



MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

Newsletter 4 • July 2007

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What a Beauty...



On Sunday February 18, forty-five of our members attended a visit to Rahiri House. This was formerly known as Caughey Mansion and is situated in the Hebron College grounds in McLean Street. We were delighted with the turnout and I suspect that for many of our members it was the first opportunity to finally pay a visit to the fairy tale mansion that they had seen as part of the landscape for many years. Like Alberton and Ferndale, to me it IS Mt Albert. As a child I often dreamed of what it would be like to live there (naturally as a princess in the turret.) Alas, it was not to be but when I finally got my chance to look it over 50 years later I have to say it was NOT a disappointment. As a longtime resident of Mt Albert, I am thankful that it is in the hands of Hebron College who are mindful of the treasure they hold.

On our arrival, Geoff Matthews, the Principal of Hebron College and our host for the day made us most welcome and gave an excellent potted history of the house both before and during Hebron's tenancy. Geoff also outlined the vision that the school has for the future internal restoration and use for Rahiri House. His talk was followed by one from Christine Caughey, whose forebears Andrew and Lucy Caughey built the house in 1888 and lived there until 1923 when they gifted it to the then newly formed Plunket Society.

We then looked at the house from top to bottom, marvelling at the ballroom ceiling and oohing and aahing over the turret room and its views (even today) and admiring the magnificent balustrading. Mr Matthew's family graciously put on an excellent afternoon tea for us which was much appreciated after all our climbing up and downstairs.

Finally, Hebron College say it best in the handout they gave to each M.A.H.S member who attended :

"From family to fairytale mansion, maternity hospital to playground sentinel Rahiri House has survived because generations have taken it to heart and loved it as their own. Preserving an innate sense of history while providing space for future generations celebrates an aspect of this house as a living breathing testament to New Zealand's rich past."

We were most grateful to Mr Matthews and Hebron College for making the visit possible and we look forward to the future development of Rahiri House.

Mary Inomata

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An afternoon at Oakfield Avenue.....



On Sunday the 25th of March thirty M.A.H.S members spent a very enjoyable afternoon visiting the beautiful historic garden of Lindsay and Brian Corban at 9 Oakfield Avenue.

The house is sited at the end of the cul-de-sac screened by magnificent trees that stand in the centre of a very elegant circular driveway. Brian and Lindsay made us very welcome with Brian entertaining us with the story of his gracious home which is considered by many to be the third most important in Mt Albert. In 1970 the Corbans purchased the badly rundown property. It had been divided into four flats with a range of colourful tenants. Gallons

of white paint were purchased and a family working bee was organised to make the house habitable. Brian and Lindsay must be congratulated on all their hard work. (It is not easy raising a young family while restoring a major part of the local history!). Wine and nibbles were served as we wandered around admiring the garden.

Jackie Wright

An Evening at Alberton with the Kerr Taylor Foundation...

Mary Inomata (M.A.H.S Secretary) and Peter Singh (Kerr Taylor Foundation) following the receipt of the \$2,199 grant on 28th April 2007.

This event was held at Alberton and was attended by several other recipients of grants from the Kerr Taylor Foundation. The Kerr Taylor family was especially pleased to be able to 'help' the Mt Albert Historical Society because of its important, local family history.



M.A.H.S Dates To Remember

22nd July (Sunday) 2pm **Visit to the Devonport Museum**, 33A Vauxhall Road, Devonport. Members will have the opportunity to listen to Rod Cornelius explain how they set up the venue in the 1970's and how it has become a specialist community museum. Members can then go exploring and look at the exhibits before it closes at 4.00pm. Light afternoon tea will be provided. Entry by donation. Enquiries to Rendell 846 7367.

19th August (Sunday) 2pm Alberton House. **Mt Albert Historical Society Inc Annual General Meeting**. AGM followed by guest speaker and afternoon tea.

