

CHAPTER 1

THE STORY OF CAPTAIN PORTER

The district to which the name Kohimarama is now applied comprises the original farm allotments 28, 29 and 30, and part of 31. This land consists of an extensive low lying area surrounded by hills. The most attractive feature of the local its is its beautiful bathing beach, over half a mile in length, the longest beach in Tamaki. Until the district was roaded and subdivided for residential purposes, the area on the flat consisted chiefly of a lagoon and raupo swamps which were a breeding ground of the "parera" or wild grey duck. Hence the Maoris called the bay "Waiparera" meaning "duck water", a name used also by the pakeha until almost 1870.

The one and only early pioneer of Waiparera was a very outstanding man with a most unusual story - Captain William Field Porter. Fortunately the tale of his voyage to New Zealand and of some of the incidents of his pioneer days were narrated in 1907 by his younger son, another William Field Porter who, in 1841, the year of the family's arrival in Auckland, was only eleven years of age. "Wishing to put on record our leaving England and the voyage out" he said, "I am trying to remember as much as I can for the young people of the family to read in after years, and see the conditions under which their forefathers came to this side of the world."

The Captain, who was a former mayor of Liverpool, and a prosperous and well respected merchant and shipbuilder of that city, suffered heavy financial losses during the middle thirties as the result of the loss of several vessels which were "not heard of for a long time, so the insurance could not be got to meet liabilities." At the same time, the Captain's elder son, Richard Field Porter, who had been finishing his education by ravelling in his father's ships, had become unsettled and was anxious to go with his young wife to South Australia, a new colony beginning to attract attention. So the Captain, who was anxious to make a new start in life after his financial ruin, decided that after he had satisfied his creditors the whole family should emigrate to Australia. Mrs. Porter, we are told, was very much opposed to the idea as she "Was grieved at leaving her sisters and other old friends and Liverpool, where she was born"; but her husband persuaded her by saying that if they did not like the new country they could always return.

It is said in one account, but not contained in his son's story, that the Captain's creditors, on hearing of his intention to emigrate, offered as a token of their esteem to finance a ship for the journey.

After much consideration, the Captain decided to take two small rather than one large one, partly so as to have a "back door" in case of accidents, and partly because on so long a voyage he wanted no strangers in the cabin with his family -

if he took a large ship. he would have to take passengers to help towards expenses. So he selected the "Porter" a brig of 250 tons which had been built in his own shipyard, and built a new brig of 80 tons which he called the "Dorset". Captain Porter who was considerably in advance of his time as regards innovations in shipbuilding, installed in these vessels every "modern" device so as to ensure strength and durability. For instance, he had double stays and iron caps for the mastheads, in place of wooden ones. The "Porter" which was to be the family home for many months had its cabin enlarged and every conceivable comfort installed. Both vessels were painted black with a broad white streak and black ports.

After a year's planning and preparation, the vessels were ready for the journey and loaded with everything necessary for beginning life in a new colony. The cargo included all the household furniture none of which had been sold; a variety of fruit trees and other plants which were packed in one of the longboats and thrived wonderfully, "though they were quite without water"; five pedigree heifers and a bull, all 18 months old, and a black jersey cow in full milk; pedigree sheep Southdown and Leesters; pigs Berkshire, Chinese and Neapoli tan: two horses, a blood stallion and a mare; numerous cases of miscellaneous small goods such as cotton, buttons, needles, tapes, lace, wools, socks, stockings etc; a dripstone for filtering water which had been brought by the Captain from the West Indies 30 years previously; a large stock of fodder for the live stock; and, on the quarter deck of the "Porter" two eighteen-pounder guns, ammunition, and an arms chest containing two muskets, flint-locks, "boarding axes" with long handles and a spike at the back of the head, flint lock pistols, and cutlasses. The emigrants were provided with ample supplies of food for the journey: casks of beef and pork; live turkeys, fowls, ducks and geese which were kept in coops and killed as required for the cabin table; corned beef, salted tongues, hams, bacon, potatoes, codfish, tripe in jars, rice, flour, sugar, casks of eggs in salt, carrots in sand, bottled fruits, jams, cakes in tins, dried fruits and nuts in plenty. All the provisions kept well, we are told, except the potatoes.

