

Top photograph (Page 49)

The main buildings of the first Stratford Hospital built in 1906 are still being used for outpatient care and occupational therapy. The large two storey Hutchen Block has been added in recent years and the construction of a new Theatre Block commenced in 1976 will make the facility one of the most up-to-date medical centres in New Zealand. The Rose Garden was established through public subscription sponsored by the Rotary Club of Stratford three years ago.

Bottom photograph (Page 49)

Stratford is well endowed with over 100 acres of Parks and Reserves, assuring future generations ample recreational areas. To this may be added the many playing fields established in the Stratford County and the 84,000 acre Egmont National Park with its ski fields and tramping tracks right at the back door of the town.

Top photograph (Page 50)

Stock sales are a feature of farm life in the Stratford district. Regular weekly sales are held in the saleyards by both Newton King Ltd and the Farmers Co-op. As well as these many farmers hold sales on their own property annually.

Bottom photograph (Page 50)

Following amalgamation with other local dairy companies the group now boasts 849 suppliers. The Spray Dry Milk Powder plant erected at Midhirst at a cost of \$7½ million is the latest expansion move. The highly automated plant is capable of processing 18,000 gallons of milk per day and is one of the largest individual spray dry plants operating in New Zealand. It enables the production of a wide range of milk powders. The Midhirst plant commenced operations in the Easter of 1975 and was in full production by August of that year. The company gained fourth best grading in New Zealand for Spray Whole Milk Powder in the 1977 competition and held orders for 10,000 tonnes of its powders.



The Centennial Programme Committee is indebted to the following for their willing sponsorship of the preceding colour plates.

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Stratford (south-east) c. 1910.
 McAllister Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library.



Stratford (south-west) showing the Hospital, the Convent, St. Joseph's School, and the Presbytery, c. 1918.
 J. R. Wall Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library.

The frustrations of the eastern settlers had continued to mount. Blame for the lack of progress in achieving metalled roads was visited in part at least on the Stratford County Council. Dissatisfaction reached a peak in 1907 when W. A. McCutchan, the east riding representative on the county council resigned as a protest against what he considered to be inadequate roading development when measured against the rates levied in the east. A public meeting at Whangamomona, in February 1908, unanimously decided that the district from Strathmore eastward should apply to become a county in its own right. This change was achieved speedily - by 29th April 1908, the new Whangamomona County Council had been elected, with W. A. McCutchan as chairman.

The overall population growth of the Stratford District was recognised in an electoral sense by the creation, in 1908, of the Stratford parliamentary constituency. Previously the district had lain variously in the Egmont, Taranaki, or Patea electorates.

The Fourth Decade 1908-1918

The formation of the Stratford A. & P. Association in 1910 was a milestone in the development of the area. It marked a degree of maturity, even

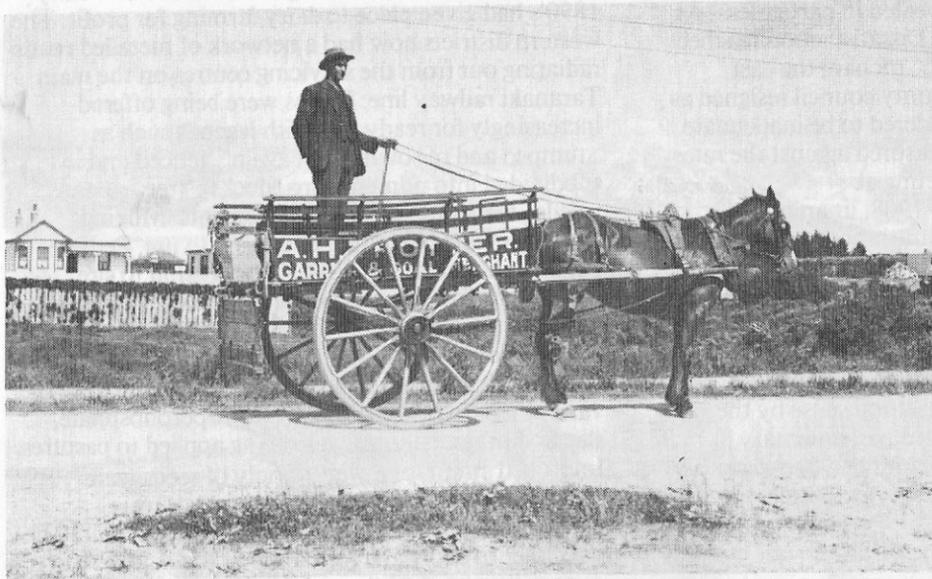
sophistication, in settlement and farming techniques. The raw subsistence farming of the 1880's and early 1890's had given place to dairy farming for profit. The western districts now had a network of metalled roads radiating out from the servicing centres on the main Taranaki railway line. Farms were being offered increasingly for ready sale with legends such as 'stumped and re-sown down again', 'fenced and subdivided into numerous paddocks', 'free from weeds', featuring in the advertisements. Milking machines were beginning to come into use. Pedigree Clydesdale stallions were available at stud to sire working horses; thoroughbred stallions were available similarly to provide riding horses, hunters, even race-horses. Holstein, Ayrshire, Jersey and Milking Shorthorn dairy breeds were now regularly sold at the various local stock sales and fairs. Superphosphate, slag and other manures were being applied to pastures. Improved strains of a wide variety of seeds were available. Berkshire and other pig breeds were widely stocked on dairy farms. Sheep had begun to be pastured. In short, the formation of the A. & P. Association marked the growth of quality and diversity in farming practice - and recognition among the farming community that pooling of knowledge, and friendly competition, among farmers would be likely to accelerate this growth.

In the same year the branch railway reached Te Wera and at last began to provide some convenience for settlers in the immediate area who were able thenceforth to be serviced directly from Stratford.



McAllister Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library.
The Stratford A & P Show, 1910.

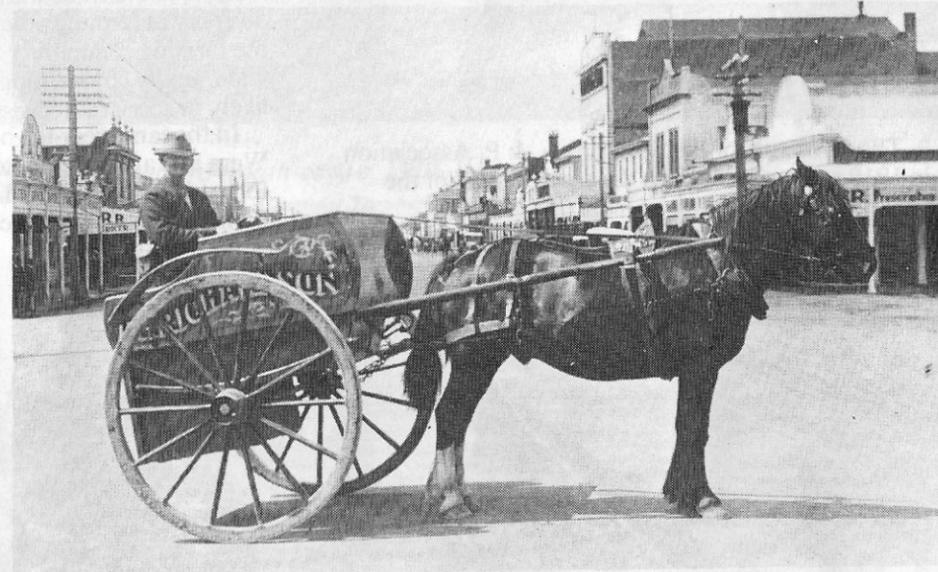
Early Forms Of Transport In Stratford



An A. H. Trotter delivery vehicle — forerunner of one of Stratford's best known transport firms.