15th – 30th September **Auckland Heritage Festival**. M.A.H.S. will hold a "**Seeking memories and Stories of Mt Albert**" display at the Mt Albert Library throughout the Festival featuring memorabilia and photographs of old Mt Albert and seeking contact with the public to share their own memories and stories of Mt Albert. Everyone's Mt Albert story is important to us. Contact Mary 846 4509 or Kathryn 846 5227.

22nd September (Saturday) at 10am and 1.30pm (wet or fine). M.A.H.S. together with the St Lukes Anglican church will also host a tour of the historic **St Lukes Anglican church cemetery** at 704 New North Rd, Mt Albert. Bookings are essential, numbers limited to 25 each tour. Free event. Contact Gillian 815 7139 for further details and to contribute any information about people buried in the cemetery.

11th November (Sunday) 9am – 4pm Alberton House. **Oral History Course with Mary Donald**. Members interested in becoming interviewers for our oral history programme are welcome to attend. Course is designed to cover all aspects of the interview process. No charge for members wishing to participate. Booking essential. Limited to 12 people. Contact Kathryn 846 5227.

Thanks To:

The Kerr Taylor Foundation for the generous grant of \$2,199 which will be used to purchase equipment.

Interested in becoming a member of M.A.H.S.? Membership Application forms are available from Kathryn 846 5227. All new members welcome!

We are looking for **new contributors** to this newsletter. Please phone Carron on 846 1313 or e-mail to Rumbaugh@xtra.co.nz. All contributions gratefully received, ecstatically received if e-mailed to above address or on a disc. (Saves typing!)

Historical Botox

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

Please note **M.A.H.S's new postal address** which is P.O.Box 77002, Mt Albert. This is to be used instead of Alberton's address.

Lisa Truttman's e-mail address is historian@avondale.org.nz. Of course, it is not preceded by www as indicated in the last newsletter.

Local Walk 4

Tracing the route of the railway ballast line from the top of Owairaka down to the Mt Albert railway station.

The railway ballast line was opened in 1878 to expedite the removal of rock from the mountain. After many years of public concern, the quarrying was finally stopped in 1928. In September 2006 I spent 3 hours with Alan Esler largely in general conversation about his career as a botanist and his time in Mt Albert (since 1970). (He gave me copies of the Mt Albert panorama and pointed out local landmarks which I scribbled onto my copy. The panorama was taken in 1911, according to Dick Scott, from the top of the mountain and the original is in the Alexander Turnbull library). Finally, we drove around following the ballast line from the top of the mountain down to Allendale Rd.

The walk starts at the top of the mountain which you will obviously need to climb first or you can park your car near the summit.

The mountain was quarried at the top where the archery range is today. This is not a natural land form but one created by the removal of countless tons of scoria. The mountain would have once reached a peak extending above the quarry edges we can see today. In the panorama one can see steep land forms (cliffs) at the top of the quarry. These have been levelled off subsequently, possibly at the same time the base was flattened out.

Walk down the right-of way.

At the boundary with the park there is a right-of-way which goes down to Toroa Rd. At the top of the path an old railway sleeper has been used as the final post. Following the new fence line along the edge of the park, one can see another old railway sleeper which was also used as a fence post. One can assume that in the past, the fence was constructed of these railway sleepers which were originally from the ballast line.

The railway ballast line went straight down Toroa Rd at quite a steep incline. There is a large house built on its site. Alan doesn't know the mechanism by which the scoria was transferred to the carts that ran along the railway line but suspects that there was some tipping motion involved. The railway line went off to the left, running along where the cul-de-sac is today. It ran into Sadgrove Tce but as there is no route through the houses we need to skirt around them.

Walk down Toroa Road to Mt Albert Road. Turn left and walk along turning into Summit Drive.

As you walk along you will see Sadgrove Tce on your left. This is where the ballast line ran.

Walk along Summit Drive turning right down Stilwell Road and right down Ferner Avenue.

The ballast line then ran through number 2 Ferner Ave and over the road through number 1a. These two sections are noticeably narrower than usual having been developed from railway land. (A cadastral / legal map clearly shows the smaller railway sections by which we can trace the ballast line route.)

