



MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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‘Oh Ballast!’

Part 1: The story of the Mount Albert Ballast Pit Branch by Paul Dillicar.

‘By 1866 there was considerable agitation for improvements in roads and transport, with many settlers being disenchanted with the state of the few toll roads in the area. By this time the Provincial Government had passed the Highways Act authorising the establishment of highways districts, and the Mount Albert Highways Board was duly founded by local citizens on 13 February 1866. It was this board that finally authorised what had, by as early as 1845, become a commonplace - the removal of stone and scoria from the mountain to build roads, bridges and walls to denote property boundaries. Many of these structures still exist today. In 1870 a gravel pit was operated by the Board on the north-western side, licensed to one J. Chalmers.’



Richardson photograph showing Owairaka/ Mt Albert and the rail leading into the quarry. Taken between 1900 and 1909. ID 4-428. Special Collections, Auckland City Libraries, NZ

‘When land was surveyed in 1871, the route for a ‘Puinui to Kaipara’ railway was along today’s alignment. In fact, the Government took some persuading to route the railway this way. Settlers well beyond Auckland preferred that for any railway serving the North, it should commence from the upper Waitemata harbour settlement of Riverhead and go by way of Kumeu to Helensville. Consequently, the Riverhead to Helensville line was built. Construction was started by the Provincial Government in 1872, but turned over to the New Zealand Government for completion and it was opened on 29 October 1875. This was well before any rail line headed north from Newmarket.’

‘Agitation by settlers in the Henderson district for a rail link with Auckland was not appeased by suggestions of a branchline from Newmarket; they wanted their area to be served by rail to both the north and south. Ultimately, a report to the Government backed their demands. By 1878 construction was underway. The formation was to take the line close to Mount Albert so it was logical that eyes turned toward the cone as a source of scoria and ballast. The land that was taken included a strip that cut right across the property of settler Edward Allen. It was used to build a branch line up the mountain in order to rail scoria out from a quarry. The quarry and railway were to be constructed and operated by the Railways Department.

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The total area of the Mt Albert Domain was 22 acres 1 rood and 22 perches. Some 12 acres were vested in the Mount Albert Domain Board leaving 10 acres available to the NZR for quarry purposes.'

'Larkins and O'Brien won the contract to build this section and the line to the quarry was completed by the time the Newmarket to Waikomiti, now Glen Eden, section was officially opened on 29 March 1880.'

'The original Mount Albert layout was a single line with loops on both the northern and southern sides. The 'ballast' loop on the southern side held thirty wagons. From this loop there was a long backshunt which ended at a stop-block close to the level crossing at Woodward Road. The line that climbed the mountain required a reversing movement from the southern loop, so the backshunt in effect became a de facto 'runaway' siding. This was a wise precaution and was used! Later the southern points were removed and the ballast line was accessed only from the main line to the north of Mt Albert Station through tablet-released points, though the 'runaway' siding was retained.'

'With an average gradient of 1 in 40 and a 'pinch' reaching 1 in 25, the line first crossed the North Road (now New North Road) at a level crossing. This was on an alignment that took it ever upward to finally reach a levelled area on Toroa Terrace, off Mt Albert Rd, some 1.1 kilometres from Mt Albert Station.'

'The levelled area on which houses at numbers 2,4,6 and 12 Toroa Terrace now stand was the end of the line. When opened, the terminus comprised a loop, and a short loop siding at the end of which was a stop-block. When the points were not in use, they were set against this siding to guard against runaways. Later (about 1913) the arrangement was altered so that the line from Mt Albert branched first into a loop which ended in a double cross over and then led into three parallel tracks. A bridge structure spanned above all the tracks, on which was built a scoria crusher and loading chutes. The crusher was driven by a coal gas engine, the gas being generated on the site in a 52 feet long engine shed from coke that had to be railed to the site. An associated water tower supplied a gas scrubber for purifying the gas, the effluent from which was a green coloured tar by-product, its smell being described as putrid. Moving the empty and full wagons around, and forming up ballast trains was the job of the work train locomotive.'

'Rocks arrived at the crusher on the bridge in small rail wagons that were filled and lowered on an incline from the quarry in the mountain crater above. The incline comprised three tracks on a gradient of 1 in 3, with a passing loop of four tracks in the middle. The weight of the loaded wagons coming down was used to pull the empty wagons back up, whereupon they were pushed to the quarry face for reloading. The site of the top of this steep incline can easily be seen today on the road around the summit where the entry to the Archery Club grounds is situated. This levelled area where marksmen practise their sport is the quarry floor as abandoned in 1928 when the NZR was finally pressured into ceasing quarrying and the 10 acres of land was transferred to the Domain Board.'

