

Pictured top left is a small 'rapoo' house of the type described by Sarah Mathew, the wife of the Surveyor General, in April 1840. The map on the right shows the tributaries to the Town Basin and the picture on the bottom left shows dense mangrove growth upstream of the Town Basin.

The River

On 18 January 1815, the missionary Samuel Marsden was told of a freshwater river at the head of the 'Wangaree' harbour.

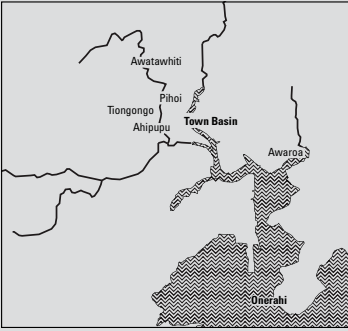
From 1820 to 1840, British and French naval vessels, explorers, traders and missionaries passed Bream Head and the outer harbour. In May 1823 missionaries rowed up the harbour to the river. They met five chiefs but few other people.

It would be twenty-five years before any colonial settlers arrived.

Sarah Mathew, the wife of the Surveyor General, wrote in April 1840 of rowing up the 'Wangaree' river with high, broken woods on one side, thickly fringed with mangroves on the other, to come suddenly in view of a small 'rapoo' house, hear a cock crowing and see pigs and cultivations near a Maori village. She walked in the rain through scrub and reeds, returning to find the tide fallen and the river a narrow winding stream through impenetrable banks of mangroves.

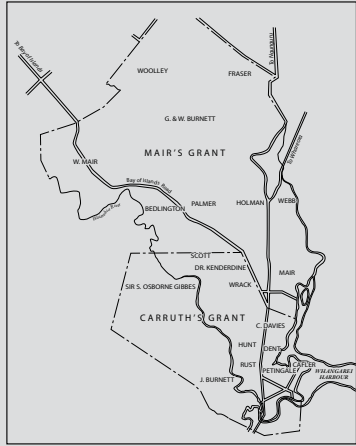
In 1839 William Carruth settled at Ahipupu on the riverside (now the Town Basin). Missionary William Colenso met Carruth that year. On a second visit, in April 1840, he met the local chief Iwitahi at his pa, Pihoi, on the hill above Ahipupu. On his third visit, in March 1841, Colenso held the first church service in English at Carruth's house, with about 20 settlers attending.

In 1843, Bishop Selwyn rowed up the Hatea River to the house of Gilbert Mair, noting 50 settlers and about 30 Maori in the area.



WANGAREE WANGARI WHANGARI
 WANGARE WANGAREI WHANGAREI

Whangarei has been spelt a number of different ways on charts and in documents over the years.



Whangarei The Founding Years, Nancy Pickmore

The plan on the left indicates the blocks William Carruth took up. The plan on the right shows the Carruth Grant and the Mair Grant and indicates where various settlers lived. The township of Whangarei from 1860 lay within the boundaries of the two grants.

The land and the people

From 1839 to early 1840, land was taken up in the Whangarei district between Matapouri to the north and Ruakaka in the south, around the harbour and west to the Wairua River.

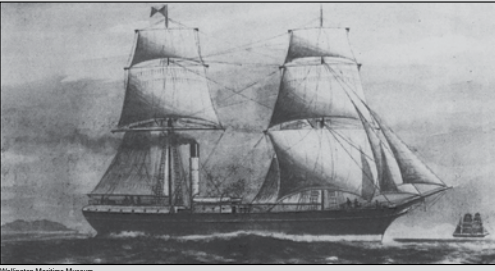
William Carruth took up the Awatawhiti and Tongongo blocks between the Hatea and Waiarohia Rivers (now the central city). Gilbert Mair took up the adjoining Hatea Block (now Mairtown, Kensington and Otangarei), and Peter and James Greenhill took up land on the Awaroa River, a short distance down harbour.

Threatened by the Kororareka War in the Bay of Islands, these first colonists fled in April 1845, leaving their simple homes, gardens, animals and fields of crops and grass.

