

CHAPTER VII.

THE EARLY SETTLEMENT OF THE TOKOMAIRIRO PLAIN.

THE Tokomairiro Plain was variously described in the accounts given to the New Zealand Land Company, but all agree in that it was of large extent, embracing some 14,000 acres. It was almost entirely covered with grass, the neighbouring hills being nearly destitute of wood. Though well watered, it was free from swamps. From it there was almost a level pass to the Taieri, or, rather, to Waihola, where, by means of the Lake, easy communication could be made by means of the Taieri River and thence to Otago Harbour. At the head of Waihola Lake, the land was described as consisting of undulating downs, round topped and covered with herbage and grass of various descriptions and of large growth. Quail were plentiful on these downs and on the adjoining plains. A very large extent of land was well fitted for cattle, sheep, and horses. The Rangitoto Lake was said to be some twelve miles from Waihola, and a short portage would take people to Kaitangata Lake and the Clutha River.

When selections of rural land were first made, Tokomairiro was practically neglected, but, when the New Zealand Company surrendered its charter and new regulations for the sale of waste lands were made by the authorities, it came in for its full share of the benefits.

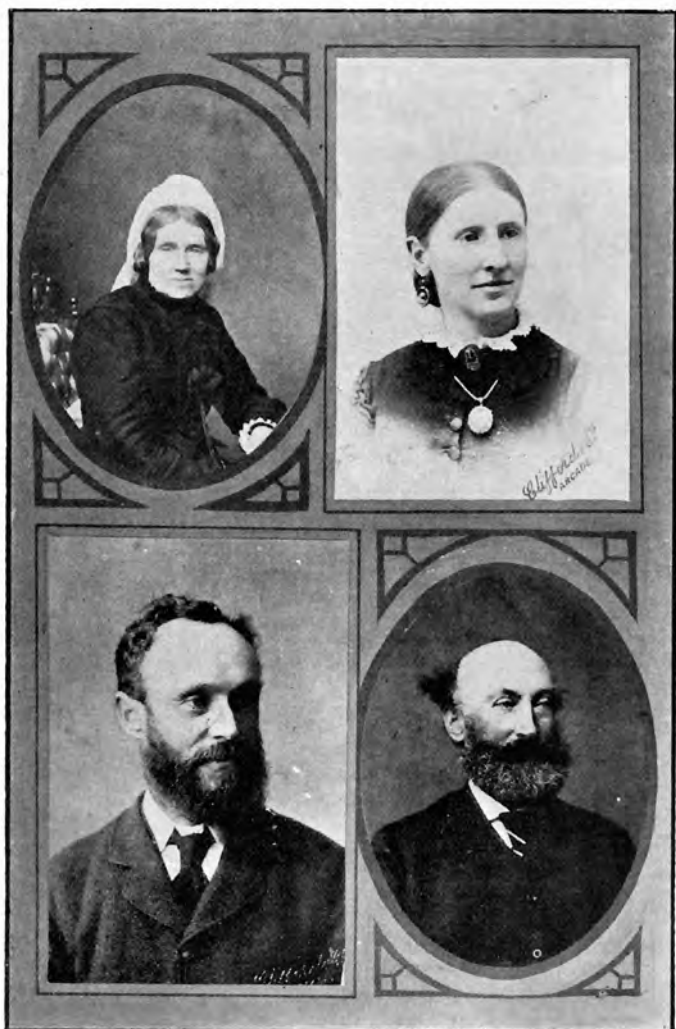
The first pioneer settler was Mr. Robert Martin, who came from Nelson, and was settled at Pelichet Bay when the first ships arrived. He purchased land on the west side of the road where Fairfax now stands, and settled on it in 1850, no doubt being influenced in his selection by the proximity of bush on the ridges near it. He was accompanied by Mr. Francis Chrystal, who did not at that time, however, purchase any land. Some years later he built an accommodation house, which he carried on for some time, and then, selling out, bought some land at Akatore,

calling the place "Cock-my-lane." Selling out this, he then purchased land at the coast, and put up a lodging-house for holiday makers at the beach.

