

Recollections



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Recollections

Recollections are documents given by residents, and information gleaned from other publications, that give an insight into people's life-at-the-beach. Of value and interest are those records of people's personal experiences during those early years. Some extracts follow, the full copies of these documents are on the following pages.

1920's: Scott Cameron, 62 Wainui Street: *"There was a sand track from Simpson's house, The Planes, down to the river where tents were used, transport being provided by brake or gig. Cooking was done on open fires or camp ovens." "The first building was a cookhouse and later a few lean-tos. These were on the waterfront, which at that time was the banks of the Turakina River. The houses became sanded up – some to the roofs – and they were subsequently shifted further inland to the middle of the present settlement."*

1920's: Ross Cameron, 62 Wainui Street: *"In the 1920's the lure of river and sea bathing did not attract many people to Koitiata when they found that there were two miles (3Kms) of sand to cross, three gates to open and shut, having to live in tents and having to cross the river to get to the sea." The track into the Domain used in those days was through a Manuka marsh in the gully. During the summer it dried out sufficiently to make a damp but firm ground to drive on. This track later became the formed road in use today."*

1930's: Allpress Family, 21 Omanu Street: *"The family rented a small bach with two rooms and an outdoor toilet at the back of the section. There was a little black stove in one room and some bunks made of old sacks. Lighting was provided by oil lamps and there was no refrigeration. There were so many children. No one really remembers where everyone slept in the two room bach."*

1930's: Maurice Heidrich, 56 Wainui Street: *"My earliest memories go back to the mid-1930's when our bach was erected at the beach. The bach, consisting of three bunkrooms and a large dining-kitchen area, was constructed from large Oregon carcasses and other material, then covered with Malthoid sheets. This meant an annual task of tarring and sanding to keep the Malthoid cover in good repair."*

1940's: Charles Haar, 5 Omanu Street: *"My father and mother retired from their dairy farm at Putorino and bought a cottage at Turakina Beach. This was during World War 2 probably about 1944." "The house my folks had bought was really a fishing shack, it was of four rooms, with dunny outside. "Mum and Dad were the only permanent residents at first, with no telephone or neighbours"*

1960's: Hilton & Maisie Farr, 48 Rapaki Street: *"They moved there permanently in 1961." "In 1961 there were hardly any baches, no electricity and no telephone." "Hilton & Maisie lit their house with a tilly lamp and cooked on a coal range." "The fishing was better then. Families used to get together and stake out nets in the surf overnight. They would cook the fresh flounder and sole in the morning on beach fires."*

Early Days At Turakina Beach Remembered

Some of the early days at Turakina Beach were recalled yesterday by Mr Scott Cameron, of Marton, who has known the area since 1914 when as a young man he helped exercise the hunters from the Simpson Estate at Heaton Park.

Turakina Beach, or more correctly Koitiata, has been in the news lately with the Wanganui-Rangitikei Electric power Board bringing electricity to the settlement and the Rangitikei County Council undertaking to develop the area with the opening up of about 40 residential sites.

Mr Cameron was asked by "The Chronicle" yesterday for some of the early history of the area and his impressions.

He said the settlement opened about 1919 when sections were leased by the county.

"There was a small Maori fishing settlement at what was known as 'Spud Hill,' but this hill disappeared in the flood of 1931.

"There was a sand track from Simpson's house, The Planes, down to the river where tents were used, transport being provided by brake or gig.

"Cooking was done on open fires or camp ovens."

Mr Cameron recalled that in a bad storm all the tents were levelled and the bed-ragged inmates had to

trudge through the mud and a new outlet had to be rain to The Planes where dug to the river. they were taken in.

"There big fires were lit at 2 a.m. and everyone dried out.

"The first building at the settlement was a cookhouse and later a few lean-tos. These were on the present waterfront, which at that time was the banks of the Turakina River.

"The houses became sanded up — some to the roofs — and they were subsequently shifted further inland to the middle of the present settlement," he said.

The oldest house at the beach at present was built by the late Mr Arthur Way and Mr Cameron's garage was subsequently added for a dining room.

Today the house is owned by Mr B. Pierson, of Marton.

Mr Cameron said two dwellings were burnt down, Mr A. Rink's and Mr C. A. Wainwright's, the latter with a serious loss of valuable shooting and fishing gear.

"A few years ago a sand lake burst," he said, "and the whole road was flooded

"The river has changed its course on many occasions and gradually the high sand-hills beloved by children have disappeared as well as the large lagoon on which there was so much boating.

BUSY HOLIDAYS

"Although lacking amenities, which today are considered necessities, children had busy holidays, the yearly highlight being a huge bonfire followed by fancy dress parties in which the youngest to the oldest joined seldom breaking up before the sun rose over the hills at daybreak.

"Watching the godwits preparing for their annual migration, the black swans on the lagoon, hunting for frogs and tadpoles, bringing home baby rabbits and ducks, building huts in the lupins, roasting potatoes on the beach while the grown-ups fished, the huge bowls of whitebait in season, morning calls with flounders for the family breakfasts — these are the memories of what are called 'the good old days'," Mr Cameron said.

My earliest memories go back to the mid-1930s when our bach was erected at the beach. This was to provide holiday accommodation for the Heidrich and Kelly families - thirteen people, though not always together at the same time.

The bach, consisting of three bunkrooms and a large dining-kitchen area, was constructed from large Oregon carcasses and other material, then covered with Malthoid sheets. This meant an annual task of tarring and sanding to keep the Malthoid cover in good repair. The bach was located approximately halfway between Ways' and Carters' baches.

I recall that at this time the settlement consisted of six baches: Heidrichs'/Kellys', Way's, Carter's, Bert Wainwright's, "Scotty" Cameron's, O'Brien's, one other and two fishermen's huts beside the river towards the river mouth.