On the "Porter" were to travel the Porter family, the Captain and his wife, the 26 year old Richard and his wife, Alice, the Captain's only daughter who was then 14, and young William, then a boy of eight. So that his children's education should not be interrupted, the Captain brought with him as governess the French teacher from Alice's former school and a German master named Shivenoe who wished to accompany the French teacher to whom he was engaged. The Captain agreed to take him only on the condition that the couple were married first, as he said "he would have no love making on board". On the "Porter", too, were a doctor, two mates, eight elderly seamen and two boys; a West Indian cook, an old servant of the Captain, who made bread and hot rolls every day; and a few families of emigrants who were given separate quarter and acted as servants, milking the cow, feeding the livestock etc.

In the "Dorset" which was under Captain Bishop, travelled a number of emigrants and their wives, the men, all trades men, being under contract to work for Captain Porter until their passages were paid. They included a blacksmith, a carpenter, a tailor, a gardener, a bootmaker and a brickmaker.

When at last the day of departure came - some time in August 1838, the emigrants were farewelled by a large company of relations, friends and other spectators, who had come to see the departure of "Noah's Ark" as they called the expedition. William Porter tells us :

"As the lines were cast off, the crowd cheered to the echo" for "such a sight had never been seen before as two ships loaded with all kinds of stock and everything necessary to found a new settlement, commanded by the owner with all his family on board and work people of all trades; nor do I suppose such a thing has taken place since, now 70 years ago. As evening came on, we all stood at the stem and watched old England fade away."

Every day after this, the family, at the end of their dinner, drank a toast to absent friends, a custom which they kept up throughout the voyage and for years afterwards so long as the family was together.

The vessels called first at Madeira, where they stayed a week and took on board more fodder and poultry, fresh butter, eggs and meat and sweet Constancia wine, and then at the Cape of Good Hope where they stayed a month. Here the Captain sold his Stallion to a Dutchman for 400 guineas, as he did not like the risk of keeping so valuable a horse on board any longer. He took on board a large quantity of Dutch cheese, bags of raisins and walnuts, a Cape mare, 4 working bullocks, a dray, a coloured man to drive them and 2 black girls for domestic servants, one of whom, "Black Sall" was later a familiar figure in Auckland. While at the Cape, they lost the Doctor, who, thinking there was a good opening for a practice there, decided to break his contract which was for the duration of the voyage, and disappear". Unfortunately, Mrs. Shivenoe, the governess, took ill 10 days after the trip was resumed and died through lack of medical attention.

After a five months voyage, the vessels arrived at Port Adelaide having experienced no mishaps or misfortune save the loss of the governess. They had had only one unpleasant adventure which, however, caused a little excitement - they were followed for three days by a pirates' schooner which ultimately sailed away, probably because the owner was afraid to attack two ships in company. That was the only occasion on which the guns and arms were got out in readiness for an attack.

Another little bit of excitement was caused one night by one of the heifers getting out of bounds and making its way into the forecastle. There it fell into the berth of one of the sailors, a Welshman, who, on feeling the horn and hide, cried out "The devil is in the forecastle".

The Captain's son wrote in 1907 :

"I doubt if people of the present day would undertake such a voyage from one side of the world to the other in a comparatively small vessel and with a deck load of stock. My Father was a man out of the common, with great self-reliance and a long experience of the sea and its ways.... It was well we did not meet with very heavy gales."

After a short time in Adelaide, the Porters moved to Port Lincoln, its beautiful harbour on the west coast of Spencer's Gulf having attracted the Captain. There he sold the "Dorset" but retained the "Porter" with which he inaugurated a regular shipping service between Port Lincoln and Port Adelaide. Captain Bishop, who also settled at Port Lincoln, was given command of the vessel.

