

## New Plymouth History

January 7, 2023

Taken from the internet site <https://teara.govt.nz/en/taranaki-places/page-3>

New Plymouth Taranaki's only city, on the west coast of the North Island 365 km south of Auckland and 352 km north of Wellington, with a 2013 urban-area population of 51,303. New Plymouth was the region's first Pakeha settlement and has always been the largest. The city is the administrative centre of the New Plymouth District Council.

### History

Originally called Ngāmotu (the islands), the site of New Plymouth was occupied for hundreds of years by Māori. More than 60 pā and kainga (village) sites have been recorded in the urban area.

### Chiefly centre

One of the most important pā in the area was the fortress of Puke Ariki (hill of the chiefs) at the mouth of the Huatoki Stream in central New Plymouth. After the arrival of the first Pākehā settlers it was renamed Mt Eliot and became the administrative centre of the township. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries the hill was progressively removed for river-mouth fill. The site is now home to Puke Ariki library, museum and information centre.

Pākehā traders set up a trading station at Ngāmotu in 1828, but it was not until 1841–42 that planned settlement by the Plymouth Company brought 868 immigrants from Devon and Cornwall in England to the 'New' Plymouth. The town site was chosen because of its fertile land, gentle terrain and sheltered beach (none of the river mouths were suitable as ports).

As a result of intertribal fighting over land sales, British troops were stationed in New Plymouth in 1855. In 1860 war between Pākehā and Māori broke out over a disputed land sale at Waitara. A decade of intermittent conflict followed, severely curtailing the development of the town and the surrounding area. New Plymouth's population fell from 2,944 in 1864 to 1,837 in 1871.

### Modesty is a virtue

Visitor Edward Payton wrote about New Plymouth's reputation after touring the country in 1876: 'All the great bustling "cities" of the Colony had a patronising way of trying to snub New Plymouth, referring to it in such derogatory terms as the dullest hole in the country ... I cannot say I find this impression correct; in fact, I have a great liking for this "slow, old hole" ... [It] is a quiet, unassuming place and has not done so much to attract immigrants and settlers by exaggerating reports, as some districts have done. It seems to me a good sign that the settlers are perfectly contented, and rarely evince any disposition to leave it.'

The end of fighting in the 1870s improved New Plymouth's prospects. It did not grow as rapidly as the new settlements of Pātea and Waitara, but by 1885 it had a port and a rail link to Wellington. It remained the commercial and administrative centre of Taranaki. However, in the early 20th century population growth was slower than in the rural districts.

Throughout the 20th century New Plymouth's population increased steadily. It gained city status (20,000 residents) in 1949.

Dairy farming remained the mainstay of the economy. After the Kapuni and Māui gas fields were discovered in the late 1950s and late 1960s respectively, the petroleum industry contributed to the local economy and brought workers and executives from all over the world to New Plymouth.

### TSB Bank

The New Plymouth Savings Bank officially opened for business in 1850. The first deposit was made by Waitera Te Karei, who rode nearly 100 kilometres along the beach from Mōkau to deposit £35. By 1960 there were 14 more branches around Taranaki, and in 1964 the name was changed to Taranaki Savings Bank. After deregulation of the banking industry in 1984, most New Zealand banks became owned by overseas interests, but the Taranaki bank was determined to remain independent. In 1986, it adopted the name TSB Bank and began to operate nationwide.

The annual WOMAD (world of music and dance) festival, and redevelopment of the regional museum and city library (Puke Ariki), raised New Plymouth's profile in the 2000s.

People

In 2013, 86.6% of people living in New Plymouth identified as European, 13.8% as Māori, 5.2% as Asian, 2.0% as Pacific Islanders and 0.6% as Middle Eastern, Latin American or African. The suburb of Marfell had a high Māori population, while Paraiti had a high Asian population.

#### Cultural and recreational facilities

Major cultural and recreational facilities include: the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, a leading contemporary art gallery which incorporates the Len Lye Centre

Yarrow Stadium, the home of Taranaki rugby, which in 2020 was being earthquake-strengthened and upgraded at a cost of \$50 million 52-hectare Pukekura Park. The Bowl of Brooklands, a natural amphitheatre in the park, hosts WOMAD.

#### Bell Block

Township 7 km east of New Plymouth, with a 2013 population of 5,277. Bell Block was named after Francis Dillon Bell, the New Zealand Company's resident agent in Taranaki in 1847–48. In 1860 a stockade was built by European settlers on the hill overlooking the town – but many houses were still destroyed by Māori forces. Extensive subdivisions in the 1960s and 1970s expanded the town so it effectively became part of New Plymouth. The city's airport is in Bell Block.

#### Victoria crosses

Within a few kilometres of Ōmāta several battles were fought during the 1860s Taranaki wars. The battle of Waireka (March 1860) took place on farmland to the north-west. Coxswain William Odgers of HMS Niger won a Victoria Cross there. In October 1863, at a battle on Allen's Hill, Victoria Crosses were won by Drummer Dudley Stagpoole and Ensign John Down, both of the 57th Regiment.

#### Ōmatā

Township 6 km south-west of New Plymouth on State Highway 45, with a 2013 population of 540. Ōmatā was established in the first few years of Pākehā settlement of the area. In 1860 the Ōmatā stockade (fort) was built on a hill near the township to protect the local farmers from Māori fighters.

In the 2000s little of Ōmatā township remained except the primary school and tiny St John's Church (1875).