Conditions were very primitive. No sealed road - only a sand track which meant getting stuck in the sand at times. No electric power. No telephones - the nearest being at the farmhouse at the entrance to the beach track. No sewerage - just an outhouse with a hole in the ground. No town water supply - water being supplied from two large concrete-lined tanks beside the bach, relying on rainwater collected from the roof. Lighting was provided from car batteries. These were kept charged by a wind-powered generator consisting of a propeller-driven car generator first mounted to the side of the bach, but due to vibrations was then mounted on a pole away from the bach. Firewood for the kitchen stove was never in short supply. A task we had was everyone bringing driftwood home after a swim. One thing that was never in short supply was fish.

As children and in our early teens, summer holidays always meant "the beach". Memories are of being plastered with sun screen to prevent sunburn, being told "no swimming until an hour after a meal". Of climbing what we called the "highest hill" - the trig station, walking through lupin bushes which at the time appeared as tall as us small children. Visiting the beach many years later as an adult I was amazed how small the lupins and how low the hills seemed!

An exciting time for us was when Bert Wainwright took his boat out fishing. Bert and his crew would row the boat out beyond the breakers, drop the net, then return. Two lines of people would then pull on the ropes and haul the net back to shore. The result - bags of all kinds of fish which would be shared among the people pulling the net in. We would be warned - keep clear of the stingrays! Memories of long walks to the wreck of the "Fusilier" or walks to the Whangaehu river mouth. Often we would have picnics in the sandhills - needless to say much sand was eaten.

As a lad in my early teens the wartime years were quite exciting. Memories of the Airforce doing low level flying along the beach, seeming to disappear below the sand dunes. The bach shaking during practice bombing by the Airforce at the near-by bombing range. Bunkers were dug into the sand dunes along the shore by the Home Guard. Many happy hours were spent playing in these. After the war, with my friend Charlie scouring the bombing range for tails of smoke bombs and empty machine gun shells. There was a certain amount of risk in this, as the range was still used by the Airforce.

"KOITIATA" - TURAKINA BEACH MEMORIES (continued)

Another memory is when the river diverted going straight to the sea at the bend. This left a large lagoon. Many happy hours were spent making a raft out of willow logs and rafting up and down the lagoon. Then, when I was older, rowing boats on the lagoon.

Memories of night fishing with my friend Charley, lighting a fire on the beach to keep warm, then having difficulties finding our way back rowing up the lagoon in the dark as we could not see the place to beach the boat. Having arguments as to which side of the lagoon we were on and getting caught in weed patches. This was until we got wise and would have a lantern shining at the landing. Spearing flounder by torch light, being careful not to spear our feet!

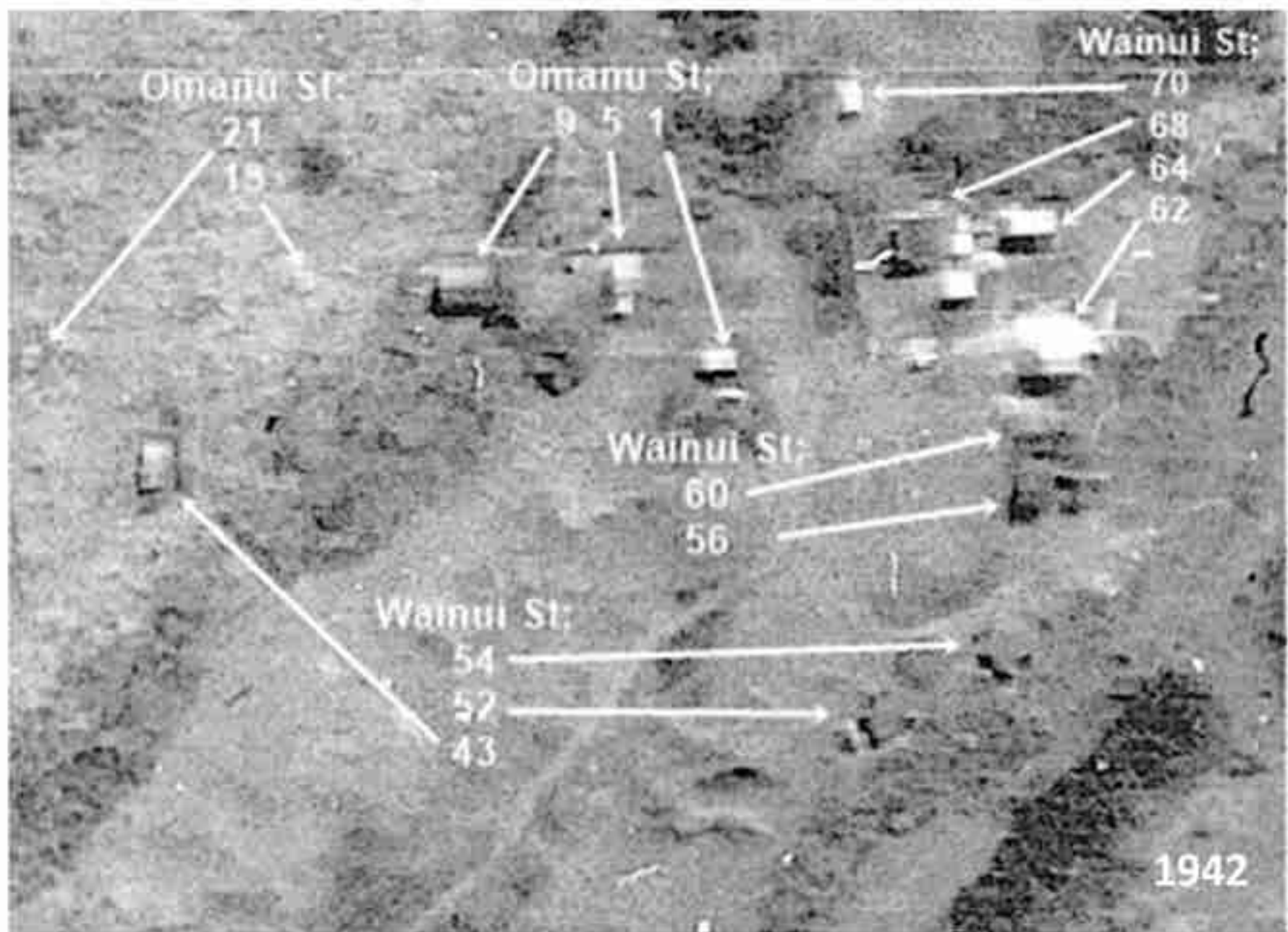
In the late 1940s I had the dubious honour of establishing the first communication link at the beach. At this time I was in the School Cadet Signal Platoon, consequently becoming very interested in radio and telephones. I constructed two telephone signalling devices, and - acquiring some surplus cable - ran a cable between our bach and Haars' bach, burying the cable in the sand and digging a trench across the road to bury it, then connecting the devices so Charley and myself could communicate with each other.

