

EARLY WAIKOUAITI

By Donald Malloch

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In 1862 the lucrative market for flour on the goldfields was probably one of the reasons that induced Mr "Johnny" Jones to build the Cherry Farm flour mill. At that period it was an imposing structure of three storeys and an attic, and, including a steam engine imported from England and the erection of three brick cottages, cost £8000. The erection of a windmill on the river bank and the cutting of a race to convey water to the mill were additional charges. One of the brick cottages is still used as a residence to-day. This was one of "Johnny" Jones's unprofitable ventures, for the business he anticipated from the goldfields did not materialise. He made a great blunder when he raised the ire of the settlers by refusing to grist their wheat, but only to purchase it. They refused to accept his mandate, and sold their wheat elsewhere. Accustomed throughout his life to having his commands obeyed and to having done what he dictated, he misjudged the calibre and independent nature of the new settlers. The opening of the Main North road had brought to the district an influx of settlers of a new type. It also brought competition to his business by rival merchants. The independence of the settlers and the business worries brought about by his trade rivals irritated and worried him for he could

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not adapt himself to the changing conditions. From the civil life introduced into the new community there emerged social conditions that gradually brought to a close his autocratic reign, and that the vast power he once possessed was rapidly slipping from his grasp was plainly written on the wall. He closed the mill in 1864. During its two years' existence the only flour produced was from the wheat grown on Cherry Farm and a few hundred bags purchased from the Maoris. He was still busy fighting his Maori land claims with the Provincial Council with little success, and the final adjustment in 1867 left him a disappointed man. He passed away in 1869 at the early age of sixty, his death bringing to a close a turbulent and colourful life that is indelibly imprinted on the pages of history as one of the most outstanding personages associated with the early history of Otago.

Cherry Farm was named after Captain Cherry, a master of one of "Johnny" Jones's whaling vessels. The ceaseless warfare waged against the unfortunate whales by the foreign fleets made them timid and shy, and those that succeeded in escaping through Cook Strait kept well out to sea when they reached the South Island coast, making a capture difficult. To counteract this, and in the hope of securing a better cargo, Captain Cherry sailed northward to intercept the whales on the way south. He landed at Mana Island on the lookout for them, and, leaving his first mate as sentry, visited a Maori pa for the purpose of buying potatoes. He was clubbed to death by the Maori

chief, who coveted the suit of clothes he was wearing. Captain Cherry's widow lived for some time at Matanaka with the family of Mr Jones, and it was locally reported that she was amply compensated for his death. Jones immortalised his name by calling the oldest farm in the South Island after him.

In 1862 the Government township was surveyed into small holdings and placed on the market for sale by the Provincial Council. Jones claimed the ownership of this block, but the Provincial Council refused to grant him a title. It comprised some of the best land in Waikouaiti, and had an area of 500 acres, 200 of which were set apart as a commonage for the use of the residents in the district. It was noted for its numerous springs of excellent water, all of which have since disappeared through cultivation, with the exception of one which, to-day, is a great boon to local residents when the town water supply fails.

Mr Jones was an indulgent father, and apportioned to his sons the following properties:—To J. R. Jones, Matanaka estate; to Fredrick, Tumai estate; to William, Goodwood estate; to Alfred, Cherry Farm and Mill Hill estate; to Thomas Jones, a nephew, Corner Bush; and to Mr William Isaac, a son-in-law, the Island Farm. The Matanaka homestead was the first substantial building of its kind erected in Otago, or perhaps in the South Island. It was built in 1843 by "Johnny" Jones, who left the whaling station and went to live there. The property is now owned by the Banna-

