

**OMATUA**



**HAWKE'S BAY PROVINCE**

**FROM  
1861**

**HOMESTEAD  
1963**



**THE STORY OF  
OMATUA**

Omatua, at Rissington, inland and north of Napier, has quite a colourful history. Colonel George Whitmore was sent there to protect the settlers. (He eventually bought them out). With the conclusion of the N.Z. Land wars, soldiers were given a tract of land. A Captain Anderson obtained what is now Omatua, and built his home in 1861 using flat stones from the river, instead of piles for foundations. Shingle was put between the walls to stop bullets. This house survived the earthquake of 1863, but with a curved roof, crooked walls, and undulating floors; and was just above flood level two years later. Badly shaken again in 1931 quake. In 1874 a relative of Cecil Rhodes bought the property and planted many of the older trees. It changed hands, first to Colonel Whitmore, J.N. Williams, and then John S. Giblin 1879. Was later unoccupied till 1907 when Mr Frank Hutchinson bought it; married Amy Large, and they lived there till his death in 1940. In 1907 they found bees in occupation, honey running down the stairs, and the house overgrown with trees and creepers. He was keen on Botany, and planted more trees. He used to visit the schools with a haversack full of bush specimens, and tell people about them. Omatua which in Maori means "First Home" was a homestead filled with the atmosphere of age, historical happenings, and of people who surrounded themselves with beauty. In its heyday the large laid out ground filled with rare shrubs, natural stone paths and terraces went down to the river, complete with orchard trees. Big gum trees and native ferns giving a background to the brilliant colour of azaleas, rhododendrons, bottlebrush and many more. The house, with its old English lead-paned windows, the steep roof, once shingled, the dormer windows, with sloping ceilings inside upstairs, the straight narrow stairway, were all evidence of this past. Various additions were built over the years. Entry to the attic was by way of the top of the boot cupboard, then the dressing chest, the manrobe, the wardrobe, and then up into the floor above. Cupboard doors with hand carved bone handles, brass hinges and fittings and square nails in oldest walls.

The rooms had wooden name plates above the doors using places of interest in the District, such as Mt. McNeil, Mangahone, Camp Flat. After the death of her brother Frank, Mrs J.N. Absolom bought the Omatua block and Homestead. It was at Omatua that Miss Jerome Spencer came to live with the Hutchinson's, and after a trip to Canada, started the first Country Women's Institute at a meeting in the

Garden Room in 1921. A bronze plaque on a stone, in memory of her efforts is at the left of the entrance gate. From 1956 the local Women's Institute met every month at Omatua, and still does to-day. While travelling to a Handicraft Exhibition at Wellington in 1953, a Guider happened to ask Rosemary Absolom, if she knew of any place where she could take her P.L.'s at Queen's Birthday Weekend for a training. On returning to Rissington Mrs Rosemary Absolom asked her Mother-in-law if this group of Napier Guides could use Omatua. She said "Yes", and that was the beginning of Hawke's Bay Guide interest in Omatua as a training home.

**1953** the property was leased for two years at a peppercorn rental to the Guides. A Committee formed of:- Mesdames: R. Absolom, Marion de Stacpoole, P.C. Lorna Nash, D.C. and D. Harlen Ranger Guider. Lease renewed again 1957. Mrs Dorothy Smith appointed to take Omatua bookings. Many L.A. working parties for House and grounds. Mrs Harlen and the Rangers helped.

**1961** the Provincial Commissioner, Mrs Mary von Dadelszen said, the highlight of the year was the generous gift from the Absolom Family of Omatua and five acres for the use of the Province. The maintenance and management of Omatua was to be the responsibility of a Board of Management, which later was called "The Property Committee" with Trustees - Messrs: B.S. Devine, C.L. Brown, A.R.H. Absolom, L.D. Gilbertson. Mesdames: R. Absolom and V. Heaps.

A House Committee was formed to deal with everyday affairs. They were Mrs V. Heaps Secretary-Treasurer, Mrs Dinah Kay, Convenor, her husband as Caretaker. Headquarters (National) have agreed to affix the seal on completion of legal formalities.

