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A look at the past, ahead of the future

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Last week, to the surprise of many local residents, 'For Sale' posters went up on the white walls of the 'Hawera Star' office in Regent St.

The building's impressive masonry exterior has contained the workplace of dozens of staff members literary and production, over the years and the doorway has welcomed subscribers, advertisers and news gatherers since 1913.

It is an end of a more than a century long era for a small town newspaper that not only published six afternoons a week, but also did general printing of handbills, catalogues and books. The *Taranaki Star* lives on and its office is moving to another address in town.

Before 1913 the *Star* was produced in a two storeyed building in High St opposite the Public Library but along with two hotels and nearly 20 businesses it was burned to the ground in the Great Fire of Hawera on a stormy night in 1895.

The next afternoon's edition was produced by the generosity of a competitor. However, phoenix-like, the office and print shop was quickly re-built on the same site and after a few years so optimistic was the proprietor, Mr WA Parkinson, the plant and office moved to new premises in Regent St in 1913.

Parkinson proved to be an innovative proprietor and installed up-to-date printing equipment.

Another able manager and journalist at the *Star* was Len Ablett who came from the *Christchurch Press* in 1927 and stayed until 1962.

During his time in the editor's chair many able men worked as reporters for the paper covering events all over the district, hospital board meetings, council meetings, court proceedings, sports matches and all manner of local happenings; one such was Cyril Roberts who worked on the paper from 1929, specialising in rugby reports. In World War II he served in the RNZAF.

With the forthcoming



The home of South Taranaki Journalism is on the move after just over 100 years.

commemorations of New Zealand's centennial in 1940, the local bodies contracted Roberts to produce a history of Hawera and the Waimate Plains. He did this by mining the back numbers of the *Star* for minutes of meetings and the stories by his predecessors. It was a major effort and his

daughter recalled going to bed to the sound of his typewriter on the dining table chattering through the night.

When Pat Booth joined the *Star* as a boy out of school in 1949 he recalls in his autobiography, *Deadline*, the names of the literary staff of that time. Harry Dansey

was a returned serviceman who had already published his first book; he was later a popular cartoonist at the *Taranaki Daily News*. Dansey was to become an Auckland City Councillor and a respected race relations conciliator.

There was Bill Morrison, a man

with a sharp mind and zany sense of humour who went on to become the news editor at the *Taranaki Daily News*. David Calder, a cadet, who went on to the *Wanganui Chronicle* and Harry Graydon in the news room. Ray Chamberlain, apart from covering events at the courthouse and borough council was widely respected by the subscribers for his gardening column and his own private garden.

The *Star* has been successful at riding many changes in its life as a daily publication but was not able to avoid the major changes going on in the communications world and the 100 year-old newspaper changed from a daily to a weekly publication; all Hawera hopes for the newspaper's survival.

■ In October, Fairfax's South Taranaki team is moving into a two-year-old building on Collins St. The new site confirms the media company's commitment to the region and its people through the *Taranaki Daily News* and *Taranaki Star* publications, *Taranaki* regional editor Ryan Evans said.