tyne family, which resides in the old homestead, and it is still in a good state of preservation. The Hawkesbury estate was reserved by "Johnny" Jones for his son James, who, however, died early in life, and the trustees of the estate in 1872 subdivided it into several allotments and placed it on the market for sale. An area of about 2000 acres, it included the whole of the bush-clad hillside opposite the township, the southern boundary being the Main North road. It was offered at £8 per acre with a purchasing clause, and it attracted to the district a fine type of the old pioneer settler, many of whose descendants are still residents of the district. Some of those who acquired allotments were J. and W. Maxwell, George Maxwell, Michael McGarry, John Irwin, Robert Pearson, John Valentine, and Alex. Stewart. At a later period the homestead and 250 acres were purchased by Mr A. C. Strode, where he resided for some years, and it was afterwards occupied by Mr Murdoch, the local resident magistrate. A number of quarter-acre sections adjoining the Main North road were set aside for building purposes and purchased by W. C. Ancell (chemist), Joseph Bates (bootmaker), G. K. Brown (newsagent), A. G. Reid (storekeeper), Ben Bray (butcher), David Gloag (draper), Robert Oxley (storekeeper), and John Smith (watchmaker), and a large stone building, built from the stone when Jones's store in Beach street was dismantled, housed the County Council's office, the post office, and a barber's shop. The site for the Mechanics' Hall and

library was a free gift from Mr Isaac. On the opposite side of the street stood the Bank of New Zealand, the Golden Fleece Hotel, the shops of Miss Price (confectioner) and Robert Price (saddler), the Commercial Hotel, then a row of tenement houses extending to McDougall's blacksmith shop, some of which were occupied as business premises. This area was known as Isaac-town.

At the corner of Pratt street (named after a former editor of the Wai-kouaiti Herald), the boundary line of the Government township, were the premises of D. and J. Malloch (store-keeper), William and Robert Mill (carpenters and timber yards) Mrs Frazer (draper), George Coker (wheelwright), Ismael Pemberton (brick kiln), Walter Henderson (bootmaker), Robert Pearson (storekeeper), Shand's flour mill, Peter Duncan (butcher), the Plough Inn Hotel, the Railway Hotel, the remains of the old brewery, the school, the police station, the manse, and many dwellings scattered throughout the township.

The Waikouaiti Borough Council, then called the West Hawkesbury Municipality, was incorporated in 1866. Mr Macleod Orbell occupied the office of Mayor for two years, his councillors being Messrs E. W. Durden, Thomas Whinan, W. James, and David Gloag, and A. H. Gill was town clerk. Until 1880 the mayoral chair was occupied after Mr Orbell by Mr T. S. Pratt (1868 to 1873), Mr John Smith (until 1877), Mr Thomas Whinam (1878), and Mr Stephen Latham (1879).

The public school was established in 1861, and erected, with a teacher's residence, on the two acres of land in Beach street, the gift of Mr Jones. Mr Franks was the first teacher, and twenty pupils were enrolled. Through some difference with the educational authority Mr Franks resigned in 1864. At a later period, typical of the versatility of the old pioneers, he established a brewery. He was a better school teacher than he was a brewer, for the venture was a failure, and had a short reign. This was due, so tradition hath it, to the poor quality of beer he brewed although Waikouaiti, at that period, contained a large section in the community that one would not expect to be fastidious about the quality of the beer.

Mr James Phillip succeeded Mr Franks in 1865, and although the school had now been established four years the attendance had only increased to

35 pupils. Members of Mr Phillip's family are residents of Palmerston today, and his school register, kindly

lent to me by one of his sons, is an interesting document. It contains the names of old Waikouaiti residents and also some who became prominent in other localities in New Zealand. The reason of the small attendance was largely the number of private schools that were in existence in Waikouaiti about that period, each of which had their quota of scholars that militated against the public school attendance. Any building, or a room, or two in a private house, were sufficient for a school room, and irrespective of one's teaching qualifications, it was a popular, though perhaps not a very remunerative, vocation in those days. Parents in those days did not look upon the education of their children, or the certification of teachers, of such vital importance as parents do to-day. A story is told by an Oamaru resident who attended one of these private schools. It was his first day at school, the teacher was absent, but had arranged for a lady friend to relieve her for the day. In his first lesson the relieving teacher told him to draw a "ho." He made a valiant but crude attempt to draw a hoe he had seen his father using in the garden, but discovered later that it was the letter "o" he was asked to draw. It is interesting to recall the names and locations of these private schools. In Beach street, which was the business centre, were that of Miss Hertslet, in the Council Chambers, then situated below where Mr Austin's grocery store now stands, and opposite, these of Miss Michie and also Mrs Widdowson; opposite the public school was

