

Apples In Tasman

The First 20 Years

Back Then...
based on research by former Motueka High School history student, EMMA RUSH.

"The tide was out and the appearance was a pretty depressing and barren one. As we travelled towards Tasman I could see the cultivated yellow clay and scrub covered hills. It looked a depressing, poor, uninviting locality."

So said Norman Adamson on his arrival in Tasman in 1912 as a Horticultural Cadet. Originally called the Moutere Bluffs by the early settlers, the name was changed firstly to White Bluffs and then to Aporo, the Maori word for apple, before becoming Tasman.

Prior to 1910 there were no roads, no telephones, no schools, no public buildings, no shop and no post office.

The land was poor clay and swamp covered with manuka, fern and gorse.

Communication with Motueka was very difficult and it was a long, hard day's travel to Nelson.

The first orchard in Tasman was planted in the Harleys Road area by A. L. Manoy, A. P. Allport and a Mr Morrissey in 1910. From that year on a planting boom occurred in the area.

In 1911 Arthur McKee and three other partners formed a syndicate called Tasman Fruit Lands Ltd and undertook responsibility to clear the land, plant the trees and maintain them for five years.

The "Colonist", in October, reported that the syndicate included "practical fruit farmers who are most enthusiastic as to the potentialities of these lands."

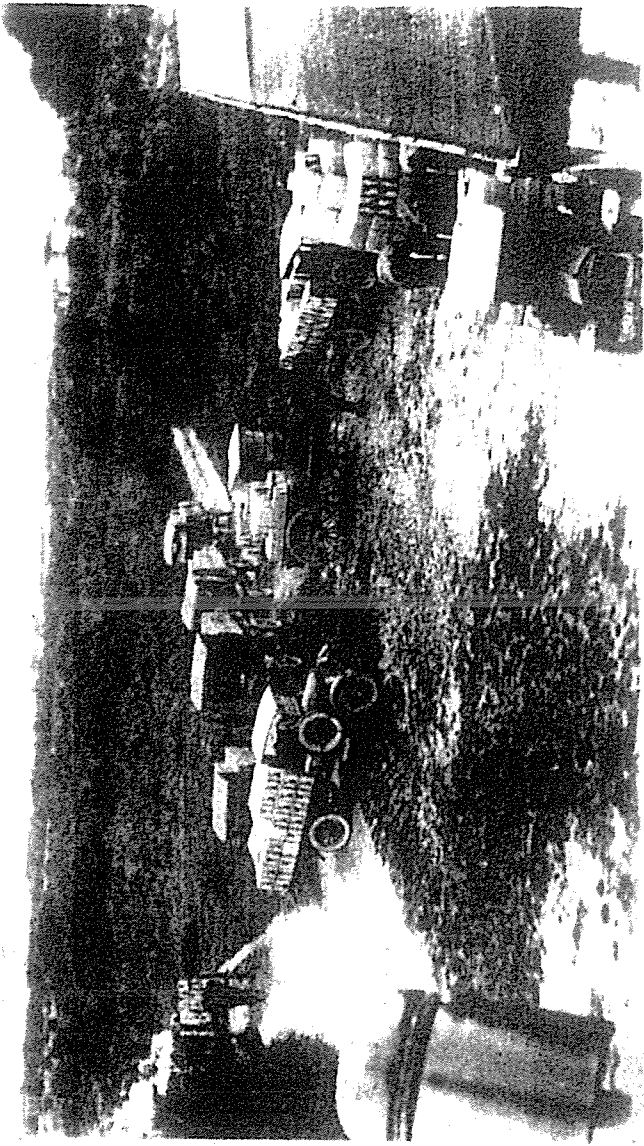
Fred Nottage, a Government Orchard In-

structor, was appointed supervisor of the syndicate's orchards.

A hard worker and good leader, Fred Nottage is generally regarded as the "father of Tasman" and as responsible for the success of its orchard development.

The plantings continued at a very rapid pace until 1916. In July of that year The NZ Farmer Stock and Station Journal commented, "Six years ago the Moutere Hills were merely a topographical expression - a desolate waste of gorse and manuka. Today ... they are one of the largest apple orchards in the Dominion, ribbed and striped with countless rows of flourishing trees and dotted with dwellings".

The Evening Mail in April the following year reported that "it is to Tasman that is owed to a great extent the fillip given to the fruit industry in the Nelson province. Those who first set about planting trees on the Tasman slopes were laughed at ... Time, however, has told its tale, and now after six



Trucking apples to the coolstore sometime prior to 1925.

years, while there are still those who ridicule the idea, they are greatly reduced in number".

After World War One the fruit trees had grown, pine trees and other flora had been planted and roads had been constructed.

Tasman now had its own church, post office, school and local store, which is still in existence and is currently a pottery outlet. Although horses were still used on the orchards, motor vehicles had arrived. However all did not go smoothly and there were setbacks. These were caused by a lack

of capital, miscalculation of the time required to bring fruit trees to profitability, and a world war which brought loss of manpower and markets, lower prices and increased costs.

In the early twenties many orchards were either pulled out or abandoned.

The Nelson Evening Mail in May 1923 reported that a large number of growers were faced with ruin. Mrs E. B. Rush remembers the hard times in those early days. "People bought blocks of land without really knowing what

they'd bought. The Tasman Fruit Lands promotion said that Tasman was 'really excellent land for growing apples'. In reality it was swamp, manuka and gorse."

The soil also lacked lime and organic matter as well as several other minerals.

The twenties were tough. There were the diseases, the rabbits, irrigation problems, arguments with the government and with each other.

However, by 1930 a Fruit Control Board had been established and Tasman had been transformed from Nörman

Photo courtesy Bernard Wells

Adamson's "depressing, poor, uninviting locality" into a thriving orchard industry.

There were still many problems to face but the 1930 export season brought a record crop.

Bernard Wells, in his book *The Fruits of Labour*, describes the districts "fortunate in having local inventive genius who helped provide equipment, and methods of handling the rapidly increasing crop with greater efficiency. "It could be said that during the 1920's fruit growers evolved from the amateur status to that of professional".

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V.F
APPLE GROWING (Nelson region)

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