**1961** Mrs R. Gooch proposed that a tent be provided and stocked with articles for sale, made by Guide members, at the Hawke's Bay A & P Show, the proceeds for Omatua funds. The Greenwood family paid for the plumber to fix the leaks in the roof (first priority) and update the plumbing. Mr Ashcroft will attack the bees again in the winter. At present one is liable to tread on Bees on the bedroom floors.

**1962** Letter from Mrs R. Absolom suggesting disposing of the rear of the house and right hand wing, which will allow for a drive round the house, and a fence at the back. An independent water supply will eventually be needed.



“Mary von Dadelszen” pointed out the possibilities of Omatua, and said she visualised the area between the house and the river becoming the finest Campsite in the country. No more than 24 Guides to stay in the house till Fire Escapes fitted. A Provincial Camp to be held at Omatua before Mrs von Dadelszen’s term of office expires. Three years before our P.C. had put forward the idea of a Provincial Campsite on the river terrace below Omatua. It took foresight and courage to imagine several Groups of Guides camping on the wilderness that existed there, a tangle of fallen tree trunks and branches, and huge blackberry bushes, with long crawlers surrounded by periwinkle. Uniformed and lay members, men and women, tackled an almost impossible task, and when spirits flagged, the P.C. turned up with tea, and a bulldozer. Logs, blackberries and periwinkle disappeared with rapidity; the ground was Levelled, and grass seed sown. In January 1964, “Pioneer Camp” with 150 people, our first Provincial Camp became reality. Each day a small magazine was typed and distributed from Omatua House which acted as Camp Headquarters. The Saturday campfire was lit by five Guides, dressed to represent the Pioneer names chosen by each sub-group - Holt, Turangi, Patene, Spencer and Colenso.

**Sunday Guides Own**, glorious sunshine the chorus of birds, and the ripple of the river, created an atmosphere along with the simple sincerity of that Service, that will live long in our memories.

**Visitors Day**, about 400 people attending was beyond our wildest dreams, the enthusiasm of the parents, the ease with which the house and grounds held so many for so long in complete harmony. “Little John” (Mr Cooksey) was guest speaker at a combined Campfire, with local visitors attending.

**Closing Ceremony.** Tonight we gathered for our closing Campfire, a little sad that our camp is almost over. Our Group Leaders spoke of the Pioneers of long ago, who cleared the land and made the roads; of the doctors and nurses who reached their patients on horseback or in bullock drays, and the teachers who rode miles every day.

Our P.C. Spoke:--“We all love, and are proud of this magic place. The weather has smiled on us. It has been a week of happiness and achievement. It has been fun, strong links of friendship have been formed, binding the Province firmly together. Take a torch back, each one of you, to your own Campfires, and re-kindle the enthusiasm of B.P.’s great outdoor game of Guiding.” We all gathered along the river’s

edge and launched our little walnut shell boats; along with our hopes and dreams for the future and started back in small groups to our tents singing "Peace I ask of Thee O River". As the singing faded into the night, it was indeed a moving experience. Each group designed and handmade its own flag for this Camp, and they now hang on the dining room wall in Mary von House.

The Property Committee men replaced the back kitchen wall, installed a new sink, an extra length of bench top, with a safe beneath it and a window that looked down the drive. The "Explorers Camp" (2nd Provincial) with 140 attending, with many exciting events on the Programme, was held in January 1966.

Annual Provincial Weekend Gatherings for adult Leaders, were looked forward to for months. The Convenor and Committee, with Commissioners and many other helpers, provided the catering for up to 100 people on the busiest day, Saturday's main meal (two sittings required for dinner). Food was served out, in the kitchen, and plates passed through the small slide. Food was donated, cooked legs of mutton, fruit, vegetables etc., and the remainder coped with in and on the old coal range, and one domestic size electric stove. Yes, the Cooks were up first, and to bed last, and often ate their meal perched on a stool in the kitchen; perhaps with a spoon, as the knives and forks had run out! How we worked, but what fun we had! The P.C. always arrived with a sharp carving knife, and began to carve the joints at least half an hour before dinner. Puddings for 100 - all lined up in the Pantry.

