

Life of Frank Larking

By Percy Allison

To celebrate Frank Larking's 80th Birthday (30th December 2004) the Beach Haven/Birkdale Residents & Ratepayers Association held an occasion for him in the Ratepayers Hall. This was also a tribute to Frank's 55 years voluntary efforts for the local Beach Haven community.

Percy Allison, Life Member of the Ratepayers Association authored and published a souvenir booklet titled "Frank Larking – A Man of the People" in 1987.

- One Man's Fight Against Erosion
- Wharf Minder
- Boat Repairer
- Groyne Developer
- Beach Builder

This booklet is being re-printed by the Birkenhead Historical Society. The booklet was launched to commemorate the official opening of the Beach Haven Sea Scout shed at Larking's Landing by the Governor General Sir Paul Reeves (Nov 28th 1987) at which Frank was awarded a Sea Scout Award for his 40 years dedication to that movement.

Frank was born in Taranaki, joined the RNZAF in 1945, and was then posted to Japan (1946). Returning to NZ he met his future wife Beverly who was a member of the WAAF at Hobsonville.

They rented a house in Tui Crescent, Beach Haven in 1949, and then bought a section in Beach Haven Road for forty-five pounds to build their own home, a converted army hut. But this did not meet the basic building requirements so they had to build on until it reached the legal 580 sq footage. Cooking was an outside activity until they got the bricks together to build a chimney.

The first of their children was born there. The family eventually extended to a boy and three girls.

Frank rowed his dingy across the harbour to work at Hobsonville Airbase daily. He also allowed the dingy to be used by young people on weekends for fishing or pleasure, a forerunner of a host of other community ventures over 55 years in his area.

He made his own 2,785 blocks to build a new home. By the time he finished the home his children were ready for the outside world. 13½ years later, the 4 bedroom 1,500 sq foot home was finished and paid for.

During this time he also helped build the Girl Guides establishment at Verrans Corner Reservoir.

He kept the Beach Haven beach clear of gorse and black berry.

Then he was posted to Fiji in 1952 where he developed a mastoid behind his ear. A clot then on the brain led to paralysis to the right side of his body and speech loss. A correspondence course soon brought him back, with Bev's help, to secondary school level.

Next project was the Sea Scouts headquarters in Shepherds Park.

Frank and Bev also helped fund-raising for the Birkdale Free Kindergarten.

In 1964 Frank repaired the Beach Haven Wharf and used heavy planks to stop erosion of the beach foreshore.

The Sea Scouts tin shed at Shepherds Park was soon developed into a full-sized building at Tui Park.

A long-boat from Herald Island was given to Frank, believed to be from the 1940 sinking of the Niagra. This was repeatedly repaired over the years by Frank as a gift to the "Children of Beach Haven" and aptly named as such – much to his own expense.

He was made an honorary warden, caretaker, carpenter and protector against demolition.

In 1967 a threat was made to demolish the wharf. Frank called on a local Barber and they organised the local young people into an action group. The local youths also organised their own petition, and peacefully demonstrated through the Beach Haven & Birkenhead shopping centres on late shopping nights, ending with a sit-in on the wharf one weekend.

Soon the Harbour Board, Defence Department and Local Council caved-in with all agreeing to share the costs to repair the wharf.

In 1987 the same problem with wharf repairs again emerged. Frank called on his support group who then involved the local Ratepayers Association, business community and soon had the

same local bodies jointly committed to pay \$40,000 cost to repair the wharf for a second time.

Frank and Bev made representations to Council to buy Messrs Seed & Dean's properties (above the groyne) for reserve and youth activities.

The 1968 erosion of the eastern end of the wharf beach was a serious problem and solutions offered seemed either unworkable or too costly.

Frank suggested a plan to build a groyne from the point, back-fill, sew grass and provide seating and BBQ facilities.

An old barge was bought from Rope Construction for 10cents and Frank repaired it for \$23, his own account. Steel rods, broken car axles were donated.

Frank Allan provided 2,903 old car tyres and the late Snow McCullough delivered them free of charge.

The groyne extended 92 metres. He back-filled behind the groyne using 686 cubic yards of mud from the sea bed at low tide by shovel onto the barge, then shovelled out again by hand. This took 2 ½ years or 1,289 hours that cost the ratepayers nothing.

When Frank retired from the Air Force in 1971 he then worked full time at Salthouse Boat builders at Greenhithe.

Then after the work on the groyne, he found that the project was illegal – without Marine Department consent and had to be dismantled at a cost of \$33,000. This started another campaign against bureaucracy, which lasted many years. A public meeting in Beach Haven in 1974 endorsed Frank's plan to amend the plan to suit the Department rules.

Then Frank broke his neck at work and when he returned to the project, Council donated \$4000 towards a grouted wall and machinery hire, plus some temporary workers were allocated to him.

Soon he crushed his leg at work and was off work for 2 months. He hobbled onto the beach to plan his next venture. He rowed his dingy, towing a barge to unload 700 yards of sand from the Hobsonville sand bar then spread it onto the beach. A further accident in 1986 laid him up temporarily, with broken ribs.

At 62 he retired from boatbuilding. By 1987 he still had 500 yards of sand to shift. By 1989 he completed the renewed beach complex.

At the completion of 40 years active membership of the Hobsonville Yacht Club, including teaching local youths to sail, the Beach Haven/Birkdale Residents & Ratepayers Association, which Frank served for 30 years, awarded him Life Membership and the Birkenhead City Council awarded him a Certificate for Community Service. With the groyne aptly named Larking's Landing, the Sea Scout Shed by the groyne has also been named "The Frank Larking Sea Scout Shed."