Mr. and Mrs. John Salmond and a family of three were the next settlers. They were passengers by the "Larkins" in 1849. Mrs. Salmond was the first white woman settled in the Plain, and those three were the first pioneers to settle in the district. Other settlers followed, the Martin family being well represented, and might well be described as a representative pioneer family. They were Robert, Mrs. Duthie, Mrs. Dawson, Mrs. Smith, Thomas, Edward, Joseph, and William. The settlers who followed the three first pioneers mostly took up their land on the same line of road. Others took up land on the river below the junction of the two branches, and up the south branch.

Mr. John Grey was settled near the Gorge, below the main road, while next was George Lindsay, above the upper road, and southward were Messrs Lang, Dall, and Salmond. Messrs. Black and Brooks were both settled on what is now called Brookland, and Mr. James Smith on Springfield, across the district road which crosses Milton and continues in a straight line to the hills; Mr. Alexander Duthie above Mr. Smith's near the Bush, and Messrs. Edward Martin and John Dewe on adjoining sections in the bush. Across the river Messrs. Stuart and Robinson settled at Riverside. Passing up the south branch, Mr. James Reid was the first settler. He was the first person interred in the Fairfax Cemetery, and his father was the first settler on the site of Milton. Mr. Thomas Reid followed on the side of the public road, Messrs. Robert Murray and William Matheson across the river, Mr. Clarke and Mr. John Cargill above them on Meadowbank. Mr. Walter Millar was the furthest west settler on the river, while John Hardy settled on the Plain on what he called Helensbrook.

Some important changes in ownership then took place. Messrs. Stuart and Robinson's property was sold to John Gillies, of Dunedin, and four of his sons, Thomas, Robert, William, and John L., carried it on for some time, but left one by one to fill important positions in the colony. Mr. Gillies, sen., was prominent both in church affairs and in public life. A lawyer by profession, he filled several important positions in Dunedin, his son, Thomas, being trained as a lawyer in his office. When Thomas left the



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farm he settled for a time at Wharepa, Clutha District, and then, going to Dunedin, he followed his profession in company with John Hyde Harris. In 1860 he was elected to the General Assembly, was Attorney-General in 1862, Postmaster-General and Secretary for Lands in 1863-4. In 1865 he removed to Auckland, and was Superintendent from 1869 to 1873. In 1875 he was elevated to the Bench, and discharged his duties in a singularly able manner till his death in 1889. Robert Gillies was a surveyor, and entered politics as M.H.R. for Bruce, but died shortly after his election.

William Gillies studied for the ministry, and occupied a prominent position in the Presbyterian Church, being successively placed at West Taieri, Timaru, and Tauranga, during the occupancy of which latter place he died. John L. Gillies went to Australia in 1851, was a digger for a while, and returned to Otago in 1855. He was a member of the Provincial Council, and, after occupying several important public positions, died in 1897. When leaving Tokomairiro he was the recipient of a presentation of nearly £100 from the settlers, but, while thanking them for their kindness, he declined to accept it for himself, and handed it over to found a scholarship or bonus for a pupil teacher.

The early settlers near the bush added to their properties by purchasing land below them on the Plain. Mr. Smith's land reached the main road through Milton, and Mr. Duthie's was on both sides of it. Mr. James Adam purchased a large area in the south end of the district, and other settlers arriving, the whole Tokomairiro was purchased by the end of 1860.

With the increase of settlement, the question of which was to be the main road came to be a debatable one. The first settlers had combined and made the road to Waihola Gorge by putting culverts on the creeks, but something better was now desired, and after much disputation the Government proceeded to gravel the present road, which was opened for traffic about the end of 1860. Some years before this a mill was built by Peter McGill, who employed Mr. Brown, sen., and James Elder Brown at the work.