So many happy, carefree hours were spent wandering up and down the beach and roaming the sandhills, being careful not to get lost when out at night.

1948 - At the age of eighteen I left home to work in Wanganui. At this time the bach was sold, so for me it meant the end of many happy holidays at the beach.

Some fifty years later, now living in Auckland, I still feel a strong pull to Koitiata.

Maurice Heidrich



The photo below is from the 1930's, in Wainui street. The buildings from left to right are; at 62 (Cameron), at 60 (Carter), at 56 (Heidrich/Kelly). They are marked in photo above. Closest bach is a good example of car case & malthoid construction.



Turakina Beach and Valley

When Mabel and Bert had their own family they took their children to Turakina Beach for annual holidays in August. The cold weather never detracted from the fabulous family holidays.

The neighbourhood children who needed a holiday were taken along for the adventure and it seemed "the more the merrier" was Bert's philosophy. A neighbour, Geoff Reid, virtually lived with the Allpress family. They drove from Wanganui to Turakina with the children and supplies all on the back of a lorry. The truck used to transport the Allpress family belonged to Bert's friend, Mr Hunt, who also drove them to Turakina because Bert didn't drive. There were no roads to the bach and chains were used to cross the rugged terrain.

The family rented a small bach with two rooms and an outdoor toilet at the back of the section. There was a little black stove in one room and some bunks made of old sacks. Lighting was provided by oil lamps and there was no refrigeration. There were so many children, no one really remembers where everyone slept in the two-room bach.

The family stayed for two weeks and took all of their provisions with them. An old tin trunk was filled with bread, which was pretty stale by the end of the holiday. No one ever went hungry. The holiday was perfectly timed with the whitebaiting season and the family lived off the delicacy.

Lyell was a great hunter and as a boy he shot rabbits, brought them back to the bach for Mabel to skin and cook on the little stove. Over the years, a baker started delivering bread to the gate and the children were sent to collect. Nola hated walking for miles and miles to pick up the bread.

Bert had a great imagination and he always had a plan for the day to keep the children entertained. They made little sailing boats to sail on one of many ponds. The children spent the whole day making their boats and they nearly always sank but it was great fun.

There were a couple of old golf clubs so Bert took the children over the sand hills and made a golf course for them. They used toetoe to mark the holes and when they returned the following day the wind-blown sand would have demolished their course.



Figure 54 Mabel whitebaiting at Turakina



Figure 55 Lyell the four-year-old hunter with a rabbit in 1931

There was always something to do and there was never any "I don't want to do that" from the children.



Figure 56 The Turakina bach that flooded due to a dam burst.



The family loved their holidays at Turakina and Bert eventually bought a bach. Bert wrote into his will that the property would be passed down to the oldest son, Bunt.

Their youngest son, Lyell Allpress took his children to the beach and they stayed in a friend's bach. The journey took little more than 20 minutes in the old car but young Graham and Glenn could never make the journey without getting car sick. The rough west coast environment created fond memories for Lyell's children and Graham loved going whitebaiting and hunting. They also walked to the bombing range that was used by the Royal New Zealand Air Force base at Ohakea.

When Lyell was unable to take the children to Turakina, Mabel (Nana Allpress) packed them up and headed for the rugged retreat and they stayed in the original family bach.



Figure 57 The Turakina golfers and boat racers right.



RECOLLECTIONS OF KOITIATA

THE LIVES AND TIMES OF A WELLINGTON WEST COAST BEACH SETTLEMENT

INTRODUCTION

In 2014 the beach settlement of Koitiata will celebrate its centenary. In 2009, as one of the oldest persons with a long association with Koitiata, I was asked to write up some of my memories of the early days of the settlement. The following is the result. It chronicles the history as far as I know and some of the personalities that had helped make the village what it is today.

What is written here are my reminiscences and observations of the people, the times and the life style of the era of the 1930's and 40's, and into the 50's, a period now well gone and one in which I was personally involved. The pre-1930 period is what I can remember from conversations of my father, "Scotty" Cameron, Bert Wainwright, Gerry Beaumont and others, plus reminiscences of Eric Gower of Marton who at 85 still has some memory of Koitiata as it was in the late 1920's. From the 1950's on, my participation in Koitiata affairs became spasmodic. While my mother and father spent most of their weekends and holidays at the beach, and later retired to live there permanently, initially I was off on my motor bike on motor club outings, and later resided in other parts of the country and sometimes overseas. Specific dates have not been mentioned unless they can be verified with documentary evidence. In consequence of this E&OE must apply. Further some of the following may be regarded as "politically incorrect" in this the 21st century, however, as this is the story of the 20th Century it is written in the terms of the 20th Century.

The earliest known pioneers to regularly use the Koitiata Domain Reserve at the mouth of the Turakina River on the South West coast of the North Island were: Bert Wainwright from Wanganui, "Scotty" Cameron from Marton and two men from Turakina whose names have now been lost in time. This was in the period of the First World War. The lives of Bert and Scotty and their families were to become intimately entwined with the development and social structure of Koitiata over the next 30 years or so with Bert becoming acknowledged as the honorary unofficial Mayor of Koitiata.

