

Dredgings helped make Ngamotu Beach

By GRAEME MCGREGOR

Ironically, while older people remember New Plymouth's sand foreshore before breakwater extensions cut the natural sand drift, a fortune has been spent fighting the annual flow of thousands of tons from shoaling the man-made harbour.

Even so, it has been a small price to pay to give New Zealand its only major West Coast port.

Although port development denuded three miles of sandy coastline, it gave New Plymouth a real beach — Ngamotu, which the city has claimed as among the safest swimming beaches in the country.

While never achieving the 1917 claim of "The Playground of the Pacific," Ngamotu, with harbours board sand reclamations, became Taranaki's most populated beach on a summer's day.

Early records, charts and drawings show Ngamotu as a narrow beach with large areas of rocks. The whaling station was established in the largest sandy patch near the Hongi Hongi Stream. And in 1841 the first settlers landed there.

Pipeline

Old photographs taken near the turn of the century show the 2300ft pipeline

through which the dredge, Thomas King, pumped thousands of tons of sand on to the beach while clearing the harbour.

Sand was also dumped on the beach from railway wagons filled by bucket cranes working on the breakwater.

Now port expansion is taking back some of the beach, with the third wharf and servicing area, now under construction, covering much of the western half of the beach.

Future development in 10 to 20 years will sprawl over more of the beach. But the exciting prospect is that the new work may result in new beaches being formed on both sides of the new lee breakwater.

Sand is now, in a very small way, being pumped into the reclamation area for the third wharf. A more ambitious scheme could see dredgings being deposited on both sides of the lee breakwater to accelerate the expected natural buildup of sand.

Buildup

I understand that fresh approaches on such a scheme have been made to the harbours board.

Sand is already beginning to build up among rocks from the end of Bayly Rd towards the lee breakwater. Time will tell if this accumulation is permanent.

Meanwhile, the public is still making full use of the remaining portion of Ngamotu Beach.

City councillor and former Ngamotu Beach voluntary worker, Mr R. J. Burkitt, adamantly opposes the council's parks and reserves committee's suggestion that the council quit the Ngamotu Beach Domain and concentrate on developing the beachfront east of Noble Line.

On Boxing Day he counted 47 vehicles at Strandon and

400 at Ngamotu. He estimated 1000 vehicles at Ngamotu on New Year's Day.

Pumping

Mr Burkitt favours an investigation into the possibility of pumping sand to form lee breakwater beaches. He said that beaches in Honolulu and on Lake Michigan in the United States were built up artificially each winter.

One thing is certain. There is no shortage of sand coming into the harbour to be used for reclamation—estimated to be

"Unfortunately, the fact that the whole beach is in imminent danger of being used for harbour purposes is a deterrent to further costly development at Ngamotu and to find the beach which may some day be the town's premier resort, we must come east to Fitzroy Beach . . . which has every prospect of rivaling Sydney's famous bays." — A quote from the Taranaki Herald and Budget's Christmas Supplement of 1930.

up to 250,000 tons a year.

Problems of sand accumulation and foreshore erosion began soon after the start of the main breakwater in 1881. This was the site favoured by engineers Carruthers and Blackett, who in 1875 rejected the 1868 scheme of Balfour and Doyle for a harbour at the mouth of the Huatoki Stream.

London consulting engineer, Sir John Coode, supported the Moturoa location in 1879 and this is where the port was established.

A sand spit extending some 450 yards from the end of the breakwater was reported in April 1888 and a year later a Mr Blair noted that the sand on the coastline from 25 chains east of the breakwater to the railway station had been denuded. What five years earlier was a fine sandy beach had become rocks, boulders and coarse gravel.

First dredge

With the harbour depth being reduced by accumulating sand, the then New Plymouth Harbour Board searched unsuccessfully for a dredge then finally converted its steam barge into the dredge, Thomas King, which was launched in February 1887.

The board's consulting engineer, Mr F. W. Marchant, recommended in 1895 that an 11in pump be fitted to the dredge and a sludge pipe be taken under the Moturoa Wharf and to run some 1100ft along the beach.

Within a year some 83,000 cu yds of sand had been pumped on to the beach for 3d a yd, compared with 8d for the crane-grabbed sand dumped from the railway.

