

Tuakau District Centennial Journal 1865-1965

Produced by the Tuakau District Centennial Committee 1965



GEORGE STREET, 1908

Middleton's Studio

EARLY TUAKAU SETTLERS

Many of the early pioneers that settled in Tuakau arrived in New Zealand aboard the "not so good ship" Ganges, a full rigged sailing vessel of about 400 tons.

The Ganges after a fair trip out from Queens-town, Ireland, arrived in Auckland on the 14th of February, 1865, just over 100 years ago.

As mentioned, the trip out was fair, that is as far as the weather was concerned. For the 480 passengers the trip was not so good, however, and en-route, conditions aboard ship were, to say the least, filthy, overcrowded, unhygienic and degrading.

Food was hard to come by and many passengers bartered their personal belongings to the crew, in attempt to secure extra food for the 150 children that helped make up the passenger total.

Sickness was prevalent and medicinal supplies in short demand. In fact the purser of the "hell ship" was a nautical rogue who thought only of his stomach and pipeful of strong smelling tobacco. He would issue supplies only when he was good and ready.

It is believed that at one stage of the voyage

two passengers threatened to put him over the side if he did not tend to his duties in a compassionate manner.

So bad did conditions become aboard the Ganges that after docking in Auckland an inquiry was held. The outcome found that several deaths en route could be put down to overcrowding and unsanitary conditions.

The Ganges carried quite a number of single men and women, the girls were quartered together in the fore-castle and the men down aft. This left amiships to married couples, who it was thought by the shipping company, would prevent problems. No doubt many a shipboard friendship blossomed forth into a lifetime of bliss.

By the time the Ganges reached Auckland on February 14th, 1865, all the passengers must have thanked God that they had arrived safe and sound. The officers and captain of the ship however must have spent a lot of time worrying what they would say to the port officials, in answer to the bad conditions that passengers had to put up with.

Once ashore the emigrants soon settled in to Colonial life at Onehunga Barracks. Many men obtained work until the time came for them and their families to move off into the interior, to take up land.

Casual jobs in those days were not so casual and many a man did a good 12 hours a day for something like four or five shillings.

However, every little helped and, by the time

they were ready to journey into the relatively unknown, many pioneers had amassed quite a few pounds with which to buy supplies and tools.

For those who intended to take up land at Tuakau, the journey from Onehunga to Drury (the first stopping place) took two and sometimes three days. Here the women and children were housed whilst the men proceeded on to Tuakau via Pokeno and through Whangarata to erect temporary tents and other family accommodation.

This task accomplished, the settlers would then bring in their wives and families along the muddy, oft-times flooded stretch of track that led to Tuakau from Pokeno.

Now came hard work and for many long months and years the sound of axe, the creaking of horse drawn cart, and the grunts and groans of tired and weary settlers became daily sounds.

From virgin bush, however, there later emerged green pastures, flax mills, cultivated paddocks and all that was necessary to keep life and limb in security and, of course, the initial making

of money by selling home grown products to the increasing population of Auckland.

Many of the old pioneers who helped to pave the way for Tuakau's future have been long forgotten, BUT, today, the following names will still be remembered, OR SHOULD BE:

John and Sarah Watson; William and Matilda Clark; John and Teresa Poland; Thomas and Elisa Elliot; George and Susan Whiteside; Henry and John Ferguson; Robert and Margaret Cooney; John and Mary Smith; John and Mary Cowan; Samuel Hewitt; Patrick and Bridget Geraghty; John and Anne Griffin; Hugh and Catherine Bruce; Edward and Eliza Boyle; Robert and Isabella Hampton; Thomas and Mary Collins; John and Harriet McMeahan; James and Catherine Turbott; Lawrence McGuire.

All God fearing men and women. All imbued with the spirit of adventure. All pioneers who had faith in their convictions. All a credit to themselves.