'Ballast trains were propelled up the mountain from Mt Albert and locomotives led them downhill. On at the end of the line, the empty wagons were usually placed on the outer or the middle road. Quarry staff then moved the wagons one at a time using pinch bars, for loading under the crusher chute on the outermost road. Full trains were then despatched from number 3 (innermost) road. The methodology of quarrying, crushing and loading was extremely efficient and the only limitation was the crusher capacity.'

Ref: Thanks to Paul Dillicar and The N.Z Railway Observer, August-September 2002. Also, thanks to John Goddard for alerting us to the existence of this article. Next issue we will read about a spectacular runaway locomotive and increasing public objection to the destruction of the mountain.

A little knowledge....

The Auckland City Council has named the service road alongside the Mt Albert shops 'Ballast Lane' in response to a suggestion from M.A.H.S

Did you know that the original Mount Albert signal box is at MOTAT as part of the Waitakere railway display? It's in a very authentic condition, you can climb up to the top floor and peer through the windows at the operating machinery inside.

M.A.H.S Dates To Remember

26th April (Saturday) 2pm Mt Albert Baptist Church, Church Lounge. Come and hear Speleologist Peter Crossley, Auckland University School of Geography, Geology and Environmental Science, and share some of his knowledge about local caves and lava flows. A wonderful opportunity! RSVP Jackie 846 6250 or Suzanne 846 6569. Gold coin donation for hall hireage.

15th June (Sunday) 2pm Alberton 'Show and Tell'. An occasion for members to share some local stories, photographs or other artefacts. Come along and enjoy the reminiscences. Followed by afternoon tea served on the 'best china' antique cups recently donated.

Marist College 80th anniversary.

Celebration centres around 11th, 12th, 13th April. Go online at www.maristcollege.school.nz

Mt Albert Community Art Project. If you are interested in becoming involved in the production of a mural reflecting local history phone Zoe Nash 846 0788 or 021 175 3713.

Historical Botox

A section in which we fill in any gaps and repair damage done made by previous issues. Email corrections or additions to Carron at Rumbaugh@xtra.co.nz or send to: The Editor, M.A.H.S, P.O. Box 77002, Mt Albert.

Do any of you have any stories about the ballast line? You are probably too young to remember the 'putrid' smell of the gas purifying system but possibly you have some family stories about the effects of this local railway on family life.

Can anyone verify whether the Industrial School was for girls (which is what I think) or boys? Any other information gratefully received.

Re: Local Walk 5

Thanks to Dave Brown who has lived in Ranleigh Rd for over thirty years. He says 'I am writing to add a little more to Mr Stacpooles notes on Allendale Road.....'

'Clay's house (now fronting Lloyd Ave) deserves a mention)

No 2 & 2a: Units built on 'Clays' property by the late Roy Page a very prominent Mt Albert builder

No 4: home of the late Captain Kirk who used to write shipping news for the Herald or Star built also on 'Clay' land (their tennis court?)

No 6: I have no idea of the Entrican & Simms connection but do know that Syd Walker one of the Mt Albert barbers lived there for some years before building on New Nth Rd beside Oakley Creek.

No 8: Dr Sam Marten practised at the house and raised a large family there before having a set of 3 units built on the tennis court at the rear, where he and his wife Inez occupied the rear one.

Bowling Club: I am not sure but believe the ground was donated by the Garlick family with an injunction against Sunday play (?)'

Want to become an M.A.H.S. member? Phone Suzanne 846 6569 or Kathryn 846 5227 for a membership form.

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Suzanne Good (M.A.H.S Secretary), Doreen Suddens and Jackie Wright (M.A.H.S Exec. Committee member) enjoy the Christmas party, at Alberton, on 30th November 2007. Bob Kinnear (M.A.H.S Exec. Committee Member) standing at rear. *(Left)*



Lisa Truttman explaining the origins of Wairaka Springs, with original dry stone stock wall in background and results of beautification programme hidden by M.A.H.S members in foreground. The Wairaka Springs walk took place on 10th February 2008. *(Centre Left)*

Mary Inomata (M.A.H.S Chair), Kathryn Twort (M.A.H.S Treasurer), Lisa Truttman and Alice Wylie (M.A.H.S Exec. Committee member) relax outside the original pumphouse built in 1904 by the Mt Albert Road Board, now Carrington's Café. *(Bottom Left)*

Carron Boswell (M.A.H.S Editor) and John Stacpoole (survivor of the 1922 typhoid epidemic) outside the old Auckland Asylum building where the first typhoid cases were noted among patients. *(Bottom Right)*



The Coronation Oaks

...Sarah Elizabeth Jackson...The Industrial School... School House....The Alice Wylie Reserve...

