

PIONEERS PROGRES

By Gilbert Lloyd

As you drive North from Wellington up the East coast, ^{you enter the AB Province} you pass through prosperous dairying country around Dannevirke and Norsewood, through rolling green hills like close clipped lawns, where five sheep to the acre fatten and then down to the ^{HERE TAUNGA} plains, where apples grow at ninety tons to the acre and every kind of fruit and vegetable abounds in profusion.

This is veritably "The Fruit Bowl of New Zealand" and it is hard to believe that pioneers starved on these dairy farms, sheep farmers in desperation, drove their surplus sheep over the cliffs to drown in the sea and fruitgrowers toiled 17 hours a day, just to provide their families with the bare necessities of life.

So lets turn back the clock and see how these struggling pioneers created this transformation.

In the early 1870s numbers of immigrants arrived at Napier from Scandinavia, eagerly seeking a new life in this country. Many were experienced farmers and when granted 40 acres for each family, had visions of good grass country where they could raise cows and poultry and give their children a better life.

So they trudged ^{forth} ~~away~~ on their 50 mile walk to the new settlement in 40 mile bush, to find no grass, just tall trees and fern with no possibility of grazing or growing crops until they felled those trees with an axe, burned the trunks and fern and cleared a space. Meantime logs must be split or pit sawn to provide ^a huts for the family and many lived on cooked roots, grubs and lice from rotten logs to avoid starvation.

With no money, no possibility of paid labour, they battled on until some fortunate ones obtained work on the new railway line being pushed through this difficult country. After walking ten miles to work, they would toil all day digging cuttings, laying rails and sleepers then walk home to face more logs until dark and share their meagre wages with their more unfortunate relations.

These Scandinavians were our finest immigrants, only hardy and determined men and women could have triumphed over these adversities and it was a thoughtless Government who gave no help, limiting the sections to 40 acres instead of 200, which would have provided their sons with a chance of another home on the property as it became developed.

The names of Hansens, Petersens and Jensens appear on the rural mail boxes today, the owners taking pride in the struggles their forebears performed here 100 years ago.

Sheep farmers, too were having their problems.

William Nelson, as a man of twenty, landed at Auckland in 1862 and decided to tramp through the country before he committed himself to settle in one district.

Auckland, Waikato, Hawkes Bay, Wellington, Nelson and Canterbury were all inspected and he settled on Hawkes Bay as his future home.

In partnership with his elder brother, he took up a small property and then moved to a large sheep station in Central Hawkes Bay, where they spent all their money improving the property.

Wool was selling at reasonable prices and surplus sheep were driven to the gold fields at Thames or shipped to the West coast of the South Island where eager miners were hunting the elusive gold and in need of this meat.

But the miners and prospectors became disillusioned and left for Australia and the price of sheep dropped from £2 to £1 to 40 cents. If that was bad, worse was to come. A horde of locusts and grasshoppers invaded Nelsons property and by next morning not a blade of grass or leaf on a tree was left on the thousand acres of pasture land in front of the house. Against these impossible odds, William harnessed his horse to the gig and abandoned the farm arriving in Hastings to establish a flaxmill at Mangateretere, with the last of his funds.

Maoris for many years had been cutting and treating flax on the swamp where Hastings now stands. The hand treated flax was a fine product for mats and ropes, but the machine dressed article was vastly inferior and in a few years flaxmilling was not a viable proposition and in 1872, Nelson returned to his family's business in England.

The loss of a meat market to miners, left the sheepfarmers in desperate straits. With 900,000 sheep in the Province, 200,000 of them culls and little feed, some turned to boiling down the carcasses for tallow with meagre returns.

Guthrie Smith of Tutira Station, that famous naturalist, boiled down 1400 cull sheep and the return in soap realised six cents per head, a scant reward for the labour and firewood and nothing for the sheep. Other farmers near the coast, realising boiling down was not worth the effort, drove the old gummy ewes over the cliffs to die on the way down or drown in the sea.

(3)

The Nelson family in England was the founder of Nelson Dale and Co, gelatine manufacturers and young William had not taken much interest in this factory when he left for the Colonies ten years before, but he now saw that this animal byproducts firm, making glue from hooves, gelatine from boiled skins, soup from the boiled waste meat and selling bones to the cutlery factories for knife handles, could have the solution to the problems farmers faced in Hawkes Bay, so in 1880 he returned to New Zealand and in partnership with his brother in law, Mr J.N. Williams a boiling down works at Tomoana near Hastings, calling the firm Nelson Brothers and Williams.

This was ^{NOT LIKE} the crude boilers used by the farmers which just drew off the tallow, but a factory that used all the sheep carcass to advantage.

Refrigeration had been in existence for some years, but Nelson had been bitten twice and was not going to have his fingers caught until someone else had bought all the head aches, but designed his boiling down plant so that it could be converted to freezing later on.

