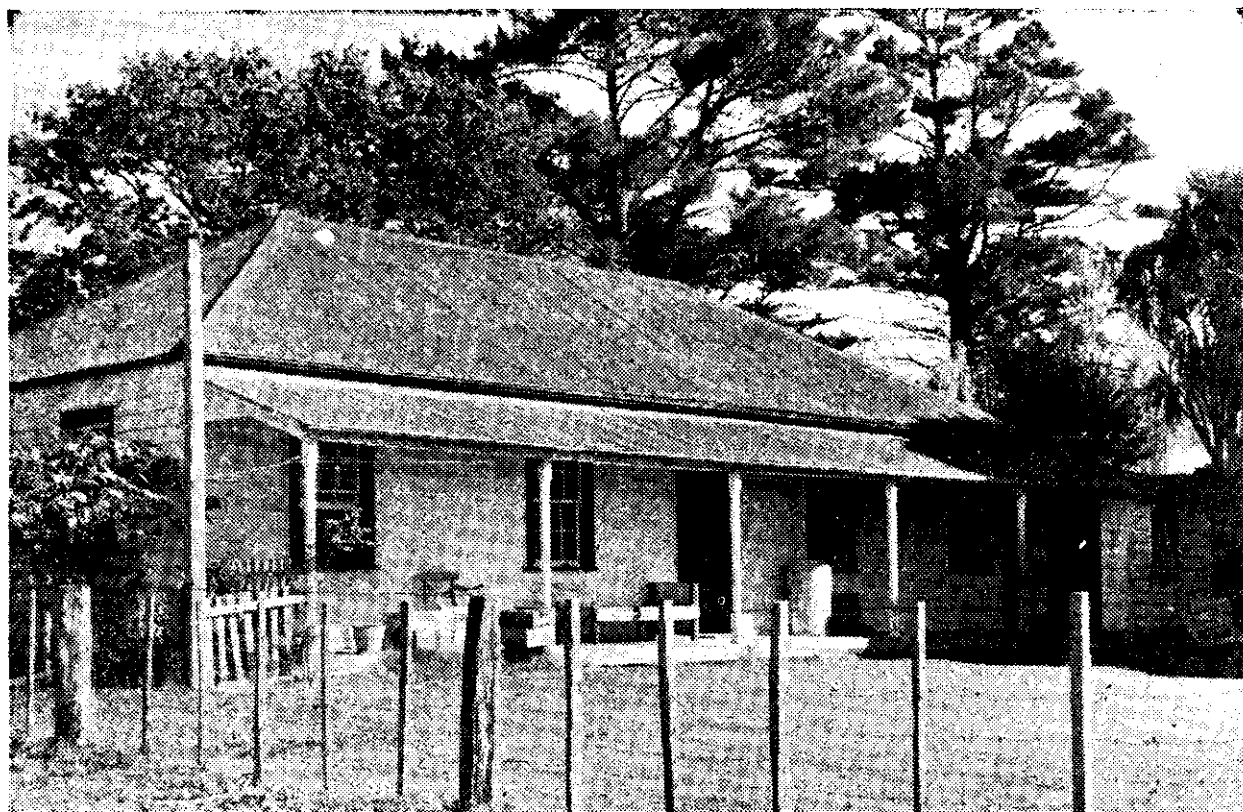




LEFT: The Maning homestead, "its kauri walls thick enough to be bullet-proof," is still lived in today by Mr. S. J. Brindle, whose family have farmed the surrounding land for the past 40 years

derided, were now to be thrust upon him. For in 1865 he was first made a J.P. and then, under the Native Lands Court Act of that year, a Judge of the new Court, for which piece of preferment he proved eminently worthy. . . . He was a favourite with the natives, had their confidence, and speedily concluded matters, sometimes, it was said, not merely by the strong arm of the law, but by the aid of his own as well."

So it was here, in this little courthouse, that Maning administered the law, and under these trees, perhaps, he used his strong arm to enforce it. . . .

The scene presented itself almost automatically to the imagination: Maoris squatting in groups all over this green paddock which surrounds the courthouse; Maning within, listening patiently to Maori eloquence which he knew so well. Did he, we wondered, feel the situation to be incongruous?—that this world was really topsy turvy, in which he, whose youth in Tasmania had bred in him a hatred of the law and all its ways, now administered it to others? Many people have remarked how silent he always kept about those early years. Was there some mystery which he could not divulge?

Neil Ferguson and his son in Rawene had spoken to us of these things. They had been undertaking research into the question why Maning, at the age of 22, suddenly uprooted himself from Tasmania and came to the Hokianga. The only answer that Maning gave was love of freedom and adventure. Were there other reasons besides? The Fergusons were hot on a trail. They had discovered this much at least; that just before Maning left Hobart, seven Irish patriots, some of them men of good standing, who had been transported, escaped from Hobart prison. In some mysterious way they were smuggled out of the country and found their way safely to America. Had Maning anything to do with their escape? He was known to have saved from the gallows the henchman he brought with him to New Zealand, Will Waters, though (writes Dr. Hocken) "how this had been effected no one quite knew." And there was that strange fact

(continued on next page)

GIANT ON THE BENCH

By CELIA and CECIL MANSON

WHEREVER you go on the Hokianga, the spirit of Frederick Edward Maning seems to haunt you. It is impossible to escape him. Even if he had never written his reminiscences, the classic *Old New Zealand*, there would still be stories handed on from one generation to another about this herculean Irishman with the pale blue eyes and long hair falling in ringlets. For Maning was everywhere and in everything. His name seems to belong to the Hokianga almost as much as Kupe's.