Before the Porters had left England, the Captain had had the frame of a cutter built. "It was put up and each piece numbered, everything complete with spars," and was then taken down again ready for transit. As there was no room for the frame on either the "Porter" or "Dorset", however, it was left ready to be despatched on the first ship to follow them. With this cutter of 25 tons which Captain Porter called the "Alice" after his wife and daughter, he started a service between Port Adelaide and Sydney.

The Captain invested a great deal of money in an estate at Port Lincoln, gave a site for a church, had Richard appointed manager of its bank and did all he could to promote the growth of the settlement, but all in vain: "the place hung fire, there being no extent of good back country." After 18 months residence there, the Captain decided to look round at the other colonies and with his family travelled on the "Porter" to Hobart, Launceston, Melbourne and Sydney, buying and selling merchandise as he travelled from port to port. At Sydney the family stayed for two weeks with some people named Abercrombie who were interested in New Zealand and were then building a vessel at the Great Barrier Island. After hearing their glowing accounts of the country, the Captain decided to inspect it in spite of warnings by many that there was no security on its shores for either life or property. To Richard's wife, this was evidently "the last straw" so she returned to England with her child saying she would return when the family were finally settled. Before leaving Sydney the Captain loaded his vessels with a big cargo of goods for the native trade - muskets, powder, iron pots, brightly coloured blankets, large clocks which were very much in demand by the Maoris, blue and red shirts, tobacco, pipes and tinder boxes (holding flint and steel). He also brought gear for the Abercrombie's vessel at the Great Barrier where he called before entering the Hauraki Gulf.

They finally reached Auckland in May 1841 to be met by Captain Rough with the "white kid gloves", the "spruce little man" of whom they had heard. They landed at low tide just

about where L.D. Nathan's warehouse now stands in Port Street, but as no houses were available, returned to the "Porter" on which they had to live until August 11th.

Two days after their final landing, an Auckland newspaper was advertising a multifarious collection of goods which were on sale at "Captain Porter's Store" in the centre of Commercial Bay. The stock included various kinds of wines and spirits; building materials such as logs and boards of cedar, casing, window sashes, doors, glass, paint, etc.; bedsteads and carpets; blacksmiths' tools; clothing such as fur coats, trousers, shawls, dresses, Scotch bonnets, waistcoats and hosiery; groceries such as butter, salt, loaf sugar, soap, tobacco and casks of beef and pork; crates of earthenware; various hardware lines and haberdashery.

