

A notice of the system of local government in force in New Zealand is only necessary so far as to enable a comparison to be made of its leading features with those of the several systems in the adjacent colonies. Until the dissolution of the Provinces in 1876, no uniformity prevailed, the Municipal Corporations in towns, and the management of the country roads, being provided for by Acts passed by each Provincial Legislature. In that year five Acts were passed by which uniformity was to a certain extent introduced—the Public Works Act, the Municipal Corporations Act, the Counties Act, the Rating Act, and the Regulation of Local Elections Act. The Provincial Acts under which road districts under the management of Road Boards had been established were left in force, subject to certain general provisions. The Public Works Act divided the roads of the colony into three classes—main roads, county roads, and district roads. Main roads were to be proclaimed by the Governor and to be maintained by the Government out of votes of Parliament, county roads were to be proclaimed by the county and maintained out of county funds; and all other roads were to be left to the management of the existing Road Boards. No roads have as yet been proclaimed to be main roads, and the Act has worked differently in different parts of the colony as to the division of county and district roads. In some cases the county has proclaimed all the roads within the county to be county roads, thereby taking all the management into its own hands, and making use of the Road Boards to carry out the works it determined on; in other cases the whole of the roads in the county have been left district roads, the county dividing its funds amongst the Road Boards for the purpose of their maintenance.

The provisions of the various Provincial Acts still in force have features of difference, but similar powers are contained in all for the election of Boards and the expenditure of their funds in the construction and repair of the country roads. The Rating Act, and the Local Elections Act passed in 1876, have superseded the provisions of the Provincial Acts so far as regards the making of assessments and the levying of rates and the procedure at elections, and have established a uniformity of practice in these particulars throughout all the road districts in the colony.

The Municipal Corporations Act of 1876 provides that all boroughs in existence shall be boroughs under the Act, except boroughs in Otago under the Otago Municipal Corporations Act of 1865, which, however, may be brought under the Act by Proclamation, on a petition from fifty ratepayers, unless opposed by a greater number. The Governor is empowered to proclaim new boroughs, subject to conditions as to size and population. Boroughs may be divided into wards, or divided into two or more boroughs or incorporated into neighbouring boroughs, by the same means. There are sixty-one boroughs in the colony at present.

Every person of twenty-one years of age, whose name is on the burgess roll of a borough or any ward of a borough is a burgess, and may vote on the following scale in each ward in which he is enrolled. If his rateable property is valued at under £50, one vote, from £50 to £100, two votes, from £100 to £150, three votes, from £150 to £350, four votes, and from £350 upwards, five votes. But for elections of the Mayor and Auditors every burgess has only one vote.

The burgess roll is made from the valuation roll, provided for by the Rating Act, omitting the names of those on the defaulters' list, which is made up on the 31st March, and includes all who have not paid rates due on the 31st December previous, but any person paying his rates before the day on which the burgess roll is signed may have his name erased from the defaulters' list and placed on the burgess roll.

The Mayor is elected by the burgesses on the last Wednesday in November, and is of the Council in virtue of his office. The Council consists of nine members in undivided boroughs, and in boroughs divided into wards, of three Councillors for each ward. The qualification of a Councillor is rateable property of £25 a year in the borough. One-third of the Council retires each year, and the annual election is held on the second Thursday in September. Two Auditors are elected on the 1st of June annually.