windsor; opposite the public school was Mrs Black, and at the lower end of the street Miss Peach and also Mr Stokes; in Dame street was Mrs Fraser, in a cottage now owned by Mr Jack Thomson, of Dunedin. In the Odd-fellows' Hall was Miss Miller; Miss Gallie was in Mr Fry's house at Lamb Hill; Mrs Franks on the Main road; Mr Martin in the Methodist Church in Henry street; and Mr McLeod in a house, opposite the public school of the present day, lately occupied by Mr John Maxwell. No records or particulars are available of these schools, but they flourished at various periods throughout the life of Waikouaiti until 1878, when they closed down through the introduction of free and compulsory education by the Government. The closing of these schools added many new names to the public school register, and was an indication of the gradual growth of the township. Due to the increased attendance the Education Board in 1879 decided to build a new school in the Government township on the site where now stands the present school. It was opened in January, 1870 with an attendance of 75 pupils, which increased to 110 in 1872, when the old school in Beach street was removed and added to the new building.

In 1874 the attendance reached 140, and the gradual increase by 1876 made it necessary to add a new room to accommodate 100 scholars. In 1877 there were 225 pupils, and in 1878 290. Mr Phillips resigned in 1877, and went to reside in the Stoneburn district, and

was succeeded by Mr Samuel Moore, who was appointed headmaster in January, 1878. The following were teachers in the school prior to the free compulsory system of education being introduced:—Miss K. Russell (mistress), 1870-72; Miss Miller (mistress), 1872-73; Miss Sinclair (mistress), 1873-76; Miss L. Woolley (pupil teacher), 1874-75; Miss Thomson (mistress), 1876-79; Miss Janet Mill (pupil teacher), 1877-81; Mr W. Maule (first assistant master), 1878-1886; Mr Chas. A. Bassett (pupil teacher), 1878-1882. Mr J. A. Valentine was also a pupil teacher in 1879-1883.

The origin of the Waikouaiti Public Library can be traced to the efforts of Miss Emily Orbell and the Rev. J. A. Fenton in 1863. Realising the advantages to the community of such an institution, they made an appeal for donations of books as a nucleus to a library, and met with a liberal response from the residents. Close on 100 books were received. Mr Fenton being the principal donor. The members of the first committee appointed were:—Messrs J. A. Chapman, F. Franks, McLeod Orbell, Joseph Bates, J. S. Mitchell, Thos. Whinam, H. Williams, and the Rev. A. Dasent. Mr Dasent acted as chairman, secretary and treasurer for 11 years. The books were stored in a room in the recently-erected school and later removed to a building in Beach street, called the Athenæum, where the committee met. The revenue derived from the subscriptions of its few members was totally inadequate for

the upkeep of the institution, but donations amounting to £50, with a subsidy granted for the same amount, together with the assistance received from the Education Board and Waikouaiti County Council enabled the committee to adopt a more progressive policy and place on the shelves a wide range of literature to suit all tastes. Following the drift to the Main North road the Athenæum was removed in 1872 to that portion of the town known then as Commercial row, where it remained for two years. The same year the Mechanics' Hall Institute Company built the Mechanics' Hall at a cost of £300, including paintings, fittings, etc., the architect being Mr D. Ross, of Dunedin. The capital of the company was £308, the amount being raised by the issue of £1 debentures. The first directors appointed were Messrs T. S. Pratt, William MacDougall, J. Drumm, D. Malloch, W. James, A. G. Reid, Thos. Whinam, J. Latham, and E. W. Durden. In 1873 it was the intention of the directors to add a room to the hall to be used as a public library. The library committee was not in favour of this proposal, but agreed to meet the directors at a conference to discuss the matter. After a number of interviews an agreement was finally reached in the following year, when the library committee agreed to purchase the Mechanics' Hall for £160. Messrs Pizey, Orbell, and A. H. Gill were appointed liquidators, and they succeeded in purchasing the shares of the debenture holders for £171 or

of the debenture holders for £111, or a shade over 11s per share. Negotiations were finally completed in 1876, when the building was handed over to Mr W. C. Ancell, the library secretary, together with £45 of surplus money in the hands of the liquidators. They immediately added a room to the hall and transferred to it the books from the building in Commercial row, which serves to-day as the public library. In 1878 it contained a little over 1000 books. A pleasant hour can be whiled away fossicking on its shelves to those who are to literature inclined, for there are still to be found some of the books in use in the middle sixties. The quarter acre on which it stands was the free gift of Mr Isaac.

