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A Short
History
of New
Zealand



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Arbitration Act enforces arbitration between employers and employees. The Bank of New Zealand bailed out from bankruptcy.

1898

The Old Age Pensions Act is passed, the first of its kind in the world.

1899

New Zealand becomes the first colony to sign up for Britain in the war against the Boers in South Africa. The war lasts four years, costs 228 New Zealand lives from 6495 who served.

1901

The six Australian colonies federated but New Zealand, invited to join, remains a separate nation. The Cook Islands are incorporated within New Zealand.

1902

Seddon's Liberal Party wins a fifth term by 47 seats to 19 and he officially becomes 'Prime Minister' rather than 'Premier'.

1905

Seddon's Liberal Party wins the election by a landslide, with 55 seats to the Opposition's 15. The first All Black side visits Britain, losing only one match, to Wales.

1906

Seddon dies at sea, returning from a trip to Australia. William Hall-Jones briefly heads the Liberal Ministry until Sir Joseph Ward assumes the leadership.

1907

New Zealand, designated a Dominion, ceases to be a Colony.

1908

The Main Trunk railway line links Auckland and Wellington.

1909

William Massey announces the Opposition group he leads will be called the Reform Party. Compulsory military training introduced.

1910

The first New Zealand Labour Party is born at a Trades and Labour Council conference. Captain Robert Falcon Scott leaves Port Chalmers for his fatal trip to Antarctica.

1911

Population passes one million.

1912

The Liberal Party's twenty-one years in power ends when five members cross the floor of the House to vote with Massey on a no-confidence motion. Four days later Massey is Prime Minister. Miners' strike at Waihi.

1913

A general strike called by the United Federation of Labour begins in support of a watersiders' stoppage, young farmers on horseback become 'special constables', help work the wharves and are tagged 'Massey's Cossacks'. The 'Red Feds' are defeated, although some strikers hold out until the following January.

1914

World War I breaks out in Europe, and New Zealand Expeditionary Force leaves for Egypt. A contingent of troops sails to Samoa and wrests it from Germany. Massey's Reform Party wins office by two seats in a general election.

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A wartime coalition government of the Reform and Liberal parties is formed. New Zealand troops take part in the eight-month Gallipoli campaign, in which 2721 of them die and 4752 are wounded.

1916

A new New Zealand Labour Party is formed from left-wing fragments at a conference in Wellington.

1917

New Zealand loses 640 men killed in one day of the Battle of Passchendaele, and 2100 are wounded. Conscription includes Maori for the first time. Six o'clock closing of hotels is introduced as a wartime measure as political pressure mounts from the prohibition movement.

1918

Labour Party leader Harry Holland wins the Grey Parliamentary seat and within a few months is joined by Peter Fraser and Robert Semple who win seats in by-elections. New Zealand troops fight in the Battle of the Somme.

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A referendum on prohibition wins on the day in New

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1861

Gabriel Read discovers gold in Gabriel's Gully, Central Otago, and sparks the first major gold rush. George Grey starts another term as Governor after governing Cape Colony, and stays until 1868. A truce is arranged with Maori in Taranaki and Grey begins to move against Waikato Maori.

1864

British troops are involved in the Waikato war against Maori, fighting battles at Rangiriri, Orakau and Gate Pa.

1865

The General Assembly moves to Wellington, which was declared the new capital the previous year.

1867

Four Maori seats in Parliament are created. Post Office Savings Bank opens first branches in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin and Hokitika. Westland has become the centre of a second major gold rush.

1868

William Fox becomes Premier and Julius Vogel, his Colonial Treasurer, soon announces a programme of massive borrowing from overseas to finance immigration and the creation of a railways, telegraph and ports infrastructure. Te Kooti escapes from the Chatham Islands on Riffeman and sails to Gisborne where he soon begins a guerrilla campaign against colonial forces harassing him.

1869

Government Life Insurance Office set up by Parliament.

1872

Two Maori appointed to the Legislative Council.

1873

Westland becomes a province separate from Canterbury.

1875

Parliament abolishes the provinces from 1876.

1876

A one-man, one-vote bill introduced by Sir George Grey, now an MP, is defeated. Voters still need a property qualification.

1877

Grey becomes Premier, leading his Liberal Party, after a 'Continuous Ministry' led by Fox, Vogel and Harry Atkinson is defeated. Education Act provides free secondary schooling.

