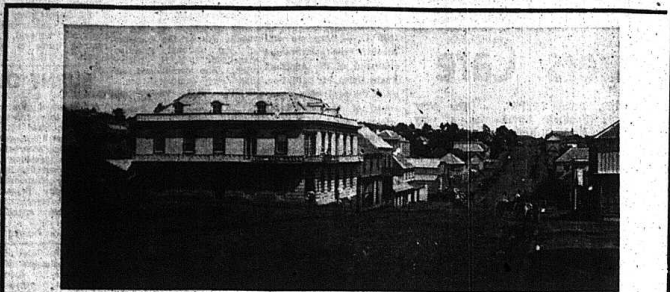


# IMPERIAL—hote of many faces



THE IMPERIAL — "Italian-style" — as it was built in the 1860s. This photograph was probably taken in the early 1870s as the hotel sign shows John Uncles as proprietor. — Taranaki Museum photograph.

Rumours of a raid by a highwayman and a visit by a runaway bull are colourful incidents in the history of New Plymouth's Imperial Hotel, which is due to be demolished very shortly.

The hotel has changed both in shape and size since it was built in 1864. It began service as a three-storey structure but later lost a complete floor during remodelling work to upgrade the premises.

Last week's article described some of the characters associated with the 107-year-old hotel and its more recent history. This concluding article covers the establishment of the Imperial prior to the turn of the Century.

The Taranaki Herald files of December 17, 1864, record that the Imperial (then named the Traveler's Hotel) being built for Mr William Henwood, "will have a frontage to Devon St and Currie St, is upward of 40 ft in height, the frontages extending 50 ft into each other.

## ELEGANT

"When finished the exterior will present a very elegant appearance, as the architectural design is tasteful, being in the ornamental, Italian style. A private entrance from both Devon and Currie Sts will lead a visitor through a spacious hall to dining room, billiard room and parlours. From the hall, a handsome staircase leads to drawing room, sleeping apartments and billiard rooms. From this floor access may be had to the balcony, which will run the full length of the building in both streets.

"The third floor also comprises convenient bedrooms. The basement contains kitchen, servants' hall, stone cellar (then partly above ground) etc. The building was designed and is being built by Messrs Watson and Brown, New Plymouth. Its costs, exclusive of land, is estimated at £1800 and it is to be finished in January next, having been commenced last month."

and Mrs Raynes, who purchased the hotel in November, 1887. Extensive renovations were carried out, including repapering and re-furnishing the bedrooms. The whole of the building was repainted, and a balcony was erected around both frontages of the hotel.

The Herald noted in March, 1894: "The dining-room has been re-decorated and all the delicacies of the season are to be served on the table. The back of the premises has been made a pattern of neatness, and a high fence erected so that the privacy of the place cannot be overlooked. With the improvements made, we are sure that the house will prove a most attractive one for visitors, and Mr and Mrs Raynes will not regret coming to New Plymouth."

## RUNAWAY

Two further references to the Imperial in November 1894 read —

"A young bull caused some consternation among the public on this morning (November 15). The animal broke away from a mob in Ponderham St and, rushing along Currie St, he made his way into the backyards of the Imperial Hotel, and somewhat astonished Host Raynes by rushing in thru the back door, along the passage, and out the door opening on Devon St.

## RUMOUR

The bull, once in the street again, continued his career, and rushing down the street, he looked to be making for Mr Reed's pharmacy when he stopped on the asphalt, and the fall evidently made him change his mind, for on getting up he made across the street and tried to get along the railway line, but was prevented by the stops. The bull was then headed up

New Plymouth's Imperial Hotel is to close next week after 107 years in the liquor and accommodation business. This second and final article by reporter DIANA QUAY describes the hotel's early years.

Brougham St. and after further loitering he was intercepted, notably the conservatory passage at the end of the entrance hall... The other reference was a less exciting incident.

"On Monday evening between 4 and 5 o'clock, a phenomenal downpour of rain occurred. The culvert at the Imperial Hotel corner could not carry off the storm water fast enough, and as a consequence, the road was flooded, and at one time it looked as if the Imperial Hotel bar would be swamped; but the rain which came down like a waterspout for 10 minutes, gradually diminished, and the miniature torrent was rained down the side channels and over the foot path and roadway. Mr and Mrs Raynes were drained away through the culvert."

"The hotel was bought in 1885 by Mr W. Walker for £2300. A long court case resulted between Mr Raynes and Mr E. L. Nathan over the commission for the sale. Mr Raynes and his wife became proprietors of the Naval and Family Hotel, built in Karangahape Rd, Auckland.

While the hotel was bought in Mr Walker's name, the licence was issued in the name of Mr Tabor.

The Herald reported several noticeable alterations and improvements in the "well-known and popular house" under Mr Tabor's hands.

## BALCONY

"The most prominent improvement is a handsome balcony that runs along the Devon St front, and returns a short distance into Currie St. The balcony is supported on handsome cast-iron columns, with hexagonal bases and spiral stems, being surmounted by Corinthian capitals, and handsome brackets, frieze and fringe, also in cast iron, representing New Zealand ferns.

"The balcony is decked over in a substantial manner and arranged to carry off all water through the hollow columns to the street and water tables.

"The entrance to the balcony is through the bal-

cony from the house is given by three French cast-iron, two from the passages and one from the sitting room.

"Several internal improvements have also been effected, notably the conservatory passage at the end of the entrance hall... The alterations were supervised by the architect, Mr O. Deacon, and the contractor, Mr G. G. G. G.

"Still further renovations were reported in September, 1894, when Mrs Tabor had sold out to Mr F. W. Watts. The alterations included the enlargement of the bar as to make it scarcely recognisable. The bar was also repapered, varnished and finished off with plate glass bars.