Bert Wainwright was a carpenter and builder from Wanganui and had his own building business, he was married and had one daughter. As I remember him he was a well built man but of a rather dour personality. The two from Turakina were employed by the County on road maintenance on the Turakina Valley road and were the first to build a whare or bach at Koitiata. Of the four Bert was the oldest and Scotty Cameron the youngest.

William Cameron, popularly known as "Scotty", was born in Glasgow in 1898 and immigrated to NZ around 1911. As a teenager he obtained work as a farm labourer on the Morrison farm at Fern Flats near Marton. On his weekends off and on holidays his boss allowed him the use one of the farm horses which he would load up with a small tent and some food and go fishing at Turakina Beach. Apart from the occasional Maori fishing party from Ratana Pa, the only people he ever mentioned as being there at that time were Bert Wainwright and the two from Turakina. Fishing at Turakina was a regular past-time until, on turning 20 years old in 1918 he was called into the Army for service in the first world war. He was posted to Sling Camp in Southern England in mid 1918, and from there attached to 2 NZ General Hospital at Cosford as a motor driver. He returned to NZ in late 1919. He was lucky in that the war ended before he was posted to the battlefields of France.

PART 1 EARLY DAYS

On the 18th February 1919 a Public meeting was held in the Coronation Hall in Marton when 40 of the 66 sections that had been surveyed were offered for lease in the "Town of Koitiata" at the mouth of the Turakina River. This was 15 miles [24k's] from Marton, 5 miles [8k's] from the main road at Turakina and 18 miles [29k's] from Wanganui. The lease of these sections was the official start of the Koitiata Domain. The first year's rent was 1 Guinea (£1-1-0) plus 3/-stamp duty at the fall of the hammer followed by £1 per annum thereafter.

In the 1920's the lure of river and sea bathing did not attract many people to Koitiata when they found that there was two miles [3k's] of sand to cross, three gates to open and shut, having to live in tents and having to cross the river to get to the sea. In those days a formed road ran from Turakina to a gate at the present stock yards. This was the last gate to go and remained in operation until the track to the beach was metalled in the 1950s when it was replaced with a "cattle stop", this disappearing when the road was finally tar sealed in the late 1960's. The next two miles to the beach were up the clay hill then across the sand dunes. The clay hill became very slippery and treacherous in wet weather and I can remember my Mother and I having to get out into the rain and push the car to help it up the hill. It was known for the odd vehicle to slide into the ditch alongside the track in inclement weather. Shovels and large chaff sacks were standard equipment, the sacks to be used as sand mats as it was almost certain that a car would get stuck in the sand at least once on the way during dry weather.

The sand dunes inland from the beach were covered in lupin, stunted manuka and scrub and had been leased out for stock grazing. The track into the Domain was along the dividing fence between the Simpson Estate of Heaton Park, near Marton, and the Perry Estate of Turakina. The Simpsons leased large tracts of the land South of the track and the Perry's the land North to the river. When motoring to the beach care was needed as one could be confronted at any time by one or more big, black and inquisitive steers or a mob of sheep wandering out of the scrub onto the track. The cattle were a real hazard at night as they liked to sleep on the track. The sheep, being sheep would run along the track in front of the car instead of going off into the scrub.

The surveyed road into the Domain ran along the Northern fence line to the river but this was never used. The track into the Domain used in those days was through a manuka marsh in the gully. During the summer it dried out sufficiently to make damp but firm ground to drive on. This track later became the formed road in use today. During the winter the gully track became too wet and unusable so the cars went along the Northern ridge, now covered with cottages.

Shortly after his return from the war in 1919, Scotty bought a Ford Tourer* with his Army gratuities and tendered for and obtained a Post Office contract to deliver mail to the rural areas in the Rangitikei, with a once a week delivery across "the desert" to Turangi. If there was room, he would sometimes carry passengers. (There was no road across "the desert" in those days, only a track through the tussock from Waiouru). He still regularly used to go to Turakina Beach but by this time several other people from Marton and Wanganui had started coming. Cars were by now quite common and American models Model T Fords, Chevrolet 4s, and British Austin 10s and Morris Cowleys and other makes were a common sight. In 1925 he married Nena Nutt who was the senior clerk for a Marton solicitor and they built a home in Marton. In 1930 I was born.

*(A 'Tourer' had a canvas top which could be folded down while a 'Sedan' had a solid metal top).

During the early 1920s three baches had been built on the river front but as they were unused for long periods and were exposed to the high Westerly winds experienced then as now, they regularly became partially buried in sand. In the late 1920's these baches were jacked up onto sledges and re-sited in what is now Omanu Street. They were dragged back by either a crawler tractor or a traction engine brought out from the Morrison farm at Fern Flats. My father talked about this and Eric Gower, of Marton, has a memory of the event and is positive it was one of these two machines but he can't remember which one. The sections on Omanu street had been surveyed prior to the sale of leases in 1919 but had not been offered for lease. Omanu Street wasn't even named. Also, during this period not too much notice was taken of surveyed boundaries by some people.

In 1926 Bert Wainwright had built himself a cottage on the lot alongside the empty section of maram grass and lupin on which now stands the fire station and the Community Hall. Bert's bach was accidentally burned down in the late 1930s and was replaced with the cottage that sits on the same site today. The new bach was built around the old fire place and chimney that was all that was left after the fire. The main difference between the two baches was that the replacement has a flat sloping roof instead of a hip. Bert's cottage was built partially off his section and in 1984 before the fire station and Community Centre could be built these sections had to be re-surveyed.

Bert's new cottage has the kitchen on the left, a bedroom on the right and the master bedroom in the centre. The left and right rooms are connected by an open verandah in the front. At the back the lounge room runs the full length of the building and has the large open fireplace on the outside wall. Outside, along the Northern boundary, was a 250 gallon water tank and a couple of 40 gallon drums for water. There were also two outhouses one of which was the toilet and the other had two rooms, one a spare bedroom and the other room was used as a tool shed. The smokehouse stood along-side this. Next to these he built a large open-fronted shed to house his car, boat and nets etc.