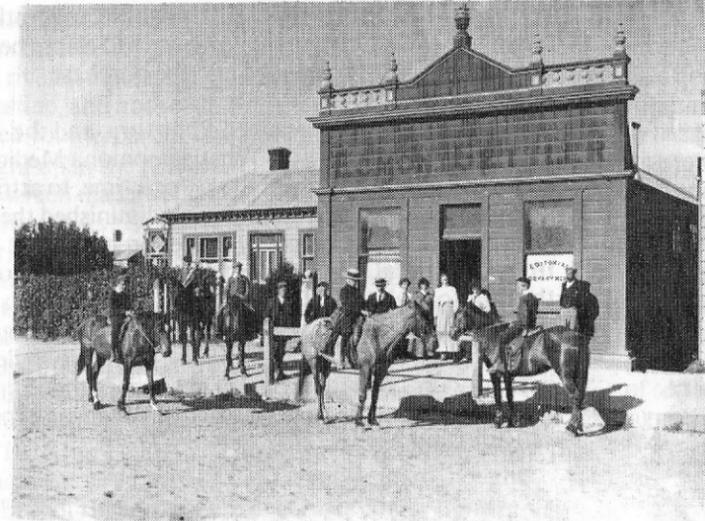
*McAllister Collection
Alexander Turnbull Library.*

*The Milk Float of Charles Richardson — a familiar sight for many years on Stratford streets.
McAllister Collection
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The Foden Steam Waggon — an early attempt at mechanisation by the Stratford County Council. The County Office — on the corner of Opunake Road (Celia Street) and Broadway — is on the right.

*McAllister Collection
Alexander Turnbull Library.*



Even newspaper delivery seems to have depended — in part at least — on the horse. This photograph shows the staff of The Egmont Settler, which was established in 1890 and merged with The Egmont Post in 1903 to form the Stratford Evening Post.

*McAllister Collection,
Alexander Turnbull Library.*

The premises of Mr C. H. Earle. The veterinary surgeon was even more important — in the days when the horse provided the motive power in the shafts of transport — than he is now.

*McAllister Collection
Alexander Turnbull Library.*



*Broadway in 1910.
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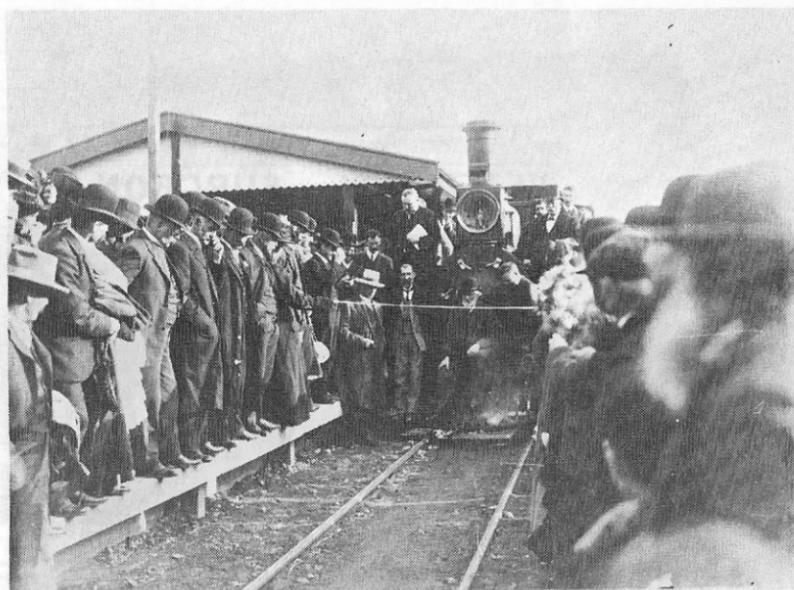
Roading benefited belatedly as the railway moved slowly eastward, metal being railed in to provide surfacing for adjacent roads. The Te Wera quarry was now tapped to provide less expensive metal than that which had been previously brought in from as far away as New Plymouth. Nonetheless, settlers were said to have made many unprintable observations about governments and policies which caused a few miles of railway to be constructed and then a few miles of road to be metalled alongside the railway - while isolated farmers and whole communities pined for the bliss that all-weather metalled roads would bring.

In 1911 the Stratford Borough Council decided to apply for a loan to acquire the Electrical Supply Company's undertaking, following the decision in principle of some four years before. By this date

electricity was commonly used for lighting in Stratford homes. However, five more years were to elapse before negotiations were completed and the purchase finalised.

In 1912 the railway reached Pohokura, and the eastern settlers formed the Whangamomona Medical Association which enabled them, for a time, to attract a resident medical practitioner - and diminished the need for dramatic emergency dashes on horseback from Stratford. Dr Paget, the first superintendent of the Stratford Hospital, on one occasion was said to have attended just such an emergency by galloping from Stratford to Kohuratahi, more than forty miles, in four hours - making frequent changes of mount.

In July, 1914, the railway reached Whangamomona - 40 miles in 13 years.



The opening of the railway line to Te Wera 1910.

*McAllister Collection
Alexander Turnbull Library.*



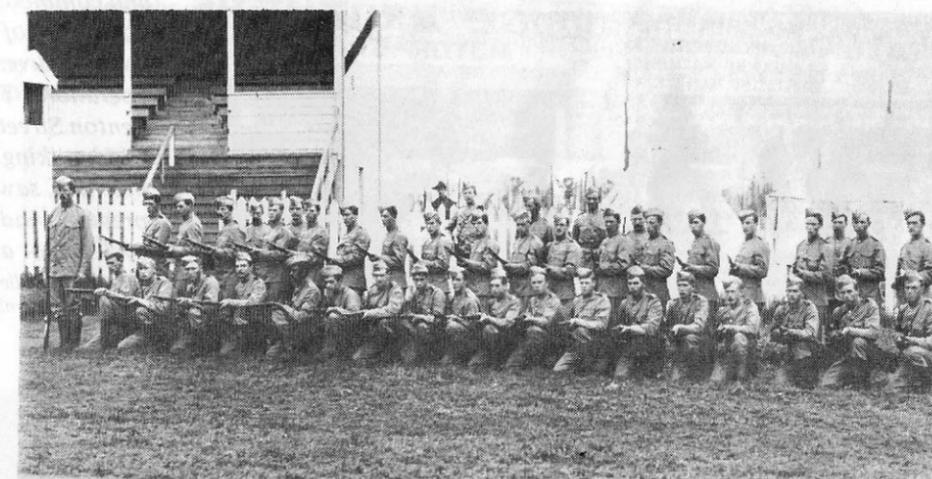
The road over the Pohokura Saddle — in the muddy condition seen commonly by the settlers during the winter months. c. 1916.

*McAllister Collection
Alexander Turnbull Library.*

In August the Great War began. Thereafter for four years the attention of the infant New Zealand nation was riveted increasingly on Samoa, Gallipoli, Egypt, Palestine, and above all, France where, like their Allied counterparts, New Zealand soldiers were caught up in the hideous mire and dreadful casualty lists which made trench warfare so tragically notorious. As elsewhere in New Zealand the Stratford district was drained of much of its youthful manpower. Economic progress slowed. The few miles of railroad track between Whangamomona and Kohuratahi took until 1918, almost four years, to form. But dairy production increased although erratically - spurred by wartime needs. Several newly formed co-operative dairy companies took over various Midhirst creameries : in 1916 the Te Popo Company acquired the Stanley Road creamery; in 1917 the Tuna Company bought the Beaconsfield Road creamery, and the Waingongoro and Pembroke Companies took over their respective local creameries.

