

Notes on the History of the
Scott's Residence, Scott's Point, Mahurangi.

From earliest times the Mahurangi peninsula has been a place of interest to the historian. The deep water of the harbour and the dense stands of kauri made it a focal point for the early timber traders. In the 1820's parties of sailors camped ashore cutting spars for the Royal Navy - groups often remaining for two to three months at a time. The spars were shipped to Sydney, the ships returning with loads of greystone for ballast - piles of which still remain around the peninsula .

The first formal contract for timber milling was an agreement in 1832 between a Captain Dacre and a Mr George Brown who had a timber yard in Sydney selling New Zealand timber. Captain Dacre had been trading in timber in the area since he first arrived in 1824 and through the 1830's he supervised the felling of kauri for the Sydney company. Supplies were plentiful and George Brown writes of "dragging great kauri trees out of the magnificent forests around Mahurangi". However demand outpaced supplies and labour seems to have been the major problem in the early days : "Our natives were so enriched and spoiled by the Buffalo * last year that they positively refused to work."

The Mahurangi Heads were surveyed in April 1840 by Felton Mathew as a possible site for the capital of the new colony. The Surveyor-General was very enthusiastic and reported to Governor Hobson that "it is a secure and most beautiful harbour, and would afford shelter to almost any number of vessels of any size. The shores are rather bold and elevated but I do not consider that they present an invincible obstacle to the erection of stores, the formation of wharfs and merchantile establishments". On his recommendation the Government bought 100,000 acres 'more or less' from the Maoris for the equivalent of £100 - namely : "400 blankets, 100 gowns, 2 horses, 2 cows, 200 pairs of trousers, 30 coats, 100 caps, 4 casks of tobacco, 6 casks of flour, 2 bags of rice, 1 bag of sugar and 60 camlet cloaks."

Despite the recommendations of the Surveyor-General, however, Mahurangi was not selected as the capital of New Zealand. Nevertheless economically it continued to thrive. In the 1840's sawmills were established along the shores. One of the earliest mills belonged to John Anderson Brown who in 1843 set up a timber

* HMS Buffalo visited Mahurangi in 1834 - later wrecked at Mercury Bay.

mill and water race on the site of the present town of Warkworth.

Readily milled kauri was becoming scarce in the immediate vicinity of Auckland and it was the mills at Mahurangi which supplied the piles for the first wharf built at Auckland in 1850 and the timber for many of the buildings erected in the new capital.

It was the attraction of the timber too which drew the shipbuilders from Auckland up to the Mahurangi. Men like George Darroch who had been shipbuilding in Auckland since his arrival in 1842, moved to Mahurangi in the period around 1852. In the same year Thomas Scott Snr. made the move to the peninsula. During the next ten years these two shipbuilders built no less than 25 ships at Mahurangi * and very likely another 10, though the dates of these cannot be proved.

These early ships were mostly cutters between 16 and 36 tons. Later generations of shipbuilders were more ambitious: Messrs. Scott Bros. (sons of Thomas Scott Snr.) built the "America" of 40 tons in 1865; in 1866 Messrs. Ben and Tom Short built the "Stately", a top-sail schooner of 87 tons (the largest ship ever built at Mahurangi); and in 1868 Mr James Darroch (son of Mr George Darroch) built the "Golden Isle", a brigantine of 72 tons.

For thirty years Mahurangi had one of the largest shipbuilding industries on the east coast, over 60 ships being built there in the years from 1852 to 1880. However the days of sailing ships were limited - Mahurangi was not unaffected for in 1870 the cutter "Frances" had been replaced on the weekly run between Auckland and Warkworth by the paddle steamer "Lady Bowen". 1880 saw the end of the shipbuilding with the launching of the brigantine "Borealis" destined to be the last ship launched at Mahurangi.

The decline of the sailing ship and shipbuilding did not however mean the decline

* See Appendix A for full lists and details of ships built at Mahurangi

of Mahurangi. The district had excellent deposits of lime and as early as 1863 John Southgate was producing hydraulic lime. Nathaniel Wilson also manufactured lime in the area and in 1884 he succeeded in producing the first Portland cement to be manufactured in the Southern Hemisphere - the beginnings of the present company of Wilson's Portland Cement Limited.

Throughout the 1890's and early 1900's Mahurangi continued to be a major coastal harbour. Rival steamship companies competed for cargoes of cement - ships apparently not stopping at ramming in order to prevent a rival from loading. In 1904 the warring companies joined forces to form the 'Settlers' Steamship Company', later to be sold to the Northern Steamship Company, which continued to operate in the area until 1936. It was not until the cement industry moved north to Whangarei after 1915 that Mahurangi receded into the peaceful backwater it is today.

Very little is known of the early years and circumstances of the founder of the family, Thomas S. Scott. Snr. He was born in Blackwell, Middlesex, England, date unknown, possibly between 1800 and 1810. As a young man he went to Nova Scotia where he started shipbuilding. From there he apparently moved to Australia. Next to nothing is known of his wife except that she bore him two sons : Thomas Stuart Russell Flower Scott Jnr. in 1833 and George Scott, date of birth unknown.