Walk along Ferner Avenue turning left onto Mt Albert Road and turning left into Allendale Road.

The ballast line came down where 16a and 16b Allendale Rd are today. Allendale Rd at this point was raised to meet the height of the ballast line and one notices quite a sudden incline followed by a dip when driving. The line cuts through 15A, down what was a shortcut to the shops but is now infill housing.

The ballast line came out next to the end of the shops. One of Alan's friends bought the building where Mt Albert TV and Video is today. He was puzzled on purchasing it to have to negotiate with the Railways Dept. Of course, this land was owned by them.

The ballast line went over New North Rd to the Mt Albert Railway station.

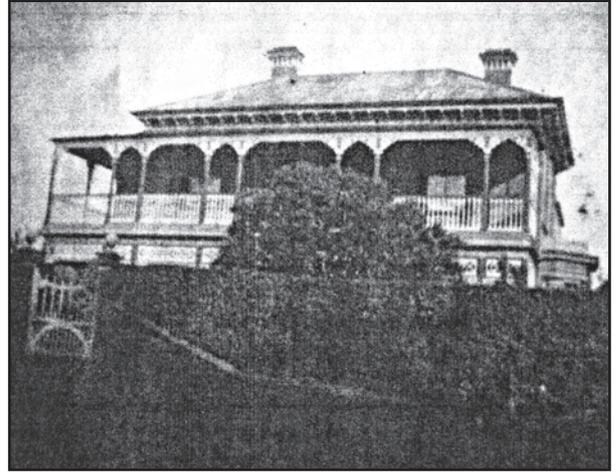
Retrace your steps to your car.

Carron Boswell

Our Streets

In this issue we have possibly the most thorough exploration of a street and its history so far. Selwyn Paine gave me some research he had done about his local streets and I was given a bundle of local maps and other official information from Wilma and Bruce Madgwick via Mary Inomata. This is a fascinating story of a highly energetic and successful pioneering family and the streets named for them, McLean Street, Duart Avenue and Douglas Avenue.

John Mor McLean was 'encouraged' by his local laird to leave the Isle of Rhum and emigrate to Nova Scotia (New Scotland). There the McLean family established a very large and successful ship building industry. John McLean was born in 1826 on the Cape Breton Island and in turn had a family there, one son Neil was born in 1854 and another Murdoch in 1855. The McLeans suffered a period of near famine and decided to join the Highlanders moving to New Zealand. However, as Presbyterians, the McLeans did not wish to join the Non-conformist settlement established in Waipu, North Auckland and so settled in Auckland.



Ainslie- The McLean family home. Poor quality due to photocopied source material

In 1887 Edward Allen sold a plot of land ' nine acres one rood and four perches' to George Oswald Metcalfe. This was DP 133 and part of Allotment 56 of the Parish of Titirangi. On the 3rd of November, 1893 the land was transferred to Isabella Welsh McLean, Murdoch's wife, as Metcalfe had defaulted on his mortgage. This parcel of land was opposite the end of McLean Rd today and ran along Allendale Road. The house was situated at what is today 58 Allendale Rd. The McLean family home was named 'Ainslie', after Lake Ainslie in Nova Scotia, and was a huge two story villa. Ainslie was an archetypal Victorian household consisting of a large house, ten children, servants and even a pet monkey.

The street opposite the house was named Murdoch Road in honour of the McLean patriarch. In 1937 it was described as two hundred yards long with one residence (Rahiri House ?) and one business premises. The name was changed to McLean Street in 1938 during the renaming programme to avoid confusion with Murdoch Rd in Grey Lynn.

John McLean and Sons was established and by 1909 was the largest firm of contractors in New Zealand. John McLean was a physically large man as were his two sons, Murdoch and Neil, who both had served apprenticeships as shipwrights.(1) A contemporary newspaper account describes the achievements of John McLean and Sons as 'being the railway bridge over the Buller River at Westport, the new wharves at Wellington (the firm has constructed the major part of the Wellington wharfage), the Wellington drainage tunnel, the Makarau Tunnel, ...the 50 mile railroad from Taupo to Putaruru , the electric tram works at Auckland, the excavating, levelling and concreting of Queen Street and many others.'