During this period several new baches were built, some of them of timber and others made from car cases and covered with "Melthoid" sheeting. In those days cars were brought into NZ "knocked down" in pieces and packed into large plywood cases to be re-assembled in the NZ garage from which they were to be sold. The large sheets of plywood from the cases made good exterior side wall and ceiling claddings, when nailed to the basic frame, which were then covered with strips of Melthoid. Melthoid paper was a strong tar-impregnated paper to make it water proof and which came in rolls about 2'6" wide. It was laid in overlapping strips on the plywood and nailed down. On the roof the nails and the overlaps were sealed with hot tar.

During the 1930's and 40's Koiitiata contained about a dozen baches concentrated mainly around Omanu and Wainui streets. Until the 1940's the sections along lower Wainui Street, from Omanu Street to and along the river front, and also Rapakai Street were just sand hills covered in maram grass and lupins. On the North side of Wainui Street, the cottage directly behind Bert Wainwright's was owned by Bill Morton, a cattle drover from Turakina. The bach next to this, on the hill (behind the fire station), was originally built by the Morrisons, farmers of Fern Flats but was later bought by the Camerons. The bach next to this, behind the fire station was owned by Mr Carter, the Station Master at Wanganui, who had three children and an over-fat fox terrier which was memorable for its periodic bouts of evil flatulence when in the cottage.

The Carter place was built of car cases and covered with Melthoid but has since been modernised and is now in permanent occupation. Carter's car was also notable for being a yellow American Reo Coupe with a "Dickie Seat" on the back. This stood out, as in those days cars generally were painted in more subdued colours. When the Carters travelled to the beach, the parents and the daughter travelled in the cab while the two boys, swathed in oilskins against the wind and rain, and the dog sat in the "Dickie Seat". Their baggage was tied onto the luggage carrier at the back and the weekend food etc. was inside the capacious space alongside the boys' legs. The younger boy and girl were of a similar age to my cousin Kelvin and myself while Eric was considerably older.

Two baches had been built outside the Domain boundary to the South. The first was built by the Turakina roadmen out of timber, corrugated iron and Melthoid and stood next to what is now the track leading South alongside the river/lagoon and about 200 metres from the present Southern boundary of the village. It eventually became derelict and fell apart, and for many years the rusting corrugated iron from the roof and fire place/chimney and bits of timber and Melthoid could be seen lying in the scrub alongside the track.

The other bach was built in the mid 1920s by the Snelgroves, booksellers and stationers of Marton this place being another 100 metres South East across the flax marsh from the "Turakina roadmen's" bach. This was sold in 1930 to the Gowers, farmers at Mt Curl, Marton. The Gower bach was dismantled in 1940 and taken out to the back of their farm at Mt Curl. In 1947 when Eric got married, it was shifted again to the front of the farm and modernised and in 1966 it was shifted again to Foxton where it is still in use. Eric was telling me that their bach was easy to get to in the winter in their Model T Ford but in the dry summer they had to walk and carry their gear to the bach because their Model T couldn't get across the dry sand.

Another two baches had been built outside the Domain boundary to the East and partially on the unused road. The first was a weatherboard cottage owned by the Lutheran Church in Marton whose pastor in the 1940s was a Reverend Heidrich, an unfortunate surname considering his Nazi name-sake's reputation in Czechoslovakia in 1940. During the 1930's & 40's, as this place was only occasionally used as a retreat by the church, Fred Kelly, a member of the church and a man with a big family, was appointed caretaker and given use of it. Fred was also one of Scotty Cameron's drivers. (In the late 1920s a competitor had undercut Scotty's re-tender for the mail run and he had lost the Post Office Mail contract. Having previously upgraded his car to a light truck, this became the base for starting a transport business, called Cameron's Transport.

The car-case and Melthoid bach next to Kelly's was owned by Arthur Way, an accountant in Marton, and a friend of my parents. I can remember being there as a toddler in the early 1930s. It was built in an L shape, the short leg of the L being the dining and living room and the long leg containing three bunk rooms. An open verandah ran along in front of the bunk rooms. A separate weatherboard out-house, with a corrugated iron roof, held the kitchen and cooking facilities. This separation of the two buildings was a precaution in case of fire especially as the tar in Melthoid is inflammable. Both the Kelly and Way baches were demolished and burned when the new sections were opened up in the 1950s.

Several baches had been built along Omanu Street. The house directly opposite the Fire Station section, on the corner of Wainui and Omanu Streets was owned by Bill Squires, a policeman from Day's Bay near Wellington. The house next to this belonged to Bill O'Brien, a baker in Hunterville. Opposite on the other side of the track was the bach of Gerry Beaumont, a plumber from Wanganui. The bach next to O'Brien's was owned by the Stent's, farmers from Ohingaiti, "Shorty" Drummond, a short rotund man from Wanganui had the other bach in Omanu Street next to the Stents. The boundary of the settlement at that time ran from the surveyed road in the North, along the Eastern sides of Carter's, the Community Centre section and along the backs of the sections facing Omanu Street. Of the above residents the Wainwrights, Camerons, Carters, Drummonds and Beaumonts were the regular weekenders during the year while the others came only periodically to the beach.

During a period of heavy rain in ~~the mid~~ 1930s, plus the breaking of a large farm dam further inland, a flood of water flowed down the gully and track pooling in the low-lying area around the junction of Omanu and Wainui Streets and into Bert Wainwright's front yard. In those days the track from Turakina finished at Omanu Street. Lower Wainui Street from Omanu Street to the river was just a walking track across a low sand ridge.

As this water wouldn't drain away, the men set to work over several weekends and dug a channel through the low sand ridge down lower Wainui Street to let this water flow away. In the 1970's another flood occurred after heavy rain but this time the County came in with a mechanical digger and dug a channel alongside the Northern fence line and out into the paddocks. People think that sand is porous which it is on the loosely packed hills, but in low-lying areas with water compaction it becomes impervious and water won't drain away hence the number of long-lasting ponds and small lakes along the coast.

