

## Happy 140th Birthday, Mt Albert!

This year is the 140th anniversary of the founding of Mt Albert. In our first article we have included some background information about this celebration.

Nearly every early account of Mt Albert makes much of its rock strewn terrain. In 1842 Mt Albert sections were not considered to be of good quality as 'half of (them) are said to be covered with scoria.'(1) As well as being liberally sprinkled with boulders from volcanic eruptions, the area was hilly in parts and covered in fern and scrub. The soil was dusty in summer and muddy in winter.

One of the basic requirements for the settlement of Mt Albert was the provision of a good roading system. In 1865 Allan Kerr Taylor successfully sold 30 acres (divided into 120 lots) of his land in Morningside and the increased population fuelled the demand for better roads. But who would pay for them?

In 1862 the central government had passed the Highways Act which enabled the Auckland Provincial Council in 1865 to legislate to provide for the institution of Highway Boards in the province. A Highway Board was empowered to raise money for the maintenance of roads through the setting of rates.

So, on 13th February 1866 Mt Albert settlers took the first step towards local government by meeting at 'Allendale' the home of a local farmer, Edward Allen. (This house at 1 Mt Albert Rd was being actually auctioned just as this historical society met for the first time!) The meeting was chaired by Allan Kerr Taylor and twelve other settlers attended. According to the minutes they were there because of their shared interest 'in the formation and repairs of the New Great North Road.' The following week the same thirteen met and formed a sub committee which presented the case for the acceptance of Mt Albert as a Highway District. And so it was declared in October of the same year.



*"Allendale" Home of Edward Allen, built in 1862.*

Special Collections, Auckland City Libraries (N.Z.) I.O. 7-A11587 Photographer: Unknown

# My Home

*Rich Afford shares the history of his home at 18 Mt Albert Rd. We can imagine John and Frank Phillipps walking down the path one summer's evening in 1866. They would have walked across the rutted dirt road arriving at 'Allendale' (number 1 Mt Albert Rd). There they would have greeted the other settlers present at Mt Albert's first meeting.*

One day in 1953 whilst fulfilling filial duties, or rather pleasures, I was driving my parents on a little nostalgic outing to the top of Mt Albert taking us up Mt Albert Rd towards Summit Drive. My wife and I were anxious to settle close to the locale of our roots for a number of reasons, so it was natural I should notice a very drunken sale notice atop a stone wall, and stop for inspection. A peek through a jungle of foliage revealed a sad and neglected old habitation in the seemingly last stages of decline. But wait. What was its irresistible appeal? Just as an old and genteel lady will exude the charms of past youth so this cottage with its delicate verandah posts wove its magnetism. In other words, after agonising considerations and negotiations we bought it, complete with drooping back door, holes in the floor, no power connection and the last property with a septic tank, plus outbuildings held together, as the saying goes, by the borer holding hands.

In time to come, curiosity compelled us to seek out and confirm something of the dwelling's history and so we commenced a search of the titles. Back and back we went in some wonderment until we discovered that in 1866 it had been owned by one John Phillipps, Oil and Colour merchant, one of the founders of Phillipps and Impey Limited. Further research revealed that William Phillipps and his son John came to Auckland and set up business in 1854 as W. Phillipps and Son, Painters and Glaziers. Another son Frank joined the firm later but where they were living is something of a mystery. One fact however seems certain and that is that as both brothers were present on 13th February 1866 at a meeting of settlers to recommend the formation of a board for Mt Albert in conformity with the Highways Act, they were both resident in the district and may well have been living in the parental abode.

The house had therefore to have been built in 1865 or earlier, qualifying it now as being one of the oldest houses in Auckland extant as a private residence. A small intriguing disclosure during interior upgrading was linings made from inch- thick cedar, confirming an old neighbouring resident's knowledge that after all the place was constructed from packing cases which appeared insofar as the interior linings were concerned anyway. Cases which contained the imported products of their trade.

