROAD DISTRICTS, 1888 - 1910

no other year do debtor and bankruptcy notices appear so frequently in the local paper. Defaulting ratepayers were also in abundance that year, and following the suing of one defaulter as a test-case, the council frequently took reluctant ratepayers to court.<sup>95</sup> At one time, in March, the council issued 117 summonses to ratepayers.<sup>96</sup> The hard times, no doubt, intensified the country settlers' antagonism to paying rates to two local bodies doing essentially the same work, and strengthened the demand from many settlers for the abolition of either the county council or the road boards. This agitation reached a peak in the early years of the 1880s, only stopping short of having the Counties Act suspended in the County of Patea.

In 1879 the County of Patea embraced an area of 1344 square miles from the Waitotara to the Taungatara, enveloping four road and highway districts. /Fig. 1/ Two years later, two counties and six road districts<sup>97</sup> occupied the same area. The Patea County had been reduced to an area of 691 square miles between the rivers Waitotara and Manawapou. By 1885, separatism had overpowered any thoughts of amalgamation, the county area south of the Confiscation Line having been subdivided into six road districts.<sup>98</sup> This was not to mention proposals for five further districts refused by the Patea County Council in 1884 on grounds that the conflict of interests involved would not further the "public welfare".<sup>99</sup> In 1888 the Waitotara-Momohaki and Motoroa Road Boards were added to this list of local authorities in the county. /Fig. 2/ Parochialism, pervaded by financial considerations, provides the most acceptable reason for the significant increase in the number of road boards during the 1880s.

Although the framers of the 1876 Counties Act desired the merging of road boards with county councils,<sup>100</sup> both were permitted to co-exist so as not to alienate entrenched road board interests.<sup>101</sup> Localism,

95. *ibid.*, 14 March 1883, p.337.

96. PM, 28 March 1883, p.2, c.4.

97. Patea and Hawera Counties; road districts of Wairoa, Patea East, Patea West, Hawera, Ngaere, and Waimate.

98. Patea East, Patea West, Wairoa, Whenuakura-Waitotara, Okotuku, Kohi.

99. PCC Minute Book II, 2 October 1884, p.56.

100. PD, 1876, 21. p.542.

101. Sutch, "Local Government..." pp.23-24; R.J. Polaschek, "Local Government Reorganisation and Decentralisation", Decentralization in New Zealand Government Administration, J.L.Roberts (ed.), Wellington, 1961, p.79.

which had emerged most strongly during the last years of provincial government, became even more intense in the initial period of county government. The area definition of 'local' was being constantly compressed by disgruntled rural ratepayers. Areas were continually hiving off from existing road districts to form their own, or out-lying districts under county control were demanding recognition as viable road districts. Parochialism was certainly a great influence in this decentralization process, but the circumstances existing in Patea County in the 1880s suggest that lack of funds and a genuine dissatisfaction with county administration were complementary elements in the promotion of separatism. Road boards also came in for considerable criticism from ratepayers, which can account for the subdivision of some of the districts. The subdivision of counties after 1886 is largely attributable to the maximum loans and subsidies provisions of the Local Bodies' Loans Act, 1886,<sup>102</sup> but the subdivision of the counties of Patea and Wanganui in 1881 and 1884 respectively must be put down to the prevalence of a feeling of neglect among the ratepayers in the areas which were to become the counties of Hawera and Waitotara.

The first indications of separatist agitation within Patea County came in December 1878 in a petition from settlers in the Whakamara Block, inland from Manutahi,<sup>103</sup> praying for the proclamation of a road board in their area. This action seems to have been prompted by the failure of the county council to expend deferred payment monies in the block.<sup>104</sup> However, a counter-petition from other landowners in the Whakamara Block swayed the council to refuse the first petition.<sup>105</sup> The toll-gate controversy of 1879<sup>106</sup> appears as the first effective shot in the struggle between the Patea County Council and the road boards within the county. The council's proposal that the road boards should merge in the county provoked a strong reaction from the advocates of road board administration. From then on, there was much argument for and against the two types of rural local government. Not surprisingly, most criticism of the county council originated from those areas at the extremities of the county; those distant from the county seat at Patea.

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102. NZS, 1886, pp. 281-296.

103. PCC Minute Book I, 31 December 1878, p.162.

104. *ibid.*, 27 November 1878, p.156; 31 December 1878, p.162.

105. *ibid.*, 5 February 1879, pp. 167-68.

106. See earlier, p.44.

In 1880 the confiscated Waimate Plains were finally sold by the Government, and came under Patea County Council control. Just at that time, the county council had called a meeting of those settlers interested in forming a road board in the Ngaere district from the Waingongoro to the county boundary at the Taungatara River.<sup>107</sup> The Ngaere Road District was subsequently constituted in August 1880.<sup>108</sup> But, immediately the Waimate Plains area of the new road district had been sold, the buyers wanted their own local administrative body to operate in the area. However, a majority in the county council voted for the council retaining control of the road-making on the plains.<sup>109</sup> The controversy aroused by the council's decision can be held largely responsible for the alienation and subsequent secession, of all that area north of the Manawapou River. Seven months after the Waimate settlers had made their wishes known to the council, the latter agreed that "the men on the spot know better than we can do what roads they want."<sup>110</sup> The settlers' prayer for a road board was granted, but too late to prevent the 'schism' which was to half the area of the Patea County.

Not only were country settlers north of the Manawapou agitating for separation, but so also were the residents of the town of Hawera. By May 1881, separatists had procured over 125 signatures for their petition; sixty-six from within the town, and sixty-one from outside.<sup>111</sup> The cause of separation drew the town and country inhabitants of the Hawera district together, against the combined opposition of the southern urban and rural population. The rural dwellers in the north argued

that the mere massing together of two distinct districts with divergent and opposing aims does not tend to unity or strength. For instance, the Waitotara and Waverley districts have little or no sympathy with the Waimate and Ngaire districts. The latter look to New Plymouth, Waitara, and Opunake as their main outlets; the former to Patea and Wanganui. In the administration of county roads it is essential that those who have the management

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107. PCC Minute Book I, 4 August 1880, p.245.

108. *ibid.*, 1 September 1880, p.248.

109. *ibid.*, 14 February 1881, p.266.

110. PM, 17 February 1881, p.3, c.2.

111. HS, 7 May 1881, p.2, c.4.

of them should have frequent opportunity of becoming acquainted with the wants and requirements of all parts of the district within their jurisdiction....<sup>112</sup>

Lack of representation on the council, and the extensive area of the county, were also used as ammunition in Hawera's struggle for independence. On the other hand, the Hawera town residents aspired for the seat of county government. The Patea Mail accused that

Hawera is vaunted as the centre of the settled district, the centre of the land district, the centre of the County, and therefore the only proper seat of local government.<sup>113</sup>

The entire Hawera area had complained of neglect by county authorities at some stage over the years, and the council's initial refusal to let the Waimate settlers have control of their own funds provided the opportunity to press for redress through separation.

The majority of those opposed to Hawera's secession did not merely wish to retain the 'status quo' so as to justify the existing county administration, but their opposition stemmed from a desire to have separate parliamentary representation for the county, and to avoid unnecessary expense in local government. Any split in the Patea County would foil the attempt to gain separate recognition in Parliament by reducing the population of the proposed electorate.<sup>114</sup> Opponents of separation argued that the proposed southern boundary of the new county would cut off a large tract of country closely associated with the Patea harbour. They also believed the existing boundaries should remain until the government had re-organised the local government system throughout the colony.<sup>115</sup> Public meetings were held in the southern area, and a counter-petition was presented to Parliament on behalf of anti-separatists. Nevertheless, the Hawera County was constituted on 28 July 1881,<sup>116</sup> confining the area under Patea County Council jurisdiction to between the Waitotara and Manawapou Rivers.

Throughout the period leading up to the formation of the new county, the arguments as to the suitability of county councils or road

112. *ibid.*, 20 April 1881, p.2, c.3.

113. *PM*, 14 April 1881, p.2, c.5.

114. *ibid.*, 23 July 1881, p.2, c.5.

115. *ibid.*, 26 July 1881, p.3, c.2.

116. NZ Gazette, 1881, p.955.

board for local administration continued apace. A Hawera public meeting, at the height of separatist agitation, resolved "that this meeting is of the opinion that the County system should be swept away."<sup>117</sup> In this they were not on their own, for at the opposite end of the county, a Waverley settler wrote:

May not our Road Boards join, as we can do very well without Councils? Road Boards can take charge of main roads in their districts without requiring any more officers, and by saving Council expenses we could relieve ourselves of a double tax.<sup>118</sup>

Such views were gaining in popularity throughout the colony, for the Patea Mail reported in August 1881 that over fifty road boards had signed an Auckland district petition calling for the abolition of county councils,<sup>119</sup> These moves did not dismay the Patea County Council which called meetings in the various road districts to discuss the question of merging the boards into the county. The council believed it to be the responsibility of the ratepayers to determine whether road boards should merge with the county. Ratepayers chose to retain road boards; the Kakaramea gathering resolving, all but unanimously, that county councils should be abolished.<sup>120</sup> Road board interests were too firmly entrenched to be discarded lightly. An all-too-rare sign of realistic thinking was manifest in a letter to the Hawera Star from 'Observer' in December 1881. This Normanby settler was convinced that

Road Boards are commended for close attention to small details - a quality in every way deserving of praise, but not usually combined with much enterprise or advance in any way; and they will by the force of circumstances, drift into the position of simply maintaining in a passable condition the few roads now open, and leaving everything else alone. ...bad roads are a source of poverty to all, however independent individual settlers may feel themselves to be.<sup>121</sup>

Such thoughts were shown in 1883 to be restricted to a small minority in the county as the Patea County Council was enveloped by one 'crisis' after another; the result, largely, of the depression conditions prevailing throughout the country.

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117. PM, 30 July 1881, p.3, c.5.

118. *ibid.*, 9 August 1881, p.2, c.7.

119. *ibid.*, 4 August 1881, p.2, c.6.

120. PCC Minute Book I, 5 October 1881, p.293; PM, 14 October 1881, p.2, c.6.

121. HS, 21 December 1881, supplement, p.1, c.1.

The scarcity of finance available to local authorities in the early 1880s contributed significantly to the feelings of neglect and injustice that many localities experienced. In the case of ratepayers within Patea County, circumstances added other grievances, including county maladministration and favouritism. The financial muddle in which the council found itself in 1883, and the subsequent virtual stoppage of all council work, provoked growing interest in the possible suspension of the Counties Act within the Patea County. Meetings to consider possible action were demanded by dissatisfied ratepayers throughout the county. Although most meetings resolved that the Act should be suspended,<sup>122</sup> no further action in that direction was taken. Dissatisfied ratepayers found consolation in petitioning for even more road districts; approximately half of the petitions presented in 1883-84 being granted.

However, not all the petitions were circulated for reasons of dissatisfaction with county administration. Existing road districts were subdivided, sometimes several times, in response to parochialism and to complaints of neglect against those road boards. The area south of Patea borough to the Waitotara River contained two road districts in 1876. By 1885, the same area held six districts. Discontent with the Wairoa Road Board appears to have consistently run at a high level among ratepayers. In 1880 when the Wairoa Board resolved "that strangers be excluded from meetings of the Board", ratepayers accused the board of doing its business in secret and of failing to render any account to its ratepayers of expenditure of rates and subsidies for the previous four years. The road district was divided into five wards, the revenue of each ward being spent supposedly in that ward. But, disgruntled ratepayers claimed their rates had been expended on roads in a neighbouring ward. A no-confidence motion at a ratepayers' meeting at Waverley in January 1883 was narrowly defeated by a single vote, but the next two years were to witness the disintegration of the Wairoa Road District into five districts. In 1888, these five were joined by two more [Fig.27]. Ratepayer dissatisfaction was partially remedied by a multiplication of local government bodies. Localism was rampant. Depression had increased the dissatisfaction with local bodies within the Patea County, leading to a north-south schism and a proliferation of road districts.<sup>123</sup>

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122. PM, 10 January 1883, p.3, cc.1,6.

123. References to the Wairoa Road Board in this paragraph were derived from PM, 14 February 1880, pp.2-3; 18 February 1880, p.2, c.7.

As the decade of the '80s wore on, the state of the economy in Patea County began to improve. Although this statement is made tentatively, because of the unavailability of local newspapers covering that period, certain pieces of evidence can be forwarded to support such a suggestion. The 1890-91 Patea County Council balance sheet showed the council finances to be in a healthy situation compared with earlier years. The council received £1945 10s 6d. in revenue and expended £1138 on public works, ending the year with a bank balance of almost £500.<sup>124</sup> In addition, the records of local authorities in the district and newspaper clippings that were available do not suggest that times were still difficult. While not suggesting that the south Taranaki district was immune to the effects of the "long depression" by the late 1880s, the writer would propose that the depression had already been experienced at its greatest intensity by that area in the early and mid-1880s. This timing differs from that suggested for the colony as a whole, but social and economic conditions varied between regions, thus explaining variation in the timing and intensity of the recession. Until a greater number of local analyses into conditions during the period of the "long depression" are carried out, a new generalization about the timing and force of the slump over the entire colony, if justified, cannot be substantiated. However, a case does exist for suggesting that the worst of the depression conditions had already passed over the southern Taranaki region when the four main centres, in particular, were experiencing the full effects of the slump in the late '80s and early '90s. The restricted performance of the local authorities, embezzlement, retrenchment, bankruptcy and separatist agitation all combine to point to the five years between 1879 and 1884 as the period in which the Patea district faced the full effects of the down-turn in the economy.

However, in the mid-90s the depression was waning, and accompanying, the return of prosperity was a trend towards greater sophistication in the needs and demands of New Zealanders. But, difficulties during the previous decade and the cost of supplying these new wants reinforced the tendency of local authorities to be reluctant to cater for these

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124. Patea County Council, Scrapbook of Newspaper Clippings, 1891-98.

more sophisticated aspirations. The evasion of extra responsibility by local bodies resulted in the "usurpation" of local government functions by central authorities. This migration of functions was a significant factor in one of the major contributions of the Liberal Government to the New Zealand social and political system: "the administrative revolution."

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## CHAPTER FIVE

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND 'THE ADMINISTRATIVE REVOLUTION'

... local bodies having separate elections and distinct powers are too numerous but that with reduced numbers and extended areas the remaining bodies should have extended duties and powers conferred upon them, to enable them to discharge such functions as are now performed by Hospital and Charitable Aid Boards, Education Boards, Land Boards, Licensing Committees, Stock Department, etc.

- Report of the Local Government Committee to the New Zealand House of Representatives, September 1890.

New Zealand historians, in the past, have tended to stress the importance of the Liberal Government of the 1890s in the social and political development of the colony. Recent research,<sup>1</sup> however, suggests that the Liberal achievement in New Zealand's administrative development deserves as much, if not more, attention as social and political contributions. Indeed, so considerable and rapid was administrative change during that decade that it has been deemed to constitute an 'administrative revolution'.<sup>2</sup> This 'revolution', the consequence of a government's attempt to satisfy a consensus of voters, could be interpreted as a continuation of a process set in motion by Vogel's development policies, that is, administrative centralization. Local authority functions were steadily being taken over by central government departments. A number of aspects of local government contributed towards the outbreak of the 'revolution', and these will be examined in the light of evidence drawn from the situation within the Patea County area. The contributing factors included a heightened level of demand from local body ratepayers; continuing local government fragmentation; central government initiative; the 'migration' of local authority functions; the expansion of settlement; and town-country relations. While being important to an

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1. W.H. Oliver, Towards a New History? (Hocken Lecture 1969,) Dunedin, 1971; P.J. Gibbons, "Turning Tramps into Taxpayers". The Department of Labour and the Casual Labourer in the 1890s", unpublished M.A. thesis, Massey University, 1970; T.W.H. Brooking, "Sir John McKenzie and the Origins and Growth of the Department of Agriculture, 1891-1900", unpublished M.A. thesis, Massey University, 1972; C.J. Rowe, "The Growth of Agricultural Administration, 1880-1900: The Dairy Industry as a Test Case", unpublished M.A. thesis, Massey University, 1973.
  2. Oliver, Towards a New History? p.12; Gibbons, p.102; Brooking, p.43.

understanding of the major theme of local government in the '90s, 'the administrative revolution', the above factors are important in their own right in the history of local government in this period.

'The administrative revolution' involved an increase in the number of laws to be administered, in response to the wide-ranging demands and aspirations of the Liberal Government's supporters, and a corresponding expansion in the number of bureaucrats to administer the laws. The number of government departments also increased, and existing departments underwent structural and functional changes. The 'revolution' brought about a "transition from permissive to coercive legislation, from local to central, from amateur to professional administration". Local authority areas were drawn more closely into a New Zealand society, losing much of their independence through their own parochialism and extreme self-interest.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most vital changes in the colony towards the end of the nineteenth century was the increasing sophistication in the social and economic demands and aspirations of the colonial settlers. Many of the demands on central government were much the same as during the 1880s. An end to depression conditions, more land for settlement, and improved working conditions were familiar aspirations. On the other hand, demands on local government varied according to the stage of development of the particular area. Local government institutions were still responsible for the provision of the most fundamental services to assist pioneers on 'the frontier'. Bridle paths and dray tracks were still in demand in the recently settled districts. However, ratepayers in the more established urban and rural areas demanded services in accordance with the progress achieved by their districts. Perhaps the greatest stimulus for changes in needs and aspirations was the impact that the advent of refrigeration was predicted to have on the colony's economy. Although the depression and a period of experimentation and consolidation meant that a number of years elapsed before such expectations were realized, ratepayers immediately demanded new or improved facilities in order to cope with local involvement

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3. This paragraph is based on Oliver, "Towards a New History?" p.10ff; Gibbons; Brooking; and Rowe.

in the developing agricultural and pastoral industries.

The Patea district was just one of the areas interested in making the most of the opportunities for economic progress offered by refrigeration. In August 1883, a committee appointed by the Patea District Agricultural and Pastoral Association to investigate the possibility of establishing meat freezing works at Patea reported that although it had been unable to interest Wellington companies in the venture, it was

now more than ever convinced that no greater stimulus to the progress of the district can be given, and that the export of meat is an enterprise that recommends itself more than any other to the country settlers and townspeople alike, /and that it would/ recommend the formation of a company on this coast with freezing etc. works at Patea, such company to have a nominal capital of £6000 (an amount ample for all requirements) in 1200 shares of £5 each....<sup>4</sup>

A public meeting was then held, and the West Coast Meat and Produce Export Company floated on local capital. The Patea Borough Council resolved to assist the new enterprise in whatever way it could in erecting a slaughter-house in the borough.<sup>5</sup> The works were in operation freezing mutton carcasses from mid-1884, but in May 1885, the meat works were destroyed by fire and the company was wound up voluntarily. In its obituary to the victim, the Patea Mail had this to say:

Although the works, so far as the individual shareholders are concerned, was not looked upon as a very perfect success, still as a local industry and very direct assistant to the prosperity of the town and district, it certainly held first place, and was undoubtedly the cause to a very great extent of the gradual and certain, if slow, advancement in business soundness which our town and district was making, and its sudden cessation will unquestionably be a very severe blow to our whole district.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the failure of this initial bid to carry out meat freezing at Patea, the attempt made demands on local authorities. In response to a request from the freezing company, the borough council petitioned the Governor to include the proposed works site in the borough. The erection of a growing number of slaughter-houses required frequent inspection

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4. Minutes of the Patea District Agricultural and Pastoral Association General Meeting, 11 August 1883, p.2.

5. PBC Minute Book I, 21 March 1884, pp.259-60.

6. PM, 8 May 1885, p.2.

by inspectors appointed by local authorities to ensure sanitary conditions prevailed. The great increase in the number of stock reared resulted in a more extensive problem of straying livestock, the remedy for which rested with the territorial local authorities.

As well as urging the establishment of a freezing works at Patea in 1883, the local newspaper editor was confident that

the dairy branch of farming may also be said to be looking up. The desire to form butter and cheese factories seems general, and is the outcome of the success attendant on those already established elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

In July 1886, the establishment of a dairy factory at Patea was mooted. At that time, the Otoia Riding of the Patea County could boast 588 cows to supply such a plant in that "much wanted and highly profitable industry".<sup>8</sup> The prospects that the establishment of these primary industries offered, provoked the cooperation of town and country in calling on the Government to open up the country inland from Patea and Waverley for settlement. In 1885, 1886 and 1891 local authorities in the district combined to urge the Government to take action in opening up Crown Lands.<sup>9</sup> The resumption of public borrowing by the colony in the early '90s allowed money to be voted for roads into the interior of the Patea district. By 1894, all the confiscated land in the south Patea area had been put on the market, but, as Bremer points out, settlement was then retarded by the unfavourable state of the export market for wool, and by the district's freezing industry not being sufficiently developed to encourage widespread land development for fat stock breeding purposes.<sup>10</sup> The harbour board's installation of a wool dumping plant on the wharf in the early 1890s increased the amount of wool able to be shipped at any one time, while the acreage under grass in Patea County had doubled between 1882 and 1890.<sup>11</sup> Dairying was growing in importance throughout the colony, and Taranaki was to benefit greatly by this progress. The Patea Borough Council was prompted in 1892 to request the Government to send a dairy expert to Patea to give a lecture.<sup>12</sup> Two years later, the

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7. *ibid.*, 13 April 1883, p.2, c.2.

