

(14) TAURANGA : ROTORUA COUNTIES

In January, 1948, the Rotorua and Tauranga Counties requested the Commission to investigate the question of an adjustment of boundaries between the two districts, and the Commission held a public inquiry into the matter at Rotorua on the 4th October, 1948. The basic reason for the proposal appeared to be that, like those of many counties in New Zealand, particularly the interior ones, the boundaries had been drawn in such a manner that they ignored geographic, topographical, and economic factors. Such boundaries as originally determined were often in inaccessible and undeveloped country, which produced little rating revenue. In those days counties had no real interest in such remote localities, and the exact location of the boundary line had very little significance. But as the areas developed over the years the lands became rateable, and the local authorities and the ratepayers in such areas became vitally concerned as to the position of such boundaries. Such matters as the responsibility for roads, for instance, particularly where they related to community of interest with another county, were of a major consequence. The economics concerned with their construction and maintenance, and ease of access from operational points, was, and still is, a determining factor in the fixation of boundaries. In this particular case the trend of development was from the Tauranga locality rather than an extension to the north from Rotorua. With one isolated exception, the economic and social activities of the settlers were centred more in Te Puke rather than in Rotorua, while there was evidence that in many cases settlers' produce was, and would continue to be, shipped or railed from focal points in the Tauranga County.

The particular area under consideration at the inquiry was land lying immediately south of the Rotorua-Tauranga boundary, and extending from the Whakatane County boundary in the east, to the Matamata County boundary in the west, some four miles wide in a straight line. This area was, for the purpose of the inquiry, divided into two, the Te Matai district extending practically from the Tauranga-Rotorua State Highway to the Matamata County boundary in the west, and the eastern district extending from the Rotorua-Tauranga State Highway practically to the Whakatane County boundary. In the case of the former there was agreement between the two Councils, and there was no doubt that, geographically and economically, the area should be included in the Tauranga County. In so far as the eastern district was concerned, the Councils had not agreed as to the ultimate determination of the area. The Chairman of the Rotorua County Council stated that his Council had no decided views on the question, but he put forward the views of the ratepayers of the district. He also agreed that the Rotorua roads had not been up to standard, mainly due to lack of plant, which was now on order, and lack of finance, which would be substantially rectified by the recent revaluation of the county. The case for the objecting ratepayers was conducted by counsel, who stated unequivocally that the settlers were concerned chiefly with the effect of the proposed change on the rating position. As to factors concerning community of interest, previously referred to, he was definitely in agreement.

The County Clerk for the Tauranga County Council indicated his Council's policy regarding expenditure of rates, stating that, although consideration had been given to revenue derived from rates in relation to expenditure in the area, the view was taken that those areas which needed developing at the expense of the more highly-rated lands adjacent to the State highways should share the cost of development in back areas, so that the wealth of the county as a whole could be increased progressively. It was undeniably recognized that attention must be paid to the backblocks settlers, as otherwise, if they depended on their rate revenue as a measuring-rod for expenditure on roads, they would remain undeveloped for a long time. We gave serious consideration to the rating liability of those settlers who expressed their objection to the inclusion of their lands in the Tauranga County, and went into the question as to whether the resultant increase in