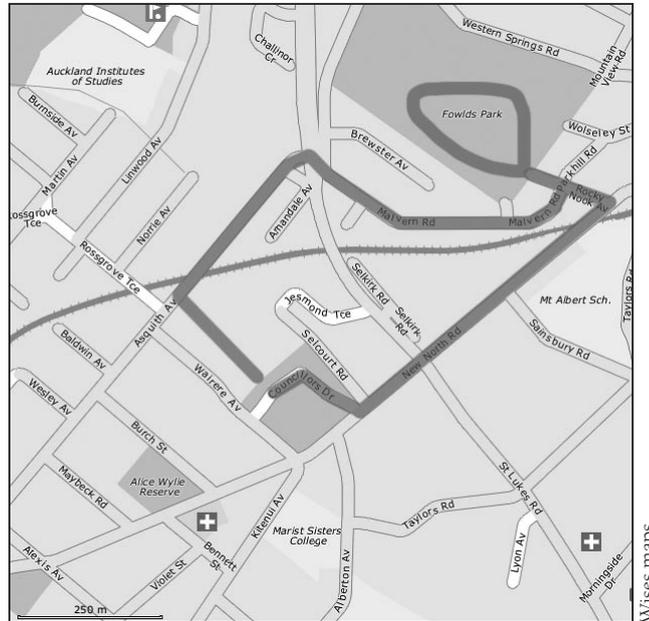
Needless to say as we slowly restored the cottage over the years the Mount Albert Council awoke to its historical importance and placed the property on its register of protection. Its future may be problematical once our incumbency ceases but one can hope it may be preserved as 'a sample of fine detailing and Regency air' as described in Dick Scott's book 'In Old Mt Albert'. Indeed it is the true human house and a far cry from the netting and plaster houses built today. It may be interesting to speculate what it will look like in another 140 years.

*Thanks to The Avondale-Waterview Historical Society for permission to reprint this article.*



# Local walk 1

This walk starts at the Mt Albert Community Centre, goes through the park, right along Asquith Avenue, crosses St Lukes Rd, turns right along Malvern Rd, circles through Fowlds Park, exits onto Rocky Nook Rd, goes right down New North Rd and back to the car park.



**Walk through the park at the rear of the community centre. Keeping the tennis courts on your right and the red tree on your left follow the path to the end where it joins Asquith Avenue.**

**Turn right down Asquith Avenue and follow it over the railway line.**

This pleasant suburban street plays an important role in Auckland's history as it once was part of the main route north. Great North Rd originally swung left at Western Springs Rd (to avoid the swamp) then continued along the Western Springs ridge where Asquith Avenue, or Old Whau Rd as it was then called, joined it.

If you look up and down Asquith Avenue you will notice how straight it is despite a large lava flow near King's Plant Barn. Rather than go around it, a cutting was made through this rock by Irish defaulters who were in trouble for fighting redcoat discipline or for sympathising with the Maori in the land wars of the 1860's. The Irishmen were instructed to cut through a fold in the line of lava crossing the road and this they did creating a 25' high cutting just wide enough to get a cart through and giving locals the perfect reason to call the street 'Chain Gang Road.'

Walking towards the Plant Barn you will come across a commemorative plaque and seat at the base of the cutting. The efforts of the soldiers opened up Mt Albert for subdivision and the area over to your right was probably the first to be subdivided. By the mid 1860's it had been named 'Albert Park' and sold in lots of 2 to twenty acres for 'gentleman's residences'. As you continue up Asquith Ave you will see along Amandale Ave possibly one of the original homes from the 'Albert Park' subdivision.

Eventually in the 1920's the road was widened causing a council member to say in correspondence to the Herald 'How on earth those men shifted some of the boulders we have come across beats me. Some of the stones weighed seventeen hundredweight. Even with our modern gear we found them tough enough and I can't think how those soldiers handled them, for handled they were; we found that out by the fact that they were packed'

**Continue to the top of Asquith Avenue. Cross over St Lukes Road using the crossing.**

This busy regional arterial road was built in 1970 to provide access to the St Lukes shopping mall thereby changing the nature of suburban life in the Mount Albert area. However, crossing the road and heading down Malvern Rd plunges us back into yesteryear.

