

Survivors remember the Hawke's Bay earthquake 90 years on

[Tom Kitchin](#), Hawke's Bay Reporter

[@inkitchnz](#) tom.kitchin@rnz.co.nz

A 99-year-old remembers the struggles in the aftermath of the Hawke's Bay earthquake in 1931 that shattered and destroyed much of the region.



Photo: RNZ / Tom Kitchin

Nola Manley was one of the survivors who attended a ceremony in Napier today, marking exactly 90 years since the quake.

She was a nine-year-old schoolgirl in Havelock North when the quake struck and remembered rushing outside with her classmates.

"One boy got hit on the head with a brick as we came out, one off one of the chimneys, and a relation, they were up at the [local] baths and he got caught with a brick too."

Manley recalled the tough times afterwards.

"Our chimney was down and we lived in a tent at the back of the section for I don't know how long now. It was a nasty, nasty thing and I wish we could get rid of all earthquakes."

Another survivor, Eric Baggett, was two when the earthquake struck.



Photo: Supplied / Napier City Council

He could not remember the quake itself, but had lived in Napier his whole life and saw the city rise from the ashes.

"The cathedral down Tennyson St there, I used to go in there and play in all the ruins."

He was impressed with how the city had been rebuilt and expanded.

"It's grown immensely of course, and of course the city's just gone further out."

At 10.47am today by Napier's seashore today, the Veronica Bell rang for two-and-a-half minutes, the length of the quake..



Photo: Supplied / Napier City Council

The bell is a key symbol of the 1931 earthquake and the navy's help in its aftermath, as it is from the ship *HMS Veronica*.

At the service, Commodore Mathew Williams, the navy's maritime component commander, retold the story of how the ship assisted the city in a time of desperate need.

The ship was at the port and although the crew were safe, they saw destruction on land.

"Ashore, in front of the *Veronica*, huge cracks were evident in the road and railway lines twisted into shapeless masses of tangled metal, some pegged to their sleepers, some now loose," Williams said.



Photo: RNZ / Tom Kitchin

The ship first reported the disaster by morse code to the Auckland port and the likes of the prime minister.

Napier Mayor Kirsten Wise told those at the service the quake should not be forgotten.

"The earthquake was a defining moment for all of you, leaving behind an indelible memory of what happened on that hot and sunny February morning. As time goes by, the memories of that day become even more precious and important to remember for the sake of future generations knowing the history of our city."

She said triumph also came from the adversity.

"The 1931 earthquake was a great tragedy but from misfortune came a beautiful art deco city that has put us on the international map."

A service was also held in Hastings at the same time, where the town clock bells rang at exactly 10.47am.

[Hamilton Logan, 96](#), spoke about his quake experience in Hastings.