

A LAND FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY

The migration of dairying and beekeeping skills and technology
to a Taranaki bush frontier, 1881-1914

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This paper draws on thirty years of bush settler research. I began with a PhD thesis on the opening in the 1870s of the southern North Island's Great Bush, then in *The Farthest Promised Land* probed the origins and early colonial times of those bush settlers who were 1870s assisted immigrants from England. I next moved on a few years with a broad analysis of the bush settlers' world in *New Zealand's Burning: The settlers' world of the mid 1880s*. Now, to break out of the 1870s and 1880s, and get an in-depth feel of bush life, I have now completed a history of the Taranaki bush settlement of Kaponga, from its beginnings in 1881, to the brink of war in 1914. This paper draws heavily on this latest book.

I chose Kaponga for several reasons. I believe that the bush aspect of our colonial life still sadly lacks in range and depth of treatment. I wanted to further probe my contention that our 19th Century settler world 'was essentially a village world, but a village world that was responding to ideas and forces that were global in the scope of their origins' and Kaponga seemed a good place to test this. It seemed a good idea to choose a settlement begun in the hard years of the 1880s, and away from the railways that gave most 1870s settlements such a boost. What clinched the choice was that my wife, Sylvia, is from Kaponga.

Over the spring and summer of 1881-2 the Kaponga pioneers made their way west from the railway, crossing the coastal strip of open country put on over a year earlier than the bush, and eagerly snapped up by more affluent settlers, who quickly shaped it into farms and ran up their service township of Patea. Turning north, about 12 kilometers inland they passed through a much narrower band of settlement on the edge of the bush, a string of Maori villages with scattered clearings for crops. They then struggled through the stumps, debris and mud of primitive roadlines to reach their bush-covered sections and begin a new band of settlement between Mount Egmont's slopes and the sea. They were settling themselves in the centre of a great east-west stretch of bush in which neither their colonist nor Maori contemporaries were then showing much interest. Their first few years were so discouraging that by the autumn of 1885 only a number had left, while others were wondering whether it was worth staying on. Down the centuries farmers' gripes seems always to have had three common topics - the government, the weather, and the markets. Our Kaponga troubles came from all three.

The 1860s land wars had concluded with the Waingongoro River as an official frontier, and Te Whiti of Parihaka as the leader of Maori passive resistance. By 1878 the government had decided to heap further injustices on

