

An office fit for a young auctioneer

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The year is 1906 and it is easy to imagine Robert Nolan standing inside a first floor window of his new office and looking down at the High St/Regent St intersection watching the people, the horses and gigs and the new motor cars moving in front of him.

Just think of him, thumbs inside the arm holes of his waistcoat, recalling that in 1880 he had arrived in Hawera with only the skills he had learned from his father in Auckland - how to buy and sell property and livestock, how to manage a store and encourage clients.

Now here he was, one of the more successful businessmen in Hawera standing inside an office that embodied Edwardian prosperity and its facade the most imposing in Hawera's High St.

His wife, Octavia, and family were at their comfortable home in Tawhiti, now widely called Nolantown after Robert, the suburb's major landowner.

Nolan came to Hawera in 1880

from his home in Auckland at the age of 25 and immediately joined in the activities of the infant settlement; he set up his business of auctioneering, joined the Hawera Rifle Volunteers and married Octavia, daughter of Major Durie, a leading citizen of Wanganui.

He was soon joined by his brother-in-law Arthur Tonks and together they had six regular livestock and farm machinery auctions across South Taranaki each month. Soon they were importing and selling feed grains and farmers' requirements from their High St premises as well as arranging the buying and selling of farm and urban properties.

The booming Waimate Plains produced good incomes for Nolan Tonks and Co as well as their competitors.

Their greatest stock auction in Hawera was held on February 18, 1898 at their yards on South Rd (opposite the modern Hawera Fire Station). They had advertised in newspapers throughout the lower North Island and farmers of properties as far away as the



Robert Nolan's High St base in Hawera now houses a gelatto shop.

PHOTO:

CATHERINE GROENESTEIN/
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Hawke's Bay sent ewes and lambs to be offered for sale.

The sheep that arrived by road and railway were mainly a strong colonial breed descended from lincolns and merinos that had proven to produce good fleeces while taking care of themselves.

The day was showery and the temperatures warm. The auctioneers worked hard to sell the 35,000 sheep in the six acres of pens.

Good prices were made and the sheep went off under the control of drovers and their dogs.

The next day Nolan and Tonks sold 450 pedigree lincoln rams and 50 romneys at the Horse Bazaar and good prices were gained with the top price of five and a half guineas being paid to GT Bayly of Mokoia.

Both Robert Nolan and his

brother-in-law Arthur Tonks enjoyed horse racing and a photograph of 1898 shows them sitting amongst the officials of the Hawera Racing Club. RH Nolan, the president, is in the middle wearing a panama hat and nursing a walking stick.

Robert Nolan was president of many of the racing clubs across South Taranaki and he was the secretary of the popular Egmont Hunt Club.

The two partners sold their very successful business to NZ Loan and Mercantile Agency Co in 1907 but continued for a short time as auctioneers in the district.

However while Robert and Octavia were visiting England in 1914 war with Germany broke out so they stayed on in London to found and run the NZ Soldiers' Club.

They came back to New Zealand in 1920 to live in Parnell, Auckland. Robert was awarded the CBE in 1918 and elevated to KBE shortly before his death in 1923.

Though the KBE was never invested, Octavia was raised to the rank and style of a knight's widow.