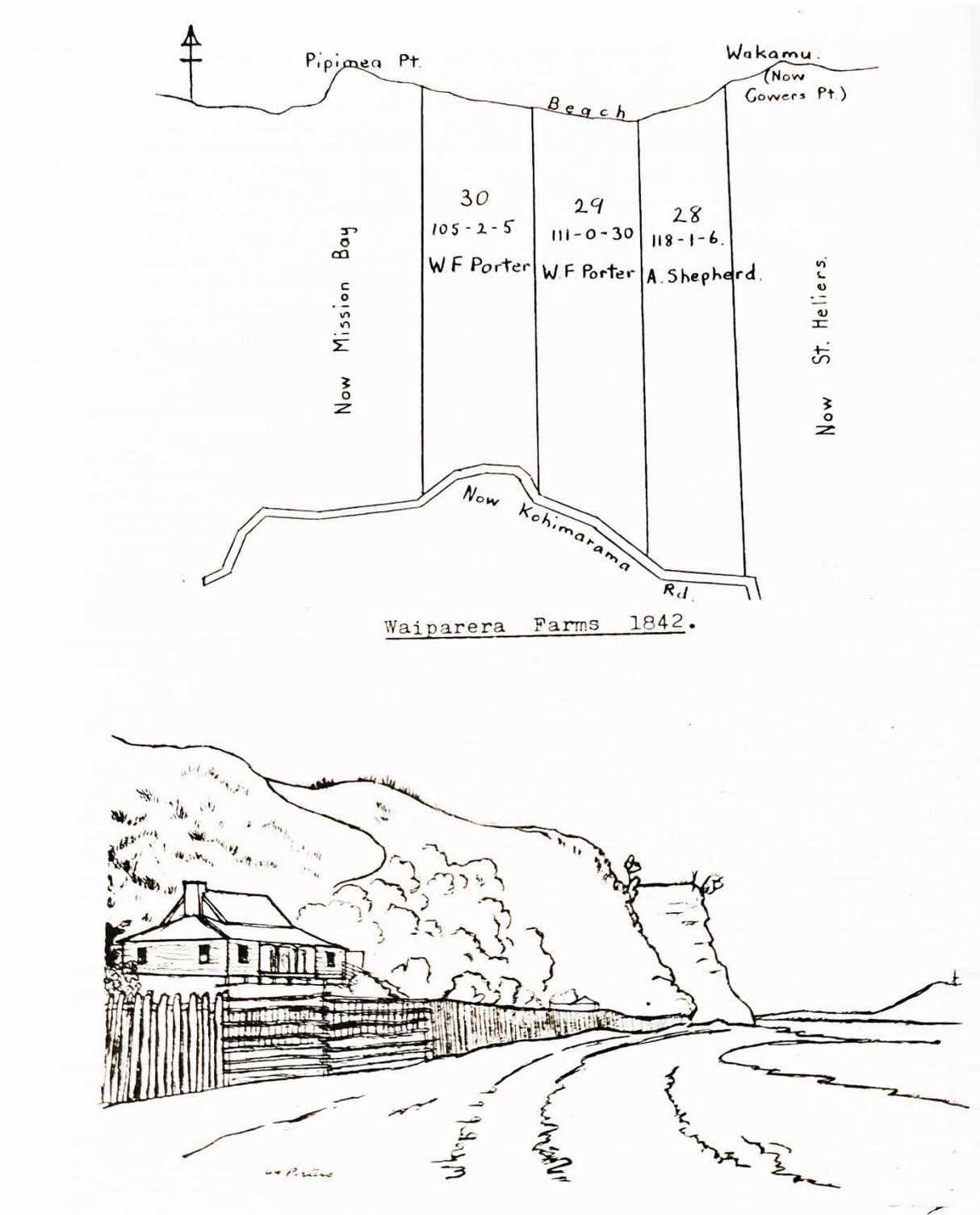
By this time the family who were impressed with Auckland and its prospects, decided to end their wanderings and sell their "Noah's Ark. Meanwhile, however, until they received a suitable offer, the vessel was employed in the Sydney trade under a Captain Tom Stewart. After some time she was sold to a Sydney firm who eventually lost her when she was on her way to Manila for a cargo of sugar.

Captain Porter had arrived at Auckland a month too late to secure land at the first Government auction, but had his opportunity at the second sale on September 1st at which he bought two "suburban" allotments of 3 acres each, a "cultivation" allotment of 3 acres and a "small farm" of nearly 10 acres.

In the following February at the first sale of Tamaki farms he was the buyer of the largest area. His purchase which totalled 455 acres, were allotments 1 and 3 at Point England, allotment 2 in the centre of Tamaki and allotment 30 at Waiparera, as Kohimarama was then called. All these allotments were secured at one guinea an acre. A month later at a sale of town allotments, he bought two small business sites, evidently for speculative purposes and in July 1842 yet another allotment in Tamaki- number 29 adjoining his former purchase at Waiparera. per acre. This was another 111 acres which he secured for £1 (See plan facing page 19 of Section 4.)

As soon as the Waiparera land was bought, Captain Porter sent men down "to clear and fence and drain ", under the superintendence of Robert Bush whom he appointed his farm overseer. Other employees were Thomas Kemp, later a landowner of Mission Bay, and William Pierce, afterwards, a resident of Point England. After the acquisition of a wooden plough, one of two which William Atkin had brought with him in November 1842, Thomas Kemp undertook the ploughing, with the assistance of William Pierce who drove the team - two working bullock, a bull and a cow which are described thus by William Porter:

"They consisted of two, working bullocks, they were red with white on the face just alike, could hardly tell one from the other - Redman and Nidu, the other two were a bull, Billie, and a cow Dairymaid, the cow was a splendid"



Captain Porter's House as Sketched by Edward Ishworth in 1844. From the original in the artist's Sketchbook.