James Elder Brown arrived in the "Ajax" in 1849, and was employed by Mr. Valpy to erect a combined flour and sawmill on the Water of Leith, Dunedin. Mr. McGill was employed to work the mill, and both stayed in the same hut. The mill proved a success, but, when the

Brown family arrived in the "Eden" in 1850, James Brown shifted to Anderson's Bay.

At this time there was a small coasting vessel being built in Otago Harbour, the "Endeavour," and McGill, in company with Sinclair Harrold and Richard Craigie, bought her for the coastal trade, sailing her for eighteen months. The vessel was then sold, and McGill went back to the mill, working it on terms. In 1856 he thought he would try to start a flour mill in one of the country districts, and, selecting Tokomairiro as the best place, in company with Messrs. Brown went out to choose the site. The two Browns made up their minds to sell out at Anderson's Bay and settle in Tokomairiro, where they could get more land and help to put up the mill. They selected 100 acres next to McGill's land. Henry Clark also purchased land, and he and McGill sawed the timber for their houses, Mr. Clark putting them both up. As soon as possible McGill, with William Baskett, sawed the timber for the mill, while the Browns sawed the necessary timber for a clay house for themselves. In October, 1857, the mill was at work, and an oatmeal mill was soon added to it. About thirty years afterwards the building, with a large quantity of grain, was burned down, when the present brick building replaced it, the contractor being the same Baskett who had helped to saw the timber for the first one.

The most important event in the history of Milton, which name had replaced the old one of Tokomairiro, was its recognition by the Government as a township, and its elevation, in 1866, to the rank of a borough. The first Mayor was James Elder Brown, and the Councillors were Messrs. E. Stewart, James Goodall, James A. Dickson, and James M. Bryce.

The "Bruce Herald," I suppose the oldest country paper in Otago, was established in 1864 by Joseph McKay, and for many years was the only paper circulating in Bruce and Clutha. Its back numbers well repay perusal, and contain many entertaining facts about the hardships which were even at that period encountered by the settlers of these districts.

Two very important matters occupied the attention of the early settlers of Milton, viz., the necessity of making provision for the public ordinances of religion and the education of their children. The first Presbyterian Church and school was built at Fairfax, on the ground

now occupied by the cemetery, the settlers contributing both in money and work to its erection. The bush sawyers supplied a large share of the timber, one settler drew the timber to the site, carpenters who afterwards became well-to-do farmers gave their labour, and so the first church was erected—not a very pretentious building, but an exceedingly useful one, both for church and school, and for all public meetings. It was opened for public worship on the 28th of February, 1857, by the Rev. William Bannerman, who had been first introduced to the congregation on February 5th, 1854, at the house of Mr. Alex. Duthie, and was its pastor till the Rev. A. B. Todd was inducted into the charge in 1859.

When Milton increased in population, the church at Fairfax was thought to be too far away, and a large wooden one was erected where the present new church now stands, the site being a gift from Peter McGill. The building looked well, but it was rather weak, as a severe gale so strained it that it was never satisfactory. The present church was built in 1889, and opened for worship by the Rev. Dr. Stuart. The bell was presented for the first church by Mr. John Gillies, sen., but the vessel that brought it from the Home Country did not deliver it in Otago, and it went Home again. It was again sent out, but the vessel, the "Henbury," took fire at Port Chalmers and was burnt. The bell was sold as salvage, and Mr. Gillies had to re-purchase it. It came safely to Tokomairiro, but, when the third church was built, it had to be re-cast, after which it was hung where it now is.

The first election of elders resulted in the appointment of Messrs Henry Clark, James Adam, George Brown, and James E. Brown, who were therefore the first session of Tokomairiro.

The Anglican Church was the next church to hold services in the district. A piece of land on the Plain was consecrated as a cemetery for members of the Church of England. Services were first held by Mr., afterwards Rev., J. Dewe, for the latter part of the time in the Court-house, Milton. The first regular incumbent, Rev. R. L. Stanford, was appointed in November, 1864. The first parsonage, near the old cemetery, was erected in the early part of 1865, and the present one in 1888.

