

PROUSE'S MILL

On March 20th 1889 a ballot was held in a temporary Land Office in Customhouse Quay in Wellington. It was for the sale of 3,000 acres of land in the Horowhenua Block which had been bought from Major Kemp for 30/- per acre. Levin was the centre of the block.

Attending the ballot was Richard Prouse Sen., and his three sons, James, ^{John} Richard and ^{my father} John. The two sons secured 600 acres of standing matai bush, the northern boundary being a survey line, where Queen Street now runs from the Railway crossing to approximately Gladstone Rd., The southern end has a line running from Beach Rd., to Gladstone Rd.,

Prior to coming to Levin James and Richard Prouse first started saw milling in the Wainuiomata area about 3 miles south from the present centre of the town down the coast road. In fact it was only on May 12th. 1963 that I in company with three generations of the Prouse family attended a centenary of a Methodist Church built by Richard Prouse Sen., and his three sons and some of the timber was pit sawn, as well as circular sawn. It was built of heart of totara and stands there in its original site to-day.

I am not quite sure when they shifted from Wainuiomata to Whitemans Valley but my father, Richard was married on the 22nd. May 1879 and went to Whitemans Valley where the brothers had been sawmilling for some time, and the end ^{of sawmilling in that valley} was in sight. Apparently it took about three years after they finished in Whitemans Valley to get started in Levin.

The mill had to be shifted and quite a few mill houses to be built ^{included} as well and two big houses for James and Richard and a lot of timber had to be cut. As near as ^{I have been told that} I can remember most of the men and the bosses wereliving in tents for a while. When the two houses were built for James and Richard both the families shifted up to Levin in August 1891.

The mill was on a site at present occupied by the Horowhenua Electric Power Board ^{Dept.} and ran until approximately 1907. ^{This mill} It was again dismantled and John Prouse took it up to the King Country. The shifting of ^{the} this mill was no small task in those days and everything from Whitemans Valley had to be let down a steep hill with a big drum and wire rope. Then it was loaded on to railway wagons and brought up to Weraroa siding. ~~I might state here~~ ^{that} the Levin Railway Station in those days was situated just a few chains north of the present Roslyn Road crossing where Mr. Peter Bartholomew had his mill, somewhere about two years before the Prouses arrived in Levin. I was in that area some months ago and came across some of the old concrete foundations still there. ^{The Bartholomew} That mill was shifted to a site approximately ^{on the} corner of Oxford Street south and Beach Road. ~~Very soon~~ ^{shortly} after we started milling in this area.

This was read out by myself & received on tape by John Bartholomew & I on 22nd Aug 3rd 1963 for a record of Milling Days in Levin & to the King-Country picture generation to know something of the beginning by Levin by the town family. Bartholomew Society R.A.P.

The Railway had difficulties in stopping their trains at Roslyn Road, (Levin Station in those days), as it was half way up the Koputerua hill - Kereru in those days - so decided to shift down to Weraroa and the station was built where the water tank ^{at Weraroa} now stands. The Railway station was shifted from Roslyn Road to Weraroa in 1894. This Railway was owned and operated by a private company, the Wellington Manawatu Railway Co., and all the people and firms who could spare a few pounds had shares in it and believe it or not it paid a 7½% dividend to its shareholders. ^{each year} Both the Prouse Bros., and Mr. Bartholomew had shares in the Company and when they applied for a railway siding into their mills, it was promptly put in and free of charge. Amazing but true, like most good things it came to an end in December 7th. 1908, when it was taken over by the Government of that time and all the shareholders paid out. The purchase ^{price was} £933000.

The standing bush in ~~this~~ ^{our milling area} area was really marvellous matai and totara were predominant, with a few rimu, white pine, rata and an occasional miri and puketea.

The matai was so dense that I have seen three trees growing together, all of good milling size 2 feet to 3ft.6in. in diameter. These trees had reached their age of maturity and the sap was only an inch thick in nearly all the trees. When heart timber was sold (in those days) it was heart and clean at 8/- per hundred feet. I have seen timber fed into the steam boiler which was the power that ran the mill, because of a small ^{piece} piece of sap, a knot or a shake. The old fences around the old ^{home} home, the sheds, even the floor of the old cowshed were cast out timber and still solid after 70 years

I have never seen a bit of heart matai with grub in it but the sap was eaten to dust. Perhaps I should explain something that my father used to be very particular over and that was heart timber cut out of dead trees ^{would} and ~~he~~ would always take borer because the resistance of the timber died with the tree.

