

## **Between religion and empire: Sarah Selwyn's Aotearoa/New Zealand, Eton and Lichfield, England, c.1840s-1900**

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Volume 19, Number 2, 2008

“Migration, Place, and Identity”  
Migration, lieu et identité

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/037748ar>  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/037748ar>

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Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association / La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0847-4478 (print)  
1712-6274 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

MacDonald, C. (2008). Between religion and empire: Sarah Selwyn's Aotearoa/New Zealand, Eton and Lichfield, England, c.1840s-1900. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 19(2), 43–75. <https://doi.org/10.7202/037748ar>

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### ***Abstract***

*Taking the life of Sarah Selwyn (1809-1907), wife of the first Anglican bishop to New Zealand, the article plots the dynamics of geographic movement and varying communities of connection through which the mid-19thC imperial world was constituted. Negotiating empire and religion, mission and church, high church and evangelical, European and indigenous Maori and Melanesian, Sarah's life illuminates the intricate networks underpinning – and at times undermining – colonial governance and religious authority. Sarah embarked for New Zealand in late 1841 at a high point of English mission and humanitarian idealism, arriving into a hierarchical and substantially Christianised majority Maori society. By the time she departed, in 1868, the colonial church and society, now European-dominated, had largely taken a position of support for a settler-led government taking up arms against “rebellious” Maori in a battle for sovereignty. In later life Sarah Selwyn became a reluctant narrator of her earlier “colonial” life while witnessing the emergence of a more secular empire from the close of Lichfield cathedral. The personal networks of empire are traced within wider metropolitan and colonial communities, the shifting ground from the idealistic 1840s to the more punitive later 19thC. The discussion traces the larger contexts through which a life was marked by the shifting ambiguities of what it was to be Christian in the colonial world: an agent of empire at the same time as a fierce critic of imperial policy, an upper class high church believer in the midst of evangelical missionaries, someone for whom life in New Zealand was both a profound disjuncture and a defining narrative.*

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\* My thanks to co-panellists at the Canadian Historical Association Conference June 2008, Patricia Grimshaw, Cecilia Morgan and Peggy Brock, and chair Adele Perry. Also to Kathryn Hunter, C.R. Cherrie and the two anonymous readers for useful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

## Résumé

À partir de la biographie de Sarah Selwyn (1809-1907), femme du premier évêque anglican de Nouvelle-Zélande, cet article étudie les forces dynamiques qui sous-tendent les déplacements géographiques et les communautés de relations variables grâce auxquelles le monde impérial du milieu du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle a pu se constituer. Tirillée entre les forces en jeu (Empire et religion, mission et Église, High Church et évangélisme, Européens et Maoris ou Mélanésiens), la vie de Sarah illustre les réseaux complexes qui soutiennent (et parfois contribuent à saper) l'autorité coloniale et l'autorité religieuse. Sarah s'était embarquée pour la Nouvelle-Zélande à la fin 1841, à l'apogée d'un mouvement d'idéalisme missionnaire et humanitaire anglais, pour arriver dans une société maorie hiérarchique et dans l'ensemble christianisée. Au moment de son retour en Angleterre, en 1868, l'Église et la société coloniales, désormais sous emprise européenne, s'étaient ralliées à l'idée d'un gouvernement dirigé par les colons qui allaient s'armer contre les Maoris « rebelles » dans une lutte pour la souveraineté. Plus tard dans sa vie, Sarah Selwyn s'est faite la narratrice réticente de sa vie « coloniale », au moment où elle était témoin de l'émergence d'un Empire plus séculier, dans l'enceinte de la cathédrale Lichfield où son mari était évêque. L'auteure reconstitue ici les réseaux personnels de l'Empire dans le cadre de communautés métropolitaines et coloniales larges et changeantes, qui sont passées de l'idéalisme des années 1840 à un climat plus punitif à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. L'analyse évoque le contexte général dans lequel une vie s'est vue marquée par les ambiguïtés liées à l'affirmation d'une identité chrétienne au sein du monde colonial, Sarah représentant l'Empire tout en étant une critique acharnée de la politique impériale, étant une croyante de la haute société se rattachant à la High Church tout en vivant aux côtés de missionnaires évangéliques, et étant une personne pour qui la vie en Nouvelle-Zélande représentait tout à la fois une profonde disjonction et un récit déterminant.

**B**y the time Sarah Selwyn reached Aotearoa/New Zealand in June 1842, religion, empire and gender had been entangled in a local history for nearly three decades.<sup>1</sup> Sarah, wife of the first Church of England bishop to New

1 The first CMS mission was established by Reverend Samuel Marsden at Rangihoua, Bay of Islands, in 1814. G.W. Rice, ed, *Oxford History of New Zealand*, 2nd ed. (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992); Michael King, *Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin, 2003); Judith Binney, Judith Bassett and Erik Olssen, *The People and the Land: an illustrated history of New Zealand 1820-1920* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1990). Imperial historian W. P. Morrell opened his history of the Anglican Church in New Zealand with the sentence: "The Church preceded the State in New Zealand."; W.P. Morrell, *The Anglican Church in New Zealand* (Dunedin: Anglican Church of the Province of New Zealand, 1973), 1.

Zealand, was greeted by a largely christianised Maori crowd calling to her “Haere mai, haere mai Mata Pihopa” – welcome, welcome Mother Bishop. After much shaking of hands, and what she describes as her own shy words of greeting using “her Maori language”<sup>2</sup> Sarah was invited to tea in the house of the leaders of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) station and residents in the Bay of Islands for almost twenty years, Marianne and Henry Williams (with eight of their eleven children). The preceding ten months had taken Sarah from the heart of English elite institutions to the newest and most distant of the British Empire’s formal possessions,<sup>3</sup> six months spent at sea, the preceding three in rapid elevation from curate to bishop’s wife and preparations for what some of her friends clearly considered her impending exile. She had been living at Eton College where husband George was both tutor and curate at nearby St George’s chapel, Windsor. Sarah Selwyn was to live in New Zealand for twenty-five years, 1842 – 68, from the age of thirty-two to fifty-nine years. She returned permanently to England when George was recalled, reluctantly, to take up the position as Bishop of Lichfield. He died in 1878. Sarah, despite being known for her frail health, lived on in the close of Lichfield Cathedral until 1907, when she died at the age of ninety-eight.<sup>4</sup>

Like other women for whom marriage in the mid-nineteenth century brought a life spanning the imperial world, Sarah Selwyn wrote intensely about place.

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2 *Reminiscences by Mrs. S.H. Selwyn, 1809-1867*, with an introduction and notes by Enid A. Evans (Auckland: Auckland War Memorial Museum, 1961), 17 (hereafter *Reminiscences*). Other copies of the *Reminiscences*, with varying pagination, can be found at qMS-1782, and MS-Papers-7188-10 and MS-Papers-7188-11, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington (hereafter ATL). Sarah, along with the rest of the bishop’s party travelling to New Zealand on the *Tomatin*, had daily lessons learning Maori, including pronunciation instruction from George Rupai, a young Maori man returning home from England, Sarah Selwyn to her cousins, Mary and Caroline Palmer, 14 April 1842, MS-Papers-7188-05, ATL.

3 New Zealand was annexed in February 1840.

4 June Starke, “Sarah Selwyn 1809-1907”, Charlotte Macdonald, Merimeri Penfold and Bridget Williams, eds, *The Book of New Zealand Women/Ko Kui Ma te Kaupapa* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1991), 595-9; June Starke, “I must write a pamphlet, or I shall burst”, *Turnbull Library Record*, 19, no.1 (May 1986): 37-46; Charlotte Macdonald, ed, *Women Writing Home, 1700-1920. Female Correspondence across the British Empire, Volume 5 New Zealand* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2006), 1-95; Alison Drummond, *Married and Gone to New Zealand* (Hamilton and Auckland: Paul’s Book Arcade; London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 97-138; H. W. Tucker, *Memoir of the Life and Episcopate of George Augustus Selwyn, D.D.*, 2 vols (London: William Wells Gardner, 1879); G.H. Curteis, *Bishop Selwyn of New Zealand, and of Lichfield* (London: K. Paul, 1889); John H. Evans, *Churchman Militant. George Augustus Selwyn Bishop of New Zealand and Lichfield* (London and Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1964); Warren E. Limbrick, ed, *Bishop Selwyn in New Zealand 1841-68* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1983); Warren E. Limbrick, “Selwyn, George Augustus 1809-1878”, *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007, <<http://www.dnz.govt.nz>>, (viewed 31 March 2008); Andrew Porter, “Selwyn, George Augustus (1809-1878)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, 2004 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25066>>, (viewed 19 May 2008).

Where she put her head to rest may not have been a matter of her own choosing but it was a subject of intense interest, in her own accounting, and in the correspondence that so vitally connected the particular localities she came to inhabit.<sup>5</sup> Marriage in 1839 to George Selwyn, a rising star of conservative reform within High Church Anglicanism, took Sarah first to England's Eton and Windsor then to New Zealand's Waimate, Parnell and "Bishop's Auckland,"<sup>6</sup> on several lengthy voyages around the Western Pacific ocean (what came to be known as "Melanesia") with sojourns on Norfolk Island, three return voyages from Portsmouth to Auckland and finally to Lichfield in the heart of provincial England. The circuits and webs of empire were lived out by individuals as well as defining the imperial world.<sup>7</sup> For Sarah Selwyn these were geographies whose co-ordinates were defined by wifely obedience, bishop's mitre and union jack. Sarah's life presents a working example of the dynamics of connection by which the imperial world came to be constituted in and across diverse spaces and communities, via patronage, social and personal networks as well as systems of governance.<sup>8</sup> To follow Sarah Selwyn between these enormously disparate locations is to track the crossroads of empire and religion: to further explore the knotty problem which tied but did not bind the diffusion of Christianity to the expansion of the British Empire. Did Christian missions and church on the one hand, and British imperial authority on the other, reinforce or undermine each other? The question remains highly contested.<sup>9</sup>

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- 5 Major collections of Sarah Selwyn's correspondence are to be found in the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington (under her name and in the collections of George Augustus Selwyn), <<http://www.natlib.govt.nz>>; at the Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin, and in the John Kinder Library, St John's College, Auckland. Some of Sarah Selwyn's correspondence is included in Macdonald, ed, *Women Writing Home*.
  - 6 'Bishop's Auckland' was the name commonly used from 1844 to refer to the 500 or so hectares bought by Selwyn for the Church at Tamaki on the eastern side of the Waitemata harbour about four miles from the centre of the Auckland township. The main plot of land was sold by Ngati Paoa to the Crown in 1841. It remains the site of St John's and property of the Anglican Church of New Zealand. Allan K. Davidson, *Selwyn's Legacy. The College of St John the Evangelist Te Waimate and Auckland 1843-1992. A History* (Auckland: The College, 1993).
  - 7 Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002); Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, eds, *Moving Subjects. Gender, mobility, and intimacy in an age of global empire* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008).
  - 8 Zoë Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections, 1815-45. Patronage, the information revolution and colonial government* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005); Zoë Laidlaw, "Closing the Gap: colonial governors and unofficial communications in the 1830s", Simon J. Potter, ed, *Imperial Communication. Australia, Britain and the British Empire c.1830-50* (London: Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, 2005), 47-90.
  - 9 Elizabeth Elbourne, "Religion in the British Empire," Sarah Stockwell, ed, *The British Empire. Themes and Perspectives* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 131-156; Andrew Porter, Special Issue, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 36: 3 (Sept 2008); John Gascoigne, "Introduction: Religion and Empire, an Historiographical Perspective," *Journal of Religious*

Towards the end of her life Sarah Selwyn wrote to a younger friend recalling “the faces that were made about my dear Husbands going to New Zealand, ‘Such a man – such a waste of him! Wanted at home!’”<sup>10</sup> The shock at George’s appointment to the newly established bishopric of New Zealand in 1841 was widespread and real. For the Church of England, and especially its high church wing, to select one of its favoured sons from the highest enclave of court and social privilege to serve in the distant and evangelically-dominated CMS mission field, was unprecedented. George’s appointment, and with it, Sarah’s destiny,<sup>11</sup> emerged from mid-nineteenth century currents that briefly saw mission, church and colonization as bridgeable, if not exactly compatible, projects.<sup>12</sup> The early 1840s marked the high point of convergence between an outward-looking and mission-inspired Church of England, and a humanitarian-influenced colonial office. As Andrew Porter notes, the 1840s was a “heady

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*History*, 32, no.2 (June 2008): 159-178; Helen Betha Gardner, review of Norman Etherington, ed, *Missions and Empire*, Oxford University Press, 2005, *Journal of Pacific History*, 41, no.3 (2006): 338-9; Tony Ballantyne, “Religion, Difference, and the Limits of British Imperial History,” *Victorian Studies* (Spring 2005) 47, no.3: 427-455; Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestantism, Missionaries, and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914*, Manchester, 2004; Norman Etherington, ed, *Missions and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Norman Etherington, “Missions and Empire”, Robin W. Winks, ed, *Historiography, Oxford History of the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 303-314; Andrew Porter, “Religion and Empire: British Expansion in the Long Nineteenth Century, 1780-1914,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 20, no.3 (September 1992): 370-390.

