

HITCHMAN'S CORNER PIONEERS' MEMORIAL WATER TROUGH – Kimbolton Road, Feilding



Architect: -

Construction date: 1939

Visible materials: Concrete

Architectural style: -

Use/building type: Water trough

Date and Compiler: Ian Bowman, 2016

Proposed ranking: B

PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY

Introduction

It is easy to drive along Kimbolton Road without noticing a very large concrete water trough in the long grass many metres from the roadway - near that road's intersection with Colyton Road and outside the front fence of No. 601 Kimbolton Road. It can be even harder to imagine nowadays that there is any particular significance to the trough beyond its obvious use for watering passing livestock – not that many of them are likely to use it nowadays. However, the trough does have a unique significance. A closer look at the trough – after pulling away some of the overgrowth – reveals a marble plaque embedded into the front of the trough that reads:

Erected
by the W.D.F.U. and the
Farmers Union
To Commemorate the Pioneers
Of the District, and to Mark
Hitchman's Corner
December 1939



Figure 1 Marble plaque on the front of the trough, photo Val Burr, 27 November, 2016

Background

In the old days the Kimbolton Road-Colyton Road intersection was known as Hitchman's Corner. The sources of the name were farmer George Hitchman, and his wife Maria, who had moved to a 100-acre property in Kimbolton Road, opposite the future trough site, in about 1878. They were some of the earliest settlers to live in Feilding, having arrived on the ship 'Salisbury' in 1873. Their daughter Catherine was the first baby girl born in Feilding. The family's story is covered in Dorothy Mingins and Dorothy Pilkington's book *Swamps, Sandflies and Settlers: Feilding and the Manchester Block - The European settler families* (pp. 30-31).¹ The speeches on the day of the trough's unveiling that are recorded below, also provide more detail of the couple's contribution to the district and the location.

In 1902, William Wescombe Corpe erected a creamery on his Kimbolton Road property opposite the Feilding-Ashhurst Road (Hitchman's Corner).² This description places the creamery very close the future location of the trough – however, it seems likely to have been long gone by 1939 when the trough was constructed.

The earliest references located during this study to the need for a trough in this vicinity, ties it into the story of the succession of Kiwitea Bridges – these being located about a kilometre from the trough in the direction of Feilding. The bridges on this site had a history of being damaged in floods. For example, in May 1894 the bridge of the time was washed away in a heavy flood, and until the next bridge was opened in March 1896, travellers and drovers - with their various charges - were obliged to ford the stream. This annoyed the settlers, those driving sheep, and doubtless it was also a struggle for the livestock.³

In September 1912, the Feilding Borough Council wrote to the Oroua County Council seeking permission to lay a water pipe from the water main across Kimbolton Road, to Mr E. (Ernest?) Short's property near Hitchman's Corner.⁴ Although not researched further at this time, this appears likely to have been relevant to the future installation of the trough.

¹ *Feilding Star*, 29 October 1900, p. 2. The Manawatu District Council cemetery records indicated that Maria ("Mary") Hitchman died on 12 February 1921, aged 91, while George Hitchman died on 6 June 1935, aged 95.

² *Feilding Star*, 7 June 1902, p. 2

³ *Feilding Star*, 26 March 1896, p. 2

⁴ *Feilding Star*, 7 September 1912, p. 4

In March 1914, a letter from Mr W.O. Caldwell was submitted to the Oroua County Council, asking if the Council would erect drinking troughs – one at Hitchman’s Corner, and another at the cross of Spur and Taonui Roads. However, the chairman of the County Council thought that as Hitchman’s Corner was so close to the Kiwitea Stream, that a trough was not necessary there. He thought that the Forlong’s Road corner was more suitable. More information was considered necessary in relation to the Spur Road site. Caldwell then submitted another letter to the County Council’s April meeting re the troughs, but the outcome is not known – other than that evidently no trough then appeared at Hitchman’s Corner.⁵

Further light is shed on the Hitchman’s Corner issue through an article published in the *Feilding Star* of 10 September 1920. Entitled ‘Old Feilding: Birth and Growth of the Town, Addresses by Old Residents’, early settler Mr W.G. Haybittle commented that he had been involved with counting the number of houses in the proposed Feilding Borough Council’s area. Two-hundred houses were needed in order that the district could be declared a borough. So in order that they could get enough houses, they had to extend some of the boundaries of the future borough, including up to Mr Hitchman’s property on Kimbolton Road.⁶ This seems likely, in turn, to be why the Feilding Borough Council’s aforementioned water main might have ended up in the vicinity of Hitchman’s Corner.

