

"Reminiscences of Hawke's Bay in the Early Days."

My people came to Napier in 1854. Murvis was the only Hotel, and there were only about a dozen other houses. My father was looking for land but found it hard to get. He had letters to Spencer Civiling, Tekopanga, now called St. Lawrence at Patangata.

My family went by boat to Clive or rather to the Ngaruaroro mouth. There was no road, the Maoris had agreed to take my family to Patangata. They guided them round the beach to the Tuki Tuki; a large canoe was ready and every one was taken to a Pah on the river side. I think His Lordship lives there now. The next step up the river was to another Maori settlement, I think the name was Ngawakatotara. I think the county council had some trouble a few years ago at the same place, because they broke into some old graves. The next step was at Patangata. During the whole trip from Napier to Patangata the party were the guests of the Natives; few if any Pakehas were seen. The Natives did everything possible for the comfort of my people.

A lengthy stay was made at Patangata, and the natives allowed my parents to occupy one of their houses. Stores were a difficulty; pork and wheat could be obtained from the Maoris. These things were paid for by the exchange of as much tobacco.

During our early experience of the Natives no member of the party knew a word of Maori, and the Maoris knew no English. Above I referred to the purchase of wheat. This had to be ground into a rough kind of flour by the aid of a small hand turned mill. It was a common practice for a visitor to grind a certain quantity for flour as some recompense for the accommodation. It was said of one Oero settler that a notice board in front of the house bore the Legend "Grind or go on."

After some months' delay at Patangata we were advised to push on to Porangahau as the Government were buying that country shortly. We again had to secure the assistance of some Maori guides. The only means of locomotion between Patangata and Porangahau was to walk. I being an infant had to be carried. The first point we made for was Pourerere. A few sheep had been landed there by a Mr. Northwood. The run afterwards became the property of the Nairn Bros. From Pourerere we went along the Beach to a nice valley with a native Pah close to the sea; I forget the name, but the valley is now owned by P. S. Mc.Hardy. The chief man of the Pah got very fond of me. I think I was about seven months old. This old man offered my mother 1000 acres of land in exchange for me. I could never understand why she didn't close the deal. The reason she gave was the old Rangatira had been looking me over and found that I had just developed my first tooth. He remarked that in his younger days, he

considered that children of that age were always the sweetest for food.

In describing the journey to Pourerere I should have indicated that the only track was via Kairako. This I think is a wrong name. When I was a child it used to be called something similar to Koinorakau. Most of the Maori names have been much altered in the last few years, and certainly not improved; for instance, take the peak Kahuraanaki; this should be three words, viz. Kahu Paa Naki. The words in English would mean "Sun kissed robe".

In due course always with the native assistance we arrived at Porangahau. The Maoris built us a whare where the township now is. We had only been there a few weeks when a large flood forced us to leave for higher ground. The Maoris who lived on the opposite bank of the river immediately came across with a large canoe and kept us at the Pah until the house was again habitable.

The negotiations were progressing for the purchase of the lands. George Cooper was the Government Land Purchase Agent, and he came to Porangahau to take signatures and pay the money. At that time, although the Native Pah was a large one, in fact there were two Pahs, all business was done for the community by the two leading families, the Matuas and Ropihaus. These people did not agree with Coopers' boundaries which embraced all the native land North of the River. After several days' argument Cooper decided to come back to Napier so he told the chiefs through the Interpreter that he would leave the money (it was all in gold sovereigns) in the whare Reinanga until they were ready to complete. I think he came back six months later, and the cash was still where he had left it, lying on the whare floor. In those days stealing by Maoris was most unusual. I had 30 years' experience of them without a single case. My most vivid recollection of the early 60's was the big earthquake of 62 or 63. It occurred at night time, and was most sever between Te Aute and Akitu. In that district there were then very few buildings other than Native built whares, so little damage was done. Our house was one of the exceptions. It was built of clay and timber. After the 'quake it was a heap of clay with some pieces of timber. The window glass was broken and split in the same way that it did between Napier and Mohaka in the 1931 shake.

The next coast development was the Telegraph line from Wellington to Napier. I think the work was going on in 1864. Everybody was greatly interested in the job, for until the line was in operation we had no means of communication with the other settlements. There was no mail carrier at that time. Referring again to the building of the Telegraph line, When you realize that there was no road of any kind between Wairaropa and Waipukurau, no bridges, and no sawmills, most of the poles were cut as close to the line as possible and were either squared with the axe or pit-sawn by hand power.

The only means of laying out the heavy poles was by bullock teams, and the drivers of these teams were exceedingly clever at getting across the roughest of country. Some critics of these men maintained that it was not so much their knowledge of topography but was more owing to their unrivalled command of language. Later on in life, I drove teams of bullocks myself, and could speak quite fluently and suitably to them. There was one very able driver who used to get the best results out of his team. This man had a most pronounced squint, and speaking and glaring at his team in a bad place. The bullocks did not seem to know which one he was looking at, so they did their best in hopes of not getting the whip. By this time 1864, the whole country was being rapidly taken up, and stocked with sheep and cattle. Perhaps the most able settler of Hawke's Bay at that time was Sam Williams of Te Aute. He was only Sam Williams for many years, when he became as you all know, "The Archdeacon." He was full of energy and travelled immense distances on horseback. I think for many years he was the only spiritual adviser between Napier and Porangahau. He christened me at Patangata in 1855. His homestead at Te Aute was badly damaged by the big 'quake in 1862. In his bedroom he kept a very ordinary sized safe. After the 'quake he could not find his valuable gold watch. Every hole and corner was searched but no result. The Maoris were instructed to search the whole place, but no sign of the watch was discovered. Sometime later, owing to alterations to the house, the safe before referred to, had to be moved, and the long lost watch was discovered underneath. Evidently the 'quake had canted the safe up at an angle and the watch had been jerked under. Many years after this I visited a Native Pah with Sam Williams. He held the usual service, after which His Reverence sat down on the ground and the party discussed the sermon as usual. One man who was not a Rangitira had a lot to say and tried to prove that the advent of the Missionary was not an unmixed blessing to the Maori. The man happened to be a fat one, a very unusual case in those days. The Rev. Samuel Williams listened for some time and then said to the speaker, "What would have happened to you if the Missionary had not come here?" The man grunted, and Sam Williams said, "They would have eaten you, you fat fool!" That ended the discussion.

I can remember only one occasion as a small boy when the Maoris attacked me seriously. I was playing about the Pah and some little distance away I discovered a concealed spade, and proceeded to try and dig with it. I was observed by some women who came after me at top speed. They of course, caught me, and thrashed me well and truly. The explanati

was that their spade was Tapu, and used only for digging graves.

As I had now reached the age of nine and under orders to go to school in Napier, I propose to thank you for listening so patiently to what I fear has just been the ordinary experience of boys like I in those early days. Should I be favoured with another opportunity I shall be only too glad to give you some more of my experiences.