**Turn right into Malvern Road.**

Malvern Rd is a virtually intact strip of early twentieth century transitional villas. This was a short lived housing style (1910-1918) that was the response of speculators to more than a decade of bungalow designs by architects. They have been referred to as 'villa in substance, bungalow in manner' as they adhered to a basic villa floor plan with some Australian and English bungalow features. As you walk along the road you can see that these houses are simpler than villas. The roofs have become lower pitched pyramids which sweep down incorporating and covering the verandah. The verandah remains in villa position but is supported by tapering wooden wings that are often unornamented or perhaps have some simple stencil cutout designs. Some of the houses still have bay windows (e.g numbers 49,46,44 and 41) but these are often solid 'box' windows supported on brackets. Numbers 45 and 43 are flat faced transitional villas with flared verandah supports and typical hand rails. They contrast well with number 39 which has the traditional villa bull-nose verandah..

Walking along Malvern Rd the houses get bigger and grander and incorporate some other bungalow features. Shingles appear along the fronts of verandah and casement windows are more common in contrast to the double-hung sash windows of the smaller houses.

There is a hidden treat at number eight. You can glimpse a well tended building that was originally the old Mt Eden railway station. It was moved onto the site in a very derelict condition in 1995 and the owners have laboured long and hard replacing windows and roof and much of the floor (1). The Auckland - Waitakere line running behind the house adds to the ambience. The house is on ex-railway land.

**Follow Malvern Rd to the end and turn left into Rocky Nook Ave.**



*A panoramic view looking south- south-east from Western Springs Rd towards New North Rd showing Fowlds Park (foreground) and Three Kings (far left distance). Taken 21 November 1923.*

Special Collections, Auckland City Libraries (N.Z.) I.O. 4-4487

**Enter Fowlds Park through the comemorative gate. Walk in a circle round the park leaving where you entered it.**

Fowlds Park was originally an 'asylum endowment' (2) that was traded by the Mt Albert Domain Board in 1912 for land adjoining the Avondale Mental Hospital. The 29 acres of the park was in a very rough state, strewn with boulders, overgrown with gorse and blackberry and infested with rats, rabbits. In 1921 the park (then known as Morningside Reserve) hit the national headlines under headlines such as 'Potential Danger Spot,'

## THE MT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

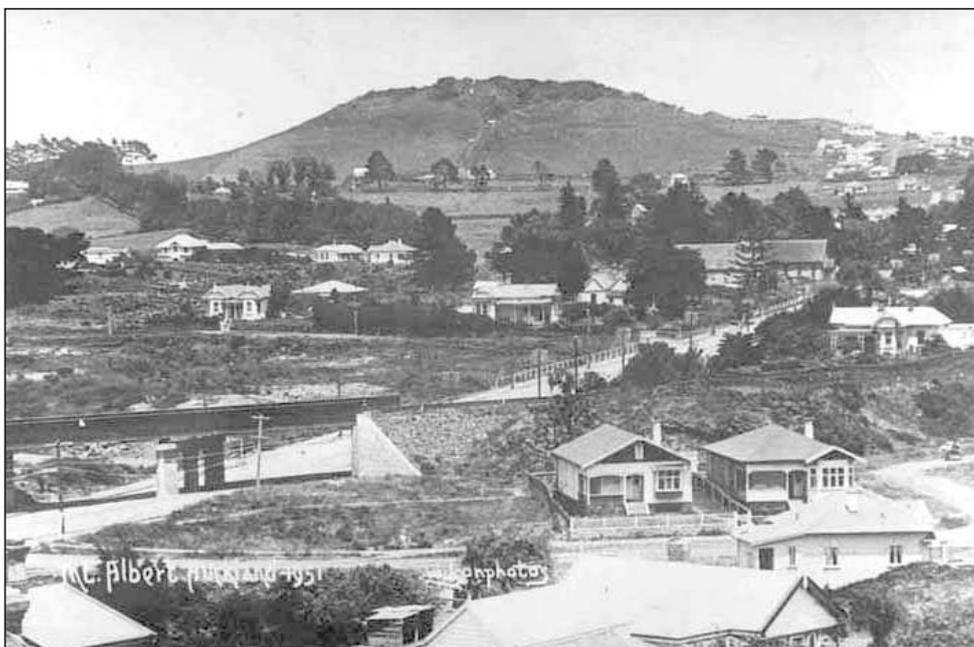
THE CENTRE OF AUCKLAND

'Rubbish Tip and Rats', 'Revolting conditions'. The Prime Minister was questioned in parliament about this local abomination! The Morningside dump issue set off an enquiry into all the Auckland dumps and this, coupled with a typhoid epidemic caused by sewage contaminated water, provided much ammunition for a very colourful general election.

