

Pioneer cottage's fate uncertain

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By PHIL TUMATAROA

A Catch-22 situation could see Taranaki lose an important piece of its pioneering history.

The 126-year-old Albuhera Cottage on Brown St, New Plymouth, is slowly rotting away.

Built in the year the second land wars broke out in Taranaki the cottage still sits on its original site close to where an army outpost was sited to guard Te Henui River and surrounding valley.

New Plymouth resident Peter White-Robinson owns the land and building. He bought them about three years ago, planning to relocate the cottage and build a house on the site.

Mr White-Robinson later found out that the New Plymouth City Council has a caveat over the land which does not allow the cottage to be moved without its permission.

Short and fruitless negotiations took place 18 months ago between Mr

White-Robinson and the council to arrange a deal which would ensure the cottage's continued survival and allow Mr White-Robinson to carry out his plans.

The council, which has the cottage listed as an historical place worthy of preservation under its district scheme, would not allow the building to be shifted because of the significance of the site.

Mr White-Robinson says the council made an offer of \$9000 to buy the cottage with the understanding that he could build as planned on the remainder of the 500sq m property.

This was unacceptable to Mr White-Robinson and the negotiations fell through.

Since that time nothing has been done to protect the cottage and it is slowly going to rack and ruin as

the elements and time take their toll.

Brown St resident John Miller, who has a keen interest in the preservation of historic places, has become concerned at the state of the cottage and wants some positive steps to be taken to ensure its future.

His main concern is that thousands of dollars have been spent to refurbish and preserve the city's Flight House while Albuhera Cottage, a place of equal historical significance is slowly wasting away.

City council town planning officer Ian Dudding says to move the cottage would mean it would lose a lot of its historical value.

He says the council has no obligation at present to care for or maintain the building.

Treasurer of the Taranaki branch committee of the New Zealand Historical Places Trust David Harrop, New Plymouth, agrees the cottage should not be moved.

The trust recognises the value of the cottage, but Mr Harrop says its hands are tied financially, especially in light of the work carried out on Flight House, and it is not in a position to do the work necessary to preserve the cottage.

He says it would be sad to lose the cottage, but for a place to warrant preservation it would have to be put to good use such as is planned for Flight House.

"It can't be preserved just to look at," he says.

Mr White-Robinson says

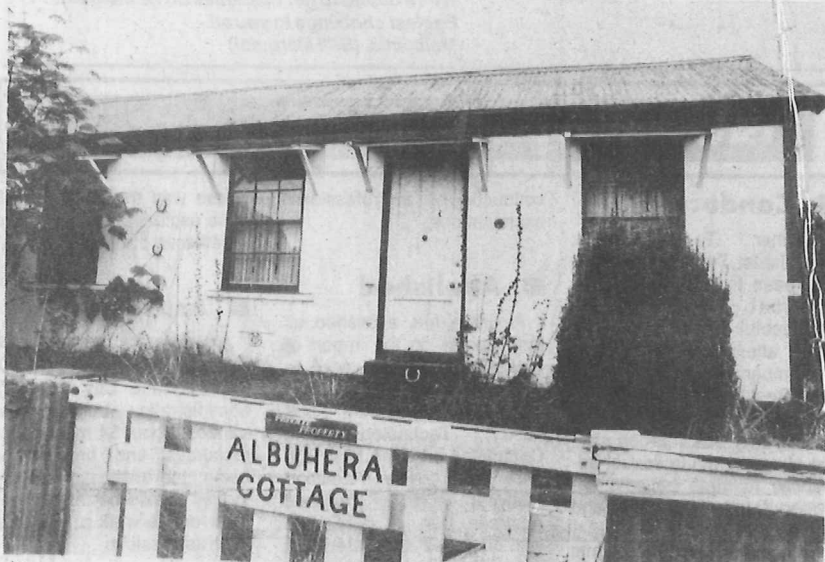
he has offered to give away the cottage to someone interested in spending the money to preserve it and even offered to help meet the relocation costs.

He says this offer still stands, but until the council agrees to allow the cottage to be moved things are stalemated.

He says the only possible alternative is that the council make a realistic offer to buy the cottage.

He would not be totally happy with a deal like this, but says he would be prepared to consider an offer.

He says, however, the issue most important to him is if and where the cottage can be moved, and until something positive is done the cottage will continue to deteriorate.



Historic Albuhera Cottage . . . caught in the middle of a new land war.

Photo: SUSAN WELSH