

FIVE | Growth and Decline in Tokomaru Bay

The Waima Song (to the tune of Galway Bay)

Words by Peter Awatere, who worked at the freezing works in the chambers

*If you ever go across the sea to Waima
Then maybe at the closing of the day
You will sit and watch the moon rise o'er Hautanooa*
And watch the sun go down on Toko Bay.*

*Just to hear again the children's rippling laughter
The JoyJoys† harmonies at close of day
Just to sit upon the Barracks' top verandah
And watch the barefoot Huihuis‡ at their play.*

*For the breezes blowing across the sea from Waima
Are perfumed by Borthwicks Meat Works as they blow
And the chamberhands drinking in Matt Ryland's cabin
Speak a language that no decent man would know*

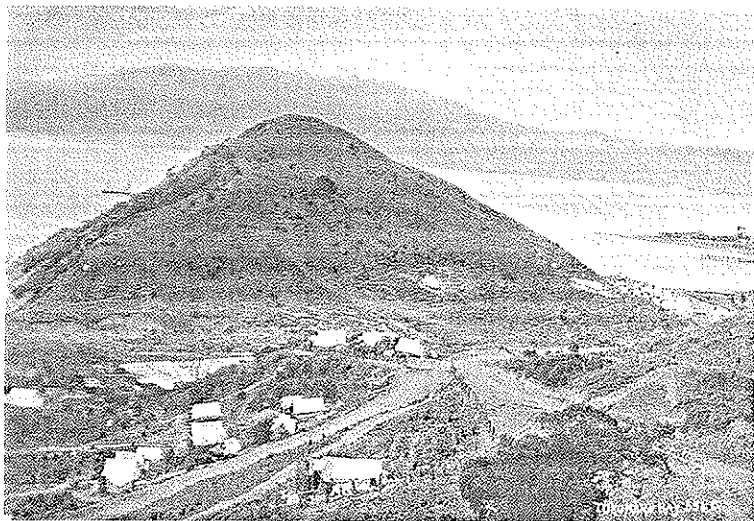
*For the policeman came and tried to alter our ways
Scorning us for being without care
So we might as well go down to Te Puka Hotel
And find God's people drinking Gold Top there.*

*And if there's going to be a life hereafter
No matter where I'd be or where I'd roam
I would ask my God to rest my bones in Waima
It is my heaven, my dear old home sweet home.*

* The point of the bay at the wharf

† Local evangelists

‡ Local Maori family



An early view of the small hill at Waima from above the future site of the freezing works. Tents and makeshift dwellings dot the valley below. The original jetty at Te Ariuru (right) was still in use and a ship is anchored just beyond the reef, possibly waiting for cargo – wool packed in from stations in the surrounding hill-country.
Beverley Scott collection

The road leading into Tokomaru Bay from Gisborne, 1893.

WF Crawford Collection Tairāwhiti Museum



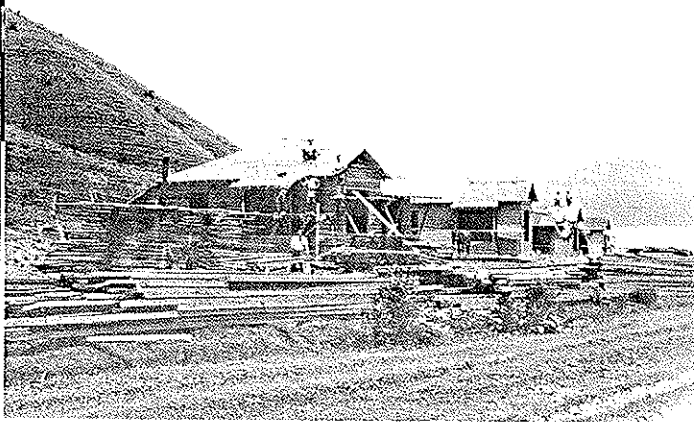
Tokomaru Bay Harbour Board's first harbourmaster and operator of the launch *Waima*, recalls:

*The barracks was a big motel/hotel with two bottom and top storey rows of bedrooms. That is where the single men from the freezing works were billeted all through the season. One thing that I remember is that just outside the front of the big building on a weekend, or in the evening in the summer after teatime, there would always be a crowd of men there playing two-up. It was their one and only game and whenever they weren't working or sleeping, they were playing two-up.*⁷

