

-AN HISTORICAL SURVEY OF MY DISTRICT

Patoka and Puketitiri, Northern Hawkes Bay.

In 1861 Colonel Whitmore obtained the Patoka and Puketitiri districts as part of a Crown grant. It was infertile, hilly country, largely divested of the original bush by fire, and used by the Maori only for occasional bird-snaring expeditions. Rissington was accessible by water, from the coast by water, to Patoka a road was built by soldiers, and this was later taken over by the Government and extended to supply the garrisons near Taupo during the Maori wars. There was a stockade at Patoka, but the area saw no fighting.

In 1873, when he sold the area to Robert Rhodes, Colonel Whitmore's Stock return showed 28,000 Merinos grazing the Kaweka Mountains and foothills, which carried tussock and native grasses. Year by year acres of fern were burned and sown to English grasses, which often reverted to fern and manuka because of inadequate stocking. The poor soil and inaccessibility of the area, low wool prices and valueless carcasses made farming unprofitable. In the 1880s Hallet, of Puketitiri, milled flax growing on his property, but it was of poor quality. By the 1890s refrigeration had made mutton a saleable commodity, and Romneys replaced Merinos, fencing improved and cattle increased. In 1893 the first fodder crop was sown at Patoka.

At this time a timber mill was built at Hendley, near Patoka, and in 1903 milling began at Puketitiri and continued until 1942. Puketitiri became a thriving township, with a hotel and a coach service twice weekly to Napier. In 1917, although farm produce still travelled by dray, <sup>daily</sup> a motor coach took over the mail and passenger service, and telephone exchanges were installed at Patoka and Puketitiri.

In the 1920s Patoka lost the school which had catered for the <sup>Hendley</sup> mill children. The land was very sparsely settled, farming was still an

unprofitable business; the 1930s saw the introduction of the tractor and increasing use of artificial fertiliser to improve the land. The alarming earthquakes of 1931 did little damage, but the war and droughts of the 1940s, the reduction of manpower and upsurge of rabbits delayed development. In 1946 the first of 18 ex-servicemen to be settled in the Patoka district moved into Hendley and the next 15 years saw much Government development, further settlements, the improvement of even the steepest country by aerial top-dressing and heavier stocking, bringing prosperity.

In 1947 a school was opened in a farmhouse, <sup>(G. Halliday's)</sup> and two years later moved, with 17 pupils, to the present building, since enlarged, which now houses 60 children. In 1948 a Countrywomen's Institute was formed with 9 members, now increased to 63. There was a C.W.I. at Puketitiri in the 1930s, but it closed with the mills. In 1955 the Patoka settlers built a War Memorial Hall, electric power came to the area, and the Patoka Post Office became a store. In 1961 the replacement of the manually operated telephone exchanges at ~~Rissington~~, Patoka and Puketitiri by an automatic exchange at Patoka brought to an end the pioneer era in the district.

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