8. *ibid.*, 5 July 1886, p.2.

9. PBC Minute Book I, 5 March 1885, p.303; PHB Minute Book I, 16 March 1886; New Zealand Graphic & Ladies' Journal, VIII, 45, 1891, p.553.

10. Bremer, p.158.

11. PM, 18 November 1890, p.2.

12. PBC Minute Book I, 6 June 1892, p.548.

harbour board decided "to offer every facility possible to protect cheese and butter from harm and encourage shipment from this port."<sup>13</sup>

The development of primary industries in New Zealand reiterated the need for adequate transport facilities between the producer and the market. The erection of dairy factories and creameries throughout dairying areas made for increased traffic on district and county roads in those areas, invariably leading to quite rapid deterioration of the roads. Local authorities, accordingly, imposed restrictions on the weight to be carried by particular types of vehicles, and handed out fines to offenders.<sup>14</sup> Watering-places for stock beside country roads were often provided by county councils<sup>15</sup> in response to suggestions and requests from settlers.

The efficiency and security of the colony's harbours was becoming increasingly important, if the country was to make the most of its opportunity to extend its export trade with Great Britain. The Government's failure to compensate the Patea Harbour Board for £4,000 worth of endowments taken for railway purposes seriously affected the development of that port. As the board did not have the wherewithal to carry out improvement work on the river entrance, much trade was diverted through other ports, usually Waitara or Wanganui, or railed to its destination.<sup>16</sup> Initially, wool, meat and fungus were the chief exports shipped through the port,<sup>17</sup> but as dairying expanded in southern Taranaki, the necessity for river improvement became even more urgent. In the late 1890's, settlers were still urging the board to undertake harbour work,<sup>18</sup> but it was not until 1913 that sufficient loan money could be raised to continue the work, stopped over thirty years earlier. In the case of **harbour** facilities, the demands of the ratepayers remained very much the same; only the trading items changed. Most settlers wished the board to make the river readily navigable for shipping, at the same time keeping wharf rates as low as possible in order to attract additional trade, for example, flax from the Waverley area.<sup>19</sup>

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13. PHB Minute Book I, 9 October 1894.

14. PCC Minute Book II, 1 August 1889, p.231.

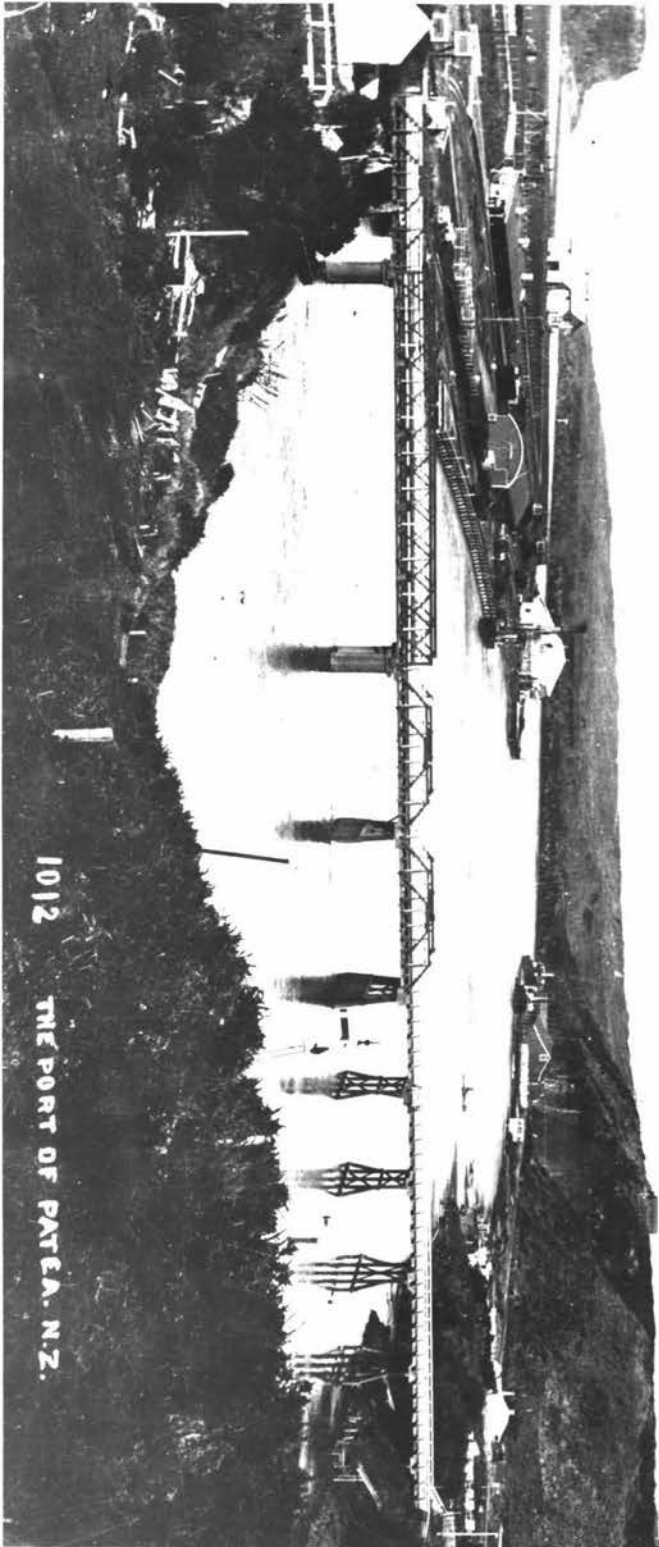
15. *ibid.*, 1 September 1887, p.162; 1 March 1888, p.182.

16. PM, 15 July 1885, p.2, c.6.

17. Patea & Waverley Press, 6 April 1927, p.3.

18. PCP, 25 January 1895, p.2; 29 October 1897, p.2; Letter sent to the Chairman and members of the Patea Harbour Board, 8 February 1896, written by James Kenworthy.

19. PHB Minute Book I, 18 June 1889.



1012 THE PORT OF PATOKA. N.Z.

PLATE II    Port of Patea, early 1890s

The Patea Harbour Board found it difficult  
to provide a safe port for shipping.

(Alexander Turnbull Library)

Perhaps one of the best examples of demands for more sophisticated facilities and amenities was that for sewerage disposal in the expanding urban areas. Poor sanitary conditions in towns were a constant threat to the health of their inhabitants. Prior to 1890, sanitation was primitive. It was only in 1889, for instance, that the Patea Borough Council resolved "that in the opinion of this Council it is desirable in the interest of general health that the School Committee be requested to adopt the earth closet system in lieu of the present mode."<sup>20</sup> There appears to be no hint of force behind the resolution. It is only when a local doctor wrote to the council of the insanitary condition of the borough that the authorities took action on the disposal of night soil.<sup>21</sup> Until 1893, Patea residents had to dispose of all rubbish, but after that date the council employed a contractor to empty the town's closets regularly.<sup>22</sup>

The protection of property within the towns also received greater attention in the later years of the century. The exact reasons for this trend are difficult to ascertain, though it could have been the outcome of a possible rise in the crime rate, particularly in theft and arson. In 1893, the Patea Borough Council resolved:

that upon a sufficient number of the burgesses guaranteeing a minimum payment of 20s per week that the Borough be asked to control the fund and appoint a night watchman to be under the control of the Council.<sup>23</sup>

The following year, the council appointed a committee to reconstruct the fire brigade, and then proceeded to equip the new brigade.<sup>24</sup> After a ratepayers' meeting voted unanimously in favour of raising a loan of £300 for the purpose of providing a water supply for fire prevention, a special rate of 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. for twenty-six years was levied.<sup>25</sup> The necessity for having a permanent brigade with adequate fire-fighting equipment had been finally realized by ratepayers and their representatives.

The heightened level of demands on local authorities from

20. PBC Minute Book I, 8 July 1889, p.467.

21. *ibid.*, 5 September 1892, p.554.

22. *ibid.*, 9 January 1893, pp. 567-68.

23. PBC Minute Book II, 3 July 1893, p.16.

24. *ibid.*, 12 March 1894, p.48; 7 May 1894, p.54; 2 July 1894, p.61.

25. *ibid.*, 23 December 1895, p.123.

ratepayers was a contributing factor in the outbreak of the "administrative revolution". The increased cost involved in upgrading facilities or providing new amenities often meant that local bodies were not able to assist in the development of these facilities, or that other functions had to be forgone in preference for more sophisticated demands. This neglect, or inability to cope with the new aspirations of the settlers, meant that local government functions often had to be assumed by the central authorities.

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, there was a continuous interchange of functions and responsibilities amongst local bodies, and between local and central authorities. The transference of functions from one local body to another was usually dictated by localist sentiment, while the centralization of local responsibilities was generally in response to the necessity for greater administrative efficiency in the performance of those particular duties. The responsibilities more readily adopted, or swapped around from one local administrative body to another, were those not considered as primary functions of territorial local authorities, such as cemetery, domain, and pound management.

In 1885, the Patea County Council handed control of the Manutahi public pound to the Patea West Road Board at the latter's request.<sup>26</sup> That same year, three domain boards were constituted in the district. The Okotuku domain had been vested in the Patea County Council in 1877, but in 1885 the council relinquished control to an Okotuku Domain Board.<sup>27</sup> The Carlyle Town Board had managed the town's sports ground until 1881, when it was taken over by a board of trustees, apparently for more "effective management".<sup>28</sup> Four years later, the Patea Borough Council notified the Government of its willingness to accept management of the domain if it was desired by the existing board.<sup>29</sup> The council subsequently became the Patea Domain Board, and set about having trees planted and empty land leased.<sup>30</sup> But in 1897, the borough council voted six to four in favour of requesting the Governor to relieve it

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26. PWRB Letter Book, 11 April 1885, p.259; PCC Minute Book II, 7 May 1885, p.82.

27. NZ Gazette, 1885, p.271.

28. PM, 9 April 1881, p.3, c.5.

29. PBC Minute Book I, 7 May 1885, p.312.

30. PM, 17 July 1885, p.2, c.6.

of its responsibility as the domain board, and to vest the ground in a separate body of management. Apparently, the majority of the borough councillors were not interested in domain management, and the grounds were consequently being neglected.<sup>31</sup> The council's request was not granted, but the attempt to extract itself from this responsibility demonstrates the exclusiveness, function-wise, of the Patea Borough Council in particular, and of local authorities in general.

County and borough councils were permitted to provide, maintain, or aid athenaeums, mechanics' institutes, museums, and public libraries.<sup>32</sup> In 1876, a group of Patea settlers had established the Patea Library and Institute in Carlyle, under the control of a committee of seven locals.<sup>33</sup> The interest of the colonists in reading and continuing their education was high. The Institute could boast an increase of membership from twenty-eight in 1876 to fifty at the end of 1877.<sup>34</sup> In 1888, the Institute's committee notified the borough council of its wish to transfer the assets and management of the Institute to the burgesses through the council.<sup>35</sup> The council subsequently purchased the Institute for £118 5s, and catered for the intellectual demands of the settlers by keeping the library open forty-six hours a week and the reading room open seventy-five hours.<sup>36</sup>

Although responsibility for some functions often shifted from one local authority to another, usually for reasons of finance and efficiency, the poor or non-performance of other duties by local bodies resulted in their 'usurpation' by central authorities. This action was an integral part of 'the administrative revolution'; local government permissiveness being replaced by central government coerciveness.

Accompanying the migration of Europeans with their plants and livestock to New Zealand in the nineteenth century, were animal and insect pests, diseases, and noxious weeds. The intensification of agricultural activities promoted the multiplication and spread of these

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31. PCP, 10 December 1897, p.2, c.7.

32. Counties Act, 1876, cl.191; Municipal Corporations Act, 1876, cl.328.

33. Patea Library & Institute Register, 1876-1888, p.1.

34. *ibid.*, p.9ff.

35. PBC Minute Book I, 5 March 1888, p.419.

36. *ibid.*, 14 May 1888, p.428.

'undesirables', thus necessitating governmental intervention. The Sheep Act, 1878, replaced earlier provincial legislation aimed at preventing the spread of scab in sheep, and in doing so, gave considerable powers to Sheep Inspectors.<sup>37</sup> These inspectors were appointed by the central government, despite attempts by the Patea County Council in 1877 to be allowed to appoint its own men in the absence of any government ruling at that stage.<sup>38</sup> An outbreak of scab in the district had occasioned the council's request, though it appears not to have been made in response to settler demand, but on the initiative of the council itself. Until the 1880s, local bodies were not entrusted with the implementation of regulatory legislation other than the right to curb the straying stock problem, and ensuring settlers trimmed hedges and furze on the sides of their roads. In the towns, the local body could appoint Inspectors of Nuisances to maintain health standards, and pass by-laws with the same purpose in mind. But the legislation affecting local government was largely permissive throughout, and persuasion and monetary penalties were the prime means of instilling conformity.<sup>39</sup>

However, with the higher incidence of animal diseases and pest problems in the 1880s, local bodies were delegated greater powers in a government campaign to alleviate, if not eliminate, the problems. But again, only if they chose to accept such responsibilities. In much of the legislation associated with the destruction of pests and the eradication of disease, politicians appear to have made provision for unwillingness on the part of local authorities to enforce the law in their districts. The Rabbit Nuisance Act of 1880, for instance, delegated the responsibility of ridding the colony of the vermin to three separate groups in case of negligence on the part of one or two of the groups in enforcing the law.<sup>40</sup> County councils were later relieved of their powers under that Act, action being left to elected boards of trustees and to Government Inspectors of Rabbits.<sup>41</sup> Some counties were fortunate in not being infested with rabbits; Patea County Council being able to resolve in 1886 to notify the Government that it had had "no experience

37. NZS, 1878, pp.149-50.

38. PCC Minute Book I, 6 March 1877, p.19; 3 April 1877, p.31.

39. References in this paragraph, unless otherwise footnoted, were drawn from NZS, 1876 (Counties Act and the Municipal Corporations Act).

40. NZS, 1880, p.162.

41. *ibid.*, 1886, pp.269-80.

with the rabbit pest."<sup>42</sup>

The Small Birds Nuisance Act, 1882,<sup>43</sup> however, was applicable to the Patea County, although the necessity for taking action under the provisions of the Act was not realized by the county council until four years later. The council resolved in July 1886, to spend up to £20 on liquid poison for small birds, and to distribute the poison among settlers.<sup>44</sup> The council took similar measures in 1888 and 1889, but had to be reminded of their responsibility in 1892 by the newly-formed Department of Agriculture.<sup>45</sup> The Birds Nuisance Act, 1891, stipulated that Inspectors of Stock were to be inspectors under this Act also, to ensure that local bodies complied with the regulations. If not, the Minister of Lands could compel those bodies to take action, or have the work carried out at the local body's expense.<sup>46</sup> The council resolved in 1893, on the chairman's casting vote, to distribute free poisoned grain to settlers,<sup>47</sup> but in subsequent years the council appears to have slipped into the ways of the majority of other county councils in avoiding this responsibility. This was an added duty local bodies apparently thought they could well do without. The Hon. John McKenzie summed up the situation in replying to a question in the House in 1898, that the Birds Nuisance Act be amended to make it compulsory for local authorities to destroy small birds. The Minister of Lands believed that such an amendment should not be necessary to enable those bodies to carry out their duty. He went on to say that

the local bodies were negligent and careless in not complying with the law. What the local bodies wanted the Minister of Lands to do in many cases was to do their work, and throw the whole odium of another army of Inspectors upon the Minister of Lands.<sup>48</sup>

The attitude of local authorities to the increasing amount of coercive legislation passed during the 1890s is exemplified in a Patea County Council resolution of 1899, "that in reply to Circular on the Dairy Industry Act this Council has no objection to Inspectors as suggested

42. PCC Minute Book II, 1 July 1886, p.123.

43. NZS, 1882, pp.21-22.

44. PCC Minute Book II, 1 July 1886, p.120.

45. *ibid.*, 6 September 1888, p.201; 1 August 1889, p.230; 7 July 1892, p.336.

46. NZS, 1891, pp.293-94.

47. PCC Minute Book II, 4 May 1893, p.367.

48. PD, 1898, 101, p.217.

provided this County is not put to any extra expense."<sup>49</sup> The council, however, proved more cooperative on the issue of noxious weeds, making settlers keep the roadside clear of such weeds,<sup>50</sup> and declaring which plants came under the Act.<sup>51</sup> Such duties entailed little or no expense to the council.

Until the late 1880s, permissiveness seems to have pervaded most of the legislation involving local government institutions. Local authorities could choose whether they wished to adopt certain powers or ignore them. The latter course is acknowledged as one of the principal reasons for 'the administrative revolution'. This reluctance to become involved in further responsibilities, particularly those which were not specifically related to the more common demands of ratepayers, such as communications and drainage, stems from a number of causes. The cost of additional duties was a strong influence in tempting local bodies to neglect these tasks, especially in times of depression. Public reaction to pests, weeds, and livestock diseases, and agitation for their eradication is not evident to the same extent as reaction to the absence, and agitation for the provision of more primary and tangible advantages, such as access to properties, adequate harbour facilities and hospitals. These latter demands warranted editorials, public meetings, and petitions. Rarely did scab, codlin moth, or gorse attract similar attention from the public. Measures to combat these nuisances were imposed from above, though not necessarily in response to demands from below.

In an effort to keep their administrative costs to a minimum, it was invariably the case that members of local bodies acted as representatives, supervisors, and inspectors. As it happened, their attendance at council or board meetings was, more often than not, one of their less important duties. One of the major reasons offered against the merging of road boards into counties, and the amalgamation of counties, was the possibility of some areas being neglected by over-worked administrators. The editor of the Hawera Star predicted that

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49. PCC Minute Book III, 7 April 1899, p.71.

50. PCC Minute Book II, 7 January 1896, p.505; *ibid.*, III, 7 February 1901, p.143.

51. *ibid.*, 4 April 1901, p.148; 6 March 1902, p.181.

so long as the road boards do not merge in the County Council, the work of attending to from twenty-one to twenty-six miles of county roads will not be very arduous. But should amalgamation take place each councillor would have nearly three times that road mileage to look after. It is well nigh impossible for any one man to be thoroughly conversant with the wants of settlers situated along sixty or seventy miles of country and district roads scattered throughout a large area.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, the burden already placed on these amateur administrators by meetings, road work supervision, and often slaughter-house inspection and engineering work, was considered by these part-time representatives to be more than enough, without further tasks being meted out to them by the central government.

It is possible that the local authorities also steered clear of carrying out the powers granted to them in respect to legislation on pests, animal diseases, and noxious weeds so as not to engender any antagonism from ratepayers. Although the powers delegated to government department inspectors in the 1890s were wider and more coercive than those permitted to local authority officials earlier, certain actions legitimised by parliamentary legislation could, and sometimes did, arouse the antipathy of those affected by them. The Rabbit Nuisance Act, 1880, for instance, contained clauses which, if effected, could well have injured the relationship between settlers and their representatives on local bodies. Boards of trustees and county councils were empowered to "do all such acts and things as may appear to them proper and necessary" to get rid of rabbits.<sup>53</sup> The Municipal Corporations Act, 1876, empowered a borough council to "adopt such measures as it thinks fit for preventing and suppressing nuisances in the borough, and for the preservation of the public health and convenience." Inspectors and councillors, as individuals, were given quite extensive powers to have buildings cleaned and nuisances abated.<sup>54</sup> In 1884, as a consequence of the establishment of an increasing number of slaughter-houses, the Patea County Council found it necessary to appoint five of its number as slaughter-house inspectors for the county.<sup>55</sup> Three years later, one councillor

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52. HS, 15 February 1887, p.2.

53. NZS, 1880, p.161.

54. *ibid.*, 1876, pp.233-34.

55. PCC Minute Book II, 3 April 1884, p.30.

reported that he had been obstructed in his capacity as slaughterhouse inspector by a butcher in Patea, who had refused to let him 'properly inspect his books'.<sup>56</sup> The council requested the councillor concerned to take the appropriate action, but he subsequently resigned his position as inspector.<sup>57</sup> Fortunately, the licensee did not go to the lengths a farmer near Rolleston went to in 1888, to show his antagonism at a visit from the Springs Road Board clerk. The ratepayer shot at, and wounded, the official, for which he received a six month gaol sentence.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, local government representatives were probably quite conscious of the need to stay on friendly terms with their neighbours, the ratepayers. This need could account for some reluctance on the part of local bodies to enforce regulations passed by the Government, necessitating 'usurpation' of these functions by central authorities, and implementation by centrally-appointed professional administrators.