Two-up was illegal but the police took rather a casual approach. During the early years of the works, young Richard (Dick) Porter – who ran a taxi and bus business in the bay for 45 years – was paid 6d a game to keep an eye out for the policeman from Tokomaru Bay. The young lad watched, from his strategic perch in a nearby tree, for the approach of Constable Bill Sleeth who purposefully ambled along on his white horse, taking his time so that the men could stop their game before he reached them.⁸

Freezing works management and staff lived in well-designed houses opposite and down the road from the barracks. Resident freezing workers had about a dozen houses in the valleys behind Waima and Te Ariuru. Roughcast houses were built for harbour board staff. It is believed a properly laid-out sewerage system serviced the Waima houses.⁹

A large brick house to the north of the shipping company's store was built for its manager but was first occupied by pilot Captain Angus and later by harbourmaster Captain Peter McCallum. The two brick houses south of the store were home to store foreman Fred Woodhead and blacksmith Alex Malcolm and their families. South of these was the Hautanoa Sports and Library Club, with billiard tables as well as books.



Above and below: Construction workers on Tokomaru Bay freezing workers' cottages, c1910.
Tairāwhiti Museum



were predominantly Maori and mainly from the surrounding area.

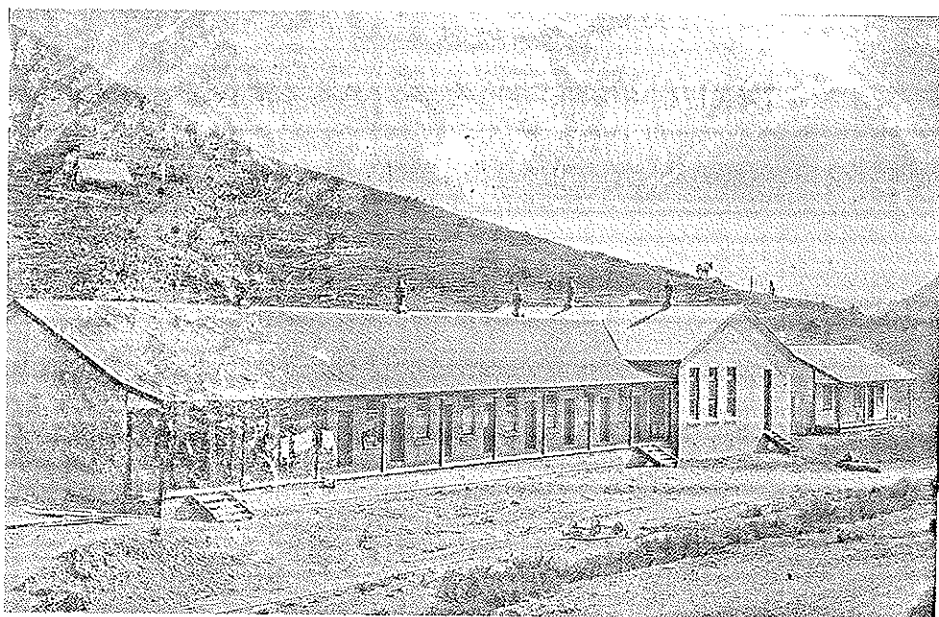
It appears likely that Tokomaru Bay enjoyed its highest population between the late 1920s and early 1950s. By 1926 Tokomaru Bay and its environs had grown to nearly 1427.* The highest population for the whole Waiapu district was in 1936 with 6301 people comprising 4282 Maori and 2019 non-Maori. By 1961 Tokomaru Bay riding had 1240 people. In 2001 the bay's population had reduced to just 462.¹⁶

The heady days of full employment ensured a happy, vibrant community. Changing jobs was easy as Noel Raihania found. One of the fortunate Maori Battalion C Company servicemen to return from the war, he finished a carpentry trade training course in Gisborne in 1947 and worked on schools around the East Coast, as part of a gang completing renovations, extensions and dental clinics. When he tired of carpentry in the late 1940s he picked up a job within Waima's freezing chambers.

When the killing finished we still had our jobs until the finish of the loading out to the lighters and then to the Home boats. Most of the people in the freezing works were put off when the season finished. I was kept on as a carpenter for repair work with the sole carpenter Albert Forrester. The following season they wouldn't let me go back to the chambers.

