



BAD SPOT: Museum is in the firing line.

Bay's historic records must be safeguarded

Your excellent articles on the Napier earthquake preparedness (*Hawke's Bay Today*, September 22) and on preparing for rising tides (September 23) bring into sharp focus the situation facing the Hawke's Bay Museum archive right now. Millions of dollars are to be spent on the improvements to the museum which lies directly in the path of any tsunami invading our shoreline.

How often have we heard the words "not if but when" pertaining to Hawke's Bay earthquakes and attendant tsunami?

Hawke's Bay stands to lose almost its entire history in the event of such calamity and the certain destruction of the museum in its present location.

Napier and Hastings would lose collections of national significance to New Zealand.

The present museum site could still be used as a museum and art gallery if the bulk of the collections were stored away from the coast, perhaps in the old Napier Hospital site or similar.

Could not millions of dollars be saved by a more modest revamp of the museum complex with offsite storage facilities in as safe an environment as possible?

Hopefully newly elected councillors may bring some new ideas to these issues.

JUNE JOHNSON
Retired archivist
Havelock North Borough
Council

Solution to preserving Bay's past

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

There's a significant answer to June Johnson's worry about the loss of valuable, history-making records in Hawke's Bay.

This answer is on a site inland from the coast, on property regarded as high as the roofline of the Hastings Opera House, in all ways less likely to be affected by tsunami.

The Community Foundation (HB) is moving steadily toward establishing a computerised archive, a knowledge bank, a digitised history library at Stoneycroft, on the expressway intersection with Omaha Rd.

This overdue province-wide enterprise will provide a satisfactory supplementary and complementary alternative to the work of the HB Art Gallery and Museum.

The knowledge bank was conceived by the Hawke's Bay Community Foundation, which recognised that it is unwise to store all of Hawke's Bay's treasures in one place, earthquakes and fires among reasons for this. At Stoneycroft we offer the front door to a realistic proposal, achievable, sustainable, free-standing — with its links and impact fanning across networks of the world.

June Johnson makes a profound point, which means that if people don't rise to this opportunity, we won't need to be surprised if today's computer-age children grow up knowing more about the outside world than they do about the province that nurtured them.

It is pleasing to report that residents from Napier to Central Hawke's Bay have contributed \$30,000 so far, quietly, out of their own pockets, in the past few months. This is going toward the purchase of plant. Firms are offering help and providing services in the interests of making sure that a means of preserving the province's history in perpetuity is in place regardless of what calamities befall the originals. Originals can be attacked wherever they are by silverfish or mildew. They can be subject to the vandalism of neglect, to bonfires as estates are cleared or in the rubbish dump as businesses are closed.

Our proposal has integrity and is on a scale appropriate to our region and its wealth of history. It brings the

combination of hi-tech archival preservation to a heritage building.

The community foundation will announce interesting developments in the next few months. This would not be possible without the Hastings District Council's support. It is doing a grand job of maintaining this historic homestead and its grounds. Nor would it be possible without the National Library of New Zealand experts, who are keen to ensure digital copies of history, economic information, environmental and social records have been captured truly for posterity no matter where the originals are stored.

The pace of progress for this long-term vision for Hawke's Bay depends entirely now on how soon we can raise the better part of the money needed for establishment.

Public response to my talks on the subject has been high throughout the region. People have written cheques on the spot for their contributions. This is a telling response to a project which is destined to have important consequences for Hawke's Bay.

JAMES MORGAN
Project champion
Community Foundation (HB)