1878

Grey and Sir Robert Stout introduce a bill to give suffrage for all men over twenty-one. Suffrage for women ratepayers is abandoned after gaining support in both the House and Legislative Council. A campaign to extend the suffrage continues with the support of some conservatives, particularly John Hall. Railway between Christchurch and Dunedin opened.

1879

Grey's government defeated as a long, intractable depression develops.

1881

An electoral country quota is introduced to give rural areas a 33.3 per cent weighting in general elections. The quota was amended over the years and finally abolished by the first Labour Government. Parhaka attacked and passive resistance leader Te Whiti arrested.

1882

Dunedin sails from Port Chalmers for London with the first New Zealand shipment of frozen meat.

1884

The depression continues, and unemployed demonstrate in Auckland. Emigration from New Zealand to Australia and the United States.

1886

Mt Tarawera erupts, kills more than one hundred people and destroys the Pink and White Terraces, previously an international tourist attraction.

1887

Kate Sheppard of the Women's Christian Temperance Union begins organising a vigorous campaign for women's suffrage.

1889

The principle of one-man-one-vote is established.

1890

The Liberal-Labour Party led by John Ballance wins the general election.

1892

Polynesian Society holds its inaugural meeting. The New Zealand Rugby Football Union is formed.

1893

Richard John Seddon is Premier following the death of Ballance. Women gain the vote, the first in the world to do so.

1837

The New Zealand Association, forerunner of the New Zealand Company, is formed in London. Samuel Marsden leaves for Sydney after his last visit to New Zealand, twenty-three years after he first arrived.

1838

Catholic Bishop Jean Pompailler arrives to establish a mission in the Bay of Islands.

1839

Captain William Hobson, Lieutenant-Governor of New Zealand, is instructed by the British Government to negotiate with Maori for New Zealand sovereignty. The New Zealand Company advance vessel, Tory, arrives and William Wakefield takes possession of land bought in Port Nicholson for the New Zealand Company. The Nanto-Bordelaise Company is authorised by the French Government to carry eighty colonists to New Zealand.

1840

Governor Gipps formally includes New Zealand within his jurisdiction. Lieutenant-Governor Hobson, after seven days of negotiations with Maori chiefs in the Bay of Islands, signs the Treaty of Waitangi on behalf of the Queen, and fifty Maori leaders sign on behalf of their people. Hobson claims British sovereignty over all of New Zealand, and within a few months the country becomes a Crown Colony under Governor Hobson, separate from NSW, and Auckland is selected as the capital. Aurora, the first New Zealand Company migrant ship, arrives at Port Nicholson. Johnny Jones and William Wentworth claim to have bought the South Island and Stewart Island from Maori for £500.

1841

The first settlers arrive in New Plymouth in March aboard the William Bryan. The first settlers arrive in Nelson in October aboard the Whitby, Will Watch and Arrow.

1842

Governor Hobson dies in Auckland and is succeeded by Willoughby Shortland as Administrator until a replacement governor arrives.

1843

Governor Robert FitzRoy takes up his appointment.

1844

The Northern Wars begin with a series of military engagements at sites such as Ruapekapeka. Hone Heke cuts down the flagstaff at Kororareka for the first of four times in a year.

1845

Hone Heke sacks Kororareka. The British government agrees to withdraw FitzRoy after long discontent among southern settlers, especially in Wellington, and he is succeeded in November by George Grey, at the end of a term as Governor of South Australia.

1848

The Otago Association founds a Scottish settlement at Dunedin. A severe earthquake hits Wellington.

1850

The Canterbury Association founds its settlement at Christchurch, and the first four ships arrive.

1852

The New Zealand Constitution Act passed in Britain provides some self-government with wide powers over domestic affairs. Maori policy remains under the control of the Governor and foreign policy under the control of the British Government. Six provincial governments are established (Auckland, New Plymouth, Wellington, Canterbury, Nelson and Otago) with three more formed later as breakaway provinces (Hawke's Bay, Marlborough and Southland).

1853

National and provincial elections held, and Governor Grey leaves at the end of his term. Colonel Robert Wynyard becomes Administrator. Edward Gibbon Wakefield arrives in New Zealand for the first time.

1854

First General Assembly sits in Auckland.

1855

A massive earthquake hits Cook Strait. It raises land on the western side of Wellington Harbour and the Hutt Valley, and around the southern coast to the east of the town.

1856

Henry Sewell becomes the first Premier, but his administration lasts only a fortnight.

1860

The first battles of the New Zealand Wars are fought in Taranaki.