



# MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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## “Memory’s Harvest”

### Mount Albert School Reunion Celebrations 10<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> November, 1938



*Our Old School: Mount Albert School, opened 10<sup>th</sup> January, 1870*

In November 1938 Mount Albert School held a reunion, 68 years after it opened in January 1870. The Reunion marked an ending and a beginning. The school had outgrown its site, and by 1940 was relocated to 7½ acres on its present site in Sainsbury Rd.

Executive Chairman of the Reunion Committee Albert G Taylor alluded to this in his words to his ‘school mates and friends’ in the Jubilee magazine: “After 68 years we again renew associations. The march of time has brought many changes. From the old order to the present age there has been an evolution of speed and science. However, looking back at the same period our old school spirit has remained the same, unchanged by the trials and difficulties that have confronted us from time to time. Let that spirit still continue into the new School which will soon displace our dear old one.”

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1870, Alexander French, MA (Glasgow) was appointed master of Mount Albert School,

established as a result of the Common Schools Act, which removed education from church responsibility.<sup>1</sup> The new master had a guaranteed salary of £50 a year and was “equipped with ink, sheet lessons, blackboard, broom, prop, a drinking dipper and one pail, eight forms and two double desks.” In a payment-by-results scale of fees, each child was charged sixpence per week until he or she learnt to read when the fee was increased to a shilling. There was a family concession: three children from a family paid 2/6, and four paid 3/-.<sup>2</sup>

The first school in Mount Albert, Cabbage Tree Swamp School, was in a Methodist chapel in Whau Rd, where since 1862, Presbyterian parson Alexander French had been teaching those children whose parents could afford to pay school fees or who could spare them from work.<sup>3</sup>

In January 1870, Mt Albert School opened in that same Chapel, and had moved into its new premises on School Rd, now Western Springs Rd,

near its junction with New North Rd, by the end of that year. Mr John McElwain donated the acre of farm land on which the school was built. The provincial Board of Education granted £100, and private donations of £23/5/- allowed a school room 30 feet by 20 feet to be built.

The roll grew rapidly, and in 1875 the building was extended 20 feet, a double chimney was installed, and the pupils held concerts to raise funds for winter fuel. In 1880 the first building was removed and replaced with a two-roomed wooden building.

The school roll continued to grow and the building underwent further remodelling, but the request to rebuild was denied. The Auckland Board of Education owned another site on the corner of Kitenui and Alexis Avenues (then Mountain Road and Alexandria Avenue) and wanted to build there. That plan was not realised, and in 1940 Mount Albert School moved to its present site in Sainsbury Road, on land known then as Wilson’s Quarry.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See MAHS Newsletter, September 2011.

<sup>2,3</sup> Scott D (1983). In Old Mount Albert.

<sup>4</sup> Dunsford D. (2016) Mt Albert Then and Now.

## The reunion celebrations 1938

**Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> November:** The reunion began in the especially illuminated school grounds, with speeches, the ringing of the bell, the assembling of each decade in different classrooms, and a cup of tea provided by the Entertainment Committee.



*Minnie Seabrook (nee McElwain) ringing the bell*

**Friday 11<sup>th</sup> November:** The principal and staff organised the Children's Day from 1.30pm at Fowlds Park, where the present pupils were the guests of the old scholars.

**Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> November:** The reunion in the school grounds began at 2pm with short addresses, the ringing of the bell, calling of the roll, and music by the Balmoral Boys' Band. A cup of tea was provided for sixpence. Mr Andrew Brown, as Chairman of the Entertainment Committee, was responsible for the Grand Banquet held in the evening in the Reception Hall of the Farmers' Trading Company, described in some detail in The New Zealand Herald on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> November.

The birthday cake, donated by ex-pupils the Newdick Brothers, was designed in the shape of a book with pages of the school's history and had 68 steps, each representing one year of service. The oldest lady ex-scholar present, Mrs Francis Gribbin, cut the cake and then an hour and a half of 'Mirth and Melody' ensued, followed by dancing until 11.30pm.

**Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> November:** A Divine Service and Thanksgiving took place in the school grounds from 2.30pm. Reverends SJ Werren and J Olphert presided. The singing was led by the Present Pupils Choir, and the Balmoral Boys' Band again provided the music. The service concluded with the Placing of a Wreath of Remembrance on the Soldiers' Roll of Honour by Lieut. RH Page.



*The Reunion Executive*

A.L. Ellisdon, G.F. Ellisdon, A.R. Watson, A. Brown\*, T. Broadbent, C. Opie  
R.C. Barnaby, F.C. McGehan, A.T. Dow, A.G. Taylor, W.W. Smith, R.G. Parr

\*Father of Harvey Brown and Dorothy Hyndman, who gave us these materials.