Updated Health and Fire Regulations meant that the upstairs of Omatua could no longer be used for sleeping. In 1977 the decision of Mrs Eve Riddell, (a stalwart Omatua worker) to give us now for Omauta \$1000 encouraged the Committee to begin plans for a new building - behind Omatua with space for wet day activities for both House occupiers and Campers; a small kitchenette with side rooms for sleeping and storage etc. It took almost three years to plan, raise funds for and then build Riddell Lodge. (The old House was still used for cooking and dining at that time.) Through Fund Raising amongst uniform members; gifts from Trusts and other Public donations, Riddell Lodge was opened debt free in November 1979. Unfortunately Eve Riddell did not live to see the Opening Day, but the "Name log" was officially hung in place by her son Mr Tim Riddell. A very joyful day for the large numbers of Brownies, Guides, parents and friends present. We had hardly drawn breath from all this, when we were informed



*Pioneer Camp January 1964*





*Omatua Homestead*



*Mary von Dadelszen House 1982*

that the old house could not be used for any purpose for much longer. So a two stage re-development plan is to begin.

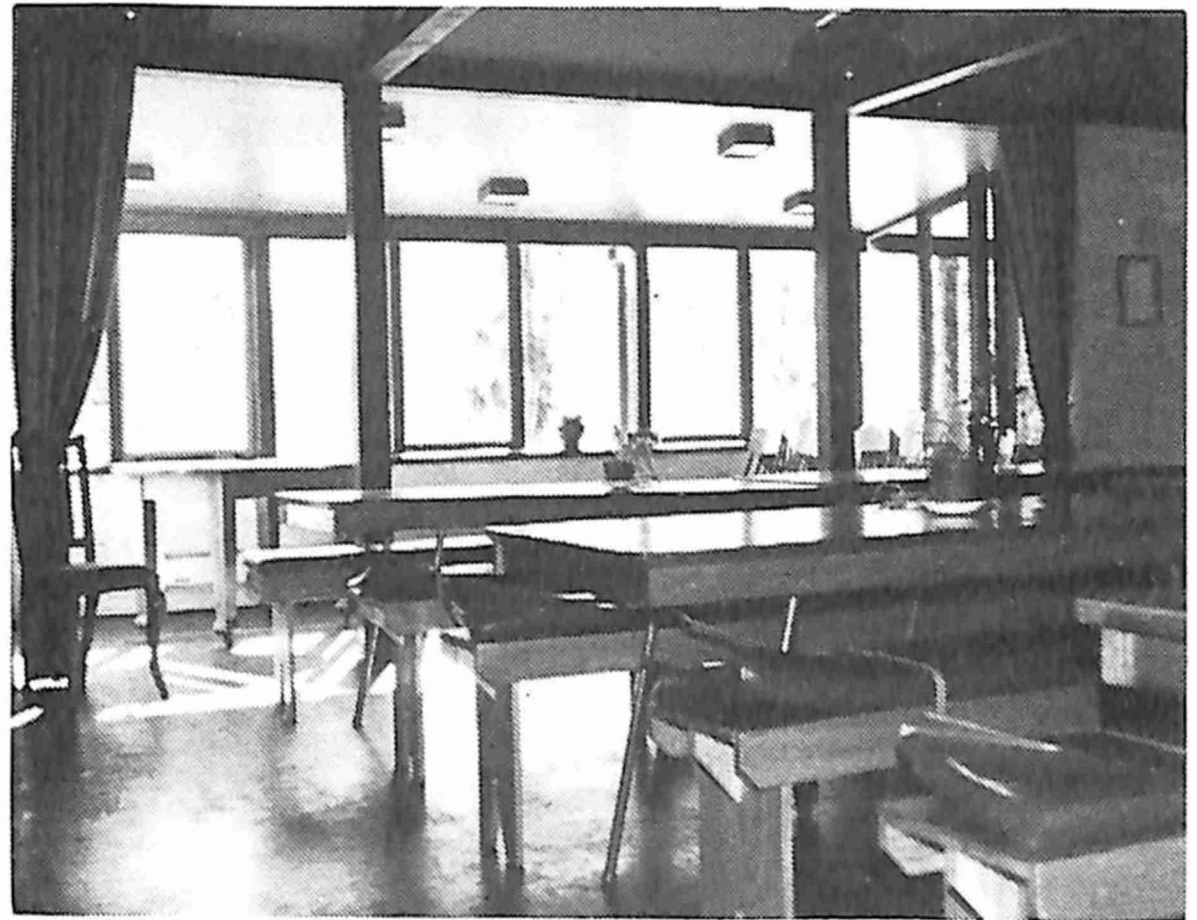
Stage 1 includes a new kitchen and dining area, which in "open plan style" includes a sun room area to replace our beloved Garden Room, and a living room area with open fireplace. Every effort is being made to retain the original flavour of Omatua House, as sadly it is to be demolished to make way for the new building. August 1982. So again planning and Fund raising, and then a new Building rising, complete with Dormer Windows, just one of the old leadlight windows looking down the drive as it used to do; a cosy area for relaxing in front of the Open fire; and a new Garden room with lots of glass and sun and view. A corner space for the institute and their belongings, and an entrance Porch complete with two of the original verandah posts.

