

1868-9.

QUEENSLAND.

Legislative Assembly.

DETENTION OF THE WARREGO MAIL.

(PAPERS IN CONNECTION WITH THE.)

(Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be Printed, 31 March, 1869.)

23rd February, 1869.

MEMO.—I regret to have to report that the Writ of Election addressed to the Returning Officer, Charleville, registered at this office on the 30th January ultimo, which should have been despatched on Tuesday, the 2nd instant, in accordance with arrangements made by you, was not despatched until Saturday, the 6th.

The Registration Clerk alleges that he received no instructions to forward it on Tuesday, on which day no mail for Charleville was despatched.

I affirm that I explained to the Registration Clerk, Mr. R. McGill, what was proposed to be done, in order that the Writ might reach its destination as soon as possible, and instructed him to forward it by Tuesday's coach.

F. E. SALISBURY,
Chief Clerk.

The Honorable the Postmaster-General.

MEMO.—On Friday the 29th ultimo, a letter addressed to the Returning Officer of the Warrego District appears to have been presented at the General Post Office for registration. On reference to the Chief Clerk, the letter was refused, as being insufficiently addressed; and I think the Chief Clerk was perfectly justified in taking this course, though, considering the importance attached to the delivery of a letter containing a Writ of Election it would perhaps have been better that special reference should either have been made to myself, or that the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly should have been informed by messenger from the General Post Office.

The Warrego mail for Charleville was made up and closed at 8 p.m. on Friday, the 29th, and on Saturday morning, the 30th, between the hours of 9 and 10 a.m., the same letter, re-addressed to Pollett Cardew, Charleville, was presented and registered.

At or about 11 a.m. on that day, the Colonial Secretary, Mr. Hodgson, waited upon me, to inform me that in consequence of the post office authorities having refused to register the letter containing the writ for the Warrego, it was possible that it might not reach Charleville on a day previous to that named as the day of nomination at Cunnamulla. Agreeing with the Colonial Secretary, that it would not be expedient to attempt to remedy this defect by the despatch of a special messenger, and that, if possible, a writ of election should be transmitted in due course by Her Majesty's mail, after consultation with the Chief Clerk, I despatched a telegram to the postmaster at Roma, instructing him to detain the mail, which in ordinary course of post would leave that place for Charleville on Wednesday, until he received the mail made up at Brisbane on the previous Monday. I thus anticipated being able to secure the timely delivery of the writ for the Warrego at the cost of a probable detention of from two to three days in the delivery of the ordinary Charleville mail.

Instructions were at the same time given to the Chief Clerk to give effect to this by forwarding the registered letter containing the Writ on the day on which the next mail for Roma was made up at the General Post Office, namely, by the mail closed at 8 p.m., on Monday, the 1st instant.

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On the morning of that day being anxious to see the re-addressed letter, and to satisfy myself that no mistake could occur, I instructed the Chief Clerk to let me see the letter, and after leaving my room he returned informing me that the letter was not in the office, and that it had been made up in the first mail leaving Brisbane for the westward, namely, in that closed on the evening of Saturday, the 30th ultimo. I remarked at the time that I was astonished it had not been kept for the ordinary Roma mail made up in Brisbane, at 8 p.m. on the current day.

I was not aware, however, that the letter had not only not been despatched then, but was not despatched on the Monday, the 1st instant, until, on the afternoon of Monday, the 22nd instant, I received information from the office of the Colonial Secretary that the Writ had not reached Charleville on the 15th instant, and I was then informed for the first time that the registered letter containing the Writ had not been made up for despatch from Brisbane until Friday, the 5th instant.

It appears from information received in this office, that the mail despatched for Charleville on that day was detained by floods.

On the morning of the 23rd instant, I instituted an inquiry as to the causes of detention, and as to the reasons for departing from my instructions. I was then informed by Mr. McGill, the Registration Clerk, that he had received no instructions from the Chief Clerk to forward the letter, in accordance with my instructions of the 30th ultimo. Mr. Garbett, who assists in the Registration Office, on being questioned by me, had no recollection of having given a receipt for the letter in question, but on the slip of receipt being produced, with his initials attached, he admitted that he had, and must have received it.

Mr. Garbett further stated that Mr. McGill had, in conversation, previous to the despatch of the letter on the 5th instant, said something to the effect that it had been inadvertently detained. In further examination, I called upon Mr. McGill to produce his books, and especially that book in which the registered letters were entered. It then appeared that this book had not been entered up since the day of October.

