

out experiments into rennet manufacture and as a result of his experiments, he was in 1918 appointed first manager of the New Zealand Rennet Company. In 1966 after several months of negotiation, the shareholders of the Mangatoki Dairy Company agreed to amalgamate with the Taranaki Dairy Company.

In the early days a busy business centre built up around the factory where at one time two stores stood opposing each other and on the north side of the road stood Jim Mills' store. On the south side was Maxwell's which also served as the local Post Office. Beside this stood Turkington's blacksmith shop where the farmers called on their homeward journey from the factory for any necessary horse shoeing or waggon repairs. Also, in the very early days McKay's Saddlery and Harness was situated here.

With the hardship of the depression days, Maxwell's Store closed, being purchased by Hammonds, now operating the store across the road. Hammonds used the other premises as a store-room. This busy store continued under this ownership for many years, until after two short changes of ownership, it closed about the same time as the next door factory.

The local school opened in 1891 with 16 children attending. Mr J. Kenah, who had actively aided the formation of Eltham's first school, was Chairman of the first School Committee. The school roll quickly rose and by 1895 there were 79 pupils and a teacher crammed into the one room. This state of affairs resulted in a second classroom being added, which served until a new school was built in 1941.

A need for a local church resulted in a Union Church being built in 1904 for the local Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians. Mr Blackhall of Eltham who prepared the plans free of charge submitted the successful tender for the building of the Church, a condition being that he used thoroughly seasoned timber from George Syme of Hawera.

The Pease family have a long continuous link with the church, succeeding generations filling the position of Secretary. Mr C. A. Pease followed his father Mr A. C. Pease as did Mr D. C. Pease following his father in 1962 as the present secretary.

As with many small country settlements, a decline in supporting businesses took place. The introduction of the motorcar, tanker milk collection and finally the closure of the local dairy factory ended an era of growth and activity. Today the local hall, school and church remain as a reminder of this once busy settlement.

### **The Swamp, Rawhitiroa and Maata District**

Because of the difficult swamp nature of the Rawhitiroa and Maata districts the early settlers preferred to pass this area by, in preference for the easier country further inland. This swampland east of Eltham stretched out to the hills for approximately 6 miles having a width of over a mile. To the north of this and separated by a ridge of dry land lay the Ngaire Swamp much the same size but about eighty feet higher above sea level.

Up to the year 1894 the land was in the hands of the Maoris. It consisted of about two-thirds native bush chiefly rimu, nigger heads, manuka, flax and toi-toi. The remaining third near the centre was

covered mainly with a growth of rushes interspersed with stunted flax and manuka. A feature of the wetter parts of the swamp was the needle-like silver pine, ten or twenty feet in height. Each swamp was partially drained by a stream, the Mangamingi in the Eltham Swamp and the Te Ngaere in the Ngaere Swamp. The district was once a favourite resort of the Maoris. The remains of orchards and clearings were found by the early settlers and it was not uncommon to unearth stone tools and axes.

In the year 1895 the land was taken over by the Government for ten shillings an acre from the Maoris and drainage work commenced, a circuit drain and main drain being put through each swamp. Shortly after, in October of the same year, the land was cut in blocks of 100 to 250 acres and sold by ballot.

From this time dates the long process of breaking in the swamp ground. The owners pushed ahead with draining at the same time felling the forest on the swamp and burning it off. On the open swamp the long straight spars of the silver pine were gathered for fencing purposes and the rough wood was burnt. On all classes of swamp, grass seed was sown on the burns.

Owing to the flammable nature of the peaty soil it was necessary that the fires be started only in the late winter and early spring while the soil was still damp. However, fires did break out and take control. Besides burning the timber on the surface the fires burnt deep into the soil exposing another layer of stumps.

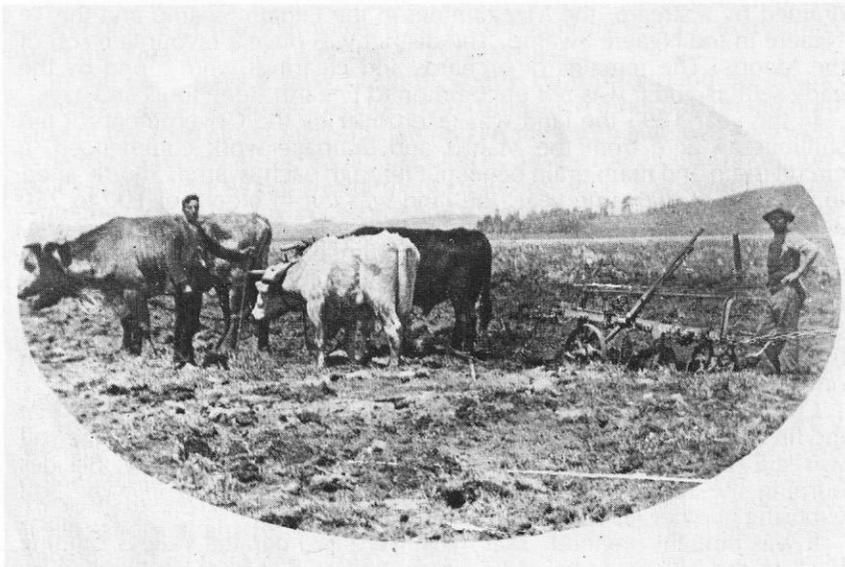
It was thought originally that there were two parallel valleys running back to the hills and drained by two streams that became blocked by ground movement or volcanic activity from Egmont. The lakes formed and then silted up until vegetation and later forests covered the one-time lakes. Following a further blockage of the streams the water again spread and the flooded trees died off. This process must have been repeated at least four times.

As the land was drained it naturally consolidated and sank a good deal until further stumps were exposed. The drains usually ranged from five to twelve feet in depth and were often about five chains apart. For any drains that were covered in, generally short lengths of silver pine were placed across the drain from the top edge, and angled to the bottom opposite side.

By the use of stumping jacks, bullock teams and sheer hard work the stumps were removed and burnt. Mr Woods, a pioneer in the development of the Rawhitiroa Swampland found the best method following stumping, was to put in a crop of swedes or turnips and then later to sow grass seed.

The early settlers were not very satisfied after a few years as the main Government drains began to collapse and fill in. At this time the area was still under the control of the Hawera County Council, so residents realised that to have effective control of the situation, a local drainage board would have to be formed. The original committee formed in 1901 consisted of Mr C. J. Belcher as Chairman and Messrs. A. Copplestone, J. Booten, J. Jacobson and C. Maslin as Board members. Mr W. J. Tristram, appointed secretary in 1903 remained with the Board for 48 years.

For the next 40 years the Board carried on drainage work by hand



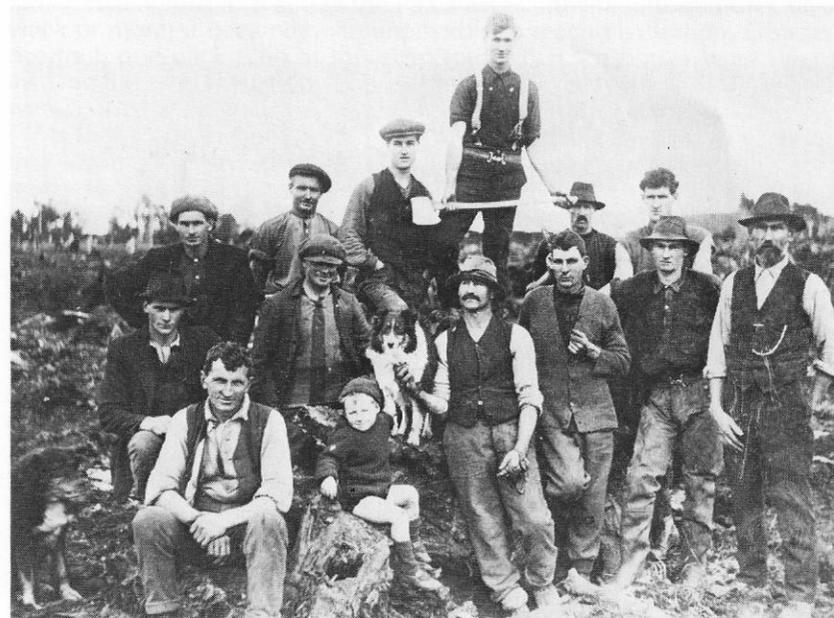
**Breaking in the Ngaire Swamp.**

labour combating the problem of the sinking swamp. As time went by the original drains formed ridges ten feet above the new ground level. In 1958 a subsidy grant enabled the work to commence enlarging all the main drains and improving falls and also providing further subsidiary drains.

As far back as 1894 the Government was finding work for the unemployed. On the high block of land on which now stands the Rawhitiroa School and Memorial pool, a settlement block of ten acre sections was formed. It was intended that these unemployed workers brought up from Christchurch would settle here with their families, supplementing their incomes off the land whilst working on the 'co-operative work schemes' digging drains and making roads. The scheme did not work particularly well as many were attracted away to similar schemes with the gum lands development in North Auckland.

At that time the district was known merely as 'Anderson Road' but the settlers put in an application for an official name for the district and it was designated 'Rawhitiroa', the Maori name meaning 'Long Sunshine'.

The Hon. Richard Seddon, the Prime Minister, visited the area a few years after the opening of the settlement, following a request for a school. The visit was made in winter and as the roads were not metalled, the Minister had to make the visit on horseback arriving back in Eltham thickly bespattered with mud. A few months after, the work of building commenced and a suitable school was erected.



