

nor, understandably, had they done so before leaving for Sydney two days later on the S.S. *Otago*. The report to Grey, dated 3 October, set out the principles of their enquiry, as already given, which they had followed 'in the examination of every site submitted to their examination'. Then followed their itinerary and the judgement:

Having thus made themselves acquainted, as far as was practicable, with the character and capabilities of both shores of Cook's Strait, the Commissioners have arrived at the unanimous conclusion that Wellington, in Port Nicholson, is the site upon the shores of Cook's Straits which presents the greatest advantages for the administration of the Government of the Colony.

The *Examiner*, in noting the Commission's departure and the sealed envelope as its only visible legacy, speculated that on arrival in Sydney members 'may not consider themselves bound' to secrecy.⁴³ The Wakapuaka-Sydney cable link was still twelve years in the future but a steamer could bring back such news from Sydney in less time than it would be received from Auckland. The expectation was in vain as the commissioners naturally respected the confidentiality of their decision.

So until the S.S. *Wellington* crossed the Manukau bar in the dawn of 14 October, eleven days later, speculation was rife. Many Nelsonians were taking optimistic bets on their chances but the Wellington correspondent of the *Southern Cross* had a contrary impression—'It was understood at Nelson that Wellington had been chosen.' Confirmation the following day was taken on the chin, the *New Zealand Herald* being quite philosophical: 'Few people will be surprised nor can we recognise in it any serious injury to the real capital of the Colony.' It was impossible, in any case, that it be moved 'so long as the native rebellion remains unsuppressed'.⁴⁴

In the short term, at least, both decision and commitment were irreversible. The move was very much part of the policy of the man about to be Premier who gave cogent reasons for proceeding.⁴⁵ Not unexpectedly a petition signed early in 1865 by 7,920 devout Aucklanders 'earnestly praying that the Northern Portion of these Islands may be temporarily erected into a separate Colony' was submitted for transmission to the Secretary of State. But first ministers, and then a reluctant Grey, were in Wellington soon after.⁴⁶ The last milestone, the great 'Separation' debate in September, concluded with a victory for unity by 31 votes to 17.