dent, Mrs Mairi Cavers. The series tells of pioneers who came to the area to build homes for their betrothed or wives and of the life these women had told through her parent's experiences

Bride in the bush

By the end of 1900, the lower end of the Awaroa Valley was settled, although some families lived in camps because their small units own houses planned for enlargement later as circumstances permitted or for sheds for other sites were chosen, were not yet finished.

A list of the first settlers in the Awaroa Valley with in brackets the names they gave their acres and any information of interest follows:

Two Babbage brothers — A.W. Babbage (Te Koraha. The old Maori name for the bluff on the section and for the surrounding subdistrict according to old Maori district divisions). H.H. Babbage (Te Toi. This was the name of the stream flowing through the property and into the Awaroa river. This is not the larger Toi stream which rises near it, but flows into Kawhia Harbour

W.D. Humphrys (Waikere. After the name of the lake on the section).

J.B. Scott (High Rock. The bluff on this section was named by Miss Mary Cody, afterwards Mrs J.B. Scott. It is about the highest, if not the highest rock in the area and Miss Cody named the whole property after it).

Two Kendrick brothers — W.E. Kendrick & J.H. Kendrick (Matarautahi. After the stream that flows from bush covered hills to the Awaroa river. It was in these hills that a young man Michael Nelson, in search of goats, came upon the rock drawings which aroused so much interest toward the end of the 1970s).

Gilbert Robertson — (Struan. Name of Rober on property in Scotland).

The above list begins with the names of those farthest from the old Awaroa landing, the one centre of the district then, and ends with Struan, the nearest to the landing.

The journey therefore was more tiring and difficult for those further away when stores etc were needed than for those at the lower and nearer end of the valley.

To Build A House

Most of the men who took up those very first sections in the valley, were either married or about to be married and their first thought was for a house.

My father built his "whare" with the outer walls of dressed ponga trunks, all for the chimney which if I can remember, the trunks were not dressed. The roof was of hand dressed shingles and the floor was of clay.

My mother had known people who left NZ to settle in South Africa and who had written of life there, mentioning the excellent clay floors it was possible to make from the local clay.

My father decided to try and make a similar floor from description in the letter.

The settlers on the next section, the Kendricks, suggested to take clay from their riverbank, where the clay seemed superior and very firm and good.

With this he agreed, but the floor did not measure up to specified hops.

This may have been due to the composition of the clay, to the treatment given, climatic conditions or all three plus other factors.

As was most often so in the camps and temporary houses of that time (pre World War I), the fireplace took up most of one end of the building. In some camps, it occupied all of one end. These chimneys were usually of ponga or more often split logs and by having so wide a fireplace, the fire could be made well away from the chimney and water could be sprinkled as a preventive of fire, other than in its proper place.

When after some years my father built a second much larger "whare", he gave it a board floor and corrugated iron chimneys.

As with the first "whare", the second had split shingles to begin with, but these were later replaced with corrugated iron.

Shingles tended to leak and needed much repair work. Worse still was that they harboured very unpleasant black beetles.

Like the first "whare" the outer walls of the second were dressed ponga trunks and as with the first, they were lined with timber which was covered with scrim over which wallpaper was pasted and very draught proof wall they were.

Both buildings were cosy in winter with the fires going, and it was quite unexpected to find papered walls inside a ponga "whare". Unfortunately my parents bedroom in the second whare had no fireplace. It was on the shady side of the house and did feel cold in winter, though not draughty.

Next issue: The bride comes to the district.

Bride in the bush

This is the second part in a four part series called Bride in the Bush written by longtime Kawhia resident, Mrs Mairi Cavers. The series tells of pioneers who came to the area to build homes for their betrothed or wives, and of the life these women had, told through her parent's experiences.

When the first "whare" was finished my father returned to Wanganui to be married and to bring his bride to their new home.

She was a town bred girl, quite new to life in the bush, its isolation, discomforts and difficulties.

