

WAITOA PROSPECTING ASSOCIATION/GOLD MINING COMPANY

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Abstract: *In July 1880, some Waitoa residents planned to form a prospecting association to explore the Te Aroha mountain, but it was not established until early November, after Hone Werahiko had made his discovery. An experienced prospector was appointed to lead the party that was paid for by the association. On opening day a claim was pegged out, and, based on encouraging signs, a company with 14 shareholders was formed in March. A failure to find the expected good ore meant the collapse of this company after just four months of work.*

FORMING A PROSPECTING ASSOCIATION

In July 1880, a Waitoa correspondent reported the formation of an association by local settlers to prospect the Te Aroha mountain:

A number of gentlemen (chiefly land owners) have already signed the memorandum, and it is expected the difficulty will be rather to limit the number to that specified in the agreement than to obtain the necessary number of signatures.... The following is the memorandum:- We, the undersigned, agree to form an association for the purpose of prospecting the Aroha ranges, on the following conditions:- (1) To advance the sum of £5 each, to be called up in sums not exceeding £1, at intervals of not less than one month. (2) To obtain the services of two experienced miners to prospect thoroughly the ground mentioned. (3) Such prospectors to be paid 30s a week each for such time as the committee appointed for the parties hereto may desire. (4) In the event of the prospectors finding payable gold, a company to be formed consisting of those signing the memorandum, holding equal shares along with the prospectors, i.e., each contributor to have an equal interest in the company, and a prospector to have a similar interest to a contributor. (5) The number of shareholders to be limited to 20 in the Prospecting Association.¹

Despite the correspondent's confidence, no more was heard of this proposal until at the beginning of November it was reported that 'some months ago' Reuben Parr and other Waitoa settlers had visited Thames and

¹ Waitoa Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 22 July 1880, p. 2.

caught gold fever, resulting in an association of 25 members.² Parr, earlier an unsuccessful Thames miner,³ was converting 1,248 acres of swamp into a farm.⁴ ‘The idea, however, collapsed in consequence of a difficulty in getting a sufficient number of members, and consequently a sufficient amount of money to carry out the work proposed’. On the evening of 1 November, a meeting held in George Stewart O’Halloran’s hotel⁵ at Te Aroha revived it.⁶

As most of those attending this meeting were Waitoa settlers, its name was the Waitoa Prospecting Association. Parr was elected chairman and O’Halloran secretary. Membership was limited to 15, fewer than the number applying to join.⁷ The names of some members were published: Parr, Falconer Larkworthy,⁸ and John Bealby Smith⁹ all owned land at Waitoa, Thomas Rowe was a butcher and storekeeper at Waihou,¹⁰ Edwin Missen was the Waihou hotelkeeper,¹¹ James Lavery was a Te Aroha timber merchant and builder,¹² and Thomas Goodman Sandes was a surveyor based in Hamilton.¹³

David Martin McIntyre, who had prospected and mined for years at Thames and Ohinemuri and had been prospecting at Te Aroha since early

² *Thames Star*, 2 November 1880, p. 2.

³ Recollections of A.F. Sawyer, n.d. [1940s], W.G. Hammond Papers, folder 34a, MS 134, Library of the Auckland Institute and War Memorial Museum; *Te Aroha News*, 30 December 1925, p. 1.

⁴ Own Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 3 July 1880, p. 4; Travelling Reporter, ‘The Piako County’, *Waikato Times*, 3 May 1881, p. 2.

⁵ See paper on his life.

⁶ *Thames Star*, 2 November 1880, p. 2.

⁷ *Thames Star*, 4 November 1880, p. 2.

⁸ See G.R. Hawke, ‘Falconer Larkworthy’, *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography: Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*.

⁹ See paper on the Waitoa Find.

¹⁰ See *Waikato Times*, Waitoa Correspondent, 3 June 1882, p. 2, 24 April 1883, p. 2; *Waikato Argus*, 11 April 1899, p. 2.

¹¹ See *Auckland Weekly News*, 28 June 1879, p. 13; *Waikato Times*, 16 November 1880, p. 2, 3 May 1881, p. 2, 11 April 1882, p. 2.

¹² See *Te Aroha News*, 28 January 1888, p. 2.

¹³ See *Waikato Times*, 8 May 1897, p. 2.

October,¹⁴ was appointed to manage the prospecting party. ‘From this gentleman’s long experience as a miner and mine manager’ a Waitoa correspondent felt ‘sure that work will be the order of the day, and that the prospecting will be done on the ranges and not around the Hot Springs Hotel’. McIntyre was ‘a paying shareholder in the Association’, and ‘the great thing, in fact the only thing, is to get the right man as manager and then success may probably follow’. It was ‘proposed to get all the tools, etc, at once, and start the men off, the locality to be started on to be fixed on at a meeting to be held in a week or so. This looks like business’.¹⁵