- 10 Sarah Selwyn to Mary Medley, 11 Oct 1897, MS-Papers-3762-4/1, ATL. See also *Reminiscences*, 14: “There were those who thought it was throwing away a good man, and a great wrong.”
- 11 *Reminiscences*, 13: “George came and sat down beside me and asked me if I could make up my mind to go to New Zealand! I said I did not like it, but I hoped I should never hinder him from doing what he thought was right. He said he could only look on this as a call to go, and so it was settled.”
- 12 George Selwyn’s appointment as the first bishop to New Zealand following closely on the formal extension of British power to the territory was not a simple response of church following in the wake of governor. In early 1840s New Zealand the traditionally anti-colonisation missions (especially the CMS), radically reforming “systematic colonisers” led by Edward Gibbon Wakefield, aloof Church of England establishment and reluctantly interventionist Colonial Office found a common project. Those aims and compromises were realised first through the negotiation of the Treaty of Waitangi as a corollary to proclamation of the territory as part of the British Empire, and secondly, through the appointment of George Selwyn as first bishop. In regional terms, Selwyn’s significance extended well beyond the New Zealand territory which had been formally annexed to the British Empire in February 1840. His letters patent received from the Colonial Office, whether by accident or design, included a large part of the western Pacific. Here Selwyn was extremely active instigating the Melanesian Mission. Claudia Orange, *The Treaty of Waitangi* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin 1987); R.M. Ross, “Evolution of the Melanesian Bishopric,” *New Zealand Journal of History*, 16, no.2 (Oct 1982): 122-145.

decade,” the high tide of the evangelical-humanitarian movement’s influence on British public opinion and colonial policy. Support for the missionary movement was such that: “Even the SPG’s [Society for Propagation of the Gospel] high-churchmen now began to jump aboard the bandwagon.”<sup>13</sup> George Selwyn was the first of fifteen bishops appointed to colonial positions in the 1840s, most with the assistance of the Colonial Bishops Fund established in 1841. Selwyn, regarded as the “hero-bishop” of his generation,<sup>14</sup> epitomized that zenith of idealism and expansiveness, along with the influence of the episcopacy movement of the 1830s. As a “missionary bishop” (no longer an oxymoron but a term of the times) Selwyn and his successors were to lead rather than follow in transplanting the church to new fields of settlement.<sup>15</sup> Sarah’s story was part of the expansion of church as well as mission, and specifically high church involvement in empire recently highlighted by Howard Le Couteur.<sup>16</sup>

Sarah and George embarked on their lives as “colonials” not only with humanitarian and church-inspired missionary idealism, but also with the reforming fervour of the Oxford movement then gaining ground within Victorian church and intellectual circles. A few days following George’s consecration in the chapel at Lambeth Cathedral on 17 October 1841, he and Sarah, along with their closest supporters, Thomas Whytehead and Edward Coleridge, spent two days visiting key figures at Oxford.<sup>17</sup> New Zealand offered the hugely energetic and high-principled George Selwyn a fresh field in which revived traditions would support a spiritually powerful and independent church headed by a bishop whose authority derived from an invigorated notion of divine apostolic succession. The new church was also to be uniquely inclusive, welcoming and recognizing equally as worshippers and as clergy, English and “native New Zealanders.”<sup>18</sup> Swept along in the high tide of late 1830s “protectionism” the Selwyns envisaged a church in which racial difference was a malleable base, where souls stood equal and where social advancement was an optimistic possibility to be achieved through the unity of a common faith. Sarah

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- 13 Andrew Porter, “An Overview, 1700-1914”, Etherington, ed, *Missions and Empire*, 52.
- 14 Grant A. Phillipson, “‘The thirteenth apostle’: Bishop Selwyn and the transplantation of Anglicanism to New Zealand, 1841-1868”, (PhD thesis, University of Otago, 1992). See also Limbrick, “‘A most indefatigable man’”, Limbrick, ed, *Bishop Selwyn*.
- 15 Phillipson, “‘The thirteenth apostle’”, 13. See also Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2 vols (London: A. & C. Black, 1966).
- 16 Howard Le Couteur, “Anglican High Churchmen and the Expansion of Empire,” *Journal of Religious History*, 32, no.2 (June 2008): 193-215.
- 17 Edward Coleridge, “Visit of the Bishop of New Zealand to Oxford, October 28, 1841,” KIN 017/1, John Kinder Library, St John’s College, Auckland.
- 18 Selwyn in turn impressed, and frustrated, candidates for ordination in New Zealand by insisting that English students become fluent speakers and readers of Maori and Maori students acquire the requisite knowledge of Greek and Hebrew before admission to the priesthood. Selwyn surpassed all in his knowledge of these and several Melanesian languages.

and George's twenty-five years in New Zealand, however, were to demonstrate the fragility and ultimately, the failure, of those ideals. The spaces that Sarah came to occupy across the imperial world were those in which the 1830s-40s notions of "race" as inclusiveness, amalgamation and "civilisation" were tried and tested, and finally, abandoned. That failure was, in part, *their* failure.

By the time Sarah returned to England in the late 1860s the vision of an inclusive common community had evaporated. At the metropolitan centre harsher understandings of race justified punitive rather than protective policies towards colonial subjects, while in New Zealand the mission and church presence had been subordinated to the now numerically and politically dominant settler population and interests. If this outcome was the common fate of Christianity in what became the British settler societies, the exact timing and processes by which the secular empire came to prevail over religion deserves attention. The transition was neither uniform or uncontested. And while the evangelical aspect of this history is well known, the place of the Church, and especially the High Church, in these processes is much less so.

Sarah Selwyn played a part in supporting the practical work of the church in the new colony of New Zealand and mission field of Melanesia, and in the wider cultural work of empire. As wife of the bishop Sarah occupied a position, along with the wife of the governor, at the apex of colonial society, a superiority reinforced by her background as the daughter of the prominent judge Sir John, and Harriet Richardson.<sup>19</sup> In New Zealand, as elsewhere, gender was central in the making of colonial relations. British and protestant influence dominated the European side of the colonial encounter. The model of marriage and family was a strong thread in New Zealand's nineteenth-century history uniting the British projects of mission, church and colonization against both French Roman Catholicism and rejected models of British colonization based on convictism and coerced labour. The evangelical CMS missionaries active from 1814 were sent to their work as married couples and families. The model was one of both moral and worldly economy, designed to demonstrate the benefits of a Christian life against both heathenism and the dissolute habits of sojourning European whalers, sailors and traders. The first British Resident, James Busby (1835-40), governor William Hobson (1840-42) and bishop George Selwyn, followed in the same model: men whose governance over territory and church ran in parallel with their authority as heads of households; intimate relations also forming ties of empire.<sup>20</sup>

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19 J. M. Rigg, rev. Hugh Mooney, "Richardson, Sir John (1771-1841), judge," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, 2004 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23565>>, (viewed 19 May 2008). Sarah's mother, Harriet, died in March 1839, resulting in a postponement of Sarah and George's marriage of a few months.

20 In the particular context of 1840s New Zealand the meanings of authority, governance and sovereignty were under acute scrutiny. In negotiating the Treaty of Waitangi in February 1840 and over the months following where further signings took place of a text in two versions one



If marriage was the foundation for church and colonization, High Anglicanism was to make Sarah's "path of duty" as an Episcopal wife an isolated one.<sup>21</sup> Higher in class, younger in age than the mission wives who welcomed her to the Bay of Islands in the winter of 1842, and married to the man in whose person lay the powers bestowed by apostolic succession, Sarah Selwyn had no direct equal in New Zealand. Sarah's personal qualities were such as not to press her advantage. She is variously described by contemporaries, both the few intimates for whom she was "dear Sasa," and more numerous acquaintances, as quiet, reserved, and "very good."<sup>22</sup> These attributes were cast into stronger relief when compared with husband George. To formal position and upper class background George brought a remarkable force of person, a man universally recognized, if not always liked, for his imposing presence. In history, as in life, Sarah has lingered in his shadow. Gender not only opened the path of higher education and formal office to him, but amongst contemporaries George was widely admired for his exemplary, and rare, combination of manly spiritual and physical strength. He rowed in the Cambridge Eight in the first Oxford – Cambridge Thames boat race in 1829, taught Eton boys to swim (thereby reducing drowning fatalities) and navigated boats around the Pacific with great skill. In the words of a sailor, "to see the bishop handle a boat was almost enough to make a man a Christian."<sup>23</sup> But he was not just a muscular Christian. His deep conviction and high principles made him known as "the thirteenth apostle," and "the royal George," someone who was naturally dominant, even autocratic.<sup>24</sup> George Selwyn drew lifelong devotion and reverence from an influential circle including W. E. Gladstone and Edward Coleridge. To Henry Harper, Edmund Hobhouse, Charles Abraham, William Martin, men of learning and similar background, he was a loved leader, no less

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Maori, one English, "sovereignty" and "government" in the English version, "rangatiratanga" and "kawanatanga" in the Maori version, were not direct equivalents. Differences in understanding, and expectation, led to conflict in the north in the mid-1840s, and the longer term divergence in Maori and Pakeha (European) histories of the Treaty compact. Claudia Orange, *The Illustrated History of the Treaty of Waitangi* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2004). Claudia Orange, "Busby, James 1802-1871," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007, <<http://www.dnz.govt.nz>>, (viewed 31 March 2008); K.A. Simpson, "Hobson, William 1792-1842," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007 <<http://www.dnz.govt.nz>>, (viewed 31 March 2008); Claudia Orange, "Hobson, William (1792-1842)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/53684>>, (viewed 15 September 2008).

