

SHAW COTTAGE

TIMBER FROM ENGLAND

WAS IT ERECTED ?

LETTER RAISES DOUBTS

A letter written by the late Mr. J. T. Shaw to relatives in England soon after his arrival at New Plymouth in 1841, which was published among other matters relating to the New Plymouth settlement, raises some doubt of the general belief that the Shaw cottage was originally built of timbers brought out in sections in the Regina, which arrived at New Plymouth in October, 1841.

Colour is given to the doubts also by an inspection of the building made about two years ago by Mr. W. H. Skinner and the late Mr. C. Clarke, borough engineer. Mr. Skinner writes on the subject as follows:—

Now that definite steps are being taken to clear the site in preparation for the building of the new post office, the question is being asked: "What is to become of the Shaw cottage, that patriarch residence of New Plymouth, and its most ancient monument?"

It has generally been considered, says the writer, that the timber in this building was brought out from England by the late James Thomas Shaw, on the Regina, October, 1841, and erected on the site in Currie Street immediately after.

About two years ago in company with the late Mr. Clarke, borough engineer, Mr. Skinner says he made an inspection of the building, and found that the outer timbers were local pit-sawn red pine, with some pukatea—procured within the town boundaries, possibly in what is now Pukekura Park.

"This was a surprise, but it was thought that possibly the frame of the building was that brought out in 1841, but of that we had our doubts. These doubts have been strengthened by a recent talk with Miss C. A. Douglas, a great-granddaughter of Mr. J. T. Shaw, who drew my attention to a letter written by Mr. Shaw to relatives in England, under date, New Plymouth, February 16, 1842, and published with others in: "Letters from Settlers in the N.Z. Company's Settlements, London, 1843."

THE ARRIVAL.

In this letter Mr. Shaw says: "... We arrived safe at this place and were landed September 20, 1841, after a very prolonged voyage . . . I am at present living with James (son) but I hope in a few days to go into a house of my own. I did not put up the wood house I brought with me, not knowing where my town land would be . . . I thought it best to buy a piece of ground that was near the centre of the town. I have bought a piece in a very eligible spot (Currie Street), 82 feet by 42 . . ."

The inference in this letter seems to be, says Mr. Skinner, that he had sold, or exchanged, the material bought from England, and had decided to build with local timber.

However, the fact remains that the building is the oldest house in Taranaki, and was in continuous occupation from March, 1842, to 1937. A picture of the house appears in a panoramic view of New Plymouth drawn by Mrs. J. T. Wickstead early in 1843.