The transition from local and amateur to central and professional administration in the late '80s and throughout the 1890s<sup>59</sup> did not mean that the centre no longer heeded local institutions. Legislation enacted by the Liberals steadily took on a coercive bent, but that bent was shaped and reshaped by experience in the localities.<sup>60</sup> Although, central authorities took the initiative in enforcing legislation in the regions, local institutions were still given the opportunity to influence the content of Bills to come before the House. Interest groups, such as farmers' organizations and local authorities, became important parts of a social communication grid connecting centre and periphery.<sup>61</sup> Even during the early 1880s, local bodies were being asked for their opinions on, and suggestions for, pending legislation. In 1882, Major Atkinson had sent a circular and questionnaire to all county councils and road boards in the colony concerning the provisions of the Roads and Bridges Construction, and the Crown and Native Lands

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56. *ibid.*, 6 October 1887, p.166.

57. *ibid.*, 3 November 1887, p.169.

58. W.H. Scotter, A History of Canterbury, Volume III: 1876-1950, Christchurch, 1965, p.149.

59. Oliver, Towards a New History p.15.

60. *ibid.*, p.11.

61. *ibid.*

Rating Bills, as well as suggestions for amendments to local government law.<sup>62</sup> Local bodies were requested in 1886 to forward any suggestions for dealing with the codlin moth pest to the Government.<sup>63</sup> Their opinions on rabbit eradication were also sought.<sup>64</sup> In 1888, the Patea County Council had cause to resolve "that this Council approves of the Californian Thistle Bill as far as that thistle and the variegated thistle is concerned but no further, but would suggest that a clause should be inserted to deal with all reserves and unoccupied lands...."<sup>65</sup> Suggestions on amendments to the Public Works Act, the Licensing Act, the Stock Bill, 1893, the Noxious Weeds Bill, 1895, the Local Government Bills of 1895 and 1899, and the Dairy Industry Act were just some of those asked for by the Government.<sup>66</sup> Often, the opinions did not have to be requested but were given voluntarily, particularly if Bills or Acts did not gain the sympathy of the local authorities, whether for local or collective reasons. Local bodies frequently circulated petitions on political matters amongst themselves to gain support before taking the matters further.

Collective action carried more influence than solitary agitation. Not surprisingly, each local body tended to judge a measure by the effect it would have on its own ratepayers, and the council or board's administration of their necessities. Self-interest was, and indeed still is, the major consideration in local government. Nevertheless, political matters affecting the entire colony were thought not to be beyond the interest, if not influence, of local governing institutions. In March 1886, the Patea County Council resolved

that this Council does agree with the main principle of the policy proposed in the circular from the Wairarapa Council re local government finance, and that it is high time any further borrowing by this colony were put a stop to, as the source from which all taxation must come, viz., the land will not stand any further strain. Besides, the proposed Railways and most of those in course of construction will neither pay interest nor working expenses....<sup>67</sup>

Five years later, the council's self-interest was apparent, despite

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62. AJHR, 1882, A.-10.

63. PCC Minute Book II, 3 June 1886, p.120.

64. *ibid.*, 1 July 1886, p.123.

65. *ibid.*, 5 July 1888, pp. 195-96.

66. *ibid.*, pp.207, 222, 365, 377, 395, 456, 498; *ibid.*, III, pp. 65,71.

67. PCC Minute Book II, 4 March 1886, pp. 108-09.

masquerading under colony-wide interests, when it resolved

that this Council views with alarm the action of the Government in regard to the Counties Bill before the House in respect to the proposal of one man, one vote, thereby entirely ignoring the holders of landed property who are the upholders of the Colony, and also opposes the Land Bills before the House which, if passed, will eventuate in disaster and ruin to the Colony and to the working men of the Colony whom the present Government proposes to befriend.<sup>68</sup>

The council went on to request

that other Councils assist in urging their members or others to oppose such ruinous, faddish Bills.<sup>69</sup>

The politics of the south Taranaki area, or of any area, largely determined the local government's reponse to such important political questions. The farming base of the Taranaki-Wanganui region dictated a conservative political viewpoint. Liberalism was not politically acceptable to the majority of landowners in that region.<sup>70</sup>

Although, several local government functions were 'usurped' by the central authorities in the later years of the nineteenth century, local bodies did not feel that they had gained any significant relief. Local authorities continued to wrangle over their respective responsibilities to the community. Government resolved one such conflict by the forming of twenty-eight boards under the Hospitals and Charitable Institutions Act, 1885.<sup>71</sup> But, the new Act rekindled the jealousy between town and country, because of inequalities in charitable aid contributions. In addition, the larger united districts were not always popular with the constituent districts accustomed to independence in local administration.

The 1885 Act was welcomed for some reasons, but disapproved of for others. The Patea Borough Council was no doubt relieved at the passage of the legislation, having been required to dispense charitable aid to an imprisoned man's wife,<sup>72</sup> almost upto the time the Act was carried through Parliament. The social legislation entrusted the

68. *ibid.*, 6 August 1891, pp. 303-304.

69. *ibid.*, p.304.

70. B.S.E. Bellringer, "Conservatism and the Farmers. A Study in the Political Development of Taranaki-Wanganui", unpublished M.A. thesis, Auckland University, 1958, p.24.

71. NZS, 1885, p.157.

72. PBC Minute Book I, 3 August 1885, pp. 324-25.

management of the Patea hospital to a Patea District Hospital Board comprising the mayor of Patea, four borough councillors, and the entire county council of nine. One commentator pointed out, somewhat sarcastically that

this is a governing body with a vengeance. No fewer than fourteen gentlemen are required to form this board to see to the proper expenditure of some three or four hundred pounds a year.<sup>73</sup>

The county council was not so pleased with the Act. At the hospital board's inaugural meeting in November 1885, a borough councillor moved that the borough and county contribute £200 each to the Hospital Fund, the rate to be estimated on the property tax valuation. The county representatives believed that their ratepayers should not have to contribute such a large amount, as the borough used the hospital facilities more than the country.<sup>74</sup> Also, having rid itself of the responsibility for the hospital just two years earlier, the Patea County Council did not consider the Act

right in forcing a county council to take over such a responsibility without giving them any choice, or even an opportunity of seeing their constituents who had elected them to manage the ordinary work of the county, not to look after a hospital.<sup>75</sup>

It would appear that this issue was one on which the Government did not specifically approach local bodies for their suggestions. A county representative went so far as to advocate the closure of the local institution and the imposition of a head tax to cover the costs of having patients admitted to Wanganui hospital. If earlier agitation to keep the hospital open is any indication, such a suggestion, if effected, would have resulted in public censure of the county council for directly contravening the wishes of the ratepayers.

The alleged object of the Hospitals and Charitable Institutions Act, 1885, was to bind together large districts, thus bringing uniformity into hospital and charitable aid administration in the colony.<sup>76</sup> But like the Counties Act, passed nine years before, certain provisions

73. PM, 12 October 1885, p.2, c.3.

74. *ibid.*, 6 November 1885, p.2, c.5.

75. *ibid.*

76. PD, 1885, 51, pp. 100-102.

in the legislation introduced powers that proved to be at complete variance with the intention of the Act. Just as the 1876 counties legislation had been passed to effect the merging of road boards, but, in fact, had accelerated the multiplication of those boards, so the 1885 Act formed large districts in the interests of uniformity, but then allowed United Boards to sub-divide,<sup>77</sup> thus defeating the original purpose of the legislation. The Patea district was united with Wanganui for the purposes of the distribution of charitable aid,<sup>78</sup> but at the very first meeting of the united board parochialism prevailed, and the united district was divided into thirteen subdivisions from Palmerston North Borough to the borough and county of Patea.<sup>79</sup> Each area was made responsible for providing charitable aid in its own district, thus contradicting the intention of united boards to equalize the pressure of contributing funds for charitable purposes. The Patea District Hospital Board undertook, at the request of the Wanganui-Patea United Charitable Aid Board, the distribution of charitable aid in the Patea district.<sup>80</sup>

However, dissatisfaction with the arrangements for the provision and distribution of aid within the united district was not long in surfacing. In May 1887, the Wanganui Borough Council complained that providing for their own poor was unsatisfactory as the town required a much greater expenditure than other parts of the united district. The Board therefore decided to rate the entire district on a valuation basis and distribute the funds itself. This turn of events, plus a growing feeling of isolation from the rest of the united district, convinced the Patea District Hospital Board that Patea's interests would be better served by its own charitable aid board. The local newspaper editor disagreed, arguing that separation proposals were entirely opposed to "the spirit of the original act, which was very clearly intended to spread the care of the poor over as large an area as the practical working of the system would render possible." The 1885 legislation had worked admirably; board affairs having taken up little of the members' time as the united board met but once every three months. Expenditure was left almost entirely to the discretion of the local members, and involved the

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77. NZS, 1885, pp. 162-63.

78. *ibid.*, p.162.

79. PM, 18 November 1885, p.3, c.1.

80. *ibid.*, 27 November 1885, p.3, c.1.

distribution of only small amounts of money within each area. The Patea Hospital Board had dispersed little more than £100 of aid during the 1887-88 year.<sup>81</sup>

Patea did not gain its own charitable aid board, but had to be content to see the local hospital board distribute aid in the district. Indeed, by 1892 the inspector of hospitals and charitable institutions was able to report that the desired amalgamation and uniformity in the social services' administration was being achieved.<sup>82</sup> In 1897, a motion that the Patea Hospital Board should consider amalgamating the local hospital with that of Hawera or Wanganui was discussed by the Patea board, but lost.<sup>83</sup> Twelve years later, the Government increased the number of hospital districts to thirty-six, each one being administered by a hospital and charitable aid board,<sup>84</sup> responsible to the Department of Health. The Government had continued its 'policy' of relieving territorial local authorities of additional duties by constituting 'special-purpose' local bodies, and by centralizing a certain amount of local administration in government departments. Central initiative continued to operate, contributing to the administrative centralization that was a part of the Liberals' 'administrative revolution'.

The centralization effort embodied in the Liberal Government's 'programme' for the 1890s could also be interpreted as an attempt to offset the extreme parochialism of the settlers. The fragmentation of counties had accelerated since 1886, when legislation governing the maximum subsidies to county councils had been passed.<sup>85</sup> The number of road districts decreased, as ratepayers petitioned to have their districts created counties, with all the financial advantages that such status entailed.

Dissatisfaction, backed by parochialism, prompted two areas within Patea County to petition for separation in the late 1880s and early '90s. In 1889, a group of settlers around Waverley and Waitotara agitated for the formation of a new county to be called Waverley, but

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81. References in this paragraph were derived from PM, 4 May 1887, p.2, c.6; 4 March 1887, p.2, c.4; 17 May 1888, p.2.

82. AJHR, 1892, H.-3, p.1.

83. Patea Hospital Board Minute Book I, 2 February 1897, p.252; 2 March 1897, p.254.

84. NZS, 1909, pp. 57-109.

85. See earlier, p.66.

their petition to Parliament was not granted.<sup>86</sup> Three years later, the Waitotara-Momohaki Road Board's attempt to have its district constituted as Momohaki County also failed; the Patea County Council having presented a convincing counter-petition to the House of Representatives.<sup>87</sup> Thus, while fragmentation of local authority districts continued into the 1890s, the extent of this proliferation of local bodies was restricted somewhat by Parliament. Politicians may well have realized that the stabilization, or amalgamation, of local authority districts was in keeping with the centralization and increased efficiency of governmental administration sponsored by 'the administrative revolution'.

The expansion of settlement continued throughout the colony as the Liberal Government's policy to put more men on the land gained impetus. The opening up of the Crown lands behind Patea and Waverley in the 1890s was a part of this expansion. While being acknowledged as a highly desirable action by ratepayers and local authorities alike, the settling of the back country increased the area under Patea County Council control, and increased the number of demands made upon that council.

The need for access to their new properties prompted the back country settlers to petition the county council or road boards to declare special rating districts for the repayment of loans raised to finance the construction of roads and bridges in their areas. For example, in 1891, the Waitotara-Momohaki Road Board levied a special rate of 4/5d in the £ on the Omahine-Momohaki Special Rating District. This was in addition to the board's general rate of 1/2d in the £. and the county rate of 3/8d in the £.<sup>88</sup> But in the outlying areas, the settlers realized the necessity of such rates for the provision of mere dray tracks and swing bridges.

As well as the demands for such material services, the back country pioneers claimed a right to proportional representation on the county council, in order to be able to forward their specific demands with

86. PM, 27 June 1889, p.2.

87. PCC Minute Book II, 7 July 1892, p.335.

88. Waitotara-Momohaki Road Board Minute Book I, 2 February 1891, p.58;

greater force and chance of having them satisfied. Since 1881, the Patea County had been divided for representative purposes into the Waverley and Otoia Ridings, separated by the Patea River, with five and four members respectively.<sup>89</sup> In 1893, the county council was called upon by the settlers in the outlying district, north of the Confiscation Line, to grant them a greater measure of representation on the council.<sup>90</sup> After considerable debate throughout the county as to the merits of the existing situation, council representation was re-adjusted. Otoia and Waverley Ridings were to return four councillors each, and the newly-constituted Kapara Riding, to the north, was allowed one representative.<sup>91</sup> The granting of representation to the areas being retrieved from 'the frontier' was to prove important in the development of those districts. More roads and bridges were demanded for the new areas of settlement, thrusting a great financial burden on the county council, and thus contributing to the council's reluctance to carry out any tasks considered secondary to the provision of those basic needs; roads and bridges.

Throughout the later 1880s and the '90s, the central government became more involved in local government affairs; encroaching upon the functions of local authorities; administering local matters neglected or inefficiently handled by local bodies. 'The administrative revolution' involved the increasing centralization of governmental administration. Another aspect of this increasing tendency of central authorities to intervene in local government matters was the Government's attempts to resolve town-country conflict. One of the most controversial topics between rural and urban authorities in the latter part of the last century was their respective responsibilities for shared public works. In the case of Patea, this controversy focussed on the renewal of the Patea bridge, just south of the town. Having resolved that a new bridge was necessary, the meeting of the county and borough councils in September 1889 reached a stalemate on the question of the apportionment of the costs involved, between the two bodies.<sup>92</sup> It was found necessary to resort to the arbitration of a government commission. The county

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89. PCC Minute Book I, 27 September 1881, p.292.

90. PCP, 15 March 1893, p.2.

91. NZ Gazette, 1893, p.863.

92. PM, 5 September 1889, p.2.

was 'inflicted' with seven-tenths, and two-thirds of the construction and maintenance costs respectively. The control of the old bridge was left to the town authorities, while the new bridge construction was in the hands of the county council.<sup>93</sup> The central government had found it, again, necessary to indulge in local body concerns.

Apart from the deadlock over the bridge issue, the Patea borough and county authorities enjoyed a large measure of harmony and co-operation in their relations. This unity was shown in their respective reactions to the attempt of the Waverley settlers in 1889 to have a "Waverley County" constituted. The Patea councils were unanimous that the existing county should not be divided so as to reduce its capital value from nearly £600,000 to a mere £150,000.<sup>94</sup> The borough council protested strongly against the petition of the Waverley settlers, believing that it was

detrimental to the Public interests that diminished areas of Counties should be granted; and the Public Mind being so strongly in favor of extended powers and areas being granted to County Councils for the purpose of economy and proper administration.<sup>95</sup>

Despite this statement, an ulterior motive of self-interest was still evident in the borough council's support of the county council on the separation issue. Some anti-separatists had alleged that the separatists merely wished to avoid having to contribute to the cost of the proposed new bridge over the Patea River.<sup>96</sup> Thus, while stating its opposition to the proposed new county, the borough council also covered itself and protected its own ratepayers' interests. The council resolved that should a division of the Patea County take place, maintenance or construction costs on the Patea bridge should be charged to the subdivisions, "as if they remained one County...."<sup>97</sup> Self-interest was still the major motivating force behind the actions of local authorities. In 1891, the Patea Borough Council went through the initial motions of establishing closer links between the town and its neighbours. The

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93. NZ Gazette, 1890, pp. 302, 305.

94. PCP, 25 June 1889, p.2.

95. PBC Minute Book I, 8 July 1889, p.466.

96. PCP, 25 June 1889, p.2.

97. PBC Minute Book I, 8 July 1889, p.466.

council went into committee in order to discuss the best means of encouraging "greater reciprocity between neighbouring towns." The Mayor was authorised to report on commercial relations within the area, but no report was forthcoming.<sup>98</sup> Then, in April of 1891, the Mayor's proposal to call a public meeting to consider the arrangement of commercial and social relations between the town and the surrounding country lapsed for want of a seconder.<sup>99</sup> This self-centred approach of local authorities made them reluctant to undertake new responsibilities or expand existing ones, necessitating the increasing intervention of the central authorities.

The transformation that governmental administration in New Zealand underwent during the 1890s was attributable, to a significant extent, to the attitudes and performance of local authorities. The heightened level of demands were made upon local bodies of ratepayers in the more established areas of the colony, and the expansion of settlement into the back country districts, particularly in the North Island, greatly increased the burden upon local government institutions to cater for all their ratepayers desires. The pressures that these demands exerted on local bodies contributed towards restricting the number of responsibilities they could effectively administer. The evasion of additional duties by, and the frequent migration of functions between, local authorities made it virtually essential that the central government intervene and 'usurp' a number of these functions. 'The administrative revolution' had broken out. The central authorities appeared only too willing to accelerate that process of administrative centralization put into motion initially by Vogel in 1870. Their legislative and administrative initiative effected "a transition from permissive to coercive legislation, from local to central, from amateur to professional administration."<sup>100</sup> The reluctance of local bodies to take on additional functions, or even to perform original tasks efficiently, and the settlers' parochialism shown through separatist agitation and town-country relations, lent justification to central initiatives, as well as originally helping to provoke 'the administrative revolutionaries'.

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98. *ibid.*, 5 January 1891, p.506; 2 February 1891, p.507.

99. *ibid.*, 6 April 1891, p.512.

100. Oliver, Towards a New History? p.15.

While the administrative transformation of the 1890s brought about a certain maturation in governmental administration, the advent of electricity, the motor vehicle, and the Babcock Test initiated the maturation or sophistication of settler demands and aspirations, and of local government responses in the early twentieth century. New Zealand was shaking off its colonial image, as it experienced social, political, economic and administrative change. These changes had a variety of implications for the workings of local government.

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## CHAPTER SIX

THE ASPIRATIONS AND RESPONSES OF A NEW CENTURY

Progress and confidence in the immediate future is plainly indicated in the fact that two new steamers are being specially built for the Patea trade, houses and land have increased in value by at least 20 per cent., and employment for all classes of labour is more abundant.

- Circular on 'Patea Harbour Affairs'  
from 'J.A. McKenna to Harbour Electors',  
3 February 1902.

By the turn of the century, New Zealand's confidence in its economic future had been restored. The depression had lifted to reveal potentially prosperous times ahead. Technological innovations played no minor role in the recovery, with refrigeration being the primary catalyst in many of the developments. The repercussions of the introduction of refrigeration on agricultural pursuits, that is, the development of intensive pastoralism and thereby, the fostering of the meat freezing and dairy industries, were to be responsible for many of the characteristics thrust upon New Zealand's social, economic and political system during those four decades between 1880 and 1920. New Zealand was maturing socially, economically and politically, and in order to keep pace with the changes involved in this maturation process, New Zealanders demanded more modern or sophisticated methods and facilities from both central and local government institutions. This progression of settler demands and aspirations to a higher level of sophistication proved to be a major factor in the abolition of road districts and boards. New Zealand reached a stage in its development when there was no longer any further need for local authorities administering purely basic environmental services.

The beginning of the twentieth century coincided with a considerable number of important developments in New Zealand's history. Both the South Island and the rural districts lost their superiority of numbers in the early years of the new century. The colony's economy became increasingly vulnerable to overseas market fluctuations and to natural forces at home, at the same time as New Zealand lessened its colonial dependence on Great Britain by achieving dominion status. Political emphasis on 'roads and bridges' had become overshadowed by a concern

for colonial problems of land tenure and social welfare, the solutions to which, by 1900, could no longer satisfy the colonial community as a whole, but only sections within the population. The political consensus of small-holder, shopkeeper, and labourer in the 1890s broke up sectionally in the first decade of the new century as the country threw off the vestiges of pioneering. This process of maturation involved the entire society, from the main centres of population to the smallest localities, and ranged over the complete governmental system, both central and local. But, whereas central government policy was then being determined by the need to satisfy sectional interests, local government continued to revolve around the principle of localism. Town and country, not worker and employer, was the division of opinion in local administration. Ratepayers aspired to improve their 'lot' as inhabitants of a particular district or town, and not as members of a particular social class or sectional group.

Two sets of demands were being made on the New Zealand governmental 'machine' in the initial years of the twentieth century. The first was from the public as taxpayers with allegiance to one of the sections in the society, whether it was farmers demanding the freehold tenure, or workers advocating land reform and higher wages. The second set of demands was from the public as ratepayers demanding improved facilities for their immediate environment, whether in town or country.

In many instances, the local government ratepayers demanded many of the same amenities as before, and for the same basic reasons of self and community interest. But the circumstances promoting this parochialism had changed. The economic emphasis in New Zealand had shifted to primary production, particularly dairying and sheep farming. Ratepayers wanted those roads, bridges, drainage systems and navigable harbours just as before, but now they demanded them to facilitate their involvement in some aspect of New Zealand's newfound source of wealth: intensive pastoralism.