Mrs von Dadelszen "Rakau" had long since retired from P.C.; but took on the job of head of the Fund Raising Committee. Her sudden death in a car accident stunned us all. Her sister Lady Ormond agreed to take her place as head of Fund Raising, and everyone rallied round to complete the job. Of course it had to be "Mary von Dadelszen House" in raised letters on a shaped slice of wood to hang above new entrance doors. "Rakau" her Guiding name meant wood or stick, and her piece of Kanuka with RAKAU on it, used to sit on the table at her place at every gathering. Everyone seemed to help with that fund raising effort, and how determined we all were to complete the job, that Mary had so enthusiastically planned and begun to work for.

**December 12th 1982.** Another opening, another fine day, parents and friends, brown and blue uniforms everywhere, picnics on the Campsite. A large black cloud was coming across; but everyone left for home before the rain poured down. And what a splendid new kitchen to provide meals for large numbers, with a big slide to the dining room for easy access. One old handbasin was installed in the new kitchen for handwashing and the old Coal Range was kept. The dining area had extra trestle tables, with bright check cloths, new wooden forms. Gay red light shades over each table. Our most treasured pieces of old furniture lovingly repolished, in the living, and garden room areas. "Pioneer Camp" flags hung on the wall, a special painting of the old house in a place of honour.



*Riddell Lodge*



*Interior Mary von Dadelszen House*

**Dedication:** May the Friendship, Love and Peace that radiated from our “First Home” continue in Mary von Dadelszen House. May the spirit and fun of Guiding that Mary shared with us, thrive in this place. “God Bless this House”.

A covered walkway links Riddell Lodge to Mary von Dadelszen House, and goes round to the old and new ablution block creating a complex.

No bookings were accepted while this house was being built and it took almost a year before the place was booked out again. Gatherings, trainings, Brownie, Guide, School and Church Groups, Cubs all enjoy our new buildings.

**Stage 2** A Dormitory Block to sleep 32, with continuing walkway along the front was built within the next 18 months, in an effort to have it completed before the Price Freeze ended. This Building backs a sheltered shingled courtyard complete with flagpole. Mrs Janet Greenfield was P.C., on July 22nd, 1984 when we celebrated again the completion of this project. Mr & Mrs Absolom had told the Omatua Trustees, that they would like to give something special as a gift to Omatua; and agreed to a pair of Garden Gates on the drive. These were installed, just in time, to be officially opened with the Ceremonial cutting of a blue ribbon on the same day as the dormitory block, named the Absolom Wing, was dedicated and opened by Mr W. T. Nelson:



*Dormitory Block named Absolom Wing*

### **“ABSLOM WING”**

Our “Guest House” is ready, the beds are laid out  
With pillows and covers; there are mats for our feet.  
The windows are curtained, there are ‘alcoves’ for two,  
It’s warm and secure, Now over to you,  
To remember you’re sharing the peace and the quiet  
That lets us all sleep so soundly at night.

### **BLESSING**

Great Father of all, we ask Thy blessing on this our  
“Absolom Wing”, so that all who come to find rest  
may be held in Thy keeping throughout each night.

