

New Plymouth's historic Flight house is to be restored in a joint project by the Taranaki Polytechnic and the New Zealand Historic Places Trust. Funds for the restoration are still being sought, and no

decision has yet been made on where the building will eventually be sited. Below is something of the life story of the man who first owned it and by whose name it is now known.

# Historic home's energetic owner

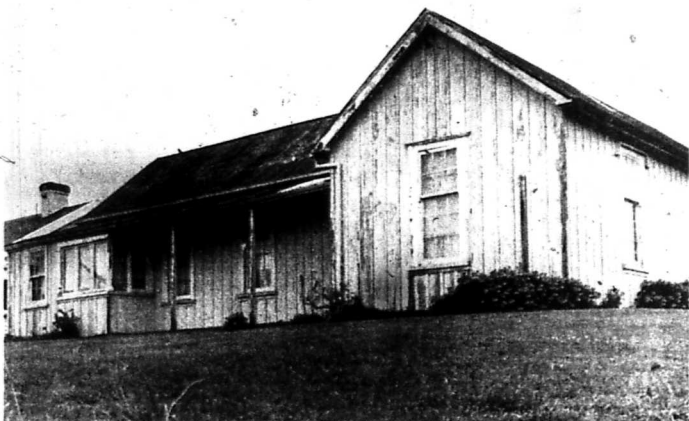
**Josiah Flight, who built New Plymouth's historic Flight house, was one of Taranaki's earliest magistrates, and a prominent social reformer.**

He was born in 1800, and educated in Tiverton, Devon.

His family owned a textile factory which produced thread, and spun wool, which were woven into sheeting and plain fabric.

However, when financial losses meant his home and factory had to be sold Josiah Flight and his wife Ann migrated to New Zealand.

A friend, Grace Hirst, in a letter to her sister Margaret in 1868, talks about the loss of social standing the bankruptcy brought, leading the Flights to emigrate.



The Flight house on its original site in Eliot St, New Plymouth. It has since been moved to the Taranaki Polytechnic grounds for restoration.

## STYLE

"When Mr Flight married Miss Devenish it was considered she had married very well and they lived in good style and were considered the great people of the family. But through some cause he got into difficulties and became bankrupt and could not hold up his head again so they decided to come to New Zealand."

What remaining capital they had was invested in the New Plymouth company land purchase scheme in partnership with

3500 acres in, and around, the town.

As settlers beyond the Waiwakaio, including the Flights, had to abandon their land, in exchange for land within the new boundaries.

Settlers were reluctant to leave their land, but eventually all were compelled to, because of the increasing hostility from the growing number of Maoris in the area.

The Flights left Mangaroraka for

magistrate were delicate and trying.

On one occasion he assembled the residents to ask for military protection for the province, and in 1855 he called out the total white male population for training as special constables.

## DIARY

In her diary of 1862-3, Sarah Flight refers to some of the ongoing incidents of the Taranaki wars.

"We heard that some of the friendly natives who had sold or were going to sell some land to the Government had been attacked by some of the King's natives while cutting the line on this land. Five were killed and 11 wounded." June 3.

"Fifty of the militia commenced mending the Omata Road. We see by the paper that one of the natives who spoke very violently against the Europeans fell dead directly afterwards." July 19.

As well as his civic duties, Flight took a great interest in all matters likely to promote the welfare of the district, and his family was actively involved in church and temperance groups.

Grace Hirst, in a letter to her sister on December 27, 1855, comments on the Flight family.

"The Flights seem such a nice pious family, we all think Mr F is so much like my brother Richard and Mrs F is such a quiet ladylike woman."

With the Rev W. Connell, Josiah Flight formed the first temperance society amongst the military in 1861, and he assisted Whiteley to found the first total-abstinence society amongst the Maoris in 1864.

In her diary, Sarah Flight refers to her father's involvement in



Josiah Flight ... a leader in early New Plymouth.

the temperance movement.

"About 25 persons at the temperance meeting ... Papa read a part of a chapter of 'The Mysterious Parchment.'" July 31.

## DRUNKARD

"Papa read to us a tale from Meliora, 'The Early Wrecked'. It is a story of a young man of high family who had become intemperate and died a drunkard, and his mother a lunatic caused by his fearful end." October 3.

Josiah Flight was also a charter member of lodge Egmont IOGT in 1873.

As a churchman he laid the foundation stone of the first Wesleyan church in 'Liardet Street on March 13, 1856.

On January 1, 1862, he laid that of the Primitive Methodist Church, and on March 11, 1868, his own denomination, Baptist, opened a church, largely through his efforts.

Josiah Flight also promoted New Zealand flax, and iron and industries, and advocated

the construction of a New Plymouth harbour.

With Devenish he brought some of the first sheep to Taranaki, and also many English fruit trees, shrubs, and flowers, such as primroses, and violets.

Josiah Flight died on March 7, 1884, and his widow six months later.

Flight house, built in 1868, originally stood in a large section bounded by Courtenay, Eliot, and Devon Streets in surroundings of camellias, shrubs, and gardens.

The house has vertical board and batten structures. This was distinctive in New Zealand to New Plymouth, before the more common horizontal boarding was introduced in the 1870s and 1880s.

Flight house is a good example of the vertical boarding, as it is slightly larger than the more common two to three-room cottage.

It also has architraves, which give an added touch to the windows. The original shingle roof has since been replaced by corrugated iron.

# Profile

By Heather Chalmers

Ann's brother, William Devenish.

They sailed from England on the Timandra, on November 2, 1841, landing in New Plymouth on February 23, 1842.

On arrival Josiah Flight describes in his diary the early settlement of New Plymouth, "the people on shore are living in tents, huts formed of reeds or mud, and a few in one-storied houses."

The Flights' earliest dwelling was a tent, and like the rest of the township, they were plagued with rats.

"Rats at night so troublesome could not sleep. Wet night. Killed only two rats." At this time Flight's diary has a daily record of rats killed, the amount reaching as high as 23.

Eventually, the Flights settled on a farm at Mangaroraka, on the Waitara Road.

On November 25, 1841, however, Governor Fitzroy declared that the New Plymouth settlement was to be forfeited, apart from

exchange land in the Mangoreia area.

Unused to the heavy labouring that colonial farming required, Flight would not have been saddened to leave it when in 1852 he succeeded Captain King as resident magistrate at New Plymouth, and sub-treasurer for the province.

On his appointment, Josiah Flight bought a house for his family at Te Henui.

At the outbreak of the Taranaki wars in 1860 they had to abandon it to seek safety in the small defended area of town, and their home was later destroyed by Maoris.

Although many other families evacuated to Nelson, during the Taranaki wars, Ann and her children, Anne, Sarah Gill, and Martha Kate, remained in New Plymouth.

As well as his role as magistrate Josiah Flight also became Sheriff of the Supreme Court, coroner of the district, and in 1860 collector of customs.

During the Taranaki wars, his duties of captain of militia, and as