



MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

Newsletter 11 • November/December 2009

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Our Place

All of the articles in this newsletter have been written by people who have had meaningful associations with Mt Albert. These contributions reflect the growing interest in our local history and the M.A.H.S says 'thank you' to the authors. Whilst we have entitled these articles with the old street names, it is worth noting that generally both street names and numbers have changed over the years.

Barbara Holt has written this first piece.

The Holts of Mt Albert Rd and Ranleigh Rd

In April 1925 my grandmother Eliza Helen Holt nee Squire [1860-1947] bought the house which still stands at No 20 Mt Albert Road known then as No 24. The land on which it was built was once owned by Frank Phillipps. John and his brother Frank signed a memorial as owners of property in Mt Albert in 1866 (see page 26 of Dick Scott's *In Old Mt Albert*).



Water colour painting of No 20 viewed from No 11 Ranleigh Rd, painted by Betty Holt [1909-1998], 1945.

My paternal grandmother Eliza Holt was a strong-minded woman born into a working-class family in Somerset England who worked her passage to New Zealand in 1891. She married a middle-class Englishman, Thomas F. Holt, in 1893 at Paihia. By 1908 she was a 48-year-old widow with five children living near Te Aroha. So they could receive higher education, she moved her family to Avondale in 1910

to a house she bought on the corner of Craddock St and Blockhouse Bay Rd. She had it moved over so that her 15 year old son Frank could build a smaller house on the same section which she let. From there she and her three unmarried children moved to 34 Walters Road which stood where an Eden Park grandstand is now. When she bought 20 Mt Albert Road it had the name Bergholt on its gate. A previous owner perhaps came from the place of that name in Suffolk England. The tall sloping roof of the house looks similar to some in paintings by John Constable [1776-1837] you can see on the Internet.



Eliza Holt

My father Laurence W. Holt [1898-1970] wrote from 34 Walters Road in 1925 to his older brother Frank D. Holt who was farming in the Waikato: 'Re our new property at Mt Albert. We expect to take possession tomorrow and may move out there. It is an old house of nine rooms, four of which are upstairs under the

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The Holts of Mt Albert Rd and Ranleigh Rd cont...

gable. It seems to be in pretty good order'. Laurence, an accountant, went on to say he and his older brother Horace thought instead of 'moving the house en bloc it might pay to get you to pull it down and build a bungalow on a cheaper section out of the best timber. It will need careful doing as the timber will be very brittle'. He asked Frank if it would be worth his while to do it and to build a 5-roomed place of modest design. Laurence added: 'Of course we may sell the thing for removal as it stands or it may pay us to pull it down carefully and sell it thus. Then again we may leave it there for a year or two as it is in fairly good order outside though old-fashioned'.

In May 1925, Laurence wrote to his mother Eliza and sister Dorothy who were on their way to England by ship and told them his brother Horace had bought the grass section at No 6. next to Bergholt in Ranleigh Road. Laurence suggested the family might build a new house on it and use the old house as a hostel for

boys attending Mt Albert Grammar School (established 1922) for a couple of years before having it pulled down. Surviving family records do not show whether the family did use the house as a hostel for a time. They reveal that early in 1926 my 65-year-old Eliza and 24-year-old Dorothy returned from England with capital Eliza was entitled to from the estate of her late husband's parents. Since 1908 when her husband died, she had received only dividends from it. It took her some months in England to persuade a Holt family executor to allow her to withdraw her share of the capital to invest it in New Zealand. The decision was then made by Eliza and her adult children to move the house at Bergholt nearer to Mt Albert Road and to build two new houses (Nos 13 and 11 Ranleigh Rd) beside it. Eliza gave her single sons Horace and Laurence mortgages on the new houses built which provided her with a secure income large enough to support herself and Dorothy.



Left: Eliza Helen Holt aged 76 in 1936.

Above: Front view of No. 20 Mt Albert Rd following its re-siting. With No.13 Ranleigh Rd beside it on left, taken 1930's.

The old house in its new position was re-blocked and the back portion of it fronting Ranleigh Road, consisting of a wash-house, toilet, bathroom, kitchen, sun-porch and back porch was entirely remodelled and re-roofed. Eliza lived here proudly until her death 21 years later in 1947. In 1936 my father arranged for quite a large Norfolk pine which stood on the section to be cut down, the house in its new position probably being too close to it. One of my older cousins recalls the strong smell in the wash-house of the home-brew our grandmother made and drank every day for the good of her health.