## A HAPPY REUNION

MOUNT ALBERT SCHOOL

PAST PUPILS FOREGATHER

BANQUET AND SOCIAL EVENING

Ex-pupils from all parts of Auckland and surrounding districts completely filled the Reception Hall at the Farmers' Trading Company on Saturday night, when a banquet and social evening to celebrate the Mount Albert School reunion, 1870-1938, was held. It was an evening of many happy reunions and many groups of friends who had not met for some years shared reminiscences of school days. The birthday cake, which had been donated by ex-pupils, was designed as a book representing pages of the school's history, and had 68 steps, each representing one year of service. The oldest lady ex-scholar present, Mrs. Francis Gribbin, cut the cake.

After the banquet and honouring of toasts, a delightful programme was presented, comprising songs by Miss Marjorie Stewart, Miss Phyllis Gribbin, Mr. A. T. Dow and Mr. S. Duncan, 'cello solo by Mr. E. Laird, piano-logue by Mr. C. E. Howley, humorous items by Mr. Alan McElwain and Mr. Cyril Walker, a sketch by Mr. and Mrs. C. F. Burnett, and a chalk talk by Mr. Carter B. Storr. Mr. S. Jackson was the accompanist.

### The Official Party

The official guests and members of the executive committee present included:—The Minister of Education, the Hon. P. Fraser, and Mrs. Fraser, who wore a frock of ivory crepe, patterned in black and red; the Mayor of Mount Albert, Mr. H. A. Anderson, and Mrs. Anderson, who wore midnight blue velvet; the chairman of the Education Board, Mr. W. J. Campbell, and Mrs. Campbell, who wore black tinsel-striped crepe; the chairman of the executive committee, Mr. A. G. Taylor, and Mrs. Taylor, who wore black ring velvet; Mr. W. Smith, and Mrs. Smith, in navy blue georgette; Mr. A. T. Dow, and Mrs. Dow, in black chiffon; Mr. F. McGehan, and Mrs. McGehan, in ruby red crepe; Mr. A. Brown, and Mrs. Brown, in rose pink embossed crepe; Mr. G. F. Ellisdon, and Mrs. Ellisdon, in black brocade satin; Mr. A. R. Watson, and Mrs. Watson, in eau de nil crepe; Mr. A. L. Ellisdon and Mrs. Ellisdon, in black and gold crepe; Mr. C. Opie, and Mrs. Opie, in turquoise blue satin; Mr. J. Fawcett, and Mrs. Fawcett, in jade green satin; Mr. D. Sumner, and Mrs. Sumner, in cherry lace; Mr. R. G. Parr, Mr. R. C. Barnaby, Mr. J. Stanton, Mr. S. Leatham, Mr. L. E. Rhodes, Mr. M. J. Coyle, Mr. G. W. Slane, Mr. T. C. Schnackenberg and Mr. H. Duncan.

*The Grand Banquet as written up in  
The New Zealand Herald,  
14 November 1938*

*Mount Albert School Reunion of  
Past Scholars, Teachers, and Committees,  
"Memory's Harvest", Reunion Celebrations  
10<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> November 1938, Jubilee Magazine.  
We thank Harvey Brown and his sister  
Dorothy Hyndman, for these materials.*

## M.A.H.S Dates To Remember

**Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> May**, 2pm at Ferndale House, we will be running Session 2 of 'Exploring the history of your house'. Well known historical researcher Lisa Truttman will talk on **Deeds, Indexes, and Cadestral Maps**. Lisa is always an amusing and informative speaker.

**Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> June**, 2pm at Ferndale House, we will be running Session 3, **Information held at Auckland Council Archives and how to access it**, presented by James Armstrong and Keith Stuart, Senior Archivists.

*Please let us know if you will be attending either or both of these sessions.*

**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> July**, 2pm at Belmont House, 29 Stilwell Rd, Mt Albert, we will have our mid-winter Christmas party. *Please register for catering purposes.*

**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> August**, 2pm at Ferndale House, we will have our Annual General Meeting.

**Request:** Judith Goldie, who has given sterling service as MAHS Treasurer, is stepping down at the AGM. We are looking for a member to take up this role and would love to hear from you.

To register for any of these events/requests, please:

Email: [info@mtalberthistoricalsociety.org.nz](mailto:info@mtalberthistoricalsociety.org.nz); or Phone Mary 846 4509.

### School committee members

The committee called together in 1869 to discuss the establishing of a Common School included names well known in Mt Albert: R.D. James, A. Kerr-Taylor, E. Allen Senior, J.T. Garlick, W. Boon, J. Walters and J. McElwain.