Sometime in the late 1830's Thomas Scott Snr. moved with his two young sons to New Zealand, leaving his wife in Australia. The family settled at Russell in the Bay of Islands and it seems likely that Thomas Scott Snr. was involved in shipbuilding though there are no records to prove this. Certainly he was involved in land deals with the Maoris for in the New Zealand Gazette of December 15th, 1841, he is mentioned (together with Flower Russell, after whom his eldest son was named, and James Anderson) as one of the claimants to 3,000 acres of land near Whangarei bought from the Maoris on 23rd May, 1839. (See Appendix B)

During the 1840's, possibly around 1845 when Maori unrest in the Bay of Islands culminated in Hone Heke's attack on Russell, the Scott family moved to Auckland. Thomas Scott Snr. is listed in the Government Gazette of the Province of New Ulster * in 1848 amongst the men liable to serve on juries as being resident in Auckland and being employed as a shipwright. A year later he apprenticed his son Thomas Scott Jnr. then sixteen years old for a period of seven years to be "taught the business of a shipwright in all its branches". (See copy of Indenture. Appendix C.)

In 1852 the Scott family first moved to Mahurangi when Thomas Scott Snr. bought two blocks of land of 30 acres and 10 acres bordering on what is now known as Scott's Bay or Scott's Point. The land deeds were registered on 7th September, 1852, and record the price as being £2.10.0 an acre .

It seems likely that the present building at Scott's Bay dates from this time. Family history has it that the original house was built by Thomas Scott Snr. in the early 1850's. Certainly finance and materials would have been no problem for his shipbuilding business was flourishing at this time and kauri timber was readily available.

* In 1846 New Zealand was divided into two provinces , New Ulster and New Munster

Apparently Thomas Scott Jnr. built the later addition to the house, possibly in the early years of his marriage in the 1860's. At this time too the internal staircase was built, the original house having only an external staircase to the top floor *

The family soon became established at Mahurangi. By 1854 the shipbuilding business was flourishing. In 1856 Thomas Scott Jnr. completed his seven years of apprenticeship and he and his brother George worked in their father's business.

In 1862 when Thomas Scott Jnr. was 29, he married Janet Dorren, aged 20 of Kawau Island. In the same year his appointment was announced in the New Zealand Gazette "to be Postmaster at Mahurangi Heads". The next generation was beginning to establish itself. **

Janet Dorren was the daughter of Mr and Mrs John Dorren who arrived from Paisley, Scotland, on the "Jane Gifford" in the early part of October, 1842. Janet was born within three months of their arrival. The family (the passenger list of the "Jane Gifford" lists five other children) moved to Kawau Island where John Dorren worked as engineer on the copper mine that had been started in the early 1840's.

Family legend has it that Thomas Scott Jnr. rowed from Scott's Bay to Kawau to court Janet Dorren - it seems more likely that he sailed across but whatever the method he used to get there, he was successful in his courting and the young couple settled in at Scott's Bay.

Thomas Jnr. and George, now building as Messrs. Scott Bros. continued with the shipbuilding business until 1870. Between 1863 and about 1882, twelve children were born : Thomas Scott, the Younger, Robert John Scott (both of whom were drowned in late middle age while sailing to Auckland), 3 girls all of whom died soon after birth, Jane Elizabeth (Bailey), born 1871, Emma Mary (Donald), Walter George Scott, Agnes Marshall (Hemus), Frederick Charles Scott, Ethel Isabella Scott (died in 1908 aged 26 years, unmarried) and Arthur Russell Scott (died aged 28 years, unmarried).

** Thomas Scott Snr. retired in 1863. He returned to the Bay of Islands and almost immediately sailed to Australia - not heard of again.

* This explains the steepness of the present staircase - the external one would have had two flights.

In 1861 the Mahurangi Heads School had been established at Woods Bay by the Provincial Council Education Board and the three eldest Scott children attended this school, the two eldest sons apparently finishing Standard Six there.

After 1870 the shipbuilding industry at Mahurangi went into decline. In the electoral rolls for Rodney County of 1871-72, 1872-73 and 1874-75, the two brothers are listed as being residents at Mahurangi living on the land belonging to Thomas Scott Snr. No further records are available until 1881, at which time Thomas Scott Jnr. was listed as being resident at Gisborne and employed as a mariner. The 1887 electoral roll gives similar information.

Sometime between 1875 and 1881, therefore, probably about 1880, Thomas Scott Jnr. and his family moved away from Mahurangi. He bought a house in Auckland and himself returned to the sea as a 'Master Mariner'. Undoubtedly the decline in the shipbuilding business at Mahurangi influenced this move.