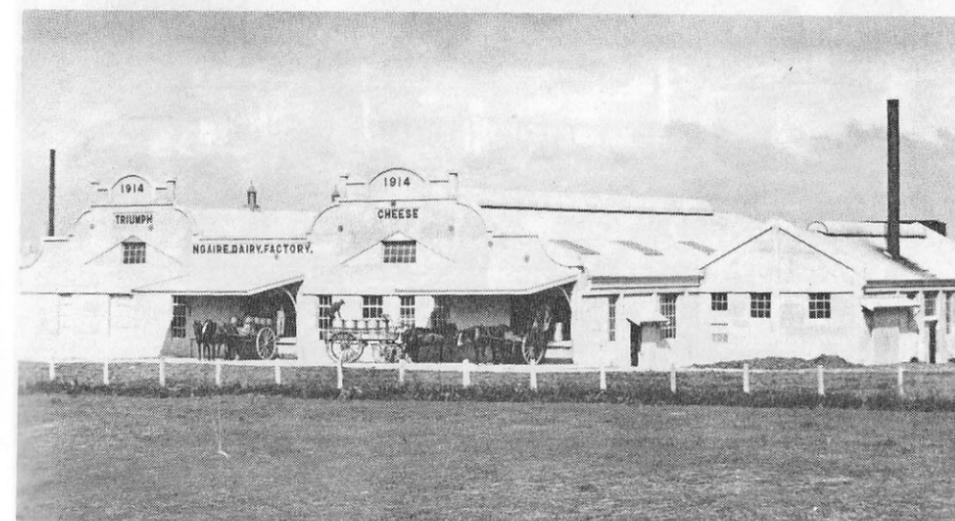
The 1916 census bore witness to the dislocation caused by war. The continuous upward surge of

district population had stopped, indeed there had been an ebb. Whangamomona county had dropped by 228, Stratford county by 74; Stratford borough had increased by 74. The loss of population in the Whangamomona area, notably in very isolated districts like Aotuhia, was never to be recovered - except temporarily when the Tangarakau railway construction township flourished in the late 1920's and early 1930's - and Stratford county required two subsequent decades to re-build its population to the level achieved in 1911. The ongoing effect of war casualties partly explains this check in population growth, but a reluctance to return to the frustrations of settlement in remote areas probably is equally as significant.



An Infantry camp in Stratford during World War I.

*McAllister Collection
Alexander Turnbull Library.*



The new Ngaire Dairy Factory (1914).

*McAllister Collection
Alexander Turnbull Library.*

The new
Pembroke
Co-operative Dairy
Company factory.
(c. 1917).

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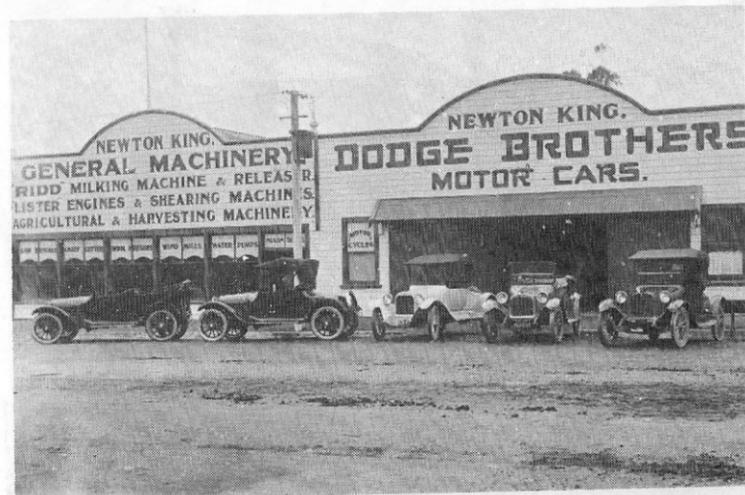
The Fifth Decade 1918-1928

This was the decade in which the internal combustion engine revolutionised road transport in New Zealand. The age of the automobile had dawned before the Great War, but relatively few motor vehicles were owned in the Stratford district during the war years. As late as 1918 stables outnumbered motor garages, the horse and gig was the most common means of family transport - and saddlers, carters, farriers, and gig, cart and waggon manufacturers still operated profitable businesses. As the 1920's unfolded, the canvashooded motor car was soon to out-distance the horse.

The increased use of motor vehicles demanded better roads on which to operate them. In Stratford borough, Broadway Central was tarsealed as early as 1918, and in Stratford County the ratepayers approved in 1920 the raising of a sum of up to Ninety Thousand Pounds to upgrade roads. The eastern districts still lagged far behind. The Borough Council purchased a diesel electrical operating plant in 1919, continuing the borough's lead in electrical reticulation over most of the rest of the country. Many other boroughs still depended upon lighting by coal gas. The Railway League was formed in the same year to attempt to ginger central government into speeding up the snail's

pace of the branch railway-building programme. By 1920 the line had been formed as far as Tahora, but this section was not officially opened until 1924. Meanwhile, fortunately for the Tahora settlers, the public works department had been running a freight and passenger service over the line.

In 23 years barely 50 miles had been completed. Slips in the Pohokura-Whangamomona section, following catastrophic flooding in the wake of a cloudburst, closed the line for several months in 1924. The agitation of the League and the Whangamomona Council, the need to service land taken up by returned servicemen in the district, the obvious dependence of all settlers on the rail link, and re-application of a vigorous public works policy by the Reform government of J. G. Coates in the period 1925-28 led to a more determined attempt to complete the line. In 1925 the Tangarakau construction township was begun as the principal base for the tunnellers and other workers who were to carry through the most difficult section of the line. For some six years the township flourished, enjoying most of the amenities of urban life - including electric light - and etching West Coast - like legends on the memory of people in Stratford district and Taranaki. After the final spike was driven at Haeo in 1932, by the Prime Minister, G. W. Forbes, and the link with the Okahukura end was at last complete - Tangarakau declined until it disappeared entirely - in terms of inhabitants. The site of the township is now part of Mr B. Herbert's farm.



Mr Newton King was prominent in many phases of Taranaki's farming and commercial development. As the popularity of the motor car grew, he was quick to diversify his own field of operations. The farmer calling at the Fenton Street branch had the choice of a Ridd milking machine, a Lister shearing machine, saw benches, chaff cutters, wool presses, wind mills, water pumps, motor cycles - or a Dodge motor car.

McAllister Collection
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J. R. Wall Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library.

The Tangarakau Public Works Development Village in the early stages of development, c. 1925.

In this photograph the Newton King depot offers, as well, Watt Bros kerosene and benzine engines, English Calthorpe cars and American cars generally.

McAllister collection
Alexander Turnbull Library.





Tangarakau Township, c. 1928

*Photograph by
courtesy of Mr L. Angus.*

To Stratford dwellers of 1978, the importance of the line may seem to be exaggerated, but settlers lacking an all-weather road looked upon the railway as a socio-economic necessity which enabled provisions, manure, machinery and stock to be brought in regularly, speedily and cheaply - and which provided the only reasonably certain and swift means of transporting people to medical or hospital care, or to perform the extra tasks of purchase or sale or consultation associated with running a business or raising a family.

Mr Clem Hill of Stratford remembers the rail link as essential in 1923 to enable him to attend as a thirteen-year-old the Stratford Technical High School (established in 1921). He lived at Kohuratahi - and his term-time Monday morning routine might well cause a 1978 bus pupil to shudder. He arose at 4 a.m., washed and dressed, lit the Orb kitchen range preparatory to having breakfast and then, at 4.50 walked down to Whangamomona - along the railway line in summer and along the road in the winter, when a mis-step in the dark on a railway bridge might have hurled him into the stream beneath. He joined the 6 a.m. train at Whangamomona - and alighted at the Swansea Road stop in Stratford 3½ hours later at 9.30. He boarded in Stratford during the week and returned on the Friday

evening train - a less rigorous journey as this train travelled to Tahora, allowing him to get off at Kohuratahi.