"Upstairs the bedrooms and sitting rooms have all been fitted with electric bells and an excellent system of electric fire alarms has been installed. Each bedroom is provided with an alarm bell connected with a switch on each floor which can be turned on in a second, thus starting every bell to ring simultaneously and they continue ringing until the switch is turned off.

"The switches will be easy of access on each floor, and in addition it is Mr Watt's intention to keep a night porter on duty.

"With such perfect arrangements, the danger from fire in the Imperial Hotel is reduced to a minimum. We believe it is the first installation of this system of fire alarms in New Zealand."

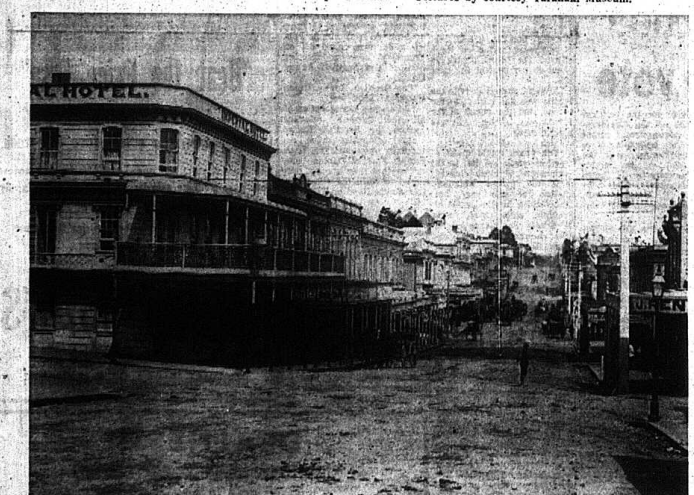
Hotels by their very nature are always an important, sometimes focal, part of their community. Few, however, can claim to have watched over the development of a city from its raw, rudimentary beginnings and to be still entertaining its citizens more than a century later.

"No doubt some people will hail the Imperial's demolition next month as "verru-due."

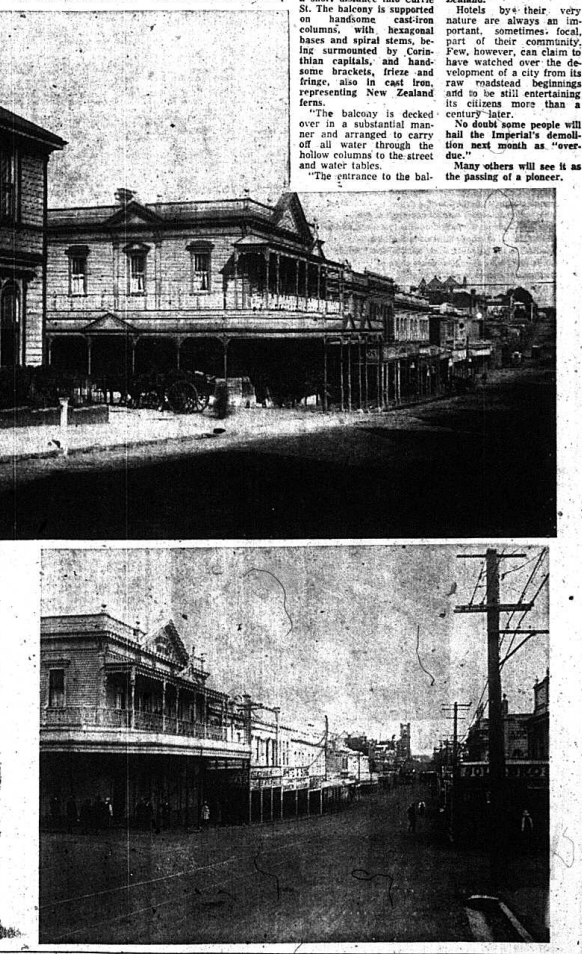
Many others will see it as the passing of a pioneer.



ABOVE: The hotel, now owned by Mr Craig, in the 1880s (The Convent in left centre background was built in 1884). The structure has changed — and so has the street! BELOW: Mrs Tabor's improvements added a handsome frontage to the hotel in 1896. The alterations earned a column of praise from a Taranaki Herald reporter who described the balcony's supports as "handsome cast-iron columns with hexagonal bases and spiral stems." — Pictures by courtesy Taranaki Museum.



MORE alterations (above) were being carried out in 1890. By then the top story had gone. RIGHT: Cars were rare and dresses still flapped around women's ankles when this photograph (also supplied by Taranaki Museum) was taken.



Tele-talk

with  
V.D.O.  
Tape

Keep it up Jack

day he might come to Taranaki and tell us all we don't know about our town!

It was a pity in a way that the BBC's "Twelfth Night" had to appear immediately after "Scotch Seven," because one just couldn't help comparing the productions, as well as the actors.

Tops of the list, for us, were Sir Alec Guinness' Malvolvo, his first appearance in a British-made television show, and Sir Toby Belch, played by Sir Ralph Richardson.

It doesn't seem very long ago since Tommy Steele was making a name for himself in New Zealand as a pop-singing seaman. He's come a long way since then. Indeed, it would seem he hasn't got much further to go. After all, you can't get past the top.

★ ★ ★

Since Marty and Alf were here, we've become a bit choosy about the "comedies" we watch.

For some weeks now a couple of pommies have been watched with a good deal of caution. Name, Morecombe and Wise.

There's been a certain amount of innuendo, but, by today's apparent standards of humour, they are appealing.

And funny!

Men" and "Malgret."

I've always had a soft spot for Glynnis McNeiloh, and I hope future episodes will give her more scope to prove her acting ability than she has been given so far.

Letters

TV ANNOUNCERS

Sir. — What is wrong with Plain Anglo-Saxon words, and why do TV announcers feel they must use long words when short ones will do the