



MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

Issue 43 • July 2018

PO BOX 77-002 MT ALBERT AUCKLAND 1350 • PH: 09 846 4509 • WWW.MTALBERTHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG.NZ

Jeanette and Keith Amies Memories of a Marriage

Jeanette Amies was a much-loved and respected member of the Mt Albert community. Her death on 16th December 2017 was a huge loss to Keith and their family and to her many friends in Mt Albert. Jeanette's work as a Wren in the team associated with the code-breakers of Bletchley Park during the Second World War has been documented in Mt Albert Inc. but friends felt there was more about Jeanette and her many years in Mt Albert that needed recording.

Keith Amies had served as a navigator in the air force in World War Two and was part of transport command flying between Britain and Calcutta before he was able to get back to New Zealand in 1946. The excitement of flying remained with him and the bank job he resumed on his return was no longer satisfying. In the same year, therefore, he returned to London to get a first-class Navigator's licence.

Keith found accommodation in a boarding house where the 21 year-old Jeanette was living. He met her at a dinner party in the house and was smitten. Her vivacity and charm captivated him and, in spite of her having a boyfriend at the time, he pursued his dream over the next months.

By Christmas 1947 Keith had his Navigator's licence and had found a job in Prestwick in Scotland. On his one flight a week to London he made sure he caught up with Jeanette. After a year in Scotland, a new job with Australian National Airlines (ANA), navigating DC4s for Ceylon Airlines on overseas routes, meant that Keith was in London only every six weeks to see Jeanette. Their courtship, carried on largely by letter, resulted in an engagement and, "after visiting 20-odd jewellers", the purchase of an engagement ring, a diamond, and emeralds, for which Jeanette kept the receipt all 68 years of their marriage.

The pair had no forward plan and it was not possible for Jeanette to emigrate as a war bride. She could, however, register as a migrant to Australia and, less than a year after registering at Australia House in London, received a telegram informing her that she could leave for Australia the following Tuesday. Jeanette hastily visited her Mother, who said, "Go if you want", so she was off on the next phase of her life.

At the time, Keith was living with a Melbourne family who organised the church wedding, complete with bridal gown and reception on 4th March 1950. In that same month Ceylon Airways cancelled their contract with ANA so



Keith & Jeanette Amies on their wedding day, 1950

Keith was faced with a new job with Qantas. This meant a move to Sydney and flights away from home, sometimes for up to 15 days at a time. They found accommodation in a residential hotel and were living there when their first child, Paul, was born on 12th December of the same year.

In September 1952 their next move was to Switzerland, with a job for Keith at Swissair. The apartment they rented in Zürich was not only spacious and well-appointed but in a complex where other Swissair families were living. Jeanette quickly made contact with them, which was important, as Keith was flying between Switzerland and New York and was away several days a week. On 18th July 1954, Mark, their second boy was born. Keith admits quite freely that Jeanette brought up the boys almost singlehandedly, with his work taking him away so much of the time.

Always ready to fit into a new environment, Jeanette went to night school to learn German and she and the boys picked up *Schwyzertütsch*, the local German dialect.

MT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

Jeanette became close friends with three German families and was able to use the familiar 'Du' term of address with them. This is something that rarely happened even between neighbours of 50 years or more, and says volumes about Jeanette and her vivacious personality that captivated Keith and subsequently her many friends in New Zealand.

From September 1961 to March 1962, Keith was sent to Japan and the family went with him. They were living in a large Japanese hotel and, when nearby university students heard that there were English speakers there, they quickly made friends. Thus began Jeanette's interest in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). She became totally enthralled by *ikebana* flower arranging and, through the Professor of a class she attended, made many Japanese friends. An American in the class translated for her.

Back in Switzerland Keith could see that his role as a navigator was going to undergo change. A visit home to New Zealand to see his parents included meeting up with contacts at Tasman Empire Airways Limited (TEAL), and the next thing Keith knew, they were asking him to "come as soon as you can". In 1964 the family were off again, this time to their permanent home in New Zealand, and Jeanette was up for the challenge.

From Keith's parents' home in Mt Eden, Jeanette went house-hunting and fell in love with the home they then bought in Kerr-Taylor Avenue. Paul attended Mount Albert Grammar School and Mark attended Wesley Intermediate School, where he was Head Boy in his last year.

Keith was first employed to write the TEAL Navigation Manual because of his wide knowledge and experience, and this meant that he was home for long periods of time. Eventually however, he was off to work at Whenuapai, and finally at Mangere, as Air New Zealand came into being and the company expanded.