Family history talks of the younger Scott family attending a private school in Wellesley Street called 'Mr Worthington's School'. It seems very likely that in fact they attended the Auckland East No. 1. School which officially opened in 1878 with a Mr Worthington as Headmaster. This school was on the site of the present Auckland Technical Institute, as a plaque on the building testifies. It has not been possible to trace class rolls unfortunately as these records were destroyed in a fire at the Auckland Education Board in June, 1927.

During the family's time in Auckland the Mahurangi home was leased for a time to a family named Grant. They ran it as a private boarding house, catering for the boating parties which used to come up from Auckland for weekends. Despite the nickname of 'Old Hotel', it was never a licenced hotel and the confusion arising from the numbers on the doors to the bedrooms probably dates from this time. *

When the lease expired the house was used as a summer house by the Scott family - the older children by now having married. About the late 1890's or 1900 **

* Copies of photographs are attached showing the house at this time. One shows a boating party on the foreshore and wharf.

** When Thomas Scott Jnr. would have been 65 to 67.

Thomas Scott Jnr. retired from the sea and he and his wife returned to Mahurangi to live. He died there in 1911 aged 78 and is buried at the churchyard at Mahurangi. Janet, his wife, continued to live alone in the house for a number of years. Eventually she was persuaded to move to Auckland. She sold all the furniture leaving only the barest essentials and moved to the city where she spent four months of each year with her three daughters. She died in 1922 aged 80 and is buried with her husband at Mahurangi.

APPENDIX A

SHIPS BUILT AT MAHURANGI 1852-1880George Darroch

1852	Eagle	20 tons
1855	Maggie	15 tons
1855	Waiwatta	
1855	Kaiaia	
1859	Muraniwi	16 tons
1859	Big Heart	
1860	Lark	24 tons
1860	Exert	
1860	William	
1860	Joseph	

Thomas Scott Snr.

1853 ?	Duke of Wellington	17 tons	
1855	James and Julia	17 tons	
1855	Mary Ann	20 tons	
1857	Gem	24 tons	
1857	Hoteroa	24 tons	
1858	Industry	24 tons	
1858	Three Sisters	26½ tons	
1861	Eclipse	24 tons	
1861	William Julia	33 tons	
1862	Australian Maid		
1862	Frances		Cutter
1862	Julia		
1863	Rosella	36 tons	

Messrs. Scott Bros., (sons of Thomas Scott Snr.)

1864	Volunteer	23 tons
1865	America	40 tons
1870	Gipsy	

John Darrach

1866	Cleopatra	Topsail schooner
	Flirt	Brigantine
	Cornet	Brigantine
	Ethel	Brigantine
	Helena	Brigantine
	Omaru	Brigantine
	Agnes	Brigantine
	Ada C. Owen	Brigantine
	Start	Cutter
	Bonetta	Schooner
	Marmion	Topsail schooner
	Julia Price	Topsail schooner
	Arthur Wakefield	Schooner
	Rover	Schooner
	Saxon	Schooner
	Elizabeth	Schooner
	Energy	Schooner
1880	Borealis	Brigantine

Messrs. Tom and Ben Short

1865	Hercules		Cutter
1866	Stately	87 tons	Topsail schooner
1868	Fiery Cross	72 tons.	Topsail schooner

Malcolm Darrach (son of John Darrach)

	Maud Graham		Brigantine
	Linda Webber		Brigantine

William Southgate

1874	Warkworth	35 tons	Cutter
1876	Eleanor	35 tons	Cutter

James Darroch (son of George Darroch - not to be confused with Darrach)

1862	Bee	31 tons	
1864	General Cameron	14 tons	Schooner
1864	Mahurangi	21 tons	Cutter
1865	Bittern	41 tons	Cutter
1867	Whangarei	32 tons	Cutter
1868	Golden Isle	72 tons	Brigantine
1869	Maud	40 tons	Cutter

James Clare

1862	The Antelope	17 tons	Cutter
1864	Sea Belle	28 tons	Cutter

Rufus Dunning

	Lady of the Lake		Scow
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George Scharpe

1867	Wild Duck	43 tons	Ketch
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APPENDIX B

EXTRACT FROM NEW ZEALAND GAZETTE 1841-1843

December, 15th, 1841

Case No. 348.

Thomas Scott, Flower Russell, and James Anderson, of the Bay of Islands, claimants.

3,000 Three Thousand acres, more or less, situate at Wangarei, about 75 miles south of the Bay of Islands, bounded by Otipo on the east, running north to the Rua Rangī Hill and the Kai Wha, running southwest by the Wangarei River as far as a place called Wakorongī Tai on the north and northeast by the range of hills from the Rua Rangī, on the west and northwest by a straight line across the land from Wakorongī Tai to the range of hills from the Rua Rangī.

Alleged to have been purchased from the native chiefs William Pohe Haai Tepene, Hatete, Tauruangi, Kowari, Kotopa, Koteaitu and others on 23rd May, 1839, by claimants.

Consideration given to the natives : £75.

Nature of conveyance - not stated.

This case was heard again at the Land Commissioners Office in Auckland on 8th August, 1842.

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