

## Opunake Bay - Shipwreck - Cutter 'Lizzie' – 09 Jun 1870

Owner: John Gibson (1824-1908) ex New Plymouth Harbourmaster

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*Taranaki Herald 11 Jun 1870 Opunake – Wreck of the 'Lizzie'*

Thursday, June 9 – It is with much regret that I have again to record another misfortune in the shipping line. The cutter 'Lizzie', after being blown about for nearly a month between this place and New Plymouth, beached this morning, discharged her cargo, and in attempting to beat out against a south-west wind, drifted on to the rocks on the north-west side of the bay, about four p.m., the tide about three-quarter flood, and not much surf. The captain and crew did their best with the limited means at their disposal, to avoid the accident, but without avail. She bumped heavily on the rocks, but it was thought if she was not too much damaged that she might be hauled off next tide. However on examining her at low water it was found that she had become a total wreck, a great many of her planks having started from the stern and stern posts. The men in the employ of the Cape Egmont Company, and a few natives, assisted the crew to remove the sails, ropes, &c., and it is expected that this night's tide will in a great measure break her up. This will be a serious loss to Captain Gibson, the owner, and also to this place; but it is in a great measure due to the want of proper appliances to haul vessels out far enough. Had she had about double the length of chain on board, she would have been hauled out far enough beyond the surf to give her a chance to beat to windward. We are sadly in want of proper moorings here, and all the necessary appliances of a boating establishment, for no vessels will come here after this accident, without there are better facilities for discharging than is the case at present. The 'Lizzie' had as cargo a portion of the building material belonging to Mr Davy, of which he intended to build a store here, but this accident has been the finishing stroke to a run of ill luck, and has had the result, I am informed, of determining him to abandon his project of settling here.

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*Taranaki Herald 25 Jun 1870 Wreck of the Cutter 'Lizzie'*

An enquiry into the cause of the wreck of the cutter 'Lizzie' took place on Monday last, before R. Chilman, Esq., Collector of Customs, when the following evidence was taken:-

Edward Oleson: I am master of the cutter 'Lizzie', which left the roadstead at New Plymouth, on the 18<sup>th</sup> May for Opunake Bay. Wind blowing from N.E., the weather being rough. I did not reach Opunake until the 8<sup>th</sup> June. I stood into the Bay and anchored at 11 o'clock a.m. The tide not answering, I did not beach the vessel until the next day at daylight, the weather was fine with light winds off the land. We discharged all the cargo the same day (the 9<sup>th</sup>). At about 11 o'clock a.m., the wind came from the S.W., and continued increasing until we hove the vessel into the Bay just clear of the surf. We were getting under way, but a heavy sea rolling in the vessel could not make head way, and was driven back into the surf, and on the beach she became a total wreck, as there were no means of getting her off. (Cross-examined by Collector): We had three anchors on board, two of which were used, with about 20 fathoms of chain, and a hawser of about sixty fathoms. If there had been a buoy put down, I could have got the vessel out safely to her anchorage, or if there had been a surf boat and crew, it is probable that the accident would not have occurred. I consider it necessary that there should be a signal station, moorings put down, and a surf boat, before Opunake Bay will be a safe place for sailing vessels to go to.

Henry Gattiku: I was mate of the cutter 'Lizzie.' We left the roadstead on the 18<sup>th</sup> May, and stood into Opunake Bay on the 18<sup>th</sup> June, and lay there until the next day, the 19<sup>th</sup>, and then beached the vessel early in the morning. Weather was fine, and wind off the land. We discharged all the cargo. At 11 o'clock the wind came in from the sea – S.W. – with rain, sea getting up, we hove the vessel off in the afternoon, the wind blowing fresh. We were getting under way just clear of the surf, but a heavy sea coming in, the vessel could not make head-way, and we were driven back into the surf and on to the beach, where the vessel became a wreck, as there was no means of getting her off. Cross-examined by the Collector: The accident was not occasioned by any deficiency of tackle

on board the vessel. If a buoy had been moored by which we could have hauled the vessel clear of the surf, I believe the accident would not have happened. Under present circumstances, I do not consider Opunake Bay a safe place for sailing vessels to go to. There should be a signal station, and if vessels are to beach there, there ought to be moorings put down, and a surf boat stationed there. If these things were done the place would be as safe to go into for small vessels, as the roadstead here. There is no difficulty for a steamer.

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*Marine Department Inwards Correspondence Register 1870*

Letter No.522 written 21 June by Richard Chilman, Collector of Customs, New Plymouth  
Sending report of the wreck 'Lizzy'

Letter No.594 written 11 July by John Henry Holford, Chief Harbour Master, New Plymouth  
Signal staff has been erected at Opunaki

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*Return of Wrecks - Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives 1871 G6 page 15*

09 June 1870 'Lizzy' – Cutter – 20 tons – three crew – cargo ballast – stranded: total loss  
Location: Opunake Bay – Wind S.W. – strong breeze. Master of vessel: E. Oleson  
Finding of Court of Enquiry: Want of moorings and of a boat's crew to render assistance when a vessel is getting underway after beaching.