They stayed a little in Kawhia on the way home, then joined a camping party at Te Maika for some days, and in this way the bride saw something of her new home district.

They then set out for Awaroa, to which there was no way of going but by rowing over the harbour and up the river.

Poor father, it was a long, tiring pull.

Revelation

For mother it was a revelation. She had known she was coming to an uncultivated district and was prepared for that, but she had no idea of distances.

She had imagined a roadless wilderness, with a river through the bush that was used for a road, but she had thought of her home as perhaps about 10 miles from Kawhia and above the tidal reaches, and every now and then as she had imagined, they would ride down the river, with a pack horse for stores and perhaps a game of tennis or other social contact.

Nothing in her imagination had approached what she now found.

The harbour was far wider and longer than she had pictured and now they were in the river, its interminable bends winding and twisting further and further from any sign of civilisation. Would they ever reach the tide's limit where the river became the road.

When at last they came to the Awaroa landing, my mother found that there was still a ride through manuka scrub, a steep hill to negotiate, then bush before the tidal limit was reached.

Mother had brought her side saddle and riding habit with her and while father went to catch the horses, she changed into the voluminous 'habit' in which it was thought suitable and modest for ladies to ride in those times. Even as she donned it, mother questioned its suitability for riding in roadless districts. But it was to be some years before she dared to openly rebel.

The journey from the old Awaroa landing to the gate of that section today might take 15 to 20 minutes in a car on a metalled road. It was very difficult then. Yet that journey was a small one compared with the journey necessary for settlers further up the valley.

The End of the Journey

The sun had long set and X afternoon was merging into evening when the tidal reaches were left behind and the horses splashed along the rivers edge. My mother had never been in dense bush before and now, as the daylight weakened, it seemed to crowd in upon her, an army of trees on either side, growing darker and darker until the individual trunks were not to be distinguished one from the other.

Here and there small scrub lent over the water from the bank, apart from the bush, presenting a grotesque figure against a glimpse of sky or of whitened water tumbling over a log.

But even these were becoming indistinct when, at long last they left the river and passing along a short bush track came upon the tiny clearing and the "whare" my father had built with so much thought.

They dismounted and let the horses go. Father went forward to unlock the door and then stood back for mother to walk first into the new home. Inside there was a rustling sound of something disturbed and the next moment out of the dimness and right at mother rushed a frightened bush rat.

It was mother's last straw. Overtired, concerned about distance from civilisation which the long, unfamiliar journey had made to appear even greater, perhaps a little homesick, she could take no more and became hysterical.

The shock must have been fairly severe. Others may have known, but it was many, many years later that I was told, and even then so long after, mother seemed to have difficulty in speaking of it.

But then she went on to tell me how good father had been. He must have been desperately tired himself after so long a pull, but gentle and understanding he managed to calm her.

Then he soon had a lantern lit, the fire going and the kettle on. The "whare", which had seemed so inhospitable and cold after being empty in his absence, soon became warm and welcoming. But mother wondered that evening, if she would have the courage and strength to be a good bush housewife and a pioneer.

Sunrise and a Cloudless Sky

Next morning mother listened to the dawn song of the birds. She rose and went to sit outside on a fallen log in front of the "whare". The sun's first rays shone from a cloudless sky and the bush, which had seemed so sinister in the gathering dark, now became beautiful, a sunlit bush, a sanctuary for the chorus of birds still singing in the early day.

She thought, to use her own words, it isn't going to be so bad after all.

Read "openly to rebel." Not "to openly rebel."

X. I unwittingly ommitted an important part of the story of the horseback journey up the Awaroa River.

Father had gone ahead a little – I can't remember why – & Mother, seeming quite in control of her horse & ~~safe~~ safe, was for a little, following more slowly. Suddenly her horse plunged deep into the river & the water rose high around mother. It had plunged into an unexpected deep hole. Fortunately [illegible]

Northward bound

An article on the early history of Kawhia and its surrounding district by long-time resident of the area, Mrs Mairi Cavers.