The rail link between Stratford and the Main Trunk took 31 years to complete. If it had been completed in, say, 1914 - and been complemented by a network of metalled roads - the subsequent history of the eastern districts could not have failed to be different. But 'too little and too late' has been a too-frequent epitaph on the monument of government blunders.

The 1926 census showed that Stratford Borough had continued its post-war progress - from 2713 in 1916 to 3085 in 1921 and 3332 in 1926. Its development as a rail junction had helped make it the hub of the economy of Central and Eastern Taranaki. Its amenities had developed with the growth of the town : its two main parks benefited from specific Council attention in 1927 - Victoria as a focus for sports and King Edward as a wooded retreat.

The celebration of the Borough fiftieth jubilee in 1928 marked the close of a decade of uneven development in primary industry - boosted by the boom of 1919-21 and then deflated by the ensuing slump.



Photograph by courtesy of Mr L. Angus.

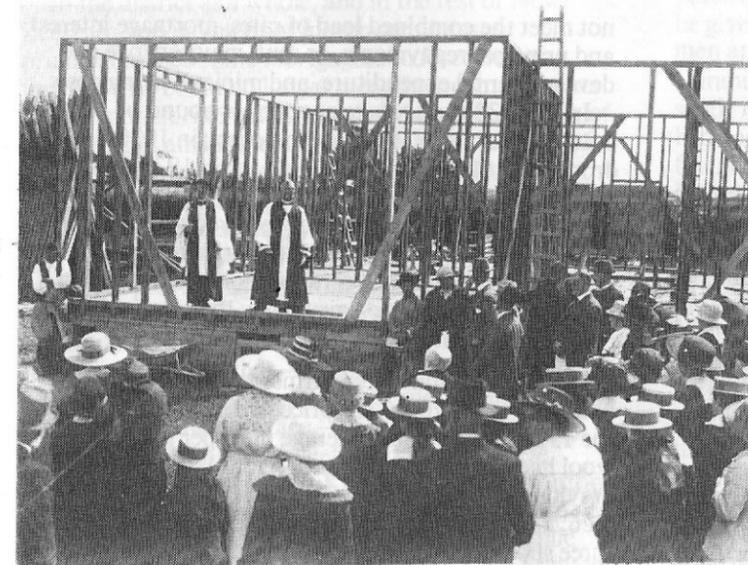
Stuck — on the Whangamomona saddle in the early 1920's.

The state of the roads in the eastern districts during the winter months is illustrated vividly. The importance of the railway to the settlers is better understood when one contemplates a patch of road like this and realises the extent of the time and effort required to free a vehicle perhaps several times in the course of a journey over the saddles east of Stratford. The passenger in the back seat is said to be Mr Newton King, presumably in the course of one of his many visits to the eastern districts to supervise the buying and selling of stock.



At left:
The Stratford District High School's Fenton Street frontage as it looked after the brick building was built in 1912 — replacing a wooden block destroyed by fire in 1911. After the establishment of the Stratford Technical High School (below) in 1921, the Fenton Street school reverted to its former status as the Stratford Primary School. The new Stratford Primary School was opened in Regan Street in 1948, whereupon Prestige Limited took over the Fenton Street buildings and the Community Centre took over the Cloton Road buildings
McAllister Collection
Alexander Turnbull Library.

Below: The Stratford Technical High School building as it looked after its completion in late 1921. Although many changes have taken place since, and the original building is almost surrounded by newer structures, it still stands as the core of the school. Now called A Block, it has been joined — as the school's role and roll have changed — by B Block, T. Block, the Hall and Administration Block, C. Block and the Senior Studies Block. The brick building which was built subsequently in front of the main door and which housed the Trimble Library was itself demolished to make way for the present larger, free-standing school library. The school's name was changed to Stratford High School to signal its development as a multi-course, regional post-primary school.
McAllister collection, Alexander Turnbull Library.



St Mary's School Stratford
The laying of the foundation stone of the main building in Broadway North by the Bishop of Auckland, the Right Reverend A. W. Averill on 16th November, 1918. St Mary's opened in 1915 as a private, or independent, school for girls. It developed the status of a full secondary school for girls. It has always maintained a close association with the Anglican Church. (Now — 1977 — officially named St Mary's Diocesan School.)
McAllister Collection
Alexander Turnbull Library.

Stratford's Post Office 1896-1924.

It was situated in Broadway in front of the railway station.

The occasion of this photograph was the welcome to the Governor, the Earl of Liverpool.

McAllister Collection
Alexander Turnbull Library.



Stratford's Post Office 1924-1963.

Distinctive both architecturally and by reason of its bell chimes, it was a landmark which dominated Broadway.

The Sixth Decade 1928-1938

The 1920's had been perhaps no more than a normally troubled period for an unstable dependent economy reliant on United Kingdom demand for dairy produce, meat and wool, but the moderate instability of the 'twenties was to seem no more than a twitch when measured against the convulsions of the early 1930's.

In January 1929, butter fetched 184/- per cwt on the London market, or almost 1s. 8d per pound; in January 1930, it had declined to 158/- per cwt, or 1s. 5d per pound, and by December 1930, had dropped to a top price of 110/- per cwt, or slightly under 1s. 0d per pound. A similar decline had occurred in New Zealand's other principal exports — wool, meat and cheese — and further decline was to follow. The farmers of the Stratford district, like all other farmers, suffered a disastrous reduction in income, a fall in purchasing power which had a numbing effect both in the shops and business houses of Stratford town and in the country at large.

Individuals economised, businesses retrenched, staff were laid off - and purchasing power continued to spiral downwards. National unemployment figures rocketed from 7000 in November 1930, to over 40,000 in August 1931, and these figures represented only the adult male unemployed who were registered: the true figure, including females and young persons, was much greater but could only be calculated approximately. And the abyss continued to deepen. The response of the United government of G. W. Forbes was to suspend construction of four railway lines - from which fate the Stratford-Main Trunk railway was fortunately exempted - and to empower the Arbitration Court by general order to reduce award wages by 10 per cent.

The two major parties, United and Reform, coalesced in September 1931, in what came to be called the Forbes-Coates coalition government. The two parties had agreed upon a policy of further cost-cutting in an attempt to so reduce costs on the farm, and to the farmer, that he would be able to win an adequate reward even though the prices of his products were still falling on the London market. It was a policy of deflation that failed to help many farmers while it killed the stimulus of demand which normally boosted the production of goods and services. The farmers affected first were those leading a marginal existence in the eastern districts and those who had to meet high interest costs on mortgages. Many of the eastern farmers had committed themselves to a substantial burden of rates in order to get their local roads metalled. Now their diminished income could

not meet the combined load of rates, mortgage interest and principal repayments, or rent, maintenance and developmental expenditure, and minimal living costs.

In 1929-30 the average payout per pound of butterfat had been 16d (sixteen pence); in 1930-31 it dropped to 11.5d; in 1931-32 to 11d; in 1932-33 to 9d — where it remained during the 1933-34 season. This was a drop to 50% of the price received during the 1927-28 season and to 32% of the price in the boom season of 1920-21 when returned soldiers and others had been attracted into dairying by the seemingly high returns to be gained.

For the marginal sheep farmer the position was as bad — or even worse. His price had dropped earlier. In the 1929-30 season the average price per pound of wool had sagged to 8.55 pence (from 14.88 in the previous season); in 1930-31 to 5.67; in 1931-32 to 5.26; and in 1932-33 to rock bottom — 5.15. Thus for three successive seasons the price of wool was less than 30% of the peak price of the 1920's. The slump in meat prices was not so pronounced, but still substantial.