- 21 Patricia Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty: American missionary wives in nineteenth-century Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989).
- 22 Mary Ann Martin quoted by Starke, "'I must write a pamphlet or I shall burst'", 40.
- 23 Quoted in Limbrick, "Selwyn, George Augustus, 1809-1878".
- 24 Phillipson, "'The thirteenth apostle"; Limbrick, ed, *Bishop Selwyn*; Frances Porter, "The letters of Caroline Abraham," *Turnbull Library Record*, 19, no.1 (May 1986): 27; Davidson, *Selwyn's Legacy*, chs.1-4.

than their lodestar, his decisions giving shape to their lives. In contrast to this embodied gender identity Sarah appears in contemporary and historical narratives as “long-suffering,” careworn, having “a lonely time,” “a hard lot,” “delicate and anxious.”<sup>25</sup> She is the frail and vulnerable figure alongside George’s legendary vigour and practicality. He was the skilled navigator, she the poor sailor.<sup>26</sup>

Eton, with its comfortable drawing rooms, stone walls and conscious invocation of tradition was Sarah’s last place of residence before embarking for New Zealand. Her married life existed within its walls, her first child William was born here (1840), and it was at Eton that thirty-one-year-old Sarah lived out the momentous year 1841: the death of her father in March, the infant steps of young Willie’s first year, the appointment and consecration of her husband George as bishop (October) and the consequent frenetic round of preparation and packing for departure for New Zealand (leaving Eton in early December, and Portsmouth on 26 December). While much of Sarah’s life was simply packed up to travel: furniture, books, clothing, and the like, recruiting funds and fellow workers for what was to be the foundation of a whole church enterprise remained the most pressing tasks. The “Eton circle,” as Sarah termed it, provided much of both, at this point, and throughout their life in New Zealand. W. E. Gladstone later described George Selwyn’s attachment to Eton, as “a love surpassing even the love of Etonians.”<sup>27</sup> Sarah’s was of equal measure.<sup>28</sup> Edward Coleridge, assistant master at Eton, served as one of Sarah’s sustaining correspondents and greatest supporters of their work in New Zealand.<sup>29</sup> It was Coleridge who made the final words of farewell flung across the water as their ship left Plymouth harbour: “God bless you God bless you ‘Floreat Ecclesia’ ‘Floreat Etona.’”<sup>30</sup>

For his last major service before leaving England, at Exeter Cathedral on 13 December 1841, Selwyn chose as his text: Psalm 137, verse 4: “How shall

25 Davidson, *Selwyn’s Legacy*, 17; Limbrick, “Selwyn, George Augustus, 1809-1878”; Vicesimus Lush quoted by Davidson, *Selwyn’s Legacy*, 17; Limbrick, “‘A most indefatigable man’”, Limbrick, ed, *Bishop Selwyn*, 14. To Evans, writing in 1964, Sarah was “‘the self-effacing Victorian wife of a vigorous and masterful husband’ who played a ‘devoted and heroic part in his career’”, Evans, *Churchman Militant*, 186.

26 Evans, *Churchman Militant*, 194.

27 W.E. Gladstone, “The Late Bishop Selwyn,” *The Times*, 18 April 1878, 9f.

28 *Reminiscences*, 12: “I was very happy in this Eton and Windsor life.”

29 Limbrick, “‘A most indefatigable man’”, Limbrick, ed, *Bishop Selwyn*, 14; Evans, *Churchman Militant*; Davidson, *Selwyn’s Legacy*. See Coleridge’s lengthy account of George Selwyn’s consecration, farewell dinner and meeting at Eton and Windsor and visit to Oxford late 1841, Edward Coleridge, “Account of Selwyn’s consecration and a visit to Oxford 1841,” KIN 017/1, John Kinder Library, St John’s College, Auckland. For the testimonial and gift of books from his Eton colleagues presented to George Selwyn on the eve of his departure, E. C. Hawtreay to George Selwyn, 6 October 1841, qMS-1774, ATL.

30 Tucker, *The Life and Episcopate of G. A. Selwyn* vol.1, 92.

we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" Expounding on the meaning of "we" in the text he pointed to those remaining in England as much as to his own party about to embark for "foreign shores." Their task, he suggested, was also to learn what this song might be — not just in prayers, but in all the practical and political support the new church in New Zealand would need. The "we" also had a conjugal and familial meaning. George accepted his appointment as a married man with a young child. Sarah was part of his life and work. This was no mere recital of marital duty. George had taken the New Zealand post in the wake of his elder brother's acceding to the opposition of his wife and father-in-law and declining it. To George this was a source of "astonishment and shame."<sup>31</sup> His understanding of ecclesiastical and patriarchal authority admitted "no limit to the duty of obedience either of a Priest to the Church, or of a wife to her husband."<sup>32</sup> Neither of Sarah's parents were alive to voice dissent even if they had been emboldened to challenge George's conviction. If George assumed Sarah's part through the principle of obedience, others took the trouble to remind him of her interests and qualities (all the more to be noted given the disappointingly small final party embarking for New Zealand). In his valedictory letter of 30 November 1841 Archbishop Howley wrote to George Selwyn:

Among the blessings which will lighten your labours there is one which I mention, not for the purpose of increasing your sense of its value, which you know from experience, but in order to gratify my own feelings in regard to the amiable daughter of the late excellent Judge Richardson, and as it appears to Mrs. Howley and myself, the inheritress of his estimable qualities. The influence of Mrs. Selwyn's kindness and piety will, I am persuaded, not only promote the comfort and happiness of her domestic circle, but will be extensively useful in bettering the condition and improving the morals of all who come within its sphere.<sup>33</sup>

The greeting called to Sarah on her arrival at the Bay of Islands of "Mata Pihopa" not only marked paternal relationships between European and Maori but was also recognition, fully apparent to Maori as well as local missionaries and other Europeans, that the Selwyns brought a new layer of status into the community. Maori society, like mid-nineteenth century Victorian society, was highly attuned to rank and status. If Bishop Selwyn was addressed by missionary

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31 Limbrick, "'A most indefatigable man'", Limbrick, ed, *Bishop Selwyn*, 15.

32 Ibid.

33 Tucker, *The Life and Episcopate of G. A. Selwyn*, vol.1, 86. See also George's acknowledgement of Archbishop's Howley letter, which concludes with the following passage: "Your Grace's recollection of Sir John Richardson's character is most true. He wd. have been the first to rejoice in resigning his Daughter to the Service of His Redeemer & at the bidding of His church. I thank God that his spirit dwells also in her," George Selwyn to Archbishop Howley, 7 Dec 1841, qMS-1774, ATL.

colleagues as “His Lordship” and commanded new levels of deference, then Sarah was accorded equivalent respect through appellation as “Mata Pihopa” (and was expected to reciprocate in her acknowledgement of the status of rangatira – tribal leaders, male and female).<sup>34</sup> George and Sarah Selwyn, it was hoped, would provide a “head” for the body of the church in the colony.<sup>35</sup> A local bishop would recognize the existence and achievement of the substantial indigenous Christian population, the product of three decades hard won missionary endeavour, while also providing the crucial power of ordination to promote “native” teachers as well as lay missionaries.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, a bishop signaled to the tiny nuclei of “systematic colonies” set in motion by the New Zealand Company, that colonization would proceed within reassuring structures of social, educational and spiritual order. Sarah brought a particular novelty to northern New Zealand as a bishop’s spouse – an as yet unseen variation on European religious offices. The only other bishop resident in the Bay at the time was the celibate French Roman Catholic, Bishop Jean-Baptiste Pompallier. Religious pluralism was only one of a number of layers to the history of interaction at the Bay of Islands.<sup>37</sup>

By the time of Sarah’s arrival, sixty or so years of interaction between Maori and newcomers at the Bay of Islands had resulted in a well established trading and cultural entrepôt, revolving around two rival centres. On one side of the main anchorage was Paihia with its neat buildings erected by the CMS, on the other the straggle of rougher structures along the Kororareka (later

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34 Commenting on the use of the appellation “Mata Pihopa” George Selwyn noted in a letter to his sister that it is “a title of respect with them [Maori], though not conveying a similar idea, when translated literally into English. They all say that her ‘atawai’ (grace) is great,” George Selwyn to Fanny Selwyn, 4 July 1843, qMS-1775, 73, ATL. Sarah also commented on how she was “immediately” called “Mata Pihopa”, Sarah Selwyn to Fanny Selwyn, 6 July 1842, qMS-1777, 490, ATL. While the Maori referred to the CMS and WMS missionaries simply by the transliteration “mihinare”, the word used to refer to the Roman Catholics missionaries, and converts to Roman Catholicism “pikopo” was derived directly from Pompallier’s position as a bishop, taken from the Latin word for bishop episcopus, Jessie Munro, *The Story of Suzanne Aubert* (Wellington and Auckland: Bridget Williams Books/Auckland University Press, 1996), 12. Sarah Selwyn to Mary Coleridge, 24 June 1842, qMS-1777, 481, ATL.

35 Limbrick, “Transformation and tradition: Bishop Selwyn and Anglican foundations,” quoting Richard Davis, Limbrick, ed, *Bishop Selwyn*, 29.

36 Davidson, *Selwyn’s Legacy*, 16; Alan Lester, “Humanitarians and White Settlers in the Nineteenth Century,” Etherington, ed, *Missions and Empire*.

37 Judith Binney, ed. and intro, *Te Kikeri 1770-1850. The Meeting Pool* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2007); E.R. Simmons, “Pompallier, Jean Baptiste Francois 1801-1871,” *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007, <<http://www.dnz.gov.nz>>, (viewed 16 May 2008). Pompallier’s career as a colonial bishop stands in close parallel to George Selwyn’s. Eight years older than Selwyn, Pompallier arrived in New Zealand in January 1838, returning to France in 1868, and dying in 1871, aged 70. Pompallier’s achievements were also mixed with failures, and he too struggled to unite in the one church Maori converts, ordinands and settlers who brought competing national traditions and practices of Catholicism.

known as Russell) beachfront serving the trading, drinking and shore pursuits of Pacific sailors and whalers. A key meeting ground for the major iwi (tribes) of the northern region, and a natural waterway for Maori as well as European shipping, the Bay was the only place where there was any semblance of concentrated European settlement. Most of the 100,000 or so Maori inhabitants of New Zealand were also to be found in the northern coastal districts of Te Ika a Maui (the North Island), in which the Bay of Islands was one of the major centres of population. Approximately one half of the estimated 2,000 Europeans living in New Zealand in 1840 were located here with tiny pockets scattered elsewhere, largely around the timber and flax trading ports of the northern coasts, and the whaling and sealing shores of the central Cook Strait and southern Otago and Foveaux Straits. Aotearoa/New Zealand in 1840 was still very much a Maori world.<sup>38</sup> Missionaries and missionary families comprised perhaps a third of all Europeans in New Zealand in 1840, the initial CMS groups planted by Samuel Marsden from New South Wales in 1814 added to by larger influxes in the mid 1820s and 1830s, when they were joined (in some rivalry) by representatives of the Wesleyan Missionary Society<sup>39</sup> and a little later by the Marist party led by Bishop Pompallier from Lyons. The pattern of settlement and balance between numbers of Maori and European was to change quickly from the mid-1840s. The New Zealand Company as a vehicle for “systematic colonisation” and speculative gain had ships at sea by late 1839 sending parties of emigrants to settlements in Wellington/Port Nicholson at the southern most tip of the North Island, and soon after, to New Plymouth in Taranaki and Nelson. These were emigrants largely drawn from skilled working and lower middle class backgrounds with small numbers of investing capitalists who had also chosen the risk of becoming colonists.

Sarah’s first years in New Zealand were spent at Waimate, where the bishop’s party was literally transplanted into the CMS structure.<sup>40</sup> Taking up residence at the most substantial home built by the mission (and thereby conveniently relieving the CMS of what had proved an expensive asset) rather than choosing to settle in any of the New Zealand Company settlements, signaled the priority accorded to the Maori church.<sup>41</sup> But it was left to Sarah and the remaining party from the *Tomatin* to establish an episcopal centre — a strong

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38 Binney, Bassett and Olssen, *The People and the Land*.

39 J.M.R. Owens, *Prophets in the Wilderness: the Wesleyan mission to New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1974).

40 With Sarah and George on the *Tomatin* were 2 chaplains, 2 ordained missionaries sent by the CMS, 1 SPG clergyman, 3 students reading for holy orders, a teacher, 2 scholars and 6 household servants, plus George Rupai, the young Maori man returning from England.

