

EARLY TAIERI FERRY

KATHLEEN A. GALLOWAY.

"I do wish you wouldn't look only at the *old* houses," one of my sons told me when we were motoring through an unfamiliar district, and I was exclaiming every time we passed a two-storey homestead with quaint dormer windows peeping out from the steeply gabled roof. Well, of course, I greatly admire smart, modern houses with their gleaming plate glass and stainless steel, but, still, I consider there is an indefinable charm about the old-fashioned ones, perhaps because our own farmhouse dates from early Colonial days.

Admittedly it is not as beautiful as others in this district and it has been on the present site for no more than 80 odd years, but it claims distinction from an inscription on the outside wall and because of the arduous journey it made, up the long, steep road from the riverside.

High on the west gable, one may read the legend, "Taieri Ferry Hotel, Jerry Swanton," not in coloured lights like an advertisement for ice cream or cigarettes, but just discernible under successive coats of cream paint. Indeed, watching for a favourable shaft of light to expose the faint lettering is analogous to the searching I've found necessary to uncover the early history of the hotel—a hidden thing to be looked for ; and to stand on our lawn and gaze at those words is to take a peep back into Otago's past.

Those of you who travel south from Dunedin will know Taieri Ferry, just south of Henley, where the river turns at a right angle before flowing away down the lower Taieri Gorge. To-day, nothing remains to show that in the early 1850's this was the chief centre of interest in the South-east Taieri ; and, until the completion of the railway in 1875, was a busy river port. Did you know that as late as 1858 Natives numbered hundreds at the Kaik, on the west of the main road which runs through the Maori reserve near Taieri Ferry bridge? A measles epidemic greatly reduced the population, for the Maoris, unused to fever, lay in the water to cool their burning bodies.

Now that the Otokia section of the new flood-free motorway is completed this historic corner of the old road at the bend in the river is cut off from main traffic.

Maori canoes would be the earliest craft to carry freight. Natives living at the Kaik and others from Moturata, the island at Taieri Mouth, would know where to find raupo and flax, eels and water fowl. The first white men to explore the tidal reaches were probably whalers and sealers who settled in scattered groups along the coast from Preservation Inlet to Moeraki. Then came the vanguard of colonisation, the surveyors.

The story of white settlement began with the coming of Richard Craigie from the Orkney Islands. He was only 20 when he arrived at Port Chalmers on the "Bernecia," in December, 1848, only a few months after the "John Wickliffe" and the "Philip Laing". At home, his family had been used alike to sea and land so he bought a small coastal vessel, the "Endeavour", and commenced trading round the Otago coast. Later, with his step-brother, James Harrold, he ran a cargo boat, the "Brothers", along the coast between Dunedin and the Molyneux, and up and down the Taieri river. When this boat was wrecked on the treacherous bar at the Mouth, the partners built the "Hope" and traded successfully in her for a number of years.

Early in the 1850's Richard Craigie acquired a farm on the south side of the river and his home, "Craigielea", commanding a sweeping view of the river and surrounding country, is still occupied as a farmhouse, and a tiny island in mid-stream is called "Craigie's Island".

The early Ferry folk built their homesteads near the river as it was the natural highway for farm products and materials leaving or coming to the community. So difficult were the overland tracks from Dunedin that some people going only as far as West Taieri considered it less hazardous to travel by whaleboat to Taieri Mouth, then up the river by canoe. Travellers going south would walk from Dunedin to Scrogg's Creek—now Allanton. Mr. Craigie ran a passenger boat from there to the head of Lake Waihola, to avoid the swampy track past Henley

and Waihola. During the '60's the effects of mining and sluicing, the deforestation and burning off on the hillsides, and increased cultivation on the slopes gradually raised the bed of the lake and channels, but as late as 1880 river craft could still run from Waihola to Berwick.

After the road and railway passed through Waihola township, lake traffic decreased, but cargo boats still plied between the railway shed at Titri and the goods shed at Taieri Mouth, and it wasn't until March, 1925, that the population at Taieri Ferry was too small to retain the school which had been built in 1879, seven years after lessons had begun in the store. The first generation of Ferry children went to Waihola school which opened in 1859.

Some years ago, the big goods shed was shifted from Titri to Waihola railway yard, and recently the tiny shelter at the siding was sold, so nothing remains of the Titri station which used to be a hive of industry at harvest time when wagon loads of grain came in from miles round the countryside.

It was James Harrold who built the accommodation house where the school played now stands. I haven't been able to find the date, but as early as January, 1851, Dr. Burns of the First Presbyterian Church of Otago, recorded in his visiting book having called on James Harrold and his wife, Agnes, so they must have been established in their first home by that time, and I understand that that house became part of the store at Taieri Mouth.

Mr. Harrold used canoes to take settlers across the river, and, early in the '50s, appeared the first punt for horses, mules or bullocks drawing any cart, dray, wagon or carriage. It was owned by James Harrold and operated by Robert O'Neill, an old whaling character known as John Bull. By 1856, schooners were bringing goods from Port Chalmers and a goods shed, jetties, the hotel and a big store were built on the south bank and departures and arrivals appeared regularly in the shipping notes. From 1857, more related Orcadian families arrived at the river settlement and in that year the ferry was taken over by the Provincial Council, Mr. Harrold being appointed official ferryman and tavernkeeper.