#### J. McElwain

Donor of the 1870 school site, he came to New Zealand from Ireland in 1847 and bought some 100 acres of land at Kingsland, from where he supplied the troops situated in the Albert Park barracks with produce. His five children all attended Mount Albert School. He died in 1916, at the age of 95.



*J. McElwain & F.J.H. Ellisdon*

#### F.J.H. Ellisdon

Chairman of the School Committee 1901–1919, and held other roles in the community: Mt Albert Road Board, Mt Albert Borough Council (Deputy Mayor), Auckland Justice of the Peace Association, Auckland Hospital Board. He was generous with his time and money in the interests of the scholars of the school. His children attended the school, and two of them greatly assisted in the work of the reunion.



#### The Page family

Three generations of Pages: James was elected Secretary in 1876. He prepared the plans and specifications for the additions to the school in 1899. His son Charles became a member of the committee and was Honorary Treasurer for over 20 years. Charles's son Ernest was elected to the committee in 1923 and filled the roles of Acting Chairman, Secretary, and Treasurer for 13 years. He also represented the school on the Kowhai Junior Intermediate School Committee for eight years. Mount Albert School saw a total of 62 years of service from this family.



*James Page, his son Charles Page, and grandson Ernest Page*

## Headmasters

**A. French**, the first Headmaster, served from 1870 until his retirement in 1886. During these 16 years the school made real progress. Mr French worked harmoniously with the school committees and was highly respected by them. Before they did their teacher training, his daughters Jessie and Agnes were assistant junior teachers at the school.

**G.W. Slane**, Headmaster at the time of the reunion. Educated at Devonport Primary School, Auckland Grammar, Tauranga District High School, and the Auckland University College. He had a keen interest in sport, and was twice captain of the Tauranga Rugby Representatives. He played A Grade Tennis and senior hockey.

Other Headmasters: **R. Cronin, N. Heath, R.C. Whitham, J.R. Whitaker, J.B. Ramsey, and E.F. Snell**

Highly respected and loved teachers in those 68 years include: **Miss Newbold, Miss Astley, the Misses French, and Miss de Montalk**. These teachers and the French family will be profiled in later newsletters. Memories or family stories about them and other significant teachers would be welcomed.

## Noted scholars

**Mr Raymond Ferner** attended 1902–1906. After further education at Auckland Grammar and Auckland University College, and war service, Mr Ferner returned to Mt Albert. He became a Councillor in 1931 and Mayor in 1933. He also served on the Auckland Transport Board, the Auckland and Suburban Drainage Board, and the Municipal Association of New Zealand. In 1936 he was appointed to the Magisterial Bench, requiring him to relinquish all other community roles.

**Mr Bert Taylor** began his education at the school in 1904. He went on to Auckland Grammar and then Auckland University College. At the age of 19 he enlisted, and at the conclusion of the war was granted a Soldiers' Rhodes Scholarship to study at Oxford, where he gained a BA and an MA with honours. He gained a lectureship at Leeds University for one year, followed by a year at Durham University. At the age of 29 he gained a Professorship in English at Hobart University, Tasmania, and was there at the time of the reunion in 1938.

**Mr Wilfred Kehoe** played a brave and conspicuous role in the gallant rescue of the officers and crew of the S.S. Wiltshire, which was shipwrecked 31<sup>st</sup> May 1922 at Rosalie Bay, Great Barrier Island. Heavy seas pounding the cliffs made it impossible to get a line to the shore. Eventually, a hatch came adrift and seaman Kehoe made a heroic descent of the cliffs and swam out to the line, which he safely brought ashore enabling all hands to be saved. The Wiltshire's crew believed that seaman Kehoe deserved the VC, and were convinced that he alone made possible their relief, not forgetting the gallant work done by the other members of the rescue party.



*A. French & G.W. Slane*



*Raymond Ferner*

**The McGehan family** had lived in the district for 71 years at the time of the reunion. Owen McGehan's children were among the first pupils of the school in 1870. Thomas McGehan began in 1873 and had four sons and one daughter who were pupils. Fred McGehan began his schooling in 1903, and in 1928 was elected to the School Committee. He was instrumental in establishing the Dental Clinic. Mervyn McGehan was at Mt Albert Grammar in 1938, and June McGehan, Owen's youngest grandchild, was the last of the family to be educated at Mount Albert School. Through 68 years, his two sons, two daughters, five grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren all received their education there.



*Bert Taylor & Wilfred Kehoe*



*Mervyn  
&  
June  
McGehan*