1930's/40's



Above: Wainui street, 1930's. Left is Bert Wainwright's at 68, right is Bob Morton's at 64.

Below: This is a bit of a puzzle; in Omanu street, probably taken 1930/40's. It is labelled, *"O'Brien 1 & 2 baches, now Ryland's"*. O'Briens had #9; suspect that it is #9 on left and #5 on right; the sea is in the background over top of dunes; bach in background is possibly located in area of Rapaki street. There were no houses in Rapaki in 1942, and none until early 1950's.

1930's/40's



The following are excerpts from my book "A Kid's Life" which was written about 1988 (before I was brain dead! My recollections then might have been more accurate, so you can glean bits from both maybe?

"KOITIATA"

The house my folks had bought at Turakina Beach was really a fishing shack it was weatherboard of four rooms, with the dunny outside. It was a fairly isolated place in those days of the mid 1940's people from Marton and Wanganui had shacks down there which they used for holidays and weekend fishing. Strange to say but Nath's folks had a batch there too which they used for the holidays it was a little more primitive than my folks house, but it served their purpose well. In those days you drove towards the coast from Turakina for about five miles then you got onto the track proper down to the beach this ran over sand hills and through lupin scrub for about three miles or so. Some of the sand hills were fairly steep and if you didn't have enough speed on you would get stuck in the loose sand, this happened more often than not. Where the ground was flat it used to flood a bit during the winter months creating another hazard to negotiate. Dad spent many hours filling in holes with lupin, flax and carting clay for the wheel tracks, and he used to complain bitterly about people traveling too fast over "His" road. I think at one time the County considered him to be their unofficial roadman down there. Then of course there was no electricity, so mum was back to meat safes, kerosine lamps and battery radios, (no not the transistor types you know today these were full sized cabinet affairs you needed a full size car battery to run them)--(transistors were not invented then.) Mum and Dad were the only permanent residents at first, with no telephone or neighbours I think mum used to, go a bit troppo by the time the weekends came and some friendly faces appeared, dad of course was in his element as there was plenty of fish or whitebait to catch in the river and sea.

The settlement at that stage was a collection of about twenty shacks the best was owned by Bert Wainwright who was a builder from Wanganui. His place was a reasonable house with a lot more room and conveniences than the rest of them. Bert was the self styled Mayor of Koitiata and if anything was to be done around the place he was always consulted first. The Turakina river used to flow parallel with the sea for a mile or so, but shortly before the folks moved in there had been a flood in the river coinciding with an exceptionally high tide and the river cut itself a new mouth through the sand hills about a couple of miles north of the original. This left a lake some two hundred yards wide and about a mile and half long, this varied from about three to six feet deep, maybe a little deeper in some areas. This had a reasonable population of herring and flounder in it. If you wanted to get to the surf beach you had to either cross this lake or walk around the end, a journey of about a mile by the shortest route. Fortunately Bert and several others had rowboats and they didn't mind others using them with care and leaving them tied up where they had found them. Bert also had a flounder net set in the lake which dad kept an eye on when Bert wasn't there this kept mum and dad in fresh fish most of the time.

Whilst I was still batching with Ron on the farm I used to go down to the beach on some weekends either going with Maurice on our pushbikes a journey of about 18 miles or if it was holiday time, maybe the whole Heidrich family would go down.

Now Nath's dad had an old "Nash" rag top car, you could pack a fair tribe inside, so the whole family me included would climb aboard, there would be boxes of apples or other fruit tied on the running boards together with a sack of potatoes etc.

"Running boards," you ask what were they? Well the old cars had their mudguards built outside the car body not inside as they do today and these were connected by a metal or wooden board, very handy to load extra goods on or to stand on, if you going into a farm where there were a lot of gates to open and shut the person doing that wouldn't get in and out of the car but stand on the running board between gates. Once down at the beach Maurice and I would either be off shooting rabbits or ducks if in season or fishing for whitebait or line fishing in the sea and our folks hardly saw us from dawn till dark. Sometimes Maurice and I would go to check on the flounder net and would see how well we could row the boat and how fast, sometimes we would have two boats and have a race or try ramming each other, if there was a strong wind blowing the lake used to get quite choppy and a lot of water would be shipped on board and we would get home wet as shags (a diving sea bird renowned for its fishing ability.)

"DANGEROUS WALKS."

The air force had used an area near the beach for a bombing range during the war and at that time was still occasionally using it, it was strictly out of bounds and there were various signs up warning people to keep out. This didn't stop Maurice and I from trespassing in there and bringing home tails off practice bombs and empty cartridge cases etc. Looking back on it now it was a very silly thing to do because there were no doubt many unexploded bombs etc. still lying around in the sand hills and it is a wonder we weren't blown up or worse still we could of been out there when a plane could have made a bombing run or machine gunned us or something, because we never checked on the papers to see when the air force was having their next practice.

"SHALL I SWEAR FOR YOU MAURICE?"

Nath's parent's batch, which they shared with the Kelly family from Marton, was largely constructed out of car cases, this was when cars were shipped in Oregon or Baltic pine tongue and grooved cases. It was quite a large batch with a living area and several bunk rooms the whole affair was covered in tar paper called malthoid and sealed with tar to make it water tight. The dunny was outside like everyone else's, it had gotten to the stage of needing fixing and Nath's Dad Maurice senior was proceeding to fix it. My Dad was standing around watching him work, I don't know whether he got distracted, but Maurice hit his thumb a real beaut with the hammer and danced around looking a bit red in the face, my Dad calmly Said," never mind Maurice do you want me to swear for you?"

"FISHING THE HARD WAY"

Bert Wainwright also had a larger boat I suppose you would call a whaler about 20 foot long fitted with four sets of oars. If the weather was suitable and if there was enough men to be conned into carrying it across to the surf and man it, he would row out a few miles from the coast where the fishing was supposed to be much better. The few times that I went out with them all I caught was a bunch of blisters on my hands from rowing. It is very frustrating to be sitting in a boat with ten other fellows fishing and you know that the hooks are only a few yards apart on the bottom and they pull in 10lb. snappers and you don't even get a bite.