In 1859, the main south road was metalled from Saddle Hill to Taieri Ferry and the next year it went down to Tokomairiro and Clutha. On January 7, 1861, the first mail coach ran from Princes Street to Clutha Ferry, the fare being 10/- to Taieri Ferry Hotel where the night was spent. The driver was James McIntosh, a mail carrier in Scotland, who had been an Otago postman travelling the south road riding a horse. During the gold rush it was not unusual for as many as eight coaches to be put up for the night in the paddock behind the hotel.

In 1874 the first ballast engines, Rob Roy and Waverley, came round by water to the Ferry and were used in the construction of the section of " railway between Abbotsford and the Clutha river which opened at the beginning of September, 1875. Sometimes there were as many as 13 ships tied up at the Ferry at a time as so much railway building material had to be brought up the river.

All this intense activity was witnessed by the hotel until it set out on its great adventure and changed its role from riverside inn to farmhouse.

I have not been able to find exactly when the hotel was built, but in many places such ford or ferry inns came very early—before houses, churches or banks—and certainly Taieri Ferry Hotel was there long before the school.

Built of totara, it had two double-storey gables set at right angles to form a big L-shaped building looking out across the river from where the school played now stands in a sheltered green curve of the Ferry hills.

Shortly before the gold rush James Harrold left the Ferry, where he had lived for ten years, and settled on Stewart Island starting a fishing business and later opening an accommodation house in Halfmoon Bay. W. J. Dyer succeeded Harrold as tavern and storekeeper at the Ferry and he later took over the toll house at the bridge which replaced the punt when the immense volume of traffic passed through to the goldfields. There is still the name of a boy Dyer cut into a pane of glass in one of our bedroom windows.

James Swanton was one of the original four American founders of the firm of Cobb and Co. which began in Melbourne in December, 1853. Later he came to New Zealand where he was engaged to drive on the south road for Cole, Hoyt and Co. He did not remain long with them, however, for he

took the Taieri Ferry Hotel and afterwards the Clutha Ferry Hotel. In 1866, he left for California. The name must have been painted in the early '60s during Swanton's reign as proprietor.

The original owners of our farm were the Yorston family. Hugh Yorston had married Betsy Marwick in the Orkney Islands in 1842 and with three sons and three daughters the couple emigrated to Otago by the ship "Alpine", 1859, and the Yorstons joined Orcadian relatives already settled at Taieri Ferry.

Like the Craigie family, the Yorstons had been engaged in farming and herring fishing at home, and Hugh had been in Canada, too, in charge of five or six trading boats of the Hudson Bay Company on the MacKenzie River.

Another son, Richard Yorston, was born in October, 1859, and for a time the family stayed at the Taieri Ferry Hotel. That summer the father acquired land on top of the hills above the Titri Valley, where early in 1959, the new Waiholo road deviation was opened. He named the property Mount Pleasant. The next baby, Thomas, born in 1861, was the first child born at Mount Pleasant.

Altogether there were seven sons in the Yorston family and for twenty years they lived up here in their first house built of stone and clay.

Meanwhile changes were taking place down at Taieri Ferry and the hotel which had witnessed the trading up and down the river, shared the excitement of the rush to the goldfields, and seen the construction of the main road and railway line, was to be sold. Wayfarers, drovers and locals had foregathered there in the days when hotels were scarce on the road and human companionship a luxury. Maoris, whalers, sailors, surveyors, early settlers, old-timers from Ballarat and Bendigo, Jews and Chinese had all used the hotel for rest and refreshment. Every year sports were held on the flat in front of the hotel, and a cannon on the hill at the back was fired- on New Year's Eve and other anniversaries. But with the opening of the railway in 1875 the romance of the coaching days departed, and the old inn wasn't needed.

In 1873, after the license had been given up, school, begun the previous year in the big store, moved to two front rooms where the long windows overlooked the swamp and the Kaik, and lessons continued there till the end of 1879. During the summer holidays of 1879 the two tall gables were shifted to allow the new Taieri Ferry School to be built on the hotel site. One section went to the nearby Pleasant Valley farm, where it was added to the Sinclair home. In 1950, carpenters modernising this homestead uncovered a wall labelled TAP ROOM.

The second gable was hauled, wall by wall, by horses and drays up to Mount Pleasant and so, after twenty years of pioneering, the Yorston family moved into their big new house ; the place which had been their first shelter down at the Ferry became their own farm homestead, and the primitive clay dwelling was used then as a smithy.

Nowadays, I sometimes watch a cottage being transported over our hill to be rebuilt as a crib at Taieri Mouth, and even with the powerful machinery used the job looks difficult, so what a tremendous undertaking the transplanting of the hotel must have been 84 years ago ! In those days the road would be far steeper, before cuttings were made and dips filled up.

In spite of its drastic uprooting, our share of the building has made a comfortable farm home of 13 rooms. I love the stairs with their 13 steep steps leading up to the bedrooms.

For nearly 30 years whenever I have worked in the garden the little pioneering lady has walked beside me, a friendly ghost in the shadow of the semi-circle of sheltering pines she planted with her own hands long ago on the windy hill behind the house. She worked amongst her flowers till she was 83, so I'm sure she must have loved them.