

SPEECH FOR the New Zealand Founders Society Inc.

Commemorative Service at the walkway memorial plaque on Sunday 27 March at 2.30pm.

Maori mihi.

Introduce self, brief bio and current Harbourmaster employment.

A privilege to speak here today the 181st anniversary of the landing of the first settlers from the WILLIAM BRYAN on 30 March 1841, a year after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. Thank you for the invitation.

I've been asked to speak on how Port Taranaki has been significant since the time of the early settlers (1850's on). There was of course no port here at the time. I'll also touch a little on how sea travel has evolved since. Not a great history buff but I have to say researching the topic here today has been quite a fascinating exercise and certainly put some of the work that I do at the port today in a bit more perspective.

New Plymouth's settler story is one of colonisation based on the model created by Mr Edward Gibbon WAKEFIELD who created the New Zealand Company purchased large tracts of land from the Maori people and established a first settlement in te Whanganui a tara, Wellington. The British government at the time had no appetite for another colony but eventually had to as the new settlement gained momentum.

Very soon after after the signing of the treaty of Waitangi, the New Plymouth Company was formed as an offshoot of the NZ Company with capital of 150000 pounds and lots of civil support. The company's object was to found a 'West of England' settlement in NZ and it purchased land from the NZ Company, which in turn had considered it had purchased from the Maori people of the area.

So in August 1840, the New Plymouth Company sent its Chief Surveyor Mr F A CARRINGTON (Well remembered and recalled in New Plymouths early history) and staff of 60 to choose a site for the 'West of England' settlement.

Carrington first considered Queen Charlotte Sound and Waitara but decided on the present site mainly because of the availability of rich arable land. He had at first favoured Waitara because of the river entrance to the sea but rejected it because a harbour there would be limited by the river bar crossing.

Carrington chose for the town "*a lovely tract of land between streams about two miles from the Sugar Loaves*". He recognised that the lack of a harbour would be limiting, as sea captains would have to anchor in an open roadstead exposed to some wild weather from time to time and in poor holding ground. But in Carrington's view the quality of the land more than made up for this deficiency. He considered that small harbours "*could easily be made and with trifling expense near the town*" namely at the mouth of the Huatoki River. A little later, he surveyed the Sugar Loaves area and considered that a harbour could be formed there "*safe and accessible at all times and seasons*". These assessments were based on the requirements of sailing ships of the time by which a port's safety and sustainability were judged. Carrington also made these assessments without experiencing a winter on the west coast of New Zealand.

Nevertheless his assessment for a modest harbour in town for small craft and a deep sea port at Moturoa was well received by the New Plymouth Company and that served to put the wisdom of the area for New Plymouth's settlement beyond all doubt. We should note though that while Carrington's judgement and vision have been validated by history, it took many years of determined leadership, dedication, inspiration and hard work for it to be realised.

The earliest WILLIAM BRYAN settlers arrived only a few weeks after Carrington completed his survey of a site for a harbour. The New Plymouth settlement on the extremity of the west coast was easily one of the more remote and difficult ones at the time. It was neither an attractive nor a safe place for ships to call. Add to that there were obviously and no roads to speak of other than the beach. No ship called for three months after the WILLIAM BRYAN settlers landed and after four months they were running out of food. Fortunately that situation was resolved by subsequent intermittent ship visits and the arrival of more settlers.

Shipping facilities became a matter of priority very quickly for the early settlers, lest the settlement fail. As well as urgent representation to the Dominion government, the building of a whaleboat, cutter and surf boat made landing cargo easier and the settlement began to prosper despite difficult shipping arrangements and the reputation of the roadstead as dangerous to mariners.

Against this situation at the time, the maritime world was undergoing a transformation with the coming of steam powered technology. This advance was quickly grasped in the New Zealand and from as early as 1851 steam ships gradually became more common on the coast. A regular monthly steam boat service to New Plymouth was established in 1860, weekly by 1862. A steam boat was not so dependent on wind, sea and tide for its progress compared to a sailing ship, it could be navigated easier and it required less crew. Together with large surf boats dragged by horses, and sheds on Ngamotu Beach, shipping arrangements were improving while the mariners fear of the roadstead remained.

