

## The Kerehoma Homestead



The grand homestead standing at 602 Collinge Road, Hastings, was built in the early 1900s as a wedding present for Paretahi Chadwick by her husband Te Raro Rangikatuakina Kerehoma. The pair were married on 4 January 1910. The land for the dwelling, approximately 10 acres, was purchased from the bride's family and a house of approximately 2798 square feet (260 square metres) was erected using native timbers and corrugated iron roofing. With a stud of 16 feet, the home contained 6 bedrooms, a billiard room, drawing-room and dining-room. A handsome brick and wrought iron fence including wrought iron gates, skirted the boundary and a fully functioning fountain and wide paths graced the front lawn. The property was truly impressive

and although built to house a large family, sadly, the married couple would not dwell there for long.



**The wedding of Te Raro Rangikatuakina Kerehoma and Paretahi Chadwick**

**Te Raro Rangikatuakina Kerehoma, or Rangi as he was known, was a man of some standing in the community, owning property in southern Wairarapa before moving to Hawke's Bay. A proficient pilot, he owned his own Tiger Moth. After serving heroically in WW1, he was tragically taken in the 'flu epidemic which followed, leaving behind a wife and**

young daughter. His brave young widow struggled on alone, but passed away, in the late 1920s, it is said, from a broken heart.

Remaining in family ownership, between the 1920s and 1950s, the property was leased to one Arty Allen who subleased it to Mr. James Daniel Donovan, of Hastings, his wife, Brigid Catherine Donovan (nee Reidy) and their growing family who lived there for a few years until the 1931 earthquake struck. It is certain the Donovan family would have resided for a longer period at Collinge Road, but the earthquake put paid to that.

In its heyday, the Kerehoma property boasted tennis courts, a flourishing orchard with many varieties of fruit and nut trees, stables, the fountain which is still in existence today, a monkey puzzle tree and a stand of Californian redwoods. An artesian well still operates today. 'Whares' stood at the back of the house also but these have now been removed and the stables fell victim to Cyclone Bola in 1988. The homestead had its own generators supplying electricity to the house well before electricity came to be an accepted part of life and it had the first telephone installed in the area.



While in residence, the Donovan Family celebrated various milestones and whenever a gathering was held in the evening, lights would be suspended from the monkey puzzle tree with the fountain providing a spectacular display. Oil burning lamps could be set into the brick pillars along the front fence providing illumination. Seating would be arranged on the front verandahs and gramophone music drifted out

through the windows into the night air. An orchestra was sometimes employed to provide music for dancing the night away.

On the morning of the earthquake, J.D. Donovan, a men's hairdresser, had an appointment with a Mr. Kersberg, a salesman from whom he purchased merchandise for his hairdressing and tobacconist's shop in Heretaunga Street. Mr. Kersberg's showroom was situated in Russell Street. Normally after conducting business, the two men would adjourn to The Grand Hotel for a chat and drink. On this occasion however, Mr. James Donovan declined the offer and made his way back to his hairdressing salon. The earthquake struck as he crossed the railway line in Heretaunga Street and he watched horrified as the Post Office Town Clock and Tower crashed to the ground and Heretaunga Street buildings fell into the street. The entire frontage of the four-storey Grand Hotel toppled forwards onto the road. Had he and Mr. Kersberg gone to the hotel as was their custom, they'd have been buried alive beneath the rubble and probably killed.

James Daniel Donovan, having served in the Hastings Volunteer Fire Brigade, spent the rest of the day extracting people who were trapped in the rubble and assisting a doctor who had the unpleasant task of amputating the leg from a woman trapped by a heavy girder. Her life was saved and months later she arrived on crutches at the Donovan residence to reclaim her handbag which had been given into the safe keeping of Mr. Donovan at the time of the lady's ghastly experience.

For those at home in the Kerehoma homestead, things were equally perilous. Mrs. Donovan with one of her daughters, Mary, was inside when the earthquake struck. Everything fell off the walls and out of the cupboards, the kitchen floor awash with smashed jars of preserves and jam. The eight double chimneys all collapsed into the house, scattering bricks everywhere. Once the shaking had subsided, in a state of shock, the women rushed outside into the garden where they found that the artesian well had burst, gushing water into the adjacent paddock. As if they didn't have enough to contend with, a swarm of bees settled on Mary, covering her face and hair. Mrs. Donovan, whipped off her headscarf and managed to flick the bees off and luckily neither women were stung in the process.

