

Donald had visited Wellington and made certain of his suit. There are some twenty-seven surviving letters from this period during which McLean, having been appointed a land purchase commissioner in April, was negotiating land purchases in the Rangitikei and Wanganui districts. Susan wrote almost every week, usually on a Friday or Saturday and usually late at night when the house was quiet. Donald wrote less regularly but sometimes two or three letters in the space of a few days, depending on his work and whereabouts.

McLean returned to Wellington on 18 October 1850 and left a month later on his first visit to Ahuriri (Hawke's Bay). He was away nearly six months and then merely passed through Wellington in May 1851 on his way to Rangitikei. Fewer letters survive from this absence and fewer were probably written as it was more difficult to get letters to and from the east than the west coast. Communicating by letter was in fact always a rather haphazard business. Many of the letters in this collection were carried by messenger or by friends travelling between Wellington and McLean's various staging posts. On one occasion letters Susan entrusted to a messenger only got as far as the upper Hutt Valley where the messenger left them at a farm saying his feet were sore and he would walk no further.<sup>13</sup> Other letters went by ship and there was always anxiety as to whether or not they would arrive. Each partner eagerly awaited letters and expressed disappointment when none arrived.

The letters do not stop after the couple's marriage. McLean's work continued to take him away from Wellington. Barely a month after his marriage day he left again for Ahuriri and did not return until just before Christmas. The correspondence recommenced. At this time Susan began the practice of writing serial letters, beginning one day and adding to the letter until the mail was ready to leave. During 1852 Donald was away from Wellington in January and May, when only a few letters were exchanged, and then from 30 June to early September. The longest sequence of letters, twenty-eight in total, dates from this last separation. Susan's are nearly all serial letters, often added to daily. Few of her letters are dated with more than the day of the week but internal evidence makes it possible to order and date these letters accurately. What is more infuriating for the reader is her practice of crossing the letters, writing four pages, then turning the paper round and writing across the same page.

These letters, along with other brief notes, Donald's diary and his correspondence with Robert Strang, enable us to follow the development of the relationship between Donald McLean and Susan Strang in a manner seldom possible. They allow us to explore the patterns of courtship and the expectations and hopes of marriage. It