41 Frances Porter, ed, *Historic Buildings of New Zealand: North Island* (Auckland: Cassell, 1979). The building is now known as Te Waimate Mission House, and is the property of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust/Pouhere Taonga, [www.historic.org.nz/register](http://www.historic.org.nz/register).

diocesan community being at the heart of George Selwyn's vision for the church in New Zealand.<sup>42</sup> Within a fortnight of Sarah's arrival in New Zealand George departed on what would be a six-month long Visitation of his new diocese, traveling over 2000 miles by schooner, canoe and foot. George anticipated that while his duties would require him to be often absent traveling around his district, Sarah would anchor his work as his representative in situ. The Selwyns' closest confidante and chaplain Reverend Thomas Whytehead was to be "a stationary man" "for Sarah" while the second chaplain would be his "travelling man." Whytehead's serious illness made for a change of plans. Sarah was left to nurse Whytehead through the final stages of tuberculosis (he died in March 1843), while setting up the establishment with the assistance of the mercurial young Reverend William Cotton.

With priority on education it was a collegial rather than domestic model over which Sarah came to preside. St John's College, Waimate, named after George's Cambridge college, drew its structure from Eton but its residents from much more diverse backgrounds than its English original. Alongside the English students and ordination candidates, decked in proper college caps and gowns, were children of the mission families seeking education, Maori adults and children, and other members of the bishop's party also expecting continued instruction. Students of all kinds were expected to live in residence and to take their meals in a common dining hall.<sup>43</sup> As in the English colleges, there was a high table and common tables. In marked contrast, however, at Waimate women and men took their places in the dining hall, Maori alongside Pakeha, students alongside teachers.<sup>44</sup> Sarah considered it "a duty to help George's young staff in homey ways lest their influence should be lowered. So we assembled in evening attire at our tea without milk and our bread without butter and made ourselves agreeable according to our lights and behaved 'pretty' as the nurses used to say."<sup>45</sup> The setting might have been novel but the habits of the high table were there to serve the successful transfer of culture along with

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42 His 1838 pamphlet *Are cathedral institutions useless* set out a strong argument in support of the cathedral's role at the centre of the church's work, particularly in education. This was consistent with his conviction as to the importance of Episcopal vitality and authority.

43 Sarah Selwyn to her cousin Caroline Palmer, 5 January 1843, MS-Papers-7188-05, ATL.

44 Twenty-two year old Robert Cecil, the 3rd marquess of Salisbury and former pupil of Charles Abraham's from Eton (and later conservative secretary of state for India and prime minister), when visiting St John's College, Auckland, in July 1852, remarked with surprise that "the ladies" also dined in the College Hall. "Journal of a visit to Auckland," July 1852, ATL. Paul Smith, "Cecil, Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne -, third Marquess of Salisbury (1830-1903)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, 2004 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32339>>, (viewed 23 January 2009). Selwyn also noted the high quotient of "married" at his colonial St John's college of its Cambridge models, George Selwyn to Fanny Selwyn, 4 July 1843. qMS-1775, 72, ATL. See Davidson, *Selwyn's Legacy*.

45 *Reminiscences*, 39.

church.<sup>46</sup> “Homey ways” existed in contrast to “colonial ways,” connoting not so much a bourgeois domesticity but an upper class decorum.<sup>47</sup> The homosocial world of Eton and Cambridge was modified at Waimate to incorporate married couples and children. Learning how to be Christian required learning how to behave as men and women. The higher standards that had been set by the bishop and Sarah’s arrival were indicated also in the rules set down for admission of adult Maori men to the School for Native Teachers. No teacher was admitted into the first class of the school “who will not pledge himself to adopt English habits, to divide his house into rooms, to abstain from smoking, to take care of his wife and children, and attend to their improvement, to wear English clothes constantly; and above all to be regular in his attendance at Church and School.” Those admitted to the third class were candidates who wished “to learn English, but have not yet made up their minds to give up native habits.”<sup>48</sup>

The aspirations might have been high but Sarah was sorely aware of the gap between the ancient, tradition-filled stone buildings of college and church life she had left behind at Eton and Windsor and those she was now occupying at Waimate. Stone and glass had been exchanged for wood and canvas. Writing to her cousin Caroline (Cary) Palmer, Sarah described the rooms of the house as “above, about and underneath, is nothing but kauri wood, so that... it is very like being inside a box.”<sup>49</sup> In a later letter she commented ironically on the

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46 Davidson, *Selwyn’s Legacy*, 37.

47 Such standards were hard to maintain, not least because of the very modest material resources available. Sarah lived most of her New Zealand life in circumstances that her English equivalents would have regarded as extreme frugality, even hardship. Robert Cecil, the former Eton pupil visiting in 1852 and Eliza Blackburn in 1859, were shocked at the “very plain fare” served at the Selwyns’ table and even more so when Sarah and the Bishop proceeded to clear the dishes from the table themselves at the end of the meal. Robert Cecil, “Journal of a visit to Auckland,” qMS-0412, ATL; Eliza Blackburn to her sisters, 26 Dec 1859, KIN 100, John Kinder Library, St John’s College, Auckland.

48 Quoted by Davidson, *Selwyn’s Legacy*, 35.

49 Sarah Selwyn to her cousin Caroline Palmer, 5 January 1843, MS-Papers-7188-05, ATL. Caroline Palmer (1809-77), a gifted artist, married Charles Abraham in January 1850, joining Sarah and George Selwyn in New Zealand in August of that year. Caroline and Charles Abraham lived first at St John’s College in Auckland, before Charles was appointed first bishop of Wellington. The Abrahams returned to England in 1870 where Charles became co-adjutor to George Selwyn at Lichfield. Frances Porter, “The letters of Caroline Abraham,” *Turnbull Library Record* (1986), 27-36; Frances Porter, “Caroline Abraham 1809-1877,” 19, no. 1, Macdonald et al, eds, *The Book of New Zealand Women*, 1-2; Anne Kirker, “Abraham, Caroline Harriet 1809?-1877,” *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007, <<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>>, (viewed 15 March 2008); Macdonald, *Women Writing Home*; Allan K. Davidson, “Abraham, Charles John 1814-1903,” *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007, <<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>>, (viewed 15 March 2008); W. G. D. Fletcher, “Abraham, Charles John (1814-1903),” rev. H. C. G. Matthew, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, 2004 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30325>>, (viewed 5 September 2008).

bishop's palace to which English friends referred, being the "large wooden box in which we dwell."<sup>50</sup> She counted it a rare surprise and treat a few years later to sleep in a room with papered walls.<sup>51</sup> Only at the Stone Store, Kerikeri, where the Bishop's library was housed from mid-1842 till late 1844 did Sarah feel a sense of ease in a colonial interior. She had a rare chance to enjoy it when waiting for favourable winds and tides before sailing to Auckland in October 1843. "The library was a great resource" she told Cary, the "room has just been lined and to sit within the massive stone walls surrounded by large grave folios was most pleasant and anti-colonial."<sup>52</sup>

After the first few months at Waimate improvising with very little, the Selwyns' possessions were hauled from where they had lain in storage at the last navigable waterway up the twenty or so kilometres inland to Waimate. Included was the classic marker of female presence in the empire, the piano. Although "banged about" in the *Tomatin* and then carried by wagon over very uneven ground in a "a nest of fern to soften its fate"<sup>53</sup> its arrival brought a little more semblance of the material substance of an Episcopal home and college. For all that Sarah welcomed the normality that proceeded from being reunified with her possessions, the sight of her Eton furniture in the house at Waimate was unnerving rather than reassuring. "The way in which our old Eton furniture sits with our present room is curious" she wrote to her cousin. Unusually, she seemed stuck for words. In the midst of the page she stopped to draw a sketch. It is of the room in which she is writing. The anomaly of objects from the old world placed in the unfamiliar and crude setting of the new, provoked ambivalence. Her Eton furniture she describes around the room, noting its strangeness. Even more at odds is the figure in the middle of the room, seated at the table: "my place" her note on the sketch indicates.<sup>54</sup> Furniture out of place, herself out of place. Letters were crucial links between the places Sarah occupied in the past of her former life in England and her present in New Zealand. But they were not always sufficient to salve the strain between the two. The long intervals between dispatch and receipt of a reply, and uncertainty as to whether letters would even reach their destination, made correspondence both a fragile but treasured link. Letters between New Zealand and England in the 1840s and 50s could take from three to six months in each direction requiring patience for

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50 Sarah Selwyn to her cousin Caroline Palmer, 3 July 1843, MS-Papers-7188-05, ATL.

51 *Reminiscences*, 24.

52 Sarah Selwyn to her cousin Caroline Palmer, 23 October 1843, MS-Papers-7188-05, ATL. See also Gavin McLean, "The Kerikeri Stone Store. A backwater white elephant," Binney, ed, *Te Kerikeri*, 99-104.

53 Sarah Selwyn to her cousin Caroline Palmer, 5 January 1843, MS-Papers-7188-05, ATL.

54 Sarah Selwyn to her cousin Caroline Palmer, 5 January 1843, MS-Papers-7188-05, ATL.



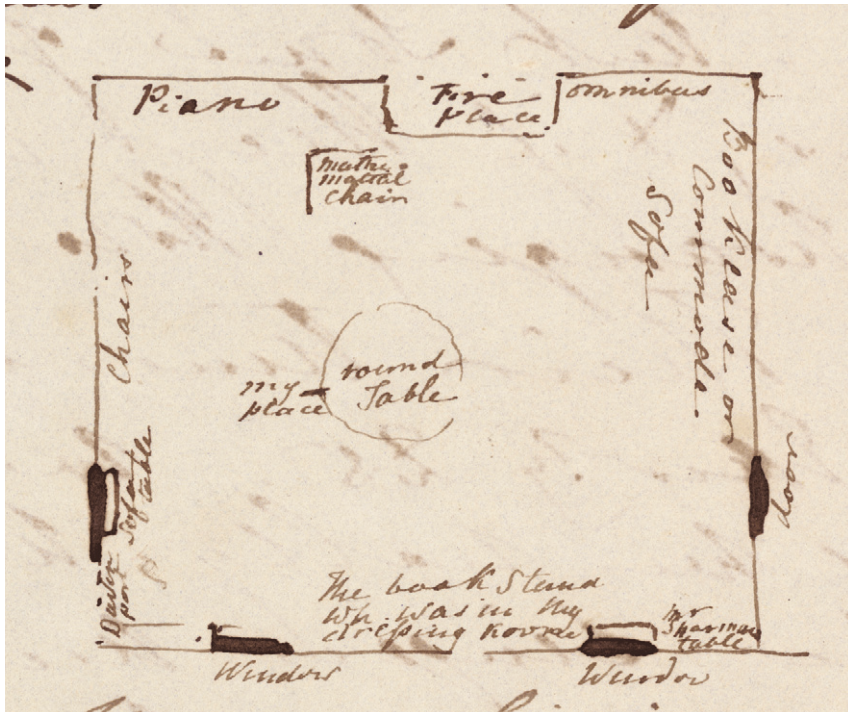


Figure 1

*Eton furniture in the wooden Waimate house, New Zealand sketched by Sarah Selwyn in her letter to cousin Caroline Palmer, 5 January 1843, MS-Papers-7188-05, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington*

response.<sup>55</sup> Colonial space did not just invert the usual order but mixed things up in a way Sarah could not yet describe. It was, at very least, unsettling. For several months in mid-1843 Sarah suffered a major collapse in health, describing it as resulting from “extra strain upon my nerves.”<sup>56</sup> In the quiet home of Reverend and Mrs Burrows at Paihia she was able to rest away from the constant presence of people and noise of the bustling community at Waimate. For all the concern, Sarah’s collapse in health was much less severe than that of

55 Charlotte Macdonald, “Intimacy of the envelope: fiction, commerce, and empire in the correspondence of friends Mary Taylor and Charlotte Brontë, c.1845-55,” Ballantyne and Burton, eds, *Moving Subjects*, 89-109; Frances Porter and Charlotte Macdonald, “My Hand Will Write What My Heart Dictates”: *the unsettled lives of women in nineteenth century New Zealand as revealed to sisters, family and friends* (Wellington and Auckland: Bridget Williams Books/Auckland University Press, 1996).

