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**WRECK REMEMBERED:** Pihama Cemetery Board member Ian Stevenson with the plaque to mark the centennial of the wreck of the Lizzie Bell. In the background is the ship's anchor. Photo: JUDITH LACY

# Ceremony marks Oeo shipwreck

By JUDITH LACY

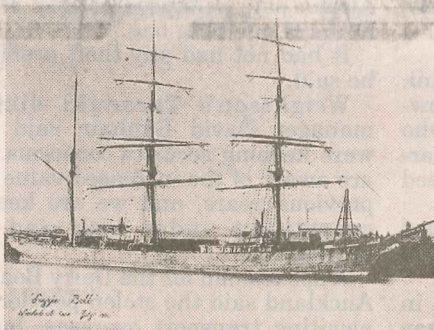
ONE HUNDRED years ago, 12 men died at Oeo, coastal Taranaki, after their sailing ship went horribly off course.

A plaque will be unveiled at the Pihama Cemetery today to mark the centennial of the disaster, with a history of the ship's journey prior to its wrecking.

Organiser and Pihama Cemetery Board member Ian Stevenson said the iron barque with 18 crew left Wellington on July 24, 1901, on its way to Newcastle, Australia.

By the end of the day it had run on to the Wharanaki Reef, off the Oeo coast.

"How they got where they were, one will never know. They were completely off course," he said.



**HISTORIC WRECK:** The Lizzie Bell.

The sailors took to their lifeboat, but it overturned twice, each time with the loss of crew.

The six survivors were helped by local farming families. One man was

saved by being hung out over a fire — the smoke causing him to cough up the water on his lungs, Mr Stevenson said.

In total, 12 men, mostly from Britain, drowned or died from exposure, with their bodies laid out on the billiard table at the old Oeo Hotel.

Marble headstones and a cenotaph mark where eight of the dead are buried at the Pihama Cemetery, although Mr Stevenson suspects the other four are in an unmarked grave.

Following a magisterial finding that the wrecking was caused by negligent navigation, the Lizzie Bell's captain, John Rees, had his licence suspended for 12 months and he was fined £25.

The ship's boiler, used to drive a loading crane, can still be seen in the sea at low tide and the anchor forms part of the memorial at the Pihama Cemetery.