The North Island bushlands were cleared to make room for the small-holder specializing in meat or dairy production. This need for more farmland to capitalize on the introduction of refrigeration, and to curb the rural-urban drift, can account, to a large extent, for the urgency placed upon the necessity of opening up the back country behind

Patea and Waverley, by the district's local bodies in the 1890s. When the land was eventually sold, the purchasers agitated for communications between their out-lying areas and the local markets. At the same time, ratepayers in the longer-established front country areas were demanding the improvement of roads and bridges linking their holdings with the creameries, skimming stations, and freezing works. These highways and by-roads had deteriorated rapidly since the introduction of refrigeration, which had increased the amount of traffic on the roads. Stock being driven to the meat works, and heavily-laden drays carting milk to the processing plants, accelerated the deterioration of the clay and gravel roads, and the wooden bridges. Measures taken by local bodies to impede the roads falling into disrepair varied. In 1902, the Patea County Council instructed its foreman to prosecute owners of drays carrying loads in excess of thirty hundredweight on three inch tyres on county roads.<sup>1</sup> That same year, the Patea East and Patea West Road Boards combined to make traffic by-laws, which prohibited the movement of 'heavy traffic'<sup>2</sup> over any of their district roads between mid-May and mid-September in any year.<sup>3</sup>

The need of farmers for the maintenance of adequate lines of communication between their properties and the towns and ports was manifest in the usual willingness to assist as much as possible with the necessary work, financially and/or manually. In 1900, settlers in the Patea West Road District had petitioned the Government to supply a £ for £ subsidy for the metalling of Ball Road; the settlers being willing to rate themselves for £4,000.<sup>4</sup> Achieving no satisfaction, the settlers held a meeting a year later to decide on further action.<sup>5</sup> The dairy traffic on the road had cut it up badly, and metalling was required urgently. But it was not until 1911 that a loan of £8,000 was raised for metalling several roads in the county, including Ball Road.<sup>6</sup> Keeping the roads passable often required the assistance of the settlers. The upper Waitotara Valley in Kapara Riding was susceptible to flooding, and settlers lent assistance to county council surface-men in clearing

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1. PCC Minute Book III, 6 February 1902, p.180.

2. Weighing over 1½ ton.

3. Circular of Patea East & Patea West Road Boards (jointly); 'New Traffic Bye-Laws', in PWRB Scrapbook of Newspaper Clippings, 1896-1910.

4. PCP clipping, c. 8 July 1901, attached to PWRB Minute Book III.

5. *ibid.*

6. PCC Minute Book IV, 11 April 1911, p.12.

slips from the roads.<sup>7</sup> The scarcity of gravel reserves in Patea County had restricted the roads, particularly those under road board control, to little more than dust tracks in summer and mud lanes in winter. But with the rapid deterioration of these roads under a greater volume of traffic, upgrading was essential for continued prosperity. The county council was forced to obtain its metal from as far afield as Marton, which proved costly, and explains a resolution in 1910 to urge the Public Works Department to spend £15,000 on the proposed railway to the gravel reef on the slopes of Mt. Egmont.<sup>8</sup>

Prior to the advent of refrigeration, the demand for harbour improvement was stimulated by the desire to participate in general trading and transporation with other coastal towns, particularly where railways had yet to be laid and roads left much to be desired. Refrigeration heightened the prospects of prosperity for a farming district, and for the colony as a whole, and good shipping facilities could contribute greatly to the realization of these prospects. Thus, in many harbours in the colony, improvements were advocated as a direct response to refrigeration and the development of intensive pastoralism. Freezing works and harbours were complementary in the success of the new agricultural developments. The lower the wharfage dues at any port, the greater the amount of trade that would flow through that port. Farmers and businessmen combined in their agitation to keep wharfage dues to a minimum, so as to attract goods usually directed through other channels. For example, the Patea Harbour Board was urged by the locals to reduce wharf charges so that the south Taranaki harbour could compete with the nearby ports at Waitara and Wanganui.<sup>9</sup> The development of dairying and meat freezing in Taranaki during the latter years of the century demanded the provision of facilities to cope with, and extend, these activities. The period between 1899 and 1907 marked the rise of Patea as a dairy produce exporting port, in competition with New Plymouth. As early as 1888, a cool store for dairy produce had been opened at Patea, but in 1901 a second store was brought into operation at the wharves by the dairy companies in the vicinity. These local dairy companies formed themselves, that same year, into the West Coast

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7. PCC Minute Book III, 9 June 1903, p.223.

8. *ibid.*, 30 November 1910, p.570.

9. PHB Minute Book I, 28 December 1881; 17 July 1882; 18 June 1889; 9 August 1898; 11 October 1898.

Refrigerating Company for the coastal shipment of their dairy products. A butter grading plant was installed at the Patea wharves after representations had been made to the Government by the harbour board in 1899,<sup>10</sup> and by 1902 the butter grading company was considering enlarging its building and installing a larger grading machine.<sup>11</sup> In the years from 1888 to 1898, Patea butter and cheese exports varied between 704 and 7145 cases in any one year.<sup>12</sup> Then, between 1899 and 1904, butter exports alone rose from 2303 to 22,667 cases.<sup>13</sup> Refrigeration was encouraging dairy production to greater heights. By 1905, Patea had become the twelfth largest exporting port in the colony.<sup>14</sup> The harbour board had had another wharf built and the western breakwater extended to cope with the increasing amount of trade, and the consequent increase in the number of coastal vessels using the harbour.<sup>15</sup> Patea's position in the ranks of New Zealand's exporting ports had risen to fifth by 1912.<sup>16</sup>

Over the early years of the new century, the freezing industry in southern Taranaki also underwent considerable growth. In 1910, the Patea Farmers Co-operative Freezing Company bought out the meat works, and profited greatly from British meat requirements during the First World War.<sup>17</sup> All these developments provoked the Patea Harbour Board to petition for rating powers in order to finance further work on the entrance to the river, which had continued to prove hazardous to shipping. In 1913, the board was granted a rating area between Hawera and Waverley, and inland to about two miles beyond Normanby.<sup>18</sup> Two years later, the board floated its biggest loan, £86,000, and let contracts for extension to the breakwater totalling £67,000. A dredge was also purchased to keep the channel clear for the coastal steamers. The harbour board had at last responded to settler demands, and to

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10. PHB Office Reports and Committee Minute Book I, 18 July 1899.

11. Chairman's Report for year ending 31 December 1901, *ibid.*, January 1902.

12. From a table of export-import figures for Patea, 1888-1901, PHB Office Reports and Committee Minute Book I.

13. Figures from table and reports, PHB Office Reports and Committee Minute Books I & II.

14. Bellringer, p.69.

15. Chairman's Report for year ending 31 December 1901, PHB Office Reports and Committee Minute Book I, January 1902.

16. PCP, 6 April 1927.

17. PM, (Patea Museum News), 25 April 1974, p.2.

18. NZS, 1913, pp.639-40.

the opportunities offered by an agricultural economy.

The lack of gravel on Patea roads before the turn of the century made the demand for metal by the settlers, in the early 1900s, appear one of sophistication. Settlers aspired, in these more prosperous times, to have all-weather access. This trend of sophistication which pervaded the demands and aspirations of ratepayers in the country was also evident in the towns. Urban authorities realized the necessity to keep abreast of the times and, thus, share in the rewards of progress, by improving urban facilities so as to sustain, if not increase, the population of their towns. Residents realized the same necessity, and accordingly demanded the provision of more sophisticated facilities, for example, asphalt footpaths, street and house lighting, improved drainage systems, town water supply, secondary and tertiary educational institutions, and telephone communications. Many of these amenities were demanded of the Patea Borough Council towards the end of the last century, and at the beginning of the twentieth.

In late 1899, the Patea Borough Council ordered 500 gallons of tar for asphaltting some of the footpaths, especially in the main thoroughfare.<sup>19</sup> Street lighting came under consideration in 1898, when the council decided to install acetylene gas lights on six street corners, at a total cost of £85.<sup>20</sup> Apparently no action on the decision took place for, in November 1899, the council resolved

that this Council do all things necessary to light the streets and public places of the Borough with electricity and to supply electricity for lighting purposes and for motive power to inhabitants thereof or such of them as Council may agree so to supply.<sup>21</sup>

A ratepayers' poll on the proposal to raise a £2,500 loan for the electricity scheme, the interest to be paid by a special rate of 6d. in the £, favoured the loan by 128 votes to 8.<sup>22</sup> The power-house erected beside the Kaikura Stream is alleged to have provided the first supply of electricity for any local body in the country.<sup>23</sup> The initial

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19. PBC Minute Book II, 2 October 1899, p.305.

20. PBC Lighting Committee Minute Book, 30 March 1898; PBC Minute Book II, 20 May 1898, p.240.

21. PBC Minute Book II, 6 November 1899, p.309.

22. PBC Advertisements, 10 January 1900.

23. I.E. Nolan, Patea..... Taranaki, New Zealand, 1881-1956. Patea Borough 75th Jubilee Official Souvenir, Hawera, 1956.

consumers numbered twenty-five; five years later, this number had risen to be in excess of one hundred.<sup>24</sup> Street lighting around the town proved to be in great demand.<sup>25</sup> To the south, at Waverley, the local town board had erected the first two acetylene street lamps in the town in 1897.<sup>26</sup> It was over a decade later before more street lights were put up and acetylene gas lighting was supplied to householders.<sup>27</sup> In 1913, the first steps were taken for supplying the township with electricity; initial consumption commencing late in 1916.<sup>28</sup>

Patea Borough residents had been granted permission in 1898 to connect their storm water drainage with the town's main drain,<sup>29</sup> but generally, drainage did not rate a high priority in town development. Of the total estimated expenditure of £600 of the Patea Borough Council for the 1898-99 year, drainage and sanitation warranted a sum of only £10, the smallest of all the allocations.<sup>30</sup> Three years later, drainage and sanitation allocation had been increased by fifty per cent, but at the expense of water works.<sup>31</sup> The small demand for improved drainage facilities was further manifest in a poll of ratepayers on the proposal to borrow £7,000 for drainage purposes in 1911. The proposal was defeated by a 2:1 margin.<sup>32</sup>

A town water supply proposal in 1910 had met a similar fate.<sup>33</sup> Prior to 1899, a reservoir in the borough had supplied water for fire-fighting purposes only; the water being lifted by windmill from a well into the reservoir. In 1899, the council's Water Works Committee recommended that residents be allowed to draw from the reservoir, provided at least six foot of water remained in the tank.<sup>34</sup> Ten years

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24. PBC Electric Light Committee Minute Book, 4 June 1908.

25. *ibid.*

26. WTB Minute Book I, 8 June 1897, p.185; 13 July 1897, p.186.

27. *ibid.*, 13 August 1908, p.307; 13 May 1909, pp. 322-33.

28. *ibid.*, 7 July 1913, p.445; WTB Minute Book II, 9 November 1916, p.120.

29. PBC Minute Book II, 7 November 1898, p.270.

30. PBC Advertisements, c. 5 May 1898,

31. *ibid.*, c. May 1901.

32. *ibid.*, c. March 1911.

33. *ibid.*, 17 December, 1910.

34. PBC Lease Committee & Water Works Committee Minute Book, 2 March 1899.



Paia. F.G.P. 3892.

PLATE III Egmont Street, Patea, c. 1902

Electric lighting; asphalt footpaths:  
Sophisticated demands?

(Radcliffe Collection, Alexander Turnbull  
Library)

later, a bore was sunk for the supply of water to borough residents and, in 1916, work was begun on a 120 foot high water tower, completed in 1918.<sup>35</sup> The provision of more sophisticated drainage and domestic water supply systems by the borough was not at the forefront of ratepayer demands, but had to wait on the provision of other amenities, such as streets and footpaths, fire protection, and even a town hall and borough chambers. These latter facilities were erected in 1913, financed by a £5000 loan.<sup>36</sup>

Although certain functions lay outside the province of territorial local bodies, local authorities were elected to represent the interests of the ratepayers, not only in local government affairs, but also in matters under the jurisdiction of central government departments. In February 1902, the Patea Borough Council considered it time that educational amenities were improved in the district and, thus, forwarded the following resolution to the Education Department in Wellington:

that in the interest of forty-two prospective pupils, twenty of whom have passed the VI Standard, it is, in the opinion of this Council, most desirable that a High School be established in Patea, which is the centre of an educational district consisting of 9 schools, and having a school attendance of over 600 pupils....<sup>37</sup>

It would appear that the council's and district's wish was granted about five years later.<sup>38</sup> However, another wish concerning educational development for the district was not carried out by central government authorities. In 1904, the Government had made it known that it was considering the question of an agricultural college for the North Island, so as to take further advantage of scientific developments in agriculture. Immediately, the Patea County Council, the Waverley Town Board and the Kohi Road Board made known their support for the college site to be fixed at the Momohaki State Farm, just south of Waverley.<sup>39</sup> Local inhabitants believed that the central position, and the available land and buildings recommended the Momohaki site.<sup>40</sup> But their applications were unsuccessful, and the college was later sited at

35. Nolan, Patea Borough 75th Jubilee.

36. PBC Advertisements, c. 26 April 1912.

37. PBC Minute Book II, 3 February 1902, p.423.

38. Nolan, Patea Borough 75th Jubilee.

39. PCC Minute Book III, 9 August 1904, p.267; WTB Minute Book I, 28 July 1904, p.262; Kohi Road Board Minute Book, 12 August 1904, p.116.

40. Newspaper clipping from PCC Scrapbook, 1892-1932, dated c. 10 August 1904.

## Palmerston North.

Borough and county councils were not the only territorial local government institutions to meet the more 'modern' demands of their ratepayers. Town boards were also caught up in the process of sophistication sweeping through the country in the early years of the new century. To facilitate the town boards' responses to their ratepayers' aspirations, legislation had been passed in 1906 to enable town districts of over 500 people to become independent of county council control, and separate from the county.<sup>41</sup> These Independent Town Districts were given greater administrative control over their own affairs, and ratepayers were almost certain of more effective treatment of their demands. The Waverley Town Board had undertaken to perform many of the basic and more primitive functions required in any pioneer settlement of nineteenth century New Zealand. Side streets and all footpaths were formed and maintained by the board. Poundage and fire protection facilities were also under town board control. The Waverley Town Board acted as the Waverley and Wairoa Domain Boards, the Waverley Cemetery Trustee, and the custodian of the Waverley Brass Band equipment. Despite these functions, the Waverley Town District aspired to control the main road through the town, and demanded such from the county council. On receiving independence, and thus control of the main road from the Patea County Council in 1910,<sup>42</sup> the Waverley Town Board forged ahead in catering for the requirements of the townspeople. Possessing complete control of their own town's affairs seems to have re-invigorated the population to push for the rapid development of the town, almost regardless of the additional cost to be borne by them as ratepayers. In September 1909, the town board doubled the general rate of  $\frac{3}{4}$ d. originally struck for that year, and levied a special rate of  $\frac{1}{4}$ d. in the £ for two years for fire brigade purposes. That same year, street lamps had been erected throughout the township.<sup>43</sup> A new town board office and a public library were opened in October 1910, financed by a special loan of £750 secured by a special rate of 27/128ths of 1d. in the £. A year later, a loan of £3000 was raised for the purpose of forming, metalling, kerbing and channeling

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41. NZS, 1906, p.154.

42. NZ Gazette, 1910, p.900.

43. See earlier, p.102.

the town's streets and footpaths. A special rate of 3/5d. was levied. By 1916, the board had borrowed £18,200 for their water and lighting scheme, inflicting a total rate of 10 5/8d. in the £ on the local rate-payers. Progress followed upon the granting of independent status to the town, but aspirations continued to run high for, in 1912, the town board applied to have Waverley proclaimed a borough. The town proved too small for the granting of such a status, but this refusal did not prevent the existing administration responding favourably to the more sophisticated demands of its residents.<sup>44</sup>

Most of the country's local authorities were able to go a considerable way in providing those amenities associated with a new era, an era of prosperity and progress; the post-pioneering period. As more of the country was infiltrated by the settlers, the long-settled districts demanded facilities other than the very basic ones associated with 'the frontier'. The introduction of, and future prospects for, intensive pastoralism demanded better facilities than those already supplied by local bodies - improved roads and bridges, wharves and harbours. In the towns, local authorities realized that demands for amenities, other than basic, had to be satisfied, if the urban settlements were to enjoy the more prosperous times, and continue to grow. Electric lighting, up-dated water supply and drainage systems, and asphalt streets and pavements were representative of the facilities demanded and provided in the post-pioneer urban settlements of New Zealand. But one local government institution, in particular, was made obsolete and superfluous by progress in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

The road boards had been seen by many, since the Counties Act was passed in 1876, as duplicatory and, therefore, unnecessary units of rural local government. Their sole purpose was to provide and maintain district roads; a function some thought could well be carried out by county councils. Many believed there existed no need for single-function territorial local authorities; they were wasteful of rate-payers' money, and should be absorbed into the larger units, the counties. However, vested road board interests held strong influence,

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44. The information in this paragraph, unless otherwise footnoted, was derived from WTB Minute Book I, 8 July 1909, p.327; 14 July 1910, p.345; 21 October 1910, p.363; 14 November 1911, p.400; 9 May 1912, p.414; WTB Minute Book II, 10 August 1916, p.106.

and not only had they succeeded in preventing the suppression of the boards, but had also multiplied the number of boards by taking advantage of the central government's rather irrational and permissive local government legislation. The road boards stood up to criticism of their extreme parochialism during the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century, but the rejuvenation of colonial conditions, which coincided with the turn of the century, signalled the beginning of decline for the road boards. Their very raison d'etre eventually resulted in their elimination. Once the boards had opened the country behind the county highways by the provision of district roads, their services were no longer required, and they were absorbed, willingly or otherwise, by covetous county councils, some of which had earlier tried to precipitate the abolition of the road boards.

In July 1895, the Patea County Council resolved to notify all the road boards within the county of its proposal under the Counties Act, 1886, to subsidise them in the following way:

When no Road Board rates are struck, to pay three-quarters of the subsidy received by Council, and when the full rate  $\frac{3}{4}$ d. in the £7 is struck by the Road Board to make them a payment of half amount received from Government as subsidy.<sup>45</sup>

This proposition would have the effect of relieving ratepayers of the road board rate at very small financial loss to the boards, while the ratepayers in the riding of which the road district was a part would gain financially without increasing the county rate. Where the road board chose to levy the full  $\frac{3}{4}$ d. rate, the reverse applied, that is, the board would benefit at the county's expense, but only slightly.<sup>46</sup> Only two of the eight road boards levied rates on their district for the 1895-96 year.<sup>47</sup> This measure to relieve ratepayers of paying double rates might well have been interpreted as a sinister move by government and county administrators to hasten the abolition of the road boards, by taking away a source of independence, that is, rates, had it not been a permissive measure, and had road board and county council membership not been closely linked. The growing redundancy of road boards as the first decade of the new century wore on, and

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45. Clipping from PCP, 8 July 1895, in the PCC Scrapbook, 1892-1932.

46. *ibid.*

47. Clipping from PCP, 7 October 1895, in the PCC Scrapbook, 1892-1932.

and the re-allocation of the government subsidy among the road boards in Patea County from 1906, could possibly justify an opinion that the county council was now attempting to undermine the position of the road boards by increasing their dependence on the council for funds. In 1913, the county council and the Whenuakura-Waitotara Road Board had words over the question of whether the council had power to direct a road board as to how to spend a subsidy. The council had threatened to withdraw the subsidy to the board if the latter did not agree to pay a portion of the maintenance costs on the Waitotara Station Road, when the county council took control of the road.<sup>48</sup> The council resolved not to accept responsibility for the road as the board had not struck a rate for twenty years but relied on the 12s 6d. in the £ grant from the council.<sup>49</sup> The road board was compelled to retain responsibility for the station road, and the county council continued to supply a subsidy to the board in lieu of rates.

Indeed, road boards had become dependent on county council grants to the extent that a Patea County Council decision in 1916 to stop subsidies the following year resulted in the merging of the remaining five road boards in 1917. This was the culmination of agitation started in 1877,<sup>50</sup> to abolish road boards within Patea County. Calls for the merging of the boards into the county continued throughout the remaining decades of the century, to no avail. Concern for their immediate local interests persuaded settlers that road boards should stay and, if need be, multiply. The economic viability of some road districts and boards remained suspect. The Kohi Road District had approximately twenty-two ratepayers in 1884-1885, paying rates to the value of £104,<sup>51</sup> while the Okotuku Road District contained only twenty-nine ratepayers in 1892-1893.<sup>52</sup> Such districts could barely finance the development work needed within their boundaries. The two largest road districts within the Patea County were the Patea East and Patea West districts. These were the first districts to be formed in the area, and the first to be abolished. In 1877-78, the West board could boast 101 names on the valuation roll, while the East

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48. Whenuakura-Waitotara Road Board Letter Book, 16 September 1913, p.75.

