

# THE MT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

THE CENTRE OF AUCKLAND

"ALBERTON", 100 MT ALBERT RD, MT ALBERT

NEWSLETTER 3 MARCH 2007

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## The Winner!

The Mt Albert Historical Society proudly presents the winner of its logo competition. Craig Humberstone, the designer and Mt Albert resident, describes it as combining 'elements that relate to the history of Mt Albert.' He goes on to describe the mountain as 'seen in its earliest representation as terraced by the Maori. The lines through it indicate the terracing and also hint at the subsequent 'decapitation'.' (Interestingly, all of the 17 designs received featured the mountain prominently. Owairaka / Mt Albert is undoubtedly the iconic feature of this area!) Craig goes on to say 'The Maori shapes at the bottom indicate the Maori cultural heritage of the area and are suggestive of the water once prevalent in the area, the underground spring and also the views to the sea. The lines also relate to the lava flow (as in a cross section of a volcano) and the shifting of the land during primeval earthquakes. The lines on the left of the mountain is the railroad that was carved into the mountain during quarrying and is also the outline of the rolling pastoral/farmland that once surrounded the mountain.' Thank you, Craig! Finally, the house is typical of the villa style of European settlers. In this case, it is based on 'Allendale' which readers will remember was where the colonists met to form the Mt Albert Highways Board in 1866.



## MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL

Craig's winning design was announced by Helen Clark at the M.A.H.S Christmas party. It will be incorporated into the masthead of future newsletters. There are suggestions that it could feature on stationery, advertising materials and on t-shirts. So, look for it on a chest walking towards you ..... any other thoughts for its use are welcomed so please drop us a line.



From left to right: Helen Clark and Craig Humberstone standing in front of another piece of Craig's artwork: a black backed gull's nest displayed at Alberton during the Christmas party.

The Society Page The Society Page The Society Page

December 1st saw the start of a fine tradition with the Mt Albert Historical Society's inaugural Christmas party held at Alberton House. Guests were greeted on the verandah with a glass of bubbly and then treated to a short visit by Prime Minister, Helen Clark. Ms Clark presented our logo competition winner, Craig Humberstone, with the prize before leaving to cope with the coup in Fiji. Then, everyone assembled was presented with the latest edition of 'In Old Mt Albert' which had been generously donated by Harcourts. Finally, we had a few moments to mix and mingle, to partake of a small, tasty snack and to continue to imbibe if we so desired.



*From left to right Vivienne Wilson, Alice Wylie, Sue Radley, Jeanette Amies*

Wednesday the 4th of October saw local maori involved in a double ceremony. Firstly, there was a blessing and re dedication of an information plaque on the top of Owairaka. This was followed by a walk around Unitec where the spring, that appeared when Wairaka stamped her foot, was also blessed.



*Hare Williams, historian, explains the significance of Owairaka to assembled guests.  
M.A.H.S hosted two walks during heritage week in September.*



*Rich Afford is explaining the historical significance of his house in Mt Albert Rd to the crowd of approximately thirty walkers who attended the second walk.*

# Postcards from the Centre

The Mount Albert Historical Society is collecting postcards of local scenes and currently has five! They are historically relevant as a form of mass communication developed in the late nineteenth century and used until the end of the first world war. They were the equivalent of making a 'quick phonecall' in the second half of the last century or sending an e-mail or text message today. Mrs S. E. Tolman wrote on the back of the St Lukes postcard 'Dear Maggie, I will not be able to come over tonight as I have to go out but I will be over on Tuesday night for sure With Love Jinnie.' In a similar vein, Mrs Sunkel wrote the following words on one of the Ponsonby postcards 'Dear A, How are you. Many thanks for the Cosmos seed. My garden looks A1. How is yours? I have daffodils, jonquils, primroses etc. The weather here is very changeable Love Gertie'. Interesting local news not dramatic, earth shattering revelations!