Amen



Absolom Gates

National President Lady Beattie spoke at the Opening:-

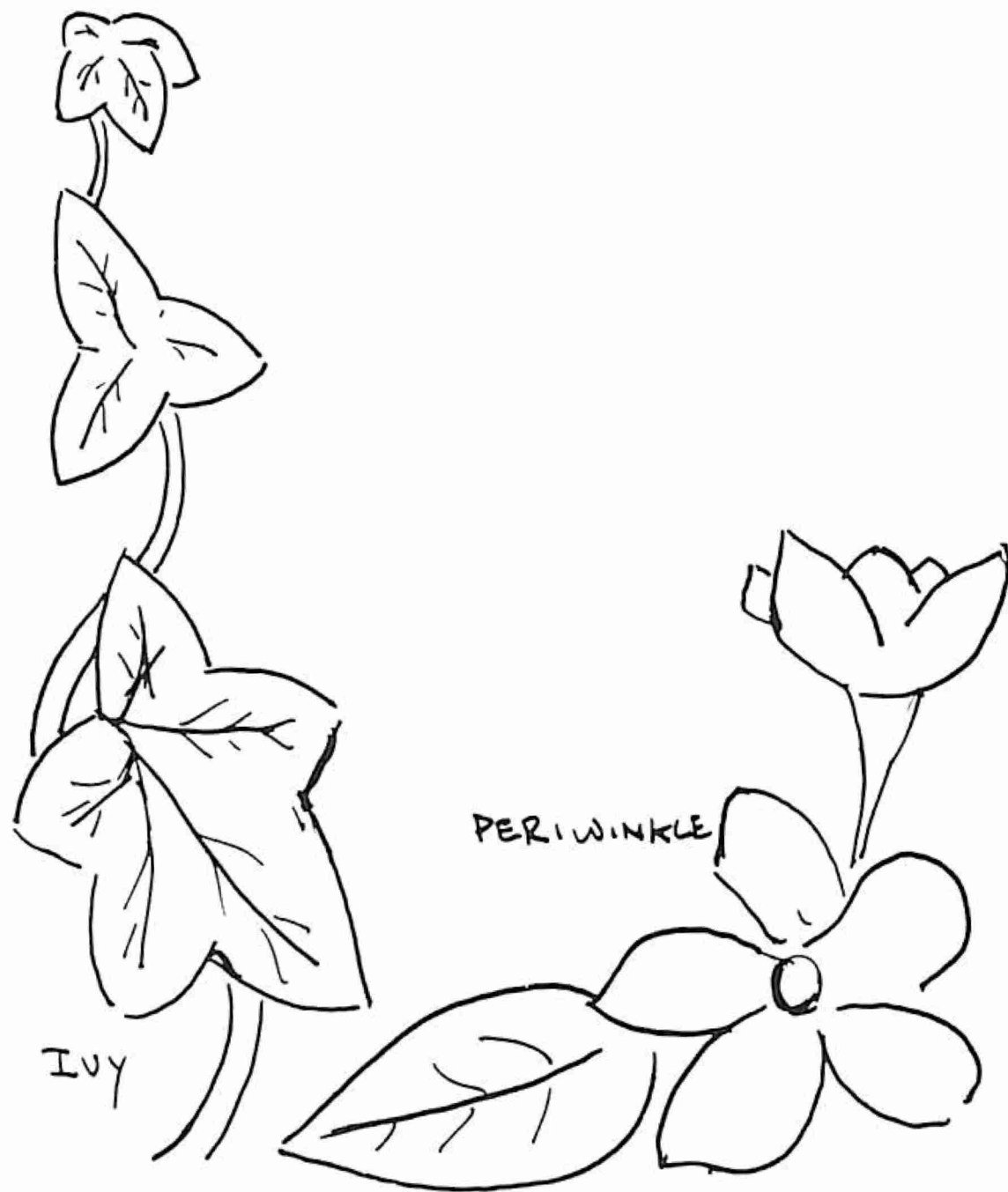
“Guiding fosters abilities and activities, which few of us in the normal way of modern life would have the opportunity to develop. Girls learn to assess the priorities of their lives, to plan and adapt, how to fit in with a small group, learn to share, and what it is to be relied on by their friends”.

From 1977 to 1986 has been the “decade” of re-building Omatua facilities, a tremendous upsurge of voluntary help. The Omatua Management Committee (voluntary) meets regularly to help with day to day affairs.