In 1880 Australia sent its first consignment of frozen meat to England arriving in good order and Otago sent their first load in 1882 by the sailing ship "Dunedin" unloading 98 days later in perfect condition to realise exceptional prices.

Nelson now had confidence to raise large capital in England, to form a new company Nelson Bros NZ Ltd. to take over the existing site and expand to a large meat freezing company.

The plant was planned to handle 400 sheep a day, but Nelson was sure he was on a winner and designed for 800 sheep a day, an impossible target all the scoffers believed. First season, they handled 41000 sheep and 10 cattle.

Today, the Nelsons ~~Bro~~ (NZ) Ltd Tomoana freezing works can process 20,700 sheep and 700 cattle in a single day.

Mr J.N. Williams was a man of means, who seemed to have his finger in every pie that was cooking in this Province and when he left the meat industry, he journeyed to California in the 1890s and saw fruit growing and canning on a large scale.

He returned to his property at Frimley, near Hastings, convinced that this district was ideal for fruit growing and established the first really large orchard.

The orchard was a mile long and eight rows meant eight miles of peaches, an impressive figure and others soon followed his lead.

Supply^{SOUP} exceeded demand and Williams in 1904, started his Frimley Cannery, which was a factory with a difference for those unlightened times.

The staff had bonus incentives, profit sharing, recreation hall, a boarding house, with subsidised rates, for the girls who came from other towns and horse buses to carry them to and from work. The factory produced considerable^{Volume} for those times but met with difficulties.

A severe frost decimated the crops in 1910 and the factory closed for the season. Someone had the bright idea that it was not necessary to import expensive tin plate for cans, when hundreds of petrol tins, two to the case, were being imported from California, ^{AND} were abandoned^{empty} all over the countryside and boys could collect them at a penny a dozen and bring them to the can plant. Here a reliable hand could cut out the top and bottom, flatten them and carefully wash them and they would have can material for negligible cost.

A fine idea in theory, but failed in practice when human error stepped in. Some of the tins were washed carelessly or missed altogether and when a house wife opened a tin for Sunday dinner and served peaches and petrol mixed, Frimley's sales graph went for a slide.

When Mr J.N. Williams died, his sons were too busy on their huge sheep properties to bother about a cannery and the ^{factory} cannery was closed^{in 1913} and the plant dismantled ~~in 1943~~.

The fruitgrowing community grieved the loss of the cannery and although several small outfits tried in the next five years, it was twenty years before anyone had the courage to really start again.

James Wattie entered the Postal services in 1915, soon after leaving primary school, but after a few months, the department found he had sight in only one eye, so informed him he could not advance beyond telegram boy or mail carrier and he should look elsewhere if he wanted a real future.

Wattie then worked in a fruit packing plant, took an office job while studying accountancy in his spare time and then became manager of a large fruit packing factory and cool stores.

In the 1920s and ~~30s~~ early 30s, fruitgrowing was passing through difficult times. With no cannery or market for low grade fruit, growers would give away dray loads of rejects to a pig farmer and if unwanted even there, would dig a pit and bury them.

Few of us could afford the luxury of paying a factory to pack our crop. You just picked and carted fruit all day and at 6p.m, with no electricity yet available, you lit the Coleman pressure lamp, turned the home made ~~grad~~ grader by hand and packed fruit until midnight.

(5)

So the pack house, managed by Wattie, closed down in the heart of the 1930s economic depression and he was left with an empty factory, cool stores and no job, so he formed a canning company with \$2500 capital and today J. Wattie Canneries and Wattie Industries is one of the largest businesses in New Zealand.

With the cannery soundly established, Jim Wattie thoughts turned to horse racing and in 1962 to his horse ^{Even Stevens} to Australia, where ~~Even Stevens~~ collected the Caulfield and Melbourne Cups and in 1963, the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh called in to see his huge cannery in operation.

When he became Sir James Wattie in 1966, an old friend said to him, "You know Jim, you were dead unlucky having only one eye and losing that post office job. If you ~~had~~ had two good eyes you could have retired as postmaster in a small country town on Government pension years ago. But now you'll just have to work on and hope to save enough to keep you and Lady Wattie in your old age".

In this small country there are few men who can claim their grandfather settled here from Europe 150 years ago, but Douglas Sturm, of Hastings is one of them.

Frederick Sturm was not a child when he settled at Mahia Peninsular in the 1830s, the first permanent white resident in Hawkes Bay. He had already travelled all over the world and had many exciting experiences.

He was born in Austria in 1809 and joined the Imperial Court, studying plant life for the Emperor, he was enthusiastic about his gardens and new and unusual plants.

Some palm trees near the palace were suffering from ^{an} some unknown disease, for which the royal gardeners had not found a remedy and the Emperor offered a reward to anyone who could find a cure. Young Sturm asked permission to try and wrapped the trunks in damp moss, which he kept moistened and the trees soon recovered.