Another way of getting fish was that Bert had a large long net, which they would take out into the surf then pull ashore hopefully with many fish in it. Everyone would be co-opted to help and usually because I was the tallest I got the job on the sea end this was to haul the net

out through the surf hanging on to the six foot pole at the end, depending on the state of the tide you would wade out till you were neck deep in water and try not to think of the sting rays you might stand on, all went well until suddenly you would walk into a deep hole and come up spluttering with a gut full of sea water. As you went out the people on the shore would feed out the net and then attach a long rope to the end. You would go out as far as you could then work along parallel with the beach some one would then wade out to me and attach another rope. Then with groups of people on both ends of the net it would be slowly hauled ashore, sometimes if you were lucky there would be ten or twelve nice snapper plus kawhai in the net also maybe a sting ray and a few sand sharks.

“THE FUSILIER.”

The fusilier was an old ship wreck about 7 miles south of Turakina beach, it was also used by the airforce as a target, but we often used to walk down there for exercise, sometimes it would be Maurice and I or Nath and I and sometimes it would be the whole family. It took quite a while to walk the distance through the loose sand unless you walked along the water line but this was impossible in places as the beach sloped too steeply. Over the years the wreck had gradually moved inland with build up of sand, but sometimes it would be on the water line if there had been heavy seas washing the shore away. There wasn't really much to see just a rusty old hulk, half filled with sand and its masts broken down or rusted away, but it was an attraction or a challenge for us to walk to trying to better our times each time we went.

Some memories of Koitiata Turakina Beach.

My father and mother retired from their dairy farm at Putorino and bought a cottage at Turakina Beach. This was during World War 2 probably about 1944. At that time the metalled road finished probably about 2 miles from the beach. So you entered through the farmer's gate past the woolshed etc. and up a hill thus far it was a reasonable farm track but after that you had to negotiate quite a large sand hill which was ok if there had been rain to bind the sand together a bit but if things were dry you were in difficulty unless you had several strong shoulders to help push you up the incline. After this there was a reasonable flat tussock flax lined track roughly grassed except for a few soft sand patch. After this you reach the outskirts of the village proper. Here there were several batches made from car packing cases and covered in tarred malthoid. Pastor Maurice Heidrich and Alex Kelly owned one of these. On the hill was a weatherboard house owned by Scotty Cameron, then came a substantial concrete rendered home owned by Bert Wainwright the self proclaimed Mayor of "Koitiata," If you wanted to know anything about the beach you asked Bert. He owned a large multiple-oared sea boat, which he would launch for a day's fishing if there were enough willing and strong oarsmen to man it. I was lucky to help row and man this boat on a couple of occasions. We would row out some miles off shore where Bert reckoned there would be fish, but I tended to be a Jonah on both occasions not catching one snapper when lines on both sides of me pulled up lovely large fish all day! Coming back in could be exciting depending on the surf running. Bert usually stood at the rear or stern with a sweep oar trying to keep the boat straight as you came through the surf, but if you swung sideways you got a drenching in the surf.

Bert also owned a very long net which if again there were enough hands available would be used to sweep out into the surf, along the beach and the pulled in by many hands on both ends of the net. Because I was 6 feet tall I got the job of pulling the net out into the surf on several occasions, this could be exciting as you could step on a sting ray or into a hole when on minute you were waist deep and the next you were trying to plant the 6 foot end pole on the ground and struggling to get you head back above the surf. The catch could be poor or good depending the time of the year, but you could get small shark gurnet, kawhai, snapper even a sting ray or two and jelly fish. Bert also had flounder nets which Maurice Heidrich junior and I used to check whenever we were down there. The river had changed course and burst out to sea a couple of hundred yards north of the village, leaving a lagoon of several hundred yards long between the cottages and the beach. This was replenished by king tides when the sea would spill over the small dune. The cottage my parents bought and eventually sold to Edwin & Sofia Nitschke was just past Wainwrights plus there were about 4 others. No electricity unless you had a wind-charger, some cottages has these which usually charged 2 x12 volt batteries, which fed to bulbs in the rooms required. Otherwise it was candles, kerosene lamps or pressure lamps. A pit toilet or take placed behind flax or some secluded scrub?? If you wanted fresh milk you had to make a trip out to the farm gate where the farmer would sell you some or go into the township of Turakina for your supplies. During the war the RNZAF. Operated a bombing range just over a couple of sand hills from the cottages, as adventurous teenagers, young Heidrich and myself used to trespass on these lands, quite dangerous when I now think about it, but we never experienced being strafed by a bomber or a fighter or encountered any un exploded bombs!

During the duck-shooting season I would join my dad on opening day and sit in a Maimai "hide," nursing cold gun barrels waiting for sunrise and the arrival of some unwary ducks or black swans. I think I have a photo somewhere of the final day's bag. There was usually a good community spirit amongst the residents, but like most areas there are exceptions and at one time I remember my Dad complaining to the local constabulary about a bloke who used to stalk my Dad through the lupins with a loaded gun a bit mental or loopy I would say. Most residents took part in trying to catch the elusive whitebait during the season. I remember a few kerosene tins full of bait, which was either shared out with locals or taken to the fish shop and sold.

It is hard for me to imagine that some 60 years later there is electricity a sealed road and even sewerage supplied!! I trust this will give you some idea of the happy times we shared all those years ago and of my Dad who carried yards of clay on the back of his old Bedford Ute to place over the loose sand patches this he did for several years. He also lobbied the County Council for help in maintaining the road but this largely fell on deaf ears. I well remember some great Christmas and New Year's parties when fun was had by one and all. Maybe you could send me your final draft of the history.

Regards, *Charles Haar*

Contentment at Koitiata

A wild and windy west coast beach, 8km from the nearest shop: a strange place for retired people to find contentment? But Koitiata residents enjoy their lifestyle.