Installation of the Trough

Newspaper reports from the Feilding area throughout 1939 possibly point to the reason why the installation of a large roadside trough might have become more important then, than in previous years. For example, the *NZ Herald* of 6 March 1939 (p. 9) recorded that a drought was affecting all the North Island hydro-electric power stations. A shortage of electricity was not expected – however, the Mangahao dam (at Shannon) was the most affected. In addition, the prolonged dry spell in the Manawatu and Feilding districts was also “*influencing*” the output of butter from several dairy factories, with the one at Cheltenham (“*one of the largest factories in the North Island*”) being down by a ton of butter per day on the same time in 1938 and down two tons on the same time in 1937. The article concluded by stating that “*An acute shortage of water is being experienced on most (Manawatu) farms, and those engaged in dairying are facing a serious problem with cows drying off through absence of suitable pasture.*”⁷ Two months later, a report on the Feilding stock sale held on 5 May 1939, recorded that it had not gone terribly well. Especially telling was the comment that: “*Most of the cattle yarded showed the effect of the food shortage resulting from the drought.*”⁸

With this dilemma in the minds of the farming and stock-handling community, it seems unsurprising that the first published reference to this trough located during this study, appeared in the *Manawatu Standard* of 19 May 1939. This is a report on a meeting of the Feilding branch of the Farmers’ Union, which had been held the same morning. This states that the chairman, Mr H.D. Richardson, had interviewed the Women’s Division of the Farmers’ Union (W.D.F.U.) “*regarding a pioneers’ memorial to be erected at Hitchman’s Corner, on Kimbolton Road. The suggestions were for either a toilet or a water trough. Regarding the water trough proposal, it was stated that large numbers of livestock passed the corner and the supply would prove of great value.*”

⁵ *Feilding Star*, 7 March 1914, p. 4, 4 April 1914, p. 4

⁶ *Feilding Star*, 10 September 1920, p. 1

⁷ *NZ Herald*, 6 March 1939, p. 9. (The *Press* of 13 January 1939, p. 11, reported that there was also a particularly severe drought underway in Victoria, Australia, that summer as well)

⁸ *Evening Post*, 6 May 1939, p. 13 (Note that the local Feilding newspapers and other records were not accessed on this matter, and so they are likely to have a more detailed coverage than the [online] *Evening Post* does)

The Farmers' Union meeting decided to approach the Feilding Borough Council regarding the supply of water, either for free or at a minimal rate. One committee member pointed out that *"there was a movement afoot whereby local bodies were being asked to supply drinking troughs and accommodation paddocks for stock being driven on country roads."* The suggestion was that the trough be placed *"on the bend of the road opposite the old Hitchman homestead."*

The committee then discussed the proposed methods of raising money for the trough, while noting that various organisations around the district would possibly wish to contribute. It was understood, however, that the Women's Division did not wish to have the proposal become a 'public' one with subscriptions involved, but rather that it be the effort of their group and also the Farmers' Union.

Thereafter followed discussion on the construction requirements of the trough itself: *"A trough half a chain long was required, and it was decided that the trough measure 21ft by 2½ft by 1½ft, with a fairly large concrete base. Mr Younger pointed out that the trough should be placed a little higher up than the corner, as traffic might be interrupted were a mob of 1,000 sheep to be watered. The matter was not discussed further, it being the intention to submit particulars regarding costs, etc., to the W.D.F.U., which sponsored the scheme."*⁹

Lack of rain continued to be a problem later in the year also, for example, the *Evening Post* of 11 November 1939 (p. 14) reported that: *"The continued absence of rain had a detrimental effect on the cattle market of the Feilding sale held (the previous day), the bulk of the heavy yarding of nearly 6,000 head failing to find buyers."*

Amidst the ongoing weather-related problems (and doubtless with war issues also a new concern), the memorial trough was officially unveiled on Wednesday, 20th December 1939. The following is the report of the event published in the *Manawatu Standard* the next day:

Tribute To Pioneers: Hitchman's Corner Memorial: Notable Ceremony

"In the presence of a representative gathering, Hitchman's Corner Pioneers' Memorial, in the form of a drinking trough for stock, was officially unveiled yesterday afternoon. Mr H.D. Richardson, president of the Feilding branch of the Farmers' Union, presided, and apologised for the absence of the chairman of the Oroua County Council (Mr A. Campbell) and the chairman of the KIWITEA County Council (Mr L.T. McLean). Mr E.H. Gordon, member for Rangitikei, was represented by Hon. J.G. Cobbe, member for Manawatu.