56 Sarah Selwyn to her cousin Caroline Palmer, 3 July 1843, MS-Papers-7188-05, ATL.

Reverend Dudley who lost his reason altogether for several months after landing in New Zealand.<sup>57</sup>

The Selwyns' shift from Waimate to Auckland at the end of 1844 did not signal any deflection from George's vision of a single church in which Christians, both Maori and European, would combine for worship and education. His ambition for a composite institution combining grammar school education along with preparation of those who would go on to ordination was one which absorbed much of his attention and resources in the following eight years. The community which formed at St John's reflected that vision. Buildings in stone were George Selwyn's preference for the permanent St John's College which took shape from 1845 at what became known as "Bishop's Auckland," a few miles distance from the township of Auckland, now the colony's capital. Sarah's role as the "placeholder" for the bishop continued undimmed as George Selwyn's absences conducting work throughout his extensive diocese were longer than his times spent "at home." Jane Williams, the long-serving CMS member who had been in New Zealand since the 1820s, and who had one son attending the College and her husband one of Selwyn's principal clergy, was relieved to hear Sarah Selwyn was in residence in June 1846. "Mrs S.," she told her sister-in-law Catherine Heathcote, "is quite a stay to the establishment in his Lordship's absence, which makes me rejoice to find she is once more among them."<sup>58</sup>

As the "stay" to George's itineracy, Sarah maintained an Episcopal presence in Auckland. At St John's it was her authority that was required for use of the college schooner, and her responsibility to conduct the weekly audit of supplies. It was no jest that Governor George Grey referred to her as the "deputy bishop."<sup>59</sup> The community at St John's included Maori men training for the ministry, notably Rota Waitoa and Henare Taratoa, along with the groups of young Melanesian men George brought to Auckland each summer

57 Sarah Selwyn to Caroline Palmer, 5 January 1843, MS-Papers-7188-05, ATL. Rev Robert and Mrs Burrows arrived in the Bay of Islands in March 1840. Both their children died soon after and Rev Burrows suffered poor health as a consumptive. They were regarded as bearing their sorrows nobly. Rev William Dudley, a graduate of Queens College, Cambridge, and his wife Elizabeth, were part of the Selwyn party on the *Tomatin*. He suffered a severe mental breakdown in his first year in New Zealand, attributed to sunstroke and poor nerves, but recovered.

58 Frances Porter, ed, *The Turanga Journals 1840-1850. Letters and Journals of William and Jane Williams Missionaries to Poverty Bay* (Wellington: Price Milburn for Victoria University Press, 1974), 388. Frances Porter, "Williams, Jane 1801?-1896," "Williams, William 1800-1878," Sarah Marianne Williams, "Williams, Marianne 1793-1879," Robin Fisher, "Williams, Henry 1792-1867," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007 <<http://www.dnz.govt.nz>>, (viewed 31 March 2008).

59 Sarah Selwyn to Mrs Coleridge, 27 May 1850, quoted in Starke, "'I must write a pamphlet or I shall burst'", 43.

from 1847.<sup>60</sup> To Rota Waitoa and Henare Taratoa Sarah was “Mata Pihopa” in a more personal way. As residents at St John’s Sarah spent more time with the College students than did George. To the Maori and Melanesian students as much as to the young European students at the college, Sarah was the female head of household — an extension of George’s authority as leader and teacher — but one encountered in the intimate daily rounds of meals, child rearing, prayers, house and farm work. Her role as “parent” was enacted in her Christian, as well cultural behavior and demeanour, a model of pious, civilized femininity.<sup>61</sup>

As part of the head of the church in New Zealand and centre of a diocese extending throughout New Zealand and further north and west into a huge area of the Pacific, it was also Sarah’s duty to offer hospitality to a wide range of

60 Ngahuia Dixon, “Taratoa, Henare Wiremu, ?-1864,” *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007, <<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>>, (viewed 18 May 2008); G.J. Dempsey, “Waitoa, Rota ?-1866,” *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007 <<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>>, (viewed 18 May 2008). Taratoa was of high ranking descent in the Ngai Te Rangi iwi (tribe) of the Tauranga district. He was taught and baptized by CMS missionary Henry Williams, whose names he took at baptism. While a lay reader and teacher at Otaki he wrote *He Pukapuka Whiha Tenei Hei Ako Ma Nga Tangata*, a textbook setting out exercises in money exchange, commerce, wages, taxes, etc, which was published in 1858. Waitoa’s background is less well known but he had links to Ngati Raukawa, Ngati Maru and Te Arawa iwi (tribes). He was an early convert of the CMS missionary Octavius Hadfield, taking the name Rota (Lot) at the time of his baptism in October 1841. Waitoa volunteered to accompany Selwyn to Auckland when they first met at Kapiti Island in November 1842. The association lasted for the rest of Waitoa’s life.

61 A parallel institution for training selected young Maori women to leadership in the New Zealand church was Mrs Kissling’s school, located a few miles away at Taurarua. Te Rina Hinehuka, who married Rota Waitoa and Emily Te Rua who married Henare Taratoa in 1850, were members of a similarly small elite of young Maori women, students at Mrs. Kissling’s School nearby in Auckland, trained for leadership in the Maori church. Joan C. Stanley, “Kissling, Margaret 1808-1891,” *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007 <<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>>, (viewed 30 September 2008).

62 Davidson, *Selwyn’s Legacy*, 57. While Sarah performed these duties with grace and willingness, she was perceived by European contemporaries as reserved, and even a figure of some awe. Eliza Blackburn, arriving with her husband Samuel, to take up the position as principal at St John’s College in 1859, told her sisters she “liked Mrs S better than I had expected. She is much more hearty & cordial in manner & less reserved than I had been told she is generally found at first.” Eliza Blackburn to her Sisters, 26 Dec 1859, KIN 100, John Kinder Library, St John’s College, Auckland. To Charlotte Godley who came to New Zealand as wife to Robert Godley, leader of the class and church based Canterbury settlement in 1851, meeting Sarah Selwyn in the raw township of Christchurch, the bishop’s wife appeared “tall and thin... [with] very dark, but small, eyes” but “has quite a faded look... she now looks worn with anxiety, and has quite a painful expression of face... You cannot be with her without seeing she is perfectly good and charming, and she has quite a lively manner with children; but in general it seems rather an effort to her to mix in society. You feel afraid to speak to her, lest she should have the trouble of answering. I can see her now, as she sat in the evening, at tea, and afterwards in the corner of the sofa, with a piece of paper over her side of the lamp for a shade, and looking as if she would fall asleep, if it were not for some great pain.”, Drummond, ed, *Married and gone to New Zealand*, 99.

visitors.<sup>62</sup> In September 1846 a large contingent of Williamses, the leaders of the CMS mission community, gathered at St John's to celebrate the wedding of Samuel and Mary Williams.<sup>63</sup> Sarah played a leading role in making the occasion. Four years later it was Sarah Selwyn to whom Lieutenant-Governor Edward Eyre turned in his star crossed courtship of Ada Ormond.<sup>64</sup> With her assistance, and hospitality over several weeks extended to both Eyre and Miss Ormond, misunderstandings were finally overcome. George performed their wedding on 3 April 1850 in St John's Chapel in a joint ceremony at which Henare Taratoa and Emily Te Rua were also married.<sup>65</sup> The wedding breakfast was held in the dining hall at St John's, George Selwyn sitting at one end of the table with Edward and Ada, while Sarah sat at the other with Henare and Emily, the college choir of Maori and settler boys singing for the 150 guests. For the Williams, and later Eyre/Ormond and Taratoa/Te Rua weddings, Sarah was acting as "Mata Pihopa," her ladyship (to George's lordship) — head of the church, and as a leading member of the small but distinctly layered colonial society. Governor and Bishop signed as witnesses to both marriages, the event attracting notice in the local press as a high point of the season's social calendar. The seating plan at the joint wedding breakfast reflected the Selwyns' vision for a civilized, just, Christian community — an inclusive yet ordered set of balanced hierarchies: church and state, male and female, Maori and European. All had a place at the table. Bringing couples together for marriage was not simply a rite of passage. Sarah and George's efforts on these occasions testified to a conviction as to the centrality of marriage in the Christian life. There was ample evidence around them as to the necessity, and the fragility, of marriage in colonial settings. George Grey's return to Auckland in 1861 for his second term as governor without his wife Eliza, to whom he had become estranged following an alleged affair, was only to become the most prominent instance.<sup>66</sup>

63 See Jane Williams' account, Porter, ed, *The Turanga Journals*, 392-3.

64 Geoffrey Dutton, *Edward John Eyre. The Hero as Murderer* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 185-8; Julie Evans, *Edward Eyre, Race and Colonial Governance* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2005), 68; Gad Heuman, "Eyre, Edward John (1815-1901)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33060>>, (viewed 18 August 2005).

65 Ngahua Dixon, "Taratoa, Henare Wiremu, ?-1864," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007, <<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>>, (viewed 18 May 2008); "Memorial window to Henare Taratoa," *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 36, no.144 (1927): 401.

66 Nancy Swarbrick, "Eliza Grey 1822-1898," Macdonald et al, eds *The Book of New Zealand Women*, 257-260; Keith Sinclair, "Grey, George 1812-1898," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007 <<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>>, (viewed 31 March 2008). For the Selwyn circle's view of the collapse of the Greys' marriage see Caroline Abraham to Sophia Marriott, 1 Dec 1860 and 9 May 1862, Macdonald, ed, *Women Writing Home*, 209-10, 219. See also Elizabeth Fairburn and William Colenso, Patricia Sargison, "Elizabeth Colenso, 1821-1904." Macdonald et al, eds *The Book of New Zealand Women*, 145-9; Porter and Macdonald, "My Hand Will Write What My Heart Dictates," 296-302. The Selwyns were more directly involved in the Colensos' ultimately disastrous marriage.

While George's ambitions for St John's College were considerable (as were the funds raised by Edward Coleridge amongst the old Eton circle for the project) after a decade's work, they lay in figurative if not literal ashes. Doomed in part by over-reach, the College was also resented by settler parents who balked at seeing their sons educated alongside Maori. The final and fatal blow came with the revelation of homosexuality amongst some of the European residents at the end of 1852.<sup>67</sup> The college community was dispersed. Locating the College a few miles distant from the main Auckland township had been designed to remove the distractions of secular port life, but isolation had presented its own temptations.

Even before this final calamity in late 1852, George's buildings at St John's had provoked controversy confirming suspicions which had earlier swirled about his and his party's High Church and Tractarian tendencies.<sup>68</sup> Stone walls and steep roofs signaled Puseyism in the eyes of evangelical missionaries and low church laity. Even Constantine Dillon, a well connected Nelson colonist, regarded Selwyn's massively ambitious college project at St John's as nothing but "popish monkey."<sup>69</sup> But it was Sarah Selwyn who had first attracted criticism on this score. Observed by the CMS's Richard Taylor wearing a large gold cross suspended from her waist, she was reproved. She removed it at the time, but was seen wearing it again later.<sup>70</sup> The missionaries were disdainful of the "fast days" kept by the bishop's party at Waimate in the early years and even more so by the attempt to introduce handsome silver candlesticks into church services. Some of the offending candlesticks came from a farewell gift of plate presented by the Windsor congregation. While they may have failed to impress the CMS, Sarah noted that Maori worshippers had quite a different reaction – not to the ritual spectacle of the objects, but rather, their associations: "the interest that the natives took in it when they knew that it came from the Bishop's former congregation was very great."<sup>71</sup> A font sent from England for the St

67 Davidson, *Selwyn's Legacy*, ch.3; K. N. Booth, "The founding of St John's College," Limbrick, ed, *Bishop Selwyn*.

68 Edward Coleridge, "Visit of the Bishop of New Zealand to Oxford 28 October 1841," KIN 017/1, John Kinder Library, St John's College, Auckland; Davidson, *Selwyn's Legacy*, 10. For a vivid insight into CMS perceptions of the Selwyns' liturgical and church leanings see Porter, ed, *The Turanga Journals*.

