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A DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF PALMERSTON NORTH,  
1870-1911.

A research exercise presented in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of BA Honours in History.

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## Preface.

A knowledge of a society's demography can give insights as to the composition of that society. By studying the demographic trends of a society over time we can see how this composition changes and the different types of composition associated with the different stages in the society's development. Historical demography is a much underestimated discipline within New Zealand's historical writing and this dissertation is aimed at being a very small contribution which will have to be added to and compared with to give a more clear picture of New Zealand society in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first one and a half decades of the twentieth. Because this is merely a beginning I have decided not to go beyond some basic manipulation of the available data upon which to study Palmerston North. My main aim is to describe and account for the patterns of population growth that occur by relating them to the history of the Palmerston North - Manawatu area and also New Zealand as a whole.

One of the first problems to be faced by a historical demographer studying New Zealand history is the great lack of any previously published material. What has been written is usually found in either economic or social histories in the form of general statements including simple computations of numerical or percentage growth of the population. The only piece of work of note dealing with the turn of the twentieth century that has had 'population' as its central theme is Willoughby's unpublished thesis about the northward drift of population in the late nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> He gives a limited coverage of general trends as those included are intended to support his thesis accounting for the 'drift north' rather than giving a full coverage.

This lack of secondary information on the population has

forced me to examine primary resources such as the New Zealand Censuses and the New Zealand Yearbooks for basic data with which to work. From the very beginning there is a possibility of inaccuracies occurring as it is impossible to be completely sure of the accuracy of the figures in a census. Censuses are well known to carry inaccuracies through human error as not everyone fills in the return accurately. It is hoped that any such errors do not affect the end result. Most of the statistical analysis is merely on a comparative basis, therefore the inexactitudes of the raw data will probably not have as much effect as might occur if only numerical data was used. However this is not always true. When using Age-Sex pyramids in a small population, a relatively small numerical variation can translate into a larger percentage variation especially when the population grows at such a rate as occurs in Palmerston North. A similar situation occurs when discussing marriage statistics amongst the older age groups especially in the early years of settlement where there may have been only one or two people in that age group. Where there are two married people making up the group, that is 100 percent married, whereas if only one is married of the two that means only 50 percent of the group is in the married state. This would appear highly significant in percentage terms but is not in numerical terms.

It should be noted that the divisions used in the age-sex pyramids are not mutually exclusive. The groups used share their boundary limits which should not occur but that is how the groups were divided by the census takers. It is hoped the inexactitude of such definition is apparent rather than real. I have maintained the divisions as used in the censuses as it would be an arbitrary decision as to what the limits should be or were, as applied by the census takers and enumerators. Being only used in general terms

it is hoped that any discrepancies that have been included in the distributions do not affect the analysis significantly.

One area where a problem did arise was in dealing with births and deaths in Palmerston North. The registers held at the Palmerston North Courthouse do not cover the whole period. The holdings of registers of births begins with that of 1880 whilst that of deaths starts halfway through 1885. A fire in 1882 destroyed newspaper files, Borough and Road Board records, and the early registers of births, deaths and marriages. Apart from the problem of incomplete holdings it was necessary to rely on the cooperation of a Courthouse assistant to look through the registers and record the various totals, because of a lack of facilities for research. Another problem related to these registers was that they do not only include entries for Palmerston North but also include surrounding areas such as Stoney Creek (now Whakarongo), Ashhurst, Karere, and Awahuri. I was only able to peruse the Register of Births for 1881 and the Register of Deaths for 1886 and also for 1891. I arrived at an average percentage of some 65 percent actually belonging to Palmerston North. This again may lead to errors in my computations but it is hoped they are not so great as to affect the study to any significant extent.

Another problem of definition arises when considering what exactly constituted Palmerston North in this period. When the Manawatu was surveyed by J.T.Stewart he saw the Papaioea clearing as an ideal site for a town. This town was duly surveyed and laid out and sections were offered for sale in Wellington. In a report to the Wellington Provincial Council in 1866 Stewart described what was laid out and it included 160 town lots of a quarter to one acre and 180 suburban and small farm lots with a total area of 1500 acres.<sup>2</sup> This was the size of the town until it was declared a borough in 1877.