"Mr Richardson regretted that Mr and Mrs W. Hitchman, of Dannevirke, were unable to be present. He referred to the hospitality accorded wayfarers by the late Mr and Mrs Hitchman, whose home had been a landmark and had recently been demolished. In the early days the pioneers had not enjoyed the transport facilities so familiar today, and the road was long and weary. Few journeying along Kimbolton Road failed to call in at Mr and Mrs Hitchman's open house for refreshments.

"Today, continued the speaker, the trough had been erected to commemorate those pioneers and to mark Hitchman's Corner. In the early days there were plenty of watering places on the road for livestock, but with the road improvements carried out over a period of years these had disappeared, and the building of a new bridge over the KIWITEA Stream had taken away another drinking spot for stock. Thanks to the Women's' Division of the Farmers' Union the new trough had been erected, and much of the credit was due to that organisation for sponsoring the project, which would serve a very useful purpose.

⁹ *Manawatu Standard*, 19 May 1939, p. 5(6)

“Mr Richardson stated that he had knowledge of one pioneer who used to tramp 15 miles through bush and cattle tracks to get provisions. The present generation had little conception of the privation and hardships suffered by those settlers whose memory the gathering was commemorating. He then called on Mrs Beatson, president of the Women’s’ Division, to turn on the water.

“Mrs Beatson recalled that her father had been the first chairman of the Kiwitea Road Board and the first district representative on the Palmerston North Hospital Board. On behalf of the W.D.F.U. she thanked all who had contributed to the cost of the memorial and especially the Feilding Borough Council for supplying free for all time the water for the trough as part of that body’s Centennial effort.

“Mrs Beatson was presented with a posy of flowers by the little daughter of Mr and Mrs P. Maegaard, of the firm of contractors responsible for building the trough.

“Different Customs: *Cr. W.W. Andrews, representing the Feilding Borough Council, conveyed an apology for absence from the Mayor (Mr T.L. Seddon) and thanked the promoters for the invitation to be present. The memorial was one which would be widely appreciated by those travelling along the road with stock. The speaker could not help visualising how much a similar function would have meant to the early pioneers. They would in all probability have made a day of the proceedings and would have been preoccupied days before in making preparations. Today we rushed about in motor-cars, rushed through the ceremony, and were not happy, unlike the pioneers who were ever ready to help each other and lived in peace, love and harmony.*

“A Fine District: *Mr Cobbe congratulated the Women’s’ Division on sponsoring the effort and thanked those responsible for the fine structure, which would be most useful in addition to commemorating the old, stout-hearted pioneers who went back in the bush over muddy tracks to fell the forest and to provide the wonderful district which their children had inherited. The Feilding district was one of the finest in New Zealand, and the speaker commended the pioneers for their work and fortitude in raising the land to such a standard in fertility and beauty. The pioneers of the district were well-known to the speaker, who had done business with most of them in the early days, and found them honest, independent, and trustworthy. They would not want their names inscribed on a piece of marble and would rather their memory be perpetuated in something of lasting value and service. The speaker was pleased that a useful edifice had been erected in the memory of the historic corner and to the pioneers of the district, to whom so much was owed for the progress made.*

“On behalf of the Oroua County Council, Cr. T. Green ventured the opinion that there were many more costly memorials erected in New Zealand, but few as useful and none better. The request for assistance received by the council had been so reasonable and objective so desirable that the council could not refuse, and had agreed to spend some of the ratepayers’ money collected for roads and bridge work.

“At the conclusion of the ceremony the gathering proceeded to the home of Mr and Mrs H.E. Hocken, ‘Grassmere’, Colyton, where afternoon tea was served amidst pleasant surroundings.

“Cr. Andrews read the following letter from the Mayor:

“The form of the memorial seems singularly appropriate. The passing traveller will reflect upon the changes time and progress have brought to our way of living, and many will recall the days when such things as this memorial were as important as the bowser is today. Even now there will be many who will praise the thoughtfulness of those responsible for this memorial. We have reached a degree of comfort and luxury undreamt of even fifty years ago. I think we are, however, beginning to realise that, although life is full of things which make for our material benefit, happiness does not always come from them. Rather it is the product of the qualities of enterprise, resourcefulness,

*independence and contentment which those whom we commemorate today found in a life of hard work and service for others. I mean not merely hum-drum existence, but a full and active life, with a vision of the future lit up for them by the light of a simple faith and trust in One Who was their refuge and strength in all dangers and difficulties. At this time we need to become reinvigorated with those qualities, for in them I believe is the cure for many of the moral and economic ailments from which we are suffering at the present time.'*¹⁰