By Mairi Cavers

In 1900, my father Gilbert Robertson rode up the coast from Wanganui to Kawhia.

At Eltham he was joined by a friend, Alfred Babbage, whose idea it had been to go north and look for land in the newly opened Kawhia district, which he had visited briefly by coastal steamer and thought attractive.

To travel up the coast on horseback took the two men about a week riding by day and camping by night and meeting a few people on the way. One of the few advised them strongly to reconsider their plans and forget Kawhia. The land was bad he said and they would do no good by settling there.

Oddly that same man bought a section in the Kawhia district himself many years later. He did not stay long, I have never heard why.

Hitch From A Horse

One day on the coastal journey, Mr Babbage's horse became jammed between some rocks and whatever was done the frightened animal would not try to free herself.

The tide was rising. Higher and higher it rose until the water swirled about her legs and still they could not free her. The two men at at their wit's end to know what to do, when a wave, bigger than all the rest, swept up surrounding her completely.

She struggled at last and broke free. How thankful these two young men were and the mare took no harm from her experience.

Perilous

My father often told us of the old track over Moeatoa, a narrow footed track of old Maori times. Over it the people of Ngati Toa must have travelled when they migrated south sometime around 1820. The exact date is not known.

Over this track, the two men led their horses. My father grasped a manuka bush and looked over the edge. One look was enough. It was a sheer drop. Going very gently so as not to startle the horses, they reached the end without mishap.

From The Past

Once over that perilous track, the men began to look about them again. Charred logs interested them. It could be seen that they had lain there a long time.

Later enquiries told them that they were the last of Te Rauparaha's fires.

Te Rauparaha of Kawhia was a rampageous chief. A good leader, a clever strategist but quick to take offence.

Possibly his touchiness was related to bad health for he suffered from asthma. At any rate he made a great many enemies.

At last neighbouring tribes felt he could not continue and that something must be done. Waikato and Maniapoto took the matter in hand, and Te Rauparaha and his people were forced to flee to Arawi, a small promontory jutting into the sea near Taharoa.

All agreed that Te Rauparaha must go and there were two options on how this should happen. One faction said that Te Rauparaha and his people should be exterminated without mercy, men, women and children. The other agreed that the district must be rid of them, but whatever was done it must be done without bloodshed.

Hiakai of Waikato devised a clever plan to which Rangituatea of Maniapoto agreed. With persuasive tongues they suggested a fishing expedition.

The party set out.

Hiakai and Rangituatea had secretly been in touch with Te Rauparaha calling for him one night (according to custom) and Rangituatea told him to leave for the south at once.

Then began the long journey to the region of Cook Strait. Carrying all they possessed Ngati Toa faced southward and still within their ancestral boundaries, reached the slopes of Moeatoa.

As higher and higher they climbed more and more of the land lay stretched before them.

Kawhia Harbour, a great sheet of water lay calm and still and reflected in it was the image of a cloud of strange appearance.

In this they saw an omen. Or perhaps a symbol of their sorrow. A great tangi broke forth, perhaps the greatest that the Kawhia district has ever known with men, women and children mourning for the loved ones left behind, for their dead, their homeland, its rivers, harbour and hills which they would never see again.

"Lie there Kawhia," they wept. "For Kawhia's people have gone to Kapiti, to Waipounamu, the greenstone water."

When all had passed out of sight of Ngati Toa lands, and were well outside Kawhia territory, Te Rauparaha lit the dry autumn bushes, as he had arranged with Hiakai and Rangituatea to do, letting them know that all was well and a great cloud of smoke showed the two friendly warriors that the fugitives had passed out of their ancestral lands without bloodshed.

The fire continued to burn until all that was left on that part of Moeatoa were some charred logs which drew the attention and interest of my father and his companion 80 or more years later, when northward bound, they passed that way.

Awaroa river the main road for early settlers

The following is the first article in a series by Mrs Mairi Cavers of Kawhia on the early history of the coastal settlement.

