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EUGENE J. O'CONNOR, Provincial Secretary.

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No. 20.

REPORT ON THE SPECIAL SETTLEMENT AT
KARAMEA BY THE PROVINCIAL SECRETARY
OF NELSON.

To his HONOR the SUPERINTENDENT.

SIR,—

I have the honor, for your information and that of the Hon. Minister for Immigration, to forward my report upon the Karamea Special Settlement, together with a map exhibiting the situation of the old land purchases, the Special Settlement reserve, and various other features of the locality, together with roads, tracks, and other works constructed by the settlers.

Description
of Karamea.

THE KARAMEA is a low-lying undulating tract of country, shelving towards the west to a sandy open beach, on all other sides it is surrounded by steep hills and a mountainous country. It consists of about 60,000 acres of land available for agricultural and pastoral pursuits, containing a few swamps, but the greater part heavily timbered with rata, black, red, and white pine, totara, and pukatea. It is drained by five rivers, all sufficient to admit vessels of light draught, the principal river being the Karamea, which as a harbor is second on the West Coast, only to the Buller, the entrance being straight, and the depth on the bar at high water ranging from 10 to 15 feet.

As early as 1866, some attempt was made at settlement, and in 1867 a land sale took place at Nelson, where some 1,200 acres of choice land mostly situated upon the banks of the Karamea were sold in lots of from 5 to 100 acres. £1000 was realised by this sale, at which 57 persons purchased, not one of whom ever settled upon the land, or since made any attempt to utilise it. About the same time a gold-mining rush also took place, and fair prospects were obtained. An attempt was then made to find a line of road to connect with the more populous districts on the West Coast in order to facilitate traffic and ensure provisions, but the attempt entirely failed, and only resulted in a report that no practicable road could be made between the Mohikinui and Little Wanganui rivers. The difficulty of obtaining provisions became very great, and as winter approached the diggers were compelled to leave *en masse* to avoid starvation. A few returned to work the black sand on the beach, and at the time the special settlement was commenced four persons were thus employed, leading a most dreary, monotonous existence, and occasionally very much pinched for provisions, which they laid in annually and conveyed from Westport by small boats during fine weather.

Previous
attempts at
settlement.

From the short sketch I have given of the Karamea, the reasons that would weigh for the establishment of a special settlement

Reasons for
choosing it
for Special
Settlement.

there will be apparent, viz. :—The extent of land available; the border of auriferous country, and the object of rendering this valuable tract of land accessible by road works. Probably the task would have been much easier to accomplish if solely keeping these objects of settlement and public works in view, the Provincial Government had been allowed to select the fittest persons for the work, irrespective of the date of arrival in New Zealand.

Character
of land re-
served.

On the 27th of November, 1874, the first settlers, immigrants and new arrivals, landed at Karamea. The land reserved for the settlement was upon the southern bank of the river, but separated from it by land formerly sold. This reserve is situated upon a terrace or plateau about 200 feet above sea level. The land nearest the river is mostly of good quality, but further from the river it becomes poorer, peaty, and lightly timbered, all the best land being heavily timbered with a thick matted undergrowth, in which the supple jack predominates. As a sufficient quantity of land was not reserved or available on the south side, another special settlement reserve was made upon the north side of the river, but also separated from it by the old land purchases. The land on the northern side is of good quality, although some will require draining, as it is low and flat.

Allotment
& advance.

The settlers upon their arrival were allotted sections, upon which they went to work clearing and building. As might be supposed, they were generally deficient, not only in tools and domestic utensils, but many were absolutely without necessary clothing; therefore, to supply an outfit necessitated an advance, which varied according to the family, from £40 to £70. Against this advance some security was held in the improvements effected upon the land. It is gratifying to note that with few exceptions those advances have been honorably repaid.

Houses and
clearings.

Sixty-eight houses have been erected, many of them are quite comfortable, and some have additional outhouses. The clearings, in various stages of advancement, amount altogether to about 400 acres, and a good road one chain in width, with substantial bridges and culverts, where required, has been made through the settlement.

First crops.

In consequence of the extremely wet season of 1875, and the insufficient preparation of the soil, most of the early crop of potatoes failed. This crop being the settlers main dependence, the failure was deemed a great misfortune, although up to the present it has afforded a sufficient supply. To prevent such failure in the future, each settler will have a small section of land of drier and lighter quality.

Experimen-
tal cultiva-
tion.

Experimental patches of wheat, maize, and other grain, of green crops, of peas, beans, and hops, were tried with varied, but on the whole encouraging results. The hop plants were remarkably luxuriant; nor was the settlement without its monster pumpkin, one was shown there last season which was worth exhibiting, and almost deserved

immortalising in newspaper paragraphs. A number of fruit trees and vines have been distributed, and they seem to thrive and promise well. From this and other evidence of the fertility of the soil, it is not unreasonable to conclude that in the future the products of this settlement will be equal in variety and quality to those even of the most favored districts in the Colony, while the close proximity of the West Coast markets will always ensure a ready sale for the surplus produce.