The history of the Anglican Church has been fully written in a brochure compiled by the Rev. E. P. Neale, and published in 1918. Built by Mr John Jones in 1858, it is one of the oldest Anglican Churches in Otago. Mr Neale's booklet, apart from the church's history, contains a great deal of useful information relating to the early history of the district, and is a tribute to the thoroughness he has shown in his research work. Another valuable contribution to the early history of Waikouaiti is the Rev. Mr J. Christie's book, "History of Waikouaiti," in which is a comprehensive history of the Presbyterian Church. Mr Christie was the first minister appointed to this church, which was built in 1863, and his parish included Goodwood and Palmerston, with periodical visits

to Central Otago. The matter contained in his book was written at a period when the information and records were easily obtainable, and, on account of their reliability and authenticity, his book is a classic that will be valued by future historians. But for his forethought many of these records to-day would have been entirely lost and unprocurable. His name and that of Mr Neale are honoured and revered in Waikouaiti to-day by those who knew them.

The Wesleyan Church was built in 1863, and the Catholic Church in 1868, on an acre of ground given to each by Mr Jones, and situated between Henry and Thomas streets. The Wesleyan Church in 1878 was removed to Beach street, and stood where Mr John McLeod's house now stands. The Rev. J. Harding was the first minister, and was succeeded by the Rev. H. Flamank. Sixty odd years

ago the church bell was removed from the belfry by some of the village larrikins in one of their midnight revels. Beach street had an unenviable reputation in those days for the prevalence of larrikinism with its senseless jokes. Despite the efforts of the police, the bell was never found, or the culprits discovered, so well was the secret preserved. For many years afterwards it was a frequent topic of conversation and conjectures as to what became of it. It was one of Waikouaiti's unsolved mysteries. Two or three years ago Mr James Brown dug the bell up in his garden, but unfortunately in several pieces. It was probably the same band of larrikins that tied a sheaf of oats to the rope used for ringing the Catholic Church bell, which was suspended from two trees in the church ground. A neighbour's cow grazing nearby was introduced into the joke. The constant clanging of the bell throughout the night, with an occasional lull, aroused the curiosity of the neighbours, and an investigation brought to a speedy end the carillon recital by the cow.

The only institutions established in the 'sixties that survive to-day are the Agricultural and Pastoral Association (1865), the Oddfellows' Lodge (1866), and the Racing Club (1863). The Waikouaiti Rifles (1864), the drum and fife band (1867), and the Waikouaiti Herald (1864) have long since sunk into oblivion. They all have their history which perhaps may some day

history, which, perhaps, may some day be written. With a record of a century behind it there still remains a large field unexplored for a literary scribe for the half hath not been told of the history of Waikouaiti. A search in the highways and byways would reveal fresh material and yield a fruitful harvest to the literary gleaner. In those days of turmoil and unrest we are far removed from the social life that existed in Waikouaiti fifty-odd years ago. Life then flowed placidly and pleasantly along without any economic problems or the disturbing influences created by the butting in and muddling of imported, half-pie politicians, and our Civic Fathers had no difficulty in balancing their budget on a halfpenny rate. This reminds one of a local topical song sung many, many years by Jack Allen at one of the local concerts to the tune of "Killallo." The words of the first verse and chorus were these:—

There's a small town on this coast,
And it's people often boast
Of the 'good old days that used to be,
When "Johnny" Jones was king, and he
reigned alone supreme
Over all the land as far as you could see,
And we've often heard the tale, that when
they caught a whale
They towed it to the jetty at the Kalk;
And the whalers made things hum when
they broached their keg of rum,
In the good old days of Waikouaiti.

Chorus:

Of Dunback you may skite, of the Kye-
burn or the Kalk,
Nenthorn, or of Moonlight, or any other

place you loike,
But Waikouaiti's the dandy, it beats them
all quite handy,
For our halfpenny rate has got them bate
In good old Waikouaiti.

Then follow several verses dealing with the local burning questions of that period, but not of much interest to-day. Gone forever are those halcyon days, and, as they linger in the memory one might aptly quote the soliloquy of the old mner: "Them was the days; yes, them was the days!"