The first settlement failed. Caroline Bedlington, nee Mair, wrote many years later:

"... Communication with Auckland and the seat of Government was very irregular, nothing has been heard from Auckland and the helplessness of our little community was too apparent. The natives partly led and partly carried us to the riverside where canoes were moored ..."

Most of those settlers did not return, selling their farms to John George Petingale, James Burnett, Eugene Cafler, Edward Dent, Charles Davies, Francis Hunt, Sir Samuel Osborne Gibbes, Dr William Augustus Perston, Robert Reyburn and Henry Walton. These names are echoed in the streets, buildings and parks of Whangarei today.



Wellington Maritime Museum



Alexander Turnbull Library Collection

Shipping Intelligence.
PORT OF AUCKLAND.
ENTERED INWARDS.
 April 12—Tey, 14 tons, Oahu, from Hauraki with 1 bushels & sheep, 11 case sports etc. 11 case steel gun, 2 bushels maize.
 April 12—Talvies, 12 tons, Jones, from Ngauru, with 15,000 feet sawn timber.
 April 12—Sperer, 105 tons, Anderson, from Sydney, Passengers—Thomas Kerr, R.N., Mr. Dewart, Wm. McGregor—Bain, Graham & Co. agents.
 April 12—Am, 20 tons, Adams, from Wanganui, with 2 pigs, 500 bushels wheat, 20 bushels maize, 2 case potatoes, and 20 natives.
 April 12—Ferd, 20 tons, Christchurch, from Wanganui, with 50 bushels apples, 4 packages sundries, Passengers—Horns, Pringle and Finns.
 April 12—Glenn, 20 tons, Kaitiaki, from Manakau, with 200 rails, 20 case firewood. Passengers—Horns, Edkwood and Waddell, Mrs. Davis and child.

JUBILEE S.S. COMPANY.
SHIP FOR AUCKLAND.
The s.s. Bellingier
 will leave as under:

Monday, 17th .. Train to Wharf 9.35 a.m.
 Thursday, 20th.. Train to Wharf 11.35 a.m.
 Monday, 24th .. Train to Wharf 1.25 a.m.
 Thursday, 27th.. Train to Wharf 1.10 a.m.
 Monday, 1st .. Train to Wharf 9.35 a.m.

For Whangarei, Whangarei Heads, Porehu and Mangapai, from Auckland every Tuesday and Friday evening.

s.s. PLANET Connects

DEPARTS

Monday 17th ..	2 a.m.	8 a.m.
Thursday 20th ..	10 a.m.	11 a.m.
Monday 24th ..	10 a.m.	1 p.m.
Thursday 27th ..	12 a.m.	2 p.m.
Monday 1st ..	2 a.m.	9 a.m.

The s.s. Planet will connect with Porehu B. and Mangapai.

Passenger Rates

Single - - - 10s
 Return - - - 15s
 Freight 6s. per Ton.

H. R. COOKER, Agent.
 N.B.—The Boat advertised to leave on SATURDAY, 19th October, will not leave Whangarei till Monday, 17th, 9.35 a.m. Train 8.10 p.m.

The paddle steamer Acheron (bottom left) was on survey in the harbour in 1849. Dozens of small sailing vessels had carried passengers, mail, produce and goods to and from Auckland from 1840. This would continue for many years, until a regular steam ship service was established. SS Wonga Wonga pictured under both steam and sail power (top left) was one of the first of these vessels. Advertisements for the Whangarei trade appeared in Auckland newspapers.

The ships

In late 1849, HMS Acheron, the first steam-driven vessel on the harbour, surveyed and defined channels to the upper harbour.

From the mid 1850s, the Petrel, owned by Chief Tirarau and captained by Robert Mair and T S Carmichael, regularly carried passengers, mail, stores and produce between Auckland and Whangarei. Dozens of sailing cutters, ketches and schooners provided an invaluable service carrying people, fruit, flour, bacon, butter, kauri gum, firewood, coal, timber and livestock to Auckland markets.

By the mid 1850s, the second wave of provincial settlers was arriving in Auckland. With the small village of 'Wangarei' and the settlement of the outlying districts well under way, the need for better communication with Auckland became apparent. In March 1855, the SS Wonga Wonga made her first run to 'Wangarei'. Her last trip was in the 1860s.