**Workers engaged in developing the Swampland.**

Chew Chong erected a creamery in this predominantly dairying district. The local farmers brought their milk in and after it had been separated, the cream was taken into the main factory in Eltham. The Eltham Dairy Company took an interest in the district and a short time afterwards, in 1903 erected a factory. With the establishment of the factory other small businesses soon commenced in the vicinity. A store and Post Office stood on the corner opposite the factory and a blacksmith shop opened around the corner on the Horio Road. Henn and Willy's sawmill operated on a site near the hall, milling timber from the swamp until being forced to close due to hardship in 1898.

Another industry long disappeared from the district is a brick kiln established by Mr H. J. Ford after his arrival in the district in 1895. Situated on the corner of Hu Road, clay dug from a bank provided the suitable ingredient. Motive power for the pug mill, a hole in the ground in which clay and water were mixed, was provided by a horse trudging around in an endless circle harnessed to a long radiating pole. After moulding, the bricks were placed in a drying shed before firing in the kiln. Mr Ford constructed a house of these bricks but this has now been demolished to make way for a more modern residence. In recent years the district, due to the effort of the residents, has gained a major recreational attraction. A swimming pool constructed as a War Memorial project and built by voluntary labour with funds raised locally, opened in 1960. Set in pleasant surroundings, the pool and its picnic grounds are in

great demand in summer months by the whole of the Eltham district and visitors from further afield.



**Main drain at Maata under construction. Mr Thomas Hunt Jenkins on the bank.**

### **The Outback**

When the first intending settlers travelled east to the Mangamingi it was practically standing bush all the way from the outskirts of the Eltham township. By way of a bridle track, three of the first settlers Messrs Sam Hardy, Sam Death and R. S. Brown, travelled out by horseback about 1887. On reaching their destination they camped on a Maori clearing known as Rukumoana. Here they found still standing, the whare of the pakeha-maori Kimble Bent, and this the trio used as a temporary home. Peaches and apples planted by the Maoris were still growing in large clumps.

The three settlers had journeyed out with the intention of taking up an 800 acre bush section each, as these were available for selection. One section was obviously outstanding so it was decided that straws be drawn to decide ownership and Mr Brown, drawing the longest, gained this better block of land. He was the first to occupy his section and immediately set about the long task of clearing the bush.

Other settlers involved in the early settlement of this hinterland were Messrs James Boddie, John Grenville, George Langry, Albert Turner, Sam and Bill Gower, Pervis and Walker.

Packhorses were the only available means of transport for all sorts of

supplies and pioneers of the backblocks had to meet the challenge of a rather treacherous ford across the Patea River. In winter, sometimes for a week or more, it became quite impossible to reach civilisation. Disaster overtook one pack train at this river ford when ten horses were swept away in the swirling waters. The train belonging to Taylor and Scriveners were loaded with fencing wire for Mr Brown's 'Rukumoana' holding.

Mr C. A. Wilkinson himself used to lead packhorse trains of supplies into the back country, a full day's journey through the deep clinging mud. The usual time of departure from Eltham being 7 a.m. and if nothing untoward occurred, camp would be reached at 9 p.m., driver and horses being covered with mud from head to foot. A bunk on the floor would be given for the night and in the morning the men would help Mr Wilkinson catch his horses prior to the long tramp back to Eltham.

At this time the only cleared land west of the Patea River was a half-acre clearing at Turners holding.

Others associated with the early pack horse were Jack Bethune, Harry Nuttal, Frank Lee, T. C. Stanners, G. H. Buckridge, G. W. Taylor and Charlie Packsaddle, his real name now forgotten.

The first store in the district was established by Mr R. A. Adams, as a branch of his Eltham store, on a site near the school. With Mr Fischer as manager, the store remained open for some seven years, serving the settlers and men involved in roadworks, bush clearing and fencing.

With milk supplied from the local settlers, a Mr Granville operated a small creamery from which he and his daughter manufactured butter for sale in Eltham.



**Works Camp on the Glen Nui Road.**

At first a bridle track from Eltham by way of Anderson Road and skirting the lower Ngaire swamp proved a hazardous journey with much time being lost in hauling the animals from the bogholes. The road then led down a spur into the Mangamingi Valley.

The Chapman Road, now King Edward Street, did not extend past the village limits until sometime after 1896.

To the south a road was formed, a continuation of the Rotokare Road named by the fact that it skirted the lake's southern and eastern edge before dipping over into the Mangamingi Valley. This road, over unstable country became unused after the opening of the road originating from the Eltham township. In January 1896 Mr Wilkinson took the first trapload of goods into the Mangamingi via the Anderson Road. There were a few tight corners but the road remained good until the winter rains set in.

For many years the ford remained the only route across the Patea River but sometime later a swing bridge was erected by the settlers. In 1898 a traffic bridge was erected across the river and the Hon. Richard Seddon performed the opening ceremony, which was a red-letter day for the district.



**Opening of the Patea River Bridge by Richard Seddon 1898.**

By 1914 the bulk of the bush in the block extending back to Omoana had been felled and grassed and many other settlers had taken up land.

Taylor Scrivener, having taken over R. A. Adams' local business, followed the land development by shifting their store further east to

Omoana. The Post Office store became known in the district as 'The Royal Tiger'. Later, on its closing, a boarding house was constructed by Messrs. Charles Reader and Bill Johnstone. The outbuilding served as a local store, post office and restaurant and a whare tucked away at the back was frequented as a bar room. Here supplies of liquor could be purchased, a bottle of whisky costing eight shillings and a cheaper variety, Green Stripe at four and sixpence proved very popular with the bushmen.

At the turn of the century it was a very busy community with up to 200 bushmen clearing land in the district and further on at Moeroa there were considerable numbers of men working on the roads. A bridle track was formed in the early days from Moeroa to Waitotara with bridges and culverts wide enough to admit wheeled traffic. This was later widened but after the '20's this gradually disappeared after a bridge washed out.

The Sprouls, McIntyres and Jacksons were the first settlers in the Moeroa area while down the Moeawatea Road which led to Waverley lived the Barrs and Otto Buckman. Schools were later established at Omoana, Moeroa and on the Mataiwhetu Road.

In the early days Mr S. J. Gear brought the mail and supplies out by coach from Eltham to Omoana. On one trip a bad accident occurred when the coach went over the bank near the Patea River Bridge and six horses were killed. In 1917 Eli Bunn continued the regular horsedrawn service, later using a motor truck. This business later being taken over in turn by Messrs Fred Robinson and Sam Morris.



**Levi Bunn's back country delivery service.**

With the closing of the Reader/Johnstone store sometime in the '30's, the County Council house at Omoana became the Post Office.

Great prospects originally had been foreseen for this predominantly sheepfarming back country district, in fact townships had been surveyed at Mangamingi and Takou, but during the depression years many settlers walked off the land, simply not being able to make ends meet and their holdings quickly reverted back to scrub and bush. In the 1970's an attempt was made to establish an Ohu on the Mataiwhetu Road, across the swing bridge which crosses the Whenuakura River flowing 102 feet below. This attempt at self-sufficiency was abandoned after a few years.

In later years, Maslin's truck, driven by Bill Worthington, carried mail and goods out and later still Bill Sheriff, who lived in the district for a time, drove the Eltham Transport Service. Today the district is regularly serviced by Mr Keith Rowe in his red rural mail delivery van which also does service as the local school bus.



**Opening of the Mangamingi School — September 1903.**

#### **Rotokare**

The existence of a body of water somewhere to the east was vaguely known by the early settlers, they having been told of a Maori trail that led there in earlier days. It took several expeditions before Rotokare was discovered in the heavily bushed inland. Mr Robinson, a Crown Lands ranger, was directed in December 1882 by the Hawera Town Authority to investigate the lake's possibilities as a town water supply. His report



**Sheep mustering on the early back country.**

proved to be not very enthusiastic. The 13 mile pipeline would be through rough bush country and because of the limited inlet flow, the water quality was not fit for human consumption being full of decaying vegetable matter.

Later efforts to preserve the timber in the reserve met with considerable opposition, but the wisdom of the decision can now be fully appreciated, the 547 acres being the only patch of native bush in the area. The name Rotokare is derived from the Maori words: Roto — a lake and kare — a ripple, — the rippling lake. Once this lake was discovered, townspeople made occasional expeditions out to it and one visitor in March 1887 described his visit as follows:

"Some went by the Chapman Road but we found the Swamp Road by far the best, about four miles and then the bush track cut by Mr P. Wilson last year is about two to three miles on to the lake. Being late, I found to my surprise on my arrival some of the party taking a trip down the lake on three of the floating islands, using tents for sails, but these did not answer well for lack of wind. The lake is well protected by hills and the bush growing to the lake edge. Some of us who did not care for sailing took a trip around the lake. We then fixed up a house for those who felt inclined for sleeping instead of fishing. Those who fished caught eels from 1lb to nearly 20lbs. One of our party caught 20. While fishing we saw two islands cruise down the lake, it being perfectly calm. After a pleasant night we started back for Eltham, a two-and-a-half hour walk".

About 120 American trout were liberated in the lake in June 1888 by Messrs. G. Willy and A. A. Fantham who carried the heavy cans for miles through rough bush country. They renamed the lake 'Trout-a-carry'. Their efforts were in vain as no trout have survived.

With the construction of the Rotokare Road giving access to Mangamingi, the road skirted the southern and eastern rim of the lake. Greater public use of the lake now being made, it was not uncommon to see as many as 40 horse-drawn vehicles there on holiday occasions. Pioneering power-boat activities also came in with the coming of the motorcar.

An easier alternative route, a continuation of the Chapman Road to Mangamingi, the present road, saw the deterioration of the Rotokare Road through lack of use over the unstable land.

