

Some of the History of Park Island, Napier. *(Notes from a recent lunch presentation)*

From the Mid 1800's beaches in this area were popular picnic spots. Maraetara and was probably the most popular among sailors for picnics as it was sheltered from the prevailing winds. The location of this beach can be imagined if you look across the lagoon from the Bayview boundary to the Poraiti hills.



In 1874 with the abolition of the Government control of the Provinces The Napier Borough Council was formed, and they took responsibility for Charitable Aid in Hawkes Bay. The Council took over the Charitable Aid refuge at the foot of Coote Road and its successor on Barrack Hill, when the last of the Imperial troops quit Napier in 1870, With extensions the Barracks could accommodate up to 240 people.

By 1875 the Refuge was home for the incurable sick, feeble minded, orphan children, the destitute and homeless, it was largely unsupervised.

Park island was named after the NZ Company Surveyor Robert Park. The Napier based shipping company of Richardson and Co owned the island in 1874 and they leased it to the Provincial Council for 20 years to build a Quarantine Station there for use by immigrants.



At the time numerous ships were bringing immigrants to Napier and many arrived in poor health. One such ship was called the "Clarence", named after the Duke of Clarence. For the Voyage to New Zealand 348 Passengers including 98 Shetlanders embarked on the 21st September 1874. The vessel tragically lost a young crewman overboard, but it was the disease which swept through the ship which was most unfortunate. 26 deaths were recorded 18 were

children 7 or under and 12 others all from the Shetland islands.

With all the illnesses experienced on the journey they expected to be put in Quarantine on arrival in Napier. However surprisingly the Napier officials cleared the vessel. In the months following the illness brought by the passengers spread through the local community. They called the illness Clarence fever before it was actually diagnosed as Typhoid. Panic and anger spread through the locals as deaths occurred and the Hospital was overwhelmed by symptom sufferers. The Quarantine officer received violent flack and was close to being Lynched.

Maybe the reason the officials cleared the Ship was because the Quarantine Station was not completed at Park Island and they had nowhere to Quarantine so many people.

In 1877 there was a newspaper advertisement for a Dairy Farm of 109 acres of well grassed land known as Park island. It said the business was capable of yielding 1000 pounds per annum. and contained a lease which had 17 years to run. The Farm had not only the islands but a large piece of land which was bounded by Wharerangi Road. The farm changed hands a few times over the years and in 1902 a letter to the editor appeared in the newspaper criticising the public bodies for not purchasing the farm as the land was very strategic for the future and was safe from flooding and surface water.

Around the late 1800s the Quarantine home had become run down, and the lease was not renewed. In 1903 the farm was again advertised for sale having a dwelling house of 9 rooms, a stable, a buggy house, 4 acres of orchard and half an acre of grapes.

In 1905 the Napier Borough Council purchased the farm with a view to build an Old Peoples' home and to secure a future site for a Cemetery as the Cemetery on the Napier Hill was nearing capacity. Tenders were called in November 1905 to Build the new Home. The old Quarantine buildings were in poor condition so they were pulled down and some of the timber was used to build out buildings. On 5 March 1907 the mayor along with the Honourable J.A. Millar attended the opening of what was termed a Charitable Aid Home. The home cost 12,000 pounds to build.

In 1910 the HB Hospital and Charitable Aids Board was appointed to control the Park Island Home. The Western Hills Cemetery has a signboard Plaque marking the place where the Old People's home was. This includes a site map detailing various buildings, cottage, and Managers house on the slope above the main buildings. Up to 100 male and Female inmates were accommodated at various times, the age of admission was 65 for Males and 60 for Females. It was lights out at 8pm and they could only have visitors between 3 to 4pm on Wednesdays and Sundays and there was strictly no drinking and anyone who disobeyed the rules was shown the door. Inmates in good health were required to do cleaning as directed and perform duties about the buildings and Gardens without fee. In 1928 the purpose of the home was officially stated as for Old Men, Chronic cases and broken down in health returned Soldiers.



Then in 1931 the Earthquake struck and 15 people lost their lives when the Buildings all collapsed. When the buildings were constructed there was much debate whether to build in timber or brick, wood cost 3500 pounds and Brick 4200 pounds the board opted for brick to the misfortune of the inmates on the day of the quake. The only building that survived the Quake was the engineers cottage.

Three days after the Quake a voice was heard and eventually they rescued a man from the debris. This man James Collins was 90 at the time survived and this photo was taken at the Dannevirke Hospital, he died 4 years later of Senile decay as they called it.

The earthquake struck in the morning when the children at Greenmeadows School were all in the playground but unfortunately 3 children were chosen to be Blackboard Monitors, those were the only children killed as they were indoors. This very sad grave for the three of them is in the Taradale Cemetery.



The only building that survived the quake was the Engineers cottage, restored by the H.B. Hospital board and the Farm was leased out, but the Old People's Home was never rebuilt.

Ken Epplett was the Manager of the HB Hospital Board Farm, the farm carried 120 Dairy cows and 400 plus pigs, food scraps from Napier and Hastings Hospitals were fed to the pigs. The Dairy Herd provided milk and cream to the Hospitals, the whey was fed to the pigs.

Ken was in charge of organising the Pig Expo at the A&P Show around 1974, and he had the bright idea of training a pig from each of the main breeds to walk on a lead so they could be walked around the oval in the Grand Parade at the end of the Show.

Unfortunately, come the Parade, one of the pigs called peanut got scared and took off amongst the Riders and Horses, well Horses don't like pigs so that was the first and last time Pigs were invited to participate in the Grand Parade.



If you are interested in taking a deeper dip into our History, I recommend "A Case History" The Hawkes Bay Hospital Board 1876 to 1989. This is available at our local Libraries.

Phil S