**1981** “The friends of Omatua” seem to “thrive” on helping with money and time, and working bees. Service Organisations have given both time and money. Tradesmen have given of their skills many times. The garden area has been redeveloped. Wide new steps lead down from the house to the campsite, with small gates at the bottom. The campsite is improved, (flooded, half covered in silt) now reformed, levelled, and regrassed.

Fund raising has continued almost non-stop. Thanks to the goodwill of so many people the Complex is again debt free. Trustees have attended many extra meetings and given willingly of their time, including the Secretary Treasurer. Some of the old trees have had to go, many more have been planted including Natives over the last few years. Planted, watered and cared for by the present Convenor. Our Guiding Folk use the area (first priority) and when not required for Guiding, Schools, Cubs, Church groups, Craft groups etc are using it more and more. It is booked most of the time, and after growing in stature and use for 25 years let us wish Omatua a busy future, with many “Young People” and those not so young coming to enjoy their stay.





Sixteen

## “OMATUA”

‘Omatua’ ’mongst the trees and ferns  
‘Omatua’ ’mongst the pines  
Where the river gleams in the distance  
And the moon on the water shines.

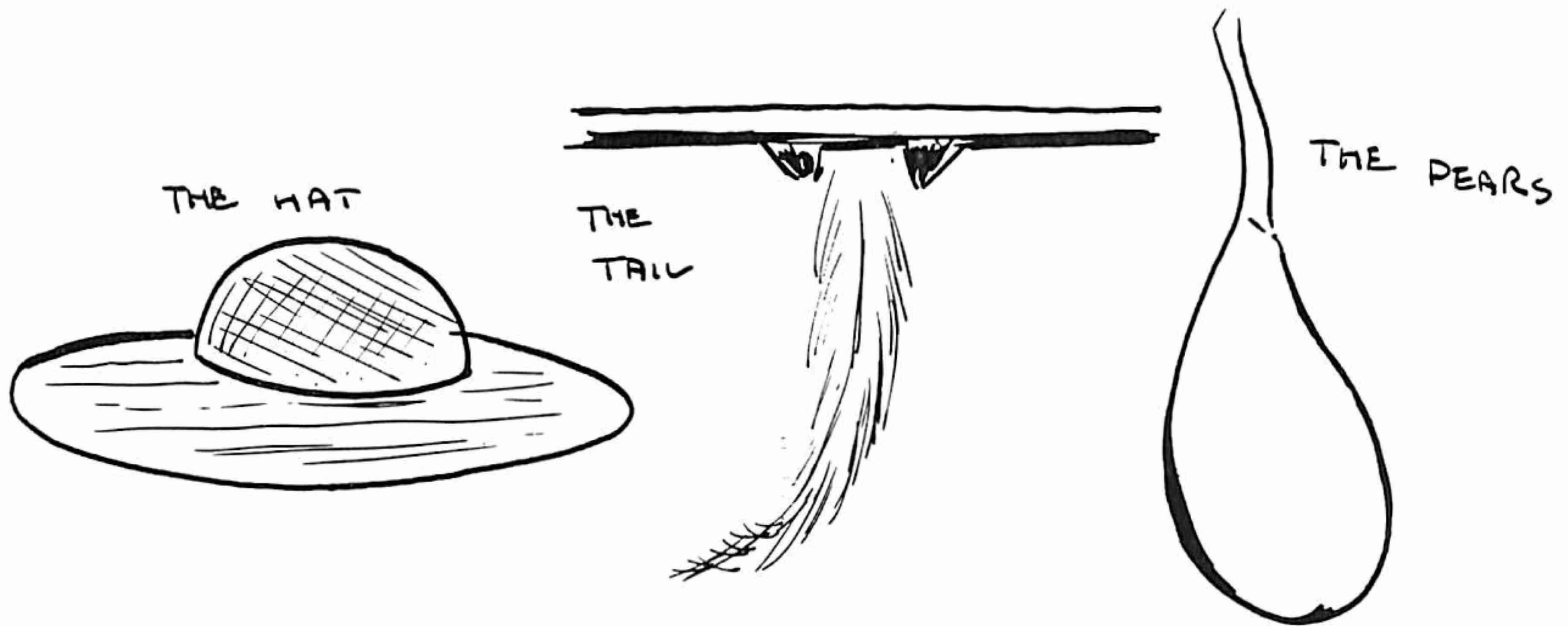
Chorus:

‘Omatua’ house stands firm and true  
To welcome all the Guides  
From Pongoroa to the Mohaka!  
Hine tu ora noho mate!