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*Taranaki Region Coastal Plan Review – Archaeological Scoping Study December 2012 by Andy Dodd*  
<https://www.trc.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Environment/Coast/ArchaeologicalScopingStudyJune2013w.pdf>

Twenty-five New Zealand built vessels are known to have wrecked in the Taranaki region. Of particular note is the schooner John Whiteley which was built at Kawhia in 1850, other early New Zealand built vessels wrecked in Taranaki but in unverified locations, include Margaret (1846-1846), Harry (1854-1857), Eclipse (1863-1865), Celt (1865-1867), Woodpecker (1865-1869), Falcon (1864-1870), **Lizzie (1864-1870)**, and Dawn (1866-1877).

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*New Zealand Registered Ships and Owners 1840-1950*

Lizzy, 40262. Cutter, 19.78 tons

43.6 x 15 x 5.1ft; Built at Mechanics Bay, Auckland in 1858 by H. Niccol.

Registered No. 3/1859 (02 Feb 1859) Port of Auckland (I.R.)

Master: Charles Watson 1867

Vessel wrecked at Urunui, Taranaki 28 Sep 1867; recovered and re-registered

Registered No. 6/1868 (02 Mar 1868) Port of Auckland

Vessel wrecked at Opunake Bay, Taranaki 09 Jun 1870

Master: E. Oleson

*Owners:*

1859-1861 Ranulph Dacre Jnr, Merchant, Auckland

1859-1861 Christopher Atwell Harris, Timber-merchant, Auckland

1861 Henry John Wadham, Lighterman, Auckland – 32 shares

1861-1863 John Francis Powell, Merchant, Onehunga (died 03 May 1863)

1863 Sarah Powell, Widow, Onehunga (Executrix for JF Powell)

*Joint owners*

1863-1864 William Davies, Boatman, Onehunga

1863-1865 Thomas Williamson, Mariner, Onehunga

1863-1867 Samuel Fleming, Merchant, Onehunga – 42 shares

*Owners*

1865-1867 George Gozar, Settler, Auckland

1868-1870 John Gibson, Mariner, New Plymouth

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*Grey River Argus 15 May 1869 Shipping Imports*

Per Lizzy, from New Plymouth: 22 tons potatoes, 10 casks butter, order; 4 bundles leather, D Girdwood and Co; 1 ton pumpkins, J. Gibson. The cutter Lizzy, Captain Gibson, from New Plymouth, was towed in yesterday morning by the p.s. Despatch. She has made a good run, having left on Sunday last. A strong breeze from the S.E. carried her across the Straits, and since then light variable winds down the coast. She has a cargo of produce, and is consigned to Messrs D. Gibson for late files of Taranaki papers.

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*Taranaki Herald 17 Apr 1869 Arrival of the Cutter 'Lizzie'*

The cutter 'Lizzie', Captain Gibson, arrived here from Charleston on Thursday last. She left this port on the 29<sup>th</sup> ultimo, and on getting into the Straits, met with rough weather; encountering a gale off Cape Farewell so violent as to carry away her rudder bands. She entered Charleston harbour on Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> instant, and after discharging her cargo, started again for this port on the 10<sup>th</sup>, arriving here as above. The 'Lizzie' goes to the Waitara to be repaired. We have to thank Captain Gibson for a file of late Charleston papers.

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*Taranaki Herald 01 May 1869 Resident Magistrate's Court*

Patterson v. Gibson – The plaintiff in this action claimed £6 11s for wages, as seaman on board the cutter 'Lizzie' and was heard before the Resident Magistrate on Thursday last.

Thomas Patterson, sworn: I engaged with the defendant on the 6<sup>th</sup> January last in Auckland. After some conversation, I said I would go with him for £7 per month to the West Coast. I went to work on the 8<sup>th</sup> January, and stayed in defendant's service until the 17<sup>th</sup> of this month, that is three months and nine days. I have received from defendant at different times sums of money to the amount of £16 16s. I never gave receipts to defendant for what he paid me. I have asked defendant to settle with me repeatedly but he always put me off by saying he had no money with him. Cross-examined by defendant: Thomas Patterson is my true name. You agreed to pay me £7 per month. I received £7 per month on a previous agreement from the defendant.

