

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.



Photograph of the Manawatu River, Palmerston North, by Robert Sanson.

**An Uneasy Relationship:
Palmerston North City and the Manawatu River
1941-2006**

Machines quarry its gravels, farms now cover its fertile plains, protected from flooding, while the city of Palmerston North nestles uneasily against it.¹

A Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History at Massey University.

Jill White

2007

¹ Richard Heerdegen, 'Manawatu River: A Region's Identity', in *The South of the North: Manawatu and its Neighbours*, B.G.R. Saunders (ed.), Palmerston North: Geography Programme, School of Global Studies, Massey University, 2000, p.46.

Table of Contents

	Page
Frontispiece	
Title Page	1
Table of Contents	2
Preface	3
Acknowledgements	4
Abbreviations	6
Chapter One: Introduction: A City and a River	8
Chapter Two: Taming a 'wayward' river: winning a battle or winning a war?	21
Chapter Three: Recreation and the river – has the City turned its back?	41
Chapter Four: Bridging the barrier	69
Chapter Five: Resources of the river: exploitation and conservation	92
Chapter Six: Conclusion: Turbulence and the River	112
Appendix I: Maps	116
Appendix II: Table of Floods	117
Bibliography	118

Preface

This preface is a declaration of interest in aspects of this thesis.

As a Palmerston North City Councillor from 1983 to 1992 I had a considerable interest in Civil Defence and was involved in the welfare operation in the 1988 flood in the south-west corner of the City. When elected to Manawatu-Wanganui Regional Council in 1989 my interest also encompassed the Lower Manawatu Flood Control Scheme (LMS), to the extent of organising a bus tour of the scheme for the Palmerston North Local History Group in 1990. In 1994 I was one of the Regional Council members on the Public Liaison group for the Review of the LMS.

In the late 1990s, as Mayor of Palmerston North I was necessarily involved in the decision-making processes for the WasteWater 2006 project. I am no longer an elected member of any local authority and represent Palmerston North City on the Wastewater Monitoring Group.

After the floods of February 2004 I was asked to be the Palmerston North trustee on the newly formed Manawatu-Wanganui Regional Disaster Relief Fund Trust. I have been Chairperson of the Trust since that time. Given the intensive involvement in that work for over twelve months, my topic for a History Masters thesis more or less chose itself.

Acknowledgements

In researching this topic I have received assistance from a number of people and wish to record my great appreciation, both for the actual contributions made to the thesis and for my enjoyment of the exercise.

The Manawatu-Wanganui Regional Council has been a rich source of information. My warm thanks go to Noelene Wevell and to Graham Doull. Noelene introduced me to Horizons Archives and has been unfailing in her efforts to find the information I have needed. Graham has discussed issues around the gravel resource and generously supplied data on floods. My thanks also to Garrick Murfitt for definitions, and to those other members of the Horizons team who made me welcome, gave me information and were interested.

The Ian Matheson City Archives have been an important resource and I am most grateful to Lesley Courtney and Barbara Olsen who have been painstaking in finding material for me and have suggested useful sources. I have spent a lot of time in the New Zealand and Pacific section of the City Library with newspaper microfilms. Special thanks to Philippa Elphick and her team for all their cheerful assistance with the microfilms and for tracking down other publications for me.

My thanks also go to Rodney Bethell of Palmerston North City Council for his assistance with Map 2, showing the Manawatu River as it passes through the City, to Michael McCartney, General Manager of Horizons Regional Council for permission to use Maps 1 and 3, to Professors Neil Ericksen and Hamish Rennie of Waikato University, the former for information he shared and the latter for steering me in the direction of Professor Ericksen.

I was encouraged by the response to a letter I had written to the *Tribune*. A number of people, by writing of their experiences, gave me a wider understanding of the place of the river in the lives of some city people. I am very appreciative of being able to use this material, as I am of the information and perceptions that have arisen in conversations with many people. These conversations have been in the street, along the riverbank, at meetings, with neighbours, over the telephone. It is heartening to discover just how important the river is to many in the City.

A small number of people also gave me their time in interviews. It was a great privilege and I hope I have done justice to the perspectives and experiences they shared. Often memories were joyful but occasionally very painful and I am grateful for all that was shared.

Two people supplied me with photographs. The frontispiece is the work of Robert Sanson, from 'Images of My Father's World'. It shows the sometimes hidden beauty of the Manawatu River and I thank Robert for allowing me to use it, and to Anthony Lewis for introducing me to Robert's work. My thanks also go to

Noeleen Olson for the several photographs she gave to me, showing both boating club activities around the late 1940s and the spectator interest in those activities.

My husband Bruce Wilson has been most supportive and encouraging, as always. His way of working is complementary to mine and I hope he has gained from my way as much as I have from his. I am very grateful for his understanding of the importance of this work to me.

My thanks are many but most particularly go to my Supervisor, Dr James Watson. James has been generous with time, a great sounding board for the discussion of ideas, and has been quietly insistent that I produce chapters when my inclination has been to stay immersed in research. His interest, knowledge and humour have been very much appreciated.

Abbreviations

The Anglers - Manawatu Freshwater Anglers Club

The Board - means Manawatu Catchment Board from 1943 -1987, including Manawatu Regional Water Board from 1968; then, from 1987-1989 means the Central Districts Catchment Board with the combining of the Manawatu and Rangitikei Boards.

CA - Ian Matheson City Archives, at the City Library, Palmerston North

Canoe Club - Palmerston North Canoe Club

CAPN - Cycle Care Palmerston North

CDJBA - Central Districts Branch of the New Zealand Jet Boat Association

C.I. - Citizens' Initiative Inc.

CRTWP - Cross River Transportation Working Party

The Council, The City Council, PNCC - all are used to mean Palmerston North City Corporation/ Palmerston North City Council

Forest and Bird - Manawatu Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society

HA - Horizons Archives at Manawatu-Wanganui Regional Council, Palmerston North

LMS - Lower Manawatu Flood Control Scheme

LTCCP - Long Term Council Community Plan

Marine Division - Marine Division of Ministry of Transport

MoW - Ministry of Works

MoWD - Ministry of Works and Development

MRUA - Manawatu River Users Association. It also covers the original name, Manawatu River Users Committee (1973-1977) and River Users Association, sometimes used from August 1981 when all rivers in the Board's area were included although the main focus remained on the Manawatu River.

MWPS - Manawatu Walkways Promotion Society

NBSSWP - New Bridge Site Selection Working Party

NRB - National Roads Board

Pony Club - Tiritea Branch of the Manawatu Pony Club

The Regional Council - means the Manawatu-Wanganui Regional Council, established in 1989. It also includes the terms 'horizons.mw', which was the brand name of the Regional Council from March 1999 to August 2003 when it was rebranded 'Horizons Regional Council'. The latter term is frequently used although Manawatu-Wanganui Regional Council remains the legal name.

RMA - Resource Management Act 1991

RUC - River Users sub-Committee

SCRCC - Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Council

STA - Save the Avenue

WAS - Wellington Acclimatisation Society

WW2006 - WasteWater 2006

Units of measure

The metric system of measures has been generally used, but where figures have been converted from imperial measures, the latter are included in parentheses or footnotes where appropriate.

Cumecs - cubic metres per second

Cusecs - cubic feet per second