*St Lukes Church, Mt Albert.*

Postcards in New Zealand arrived as a spin off to an international trend. Their start date was set by the legalisation of picture postcards by the British Post Office. Far flung colonies (like New Zealand) followed suit and their distribution here was enabled by the advent of the 'universal penny postage'. If you look at the back of one of these postcards mailed between 1901 and 1918 you will find either a half penny or one penny postage stamp. Most postcards were actually printed off shore in Germany, Saxony or Bavaria where production costs were low. However, these places of origin also contributed to the postcards demise because of anti-German sentiment postwar. (It is possible to find postcards with 'Printed in Saxony' scratched out.) Other reasons for the end of the postcard phenomenon were the advent of the telephone, increased newspaper circulation and a rise in the cost of stamps.



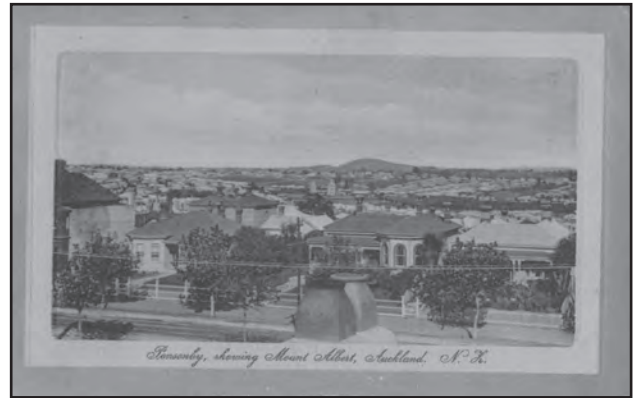
*MAHS Postcard collection.*

This is an example of a 'Real Photo Post Card' (also known as RP or RPPC cards) which can be identified both by this name printed on the back and by the photographic paper used. As in this case, captions were often 'scratched' or marked on the negative in some other way that leaves the text white in colour. RPPCs seen under a magnifying glass do not have the dot pattern seen on modern photochrome cards.

### *Postcards from the Centre continued*

## Spot the difference

Photo shopping is not a new art. One of these old postcards was altered when it was produced around 1912-1913. Can you see where? These are examples of postcards printed using a dot pattern much like a photograph printed in a magazine.



Postcards are becoming an affordable collectable. Rendell managed to source the St Lukes Mt Albert one on-line and paid \$16 for it. Keep your eyes open for any others. We would gladly accept them as a donation or will pay the going rate.

### *References*

[www.rootsweb.com/~nzlscant/postcards.htm](http://www.rootsweb.com/~nzlscant/postcards.htm). [www.postcard.co.uk/hobby\\_history.htm](http://www.postcard.co.uk/hobby_history.htm).

*Postcards from Chris Firth, Phyllis Turner, M.A.H.S Postcard Collection.*

## Rendell goes to Wellington

In October Rendell Mc Intosh, acting M.A.H.S Chair, dovetailed a personal trip to Wellington with a visit to the Turnbull Library and National Archives. The Turnbull holds about 6,000 images on the Auckland area, very few are categorised under 'Mt Albert' but Rendell's experience told him that he needed to check the lot. Following this, he discovered a photo of an old drawing that showed where Maori habitation in Auckland occurred in 1720. On the second day, he tackled the National Archives. He found out that there are 1,334 items relating to Mt Albert. Most of these are probates or Govt/Council related documents and are held in the Archives Department in Mt Wellington. However, he did manage to get his hands on two important files related to the involvement of NZ Railways in the destruction of Mt Albert. He has promised to present this information as an article for a later edition of this newsletter. Thanks for your hard work on our behalf, Rendell!

