

'Journalist of Repute': Alexander McMinn and the early years of the *Manawatu Standard*

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In 1880 a second newspaper was set up in the young township of Palmerston North; it was this paper which was to survive and prosper. The lengthy struggle between the two enterprises is beyond the scope of this article—I examine here only the first surviving issues of the *Manawatu Standard*—but this examination does cast light on the early printing and book trade, that is, newspapers and printing, stationers, booksellers and a public library, which began in Palmerston North in the mid 1870s, and by 1890 had more or less taken lasting form.

Alexander McMinn founded the *Standard* in 1880. Its full title, *The Manawatu Standard, Rangitikei Advertiser, and West Coast Gazette*, gave notice of his energy and ambition. Unfortunately, the first three years' issues of the paper have not survived to their centenary; the General Assembly Library holds the earliest run (1883 to June 1886), and the Palmerston North Public Library is indexing issues from 1903 on. So the narrative of the first years of production has to be drawn from external sources.

Pakeha settlement at Palmerston North began in 1871, and for a decade at least the town was very much a poorer inland relation of the thriving port of Foxton, at the mouth of the Manawatu River. But Palmerston North soon began to prosper, a tramway was built to link it with the coast, in 1875 the Manawatu Gorge was bridged, and communications with the Wairarapa improved. At this stage, John Law Kirkbride and Joseph Poulter Leary (who only five months before had set up the *Rangitikei Advocate* in Marton) established the first newspaper, the *Manawatu Times*, and at the same time set up a newspaper for the Scandinavian community at Palmerston North, called *Skandia*. The editor of the *Manawatu Times* was C.J. Pownall, the editor of the Marton paper, one Alexander McMinn, and the short-lived *Skandia* was edited by Hjalmar Graff, a bookseller in Palmerston.¹ Perhaps prophetically the port of Foxton, soon to be eclipsed by its inland rival, did not acquire a newspaper until 1878, when the Russell brothers founded the *Manawatu Herald*.² The Kirkbride-Leary partnership seems to have