

## **NAPIER EARTHQUAKE 1931**

### **Letter from Frank Logan to Newcastle post the earthquake**

A member of a well known Newcastle family, Mr. Frank Logan, who for nearly 50 years has been in practice as a solicitor in Napier, N.Z., is among the sufferers by the recent earthquake disaster. He and his family were lucky to escape with their lives, as will be gathered from a graphic account of his experiences, which he has forwarded to his brother in Newcastle, Mr. James Logan, and which we publish today.

The two brothers are sons of the late Mr. James Logan, who for 37 years was manager of the Newcastle branch of the North British and Mercantile Insurance Company. Mr. Logan served his articles as a solicitor with Mr. Joseph A. Philipson of Newcastle. He was prominent in his younger days as one of the pioneers of rugby in the district, and was a playing member of the Northumberland Rugby Football Club. He helped to introduce the game into N.Z., was president of the N.Z. Rugby Union, and has been largely instrumental in arranging the tours of The All Blacks.

MR. James Logan, the other brother, who remains in Newcastle, served with the North British and Mercantile Insurance Company for 50 years. He succeeded his father as manager of the Newcastle branch in 1898, and continued to fill that office until he retired from business in 1918. He still holds the position of chairman of the Universal Building Society, in which he also followed his father.

### **TERROR-STICKEN TYPISTS**

In his letter which is dated February 2nd, Mr. Frank Logan states:- " I will try to write you a little day to day. The catastrophe occurred yesterday morning. Without an instant's warning the whole town was in the throes of the most awful earthquake you can possibly imagine. What a merciful Providence that we were all saved! Ivan, my son, had a narrow shave. He was in the office, and went to get out the typists from amidst the falling brick walls and plaster. They were terror-stricken. One collapsed altogether, and this delayed things while the walls were falling. Eventually Ivan succeeded in rescuing them all. It was impossible to put our trust account ledgers and our costs ledgers in the strong room, nor the cashboxes or anything else. Everybody was very lucky to have escaped. In the adjoining premises on one side there were deaths and on the other side a man was seriously injured while our office people were struggling out.

A fire started almost at once some distance away and soon engulfed the whole town. The



water mains had burst, and the fire-engines were useless until they got their leads hose into the sea. The engines could not get to many places on account of the streets being blocked with fallen buildings and other debris.

### **WHOLESALE DESTRUCTION**

The fire swept over what was left of the office and destroyed all our records of the past 50 years. All the banks suffered the same fate and I believe their books and ledgers are gone also. The Public Hospital has gone and we don't know yet the fate of many of the patients, and a private hospital on the Marine Parade crashed. It was a three-story building which had cost 50,000 pounds about 10 years ago. They say it was the best equipped private hospital south of the line.

At the request of the government, two cruisers steamed full speed from Auckland to Napier. I have just heard that they have arrived, and that what is left of the town is being patrolled by marines and blue-jackets. Doctors and nurses and stores are being hurried into the place by motor-cars.

There is no water and women and children are being hurried into the country as want of proper sanitation will soon be a burning question.

Ivan's house is more or less a wreck. Chimneys have crashed through the roof and the whole building has got a nasty twist. Chimneys are all down in our house and furniture thrown everywhere. The roads to Frank's place are blocked but he got a messenger through to us late yesterday afternoon by bicycle and foot."

### **FARMERS' LOSS**

**February 6**

"Frank got through to us yesterday. His house has suffered too. All the chimneys are down, but the house itself is not the wreck that Ivan's is. Still no rain and the country is awful. The water pipes from Frank's spring (two miles away from the house) are burst. These pipes supply troughs in all paddocks where there are no creeks. The stock on Frank's farm are dependent on water for its existence. In drought time when there is no feed water keeps the stock alive.

I have just heard that all the freezing works in the district are ruined.

Louie and I are living in Ivan's car shed. It is a small, rough wood shed, but we are glad to be beside Ivan and his family. They dare not sleep in the house and are living in two tents in the garden.

We hear that Napier is to be evacuated within two days on account of risk of an epidemic of fever. The sewerage pipes are hopelessly broken. As it is, the squares and public parks are full

of tents and the people are living and sleeping out of doors.

We are having about a dozen serious earthquakes every day. This will continue for a few days yet. Ivan's family are all going to Frank's place today. They will sleep in tents in the garden. Louie and I have decided to accept an invitation from an old friend in the country, ten miles from Napier, and near to a doctor. We will have a bath and lavatory to ourselves.

The loss of the freezing works is dreadful, as at this time of the year farmers sell most of their surplus stock to the freezing companies. This means a still greater loss to the poor farmers.

#### **IN ABSOLUTE RUINS**

**February 7th**

We are now in very comfortable quarters with Kinross White ten miles from Napier. There are still continuous heavy shocks of earthquake going on, but not by any means as severe as the first big one. The town is in absolute ruins. Both Napier and Hastings are under military law. There will not be much business done in Napier or the surrounding country for months, if not years.

The mail leaves tomorrow. I can write no more at present. Except just to tell you of my miraculous escape. I was well enough that morning to attend the annual general meeting of the Gas Company. I arrived a quarter- of- an- hour before the hour for the meeting and the secretary and I were the only two in the room when the earthquake struck us. We hung on to the big table which took us round the room, and then the walls began to collapse. Eventually the secretary got me down the stairs, only to find that the front and back access of the building were blocked by falling walls and loose bricks and masonry. In the end we climbed (I was mostly dragged by willing helpers) over the fallen bricks and I was rescued without a scratch - also the secretary.

I am beginning to feel the reaction now. I am evidently not meant to go under yet!