By courtesy of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. (Ref. No. 351831/2)

"worker, but hard to milk. Cattle were scarce and high in price, the two bullocks cost £40, were imported from Sydney."

The Captain often travelled down to his farm "in a very fine boat" built of teak which had once been the Dorset's longboat. It was "rigged with spread sail and jib, also a jigger with boom out of the stern". On one occasion, however, he decided to return to Auckland overland on his horse as he wanted to become acquainted with the neighbouring country. He rode from his farm over the hill to the Purewa Creek and then up through what is now the Purewa Cemetery, until he reached the "Tamaki Road" a native track which ran to Newmarket in the same course as the present Remuera Road. Near Green Lane, however, the track was so overgrown with fern and teatree that the Captain lost his way and had to be accommodated for the night in an isolated farmhouse in what is now Ellerslie. At that time the land between Orakei and what is now Newmarket was covered with black birch bush.

We are told how the wily Okahu natives tried to make money out of the new pakeha:

"Soon after work was started at the farm a party of natives came round from Okahu and pointed out a spot where they said some of their ancestors were interred. Father called some of the workmen and told them to get posts and rails and fence the place in at once. One of the Maoris understood a little English; when they saw what was going to be done, he said 'Give money gold then you plant potatoes there'. It is needless to say that they did not get the money gold. They came again one day in a large canoe loaded with potatoes in kits. Stacking them two high along the beach, the chief Te Kawau stood out saying 'Homi Homi', being literally translated meant 'You give me I give you.' Two large boxes with good locks had taken his fancy and they were proceeding to walk off with them. Unfortunately for them, the owners did not see it in the same light and at last they had to be satisfied with a fig of twist tobacco on each kit, the regular price at that time: each kit held 50 lbs."

The Porters continued to live in the city their home was in Grafton Road until the spring of 1844 when the Captain and his wife moved to a new home just completed at the western end of Kohimarama Beach. To secure a sheltered site for his home, the Captain had bought from his neighbour, Mr. Newman, a three acre triangular shaped section which lay below the level of the remainder of Mr. Newman's farm and was of little use to him. It was ideal for the Captain's purpose, however, as it was a very sunny spot with high cliffs at the back and a beautiful outlook over the Waitemata - view to gladden the heart of any retired sea-captain. Alice Porter who was now 20 remained on at Grafton Road to keep house for her brother Richard whose wife had not yet returned. The Captain and his wife, however, were looking forward to the return home of their

younger son, William, who had been for two years at a small school in Nelson; he was to start at St. John's Collegiate School in March 1845. He was then 15 and had received very little schooling since leaving England seven years previously.

In the autumn of 1846 Captain Porter reaped an excellent harvest and therefore, as was customary among the well-to-do farmers of those days, he celebrated his good fortune by giving a "harvest home". As explained in Section 3 of this series, the so-called "harvest homes" of a century or more ago were not thanksgiving gatherings of a religious nature such as those still celebrated in many churches and called "harvest festivals" but parties given by farmers to celebrate the completion of the gathering in of their crops. The parties generally took the form of sumptuous dinners followed by social evenings but this particular one was quite a novel affair as the dinner was preceded by an afternoon cricket match. William Bambridge, the Deputy Registrar at St. John's College, who was one of the guests, wrote a detailed account of the event in his "Journal". He tells us that the College party - the Rev. Cotton, four of the divinity students and himself - went by whale boat from Purewa Creek to Waiparera arriving there at one o'clock. They then joined the other guests, mostly Tamaki landowners, at luncheon, and afterwards "repaired to a level field" for the cricket match. "After the match", writes Mr. Bambridge, "we returned to the house and amused ourselves as well as we could whilst dinner was preparing - Archery, Catchball etc. and at 7 we were summoned to the diningroom where a beautiful spread lay before us. Mr. Cotton carved a roast turkey, Mr. Porter at the other end a boiled round of beef. The side dishes were boiled rabbit, roast duck, with various dishes such as Tongue, Ham, etc. with varieties of vegetables. The second course Gooseberry and Apple Pies, Jam Tarts, Custard, Trifle etc. Third, Bread, Biscuit and Cheese. Dessert, Peaches, Gooseberries etc. Afterwards we managed a charade (MATRIMONY) which was too hastily got up but went off very fairly.... We broke up at 11 ½ ." This was a comparatively small party as only 13 men and 3 women - Mrs. and Miss Porter and a friend of the latter - were seated at the dinner table. How the Porters formed two cricket sides it is difficult to say unless the farm hands were invited to join in the fun.