When in 1900, my parents came to live in the remote Kawhia district, which had lately been surveyed and opened for settlement, there were no roads for travel or transport of goods.

In the Awaroa Valley, where they were among the very first settlers, the river was the road. Canoes manned by capable Maoris navigated the tidal reaches.

Above the tide's level horses splashed along stony shallows and waded the deeper places. Occasionally, in floods, they swam.

The Awaroa winds and twists between river flats on its lower reaches to far above the tidal level until it passes through what is almost a ravine — steep hillsides on either side leave little room for river flats, and so it winds for some way until the valley widens to larger river flats once more.

Short Cuts

Later, many cricket matches and picnics were held on these wider flats, but at first, when they were still in bush, the settlers used them for short cuts, to avoid rounding the bends, until in winter they became so muddy that, except in flood time it was better to round the bend after all.

All over the Kawhia district of those times it was the same.

Old Maori tracks along ridges, surveyors tracks, creeks, rivers and mud flats at low tide — these were the roads and all journeys were slow.

"Callers" visiting friends a few miles away came late in the day because they had been travelling all morning. They stayed the night and then went home the next morning.

Canoe Monthly

All goods and mail came once a month by Maori canoe from Kawhia to the Awaroa landing and travellers leapt ashore from the canoe, drawn close to the bank.

Welcome mail was received, goods stacked on the bank, then waiting packhorses were loaded for the long trek home.

There was no timetable and no set day for the service. It was a matter of the day and the time convenient for the canoe's crew.

No doubt the hours may have depended a little on the tide, for it is undoubtedly easier to paddle with it than against it, but the Awaroa river would have been navigable at most times for a river canoe.

Hauturu Launch

The settlers dealt with Kawhia storekeepers in the first days, but later when Mr George Grey brought a launch, which he called the Hauturu, Mrs Grey opened a store and with it she ran the Post Office. The very first step to improvement in travelling was made.

So much time could be saved. Goods could be bought and loaded onto pack horses at once and there was a set day for the mail.

To be continued.

3rd. while in this set

Bride in the bush

This is the third part in a four part series called Bride in the Bush written by longtime Kawhia resident, Mrs Mairi Cavers. The series tells of pioneers who came to the area to build homes for their betrothed or wives, and of the life these women had, told through her parent's experiences.

My mother's determination to master life in the bush was strong, though life in the bush she found, was very different from life in the town.

Life had been very comfortable in Wanganui. It was a small town then, but a progressive one where all pioneering was long over.

As it was everywhere in those days, help in the home was easily obtainable, leaving employers comparatively free of pressing routine duties, especially when more than one girl in the family was at home and whatever duties undertaken could be shared.

My mother's experience of housekeeping was along these rather undemanding lines.

But had she been the most experienced of housekeepers from a town, she might have found life in a "ponga" whare in the bush with only an open fire and camp ovens for cooking and kerosene tin buckets for heating water, a little daunting at first.

The first thing every bush housekeeper must learn to do is make bread and to make bread, you must have yeast, but mother had no idea of how to make either.

Cabin Bread

She consulted "Mrs Beaton's Cookery Book" but though there were instructions for making both yeast and bread, these were not applicable in the bush. Father, who had managed on cabin bread—a hard, tasteless biscuit, was not much help.

In the end, a bushman taught mother how to make potato yeast, the only yeast people made in the bush it seemed and he taught her how to make bread.

Father taught mother how to manage camp ovens which make beautiful bread, but my mother who was never robust, found them cumbersome to work with and heavy, especially the biggest, in which the bread was made.

Mihi Ruruhi (Mrs Wahitapu) helped my mother to wash clothes and taught her how to manage without a washhouse and all it would contain, tubs, taps and wringer, and to use kerosene tin buckets instead of a copper.

The clothes were ironed with "Mrs Potts" irons warmed by setting them without handles (affixed later) upon the hearth.