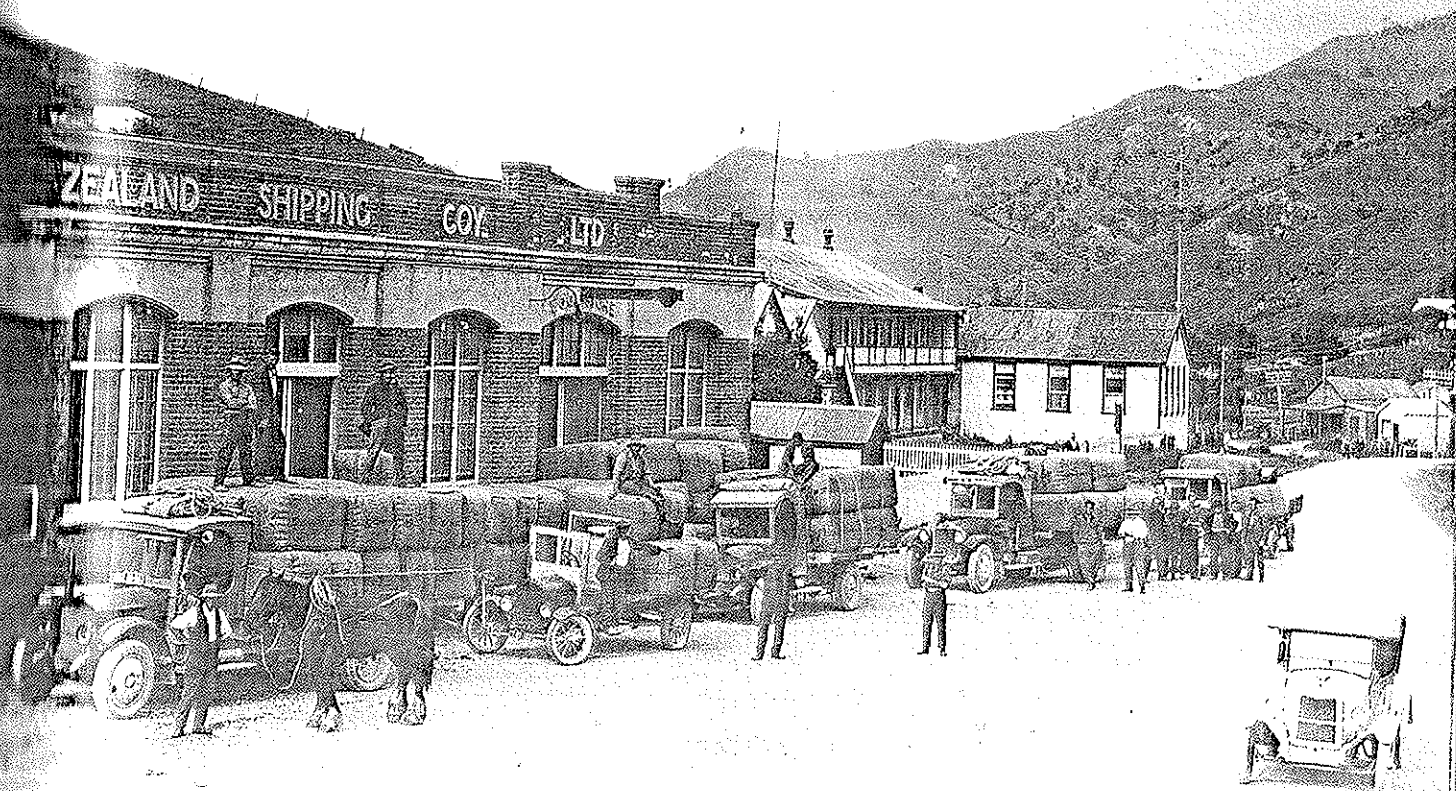
He worked on general repairs and coopering, making barrels from