At night we hear the Ruru’s call  
Sounding from the trees  
While we waken to the bell-bird’s call  
Floating clearly on the breeze.

Omatua stairs are dark and dim  
They lead to attics bare  
But the hearths down stairs are warm and bright  
And the comradeship is there.

N.B. “Hine tu ora noho mate” means;  
The industrious thrive while the idle die in want

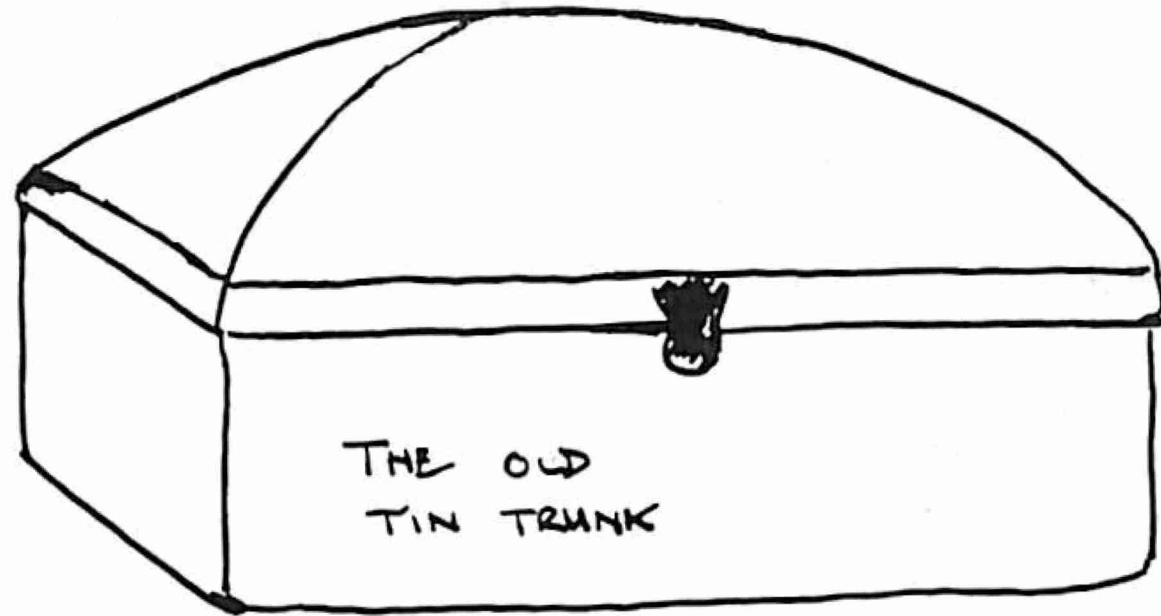


### Moments to Remember:-

Exploring the many cobwebby, dusty cupboards, when first Omatua was "ours". Found something? Large dark and round, in the farther corner! When we ventured to touch it, out came a very ancient large brimmed silk hat, decorated with Cobwebs.

One day when inspecting the house, up in the Wing, a furry tail hanging down through a hole in the soft board ceiling - Yes, Possums used to climb up from under the house and sleep between the walls, upstairs and downstairs, preferably near the hot water cylinder.

