

OPOTIKI: PORT AND BOROUGH.

ARISING CENTRE OF TRADE AND COMMERCE

The most picturesque town on the East Coast, and one of the most attractively situated towns in a Dominion abounding with scenic attractions, is the Borough of Opotiki. The eastern and northern boundaries are the winding Otara River, on which the wharves are situated. The western boundary is the Waioeka River. Thus three of the four boundaries of the borough are formed by beautiful streams, which are spanned by two bridges. Westward of the wharves the two rivers combine forces, forming a fine stream, known as the Opotiki River, until they reach the waters of the Bay of Plenty.

Rich alluvial land, dotted with cabbage trees, extends for about a mile eastward of the town, and beyond this stretch of level country is the Tableland, an extensive grassy plateau, which is one of the most prominent features of the landscape. Southward of the borough, extending for several miles is more land consisting of rich and deep alluvial deposits. These flats are dotted with trees and comfortable homesteads. A beautiful background to the level country is formed by hills partly covered with native trees. Weeping-willow trees line the banks of the rivers.

The country westward of the Waioeka River is mostly undulating. With the exception of patches under cultivation it is all in grass, and the green slopes and hollows form a pleasing contrast to the level land on the eastern side of the river. This locality is the home of the golf club, and is becoming increasingly popular among business people as residential area because of its pleasant situation. Parts of it are already thickly dotted with residences. At the summit of one of these comparatively low hills is the Opotiki public hospital. Extensive improvements to that institution have been authorized.

Viewed from one of these hills, or from the Tableland opposite, the town of Opotiki and the level country southward form one of the finest panoramas that it is possible to find. The beauty of the town is enhanced by the competent manner in which it has been laid out and by the ornamental trees and shrubs, trim hedges, flower-gardens and lawns that ornament almost every home in the residential areas. The popularity of the game of bowls is demonstrated by the fact that there are two bowling clubs in the town, each club having extensive, well-kept greens in almost daily use during the season. Lawn tennis is also popular, and the Tennis Club possesses several fine courts. Croquet is provided for, but this game is not nearly as popular as tennis or bowls;

Still larger open spaces in the town are the play-grounds known as the Cricket is in a languishing state, but Rugby football and hockey flourish during the winter, Opotiki being frequently the scene of important matches. Near the wharves is a little park, containing some handsome palm-trees and a band-stand. In the heat of summer this is a handy and pleasant retreat for town residents. It is triangular in shape, being bounded by streets on two sides and by a tidal creek on the other. On the hottest day a breeze fresh from the sea travels up the water and rustles the leaves of the trees in this quiet nook. It is exceedingly pleasant to listen to the Town Band's music here on a warm evening of summer. A few chains away are a striking monument, erected in memory of the Opotiki soldiers who fell in the Great War. Within a few yards of the monument, near the centre of the business area is small enclosure with a grassy plot and rock fountain.

The streets and footpaths in the business area of the borough are well paved and the buildings are substantial. The town bears a wide reputation for solidity in business, and this solidity is reflected in its buildings. In the business area no buildings are allowed unless they are composed of brick, stone or concrete, but the wooden buildings that were erected before a by-law to this effect came into force are not interfered

with unless they fall into a state of decay. Many of the original wooden buildings were destroyed by fire and were replaced by handsome structures of brick and concrete. The town possesses one efficient volunteer Fire Brigade, and is provided with electric light and power.

The system of water supply is one of the finest in the Dominion. Several miles out in the country, among the foothills, running through virgin bush, a beautiful natural water-basin was discovered, with a waterfall at the outlet. After deliberation, the Borough Council, recognizing the need of a water-supply for the town, decided to obtain water from this spot. When preliminary arrangements had been made, the borough ratepayers authorized the necessary loan, and operations commenced. Under the supervision of the borough engineer, the contractor dammed and cleaned out the water basin, transforming it into a large reservoir capable of providing for a population of five thousand. The water was carried by pipes across the Otara River and along a county road to the borough. Smaller pipes distributing the water to the householders in every street. The pressure is heavy enough to drive machinery, and every town resident receives as much pure water as he can use at all seasons.

Being a seaport town and the centre of an extensive and rapidly developing district, the volume of shipping that passes over the Opotiki wharves is considerable. The authority administering the harbour is the Borough Council, which body has found it necessary from time to time to extend the wharves and the wharf buildings. Extensive improvements to the wharves are now in progress, involving the expenditure of £1,200. The whole of this amount is being met out of the accumulated wharf dues, so that it is unnecessary to borrow money for the work. The improvements include the replacement of the old wooden foundations by substantial Ferro-concreted, and shelter-sheds for pigs awaiting shipment were erected.

Until recently the trade between Opotiki and Auckland was conducted by steamships, but owing to the local conditions, a specially constructed motor-ship carried passengers, as well as cargo, whereas the oil-ship Motu carries cargo only. The latter however has proved that it is admirably adapted to meet all the local conditions and the service provided by this vessel is regular and eminently satisfactory to shippers. Passengers to Auckland now travel overland by car and train to Tauranga, boarding a steamer at the port, or by car to Rotorua, boarding a train there. In addition to meeting the ordinary shipping requirements at the Port of Opotiki, the oil-ship Motu copes with the seaborne traffic between the Port of Kutarere and Auckland, and between Kutarere and Opotiki is catered for by auxiliary vessels of light draught.

The coastal trade between Opotiki and Cape Runaway is catered for by the motor-launch. Waihou, which carries several tons of cargo. This little vessel also carries passengers, and takes merchandise from Opotiki to the numerous bays, returning with some of the products of the Coast. The installation of the most modern type of crude-oil engines in this launch has greatly increased its reliability and reduced the running costs; but it is felt that a larger vessel, capable of carrying about twenty tons of cargo is necessary if the whole of the Coast trade is to be centered at Opotiki. At present there appears to be some difficulty in financing such a vessel, even if the right type of craft were easily obtainable. In the meantime the bulk of the wool produced on the Coast is shipped at irregular intervals to Napier, although some of it is brought to Opotiki and trans-shipped to Auckland.

It is recognized by both town and a coast resident that the most reliable means of communication between Opotiki and the Cape is a good road, such a road is in course of construction. When it is completed, the Port of Opotiki will be the shipping centre for vast quantities of wool, maize, and dairy produce from the Coast, in addition to the large volume of trade that now comes from the wide coastal area between the

Waiotahi River and Tunapahore, and from the extensive sheep country in Upper Waioeka. Opotiki's imports will then increase correspondingly, and the town will become an increasingly important centre of trade and commerce.



Main-street, Opotiki, showing the intersection with Church-street. At the western end of Main-street is the monument that was erected in memory of the Opotiki soldiers who fell in the war of 1914-18. Photo, Guardian Staff.



Church-street, Opotiki, viewed from the northern end of the business area, at the junction of Kelly-street. Photo, Guardian Staff.



View of Church-street, Opotiki, showing part of the business area of this rising centre of trade and commerce.
Photo, Guardian Staff.



This unique photograph of part of the residential area of Opotiki, and showing a few of the business premises, was taken from an aeroplane. It clearly demonstrates the care that was taken in laying the town out.
Photo, G. S. Shalloon.