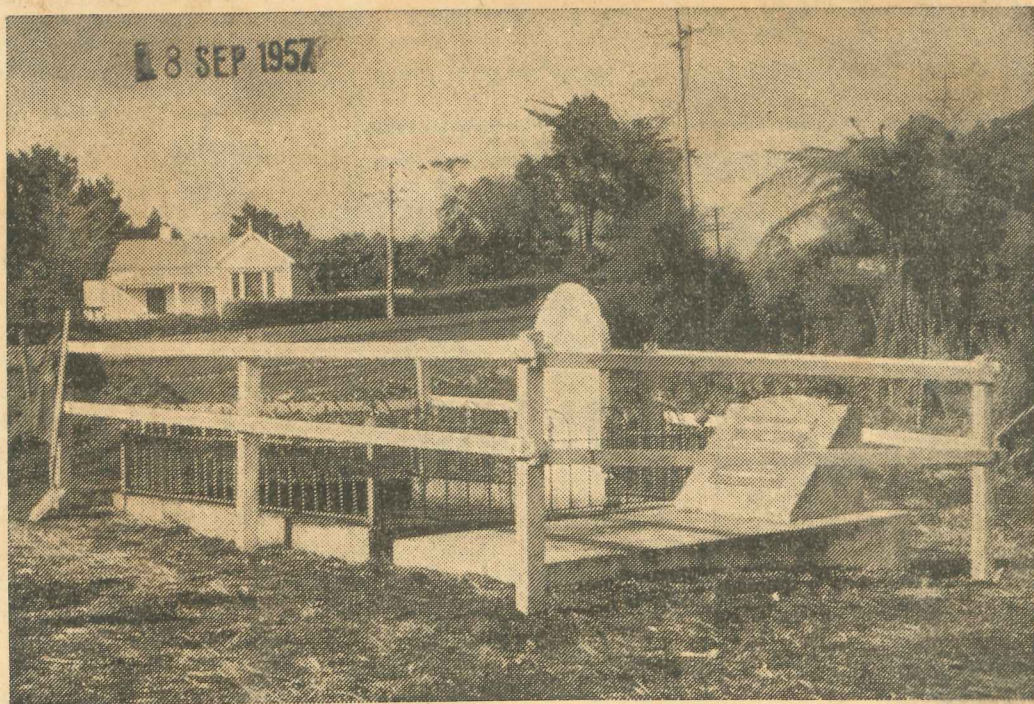


PIONEERS' GRAVES AT OMATA



THESE GRAVES of three Taranaki pioneers, one of whom was killed during the Maori wars, have been cleared of obscuring trees during reconstruction work on the main highway at Omata.

The graves are just outside the Omata School grounds and about 15 feet from the highway.

Mr. W. Sanger, chairman of the Omata School Committee, said today that the graves had never been lost or buried in undergrowth but had been partly hidden by trees. During the highway reconstruction opportunity had been taken to have the area cleared by a bulldozer. It would be sown in grass and cared for by pupils of the school.

Many years ago there had been a Methodist Church next to the graves, said Mr. Sanger. The building had since been sold to a farmer and removed.

The Government headstone on the grave of John Hurford, an Omata farmer and old settler, gives the date of his death as September 2, 1860, but contemporary records show that he was killed by marauding Maoris on August 2, 1860. Killed with him was Gunner Gaffney, an artilleryman serving with an armed detachment stationed at Waireka.

Hurford left the stockade to call at the army camp for three artillery men who were to accompany him as far as his farm in the bush. The party ran the gauntlet of several volleys fired by enemy Maoris,

the party separated and two of the servicemen escaped to make their way through the bush to their camp. Gunner Gaffney's body was mutilated by tomahawks, but Hurford had no tomahawk wounds.

The artilleryman was buried in the Roman Catholic cemetery and John Hurford, according to the Taranaki Herald of the time, was buried in the Independent burial ground at Omata on August 5.

The headstone on the other grave carries the inscription: "William Holloway, died January 1855, aged 50," and, "Frances Hart, his wife, aged 72." Near the bottom is added: "Arrived in New Plymouth on the Barque Blenheim, November 19, 1842."

FORGOTTEN GRAVES

The uncovering of three old graves at Omata during reconstruction work on the main highway, as reported in yesterday's Herald, could precede an inquiry into the attention given to the older, disused cemeteries, large and small, spread throughout Taranaki. Financial and labour problems sometimes make supervision of these old plots difficult, but occasionally the fault of neglect lies in the fact that they have been forgotten.

Yet there is an untidiness about a forgotten cemetery which offends the mind as well as the eye. Weeds and other growth shading the headstones advertise how little regard is held for these places where the pioneers found their last earthly refuge, which is a pity, for history as well as sentiment calls from the past.

The Omata graves were not lost, or buried by undergrowth, but they were screened by trees, so that their unveiling to public scrutiny involved some voluntary labour in tidying-up the area. The particularly pleasing aspect, however, is the undertaking by pupils of the Omata School to care for the plot after it has been sown in grass. Possibly other schools in a history-conscious province could be encouraged to a similar endeavour.

20 Sept 1957