After about two years at St. John's, William Porter junior began work on his father's farm. He tells us in his diary that for years he worked the two bullocks, Billie the bull and the cow Dairymaid. "After the land was broken up", he says, "the 2 bullocks were enough with the light plough, they went like horses, would come round at the word, did not require a driver. Later we got two steers, that made a good team of four for heavy work. The bull went in the cart shafts and was very good at holding back going down hill with a big load on." At the 1849 agricultural show the Porters won the prize for their plough and bullock team.

In 1853 the farm was enlarged by the acquisition of an adjacent allotment, number 28. This was bought from the Hon.

Alexander Shepherd, the Colonial Treasurer, for £1060. Mr. Shepherd had owned this farm since July 1842 when he bought it at a Government auction for £108.5.9, i.e. at £1 per acre. He acquired it merely for speculative purposes. Captain Porter was now the owner of the whole of Kohimarama.

He, too, appears to have bought part of his Tamaki land for speculative purposes - allotments 1, 2 and 3* for in September 1843 he sold all of allotment 3, half of 2, and 6 acres of number 1, to Commissioner Spain, receiving for the total sale £193.5.0, thus making a very small profit, only about £8. The remainder of allotment 2 was sold early in 1845 to Mrs. Watts, the St. John's College cook, for £63, about £1 less than the cost price. However, during that same year the Captain made £43 on part of allotment 1 - 70 acres of which he sold to Mr. R.C. Barstow. During the next two years he disposed of most of the remainder, making £32, but the final 11 acres by the Tamaki River remained on his hands until 1854 when he sold it to the Bishop.

Two years after he had built his home at Kohimarama the Captain retired from his trading business, but continued to participate in the public life of the young city and to take an active part in politics, in which he had been interested ever since his arrival in the country. It was in October 1841, after only five months' sojourn in New Zealand, that he assumed his first official positions - 13 Justice of the Peace, one of the first group to be appointed in New Zealand, and as a Member of the Legislative Council, of which he was the only nominee other than those who held office ex officio.

In the annual Auckland regatta held on St. Patrick's Day 1842 the Captain was chosen as one of the two stewards and in 1843 he was elected a vice-president of the Auckland Agricultural and Horticultural Society.

He and his wife were always guests at the leading social functions of early Auckland and generally his elder son and his daughter as well. At the wedding of Lieutenant Governor Eyre held at St. John's College in 1849, the whole of the Porter family were guests for they had known the bridegroom intimately in South Australia.

The year 1853 was an eventful one for the Porter family. The Captain, who had resigned from the Legislative Council some years earlier, was elected to the first Provincial Council as the Representative of the Suburbs of Auckland: Alice Porter was married to Captain J. Salmon of Auckland; and Richard Porter was appointed Clerk in Charge of the Provincial Treasury, at a salary of £300 per annum. Later that same year, the Captain was elected, again as the Representative of the Suburbs of Auckland, to the first New Zealand Parliament which met in May 1854. At that time he was 70 years of age and regarded as the "Father" of the assembly.

* These were bought in his wife's name as Crown Grants but they were released to the Captain within a year of their purchase.