The Rotokare Domain Board who controlled this Lands and Survey Reserve, handicapped through lack of funds, handed the control of the lake to the Eltham County Council in 1957. Access to the lake at this time was possible across the farm of Mr L. O'Connor who made the land available for a public road. The Eltham County Council, with the assistance of a grant from the Lands and Survey Department, undertook the construction of this road, an extension of Sangsters Road in 1973-74. Recent Catchment Commission checks have determined the legendary bottomless lake does not exceed 20 feet in depth in any area. With the addition of a National Walkway around the lake edge utilising in part the old roadway, Rotokare has regained its popularity as a boating, water skiing and picnic area.



T. W. Reilly's Bakery and Tearooms, Bridge Street.

## MEDICAL SERVICES

Long before Eltham's first doctor became resident in the Village, Mrs Oliver Robinson willingly made available her services for those of her fellow settlers in need. Bushfelling was a hazardous occupation and many injuries were incurred. The injured bushmen often had to be carried into the settlement on an improvised stretcher made from sacks and saplings. Mr D'Arcy Hamilton, the school's first headmaster who had studied earlier with the intention of becoming a doctor, also gave freely of his services.

When word of a bush accident or illness became known a telephone message from the Post Office store brought the response of a doctor, who came through from Normanby or Hawera. Dr Lightbourn often attended and made the long difficult trip into the bush to the scene of the accident. The patient, if necessary, would then be consigned by train to hospital at either Hawera or New Plymouth.

Medical supplies were obtained from Stratford or Hawera often involving a long horse ride. With the development of the village, Mr Frazer opened a shop in High Street, this was later purchased by a Mr Baber. Many of the settlers, however, probably relied on the time-honoured treatment administered from a blue castor oil bottle or a mixture of sulphur and treacle.

Dr Branting became Eltham's first doctor for a few months in 1893 until illness forced him to be hospitalised in New Plymouth.

Dr G. A. Harrison came to Eltham from England in 1894 and commenced practice. He travelled about the district in a horse and buggy later driven by a groom. Early in October 1898 when returning home from a call at Mangatoki, his horse reared and threw itself, the buggy and the doctor into a stream 20 feet below. This area became known to the local settlers as 'The Doctor's Drop'. Dr Harrison became a highly-respected figure in the district because of his confident and cheerful nature.

On one occasion when visiting a patient he overheard a minister within saying a prayer. After a lengthy wait, he burst in and exclaimed, 'I say Parson, your horse has bolted'. The minister hastily departed, leaving the field clear to the doctor who had greater faith in his own administrations.

In February 1913 a prick from a safety pin to this thumb at his cottage hospital in King Edward Street proved fatal. With the resulting death of Dr Harrison, the whole town went into mourning and a short time later Memorial Gates were erected at the eastern entrance to Taumata Park.

Dr Wake arrived in Eltham about 1900 and set up a surgery in York Street opposite the school grounds. His premises were easily discernable at night by the red street lamp erected with the permission of the Borough Council. He also proved to be a popular practitioner until his departure in approximately 1912.

Dr H. Cooper came to Eltham early in 1912 to assist Dr Harrison, taking over the practice on the latter's death. In 1919, to replace the cottage hospital, he built the imposing Mount View Hospital on the hilltop above Hill Street. A two-storeyed residence, complete with a

surgery in High Street, adjoining the present library grounds was also built. Aided by volunteers, the major challenge of the 1918 influenza epidemic were met by this lone physician of the town. After the death of his wife in 1925, Dr Cooper sold his practice and left for England to study in order to specialise in children's diseases.

Dr D. H. Saunders bought the practice, residence and the Mount View Hospital in October 1925. He soon became deeply involved in the affairs of the town and its various sports clubs. In 1944 he successfully coached the Eltham Rugby team to its first Taranaki Championship victory. Another great interest, the Eltham Volunteer Fire Brigade, resulted in his receipt of a Gold Star for 25 years service as honorary surgeon. His most important office was the Mayoralty which he held from 1947-1953. His name was bestowed on the sports ground, the formation of which he initiated during this time. The sudden death of this highly respected doctor and friend of the majority of Eltham's citizens shocked the town on 11 November 1957.

In 1934 Dr D. Crawford set up a private hospital in a large house purchased in Meuli Street. Known as the Melrose Private Hospital, it remained open until the departure of Dr Crawford overseas to serve during World War II. He also maintained a surgery at his residence on High Street north.

Dr B. W. Scott came to Eltham in 1954 to assist Dr Saunders, being joined by Dr G. Wood in 1957. On the death of Dr Saunders, the two doctors formed a partnership which was dissolved five years later.

Dr Scott remained in practice at the surgery of the High Street residence which he had purchased. He took an active interest in public affairs, serving as a Borough Councillor and President of the Civic and Recreational Society. He was also elected as Patron of the Eltham Highland Pipe Band and a Life Member of the N.Z. Antique Arms Association. Early in 1981 Dr Scott accepted a commission in the N.Z. Army and at present is in command of the Papakura Military Camp Hospital in Auckland.

Dr Wood, after opening a temporary surgery in Bridge Street East moved to his present High Street Surgery in May 1965. Here he maintains Eltham's remaining practice in a highly-respected manner.

Mount View Hospital was sold to the Hawera Hospital Board after the death of Dr Saunders in 1957. Ownership of the hospital was transferred to the Taranaki Hospital on the amalgamation of the two Boards in 1968. Due to the lack of public support and the declining birth rate, the hospital closed in 1972. Except for being used for a short time as a temporary Eventide Home, the building has lain idle until its purchase by the Catholic Social Services in 1981.

Completely renovated, it was used as a Social Welfare home for several months and then closed. Plans are now being formed for its use as a youth works skills training centre.

### Dental Services

Eltham's early sufferers of toothache had to rely on travelling dentists for the relief of pain. One of the more colourful of these, Kickapoo Hunter from Stratford, a former salesman for an American Medicine

Company visited Eltham during his circuit of the South Taranaki district. In the country areas, the surgery consisted of a tent erected for the visit and a kerosene tin placed ready to receive the drawn offending teeth. Extraction was the only recognised cure. Once 'the gas' had been administered, making the patient oblivious to his attentions, the dentist set to work. At this time a follower of the profession was not worthy of his calling if there was not at least one tooth in the air whilst grappling with the next.

A chemist, Fraser, also practised as a dentist, his business being located in the block of shops destroyed in the High Street fire of 1907. At the height of the blaze the explosion of his gas cylinders shook the district with a force like cannon fire.

Sir Charles Burdett, Bart. practised from a surgery where Crown Farmers' are now located. In 1917 his skill as a dental surgeon was recognised by his being appointed to the Army to undertake the organisation of a Dental Division. While on leave in Eltham in 1918, he died as a result of the influenza epidemic.

Ernie Carter practised upstairs in Wilkinson's building overlooking High Street and later in semi-retirement from his Mills Street residence.

Another controversial dentist, Charlie Taplin practised upstairs in the H.B. building — across from the Central Hotel.

Harry Glover on the Eltham Road at Mangatoki maintained a surgery at his farm house commencing approximately in 1935 and continued for about 10 years.

In recent years O. Millen Paulin practised in Wilkinson's building being succeeded by Paul Swinburn of Hawera, who visited Eltham two days a week.

The senior partner of the present dental practice, Peter Smith, arrived in Eltham on 1 March 1951 to assume control. A move was made to the new professional chambers in High Street in May 1965. Kishor Bava joined the practice in 1977 continuing until his untimely death in 1980. Barry Robertson joined the practice late in 1980.

### Quick Retreat

Constable Fleming's tall figure was observed rapidly striding toward the local hotel. It was in the days of six o'clock closing and some of Eltham's more eminent citizens had dallied too long in convivial conversation. The only possible route of escape was taken — a quick retreat under the bar.

The Constable entered and after a quick glance around, approached the barman busily mopping up.

'Bit late clearing up tonight,' he enquired. A hastily concocted explanation followed which developed into a somewhat lengthy conversation. The fugitives cramped beneath the bar silently squirmed and cursed as the constable rambled on. Finally, an eternity later, about half an hour really, they sighed with relief as they heard him turn about to depart.

A sharp rap on the bar followed, 'Good evening Mr Horton, good evening Mr Blank, good evening Mr Jones'.

They had overlooked the fine reflecting qualities of the bar mirror!

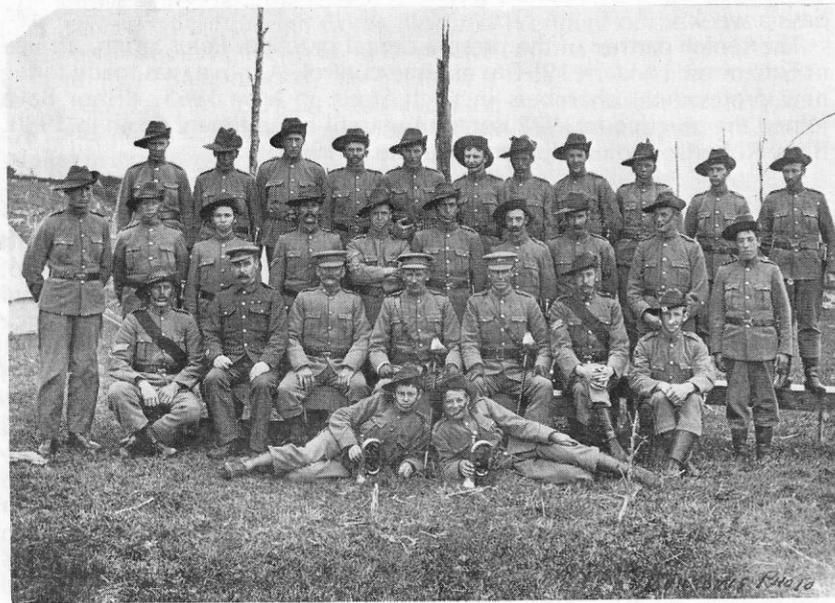
## THE ELTHAM VOLUNTEER RIFLES

Shortly after the outbreak of the Boer War the Eltham Volunteer Rifles was formed. Operating as a volunteer social unit, positions of command were decided by election and Captain James Boddie became the first commander. Other positions in the earlier years were filled by Lieutenant's Page, Velvin and McSkimming. The unit decided their dress uniform should consist of a scarlet tunic and blue trousers.