Future pro-
ducts and
markets.

Ninety head of cattle, about a hundred pigs, and an abundant supply of poultry represent the imported live stock, which would have been much more numerous but for the cost and difficulty attending shipment, the steamer latterly not calling more than once in six weeks or two months. At present over forty head, mostly dairy cattle, await shipment.

Live stock.

From the first of the settlement it was found necessary to establish a Government store, which has been locally under the control of the overseer, and under the care of a storekeeper. Although the store has entailed constant supervision and a vast deal of extra trouble and anxiety, in practice it has been found extremely useful in preventing extravagance, securing supplies at a low price, and preventing the surreptitious sale of intoxicating drinks, which, if once allowed, would have raised numerous difficulties. It remains a source of congratulation that no disturbances have taken place as yet at the Karamea, nor has police intervention been required.

Storekeep-
ing.

Temperance

Police not
wanted.

The settlers in the aggregate appear fully equal to the average population of other localities in the Colony. Still, it must be said that there are some there, as in most other communities, whose absence would be an advantage; there are also a few constitutionally unfit for a rough and arduous life. Notwithstanding the exceptions above noted, the accumulation of private property, as well as the quantity of public work completed, bears testimony to general industry and thrift, which is the more remarkable when it is remembered that the immigrants were taken almost promiscuously from shipboard without previous experience or training to qualify them for the work.

Character
of settlers.

A liberal allowance of time was given to each settler to build and to make his family comfortable, then all were required to commence the public works by making the roads through the settlement. With some tuition they succeeded in completing road work, culverts, and bridges that will bear favorable comparison as to workmanship and cost with similar works elsewhere—the work in almost all cases being done as piece work, day work having been found very unsuitable.

First at-
tempts at
road work.

The local works, including the erection of the Government buildings, clearing the Government reserves, &c., having been thus completed, attention was next directed with considerable anxiety to the outlying road intended to connect the settlement with Nelson on one side and Westport on the other.

Erection of
Government
buildings.

Exploration for roads.

Two parties, headed by leaders of experience, have been detailed to explore for suitable lines of road, but up to the present the result does not hold out any hope of success in finding a direct road to Nelson. A practicable line was found between Little Wanganui and Mohikinui, but it soon became apparent that within reasonable expenditure, and without crossing the snow line, the only available road to Nelson must be along the coast to the Heaphy river, then by the Heaphy valley over the Salisbury open, down the Aorere valley, and by way of Collingwood to Nelson.

Unwillingness of settlers.

The available labor was directed to the road works from Little Wanganui to Mohikinui; but here difficulty was experienced by the unwillingness of some of the settlers to leave their homes at Karamea. Many of them upon the most frivolous pretext left work, and much time was lost, until stringent rules were put in force, compelling those who were in debt to remain constantly at work, or have their credit stopped at the store. The track is well laid out, and with good gradients, though several heavy rock cuttings have been made. It is taken through a country of limestone formation, which, although hilly, appears to be of good quality, even to the hill tops. The track will probably be open about the end of July, 1876.

Education.

The education of the children has not been entirely neglected, a school having been opened upon the terrace, and established about twelve months, attended by about 40 children, with good results. No school building has yet been provided, although very much required, and as the settlement is too small to support two schools, it would be desirable to provide one in a central position, so as to secure attendance from both sides of the river.

Success of settlement.

From the foregoing may be gathered how far success has attended the works entered upon at Karamea. The great object of planting a settlement in the hitherto inaccessible wilderness has been accomplished by the location of seventy families, and although another year may elapse before all these can safely depend upon the produce of the land to supply their wants, the amount of extraneous employment necessary in future need not be very large. At one time there was a prospect of the establishment of saw mills at Karamea; this would have given all the employment required, but the fall in the value of sawn timber has temporarily checked enterprise in that direction. The number of persons engaged in mining at Karamea has increased, and probably some of the settlers will presently supplement the returns from their land by this industry, but for the next year some other employment will be required especially by those who have to provide for large families.

Necessity for further employment for settlers.

Reproductive public works are urgently required in many parts of this district where comparatively nothing has been done to connect the interior with the port, and in addition to the settlement roads, which should be continued, there are at least two works in the neighborhood of paramount importance, which really should be undertaken

with as little delay as possible. One is the track from the mouth of the Mohikinui river to the quartz reefs, a distance of twelve miles; the other being the continuation of the coast track from the Karamea via Heaphy, Salisbury's Open, and the Aorere, to Collingwood. Of the former work it will be sufficient to say that the Provincial Government have already commenced it, and that it will take £2500 to complete. The necessity for the track is shown by the many valuable lives lost by the pioneers of that district while endeavoring to convey provisions and machinery over the dangerous falls and rocks of the Mohikinui—a work that can be attempted only in fine weather, and then so fraught with risk that the freight is one pound per ton per mile. Notwithstanding all these difficulties the reefs are slowly progressing, although occasionally a run of bad weather compels all the miners to leave for want of provisions. The coast track is also a most essential work, and as a means of through communication would be a great boon to the farmers in the Collingwood, Takaka, and Motueka districts, as well as to consumers on the West Coast, for on the one side farmers complain that they find no market for their stock, and on the other great difficulties are experienced in consequence of the very high price of meat; but apart from this consideration, the addition to the public estate by rendering available the Heaphy Valley would amply warrant the outlay, which for a sufficient cattle track would not exceed £5000.

