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Fact or Fiction?  
William Colenso's Authentic & Genuine History of the  
Signing of the Treaty of Waitangi

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements of the degree of  
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in  
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Figure I: William Colenso, circa 1880, photographer unknown, reproduced with the permission of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

## *Abstract*

William Colenso's eye-witness account of the debate and signing of the Treaty at Waitangi on 5 and 6 February 1840 is part of a body of work which informs our understanding of the Treaty as the basis of our nationhood and the source of autonomous Maori rights. His record of the speeches of Nene and Patuone was pivotal in the Court of Appeal's judgment in the State-Owned Enterprises case and informed the decision-making of the Waitangi Tribunal in the Muriwhenua Land Claim. Colenso's history was also a pervasive influence on T. Lindsay Buick's history on the Treaty and Ruth Ross's work on the texts and translations. Despite the reliance on this 1890 text, historians have not tested Colenso's claims to authenticity and objectivity. This thesis compares William Colenso's manuscript, which was purchased at Peter Webb Galleries in Auckland in 1981, against his *Authentic and Genuine History of the Signing of the Treaty of Waitangi*, which was published by the government in 1890 to coincide with the 50<sup>th</sup> jubilee of the signing of the Treaty at Waitangi. It also explores the similarities and discrepancies between the two and whether it is possible to corroborate Colenso's narrative from the accounts of other European eye-witnesses. The thesis concludes that Colenso's manuscript is an 'authentic' eye-witness account that was written in 1840 and suggests it was principally intended to reiterate the allegations he had made in a letter to the CMS on 11 February 1840 in which he had referred to Henry Williams' land purchases and suggested that the missionary had had a conflict of interest when he encouraged Maori to sign the Treaty. The thesis also concludes that Colenso's manuscript was written with a purpose, that both texts were influenced by his personal views and biases and that the footnotes added by him in 1890 may have been inserted in order to garner favour with Canon Samuel Williams, the third son of Henry Williams, and obtain a seat on the Anglican Synod.

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## *Abbreviations*

ACL	Auckland City Library
AML	Auckland Museum Library
ATL	Alexander Turnbull Library
AUL	Auckland University Library
CMS	Church Missionary Society
CO	Colonial Office
CUT	Cambridge University Library, England
HL	Hocken Library, Dunedin
HRA	Historical Records of Australia
MUL	Massey University Library
NLA	National Library of Australia
NLNZ	National Library of New Zealand
OLC	Old Land Claims
WMS	Wesleyan Missionary Society
WRM	Whanganui Regional Museum

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