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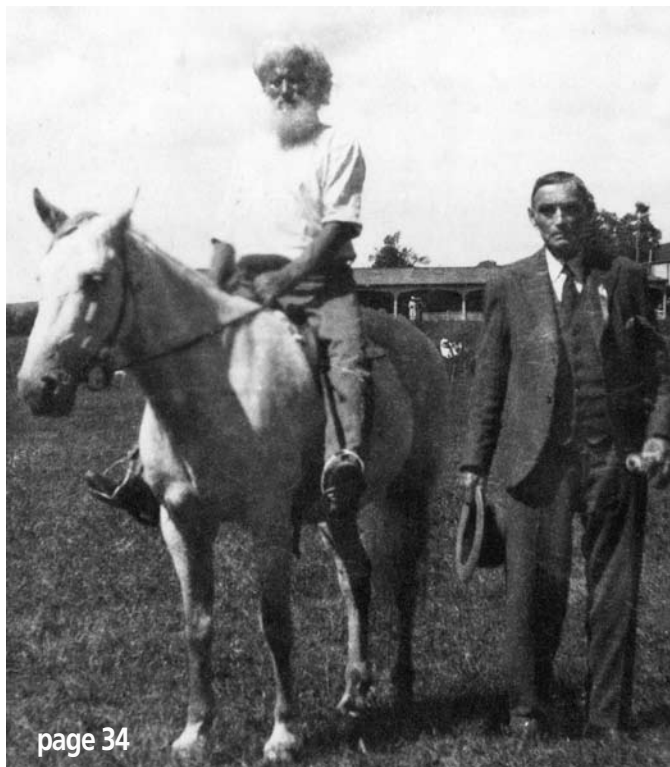
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How Taumarunui got its name

Most local folk accept that Taumarunui means “a place of abundant shade and shelter” but some sources say the emphasis placed on the syllables of the town’s name are not representative of how the town was named. According to FRANK T BROWN, who wrote in the Taumarunui Press in 1926, the name Taumarunui is closely connected with the arrival of and conquering of that portion of the King Country by the Whanganui River natives during the 18th century . . .

The war party that succeeded in capturing the principal pa and taking prisoner the chief of the district was headed by “Ki Maru”. His warriors, to show their appreciation of his prowess and the honour of the victory, acclaimed him “Tau-maru-nui”, which means “Maru the Great”, or “Maru the Conqueror”, that name was taken for the district and has been used ever since.

That same year an “Old Riverman” wrote to the *Taumarunui Press* to endorse this view. He said:

“Taumarunui has been the name of this place as far as I can trace back seven generations. I always take Maori history from songs. It was the only way the Maori had of handing down history, and only recently I got an old Maori to repeat for me the history of Taumarunui which I had first heard over 40 years ago and which I have heard at places far away from here.

“I have a collection of 700 Maori songs and in 1912 published a booklet giving the songs in Maori and English of places around Wanganui. Part of a song in it relates to Taumarunui. It is called *Maori History in Song* by Te Rangi Rei, the name by which I was known amongst the Maoris.

“The Waikato Maoris used to raid the river and hunt the Maoris living, but the natives of the river took to the bush. They had no fighting paha, but one, Taumarunui, stood his ground and the Waikatos got a surprise and were mostly eaten themselves. He was regarded as the head of the Whanganui River.

“The confusion that has occurred in the general meaning of the name *Taumarunui* is because the name has been in existence so long that its origin has become obscured by the gradual dominance of the pakeha over the Maori and the old traditions and folklore being lost sight of and of the younger generations being lost altogether.

“The definition given and generally accepted is the literal meaning of two words, *Taumaru*, shade, *nui* big, but in reality it is composed of three words, *Tau* (thou, you), *Maru* (the name of a warrior), *nui*, (big, large, great).

“So that I say it does not always do to take things too literally without looking into things, for mistakes arise that take a lot of refuting unless unanswerable arguments can be brought forward, but I have tried to get at its origin and my delving and questioning has got me this far.

“The name has been in existence since

about the 17th century and to have become the name of a pa and also a large district must have originated from more than just a common everyday thing such as a shade.

“I will try and convince you that shade or shady place had nothing to do with the name but the name of a man was the foundation. Maru, one of the biggest chiefs in the old history of this District and one who won for himself among his people and his neighbours, distinction and honour.

