

THE CAMP BAKERY

Standing alone on the corner, is the cold, dilapidated building known as The Camp Bakery – which did brisk business during days of the two World Wars, and the intervening years.

Joe Towersey – a colourful character – was well known locally, both for his high quality baking capabilities and his wide scope of knowledge.

Joe was born in Wellington and as a lad moved with his family to Tauherenikau – living in the old red house that once stood in the bluegums north of No. 1 Line corner.

Clasping a one pound note in his hand, he left home at the age of 14 years, to seek work. His first job, lasting four years, was with Adams, builders, in Wellington – where houses built in Aro Street still stand today.

Longing for the wide open spaces, Joe returned to Featherston – where he was engaged as cowboy at the “Fernside” property of Mr & Mrs Charles Elgar. Amongst others – Joe’s chores included conveying guests to and from Fernside railway station, by horse and gig.

With brother Ted, he went to Feilding, working for a baker; then the two following in their father’s footsteps – commenced their own business in Constable Street, Newton, Wellington, calling it the South Wellington Bakery.

With wife, Sophie, Joe ventured to Sydney, first being employed as a baker, then opening their own bakery shop.

Returning to Featherston, Joe baked for Towersey-Dunn Bakery, in Fox Street, where later Mr Bill Rowles had his hairdressing saloon and bookshop.

At Murphy’s Line, on his mother’s property, Joe built a bakehouse, continuing in his trade. This area, now owned by Mr L. Wall, also was the scene of Chinchilla Rabbit breeding – Reg Watson having built a concrete wall, for the Towerseys, as an enclosure.

About the time of World War 1, the Camp Bakery was

built on the corner of Murphy’s Line and Fitzherbert Street. At the rear, a block of fowlhouses were erected – the poultry serving a double purpose – eating the stale bread and cakes, and in return supplying freshly laid eggs for the baking.

A ten acre block of land on Martinborough Road, Joe utilised to graze his horses – kept for drawing the bread-cart.

When electricity was first introduced to Featherston, Joe had lights installed in his shop – the date being August 1923. He then had power connected to his flour machine – the wiring being done by “Smithy” (J.B. Smith) a Power Board employee who lived in Harrison Street, and received instruction from the head office in Carterton. The ovens in Joe’s bakery were first heated by wood, before the installation of a portable oil burner.

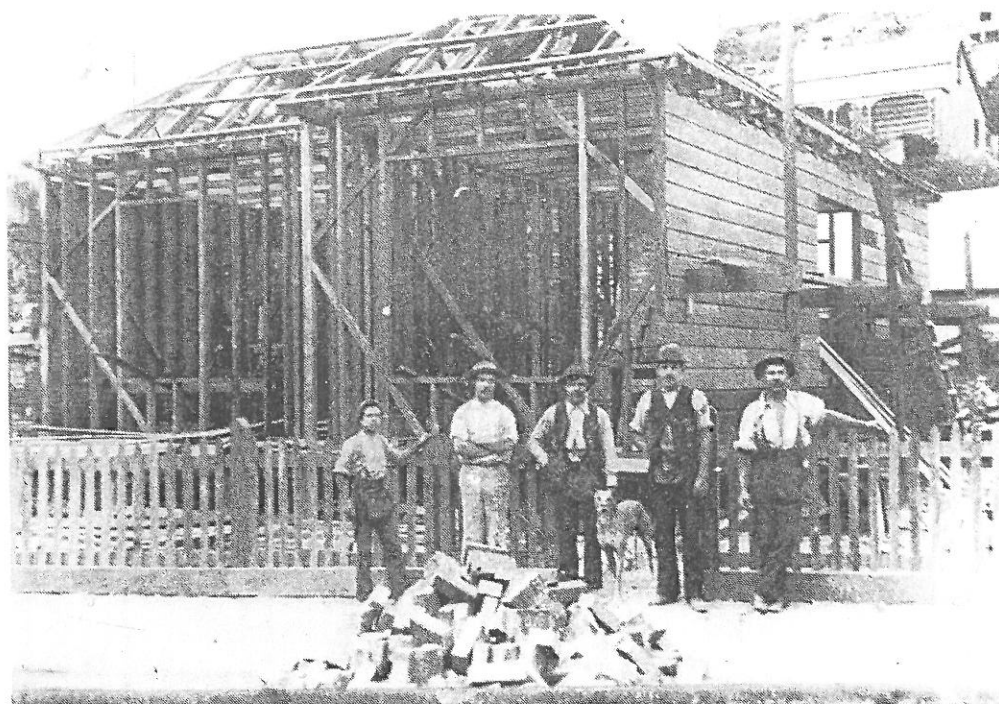
The depression days saw Joe’s return to Wellington, where he continued in his trade, in Vivian Street.

In the late 1930’s he came back to the Camp Bakery doing a roaring business during the WW II. Joe’s concern was apparent when, on the day of the riot at the camp, he saw ambulances, doctors and police, rushing to the scene.

About 1950 the old bakehouse was used by Bill Mawson, for cake baking – when he had a shop on the present site of FCDC. At this time Joe was employed baking cakes in Masterton, by Adams Bruce Ltd – a nationwide chain of cake and ice cream shops.

Semi-retired he undertook cleaning at the Post Office and N.Z. Bank an occupation which kept him in constant touch with the people, with whom he liked to converse.

1960, Joe and his second wife, Kathleen, moved to Martinborough, Joe enjoying his retirement to the ripe old age of 92 years (1972) and Mrs Towersey passing away on July 4th 1979.



1895. Joe Towersey at left, working with Adams, builders in Wellington.