

MS 187 Gibbs Harioaka

Frank C. Gibbs
4 Gow Street
Helenoville
Nth. Auckland

January 14th 1963.

The Managers
"The Opotiki News"
Box 51. Opotiki

Dear Sir

I have just received two issues of your very interesting paper (Nos 94 & 95. Dated Dec. 14th & 18th) in which are accounts of the construction and opening of the Waioeka Highway. I would very much like to have two more copies of each issue if you have any on hand and for which I have enclosed 1/6 in stamps in payment and postage. I am keenly interested in the progress of the work on that river road as I used to carry the mail on pack-horse just over 52 years ago between Matahanea post-office - run by "Bill" Dickey and Oponeke post-office run by Mrs. Eaton. The trip, return, in those days took about 12 to 14 hours - in good weather and no slips - and I had to ford many creeks and often cross the Waioeka River when the track was washed away. I later worked on a bridge building job

WHAKATANE MUSEUM
P.O. BOX 203
WHAKATANE

across the Omakaro Stream - a few miles above Oponae. Mr. Charlie Abbott was the contractor and all timber was felled and pit-sawn on the job. I later joined a small party on contract regarding and widening the track in the more dangerous places. At one camp I was in a man called in for a "feed" which in those far off days was very seldom denied and a day or two later the police called and our visitor was said to be Powelka. The life was a bit on the wild side but it was a grand life. When we could get wild pigs we did but we also bought mutton from one of the sheep farmers who would deliver it to the camps for 2/6 a lb. and we would take a half sheep and salt most of it. Our butchers came about three or four times a month. There were no "piges" up there in those days. The pulling rate of pay in those days was 7/6 an hour but on contract work it was possible to knock up £50 in four or five weeks. Living was very cheap in those days - sugar in 50 lbs bags was about 8/- and flour also in 50 lbs bags was about the same, cigarettes at 6/- for ten and Havelock or Derby plug tobacco 5/6, a box of matches was often given with a packet of cigarettes, tea, bed & breakfast at the Opatiki Hotel 4/-. dinner 2/-, Mr. Forbes was the licensee in those days. There was also a Sergeant O'Reilly

the police force who frequently carried a thin cane or a
 piece of whipjack with which he tickled the rumps of
 the lads of the village whom he caught misbehaving - and
 the lassies too I have heard people say. They were good
 days in a way but I think I would not like to go back to
 them. There were two papers in Opatiki in those days -
 "The Guardian" (Mr Scott) and "The Herald" (Mr Crawford)
 Occasionally I used to write for the latter paper. Many of the
 older residents of Opatiki District will recall that the
 proprietor/editors were sitting ducks for each other, the
 Guardian - affectionate known as "Gammie" and always
 referred to the "Herald" as "our local contemporary" but the
 "Herald" was not quite so particular when referring to
 the "Guardian". I have made this letter longer than
 I intended but as we get old we love to reminisce so
 you must excuse me.

Kind Regards and Best Wishes for 1963.

F. C. G.