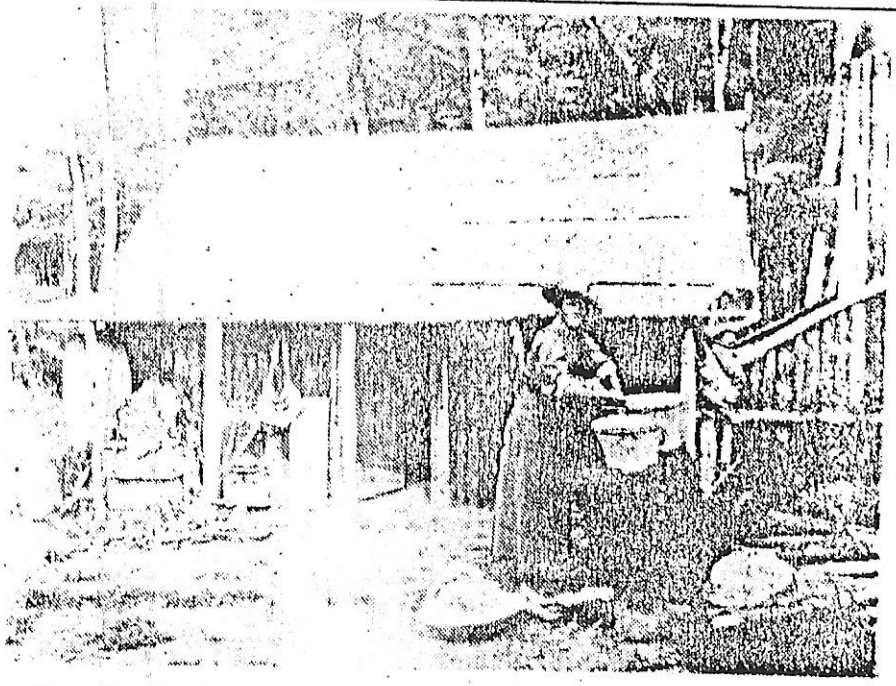
The hearth, like the floor, was of clay, but it had a neat surround of bottles turned upside down and buried deep in the clay, giving the effect of a fender. It was within this that the irons were set to heat.

The Fireplace

My mother learnt that the fireplace and the fire were the focal point of domestic life for the bush housewife.

At first, in the bush, few if any had a stove. All cooking was done in camp ovens and the open fire took the place of the kitchen stove as well as giving warmth and cheer on winter nights and evenings.

The fire itself was set in the very centre of the wide fireplace, placed well away from the chimney on all sides and from the "fender" to reduce fire risk.



My mother in about 1901-1902. The bush housewife has learned from Mihi how to wash clothes without a wash house.

Over the fire hung the camp ovens and a full kerosene tin of water. The tea kettle sat on two iron bars which spanned the breadth of the fire and were supported by iron "dogs" on either side. The dogs were iron rods, formed into stands or supports for the bars.

The ovens and tins were supported by two strong sticks driven into the clay with a crossbar, usually all made of green manuka and hung from hooks of fencing wire in a 'S' shape.

Or if that did not provide the right heat, an arrangement of hooks below the first could be made.

In this way, more than one camp oven could be hung over the fire, each adjusted to its own heat as well as a tin of water.

Where a slow steady heat was required, the camp oven could stand on its three legs in the warm ashes close to the fire with the lid covered with embers.

Using a poker to lift the hot lid by slipping it through the loop on the lid, it could be removed without harm to the housewife's hand.

4th and last article in this set

Bride in the bush

This is the final part in a four part series called Bride in the Bush written by longtime Kawhia resident, Mrs Mairi Cavers. The series tells of pioneers who came to the area to build homes for their betrothed or wives, and of the life these women had, told through her parent's experiences.

The use of kerosene in the bush household, in fact in most country households, was general, even 60 years ago.

Kerosene in the first 20 or 30 years of the 20th century, continued to provide country homes with light. Candles were used too, but the main light in the home in the evening was from the kerosene lamp, a soft, soothing light, which did not try the eyes.