An annual camp took place usually at Taumata park where a week of intensive training took place, finishing with a grand concert held in a marquee erected for the occasion. A rifle range lying in a gully behind Hill Street was formed by the volunteers and opened in January 1901. Here a number of shoots were contested locally and with other units. The orderly room stood behind what is now the Eltham Super Service Station.

The Eltham Volunteer Rifles continued in existence until 1911 when the Compulsory Military Training Scheme came into force. The officers continued their service by assisting in the training of the territorials.

A Mounted Rifle's Corps was also formed in 1902 combining with a Straford Unit. Parades alternated between the two centres. Camps and contests were held on the site of the old Eltham Race Course on Mabey Street.



The Eltham Volunteer Rifles 1904-05.

## THE HOME FRONT — WORLD WAR I

With the outbreak of the Great War, Eltham's citizens were quick to form a Patriotic Committee which engaged in active fundraising for the duration of conflict.

In 1916 Mrs H. J. Barnard, wife of the local Postmaster, undertook the organisation of a local major fundraising effort in aid of an ambulance for the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in France. Six hundred pounds was raised which proved sufficient for the purchase of an ambulance and six month's running costs.



The motor ambulance presented by the people of Eltham.

Mrs Barnard who saw six of her sons leave to serve overseas, earned the name locally as the "Gingernut Lady". This was due to the large number of ginger biscuits she baked and sent to the New Zealand troops. The recipe for her biscuits is included in the cookbook of former Eltham identity "Aunt Daisy", who performed in the local Patriotic Concerts.

With the signing of the Armistice Surrender Agreement on 11 November 1918 a grand two days of celebrations occurred. People poured in from the country on learning the news and the streets were thronged with people. Fire, school and church bells rang, car horns blared and children beating kerosene tins gathered from the Borough depot roamed the streets. Flags, bunting and ribbons flew and it was claimed that never before had Eltham presented such a festive air.

A procession formed at the fire station with the participants dressed in fancy costumes amidst the motor lorry drawn floats. Proceeding to the

Town Hall they were addressed by the Mayor, Mr T. R. Crump, who made the official Peace announcement.

In 1924 a Committee was set up to collect funds to erect War Memorial Gates at the school's main entrance on Conway Road. The Memorial was completed at a cost of £470 and was unveiled on Armistice Day 1926 by the then Minister of Agriculture, Mr O. J. Hawkin, and the Mayor, Mr I. J. Bridger.

## THE TIMBER INDUSTRY

### Egmont Box Company

As a timber milling town and intensive dairying district, Eltham proved a logical centre to commence the associated industry of butter box manufacturing. Runciman and Company began operations in 1899 being managed by T. Runciman and R. S. Allan with Messrs. Chew Chong and J. Penny Jnr. as shareholders.

A large number of dairy companies arranged for a supply of cheese crates and butter boxes for three years at 9½ pence each delivered to the nearest railway station. Later, Mr T. Runciman became the sole owner, the business then being the Union Timber Company.

Taken over by a group of co-operative dairy companies in 1902, it became the Egmont Co-operative Box Company. This company continued for another four years until it went into voluntary liquidation to allow reconstruction and expansion.

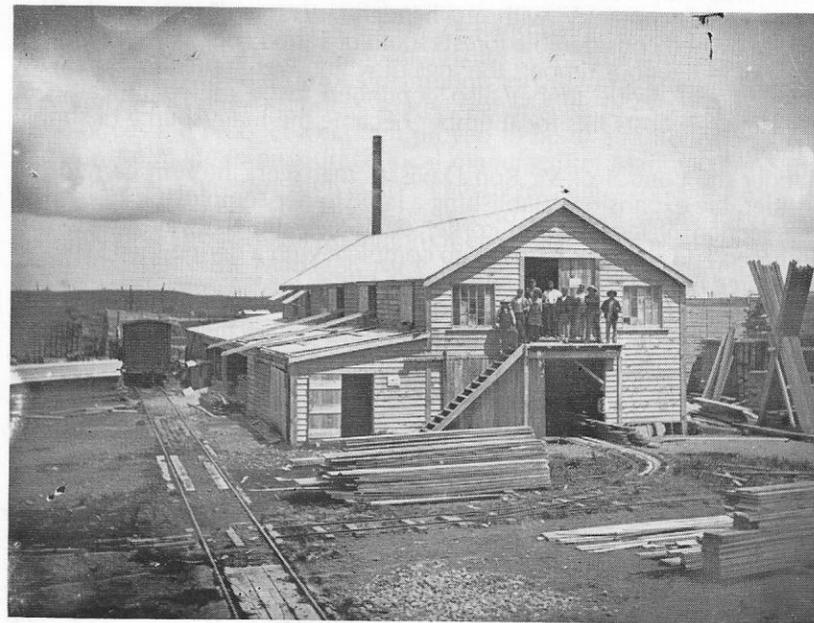
Restructured as the Egmont Box Company in 1906 operations commenced with the purpose of supplying butter boxes and cheese crates to its shareholders, some sixty Taranaki Dairy factories. Mr R. G. Barr became the Company's first manager. Several highly successful years followed but a problem arose with the cutting out of local supplies of white pine, no substitute timber being considered suitable at this time.

With the maturing of pinus radiata forests the company adapted to the use of this timber purchasing a large bush milling plant in the King Country in 1913.

At busy periods up to 85 men were employed, the average staff however being 40. Record production reached 440,000 butter boxes and 550,000 cheese crates in one year. The Eltham yards were extensive, covering about six acres on which the timber was stacked to season after being railed from the King Country mill. The source of power, a huge steam engine developing 130 h.p. was fed on shavings and waste timber. Sufficient steam pressure was always maintained by the night watchman employed to signal any outbreak of fire at the mill or observed in the town. The mill became partly electrified in later years.

A mill at the yard also milled local timber for the boxes and crates or supplied the building trade, up to 10,000 feet a day being cut in the 1930's. A timber yard and joinery were established in Hawera.

With the founding of a large mill in the King Country the scene of operations intensified in that area. At the end of the Second World War in 1946, all milling and factory activities were transferred to Tokoroa, the office headquarters shifting to Hawera.



The Egmont Box Company in its earlier days.

The loss of this source of employment was a serious blow to the town as over the years a vast proportion of the local workforce had been involved in some way with the Egmont Box Company.

The Egmont Box Company's steam engine gave the Eltham township a considerable shake-up in its early days. A twin-cylinder compound model with a flywheel about 15 feet in diameter, it was supplied with steam by a Babcock and Wilcox boiler. The engine required a driver with a first-class stationary engine ticket to be constantly in attendance.

However, one morning the engine man, seeing that everything appeared to be running smoothly "just slipped out for a moment" to milk his cow on the nearby railway reserve. Unfortunately during his absence, the belt driving the generator chose to break and the engine soon picked up speed and bolted. Becoming a thundering, shuddering monster, the vibrations were felt all over the town. Fortunately the steam supply was able to be turned off before destruction occurred.

### H. Clements Mill

On the transference of the Egmont Box Company to Mr H. Clements, the millsite with the old mill building was removed and a new smaller mill constructed. Timber milling began in May 1947. Logs were procured from the outskirts of Egmont National Park but problems arose with the extraction of the native timber from the bush area. Timber was also milled from local farm plantations.

### **Puketapu 3.A. Block Incorporated**

Clements Mill was taken over in August 1948 by the above firm, a Maori-owned company with its headquarters at Taumaranui. This concern owned considerable forests south of Taupo containing a plentiful supply of indigenous timber, the logs of which were railed to Eltham for milling. Local exotic timber also continued to be milled. Because of increasing rail costs this local timber became the main source of supply for the mill.

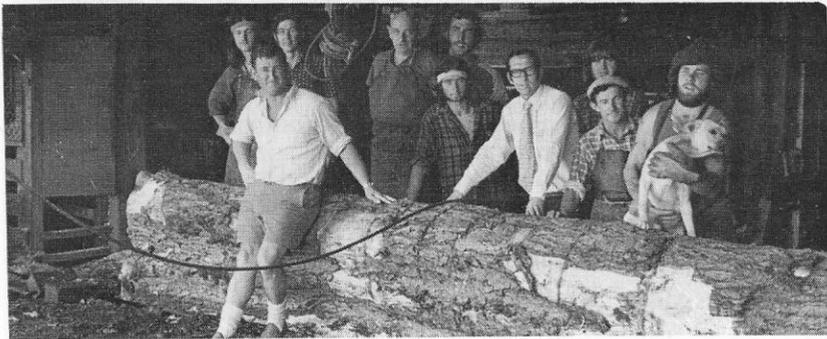
Under the control of Mr Ron Davis as manager, the firm carried out considerable expansion establishing a large Joinery employing 12 men. A large section of land on the corner of Bridge and Railway Streets was purchased and a timber yard set up complete with a drying shed. The old Post Office next door became the firm's office.

In 1962 the Puketapu 3.A. Block management decided to withdraw from their Eltham operation and concentrate their activities in the centre of the island. They sold their interests in Eltham to the Kauri Timber Company.