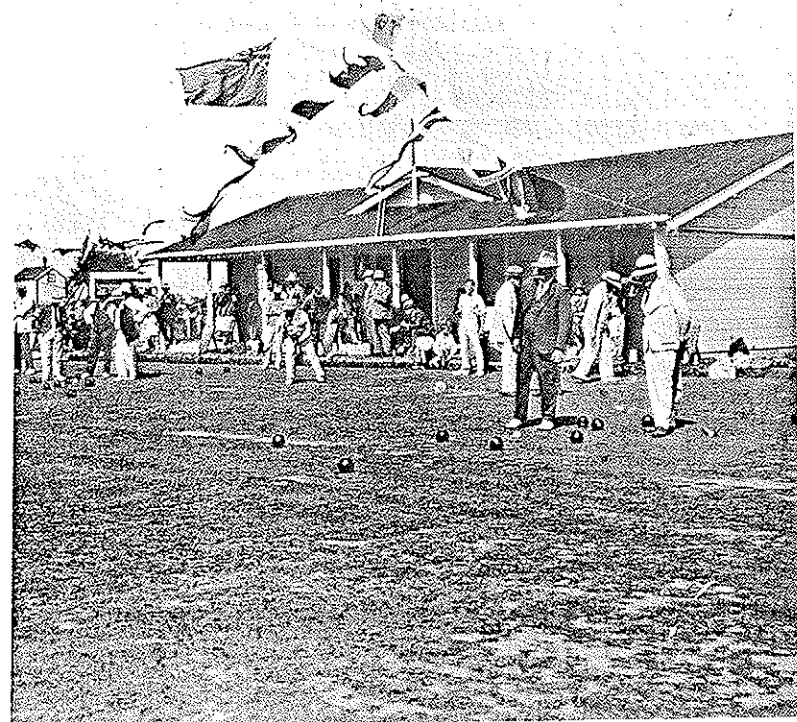
* Definite population figures are difficult to compare for different years. Localities in the vicinity of Tokomaru Bay noted in one census – such as Hautanoa, Te Ariuru, Te Puka, Waima and Ongaruru – are not noted in other years



Some accommodation for single men was provided at the barracks, here still single-storied, 1910-11. Tairāwhiti Museum

By 1926 trucks were the favoured means of carting the wool and the demand for accommodation saw an extra storey built on the barracks. Some of the Waima stores can be seen at right. Tairāwhiti Museum

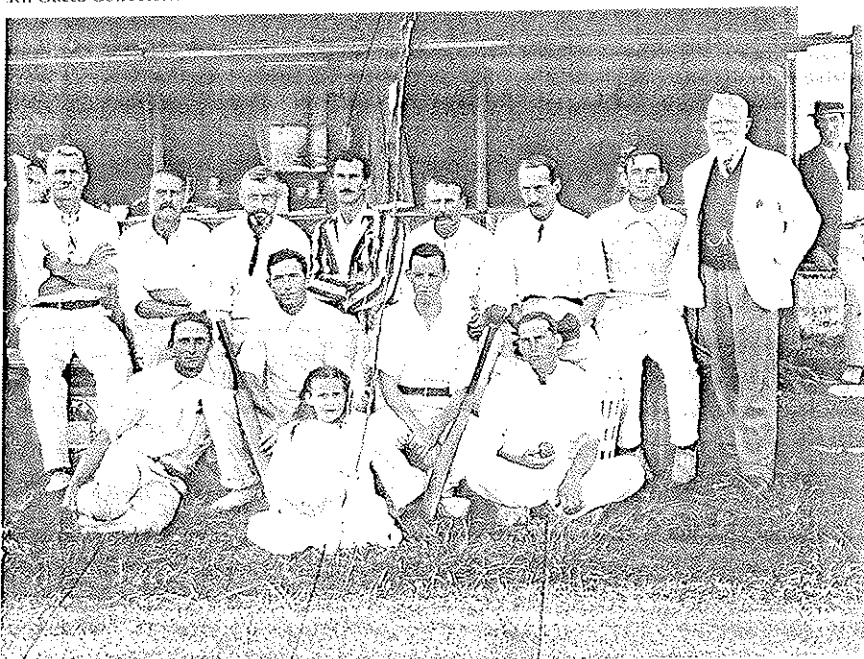




opening of the Tokomaru Bay bowling and
its clubs, c1930. Tairāwhiti Museum

he 4 February 1937 edition of *East Coast Press*, then printed and published by journalist Frank Louis Joseph Nathan, advertised the services of Bignell & Holmes A Grade Garage, J J Roberts, Sam McKee's advertising Stetson hats, G Doig, plumber, East Coast Theatres, Tokomaru Gaiety, Sampey's Butcher, Toko Taxi Service, J Oates, agent for Borthwick & Sons, D J Barry, Geo Chaffey, cartage contractor carrier, horse dealer.