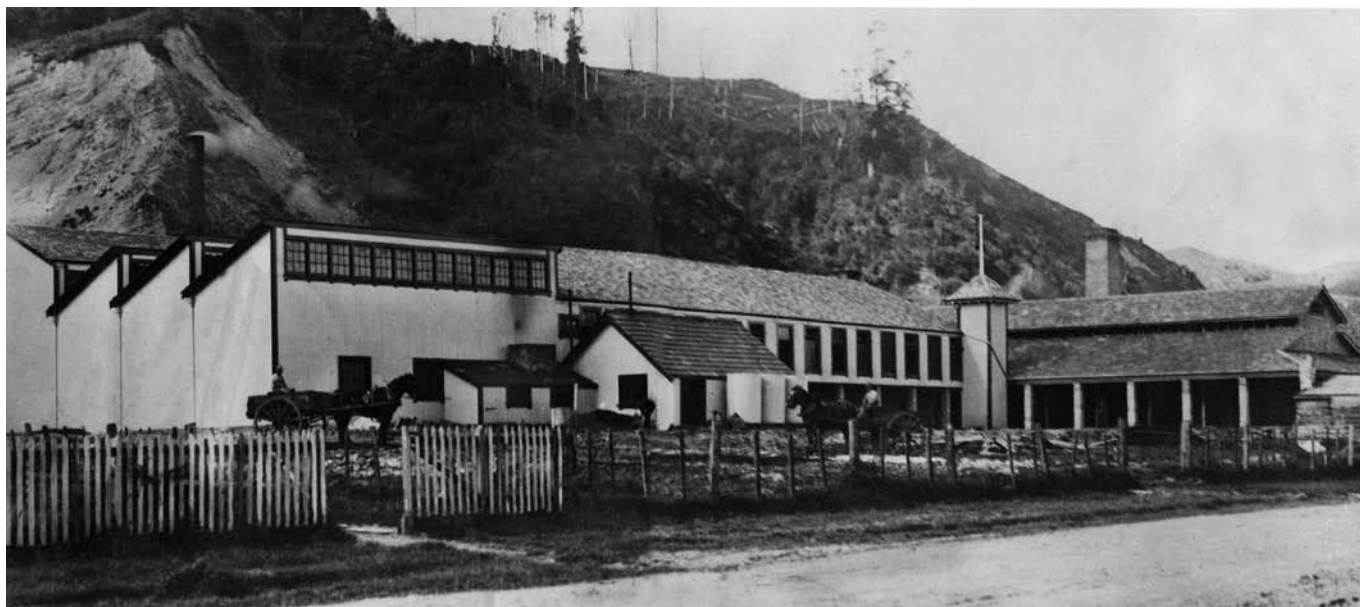
“His life work was to defeat the oppressors and conquerors of his people and to help them throw off the yoke and to occupy the land of their forefathers who had been driven back, and to make an honourable peace which has not been broken to the present time. He was a man who in those days of barbarism must have been to his people their ideal hero.

“I have written elsewhere how he accomplished this and how in the end he was acclaimed as *Tau maru nui*, a name he annexed as now being chief of a district through conquest, and how when his enemies tried later to defeat him, he drove them into their own country and made a treaty of peace, and the making of a boundary which is the boundary between the two tribes today.”



According to stories passed down to local identity Mere Bell by her grandmother, Okeroa Te Turi (wife of Te Huia Pikikotuku), the area originally known as Taumarunui was the flat area below Te Peka (shown above) which stretched downstream from the present road bridge to the point opposite Cherry Grove and before the Ongarue River junction. Mrs Bell was also told that the Maori chief, Maru the Great, was killed in battle on the big rock that used to sit in the last long rapid in the Ongarue River about 100 yards above the junction (centre foreground). This is basically the reason why the river flat above this rapid was known to the Maori as “Taumarunui”.

- photo by Ron Cooke, Taumarunui (ref: RLC 115028a).



Winstone's Roofing Tile Works Ltd rebuilt after the disastrous fire in 1922. An earlier fire, in October 1919, forced the previous company into liquidation but the directors did not lose faith and re-formed. - photo courtesy Winstone collection, Auckland (ref C&S 2053).

