

Old building has interesting history

Keen interest is being taken in the demolition of the building, believed to be about 90 years old, near the corner of Devon and Currie Streets, New Plymouth, to make way for the new Australia and New Zealand bank premises.

The land on which the building stands had amongst its owners the late Archdeacon Henry Govett, who held the title jointly from 1894. Its last owners, before the bank purchased the land and building in 1956, were Messrs. W. A. Dean and R. T. Harris.

The age of the building is uncertain, but Mr. Wilfred Chong, of New Plymouth, was born in the upstairs portion 80 years ago next July. The building at that time and for some years before and after 1880, was leased by his father, Mr. Chew Chong, who established Taranaki's first dairy factory and who settled in New Plymouth in 1870.

FUNGUS TRADE

Mr. Wilfred Chong said today his father also owned a three-storey building which stood on the east side of the one now being demolished. It was pulled down many years ago. Mr. Chew Chong, who developed a large export trade in fungus, used the top storey for assembling and sorting the fungus.

The beach stone wall on the western side of the building is regarded as much older than the wooden portion. Mr. Hercules Moon, whose grandfather, Mr. Philip Moon, was a stonemason and who arrived in New Plymouth in 1842, believes that Mr. Philip Moon built the wall and also the walls of similar construction which formed the foundations of the old bank building on the corner which was demolished in 1956.

MANY CHANGES

Since Mr. Chew Chong occupied the premises there have been many changes of tenancies, but the popular name for the building was the "Cash Palace," so named by Mr. Harry Cottler when he opened a drapery business there early this century. Before that it had been used as a confectionery shop and was once Craigmile's drapery store.

The building also has an association with the present Prime Minister, Mr. Nash. During part of World War I he was a partner in the tailoring firm of Besley and Nash, which his partner subsequently took over and developed into one of the biggest tailoring businesses in Taranaki. The tailoring work was done on the top storey and at one time as many as 20 hands were employed. The business went out of existence during the depression years. Mr. E. G. Pearce also conducted a tailoring business in the building.

The last occupant was Mr. John Barr, a clothing manufacturer.

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