At that time Frank had only a few words to say

"It's all been worth while, a great pleasure to serve the community and without the full support of my loyal wife Bev, it would all have been impossible."

To commemorate Frank's 40 years voluntary community service the Frank Larking Support Group also nominated him for a well earned Queen's Award. Believe it or not, it took five years before his QSM was granted. But what concerned the group was that others in the community received Royal Awards before him. One in particular, had only been in the country a few years. One other had received an award even though being a paid community worker!

The group also discovered that it was the most closely guarded secret (by law) as to who nominates who for such awards. Our group broke the rule by publicly proclaiming that we had sponsored Frank's nomination, which was supported by the local Ratepayers Association, Sea Scouts & Girl Guides Committees.

The group then forwarded Frank's name to the Guinness Book of Records as "The only man in the world to build a beach." Their response was that "they receive 10,000 applications per year and Frank's efforts did not meet their criteria".

The group was then forced to question "whether Frank now had to build two beaches to qualify?"

As a big thank you to those special people in the community who gave their time and energy in support of his projects Frank made and dedicated seats on the groyne to his late wife Beverly, the late Snow McCullough, Eric Townsend, the late Doreen Fahy Lithgow, their bridesmaid and true friend.

To his only son Adrian who drowned off Muriwai in 1990, this stress caused Frank a heart attack.

Although Percy Allison is still alive, the Percy Allison and Family seat is tucked in a private spot overlooking the bay.

Frank notes "popular for intercourse" (jealous says Allison on hearing this). "Maybe Frank should install a bed"

A gap has been left for Frank's own plaque, carved and waiting in his garage. (Metro Magazine June 2003)

If one were to think that ended the story, shock upon horrors came upon Frank when he requested more sand be obtained to replace the existing sand on the beach, which was disappearing due to the flotsam and jetsam of the westerly wind and tides.

Council Area Secretary, Paul O'Brien takes up the story....

Beach Haven Sand Project

By Paul O'Brien
Area Council Secretary

Original cost of sand (excluding ARC consents, barging, engineering reports etc) \$25 per cubic meter plus GST.

Source of sand Kaiaua (Stephenson's Quarry)

Origin of sand, seabed off Coromandel coast using Resource consent from Waikato Regional Authority.

Original estimated quantity of sand needed for Beach Haven was 550 cubic meters at a cost of \$13,750.

Following engineering assessment and hydrology report this was increased to 650 cubic meters at a cost of \$16,250.

Part of the consent process was the need to consult with local Iwi and a meeting occurred with Jane West who outlined her concerns relating to the proposed source of the sand being Coromandel. She indicated that Iwi would generally be unhappy for sand from that location to be mixed with local sand on the inner harbour. When asked where an "acceptable" source might be found she indicated that it could be obtained further north up the coast at Pakiri (there was an existing resource consent already in place to do this) or from the other side of the inner harbour around Hobsonville. The

latter had no resource consent in place and would have to be the subject of a further Resource consent process with the ARC and another consultation with local Iwi.

This advice from Jane was initially accepted in good faith however further research on the cost of obtaining sand from both these sources indicated that the cost would be prohibitive. Discreet enquiries revealed that Pakiri sand cost around \$70 per cubic meter plus barging, and the Hobsonville source was undetermined but likely to match that figure when taking account of the additional ARC consents needed and the fact that the Iwi concerned were the same group as those at Pakiri anyway. It was at this point in the process that Council decided to broaden the Iwi consultation and determine whether the "source" issue was a view that was widely shared with other Iwi groups. Contact was made with over 12 potentially interested Iwi representatives (including Jane West) who with one exception came back with the view that the source issue was not as significant as we had originally been led to believe. All this material was forwarded to ARC for their information as part of the Resource consent process.

During all this time the Kaiaua sand was being held at the quarry pending the outcome of the process and the operators also held their original price at \$25 per cubic meter, which was extremely generous of them seeing it took the best part of two years to finally resolve this. The ARC having considered all the issues finally resolved to approve the project in March 2004 and so the work went ahead.

Overall the Beach Haven project cost nearly \$40,000 taking into account not only the cost of the sand, but all the other expenses as well. This included Resource Consent, Hydrology report, Barging expenses and a specific contract to off load the sand and spread it on the beach.

Continued by Percy Allison

Then if the community thought all problems were solved....

Frank was faced with the problem of having Council replace the wharf shelter shed which was removed for repair 4 years ago.

He led a deputation to Council recently requesting the shed be replaced.

Percy Allison from Frank Larking Support Group stressed the importance of replacing the shed in time to coincide with 30th December 2004, his 80th Birthday.

"If it is a question of money" said Mr Allison "compare what Frank's voluntary work on the wharf, groyne and beach area would have cost if Frank were to submit an account for time spent in those 55 years?"

Hopefully, Council will respond in time.

A sleeping bag donated to Frank by The Frank Larking Support Group was suggested, in jest, that Frank only wanted the shed to sleep in to be on the job full time!

No.... the fight is not over for poor Frank. The ARC now wants to erect a passenger pontoon on the northern side of the wharf against Frank's objection that it should be on the Southern side of the wharf!

Finally, while Frank's achievements are now well recorded it must be remembered that without his wife's support his new ventures could not eventuate.

This must also include individuals and local community support.