



History

with Judy Waters, Warkworth & District Museum

Goatley Rd's fruit-growing past

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Goatley Road branches off State Highway 1 at Keith Hay corner and meanders up through a peaceful valley. The first settlers arrived in the area around 1860 when the designated road was nothing more than a line drawn on a survey map. The Claydens, Chamberlains, Barkers, Boons and others made their own tracks through the forest to reach the land they had acquired as Crown grantees. Minutes of the Upper Mahurangi Highway Board tell the story of protracted negotiations by the settlers who sent deputations and petitions to board meetings pleading for a road to their land.

Many small streams flowed through the area making it necessary to build bridges and culverts to make even a bridle track possible. Finally, in 1879, it was reported that the plans for the road had gone to the survey office for certification. The following year it was resolved to open a road through the deviations purchased from settlers more than five years previously.

The first mention that the road was to be called Goatley is found in a minute dated 1883. James Henry Goatley was a widower newly-arrived from Oxfordshire, England. Unlike his Dome Valley neighbours, who had reached New Zealand by sailing ship after long sea voyages, he had travelled a shorter route through the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal.

In the Warkworth Museum archives is a letter he wrote to a relative describing his journey. A highlight was a visit to Naples where the passengers feasted on the most delicious fruit including grapes, peaches, apples and pears. This experience may have inspired him to develop the extensive orchard on his farm, which became something of a show-place. A correspondent from the Taranaki Herald wrote of visiting the Goatley orchard and orange grove, in 1898, and described it as a sight to behold. Mr Goatley also had a passion for cricket and loved to entertain visiting teams from Auckland and replay the games with them.

In 1897, at the age of 56, he remarried and the second Mrs Goatley worked alongside her husband becoming a noted orchardist in her own right. She was quoted as saying a woman could support herself by owning a small orchard and would only need to employ a man to do the ploughing. It was said that while fruit growing prospered, the district could not grow grass. This must have changed because



The home of James Henry Goatley, about 1900.

by the time electricity reached Goatley Road, in 1942, there were four dairy farms ready to make use of it.

A local historian who lived on Goatley Road for 46 years, and saw many changes in that time, was Stan Gittos. He wrote of his family's arrival in 1930. His walk to the school bus stop covered half a mile of clay, then a mile of metal. On cream collection days, he could ride part way with his father on the gig, then in the cream lorry to the main road bus shelter. He said the whole length of the road was finally metalled in 1935. Few of the original settlers stayed in the area and as the properties continue to change hands, it is harder to recall the names of all the families who have called Goatley Road 'home'.