

One of the newcomers to the Cambridge district at this time was Mr Francis Hicks. He had first visited the town in 1873 on a quest for cropping land suitable for the growing of swede turnips—a point on which he was strangely adamant. Earlier, he had taken a trip through the west coast of the North Island, eventually arriving at Cambridge. He was particularly impressed with the farms of Geo. E. Clark, the Fisher Bros, of Pukerimu, 'Pencarrow', William Scott and Joseph Gane, but it was with the

encouragement of Mr Henry Keynolds that he became interested in a block of land at Pukekura, still in its virgin state and covered with fern and manuka.

Mr Hicks was determined on this acquisition, but the consolidation of various untenanted military grants into one sizeable title was still no easy task as he found that most of the absentee owners were away working in the Otago goldfields and elsewhere. This, of course, necessitated much travelling about the country to acquire agreements of sale of these allotments. It was not then, until Boxing Day 1875, that Mr Francis Hicks was able to take possession of his eight hundred acres at Pukekura. He named his property 'Trelawney'.

On his arrival in the Colony in 1858 in the ship *William Watson*, Francis Hicks had spent ten months in Auckland getting an insight into colonial ways, after which he travelled to Hawke's Bay. It was while working there that he first became acquainted with wire fencing. Up till this introduction the Bay graziers had employed boundary riders to hold their respective flocks. This, of course, had resulted in a considerable wastage of good grass through patchy grazing. The advantage of the wire fence was apparent as sheep could feed right up to it.

Smitten with the prevalent gold fever of the day, Hicks crossed the Tasman and tried his luck on New South Wales fields, but the precious metal was elusive and he returned to Gabriel's Gully in Otago, again without success. Visiting Auckland once more with the Waikato War still in progress he took charge, with John Martyn, later of 'Pencarrow', of a large body of men, inmates of Mt. Eden stockade, engaged in breaking stone for the road between Drury and Mercer destined, at that stage, for troop supply. Afterwards he became Paymaster to the forces until the close of the war. Later he returned to Hawke's Bay and undertook fencing contracts.

From these he made sufficient to purchase a property from Mr Tanner, not far from Napier. He gained strong opinions as to the value of root crops, together with the need to winter as large a number of sheep and cattle as possible. This he regarded as the key to successful farming. The Hawke's Bay purchase he found unsuitable for his purpose. He found that when he turned his stock on to his swede turnips half the roots were wasted owing to land pugging. It was important that he should have suitable

land if he was going to carry out his stock wintering policy. He decided to cut his farm up into sections and dispose of them. The railway line was being laid at the time from Napier and he donated the site for a station as well as for other public buildings. His farm property had been called 'Hicksville' but he named the railway station 'Hastings'—after the celebrated Anglo-Indian, Warren Hastings.

At 'Trelawney' Mr Hicks commenced vigorous operations and within a few years hundreds of acres had been burnt off, ploughed and grassed. The operations were watched with considerable interest by Cambridge settlers as Mr Hicks had declared his intention of subduing the regrowth of fern—hitherto a very grave problem—upon the same principle as was adopted on the Napier sheep runs, which was by stamping it out with heavy sheep stocking. With this object in view, the paddocks were made smaller and sheep brought over from Napier. On this count of management, Mr Hicks, if for no other reason, might well be considered now as pre-eminent among our pioneers in the Waikato. The land was ideal for his system and he pursued it with marked success, driving mobs of sheep via Taupo, growing large areas of swede turnips and fattening sheep and cattle on the excellent grass which followed his crops.

But perhaps of still greater interest than to the local settlers was his introduction of the wire fence, which had not as yet made its appearance in the Waikato although it had been in use in Hawke's Bay and on a smaller scale in Otago. The news of this innovation spread throughout the whole of the Waikato and many settlers rode long distances to view its construction. The rapidity with which the work was done was an eye-opener to them. In the immediate neighbourhood the leading settlers soon adopted it and before long, in every direction, the 'ditch and five sod bank fence', became a thing of the past.

'Trelawney' itself was being moulded into one of the most attractive farms in the district. An avenue of trees nearly three-quarters of a mile in length was planted leading up to Mr Hicks' residence which he had sited on a low knoll. Ornamental trees were set out, while at the rear of the homestead a piece of swampy ground was drained and eight acres of orchard planted.

Mr Hicks was considerably impressed by the ready interest shown in his ideas of fencing, sub-division and the growing of root

crops for stock wintering. The fact that these new ideas and techniques had not previously found their way into the Waikato—which was not surprising in view of the poverty of communications—decided him on the need for a Farmers' Club. Thus might new methods be usefully promoted for the common good. He approached a number of the larger landowners and the suggestion was taken up enthusiastically.

An inaugural meeting was held at the homestead of Mr George Clark at Pukeroro in October 1875, where the rules of the proposed club were drawn up under the title of 'The Waikato Farmers' Club'. Canvassing began immediately. In December the first meeting was held to elect the officers. This resulted in Mr Every Maclean being chosen as President with Mr D. Buttle secretary. Committee: Messrs Francis Hicks, John Runciman, James Runciman, Major Wilson, George Clark, Rueben Parr, R. W. D. Ferguson, Richard and Henry Reynolds.