Tokomaru Bay cricket team.
with Oates Collection



kahikatea timber for the fat and skin, sealing them with lids and tightening the bands once full.

Then I thought, bugger it, I wanted to be a butcher. They accepted me and I went along as a learner. They brought in the semi-chain that year. Someone else cut the animal's throat but it was not that different, we could still do solo.

Peter Plummer, the son of Tokomaru Bay's first harbourmaster Captain Sidney "Skipper" Plummer, recalled:

Every New Year's Eve when we lived on the top of the hill, about midnight we would hear a gang of freezing workers from the barracks, mostly Maori, coming up the hill. We could hear them long before they got up to the top of the hill, shouting, singing and laughing, all high as kites. They would line up on the front lawn and say, "Happy New Year Skipper, Happy New Year Mrs Plummer" and they would laugh and sing again. Skipper was always well prepared and soon had a couple of cases of bottled beer on the verandah. They would all grab a bottle and

sit on the edge of the verandah and have a drink for a quarter of an hour or so and tell a few stories. Then they would all get up again, line themselves up and sing *For He's a Jolly Good Fellow* at the top of their voices. You could have heard it all over Tokomaru Bay. There were a few more "Happy New Year Skipper" as they trooped off down the hill again laughing and singing. We could hear them until they got back to their barracks again.¹⁷

Shipping and other transport

Shipping made for a thriving port and township while the Gisborne to Tokomaru Bay road was unformed. Most people and goods, including live sheep, came and went by sea. When the works opened in 1911, the Waima Shipping Company was already operating a launch service to the big steamers that called into the bay.

The harbour board bought the launch *Waima* in 1912, operating her for

nearly 27 years to ferry people, mail and freight to passenger ships anchored about three miles offshore. The *Waima* was skippered by Captain Plummer and assisted for many years by engineer Jack Lindsay and chief deckhand Jimmy Cockery. Peter Plummer recalled:

The regular passenger ships, mostly Union Steamship Company ships but occasionally Huddart Parker ships, came up and down the coast from Auckland to Wellington and back but they called regularly every week to Tokomaru Bay for passengers.¹⁸

The last steamers engaged in passenger work on the East Coast on regular schedules were the *Takapuna*, *Arahura* and *Waimii* – belonging to the Union Steam

making inroads into Tolaga Bay and the government's 50kV line to Tokomaru Bay was in the process of being built. With the prospect of providing a public electricity supply to the whole of the East Coast, years of work lay ahead.

Fellmongery worker and union rep Te Arawhanui-atane (Kaiser) Paerata was offered a job in Wairoa but instead took up a position at the local telephone exchange before going farming on his own account.³⁶ Major Newton joined the urban drift when the slaughterman's job he had held for five years came to an end. He spent a season at Invercargill before joining the power board as an assistant lineman in 1954 and spent the next 34 years helping to bring power to virtually every house on the East Coast.³⁷

Ironically, while the power board provided work for many men, the works' closure meant Waima lost its lighting source. Tokomaru Bay finally got electricity in 1957 but it was not until about 1960 that Waima again enjoyed electric lights.³⁸

The district lacked work for all those put out of their jobs. Many left the district for other freezing works in Gisborne, Wairoa and the South Island where the freezing works industry was still strong and the community welcoming.

Unlike later years, when freezing works' closures around New Zealand saw East Coast Maori workers return home, shutting the Waima works forced many to leave their homes and ancestral lands to find work in other parts of New Zealand. For some this meant the loss of strong family, ethnic and community ties and related support networks, and a sense of disorientation.³⁹