69 Constantine Dillon and Fanny Dillon to Lady Dillon, 17 April 1849, C. A. Sharp, ed, *Letters of Constantine Dillon* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1954), 89. See also Robert Cecil's report of the views of "the utilitarian shopkeepers of Auckland" on what they decried as "gall & wormwood" – "the Bishop's roofs", the sharp pitched roofs of the College, built according to the recommended 60 degree angle of the reforming Camden Society but to most lay colonists' eyes "a needless waste of material & labour," Robert Cecil, "Journal of a visit to Auckland," qMS-0412, ATL, 195.

70 J. M. R. Owens, *The Mediator: a life of Richard Taylor 1805-1873* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004), 69-70, 99, 114.

71 Sarah Selwyn to her cousin Caroline Palmer, 5 January 1843, MS-Papers-7188-05, ATL.

John's chapel inscribed with Maori words "excited ...wonder" and provoked the question "if people talked Maori in London."<sup>72</sup> Objects traveled easily between places in the empire even if their meanings took on local forms. To Maori the candlesticks had a genealogy, conveying a sense of the bishop and Sarah's lineage and prestige. To Sarah the familiar forms of her Eton furniture in unfamiliar Waimate spoke of her own disjuncture, the meaning had been mislaid in transit.

Even if the fate of St John's had been different, Sarah and George's sons William (born Eton 1840) and John (born Waimate May 1844) were destined for schooling at Eton. The difficult conundrum of where and by whom children of missionaries should be educated was not a question for Sarah and George. At the age of seven years, Willie was sent to England in the care of the captain of the *Dido* to begin his Eton years. John followed, aged ten. The strong bond between the Selwyns and Eton College, forged through family, class, affiliation, friendship and fund raising, was not broken by colonial service. Children connected disparate localities Sarah inhabited while parenthood was also a shared source of joy and sorrow in the mixed community she lived within in New Zealand. Both Sarah and Te Rina Hinehuka, Rota Waitoa's wife,<sup>73</sup> were pregnant through 1850, giving birth within a fortnight of each other in September (both daughters). The joy of the newborn later turned to tragedy when Rota and Te Rina's baby died of fever at the end of January, just four months old. Within a month Sarah's own daughter, Margaret, her precious fourth child (a third had been still born) and only daughter, also succumbed to fever and died at just five months. In George's absence (he had only seen his daughter for the first twelve days of her life), it was Caroline and Charles Abraham and the Waitoas with whom Sarah sought comfort.<sup>74</sup>

In 1854-5 Sarah and George Selwyn traveled briefly back to England. Funding, men for the church and support for a bishopric in Melanesia were what

72 Robert Cecil, "Journal of a visit to Auckland," ATL qMS-0412, 195.

73 They were married at St John's on 10 August 1848. Te Rina Hinehuka of Ngati Porou, was a pupil at Mrs Kissling's school for Maori girls and women in Auckland, a parallel institution to St John's, designed to educate young Maori women to positions as leaders in the church, G.J. Dempsey, "Waitoa, Rota ?-1866," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007 <<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>>, (viewed 18 May 2008); Joan C. Stanley, "Kissling, Margaret 1808-1891," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007 <<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>>, (viewed 30 September 2008). Porter and Macdonald, "*My Hand Will Write What My Heart Dictates*," chs. 7 and 10.

74 Caroline Abraham to Mrs Marriott, 25 February 1851, MS-Papers-2395-2, ATL. Sarah Selwyn's long serving servant, known only as "Old Nurse," attended both Sarah and Te Rina during their confinements. Over fifty years later the loss of baby Margaret was still sorely felt, aged 94 and 34 years back living in England Sarah thanked the then Principal of St John's for "the kindness of your dear little girls who lay the flowers on my little daughters grave," Sarah Selwyn to Harold Anson, 20 July 1902, SJC 1/2/50, John Kinder Library, St John's College, Auckland.

they hoped to return with. What Sarah and George crucially took to England was knowledge about New Zealand and about the colonial project more broadly. As Susan Thorne has suggested, it was missions and church people who were key producers of information about the empire “at home.”<sup>75</sup> In the Selwyns’ case their position and connections gave them access to the highest circles. While Sarah clearly enjoyed the visit, noting the “rush of pleasure”<sup>76</sup> she felt when approaching English shores for the first time after an absence of twelve years and four months, she was also irked by the many demands on George to preach and travel to speak at public meetings when this was supposed to be an opportunity for rest. That men in England — and good men too — simply did not realize what pressure George was usually under or the ease of their own situation made her impatient. She noted that home clergy went “to their daily toil without wetting their shoes, or indeed going on tramp to their objects. I should like to have taken them on a bush journey in New Zealand going on foot with swamps to wade through, and rivers to swim.”<sup>77</sup> Dry feet and fine shoes were the privileges of a “home” rather than “colonial” man. Even by comparison with Australia, New Zealand presented special demands. A couple of years earlier when the Bishop of Newcastle (New South Wales), W. Tyrrell, a fellow-student of George’s from Cambridge, had visited them in Auckland, Sarah had been startled and bemused by his “thin, trim shoes.” They excited “almost as much surprise as did George’s sturdy double soles in Sydney.”<sup>78</sup>

Towards the end of their English visit, Sarah and George were invited to dine with the Queen at Windsor. The occasion was significant to Sarah for how she would be called on to describe it when back in New Zealand. “I took note of everything knowing how I should be questioned by my Maori friends, no particulars would be too small. Her majesty walked round the room after dinner speaking to all her guests in turn and happily she asked me some question about them [ie Maori], which greatly added to the halo this event threw around me.” Amidst the worst of the Crimean campaigns, Sarah found the Queen and her Ladies busily occupied after dinner knitting comforters for the “freezing soldiers in the trenches.” Her Maori listeners, she noted, “took a keen interest in Her Majesty’s knitting.”<sup>79</sup>

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75 Susan Thorne, “Religion and Empire at Home,” Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, eds, *At Home with the Empire: metropolitan culture and the imperial world* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 143-165.

76 *Reminiscences*, 48.

77 *Reminiscences*, 50.

78 *Reminiscences*, 40.

79 *Reminiscences*, 54. During Sarah’s subsequent visit to England in 1861-2 she attended the graduation ceremonies at Cambridge where the Prince of Wales was a graduand. Introduced to him she was also careful to note where she went, who she saw and conversed with, who conversed with her — all for the sake of relaying faithfully back to friends and family, Maori and European, when back in New Zealand. Introduced to the Prince of Wales at a reception following the ceremony she made careful note of his asking “affably...after the Bishop,” *Reminiscences*, 67-8.

Sarah's role as a conduit of knowledge worked in both directions. For Maori the Treaty signed in 1840 had created a personal relationship between themselves and the British sovereign, one that was alive and maintained through such exchanges.<sup>80</sup>

Relations between crown, church and Maori were not long to continue on such a cordial footing. As a "missionary bishop" George Selwyn was expected to consolidate the work of missionaries in creating a community of Maori Christian converts as well as act as leader of the church to a growing settler population. The tensions between these diverse aspects of his work were always present but were most sharply felt in the period from 1859. By the late 1850s the settler population had increased exponentially<sup>81</sup> from its miniscule and scattered presence in the early 1840s. Within less than twenty years incoming Europeans, predominantly from the British Isles and Ireland, reached numbers to match, and then quickly surpass, the local Maori population. To the northern centres of early and sustained contact had been added settlements in Wellington, Taranaki, Nelson, Otago and Canterbury, all with immigrant populations impatient for land and control in places they had been coaxed to believe offered fresh beginnings, opportunities for material advancement, social and political autonomy.<sup>82</sup> Arguments over land, especially terms of sale, became the critical pressure point. Sarah shared the views of George and others of church and missionary party in vehemently disagreeing with the actions of Governor Gore Browne in endorsing the Waitara purchase in 1859.<sup>83</sup> The sale of a large block of land by a person widely acknowledged as lacking the authority to sell and doing so directly in opposition to the leading figures in the tribe was the catalyst for what became known as the Taranaki war, 1859-61. She shared deep indignation at what was perceived as a flagrant disregard of guarantees given under Treaty of Waitangi, recognition of Maori as citizens with rights and pro-

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80 Orange, *The Treaty of Waitangi*.

81 The predominance of young adults, and high marriage rates produced very high levels of natural increase.

82 Rice, ed, *Oxford History*; King, *Penguin History of New Zealand*; Binney, Bassett and Olssen, *The People and the Land*. After gold was discovered in Otago in May 1861 the number of Europeans arriving in the colony spiked, most coming from Australia. Whereas the late 1850s populations of Maori and European were roughly equivalent at between 55-60,000, by the mid-1860s the European population had reached over 160,000. By the 1890s there were approximately 900,000 European or "Pakeha" New Zealanders to just 50,000 Maori.

83 See, for example, Caroline Abraham's wholesale condemnation of Governor Thomas Gore Browne in a letter to her cousin: "A Country like this, in which it was known when Sir George Grey left it [at the end of his first governorship in 1853], that a great experiment was being tried, and a great crisis in that experiment approaching, ought not to have been confided to a man whose Governing powers had only been exercised on the rock of St Helena." Caroline Abraham to Sophia Marriott, 1 December 1860, Macdonald, ed, *Women Writing Home*, 214.



tections of British subjects under law, including property rights. But as the wife of the bishop it was difficult for Sarah to articulate public dissent in colonial Auckland. George Selwyn sent a “solemn protest” to the Governor, as did others, but such voices (largely church and missionary) represented a small if vocal minority against a rising tide of settler belligerence.<sup>84</sup> The pro and anti voices were not only heard in New Zealand but also in London where requests from New Zealand for imperial troops to suppress the Maori “rebels” were hotly debated.

In this context Sarah Selwyn’s private letters home on the issue — opposing the sending of troops and the governor’s actions — were the most prominent among those published as *Extracts of Letters from New Zealand on the War Question* in 1861 as part of the pamphlet war waging in Britain.<sup>85</sup> What for Sarah could only be uttered privately in New Zealand, appeared in print in England where it was hoped some influence might be wrought on colonial office instructions to the governor. *Extracts of Letters* was printed by F. J. Wilson, 1 Great Russell Street, London, and marked “for private circulation only.” Five of Sarah Selwyn’s letters, along with three written by Mary Ann Martin, one by Caroline Abraham, and several others which had appeared in the New Zealand press and a copy of the highly objectionable Native Offenders Bill, deeply opposed by Sarah and her circle, made up the 106 page booklet. Definitive evidence is elusive but it seems highly probable that Sarah Selwyn assented to a printed compilation of letters and documents while on a visit to England to see her schoolboy sons between May 1861 and early 1862. In the critical interlude following the cessation of hostilities in Taranaki and the recall of Governor Gore Browne in 1861 there was an opportunity to influence colonial policy. There was added urgency following the disappointingly weak defence of the Selwyns’ circle position in the House of Commons debate on the subject which took place while Sarah was sailing from Auckland to Portsmouth between February and May. While George Selwyn, and like-minded clergy, notably Octavius Hadfield, had spoken out in public in the New Zealand press, Selwyn was reluctant to utilize the informal route of his personal connections

84 George Selwyn had earlier admonished Taranaki settlers using the lesson of Naboth’s vineyard (1 Kings 21), incurring indignation, Kerry R. Howe, “‘The Bishop Alien’: Selwyn and the New Zealand Wars of the 1860s,” Limbrick, ed, *Bishop Selwyn*, 96.