## Sponsorship Anyone....?

We are very grateful to Bob Kinnear for sponsoring this newsletter. His generous sponsorship enables us to inform the wider community of its history as well as our hundred or so members. M.A.H.S feels that it should be informing, educating and engaging our residents in their past in order for them to understand what they have to protect for the future. However, this requires more funds than our membership currently generates. So, we are looking for additional single sponsors. The sponsor's advertisement will be prominently placed on the lower 1/4 of the back page. This newsletter is widely circulated throughout Mt Albert. It can be hand delivered to up to a thousand local residents and is also available from local libraries, cafes, the community centre and the Plant Barn. Copies are eagerly taken and read from any venue in which they appear and we are continually asked for 'top ups'. For more information about sponsorship please contact Kathryn Twort our treasurer on 846 5227.

## Dates To Remember

**25th March (Sunday)** 3pm Brian and Lindsay Corban invite M.A.H.S members to look around their picturesque and historic gardens at 9 Oakfield Avenue, Mt Albert, followed by refreshments. Limited numbers. RSVP Jackie Wright 846 6250. Cancelled if raining. M.A.H.S. members only.

**22nd April (Sunday)** 2pm Alberton. Mary Donald will give a brief (20-30 minutes) introduction to oral history. She will describe her experiences as an oral historian and archivist and provide an overview of what M.A.H.S needs to do to establish an oral history resource. Followed by question time. Anyone interested in learning what is involved please come along.

**17th June (Sunday)** 2pm Alberton. Lets Talk About Us. M.A.H.S members are invited to share an anecdote, personal memory, show an object or pictures/photos of interest. 10 minute limit on each performer! If we run out of time, items will be held over.

## Local Walk 3

### Discovering the route of 'The Avenue' leading from Alberton House to New North Road

This walk starts from the verandah of Alberton House goes out along Mt Albert Rd, down Alberton Avenue, down through the Mt Albert Grammar school farm, meets up with the Meola Stream walkway which it follows until exiting back onto Alberton Avenue, continues down to the Mt Albert Baptist Church then turns around and follows Alberton Ave and Mt Albert Rd back to Alberton.

The sons of Lieutenant- General William Taylor were instructed by their father to buy land. In accordance with these paternal wishes, the Taylor boys bought land in Auckland which they named Glendowie, Glen Innes and Glen Orchard. The youngest of them, Allan, at the age of sixteen bought nearly 300 acres in Mt Albert in 1849 for four hundred and fifty pounds. This was the beginning of his estate which he subsequently named 'Alberton'. As Jan Harris describes '...the "manor" of Mt Albert. Alberton almost seemed like an attempt to reproduce English country life, with Allan as squire or patron, and the family as "first family" of their county'. (1) The Avenue seems to be hugely symbolic in establishing this impression. It was an entrance road lined with trees running about 500 metres (2) in an almost straight line from New North Road to Alberton House. The trees were mostly pines, with Norfolk Island pines and oaks nearer the house. They were under planted with Arum lilies and the road was covered with scoria.



*A photo of The Avenue before the trees were cut down. Alberton House is out of sight to the right. Photo taken from the top of Mt Albert. Courtesy of Turnbull Library.*

**Start on the front verandah of Alberton House.** Looking straight ahead past the fountain you see the area where the famous gardens and orchard used to be is now occupied by the Crown Research Institute.

**Walk to the left hand corner of the verandah (towards Kerr-Taylor Ave).** You can see the remnants of The Avenue. Closest to the house is a japonica, followed by another japonica one cart's distance to the left. Behind the first japonica, is a redwood (planted by Allan Taylor in memory of his time in the Californian goldfield) and then an oak tree.

Walking down to these trees you can catch a distant glimpse of an oak which stands in line with these four trees and is thought to be the only other surviving specimen of The Avenue.

At the top of The Avenue there was, as there still is today, a vehicle reception and turning area. However, before Kerr Taylor Ave was formed the land was flat, the creation of the street formed the slope that you see today. 'A huge monkey puzzle tree stood near the house in a circle formed where The Avenue branched and drives went on to the stables and upper gates.' (1) (The 'upper gates' were the existing main gates of today which were moved from Mt Albert Rd to their present location.) The monkey puzzle tree was felled during the creation of Kerr Taylor Ave in the 1950's.