All farmers were under stress, but the remoter Whangamomona farmers were under the most extreme stress. For those living on the periphery in Aotuhia and at the ends of roads or tracks — and for those among the returned soldiers who had been placed on ill-conceived uneconomic units and who had remained — this sustained drop in income was disastrous. A trickle of outward population erosion had begun in the early 1920's when a slump in primary produce prices had occurred which was severe enough — although it was to be dwarfed by the cataclysm of the early 1930's.

Nonetheless, most of the Whangamomona settlers had continued to withstand patiently the rigours of isolation. They had accepted the lack of readily available medical care; restricted access; excessive transport costs; irregular deliveries; remoteness from schools; frustrations of all kinds, including the frustration of owning a motor car which had to be jacked up and placed on benzine boxes for several months of the year because the state of the local roads would not permit its operation; and the enforced use of candles or kerosene lamps while other areas of New Zealand were beginning to be reticulated with electricity. And now they were faced with the inescapable fact that, in simple terms, the income from their wool and meat had slumped below the irreducible level of their costs — and seemed likely to remain there as 1930-31-32 unfolded with no improvement in the catastrophically low level of wool prices.

It is not a matter of wonder that desperation finally broke the spirit of some marginal farmers and caused them to walk off their farms or, where they could, sell to a neighbour; rather one marvels that they were so tenacious for so long. Thus continued the population drift from the Whangamomona district which left substantial areas of land completely unoccupied and reverting to second growth or leased to remaining farmers at a nominal rental.

In the district as a whole, and in the rest of New Zealand, non-payment of mortgage interest or principal caused some mortgagees to foreclose on farmers who could no longer meet their commitments — and more farmers thus lost their farms. In a series of statutes, and amendments, between 1931 and 1935 the coalition government gave increasing relief to mortgagors and tenants — enabling interest payments to be reduced and arrears remitted — but this relief was too tardy for those who had already lost farms under the previous law relating to mortgages.

The only gleam in the murk for the Whangamomona farmers, apart from the completion of the railway, was that — belatedly — the metalling of county roads was speeded up. Some 20 miles of road received a metalled surface — largely through the services of unemployed 'relief' workers who were established in a camp in the Kohuratahi area. Stratford borough gained a few similar spin-off benefits from what was otherwise an unmitigated socio-economic disaster: the Swansea Road cutting, the King Edward Park sportsground and the filling of Ariel Street South were attributable, largely to relief workers.

In the borough the degree of hardship experienced is illustrated by reference to entries in the minutes of the Borough Council and the Hospital Board. In April 1930, the Chairman of the Board, W. L. Kennedy, referred to the drain on the Board's resources and the worry involved in helping so many travelling unemployed — the 'swaggers' who had become an everyday sight as they tramped the country looking for work, food and clothing.

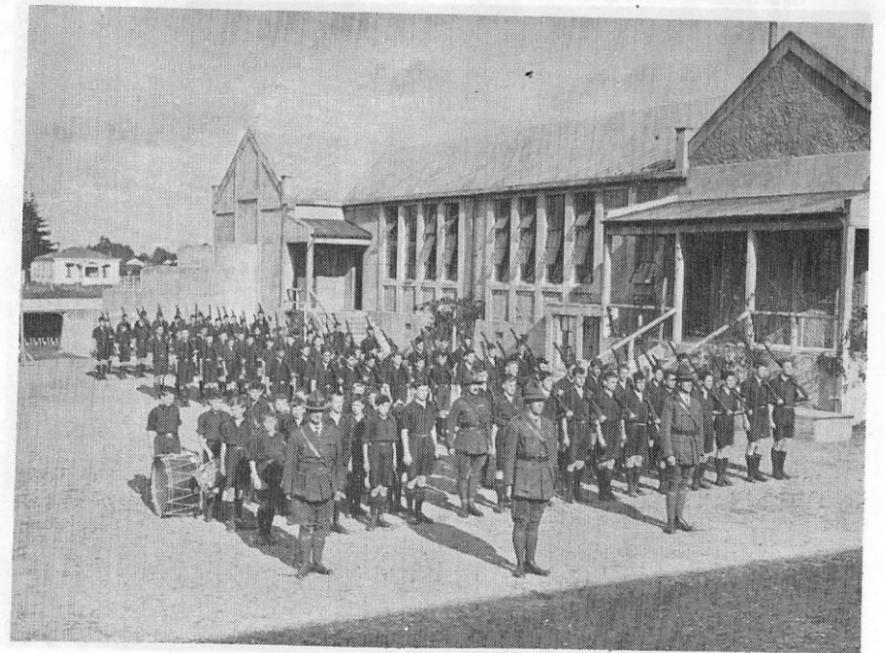
Even amid the stress of economic depression simple humanity continued to assert itself. Following the Napier earthquake in February 1931, it was reported that 99 people had been billeted in Stratford — mostly in private homes.

In June 1931, the Borough Council proposed that

*Military drill at the
Stratford Technical High School
in the 1930's.*

*This area at the back
of the school was later to
become — and remain, a
largely enclosed quadrangle
when the south-east wing was
extended to provide three
more large rooms.*

*J. R. Wall collection
Alexander Turnbull Library.*



Stratford's first cinema building. The King's Theatre (now the Regent) was built in response to a public demand for a new kind of entertainment, the silent moving picture, or movie, which had begun to develop overseas just before World War I. Rudolph Valentino, Charles Chaplin, Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks were some of the fabled Hollywood stars whose films would have been shown at The King's during the 1920's.

In the 1930's the talkies made the cinema an even more influential form of public entertainment. Later The King's was joined by the Plaza Cinema on the corner of Regan Street and Broadway.

J. R. Wall Collection
Alexander Turnbull Library.



The Marble Bar — a popular tea rooms when public taste required (and labour was cheap enough to provide) a formal, mannered atmosphere even for a casual lunch or afternoon tea.

J. R. Wall Collection
Alexander Turnbull Library.

government was swept out of office by the Labour Party, led by M. J. Savage. The new government introduced agricultural, financial, employment and industrial development policies which re-charged internal demand and hastened the climb out of depression. The guaranteed price system for dairy produce was the innovation which made the greatest immediate impact on the Stratford district.

The 1936 census — the first since 1926 — revealed that the county (5321) and the borough (3755) were still growing. Even Whatangamomona county (1301) had declined only slightly. The increase in permanent railway staff to maintain the line and to service stations and trains — and the continued presence of some population in Tangarakau, although declining — tended to off-set the continuing effects of the loss of population in the outlying farming areas.

In May, the Borough Council decided to institute a 40 hour week for council staff — as from 1st June. In July, Mr G. C. Grace was appointed acting Town Clerk (an appointment confirmed in January 1937) following the appointment of Mr P. Skoglund as a regional transport licensing authority.

The Stratford Aero Club held its official opening pageant in May 1937. Other events of note in the same year which illustrated that the economy had revived were the acceptance of a tender for the construction of the municipal swimming baths and the closing of the unemployed men's shelter in Miranda Street. The Health Department condemned the classrooms on the south side of the primary school abutting on Cloton Road. But this evidence of advance was tempered by the loss of Stratford's daily newspaper when the "Central Press", formerly the "Stratford Evening Post" went out of print.

The Labour Government's housing policy embraced Stratford in 1937. The Borough Council clashed with J. A. Lee, the under-secretary in charge of housing, on the question of the site of the first state houses to be built in Stratford, but the difference of opinion was resolved — and the first three houses in Achilles Street were opened officially in September 1938.