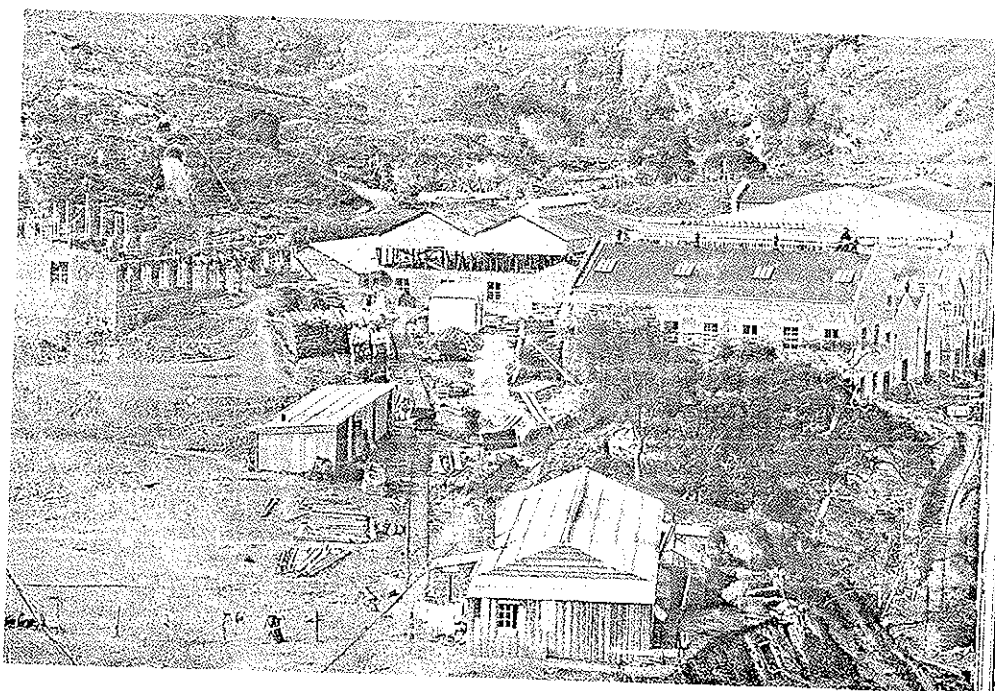
The links between Ngati Porou and the South Island and Ngai Tahu were well-established since the eponymous ancestors of both iwi – Porourangi and Tahu-Potiki – were brothers.⁴⁰ In addition many North Island Maori had beaten a path to the Southland district since the late 1930s when the chain system was introduced. The Mataura freezing works, after cultivating a close relationship with Maori elders in the North Island, had hired about 150 Maori men from the north. Incentives included free travel to and from Southland and guaranteed accommodation.⁴¹

Noel Raihania headed to Mataura to work as a carpenter when the Tokomaru Bay works closed. Several seasons of shearing on the East Coast and South Island followed and in 1956 he headed back to Mataura, with his wife and three children, to set up his own contract shearing business. He stayed for 30 years – never working as a freezing worker again – before returning to Tokomaru Bay.