Small cookers, for frying or for boiling a kettle were run on kerosene. There were also kerosene room heaters — these, most probably were not so popular as other kerosene appliances or not if they smelled as strongly as did the one my parents had to warm ~~thim~~, sunless bedrooms. However, it did warm the air.

My mother made "kerosene emulsion" for checking a certain blight (Wooly Aphis) on fruit trees and she put a little kerosene on dusters to make a better job of dusting, and also because spiders and other insects dislike it.

Kerosene stores, lanterns and small wall lamps were the property of everyone.

There seemed no end to the uses of kerosene in the life of the bush housewife. A dash of kerosene in the rinsing water was even used for hair washing. It left the hair healthy and glossy and was a great cure for dandruff.

The Kerosene Pump

The kerosene was pumped into lamp, lantern or for whatever it was needed by a special kerosene pump. A hole was made in the top of the fire and the pump inserted. When the tin was empty and the pump removed to the new tin, the top of the old one was cut right out, the raw edges hammered down a handle put on and hey presto, a new bucket.

For household water not always could a suitable site be found near a creek. In this case tanks were the only alternative.

There was always water somewhere in the locality, and people dependent upon tanks piped water to the house, as soon as they were able.

For everyone, the river or a creek was often used in summer for washing clothes, for it saved the man of the house carrying so much water.

The copper (or the ~~kerosene tin bucket~~) could be boiled up on the bank of the stream and clothes hung on bushes to dry.

In those early days, when even the wash was not possible without a kerosene tin bucket, great care was taken of the buckets used for clothing. They must be dried at once when done with for the day, turned upside down and left in a dry place. Rust forms easily in damp, ungalvanised buckets and rust becomes ironed on* clothes, which ruins them.

Before we leave the subject of water and creeks, there is another thing which was performed at our creek in fine weather — butter making. It was a wonderful place in which to wash the newly made butter and no need to carry the water further than to a large basin placed on the bank.

On that bank too, between the place used for butter making, some yards further down clothes were often washed where was a seam of pale bluish clay. This clay, we discovered, made an excellent soap. My sister and I often used it for our faces, it left the skin so smooth and soft.

I write of my own home and family in those early days in the bush, in the Kawhia district. But though all lives have different experiences, the general conditions in a given situation are the same, and so in this way, I write for everyone who went into the bush, as people said, and took up land.

Kawhia was so much later than other places in becoming a farming area, that all who went to live there came from districts far more developed, where life was easier and homes more comfortable, and though it was generally much warmer than many southern places, there were many problems to over come.

Though my thoughts go out to the memory of them all, I think I must save a corner of this memory for the women especially. They did not get away from the monotony of the domestic ~~bound~~ as the men did. They felt the isolation more and homesickness was not unknown.

"I walked on until I could see Albatross Point," she said, "I thought: beyond that point and southward is Taranaki, my home, my brothers and sisters. I did this as often as I could, because it made them feel nearer. It comforted."

No, it was not my mother speaking, but another of the very early pioneer women in the Kawhia district, in the very early days.

→ 2: Kawhia

* Rust becomes iron mould on clothes, which ruins them

* "They did not get away from the monotony of the domestic scene."

* Please read "A hole was made in the top of the tin and the pump inserted."

EARLY KAWHIA.
Snippets by C.P.W.

I have often been asked both by visitors and residents, "What made Kawhia tick in the early twenties?" so, for my article this month I will recall the various businesses etc. operating about that time. To keep within the normal space available in the "Post", names involved will be kept to a minimum.