The Seventh Decade 1938-1948

This decade saw New Zealand's involvement in the Second World War, 1939-45, as a nation which declared war in its own right, on 3rd September 1939. The Stratford district again readily provided volunteers, this time for three services — the R.N.Z.A.F. having been formed in 1937 to replace the microscopic Permanent Air Force and the R.N.Z.N. replacing the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy in 1941 — until voluntary enlistment proved inadequate and conscription of single men was introduced in 1940, and married men in 1941, to guarantee a regular flow of manpower to meet the commitments New Zealand assumed overseas. New Zealand's participation, as befitted a nation almost fifty per cent greater in population than in 1914, was on a greater scale and on a wider-ranging front than in World War I. The main thrust was provided by the Army through the 2nd N.Z.E.F. in Greece, Crete, North Africa and Italy — and in the Pacific for a time after Japan entered the war in December 1941 — but whether in the R.N.Z.A.F. or the R.A.F., the R.N.Z.N. or the R.N. or the Fleet Air Arm, or the Merchant Navy, New Zealanders served in most theatres of war, and Stratford men were among them.

The civilian population was, of course, not subjected to hazards of war such as air raids, bombardment and military occupation, but as the war years unfolded the stringency of shortages affected everybody. Petrol and tyres were rationed early — followed in 1942 by tea, sugar, clothing, footwear and household linen, in 1943 by butter, and in 1944 by meat and, in certain areas, eggs. Prices were controlled. The last vestiges of unemployment had soon disappeared following the outbreak of war: by 1942 over 150,000 men were in the armed services, leaving such a shortage of civilian manpower that official direction of manpower was introduced and certain industries — including farming — were declared essential services whose labour force was largely

C. W. Ansford's garage in Broadway South. By the 1930's the hard-topped car had replaced the canvas-hooded vehicle of the 1920's.

The Church of the Immaculate Conception in Miranda street can be seen in the right background.

J. R. Wall Collection
Alexander Turnbull Library.



exempt from military service. Men who wished to serve were frequently held in their jobs by employers who appealed successfully against their entry into one of the armed services.

Petrol and tyre rationing — and the increasing shortage of spare parts for ageing motor cars, the war having effectively ended new car production in the countries from which New Zealand traditionally imported cars — restricted mobility in the rural areas. The local hall was re-affirmed as the hub of district or community activity. In it many servicemen were farewelled on 'final' leave before departing overseas — and various were the fund-raising and other war-related activities which centred upon the hall.

Women replaced men in many occupations — not least in farming where the shortage of men became so pronounced that production began to decline and thus led to the introduction of butter and meat rationing to enable exports to Britain to be maintained. The land girl became a not uncommon figure in the hay paddock and the wool shed, as well as in the cowshed where wives and daughters had long been expert milkers. Women also replaced men in non-combatant roles in the three services — in the newly formed W.A.A.C. (Army); W.A.A.F. (Air Force); and W.R.N.Z.N.S. (Navy).

Public works were curtailed by shortage of labour and the competing financial needs of the armed services. Housing construction diminished as tradesmen and building materials were diverted into the construction of aerodromes, military camps and fortifications. The building controller became a most influential figure.

Necessarily, social and economic development was inhibited by the unceasing need to divert resources into the war effort. Payments from the War Expenses Account reached an annual level of more than one hundred and thirty million pounds. Thus the Stratford district saw little obvious change during the war years.

However, one notable event was the opening of the new Marire Hospital in 1942. Dr Doris Gordon and Dr W. P. P. Gordon had acquired Dr Paget's practice in 1919, including the original Marire in Juliet Street. Dr Doris Gordon recounted that at 2 a.m. one morning in 1940, while taking a tea break in the course of attending a delivery, she became vividly aware that the Gordon private hospital was "Old! Adapted! Then re-adapted! A hotch-potch of architecture. Certainly a paradise of a place compared with the even more primitive establishment . . . taken over from Dr Paget . . . but . . . could (she) any longer hope to get the right type of sisters in this old building?"



Alexander Turnbull Library
Stratford, c. 1940

Despite difficulties and frustrations spawned by wartime controls and shortages, she monitored the construction of a fourteen-bed hospital alongside the Gordon home in Portia Street. It was opened formally in early 1942 by the Minister of Health, A. H. Nordmeyer.

Another prominent Stratford woman, Mrs F. L. Young, former headmistress of St. Mary's School, was elected to the Stratford Borough Council in 1944, as the first woman councillor.

In the same year, an architect issued an ominous report that the Post Office clock tower, not having been constructed with any provision for stress against earthquakes might be toppled by a major shock. However, it was to survive for two further decades before it was felled by the demolition specialist's ball.

The 1945 census — the 1941 census having been omitted — revealed a drop of 570 (to 4751) in the population of the county, a rise of 99 (to 3854) in the borough, and a 35% drop (to 851) in the Whangamomona county. These figures reflected, of course, the toll of casualties, and the dislocation inseparable from voluntary and involuntary movement in response to the needs of war, but also showed starkly the longer term effect of disillusionment in the Whangamomona area, the abandonment of farms and the consequent contraction of services. Probably, the beginnings of urban drift are discernible as well.

As normality returned slowly in the still-controlled post-war environment the borough at last gained its replacement primary school. A new Stratford school was completed in 1948 on land formerly part of King Edward Park.

The Eighth Decade 1948-1958

The Centennial Rest Rooms building, begun in 1948, satisfied belatedly a long-felt need among out-of-town wives. For many years, mothers, particularly of young families, accompanying their husbands to Stratford on sale days or business or shopping expeditions had had to put up with the considerable inconvenience which followed from lack of suitable premises in which to attend to the needs, indeed demands, of babies and infants. In the days when most farmers or visitors travelled by gig or buggy the stables provided a ladies waiting room which offered facilities of a sort, but after the motor car replaced the horse-drawn vehicle during the 1920's mothers either relied on the use of a friend's or relative's home or were forced into reliance on their own ingenuity and stamina to get through what could be a long and trying day. Now they had a haven, appropriately equipped, which became also a cultural centre and meeting place.

The old school buildings were not demolished. The brick structure fronting on to Fenton Street was converted into a ladieswear factory by Prestige Limited; the wooden building backing on to Cloton Road became the Community Centre, whose two easternmost rooms were sub-let later, in 1951, to

house the newly-formed Stratford Kindergarten.

In 1949 occurred the first change of government since 1935: the National Party, led by S. G. Holland, ousted Peter Fraser's Labour Government.

The 1951 census revealed that the county (5165) had almost recovered its previous loss of population, the borough (4445) had increased by 591, but the figures also sounded the death knell of the Whangamomona county which had lost a further 50 people and had slumped to 801. At a time when most New Zealand farming areas had benefited, and were continuing to benefit, from a surge of post-war capital investment, by reason partly of the finance provided, and land development undertaken, by state agencies under the legislation covering ex-servicemen's rehabilitation and partly by private investment, the Whangamomona area had been barely touched. Access remained the principal problem. The Main Highways Board had taken over the maintenance of the Ohura Road, reducing the burden on the Whangamomona County Council, and most roads were now metalled, but generally these roads were narrow, tortuous and demanding on motor vehicles because of the hilly nature of the country. All services were costly because of the terrain and the distance from the main servicing centre, Stratford.