After my father married in 1933, he lived at No 13 Ranleigh Rd with my mother Betty and my sister Elizabeth [1934-2009]. However, I spent my first

30 months in my grandmother's home because her daughter Dorothy [1902-1994] married in 1936 and my father thought 75-year-old Eliza should not live alone at No 20. My mother eventually agreed to move into No 20 quite reluctantly as it meant lifting new fitted carpets and taking down new curtains at No 13. My parents' double bed was pulled up by ropes into an upstairs bedroom after a window was removed. A feature of the house Betty came to prefer was the wash-house being on the same level as the kitchen. It meant I could follow her by crawling between the two rooms. I recall being fascinated by the different coloured panes of stained glass in the windows at the end of the verandah.

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M.A.H.S wishes you all a happy festive season and wonderful New Year!

M.A.H.S Dates To Remember

11th December (Friday) 5pm. Christmas Cocktail Party. Alberton House. Entertainment by Bruce Paine, well known local guitarist. Also carol singing, raffles, bubbly and light supper.
\$10 per person payable on entry. MAHS members only.

The Senior Citizens Club Rooms, Rocket Park, Mt Albert have proved to be a successful venue and M.A.H.S has booked them again for events in 2010. Please circle the following dates on your calendar: Saturday 13th March, 8th May, 10th July, 28th August, 16th October.

13th March (Saturday) 2pm. The Senior Citizens Club Rooms. **'The Two Sarahs'**. Sarah Constance Ward nee Jackson is giving a talk about the life and times of Sarah Elizabeth Jackson. Sarah Elizabeth was one of the first woman Justices of the Peace, was closely associated with the National Council of Women and was a long serving Matron at the Industrial School in Mt Albert. Sarah Constance will also display her embroidered works of art, some inspired by her forbear. Gold coin donation. Tea, coffee and light refreshments. Everyone welcome.

8th May (Saturday) 2pm The Senior Citizens Club Rooms TBA

10th July (Saturday) 2pm. The Senior Citizens Club Rooms. 'Show and Tell' Bring along your memories of Mt Albert and local artefacts.

28th August (Saturday) 2pm. The Senior Citizens Club Rooms. AGM and invited guest speaker. TBA.

Acknowledgements

MAHS thanks Auckland City Council and the Eden/Albert Community Board for funding this edition of our newsletter.

Guy Marks from St John's Ambulance has donated a pair of wooden splints which are stencilled with 'M A Homeguard.' They are in fairly pristine condition so clearly did not see much 'active duty!' We believe they are quite rare.

A group of Marie Neverman's friends recently assembled on top of Mt Albert to celebrate the installation of a wooden seat in her memory. MAHS also acknowledges receipt of a financial bequest from her estate.

A well has been discovered at 26 Mt Albert Rd. Patrick Lee, the owner, is planning not to fill it in but to have it lit inside and covered with a permanently fixed glass lid. The Alberton well has been similarly treated and is 12 metres deep. Please tell us as wells are discovered.....

The Gate Escape

Recent visitors to the Alice Wylie Reserve will have noticed the absence of the gates. These gates were possibly the original gates into the Cottingham Willis estate i.e. prior to the Industrial School and School House. We loved them! (See MAHS newsletter 7). However, their decrepit state had been noted....Then even more recently, we were amazed to see that the original gates had been replaced with a reasonable copy. Thankfully, the design of the original gates has almost been replicated (with the addition of the woodworkers plaque). However, we note that 'heritage value' is mostly in the provenance of an artefact. Replacing one of our taonga with a copy is like a forger imitating a painting!

As well as items from our built environment, we are concerned about protecting areas of natural history. For this reason, we have asked Auckland City Council to uncover the quite spectacular lava flow in the same reserve. This flow has been injudiciously covered with earth and planting.

Please help MAHS compile a list of local treasures worthy of protection.

MAHS wants to start an inventory of things we value. Please send us your ideas. carronboswell@hotmail.com

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Above: Two Deputies and a Fake Mayor. Rich Afford models the authentic Mt Albert mayoral robes borrowed for the occasion of the 'Show and Tell' on May 9th, 2009. Alongside him are two former Deputy Mayors of Mt Albert, Alice Wylie and Arnold Turner. The robes were made by Margaret Enshaw, whose daughter said 'she was not a sewer,' and a 'Mrs McKenzie.'



Real gate



Fake gate

**Are we overreacting?
(See page 3)**

**Please send us
your thoughts!**



Left: Alice Wylie with guest speaker, Lucy Lawless, at the A.G.M. on August 22nd, 2009. We had a marvellous (and unsurprising!) turnout of sixty M.A.H.S members and even a few members of the public. Lucy's attendance was mentioned in the October issue of Next magazine

The Turners of Selwyn Road

Arnold and Marjorie Turner supplied us with these outstanding two photographs. The text was kindly supplied by Arnold in an e-mail. I have cut and pasted it and tried to preserve its authenticity.