From 1965 Jeanette found work in her new home. In 1968 she had a job she loved, at Kodak, where her interest in photography was firmly established.

She was very aware of her interrupted early education, as her peripatetic life with her Mother after her parents' separation had meant that she attended four primary schools and was forced to cut her secondary education short when war began. Jeanette was, therefore, determined to gain qualifications. In 1966 she joined the English Speaking Union, and was on the committee 1984–1991. She studied for her School Certificate at night school and passed that in 1980. In 1989 she gained a University Entrance qualification in English Literature, and she followed that with a Teacher's Certificate through Unitec, where she then taught ESOL classes.

Jeanette worked at Studio One after Kodak, was part-time Assistant Curator at Alberton House from 1982–85, then was back at Studio One before returning to Alberton House in 1988. She retired in October 1991.

The spiritual side of Jeanette's life was also important. She was confirmed at St Luke's Anglican Church but eventually found her home at the Mt Albert Baptist Church where she was a Deaconess and a chorister from 1978.



Jeanette in full swing

In 1970 in Auckland Jeanette joined the Order of St John's. She was commissioned as an officer in 1973, upgraded in 1975, and in 1978 passed First Aid / Air Attendance.

Jeanette's wide-ranging interests saw her gain membership of the Grand Opera Society, the Victoria League, the Organisation of Women's Naval Services, and Mt Albert Probus Club, where she served a term as President and performed in Christmas pantomimes over many years. She was on the Board of the Kerr-Taylor Trust and was a life member of the Historic Places Trust. Her vivacity, warmth, charm, grace, and enthusiasm enlivened such groups. Those qualities, her friend Alice Wylie suggests, were the essence of her person and her success.

Keith, who retired in 1987, can look back on a long, interesting, successful working life and a wonderful marriage. In his Kerr-Taylor Avenue home he is surrounded by photos and memories of his and Jeanette's life. He misses her terribly but is hugely proud of the young English woman he courted and married; who adapted to all of the moves in their early married life and became a wonderful New Zealander and a much-loved member of the Mt Albert community.



Jeanette & Keith in 2017

M.A.H.S Dates To Remember

July 1st- June 30th 2019 subscription fees for MAHS are now due. The \$20 can be paid by cheque, or directly to bank account 12 3029 0402365 00.

Sunday 29th July, 2pm at Belmont House, 29 Stilwell Rd, Mt Albert, we will have our mid-winter Christmas party. Members only. Gold coin donation. *Please register.*

Saturday 25th August, 2pm at Ferndale House, we will have our Annual General Meeting. The Speaker will be our member Brian Corban, talking on the history of Corban wines.

Saturday 1st September, 2pm at Ferndale House, we will be running Session 4 of 'Exploring the history of your house'. Mark Stoddart, Senior Archivist will talk on **How to locate details of your property through central government records held by Archives New Zealand, Auckland Office.** *Please register.*

Saturday 3rd November, 2pm at Ferndale House, we will be running Session 5 of 'Exploring the history of your house'. Joanne Greaves, Senior Librarian, will talk on **Information available at Auckland Central Library and how to find it.** *Please register.*

To register, please: Email: info@mtalberthistoricalsociety.org.nz; or Phone: 846 4509.

Another date for your diary: **Sunday 25th November**, 2pm at Ferndale House: High Tea (details in October newsletter).

The Afford Family Kitchen Table

The modern table today is as much an ornamental piece of furniture in a dining alcove, divorced from the kitchen activities, as any item of limited use. But not so the old farmhouse-style deal table with scrubbed top and robust legs, which took pride of place in our utility room. All major family activities seemed to centre round the kitchen table, large enough to seat 10 or a dozen folk.

After breakfast and dishes were cleared away, flour would be spread and pastry rolled, cakes, scones, pancakes and biscuits rushed to the old coal range oven at the end of the room, vegetables sliced and fruit bottled. A mincing machine would be screwed to the table edge, meat of any sort pushed into its craw, the handle turned and the mince falling into a bowl below, ingredients for the evening's cottage pie.

A hive of morning activity, the table was in use in the afternoon for dressmaking. The old treadle Singer sewing machine was close by, so consequently the table top served as a workbench for Mother's sewing operations. I remember my sister standing on the table whilst Mother stuck pins in her skirt to delineate where the hem line should be.

The evening meal would be followed by numerous other events. Perhaps we would gather around to play cards, cribbage in particular, snakes and ladders, or if more energetic, a game of ping-pong or otherwise just discussing world events and reading the Auckland Star.