In the post-war years some Whangamomona farmers who had milked small dairy herds as a source of regular income were encouraged by an improvement in wool prices to change over completely to sheep farming. This change set off a ripple effect. Fewer dairy farms meant disproportionately high costs of cream collection by lorry to and from Stratford. Gradually the boundary of the dairy farming area shrank in towards Stratford until dairying had virtually disappeared from the Whangamomona county. As costs crept upwards, farmers responded by increasing the size of their holding and balancing increased stock numbers against increased costs. As holdings became larger, ratepayers became fewer to bear the cost of maintaining existing roads and bridges, let alone bearing the cost of servicing loans required to undertake developmental roading and bridging. In other areas of New Zealand, where the central government undertook aggressive land development schemes, existing farmers received spin-off benefits; no such benefits accrued to the Whangamomona farmers.

For the Stratford borough and county the decade of the 1950's was one of notable development and growth as the pent-up demand of the previous decade — restrained as it had been by war-time shortages and the lingering effects of controls — was released to find expression in house-building, farm development, and the purchase of the gadgetry which the post-war technological age had introduced in a flood.

In May 1951, an appeal for ten thousand pounds to build a war memorial community centre closed, netting some hundreds of pounds over the amount requested. A letter from the Railways District Engineer, in October, signalled a government decision which was to alter the face of the borough significantly: the Council was asked to begin the formalities necessary to close permanently the level

crossings over Lear Street, Celia Street, Romeo Street, and Warwick Road, to facilitate the construction of a new station yard. A new level crossing would be opened in the vicinity of Hills Road and a new bridge would be constructed over the Patea River in Juliet Street to provide compensatory access to the south-east corner of the town.

In December 1951, the Forestry Service announced that some 6,000 acres of land (later increased to 10,000) at Te Wera would be converted gradually into a state forest; the most spectacular fire in some years gutted the Kleeman and Bishop garage between Broadway and Miranda Street; and the Taranaki Rugby Union agreed to contribute six hundred pounds towards the cost of forming two grounds on the Page Street frontage of King Edward Park adjacent to the municipal camping ground.

Work commenced on the new Stratford reservoir in January 1952, and in the same month the suggestion appeared in the press that the representation commission would restore the Stratford parliamentary constituency which had been split between Egmont and Waitomo in 1946.

In March the impact of new technology on Central Taranaki farming was underlined by a group of farmers in forming the Douglas Airstrip Company which followed the earlier example of Mr R. Anderson of Strathmore and which focused attention on the new aerial topdressing industry as a means of manuring land which previously either was not manured at all or only arduously by hand. The use of airstrips spread into

the Whangamomona county during the next two years as other farmers followed this lead. The hill country farmer was at last able to manure his slopes effectively, a boon which had been enjoyed — less expensively — by his counterparts on flat and rolling land, for some decades.

In April a site in King Edward Park near the War Memorial Gates was cleared to provide new basketball courts, which were completed in time for the 1953 season.

The War Memorial Hall in Miranda Street — a project long conceived — at last was within sight of being a reality when, in July 1953, the Stratford Borough Council accepted a tender of thirty-two thousand five hundred and twenty-one pounds for its construction. The Council had voted ten thousand pounds towards the project to match the amount raised by the previous public appeal, a government subsidy making up the balance. Queen Elizabeth II visited Stratford in January 1954, an event which necessarily pushed celebration of the district's 75th anniversary into March 1954, instead of late 1953 as had been intended originally: 1954 was also the diamond jubilee year of the Pembroke Road School, of the recently renamed (1951) Stratford Co-operative Dairy Company and of the Stratford Fire Brigade. This latter organisation was able to commemorate its sixty years of valuable service by letting a tender to build the new Fire Station in Miranda Street.

The growth of the borough's population — and consequent pressure on housing — was emphasised by the Borough Council's decision in July to open Curtis

Street sections for sale and, in August, to extend Fabian Street off Curtis Street. It was reported that by this time 22 state houses had been completed in the Olivia Street extension. In July, the Council also agreed to recommend the subdivision of Antonio Street, and in October announced that a new street to be opened off Cloton Road — opposite another new street, Claudius Street — would be named Elsinore Street. Other new streets in which housing projects — either state or private — had begun or were shortly to begin, were Ajax Street, off Achilles Street, and Shakespeare Street, off Brecon Road. In December, the Old Folks Association announced a project — backed by the Rotary Club of Stratford — to build club rooms on the corner of Regan Street and Juliet Street on the site where once had stood the Trocadero Hotel.

In the general election of November 1954, Mr T. T. Murray was returned as the member of parliament for the re-constituted Stratford electorate.

Earlier in the year the last act had begun in the drama of the almost forgotten Whangamomona county. W. S. Goosman, the Minister of Works, had refused a request from the County Council to extend the Rerekapa Road westwards to link up with the coastal state highway and so improve markedly the access of the Whangamomona farmers, particularly to the meat works at Waitara. For the last time the voice of the hinterland farmers was heard speaking for their county, protesting to an unresponsive central government that there remained in New Zealand an area which lacked electric power reticulation; where no opportunities for secondary education existed and where the quality of primary education was in danger of falling as schools grew smaller in size or disappeared with the decline in population; which seemed to be shunned by state lending agencies like the Marginal Lands Board and the State Advances Corporation; whose financial resources had been stretched past breaking point to maintain existing roads; and whose declining social services, difficulty of access and consequent remoteness discouraged farm labour from accepting employment and made young women reluctant to marry themselves into isolation.

The "Daily News" entered the lists in support of the beleaguered county, arguing stoutly that a recent Meat Producers Board report on the problems and potential of six Taranaki counties made a strong case for immediate aid in roads, schools, reticulation and finance. It mentioned that 35,000 acres had been lost in the Whangamomona area since 1920 and that this abandoned land was now either farmed by neighbours or grazed on a year-to-year basis or had reverted to scrub, but that potentially rich acres would be won back if the Rerekapa Road were put through. Not only would the Kohuratahi settlers be brought within 20 miles of the coast; the coast would be brought within 20 miles of the railway. But the central government remained adamant. Clearly a feeling was abroad in Wellington that, in a country whose proliferation of local bodies made for waste and inefficiency, rationalisation demanded that a least this under-

populated county should be culled.

In July a report appeared that the National Roads Board favoured the re-absorption of the Whangamomona county into the Stratford county as a riding. Stratford County Council members were divided on this issue, but a majority seemed to favour Whangamomona's re-admission provided that the new riding, or ridings, did not become a burden on Stratford county rates, and that the National Roads Board took responsibility for the whole of the Stratford-Tatu road and not merely that part which passed through the Whangamomona county. In November the Whangamomona County Council requested details of the suggested merger; in December representatives of the National Roads Board and the District Road Council met the full membership of the Whangamomona County Council to discuss the proposals. The meeting was held in committee, but afterwards the Whangamomona chairman, Mr M. P. Ford, announced that the proposals would be referred to electors of the Whangamomona county at a meeting on 27 January 1955.

At this meeting, held at Whangamomona, Mr N. H. Moss, as a member of the National Roads Board, bluntly told the one hundred ratepayers present that the Whangamomona county was the only local body in New Zealand in default with its loans; that its financial position was as bad as any county's in the country; that the latest minimum estimate for the restoration of the county's roads and bridges was seventy-five thousand pounds; that knowledge, plant, money and labour were required; that the Roads Board was trustee of over fifty million pounds of public money and if asked for assistance was entitled to ask in return if the applying body was equipped to spend the money efficiently; and that the government was not likely to encourage the Roads Board to pour money into a county which was weak and unable to stand on its feet. If the merger was accepted, the Board would see that the area got roads, and would maintain them.

