

East Road Building Steeped in Racing History

A PROMINENT two-story building on the corner of East Road and Rockdale Road, opposite the Invercargill cemetery, and occupied at present by Mr and Mrs DV Pankhurst, has at some time, housed practically every South Island trainer of the past decade.

But the 'urban sprawl', which has engulfed several training establishments in the area, has claimed another victim. Pankhurst has sold the property to an Invercargill builder and is in the process of obtaining another establishment, probably at Washdyke.

A regular stopping over place for South Island horsemen since 1918, the building is steeped in racing and trotting history. Owners, trainers, jockeys and race goers from all over the South Island have stayed there at some time, and some from as far afield as the North Island.

At times it has accommodated up to 70 persons and Mrs Pankhurst can recall times when at least 50 folk had breakfast there at the height of the racing season. While Mr and Mrs Pankhurst perused the old guest book, they recalled many top horses and racing personalities who had stopped at the establishment. The building is steeped in racing and trotting history.

Members of the Pankhurst family have had a close association with the building. Apart from a break of five years, Pankhurst and his wife have lived in it since their marriage in 1935. Pankhurst shifted with his parents, the late Mr and Mrs JF Pankhurst, who farmed at Otaitai Bush, to the building in 1918. He was nine at the time.

Right of Purchase

THE BUILDING had been erected 18 months and was owned by a Mr Blondell and occupied by the late Mr Harry Townsend. Pankhurst's father leased the building for 18 months with a right of purchase.

Pankhurst's father died in 1936 and interest in the building was vested in his mother, Jessie Fairbairn Pankhurst, who sold it to Mr WD McLeod, of Wantwood Station, Mandeville, two years later, on the condition that it later be offered to a member of the Pankhurst family. DV Pankhurst exercised this clause in 1958 on Mr McLeod's death, and he and his wife



EAST ROAD LANDMARK — formerly a hotel, but occupied by the Pankhurst family since 1935, this double-story building on the corner of Tay Street and Rockdale Road has been a regular stopping over place for horses racing at Southland meetings since 1918. In recent weeks the 28 loose boxes on the property have disappeared and the property is shortly to make way for a motel project.

have lived there ever since.

Before 1918, there was a hotel, licensed to sell liquor, on an adjoining section and the present building was erected to replace the hotel, which was destroyed by fire. However, with a tightening of licenses, the present building was denied hotel status and remained 'dry'.

Not long after the late Mr Pankhurst took over the establishment in 1918, some 28 loose boxes were built, and horsemen flocked to the building when it was opened as a guest house.

"Those were the days of the railway loading ramp at Mill Road, a couple of miles down the road," Pankhurst recalled. "Horses travelling south for Southland meetings used to embark at that siding and walk down the road to our stables. Southland horses going north had to board the train there, too. I've seen times when the building was almost bursting at the seams with racing folk," Mrs Pankhurst recalled. "On more than one occasion they had to sleep on mattresses in the dining room - anywhere to get a bit of sleep."

Plenty of Problems

FEEDING such a large number of guests created plenty of problems. Those remaining at the building during race days would just be finishing their supper when the race crowds would arrive home for evening dinner.

Harry Coker and Jim Boyd were two North Island horsemen whose names are included in the guest book. The successful Invercargill trainer, JA (Jim) Rowland was a permanent boarder before retiring to Green Lane, Auckland.

Many incidents are clearly remembered by Mr and Mrs Pankhurst. One of the most

notable was a stable fire in which a row of loose boxes was destroyed. Well known trotting trainer, Bob Townley was helping Pankhurst and several others to extinguish the blaze when he suffered a serious injury. Pankhurst was throwing wet sacks on the blaze from a rooftop when he slipped and fell on Townley, whose neck was injured. He was sidelined for several months.

The guest book confirms how cheap board was in those days. Mr Jim Burnett of Halfway Bay Station, near Queenstown, stayed a week and had to pay only £1/5/0 (One pound five shillings). He had to pay only 2/6 (two shillings & sixpence) for a week's use of a loose box. At that time Mr Burnett was standing the English stallion, Weathervane, at the stud, and he used to travel throughout Southland with him. He served

mares in the back yard of the building.

The list of guests in the guest book is seemingly endless. Some of those to stay at the building were FD Jones (Amaythis' trainer), Fred Shaw (Jamell's trainer), Frank Trilford, Peter Gallagher, R McNay (Rodeur's trainer), Bob Townley, Tom Gunning, Jock Bain, Tom Hobbs, "Fin" McKay, "Put" Hogan, Frank McGregor, Davey McGregor, Harry Coker, Jim Boyd and a host of others. Frank Johnson, of Momona, Dunedin, is remembered for the big string of trotters he brought south, one good one being Fancy Goods.

Pankhurst has spent the past few weeks touring New Zealand, looking for a suitable property on which to set up as a trainer. No firm decision has been reached, but he may settle at Washdyke.

Throughout the years a steady stream of winners has been produced from Pankhurst's Invercargill stable. Struan, Royal Bid, Capasco, Cheerio, Bellbridge and Riverstone are rated as the best horses he has trained.

Others to have won for him include Cat-tea, Renway, Wayren, Lorastan, Coinalot, Fiery Creek, Sure Lance, Naughty Boy, Meadow Gold, Royal Crest, Aquinas, Celtic Chief, Brandy Gold, Te Anau Lad, Treasure Shiel, Captain Howe, Lo Bridge, Walaroo, Waikiwi Star, Bank Roll and Waterfront.

Riverstone's success in the Lincoln steeplechase at Riccarton is one of the major training successes achieved by Pankhurst. Other notable ones were two Riverton Cups (Cheerio), Fendalton Handicap (Royal Bid) and Riccarton Handicap (Bellbridge).

Capasco, Ocsapa, Bonney Belle and Talison are included in his present team. Apprentice Angus Mavor is also attached to his stable.