In 1933, in a pioneering scheme, Mt Albert raised 40,000 pounds to employ 160 men at standard rates of pay for 40 hours per week. These men were known as 'relief workers' and eventually numbered 800 in the borough. Between 250 and 300 were employed draining the Wesley Swamp and Fowlds Park. Fowlds Park was given its new name the same year. It honoured Sir George Fowlds who had lived locally and who, as Minister for Health, had arranged the original land transfer. The council continued improving Fowlds Park by planting many native trees and providing sports and playing areas.

### **Exit Fowlds Park and walk along Rocky Nook Ave towards New North Rd.**

You will pass two early homes at numbers 4 and 6 Rocky Nook Ave. If you look closely you can see them in the photo below which may have been taken around 1924. The railway overbridge was opened in 1913, middle right in the photo is St Lukes Anglican Church.



Special Collections, Auckland City Libraries (N.Z.) I.D. 7-A6696 Photographer: Wilson Photos c.1924

### **Turn right onto New North Rd and walk back to the community centre.**

The community centre was built on land that was once the area known as the 'Borough Pound'. Stray cows, horses and other livestock were rounded up and kept there until their owners claimed them for a small fee. It was a rocky, gorse covered piece of land that was eventually developed into the fine community facilities (but no library!) that you see today.

#### *References for Mt Albert: Local Walk1*

(1) *Central Leader*. 5/11/1996

(2) *McGehan Papers*. Mt Albert Library

*Old New Zealand Houses*. Jeremy Salmond.

*The Bungalow in New Zealand*. Jeremy Ashford.

*Auckland City Libraries Heritage Photos*

# Alice Wylie QSM JP

Patron of the Mt Albert Historical Society

As members of the Mt Albert historical society we feel very privileged to have Alice Wylie as our Patron.

Alice arrived with her husband and two small daughters on transfer from Nelson fifty years ago, not intending to stay in Vinter Terrace, but luckily for the people of Mt Albert, she is still here today. An elderly aunt of hers from Parnell was heard to say "Sorry dear, you have to be so far out of Auckland".

Sadly, Mr Wylie died early. In a time when it was not easy for women to be involved in public work, she began working for the people of Mt Albert. In 1965 she was elected to the Mt Albert city council where she stayed for twenty seven years, three terms as deputy mayor serving with the well known mayor Frank Ryan. Over the years there were many achievements, to mention a few;

- twenty five years Auckland District Court – sitting as a Justice of the Peace on preliminary hearings
- fifteen years Museum board – where she is an Honorary Life Member
- a member of the Real Estate Licensing Board
- trustee of the Auckland Savings Bank – now the ASB

Being vice president of the Mayoress Welfare Committee was an opportunity to be in the community in a hands on capacity. The organising of an art exhibition at the War Memorial Hall through the Mackelvie Trust, the ongoing interest in the Boys home in Owairaka Avenue, the celebration for the oldest residents of the area, these are a few memories of very successful events which led to a stronger community. When asked of her most important achievements housing was at the top of the list (own your own flats for people with small means – Birch St, and Coyle St). Others may note with admiration that Alice has had a reserve named after her (but that is another story).....

Things changed dramatically with the amalgamation of the councils but the work still carries on for the rate payers of Mt Albert.



## Dates to Remember

**June 1 –August 25th** Enter the J T Diamond essay competition. Write about the history of West Auckland, there is a 10-18year age group and another for adults. Essays can be anywhere between 800 – 3000 words long. Diamond pendant from Franich Jewellers prize. Forms are available from Waitakere libraries and Mill Cottage or [www.waitakerelibs.govt.nz](http://www.waitakerelibs.govt.nz)

**23 July (Sunday)** 'Meet Your History' A short talk about the history of Ferndale House by Alice Wylie (see above). Followed by afternoon tea and opportunity to chat to like minded people. Ferndale house, Pink Room. 3:30 – 5.00pm. Admission free. All welcome.