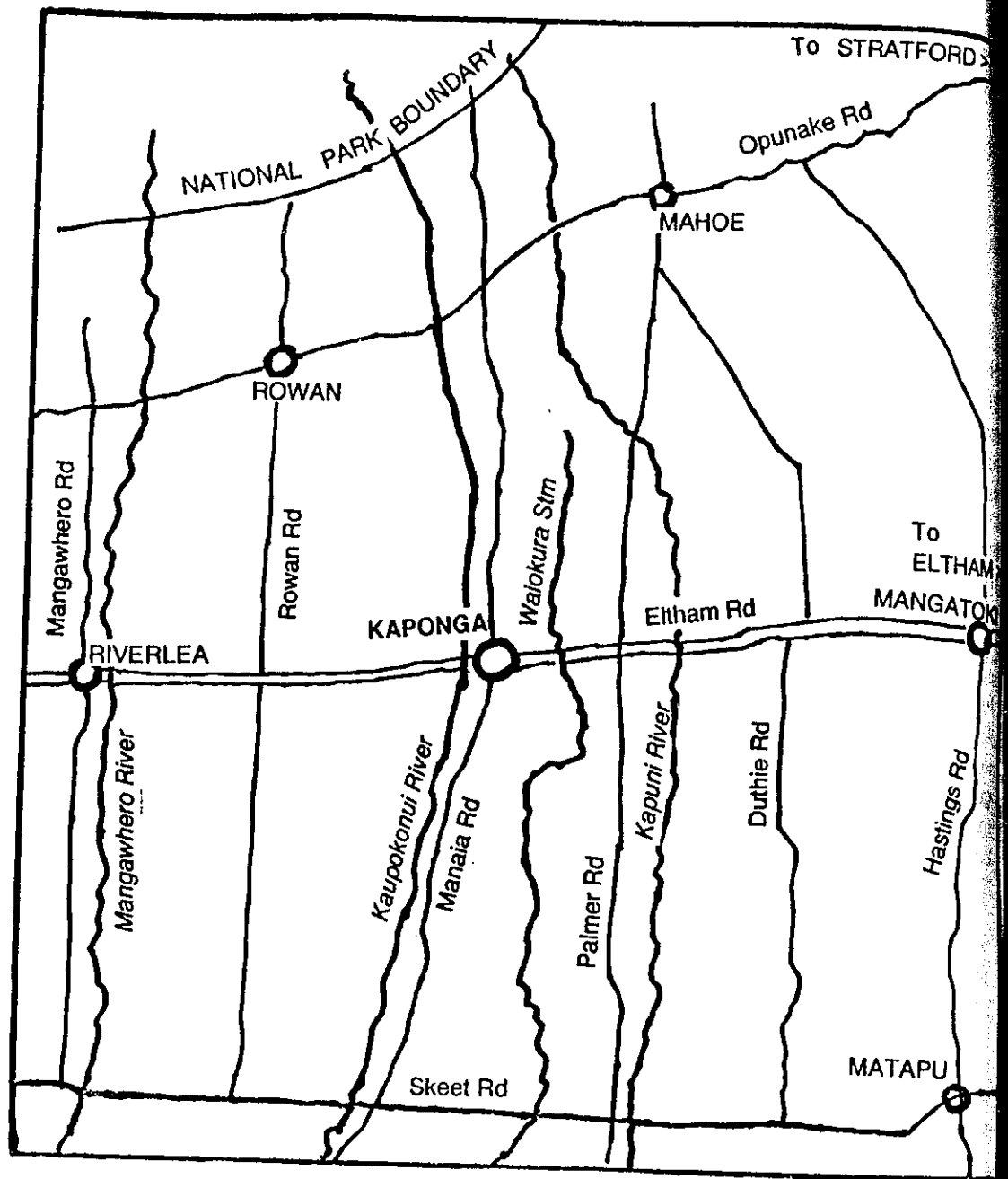


FIGURE 1 Location Map

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the Maori of Taranaki and virtually rob them of their lands beyond the Waingongoro. Our Kaponga settlers were largely ignorant of this background, but they were to suffer severely from the muddle and penny pinching of the government's rushed survey? sale and settlement of the district. To prosper they needed good road links with the railway, and a clear settlement centre. The government gave them neither. With its soft volcanic soils and heavy rainfall, South Taranaki was roadmaker's nightmare. Egmont's streams raking the country from north to south made the east-west roads the worst headaches. Common sense would have concentrated resources on no more than three such roads. In a muddled mixing of immediate strategic needs, longer term settler roading needs, and even longer term railway possibilities, the government puttered about with five roads and vestiges of a sixth; thereby wasting its own money, and leaving local bodies with almost unbearable burdens and subjects for endless arguments. It also confused the settlers into scattering themselves unnecessarily widely. Some read their district as an outlier of Stratford with Opunake Road as its key, others as an outlier of Manaia and Okaiawa with Manaia and Skeet Roads as the keys. A few thought Kaponga township, and the proposed railway along Neill Road were the ways to fortune. All were wrong. The government did not even clear the site of Kaponga as it had done for the earlier villages on the railway, so it remained a paper township - a dead, uncleared heart to the district, with a few settlers on the nearby rural sections. For years the name 'Kaponga' was hardly used; one reads of Kaupokonui', applied to a broader district. By the time Kaponga eventually emerged Eltham Road was clearly the one that really mattered.

Confused and scattered by a muddled government, the settlers had their hearts broken by three summers of rain, RAIN, RAIN that frustrated their bush burns. Without burns they could neither farm nor fence; without fences they lacked control of stock and crops. To preserve their district's good name they maintained a stoical silence about these dilemmas. But in March 1884, with the first hopes for the third season devastated, the *Hawera Star's* 'Kaupokonui' correspondent could contain himself no longer.

Since Friday and Saturday's downpour . . . disgust and disappointment is now easily discernible on many a countenance I wonder if there ever was such a season before? No doubt at times the bush has been sufficiently dry, but there has never been anything like a wind - one of the main requirements to ensure a successful burn in this flat and open bush. The loss is one that would be difficult to estimate I have no hesitation in saying that it will throw the whole of the bush country back for a period of at least five years. Verily, sir, a man's heart need be, not only as big as a stump, as one of my neighbours very aptly remarked, but as big as the tree itself.