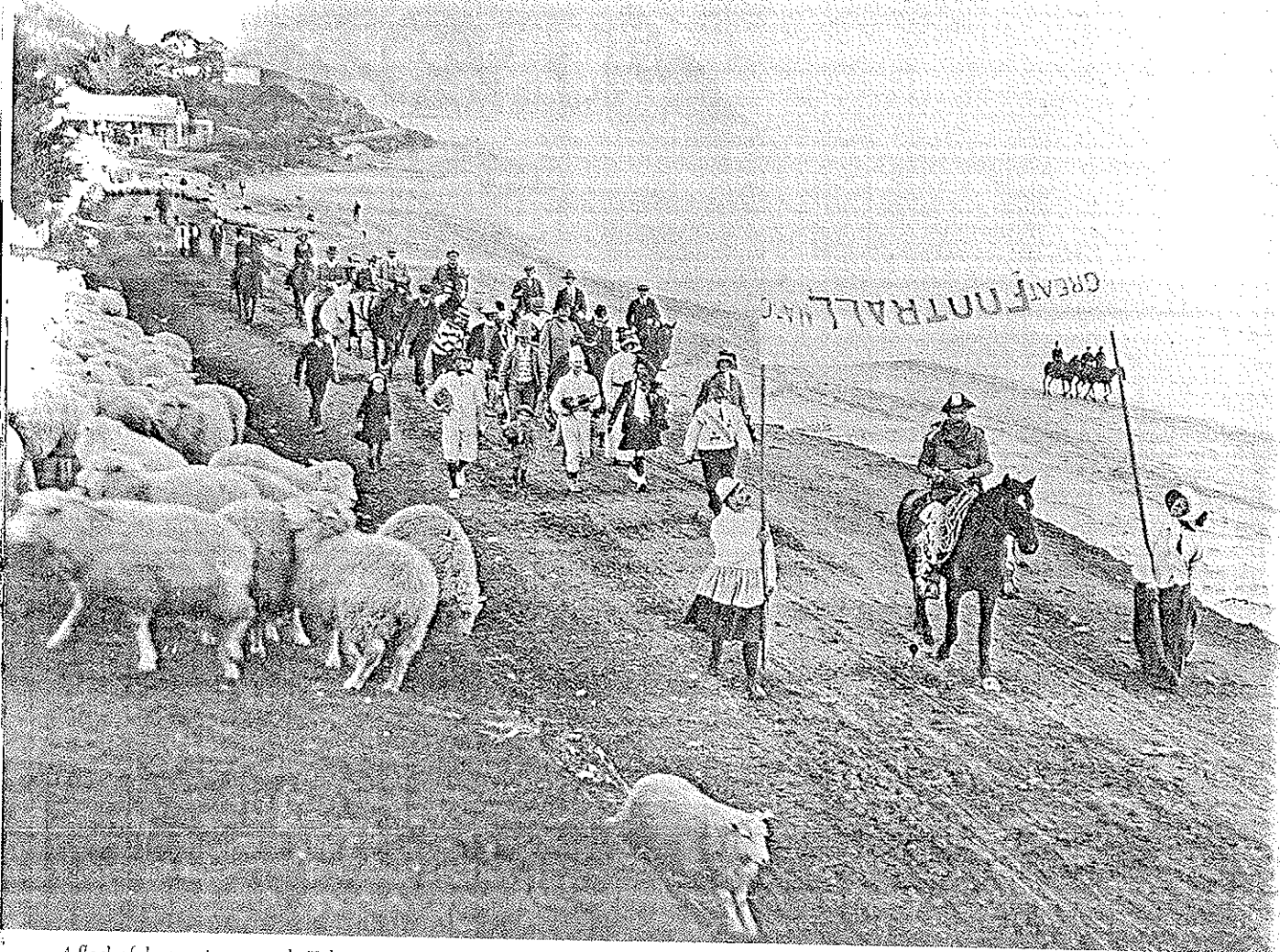
It was good working for the farmers down there; it was totally different. They invited you into their homes, you slept in their spare rooms and ate at their tables. That wasn't something farm workers experienced on the East Coast.

Many of the slaughtermen were shearers in the off-season.

Meat inspector John Chaffey, who worked at Kaiti in the 1980s and later at Progressive Gisborne, also spent many years at Mataura. Some men took their families with them, he recalls, and others made new ones.



Construction of Tokomaru Bay works, 1910-11.
McCarthy-Robinson collection



A flock of sheep on its way to the Tokomaru Bay freezing works at the far end of the bay gives way to a lively procession of Waima football supporters, several in fancy dress. The game of the day was Waima vs United at the Tokomaru Bay township's rugby ground. Tairāwhiti Museum

Richard Porter (left) outside his canvas wharf accommodation during the construction of the Tokomaru Bay freezing works at Waima, c1909-10. McCarthy-Robinson collection

During the boom years, Richardsons' lighters came from Napier every four to six weeks to ferry out wool and frozen meat to the New Zealand Shipping Company's overseas vessels – the "Home" ships including *Rimutaka*, *Rangitane*, *Rangitiki*, *Rangitata* and *Ruahine*. Between 12 and 15 of these ships called at the port each year during the 1930s. There were also numerous coastal vessels operating between Tokomaru Bay and Auckland, and Gisborne and Napier.²³

Captain Peter McCallum, who was harbourmaster from 1948, when Captain Plummer retired, through to the early 1960s, said it was a busy port when he started as assistant harbourmaster in 1938.

We used to have at least nine Home boats a year in here loading meat and wool, mostly from the Waiapu flats. We had an arrangement where lighters from Napier were always available to service the Home boats. We also had about two coastal vessels, working between Auckland and Tokomaru Bay, or Tokomaru and Gisborne or Napier, in a week.²⁴

The Union Steam Ship Company Ltd carried only freight after 1927 and abandoned its East Coast route altogether in 1935. The gap left was filled by Richardsons of Napier which had been its competition for decades. During the 1930s and 1940s, *Koau*, *Pukoko*, *Kopara*, *Pakura* and *Rannah* were regular callers. Probably the best-remembered vessel from this era

