

HARRY EVISON

## The Wentworth–Jones Deeds of 15 February 1840

### 1. *The Background*

In 1830, in New South Wales, the arbitrary powers of the colonial governor were under attack by political reformers who demanded an elected property-franchise legislature with a measure of responsible government. Prominent in this agitation were Sydney commercial interests led by William Charles Wentworth, a rich barrister, speculator, and publicist later dubbed ‘Australia’s greatest native son’.<sup>1</sup> Governor Ralph Darling (1825–31) became a particular object of Wentworth’s criticism.

At Akaroa in November 1830, Captain John Stewart of the English brig *Elizabeth* assisted Te Rauparaha in massacring some 200 Ngāi Tahu. When Stewart arrived in Sydney in 1831, Darling had him put on trial for murder. Wentworth’s law partner defended Stewart, who then disappeared—with the connivance of Wentworth, according to Darling.<sup>2</sup> Darling’s subsequent replacement by the more liberal Governor Bourke was applauded by Wentworth, the sworn enemy of autocracy.

In 1838, Sir George Gipps became Governor of New South Wales. When rumours reached Sydney that Britain planned to annex New Zealand, Wentworth and other Sydney speculators hastened to obtain so-called ‘deeds’ for large areas of New Zealand, signed by Māori chiefs, with a