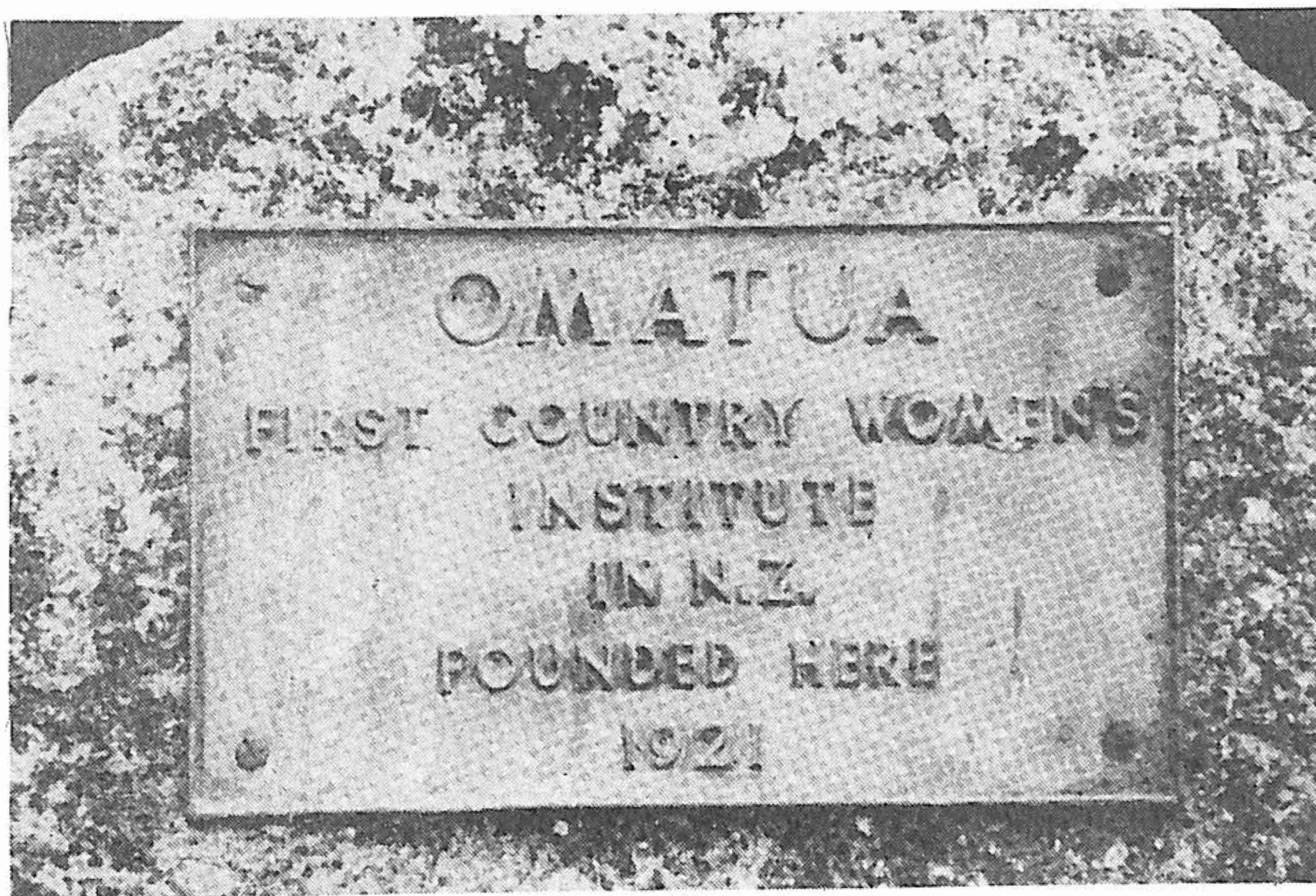
After dark Possums noisily enjoying the fruit of the 100 year old « pear tree (even if it is hard and cardboardy).



Our P.C. waiting till everyone was in bed before she rang the "Bell" for Fire drill. It was a big brass bell hanging in a wooden stand on the wall of the Garden Room. Rumour had it that some people went to bed in their clothes!!! It could be very cold indeed waiting while the roll was called, down the drive by the Walnut tree.

**The large tin trunk** rescued from the Attic, which still had tapestry wools and canvas etc inside. The trunk was cleaned and used under the kitchen bench for years as our Bread container. The wools and canvas were later made into a Tapestry worked bag, and presented as a gift to Eve Riddell.

**The Ghost on the Stairs** which became a legend, and the **Safe** which was supposed to be a bread oven behind the living room fireplace?



### **“ABSOLOM GATES”**

“Absolom Gates” are strong and true  
Of cedar wood with natural grain,  
They open “IN” to welcome you  
And open “OUT” to say farewell.  
They’re given by two ‘caring people’  
Who hope that all who enter here  
Will grow to love this happy place  
And gather strength from nature’s grace  
Of trees and hills and open space.  
To leave for home with heads held high  
With joyful hearts and open minds,  
To face the challenge of our times.

***COMPILED BY "TITOKI"***

**MRS MARY WALLACE**