The Captain retired from both the Council and the House of Representatives in 1855 but during his short term of office strongly championed the rights of the Maoris and contended that the Treaty of Waitangi was not being fully observed. In 1854 he was the convener of a committee set up to enquire into bribery at elections and the same year was chosen chairman of the first board of harbour commissioners.

In 1855 Richard Porter became Provincial Treasurer at a salary of £350 per annum, a position which he held until many years later when he became Under Secretary to the Colonial Treasury Department.

The year 1857 brought the first bereavement to the family - Alice died after only four years of married life.

Some time during the fifties, William left Waiparera to farm first at Waiheke and then in the Miranda Mangatangi district to the west of the Firth of Thames where his father owned extensive property.

In 1860 the Captain decided to put part of his Waiparera farm on the market (allotments 28 and 29) while the Kohimarama Conference was in session, so that intending land buyers might avail themselves of the steamer then running twice daily to Kohimarama. He advertised that he would be willing to sell in lots to suit purchasers. However, none of the land sold until the following year, when Bishop Patteson bought both allotments on behalf of the Melanesian Mission for £3500.

Two days before the Christmas of 1862 the old Captain lost his wife who for so many years had stood by him during the hard ships of pioneer life; then he decided to sell his home and the remainder of his Waiparera land and to join William at Mangatangi. It did not sell until late in 1864, however, when William Buchanan, a watchmaker and jeweller of Auckland, bought it for £2250.

Early in February 1864 William married Anne Munro, a daughter of one of the Waipu settlers from Nova Scotia and later, that same month, Richard, whose first wife had died, married another Scottish girl, Christina Hall, whose people resided near him in Grafton Road.

Five years later the Captain died at Mangatangi at the age of 85 and his remains were interred beside his wife in the Symonds Street Cemetery. Richard survived his father by only twelve years, dying at the age of 69 after several years of retired life.

Towards the end of the century William retired from active farming and left Mangatangi to reside with a married son at Taupiri. In 1906 he visited Waiparera, then called Kohimarama, and saw the old home still standing and two willow trees which he had planted in 1846 still growing near the back door. He then returned to Taupiri to write his record of the family's emigration and incidents of their pioneering life. He died in 1910

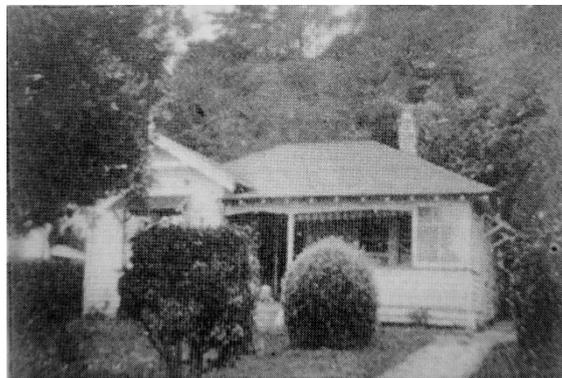
at the age of 80 and was buried at Purewa.

His eldest son, also called William Field, seems to have had his grandfather's enterprising spirit for, after gaining his master's certificate 1893, he left for Thursday Island to engage in the pearl fishing industry. Ultimately he owned fleet of pearl fishing vessels which he controlled from the Dutch East Indies, where he lived for fifteen years. He later made his home in Remuera, but except for frequent visits to see his family, continued to spend most of his time in the tropics. He died while staying at Waimauku in 1927 and left one son, a solicitor, whose name also perpetuated the name of the grand old Captain, William Field Porter.

The Waiparera home which became 175 Tamaki Drive survived until 1954 when it was demolished to give place to a new building. During the early part of this century the old house was modernised but retained till the last a rather unusual old-time feature - a cellar which is said by some to have been a brandy distillery and by others a wine cellar. One of the willow trees already mentioned remained until 1950 when it was cut down.



Captain W.F. Porter in his latter years.



The Former Home of Captain Porter very much re-modelled. A 1950 photograph.