Sand was also pumped from between the wharf and breakwater on to the beach for about 10 years during this period.

Drift

In 1899, Mr Marchant rejected long-standing opinions that the drift of sand along this part of the coast was from east to south-west.

"It must be taken as a fact proven, to demonstration, that the natural littoral drift here is from south-west towards north-east."

The present-day chief engineer, Mr P. D. L. Holmes, says that sand carried around the main breakwater and ending up on Ngamotu Beach, is carried back towards the wharves by the

wave action inside the harbour.

In 1900 the board chairman, Mr E. Maxwell, observed in a review that following the completion of the breakwater it was discovered "without anticipation" that the structure had intercepted a strong natural sand drift. Subsequent shoaling had given the port "a bad reputation."

The dredge Paritutu came into use in 1910 and, with the Thomas King, began to make headway against the tremendous sand drift.

Eastern Wall

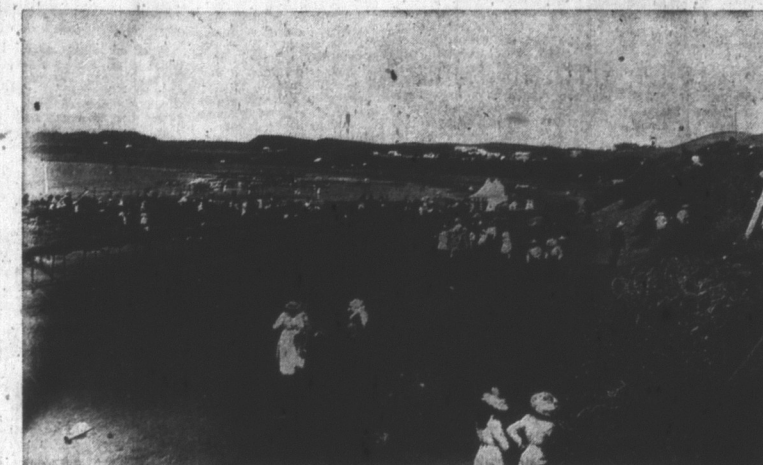
In his 1917 scheme for port extensions, Mr J. Blair Mason proposed an eastern wall out from Moon's Reef (just east of the new lee breakwater, completed last year).

He commented that the beach east of such a structure would naturally make up with sand in time.



A 1901 PICNIC at Ngamotu Beach. Many of the 2500 people went on a trip on the Union Company's Mapourika. The Town Band played alongside the big elevated pipe which pumped dredgings for several hundred yards along the beach and thus built up the sand.

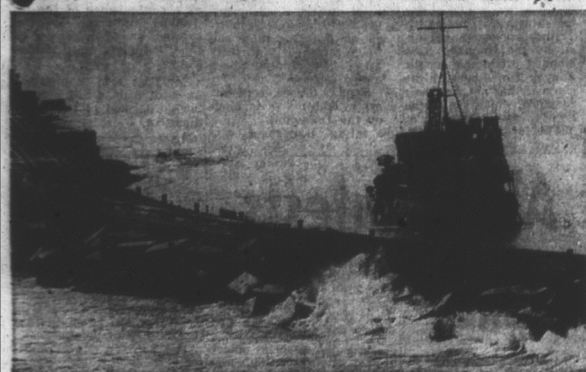
—Taranaki Museum picture.



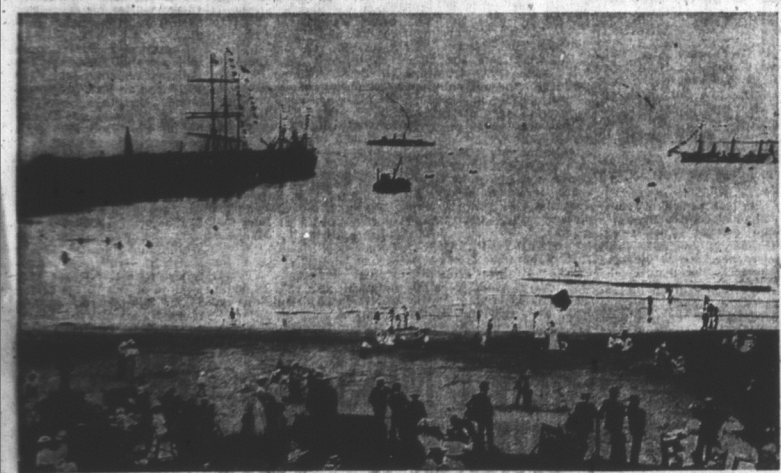
ANOTHER VIEW of the sand pipeline running along Ngamotu Beach. The big stones show just how rocky this part of the foreshore was before the sand build up occurred. Note the sparse settlement on the background farmland, now closely packed with buildings.