85 *Extracts of Letters from New Zealand on the War Question* (London: F.J. Wilson 1861). Starke, “I must write a pamphlet, or I shall burst”. See also Octavius Hadfield, *One of England’s Little Wars: a letter to the Right Hon. The Duke of Newcastle* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1860) and *New Zealand War: the second year of one of England’s little wars* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1861); Sir William Martin, *The Taranaki Question* (London: W.H. Dalton, 1861). See also Karen M. Morin and Lawrence D. Berg, “Gendering resistance: British colonial narratives of wartime New Zealand,” *Journal of Historical Geography*, 27: No.2 (April 2001), 196-222.

to people in power in England as a means to influence policy.<sup>86</sup> For Sarah, and her friends Mary Ann Martin and Caroline Abraham, there was no constraint of public office. These were private letters, written to friends, and now in print to enable circulation in circles where some influence might be wielded. In the pamphlet Sarah is deprecating of her own capacities to state her position, deferring both to her friends and to George's pastoral letter to church members in Taranaki (included in *Extracts of Letters*). If typical of her usual inclination to stand in the background, it misrepresents what is a fervent and cogent statement of position.<sup>87</sup>

In her 30 August 1860 letter printed in *Extracts from Letters* Sarah berated the government for having "rushed into a bloody quarrel without trying all other methods of settling the dispute first; assuming that the natives are rebels before they have done one single thing to prove themselves to be so, and denying them the ordinary privileges of British subjects, which the Treaty of Waitangi declares them to be... Oh! We are sinking so low in the eyes of the Maories. Where is our good faith? Where our assurances that the Queen would never do them wrong?...it goes to our hearts to see a noble race of people stigmatized as rebel, and driven to desperation, by the misrule of those who are at the same time lowering their own people in their eyes."<sup>88</sup> Colonial space had become one of confrontation and threat. In that space the views of Sarah and George were deeply unpopular. Within the tense ties of politics between Maori and settler (Crown) interests, Sarah Selwyn became a dissenting political agent of empire.

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86 Mary Ann Martin, explaining the actions open to those who opposed the Governor's actions in New Zealand, attributed the Bishop's reluctance to write home to the Duke of Newcastle and Gladstone to his "disliking all private communications to people in power". Gladstone was his old schoolboy friend, godfather to his eldest son and life long friend and supporter. Starke, "I must write a pamphlet or I shall burst", 43. George Selwyn's stance is consistent with his strong sense of obedience and loyalty within public office, but also indicates the shift in government and administration from the early nineteenth-century reliance on informal patronage and personal networks to bureaucratic and formal systems, see Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections*.

87 The print run was probably very limited. Only 5 copies have survived in public collections. Excerpts from Sarah Selwyn's letters, and those of other women correspondents on both sides of the controversy can be found in Porter and Macdonald, "*My Hand Will Write What My Heart Dictates*," ch. 3 and Harriet Louisa Gore Browne, *Narrative of the Waitara Purchase and the Taranaki War*, ed W. P. Morrell (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1965). Harriet Gore Browne was married to the Governor Thomas Gore Browne whose actions were simultaneously lauded and denounced. Sarah Selwyn's letter of 30 August 1860 is reproduced in full in Caroline Daley, ed, *Women and Empire, 1750-1939, Volume II. New Zealand* (London: Routledge, 2009) 373-9. Women were active as participants in the controversy, and in chronicling its history for posterity. Harriet Gore Browne's "Narrative" was written as a defence of her husband's actions, intended for historical judgement as much as an answer to his immediate political opponents.

88 Quoted in Starke, "I must write a pamphlet, or I shall burst," 44.

The situation was highly volatile. By late 1862-3, a spreading Maori resistance, both in actions against particular settlers and in the King movement, an expression of Maori political autonomy, was seen as threatening and unlawful by government and settlers. The Selwyns, along with most of those who had previously been highly critical of the colonial government, now supported plans for military action against those sections of Maori who were judged as having gone “too far.” Maori were now seen to be transgressors of the law under whose protection they had previously been defended, and as threats to the common authority and loyalty owed to the British Crown under the Treaty of Waitangi. In the military campaigns fought against “rebel” Maori in 1863-4 Selwyn accompanied imperial troops as their chaplain, and while he ministered to any in his path — Maori or Pakeha — his prominent role at the front of fighting alienated him from those Maori among whom he had previously circulated and won respect. Widespread belief amongst Maori that Bishop Selwyn had betrayed them at Rangiowahia in June 1864, where a pa (fortified village) used as a refuge for women and children was attacked and a large number of lives lost, left a particularly deep wound. By 1865 he was deeply out of favour with both sides. As Sarah noted later, of this time: “We were all highly unpopular, though it was only George who had real as well as abusive stones thrown at him.”<sup>89</sup> Alienated from both settler opinion, in whose eyes the Selwyns headed a “church party” weakly and naively defending belligerent Maori, and Maori to whom the church had apparently sided with its political rather than religious allies, there had ceased to be any middle or meeting ground. Rota Waitoa’s death from illness in 1866 only added another blow to this low point in Sarah and George’s time in New Zealand, the end of an era of co-operation and of a church led by Maori alongside European.<sup>90</sup>

The course of the Selwyns’ tenure in New Zealand had seen the arc of humanitarian idealism flourish and then dissipate. Indigenous peoples seen *not* to comply with the policy of amalgamation but to defy the imposition of colonial authority and settler expansion were militarily quashed. The church had

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89 *Reminiscences*, 63. See also Howe, “The Bishop Alien,” Limbrick, ed, *Bishop Selwyn*, 94-120; Curteis, *Bishop Selwyn*, ch.6. Sarah did not accompany George on these expeditions, remaining in Auckland where she maintained the bishop’s residence, extending hospitality to all, including the wives and widows of men serving in the armed forces. By this time most Maori had left Auckland.

90 Waitoa died in Auckland following a riding accident. George was absent but Sarah and the rest of the Selwyn circle – the Martins, and the Auckland clergy, as well as Rota’s wife and children, were all with him. Dempsey, “Waitoa, Rota, ?-1866,” *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007, <<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>>, (viewed 18 May 2008). See Thomas Chapman to George Selwyn, 22 July 1866, Mary Ann Martin to George Selwyn, 24 July 1866 and Sarah Selwyn to George Selwyn, 30 July 1866, ANG 090/6, John Kinder Library, St John’s College, Auckland; Morrell, *The Anglican Church in New Zealand*, chs. 4 and 5.

been established but at a cost to the broader vision. By the late 1860s it was moving to replicate the colonial hierarchy rather than critique it. The transfer of Episcopal authority failed to secure a leading role for religion in the direction of colonial policy. By 1860 the church or religion as the “conscience” of colonial direction had been marginalized, and by 1863, being persuaded of the need for “belligerent” Maori to be chastened by force, had alienated any loyalty it had once gathered. The New Zealand experience in the early 1860s was one that contributed to a wider hardening of colonial policy, and underlying ideas which came to support it: a more rigid notion of race, civilization and the meaning of empire as a place of white dominance. In New Zealand the era of religion – missions and church – as a critic of colonization and colonial processes ceased. That role was not to be resumed on any significant scale until the late twentieth century brought the challenge of postcolonial politics within the church and wider polity.<sup>91</sup>

By the time the Selwyns left New Zealand in the late 1860s, the colonial state had established sovereignty; settler power, rather than Maori power, was in the ascendant. Missions and the Maori church had fallen away and what remained had been relegated to the periphery. Christianity had not disappeared but was no longer the meeting ground it had once promised to be. New syncretic religious movements emerged drawing popular support in many parts of Maoridom while the church increasingly became an institution of the settler society.<sup>92</sup>

Sarah's life shifted from New Zealand to England when George accepted the position as bishop of Lichfield at the end of 1867. For George it was a move made with sorrow, and one he first refused. As he explained, my “heart is in

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91 The Anglican Church of New Zealand was deeply riven by debates over the recognition and meaning of the Treaty of Waitangi in the mid-1980s. The constitution of the church was revised to recognize the Treaty relationship and diversity within the contemporary church. The resulting 1992 constitution recognizes three autonomous tikanga (cultural streams): Maori-Aotearoa, Pakeha-New Zealand and Pasifika-Pacific. Bishop Whakahuihui Vercoe's speech at the 150th anniversary of the Treaty of Waitangi, on 6 February 1990, in the presence of Queen Elizabeth II, was a highly political occasion, the Maori church challenging the Crown as to its failures to maintain the agreement made in 1840, [www.anglican.org.nz](http://www.anglican.org.nz), viewed 15 April 2008; *Te Ripoata a te Komihana mo te Kaupapa Tikanga Rua mo te Tiriti o Waitangi=The report of the Bi-cultural Commission of the Anglican Church on the Treaty of Waitangi* (Christchurch: Provincial Secretary of the Church of New Zealand, 1986); “Have the Anglicans found the formula?”, *Mana*, Jan/Feb 1993, 36-9. See also Orange, *Illustrated History*. According to the 2006 Census the Anglican Church has 554,925 followers, *DominionPost*, 14.5.08.

92 Judith Binney, *Redemption Songs: a life of Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki* (Wellington and Auckland: Bridget Williams Books/Auckland University Press, 1995); Bronwyn Elsmore, *Mana from heaven: a century of Maori prophets in New Zealand* (Tauranga: Moana Press, 1989); Paul Clark, “Hauhau”: the *Pai Marire* search for Maori identity (Auckland and Wellington: Auckland University Press/Oxford University Press, 1975).

New Zealand and Melanesia.”<sup>93</sup> They were the first incumbents for 200 years to live in the neglected bishop’s residence at Lichfield which “to our colonial eyes” looked palatial.<sup>94</sup> Two wings were added to the house, one of which was fitted with cubicles in the manner of ship’s cabins where visiting clergy or candidates for ordination were housed. A new chapel contained items with what contemporary observer, H. W. Tucker, described as “the fragrant memories of New Zealand.”<sup>95</sup> These included a memorial window dedicated to Henare Taratoa, Selwyn’s former student and co-worker at St John’s and Melanesia, who had been married in the double ceremony with Edward Eyre. Taratoa was later killed in battle on 21 June 1864 fighting against imperial troops. He was revered for holding fast to a code of chivalrous conduct while taking up arms against his enemy, dying with verses from Romans found on his body.<sup>96</sup> That it was the chiefly, chivalrous, learned but unordained Henare Taratoa rather than the loyal, steadfast, ordained, but by tribal background commoner, Rota Waitoa, who the Selwyns honoured testifies to the contradictory heart of their New Zealand legacy.<sup>97</sup> Taratoa, considered “too impetuous for the ministry,” had not become a leader in Selwyn’s church, but had maintained the highest standard of noble conduct; his commemoration in the Lichfield cathedral window making him little less than a martyr in the struggle for Maori justice against colonial power.<sup>98</sup>

It was not only in these material ways that Sarah and George’s life in Lichfield continued to be “colonial.” Provincial England was perceived by contemporaries in the church to be likely to benefit from the “fresh colonial air” George and Sarah Selwyn would bring.<sup>99</sup> The diocese of Lichfield included the mining districts around Wolverhampton and Stafford where mission experience was seen to be relevant. In the wider church communion, New Zealand experience

93 Tucker, *Memoir of the Life and Episcopate of George Augustus Selwyn*, vol.2, 238. See also *Reminiscences*, 77.

94 Tucker, *Memoir of the Life and Episcopate of George Augustus Selwyn*, vol. 2, 241. Previous incumbents had lived at Eccleshall Castle, 25 miles from Lichfield and distant from the rail-head.

95 Tucker, *Memoir of the Life and Episcopate of George Augustus Selwyn*, vol.2, 247. The chapel included a New Zealand scene containing whare (house) and waka (canoe) and a prominent Maori figure in Minton tiles.

96 Romans 12: 20 “if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink”. Dixon, “Taratoa, Henare Wiremu, ?-1864”; “Memorial window to Henare Taratoa,” *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 36: 144 (1927), 401; H. T. Purchas, *The English Church in New Zealand* (Christchurch: Simpson & Williams, 1914), 219.