Railway attracted brickworks

Rumours were circulating Taumarunui as early as September 1906 that a brickworks was to be established in Taumarunui. About five months later the intentions of "an experienced brickmaker" was reported in the local newspaper of starting an industry of making cement bricks. This initiative seemed to have fizzled out and it was not until JAMES O'REILLY arrived that one of the town's oldest industries was born . . .

During the early years of the 20th century, brick and pipeworks became widespread throughout New Zealand and small towns like Taumarunui were experiencing problems with attracting resident bricklayers.

Finally, in October 1908, James O'Reilly announced in the *Taumarunui Press* that he had commenced business as a bricklayer.

Other bricklayers also arrived into the district and set up in business making patent pumice bricks or cement bricks or a mixture of both but it was eventually the three O'Reilly brothers, James (Jim), Frank and John (Jack) who went into the production of dry pressed bricks and roofing tiles.

KEY LOCATION

Despite the relative isolation of Taumarunui, the O'Reilly choice of site had much to commend it at the time. The Main Trunk Railway had been completed only the year previously and Taumarunui was a key station. It was also the junction giving access to Taranaki.

Furthermore, it was at the navigable limit of the Whanganui River, still at that time an artery of transport between the port town of Wanganui and the farms and settlements upriver in the North Island hinterland.

The O'Reilly brothers were satisfied
10 ROLL BACK THE YEARS

that the local Taumarunui shale would be excellent raw material for roofing tiles and bricks and that they would have available the two vital sources of transport, rail and river, to convey their products to the principal markets.

RETARDING EFFECT

But their venture soon ran into bad times with the 1st World War being declared and the retarding effect on normal building operations within New Zealand soon became apparent. There were also labour supply difficulties.

Despite these problems the O'Reilly brothers continued with their enterprise. The end of the war certainly brought a rejuvenated market for their output, but now, at the same time, they were faced with increased competition from imported tiles.

Meanwhile, Winstone Ltd directors had been giving consideration to the manufacture of roofing tiles from New Zealand clay. They were satisfied that, if they could produce a suitable product, with the merchandising system which the company had built up they would be able to compete with importations.

AID DECISION IN 1915

Thus there came about discussions between Winstone and the O'Reilly brothers company, resulting in a Winstone decision

in 1915 to aid the Taumarunui project.

The plan to make good quality roofing tiles at a competitive price seemed doomed to failure, for in October 1919 a fire so seriously damaged the Taumarunui works that the company went into liquidation.

However, the Winstone directorate did not lose faith and the liquidated company was re-formed under the title of Winstone's Roofing Tile Works Ltd.

DISASTROUS FIRE

Then came another blow, this time in 1922, and again in the form of a disastrous fire. This set-back, coming on top of a realisation that the type of tiles being made in Taumarunui was too expensive compared with imported roofing tiles, convinced the directors of a need for major alterations to both the products and the production methods.

They decided on a wide scale rebuilding of the works incorporating the most up to date equipment for the production of Marseilles tiles, with bricks as the "work-horse" standby.

PROUD OF OUTPUT

These new works went into operation in 1924 and it was not long before the company had reason to be proud of its output. But there was continued heavy opposition from imported tiles, and it was not until 1926 that the new works, with its

modernised equipment and a new type of product, returned a profit.

At last the Taumarunui works seemed to be on a sure footing. Then, like so many other New Zealand businesses, it felt the first whiff of the world economic recession in 1928. In 1932 the drastic falling-off in building throughout the country brought about a close-down of the works.

PRODUCTION RESUMED

Two years later the general economic situation had brightened sufficiently for production to be resumed. This two year closedown necessitated a major overhaul of equipment and thus it was not until 1935 that the works were in a position to meet the demand for its products.

Despite the many improvements which had been made to both plant and production methods at Taumarunui, it became apparent after the 2nd World War that these works could no longer meet the demand for tiles.

TWO POSSIBLE ANSWERS

There were two possible answers—further

SKILLED STAFF

Many people were associated with the brickworks in Taumarunui during the years they were in business.

After the factory was erected by Jim, Frank, and Jack O'Reilly and when George Winstone took over in 1915, the factory was managed for some years by Frank O'Reilly. From about 1920 to 1922 the manager was Mr W Chote.

About this time the factory was rebuilt and Mr E (Edward) Edwards took over management, Joe Miles being made works foreman.

In 1925 Charles Hillier was transferred from Auckland as accountant and he became manager in 1934, with Tom Harrison as factory foreman. When the latter retired he was replaced by Ron Bradley.