**6th August (Sunday)** Committee meeting of M.A.H.S. If you would like to join or have any suggestions please phone Rendell 846 7367

**25th August - 9 September** Dolls through the Ages. Alberton. A display of over 60 dolls. Presented by Auckland Dollmakers and Collectors. \$5 entry.

**15-23rd September** 'Out of the Closet.' Victorian period clothes from the Kerr-Taylor collection. \$5 entry.

**16th – 24th September** Auckland Heritage Week. Two walks organised by M.A.H.S

**Sunday 17th September** walk 1 meets at Mt Albert Community Centre, New North Rd, 3pm. Includes Asquith Ave, bungalow and villa territory, Fowlds Park.

**Sunday 24th September** walk 2 meets at Ferndale House, New North Rd, 3pm. Covers places and people important to the 140th celebration. Contact Carron at [Rumbaugh@xtra.co.nz](mailto:Rumbaugh@xtra.co.nz) for more information. All welcome. Free.

**September – November** Plans are underway for a walk and talk surrounding the Maori history of Owairaka. All welcome. Watch this space for more details.

**1st December** Christmas Cocktails at Alberton. 5pm – 7pm. RSVP Alberton 846 7367.

## The Inaugural Meeting of The Mt Albert Historical Society

The first ever meeting of an historical/ heritage society based in Mt Albert was held on Sunday 9th April 2006. It was convened by Rendell McIntosh who is the manager of Alberton House and Chair of the Parnell Heritage Society. He took it upon himself to mark the 140th anniversary of the Mt Albert Highways District by facilitating the development of an organisation dedicated to promoting and preserving Mt Albert history.

The meeting was attended by local luminaries (Alice Wylie, Rich Afford, Lisa Truttman, Gillian Dance and descendants of the Kerr Taylor family). A further thirty or so members of the public also came to this introductory meeting ( Apparently we had three more attending than at the first Parnell Heritage meeting!). Following a welcome from Rendell we listened to an extremely interesting talk by David Simmons. David is an ethnologist / anthropologist with a particular interest in Maori history, artifacts and taonga. He explained some Maori history of Tamaki-makau-rau (Auckland) and Owairaka (Mt Albert). Then there was a short section of 'general business' in which those attending decided on the name 'The Mt Albert Historical Society' rather than use the word 'Heritage' as the descriptor. Finally, a small group of interested people offered to form an executive committee to meet late May.

## Of Fairy Folk and Volcano Throwing Competitions.....

*David Simmons gave an absorbing and complex overview of some of the Maori history of Auckland. We have used his very accessible book 'Maori Auckland' (2 )to compensate for our meagre note-taking and poor audio-tape quality. Here are some of the highlights:*

Long ago Tamiki-makau-rau (Auckland) was a flat, fertile plain on which stood many trees. These trees were naturally the homes to many birds and therefore the hunting grounds of different tribes. One fateful day, a young man, Tamaiera, met a young woman, Hinemairangi, while out trapping birds in the forest. They were both patupaiarehe (fairy folk) and were instantly attracted by the good looks, reddish hair and pale golden skin of the other. They fell in love and Hinemairangi, who was from Hunua, eloped with Taimaiera to Hikurangi in the Waitakeres where his people lived. A war party was formed to fetch back Hinemairangi and this fierce band of angry warriors stormed across Tamaki. Taimaiera's people were determined to keep his young love with them and their most powerful tohungas ranged along the Waitakere mountain. They uttered their most powerful incantations to destroy the marauding party. So effective were the spells cast that not only were the invaders utterly destroyed but the earth rose in tremors giving birth to the volcanoes we know today.

Another tradition about Tamaki-makau-rau's volcanic landscape concerns another group of tohungas who were out at sea off the coast of Waitakere. They were all feeling pretty relaxed and jovial. One of them instigated a friendly volcano throwing competition. He picked one up and threw it a short way landing it in Waitakere. Another tohunga was pretty derisive of his effort and picked up another volcano and hefted it. This one fell at Owairaka (Mt Albert). In rapid succession more volcanoes were lobbed, each one falling in close proximity. Finally, one wily older tohunga picked up a volcano and with a huge effort threw it into space. It sailed through the air and over the sea landing at Rangitoto. He dusted off his hands, smiled at his comrades and sat down.