The Emperor was delighted, gave him his reward and placed him in charge a small party to search for a rare and precious orchid in the Balkan mountains. In a little village, one evening, he was watching some of the locals drinking and gambling and at the close of play, one of the players could not meet his debts and it looked as though bloodshed would follow and Sturm offered to pay the debt if the debtor would reimburse him next day.

When the debt was repaid, the grateful borrower gave him a token saying, "If you ever get into trouble around these parts, just show this token and you will be quite safe".

(6)

A few days later, while fossicking for orchids alone in a remote valley, he was waylaid by bandits and in the scuffle he was wounded before they overcame him and started to truss him up. He suddenly remembered his token and without much hope, produced it, when the bandits treated him with the greatest respect and led him to their headquarters to meet their leader, who was the debtor he had rescued a few days before. They dressed his wound and he relaxed at leisure while their chief sent his men to collect the orchids and many more unknown plants which he took back to his superior in triumph.

The superior then joined him to a five man team of experts, who were to travel the world in search of more rare and exotic plants and they visited England, Africa, China, India, Australia and New Zealand, landing at Otago before returning via Sydney on their homeward voyage.

With all this travel and new experiences, young Fred returned did not feel like settling down to staid Court life, so left the party at Sydney and travelled by whaling ship to New Zealand to become a whaling station supervisor at Mahia Peninsula.

The whaling crews were a fairly wild lot, often falling foul of the Maoris along the coast and during ^{INTER-TROUBLE} a raid on the whaling station by a rival tribe, he was captured, carted off, tied up and then locked in a ^{whore} where.

The outlook looked very grim and he was ^{POSSIBLY} obviously heading for the cooking pot and with no safety token this time, but fortunately a princess, the daughter of the local chief, had noticed him and after darkening, crept out, released him and hid him in her ^{whore} where.

The princess's ^{TEMPORARILY} where was tapu, sacred, so he was safe temporarily, but he needed permanent protection for a life insurance policy at that time, ~~she seemed~~ a pleasant girl, so he married the princess and thus gained immunity from any other molestations.

A linguist in five languages, he soon learnt Maori, leased a ^{PROPERTY} ~~share of the~~ ^{land} and was ^{TRUSTED} very popular with all the Maoris in the area, especially when he planted peach and cherry trees all along the banks of the ^{MAHIA} ~~airon~~ river. ^{THE WHOLE OF THE SUCCESS FOR, THEY ARE UNWILLING TO DOUBT THE BUT}

~~The princess had a daughter, but~~ ^{THE PRINCESS} died a few years later and it was not until much later when the white population became numerous that he married ^{A SEVERAL DAUGHTERS} again and raised another family.

When settlers arrived to take up land further South, he would often walk the hundred miles over the rough country between Nuhaka and Napier to act as interpreter and represent the Maoris in the Land Court when

many ^{new} land squabbles and devious land deals took place in those times.

The Government offered him a large sheep station at a reasonable price, in return for all his help to the people of his district, but his heart was not in sheep, but in trees and plants, so he left the district and in 1867, established a nursery at Mangateretere near William Nelson's flax mill.

Soon after, he sold fruit trees to a young gardener, named William Guthrey, who had purchased a few acres between Havelock North and his nursery and as was usual, Guthrey planted seasonal crops between the young trees to give him income while he waited for the trees to come into bearing.

That year he had a fine crop of water melons, just ready to harvest, which would sell for a penny or two pence each, to the people in the little village, when who should come down the road but Te Kooti, that fierce warrior chief, who had been the terror of earlier settlers.

Queen Victoria had pardoned Te Kooti some time before, but he and his twenty warriors looked mighty ferocious, ^{WHEN} they spotted Guthreys water melons, jumped the fence ^{TO} and started ramming the melons into their flax kit bags.

Guthrey remonstrated with them but they took no notice and he was in despair as he saw all his pennys and two pence being lost, but he cheered up no end when he saw Te Kooti's ^{KOOTI'S} Paymaster coming along and where a large melon had been lifted he placed a sovereign and a half sovereign in the smaller indentations.

Guthrey immediately became the enthusiastic fruit salesman he was to prove in later years, pointing out the finest melons and helping them to cram more of them into their kits.

When Te Kooti moved on, Guthrey found eighty gold coins spread over the water melon patch, the foundation of his fortunes, when he established his fruit shops ^{IN} Hastings became a town, ~~in later years.~~

Other small nurseries soon followed Sturms venture and the large orchards and cannery attracted Thomas Horton, from Pahiatua to commence a nursery close to the Frimley operations.

This grew to ^{he} one of the largest nurseries in the country, sending ship loads ^{of trees} to Nelson and Motueka when fruitgrowing boomed there, shortly before the 1914/18 war. By 1917 the nursery covered seventy five acres and employed sixty men in the season.

Thomas Horton was a nurseryman and a salesman with vision, displaying fruit and plants at the New Zealand International Exhibition in 1905 and also displays in Melbourne.

In 1913 and 1914 he paid visits to the Argentine, investigating the pe