Things came right at last in 1885-6, as I tell in *New Zealand's Burning*. Of the decade saw fine burning summers. With steady felling opening clearings, the settlers had to get to grips with their third problem - So far they had scraped a living, drawing subsistence from their

garden, orchard and house cow; and income from roadmaking, timber milling, bushfelling and selling cocksfoot seed and fungus. Now they must decide what kind of farmers they wanted to be. A real problem was that all the significant New Zealand markets had been preempted by more convenient, well established suppliers. So a lasting solution required products that could be profitably moved over their primitive frontier roads and across the world. Clearly these needed to be high value, easily transportable ones. Kaponga will have watched with interest various experiments in neighbouring older districts, such as the hop growing initiated in Normanby in April 1883, and fanning out to other hop districts until brought to a sudden halt by gales in December 1884 and March 1885. Some will have read in their *Hawera Star* of 25 September 1885 a letter from a more affluent neighbour, Joshua Cuff, of the open country to their south. He wrote

I am now distributing tobacco seed. Intending growers ought to lose no time in sowing. In answer to those who think the Plains too exposed, I would advise them to sow maize amongst the tobacco. I am planting a few peanuts as a trial, should they be a successful crop, and I believe the soil is just suited to them, they will pay handsomely for the oil, and the residue is capital cake for cattle feeding. I hope settlers will give this plant a trial....

Sunflower, another oil producer, ought to do well on this coast.

He adds fruit, potatoes, bees, cows and pigs to his more recondite suggestions. But we must turn from Cuff's fertile mind to the 'milk' and 'honey' of our title.

South Taranaki's bee-keeping enthusiast of the 1880s was the Manala school's disputatious headmaster, the Rev George Wilks. Leaving quarrels at his previous school in Christchurch, he came to Manaia in 1882, bringing a hive of bees. Although busy with his school and helping with Anglican services in the district, within three years he had multiplied his bees to 40 hives. He had probably developed his apiarist hobby in England, which he left in 1877 at the age of 31. The *Hawera Star* of 24 October 1885 wrote up his Egmont Apiary, and advised readers that he would offer beekeeping advice to callers on Saturday mornings. The *Star* followed up with some bee-keeping articles by "G.W." In one he quoted from a Californian source and commented

We can produce here a finer quality of honey than the people of California, as we have plenty of white clover, from which bees gather honey of the first quality....At the present time - the white clover having almost disappeared- bees are drawing their supplies from the flax in large quantities, but the honey is darker in colour and, according to the opinion of experts, not so nice to the palate.

I have written to several houses in England, asking for information as to the best form to send this honey in, and also asking for the latest prices; as soon as I receive replies I will lay the results before my fellow bee-keepers. I opine that . . . the honey must be packed here in such form

as to suit the market in England, and that it must be sent direct from the producer to a London merchant, without allowing the "middlemen" to swallow all the profits.

We see clearly here several important features of the way the district's farming future was being sorted out. A knowledgeable enthusiast experiments with the local conditions and explores the overseas markets while drawing on worldwide experience through his reading. Such enthusiasts did not get universal thanks for their efforts. The 'Kaupokonui' correspondent responded to Wilks in the *Star* of 14 December 1885:

Of course your contributor "G.W.'s" articles on bee-keeping are eagerly read by your own, but I fail to see the extraordinary benefits he points out. In this colony - I might almost individualise it, this district - we suffer periodically from crazes. Some new idea is wafted abroad whereby heaps of coin may be amassed . . .

In any case the bush clearings did not yet have the white clover for a significant honey industry. So we'll leave 'honey' for a decade or so and turn to 'milk'.

The house cow was an early arrival on the Kaponga bush clearings. Having provided his own milk, cream and butter the settler found a little local butter market among the timber, roadmaking and bush felling workers, reached through the Manaia and Okaiawa storekeepers, or Kaponga's own Henry Davy's store, on the northern edge of the 'paper' township. So he added a few more cows and the dairy industry began with his primitive skimming and churning. We have no descriptions of these early endeavours but they will have been very like the *New Zealand Farmer's* Hawera correspondent's May 1893 account of bush production for the British market:

Many of our new settlers are bachelors and do a little milking - five to fifteen cows. The storekeeper's visiting days are well known, so churning is the order on night or morning prior to his expected visit. The butter is placed unwashed and unsalted in a milkpan on the table of the whare, with a note alongside stating requirements for the next visit. Should rain set in (which unfortunately, often occurs), the storekeeper's visit is put off until the following week. The pan of butter in the meantime is stowed away, say under a trunk or some other unsuitable place, unwashed, unsalted, and no more thought about till the next churning. Eventually, the storekeeper's boy comes along, take~ the new and old churnings, crams the same into a flour sack, and slings it with other lots into the bottom of the spring cart. Rain, mud, dust, or sunshine - all are equal to the lad, or butter. Arriving at the mixing room, the day's collection is pounded together, washed, sorted, put up in questionable kegs, and shipped to our home consumers.