49. PCC Minute Book IV, 8 September 1913, pp.136-37.

50. PCC Committee Minute Book, 5 June 1877.

51. Kohi Road Board Rate Book, 1884-1897.

52. Okotuku Road Board Rate Book, 1884-1896.



PLATE IV      Main Street, Waverley, c. 1917

Demands and response in an Independent  
Town District. Rapid progress?

(Tesla Collection, Alexander Turnbull  
Library)

board had approximately thirty-nine ratepayers. These numbers had almost doubled in the next five to six years.<sup>53</sup> Developments after the return of prosperity in the late '90s helped raise the valuation levels within all the road districts two or three times between 1898 and 1908, contributing to a county-wide increase of over one and a quarter million pounds.<sup>54</sup> But even so, the valuations for the various districts still ranged between £582,000 for the Patea West district and £64,000 for the Motoroa district in 1908.<sup>55</sup> A low valuation could sometimes seriously affect a board's ability to provide those improved facilities demanded of it by ratepayers, and the prosperous and progressive times.

The Patea East Road Board was the first board in the county to recognize that its ratepayers would benefit more from merging with the county than remaining separate, in the light of the changing times. The East board realized that the pioneering era was drawing to a close and that the road boards' task of opening up the land inland from the coast, through the formation of roads, was near completion. In 1902, the board had resolved to circulate a petition for merging among its ratepayers,<sup>56</sup> but nothing eventuated from the resolution. Seven years later, the East board decided that the time had arrived when road boards should be merged, and approached the Patea West Road Board to discuss the proposal.<sup>57</sup> Petitions were circulated and presented to the Patea County Council, which granted the boards' prayer; the mergers being official as from 30 June 1910.<sup>58</sup> The districts of these two boards were the most advanced areas of the county, with the greatest number of ratepayers and the highest rateable valuation. The Patea West board had jurisdiction over more than one hundred miles of road, while its neighbour controlled between thirty and forty miles.<sup>59</sup> The two boards were dependent largely on county council grants, like most of the other boards striking no rates, but indebtedness was not responsible for the mergers in 1910, both boards handing over considerable monies to the county council.<sup>60</sup> Instead, their raison d'etre exhausted, the road boards hastened the inevitable. The county

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53. PWRB Rate Book, 1877-92; PERB Rate Book, 1877-1895.

54. Newspaper clipping, c. November 1908, from PCC Scrapbook, 1892-1932.

55. *ibid.*

56. PERB Minute Book II, 4 October 1902, p.91.

57. *ibid.*, 7 August 1909, p.202.

58. NZ Gazette, 1910, p.1595.

59. PWRB Minute Book III, 9 October 1905; PERB Rate Book, 1877-1895.

60. PWRB Minute Book III, 15 November 1909; PERB Minute Book II, 2 July 1910, p.212.

councils could not adequately carry out maintenance work, and save the ratepayers one set of administrative costs. The two boards may well have foreseen the consequences of motor vehicles upon district and county roads and bridges, and decided to opt out of the system to avoid the expense incurred. It is also possible that county control of all roads was commended by economies of scale. This could well have been related to changes in the technology involved in road-making and maintenance, for example, the transition from manual labour to a greater use of machinery. While surfacemen, with horse and dray teams, were still very much a part of local body road development gangs in the first two decades of the twentieth century, mechanised graders and steam rollers were becoming more evident throughout the country. Although merely conjecture, it is feasible that the cost of such capital equipment was beyond road boards, and thus obliged these boards to merge with the county. The unnecessary duplication of machinery and costs was, therefore, avoided.

The remaining six road boards within the county were more reluctant to be absorbed into the county, and lose their identity. The area between the Whenuakura and Waitotara Rivers contained a greater proportion of the county's back country and, therefore, of the later developed country. The area had been less administratively stable than the northern portion of the county, with ratepayers turning towards separatism and subdivision as a solution for extreme parochialism.<sup>61</sup> This tendency resulted in a plethora of small, often financially weak, local government units which came in for some harsh criticism, particularly from centralization-minded newspaper editors. The local editor in 1887, for instance, wrote:

It may have a pleasant sound of importance to be a member of one of those influential local bodies and it may also have a savour of pleasure - albeit of a dog-in-the-manger type - to feel that a half-dozen settlers can form themselves into a Road Board, and, by fixing the rate at a minimum, just provide funds sufficient to pay the working expenses of the board, and for a load of gravel to be deposited at each farmer's gate during the winter months.<sup>62</sup>

But the road boards continued to exist, as though oblivious to such

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61. See earlier, chapters 4 & 5.

62. PM, 27 May 1887, p.2, c.2.

criticism. In 1913, the Waitotara-Momohaki Road Board merged with the county after vehemently opposing such a move since the turn of the century. Between 1908 and 1912, the board often experienced difficulty in raising a quorum at its monthly meetings,<sup>63</sup> which could have contributed to the reasons for the board's about-face on the merger question. A sense of realism amid changing times, and not financial difficulties, can probably most accurately account for the board's decision.

The 'hand' of the remaining boards was forced by the county council's decision to cease distributing subsidies to the boards after 1916.<sup>64</sup> Financial problems led to the council's action. The merging of the three road districts, comprising a large portion of the county, resulted in a reduction of the council's subsidy from the Government by approximately £1100 and, thus, the council resolved to adopt measures aimed at recovering its financial position.<sup>65</sup> Where no road districts existed within a county, a government subsidy of up to £2500 could be granted, as opposed to the grant of a much smaller amount if road districts existed within a riding of the county. Rates between, but not within, ridings could vary. Thus, road districts within ridings had to pay the same rates as the riding, besides any road rates their own board might levy. The Patea County Council proposed to pay back half of any riding rate levied on a road district,<sup>66</sup> but this double rating, plus the council's resolution to stop paying out subsidies, resigned the road boards to petition for abolition. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the minutes of each meeting of the road boards were noticeably shorter, often no more than a few lines. Members frequently met for little else than to pass accounts for payment.<sup>67</sup> The county council was being entrusted with the control of a growing number of district roads,<sup>68</sup> thus minimizing road boards' responsibilities and adding to the boards' redundancy. The economies of scale, in relation to changing technology in road

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63. Waitotara-Momohaki Road Board Minute Book II, pp. 176-232.

64. PCC Minute Book IV, 13 March 1916, p.260.

65. Okotuku Road Board Letter Book (Inward), 11 August 1915.

66. *ibid.*

67. Various road board minute books for the period 1900-17 listed in the bibliography.

68. PCC Minute Books III & IV.

development mentioned earlier, could be more meaningful as a possible reason for road board mergers at this later date. Manual labour was almost certainly being replaced, to a certain extent, by the use of machinery by 1916-17. In late 1916, the committee of the whole Patea County Council decided that the county's main road should be tarsealed, and that a complete tarring plant, including a tar boiler, sprayer and truck, be purchased.<sup>69</sup> The increase in the volume of heavy motor traffic on roads compelled local authorities to take such action to maintain adequate communications. The cost of maintaining adequate roads in those times could have prohibited road boards from carrying out effective maintenance and, thus, hastened their abolition.

In June 1917, the district roads under the control of the Kohi, Motoroa, Wairoa, Okotuku, and Whenuakura-Waitotara Road Boards came under the jurisdiction of the Patea County Council,<sup>70</sup> bringing to an end forty-five years of road board administration within the Patea district. These road boards joined in the nation-wide trend of road district abolition and, perhaps, the first step towards local government consolidation.

Demands on the whole dominion, and circumstances affecting the entire nation, in the first two decades of the new century, appear to have drawn local authorities more closely into national life. New Zealand's involvement in the Boer War and, more especially, in World War I, gave local bodies an opportunity to voice individual opinions on the Government's war policy, as agents of the central administration. Local authorities assumed the role of recruitment agents in their localities, as well as providing employment for conscientious objectors and returned servicemen.<sup>71</sup> In Patea, members of the borough and county councils, and of the executive of the Patea Patriotic League, joined in a recruiting committee to assist in implementing the Government's recruiting scheme in 1916. The committee advertised for a recruitment canvasser to be paid £4 per week plus expenses; the cost to be shared by the borough and county councils.<sup>72</sup> A number of suggestions from

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69. PCC Committee Minute Book, 22 November 1916.

70. NZ Gazette, 1917, p.2528.

71. PCC Minute Book IV, 16 April 1914, p.167; 11 October 1915, p.243.

72. Patea Recruiting Committee Minute Book, 23 February 1916;

PCC Minute Book IV, 13 March 1916, p.257.

local bodies circulated among the country's borough and county councils for endorsement or rejection, in relation to the war effort.<sup>73</sup> Other contributions during this crisis period included county surface-men assisting farmers with their harvest,<sup>74</sup> while at the conclusion of the Boer War, the Patea Borough Council gave a celebration at the return of each one of the district's soldiers.<sup>75</sup>

The industrial strife of 1912-13 revealed the sectionalism of many of New Zealand's communities. The Patea County Council's resolution on the subject sums up the attitude of the agriculturally-oriented towns and their hinterlands:

That this Council desires to convey to the Hon. the Premier and members of the Government the sincere thanks of the community for the judicious and firm attitude they have assumed in dealing with the late industrial crisis and also wishes to convey to those settlers who have so readily offered their services as Special Constables and in loading Home vessels the thanks of the district in preventing what might have been a more serious financial loss than has been the case.

The Council also wishes to convey to the Government their sincere hope that effectual means will be devised for prevention of a repetition of unreasonable strikes in the future.<sup>76</sup>

Industrial trouble had earlier affected the Patea district. In 1911, members of the Wharf Labourers' Union had ceased work at the local port in demand for equal pay rates with those paid at Wanganui.<sup>77</sup> Union leaders condemned 'the blacklegs' who continued to work the port, and urged unionists to refuse to work the ships, saying:

We, as members of the largest union in New Zealand, cannot afford to allow the small union at Patea to be beaten by a matter which vitally affects their conditions of living, and unionism completely shut out of the port, which is the object being aimed at by the employers.<sup>78</sup>

Such trouble, no doubt, strengthened the appeal of the Reform Party in strongly rural areas like Patea.

73. PCC Minute Book IV, 10 August 1914, p.179; 13 December 1915, p.249.

74. *ibid.*, 14 February 1916, p.255.

75. PBC Minute Book II, 3 December 1900, p.360.

76. PCC Minute Book IV, 8 December 1913, p.150.

77. Clipping from PCP, c. April 1911, in PHB Scrapbook, 1893-1946.

78. *ibid.*

More typical matters continued to tighten the links between central and local administration. The plague scare in the early years of the century strengthened co-operation between Wellington and the localities and between individual local authorities, as the latter implemented sanitary precautions at the bidding of the Government.<sup>79</sup> The Patea Borough and County Councils combined in a campaign to destroy rats in the district.<sup>80</sup>

With the more sophisticated facilities demanded by ratepayers in the twentieth century, local territorial authorities continued to welcome every opportunity to unburden themselves of any responsibility that might be more suited to a special-purpose body. In 1910, the Patea County Council willingly handed over, to the Patea Hospital Board, the control of infectious diseases in the county.<sup>81</sup> Sanitation later came under the hospital authorities as well.<sup>82</sup>

The initial years of the new century were notable in local government for the increasing sophistication of the ratepayers' demands, in order to keep pace with changing times and new developments. New Zealand was experiencing the post-pioneering era of modernization. Many former facilities were updated, or replaced by more sophisticated items and methods. Pioneering local bodies, such as road boards, found their usefulness declining as their prime justification for existence, the provision of basic facilities, was fulfilled. The development of intensive pastoralism, fostered by the introduction of refrigeration, in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, provoked settlers to request new, more sophisticated amenities, in order to participate more profitably in ventures connected with primary production. Improved harbours, roads and bridges constituted some of these more sophisticated demands from ratepayers. The aspirations of town dwellers also focussed on keeping pace with new developments in urban facilities, such as asphalt footpaths, and adequate water and drainage schemes. These were the demands of the new century, as New Zealand cast off many of the characteristics of a pioneering society.

Demands made of local government institutions by settlers progressed from those of a very fundamental nature to the more

79. PBC Minute Book II, 5 February 1900.

80. PCC Minute Book III, 3 July 1900, p.119.

81. *ibid.*, 16 May 1910, p.534.

82. PCC Minute Book IV, 11 March 1912, p.50.

sophisticated demands of settlers within an established area in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, presentation of evidence and analysis of demands is but half the story. The response to these demands and aspirations is equally important. While much of the evidence for determining the performance of the local authorities can be found within the minutes of the particular bodies, an examination of the personalities involved in local government in the area can also prove useful in this respect. The importance of focussing a certain amount of attention upon 'the electors and the elected' in any local government study has only been recognized over recent years.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ELECTORS AND THE ELECTED

This County is governed to death.

- 'Alladin' in the Patea Mail,  
15 January 1883.

An investigation of 'the human element' in local government is essential to any evaluation of the responses of local authorities to the demands of the ratepayers, and of the latter's reaction to those responses. The type and number of men who stood for local body positions, the electoral performance of both the candidates and the electors, and the post-election day attitudes and actions of local body members and other ratepayers all have something to offer in a discussion on local government responses and ratepayer reaction.

In December 1876, a young settler at Kakaramea, Robert Petch, wrote to his brother in England of a visit he had had from "a large settler living out in the open on abt. 1000 acres... to ask me to give him my vote for the Otoia Riding, which I did...."<sup>1</sup> One day earlier, Petch had written of the great excitement aroused by the county council elections.

A man called Dale of Patea got the head of the poll which is first rate for me and for land owners of the Otoia Block. Dale is a pushing man and one who has a great wish to get the Country opened out near my place, to make roads etc. - he having no end of land there and 50 acres of land cut into  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre sections which he has sold....<sup>2</sup>

Robert Petch portrays the image of the young English immigrant aspiring to greater heights in a new environment. With financial assistance from his father, Petch purchased 217 acres of bushland and four town sections at Kakaramea at a total cost of £328 8s., in 1876.<sup>3</sup> In the longer-settled and more expansive areas of the colony, such as Canterbury, two hundred acres would have represented a small holding, but in the more recently opened, extremely fertile country of south Taranaki, this

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1. Robert Petch to John Petch, 29 December 1876; Robert Petch Papers 1876.  
2. Robert Petch to his father, 28 December 1876; Robert Petch Papers 1876.  
3. Robert Petch to his father, 10 November 1876; Robert Petch Papers 1876.

acreage placed Petch amongst the thirty-six per cent of landholders who owned over two hundred acres.<sup>4</sup> Seven of the nine members on the inaugural Patea County Council were in this group of property owners. Of these, William Dale and two others had in excess of six hundred acres each.<sup>5</sup> Thus, by colonial standards, the Patea County Council was numerically dominated by men with medium-sized holdings, rather than by the larger runholders so evident in Hawkes Bay and in many of the Canterbury counties. It was not taken for granted by the inhabitants of the Patea district that local government was the domain of the wealthiest settlers. Indeed, the personal possessions of Patea County councillors in the years under consideration varied greatly. The council in office in 1879 comprised no fewer than four men with little more than town sections, while four of the members of the 1897 council owned properties in excess of 1000 acres.<sup>6</sup> Over the period, the average size of the councillors' holdings increased; the member with the smallest amount of land in the 1897 council possessing over 150 acres.<sup>7</sup> Apparently, the Patea district was not greatly conducive to land speculation, and there are few, if any, recorded complaints against runholders grabbing extensive amounts of available country.<sup>8</sup> This lack of speculation appears to have resulted in a more equitable distribution of land among settlers in the district.

Rural local bodies, not unnaturally, attracted farmers to their membership, but they were not run exclusively by these men. The first four chairmen of the Patea County Council were respectively, a ferry owner, watchmaker, auctioneer, and storekeeper.<sup>9</sup> Sheep and cattle breeders predominated in the council over the years, but it was not uncommon to find a storekeeper or veterinary surgeon among their number. Road boards in the area followed a similar occupational pattern to that of the county council, as many of the councillors were also road board commissioners. However, there would appear to be a wider range of vocations represented on the boards. Storekeepers, slaughtermen, publicans, woolscourers, commission agents and coach proprietors joined

4. AJHR, 1882, A.-11, p.3.

5. PCC Rate Book, 1877-84.

6. *ibid.*, Cyclopedia Company Limited, Cyclopedia of New Zealand, six volumes, Wellington & Christchurch, 1897-1908, I, pp. 1465-90; VI, pp. 224-69.

7. Cyclopedia of New Zealand, I, p. 1465-90; VI, pp. 224-62.

8. Bremer, p.152.

9. Roberts, p.29; Cyclopedia of New Zealand, VI, pp. 47-8, 249, 259.

the farmers around the road boards' meeting tables to administer the affairs of their particular territory.<sup>10</sup> Despite this diversity, the farmers who sat on the boards, but not on the county council as well, tended to be those who owned larger units than the council members. This characteristic of road board membership within the Patea district lends support to the notion of vested interests in the colony's road boards. The influence of these interests prevented the Government abolishing the boards in 1876. The larger runholders concentrated their attention on the road districts and boards, on which they were able to wield more influence and power. The greater power they were able to exert in local affairs through the road boards convinced these men of the necessity to preserve and, indeed, multiply the number of these small local government institutions. Many of these larger property owners probably saw the county councils as a direct threat to the road boards, and thus were not prepared to seek nomination to the former. The road boards in the Patea area appear to have been more attractive to settlers with larger-than-average properties than the county council.

The local authorities within the Patea district's urban communities were manned by men involved in a variety of occupations. Retailers were most consistently represented on the Carlyle Town Board and its successor, the borough council, though solicitors, clerks, and commission agents were not uncommon. Publicans, brewers, bakers, and skilled tradesmen also took an active part in town affairs. A Wesleyan minister, T.G. Hammond, was a Patea Borough councillor towards the end of the century. A labourer was elected to the town board, and later to the council, but the outrage at this caused the resignation of the illiterate pauper on both occasions.<sup>11</sup> The Waverley Town Board attracted a greater number of farmers to its membership, than did its northern neighbour. Quite a number of farmers seem to have either lived within the town's boundaries or invested money in town sections while living in the surrounding countryside.<sup>12</sup>

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10. Cyclopedia of New Zealand, I, pp. 1465-90; VI, pp. 224-56; various boards' minute books.

11. PM, 30 May 1877, p.2, c.6; 4 April 1883, p.2, c.3.

12. Information in this paragraph, unless otherwise footnoted, was derived from Cyclopedia of New Zealand, I, pp. 1472-88; VI, pp. 256-69, 622-24; Patea Mail, and the Patea Borough Burgess Roll 1896-7.

Satisfaction and discontent, apathy and enthusiasm can be manifest by ratepayers in a variety of ways. Election time provides an ideal situation at which to sum up the responses of the electors to the immediate past administration, and evaluate its performance. A keenly contested election could indicate interest, or dissatisfaction engendering a desire 'to do better oneself'. Uncontested election usually signified complete satisfaction with the previous council, or apathy. A lack of nominations normally warranted the label of stagnation or apathy on the part of the enfranchised.

One commentator on local government in New Zealand has asserted that for the first two decades of their existence

most local governments thrived. Settlers, realising local "self" government was a trust and right that they could not lose sight of or abuse by neglect, were normally willing to stand as council candidates and certainly keen to endorse any plans and their associated loan proposals, for the development of needed amenities.... But this idyllic state was not to last.<sup>13</sup>

The first of these two assertions is certainly verified in the case of local government within the southern Taranaki region. Robert Petch wrote in December 1876, less than one year after settling in the Patea district, that he had

stood for one of the members of the road board at Patea. There were about 15 candidates and seven to be elected.<sup>14</sup>

Petch had received "a few votes". The enthusiasm of this Patea West Road Board election pervaded all local authority elections in the area for a considerable period. Sixteen candidates contested the first Patea County Council elections to find nine councillors.<sup>15</sup> The Carlyle Town Board elections in 1876 drew this comment from the editor of the Patea Mail:

The fact of half a dozen coming forward is a proof that the seats at the Board, though unattended by any emolument, and indeed only involving loss of time, and in some cases a great deal of trouble, are valued and deemed worthy of local ambition.<sup>16</sup>

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13. Thynne, p.31.

14. Robert Petch to his father, 12 December 1876; Robert Petch Papers 1876.

15. PM, 27 December 1876, p.2, cc.1-2.

16. *ibid.*, 3 June 1876, p.2, c.2.

The Patea East and Hawera Road Boards and the Waverley Town Board were also endowed with an excess of candidates for the number of seats available. The trend continued, from county council elections to recreation ground management committee elections. A public meeting in 1881 voted for five of thirteen nominations for the Waverley Domain Board.<sup>17</sup> Fifteen candidates contested the nine seats on the first Patea Borough Council, while the mayoralty attracted two contestants.<sup>18</sup> The newly-constituted nine-member Hawera Borough Council drew twelve council and three mayoral nominations.<sup>19</sup> The struggle to gain county, borough, town or road district status for a particular area taught the settlers to value the existence of their particular local governing body, and not to neglect exercising their rights as ratepayers. The abolition of the provincial governments and their replacement by a multitude of local authorities permitted a greater number of settlers the opportunity of entering public affairs. These two factors are important to an explanation of the abundance of candidates willing to come forward to contest local body elections. Involvement in public affairs of a district no longer meant riding long distances to attend provincial councils at New Plymouth or Wellington. The new local government representative was usually within a short distance of the meeting table, and readily accessible to the majority of his constituents.