The first Catholic services were held in the late Wm. Poppelwell's house, in the 'fifties, when Father Petitjean, a French missionary, made occasional visits to the scattered members of his flock in the South.

In the early 'sixties, a church was constructed out of the materials of a store kept by Messrs. Smith & Hibbard, and in 1869 a handsome Gothic building was erected at the end of High Street, the dedication ceremony being performed by Father Ecuyer, who resided in Tuapeka. The late Bishop Moran purchased and presented to the congregation the Presbytery site in Queen Street, together with a small dwelling, which was occupied for eleven years by the first parish priest, Rev. T. Lenihan.

In 1863, the Rev. Isaac Harding stayed at Milton on his way to the goldfields, and a little later the Rev. R. L. Vickers held the first Wesleyan service in a clay house. Occasional visits were afterwards paid by the minister from Dunedin, until Lawrence was made a circuit, when the minister came down and conducted services, chiefly on week nights. In 1871 the first regular Sunday services were conducted, and during Mr. Isitt's pastorate the present church was built.

The first school, as already stated, was held in the first Presbyterian Church at Fairfax, except for a short time before the church was built, when it was held in a small building belonging to Mr. James Smith and in the schoolmaster's house. Mr. Alexander Ayson was the first teacher, and after some years he retired to Wharepa, where he settled on some land he had purchased there. He again took up work at Southbridge, and finally retired to Matura, where he died. During this time a new school was built at Milton, where the Courthouse now is. Mr. David Ross was the next teacher, and was succeeded by Mr. Malcolm, who was again succeeded by Mr. James Reid, in the present school, opened in 1880. The present rector is Mr. W. B. Graham, an ex-pupil of the school.

Mr. Alex. Brown, Milton, describes his first trip to the district in the following words:—"It was a bleak, cold, windy day in the end of September, 1856, that I had my first view of the Tokomairiro Plain. Mr. Peter McGill, my brother James, and myself had driven our cattle that day from Taieri Ferry, where we had lodged the night before on our way to settle on our new location, and, cold and weary with our journey, when we got through Waihola Gorge, as we called it then, and saw the plain stretched out before us, my heart sank at the prospect. There was only one house near the Gorge (Mr. John Grey's), and we had to hold eastward and come along the road that passes Springfield and Fairfax. Coming to the store, then owned

by Mr. Thom, and afterwards by Mr. James Goodall, and the only store in the district. Mr. McGill purchased a few eatables, among them a pot of marmalade, to supplement the provisions we had left in the house which he had previously erected. We made our way down to it, and, letting the cattle wander at their will, we entered the house, tired and hungry, and ready to enjoy a hearty tea. But 'the best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft a-gley.' McGill had bargained with a man to build a clay chimney to the house while he was away. The man had built the chimney, but had also made a raid on the eatables, leaving a big deficit, and the tea bag was empty. We agreed to try marmalade as a substitute, but I cannot recommend the tea it made, and I have hated the taste of marmalade ever since.

"A bargain had been made with a carter in Dunedin to take a dray load of our belongings and the womenfolk of the family to the Taieri, so after staying in Dunedin for a night, they—my father, mother, and sisters—made a start next morning, but the load was so bulky that there was not much room on the dray for them, and they had to make most of the journey on foot, carrying a baby. Fortunately for them, a sailor, who was going to the Taieri, had joined them for company on the road, and he volunteered to carry the baby. For a while they tried to keep up with the dray, but found they could not do it, so, telling the drayman to leave his load at Scrogg's Creek, they reached a friend's house, where they stayed for the night.