### **Waipari Timber Company**

Within one week the Kauri Timber Company, in a controversial sale, sold to the Fletcher Timber Company. The new Company continued milling timber on the same scale as the previous Puketapu concern, making little in the way of changes in the 13 years of its operations. Trading under the name of the Waipari Timber Company, they turned out one and a quarter million superfeet of timber a year. In September 1975 they announced their intention to cease milling due to the lack of local timber available.

The closing of the Mill in October 1975 marked the end of Eltham's oldest industry which began some 96 years previously. The Fletcher Timber Company continued operating the joinery in the old Egmont Box Co. factory until, in 1983, the concern was purchased by Messrs Bernard Wyss and Murray Chinery.



**The Last Log.**

**From left to right: Ian Nichols, Sam Vickers, Laurie Bevans, Pat Sheppard, Brian Vickers, Graham Gardiner (at back), Dick Williams, Glen Priest, George Gavin and Jeff Nichols.**

## **NEW ZEALAND CO-OP RENNET CO. LTD**

During the early days of the New Zealand dairy industry, rennet, the necessary additive for cheese manufacture had to be imported. During World War I, with the serious disruption to shipping, supplies became very limited. As a result, prices soared reaching up to £50 a keg. Even at these prices the product too often proved to be of an inferior quality so efforts were made to encourage local manufacture. Manufacturing trials were held at Dunedin and at the Patea Freezing Works but the first quantities of rennet produced proved to be too weak for cheese manufacture. The scene of operations then shifted to the Mangatoki Dairy Company where the Manager, Mr C. Cooper, had previously manufactured a satisfactory form of rennet. Shortly afterwards a move into Eltham followed where premises were rented, these being a garage where Mr C. A. Wilkinson had operated his Maxwell car agency.

The first 50 kegs of rennet manufactured here by Mr Cooper proved satisfactory to the users. At this stage the use of lamb vells proved to be the cause of the previously low strength product, the superior calf stomach lining being used from this stage on. The method of manufacture at this time still left room for improvement. It closely resembled the crude methods mentioned in the Old Testament.

A local chemist, Mr G. H. P. Fitzgerald, became interested and tackled the problem with scientific determination. His efforts were successful and his methods of manufacture were closely adhered to for 37 years. Mr Fitzgerald was appointed Manager of the Rennet Company in 1924 and General Manager the following year, and when he resigned from the Company in 1941, he held the position of Managing Director. During his 17 years with the Company a wide range of products, many still produced today, were introduced including veterinary ointments and cheese colouring.

In spite of serious financial problems in its early years, the Company was firmly established by 1930. The purchase of land allowed considerable building expansion and larger staff members became employed. The Company now had a considerable hold on the New Zealand market as well as exporting to a large number of overseas countries. In 1939 a new laboratory was completed and at that time it was considered to be equal to that of any other rennet manufacturer in the world.

During World War II, the Company, at the request of the Government, engaged in the manufacture of processed cheese for the American troops in the Pacific, a substantial amount being turned out. In 1952 the trial manufacture of Blue Vein cheese was undertaken on request of the Dairy Industry. The venture was an immediate success, the output of 69 tons being increased to 98 tons. The following year in 1957, the initial development of an export market followed. Disaster struck the Company that year with the destruction of the factory by fire. Within four months, sufficient reconstruction within the original walls, being the old Wilkinson Picture Hall, had been completed to permit resumption of production on a limited scale.

The factory took the opportunity to carry out extensions and

renovations, a policy of growth which over the years has seen the factory extend to Bedford Street and back onto King Edward Street. This complete area is totally concerned with natural cheese manufacturing, storage and packing. Over the years many other varieties have been added to the range. The present annual production totals some 1,200 tonnes whilst across the road 500 tonnes of process cheese is manufactured. Some 52% of all this cheese is exported.

Rennet, the origin of the Company, is still the mainstay producing 55% of the Company's income. During recent years modifications to the process have been introduced to keep up with advancing technology. Present annual production from 732,000 vells results in 285,000 litres of liquid Rennet plus 51,000kg of Rennet powder. For many years the Company manufactured in its cooerage all wooden kegs used in the shipping of the liquid rennet — these are now superceded by plastic containers.

Mr P. H. Coward, a former secretary of the Company, became the General Manager in 1966 on the retirement of Mr C. Cassels. The present staff of the Company numbers 87 employees.

Although this district has long been regarded as the cradle of the dairy industry, and will shortly no longer be a major manufacturer of dairy products, the local citizens regard with pride this Company which produces vital products for the dairy industry of New Zealand.

---

## J. C. HUTTON (N.Z.) LTD

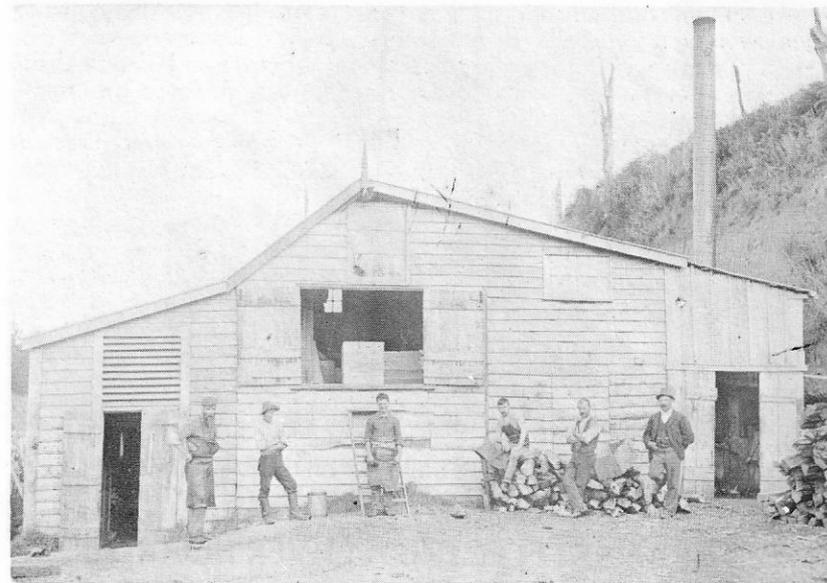
Etham's major employer J. C. Hutton Ltd is directly descended from a small bacon factory operated by Messrs. Buchanan Bros. on a site on the Eltham Road east of Hunter Road, all traces of which have now disappeared. It was taken over by the shareholders of the Eltham and Mangatoki Dairy Companies under the title of the Eltham and Mangatoki Co-op. Bacon Company, and later after re-organisation became the South Taranaki Bacon Company.

New works were then built in the Eltham borough on the eastern bank of the Waingongoro River but shortly after coming into use in 1904, were destroyed by fire. The factory was rebuilt and in 1916 following a merger with the Waikato Farmers Co-op Bacon Company and Messrs Dimock and Company, the concern became the New Zealand Meat Packing and Bacon Company.

Operations were considerably extended, the works and plant being enlarged to cope with the slaughtering of cattle and the canning of beef. The associated by-products produced were tallow and blood and one fertiliser. The canning department was most successful until a slump in the beef market caused production to cease.

With the increase in Eltham's population a municipal abattoir became compulsory so a mutual agreement between the Company and the Borough was concluded. The factory being gazetted as an abattoir in 1922 saved the Eltham ratepayers the necessity of having to raise a considerable loan. In 1923 the New Zealand Meat Packing and Bacon Company went into liquidation.

The whole of the assets were bought by J. C. Hutton (N.Z.) Ltd who over the years considerably rebuilt and enlarged the works. In August 1983 the pig killing chain closed down, the entire operation now being directed towards the beef market. A further amalgamation took place two years ago when the New Zealand holdings of J. C. Hutton were acquired by Brierly Investments but still operates as J. C. Hutton Ltd. At the height of the season 210 hands are employed. The present manager is Mr V. Sattler.



**Messrs. Buchanan Bros. bacon factory — Mangatoki.**

### Green Fingers

Constable Townshend was having trouble with Deny a regular misbehavior who frequented the local, too often for his own good. So in order to give him a break he took Deny back to the station for a little gardening exercise with a large garden patch and some cabbage plants.

When Townie returned home he found old Deny gone, the job finished and on close inspection, revealed the most perfect and orderly planting job he'd seen for many a day — every plant lined up exactly from whatever angle it was viewed.

In a couple of days the plants began to show signs of distress and wilted and died. The puzzled constable, after much thought, pulled up several plants for close inspection and lo' and behold, every plant had been neatly trimmed of its roots — the facts of the next meeting are not recorded.



The Eltham Bacon Company's buildings on the present site of J. C. Hutton Ltd.

## TARANAKI ELECTRIC POWER BOARD

In May 1919 the Eltham Chamber of Commerce organised a meeting of local bodies and Dairy Companies to discuss the possibility of introducing electricity to the district. No definite conclusions were arrived at until a further meeting on 11 April 1921, agreement was reached to form the Taranaki Electric Power Board District. On the recommendation of Mr L. Birks, the Government's Chief Electrical Engineer, the district included the Waitara, Inglewood, Stratford and Eltham areas.

The Taranaki Power Board's District having been gazetted in May 1922, elections for Board members were held two months later. Mr H. Carman of Eltham became the Board's first Chairman and Mr W. J. Tristram was appointed Clerk.

Several power schemes were investigated and that submitted by Messrs. Climie and Son was adopted in April 1923. Based on a 400 foot drop between the Manganui River near Tariki and the Waitara River near Motukawa, the scheme directed water through canals, a lake, tunnels and a steel penstock to a powerhouse.