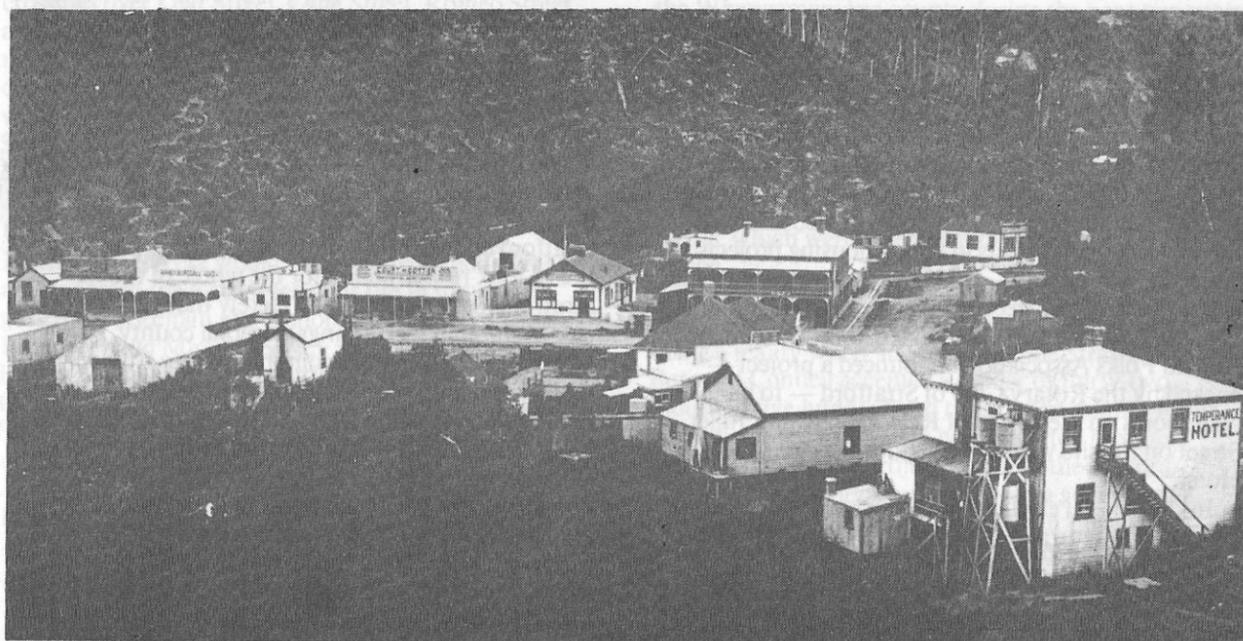
There were only two dissenting votes when the meeting voted on a motion to accept the conditions of the merger.

In April, the Stratford County Council by a majority vote passed a motion supporting the Whangamomona request to the Local Government Commission to take steps for the merger of the Whangamomona county as a special riding of the Stratford county, including a proviso that the National Roads Board should take responsibility for the future construction and maintenance of the section of the Stratford-Tatu highway which lay within the Stratford county boundary. In June the Local Government Commission announced a provisional scheme for the union of the Stratford and Whangamomona counties which proposed that the Whangamomona area should have two members in the new twelve-member Stratford County Council.

By 3 November 1955, the necessary formalities had been completed, the county office at Whangamomona was closed on this date and — after 47 years of separate existence — the Whangamomona area once



Alexander Turnbull Library
Broadway, Stratford, 1952



Photograph by courtesy of Mr L. Angus.

The township of Whangamomona in its hey-day.

more formally became part of the Stratford district.

The 1956 census confirmed all the obvious indications of growth in the district. The county population reached its record level of 6219: even without the addition of the Whangamomona area a figure of approximately 5500 would have been recorded. The borough population also reached a new peak — 4811.

Changes were beginning to take place in the dairying industry which were to play a significant part first in halting the growth of district population and then in reducing it. In 1955 the Ngaire Co-operative Dairy Factory Company became the first Taranaki company to introduce tanker collection of milk from the farm. Hitherto individual farmers were responsible for delivering their milk to the factory. Some used a tractor and trailer; others used a small truck; some still used a horse and dray. The tanker obviated the need for this trip. In 1956 the Stratford Co-operative Dairy Company, faced with re-building costs at its Skinner Road branch factory, decided to close down this factory and substitute tanker collection of milk from suppliers in the area.

Reflecting the growth in Stratford urban population, a new primary school, Avon, was opened in February 1957; reflecting the growth in Inglewood district population — and the tenacity of its civic leaders — the opening of the Inglewood High School in the same month reduced the roll of the Stratford Technical High School by almost 170 pupils.

In July, the Stratford Borough Council became the first Taranaki local body to issue a town planning scheme.

Changes in the system of milk collection continued during 1957. Encouraged by economies in wages, fuel, and overhead costs generally, which followed from the

closure of the Skinner Road factory in the previous year, the Stratford company closed its Huinga branch factory and broadened its area of tanker collection. The Ngaire company had meanwhile expanded its tanker fleet and gone over completely to tanker collection. The suppliers of the Midhirst Co-operative Dairy Factory Company were divided at first on the desirability of this new system of collection which necessitated the closure of local branch factories. At an extraordinary general meeting in January 1957, a majority of shareholders voted to defer the question of tanker collection for two years, but continuing dissent among shareholders caused further meetings to be held during the same year. In September, an extraordinary general meeting finally voted unanimously that all manufacture would be consolidated at the main factory in Midhirst and the branch factories would be closed, York Road and Tuna at the end of the 1957-58 season and Beaconsfield, Waipuku and Tariki as soon as possible thereafter.

The question of the amalgamation of small independent companies with larger units now began to be canvassed publicly. In August tanker collection and amalgamation were discussed at the annual meeting of the Lowgarth Co-operative Dairy Company, and a proposal at the annual meeting of the Pembroke Co-operative Dairy Company that the Stratford, Midhirst, Lowgarth, Eltham, Cardiff, Ngaire and Pembroke companies should be merged together was favourably received.

In December discussions took place between the Pembroke and Stratford companies; in January 1958, an announcement was made that these two would merge on 1 July.

The Ninth Decade 1958-1968

During 1958 tanker collection expanded further, and more branch factories closed. In May the Midhirst company closed its factories at Beaconsfield Road, Tuna and York Road. In June the Stratford company sold its Douglas branch factory to a transport firm and henceforth collected milk from the area by tanker.

Elsewhere in the county, electrical reticulation began to extend into the Whangamomona area and the Skinner Road Memorial Hall was opened.

In the borough further expansion of housing caused the opening of Avon Street, off Warwick Road, and Hathaway Street, off Brecon Road. Prospero Place, between Broadway and Miranda Street, was established officially. Towards the end of the year the Stratford Baptist Church was dedicated.

The Stratford Club Hotel, which had been under virtual sentence of death for some time because it fell below the minimum conditions required by the Licensing Commission, closed finally in February 1959.

Facilities for recreation expanded, or were projected: in March the Stratford skating rink was opened in Victoria Park, and in April the Stratford Mountain Club announced its intention to build a four thousand pound ski lodge which, with subsequent extensions, took some years to build but whose building was facilitated by the opening shortly afterwards of the flying fox over the Manganui Gorge.

The new railway deviation south-east of the borough came into operation in May — and trains bound eastward ceased thereafter to run down Celia Street.

The Midhirst company closed its Waipuku branch factory. The Tariki branch was to be closed in the following year.

Land was acquired in Lear Street for the subsequent erection of three pensioner flats. A club charter was granted to the Stratford and District R.S.A. permitting the sale of liquor for consumption on the premises.

In April 1960, an announcement was made that a new kindergarten would be built in Avon Street. Shortly afterwards an old landmark, the fire brigade bell tower, was dismantled. The Lear Street level crossing was closed. Although this closure had long been foreshadowed as part of the re-development of railway facilities in the town, the event itself provoked some critical public comment as it forced a change in vehicular habits.



McAllister collection, Alexander Turnbull Library.
The Stratford Club Hotel — early in the century.