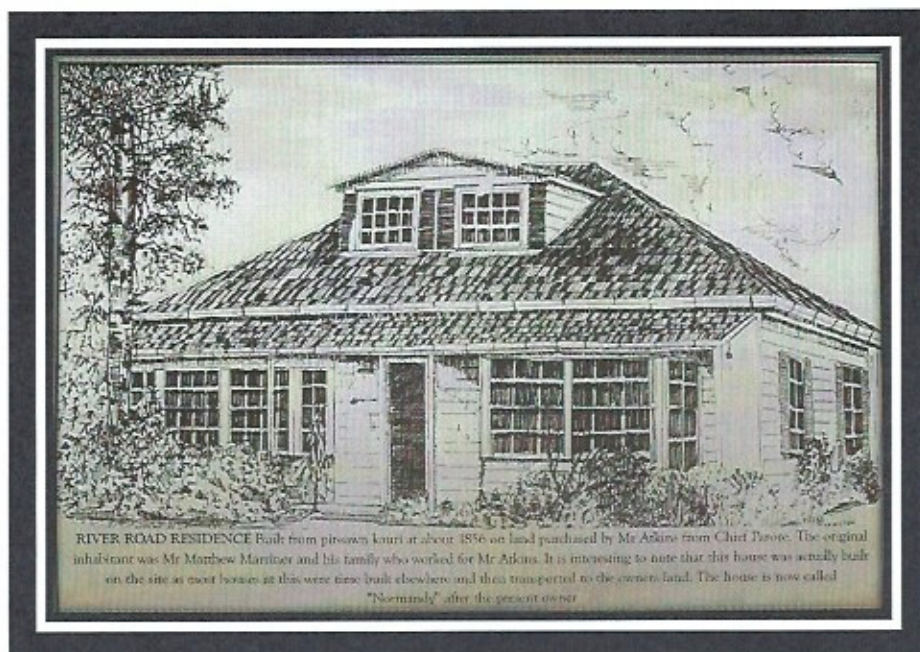


Marriner's House

A Riverfront Legacy of Kauri, Courage and Colonial Charm

61 River Road, Dargaville



On the quiet curve of River Road in Dargaville stands a home that has watched nearly two centuries unfold upon the banks of the Northern Wairoa. Built from the golden heart of kauri and weathered by time with grace rather than wear, **Marriner's House** is more than a residence — it is a survivor, a storyteller, and one of Kaipara's most enduring treasures.

The Birth of Mangawhare

The story begins before Dargaville was a town at all, when the Kaipara was still a wild, water-bound frontier. The 1840s saw the first trickle of European settlers making their way up the mighty Wairoa River, drawn by the promise of kauri timber and trade. Among them was Thomas Spencer Forsaith, who sold a tract of Mangawhare land to Hastings Atkins — a man whose name (sometimes spelled *Adkins*) would soon be etched into the district's earliest deeds and stories.

It was Atkins who, around 1856, oversaw the building of what would become the first permanent house in Dargaville. Fashioned on-site from pit-sawn kauri, its beams and boards were cut by hand from the native forests that cloaked the Kaipara hills. The house rose on land purchased from Chief Parore, a respected Ngāpuhi rangatira, whose mana still lingers in the soil. Unusually for the time, the home was built where it stands, not prefabricated elsewhere and ferried upriver — a fact that anchors it both literally and symbolically in its landscape.

From its riverbank vantage point, the house would bear witness to the birth of a town, the hum of trade, and the laughter of generations.



Sailed on 29th September, 1831

Arrived 13th February, 1832 at New South Wales

Average sentence: 10 Years | Life sentences: 97 | Passengers: 201

The Marriners Arrive

In 1849, the house found its soul when Matthew and Rebecca Marriner arrived with their seven children, bringing industry, gentility, and an English steadiness to this far-flung corner of the world.

Matthew Leslie Marriner had begun life far from privilege. Born in England in 1809, he was transported to Australia aboard the convict ship *Asia*, arriving into Sydney in 1832 — a fate that might have broken a lesser man. But in the raw freedom of the colonies, he remade himself. By the time he and his young wife Rebecca Hambley Pells reached the Hokianga, he was a man of enterprise and resolve. They married there in 1837 and, a decade later, made their way south to Mangawhare, where the kauri forests met the river.

Matthew became manager of Atkins' store, the hub of local trade, and soon the name *Marriner* was woven into the district's fabric.

In 1857, when the first Post Office in Mangawhare opened, Matthew was appointed Postmaster, a position he would hold with diligence until his sudden passing in 1875.