In 1877, the arrival of the SS Argyle and SS Stormbird, supported by local shareholders, signalled a more satisfactory and lasting service. The McGregor ships became, in 1881, the foundation of an expanding Northern Steamship Company, which provided many years of comfortable travel and efficient transport of goods.

By the 1930s the era of shipping was over, replaced by the railway from 1925. An 'all-weather' road to Auckland was in place by 1934.



Florence Keene Collection



Whangarei Museum Collection

The upper image shows an 1881 artist's impression of the town wharf at Whangarei, the lower image is a photograph taken from the same angle about 1922. On the far right is Reyburn House which has since been shifted down river. The large shed is in the approximate location of the current Town Basin retail area.

Town wharf

In earlier years there were two landings in the Town Basin, one up the Hatea River, the other at Ahipupu on the riverbank at the end of Walton St. In May 1864, the materials for the first wharf were lying on the beach at Ahipupu while the Highway Trustees awaited Government money.

In 1872, the Town Board asked settler Eugene Cafler to pay half the cost of wharf steps, and it employed settler Henry Holman in 1876 to remove boulders and obstructions from the channel.

In 1877, the management and control of the Town Wharf was vested in the newly formed County Council. It met as the Harbour Board for the first time on 13 August 1879. In 1880, the wharf was extended to meet Reyburn's frontage. For two years coal trains ran down Walton St from the mine at Whau Valley.

In 1922, after twenty years leasing to sawmilling companies, the Harbour Board resumed control of the foreshore at the junction of the Waiarohia and the Hatea. A stone retaining wall was built and the Town Wharf was extended. Tenders were invited for a large, concrete, iron-roofed goods shed.

By February 1923 the Harbour Board office on Walton St was completed. It remains on the site today.



Whangarei Museum Collection



Florence Keene Collection



Florence Keene Collection

The 1922 photograph (above, top) shows the former Harbour Board building, it was vacated by the Northland Regional Council in 2006. The picture on the bottom left shows the original wooden 'Victoria Bridge'. The picture to the right is an early image of the Town Basin.

Waterfront

In 1909, the Harbour Board needed to define the foreshore limits of the land granted to settlers Carruth and Mair. Old waka mooring posts were long gone, and it was evident that the original riverbank was covered by reclaimed ground. Robert Reyburn Jr. offered to 'dedicate my waterfront from Walton St to James St' as an esplanade. The Harbour Board later built the retaining stone embankment along Reyburn's foreshore and named it Victoria Quay.

The Whangarei Harbour Board Act of 1907, and many subsequent local Acts and Orders-in-Council, had given the Board jurisdiction over many acres of foreshore endowment lands. These paved the way for removing mangroves, dredging, stopbanking and draining the tidal flats, and deepening and straightening channels to improve water access and provide large areas of land for industry.

A pivot bridge across the Hatea from James St to the Old Onerahi Rd was completed in January 1898. A commissioner, appointed a few months later, vested its control in the Whangarei Borough Council, which shared costs of maintenance and repairs with the County Council. There was continual trouble with the pivoting span. Declared unsafe in 1926 it was closed. It was replaced in 1936 with the concrete Victoria bridge.

By 1923 Borough and Harbour Board were working together to improve the road frontage across the river. The Borough would construct the 66-foot roadway, while the Harbour Board would build the stone retaining wall 24 feet beyond and provide the fill. It was the start of the riverside marina.



The Town Basin was never deep enough for larger vessels. The upper image shows a new town wharf at Opau (Kioreroa). On the lower left is an early aerial photograph of Port Kioreroa, in the centre the railway spanning the harbour to Onerahi and on the right, the public ceremony of "turning the first sod" for the railway terminal at Onerahi wharf.

Deep water

The inability of larger vessels to berth at the Town Basin was a long standing problem. In 1840, Surveyor General Felton Mathew rejected Whangarei as a site for the future capital of New Zealand because of inadequate flat land and insufficient depth of water in the inner harbour.