The settlement has about 100 dwellings, from old-fashioned baches (two incorporate old tram cars) to modern homes. They sprawl along the dunes near the mouth of the Turakina River.

The people range from retired through to young families, and half the houses are only used at weekends.

On windy days you might think no-one lived there. But on fine days people, dogs and vehicles spread through the settlement and along the beach and river.

Five households of retired people were interviewed. Most only go to town (Wanganui, Marton or Palmerston North) once a week, for shopping or doctor visits.

They readily admit the lifestyle would not suit everyone.

"I'd go mad if I didn't have my hobbies," one said.

When the wind begins a "10-day blow" they get out their spinning wheels, work on their veteran vehicles and stoke up the fire.

"After a westerly, you can get

In the second of a three-part series on coastal settlements between the Whanganui and Rangitikei rivers, LAUREL STOWELL finds contentment at Koitiata.

half an inch of grease (salt) on the windows," says Trish Dooney. But she adds, "You forget the wind on fine days".

"My fire goes for three months, never goes out," says Arnold Nation.

Like many others, he uses his landrover and three wheeler to get firewood from the beach and forest. Driftwood is a feature of this typical west coast beach. What is not picked up by locals stabilises the dunes downcoast.

Residents love the sunsets and the views of sea and river, which are always changing. On very clear days Mt Taranaki, Kapiti Island, Mana Island and even the South Island can be seen.

But the sea changes more at Koitiata than at other places. The mouth of the Turakina River is constantly shifting, either gradually or suddenly.

In mid-January it was blocked and brackish water was up to 1m deep on the river access route. Usually, the mouth is 3km south of the set-

tlement, and a long narrow sand spit divides river and sea.

It can be frustrating trying to get to the beach — especially if the river is in flood.

Locals have tried to cut a channel and force the river out to sea near the settlement. But the strength of wind, tide and flood always triumph, and the river finds its own mouth.

These days Department of Conservation policy favours this, too.

Everyone said they enjoyed the peaceful atmosphere at Koitiata.

"That feeling of peace and tranquility hits me as soon as we turn off the main road," Trish Dooney said.

Locals know most of the people in the settlement and on the beach. Most are glad there is no council-owned land left for subdivision and the settlement is unlikely to grow.

The only thing that shatters the peace and drives some of them crazy is the frequent flyovers from Ohakea Base train-



Vertebrae from a stranded sperm whale frame this bach entrance.



Maisie Farr sometimes had 10 grandchildren to stay at once and gave them "the best holidays".



Hilton Farr has seen a lot of change since he arrived in 1961.

ing aircraft.

Wild coastal landscape presses in close around the little collection of houses. There is the beach, spit (with endangered native pingao) and estuary.

The estuary is visited by many fishing and wading birds, including the odd white heron, spoonbills, stilts, oystercatchers, dotterels and godwits.

The tidal river flats have herbfields of salt tolerant glasswort and yellow bachelors button, quite special when flowering.

Koitiata Domain Recreation Reserve (62ha) stretches to the south. Flax, toetoe and other native coastal plants clothe it, and sandy roads wind through it.

The main threats to this reserve are a range of inadequately controlled weeds.

Santoft Forest is to the south and offers hours of walking. Being sheltered, it is a good destination on a windy day. To the northeast are farms and the Turakina River.

Hilton and Maisie Farr remember the early days at the beach. They moved there permanently in 1961. They were taking refuge from a busy seven-day business in Taihape, and revelled in the isolation.

Rangitikei District Council has owned the land since 1916, setting aside some for subdivision, the rest for reserve.

In 1961, there were hardly any beaches, no electricity and no telephone. Most people got water off their roofs, as they do today.

Hilton and Maisie lit their house with a tilly lamp and cooked on a coal range.

The fishing was better then. Families used to get together and stake out nets in the surf overnight (now not permitted).



Hilton and Maisie's cat prefers a spot out of the westerly wind.

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Hilton and Maisie's cat prefers a spot out of the westerly wind.

So do these people feel intimidated, gazing out through their windows at the wild landscape and shore? No, they love it. Some are rural people, who could not bear to retire in town.

They like to get out walking, riding, whitebaiting, fishing, gardening and firewood collecting. If the weather is intolerable, they settle inside with their crafts and hobbies. Or, as Maisie suggests, "go to bed or go on holiday".

Visiting grandchildren enjoy a marvellous annual Christmas party and parade with floats, and they have a vast outdoor playground at their disposal.

Hilton and Maisie sometimes had 10 grandchildren to stay at a time. Then, as now, they tended to roam in groups and only come back to the house for food, a wash and sleep.

"Best holidays we ever had," recalls one who is now an adult.

Many commented how much they enjoy the "relaxed family atmosphere" at the beach. People wear comfortable old clothes around the settlement and along the river. Sometimes they don't recognise each other dressed up!

Koitiata has a social club. There are gatherings, including

craft and games afternoons in the hall. There is a fire brigade, a "Dad's Army" version, where the average age is 60. Their job is to contain any fires until the Ratana brigade arrive.

A resident's committee meets with Rangitikei District Council on local issues.

The most sensitive issues at the moment are rates and the possible local body merger — rates have doubled or trebled in recent years.

But for most even rate increases are no more than a splash of annoyance in a bucket of contentment.



Direct access to the beach is blocked by the tidal estuary of the Turakina River.

The Mayor

One name that keeps popping up in the history of Koitiata, is Bert Wainwright.

There are several references in people's recollections to Bert being the "Mayor of Koitiata". He was here before the village started and was here at the start-up of Koitiata.

He built at 25 Rapaki in the early 1920's. But his first house sanded up and he moved that house in the 1920's or early 1930's to 68 Wainui street. The house was flooded in 1936, and then to cap it all off, the house burnt down in the late 1930's. Bert rebuilt the house using the same chimney in the same place.

You get the impression that Bert was serious about being in Koitiata. He was a builder and as a testament to his skills, that same house is still standing at 68 Wainui street today!



