

The following is from a report of the Lake County Council meeting as reported in the Wakatipu Mail, 4th April, 1878.

“Tenders

No. 19 – Formation of road between Wakatipu and Moke Lakes: - Wong Ah Fun and Co, 126 pounds; G. Beer 208 pounds and 5 shillings; O. Traynor 147 pounds and 10 shillings.

Before any tender was accepted for contract No. 16, a discussion ensued as to the desirability of the Council employing Chinese labour.

Mr McDougall felt a difficulty, as the Chinese were not a desirable class as colonists. They had done a great deal of harm to the district.

Personally he was in favour of accepting the next lowest tender, though it involved a breach of their understood rule. He therefore proposed that Owen Traynor’s tender be accepted. Seconded by Mr Smith.

The Chairman – The Chinamen’s contract before us is 19 pound and ten shillings lower than the one proposed to be accepted. It was difficult to deal with the subject, but in O’Donoghue’s and those cases they had accepted the lowest tender. It seemed invidious to make distinctions after they had called from tenders from anyone.

Messrs. Smith and Malaghan would prefer to give preference to the resolution, and thought it could be done.

Mr McDougall – All the Chinese earn is spent in Hong Kong or some other place in China.

The Chairman remarked that, by accepting a higher tender, they would be paying 20 per cent on the work.

Mr Douglas and Mr Edgar could not support the resolution.

Moved by Mr Douglas, seconded by Mr Hicks, that the tender of Wong Ah Fun being the lowest it be accepted.

The Chairman said that he felt bound to support the amendment.

In the past they had accepted the lowest tenders and they had also a right to protect the ratepayers’ money.

The amendment was carried.”

It would be nice to think that the refusal to grant the tender to the second lowest tenderer had as much to do reluctance to indulge in prejudice as much as a duty to take the lowest tender. We will never know. The Chinese were at the rough end of a lot of prejudice but mostly in the cases where they dealt with official bodies they seem to have mostly treated in a fair handed manner. These bodies included the Magistrates Court, the Warden’s Court (which dealt with mining matters, claims, water rights etc) and in this case the Local Body. I have come across one case where a Chinese cook who worked at Eichardts Hotel received a harsh penalty for

stealing some crockery. Where the Chinese felt they were being disadvantaged they were prepared to do something about it. The first Magistrate and Warden was Beetham. In May 1872, the Chinese signed a petition asking for his removal from office which was presented by Mr Macassey, a Member of the Provincial Council. He stayed in office but it probably tempered his presumed prejudice.

Mr McDougall is error by calling the Chinese colonists for they never came with that intention. They came for the money and it was their intention to return to China. 100 pound was the magic figure for that would set them up for life when they returned. There was a continual inflow and outflow of Chinese over the gold rush period.

We assume that Mr McDougall's opinion was widespread and it probably was, but in the publications of the time there were articles in support of the Chinese and their presence in New Zealand.

Mining by and large shut down for the winter months and both the Local Bodies and later the Mines Dept put up money for the construction and maintenance of roads in the area. This happened in Glenorchy as well. Gold was generating wealth in the Province and good roads assisted in this. A group of miners would submit a tender for this work and that provided them with winter employment. They probably did not much more than "tucker" money, but it kept them going.