2000 people petitioned Parliament in 1897 for an extension of the railway to Grahamtown (Onerahi). Here Mrs Robert Thompson turned the first sod of the railway to deep water on 31 March 1901.

The Railway Department completed the Opau wharf at Kioreroa in 1904, two miles downriver from the Town Basin. It was successful - timber booms alongside, coal trains unloading and passenger traffic. By 1911, the link between Opau Wharf and Onerahi Wharf was in full operation. A causeway carrying the railway line curved across the harbour. A draw span known locally as the 'Gull Roost' could be opened as traffic demanded.

A Whangarei Harbour Improvement Plan was accepted by the Harbour Board in 1920. In July 1926, tenders were invited for the construction of a harbour at Kioreroa to replace the Onerahi connection. By 1933, the Kioreroa and Onerahi section of the railway was closed. The causeway, Onerahi Wharf and the old Opau (Kioreroa) wharf were demolished.

With the channel, and an eight-acre turning basin dredged, Kioreroa became the deep-water port. In 1938 'Port Kioreroa' became 'Port Whangarei'.



Reynum House Collection

The Town Basin, no longer a commercial port, became an important maritime and social hub for the community. P-class yacht races, popular among yachting enthusiasts as pictured above at a 1945 Regatta Day, were one of the many activities on the town waterfront.

Playground

From the 1920s, the foreshore above Victoria Bridge along Drummond Creek, was leased to boat builders and for boat sheds. The area was headquarters of both the Rowing Club and the Whangarei Cruising Club.

Civil engineer and yachtsman Harry Hight designed and sailed the first P-class yacht at the Onerahi Regatta on New Year's Day 1920. For many years, P-class yacht races were popular among young yachting enthusiasts.

In 1926 and again in 1929, on a three-mile course starting at Kioreroa and finishing at the Town Wharf, the national champion sculler Paddy Hannam beat his challenger James Mason of Whangarei.

With the industrialisation of reclaimed ground beyond the Town Basin and the loss of coastal shipping and large ships at the Town Basin, the Hatea was no longer a commercial area. The river became a haven for fishermen and pleasure boats.

Under the auspices of the Whangarei Harbour Board, a patrol and emergency service of nine locally owned boats was set up in 1939. Several of these local launches were involved in the rescue of RMS Niagara after she hit a mine near the Hen and Chickens in June 1940. This 'Whangarei initiative', as the Navy termed it, was the forerunner of the New Zealand-wide Naval Auxiliary Patrol Service (NAPS), a sea-going Home Guard.



Whangarei Town Basin has been redeveloped several times over the past 180 years. It has now gained a reputation throughout the world as a safe haven for international yachts. Just as it was in the earliest times it remains a draw-card for travellers from far and wide and is becoming an increasingly important social and recreational hub for visitors and residents alike.

Modern times

Much of Whangarei's commercial centre is built on land reclaimed between the 1920s and 1960s.

The original line of the Town Basin foreshore disappeared when mangroves were removed, Doctor's Creek and the Waiarohia were diverted, the tidal flats fronting Okara and Hihiaua were reclaimed and Riverside Drive, across the Hatea, was established. In March 1953 the Whangarei A&P Winter Show Building opened in Dent St.

In the 1970s, traffic patterns changed with the construction of the John Street bridge parallel to the Victoria Bridge. A replica of the Bounty, built by local firm WECO, became a tourist attraction at the Town Wharf.

By the 1980s the Whangarei Theatre Company had erected a geodesic-style theatre on the riverbank and the Town Basin was gaining a reputation as a haven for international yachts. In 1985 French agents moored their yacht Ouvea at the Basin, prior to sinking the Rainbow Warrior in Auckland.

In October 1995 another Town Basin development opened. The old wharf sheds were demolished. Claphams Clocks had a new home. Colonial styled buildings housed shops, eateries, a glass blowers' studio, doll and fish museums.

In 2005 the Waka and Wave millennium sculpture was unveiled at the end of the Hihiaua reclamation. In 2006 the Northland Regional Council vacated the old Harbour Board building, Dent and Quay Street roads were realigned, the A&P buildings were demolished, Victoria Bridge was widened and John Street Bridge was closed.