John Gibson sworn: In the early part of January last, I saw the plaintiff in Auckland. He said he was very hard up, and asked me to take him on board my vessel again. I told him I would take him at the wages of the port when my men left. One of my men soon left and I told defendant that he could come. Nothing more was said about wages. He entered my service on the 8<sup>th</sup> January. I engaged another man on the 11<sup>th</sup> January at £4 10s per month. Plaintiff stayed in my vessel until the 17<sup>th</sup> of this month. He then told me he wished to leave. I said he had better leave when we got round to the West Coast, as there was no chance of getting a man here. He made no objection. In consequence of information I received I went out to the Waitara on Tuesday morning. I found plaintiff drunk and wanting money. I told him I would give him no more money. On Wednesday morning he was still drunk. He then said that he had put himself off pay and engaged another man in his place, and said he would pay him out of his own wages. I said I did not want him or any other man, and I discharged him. Cross-examined by plaintiff: I never promised to pay you any balance. I gave you £10 on account. I had no books by me. I can swear I did not say on the 17<sup>th</sup> January that I would bring out the balance on the Monday. I allow you £5 per month. It is not customary in small vessels to enter a seaman's capacity and his wages in the log book. I merely made an entry in my pocket book. I may have made an entry in my journal. By the wages of the port is meant the wages of the same trade. Wages rise and fall, according to the scarcity of men. The man I engaged at £4 10s was as good a seaman as the plaintiff, and much steadier. No conversation has passed between myself and the plaintiff relative to the rate of wages, till I got the summons. Nothing was said about £7 per month. I took plaintiff into my service, I took him at £5 per month.

John Legg sworn: I know the plaintiff. I was a seaman on board defendant's cutter from the 28<sup>th</sup> September to the 25<sup>th</sup> December 1868. At first I received £6 per month but latterly the wages fell and I only received £5. I was in Auckland on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> January, there was no rise in the wages at that time. It is usual for men to ship at the current rates of the port. I think £5 per month was too little for men to ship for the West Coast. The Court gave judgment for defendant.

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*Taranaki Herald 26 Jun 1869*

The cutter 'Lizzie', Captain Gibson, from New Plymouth, was towed in yesterday morning by the p.s. Dispatch. She left the Waitara River on Saturday last, at 6 p.m., and shortly afterwards encountered a very heavy S.E. gale, which the master describes as the worst he has met for fifteen years. The cutter was hove-to for forty-four hours. Light variable winds succeeded, which brought her off this port at 10 a.m. yesterday. She has a cargo of produce to her master's order.

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*Grey River Argus 19 Oct 1869*

Captain McGillivray [of the s.s. Murray] reports that in passing the Farewell Sandspit he saw a cutter ashore. The engines were stopped and a boat sent ashore to render assistance. The stranded vessel proved to be the cutter Lizzy from Taranaki for this port with a cargo of potatoes. She was driven ashore in a N.W. gale on Sunday, the 10<sup>th</sup> inst., and had lost her main boom and rudder. Her master was endeavouring to kedge her off, and refused the Murray's offer of a tow.

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*Taranaki Herald 30 Oct 1869 Stranding of the Lizzie at Nelson*

The cutter 'Lizzie' from the Waitara, bound for Greymouth, is reported to be ashore on the sandspit at Nelson. Her cargo had been landed and endeavours were being made to get the vessel off. The 'Lizzie' left the Waitara river on the 8<sup>th</sup>, and with contrary winds was knocked about the Straits till about the 17<sup>th</sup>. On the evening of that day, the captain felt a bump and found that he was amongst breakers with a very heavy sea on. The wind was westerly at the time, and had been so for several days, so they got the anchor out to prevent the vessel going too high on the beach, but the chain parted. When the weather cleared up the captain tried to float her at the spring tide, but without effect, as they could not move her. So they took out some of the cargo of potatoes, and carried them above high water mark. They then tried again to get the schooner off but without success; so they had to unload her altogether, before she would float. After they had her afloat, and the cargo again on board, the anchor chain parted, and the 'Lizzie' went up some distance. The tide had by this time gone back considerably, and as the men were afraid to risk the vessel, they let her remain where she was till they heard from the owner. The vessel is safe, with little damage, and part of the cargo has been landed on the sand-spit. We are afraid that Captain Gibson will be a heavy loser by this accident.

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*Taranaki Herald 26 Jan 1870 The Southern Flax Companies*

The cutter 'Lizzie' has been chartered by the Opunake Flax Company to convey their plant and stores, and will leave the Waitara to load at this port by the first opportunity. Intelligence from Opunake is to the effect that the natives are anxious for the Flax Companies to commence operations.

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*Taranaki Herald 05 Mar 1870*

The cutter 'Lizzie' had brought a cargo of timber from Pelorus Sound, landed it at Opunake, and has returned for another freight of the same kind. Messrs Webster Brothers schooner 'Falcon' has been chartered to take a cargo down to this new settlement, and will proceed there in the course of next week.

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*Taranaki Herald 30 Apr 1870 Opunake*

The cutter 'Lizzie', which has been coasting for the last three weeks between New Plymouth and Opunake, has at last succeeded in discharging her cargo, and sailed with a fair wind for the Pelorus, and if fortune favours her she will be back in about eight days, with another cargo for the Egmont Company. The erection of these mills, which has been so long delayed owing to want of sawn timber, will be commenced, I am informed, next week, by the contractors, Messrs Taylor and George.

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*Taranaki Herald 18 May 1870 Shipping*

New Plymouth Arrival – May 17 – Lizzie, cutter, 19 tons, Gibson, from Opunake, in ballast – Master, agent. The cutter 'Lizzie' was signalled during the greater part of yesterday, but did not come in.

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