They then set out to find Mr. Reilly, their gardener who they found buried beneath a pile of leaves with his wheelbarrow on top of him. Mr. Reilly was an old age pensioner with nowhere to live. In return for keeping the large garden and tennis courts in order, the Donovans gave him a home. He lived in one of the 'whares' at the back of the Kerehoma homestead.

Other members of the family were either at work or school when the 'quake struck. Margaret and Clare Donovan were in attendance at St. Joseph's Convent School. It was the first day back at school after the holidays and as was the case elsewhere, everything fell off the walls, bookcases toppled forwards and blackboards crashed to the floor with petrified children screaming in terror and panic. The entire school ran outside onto the rugby field, thinking the end of the world had come. Margaret Donovan's class watched the Standard One class stampede towards the school doorway, but a quick-thinking nun, Sister Joan, barred their way while a huge double chimney crashed to the floor in front of them after which the class scrambled over the bricks to safety outside. Maurice Donovan arrived to dub his sister home on his bike while Clare Donovan walked home with her friend Molly Fern. A large drain blew up like a huge geyser just after Margaret and Maurice passed over it. When they arrived home they found Mrs. Donovan and Mary sitting on a garden seat under a tree to the left of the main entrance gates, everybody happy to be re-united. A son, Verdon Donovan, a fitter at the Whakatu Freezing works at the time, arrived home, deposited his packed lunch and set off for Hastings township to administer help. The eldest son of the family, Thomas Donovan, was working at Carlyle, McLean, Scannel and Wood, Solicitors, at the time. After the earthquake he went round to Heretaunga Street to see if his friend, the family butcher, Mr. Thear was alright. Tom couldn't find him and was about to leave the butcher's shop when, on impulse, he decided to check the walk in freezer. Luckily the door opened and Tom found Mr. Thear slowly freezing to death as there was no inside door handle. Mr. Thear, no doubt, was forever grateful to Tom Donovan for saving his life. (See notes).

Once the family had re-assembled that night at Collinge Road, all their mattresses were dragged outside and they slept beneath the stars, fearing it was too dangerous to sleep inside. Had the earthquake happened during the night, they might well have been killed as the



chimney bricks had fallen onto their beds. An almighty aftershock struck at about 9pm and Clare and Margaret Donovan stood, looking towards Hastings witnessing the inferno that erupted as the town's gas mains burst, igniting the central business area. The fire hydrants were buried beneath bricks and rubble so people had to watch helplessly while Hastings burned.

On the homefront, the family all pulled together with the men building an outside stove against the back fence which Mrs. Donovan cooked on and the family slept in tents pitched on the tennis courts for a period of five weeks. By then it was decided that they would move back to their family home at 403 Eastbourne Street West, where Jack Reidy, brother of Mrs. Donovan built 'whares' behind the house, similar to those at the back of the Kerehoma homestead. These solved their previously cramped living conditions. The Donovan family were extremely fortunate to come out of the experience relatively unscathed. The only 'casualty' was Mr. Donovan's near new, orange and black 1930 Essex. It had been parked behind his tobacconist's shop and was crushed by falling debris. The car was uninsured.

The Kerehoma homestead was duly repaired and with the lease expiring in the 1950s, the Kerehoma family once again took up residence. It is heartening to know that the homestead is still owned by the Kerehoma family today and lived in by Mr. John Naera (and his wife Mavis), grandson of the original owner, Te Raro Rangikatuakina Kerehoma. The lake and stream were eventually put underground by the council, but the property remains today much as it was when first erected, a fine testament to the man whose great vision made it possible.

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Grand-daughters of James Daniel and Brigid Catherine Donovan (Nee Reidy).

The information for this article was supplied by Mr. and Mrs. John Naera present owners/occupiers of the Kerehoma homestead and from memories recorded by Margaret Donoghue (nee Donovan).

### Notes

In Michael Fowler's book: "From Disaster to Recovery: The Hastings CBD 1931-1935", there appears an account of Jack Thear and his son, also Jack Thear both butchers and their experiences during the earthquake while working at the British Meat Depot. Neither men were found locked in a freezer and both survived. However, extensive searches through electoral rolls and cemetery records has established that there were at least two Thear families in Hastings at that time and both families worked in the butchery trade. A search through Papers Past uncovered a list of totally destroyed buildings in the earthquake. One was listed as the Heretaunga Meat Company (possibly the same as the British Meat Depot which was in Heretaunga Street) where Jack Thear and his son worked, and Thear Butchery, possibly where Tom Donovan's friend worked. Another unverified account asserts that a butcher was found frozen to death in a locked freezer as a result of the earthquake. Again, searches through cemetery records and Births, Deaths and Marriages found no evidence of anybody by the name of Thear dying as a result of the earthquake.