Beginning along the waterfront....we had a resident County Engineer (Mr.Gould) and a resident County Clerk (Mr.Barton). There was the "Kawhia Settler" newspaper published weekly (Mr.Schnackenberg), the Northern Steamship Co.(Mr.Langley) sometimes handling 2 steamers a week. On the corner of Jervois and Kaora Sts. was Mr. Wackett's lolly shop. Next we had Ward Bros.engineer's shop with the picture and dance-hall above it with silent movies once weekly and talkies from 1927. Then Mr.Berg's boat-building shed followed by the whale-boat shed and Mr.Wright's saddlers shop. Next was Mrs.McMonagle's store and billiard room and finally on the waterfront Mr.Reading, fisherman, and his smokehouse. Proceeding up Jervois St. from the wharf on the right-hand side we had Oldbury's General Store, Mr.Chase's store, Geo. Maxwell's boot repair shop and on the corner Mr.Sheweiry's fruit shop. About where Mrs.Culley's house is now, stood a boarding-house (Mrs. Neilson) and next to it was the first Bank of N.Z. Opposite Geo. Gould's and standing on piles was the Library then a gap to Randall's butcher-shop. On the Four Square corner we had Nesbit's barber shop, also soft drinks and billiard room. Around the corner we had Robinsons Garage and next Dan Robinson's soft-drinks factory. Back to Jervois St. coming up the left-hand side opposite the Community Hall was a tailors shop then Mr.Sheweiry's general store followed by Braines's Bakery with bread 6 days a week, also their tea-rooms. On the corner of Tainui St. was Jonathan & Co. General Store. Across Tainui St. to the Post Office (exchange hours 9am - 5pm). Next was Hotel Moana (Mrs. Schultz) later Tainui Hotel (Mrs.W.Scott) followed by the newly built B.N.Z. with resident Manager (Mr.Morgan). Up the left side of Tainui St. opp. Police Station was a Chemist Shop (Mr.Edgar previously Mr.Mann and before him Mr.Wilson). On the right-hand side of Tainui St. was the Courthouse (F.W.Platts, Stipendiary Magistrate of Hamilton) Police Station (Const.Smith) and in Jack Murch's house lived Dr.N. Waddle. Also on this corner were the offices of a resident Barrister and Solicitor (Mr.Mathieson) and resident Surveyor (Mr.Jack). There was a

esident Public Works Overseer(Mr.Wightman)in Pouewe St. In Charleton St. Mr.Hamilton had his stables and housing for his Coaches which ran once weekly to TeMata and Otorohanga. Kawhia had a Defence Rifle Club with the rifle-range on the hills in a valley parallel to and south o: the present golf course. Kawhia's third boarding-house was St.Elmo (Mrs.Morgan)situated where Carol and Rex Adam now live. The Cottage Hospital under Sister M.Reidy and two nurses provided for maternity, general and accident cases. Builders wereA.H.Knight & Co.,Radio dealer was Richard Ward and launches were hired by H.Morgan,J.SCHULTZ

and H.Draper. Mr. C.R.Morris was Land and Estate Agent and Martin Oldbury was a Tailor. Our dentist came from Otorohanga and Huki Wetere was General Carrier. Ou Town Clerk was J.K. Newton. Kawhia's homes and shops were lit by kerosene lamps except for the odd acetylene gas system built by Ward Bros. Ordinary mail came by launch from the Coach Terminal at the Oparau Ferry and parcel mail came by steamer from Onehunga.

Yes! Kawhia really did tick in those days!

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~~K~~ Spotlight on a Settler and on Coastal Steamers

The End of an Era

In the early years of this century, a great deal of travel continued to be done by coastal steamer. The Main Trunk railway line was not completed, and for some years after it was through, coastal steamers still conveyed passengers, though not so many as previously.

As roads improved, and cars came into the country in plenty, people were able to go from place to place in their own vehicles. By degrees the steamers came to carry only goods. Even that came to an end when so many trucks became available to convey cargo overland.

My mother an I watched our coastal vessel steam a little way up the channel from the wharf, and turn, outward bound, for the last time. That was in 1944.

My mother was a bad sailor and hadabandoned, at the first possible moment, any thought of coastal travel for land travel, but we were witnessing the end of an era, andit brought a pang of sadness. Coastals had served Kawhia before Kawhia had a wharf.

A Pioneer Family.