This article is a great example of 'one thing leads to another'. It started off as a query in Historical Botox about the story behind the Coronation Oaks.

There are three 'Coronation Oaks' in Burch Street towards the New North Road end. Each was planted to commemorate the coronation of a different monarch. The first was planted to commemorate the coronation of Edward VII in 1902, the second the coronation of George V in 1910 and the third was planted on May 12th 1937 to commemorate the coronation of George VI. If you look carefully, you can see that each oak tree has a plaque giving the tree's provenance at its base. Each plaque reads 'MOUNT ALBERT CITY COUNCIL PROTECTED TREE THIS IS ONE OF THE OAKS PLANTED TO COMMEMORATE THE CORONATIONS OF EDWARD VII GEORGE V AND GEORGE VI'

The first two oaks were planted under the auspices of Sarah Elizabeth Jackson who was the matron of the Auckland Industrial School which occupied the building on the site. (1)



This photo has been identified by John Stacpoole as Cottingham Willis's home. This substantial sixteen room, two storeyed home was on a six and a half acre site. It was bought by the Welfare Department and became the Auckland Industrial School. The Auckland Public Library mistakenly called it the Methodist Orphanage. This photo was probably taken during its use as the Industrial School because of the presence of the girls who the APL call a 'school group'. In 1926 the house was sold to the Auckland Grammar Schools Board and 1927 opened as Mt Albert Grammar School's School House for boarders. The identity of the building is verified by the similar photo in 'Tradition and Change.' School House was demolished in 1972. ID A15263 Special Collections, Auckland City Libraries, NZ

The Grammar Schools Board was persuaded by the Headmaster F.W. Gamble to buy the Industrial School building in 1926. He was conscious that forty four boys were boarding privately in Auckland. In February 1927 the first batch of twenty two boys were ensconced in what became known as 'School House'. This was the first state secondary hostel for boys in Auckland. Within a year the numbers in this hostel had almost doubled.(2)

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Mt Albert Grammar School boys had been boarding in School House for ten years when the third oak was planted in 1937 by Sir Algernon Thomas in its grounds. He referred to the historic significance of the occasion (the coronation of King George VI) and also explained that the tree had been grown from an acorn from Westminster Park. Sarah Jackson who was well into her seventies by this time, was also present. (1) (She is buried in the St Lukes graveyard.)

When the new school hostel opened in Alberton Avenue in 1969 or School House was pulled down in 1972 (two versions!) the land was bought by the Government. There was a plan for a fisheries research centre and the threat of the oaks being cut down. Alice Wylie led the opposition to the possible building of another centre like the D.S.I.R. saying 'That building is an eyesore and can be seen from every part of the borough.'(3) After some lobbying, in 1976 Mt Albert Borough Council was promised by The Hon. George Gair, Minister of Housing, that the site would be kept for housing. A covenant was placed on the title to protect the trees when the land was sold to private subdividers.(4)

Subsequently, the land was taken possession of by Mount Albert City Council and the trees were protected. Some of the land was made available for housing intellectually disabled people who could manage on their own, some land was designated for 'own your own' flats for people of modest means and some was left for private development. The 'Edward VII' oak is now under the 'stewardship' of Peter Singh who owns the land at 10 Burch St on which it grows. 'George V' and 'George VI' are growing a short distance away on a piece of land renamed 'Coronation Oaks Reserve' by Peter from 'Burch St Reserve'. (Auckland City Council has formally adopted Peter's suggestion). Auckland City rediscovered the trees during the reserve name change as records of them had been lost during amalgamation.(5) However, they are still not listed as schedule trees as shown in the last M.A.H.S newsletter although one oak tree is listed at 2 Burch St. (Possibly another schedule mistake!)

