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NEW POST OFFICE SITE

CONFIRMATION OF SALE

PURCHASE BY THE DEPARTMENT.

HISTORIC HOUSE ON THE SECTION.

TOWN'S EARLIER DAYS RECALLED.

The reported purchase of a new site for the New Plymouth post office recorded in the Taranaki Daily News yesterday was confirmed in advice received by the chief postmaster at New Plymouth, Mr. R. G. May, yesterday morning. The site is 2 roods 11 perches in area, situated at the intersection of Currie and Gill Streets, and is at present chiefly occupied by the old warehouse of Archibald Clark and Sons and the former residence of Miss Lydia Shaw. The purchase price was £10,000, the vendors being the Shaw estate.

Many of the older residents of New Plymouth will no doubt feel keen regret at one fact associated with the prospective change of the post office to its new site—it will be necessary to remove the oldest house in the town, a house full of pleasant memories for many persons scattered through the Dominion.

Long screened from the public gaze by the high wooden warehouse on the corner of Gill and Currie Streets, the Shaw homestead is probably unknown to most members of the younger generations. Miss Lydia E. Shaw, who occupied the cottage until her death at the age of 93 on December 31, 1927, was a child of seven when she arrived aboard the Amelia Thompson, the second ship to bring settlers, on September 3, 1841. New Plymouth was then a handful of huts and whares, and a Maori pa or so on the fringe of the great forest. All the privations of the pioneers were known to Mr. and Mrs. J. T. Shaw and their family when, after a voyage of five months on a ship of not more than several hundred tons register they moved into a raupo whare at Devonport, near the site of the Terminus Hotel. Miss Shaw's brother James, after whom James Lane is named, preceded the family in the William Bryan, and he had made what few preparations he could for the reception of the others.

HOUSE IMPORTED BY REGINA.

It was in a following ship, the Regina, that Mr. Shaw senr. imported the house that is about to be demolished. It was sent out from England in sections and erected in lower Currie Street on a rise then overlooking the sea. The place was added to many times in the years preceding Miss Shaw's death, but she herself always used the original rooms, though she had them altered and brought up-to-date with the changes that fashion and invention decreed. One of those huge open fireplaces tucked under a giant chimney, so popular in the last century, was transformed into a pigmy grate, and the electric light followed the candle.

Mr. J. T. Shaw, the original owner of the house, was associated with timber interests at New Plymouth and was a ship's architect. After his arrival he designed several small sailing craft, but farming was his main pursuit. Miss Lydia Shaw became a teacher, first in a small school conducted in the meeting-house of the Kawau pa on a hill, since levelled, near the lower end of Currie Street. This school, which was subsidised by the Provincial Government, was moved in 1878 to the sandhills behind the Foresters' Hall in Gill Street, and was taken over by the Colonial Government under the Education Act of that year. Miss Shaw thus became the first Government female teacher in Taranaki. In 1884 the school was closed, and of several positions offered her Miss Shaw choose that of headmistress of the new school on the South Road, the genesis of the present West End school.

Miss Shaw retired in 1900, but continued to take a very lively interest in her former pupils. Her home in Currie Street therefore became not only the headquarters for members of her family, who looked upon her as the head of the clan, but also a rendezvous for many friends, old and young, who regarded her with affection.

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