The need for a port or harbour never went away though rivalry for a port between the Waitara River and the New Plymouth roadstead persisted from 1850s and this continued for some time.

As well as technology advances, civil structures for governance and civil administration of the province were devised by the government of the day and significantly the Taranaki Provincial Council was established in 1853. Since inception, the Provincial Council championed the establishment of a harbour for the settlement. The suggestion of a harbour at the Sugar Loaves was eventually rejected, clearly with the help of the redoubtable Mr Carrington, now a member of the House of Representatives. Central government money was accordingly made available for another survey and costs for a harbour at the mouth of the Huatoki River. The port was of course eventually established starting in its current location, can be seen as something of a compromise between the Huatoki River and Sugar Loaf islands options.

Another significant milestone came in 1874 when the Government passed an Act for the establishment of the New Plymouth Harbour Board, which was to be responsible for the establishment of a harbour and funded by one quarter of the land fund for the province, a powerful body indeed. Thus began the real history of Port Taranaki, 35 years after the first settlers arrived.

1875 to 1881 were difficult years as the new board grappled with the cost and technicalities of establishing a rubble harbour mole near the current main breakwater. Labour was short, rock from Paritutu proved unsuitable and concrete was expensive but work proceeded nevertheless and Mr Carrington laid the foundation stone for the breakwater on February 7 1881. Moturoa wharf was begun shortly after as the breakwater alone was not suitable for

berthing ships. Wildly expensive but managed through loans and some government grants, as well as local rates.

Steam and some sailing ships visited the port with increasing regularity from 1882. It was quickly found that dredging was essential to deal with the drift of sand into the harbour. A railway line was established to the port in 1886 but this would have serious repercussions later as it tended to crowd out the movement of other import and export produce. Direct shipments of cattle to Sydney Australia began in May 1886 and this became a key export. Later followed by frozen and chilled primary produce with the introduction of refrigerated cargo.

So that's the port in a nutshell from its inception. It grew a lot from this early period with the acquisition of a harbour dredge PARITUTU in 1910, gradual extensions of the main breakwater, the establishment of Newton King wharf in 1923 construction of Blyde wharf in 1956 and construction of the Lee breakwater in the 1970s.

Looking back There are several features of its history which made it the port the successful operation it is today successful.

- I think the first of these is the vision, drive and determination of the original surveyor of the land and port area, Mr F A Carrington who was able to see his vision realised over the course of his lifetime. His vision was not lost on the early settlers who well understood the requirement for a harbour and port. It's people like this who were key to New Zealand's early success as a dominion and later a sovereign state.
- There was quick, eager and clever responses to technology as it developed: steam powered ships, railways, refrigeration, and electric cranes from 1901. Enablers to infrastructure. The return on investment

from these technologies is difficult to quantify but each brought about its own transformation.

- Thirdly, from the establishment of the harbour board there ample evidence of strong leadership and governance in its membership which saw Carrington's vision through. There were a good few who served for decades on the harbour board, Newton King, Mr H E BLYDE are examples. So the service and dedication of community leaders has been a key feature of the port's development through thick and thin, good times and bad times – there were plenty of them. No one gave up.

So thanks to these features of its history, Taranaki now has a significant item of national infrastructure in its region. The cargoes have changed – agricultural produce has largely been replaced by petrochemical and log exports which currently dominate but something like 6% of the country's GDP passes through the port on a yearly basis. It's an important employer of around 120 people. The harbour has become a major recreational area for the boating and swimming public and it grows yearly.

One of Port Taranaki Limited's values is to acknowledge and a pioneering spirit as one of its core values. Certainly the history of the port is a reflection of just that. I think it's a fine thing that this is not forgotten and remains an important legacy for the port.

We promise to foster, promote and guide

our future generations,

to maintain that hardy will and spirit of enterprise,

responsibility, work, and faith

so abundantly possessed by our Founders.

**This has been such an important factor in the life and progress
of New Zealand.**