**Walk up the slope turning left along Kerr Taylor Ave.** Once large camellia trees edged the lawn near today's entrance.

**Walk along Kerr Taylor Ave turning right into Mt Albert Rd and continue walking along until you reach Alberton Ave.** Mt Albert Rd was on the edge of the Alberton estate so while walking along it you are on the boundary of the 500 acre property.

**Turn right into Alberton Ave.**

Alberton Ave was originally called Rob Roy Rd possibly in deference to the Taylors Scottish heritage. DP13685 shows a planned subdivision of two rows of sections, one behind each other, by Sophia Taylor, in 1920. Only one row of houses were built but there still are a couple of empty sections. This is possibly land that was designated for a public road in the subdivision.

**Walk down Alberton Ave turning into the school farm entrance at number forty. Walk down the driveway to the end and through the school carpark. You should pass between a multistorey, yellow 'E' block on the left and a smaller, white portakabin type 'D' block on the right. Follow a narrow pathway (which may possibly be closed off by a chain, its easy to walk around it though) along the edge of the school playing grounds.** Looking over to Alberton you will see the large oak you originally may have spotted. The oak is a remnant of The Avenue so if you plot a straight line joining the Alberton trees and the oak and continuing on from there you have the route of The Avenue.

**Continue walking over the little bridge and turn left. Continue following Meola Stream.** This stream has its origins in a spring 150 yards in front of Alberton House where the boys in the family went to wash. Later the family created a little swimming pool/bathing area around it. The spring was named Meola after a glacier area in India (from Allan Taylors childhood?) and gives its name to the stream.

**Exit from the Meola Stream walk via the Roy Clements Treeway. Continue down Alberton Ave to the New North Rd.** There is a slight kink in Alberton Rd supposedly because of the original position of The Avenue which started on the site of the Mt Albert Baptist Church. There is an old retaining wall which looks to predate the church and may be part of The Avenue.

**Turn around and return to Alberton walking up Alberton Ave the whole way.** As you pass Mt Albert Grammar you will notice the extensive terracing of the ground the school is on. 'The block carved out from the Kerr-Taylor estate had sloped roughly from south to north as it fell away to Meola Creek, the gradient being more or less conforming to that of upper Alberton Avenue today. Site preparation involved tree- felling and much earth movement. Some of the trees cleared had once formed part of Allan Kerr Taylor's coach road...' (4) One of my informants told me that there had in fact been one tree remaining from The Avenue on the school grounds. He remembered it as a giant fig that boys used to gather under to eat their lunches. It blew down in a storm one day when thankfully it was not sheltering any Grammar boys!

*References for Mt Albert: Local Walk 2*

1) Harris, J. 'Alberton and Its Family', New Zealand Historic Places Trust 1999

2) DP7365

3) DP 13685

4) Stone, R.C.J. and McMillan N.A.C *Tradition and Change Mt Albert Grammar School: The First Seventy-five Years*

# Our Streets

*Mary Inomata has exhaustively researched the origins of Benfield Avenue. This has meant trailing through many documents in order to uncover the precise sequence of name changes. She has uncovered tragedy as well as much joy and happiness. Thank you for your tenacity, Mary!*

Wherever I have lived I have always desired to know the history of my home and street. Despite my enquiries no one seemed able to tell me how **Benfield Avenue** had got its name.

Researching old maps showed me that Benfield Ave had started life as **Old Counsel Road**, a short street that originally finished at number thirteen. In 1912 it's name was changed to **West Street** and an extension to the street connecting it with Williams (now Wilcott) was named **Frederick Street**, presumably after Frederick Carrington, the surveyor for the area.