I then instructed Mr. McGill not to make any further entries in any book, and gave written authority to the Chief Clerk, to intimate to him his suspension from office. Nothing can excuse Mr. McGill for this gross neglect of duty. No new facts which may be disclosed can palliate this most unseemly neglect of one of his most important duties; and I shall insist on the confirmation of Mr. McGill's suspension. But it is also a serious reflection on the Chief Clerk, that such important entries should have been allowed to fall into arrears for four months. I must further remark, that though I believe Mr. Salisbury, when he states that he gave the necessary instructions to Mr. McGill, in spite of Mr. McGill's statement to the contrary, I am at a loss to understand why he did not satisfy himself, for my information, on the occasion when I requested that the letter containing the writ might be brought to me for my inspection.

This he could have done conclusively by referring to the despatch book; and yet it appears not to have been done;—for the letter, according to that record, was not despatched from the office until six days after I had been assured by the Chief Clerk that it had left the office.

It is with extreme regret that I feel bound thus to comment on the conduct of such an excellent officer as Mr. Salisbury; but I am so satisfied that the facts disclosed in the inquiry which I have felt bound to institute, reflect so seriously on the character of his supervision, that I deem it necessary to lay them before His Excellency the Governor in Council. In view of this intention, I shall be happy to entertain any explanation which Mr. Salisbury may wish to offer.

J. DOUGLAS.

General Post Office, 25th February, 1869.

I beg to offer the following remarks on the animadversions of the honorable the Postmaster-General on my conduct with regard to the non despatch of Writ referred to in these papers, and to the negligence of the Registration Clerk.

I was not aware when the letter containing the Writ was shown to me, that there was so much importance attached to its reaching its destination by the first mail, that any semblance of a risk of its delay should be brought under the notice of the honorable the Postmaster-General.

All letters containing Writs hitherto posted at this office, have been treated as letters for despatch in the usual course. The address, in this case, was so decidedly insufficient, that I did not think there could be a difference of opinion about its having to be returned for the deficiency to be made good, and for the doing of which there was ample time.

I do not recollect the circumstances of my informing the honorable the Postmaster-General—"On Monday, the 1st instant, that letter was not in the office, and that it had been made up in the first mail leaving Brisbane for the westward, namely, in that closed on the evening of Saturday, the 30th ultimo." It is inconceivable to me how I could have so mis-stated the fact, seeing that I knew well that no mail for Roma, or any place beyond, could have been forwarded before Tuesday morning, and that on Saturday evenings no mails are made up at all.

Having given instructions as to the despatch of the letter, I considered that I had done all that was necessary. I could not ensure its positive despatch unless I sent it off with my hands. I must place some confidence in those who work under me.

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Some time ago, I knew that the Registration Clerk was a little behind with his books, owing to pressure of work. I then requested him to get them up and to keep them so, and that if he required more assistance he would have it; but I, at the same, thought he had enough.

The Registration Clerk since that time has never represented to me that any of his books were getting behind-hand for want of assistance. On the contrary, he has always assured me that his books had since been kept up, in which assurances I unfortunately placed confidence.

F. E. SALISBURY,
Chief Clerk.

26th February, 1869.

Mr. Salisbury, in his memo. of the 26th, states that he has no recollection of having informed me that the letter containing the Writ was not in this office. Though Mr. Salisbury does not recollect the *day* on which I made the request to see the letter—and I recollect it distinctly—he must remember that I did ask to see the letter, and that he said it was not then in the office. That day was Monday, the 1st of February. A mail was made up on Sunday evening, and not, as I incorrectly stated, on the Saturday evening, and did leave Brisbane for Toowoomba and Dalby on the morning of that day. I cannot withdraw from my statement, that Mr. Salisbury, in explicit terms, led me to understand that the registered letter was not in the office, and had left by the mail on the morning of the day I made the inquiry.

J. DOUGLAS.

3rd March, 1869.

I certainly do remember the Honorable the Postmaster-General asking to see the letter, but why I did not obtain it for him, or what I replied, I cannot recall to mind. I still think that if I stated that the letter was not then in the office, I must have had some good reason for stating so, as I should hardly have answered, on the spur of the moment, without making some inquiry.

F. E. SALISBURY.

3rd March.

Ministers recommend that Mr. McGill's suspension be confirmed, and that Mr. Salisbury be severely reprimanded. Mr. Salisbury's meritorious services, and his pains-taking discharge of onerous and responsible duties entitle him to the most favorable consideration. Such serious mistakes, however, as those disclosed in the inquiries instituted in consequence of the unjustifiable delay in the transmission of the Writ for the Warrego cannot be overlooked.

Mr. Salisbury must be held to be mainly responsible for the inconvenience which has arisen in consequence of the detention of the Writ for the Warrego; and it is further to be remarked that the failure of Mr. McGill to keep his Register Book entered up for so long a period as four months, however culpable in itself, is also a serious reflection on the supervision exercised by Mr. Salisbury.

A. V. DRURY,
Clerk of the Council.