If he were alive today, he would be pleased to see that his old house at Onoke is still more or less as it was in his time; children, although not his own descendants, playing on the broad verandah, helping on the farm, or—which would surprise him more—going off by launch to school at Rawene.

And he would look with approval at the solid kauri walls of the homestead, made, by his orders, thick enough to be bullet-proof. "They can't build like that now," he would say, "they haven't the kauri, and they haven't Jackie Marmon to put it together." Jackie, another legendary figure of the Hokianga, had certain tricks of building; they can be recognised today.

And in one of the darkly panelled front rooms, Maning would see his own judicial chair, made also of kauri, unstained. In this he had sat as judge in the little courthouse that still stands in the paddock a hundred yards or so from the house in the shadow of a great aspen poplar which he himself had planted long ago.

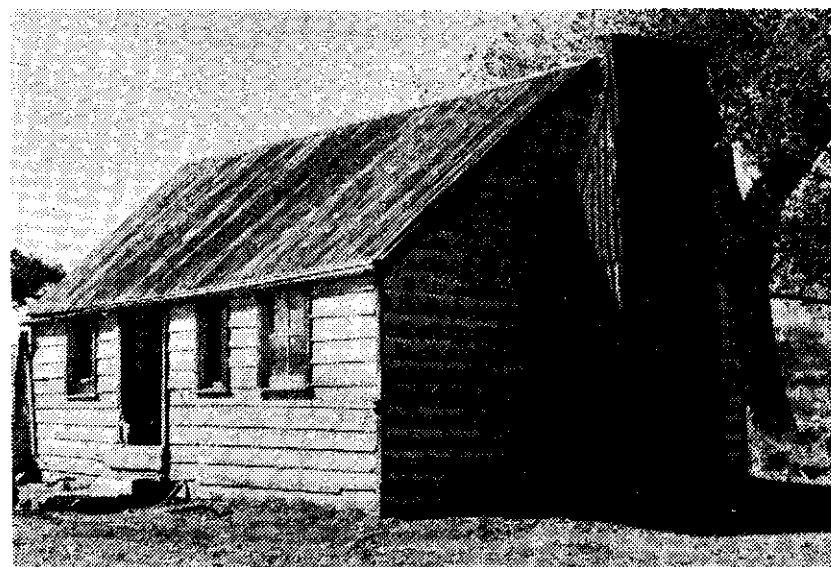
It is a wonderfully peaceful place, this old Maning home. Behind it rise the steep hills; in front, lawns of brilliant green and paddocks watered by a tidal creek run down to the shore of the broad Hokianga estuary. The old trees are huge and high, giving shade to the sheep, and the orchard near the house has fruit trees of every kind. Peach trees, as all along the Hokianga, grow everywhere: tree-tomatoes riot, an incongruous word to use of such a place as this—where even the pony on which our children rode was gentle and quiet.

The little courthouse, said to be the first Maori land-court in New Zealand, looks so small that you can scarcely imagine any dignified legal proceedings taking place in it. It stands in a paddock near the house. It looks like a barn, and that in fact is what it has become. Inside, hay is stacked high to the ceiling. But you may still see the original fireplace in front of which His Honour Judge Maning sat, administering those same British laws which, in his youth on this very river, he had done his best to keep out of New Zealand.

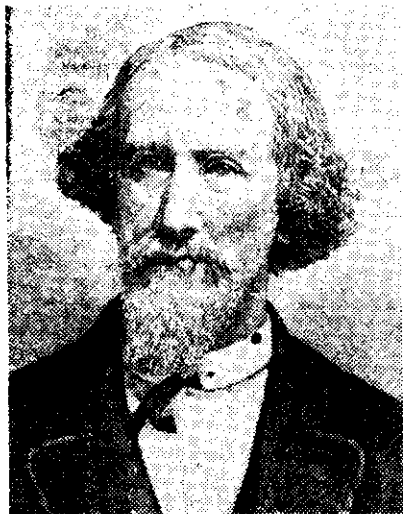
He was not altogether happy, they say, about this Judgeship. Married to a Maori

wife, and having lived so long among the Maoris, he knew them almost too well. He knew their customs, their tapus and their complicated systems of ownership. The idea of applying Western laws to the Maoris had troubled him more and more. "I don't think the law will have much 'mana' here in my time," he had written. "I feel as if I were two persons at the same time. Sometimes I find myself on the Maori side, and then, just afterwards, wondering if 'we' can lick the Maoris and set the law upon its legs, which is the only way to do it. . . . I belong to both parties, and I don't care a straw which wins. . . ."

Three years after writing those words he was administering the law himself. "That greatness and respectability," wrote Dr. Hocken, "which so long he had



THE OLD NATIVE COURTHOUSE, believed to be the first in New Zealand, is "so small that you can scarcely imagine any dignified legal proceedings taking place in it"



Turnbull Library Archives

JUDGE MANING
A strong arm helped