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NEW PLYMOUTH, FRIDAY, MARCH 4, 1983

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Firemen from four Taranaki brigades fight to prevent the blaze at Bennett and Sutton Ltd's New Plymouth store from spreading to other inner city buildings. The photograph was taken from Brougham St by Taranaki Newspapers Ltd chief photographer Mr Merv Gaston shortly after 2am today.

# Building toppled after marathon fire fight



Bennett and Sutton Ltd manager Mr Alistair Brown, Inglewood, at the clean-up operation after fire destroyed the store at the corner of Brougham St and Powderham St, New Plymouth, early today.

The fire-ravaged shell of a two-storey New Plymouth building was demolished today so firemen could extinguish a blaze which had been burning for more than 11 hours.

The fire was reported at 1.20am by two police constables and flames were still flickering from the inside of the building early this afternoon.

The hardware store of Bennett and Sutton Ltd on the corner of Powderham St and Brougham St was one of the oldest wooden buildings still in commercial use in New Plymouth.

## 1890s

It was built some time between 1890 and 1900 for Sargood and Sons.

Taranaki Museum director Mr Ron Lambert said the loss of the building was unfortunate as it had been one of the last remaining examples of turn of the century architecture in New Plymouth.

Chief Fire Officer Michael Burke said the building had to be demolished because it was too dangerous for firemen to enter.

A. J. Cowley Ltd, New Plymouth, did the demolition.

The building was owned by Mr Frank Hocken, Bell

Block, and his wife in a family trust.

## Little

Mr Hocken told the Herald there was little to be saved from the ruins.

"We'll salvage what we can for the insurance company."

Mr Hocken said there was \$250,000 worth of stock in the building.

The stock included building and plumbing supplies, china, crystal, hardware and sporting goods.

## Danger

Because of the danger from the building, Brougham St between Devon St and Powderham St was closed, and traffic was restricted to one lane on Powderham St.

Sand was dumped on Brougham St to prevent hot timber from melting the tar as the walls were removed.

Mr Burke said the brigade was lucky there was no wind. There were initial fears the fire could spread to other buildings in the inner city block, but it was contained.

At the height of the blaze a total of eight appliances and 62 men from the New Plymouth, Waitara, Inglewood and Oakura brigades were fighting the fire. Another engine from Waitara was on standby at the city fire station.

Firemen had to use breathing apparatus because of the extensive smoke, which could be seen from many parts of New Plymouth.

## Too big

Six ordinary hoses and four hoses too big to be handled without machinery were used to fight the blaze, the cause of which is not known.

Firemen answered a call to the Taranaki Base Hos-

pital at 2.17am where the smell of smoke was reported. The brigade found the smoke was from the Bennett and Sutton building fire about 2km away.

## Damage in the millions

ADELAIDE, Today, (NZPA). — Rescue workers today continued to plough through debris left by yesterday's floods in South Australia as the Weather Bureau predicted more storms to come.

Police said they needed a respite from the torrential rains but the bureau warned early this morning there would be more showers and thunderstorms later this afternoon.