In 1947, G H E (George) Collins became manager with Vern Fittall as assistant and "Ocker" Jarvis as factory foreman.

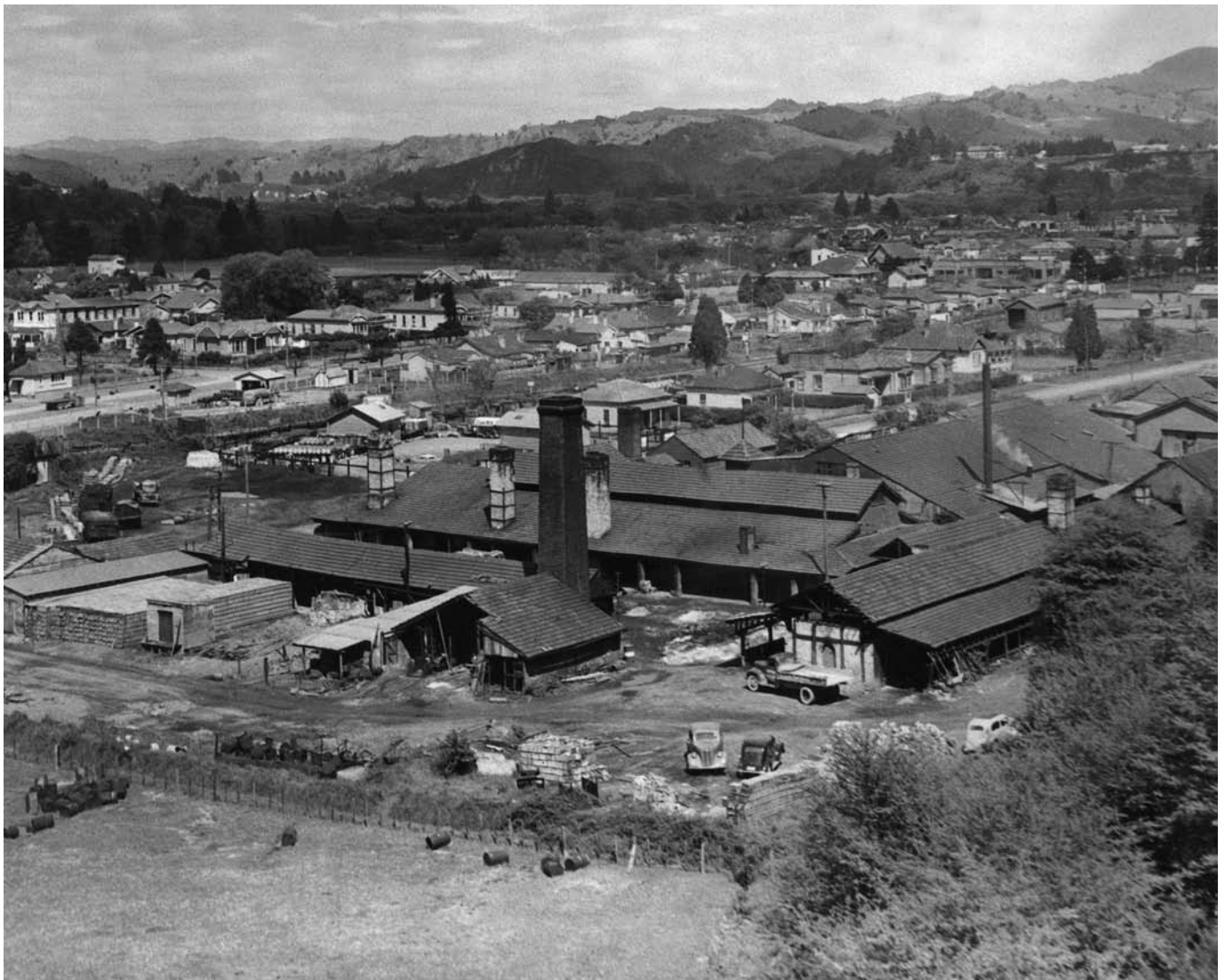
extensive remodelling at Taumarunui or the establishment of a second works elsewhere.

After consideration the company chose the latter course, and a new factory was constructed in 1948 near the clay deposits just inland of the beach resort of Plimmerton about 20 miles north of Wellington. The plan was that Taumarunui should supply the northern part of the North Island while Plimmerton met the needs of the southern portion.