Thynne's second assertion that the settlers' enthusiasm for, and interest in, local government waned after the initial twenty years of local "self" government<sup>20</sup> does not hold true for the Patea district at least. Contested elections are an indication of the electors interest and enthusiasm. In the Patea area, throughout the entire forty-five year period under discussion, seldom was it unnecessary to conduct a poll at county council triennial elections or at elections to fill extraordinary vacancies on any local body. On four separate occasions between 1899 and 1907, elections for riding representation on the county council went uncontested or nominations had to be called a second time.<sup>21</sup> Otherwise, nominations usually numbered at least two

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17. Weekly Herald, 14 December 1881, p.2, c.7.

18. HS, 7 November 1881, p.2; 16 November 1881, p.2, c.7.

19. *ibid.*, 23 January 1882, p.2, c.6.

20. Thynne, p.31.

21. PCP clippings in PCC Scrapbook of Newspaper Clippings, 1892-1932, early November 1899; 14 November 1902; 10 November 1905; 28 August 13 September 1907.

or three more than the seats available. The number of road board candidates varied over time and between districts, but generally a contest could be relied on. For example, the Waitotara-Momohaki Road Board received eight and six nominations for its five seats in 1901 and 1904 respectively.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, at least three of the five boards which merged with the Patea County in 1917 failed to attract more than the minimum number of candidates required in 1916.<sup>23</sup> This could be attributed to the uncertain future facing the boards at that time. It could also be accounted for by the limited number of ratepayers within each of the road districts. The greater the number of ratepayers the greater the number willing to become involved in local government. Although mere speculation, this relationship, in the case of these boards whose membership represented between one-sixth and one-quarter of the total number of the ratepayers in each district,<sup>24</sup> could have had a bearing on the number of nominations forwarded.

Urban government elections followed a similar pattern to their rural counterparts in the Patea area. Two decades after the Patea Borough Council was constituted, seats on the council were still keenly contested - by fifteen candidates in 1901, eleven in 1911, and by fourteen two years later.<sup>25</sup> A £3 nomination deposit did not deter townsmen from standing for council, nor £10 from seeking the mayoralty. The former town clerk was elected unopposed to the mayoralty in 1897, but thirteen years elapsed before a mayoral candidate did not have to fight an election.<sup>26</sup> There was usually one other to make a contest. Nominations were not hard to find for Waverley Town Board elections throughout the period either; eight candidates presenting themselves for the five positions in 1914.<sup>27</sup> It would appear then, that settlers in the southern Taranaki region, having won themselves acceptable local government representation, were not prepared to neglect that right through inadequate nominations and uncontested elections. There were always sufficient interest shown in, and value placed on, seats on local bodies in the area to attract numerous candidates, thus disproving

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22. Waitotara-Momohaki Letter Book I, 1 May 1901, pp. 159-60; *ibid.*, II, early May 1904.

23. Wairoa, Kohi, Motoroa & Okotuku Road Boards Letter Book, 29 April 1916, pp. 266-67.

24. Information derived from various Patea road boards' rate books.

25. PBC Advertisements, c.24 April 1901; c. April 1911; c. April 1913.

26. *ibid.*, 17 November 1897; c. April 1910.

27. WTB Minute Book II, 23 April 1914, p.1.

any suggestion of apathy on that count.

A further criterion by which to measure interest or apathy in local government in any district is electoral participation. It has already been shown that settlers in the Patea district were prepared to become involved in local affairs by allowing themselves to be nominated for positions on local bodies. This trend was persistent over time, and did not appreciably wane once the novelty of local government had worn off. Having put up their candidates for election, the settlers could show their interest by attending campaign meetings, and then the polls. The percentage of ratepayers who cast their vote at an election was taken as an indication of the enthusiasm for local politics. Public meetings were one of the most common events in the colonial settlements, and each drew support in relation to its importance to individuals. Support shown by the numbers at a meeting also varied according to the weather, distance and the state of the roads. The distance from polling booths would also have been a factor in estimating support.

The election meetings that were held in the Patea district usually attracted large and enthusiastic audiences. Between three and four hundred people attended a meeting in Patea in 1881 to hear a prominent resident, G.F. Sherwood, campaign for his election as Patea's first mayor.<sup>28</sup> Surprisingly, a mere 115 votes were cast at the subsequent mayoral election.<sup>29</sup> This would suggest that there were many non-ratepayers at the election meeting. Apparently, interest in local government affairs was not confined to ratepayers, but percolated down to the unenfranchised also. This group participated in local affairs as far as they were able.

While local body election meetings attracted considerable interest from both ratepayers and non-ratepayers in the Patea district, none were more popular than central government electorate meetings held to discuss election policies, air grievances or forward the demands of the district to the local Member or some itinerant politician. In 1879, G.F. Sherwood, former chairman of the Patea County Council and of the Carlyle Town Board and Taranaki provincial councillor, stood against Major Atkinson for the Egmont electorate. Although defeated by a

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28. Weekly Herald, 27 October 1881, p.3, c.1.

29. HS, 18 November 1881, p.2, c.7.

relatively narrow margin, Sherwood drew over three hundred people to his pre-election meeting at Patea.<sup>30</sup> Two years later, George Hutchinson's election meeting at Patea caused the Weekly Herald's Patea correspondent to comment that "I do not remember so much enthusiasm being shown by a Patea audience before."<sup>31</sup>

Men aspiring to positions of responsibility within the community often went to considerable lengths to gather support. The Patea mayoralty was vigorously contested between a draper and a storekeeper in 1883, Their respective policies were outlined in open letters in the "Miscellaneous" columns of the local newspaper, and both displayed posters and rallied last-minute support on polling day.<sup>32</sup> The editor of the Patea Mail disagreed with these election tactics, labelling them "button-hole" methods, and suggested that candidates should have expressed their policies before public meetings to avoid the election degenerating into purely a question of personalities.<sup>33</sup> Such protestations did not deter candidates from canvassing privately in the future.

The attendances at public gatherings to discuss issues in the development of the Patea district provide a standard by which to judge the importance placed on particular required amenities by the rate-payers and others. A meeting called in 1876 to discuss the harbour works at Patea was well attended, but a second meeting called for a few days later to enquire into the possible establishment of a hospital in the town fell through 'owing to a series of misapprehensions'. Apparently, inclement weather restricted the numbers at a second hospital meeting, but those in attendance took the opportunity to express their regret at 'the lukewarmness of the country settlers in the matter'. At that stage, environmental services attracted greater support than did personal services. The settlers were generally wary of any proposal which might have disadvantaged their locality, as evidenced by the 'anti-county council' tone of the several public meetings held in the southern areas of the county to discuss the erection of the toll-gate at the Waitotara bridge in 1879.<sup>34</sup> However on other occasions settlers did display loyalty to larger areas, such

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30. Weekly Herald, 13 August 1879, p.3, c.1.

31. *ibid.*, 30 November 1881, p.2, c.8.

32. *PM*, 27 August 1883, p.3,c.2; 5 September 1883, p.3, c.3.

33. *ibid.*, 29 August 1883, p.2, c.3.

34. See earlier, p.45.

as the county. In 1876 public meetings of inhabitants between Waitotara and Hawera defended vehemently the proposed boundaries of the Patea County against the protests of the northern Taranaki settlers.<sup>35</sup> Public assemblies held to urge upon the Government the necessity for a railway through the county similarly drew large audiences.<sup>36</sup> Meetings held in the county in 1883 revealed public support for the proposed suspension of the Counties Act within Patea County to be varied. "A very fair number of ratepayers" attended the Kakaramea gathering, whilst the Whenuakura meeting had to be adjourned, through lack of interest, to a day which coincided with the local school committee elections. Although no further information regarding the adjourned meeting could be found, the school committee election for the Whenuakura school was not held as there were only five people in attendance. Harbour issues continued to attract much attention from the public and a 'well-attended meeting of business people and settlers' in 1888 resolved to petition the Government against closing the port of Patea for landed goods.<sup>37</sup> Public meetings were seen as an important means of ascertaining public opinions, and of gathering support for or against certain proposals affecting the community. In those early days they were used frequently to test settler reaction.<sup>38</sup>

Apathy or interest as shown by voting numbers is difficult to gauge, for actual numbers of voters are concealed by plural voting. For a true picture, figures for the number of eligible voters, and the numbers of votes exercisable need to be known. Voting by ridings in county elections adds to the difficulties if riding populations are not given. Election day details for these early polls are usually scanty, thus preventing any complete analysis from which conclusions can be drawn.

For elections in the Patea district, the local newspapers, while

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35. See earlier, pp. 31-2.

36. Weekly Herald, 17 July 1879, p.2, c.7.

37. Egmont Star, 17 March 1888, p.15.

38. References in this paragraph, unless otherwise indicated, were derived from PM, 29 July 1876, p.2, c.5; 16 August 1876, p.2, c.4; 23 August 1876, p.2, c.4; 10 January 1883, p.3, c.1; 15 January 1883, p.2, c.3; 24 January 1883, p.2, c.6.

often condemning the settlers' apathy, never point to poor voting percentages for evidence, though this need not necessarily mean that large numbers of electors always turned out to exercise their right. The first mayoral election for the borough of Hawera in 1882 returned a fifty per cent poll,<sup>39</sup> but little other conclusive information is readily available. The results of polls for loan proposals are more precisely detailed, and provide the basis for some analysis. For example, in a poll held in August 1893, for a proposed loan of £4,000 for making roads in the Kapara Special Rating District, of the eighteen ratepayers on the roll exercising a total of thirty votes, two-thirds voted in favour and the rest did not vote.<sup>40</sup> This percentage could probably be counted as a good representation, due to the isolation of some of the back country, and the poor communications. On the other hand, the Whenuakura bridge loan poll in February 1894 attracted only 233 voters and 451 votes of a possible 519 voters and 886 votes. Although only eight ratepayers exercising nine votes were against the proposal, it was lost because neither a majority of voters or votes were for the scheme.<sup>41</sup> The interest of enough ratepayers was not there at that particular time, but the following year the proposal was carried at the poll.<sup>42</sup> When larger areas were involved in a poll, the attitude of the ratepayer may well have been to leave the voting to the next man. His vote would not be missed. This was not the case, however, in the smaller areas where settlers were prepared to rate themselves in order to raise a loan for development purposes. The ratepayers within the Omona Special Rating District numbered six in 1896, when four of them voted to raise a loan of £625 for roads.<sup>43</sup> Two failed to record their votes, but a sixty-six per cent turn-out had been achieved in the interests of a small area. Generally, the interest in elections in the district around Patea and Waverley appears to have run quite high, and often every effort was made to ensure that as many ratepayers as possible had the opportunity to cast their votes. During the elections for the first Patea County Council, an

express coach, decorated with bunting, plied  
between Normanby, Ketemarae and Hawera... and did

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39. HS, 8 February 1882, p.2, c.6.

40. PCC Scrapbook of Newspaper Clippings, 1891-98, c.26 August 1893.

41. *ibid.*, c. 1 March 1894.

42. *ibid.*, c. 20 June 1895.

43. *ibid.*, 16 March 1896.

good service in bringing electors to the polling booth, and conveying them home again after the declaration of the poll.<sup>44</sup>

A further measure of ratepayer confidence in, or dissatisfaction with, local authorities is the continuity or otherwise of local government personnel. Only once between 1872 and 1917 is there almost a total defeat inflicted upon sitting members of a Patea district local body by the electors. The Patea Mail described the 1884 county council election within Waverley Riding as "a dreadful massacre", only one former member being returned, and only one member not suffering defeat even in his immediate district.<sup>45</sup> The council's financial mismanagement in 1882-83 may have contributed towards this election day reversal, but it was confined to Waverley Riding alone. The Patea Mail praised the defeated members as 'assiduous and conscientious'.<sup>46</sup> None had served on the council for more than three years at a time; only one serving more than a total of three years. The difficult economic times may have made the ratepayers dissatisfied with their representatives, although their successors held office for at least three three-year terms,<sup>47</sup> and again the hard times were not confined to Waverley Riding only.

Analysis of the 'turnover' rate of Patea County Council members reveals that membership was relatively unstable during the council's first decade. During the first forty years of the Patea County Council's existence seventy-three men sat on the council. Thirty-two of them had held office between January 1877 and October 1884. At least twelve of these men resigned during their term of office, while the remainder did not stand again, or were defeated at the county's general triennial election. Presumably, some of those who resigned, did so because they were leaving the district; a reason which might have something to tell about the state of the economy during the later 1870s and early '80s. Others were no doubt disillusioned by their experience as local body members, and resigned, while others may have found that local government was too demanding upon their time and health.

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44. PM, 30 December 1876, p.2, c.6.

45. *ibid.*, 14 November 1884, p.2, c.4.

46. *ibid.*,

47. List of Patea County councillors, C.J. Roberts, Official History of the County of Patea, Hawera, 1937, pp. 92-3.

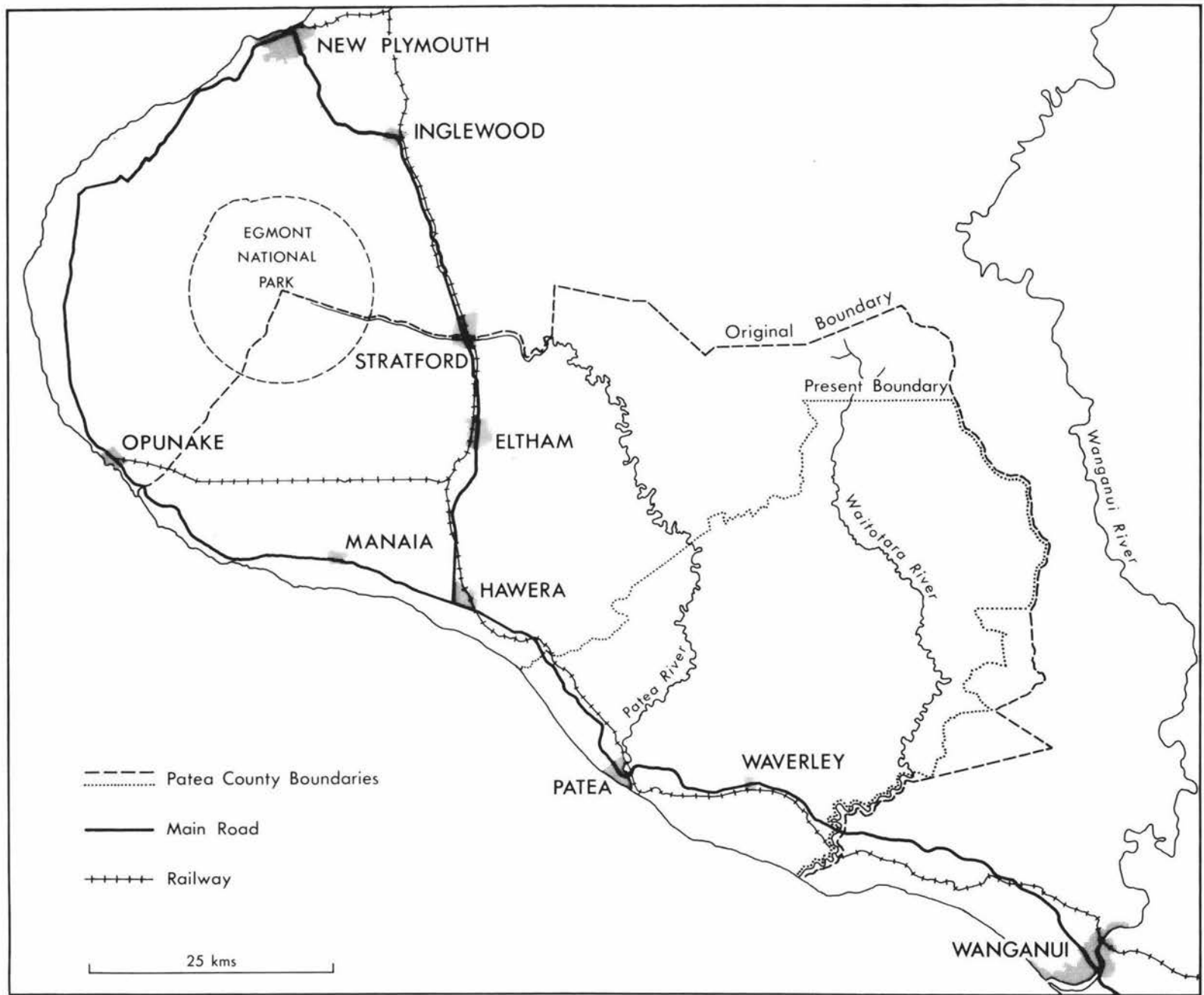


FIG. 3. PATEA COUNTY, 1917

But those who were beaten at the polls must not have come up to the expectations of the electors, and were, therefore, replaced by others. After 1884, members appear to have been more permanent on the council, serving an average term of six years each. Over one-third of those councillors who were in office between 1884 and 1916 completed three three-year terms or more, while six of the forty-one members were on the council for between sixteen and twenty-six years. This permanence could be attributed to a number of factors, including a greater degree of geographical stability as settlers became more established, and perhaps as better times overtook depression conditions in the district.<sup>48</sup>

The 'turnover' of Patea County Council chairmen followed a similar pattern to that of councillors. Between January 1877 and June 1882, the chairman was changed six times, while from June 1882 to 1917 only four men held that position. Although the chairman was elected by the council from one of their number, and thus dissatisfaction within the council could have been responsible for the frequent changes of chairmen in the early years, in the case of the Patea County Council resignations, rather than dissatisfaction, accounted for most of the leadership changes.<sup>49</sup>

The mayoralty of Patea between 1881 and 1917 circulated among ten men who served between one and seven years at any one time. Over half of the number of terms served by these ten were less than three years in length. As shown earlier,<sup>50</sup> mayoralty candidates were rarely in short supply in Patea and electors seem to have wanted a regular change of mayor. The same was the case with the borough councillors, over fifty of them passing through office during the first two decades of the town's borough status.<sup>51</sup>

Road boards in the Patea area were affected similarly, with usually only those long-serving county councillors being returned for

48. Details in this paragraph were derived from Roberts, pp. 92-3, and from PCC minute books.

49. Information in this paragraph derived from Roberts, p.91, and from PCC minute books.

50. See pp. 120-21.

51. References in this paragraph derived from lists of the mayors and councillors in Nolan, Patea Borough 75th Jubilee.

several terms on the boards. For example, W.C. Symes, J. Paterson, and G.V. Pearce who sat on the county council for a total of sixty-eight years, also held office on the Patea West Road Board for lengthy periods.<sup>52</sup> However, this did not always hold true, particularly for the smaller boards. The Okotuku Road Board of four members had only thirteen different representatives in its thirty-three years of existence; only three of these men sat on the county council. The longest serving men on the board never represented the Waverley Riding on the Patea County Council. P. Elmslie (1884-1917), G. Howie (1885-1906), and S. Napier (1887-1905) were never more than ratepayers of the county.<sup>53</sup> The small Kohi board followed a similar pattern with its representatives, few rising to county council membership.<sup>54</sup> If any councillors had served on road boards already, it was usually on boards in the larger districts that they had done so. Approximately two-thirds of Patea County councillors sat on road or town boards at some stage of their public life. Of these, over half were on either the Patea East, Patea West, Waitotara-Momohaki or Whenuakura-Waitotara Road Boards.<sup>55</sup> These men may have been considered better prepared for administrative duties than those on smaller boards which often met infrequently and transacted little business.

Examination of the membership of Patea's local authorities would seem to dispel any suggestion that a small 'clique' held the power in the district. There was no 'governing elite' which monopolised local government positions, though several names are prominent in local body records. The frequent resignations, and the apparent willingness of many ratepayers to take their share of local government responsibility, excluded any possibility of a ruling 'clique' forming. The dispersal of local authority positions among men involved in a wide range of different occupations in urban government, and among small as well as large landowners in rural local administration, also meant that responsibility did not devolve upon a small group of influential men. Local government membership in the Patea district appears to follow a pattern

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52. Roberts, p.92; PWRB Minute Books.

53. Okotuku Road Board Minute Book; Roberts, pp.92-3.

54. Kohi Road Board Minute Book; Roberts, pp. 92-3.

55. Roberts, pp. 92-3; various road board minute books.

of more to less exclusiveness from the mid-'70s. Participation in local government was restricted to a smaller group of settlers in the initial years of the local government 'system' established in 1876. Some settlers served on several local bodies simultaneously, thus restricting the involvement of a maximum number of people in local government. However, through the 1880s and 1890s there appears to have been a broader recruitment of members. Seldom did one man sit on more than a road board and the county council at the same time. There would seem to have been greater competition for local government membership in these later decades. Although merely speculation, this drift from more to less exclusiveness in local government membership runs parallel to a quickening of interest in colonial politics throughout the country in the 1880s and 1890s. Lipson believes this interest, as reflected in the higher voting figures recorded in general elections from 1879 onwards, was stimulated by the depressed economic conditions of the '80s and early '90s.<sup>56</sup> Regardless of the validity of this belief, the increasing participation and interest in politics could have extended to the field of local government. As interest grew, more settlers became involved in local authority affairs of the Patea district, and local body membership became less exclusive.

