

John Morrison to Dr Featherston 31 May 1872

Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives 1872 D1c p7 Enclosure 2

Written from 7 Westminster Chambers, Victoria Street, Westminster, SW, 31 May 1872
Manuscript equivalent: Archives NZ Reference Im 6/1/1 1872/265

Sir, Having undertaken, at your request, to proceed to the Western Highlands to complete certain emigration matters, I beg leave to submit to you a report of my proceedings. Whilst acting for the Government, I granted assisted passages to a few families from Ross-shire. Being informed that they had written most favourably concerning the Colony to their friends at home, so much so, that several were desirous to follow them, I proceeded direct to Loch Alsh, to grant them passages, and to make suitable arrangements for their embarkation. At the same time, it was expected that by personal interviews with the landed proprietors, it would be the means of securing their influence and co-operation. In general I am glad to say that this anticipation has been realized.

At Loch Alsh upwards of fifty individuals applied for passages: satisfying myself of their eligibility, I had no hesitation in granting their applications. In the district of Loch Carron I found the people less disposed to emigrate. Some who applied, and whose behalf strong representations were made, were unable to provide the money contribution required by the regulations.

While there I instituted inquiries to discover the individuals referred to in the list furnished to His Honor the Superintendent of Otago, by Mr Finlay Murchison, of Riverton. Fortunately I succeeded, and you will observe, from the annexed schedule, that passages are provided for several; also, that this had been done prior to the receipt of the list.

I likewise visited Portree, in the Isle of Skye; Stornoway, in the Island of Lewis; Ullapool, Garve, Dingwall, Inverness, Nairn, Perth, and other parts, at which places I communicated with the local agents, and did everything in my power to further the object of my journey.

Finding it impossible in a limited time to visit the scattered districts in the Islands of Skye and Lewis, and gathering, as the result of my observations, that emigrants of a suitable class were to be got from those parts, I arranged, subject to your approval, that this should be done by one of the Government Emigration Officers. As you approved of this suggestion, and were good enough to appoint Mr Seaton to undertake this duty, I proceeded to Inverness to await the arrival of that gentleman. On his meeting me, I took the opportunity to explain to him the duties he had to perform, and the nature of your instructions, after which he immediately proceeded to Stornoway.

While at Inverness I concluded an arrangement with the Highland Railway Company to convey the emigrants by rail from Strome Ferry and intermediate stations to Dundee, and thence by steamer to London, for the sum of 20s each. This low charge, which is much less than half the ordinary rate, was obtained through the influence of Mr Matheson, MP, the Chairman of the Company.

Regarding it advisable that the emigrants should not be landed at London, but, if practicable, that they should be transferred from the steamer to the ship off Gravesend, I proceeded to Dundee to arrange this. I also provided that the emigrants should be supplied with provisions during the voyage, and as the West Highland train generally arrives many hours before the sailing of the steamer, I likewise stipulated that they should be allowed to embark immediately upon their arrival at Dundee.

My object in dealing thus minutely with these details was to dispel the dread entertained of the difficulties and discomforts of the journey. It gave universal satisfaction when it became known that a person connected with the Government would be sent to take charge of them; it shows, as they expressed it, "that the Government really intend taking care of us." Although able-bodied and intelligent, from their limited knowledge of English and their total inexperience in travelling, they have not confidence in themselves. For the future, when circumstances admit of it, a similar policy should be adopted. It would also be advisable to make it generally known, for such like facilities tend to gain the confidence of the people, and will thereby increase the stream of emigration from those parts.

In conclusion, I have to state that the experience gained by my visit is, that the labouring population is at present unusually well employed, and that it is quite indifferent about emigration. This is applicable to most of the districts I visited; the Islands of Skye and Lewis, and on the main land about Loch Broom and Gairloch may be excepted. The large land grants offered to emigrants by the United States and Canada attract a considerable number. The strong desire to be possessed of land; the shortness of the passage as compared with the length of the voyage to New Zealand; the preference given to steamers over sailing vessels; and the large allowances paid to American agents for each emigrant, tell with great force against the service to New Zealand.

Another feature is the extreme poverty of the people. In general they are unable, without help, to provide the money payments required by the regulations, but notwithstanding, instances came under my notice in which aid was declined as soon as it became known that it was to be granted by the proprietor. As before stated many landlords are willing to co-operate most liberally, even to the extent of foregoing to those desirous of emigrating, all arrears of rent, releasing them from all engagements for houses or land, and in some instances offering grants of money to provide outfits. The ruling power in these parts appears to be commanded by the clergy of the Free Church of Scotland. Large numbers would leave if the movement were headed by a popular clergyman. Repeatedly my attention was called to this, and I have no doubt of its correctness; but knowing that it was a matter you could not encourage, I merely refer to it now as one of the incidents of my journey.

List of persons to be sent out to the Province of Otago, and particulars concerning them.
Mary Murchison and family, 7 and half adults, Kishorn [*], Hydaspes
Martha Murchison and family, 5 and half adults, Ardnorff [*], Hydaspes
Angus Macdonnell and family, Loch Carron. This individual is reported to be dead. Information could not be ascertained about children.
Donald Campbell and family, Isle of Skye. Said to reside about 9 miles from Portree; was written to but no answer received.
John McRae and sisters, Loch Alsh. Decline to go on account of father being bedridden.
John McRae and sisters, Ardnorff. Will not go.
Donald McRae and family, Ardnorff [*], Hydaspes
John McKerlech and family. Could not be seen.
Jane McKerlech. Won't leave her father.
Grace McKay and Catherine McKay. In service in England.
John Finlayson and family, Ardnorff. Would not decide to go.
Donald Finlayson and family, Loch Alsh. Will never go; family in various parts.

Mr Seaton is furnished with the above particulars, and instructed to communicate with those who have not replied to the communications sent to them.

[*] For these families passages were provided before receipt of the list.