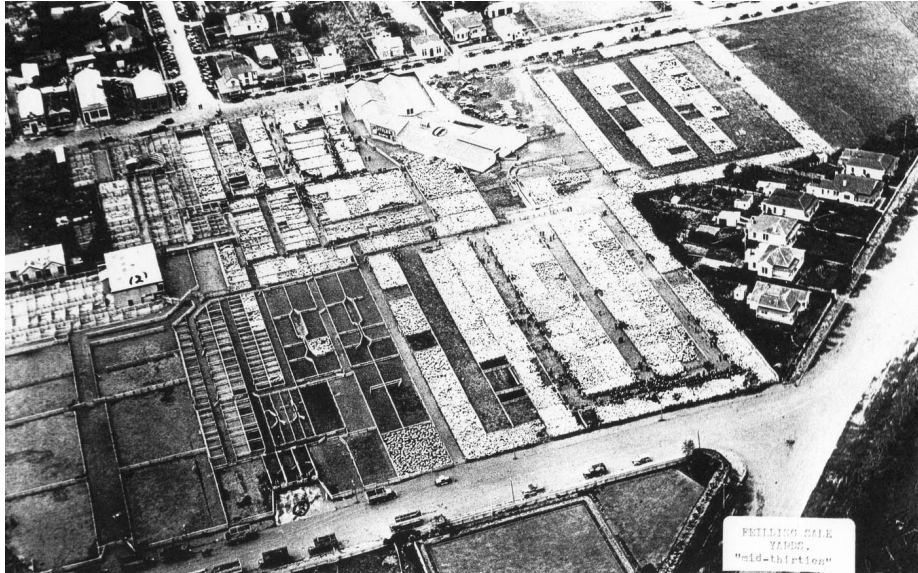


Figure 2 The Feilding Saleyards are shown here in 1937. Hunter (p. 18) states that this was a record yarding consisting of 52,000 sheep, while the *Evening Post* of 22 February 1937 (p. 17) gave the number as approximately 50,000 sheep. Doubtless many of them had been driven along Kimbolton Road to reach the saleyards, and this stock movement provided much of the pressure that resulted in the construction of the trough three years later. Hunter recorded that to accommodate them all, temporary yards were set up in Levin & Co.'s paddocks (shown above right). Unfortunately, once the auction began and people started moving through the pens, the sheep moved to avoid them and ultimately the hurdles collapsed. As a result, sheep went everywhere. They were still being sorted out again the following day. (Feilding Library photo: AGR: me 9)

The Passing Livestock

While focused on the saleyards themselves, Brian Hunter's book *Feilding Saleyards: 125 years of Success, 1880-2005*, provides some useful information on stock-movements that will have seen the trough in use. The saleyards had operated since the latter 1870s, although the outlying towns usually had their own smaller saleyards. However, stock from those other saleyards was also likely to pass by from time to time when heading to new owners, to the freezing works in Feilding, or to or from the railway yards.

Some huge yardings of stock occurred at Feilding, and some figures from shortly before the trough was constructed give good justification as to the need for such a facility. For example, the *Auckland Star* of 5 March 1934 (p. 9) reported that over 100,000 sheep, mostly breeding ewes, had been auctioned at the Feilding saleyards over a three week period during February of that year. Some 40,000 ewes were at the 1936 ewe fair, followed by 36,000 in 1936 and then a new record of around 50,000 were at the 1937 ewe fair.¹¹ An aerial photo of the yards filled for the 1937 sale is published with this report. The *Evening Post* of 18 February 1939 (p. 13) and 19 February 1940 (p. 10) then gave figures of around 44,000 and 39,000 respectively.

¹⁰ *Manawatu Standard*, 21 December 1939 p. 4(4)

¹¹ *Evening Post*, 22 February 1937, p. 17

Brian Hunter's book also describes some of the droving activities that will have involved this trough. He records the memories of Alby Burney who drove stock around the region for almost fifty years, until the sheep trucks took over the work of the drovers. Burney described how with a number of drovers trying to get their stock in for sale day, there would be a "certain urgency on sale morning as the animals got near Feilding. 'If we didn't get to the Kiwitea Bridge in Kimbolton Road by midday then we wouldn't be allowed to go over (the bridge) until one o'clock.' Alby says that both drovers and dogs would be listening for the siren that marked the end of lunchbreak at Borthwicks' Freezing Works to come echoing over the paddocks so they could get on their way. Then it would be down Kimbolton Road and along East Street making sure that the suburban gardens lining the streets didn't suffer from any of the drover's charges deciding to sample the tempting greenery on the way."¹²

A specific incident that Alby Burney recalled was about one particular big cattle fair where eight mobs of cattle were left waiting to cross the Kiwitea Bridge at one o'clock.¹³ The trough would have been well-used that day.