In 1927 newspapers were momentarily full of West Street when the bodies of a newly arrived immigrant family were discovered in a home there. Mr & Mrs Kiddell and their twenty year old daughter had arrived in New Zealand mid-year from London. Mr Kiddell was a recently retired British Customs agent and they had come to join their son Colin who had been farming in NZ for 5 years. Colin had suffered a breakdown following the unwise purchase of a farm and the family had arrived to help him out. They took a three month lease on the West St home. After just three weeks, the milkman and a neighbour, Mrs McMahon, had concerns because an electric light had been left burning for more than 10 days. The police were informed and their investigations uncovered four bodies. The prevailing opinion of the time was that the three older members of the family had committed suicide with the young woman being murdered by one of them. A letter left by the father addressed to the police, stated that he was not insane but this was the only way out of their troubles and that there was £25 in his pocket for burial expenses. At the inquest it was decided they were 'gravely neurasthenic' and had had a 'corporate nervous breakdown'. Among other tributes, a small homemade wreath of rosemary and white flowers that said 'from a New Zealander' was left in memory of the family at their graveside.

The following year West Street and Frederick Street were incorporated under a new name, **Benfield Avenue**. I believe this was precipitated by the deaths, as the great Auckland street names change did not occur until around the mid 1930's. However, there was still the mystery of where the name Benfield had come from. Browsing in the Auckland City Library map section I came across a map from 1884 advertising a subdivision auction of the Benfield Estate by J.H. Daubeny. Eureka – all was now revealed.

The end paper of "In Old Mt Albert" shows Benfield Ave (then known as West St) in 1911 running horizontally from the middle of the left page approximately one third of the way down the page and showing the two existing dwellings – one of which I am now lucky enough to live in.

The street remained like this until 1921 when building began in earnest. During the twenties, thirties and forties it was a happy street full of children. At one time there were nineteen of them! All of these children attended Gladstone School (and many of them still have regular reunions). Mrs Phyllis Turner, nee Lockwood and Mrs Valda LeGrice, nee Moir shared their memories with me of cricket, basketball, skipping, rounders, hopscotch, kite-making and flying all played in the street. Marbles were played in the gutter, tennis was played in the courts at the back of the Moir's home and every year bonfires were built for Guy Fawkes on the then empty sections running through from Benfield Ave to Woodward Rd. Concerts and plays written by the older girls, Margaret and Jean Stewart (who lived at number 21) and Isabel Blake (from number 25), were then performed for parents in the week before Guy Fawkes in order to raise money for fireworks. Happy times indeed!

Phyllis Turners' paternal grandparents, William and Elizabeth Lockwood lived on the corner of Counsel Tce and Gladstone Rd (now Carrington Rd) in a house that is still there. It was this fact that motivated Phyllis's father to build his house at number 16 Benfield Avenue. At this time most of the children in the street were birthed

*Our Streets continued*

at home. Phyllis and her brother were born in 1928 and 1925 at their home. Vera Robinson nee Blake, was born at what is now number 25, around 1922. She lived in Benfield Ave for her whole life, moving to number 19 when she married.

In 1939 we had two reverends living in the street, diagonally across from each other. The Rev. Arthur Hopper at number 20 and the Rev. W McCormack at number 13. It seems we were either a holy street or we had gone to the devil!

Nothing much of note has happened in our street apart from a fire in my house in 1939 .(Hmm what was I saying about the devil ? ) and for the residents of our street that's just the way we like it. It is a narrow street, not widely known, with a happy air to it that I like to think is a an echo of the children who “ cannot remember a cross word between them but only happy times.”



*Elizabeth and William Lockwood outside their home (which still exists) on the corner of Counsel Tce and Carrington Rd*



*From left to right:George Lockwood (son of Elizabeth and William),Carrie Lockwood (owners),Elizabeth and William Lockwood, John and Mary Webster (Carrie's parents), Robert and Phyllis Lockwood. Taken early 1930s.*

*References for 'Our Streets': Benfield Avenue*

*Online Maps 4497-20 and 77*

*New Zealand Herald July 5,6,7 1927*

*Auckland City Street Names Database*

*Conversations with Mrs Phyllis Turner, Mr Barry Clarke, Mrs Valda Le Grice, Mr George Sims, Mrs Verna Good Scott,Dick 'In Old Mt Albert' Endpaper.*

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