In 1924 with the coupling up of a small 200 k.v.a. construction site generator at Tariki, the Eltham butter factory unit, the Kaponga Town

Board unit and a supply from New Plymouth, Eltham received its first power on Christmas Eve of that year. This link-up and running in parallel of several widely spaced units is believed to be the first occasion of this now common practice.

In January 1927 the Board's own power station came into operation. Initially two 1,800 k.v.a. alternators driven by 2,200 h.p. turbines were installed and later in 1938, to meet increased demand a third identical unit was added.

As the completed scheme cost twice the estimated £250,000, the Board struck an 'Availability Rate' in 1927. This rate of a minimum of £30 for all properties with 10 chains of a supply line and deducted from power used, soon rapidly increased the number of consumers in the Board's area. This unpopular rate was dropped four years later.

Stratford Borough discontinued generating its own power supply after 1926 and the Board agreed to supply that Council, as later did Kaponga, Waitara and Inglewood.

In 1933 arrangements were made with the Public Works to draw 6,600 volts from its system during shortages, but the Board was still able for a time to feed surplus energy back into the North Island grid. Since 1941 this supply has been drawn at 33,000 volts.

The Eltham Gas Works closed down its supply to consumers in October 1960, the Board in taking over the energy supply paid the Eltham Borough Council approximately \$11,000, the loan liability of the gas works. The Board purchased the electrical undertakings of the Kaponga Town Council in October 1963, that of Waitara in 1964 and in 1970 Stratford and Inglewood were merged into the Board's supply area.

Power reticulation over the years has spread to many back country areas such as Omoana, Whangamomona and as far north as Mount Messenger. Recently the penstocks to the Motukawa power station have been replaced and enlarged, new lines depots built at Stratford and Waitara, and also office depots at these two towns.

The headquarters of the Board constructed in Eltham in 1924 and progressively enlarged are at this time being replaced. The Board announced the purchase of the store buildings on Collingwood and Bridge Streets from the Taranaki Dairy Company in June 1982. Extensive modifications are being carried out at this complex, to which the Board hopes to transfer its Eltham operations by May 1984. The Dairy Company Garage workshops are also included in this concept. The present Secretary/Manager is Mr T. G. Murray, the Accountant Mr B. F. Lyon and the Chief Engineer Mr B. Heywood. The Chairman of Directors is Mr J. W. Baxter.

When Mr H. G. Carman visited Eltham to investigate the possibility of opening a business, he was so impressed by the view of the mountain he decided to stay. The large stationery, book and china shop on the ground floor of Pease's building became a by-word in the district. He was a prime mover for the formation of the Taranaki Electric Power Board and was the Board's first Chairman.

## TARANAKI FARMERS'S MUTUAL FIRE INSURANCE ASSOCIATION

In an effort to obtain lower insurance rates for the farming community, a meeting to promote a mutual insurance company was held on 9 April 1904 in the Athenaeum Hall. With a decision to proceed being reached, Lord Ranfurly signed a Warrant to operate on 13 July of the same year.

On 15 December the first General Meeting of the Directorate was held, the members being Messrs. Boddie (Chairman), Blair, Maxwell, Baker and Murray with Mr A. Naughton as Interim Secretary. On 14 June 1905 Mr W. J. Tristram was appointed Secretary, a position he held for 45 years.

The Farmers' Mutual Office followed Mr Tristram's various appointments around the town, finally ending in his own offices at the corner of King Edward Street.

In 1958 with Mr Hec Taylor as Manager, the Association erected large modern premises on a new site in High Street at a cost of £15,000. These were occupied on 24 November 1958.

On 1 April 1978 the Association merged with the Primary Industries Insurance Company of Palmerston North and the South Island Farmers' Mutual Insurance Association and now operates as the Farmers' Mutual Insurance Group.

Early in 1984 it is intended to reduce the Eltham office to a sub-branch with the removal of the Taranaki Headquarters to New Plymouth. The Taranaki Manager is Mr Gordon Francis.



Six members of the cast of "The Eltham Operatic Society's production 'Les Cloches de Cornville'. They are: Sybil Carncross, Lallu Wilson, Mrs Drayton, Sybil Gubb, Mrs Nodder and Jane Parker.

## KAPUNI GAS

In a south-western corner of the Eltham County lies a major source of energy for New Zealand — the Kapuni Gas Field and Treatment Centre.

On the Palmer Road drilling commenced on 27 January 1959 on the well which laid the foundations for the country's first commercial natural gas discovery.

Activity began in Eltham in May 1960 when Wilkinson's empty bulk store became the headquarters for Shell, B.P. and Todd's continuing search for oil. Here drilling equipment and piping was stored for use in the seismic survey of the surrounding countryside.

The Fletcher organisation having been awarded the contract for laying the 8 inch pipeline between Auckland and Wellington in mid-1968, established a works camp in Eltham. The Farmers' Co-op saleyards adjoining the Eltham Hotel in Bridge Street were purchased and here huts, drainage and a water supply were provided for 100 men. Across the road a large cookhouse and dining hall was installed in Wilkinson's building. From here the pipelayers travelled south and then north as far as Tongaporutu working on the difficult Mount Messenger section of the pipeline route.

The Shell, B.P. and Todd Consortium owns the 11 wells drilled on the Kapuni Gas field and these are all within a 6.5 kilometre radius of the treatment station. Condensate which is separated at the well-heads is pumped to New Plymouth for storage prior to shipment to Marsden Point Refinery.

Crude gas is sold to the adjacent Natural Gas Corporation where impurities are removed prior to it being piped to Auckland and Wellington, many towns and cities being supplied along the way. By-products such as L.P.G. are sold back to the Shell, B.P. and Todd Consortium for distribution. Treated natural gas is also supplied to the recently completed Ammonia-Urea plant across the road where it is hoped to produce 155,000 tonnes of urea fertiliser annually for the domestic and export market.

Gas was again connected in the town in 1977 with the Natural Gas Corporation laying a pipeline to Eltham. At first this delivered untreated gas to Eltham's industries, purified gas has recently been connected for domestic use.

Meanwhile the oil search continues. A recent seismic survey utilising helicopter transport has been conducted near the town along the banks of the Waingongoro River.



## TRANSPORT

Prior to the introduction of horse transport, bullock teams, being more sure-footed, pioneered transport in the difficult muddy conditions. The 'bullockies' of the time were noted for their 'colourful' language. As the roads improved, horse teams took over. Amongst these Moller's handled the bulk of freight between Opunake and Eltham. Mr Jack Moller recalls that five- and six-horse teams of draughts were used on the main contract, carting Opunake Dairy Company 'King' brand of butter to Eltham. To avoid the heat of the day a start at 5 p.m. was made from Opunake to the Kaponga yard for an overnight stop. To avoid a late arrival penalty at the Eltham railway goods yard, the journey was recommenced at 3.30 a.m. Back loads included goods for the Kaponga Store or Hotel or up to 600 empty butter boxes from the Egmont Box Company. Also 146 sacks of chaff, fuel for the horses, could be carried in one waggon load. Loads of pigs were also carted from Opunake to Dimock's Bacon Factory in Eltham. In 1910 Mr W. W. Moller sold his transport business in order to further his farming activities.



Moller's waggons beneath the Waingongora River Bridge — 1908. Bay Team — Lou Meads. Grey Team — Jack Moller.



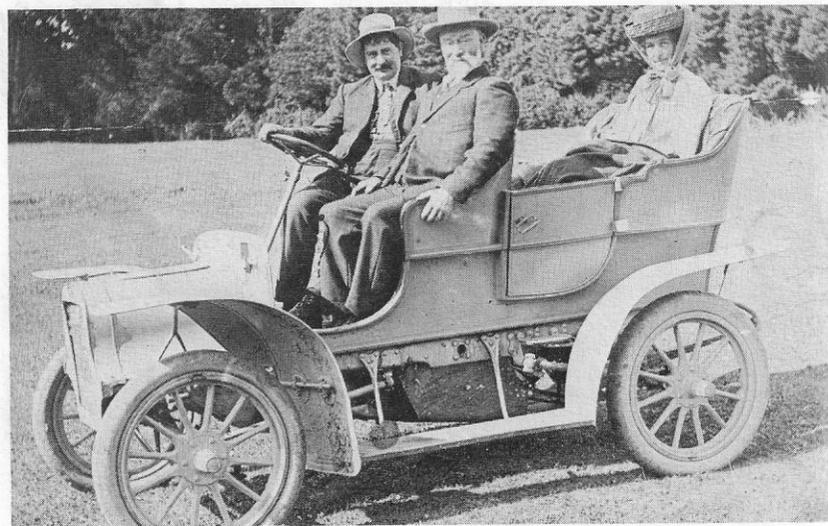
Mr Tom Kydd's Eltham-Opunake stage coach at the foot of Burke's Hill. This coach was later, in August 1903, overturned whilst attempting to cross the flooded, unbridged Mangawhero Stream, Riverlea. Although the driver and his team were drowned, the mail was recovered and forwarded on.



The successor to the waggon teams, an early Eltham-Opunake carrying truck at the Eltham railway goods shed.



**The first aeroplane to land at Quin's farm (now Highlands). The local golf links provided flights over the town for the local inhabitants. Constable Townshend in the white helmet.**



**An early motorcar in Eltham driven by Mr Jack Wheeler accompanied by his parents. The first car in the district is generally accepted as that which was brought here by Messrs. Cole and Donnelly in 1906.**

## WORLD WAR II

### Home Defence

Over 300 men turned up for the initial parade of the Eltham Home Guard in January 1941 with units also present from the surrounding Districts. These were the early days when a uniform consisted of an armband and broomsticks were substitutes for rifles. The local Commander of the Eltham Battalion was Major Jim Hessel, a local solicitor in civilian life and he was assisted by Captain H. Stanners and F. Coward. The parades were under the control of Sergeant Major 'Dick' Moller.