At the corner of Bartholomew Road and Liverpool St., out in the paddocks there grew a giant rimu tree on a clay bank which runs through that area. In the 1920's I was ploughing there and dragged away some very large roots of a tree. Working with a Mr. James Parsons I asked why they were so large and he told me that he had felled that tree which was the king of the forest - 108 feet without a limb and over 5 feet in diameter - and said what it was used for.

Some time in 1935 the Bank of New Zealand were renewing the inside of the Wellington Bank and when the counters were taken out no one ^{could} could find a join in 12 feet long, 3" thick and four feet wide and fortunately I was able to tell them where the tree grew and all its measurements; in timber terms, the tree was

unblemished and cut 8 - 12's and 1 - 10 and you can see them there to this day. I suppose millions of pounds in cash have passed over there since 1900.

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out
In 1895 the Prouse Bros. owned and operated a mill up the south branch of the Hautere Road between Otaki and Te Horo over those stoney flats on both sides of the Railway line. There was a small railway siding there called "Hautere" but was taken down and dismantled in 1900 when the mill cut out. It was a fairly large area of solid totara and even today a large portion of the same area is growing totara, second grade. As near as I can remember the output of that mill was 80,000 broad feet a month and employed about 20 men. Apparently the bush had been bought on a time limit of 5 years and at the end of 9 years the Bros., could see they would have to leave a lot of beautiful trees still standing if they didn't change the milling operations, so they put the mill at Levin and Kereru on part time and took all the men who could be spared and felled as many trees as could be felled and dragged on to the road and railway of the property and it took two more years to clean up what they had felled. These logs were railed up to Levin and Ohau and cut up when orders for totara were needed.

^{now} I mention Kereru which is Koputorua. ^{now known as} The name was changed when the Government took over the railway. I have been told that there was another Kereru somewhere else.

Prouse Bros. had another mill at Kereru, just at the back of the Railway station and a lot of white pine timber was cut there and sent to Australia. I can clearly remember seeing big U.B. railway wagons loaded and being loaded with white pine, in pieces 10 x 10 or 12 x 12, forty to fifty feet long. The full length of those big trucks. The manager was a tall thin man and his name was Bill Rogers. That mill when it cut out of timber was shifted to the Horse Shoe lake on the Manawatu River. The road was at the southern end of the Shannon railway station, running in a westerly direction to the Manawatu River by the Saunders old homestead and rata and white pine was cut there for about three years. I remember seeing some big dead trout in a back wash of the river where the sawdust was dumped and afterwards learned it was the acid which came from the rata sawdust which killed the fish. That practice of dumping the sawdust was discontinued when it was discovered what was killing the fish.

At Ohau, James and Andrew Gorrie had a saw mill, just at the back of the railway station on the east side of the line and some of the old mill houses were still standing and used by the maoris ~~as~~ until a very recent date. The Gorries were relations of the Prouses and used to work together in some ways but I never heard of any financial tie-up between the parties. To keep the mill going it had to be fed with

logs and to do this there were miles of tramways carting logs into the mill, from different stands of bush. In most, or nearly all cases, the trees were picked out for length, size and kind according to orders received and the bush men would get their advice from the mill foreman of what was required. The logs were felled and dragged up to a set of skids either by bullock ^{team} or a steam winch ready for the tramway man to load on to the trucks and taken to the mill or some other set of skids where logs were stored handy to the mill. In all cases and most all mills these tramways were hauled by horse teams. I can remember one big set of skids where the Veteran Soldiers Home stands today and the tramway branched at that point - one line going east and the other going south. The latter went down to McLeavey Road and the former to Gladstone Road, via. Queen Street, but as all the milling logs we^{re} cut out of the bush the tram was shifted on to make short haulage to the tram head. There was no rivalry or animosity between the Bartholomews and the Frouses if one wanted to go across the other's property or tramways, they just went. If one couldn't supply a certain grade or kind of timber it was passed over to the other and vice versa. The employees worked and ~~played~~ ^{worked} together, 44 hours a week, from 7.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. - even daylight saving was in practice in the mills in 1890. The wages were 8/- a day or 1/- an hour. The foreman got 8/6 a day. All these men had families and the prices of clothing and groceries, boots etc., was in keeping with the wages. Rent ^{a week} of houses was a day's wages - 8/-. Saturday afternoon and Sundays in a lot of homes was spent filling the larder ^{with a} for the few extras. There were wild pigs and most of the game birds, pigeons, fish, rabbits and hares, ducks, swans, etc., I have eaten pigeon stew and when you are so full that you can't get up from the table you can still suck the bones.