Clearly if Kaponga was to have an overseas market this just wouldn't do. Britain's large and growing market, created by her steadily rising population and living

standards, could only be successfully entered by a shift to factory dairying, and a revolution in care and cleanliness on the farms. But how were the needed new skills, attitudes and capital to be got out into the bush? The best way undoubtedly would be through settlers coming from the world's successful dairying districts. Let us sketch the emergence of this new global industry.

Dairy factories, using new technologies and water or steam power, had appeared in the state of New York, USA, in the 1850s and spread steadily to New England and the Northwest, where Wisconsin emerged as the leading dairying state. By 1865 America had replaced Holland as the main source of British cheese imports. By the 1870s Britain was adopting American style factory cheese-making, only to have it largely swept away as liquid milk was railed in ever growing quantities to London and the industrial cities. Meanwhile Canada became known for cheese. In Denmark a remarkable farmers' co-operative movement won fame for factory butter, and from the late 1880s Victoria showed how with refrigeration an Australasian colony could enter this market with great success. In 1883 Southland's Edendale factory won a New Zealand government award for the first satisfactory export of 50 tons of cheese 'produced in a factory worked on the American principle'. There was other quality dairying in the South Island, particularly for the Christchurch market. Canterbury's great A & P Show, and the appointment in the early 1880s of a dairying expert to the young Lincoln Agricultural College, encouraged high, modern standards. These were the places with the dairying technologies and skills that Kaponga needed.

Over 1885-7 the Kaponga settlers saw dairy factories established nearby in Opunake, Normanby, Manaia, Otakeho and Eltham. Kaponga went through an intermediate stage between home and factory dairying when a few folk acquired separators and took in their neighbours' milk. Thus around 1888-9 storekeeper Henry Davy began a little 'factory' on a stream just east of the township, and in 1889 his brother-in-law, William Seward Hutchinson, set up another on Skeet Road near the Manaia Road intersection. In both the separator was powered by a waterwheel. Hutchinson, of farming stock from Windermere, Westmoreland, was of an inventive mind. So was his younger brother, George Fell Hutchinson, who took out various patents, mainly for water rams and pumps and milking machines. In the early 1890s Davy's and Hutchinson's lead was followed by some newcomers who brought further important Old World experience to the district.

The July 1891 *New Zealand Farmer* reported 'an influx of South Island dairymen' to south Taranaki. They included the two Candy brothers, William Ernest (1863-) and Henry (1869-) who took land on lower Palmer Road, farmed there for seven years before returning to Canterbury, and began Kaponga's first cheese making in a little cheese and butter factory on the Kapuni River. They were sons of Charles Benjamin Candy (1825-) a Somerset farmer who emigrated to Canterbury in 1860. For many years, he was the Canterbury A & P Show's chief cheese prizewinner; in 1886 he won the first prize for cheese at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London. Perhaps this family was related to C.F. Candy (c.1834-1917), recruited in 1882 by Lincoln Agricultural College as an Old Country expert in Cheddar cheese manufacture. Some of his children migrated to south Taranaki and he spent his last 16 years in Kaponga. Through

these Candys Kaponga dairying had early links with Somerset's cheddar cheese tradition and with Lincoln College. Through the Dane, Carl W. Sorensen, it gained a similar early link with Denmark's butter factory tradition. After a year as a government dairy instructor sharing his Danish butter experience with North Island dairy factories, Sorensen resigned in 1892 to conduct a small butter factory at the Manaia-Skeet Road corner. He returned to government service in October 1895.

There were other of these small neighbourly ventures, including one on the upper Manaia Road and one at Rowan, but I have not been able to discover their founders' backgrounds. These concerns demonstrated ingenuity in using available resources of wood and fast flowing streams to create waterwheels to run their separators. They showed the district that the centrifugal separator saved much labour over the old pan-setting method, and took out all the cream instead of only three quarters. They must also have made progress with improving the district's dairy hygiene. Thus Kaponga's infant dairy industry drew directly on the dairying experience of several British districts, Denmark, and earlier pioneer work in Canterbury.