PERMANENTLY CLOSED

The Taumarunui plant remained in production until 1959, when it was permanently closed down—because of the age of the plant and the high cost of transporting the finished product to the principal regions of population growth.

Extracts from "THE FIRST CENTURY", a Winstone publication; and the Taumarunui Primary & District High School 50th Jubilee Booklet of 1958.



YESTERYEAR: The "Brickworks" just prior to closing down in 1959. The long running industry was located on Bell Road and immediately below its source of raw material which was obtained from the hills behind. The Taumarunui Primary School can be seen left background and it was an on-going interruption to learning every time an explosive charge was set off and on rare occasions small pieces of debris would land in the playground.

- photo courtesy Winstone collection, Auckland (ref: C&S 2058).

CAN YOU HELP?

Photo No 1



This pioneering scene has everything. It could be anywhere in the King Country with its cut-over farms, basic dwellings, horse-drawn logging tram, picket fences and two wheel cart. Readers are invited to write and tell us where this photo was taken and if possible the names of the people featured.

- photo courtesy Colin Seccombe, Taumarunui (ref: C&S 2179).



- photo courtesy Taumarunui Historical Society collection (ref: C&S 1398).

Used for variety of jobs

Taumarunui historian CECIL DAVIES, and colourful author of the popular local newspaper series Pioneering Memories, writes about the unusual loads carried by the early riverboats . . .

Hatrick's river steamers were often used for a variety of jobs apart from transporting cargo and passengers up and down river. They were used also for ferrying sheep and cattle across the Ongarue River before the first road bridge was erected in 1911.

The pictures on this page show the riverboat *Ongarue* taking sheep across the river from Hatrick's boat landing, a short distance downstream from the present bridge that spans the river at the bottom of Hospital Hill.

These sheep had been brought up by rail from outside districts and were, after crossing the river, driven over bush tracks to the farms of early settlers in Otunui and Aukopae.

When the *Ongarue* was being used to ferry sheep or cattle across the river a false deck was built with frames to form a yard around the sides, many thousands of sheep and cattle being transported thus in a completely satisfactory manner.

Before the river road was formed between Wanganui and Pipiriki the boats were the only means of shifting stock, and it was quite usual to see a pen of sheep or cattle on board the large steamers with many passengers and tons of cargo.

When there was a full load of stock to be taken, a special boat would be fitted up with cattle and sheep pens and even after the road reached Pipiriki stock had to be taken across the river. Above Pipiriki where there are no roads, stock was still being carried by boats until the 1970s, and in some cases are still being driven though bush tracks to the nearest road and then to Raetihi.

Some years after the river service was finished on the Taumarunui end of the

river, the boats still maintained a service for the farms above Pipiriki as far as Tangahoe, some 22 miles above Pipiriki.

About 1940 the river's worst tragedy occurred when the *Ohura*, a vessel of over 100 feet long, and with twin screws, was bringing a load of 44 bullocks and 250 sheep down from Tangahoe.

She was in the charge of Captain Andy Anderson and all was well until she arrived at Ngaporo Rapid, which is the worst on the river. This rapid is in three stages and is like the letter Z in reverse. The first, or top, stage is very steep and empties into a very deep whirlpool between the beach and the cliff, then turns very sharply to the left and down the second stage of swift but smooth

water and then down the third stage of the rapid which is smooth, but very steep, dropping 11 feet in 100 feet.

The *Ohura*, after taking the first stage and entering the whirlpool, listed sharply to starboard and the load of stock slipped to the side, and the vessel turned turtle—three of the crew of five were drowned.

Captain Anderson and his adopted son managed to swim ashore and as it was getting dark they had to put in a very miserable night on a sandy shelf under the cliff. As soon as it was daylight they climbed up the cliff and walked through the bush toward Pipiriki for some miles, until they procured a small boat and soon reached Pipiriki.

A relief boat left for the scene of the wreck and I think the bodies of the drowned men were later found. Some of the cattle and sheep were found alive on the banks of the river, though many were trapped under the vessel and drowned.

The *Ohura* was salvaged and repaired and ran for some years afterwards.



- photo courtesy Gordon Old collection (ref: C&S 1399).



