**Tales from the Dead Centre of Town**

**Samuel Coates Parlour 1868 – 1938**

Samuel Coates Parlour was born in Gayles, York, UK and emigrated to New Zealand as a young man to work for his uncle Isaac Coates of Hamilton. His uncle had flax milling interests in the Waikato and young Samuel worked in and around Morrinsville before returning to England around 1899 to marry Annie Davison.

They returned to New Zealand and by 1901 Samuel was a Flax mill Manager at Morrinsville.

In 1894 John, Thomas and Daniel Fry obtained from John Turnbull, a sub-lease for 14 years and six months of thirty seven acres of part of the Te Au o Waikato block (where the Morrinsville Light Horse Club is now). They arranged to pay £15 per annum rental. In 1898 a fire destroyed the Fry Bros flax and grain storage shed. The shed and contents were insured by Norwich Union for £340 but due to only a small amount of flax being stored the claim was only for £148. The claim was sent in on Monday and the cheque settling the claim was forwarded by return mail. Take note 2024 insurance companies! Unfortunately, this was not their only setback, a swamp fire had recently destroyed thousands of tons of their green flax. This is when flax was worth £10 per ton and the mill was barely profitable. Several boarding houses had opened in the fledgling town of Morrinsville to cater for the influx of workers at the flax mills around the town.

Sometime in the late 1890’s Isaac Coates (Mayor of Hamilton, flax miller, farmer, drainage and railway contractor) bought the flax mill in Morrinsville from the Fry Bros. He had a turbine installed to replace the Pelton water wheel and appointed his nephew Samuel Parlour to take charge of the plant. This flax mill was on the banks of the Topehahae Stream, and parts of the old plant are still visible today. At some stage Isaac Coates appears to have relinquished his interest in the mill and in 1905 Samuel Parlour and Jack Clifford a local store owner, purchased the property of thirty seven acres from the Assets Realisation Board with details recorded in their ledger as ‘Techmongery plant - £500, interest 4 ½% p.a. Two years earlier they had successfully applied for petters patent regarding an improvement in flax drums.

In January 1907 the flax mill and dam were destroyed by a flood but by September 1909 it was back in operation again. The value of flax fluctuated between £10-26 per ton and fires, caused by the highly flammable nature of dried flax, and flood, due to mills proximity to water for power and sparks from machinery, frequently devastated owners. During the heyday of flax, Samuel Coates and John Clifford owned three mills – two at Tauhei and one at Morrinsville. Flax as a commodity however was eventually replaced by synthetic fibres and mills were gradually closed from the 1920’s onwards. The Morrinsville flax mill closed about 1928.

In 1907 Mr Parlour purchased a Belsize car and along with John Clifford they were the first car owners in Morrinsville. In fact, they were among the first in New Zealand to drive motor cars. Mr Clifford’s registration was 4 and Mr Parlour’s 11 for the North Island. Interestingly in 1911 he featured in a court case in Hamilton accused of negligence after driving his car around a corner on the Morrinsville to Hamilton road at a speed of 6mph and colliding with a horse and buggy.

In 1908 he was elected to the inaugural Morrinsville Town Board and served for the next four terms. His other interests were in the Piako Rifle Club, Cricket Club, Masonic Lodge and the Anglican Church. He and his wife Annie often entertained at their residence named ‘Dalton’ built in Studholme Street in 1905 (behind the Town & Country store) and mentioned recently in my story about early butchers. The house is still occupied and nearly 120 years old.

In 1920 Annie Parlour started business as a women’s outfitter but in 1923 was adjudged bankrupt after several years of poor trading and suffering rain damaged stock. While all outstanding debts were covered by her husband, the landlord refused to terminate her tenancy forcing her to file for bankruptcy. Samuel Parlour was also adjudged bankrupt in 1930 due to his 100 acre farm on the outskirts of Morrinsville becoming unviable and being unable to service loans on it. This was the beginning of the Depression years and rather a sad story.

Samuel and Annie Coates retired to Te Puru on the Thames Coast in 1936 where Samuel died two years later. Both he and Annie are buried in the Morrinsville old cemetery.

Penny Pickett

Morrinsville Museum  
Sources:

Morrinsville Museum archives

Beyond the Landing

Peter Barker archives

Papers Past

Photos:

‘Dalton’ the Parlour family home in Studholme Street

Parlour family car in 1907

Flax mill workers, date unknown