In the 1890s full scale dairy factories appeared. The decade began with the township site at last being cleared, Eltham Road at last becoming a metalled road giving reasonable access to the railway, and the Kaupokonui bridged to give access to the west. Kaponga's 'paper' township suddenly mushroomed into reality, and the district quickly developed a unity and identity. But it all came too late for Kaponga to pioneer the district's factory dairying. That honour went to Mangatoki, where in 1893 the New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency bought a factory put up in 1891 and developed it as a buttermaking centre, with several creameries to the west, including a large one at Kaponga and smaller ones at Lower Palmer Road and Riverlea. The Kaponga settlers' five years with the L & M before setting up their own Co-operative provided them with invaluable experience. The L & M arrangement had many of the features of a co-operative venture. Its charges for working expenses, interest on capital, depreciation, &c, were clearly set out. Its books were open to inspection by a suppliers' committee. Each season's profits or losses were allocated to suppliers on a pro rata basis. At annual meetings suppliers could bring all aspects of the concern under close scrutiny. In 1896 the L & M agreed to an elected Board of Advice, which supervised the concern very closely. On this Board several Kaponga suppliers met regularly with the manager and had a fine education in factory dairying. The manager was Andrew McWilliam, whose approach and background were well described in the *New Zealand Farmer* of July 1896:

This gentleman, . . . by birth a Creole of St Croix, and by upbringing and education a Scot of Galloway, brought with him to his task theories and experience gained in one of the most successful dairy undertakings in Scotland, viz., that of the Wigtownshire Creamery Company.... He holds that half the success of manufacture lies in cleanliness, not as the term is frequently understood, but as near an approximation as possible to such an ideal as the cleanliness of snow. Hence it is that in the alteration of the factory, which took place in the winter of 1894, and in the erection of the

tributary creameries now numbering five, the architect . . . was required by Mr McWilliam to carry out everything in such a way as to be readily accessible to scrubbing brush and broom, which are ever at work . . .

Thus Kaponga dairying drew on the best Scottish factory dairying experience, from a district lying beyond the reach of the British milk trains.

In 1898 leading Kaponga settlers formed the Kaponga Co-operative Dairy Company. A minority of suppliers stayed with the L & M's creamery. The two concerns competed down the years, with the Kaponga Co-op. soon winning all the country to the west while its rival, itself a co-operative from 1900, hammed it in on the east. The Kaponga Co-op. selected Raymond Newitt, from the Normanby factory, as its founding manager. Newitt was a Tasmanian, and may well have been influenced by the dairying endeavours of Tasmania's neighbour, Victoria, before crossing to New Zealand. In July 1898 25 delegates of Taranaki's co-operative factories companies met in Kaponga's town hall to form a Taranaki association of co-operative dairy factories. The venue had obviously been chosen to boost the new venture, and the occasion was chaired by the Kaponga Co-op's founding chairman, Frederick Wilkie. Matters discussed included standards, technology, training, transport, and marketing. Present by invitation, and making a valuable contribution, was the Canadian J.B. MacEwan who had served briefly as the government's chief dairy expert in the mid 1890s. He then entered dairy merchandising and had just returned from watching the arrival of New Zealand produce in London. His presence is another example of international input into Kaponga's young dairy industry. The Kaponga Co-op. produced its first butter in September 1898, and went from strength to strength over the following years.

What, in the meantime had been happening with honey? By the turn of the century the key honey source, white clover, was plentiful in Kaponga's spread dairying pastures, and the clover's short season was supplemented by a long succession of honey producing flowers in the bush, gardens, orchards and shelter belts. *Brett's Colonists' Guide*, published in 1883, listed the flowering times of over two dozen honey-producing native and introduced trees and plants, and no doubt Kaponga's beekeepers could have produced a similar list. It is difficult to get a clear view of how Kaponga beekeeping got under way. Unlike factory dairying with its small number of dairymaking districts, beekeeping was a minor activity over much of the world. It doesn't help much to know where beekeeping settlers came from. Beekeeping mainly as a backyard hobby, South Taranaki beekeeping didn't make as much of the great dairy industry did. However the competition and stimulus of the Horticultural and A & P Shows gave to the little industry provides some indication of what went on.