While no 'clique' acted to monopolize local government positions even in the 1870s in the Patea area, several men did distinguish themselves in local affairs. G.F. Sherwood, a watchmaker, was the most prominent of this group in the late 1870s and early '80s. A former midshipman in the Royal Navy, cavalryman in the Imperial Forces during the Maori Wars, and then ferryman at Waitotara, Sherwood established a watchmaking business in Carlyle about 1870. He entered politics in the mid '70s, being elected to represent the Patea district on the Taranaki Provincial Council in 1874. At the end of 1875, Sherwood became the first chairman of the Carlyle Town Board, and subsequently, Patea County Council chairman, first chairman of the Patea Harbour Board, and in 1881, the first mayor of Patea. He was also a trustee for the Carlyle recreation ground, and in 1879 stood for Grey's "Liberals" against Sir Harry Atkinson for the Egmont electorate, being defeated

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56. Leslie Lipson, The Politics of Equality. New Zealand's Adventures in Democracy, Chicago, 1948, pp. 24-5, 171-72.

by a mere sixty-six votes. Sherwood's occupancy of up to three positions of responsibility simultaneously, provoked a considerable amount of criticism from local settlers. The editor of the Patea Mail proved to be Sherwood's keenest critic, writing

that this individual will shortly be removed out of harm's way and resigned to the obscurity from which a few thoughtless ratepayers brought him out by assisting to elevate him to the present position he unworthily fills....we venture to assert that there will not be found six persons in Carlyle likely to record their votes in his favour should he again seek re-election. We are more surprised at the members of the Board in not taking prompt action to curb their Chairman, who appears to have the Board entirely under his thumb...<sup>57</sup>

The editor apparently miscalculated Sherwood's popularity amongst the majority of ratepayers in the town, for the chairman was returned at the top of the poll for another year's service.<sup>58</sup> However, Sherwood did relinquish his positions one by one, holding the chairmanship of the harbour board for the longest period, four years.<sup>59</sup>

Other well-known personalities in local government included G.S. Bridge, auctioneer and farmer, and chairman of the Wairoa Highway Board (1876-84), the Patea County Council (1877-78), the Okotuku Road Board (1884-97), and the Wanganui Education Board. Bridge was also a member of the Patea Harbour Board in 1878.

Felix McGuire ran a general store at Carlyle and then at Hawera. He represented the southern portion of the province on the Taranaki Provincial Council in the 1870s, chaired the Patea County Council in 1878-79, and then represented the Egmont and Hawera electorates in the House of Representatives between 1891 and 1902.

J. Livingston sat on the Hawera Road Board during the mid-1870s, and on the Patea County Council in 1877-78, but achieved his fame through his presidency of "the Hawera Republic" in 1879, an emergency

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57. PM, 23 February 1876, p.2, c.5.

58. *ibid.*, 7 June 1876, p.2, c.1.

59. Information about G.F. Sherwood was derived from a variety of sources, including HS, 1 February 1937, p.12, cc.1, 6; Cyclopedia of New Zealand, VI, p.259; early numbers of the Patea Mail; and minute books of local bodies with which he was associated.

organization to resist Maori aggression.<sup>60</sup>

Robert Horner, chairman of the county council from 1882 to 1887, was also a member of the Patea Hospital and Harbour Boards, the Patea East Road Board, and a trustee of the Patea recreation ground.

Walter Symes, who succeeded Horner as county chairman, was a member of the harbour board and of the Wairoa Road Board, before he moved further north in 1894, soon becoming a Stratford County councillor. Symes was elected to the House of Representatives for Egmont (1896-1902) and then for Patea (1902-1908).

W.C. Symes succeeded Walter Symes as county chairman in 1894, holding that position for eleven years. He chaired the Patea West Road Board for the entire twenty year period (1886-1906) of his membership of that body, and was a member of the local harbour and hospital boards.

G.V. Pearce was a Patea West Road Board commissioner, a Patea County councillor from 1890 to 1920 and county chairman for the last fifteen years of this county council association. Pearce was also chairman of the harbour board (1908-12), and MHR for Patea between 1908 and 1919.<sup>61</sup>

A number of men were prominent in urban government in the Patea district over the period also. R.A. Adams and J.A. McKenna were both chairmen of the Patea Hospital Board, mayors of Patea, and members of the local harbour and domain boards. McKenna was chairman of these last-named authorities, while Adams had been a member of the Carlyle

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60. John Houston (ed.), Diary of James Livingston Esq., J.P., 9 June 1878 to 3 January 1879, Hawera, (typescript copy held by the Patea Public Library). The Maori aggression in 1879 was that of the prophets, Te Whiti and Tohu, and their followers who, dissatisfied with European settlement on lands south of the Waingongoro River, crossed that river and began ploughing up the settlers' lands. The settlers petitioned the Government for protection, but as none was forthcoming, a public meeting in the Hawera Blockhouse on 23 June 1879 formed "a necessary temporary local Government with power to act until the central Government could take its place." (Houston's introduction to the Diary, p.3.) Livingston was elected President of "the Hawera Republic", a guard was mounted on the settlers' lands, and a flag raised. No blood was shed, and the Republic soon faded out of existence, its justification gone.

61. Biographical details in this paragraph were derived from Cyclopedia of New Zealand, VI, pp. 47-48, 165, 249, 262; Roberts, pp.91-93; HS, 1 February 1937, pp. 10-13; and the various minute books of the local authorities on which these personalities served.

Town Board. John Gibson and John Milroy were also well-known in the area as town board commissioners, mayors, and harbour board members. Gibson chaired the latter body from 1882-86.<sup>62</sup>

The names mentioned so far are some of those which stand out as belonging to men who were involved with at least two, but usually three or more local authorities. Another distinguishing feature of this group is the relatively large proportion who aspired to, or who did, in fact, rise from local government membership to become parliamentarians. McGuire, Walter Symes, Pearce, and a Patea West Road Board commissioner and later chairman of the Stratford County Council, G.A. Marchant, all stepped from local to colonial government, while Sherwood aspired to take that step and was only prevented by a small margin. Of the four Members, only McGuire was not a rural man by occupation, but he, like the others, did own considerable property in the Patea district. This tendency for Members representing the southern Taranaki electorates to have strong rural affiliations underlines the rural nature of the area. It also has something to say about the nature of politics in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Involvement in colonial politics beyond the actions of attending political meetings and casting a vote, or votes, was still largely confined to men of 'considerable means', which generally meant the more wealthy landowners. These men could more readily aspire to become politicians for they had both the time and the money necessary for such a position. The towns in the Patea district were small and so closely linked with their agricultural hinterlands, that what was good for the country areas was also good for the towns. In this case, it was the rural representative who could apparently benefit both. Town and country in southern Taranaki thought alike in their choice of Members.

The progression of several of the settlers from local to colonial government points to the suggestion that membership of local government institutions was seen as a way to the top. These men served their

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62. Information in this paragraph was drawn from Cyclopedia of New Zealand, VI, pp. 258-59; Nolan, Patea Borough 75th Jubilee; early volumes of the Patea Mail; HS, 1 February 1937, pp. 12-13; and from the minute books of the various local bodies mentioned.

apprenticeships around the meeting tables and on the roads of the local bodies before taking up their places in the chamber of the House. The chairmanship of a local authority appears to have been the most appropriate point from which to step to MHR status; three of the four Members from Patea local authorities having chaired at least one of those bodies before winning a seat in the House. This suggests that local government membership was recognized as a valuable experience by both the aspiring politicians and electors. The former were able to participate in governmental affairs on a smaller scale first, and become known, while the latter had had the opportunity to become acquainted with the candidate and be in a position to estimate his suitability for colonial politics.

Once elected to a local government institution, the member was usually expected to attend monthly meetings regularly, and sometimes to work in a supervisory capacity on district works, act as an inspector, or carry out the authority's clerical functions. And he had to ensure that he was readily accessible to those for whom he was responsible. Such a burden often relegated attendance at meetings to a lower priority on the representative's list of duties, and thus, it was not unusual for meetings to lapse through want of a quorum. This occurrence was apt to provoke condemnatory statements from newspaper editors and those not involved in local administration, and no doubt some of the adjournments can rightly be attributed to apathy on the part of the members. But many of the representatives could have justifiably pleaded excessive workloads, allowing little time to attend board or council meetings, which, on many occasions, transacted little other business than the passing of accounts for payment. Much of the road boards' duties were carried out by part-time staff - clerks and surface-men - leaving elected representatives to act as unpaid experts and supervisors. Representatives on the smaller road boards, in particular, came in for a considerable amount of administrative work. The Okotuku Road Board for instance, comprised four members usually representing less than thirty ratepayers at any time.<sup>63</sup> It rarely received more

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63. Statistical Returns, 1911, 1914, 1917, at back of Okotuku Road Board Minute Book, 1884-1917; The returns for 1911, 1914, and 1917 show ratepayers to total 36, 49, and 54 respectively, but for much of the period 1884-1917, these numbers seldom rose above thirty.

than £50 in rates, and often struck no rate at all.<sup>64</sup> For the first fourteen years of its existence, the Okotuku Road Board curbed its salary expenditure by appointing the chairman to fill the positions of clerk, treasurer, and rate collector to the board.<sup>65</sup> But the infrequent meetings held by the board, no doubt, relieved that official of much of the pressure. It was not uncommon for the board to meet but once a year.<sup>66</sup> The Kohi Road Board, despite meeting more frequently than its neighbour, often did little else than strike a rate, pass accounts for payment, and elect a chairman, who was also responsible for the board's clerical duties.<sup>67</sup> These small boards did not seem to encounter difficulty in raising a quorum at their meetings, mainly as a result of their infrequency.

On the other hand, the larger and more financial boards such as the Patea East, Patea West, and Waitotara-Momohaki Road Boards were plagued by poor attendances at their more regularly held meetings.<sup>68</sup> Poorly attended meetings appear to have occurred in spasms, from which even the Patea County Council was not exempt.<sup>69</sup> But, generally the greater use of full-time employees to perform council duties enabled councillors to attend council meetings regularly. The composition of ad hoc local authorities from existing territorial local bodies increased the administrative load upon certain county and borough councillors and town board members, and could have affected the attendances at the meetings of both types of local government. The Patea Harbour Board experienced such trouble occasionally,<sup>70</sup> but rarely the Patea Hospital Board, despite its large size of fourteen members. The quorum was set at such a low number that only three or four members need have attended at any meeting.<sup>71</sup>

The institution of local government came in for a great deal more criticism from inhabitants of the Patea district than did individual

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64. Okotuku Road Board Minute Book, 1884-1917;

65. Okotuku Road Board Minute Book, 6 May 1884, 3 April 1897.

66. Okotuku Road Board Minute Book, 1884-1917.

67. Kohi Road Board Minute Book, 1884-1917.

68. Minute books of the Patea East, Patea West, and Waitotara-Momohaki Road Boards.

69. PCC Minute Book I.

70. PHB Minute Book I, 2 May 1881; 13 March 1882; 8 May 1882.

71. Patea Hospital Board Minute Books I & II; PM, 19 October 1885, p.2, c.3.

councils or boards, and their members. The system, rather than those involved in it, was condemned throughout the entire period, though the volume of criticism fluctuated according to circumstances prevailing at the time.

Extensive discussion ensued throughout the colony in 1876 as to the merits of the local government proposals of the central government, the newspapers leading the debate. In May 1876, the Patea Mail editor wrote that the legislative proposals would "prolong the existence of the scores of petty Boards at present existing".<sup>72</sup> He believed that the road boards' waste of ratepayers' money could be curbed, and "that petty local spirit, apt to be generated in small local bodies" checked, if the councils to be introduced managed charitable aid, hospitals, and "even education", as well as making and maintaining roads.<sup>73</sup> Two Patea County councillors had similar ideas in moving in committee in June 1877,

that it is highly expedient that there should be fewer local governing bodies than at present, and that the duties of the Education Boards might safely be entrusted to the County Councils, with large central control to be exercised by the General Government.<sup>74</sup>

The motion was defeated.

Ratepayer opinion was divided on the question of the respective merits of county and road district administration. But generally these opinions varied according to the treatment received by a particular district from the county council or road board. The Patea County Council's refusal to grant any financial aid to the Hawera Literary Institute in August 1877, provoked condemnation of the council from Hawera district inhabitants. 'Wild Cat' of Hawera believed that the council's action was "a splendid instance of the tyranny of majorities",<sup>75</sup> while another correspondent was moved to suggest that "the feeling that greater power should be given to the Road Boards,

72. PM, 24 May 1876, p.2, c.1.

73. *ibid.*

74. PCC Committee Minute Book, 5 June 1877.

75. PM, 19 September 1877, p.3, c.1.



PLATE V      Patea Borough, County, and Harbour,  
c. 1920.

A proliferation of local bodies?

(Radcliffe Collection, Alexander Turnbull  
Library)

and thus avoid the necessity for a County Council, is gaining ground "76  
 A similar outburst against the county system followed publication of the Patea County Council's alleged intention to erect a toll-gate at the Waitotara bridge. The inhabitants of the southern portion of the county held public meetings at which they expressed their lack of confidence in the county system, and approval for the continued existence of road boards.<sup>77</sup>

Financial mismanagement by the council in the depression years of the 1880s was also responsible for producing a considerable amount of criticism of that authority. One critic wrote of

the gross mismanagement of the Patea County affairs by a clique at Patea, which from the first has held the reins, but has guided so badly as to lose Hawera and disgust Waverley.

Meetings called by the council in 1881 to discuss the proposal to merge the road boards into the county voted against such a move, while two years later, some ratepayers were so incensed by the mismanagement of county affairs that they called public meetings to consider the suspension of the Counties Act within the Patea County. But this was as close to extinction as the council came. Even councillors themselves were divided as to the advisability of the county system continuing. Indeed, the Wanganui County Council resolved in 1883 to recommend to the local MHRs to take action to have the Counties Act suspended, and to hand over local government to the road boards. In 1881, two other neighbouring local bodies, the Rangitikei County Council and the Rangitikei Highways Board, had resolved jointly:

That in the opinion of this joint committee the machinery provided by the Legislature to take the place of the abolished provincial system of government is utterly inadequate to carry out the functions of a good local government, rendering it absolutely necessary that a better system be provided....<sup>78</sup>

The Patea Mail reported in 1883 that 'the Taranaki Road Boards are moving to abolish the County Council', but dual local rural administration continued throughout the colony.<sup>79</sup>

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76. *ibid.*, 15 August 1877, p.2, c.6.

77. *ibid.*, 19 February 1879, p.2, cc.1-2; 26 February 1879, p.2, c.4.

78. HS, 1 May 1881, p.3, c.3.

79. References in this paragraph, unless otherwise stated, were derived from PM, 3 January 1883, p.2, c.3; 10 January 1883, p.2, c.2; 9 May 1883, p.2, c.2; 31 October 1883, p.2, c.4.

It appears that there existed considerable disillusionment with the county system among ratepayers by the mid-1880s. This disillusionment was encouraged by the road boards who saw their positions challenged by the councils. While the road boards continued to operate beside the county councils, the latter could not operate at the most local level. The boards had responsibility for district roads which were the first priority in the opening up of new country, and this resulted in constant interaction between the road boards and their ratepayers. The commissioner was likely to be just over the fence or at least within a few miles of the ratepayers. The county councillor could have been the farmer at the other end of the riding, concerned with the administration of a much larger area than the commissioners. Parochialism prevailed; the smaller the unit of administration, the better the ratepayers liked it. In some cases, the county council appeared as just a middle-man in the administrative process. The Government granted finance to the councils, who could then distribute it among the road boards for development purposes. Settlers were also disillusioned by the fact of having to pay two rates to bodies doing basically the same work, that was, providing communications. The constitution of an increasing number of ad hoc local bodies, harbour, hospital and education boards, acted to further obscure any distinctions which existed between county council and road board functions. The difficult economic times of the 1880s compounded the settlers' disillusionment with the county system, whose finances were also strained and inadequate. The county system was falling short of the aspirations of both the parochialists and the centralists.

The number of men involved directly in local government proved to be a constant target for criticism, as did the number of local bodies. One columnist in the local newspaper stated that

this County is governed to death. Thank goodness the local-government-rate them-and-squander hobby horse is being ridden to death. Just fancy ten Boards in the County of Patea alone. Each little Board pays rent, keeps books, pays salaries, and runs into money.<sup>80</sup>

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80. *ibid.*, 15 January 1883, p.2, c.7.

The writer continued, suggesting that minor local bodies such as domain and cemetery boards could be fused into the borough councils, and rural local government bodies, harbour and land boards could be centred in one administrative council for each provincial district.

We should then, sir, I believe, be decently governed at less expense. Now we pay much to have it collared by industrious and covetous dog-tax collectors and muddled away by dishonest servants. Why is it that the Government do not admit that the present system is a contemptible and ridiculous break-down? The fact is it is their own child, and, like all parents, they are blind to the fact that it is a booby.<sup>81</sup>

Two years earlier, doom had been forecast for local government in New Zealand. An editorial headed 'The Struggle' warned that

Local Government is being pitched into chaos. Every political doctor has his separate scheme, most of them turning things topsy-turvy. See what a medley of local reforms they are wrangling over in Parliament!<sup>82</sup>

The elections of that year were fought on the reform of local government.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, little reform of any consequence was passed then, or indeed, within the next three decades. By that stage, New Zealand had passed beyond the pioneering phase of its development, and with this transition went the exodus of the road boards. Perhaps the propagation of the road boards in the 1880s and '90s quickened their own demise, but their disappearance was counter-weighted by an increase in the number of ad hoc local bodies to administer functions, which had become increasingly specialised, as the dominion entered the era of modernity.

The level of interest and involvement of settlers in local government affairs within a particular area can provide an indication of the attitude of the settlers to the performance of their local authorities. Thynne argues that the ratepayers initial enthusiasm for local government in New Zealand was rarely sustained beyond a period of two decades.<sup>84</sup> After this time, local "self" government, as a trust and a right, was no longer an innovation. While this may have been the case

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81. *ibid.*

82. *ibid.*, 23 July 1881, p.2, c.5.

83. *ibid.*, 23 July 1881, p.3, c.3.

84. Thynne, p.31.

in some regions, evidence suggests that the Patea district was not one of them. Patea settlers appear to have placed considerable value upon the existence of local government institutions throughout the entire period, 1872-1917. This value is possibly a reflection of the local bodies' response to the demands of the settlers. Local body elections in southern Taranaki rarely went uncontested; a large number of settlers, representing a varied range of occupational pursuits, deeming membership of local authorities a worthwhile venture. The participation of settlers in public meetings to discuss local issues also mirrors the district's enthusiasm for local government. Election meetings attracted the biggest gatherings of both electors and the unenfranchised, while meetings called to discuss most environmental needs of the district, in the way of public works, came a close second in popularity. Personal services, such as hospitals and charitable aid, did not receive the same support at meetings as environmental demands. Plural voting makes it difficult to draw conclusions about ratepayer participation at the polls, but the competition between candidates may well have encouraged large numbers of voters to the polling booths. Local government membership in the period to the mid-1880s proved to be quite unstable, with a relatively high 'turnover' of members compared with the period after 1884-85. The unfamiliarity to some of the requirements of local government; the difficult economic times; the impatience of settlers for the provision of basic needs; and the usually wide range of candidates from which to choose local body members, contributed towards this instability. Later, local authority members were more likely to serve at least two terms before retiring, resigning, or being defeated. But on only one occasion in Patea County elections did the electors upset a considerable proportion of the sitting members. In the latter years of the nineteenth century, local government membership in the Patea district became less exclusive. Fewer men held several positions on local bodies than previously, thus allowing a greater number of settlers to experience local authority membership.

Although individual local bodies and members could not hope to come up to every ratepayer's expectations and satisfy every demand made upon them, the strongest and most frequent criticism from settlers around Patea was directed not at particular bodies or members, but at

the local government system operating in the colony While existing circumstances within a particular area determined which local authority took the brunt of the criticism, much of it was voiced for the benefit of the Government. Reform of the entire system was demanded. It would appear from the evidence, therefore, that local bodies within the Patea region responded to their ratepayers' demands to the best of their ability, considering that the central government encouraged, albeit unintentionally, settler parochialism through legislation which allowed road boards to co-exist with county councils, and provoked county subdivision. The ratepayers recognized the value of local government institutions to the development of the country, and especially to that of their local district. Enthusiasm for local government was sustained in the Patea district.

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## CONCLUSION

'A HISTORY OF DEFEAT'?

The 'Sutchian' interpretation is a widely accepted view of the history of local government in New Zealand. While not throwing any necessarily fresh ideas into the picture already presented by commentators, including F.B. Stephens<sup>1</sup> and Leicester Webb,<sup>2</sup> Sutch's paper,<sup>3</sup> delivered to the 1956 Convention of the New Zealand Institute of Public Administration, is the most forthright attack on the local government system in print.