At the time of the last Royal Visit in 2002, Peter Singh suggested to the tour organizers that this would be a great chance for the Queen to visit the

trees as it was also the centennial of the planting of 'Edward VII'. A cup of tea and a piece of cake were offered as an enticement. However, the Singhs' kind offer was refused. Instead they received an invitation to the Royal garden party. Peter and his wife Irene attended, met the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh and had a 'grand time'.(5)

The land on the corner of New North Road and Burch Street was retained by Council to protect the heritage stone wall and some specimen trees. In a full Council meeting, Alice Wylie moved that the land be named the 'Burch Street Reserve'. Athol Morris (a Labour councillor from Kingsland) stood before the motion was seconded and said 'We would like it to be named the 'Alice Wylie Reserve'. Alice said about this 'That was one of life's astonishments!'(6)

The specimen trees in the Alice Wylie Reserve were planted by Jack Clark of Eden Gardens fame. He planted azaleas, camellias, rhododendrons, hibiscus and conifers. The area became a 'miniature Eden Gardens' (7) with the intention of labelling all plants and varieties with their names as money became available. Unfortunately, after amalgamation the Auckland City Council of that time preferred native planting and gradually the reserve lost the features that made it an 'horticultural gem.' The oaks in this reserve are often mistakenly taken for the Coronation Oaks which may explain the scheduling glitch. They are, in fact, Coronation Oak 'babies' having been grown from acorns harvested from their royal relatives!

1. The Albertian November 1937 (courtesy A. Wylie)
2. Tradition and Change Mt Albert Grammar School: The First Seventy Five Years. R.C.J Stone and N.A.C. Mc Millan
3. Central Leader. No date. (courtesy A. Wylie)
4. Copy of Mt Albert Borough Council Ordinary Meeting No. 864 Minutes (courtesy A.Wylie)
5. E-mail from Peter Singh 4/02/08
6. Conversation with Alice Wylie, November 2007.
7. Letter to members of the Community Board and Parks Committee dated 14th December 1965 from Alice Wylie. (courtesy A. Wylie)

Local Walk 6

A walk back along the length of Allendale Road on the township side of the road with historian and architect, John Stacpoole.

Sorry to keep you waiting, it's time to head back. this walk starts on the McLean Road corner site.

This corner was long vacant except for a giant macrocapa tree. Next to this heading back townwards was Marsden Caugheys beautiful house, less than half the size of his father's Rahiri but more elegant and surrounded by gardens full of trees in the high branches of which two gaudy long tailed macaws had their home.

Marsden Caughey's mother married a second time. An old flame returned from England where he had been living and, as Mrs Emerson, the former Mrs Caughey lived in a tall house built quite close to the road at number 57. It was also called Rahiri. She was a familiar and friendly figure in the street and in her always colourful garden. Mr Emerson, too, had charm. They were to be seen every Sunday morning, arriving at St Margarets through a gate in the wall of Marsden Caughey's back garden, opposite the church door, Mr Emerson in a tail coat and wearing a homburg hat. They were a delightful old couple. Their house, unlike Marsden's, is still there being part of the Everill Orr. Mrs Emerson died in 1954.

The Everill Orr complex, now very extensive, began with the gift of William Astley's adjoining property to serve as a retirement home. William Astley was the first resident on this stretch of road. He was company secretary of Smith and Caughey Ltd. His house, dating from the early 1900's, was spacious, single storeyed, and beautifully sited on a low rise with fine views of the upper harbour and the Waitakere Ranges. The land sloped to the backs of houses on New North Rd.

The next house to Astley house, number 53, was built for Leslie McNaughton, father of Professor Tony McNaughton, like his father an educationist: then down a right of way came Adrian Black, an accountant whose wife was the daughter of a well known First World War army officer, Major Wallingford. Next is number 49 which belonged to Fitzgeralds, Yorkes,

Maroon-Josephs and Stacpooles (the last for 42 years) before being sold to its present owner, Dr John Young. The house was built in 1922 and was surrounded on three sides by stone walls. It backed onto a paddock behind Wesley pragg's New North Road house.

Number 47 was in the hands of the Allely family in the 1940's, 50's and 60's but was then sold to a couple named Thompson. He was a brother-in-law of Sir Brian Barratt- Boyes and she was a daughter of the short story writer, Roderick Finlayson. Judge Arnold Turner, then of the Magistrates Court, was at number 45. Passing homes owned by the Stevens, Beck and Ormsby families we come to Richard Rowntree the cricketer at number 31. The entomologist Dr William Cottier lived at number 25 and at number 21 John Wakefield was succeeded by Olympic Gold Medallist Peter Snell.