The Kaponga Horticultural Society's annual show, founded in February 1900, went from strength to strength over the Edwardian years, providing evidence that settlers' interests extended beyond the dominant dairy industry into vegetable and flower gardens, orchards and poultry runs, cooking

and preserving, sewing and a good variety of hobbies. Honey first appeared on the prize list at the second show, in 1899, when bootmaker George Hartnell's 'honey in the comb' was highly commended. Thereafter entries grew to about half a dozen. In 1910 the government apiarist judged the honey section pronouncing it as good as the best in New Zealand, undoubtedly worth from £250 to £500 a ton on the English market. Kaponga beekeepers began entering the fine honey in the big Hawera shows, and in 1908 were involved in the founding of the South Taranaki Beekeepers' Association, whose activities had by 1910 made the honey section one of the most exciting features of the Hawera Winter Show.

The considerable technical knowledge and skill required in successful beekeeping meant that it was best pursued in a supportive social setting. News of the shows and the South Taranaki Beekeepers' Association indicates three interesting groupings in Kaponga beekeeping. There was a small group of townfolk, like first local exhibitor, bootmaker George Hartnell, taking up beekeeping as a backyard hobby. Thus in the Horticultural show prize lists we find seed merchant Charles Betts in 1902 and builder C.S. Walker in 1912. There was a rural group among the settler families around Riverlea, including Robert Gibson and his daughter, Marc Frederic Voullaire, and Allan Bates. Allan Rishworth Bates was the son of farmer Charles Bates. As a girl in Kaponga in the 1930s my wife Betty knew him as 'Honey' Bates. Finishing school in 1900, he became over the following years a regular honey competitor at the shows. His first appearance on the electoral roll in 1910 is as 'apiarist'. By 1911 he was a vice-president of the South Taranaki Beekeepers' Association. His mother was nee Alice Crabbe, and he may well have been related to N.G. Crabbe, headmaster of Matapu School 1902-13, who with his wife were also horticultural show honey competitors. This introduces us to the third grouping, rural professional men. We have already seen that another school teacher, clergyman George Wilks, was South Taranaki's pioneer beekeeping enthusiast. A third school teacher with an input into Kaponga beekeeping was Samuel Turkington, headmaster of Mahoe from 1905-10. He was a well educated man but, like Wilks, disputatious, which led to his being relegated to this small back-country school. Some Mahoe neighbours with whom he had fallen out blew up two of his 'patent bee boxes' in an explosion heard four miles away, while he was away over the 1909-10 summer holidays.

Educated men immersed in country life have played a prominent part in the beekeeping story. In England rural clergymen have a long history of advancing understanding of bees and it was America's Reverend Langstroth who in 1851 revolutionised the craft with his movable frame hive. In fact, much of the theory and technology of modern beekeeping was developed between the colonising of New Zealand in 1840 and the settlement of Kaponga in the 1880s. While we know little of where they learned their craft, we do know the essence of what Kaponga's leading beekeepers were teaching their neighbours. As with dairying, they were pushing 'modern scientific' methods, not the outdated traditional ones. Figure 2 shows an Old World beekeeper making the transition. On the left are three traditional hives, the old straw skeps that gave the keeper little control over what went on. Their crop was harvested at each season's end

first appeared by the painful process of killing the faithful bees with burning sulphur and George Hartne cutting the honeycomb out with knives. From early in the 19th century some is grew to ab progress was made in finding ways of avoiding this terrible annual massacre. honey section the invention in 1851 of the Langstroth movable comb hive gave the final worth from \$ solution. Used in conjunction with the new bellows smokers, developed from the an entering the 1870s, to quieten the bees, it allowed honey to be taken easily throughout the in the foundi season. With the new honey extractors the honeycomb in the frames could be s had by 19 continually reused, allowing the bees to concentrate on producing much more Hawera Wint honey. The Langstroth hive, introduced to New Zealand in 1878, was probably in successf used by Kaponga beekeepers from the start through the advocacy of George Wilks and his successors.

So both in dairying and in beekeeping, modern skills and technology came into early use on the Kaponga bush frontier. Genealogists and family historians are well placed to help us discover who the folk were who brought such things about, and how they went about it.



FIGURE 2 An Old World beekeeper changes to the Langstroth moveable frame hive