

P E T I T I O N

OF THE

M I N E R S A N D R E S I D E N T S

ON THE

W A K A T I P G O L D - F I E L D S ,

P R O V I N C E O F O T A G O .

PRESENTED TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, DECEMBER 10TH, 1863,
AND ORDERED TO BE PRINTED DECEMBER 11TH, 1863.

PETITION OF THE MINERS AND RESIDENTS ON THE
WAKATIP GOLD-FIELDS, PROVINCE OF OTAGO.

TO HIS EXCELLENCY SIR GEORGE GREY, GOVERNOR AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE
COLONY OF NEW ZEALAND, AND TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES IN ASSEMBLY.

The Petition of the undersigned Miners and Residents on the Wakatip Gold-Fields, in the
Province of Otago,

HUMBLY SHEWETH—

That your Petitioners are constrained to bring under the notice of your Excellency and the
Honorable House the following :—

The Provincial Government of Otago derive from the Gold-Fields of that Province about
two-thirds of the whole Provincial revenue.

Your Petitioners, when these fields were first opened, were contented to pay high prices for
the necessaries of life, in respect that the Provincial Government had had no opportunity of
opening up communication, so as to permit the importation of merchandise to the fields, and
waited with patience the action of the Provincial Government. When your Petitioners saw,
however, that all the action likely to be taken by the Provincial Government was to enforce the
collection of revenue, they remonstrated in a respectful Petition addressed to His Honor the
Superintendent, and called his attention to the hardships under which they laboured. Your
Petitioners called attention to the fact that these fields had been left for many months with only
one Warder, who could not possibly perform all the duties required—that the diggers from the
utmost corner of the field had to come to Queenstown to have settled every trivial dispute, dis-
tances varying from four to fifty miles—that these journeys were for the most part over a country
where even the most careful walking is attended with a certain amount of personal danger, and
always attended with great fatigue and loss of time—that a comparatively small sum would suffice
to furnish, at least, pack tracks to the various almost inaccessible diggings, would reduce the price
of provisions and would be the means of saving the loss of many valuable horses, as many of these
are killed by falling over precipices &c., while travelling the fields with provisions and other
necessaries—that the mates of miners suffering from sickness were unable, from the want of roads,
to bring down their brethren for medical advice, and that many diggers had died without anything
in the shape of medical attendance to alleviate their pains. Your Petitioners also called the
attention of His Honor to the fact of the camp having been removed from Queenstown to Frank-
ton, thus aggravating in a tenfold degree the evils already attending the journeyings to and fro.
This Petition was couched in respectful, though firm language, and your Petitioners disclaim
having had any intention of being disrespectful to His Honor. His Honor, however, declared that
it was disrespectful, and declined to receive it. Action was however taken upon it to a certain
extent, inasmuch as the camp was moved back to Queenstown, and the sum of one thousand six
hundred pounds given for the formation of a road up the Shotover.

That your Petitioners consider the sum of one thousand six hundred pounds thus given was
entirely inadequate, and indeed it was a burlesque; and at the present moment your Petitioners
are still without proper access to the various diggings. The result has been that during the late
disastrous season, many miners have expended their all, owing to the high price of provisions.
These prices were increased one hundred-fold by the expense of carriage.

Your Petitioners beg further to state to his Excellency and the Honorable House, that a motion
was brought before the Provincial Council by one of the Mining Representatives, stating that
your Petitioners were inadequately represented in the Council, and urging the Chamber to increase
the number of these Representatives—that while the diggings, with a population of 24,000, are
represented by three members only, the town of Dunedin is represented by double that number,
and that the pastoral interest of Wakatip, with only five names on the electoral roll, has one
member for itself. This motion was negatived, on the ostensible ground that the miners are a
“wandering population.” Your Petitioners deny the assertion that the miners are a wandering
population, and are ready to settle upon the lands, if the Provincial Government will open them
up. The keeping of these lands closed has been the cause of disease in the shape of scurvy, and
deaths thereby have been numerous.

That your Petitioners humbly beg to bring further under the notice of His Excellency and
the Honorable House, that the management of the Gold-fields has been so radically bad as justly
to lead to discontent. The powers delegated to His Honor the Superintendent, and which he

alone is authorised to use, have been exercised by a subordinate officer in a manner that your Petitioners deem disrespectful to His Excellency, as well as to your Petitioners. A gentleman holding the position as Gold-fields Secretary has made and unmade officials on the Gold-fields in the most erratic and illegal manner. Several of these actions have been productive of evil to the interest of the miners, in regard of the vexatious delays caused by removals from place to place of various officers to supply the vacancies thus created. And all of the Gold-fields Secretary's proceedings are hurtful to your Petitioners, inasmuch as that they are illegal and despotic; and your Petitioners feel insulted by the fact that your Excellency's delegated power should have been exercised by an inferior and irresponsible official, thus throwing contempt upon your Petitioners, and implying that they are not worthy of respectful or legal treatment.

That your Petitioners would further beg humbly to bring under the notice of your Honorable House, that subsequent to, and your Petitioners believe in consequence of, the acts before alluded to of the Gold-fields Secretary, a motion was brought before the Provincial Council, urging it to elect a Gold-fields Secretary, who should be a member of and responsible to the Government. This motion was carried, and your Petitioners were consequently in hopes that the wants of those on the Gold-fields would then be more cared for, and the attention given to them which their importance as a producing element entitles them to. Owing to some informality, however, in the form of procedure, it was necessary that the vote should pass again; and advantage was taken in the absence of some of those who had supported the motion, to re-open the question, and it was negatived. Thus a measure which would have gone far to have put an end to the misgovernment of those fields, deliberately debated and arrived at, was thrown overboard.

That it has pleased an all-wise Providence to visit the miners on the Shotover with a season of great severity. Accidents have been rife, and disease, superinduced by exposure and want, has done its work. The violent deaths occasioned by landslips and floods alone exceed in number those that have been killed in the Maori war in the Northern Island; and the majority of deaths from diseases brought on by want and exposure, we charge at the door of the Provincial authorities. Those deaths especially caused by scurvy, however they may be looked upon by legal authorities, in the eyes of a moralist cannot be spoken of except as deaths resulting from cruel and criminal mismanagement.

That your Petitioners beg humbly to state, in conclusion, that they have no confidence in the Provincial Government—that they have proved themselves utterly incapable of managing the Gold-fields, and that the state of matters on these fields is such as to call for the immediate attention of His Excellency and the Honorable House.

And they humbly pray that your Excellency will withdraw the powers delegated to His Honor the Superintendent of the Province of Otago, and take into your own hands the immediate control of the Gold-fields, or do otherwise as your Excellency and the Honorable House may deem proper.

[Here follow seventeen hundred and fifty signatures.]