These two histories are geomorphologically correct. The details of the first one describe the movement of the earth's plates giving rise to volcanoes. The second one provides an accurate sequence for the development of Tamaki's volcanoes

# Our Streets

We would like to run this column as a regular feature. We want it to explore the origins of our street names, changes that have been made to them and any local family and community connections.

Many thanks to Colleen Chamberlain nee Pickens for sharing her family history.

**La Veta Avenue** was named after La Veta, Colorado, U.S.A. where Thomas and Anne Pickens lived before emigrating to New Zealand in the 1890's. Once here they went to Tutakaka where Anne died an hour after giving birth to her tenth child. A grief stricken Thomas brought most of the younger children down to live with him in Mt Albert in a large, return verandah villa he built near the Richardson Rd / Stoddard Road corner. He was an astute businessman having a small herd of milking cows, buying and selling houses and shops (including a block of brick shops still standing in Kingsland) and owning land in Mt Albert. He married his children's nanny, Matilda, and had four more children. His children Annie, John, Edie, Bella and Willie helped tend his herd of milking cows.

His two older sons, Joe and Tom, eventually moved down to Mt Albert from the north in 1922 and bought land off their father. They developed a 20 acre dairy farm, milk round and owned the scoria pit. In the mid 1940's they roaded the property creating La Veta Ave (named for the above reasons) which ran from Richardson Rd almost to the quarry at the top which was owned by the family. Sections were sold for 100 pounds for a 1/4 acre. Then they put in Mt Royal Ave which ran up from up La Veta to connect with another street. Around 1955 Pickens Crescent was completed near the top of La Veta. Joe and his family lived at 107 Owairaka Ave, Tom lived at 8 La Veta Ave. Joe was a well known labour councillor for the Mt Albert Borough Council for many years.

John Joseph Thomas Pickens (Jack) was Joe and Lily Pickens youngest child and grew up on the Mt Albert farm. Here are some of his son's recollections:

"Some of my earliest memories are of the farm at Mt Albert. I can remember the cows being milked by hand in the cowshed and then the milk being put through the hand separator. There were always cats and kittens waiting for a dish of milk still warm from cow and we children often squirted some straight into our mouths as well- no worries in those days about the dangers of unpasteurized milk. When the milking was finished we would go home for breakfast-usually porridge smothered in freshly separated milk which came home in a big preserving pan. Grandpa and dad would load the big milk cans on the truck and deliver to their customers who would come out with their billy cans to be filled. In later years when the milk run had become more 'modernised' ie milk in bottles delivered to the gate, it was always a school holiday treat to get up in the early hours of the morning and go with dad on the milk run..'

Many members of the Pickens family still live and work locally. The family is intrinsically associated with dairying and the sale of milk to the Mt Albert community.

## About this newsletter.

The writing of this newsletter quickly turned into a collaborative effort. Rich Afford offered the account of his home and Blair Wright took the photo. Then, following an art group meeting Colleen told me about her relative after whom Pickens Cres. is named. This is how it should be and already we have pulled together scarcely known local facts. Our community is already telling its stories in its many layers. Please feel free to inform, question, criticize, entertain, and correct by writing to M.A.H.S. at 100 Mt Albert Rd, Mt Albert. We would also love copies of old photos and local memorabilia. Carron can also be contacted by email at [Rumbaugh@xtra.co.nz](mailto:Rumbaugh@xtra.co.nz).

### References

- (1) Scott, D. 'In Old Mt Albert' Southern Cross Books 1961
- (2) Simmons, David 'Maori Auckland' The Bush Press, Auckland. 1987
- (3) Graham, George. Letter to the Editor, The Herald, 'History of Wairaka (Mt Albert) and that Chieftainess after whom Mt Albert (Owairaka) was named.' 21/3/31. Copy from D. Simmons.
- (4) Pickens Family 'Pickens Centenary 1893-1993' Private publication