"Next morning Mr. Antonio Joseph came with his boat and took them with the luggage to Harrold's accommodation house at Taieri Ferry, where they stayed the night. Next day the wind was very high, and Mr. Joseph was unwilling to take them up Waiholo Lake, but my father persuaded him to go. Going up the river they were safe enough, but when they came to the Lake the waves were very high, and the settlers on the lakeside watched their progress with great anxiety, expecting every minute to see the boat swamped. When they arrived at the head of the Lake Mr. Joseph told them he had never been on the Lake before in such a storm.

"Mr. John Cargill's bullock dray was waiting at the store erected by the settlers to stow their goods, and conveyed them to Thom's store, whence they walked to the house—cold, weary, and hungry—only to find a shortage



MR. AND MRS. ROBERT CAMPBELL

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of provisions, but glad to find themselves safe at their journey's end." Such is a sample of what the women and children had to undergo in helping to provide homes in the wilderness in the early days.

Many and varied are the stories told by the early settlers of the district, relating to their work and the difficulties they so successfully overcame. The comic element often obtruded itself, and served to lighten these days of worry and hardship. There was a common and almost universal feeling of brotherhood among the settlers, and if there was one thing more than another which was looked back upon with profound pleasure it was this practical brotherhood and absence of selfishness exhibited towards one another.

"In the matter of food," says a settler, "with the exception of tea, sugar, and a few other groceries, all the main staples were raised on the premises. Still, roads, or rather bridges, were required to enable us to receive our supplies from and send our produce to Dunedin, and these bridges were provided for and constructed in the following way: The names of the different creeks to be bridged, or culverts to be constructed, were put into one hat, and the names of the settlers in another, and the drawing took place on the understanding that those settlers whose names were not drawn were to give their assistance to those who drew the heaviest bridges or culverts—an arrangement which was most honourably carried out."

The roads were for a long time mere tracks, some became perfect quagmires, and the difficulties of transit may be realised when we are told that the first wheeled vehicle seen in the Tokomairiro district occupied nine days in the journey from Dunedin. This vehicle was taken thither by Mr. Poppelwell in 1853. In 1850 it took three days to drag a plough from Dunedin to Waihola, and nearly as long to take the first dray over the survey track.

The humorous side of travelling in these times is well illustrated in an account of the trip made by four men, John Cargill, W. H. Cutten, J. McAndrew, and W. H. Perkins, who started down the country to obtain signatures to a petition for self-government, needless to say for the colony, and not for themselves. The Tokomairiro River was in flood, and the water was up to the top of the banks. Mr. Cargill plunged in without hesitation. Perkins saw only his head and shoulders occasionally, but,

undaunted, he followed and managed to struggle to the landing place. Mr. Cutten declined to trust to his horse, so he stripped, tied his clothes to the saddle, and drove his horse before him into the stream, swimming by its side himself. Mr. McAndrew was afraid to tackle it on-horse-back and could not swim. After many suggestions, he said that if he had a rope round his waist he would risk it, so the others flung him a tether rope, which he joined to his own and also crossed safely.

Now commenced the real fun. Mr. McAndrew did not fancy riding in wet clothes, but the others were not so particular, so he stripped all save his shirt, boots, and hat, and hung his garments on either side of his horse to dry. When they got in sight of a settler's hut—one Cameron—they saw Mrs. Cameron and some one else at the door. Mr. Cutten suggested that they should ride up to the hut. "No, no," cried the unfortunate Mac; but the others hurried on and his steed followed. The two who stood in the doorway could not make out who or what the fourth person might be. First they thought it was a Maori with a mat on, but, as the riders drew nearer, they beheld the various garments flying in the wind, conjecture failed, and violent laughter took its place.

After a feed of mutton and sugarless tea, the four adventurers started for Clutha, but got lost half-way to Mount Stewart. They then climbed up till they got a view of the Nuggets, and after consultation decided to proceed, so steering with the sun on their left they ultimately reached the river. They were again wet through, and the boat on which they had depended to reach Inch Clutha, where several people had already settled, had been swamped, and no other was procurable. They cooeed loud and shrill, and at last Mr. Redpath from the opposite bank told them that there was no boat nearer than several miles down the river. He advised them to remain where the ground was at least dry, though they themselves were soaking and they had neither food nor blankets.