A Family's Life Beside the River

The Marriners' home became the beating heart of early Mangawhare. A *Daily Southern Cross* correspondent in 1867 described "two fine dwellings with verandahs" overlooking the river, belonging to "Mr. Marriner and son" — their white weatherboards gleaming in the sunlight, the scent of kauri gum and woodsmoke in the air.

Rebecca, in a gesture of devotion and symbolism, transplanted a kauri sapling in front of the home — said to commemorate the birth of their eighth child. That tree grew tall and straight for 120 years, a green sentinel watching over the family's story until its death around 1980.

Life in the Marriner house would have been both industrious and warm: the thud of gum sacks, the creak of riverboats at the landing below, the laughter of children beneath the verandah's shade. Within its kauri walls, letters were written, goods tallied, and lives quietly shaped the community that would become Dargaville.

Loss and Legacy

In January 1875, tragedy and change arrived together. The Marriners' store burnt down, and within weeks, Matthew Marriner passed away suddenly, his heart giving out as he rested after another day's work. His obituary spoke of "one of our oldest colonists," a man respected and remembered for his integrity and tireless energy.

Their son William Marriner, by then an established trader himself, carried on the family tradition. Around 1880, he built his own fine home at Mount Wesley, still overlooking the river that had carried his family's fortunes. The original Marriner home, though no longer the family's centre, remained an enduring part of Mangawhare's riverside life — its verandah watching the town grow around it.

It is with extreme regret we read under an obituary notice in our columns of the death of Mr. Matthew Marriner, one of our very oldest, if not the oldest, colonist in the North Island. The deceased gentleman, whose loss will be much felt, and whose memory will be held in deep respect, resided in the Northern districts of this province for a period extending over forty years. During the greater part of this time Mr. Marriner has been engaged in active pursuits. For fifteen years the deceased conducted an extensive business at Hokianga in the timber and gum trade, and for the last twenty-five years at Mangawhare — first as manager for the late Mr. Atkins, and for many years previous to his death as agent for Messrs. Brown, Campbell and Co. The deceased, although feeling unwell, was attending to business as usual up to the day of his death, and, feeling ill, went to lie down. He was observed to suddenly change countenance, and died in a few minutes afterwards.

Through the Twentieth Century

By the early 1900s, the land surrounding the house had been absorbed into the holdings of Wairoa Stores Ltd, successors to Brown & Campbell, who subdivided the area in 1920. In 1933, ownership passed to Eliza and Alfred Underwood, and from 1939 to 1956, it belonged to the Gracie family. The property was issued with its own separate title in 1978, securing its individuality once more — a symbolic full circle for a home that had stood independent from its first kauri board.

Later the house became called "Normandy", lovingly named by its owners at the time, the Norman family, who were continuing the proud tradition of stewardship begun nearly 170 years ago from today.

Architecture of Endurance

Though modified gently over the years, *Marriner's House* retains its essential colonial cottage form — a symmetrical gabled roofline, wide verandah, and hand-crafted joinery that whisper of an era when every nail-less hand-hewn beam was placed by human hands. The pit-sawn kauri timbers, with their rich honeyed hue, remain its bones — as sound and graceful today as the day they were laid.

There is a modest beauty to its design, the elegance of function shaped by frontier craftsmanship. Every board carries the marks of its making — the faint ripples of the saw, the depth of grain from ancient kauri forests — a living texture that no modern machine could ever replicate — but fully complemented by all the comforts expected in a modern home.

A House of Heritage

In recognition of its significance, the property is listed by Heritage New Zealand as a Category 2 Historic Place — an honour reserved for buildings of substantial historical and cultural value.

For its owners, this listing is not a restriction, but rather a *badge of pride*. It means the streetside character — the public face that connects the home to its past — should be kept sympathetic to its original form, while the interior remains free for modern life. In essence, it allows owners to live comfortably in history's embrace, preserving what the community sees and cherishes, while shaping their private spaces as they wish.

To own such a home is to become a custodian rather than merely an occupant — part of an unbroken lineage stretching back to the earliest days of European Northland. It's the privilege of living within a living artifact: timber that still breathes, stories that still echo.



A River's Memory

Stand at the verandah today and look across the Wairoa River of the Kaipara Harbour, and little has changed in spirit. The air still carries the tang of the river and the murmur of wind through kauri and totara. Beneath the floorboards, you can almost hear the footsteps of Matthew and Rebecca, the laughter of children, the scratch of pen on a ledger.

Marriner's House is a rare survivor — a bridge between centuries. It embodies the resilience of early settlers, the quiet industry of the Marriners, and the enduring craftsmanship of kauri. It is, in every sense, a house with a heartbeat — one that continues to thrum softly along the banks of the Kaipara, a timeless testament to courage, endurance, and the beauty of New Zealand's colonial past.