

Warning

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EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY - UNIV

(McLintock, A. H.,
2009f)

Foundation

1870

The colony was still young when talk began of providing university education for some selected scholars; and in 1868, following the report of a Joint Committee of both Houses of Parliament, a New Zealand University Endowment Act was passed. The chief result of the Act was to stimulate the Province of Otago to push on with its own plans; and, an endowment of 100,000 acres having been set aside, in 1869 the University of Otago was founded by a Provincial Council Ordinance, the Presbyterian Church having agreed to endow a chair of mental and moral science and political economy, while the Council provided for a chair in classics and English and a chair in mathematics and natural philosophy, and, later, for one in natural science.

Stirred in its turn to action, Parliament passed in 1870 the New Zealand University Act. The debates on the Bill were long and acrimonious, conflict of opinion developing at once (it lasted for half a century) between those who saw a university body, incidentally examining for and granting degrees, and those who envisaged merely an examining and degree-granting institution. The intention of the Act, as was that of the majority of the members of the Joint Committee that prepared the Bill, was the establishment of a community of scholars — of teachers and taught — in a place to be determined, with examining and degree-granting functions as a corollary.

The Act provided for a council, to be nominated in the first place by the Government, and an annual grant of £3,000. It also empowered the University of Otago to agree to its dissolution and the transfer of its endowments to the University of New Zealand, in which case “the said University shall be established at Dunedin”; but, in default of such agreement with Otago, the University of New Zealand might be founded at such other place as the Government might determine. The first council comprised three Auckland, five Wellington, two Nelson, four Canterbury, and six Otago representatives and when H. J. Tancred and Hugh Carleton were elected chancellor and vice-chancellor respectively, both holding to the examining and degree-granting function and both hostile to amalgamation with Otago, it was apparent that neither party would agree to terms submitted by either. In these circumstances Otago proceeded with the appointment of its professors, while the University of New Zealand, “houseless and homeless”, proceeded to draft conditions for the affiliation of “Scholastic or Collegiate Institutions”.

Otago petitioned the Government for a charter; so did the University of New Zealand. The Government sent forward both applications without expressing an opinion on the merits of either; but Her Majesty's Government, said the Secretary of State in appropriate diplomatic language, would be unwilling to advise Her Majesty to grant charters to two universities, and would postpone any advice till the New Zealand Government could make up its mind which to recommend.

Agreement by Otago was hastened, if not precipitated, by action in Canterbury, first in the formation of the Canterbury Collegiate Union, and by the passage, by the Provincial Council, of the Canterbury College Ordinance in 1873, and the establishment of a board of governors which very soon petitioned Parliament for the maintenance and chartering of a single university in the colony — the University of New Zealand — and then sought affiliation therewith. Otago gave up the unequal struggle. It, too, agreed to affiliate on condition that it retained its endowments, its title of University, and its right to a share of the University grant of £3,000; but it abandoned its application for a charter and power to confer degrees.

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Next Part: The 1874 Act and the 1879 Commission

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