

APPENDIX F.

ANNUAL REPORT ON PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND OTHER WORKS, BY THE COLONIAL ARCHITECT.

The COLONIAL ARCHITECT to the Hon. the MINISTER for PUBLIC WORKS.

SIR,—

Wellington, 1st July, 1874.

I have the honor to submit, for your information, the following report, under three heads, of the buildings and other works commenced, finished, or designed during the financial year 1873-74, in connection with the Colonial Architect's branch of the Public Works and Immigration Department.

Immediately after the prorogation of Parliament in 1873, a commencement was made to prepare the necessary drawings and specifications for carrying out the most pressing of the many works throughout the colony, for which, altogether, the House had been pleased to vote £91,965.

The largest and most important buildings decided upon were new departmental offices for the General Government in Wellington, for which preliminary sketches for timber buildings had been prepared, prior to the meeting of Parliament, to suit a site being the frontage in Molesworth Street of the Public Buildings Domain, from which an approximate estimate was made, amounting to £16,000.

Objections had been taken to the site; and a preferable one having been offered by the Provincial Government, by reclaiming a portion of the harbour at a cost of £3,771 16s., new plans became necessary not only to suit the new site, but also to provide increased accommodation that was found to be wanting. A hurried sketch was prepared, for the purpose of arriving at an estimate, when it was found necessary to ask for an increased vote of £7,000, but the application was too late: the original estimate of £16,000 had been voted on the previous evening.

The contract, plans, and specifications, containing about twenty more offices and other accommodation in fire-proof safes, &c., than the preliminary sketches provided, were nevertheless completed, and separate tenders were invited throughout the colony for the buildings, either in concrete or timber.

When the tenders were received, the lowest in concrete was £40,900, and in timber £29,975. These apparently excessive tenders as compared with the estimates, are to be, in a measure, accounted for by the fact that just before tenders were invited, the saw-mill proprietors advertised an increase of 2s. per hundred on the price of timber, carpenters had struck for 2s. per day increase of wages, and the labour market generally became so disturbed that high tenders were looked for.

The effect, however, was felt more in Wellington than in some other places; buildings in Napier and Tauranga, designed and estimated about the same time to cost £4,000 each, were both taken below the estimates.

The cost of building, in Wellington especially, still remains very high, and contractors are unwilling to tender without having a large margin for profit and contingencies.

Before closing this reference to the General Government Departmental Offices at the seat of Government, I desire most strongly to urge the advisability of erecting them in some indestructible materials, or some materials, at any rate, not susceptible of being easily reduced by fire. I would advance as a reason, the valuable papers and records contained within their walls, and the irremediable loss the colony would sustain in the event of their destruction by fire. To my mind, the circumstance that Wellington has been visited with earthquakes is not a sufficient reason to limit the chief materials of all buildings to timber. Are not Christchurch and Dunedin also liable to similar shocks?—Nor am I aware of any other city subject to quakes, besides Wellington, where the material used in houses is chiefly confined to wood. In San Francisco, buildings many stories high are constructed of brick, stone, or concrete, and where, I am told, shakes are more severe than in this colony.

Numerous buildings and other works have been completed or commenced during the year, of the usual character, consisting of Post and Telegraph Offices, Court Houses, Custom Houses, Departmental Offices, Ministerial Residences, Immigration Depôts, Quarantine Stations, &c., &c.; the total moneys paid during the year through this branch being £493,64 2s. 11d.

Enclosed is a list of the various works referred to, classified under three heads, and will be found to contain full information as regards the work performed.

Since the Colonial Architect's Department became a branch of the Public Works and Immigration Department, its administration has been greatly improved.

The country works have derived the advantage of a general supervision by the District Engineers, in addition to local inspection by officers temporarily appointed; and reliable information from these professional officers proved of great assistance and advantage.