The main parades for the weekly evening training were held at the Rugby football gymnasium. The men were then marched to either Eltham or Stanners Motors for further instruction. Often an apple would be collected by bayonet point from Jimmy Panchio's fruit display en route. Here the Home Guardsmen were instructed in the art of armed combat which was later put to practical test in the darkness when the men faced the hidden perils of Eltham's cow-inhabited pastures.

A monthly daylight parade took place when rifles became available and shooting practice was held on a river flat on the Waingongoro bank below Hutton's. At first, due to the peculiarities of the rifles and the fact that the ammunition had lost the first bloom of youth, it was felt the Battalion shooting left room for improvement. Specialist units were established, the Signals under Captain H. J. Andrews assisted by Sergeant A. Tiplady and Guardsman L. White.

Les White recalls that during an invasion scare their unit could only muster sufficient petrol to reach the top of Burke's Hill. Various forms of signals were used, radio, flags, lamps and even locally constructed heliographs.

A medical unit also existed under Sergeant D. R. Gyde and Corporals B. G. Rush, H. E. Nichols and A. T. Gudopp. Transport was controlled by Unit Commander F. Bush and Transport Column control was the responsibility of Inspector A. Lethbridge. The Pioneers were a Rawhitiroa unit specialising in Trestle Bridge construction, demolition and the use of Molotov cocktails.

When Japan entered the war, a very real threat of invasion became feared especially in Taranaki, an ideal isolated area to establish an enemy bridgehead. Trenches were dug on the roadside on the northern approaches to the town and air raid shelters were dug in the school grounds and in local back yards. Some claimed they would rather have faced the bombs than the spiders. Eltham's main air raid shelter was declared to be below the solid Pease's Building on Stanners Street corner.

Much of this activity was under the control of the Emergency Precautions Service, the controller being the Mayor, Mr C. A. Wilkinson. A women's unit, the Women's War Service Auxilliary was formed — Miss L. Carman and Mrs D. Knuckey were involved as drivers. They were required to gain as much experience as possible in driving all types of motor vehicles. Mr Fred Taylor recalls giving instruction to the unit on how to effect repairs to bicycle tyre punctures.

A very strong Patriotic Society was formed with Mr and Mrs Wilkinson at the head of the Unaddressed Parcels Committee to troops. All of the

parcels sent from Eltham were paid for with voluntary contributions from the town and district and not one penny was claimed from the central organisation. Mrs Wilkinson later received the M.B.E. for her work in this field. Much of the fundraising was organised by Messrs. Bruce Edwards and Les Haycock by means of concerts.

With victory being declared in Europe, a day's celebrations on 9 May 1945 took place at Taumata Park with an almost unknown treat of icecreams and sweets being distributed to the children. A highlight of the day was a 'pig hunt' when what was claimed to be a genuine Captain Cooker from the wilds of Mangamingi was pursued by hundreds of children. A further day's celebrations took place in Bridge Street on V.J. Day with dancing and entertainment mainly for the children and with the distribution of raspberry drops manufactured in Nightingale's nearby shop. A grand Victory Ball was held in the Town Hall that evening for the adults.

---

## PEOPLE, PLACES AND EVENTS

This town is named after Eltham in England which is situated on the outskirts of London in the County of Kent. There it is pronounced Elt-ham, not as we pronounce it, Elth-am. The name is derived from a Saxon word 'Elts' which translates to 'little man' and coupled with the word 'ham', meaning a 'town' results in 'The Town of Little Men'. Many would hasten to agree this is not true in this case!

George Washington Tayler was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1858 and was brought to New Zealand by his parents in his first year. The family lived in Geraldine for a number of years, arriving at Eltham in 1886. G. W. Tayler opened a drapery store for Mr R. A. Adams, a Patea business man. He commenced a notable public career, being Eltham's first Magistrate for a term of 13 years and achieving the honour of becoming the town's first Mayor in 1901. R. A. Adams' Eltham business became the firm of Tayler and Scrivener and then eventually passed into Mr Tayler's hands. When he was 'Mine Host' of the Branch Hotel in 1919 he was again elected to the Mayoralty, serving for a further six years. He also served for 30 years as a pioneer member of the Hawera Hospital Board and as Harbour Board representative.

Roy Frethey was born in Midhurst in 1902 and his father, a dairy farmer, moved to Eltham where he milked a small herd. Roy lived in Eltham for the next 20 years. He attended the Eltham Primary School and the Stratford High School. His banking career began as Bank Clerk with the Eltham branch of the Bank of New Zealand and ended with the position of Manager of the London Branch as well as being a Director on the Boards of several large British Companies with New Zealand contacts. Roy Frethey was famous for his stock reply to clients — 'no' — but this answer was not always final.

Mr Taliesin Thomas commenced duties as headmaster at Eltham School in February 1893 and remained in charge for 30 years. He was renowned as a teacher for bringing out the best in his brighter pupils. Any untidy schoolwork would provoke an admonitory tap on the arm with the comment 'Dirty habits'. Many pupils recall his peering through the glass panel of the classroom door from the corridor and if misdemeanours were observed an invitation to 'come into my lobby' soon followed. 'Drom' as he was nicknamed by his pupils was an enthusiastic photographer and recorded many of the early scenes of Eltham. He died in Fiji.

Ira James Bridger, born in Kaituna near Takaka, Nelson, came to Eltham in 1894 aged nine with his parents. His family bought land from Mr Brown, through which Collingwood Street and Bridger Place now run. He became involved in the cycle trade shortly after leaving school, working for Cole and Donnelly of Stratford. On the opening of an Eltham branch, he became manager for 12 years. Ira J. Bridger then purchased the business, moving it to Wilkinson's buildings and later to the shop that once stood on Bridge and Stanners Street corner. This building collapsed in a gale in August 1938. In 1925 Mr Bridger was elected Mayor serving until 1938. He became well recognised for organising relief work during the Depression years. Bridger Park was named as a result of his efforts. Ira J. Bridger moved to Auckland in 1938 to take on the position of Director General of the Red Cross Society of New Zealand.

On the completion of his new Seed Store in Bridge Street west in March 1910, Mr C. A. Wilkinson issued an open invitation to the public to attend a ball in honour of the occasion. The function was considered to be one of the most outstanding events in Eltham if not Taranaki. Over 800 people attended with up to 60 couples dancing at a time. The Eltham Brass Band provided the music from a raised central platform and the building was well decorated with flags and greenery. The large front showroom was utilised as a supper room. This store was the scene of a further triumph in 1928 when a closely fought election campaign took place. Mr Hawkin, his rival, had hired the Town Hall for a meeting so 'Wilkie', not to be outdone, cleared all the stock from the Seed Store and brought in every seat he could find. The store was packed.

Eltham's oldest boarding house, still standing in Railway Street, was built in 1892 by Mr George Moir when he sold the Eltham Hotel. This later became Nodder's Boarding House. The Moirs, on moving, built a new house on the Mountain road opposite Ashleigh Lodge. This also became a boarding house and later in 1923, while leased by Allendene's, was destroyed by fire. Behind what is now the Westend Dairy in Bridge Street, Mr John Wilcox Kenah built a two-storied residence and here the Premiers Fox and Sir Harry Atkinson were his guests on a number of occasions. In later years the building became the West End Boarding House and was destroyed by fire in 1925. The Dominion Boarding House, built by Mr R. A. Adams in 1900 for the Bank of New South Wales and situated on Railway and Bridge Street corner, was also destroyed by fire in 1926 with the loss of four lives.

Walter Charles Frederick Carncross was born in Bedigo, Victoria and moved to Dunedin where he was educated. He entered the profession of journalism as a young man and in 1900 came to Eltham to assume ownership of the Eltham Argus. During his residence here he took a full share in local activities and became a keen supporter of all sporting bodies. He first entered Parliament in 1890 as a Liberal and was Senior Whip when the Seddon Party came to power. He retired from the House of Representatives in 1902 and was appointed to the Legislative Council. Eight years later he was elected Chairman of Committees. In 1922 as Speaker of the Chamber he was knighted for his services. As a journalist he was highly respected throughout New Zealand.

When the Eltham Amateur Theatrical Society was formed in 1920 with the intention of producing a revue, most people considered the Society was somewhat ambitious. Some of their early productions, 'Pot Pourri', 'The Habit of Happiness' and 'The Magpies' proved their critics wrong. Rehearsals were held in the upstairs portion of the old 'Bon Marche' building in Bridge Street west and the shows performed in the Town Hall. From the success of this venture, the Eltham Operatic Society was born and the Opera 'Dorothy' was the first production. In later years 'Les Cloches de Corneville' toured the province, followed by 'La Mascotte'. Several shows followed. In those days Eltham could produce an orchestra of eighteen players to accompany the performances. Everyone who could sing, dance or play an instrument were in the shows. One of the cast, Mrs J. A. Rankin, proved to be an outstanding soprano singer and took part in many other Taranaki productions.

Edwin Parrott had a menswear shop in Bridge Street and was Mayor 1910-11. He was presented with a miniature silver cradle by the Town Council when a son was born during his term of office. Mr Parrott had a gift of setting thoughts and events to rhyme.

Another silver cradle was presented to Mr Tom Stanners, a pioneer settler and Mayor 1909-10, when his son Illay Stanners was born. Mr Illay Stanners succeeded his brother, Mr C. C. Stanners, who had established the family business of Stanners Motors after his return from the First World War.

Harry Gubb's boot and shoe repair business operated for over 40 years. A strong Methodist and family man, he had a fund of jokes and riddles for the children.