Sutch condemns local government in New Zealand as feeble, and local authorities as 'weak', 'apathetic', and 'short-sighted'.<sup>4</sup> He allows these adjectives to colour his entire treatment of the New Zealand local government system. While this writer is not in a position to say whether Sutch's analysis of the system in general is right or wrong, he would suggest that Sutch's arguments are not based on local evidence. So far, there has not been sufficient local studies carried out to be able to draw any meaningful conclusions as to the effectiveness of local government institutions in general. Dr. Sutch's generalizations appear to be based mainly on statements made in parliamentary debates, and on other official government records. To draw conclusions about the performance of local government institutions almost solely from statements made by colonial politicians seems somewhat unjust and historically superficial. Only by examining a representative sample of local authorities throughout the country, and drawing the evidence together, could an accurate picture of local government performance be painted.

The Patea district during the 1860s and 1870s was plagued by difficulties with the Maoris and by provincial neglect; both were major contributors to the slow development of the district. A lack of government from afar was corrected, to some extent, in 1872 and 1875 by a grant of local government in the form of road and town boards.

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1. F.B. Stephens (ed.), Local Government in New Zealand, Wellington, 1949.
  2. Leicester Webb, Government in New Zealand, Wellington, 1940.
  3. "Local Government in New Zealand - A History of Defeat", reprinted in R.J. Polaschek (ed.), Local Government in New Zealand, Wellington, 1956.
  4. *ibid.*, pp. 12, 22.

Their revenue, however, was wholly inadequate to cover the cost of the development work necessary. Nevertheless, the local settlers were enthusiastic that the road boards, given additional sources of income, would prove much more effective than the provincial authorities.<sup>5</sup>

This parochial attitude was a part of human nature, and had been first exposed in the colonists by the working of the colony's semi-federal form of government established in 1852-53. The provinces were left largely to their own devices, but the wider sense of parochialism that this isolation helped foster among the inhabitants of each province was shattered by the inability of the provincial authorities to provide for the needs of an expanding population. With the settlers venturing out from the six main centres of the colony to take up new lands, their previous identification with a particular province was transformed into a feeling of identity with their immediate environment. The provinces, despite each being responsible for large tracts of the colony, had been, to all intents and purposes, identified almost exclusively with the original six settlements around the New Zealand coast. Thus, as settlement steadily progressed beyond these centres, "province", unconsciously, took on a wider meaning. Unfortunately, these "expanded" provinces came also to be associated with neglect of their out-lying areas. This neglect intensified the parochialism of the settlers in these districts, who agitated for separation and central government action in providing public works for the areas, and for control of their own affairs through local bodies. Petitions from these "disadvantaged" areas, the passage of the New Provinces Act in 1858, and the consequent increase in the number of provinces, and the implementation of Vogel's development policies in the early 1870s, all point to a growth of parochialism, a "re-identification process", as settlement continued to spread out from the original centres of population.

The settlers in the Patea district showed by their agitation for separation from Taranaki and/or for greater control of their own district's affairs that they were involved in this process of "re-identification". The concept of "the Taranaki Province" as predominantly the settlement at New Plymouth was no longer valid. The opening up of new country around the Taranaki coast warranted the geographical extension of the provincial government's activities, but the inability and reluctance

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5. See earlier, pp. 16-17.

of the authorities in New Plymouth to cope effectively with this wider area provoked sentiments of extreme parochialism among many of the settlers beyond New Plymouth. Over the years, settlers came to realize that the larger the area, the less likelihood there was of provincial, and later local body, finance and attention being distributed evenly among the constituent parts of that area. In order to ensure that their particular locality did not suffer as a consequence of the partiality of the distributing authority, settlers, after 1876, were able to take advantage of a number of opportunities offered to them by government legislation. Counties and road districts could subdivide; out-lying districts could petition to become road districts; and town districts could become boroughs provided they fulfilled certain conditions of area and population. After 1886, it was in the interests of road districts to become counties and counties to subdivide, so as to make the most of the provisions of the Loans to Local Bodies Act of that year. Thus, by allowing the road boards to co-exist with the county councils, and setting a fixed annual maximum for county borrowing, the Government promoted, albeit unintentionally, settler parochialism earlier aroused by provincial partiality. The settlers in the Patea district were no different in their parochialism than those in other areas of the colony, if the pattern of multiplication of local authorities is any indication.

The self-interest, which persuaded the Government in 1876 to deviate from its original intention of creating only thirty-nine counties and abolishing road boards and, in 1886, to introduce legislation which encouraged the opposite to that which was actually desired, appears to have also been responsible for causing the central authorities to create more special-purpose local bodies and to assume control of functions previously delegated to local government. But this may not be the only reason for the reluctance of some local bodies to continue to administer certain responsibilities or to take on new functions.

Dr Sutch argues that "the local authorities were determined not to carry out essential charitable and public health functions."<sup>6</sup> His evidence for this statement lies in defeated attempts by the Government to legislate in this direction on four separate occasions, prior to the

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6. Sutch, p.28.

passage of the Hospital and Charitable Institutions Act in 1885.<sup>7</sup> Such a sweeping generalization denies recognition of the efforts of individual local bodies, and while these efforts may be the exception to the rule, until more research is carried out into individual local authorities' activities, no final decision can be made on that point.

In 1877, the Patea County Council assumed responsibility for hospital facilities in the district. Although some councillors believed that the hospital should have been taken over by the Government, or closed, there were a majority of council members in favour of county management of the institution. The council continued to administer hospital affairs in the district, building a new hospital in 1879, until financial difficulties caused the council to relinquish its responsibilities in that field in 1883. It was the Government's failure to provide the usual subsidy for the administration of the Patea hospital, more than the "short-sighted self-interest"<sup>8</sup> of ratepayers and county council, which can more accurately account for the council's abandonment of the hospital. The council had also undertaken poor relief in the county as if it was obligatory, and the Patea Borough Council continued to distribute charitable aid right up to the time the 1885 legislation, setting up hospital and charitable aid boards, came into force. Such efforts hardly support Sutch's argument that local authorities were determined not to carry out these functions.

Besides being called "parochial", local authorities, and the attitude of the ratepayers towards them, have frequently been described by contemporaries and historians as "apathetic". In terms of the attitudes of the ratepayers to local government during the provincial period, it is difficult to reconcile "parochialism" with "apathy". Agitation for separation, or for provincial or local government representation, by the settlers did not indicate apathy on their part, but parochialism. They were anxious for the advancement of their immediate district, and took steps to try to facilitate this development. It has been suggested<sup>9</sup> that local communities soon lost interest in the "system" of local government established in 1876, and in individual local bodies, because of

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7. *ibid.*

8. *ibid.*, p.12.

9. A.T. Campbell, "A History of the Establishment of County Government and its subsequent Development with Special Reference to Canterbury", unpublished M.A. thesis, Canterbury University, 1942, p.v1.

the permissive nature of the 1876 legislation and the subsequent centralization of a number of local functions in Wellington. This alleged loss of interest implies apathy towards local government institutions, which, however, was almost certainly not the case in the Patea area.

Settlers in southern Taranaki continued throughout the period to make their demands known to the appropriate local authorities. Their interest in, and enthusiasm for, local government is shown in their active participation in public meetings, elections, and in their willingness to stand for local body membership. Interest could also have been shown by their criticism of the "system" as a whole. Many had come to realize that perhaps local government in the colony was on the wrong course, and needed to be guided more closely. But, this enthusiasm shown by the settlers is probably more a reflection upon the performance of the individual local authorities. These bodies could well have supplied satisfaction to a sufficient number of ratepayers to sustain the latter's interest and enthusiasm. Despite reluctance on the part of local bodies to undertake additional functions, and the consequent movement of central authorities into the realm of local government administration, it would appear that local bodies in the Patea district were doing enough, most of the time, to satisfy the majority of settlers. When they were no longer of use in the development of the area, they could be discarded, as the road boards were between 1910 and 1917. Generally, a feeling that Patea local authorities were worthy of the ratepayers' interest seems to dominate ratepayer attitudes. Their own local bodies were a welcome change after several years of neglect by the provincial authorities, and the settlers did not intend to abuse the trust and right of local "self" government. Participation in local government affairs by a substantial number of settlers, contributed to the justification of those local government institutions.

Local bodies could well have found it difficult to avoid being called apathetic, on account of the permissiveness of the 1876 local government legislation. Territorial local authorities were seen by their members, and by the central government, as essentially for the provision and administration of environmental services, such as communications and drainage. Any demands beyond these elementary needs were considered of secondary importance, and if the Government was

prepared to constitute ad hoc bodies to look after these, all the better.

Patea district's local bodies were criticised by some settlers for alleged apathy, but it is difficult to reach a conclusion as to the validity of the criticism. Apathy could have been shown through poor attendances of members at meetings, but these could also have been the result of the amount of local government work members were required to perform, apart from attending meetings. The failure to meet the demands of the ratepayers adequately, or to take any action at all on certain matters, could have aroused accusations of "apathy". There is no denying that the actions, or inaction, of local bodies did not please every settler all the time. However, the progress of the district, particularly in the late 1890s, and the early years of the twentieth century, and the involvement of a considerable number of settlers in local affairs throughout the entire period, suggests that, in many instances, local body responses were very satisfactory.

Therefore, while much of what Sutch and other critics have written about local government in New Zealand in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mainly from a restricted number of official government sources, can almost certainly be substantiated by local evidence, this need not necessarily be so in every case. This particular study, while suggesting that the Patea local government situation over a certain period does coincide with what Sutch and others believed to be happening throughout New Zealand, also isolates certain variations in this accepted colony-wide pattern of local government. The significance or geographical extent of these variations cannot be determined until further local government studies are carried out. The argument that local authorities refused to accept responsibility for functions, other than the very basic ones, needs re-examination in the light of local evidence, as does the labelling of local government institutions and ratepayers as "apathetic".

In an attempt to assess the level of ratepayers' demands and the adequacy of local body responses, two questions appear most relevant. Did the local bodies perform their basic functions well? Did discontent emerge from a minority demanding either a better basic performance, or an advance to further services, such as hospitals? These questions

can be treated together, for the emergence of discontent among ratepayers could have indicated an unsatisfactory response to basic needs from local authorities. Thus, ratepayer reaction to the performance of the local bodies is one measure of the adequacy of that performance. The result of the works local bodies were required to do by the ratepayers, in terms of the development of the area, can also be a factor in determining the adequacy of response. But the competence of local bodies in responding to demands should not be based on this latter criterion alone.

Road boards are often praised in local histories for the efforts in opening up the country inland from the main roads, but it is doubtful this achievement was solely theirs. In the case of many of the Patea road districts, ratepayers were often required to carry out much of the work involved in forming roads to their properties, as well as pay general rates. Nevertheless, during the forty-five years of road board administration in the Patea area, many district roads were pushed into the interior. Road formation proved to be a slow task, and the end product was not always satisfactory. The roads, however, were an improvement on the narrow, rutted tracks that existed in the early 1870s. The rough, unmetalled roads provided by the boards, with the cooperation of the settlers, sufficed until the development of dairying, in particular, placed increased pressure on these roads. Settlers began demanding the provision of all-weather roads to cope with the increasing volume of traffic. The inability of most boards to respond positively to this demand for improved basic facilities was partially responsible for their abolition. The added cost of freighting gravel, so scarce locally, from other areas usually placed all-weather metalled roads beyond the already meagre financial resources of the road boards. Thus, while the Patea road boards were able to assist settlers with access to their properties, any improvement to the quality of those roads generally proved to be outside the boards' scope.

The Patea County Council faced a varying amount of criticism from ratepayers over the period, most of it being directed at the council's performance of basic environment tasks. The alleged neglect of the northern region of the county provoked considerable discontent among the settlers in that area, and ultimately resulted in the constitution of several road districts and, then, the separation of the area to form the Hawera County. The settlers had demanded a better basic performance

from the Patea County Council, but when their demands were not met to their satisfaction, they seceded. Discontent with the Patea County Council's performance continued through the early 1880s as the council experienced a financial crisis which almost brought its administration to a halt. The deterioration of existing roads and bridges were the main concern of the ratepayers, not the desire for the extension of council services. However, after the mid-1880s, the council retrieved its financial position somewhat, and was able to carry out its basic environmental functions more satisfactorily in the eyes of the ratepayers.

Over the period, 1877-1917, the settlers had rarely demanded that the council engage in activities to improve the social environment. The Government, and not the ratepayers, had obliged the council to accept responsibility for the administration of the local hospital and charitable aid facilities in 1877. When the council relinquished control of the hospital in 1883, because of financial difficulties, more dissatisfaction was voiced by Patea borough residents than by county inhabitants. Much more concern was shown by county ratepayers in the response of the county council to their demands for improved basic services to cope with the impact refrigeration was having on agricultural pursuits. All-weather access was the prime need of the settlers. In supplying these roads, the council proved more successful than the road boards. By 1917, twenty-six of the forty miles of metalled roads within the county area were under the jurisdiction of the county council, and that body had started its tar-sealing programme.<sup>10</sup> Although the county council was responsible for the provision and administration of a number of services, both environmental and social or personal, it was the former which gave the greatest concern to both the ratepayers and the council. The demands made upon the council moved from those for basic environmental needs such as roads and bridges, to those for more sophisticated forms of these environmental facilities, for example, metalled and, then, tar-sealed roads.

Urban authorities' responses appear to have followed a similar pattern in the Patea district. The physical environment took precedence over the social environment in the demands of the residents. Formed streets and footpaths, and drainage constituted the basic environmental

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10. Roberts, pp. 87-88.

needs of the townsmen, and a £10,000 loan was raised to cover the cost of these facilities in the new borough of Patea. The urban local bodies in the Patea district came in for criticism for alleged partiality in the distribution of improvements throughout the towns, but, generally the reaction of the ratepayers to the work carried out by the town boards or borough council was favourable. During the later 1880s and early 1890s, Patea borough is said to have stagnated as the result of the completion of the Wanganui to New Plymouth railway in 1885. Little development took place in the town, but with the return of prosperity in the later '90s, the borough council was able to provide a considerable number of the services demanded by ratepayers. These included sewerage disposal, a water supply for domestic and fire fighting purposes, electric lighting, and tar-sealed streets and footpaths. These facilities were essentially environmental concerns on a more sophisticated level to those already provided.

However, provisions for the social environment in the towns were not neglected. The Patea Borough Council had distributed charitable aid before 1885, and recreational facilities were an early demand from ratepayers and residents. The provision of the latter was carried out in the towns of the area with varying enthusiasm. The Patea Borough Council tried to release itself from responsibility for the local domain in 1897, while the Waverley Town Board catered for the recreational needs of the community with much more vigour, providing amenities at its two domains for a wide variety of social activities. The fact that the board was not responsible for the main road through the town may have accounted for the board being able to spend more on these facilities.

In the years following the abolition of the provinces, the local bodies in the Patea district appear to have contributed greatly to an appearance of "instant civilization". The lack of progress in the area during the provincial period made any subsequent progress stand out. But, as a whole, local government in the area did provide those basic environmental services as effectively as their generally limited resources would allow. The provision of these facilities may have lapsed over the 1880s as a result of depression being experienced throughout the colony, but the demands of the ratepayers reached a higher level in the later 1890s and the early years of the twentieth century. These demands were more commonly for the provision of better environmental services, while many of the personal services were left

to ad hoc and volunteer bodies. Any discontent that arose over the response of local bodies was usually for the provision of better basic amenities, and less for additional services for the social environment, such as hospitals and charitable aid. These were not neglected, but took second place.

In other areas of the colony, some ratepayers may have made different demands, and local authorities responded differently depending on the particular circumstances of the area. While the theme of "demand and supply" is central to any local government study, the differences, as well as the similarities, between local governments in different areas, must be recognized.

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## APPENDIX

CHRONOLOGY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT, 1872-1917

| <u>Events &amp; Legislation</u>   | <u>Comments</u>   |
|---|---|
| 1872 Patea East, Patea West & Hawera Road Districts constituted.                                    | Some local responsibility for district roads given by Taranaki Provincial Government.   |
| 1873 Patea area received separate representation in Taranaki Provincial Council.                    |   |
| 1874 Patea Education Board constituted.   | Provincial neglect replaced by local control.   |
| 1875 Wairoa Highway District formed.  | Reaction to Wanganui-Waitotara Highway Board neglect.   |
| Abolition of the Provinces Act.   |   |
| Carlyle and Hawera Town Boards constituted.   | Local residents to administer own affairs.  |
| 1876 The Counties Act; Patea County, one of sixty-three, formed.                                    | County councils & road boards to share in rural local government.   |
| The Municipal Corporations Act.   | Consolidated existing urban local government law.   |
| Patea Harbour Board Act.  | One of fourteen special Acts allocating the control of New Zealand's harbours to local <u>ad hoc</u> authorities. Patea Act aroused town-country rivalry. |
| The Public Works Act, the Public Health Act, the Rating Act, the Regulation of Local Elections Act. | Central legislation bearing upon the creation and functions of local bodies.  |
| 1877 Waverley Town District constituted.  | Main street still the county council's responsibility.  |
| Inaugural meetings of the Patea County Council and the Patea Harbour Board.                         |   |
| Patea County Council assumed responsibility for the local hospital.                                 |   |
| Control of the Okotuku domain vested in the Patea County Council.                                   |   |

- 1877 Education Act. Centralized the education system in the colony by creating 12 education boards and local school committees. Patea in the Wanganui Education District.
- 1879 Sir John Coode's report on the improvements needed to the Patea river and port. Remained the 'blue-print' for future development work on the river.
- Toll-gate briefly established at Waitotara. Aroused intra-county discontent.
- 1880 Formation of the Ngaere Road Board. Local settlers' agitation rewarded.
- Constitution of the Waverley Domain Board.
- The Rabbit Nuisance Act. Powers given to county councils to destroy rabbits.
- 1881 Formation of the Waimate Road Board. Parochialism of the rate-payers.
- Hawera County constituted north of the Manawapou River.
- 'Patea' became the official name for Carlyle.
- Patea and Hawera granted borough status. Greater powers.
- Patea Domain Board constituted.
- Town Districts Act. Provisions for smaller settlements.
- 1882 Road Boards Act. Road Boards recognized by own Act, apart from Counties Act.
- 1883 Whenuakura-Waitotara Road District constituted.
- Wairoa Road Board dissolved.
- Patea County Council refused to accept further responsibility for the management of the district's hospital. Committee of Management set up. Government failed to pay its share of hospital costs, therefore council took opportunity of unburdening itself of responsibility.
- 1884 Waitotara County constituted out of Wanganui County.
- Wairoa Road District reconstituted. Parochialism provoked the proliferation of road boards and county councils.
- Okotuku, Kohi & Whenuakura Road Districts formed.

- 1885 Patea Borough Council to be the Patea Public Domain Board; Patea County Council to be the Manutahi Public Domain Board.
- Manutahi cemetery brought under the control of the Patea County Council.
- The Hospitals & Charitable Institutions Act; Constitution of the Patea District Hospital Board and of the Patea-Wanganui United Charitable Aid Board.
- Act set up 28 administrative districts under ad hoc boards to assume responsibilities previously permitted territorial local bodies.
- Okotuku Domain Board formed.
- Assumed control from the Patea County Council.
- 1886 The local Bodies Loans Act.
- The Government Loans to Local Bodies Act.
- Maximum loan provisions encouraged subdivision of counties, unwittingly.
- 1887 Powers delegated to the Waverley Town Board as the Wairoa Domain Board.
- 1888 Wairoa Road District subdivided into Wairoa, Motoroa and Waitotara-Momohaki Road Districts.
- Eight road districts in Patea County.
- Patea East & Whenuakura Road Districts merged into the Patea East Road District.
- 1889 Patea Borough Council assumed responsibility for the Patea cemetery, and the Waverley Town Board for the Waverley cemetery.
- Attempt of Waverley-Waitotara area to form itself into a county.
- To take advantage of the loan provisions for counties.
- 1890 Stratford County formed.
- Reduced area of Patea County.
- 1891 Waitotara-Momohaki Road Board delegated powers as the Waitotara Domain Board.
- The Birds Nuisance Act.
- Local bodies could be compelled to enforce the provisions of the Act.
- 1893 Boundaries of Otoia & Waverley Ridings altered, and Kapara Riding constituted.
- Outlying district given riding status and, therefore, representation on the Patea County Council.

- 1906 Town Districts Act. Towns of over 500 population could be granted independence from counties.
- Eltham county formed.
- 1910 Patea East & Patea West Road Districts merged with Patea County. Road boards becoming obsolete, as district roads formed, and unable to afford maintenance, with advent of motor vehicles.
- Waverley granted 'independent town district' status. Assumed control of main street from county council.
- 1913 Waitotara-Momohaki Road District merged with Patea County.
- Patea Harbour Board Act. Board given extensive borrowing powers.
- 1917 Kohi, Okotuku, Motoroa, Wairoa, & Whenuakura-Waitotara Road Districts merged into the Patea County. Trend of abolition of road boards increasing.
- Momohaki Riding constituted.

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