'The house is the one which was situated on Selwyn Road (now Selcourt Road). I think it was in a position a little beyond where the Recreation Centre building is now. It was the home of my grand-parents Edward and Maude Turner from 1909 until at least 1918. Edward died on 18 June 1918 and eventually Maude moved to 11 Allendale Road - but I don't know just when.'

'Did my grandfather build the house? I doubt it. It went with several acres and as he had been a nurseryman in England - and had planted fruit trees at Huia - he probably took over an established small orchard with the house.' 'Edward was one of the original Borough Councillors in 1911 - he is in the photo of the first council. I don't know how many terms he served.'

'In the 1950s the house was occupied by the Nicholls family. Marjorie says that the children were a little older than ours. The property was not owned by the Council during my term on the Council - up to 1962. It was probably acquired by the Council during one of Frank Turner's later terms as mayor, and I presume that the house was then demolished.'

'This is the wedding photo of Edward and Maude's eldest son, Ebenezer Constable Turner and Margaret Maud Woodward, with the wedding party standing on



*Home of Edward and Maude Turner,
Selwyn Terrace, Mt Albert*

the front steps of the Selwyn Road house. The date was 11 October 1913. I don't know whether Margaret Maud was one of the Mt Albert Woodward family.'

'To add a little to the history of the overall 'community centre' site as it now exists. In the early 1950s there was a house on the site of the Rocket playground, and 1 or 2 other houses on the Wairere Ave frontage which the Council acquired during that decade. The then Council acquired (front and rear?) properties further along Wairere Ave - where the far driveway and parking area now are - and established the borough depot on the rear part of that site (now part/ all of the far parking area.'



*Wedding party of Ebenezer Turner and Margaret Woodward
at the Turner family home in Selwyn Terrace.*

The Smerdons of Mt Albert Rd.

Rhoda Price nee Smerdon writes

‘Our 21 Mt Albert Rd house is still there but hardly recognisable because of alterations and additions. Also the numbering has changed so it is now 14a Allendale Road.’

‘In 1920 after returning home from World War One , Stanley Smerdon had this house built at 21 Mt Albert Rd. It remained in his possession until approximately the early sixties. At the time of his retirement he was headmaster of Owairaka School. As his daughter, I called that address home for twenty two years and always felt proud to have my roots in Mt Albert. I remember it fondly as a lovely suburb with easy access to the city by rail or tramcar. The cost of tram travel into Auckland city was tuppence halfpenny for children and five pence for adults.’

‘I attended Gladstone Primary School because at the time it was the nearest. It had its own swimming pool – a rarity for those years.’ Rhoda was born in 1920 and was only a few months old when the family moved from Dominion Rd into the new house in Mt Albert Rd. Her mother was Rowena Smerdon nee Howden.



Stanley Vivian Smerdon at Trentham Military Camp preparing to leave for overseas near the end of the first World War where he served mainly in the army of occupation in Germany



The Smerdon's home at 21 Mt Albert Rd

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The Hols of Mt Albert Rd and Ranleigh Rd cont...

After my aunt Dorothy Shearsby's marriage failed in 1937 she returned to live at No 20 Mt Albert Rd, looking after her mother Eliza in her house and garden there for the next 20 years. Eliza's Will said Dorothy could live there for five years after her death before it had to be sold and the proceeds shared between Eliza's five children. In February 1946, my father arranged for a valuation of No 20 to be done, probably to decide what maintenance work might be needed on it. The valuer wrote the house was in an 'exceptionally good state of preservation throughout & has been well-maintained'. He estimated the 'solid heart of Kauri house' was then 'about 50 years old' which would mean it was built in about 1896. I think he may have under-estimated its age considerably to increase its valuation.

I recently made an effort to find out when my grandmother's home was built (on part of Lot 30 of Sub-lot 40) by doing research in the Auckland City Archives (under Auckland Public Library), in the Electoral Rolls at APL and at Land Information NZ's office in Wakefield St with advice from researcher Lisa Truttman. I found out that Allan Kerr Taylor sold parts of Sub-lot 40 known as Albert Park to the Phillips brothers jointly in 1865. Rates books for 1867-68 show John Phillips paid rates on Lots 25, 26 & 27 of Sub-Lot 40 'with a house' - total estimated value £375 and Frank Phillips on Lots 30, 31 and 32, Sub-lot 40 'and a home', total estimated value £400. By 1871 Frank seems to have sold his remaining interests in Mt Albert land to his brother John and left the district. I think it is possible he had my grandmother's house built but my research so far suggests otherwise. Between 1874 - 1884 the estimated value of Lots 25, 26, 27 and 30 owned by John Phillips went from £500 to £552. The 1887-89 Rates Books show the owner of Lots 27 and 30 was a Robert Farrell and their estimated value was £600 which suggests he may have built my grandmother's house about then. The 1890 Electoral Roll of West Auckland shows a Robert Farrell was an Anglesea St builder. Mr Thomas Finlay a commercial traveller bought the house in October 1903 and sold it 22 years later to my grandmother.