97 At the time of his death it was Waitoa’s “stedfastness” and “faithful service” that was emphasized, see Mary Ann Martin to George Selwyn, 24 July 1866 and Sarah Selwyn to George Selwyn, 30 July 1866, ANG 090/6, John Kinder Library, St John’s College, Auckland.

98 Ngahuia Dixon, “Taratoa, Henare Wiremu, ?-1864,” *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007, <<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>>, (viewed 18 May 2008).

99 Curteis, *Bishop Selwyn*, vi. See also Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, vol.2, ch.6.

in devising a constitutional structure for a national church, managing a voluntary compact, stretching scarce resources in a pluralist society, and doing so pragmatically from a position of high principled conservatism gave George Selwyn an influential voice.<sup>100</sup> A number of colonial clergy were recruited from the diocese including W. G. Cowie, Selwyn's successor, and S. T. Nevill, later bishop of Dunedin.<sup>101</sup> Sarah, in particular, was often hosting friends and acquaintances from New Zealand at Lichfield, even those with whom they had had tense relations. In 1871 Richard Taylor, the clergyman who had reproved her for wearing a cross, was shown around the cathedral and given lunch.<sup>102</sup> Members of the old Eton circle who George had recruited to work in New Zealand were now drawn to Lichfield.<sup>103</sup> Sarah's close companionship with Mary Ann Martin, dating back to her original voyage from England on the *Tomatin* in 1841-2 was renewed when the Martins returned to England in 1874, settling at Lichfield. With Caroline Abraham, the three women's close bond in England was united by their shared experience of New Zealand.

The violent death and subsequent framing of J.C. "Coley" Patteson's death at Nukapu (Solomon Islands) in 1871 as a bishop martyrdom deepened the connections between the Selwyns, Lichfield and the Melanesian mission. The sensational story of a martyred bishop, body floating dead in a distant lagoon, shot fast through church and public at large. Establishing the Melanesian Mission had been a major preoccupation between 1847-59, one in which Sarah was deeply involved, both as a teacher of Melanesian students brought to Auckland, and as teacher and traveler in Melanesia herself (especially at Norfolk Island). The students there had presented her with a surf board they had made, an object she later reflected "could only have been a useless trophy in the Diocese of Lichfield, where a whiff of salt is not to be had, more's the pity, so it is well that it was not there to exalt me over the heads of other Bishops' wives who never had the chance of such a testimonial."<sup>104</sup> The link between the places, and the mission field, became even more tightly bound when Sarah and

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100 Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*; Tucker, *Memoir of the Life and Episcopate of George Augustus Selwyn*, vol.2, chs.5-7; Evans, *Churchman Militant*, ch.10.

101 Purchas, *The English Church in New Zealand*.

102 Owens, *The Mediator*, 272.

103 Charles and Caroline Abraham left the bishop's residence in Wellington and were in Lichfield by 1870, along with Edmund and Mary Hobhouse (former bishop of Nelson), Mary Ann and William Martin, Frederick Thatcher, John Lloyd and others. Frances Porter, "Caroline Abraham, 1809-77," Macdonald et al, eds, *The Book of New Zealand Women*, 1-2; Frances Porter, "Mary Ann Martin, 1817-84," Macdonald et al, eds, *The Book of New Zealand Women*, 424-8; Shirley Tunnicliff, ed, *The Selected Letters of Mary Hobhouse* (Wellington: Daphne Brasell Associates Press, 1992).

104 *Reminiscences*, 62. In fact George had commandeered the surf board, more like a small raft, used to get from anchorage outside a reef to shore, for use in his schooner, the *Southern Cross*. When that was wrecked the board was lost with the ship.

George's younger son, John, succeeded Patteson as Bishop of Melanesia in 1877.<sup>105</sup>

After George's death in 1878, Sarah continued to live at Lichfield, a keeper of the Selwyn flame. The "hero bishop" was rapidly constructed into a memory that was tidier and more assimilable than the man had been in life, the work of memorializing beginning immediately with his death. Within a year a substantial two-volume work was published: *The Life and Episcopate of G.A.Selwyn*, the dedication indicating that the work was written at Sarah's request.<sup>106</sup> Selwyn College, Cambridge, was opened in 1882 as a memorial to continue his work, the principal instigators being his long term friends and co-workers Charles Abraham (the chief benefactor), Edmund Hobhouse and Sir William Martin.<sup>107</sup> Selwyn College at New Zealand's oldest university, Otago in the city of Dunedin, followed soon after, founded by another of Selwyn's protégés, Bishop Nevill.

The Selwyn memory became a strand in the narrative of empire building, the expansion of England and Christianity enunciated with pride at that high moment of empire at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>108</sup> The transplantation of the church to the expanding realm of Britain's formal world of empire united those parts of the globe under the union jack and in a single communion of believers (where the Church of England was dominant if not the only presence). Selwyn was a powerful symbolic figure of the achievement, arguably more influential in memory than in contemporary life.

In 1892, ostensibly at the urging of her sons, Sarah wrote her *Reminiscences*. Although the work opens with demur that she does "not very willingly comply with your request that I should leave some record of my life," the account is lengthy: 220 pages<sup>109</sup> and was clearly not hastily written but composed with

105 "Obituary, Bishop [John Richardson] Selwyn," *The Times*, 14 February 1898, 8d, includes the lines: "He held by double right as son and master [of Selwyn College] the hero name of Selwyn"; W.H. Fremantle, "Patteson, John Coleridge (1827-1871)," rev. David Hilliard, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, 2004, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21580>>, (viewed 19 May 2008). One of the reactions to Patteson's death in England was to hasten passage of the Pacific Islander Protection Act, a measure intended to regulate the labour trade (it was understood that Patteson's death was retaliation for the abduction of 5 men from the island by a labour recruiter).

106 The dedication reads: "To Her, who for forty years encouraged and shared her husband's labours, these volumes, written at her request, are respectfully dedicated.", Tucker, *The Life and Episcopate*, v.

107 The prime instigators behind the founding of the College were Charles Abraham (also its principal benefactor), Edmund Hobhouse and Sir William Martin. Another Selwyn College was founded in 1893 at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, by one of Selwyn's protégés, Bishop Nevill, then Bishop of the Otago diocese.

108 J.R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (London: Macmillan, 1883).

109 Sarah Selwyn, "Reminiscences", MS-Papers-7188-10 & 11, ATL. See also qMS-1782, ATL. These two typescripts have different pagination but the content is the same. Evans, ed, *Reminiscences* runs to 77 foolscap pages. Mary Ann Martin's reminiscences of her life in New Zealand were published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge under the title *Our Maoris* (London: SPCK, 1884).

care and with some reference back to letters or journals. In memory (and fourteen years a widow), Sarah presented her gendered position in telling “our” rather than “her” life, explaining that her account was of “our New Zealand lives. I say ‘our’ because though the risk and the toil mental and bodily and the wear and tear and work were George’s much larger share, in which I had no part, mine was to speed him off ever and again (and he liked to be speeded) and then to wait and hear nothing and know nothing and hope the best till he came back, and watch the signal staff, as the time drew near that he might come, for the signal of a schooner.”<sup>110</sup> Her life in New Zealand occupies by far the greater part, the account concluding with her return to England in 1867-8. Is she suggesting that her life after that point is known and does not need telling, or that what is interesting has ceased? Or that her readers, her sons in the first instance, know the story from then on and therefore do not need to be told? Colonial space occupied and shaped her life.

The *Reminiscences* offer a tidy narrative in which Sarah constitutes herself as an imperial subject. To look back on her early years in New Zealand was not just to look back on her own early life — her self as a young adult across the distance of time — but also to look back on a very different point in the imperial project. Now, in the 1890s, British sovereignty was in the ascendant built on the “natural” hierarchy between white and non-white, settler and indigenous. A smooth narrative culminating at this point made what had been strange and uncomfortable now natural and normal. And it has been Sarah Selwyn’s *Reminiscences*, the smoothed story rather than the raw correspondence, that has been influential in shaping historical imagination of the colonial encounter in New Zealand.<sup>111</sup>

Sarah Selwyn was no Mrs Proudie cutting a swathe through contemporary life by taking up the bishop’s mitre as her own.<sup>112</sup> Sarah lived a more orthodox life as a wife. But her story is replete with the ambiguity of Christianity in the colonial world of the mid to late nineteenth century: an agent of empire at the same time as a fierce critic of imperial policy; an upper class High Church person in

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110 *Reminiscences*, 63.

111 It is Sarah Selwyn’s *Reminiscences* rather than letters that have been drawn on most commonly — see Limbrick, ed, *Bishop Selwyn*; Davidson, *Selwyn’s Legacy*; Evans, *Churchman Militant*; Phillipson, “‘The thirteenth apostle’” and Porter and Macdonald, ‘*My Hand Will Write What My Heart Dictates*’.” It was not just in the *Reminiscences* but also in her personal correspondence, that Sarah Selwyn evoked a softened “New Zealand connection” in her later years. Writing to her New Zealand friend Mary Medley in 1897 Sarah even recalled the weather to be better in recollection: “I used not to think spring the pleasantest time of year in NZ tho all seems pleasant as I look back upon the place & people,” Sarah Selwyn to Mary Medley, 11 Oct 1897, MS-Papers-3762-4/1, ATL.

112 Anthony Trollope’s famously outspoken and combative wife of the Bishop of Barchester, a leading character in his “*Barsetshire*” novels, published 1857-67.



the midst of an evangelical mission community; someone for whom life in New Zealand was both a profound disjuncture and a defining narrative. Between England and New Zealand, the 1840s and early 1900s, Sarah's personal circumstances exemplified the broader shifts between religion and empire, church and state. What had been a brief convergence in the 1840s had become by the 1860s, divergent tracks. Maori Christians looked to their own prophetic leaders rather than "Mata Pihopa" while what had become the Church of the Province of New Zealand was largely a settler institution.

Lines which connected Sarah Selwyn to disparate places in which she lived her life are those we have come to understand as an intermeshed imperial world. Eton and Lichfield were provincialised to some degree by the same processes through which Waimate and Auckland became colonial.<sup>113</sup> The contending forces of religion and empire shaped these places and those who lived in them. As an individual moving between these spaces Sarah Selwyn gave voice to their uneasiness. In New Zealand, where Sarah Selwyn was part of the founding of the church following a period of missionary endeavour, the vision of a uniting Christianity failed in the face of settler expansion. The cultural work of Anglicisation pushed the church to a subordinate role within colonization. The space Sarah occupied during her time in New Zealand proved increasingly impossible to reconcile in terms of purpose, even as it became more familiar as her home. Yet it is not so much the language of displacement or unsettlement that best characterizes this condition. For her, as for her contemporaries, Maori and European, indigenous and newcomer, to be colonial was to be "out of place."<sup>114</sup> As a bishop's wife, linked by the sacrament of marriage by which 'two were made one' and in which the husband also carried the authority of apostolic succession, Sarah was caught up both in the "struggles for sacred power"<sup>115</sup> across low and high church as well as in the broader attempt to combine cultural imperialism with an equality in Christian faith.

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113 "Provincialising" carries historical and theoretical meaning here. Metropolitan and province describe structures within the Church of England, with "metropolitan sees" being headed by bishops. Selwyn's 1858 constitution for the Church of England in New Zealand meant his New Zealand See was no longer an annex to the Metropolitan See of Sydney, and from 1874 was known as the Church of the Province of New Zealand. For the recent postcolonial argument see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, rev. ed, 2007).

114 Nicholas Thomas, "Out of Place: Reflections on Oceanic Art and History," public lecture, Victoria University of Wellington, 16 April 2008.

115 Elbourne quoting Janet Hodgson, "Religion in the British Empire," Stockwell, ed, *The British Empire*, 152.

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