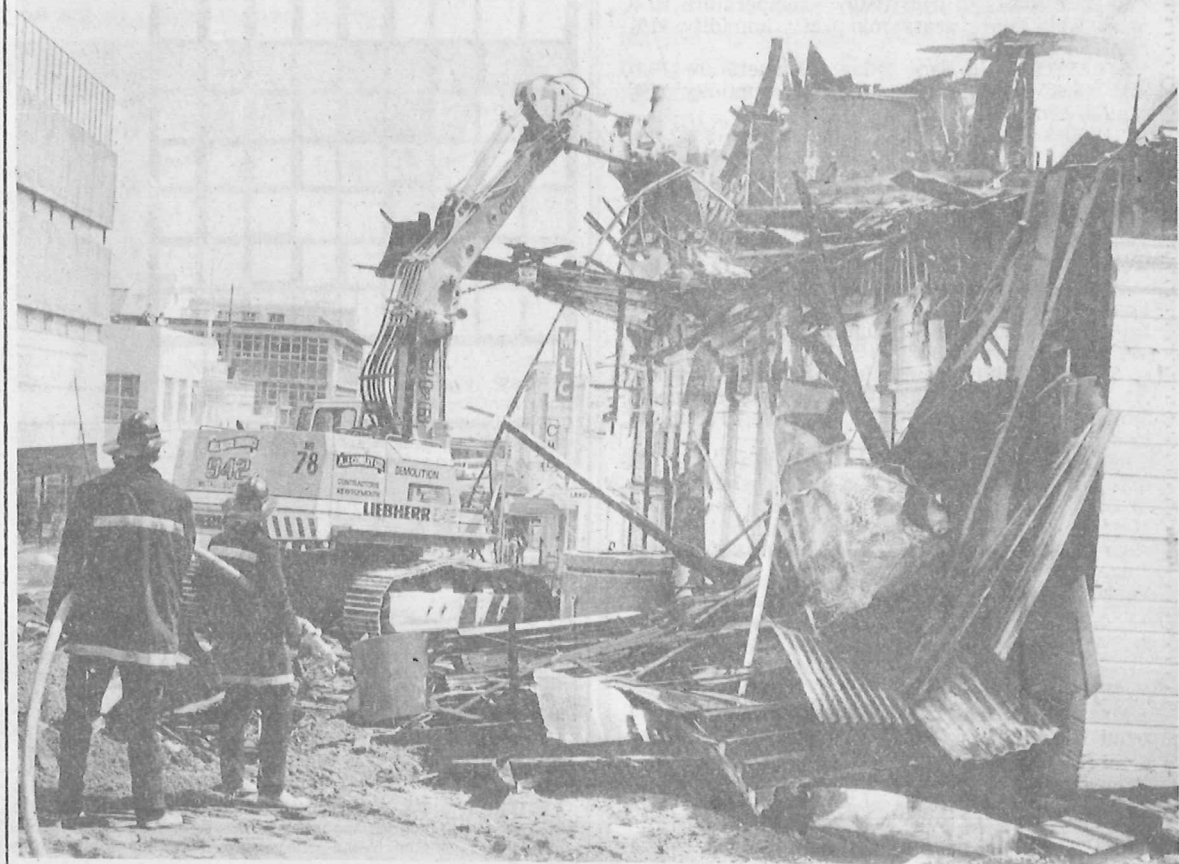
A police spokesman said water surged through McLaren Vale, 40km south of Adelaide, overnight but there were no reports of damage.

No serious injuries have been reported in the flooding.

Police said an early estimate of property damage in the Barossa Valley alone is \$NZ4.2 million but is expected to be several million dollars more when agricultural losses are added.



Demolition contractors (above) tear down the remains of the two-storey New Plymouth building early this afternoon to allow firemen access to the burning interior. Below: Firemen stand by with hoses as the Brougham St wall of Bennett and Sutton Ltd's premises is torn down.



## Scary wall saves neighbour

The two-storey brick wall of the Bennett and Sutton Ltd building was always regarded as a threat by the owner of the neighbouring business.

"I've always been scared of that wall," said Mr Ted Wood, of E. A. Wood and Co Real Estate in Brougham St. "But it has saved our building."

Mr Wood said it had prevented the fire which destroyed the Bennett and Sutton building from spreading to his own.

He had always thought of the wall, towering above his building, as an earthquake risk.

Wood's was one of several neighbouring businesses disrupted for

most of today because of the fire.

He said there was a risk of the damaged building collapsing on his premises so no-one was allowed inside. The power and telephone had also been disconnected, so carrying on business was impossible.

Mr Wood said several

people had approached his staff in the street to pay rents which the company collects from about 60 city houses.

"But we can't get into the office to give them receipts."

He said his son, Mr Russell Wood, entered the real estate office with a fireman about 6am

today and reported there was no damage from either fire or water.

Mr Wood praised firemen for saving his premises.

Other buildings in Brougham St, including a restaurant being renovated next door to the real estate agent, were also closed.