The late Mrs Joan Moore (née Humphrys) of Morrinsville, in a letter dated 11 April 1973, wrote of the arrival of her parents and herself in Kawhia to settle in the Awaroa valley:

"I was two years old when we came to Kawhia in the Kanieri from Waitara.
There was no wharf. Mother climbed down a rope ladder, her feet guided by a stalwart Maori who afterwards carried her ashore."

That was in 1900, and records the arrival of Mr and Mrs W. D. Humphrys and their ~~The Humphrys~~ daughter Joan. Some years later another daughter, Barbara was born.

The Humphrys family owned a property of 1000 acres in the Awaroa valley, which they called "Waikere" after the lake of that name which lay hidden in the bushclad hills at the back of the property

Mr Humphrys was English and new to backblock life in New Zealand. He disliked the bush which had a depressing effect upon him, and he was not completely happy with his section which he found harder to "bring in" than had at first seemed the case. But they remained there for about eighteen years, then it was sold with its comfortable little cottage of pitsawn timber, and the thriving orchard which they had planted beside it.

It was from that verandah, that as a child of nine I saw Halleys comet 76 years ago. The new owners did not live there, employing a manager. "Waikere" was never a

e again. The manager and his family met with illfortune. Their little daughter had to have one leg amputated. The school to which the children would have gone closed for lack of enough children coming on to replace those leaving. The manager and his wife decided to leave and noone took their place, then or since, though the block is sometimes still called "the Humphrys block". The house was pulled down eventually, and later a bulldozer ~~attacked the~~ altered the site of the homestead and orchard out of all recognition, and all that remained were a few ornamental trees which Mrs Humphrys had planted. The farm today is a wilderness .

A False Story

Many years after the Humphrys family had left the district I visited a Kawhia resident who had not known them, being a much later arrival.

At afternoon tea she said "What a curious story about that Mr H umphrys who lived up the Awaroa valley--- and how sad."

I was surprised. We knew the H umphrys family well. My parents knew them in Wanganui before the Awaroa was to know either-- Mrs Humphrys and my mother were at school together. We had always kept in touch.

"Oh, " I answered. "What was that?"

"Ihve been told that he lived up that valley alone, and suddenly disappeared. No message left, no goodbye to anyone. He just vanished and was never heard of again"

When I had enough breath ~~again~~, I exclaimed"There is not a word of truth in that story! Mr and Mrs Humphrys and their two daughters moved to New Plymouth and they are still living there". Which was so, at that time/

But who would think up such a tale-- and why?.

Farewell to Kawhia

Mr Humphrys' birthplace was in England but as a young man he came to New Zealand and never left it.

After the farm in the Awaroa valley was sold the Humphrys family left the district and, as they had arrived, so they left, by ~~coastal~~-steamer, still used along the coast though the Main Trunk line had been completed many years. This time they walked along the wharf and over a gangway to board the steamer. Rope ladders to clamber up and down into dinghies were a thing of the past in Kawhia .

The family stayed for a little while in or near Wanganui and then near Hunterville, then found a home in New Plymouth w here they lived for many years and where, in

the fullness of time Mr Humphrys died.

Mr Joan had married Mr Len Moore of Morrinsville in 1938, and after Mr Humphrys death her mother went to live with them, bringing the green parrot ~~Hector~~ Hector. HHector died about 75 years old it was thought, in the 1950's and was buried in their garden. They have all passed on now.

Mr and Mrs Humphrys memories would have streiched back to New Zealand in Colonial times---- Mrs Humphrys was Ethel Ward, one of the nine children of Judge Ward who was an interpreter in the Land Wars and an early Judge of the Native Land Court.

They would recall their arrival in Kawhia and the first days in the Awaroa Valley when the Awaroa River was the road; when the Maoris brought mail and passengers in their canoes to the Awaroa Landing; when acre upon acre of standing bush was felled to the ring of axes; when the bush burned and the grass was sown in the embers to make the land into farms; when timber was pitsawn to make their house; and when the steamers of the Northern Steamship Company were the lifeline upon which the district depended for so many years.

M.F.Cavers