

# SMALL'S COTTAGE

Tenure 1853 to 1905

Now 130a Pendarves Street, New Plymouth

William Thompson Small aged five arrived in Wellington from Fifeshire Scotland with his parents and five other children aboard the Martha Ridgeway on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1840. Sometime around 1846 the family moved to Wanganui where they farmed.

In New Plymouth, aged 18 years William purchased Lot 1657 (Certificate of Title 16/89). Why he left Wanganui and how he financed such a purchase is unknown. Further, what work he undertook is also unknown. Aged 18 it seems feasible he would have at least cleared the site or built some rudimentary building or shed on it. Eventually William left New Plymouth for the safety and riches of the South Island. As his obituary suggests, he went to the Otago gold fields. It is unknown when he went south.

Fort Niger was erected on what was previously a Pa site (Wharepapa) by the Navel Brigade off HMS Niger early in 1860. It was the corner stone of six blockhouse defences during the Land Wars. The small T or X-shaped was on higher ground than today and was contained within an earth parapet. On the 18<sup>th</sup> August 1860 it was attacked by several 'natives' from a distance of a few feet. A blue light was hoisted and alarm bugles sounded. The attackers made a 'precipitate' retreat as they were fired upon by a volley of shots (Taranaki Herald [TH]). The Blockhouse and four houses were put up for sale on the 7<sup>th</sup> March 1867 (TH 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb p.2). It is suggested you walk to the Fort, a few metres away, and read the District Council sign.

William also used his middle name Thompson or Tom. Down south he worked as a carrier on the Otago gold fields for 12 months then took on a mail contract and went into 'business'. Latter he went to the Hokitika gold fields. During this time he met and married Isabella (nee Jones, mother Duke) from Dunedin, formally of Ireland on July 1863 at Meadowbank, Tokomairiro North Otago. Sadly they had no children.

The couple arrived back in New Plymouth at the end of December 1875 where he followed the occupation of builder and contractor. It is most likely he would have built his own home. It is reasonable to assume parts of the Cottage were constructed from 1876 onwards; some 138 years ago. The stone piles of the house indicate very early construction; take a look. During the sale of the property we have taken a conservative period of 1880s (125 years)

William or Tom, no doubt supported by his wife was elected to the Borough Council from 1884 until 1893 (9 years); he died on the 8<sup>th</sup> October and is buried at Te Henui Cemetery.

Isabella died on the 29<sup>th</sup> July 1905. Both funerals left for the cemetery from the cottage, address Fort Niger. Isabella left a legacy to the Recreational grounds (£25) and £500 to the New Plymouth Hospital. We know nothing about her contributions to early New Plymouth.

Following Isabella's passing their possessions were auctioned, amongst household items were 46 bottles of homemade wine and 30 head of poultry.

The house and surrounding land was next purchased by the Presbyterian Church; they kept the land and building for over 20 years before subdividing and selling to Nelson Armstrong Hill a land agent in 1927 – 1971. Following owners were H Vosper (1972), Smith/Melgard (1976), Watkins 1987.

Selwyn and Barbara Watkins 29 March 2014

*William Small Obituary: 8<sup>th</sup> October 1895, p2 Taranaki Herald*