—Tees picture.

THE TARANAKI HARBOURS BOARD'S chief engineer, Mr P. D. L. Holmes, with a relic uncovered on a bank close to the coal-fired power station site. Mr Holmes has identified it as a suction pipe from the board's first dredge, the Thomas King.

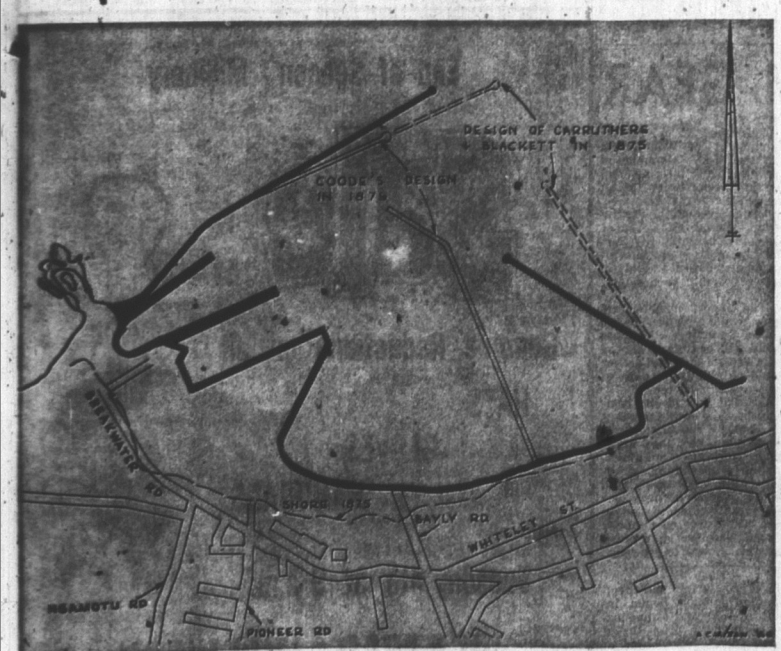


THE TARANAKI HARBOURS BOARD'S PRESENT DREDGE, Ngamotu, single-handed can keep the port clear of sand. Shown working on the sand bank inside the breakwater, this suction-grab dredge, with an 800-ton hopper capacity, has moved up to 510,000 tons of sand a year.



ANOTHER GREAT DAY at Ngamotu Beach when horses and buggies and crowds of people lined the sands of June 17, 1913, to welcome the 19,000-ton cruiser HMS New Zealand (centre background). In the centre foreground is the dredge, Thomas King, which dredged the harbour for many years. Its hull now lies under the breakwater extensions.

—Taranaki Museum picture.



A MAJOR PART OF THE FORESHORE of Taranaki's port at New Plymouth has been reclaimed, as shown by this drawing prepared by the Taranaki Harbours Board. A groyne constructed in the early stages of port development permanently connected Mikotahi (centre left) with the mainland after the subsequent sand build up.

Tom Tiddler's ground

Bowls bores

I disagree when people claim
That bowling is a boring game,
So I declared a holiday
And went to watch the bowlers play
One morning in the Open Fours.
I walked around and read the scores
And found a seat beside a chap
Indulging in a morning nap.

Then someone clapped and he awoke;
I turned and met his eyes and spoke
To him, as bowlers do, and said,
"Now, isn't that a pretty head!"
"Call that a head!" he answered me
And laughed a little scornfully.
He cleared his vocal cords and then
He started, "I remember when . . ."

We poured into each others ears
Our memories of bygone years—
The games we won, the shots we played,
The many famous friends we made;
And taking turns we talked about
The good old game till time ran out—
Which certainly refutes the claim
That bowling is a boring game.