Track to quartz reefs

To Nelson.

Up to the 31st of May the expenditure and liabilities of the settlement have been as follows:—

Cost of settlement.

Advances from the General Government, (disbursed as per returns) ..	£10,200
Liability for stores and freight ..	1,000
Due to settlers for work done ..	760
Accruing due to settlers for contract work incomplete	640
	£12,600

No explanation will be needed, except perhaps for the latter item, which represents the amount that will be due when contracts now in hand on the Mohikinui track are completed. The two latter items, amounting to £1,400, will be required immediately, to enable settlers to take up their leases, and to purchase seed and cattle.

Direct result of outlay—		Direct result.
16½ miles Mohikinui road ..	£6,615	
5 miles settlement road ..	2,500	
Other roads, tracks, ditching, &c. ..	1,100	
Explorations and surveys ..	600	
Balance due by settlers ..	990	
Working stock and goods in store ..	1,350	
Passages of immigrants to port of destination	500	
Subsidy to steamer	300	
	£13,955	

The amount due by settlers is here set down at £990, but when the works now in hand have been completed, probably about the end of July, I expect to see the item reduced to about £350. The stock will also be reduced probably to £700. With regard to the sum of £500 disbursed in forwarding immigrants to their destination, it seems to me unfair to saddle this expenditure upon the

Passages of immigrants.

Steamboat
subsidy.

advance for settling immigrants upon the land, because as it really forms part of their passage money, and such expenditure has been so treated in other cases, therefore I submit that a refund of that item should be made to the advance account. I have also treated separately the steamer's subsidy for mail service, &c., on the ground that this cannot properly be charged solely against the special settlement. Looking at the direct result of the expenditure here dealt with, we find a surplus on the side of assets. This arises from the margin of profit left on the small percentage charged in the store to cover freight and charges.

Summary
and con-
clusion.

The advantages resulting from the establishment of the special settlement may be shortly summarised:—Public works, to the value of the money spent; land taken up under special settlement, 4000 acres; 70 families provided with homes, and improvements made by them on their lands to the value of £5,000. It is worth noticing as an additional result, indicative of what will follow, that 1497 acres have already been taken up by thirteen persons outside the special settlement. In considering this, I cannot help wishing that the large sums spent in this Province in public works during the past three years had been productive to a like degree. If they had been so, then, putting that expenditure at £250,000, our population would now have increased by about 6000, and 1400 families would have been enabled to make homes for themselves, and would have added to the wealth of the Colony £100,000 by their industry in permanent improvements upon land taken into occupation.

Although taking this view, I am quite aware that so marked a result is not to be expected, particularly as much of the last-mentioned expenditure was made to gain other results, perhaps equally desirable. Still, I must express my conviction that a great extent of bush land on the West Coast of this Province cannot be settled for years in any other way than by combining public works with settlement, so as to enable working men to make

sure of sufficient employment to assist them in supporting their families while making a home. Any work set aside for such a purpose should be extended over three years, and should amount per family according to circumstances, from £100 to £200. I feel sure, from applications asking to join the settlement at Karamea, that there are hundreds in this Province, sons of the old settlers, or men who on the goldfields have borne the heat and burden of the day, and consequently have stronger claims upon the country than new arrivals, would be extremely thankful for such an opportunity of providing for their families. Many of these are now compelled, in order to obtain employment, to live in town where employment not being constant, much of their time is lost. The highest result a man so situated can expect, is that he will be able to feed and clothe his family and pay his rent. Certainly another advantage highly prized is extended to him by the liberal provision made by the State for education, but while enabling working men to form settlements upon the land in connection with public works, education might still be provided for, and, I repeat, a great boon thus extended to many who, no matter how industrious or hard working, may never have the means of taking land and making a home upon it. I am also convinced that as an investment for capital, clearing the heavy bush land upon the West Coast will not pay, and that the only way to clear away this useless bush and establish in its place productive settlements and homes for the people, is to extend to a certain number yearly the advantages bestowed by the combination of public works and settlement. In doing so no doubt the experience already gained will be of some advantage, but in the main if the people are of the right class, and the land good, the management will be poor indeed if success be not achieved.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

EUGENE O'CONNOR,

Provincial Secretary.

June 30, 1876.