Murdoch left New Zealand on a fact finding mission to do with two new projects, the Arthurs Pass tunnel contract and the Otira Tunnel. He investigated exhaustively, touring Europe for six weeks before placing orders for equipment. At one point, Murdoch and three other New Zealanders accepted an invitation to visit a monastery. Their car broke down and the rest of the journey was finished on foot. ' At the 'hospice' at the summit the New Zealander and his three companions were hospitably received by the Abbot in charge, who afterwards lent them a horse and sleigh for the return journey. On the way down the sleigh was capsized and its occupants thrown out onto the snow. "Fortunately," says Mr McLean, " I was underneath, else the others might have got hurt."(2)

The family assembled its considerable resources to construct the Otira Tunnel in 1907. This was a stupendously difficult challenge and John McLean and Sons bid was for 599,794 pounds (in 1994 \$62.4 million). Neil said 'We hope to make money out of it, but we intend to put a hole through the hill.' Unfortunately, they were able to do neither because no one had 'any idea of the extent, variety or complexity of the physical and industrial difficulties that were to present themselves.' In August 1912 when the five year contract should have been completed, only two miles 440 yards of the five miles 528 yards total had been excavated. The Public Works Department eventually completed the project in 1923 by which time the cost had reached 1,144,860 pounds. (1)

Our Streets

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John McLean and Sons went on to carry out several other projects. Murdoch McLean was Mayor of Mount Albert between 1914 and 1917. His eldest son Glenn had died falling down a precipice at Otira in 1910, another son John fell at Gallipoli and Ronald at the Somme. (Fourteen members of the extended McLean family went to fight in the First World War and five did not return). Murdoch himself died of cancer in 1917, aged 62. 'The heart had been knocked out of the family and the company closed in 1919.' (1)

On 23rd July 1921 Isabella transferred joint ownership of the land to herself and Neil Clifford McLean, her son. In December of the same year they transferred part of lots 10 to 14 to His Majesty, the King, for a road. This was duly formed and named Duart Avenue after the ancestral home of the McLean clan in Scotland. Isabella and Neil then got to work and subdivided their estate making the first sale of lot 25 to Kathleen Florence Faulkner on 28th March 1922. Between then and 1940 about twenty five lots were sold. Isabella died in 1943 having survived Murdoch by twenty six years. Douglas Avenue was possibly named after Ronald Douglas, one of Murdoch's sons who was killed in the Somme.

Selwyn says 'I have lived in Duart Avenue continuously since 1953. Until it was demolished there was a large house near the rear of our section. I think it was probably the one in which Murdoch and his family lived. During my time it was also the home of a subsequent mayor of Mount Albert, Mr H. A. Anderson whose term was 1936 to 1959. At the back of our next door neighbours' section there used to be, until about two years ago, an old building (an outhouse of some description) which, I was told, originally belonged to the owners of the big house. I witnessed attempts by modern machinery to demolish it. So stubborn was its resistance that the workmen eventually gave up and left one wall standing and re-incorporated it in re-landscaping."

Carron Boswell

References

- 1) *Contractor magazine*. March 2001. Review of 'Pioneer Contractors- The Story of John McLean and Sons.'
John McLean author.
- 2) 'Men Worth Knowing' *Farmers Weekly and Land Agents Record*. Not dated. 1906/1907
- 3) *Sewlwyn Paine research and personal reflections*.
- 4) DP 15324

Other Up and Coming Events

June – July. MOTAT **Stepping Into The Sunshine**. A display of Victorian women's costumes worn by them as they moved out into the worlds of work and play. Some local costumes donated by the Winstone family i.e. a croquet dress and riding habit. Includes a fabulous dress worn for tennis and a complete nurses uniform. Displayed in the newly refurbished Cropper House (above the new café). Worth a visit!

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