The next morning they found that three of their horses had broken away. A meeting was held, and it was decided that they had had enough of it. However, the horses had not gone more than six miles, when they were stopped by a creek, and were caught by the old device of driving them into a bend and stretching a tether rope across, with a man at each end and one in the middle, so that the animals were caught under the jaws.

Once more they mounted, but by this time McAndrew was fairly exhausted and could not go beyond a walk. The two freshest of the party rode on, and the laggards joined them some hours later at Cameron's. Mac was not yet conquered, for, after a meal and a rest, he suggested that the party should go eeling. They made preparations and started at 8 p.m., lost their way in a swamp, and came home at midnight, but without any eels. Alas! the fire was out, no supper had been prepared for them, and there were no blankets. Once again the soaking adventurers passed a night without food, but this time they rolled themselves in a few old wool packs and were thankful.

Mr. Gillies once applied to a carpenter in the district to help him to build a barn. The man refused, saying he could not finish before harvest was in. "What has that to do with the harvest?" was the query. "Oh," was the reply, "I always lock up my tools during harvest." "How is that, when your wages as a carpenter amount to 10/- a day, and you get only 6/- for harvesting?" was again questioned. "Yes; I ken that; but, Mr. Gillies, if I didna help the farmers to get in their harvest, they couldna afford to keep me the rest o' the year," was the pawky reply.

In the same district was a useful, but eccentric, Scotchman, who possessed a bellows, anvil, and a few blacksmith's tools, that enabled him to do any simple piece of work, such as setting a plough sock, &c., but, if anyone tried to give him advice, it was no uncommon thing for him to throw down the tools with the ultimatum: "There's the anvil, and here's the hammer; tak' and dae it yersel!" and off he would go to the bush, and one had just to turn to and do the job or leave it until he got over his tantrums, when he would probably do it as was wished.

A good story is told of a mailman—Black Andy. He used to take Mr. John Cargill's letters to his farm on the Toko River, and was rewarded by having his dinner there. One day he was seated alone in the kitchen after a good square meal, when his curiosity induced him to look what was boiling in a pot over the fire. There he discovered a plum pudding, intended for Mr. Cargill's dinner when he returned at night. Quickly he took it out of the pot, slipped it into the sack where he carried his mail bags, and departed. A few miles on the road, the smell proved so enticing that he could no longer withstand the temptation, so, opening the sack, he attacked the pudding with

a sheath knife and eagerly devoured it. While thus engaged, Mr. Cargill appeared on the scene. Noways abashed, Andy asked him if he would like a slice of pudding, which Mr. Cargill at once accepted, and after a yarn each proceeded on his way. When dinner was served Mrs. Cargill deplored the loss of her pudding, which, she said, was an extra good one. Mr. Cargill, at once suspecting who the thief was, told her not to mind as he had already eaten his share, and laughed heartily as he related his adventure with the mailman.

Tokomairiro had the honour of instituting the first ploughing match in Otago. This fixture took place on April 18th, 1856, and was the forerunner of many such fixtures in other districts. The amount distributed in prize money was only £25, but spoke well for the enthusiasm of those connected with it in those strenuous times. The traction employed was bullocks in yoke with drivers, and bullocks in harness without drivers, and much ingenuity was displayed to ensure the gaining of the coveted prizes. The prize list is worthy of publication, and is as follows:—

Bullocks in yoke with driver: Ploughman, Louis Dawson, owner E. Duthie, driver J. McKenzie, 1; ploughman James McNeil, owner J. Smith, driver Thomas Wilson, 2.

Bullocks in harness without drivers: E. Martin, 1; W. Gillies, 2; D. Loudon, 3.

Horses without driver, R. Gillies.