Aaron Smale, in his article 'Saleyards' in *The New Zealand Geographic* of Nov-Dec 2006, wrote of an undated ewe fair at Feilding where there were 50,000 sheep stretched over a 5km stretch of Kimbolton Road north of Feilding. The trough would have been most useful then too.



Figure 3 The trough with its concrete foot pad in the foreground. The rail along the length of the trough was to reduce the temptation of livestock to jump into or over the trough, and also to make it easier for stock to drink from both sides of the trough without interfering with each other. Looking in the direction of Cheltenham and the Colyton Road intersection - 27 November 2016

The Decline in Usage

Ruth Entwistle Low's book *On the Hoof: The untold story of drovers in New Zealand*, gives some information relevant to the declining use of the trough. She recorded that census data on drovers showed that their numbers (nation-wide) reduced from 976 in 1936, to 447 in 1945 and then down to

¹² Hunter, p. 45

¹³ Hunter, p. 45

187 in 1951.¹⁴ This corresponded with the development of increasingly reliable, more powerful and larger stock trucks. However, whereas it was easier for these trucks to carry a fairly large number of sheep, they could carry only relatively few cattle. So the cattle continued walking.¹⁵

Hunter (p. 35) refers to loading ramps being installed at the Feilding saleyards in the mid-1960s. This also removed the need for saleyards in the various small towns, and soon Feilding's alone remained locally.¹⁶

While it was not apparent during this study just when the last mob of sheep or cattle might have made use of the trough, clearly the numbers will have declined radically from the mid-1960s. However, Low (p. 112) interviewed a drover named Arthur McRae for her book, and he spoke of undertaking regular six-week-long treks with 500-600 head of cattle from the 1970s and into the 1990s. These began at Gisborne, passed through Hawkes Bay, over the Saddle Road to Ashhurst, then up to Colyton, and then (after passing the trough) into Feilding. From there they would proceed onto their destination near Hunterville – possibly via Halcombe.

Conclusion

This trough was born of the need to water stock after the Kiwitea Stream became less accessible to the passing mobs of sheep and cattle – and also because the stock might become stalled there for an hour or so to await permission to cross the Kiwitea Bridge. It was also born of both a significant regional drought and the district's will to have something to mark the early pioneers of the area during the Centennial year (i.e. 1940). It is telling that there was evidently already a water main from Feilding to the site by around 1912, and also that the Feilding Borough Council – and therefore presumably its successor – had agreed to supply the water to it *“free for all time...as part of that body's Centennial effort.”*¹⁷

Feilding has a number of features representing the days of the drover – with the beautiful 'Drover & Dog' statue being a most significant one. However, this mostly overlooked old trough is likely to be the only true 'designated memorial' of those times that also actually serviced the industry - and in such a practical way.

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

The water trough was constructed of concrete and is 21ft by 2½ft by 1½ft. A length of railway steel is fixed above the trough. The trough is located some distance from the road in a large, flat, grassy berm adjacent to neighbouring farmland.

REVIEW OF REPORT

Based on a review of the report and viewing of Council files, the assessment undertaken in 2016 for this memorial is still applicable as at April 2021.

SUMMARY OF HERITAGE VALUES

The water trough has **moderate** to **high local** significance for **historic people** and **pattern** values as well as **rarity** heritage values.

¹⁴ Ruth Entwistle Low, *On the Hoof: The untold story of drovers in New Zealand* (Auckland, 2014), p. 229

¹⁵ Low, p. 226-7

¹⁶ Aaron Smale, 'Saleyards' in *New Zealand Geographic*, Nov-Dec 2006:

<https://www.nzgeo.com/stories/saleyards/>

¹⁷ *Manawatu Standard*, 21 December 1939 p. 4(4)

The trough has **high historic** values as a memorial to early pioneers, particularly the Hitchmans who lived opposite, and who offered hospitality to bushmen, drovers and others making their way to Feilding. They were seen as epitomising the values of a rural bygone past. It has **high historic** values in its association with droving of stock, demonstrating a significant agricultural activity in the region up until the 1990s. Stock were driven to and from the Feilding stockyards, at one time the largest in the North Island. Its location has **moderate historic** significance as a place for stock to congregate before being allowed to cross the Kiwitea Bridge to the stockyards. The trough has **moderate rarity** values as one of few such objects surviving in the region.

SOURCES

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Thanks also to Peter Olsen of Colyton, for some invaluable guidance on the story of the trough.