At number 17 was Mrs Emily Ward who it was, I think, ran a small plant nursery from her garden. Her modest house was unusual for its corner bay windows, not like the rounded casement bays of later Californian bungalows, but set at an angle of 45 degrees and double hung as were the grander windows at Tynesfield. Number 17 shared a back boundary with the tennis club access to which, from either Allendale Rd or New North Rd, was conveniently given by the stony, unsealed track left from lifting the rails of the old ballast line. It also gave Stilwell Rd and Allendale Rd housewives a short cut to the shops when families rarely had a second car for their convenience and most women travelled to the city by tram car.

And so we arrive back at the Astley corner. Mrs Frank Astley occupied a large villa on an acre of land reaching to the ballast line. The land subdivision began with a house, perhaps best described as 'uncompromising', designed by Vernon Brown in the late 1940's for Lincoln Astley. A softening gesture was made by building a roadside seat into the boundary wall. The house is at the back of the site beside the ballast line. Later buildings screen it from view.

Our Streets

This issue gives some information about the interconnecting streets of Seaview Terrace, Guardwell Terrace and Martin Avenue.

Murray Stevenson wrote a substantial letter to Rich Afford in which he covered many issues of local importance. Here is what he said about his family's connection with **Seaview Terrace**. 'My father, with his family moved to 'Glen Iris' a house on the corner of Gladstone Road and Seaview Terrace in 1912 when dad was seven. The house had quite a bit of land attached to it, some of which he sold/ or gifted to Gladstone School for an 'Infants Block'. The house 'Glen Iris' (named after a suburb in Melbourne from whence my father came) faced down towards Pt Chev and from the front veranda one could see, I'm told, the Ponsonby clock tower and the clay cliffs at the bottom of Don Buck's Road. I have wondered why the street at the back of 'Glen Iris' was called 'Seaview Terrace' and I realise now that when the street was established it must have had a good sea view.'(1) According to John Davenport, the name was given to this street by the subdividers of the Roganville estate in 1882. In 1938 there was a proposal to rename it Clay St after a local mayor but this was decided against.

Guardwell Terrace was named Gardner St until 1938. No reason for its new name has been found except for the practice of replacing names with others sounding the same (as in this case) or starting with the same letters.

Martin Avenue was named after William Hurst Martin who owned land in the area. He was born in Rosslea, County Fermanagh, Ireland in 1836. His home in Mt Albert was called Martinborough.(2)The following is a transcript about William Martin from the Fred McGehan papers. (3) Fred obviously copied out a contemporary account of William Martin.

'On leaving school he worked with his father who was an extensive dealer in cattle and horses; and in that way he gained such a thorough knowledge of stock that he enjoys the reputation of being one of the best judges in Auckland. In 1863 accompanied by his wife Mr Martin came to Auckland by the ship ' Ida Zeigler' commanded by Capt. Reynolds'..... 'Wishing to live nearer the city Mr Martin sold his farm and obtained a lease of his present property from the then owner, Capt. Crawdie but shortly afterwards he converted the lease by purchase into a freehold. He engaged successfully in cattle dealing and invested so extensively in freehold properties in the district that he is now a ratepayer to seven Highway Boards, one county council and one city council. On taking up his residence in Mt Albert Mr Martin began to take a prominent part in the local affairs of the district and was elected to the Mt Albert school committee of which he served for many years. He has been intimately connected with the progress of Mt Albert Road Board almost from its inception and was for many years its chairman. He retired on the death of the late Allan Kerr Taylor who had for years co-laboured with him on the board. Seven years later he was again requested to stand for election as the boards finances were in a bad state and there was a large deficit. He therefore again took office and in the course of about three years extricated the board from its difficulties and placed its finances on a sound footing having wiped out the old debt with eighty pounds to the good as well as provided a large quantity of road metal.'

'Mr Martin has also done good service to St Lukes Church Mt Albert where he was church warden for several years and was instrumental with the assistance of Mr Allan Kerr Taylor, Mrs Martin and Mrs Kerr Taylor in thrice enlarging the church and clearing the debt off the parsonage and public hall.'

References

- 1)Letter to Rich Afford from Murray Stevenson
- 2)Davenport, J. 'Street Names of Auckland.'
- 3)Fred Mc Gehan papers. Mt Albert Public Library.