In both Bartholomews and Frouses' mill there was a night watchman man employed and if a fire broke out anywhere within sight the mill whistle was sounded and as a child I was more frightened of the sound of those whistles than thunderstorms or earthquakes. Every available man of both mills would turn out at any hour of the night to fight a fire and in those days it was no easy task. The only water that was available was out of wells, 50 to 80 feet deep. Hand pumped - which was slow. Bucket and windless or bucket and rope.

There is a picture in ^{Leon Jubilee's business Publications} Mr. ~~Parsons~~ ^{Parsons} of the old mill-hands that worked in the mill at Werarora and their names and on the back. In Selwyn Simcox's book of "Otaki" there is a picture of the mill and its workers in Prouse's mill at Hautere.

I think at this stage it would be unfair if I didn't

mention the part my mother played in the welfare of the mill in general. She used to travel to Wellington once a fortnight and cash a reasonably big cheque for the mens' wages. No bank in Levin in those days. The train was the only means of transport. I cannot give you the time of departure or arrival on return but I have heard her say that she only had 21 minutes to get to the Bank of New Zealand and back to Thorndon railway station to catch the train back to Levin. She had a standing order with a cabbie. I think it was about 1895 when Palmerston North opened a branch bank of New Zealand at Manakau and Mrs. ^{my mother} Preuse used to ride down there for the mens' wages and it wasn't until ¹⁸⁹⁴ before the Bank of New Zealand started in Levin. ^{my mother}

The nearest doctor was in Foxton. No telephone. If you required the services of a doctor, well you had to ride over to Foxton and get him and both ride back again. ^{there was} No bridge over the Manawatu River. You and your horse had to swim it and it was quite a few years before a doctor came to Otaki.

The broken legs, arms, bad cuts were all taken over to the "bosses Mrs's" and she fixed them up and made them comfortable until they could be put on a stretcher and slung up in the guard's van of the train and sent to the nearest hospital in Wellington. I can remember my mother relating a little episode of a man that had accidentally chopped his toe off. After she had attended to it he unwrapped a dirty piece of rag with his toe and asked if she could stick it on again.

Another old chap was brought into the old home with the D.T's and she took his pants and put him to bed and gave him a pair of a small girl's boots and told him when he had got the boots on she would give him his pants back and he could go home. He was better in 36 hours. I believe he spent 12 hours trying to get those boots on and then went to sleep.

A man got into the train at Ohau one morning and he had gone totally blind fighting bush fires. His mates had put him in the carriage and he was heading for Wellington hospital. My mother enquired what was his trouble and she put his head on the window sill and licked his eyes. The roughness of the tongue removed the smoke screen and he regained his sight immediately. He got off the train at Manakau and walked back to Ohau. Many and many a time I have seen ^{my mother} her removing steel filings from the mens' eyes with a sharp magnetised pocket knife.

Then there were all the babies she helped into the

world, the sick children, she saved their lives and they lived a full life. There still stands an old house in Wilton Street where three children had been eating wild *tutu* berries down the pit on their way home from school. They started with convulsions and by the time my mother arrived they were very sick children. She started with an emetic and made them sick to find out what they had been eating. Then she tied their hands and feet and put corks in their mouths to stop them biting their tongues ~~off~~ and rolled them in hot ^{sippy} blankets and sweated all the poison out of their systems. They had sent to Foxton for the doctor and he arrived at 4.30 a.m. He had a look at the children and said she had saved their lives, which I don't think I could have done myself. Those were the mill foreman's children and they all ^{grew} up and married and had families of their own.

In conclusion I would like to say that both my father and mother were good God fearing people that set an example to others and I hope I have inherited some of their teachings.

Richard Allan Prouse.