The Maslin family also were involved in the transport field. Mr F. Maslin operated a steam-powered chaff cutter in the district during the 1890's and a son, Caleb Maslin ran a successful transport service. His son, Ted, was involved in coal mining further afield and a local earthmoving contract business. Other carrying businesses were operated by Messrs. Whit and Dick Gow from the present Rennet Company premises and Caves from the present Eltham Transport Depot. The Commerer family were also actively involved in transport.

Mr Jack Crabtree came to Eltham some time prior to 1918 to take possession of the Coronation Hotel. He became highly respected as a benefactor of the town, an example being the presentation to the Fire Brigade of their first motor fire truck. He also provided the town with the 'Sample Rooms' now the Eltham Scout Den. Many recall on Christmas Eve his children's money scramble, pennies thrown from a bucket on the balcony of the Coronation Hotel. For many years a depression on the northern boundary of the town was known as 'Crabtree's Dip' following a motoring incident with a fellow Eltham identity.

Mr Tom Bennett was a metal contractor and carrier in the block-drays and draught horse days and often provided a convenient ride for children on their way to school. A noted sportsman in the district, he did much to help develop Eltham's early sportsgrounds.

Connell's Photographers, the oldest established family business in Eltham began as Connell Bros. The principal partner Nigel Connell, a familiar figure in his 'plus-fours', gave painting lessons. He was a prominent landscape artist as well as a family photographer.

Sir Ronald Syme, renowned scholar and Professor of Ancient History, was born in Eltham. The son of a local solicitor, he received his education at the local primary and district high school and later at Stratford and New Plymouth. Gaining a University Scholarship, he completed his degree and later, in 1925, moved to Oxford as a visiting scholar. As the author of several world-recognised books on Roman History, he was knighted in 1959. Sir Ronald has revisited his home town several times in recent years and is still actively occupied, writing and speaking in Britain and overseas.

Mr James Ure Murray took an active role in the community. A school teacher at Te Roti, a farmer, foundation Director of the Eltham Dairy Company and a stalwart of the Presbyterian Church, Mr Murray was the classic dour Scot, a very upright man and a lay preacher. An asthma sufferer, he appeared in the pulpit in cold weather muffled up to his chin in scarves, jackets and waistcoats which he discarded one by one as he warmed to his subject. The story was told that seven garments were laid aside by the end of one sermon. Mrs Murray, a devoted wife, would precede him to his carriage when he set out on a journey, carrying his briefcase and a pillow to arrange for his comfort.

William John Tristram came to Eltham from Hawera to give a lifetime's service with various local bodies and the Taranaki Farmers' Mutual Insurance. A local accountant, he was assisted by Frank Clemo as his business manager and Harold Gibson in his land agency business. 'Tris', as he was locally known, was noted for his floral buttonholes and his La Salle motor car. Also, his private gardens in Cornwall Street were regarded as the finest in the district. He was Founder and Patron of the Eltham Pipe Band and the band played before his residence every New Year's Eve.

Ruby Maude Basham, wife of Mr Fred Basham (Eltham County Council's first engineer) became a household name throughout New Zealand as Aunt Daisy. The Basham family lived in Cornwall Street, Eltham and Mrs Basham was actively involved in the musical circle in the town. In 1917 the family left Eltham and later 'Daisy' Basham worked for 1YA in Auckland, singing in the Radio Choir and assisting with the Children's Session. This later led to her Morning Programme and her cheery "Good morning — Good morning" will long be remembered by many New Zealanders.

There were a number of Chinese businessmen in Eltham in the early days and they were often the victims of persecution. A fruit and sweet shop, known as the 'Pig and Whistle' owned by Fred and Frank stood beside the present Adams Plumbers shop. The two proprietors mysteriously disappeared one night, leaving their front door open. Another fruiterers, A. P. Jacks, stood on the site of the Taranaki Savings Bank and Leon Bing's shop was across from the West End Dairy, its 'Cash Buyers of Fungus' sign visible for many years. Ah Lum's Laundry and watch repair sideline business stood opposite Stanners Motors.

Pease's building on Stanners Street corner caused the local authority considerable concern when it was constructed in 1909. Designed by Messrs Duffil and Rough — Architects, then resident in the town, it was the first building of its type built outside of Europe, having a fully suspended floor. The Council of the day issued a permit on the understanding the building underwent a full loading test on completion — failure to result in demolition. Every available space was packed for the test and the building passed with flying colours.

Martin Donnelly, son of an Eltham boot repairer, became one of New Zealand's most notable cricketers. He was introduced to the game as a schoolboy and soon began playing for the town's senior team. He represented the N.Z. Army during World War I and later became a noted New Zealand batsman. On moving to England he made a name for himself in county cricket and played for that country. In Australia he coached State teams and now lives at Turramurra, New South Wales.

Eltham inventiveness has produced several early milking machines to aid the dairy industry. The 'Uneeda' Milking Machine Company was based in the town and Mr Arch McGuiness of Mangatoki produced an early machine. The Hutchinson vacuum pump was also developed at Mangatoki by Mr George Hutchinson. In recent years Mr John Burgham developed his own Egmont Farm Machinery milking machine. The 'Turnstyle' rotary cowshed was invented by Mr Merv. Hicks of Mangatoki and with the engineering aspect developed by Hotter Engineering, Eltham, was the forerunner in the world of this revolutionary milking method.

The origins of the Veterinary Club group system started in New Zealand in 1937 when Mr Alan Leslie, a veterinary surgeon from Lincoln College, was brought to Eltham. A group had been formed by five local dairy companies and the laboratory of the N.Z. Rennet Company was first used as a base. Miss Audrey Sutcliffe served the group as office assistant for many years, following it from the Rennet Company to the Eltham Dairy Company and finally to its present headquarters in the old Eltham Courthouse. In 1956 she married head veterinarian Mr Hendrik De Jong. Mr Leslie resigned in 1947 to take up the position of chief executive officer with the newly-formed Veterinary Services Council.

For over 40 years Mr G. R. (Rolly) Walker has been actively involved in the Eltham community. Formerly he was a cooper at the N.Z. Rennet Company, a trade superseded by the plastic container age. As a foundation member and President of the Recreation Society, he has helped the town gain many sporting facilities, especially for the youth of the town. He has also been involved in the organisation of several Winter Shows.

The Eltham District in recent years has produced several top class shearers. In 1968 Ted Kelly won the Golden Shears title which gained him a trip to Britain to demonstrate the superior New Zealand shearing technique. Alan Finer repeated the feat the following year. In April 1977 Roger Cox won the Golden Shears title and two months later became the first Champion World Shearer at Shepton Mallet in Somerset, England. He has also won the New Zealand Golden Shears title again on two occasions.

Mr F. J. Taylor, longest serving Mayor, was born in Eltham as was his mother Sarah Bosley, being the first white girl born in the district. Fred Taylor has served six terms as Mayor, the first of his 14 years' service began in 1953 continuing until 1968. He was re-elected in 1977 for a further term and also in that year received the M.B.E. for his services to the community. His lifetime career as a cycle dealer began with Bodle Bros. in 1928.

An early employee of the Eltham Dairy Company, Mr Mick Bourke filled the position of Factory Manager with many of the Company's branches before becoming Manager of J. C. Hutton Ltd. His son, Mr T. R. Bourke, became a Manager of the Taranaki Electric Power Board. Five days before his retirement he accepted the position of Mayor of Eltham on the death of Mr H. Drabble. Red Bourke held the Mayoralty for seven years and received the Q.S.M. for his services to the community in 1983.

Arthur Lethbridge, the Borough Inspector was, for many years, a familiar figure on Bridge Street corner. Woe betide any who cut the corner avoiding the dome which once marked the centre of the crossroads.

In 1966 Alan Beck came to Eltham to operate a ground weed spraying unit and two years later commenced his own business. A helicopter was hired for four years until a licence was granted, enabling the firm to purchase their own Bell machine. In May 1977 Beck Helicopters purchased a Bell Jet Ranger, the first to be used for agricultural work in New Zealand. To date Alan Beck has flown on 67 Search and Rescue missions and Constable Jock Simpson has assisted on 30 of these. They were both awarded the Royal Humane Society Silver Medal on 18 July 1980, this being the last official duty of a former Mayor, Mr F. J. Taylor.



Bridge Street at the time of the introduction of the motoring era.



Bridge Street 1984.



Charles Anderson Wilkinson



A series of cartoons were issued by Mr Wilkinson's rival during the 1928 election campaign.



Bridge Street approx. 1915.

## SOURCES OF REFERENCE

- The Restless Mountain*: D. H. Rawson
- Von Tempsky Adventurer*: W. T. Parnham
- The Strangest War*: Edgar Holt
- Kimble Bent*: James Cowan
- The History of Eltham, N.Z.*: H. J. Andrews
- The Forests Falls Sawmilling*: H. J. Andrews
- A Pioneer Looks Back*: W. K. Hewitt
- The Hawera Star and Egmont Star Files
- The Eltham Argus Files
- The Taranaki Daily News
- The Stratford Press
- N.Z. Railways Publicity Dept.
- N.Z. Post Office
- Archives Dept. Banks New Zealand, Westpac and A.N.Z.
- The National Archives
- Memories of Eltham 1900-20*: Elthel Cocker
- A Century of Railways in Taranaki*: T. A. McGavin
- A History of the N.Z. Dairy Industry*: H. G. Philpott
- The N.Z. Dairy Industry*: G. A. Duncan
- School and District Jubilee Booklets: Te Roti, Mangatoki
- Mangimingi and Ngaere
- Taranaki Museum Photograph Collection