To reach the necessary population to become a borough the Town Board extended the boundaries so that the area of the borough was "one of the largest in the Colony, [at] 4595 acres" <sup>3</sup> although most of it was bush. With such a large area for its population no doubt the boundaries remained unaltered for some time. The statistical boundary would be the same for most of the period under study.

For a general history of Palmerston North the most important work is G.C. Petersen's Palmerston North: A Centennial History (1973). This is the most substantial work since T.L.Buick's Old Manawatu which was published in 1903. Other articles of a more specific nature provide the remainder of my sources for the Manawatu's history in this period. To cover the general economic history of this period Condliffe's New Zealand in the Making (revised edition, 1959) is useful as is Lloyd Frichard's An Economic History of New Zealand to 1939 (1970).

I would like to thank Professor Oliver for his assistance in reviewing the initial draft.

Footnotes to Preface.

1. Willoughby, D.E. "Population Changes in New Zealand 1867-1911, 'the drift north'," Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Auckland, 1962.
2. Reports from Mr Stewart on the Manawatu Survey, Acts and Proceedings of the Wellington Provincial Council 1866.
3. Petersen, G.C. Palmerston North: A Centennial History, (Wellington, 1973) p.99.

## I. Introduction.

The form that any growth takes depends greatly on its foundation and then the various catalysts and restraining factors which mould the growth that occurs. This is especially true in relation to the growth of Palmerston North as well as to the rest of New Zealand. Many New Zealand towns were founded in the 1870 to 1911 period with some expanding rapidly whilst others grew slowly and others failed to take root. The settlements planned for Martins Bay (Jamestown) and Jackson Bay (Seacombe) collapsed after several years growth with very few families there today because of a lack of resources.<sup>1</sup> Some settlements such as Feilding, Dannevirke, and Masterton developed slowly whilst others like Palmerston North developed rapidly because of their favourable situation. Palmerston North was very much favoured by the governmental expenditure of the Public Works and Immigration Act of 1870, as well as the investments of the Wellington - Manawatu Railway Company. These can be seen as the two major factors for the growth of Palmerston North with other minor factors also contributing.

The exploration of the Manawatu for settlement stemmed from the lack of suitable land in the Wellington area for the Wakefieldian settlers. This led to E.J.Wakefield being sent to find more suitable land which he did very soon after the New Zealand Company ship Tory, and others, had reached Wellington. The New Zealand Company negotiated the purchase of 25,000 acres around the lower Manawatu River when surveys began in 1842. Early activity was restricted to the area around Te Awahou (Foxton) and Paiake (ten miles upriver from Foxton). The upper Manawatu was surveyed by J.T.Stewart for the Government during the late 1850's and the 1860's. He travelled up the Manawatu River and reported the existence of large amounts of land still available in the

Manawatu and that the river was an excellent means of communication.<sup>2</sup> Stewart was struck by one area in particular as a suitable site for locating a township and this was the Papaioea clearing. This clearing was natural in origin and covered an area of some 900 acres. It was surrounded by dense bush and was located approximately half a mile inland from the river near the Hokowhitu pa.

Surveys of the Papaioea clearing and the surrounding Ahuaturanga block were completed by 1867 and sections were offered for sale in Wellington including 160 town lots and 180 suburban and farm lots.<sup>3</sup> Most of the town sections were sold but it was some two years before there was any movement towards actual settlement of the sections. One of the main limitations on initial settlement was the difficulty of transportation into the area, with its dense barrier of forest. There was no suitable road from Foxton to Palmerston North so goods had to be brought upriver by canoe even though it was quite expensive. The cost of freight from Wellington to Foxton was one pound per ton whilst from Foxton to Palmerston North it was twenty.<sup>4</sup> More interest in taking up already purchased land was shown when the government promised the construction of improved transport facilities between Palmerston North and Foxton. This was put into effect by the completion of a dray road between the two in 1871 and a tramway by 1873.

The beginnings of Palmerston North's growth is inextricably associated with transport. The year 1870 heralded the coming of Julius Vogel's massive Public Works and Immigration Act which aimed at opening up the country by constructing transport routes. As insufficient suitable people could be found in Great Britain to emigrate quickly enough, some from Scandinavian countries were selected and their first group arrived at Awapuni (Palmerston North) in February 1871 followed by a second group who arrived in Wellington

one month later. The first group was allotted land, on a deferred payment scheme, along the projected route of the road and tramway between Palmerston North and Foxton. This group consisted of eighteen married couples with all the males being employed on the construction of the road. The second group who arrived were settled at Stoney Creek and included some unmarried men and women.<sup>5</sup> This group assisted in the construction of the road through the Manawatu Gorge which was begun in 1871 and completed in 1875.