THE WAITOA CLAIM

On 25 November, the opening day of the goldfield, Sandes pegged off two acres as the Waitoa claim, adjoining the United and Te Aroha No. 1 South.¹⁶ As overlapping pegging out meant rival claimants, on 30 November all the parties agreed to amalgamate.¹⁷ By joining with the Puke-Paeroa party, they sought 15 men’s ground, which reportedly contained ‘large bodies of quartz’, all untested. This larger claim was bounded on the north by the Who’d Have Thought It, on the east by the Te Aroha No. 1 South, and on the south by the United.¹⁸ When the boundaries were checked it was found to be 14 men’s ground, or four-and-two-thirds acres.¹⁹

On 4 January 1881, seven members of the association decided to abandon one of their other claims, the Moonlight. Parr resigned as treasurer because of pressure of business, and members agreed to call another meeting to form a company.²⁰ Not till late in February was the

¹⁴ See *Thames Guardian and Mining Record*, 17 October 1871, p. 3, 2 April 1873, p. 3, 31 May 1873, p. 3; *Thames Advertiser*, 7 January 1875, p. 2, 11 January 1876, p. 3, 2 September 1876, p. 3, 12 June 1878, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 4 October 1880, p. 2.

¹⁵ Waitoa Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 4 November 1880, p. 2.

¹⁶ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 161, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁷ *Thames Star*, 1 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁸ *Te Aroha Miner*, 2 December 1880, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 3 December 1880, p. 2; see also Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Applications 1880-1882, folio 102, BBAV 11505/3a, ANZ-A.

¹⁹ *Thames Star*, 6 December 1880, p. 3.

²⁰ *Thames Star*, 7 January 1881, p. 2.

association heard of again, when work had begun,²¹ under the direction of another experienced Thames miner, Charles David Lindsay McLean.²² McIntyre had left the district in January, and with his mate Peter Ferguson,²³ with whom he had prospected Te Aroha, was prospecting at the new Tiki field.²⁴ Immediately he commenced work, McLean found a lode, and the following month miners found a 'large body' of promising stone.²⁵

FORMING A COMPANY

Early in March a full attendance of shareholders at an 'enthusiastic' meeting formed a company with 10,000 £1 shares, 8,500 to be divided amongst the subscribers and 1,500 reserved for future sale. O'Halloran, Parr, Smith, and Charles Collins, formerly a miner at Thames and now a farmer at Waitoa,²⁶ were elected directors, and a call of 3d per share was paid.²⁷ That Henry Ernest Whitaker, an accountant,²⁸ was appointed legal manager was regarded as 'sufficient proof of the bona fides of the company'.²⁹ On 11 April, when all the shares offered for sale had been subscribed, Whitaker applied to register the company. All 14 shareholders (one being a partnership of two people) held 500 shares. Four lived at Waitoa and most of the rest nearby: three at Waihou, three at Te Aroha, two at Cambridge, one at Hamilton, one at Whanganui, and one (Larkworthy) in England. Four were hotelkeepers, three were farmers, and the remainder were a storeman, a contractor, a builder, a surveyor, a banker, and a clerk. Despite being a director, Smith was not an original shareholder, unless one of the others was a dummy for him; nor did McLean have any shares.³⁰

²¹ *Thames Star*, 21 February 1881, p. 3.

²² See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 7, p. 27.

²³ See paper on Peter Ferguson and his New Era.

²⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 31 January 1881, p. 2.

²⁵ *Thames Star*, 21 February 1881, p. 3, 12 March 1881, p. 2.

²⁶ Mistakenly printed as 'Winton' in *New Zealand Gazette*, 9 June 1881, p. 744.

²⁷ *Thames Star*, 4 March 1881, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 8 March 1881, p. 2.

²⁸ See paper on Harry and Charles: Henry Ernest Whitaker and Charles Stanislaus Stafford.

²⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 8 March 1881, p. 2.

³⁰ *New Zealand Gazette*, 9 June 1881, pp. 744-745.

THE COMPANY WORKS ITS GROUND

By mid-May, over 300 feet of driving had been done, clearly unsuccessfully, because all the wages men were discharged. Despite this, tenders were called for a 100-foot tunnel to intersect the big reef in the neighbouring United. 'They have had a very good prospect from 10lb of stone from the reef', which promised to produce one ounce to the ton.³¹ By the end of June 200 feet had been driven, and it was anticipated that another contract would be let, 'as they have not yet reached the United reef as expected. It is a very likely looking country for gold, and several colours have been seen in working'.³² Despite this optimism, on 14 July a meeting 'agreed to put a man on for a fortnight, and pay him £4 and a full share if he finds payable gold', when shareholders would be asked whether to continue working.³³ Neither claim nor company was heard of again.

CONCLUSION

Typical of the enthusiasm of the time, a prospecting association turned itself into a company after having found, it thought, encouraging prospects. As the prospects were anything but encouraging, the company had a short life, and its small number of investors lost their money.

³¹ *Thames Star*, 9 May 1881, p. 2; *Waikato Times*, 17 May 1881, p. 2.

³² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 29 June 1881, p. 3.

³³ *Waikato Times*, 5 July 1881, p. 3, 16 July 1881, p. 2.