

A PLUCKY ACT

An incident in the early history of the Colony of New Zealand:

Deserving a very prominent place in the written history of the Colony this is one of those incidents which gives a true glimpse of the trials and fortitude of the early settlers, showing the present day folk what courage and pluck was possessed by some of the pioneers who paved the way for the growing nation by subdividing the savage man and the wild country. The prominent actor in this little piece was an English sailor lad of about 18 years of age, born in 1827. In the year 1843, six pairs of Sawyers were sawing in the bush about half a mile from the bank of the well known Hutt River (near Wellington), in front of a remarkable Maori Pah built for war purposes and occupied by Maori warriors, followers of the notorious Rangitiaeata, the great Te Rauparaha's lieutenant, rather distinguished neighbours for the Sawyers, and in olden times the Maoris were not the Maoris of the present day but the real dignified savage who looked upon the Pakeha (whiteman) as his greatest natural enemy, who was slowly but surely edging himself into the interior, which fact at times rendered the Maoris anything but agreeable to the settlers, but this little incident is only a sample of how the Maoris treated the whites where they could. But to my yarn. The Sawyers possessed a canoe to cross the Hutt River with, which one day disappeared, but was found to have been annexed by the Maoris and moored to the bank of the river in the midst of their own canoes, and on being asked for, ten shillings was demanded by the Maoris, this charge was looked upon by the white men somewhat in the sense of blackmail which could not be tolerated. A council of the Sawyers was held as to what course of action to pursue, and after considerable discussion a volunteer was asked for, to go and take the canoe, while the rest of the party stood in readiness to help in case of need, and was forthcoming in the young sailor lad, who boldly walked into the Pah, quickly took the canoe, cut the painter and paddled downstream with all his might. As soon as this impudent act was discovered the whole Pah was in an uproar, and a number of natives with a war whoop gave

chase in about half a dozen large canoes. About a mile down the river the lad was overtaken by one of the canoes paddled by two stalwart warriors, one of whom leaped into the lad's canoe with a paddle and vigorously paddled for the shore, but the young sailor proved too much for the Maori and kept the middle of the stream. The Maori being thus foiled in his idea, upset the canoe with the evident intention of drowning the boy, who, much to the surprise of his assailant, proved the best swimmer, both struck out for the bank. Gaining the shore first, the lad attacked the Maori while attempting to land and gave him a sound thrashing. By this time the other Maori, in his canoe, gained the shore some distance further downstream, and immediately came to his mate's rescue, spear in hand, with which he struck at the lad, grazing his side, but he was immediately set upon by the boy in such a way that the Maori took to the river to evade his pursuer. The balance of the white men and the Maoris witnessed the bravery of the lad, which elicited favourable comment among them, and it was then arranged on the suggestion of the principal Chief, that one of the Maoris should have a stand-up fight with the lad, which accordingly took place, but as the battle proceeded a Maori who was standing by, treacherously aimed a blow at the head of the lad with a tomahawk which he had concealed beneath his blanket. This act was discovered just in time by one of the Sawyers who struck the Maori and knocked him down. The fight however, resulted in the Maori getting a sound beating. This Maori subsequently murdered a settler named Gillespie at the Hutt and was shot at Pauatahanui in the year 1845 in the war with the Maori carried on by Sir George Gray. The above is a truthful record of the incident and is in no way coloured. The leading character in this sketch, Mr J.G. Rush, is now a well known public man in this town, having held positions of, Borough Councillor, Chairman of the Licensing Bench, Chairman of the Borough Charitable Aid Committee, School Committee, Justice of the Peace, etc.

The writer, Mr Geo. Farmer, a settler at Karere, was one of the Sawyers referred to and probably the only living witness to the incident.

**Note: The above was taken from a newspaper cutting and is a true copy,
18 August 1966.**