A dim recollection was the old magic lantern which threw a picture onto a screen – a sheet pinned to the kitchen wall. At evening's close a bowl of flowers would grace its lace centrepiece.

Now one Saturday midday we were gathered around for roast beef and Yorkshire pudding cooked to a turn by my Father, who was a dab hand at cooking. It was 1935, King George V's Silver Jubilee. My young brother was misbehaving, sufficient to warrant a sharp rebuke and clip on the ear from Mother. There was a loud rap on the door, a courier with a registered parcel. What could it be? Father unwrapped the official-looking box and there was a medal and citation certificate, The British Empire medal for Services to the Crown. In unison we all expostulated: "What did you get that for, Dad?" Up piped my disgruntled brother; "For marrying Mum."

Richie Afford, 2018

CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS

According to the Constitution of the Society, we cannot continue without a Treasurer. As we mentioned in the last newsletter, we urgently need one of our members to step forward and take on this role, when Judith Goldie, who has given sterling service as MAHS Treasurer, steps down at the AGM, 25th August 2018.

PLEASE

Email: info@mtalberthistoricalsociety.org.nz or Phone: 846 4509.

Heritage Walk

On **Sunday 14th October at 2pm**, we will meet at Mt Albert Presbyterian Church, 14 Mt Albert Road, to begin our 2018 Heritage Walk. John Childs will lead us on a tour looking at Pre-World War One homes and buildings in and around the mountain that epitomise the cultural heritage of early prominent families who emigrated from the United Kingdom. Two churches and a historic object will also be visited.

To register:

Email: info@mtalberthistoricalsociety.org.nz or Phone: 846 4509.

Mt Albert Fire Station: Always Ready

In 2016 a character building at 516 New North Road, which once served as the Mt Albert Fire Station, was for sale following its conversion into an 18-bedroom boarding house. According to Kingsland Heritage, the brick fire station was built in a Georgian Revival style in 1933 to replace an original timber station with a watch tower that was erected in 1906. The 450m² building on a 496m² freehold site was completely renovated after a fire in 2008.

Grant Manning's memories of growing up in the Fire Station became very vivid as he read the news articles about the building and the sale:

"First of all, it's Mount Albert Fire Station, not Kingsland Fire Station, as was stated in recent news articles. My Father was promoted to Station Officer and transferred to Mt Albert in 1956. It was also the time the tram tracks were being removed in Kingsland. In those days the fire engine was an open Ford V8. Each station was responsible for the street fire alarms in their district – those red circular boxes mounted on most street corner telegraph poles.

As Dad was in charge of the station we moved into the Officers' Quarters above the Engine Room. We lived there for 10 years although Dad worked there until the station closed down in 1974. The fire engines and staff (Mt Eden Fire Station had closed some years earlier and moved in at Mt Albert) were moved to the new Balmoral station.



Fireman in uniform, 1960

an allowance per turnout but mainly received cheap accommodation. It was also the local place where Mt Albert Traffic Officers, Fergusson and Gray, plus the Kingsland Constable, Dick Whittle, would call in to keep each other up to date with the happenings in the borough. Kingsland Police Station was just around the corner on Kingsland and First Avenues.

Most Guy Fawkes nights the engine would not be on station. I remember one year Mt Albert was turned out as first pump to Laingholm. If Dad was on duty he was never around to help us let our fireworks off. There were

always a few times when the fire engine was out at a call, when a steam train would empty its ash box on the tracks at the back of the station, setting fire to the sleepers and scrub so the Manning bucket pump brigade sprang into action.

A few years ago the station itself was a victim of fire. While being used as a boarding house it caught fire and went to a 2nd Alarm turnout.

These are just a few of the memories; as you can imagine, there are plenty more. My brother Warwick and I are the only ones who lived in residence at the station who are still alive, so I thought a bit of rambling and a few photos might stir memories from other people."

Grant Manning, 2017



Mount Albert Fire Station and its engine, 1960

It was quite an upbringing living in such circumstances. Many a time Mother, my brother and I would recommission the appliance (flake the hose back into the hose beds on the engine) while the men showered and ate before going back to the fire ground to do standby, making sure the fire was out.

Most fire station social clubs ran Sunday night movies in their social rooms. There was always a good turnout of local neighbours to boost the social club's kitty.

What a thrill for a young boy to ride on the back step of the Ford as Dad took the fire engine to the Mt Albert Primary School gala. He would spend the afternoon going around the school field with the siren screeching, raising funds for the school.

A lot of stations had auxiliary firemen who signed on at night after working or studying at university. They received



Mount Albert Fire Station, 1970