When not involved in roadbuilding the early settlers in the area busied themselves with clearing their sections of the forest cover. The sections were of forty acres for married men and twenty acres for single men, the price to be paid over a period of five years from their wages from roadbuilding.<sup>6</sup> It is not surprising considering the nature of the surrounding environment that the first economic enterprise undertaken was sawmilling. Timber however was only of use as a means of income once the tramway was completed and the timber could be transported to Foxton and from there transhipped to the various markets. The rate of the clearance of the land was such that by 1880 large areas surrounding Palmerston North were cleared of bush and dairy stock were being introduced. Such was the growth of the dairying enterprise that the first cooperative dairy factory was opened in 1884 at Longburn. Soon various dairy factories were sited throughout the area surrounding Palmerston North as well as up the Pohangina Valley.

The most important catalyst to the growth of the Manawatu and Palmerston North especially, was the location of the railway. The importance of transport routes can easily be seen in the location of colonial settlement in both Australia and New Zealand. The first points of contact were usually the best harbours with major cities developing nearby. This is seen in the growth of Sydney, Adelaide, Hobart, and Perth in Australia; and Auckland, Wellington, Christ-

church (Lyttleton), and Dunedin (Port Chalmers) in New Zealand. Later as the population grew in each colony the transport routes between the cities spread out along the favourable natural features which allowed for relatively easy movement. A good example of this was that the beach between Wellington and Wanganui was for several decades the 'main trunk line'. Exploration of the interior was carried out mainly by travelling up rivers such as the Manawatu and the Rangitikei which resulted in the development of river-mouth ports such as Foxton and Patea. With the initial development of the hinterland came a demand for coach roads and later still railways which gave birth to towns on their routes, initially as construction bases and then continuing because of the business generated by through traffic. The development of these internal routes allowed for the further exploitation of the hinterland's resources, which in the Manawatu was mainly timber and flax, and the improvement of these activities by providing a rapid means of transport to markets and also service centres. Palmerston North benefitted from all these factors in the long run.

The development of the transport system led to the development of the agriculture in the region. This was greatly assisted by the development of refrigeration techniques in the 1880's which made frozen meat (and at a later date dairy products) among the colony's largest exports. This gave the earning power of the Manawatu farmer a great boost when the 'depression' of the 1880's was casting a shadow over the New Zealand economy as a whole. During the 1890's an increasing amount of land was brought into production by a growing population and Palmerston North grew to accommodate the needs of this population. This increase can be seen as coming from two main sources after the initial immigration; natural increase (excess of births over deaths) and from the 'drift north'. A later

high growth rate occurred in the twentieth century with another burst of immigration to New Zealand which started in 1901 and continued until the war interrupted the flow in 1914. The immigration was not entirely unassisted as it was boosted by the help of government aid in 1904.<sup>7</sup> By the end of the first forty years of Palmerston North's existence (that is 1911) the population had reached an impressive figure of nearly 11,000<sup>8</sup> and the town's population was now in a relatively settled urban existence.

Footnotes to Introduction.

1. Knox, Ray "The Settlements That Failed", in New Zealand's Heritage, Vol.3, Part 43, pp.1177-1181.
2. Stokes, Evelyn "Settlers in the Manawatu", in New Zealand's Heritage, Vol.3, Part 44, p.1221.
3. See footnote 2 of Preface for reference.
4. Hely, A.S.M. 'Some Effects of Changes in Transportation upon the Economic Development of the Manawatu 1876-1946', Unpublished M.A. thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1947, p.40.
5. A full listing is given in 'Papers relative to the introduction of Scandinavian immigrants', Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives, 1871, D.3. p.9.
6. Petersen, G.C. Palmerston North: A Centennial History, (Wellington, 1973), p.71.
7. Lloyd Prichard, M.F. An Economic History of New Zealand to 1939, (Auckland, 1970), p.182.
8. Palmerston North was the third largest borough in the North Island and seventh largest in New Zealand behind Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, Invercargill, and Timaru. Napier and Wanganui both had a population of over 10,000 so were not far behind Palmerston North. (N.Z. Census, 1911.)



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