In June 1939 my father moved his family from No 20 to No 11 Ranleigh Rd (sold to him by his brother Horace) when my mother Betty was pregnant with their third child James [1939 - 1983]. Also in 1939 my father sold No 13 Ranleigh Road to the Misses Isabella Bald Lochore and her sister Margaret Wright Lochore. About that time, I enjoyed attending a very small kindergarten at No 18 Mt Albert Road when its owner was a Mrs Kennedy. Between 1941 and 1946 I was a pupil at Owairaka School, my headmasters being Mr Floyd who corrected me once in his office for not calling him 'Sir' when I was aged about 6 and then Mr Smerdon whom I liked better.

About then, English-born Dr Geoffrey Blake-Palmer [1909-1980] who was I believe head of the Avondale Mental Hospital lived at No 18 Mt Albert Road with his wife and two sons. A website says about him: 'His great contribution to NZ literature was to cancel the lobotomy operation scheduled for Janet Frame'. My parents' fourth child William [1947 - 1982], who was my grandmother's 14th and last grandchild, was introduced to her 2 months before she died at age 86. Dorothy then took in boarders at No 20 Mt Albert Rd for several years before it was sold to a family from England in 1951. We continued to live at No 11 Ranleigh Road until December 1953 before moving to Browns Bay on the North Shore where my father had bought land in 1942. My mother used to say we should have retained ownership of No 20 Mt Albert Road as such older homes became very fashionable to live in during the 1950's not long after we sold it.

Barbara Holt.

Our Streets

*Why are the street names on the old Shawville Estate so confounding? Recently a Herald article perpetuated the myth that they were called after Elihu Shaw's children and our own newsletter has been slightly misleading as the mystery unravels. (MAHS newsletters 7 and 9) Finally, the end of the conundrum may be in sight! Marjorie Prictor has contributed the Shaw family tree which shows the origins of **Ethel** and **Leslie Streets**.*

According to Marjorie the Shaw family tree goes like this:

Elihu Shaw's eldest son was John Shaw. John married Amelia Lawrence in 1859.

Their eldest daughter (and Elihu's grand daughter) was born in 1860 and named Jane Amelia.

As an eighteen year old, Jane Amelia married John Capes in 1878. The couple had three children (Elihu's great grand children). Ethel Capes was born in 1890, Vincent Capes was born in 1894 and Leslie Arthur Capes was born in 1896. (Leslie is the one who married Jane Appleton). So, we are now confident that Ethel and Leslie Streets were named after Elihu's great grand children.

There are two living children from the Capes family, one boy and a girl. (1)

Also, Ailsa Gerbic has submitted a short piece about the Britishness of Mt Albert street names.

Ailsa points out the preponderance of names from Britain's past that can be found in Mt Albert. She lists the names that relate to royalty: Mt Albert Rd, Mt Royal Ave, George St and Charles St. Reimers Ave used to be called Queen St but the name was changed in 1906. (However, we still have Kingsland). Alexis Ave used to be Alexandra Ave but the name was changed in 1938. Royal castles are remembered in Sandringham Rd, Balmoral Rd and Windsor Rd (in Blockhouse Bay).

Other names relate to British Prime Ministers. These are: Gladstone Rd, Chatham Ave, Asquith Ave, and Baldwin Ave.

Names deriving from British locations are: Westminster Rd, Cornwallis St, Cardigan St, Newcastle Tce, Truro Rd, Rossmay Tce, Malvern Rd, Exeter Rd, Warwick St, Bournemouth Ave, Highland Rd, Hampstead Rd and Euston Rd. (2)

And, just a reminder to young folk who may, like Ailsa's grandchild, think that Mt Albert was named after Albert Einstein! 'Our' Albert was, in fact, a German prince. Almost from birth his family conspired to marry him off to Princess Victoria of England. (The two were cousins, his father being the brother of Victoria's mother.) They met once as teenagers and she was unimpressed. As queen she 'interviewed' other German, Dutch and Russian princes before Albert was invited back. The PBS website says 'Victoria knew she was rather plain, with her chief and perhaps only asset her position as queen of the mightiest empire on the globe. In her diary she wrote "It was with some emotion that I beheld Albert – who is beautiful." They were married on February 10th, 1840. (3) It appears that our volcanic cone was renamed Mt Albert in the early 1840s. Can anyone give us more precise information?

References:

- 1) *Email to Mary Inomata from Marjorie Prictor.*
- 2) *Hand written letter from Ailsa Gerbic.*
- 3) *PBS website www.pbs.org/empires/victoria/empire/albert.html*