IN RETROSPECT: Hakiaha Street, Taumarunui—in 1914 and 1980. The views are from the Taumarunui Library looking across to the entrance to Manu aute Street. The date of the old photo is not known exactly, being either late 1914 or early 1915. According to Mrs Eileen Dempsey the man pictured with the horse and cart is her father, Stephen McCarthy, the local milkman. Only the first two buildings have stood the test of time—although the top floor of Wallace & Co has since been remodelled, the general storekeeper built the magnificent structure pictured above in 1912 to modernise their basic single-storey shop of 1907. The next building, of G Sang & Co, has very little change from its original appearance was also built in 1912. And whereas our pioneers had to put up with dirt roads, our particular cross seems to be power poles and power lines.

- top photo courtesy Dempsey collection, Taumarunui (ref: C&S 1084). Bottom photo by Ron Cooke, Taumarunui (ref: RLC 675/12).



Jack Allen: King Country Legend

The name Jack Allen is firmly engraved in the history of Taumarunui district. So much so that few pioneers have achieved the notoriety that surrounds this man . . .

There are conflicting stories about Jack Allen, and such was his mana that you could tell which particular suburb of Taumarunui a person was from by asking them which railway station Jack Allen supposedly died in.

Those from the north will say Taringamotu; those from the south, Manunui; but we have it verified that he died in hospital, after being found in a sorry state near the Taumarunui Railway Station.

A railway employee of the day, Cliff Gulbransen, noticed Jack Allen assuming a customary pose under a tree in the area between the men's public toilets and the taxi stand. Jack was known to sleep outside, without cover, even in heavy frosts, and wander around barefooted, without a coat,

but on this occasion Mr Gulbransen could see he did not look too well.

Fellow railway employee, Bill Wilson, a St John man, agreed with Mr Gulbransen's diagnosis and between the pair of them they carried Jack Allen into the general waiting room of the old station. An ambulance was called and Jack Allen began what he told Mr Wilson was "Jack Allen's last ride".

Rumour has it that one of the first things done to him in hospital was that he was given a bath. A variety of references can be found to Jack's apparent disregard for personal hygiene and it is said he felt that if he was washed, he would die. Whatever the truth of the matter, the Taumarunui District Court has in its births, deaths and marriages register an entry which states: "Jack Allen, Labourer. Died 19/4/37. Aged

86, in the Taumarunui Public Hospital".

Jack Allen was born in Victoria, Australia, where he was reared by his farming parents. He came to New Zealand about 1886.

Most recollections of Jack Allen are of him as an elderly man and little is known about his early life, except that he was fond of horses and was an excellent shot.

In regard to the former he had four greys, named Dick Seddon, Joey Ward, Bob Semple and Frank Langstone.

In regard to the latter, he was a consistent performer in shooting championships, one year, at Stratford, bagging 13 of the 14 birds, while another year won the national championships after having a little trouble with the law.

It seemed Jack had arrived in Wellington by train for the championships and was walking down the street in his bare feet, with his gun over his shoulder. The police picked him up because they thought he was a vagrant, but found he had a sock tied on to his belt in which he had £136. He was released just in time to compete.

Jack was not necessarily a modest man. He believed firmly in his capabilities and once drove a flock of geese from Melbourne to Sydney for a wager. He is also supposed to have driven a flock of turkeys from Ohura to Manunui. When night came, he perched the birds on a fence and went to sleep on a sack nearby.

Jack also boasted he would climb Mt Egmont, barefooted, within a given time, as an octogenarian, and accomplished this feat.

There is also a story behind his permanent sockless and coatless state. The story goes that Jack's wife ran off with another man, and he swore he would not wear an overcoat or sox again until he found his wife, and meted out justice to her lover. It appears his search was fruitless.

Jack Allen made his living from the bush, utilising his expertise with firearms in shooting rabbits, selling them, and at one stage, fish.

Such was his mana that when the *Auckland Weekly News* published an article about Jack Allen in the early 1960s it was not long before that publication's mailbag began to fill with letters and photos, from men and women who had admired him for his gentle independence, his brilliance as a marksman and horseman, and his striking appearance.

The many photos published showed Jack in "characteristic pose".

Jack Allen was truly a King Country legend.

ROLL BACK THE YEARS 15



Jack Allen willingly poses for Henry McHattie at the Taringamutu Totara Sawmills during the 1930s.

- photo courtesy McHattie collection (ref: C&S 193).