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# THE ROUND HOUSE

## HISTORIC LANDMARK

### BROUGHT FROM ENGLAND

#### TO BE DEMOLISHED

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Another of New Plymouth's early and historical landmarks is about to disappear. The march of progress necessitates that the old must make way for the new, and the Round House, which has stood in New Plymouth for nearly 80 years, is now to be demolished to make way for extensions to premises for a motor garage firm. The building is situated in Courtenay Street, opposite the Central Infant School, and will be pulled down during the next few weeks.

The house, which was brought in parts from England by its first owner, is rich in story that begins with its voyage to New Zealand 86 years ago. It has been named the "Round House" for many years, but is more octagonal in shape with an extension to the eastern side. Its timbers are remarkably preserved and it still has the original locks on the doors. It is not a large building and on the ground floor has only two rooms. On the second floor, which was added some time after it was erected, there are six bedrooms, four being three-cornered and two rectangular. Altogether it is a quaint house.

#### THE BARQUE GWALIOR.

The frame of steel and the timbers of the house were brought to New Plymouth in 1852 by Mr. Thomas Hirst, who was accompanied by his wife and his family of four girls and one boy. They travelled in the barque Gwalior, of 404 tons, and it was a most disastrous voyage of over six months. There was a shortage of food and water, a mutiny on board, and a captain who had the "horrors" and eventually committed suicide. The ship was leaky and badly trimmed and was definitely lopsided. When the passengers suggested to the captain that it was dangerous he answered that if it sank they would only reach Heaven a little sooner than they expected.

That the ship reached port was due only to lucky circumstances and to having to put into Cape Town for water and for food. At that port they took on board the late Mr. Chantrey Harris, a well-known Wellington newspaperman, as first mate. He, by sheer pluck and good seamanship, brought the vessel a partial wreck into the Auckland harbour.

Mr. and Mrs. Hirst left it at the Bay of Islands to continue the trip on a coastal schooner, and the condition of the Gwalior was reported at Auckland to the authorities, who sent H.M.S. Pandora to bring it into port. The Hirsts came on to New Plymouth and lived in the round house for a time before taking a farm. Later in the 'sixties they returned to live here and remained until the death of Mr. Hirst in 1883.

#### ORIGINAL POSITION.

At the time of its erection the house was a single-storied building according to a painting that is at present in the early colonists' section of the New Plymouth Museum, and it was situated in Devon Street, then Devon Line. The date of the addition of the second storey is not known, but it is thought to have been in the 'fifties. Together with the "Square House" that is alongside it today, the "Round House" was shifted by Mr. William Courtney from the Devon Street frontage of the section on which it stands to the Courtenay Street frontage.

It has changed hands several times since the Hirsts left it in 1883, and at one stage was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Batten, grandparents of the famous aviatrix. In fact there is a story current that it was Jean Batten's birthplace.

#### OFFICERS' MESS.

During the absence of the Hirsts in England in 1860 the house was used as an officers' mess in the Maori War by one of the regiments, the "Square House" being used for a similar purpose by the officers of the 43rd Regiment. It was also used as a refuge after the White Cliffs massacre in February, 1869. Memories of the two houses are vivid to Mrs. W. H. Skinner, New Plymouth, a grand-daughter of the Hirsts. When the "Square House" was erected and before the partitions were placed inside Mr. Hirst held a ball typical of the Victorian days with the garments of that period and the old quadrilles.

The house is substantially the same as when it was occupied by the original residents, although it has deteriorated in the past 20 years. The reason for its demolition is that the section on which it stands has been purchased by Len Nicholls Motors Ltd. and will be used for the extension and remodelling of the garage premises.

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