



# MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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## Jennie Priestley: Making her Mark in Education

Hannah Jane Priestley (who appears on educational records as H J Priestley) preferred to be called Jennie and is found as such even on electoral rolls. She voted in 1893 as soon as suffrage was extended to women.

Jennie was born in Manningham, West Yorkshire – which was to be the birthplace thirty years later of her likely relative, the famous writer, J B Priestley (1894–1984). Jennie's family was affluent: her father, John Priestley (1835–1908) employed 29 hands as a worsted manufacturer, as noted in the 1971 British census. Priestley serge was a well-known fabric.

By 1881, presumably as a result of the 1880s depression, John Priestley had come down in the world. He was then an 'oil and tallow merchant'. The family emigrated to New Zealand on *SS Doric* in 1884. John and his wife Eliza (who also voted in the first election) had four sons and two daughters. They lived first in Mt Roskill, then Avondale, and by the 1890s had moved to Morningside. Jennie's oldest brother Hedley, a builder, had a small holding there, where he raised prize-winning poultry.

Jennie was clever. As a teenager she attended boarding school in Wiltshire. During the 1890s she took several papers at Auckland University College, though it seems she may never have completed a degree.

Immediately on arrival in Auckland Jennie took up teaching, first at the Wellesley Street School, and then in a sequence of schools in Mt Roskill and Avondale. From 1902 until her death, during the years she was resident in Morningside, Jennie was then Infant Mistress at Beresford Street School.



Jennie Priestley

Jennie was a committed educationist, and was elected to the Auckland Committee of the NZ Educational Institute in 1908 and 1909, only months before her unexpected death. George Fowlds, then Minister of Education, sent a telegram regretting his inability to attend the funeral. Miss Priestley had been one of his first New Zealand friends. He had 'high respect for her high character and amiable disposition.'

An enlarged portrait of Jennie was presented to the Beresford Street School by the Auckland Committee and a memorial plaque was raised there in 1910. Her youngest brother Maurice was to become a schools' inspector and was grandfather of the high court judge John Priestley.

While still living in Avondale, the young Priestleys got involved with the Mt Albert Mutual Improvement Society, which met from 1883 to 1891 at Ferndale, the home of Jonathan Tonson Garlick and his wife Annie. Following the demise of the Mutual, as it was known, something of its function was continued at the weekly

meetings of the Mt Albert Literary and Debating Society, at the Wesleyan School room. The aim of the Mt Albert 'Mutual' had been to 'interest and improve' the Young Men's Bible Class of the Wesleyan School. Eventually 'the fair sex' was invited to join, and the meetings included a wide range of activities.

Mutual Improvement Societies were common in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially in Lancashire and Yorkshire West Riding but spread throughout Britain and beyond. They were not dissimilar to Mechanics' institutes but operated more on a cooperative basis, meeting in private homes or under the auspices of a church or chapel. The aim was the development of the verbal and intellectual skills of young working-class men. These societies were seen to have a formative influence on the Labour Movement.

The Methodist and Baptist faiths underpinned the Ferndale enterprise. The Garlicks and Priestleys had been staunch Baptists in England but made use of what local churches existed in the newly developing Mt Albert: the Methodist church opposite Ferndale and the Anglican church of St Luke's. J T Garlick gives a good idea of the scope of the meetings of the Mt Albert 'Mutual' in his diary:

*The programme, or syllabus, was carefully drawn up at the commencement of the session. Evenings were set aside for music, elocution, essays, debates, prepared speeches, extempore speeches, readings, recitations and lectures, junior members' nights, young ladies' nights, young men's nights, Mss. Journals, Conversazione, cookery and flower competitions and prize essays.*

# MT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

Reports on the Ferndale evenings are found in the Auckland press through the years that the Mt Albert society lasted. The young Priestley family were regular participants, especially Jennie, her sister Alice, and one of their brothers, Clifford. Alice (who became Mrs Wilding) played the piano; Clifford read and recited a range of material, and talked on subjects from 'Assaying and gold extraction' to 'Mutual Improvement Societies, their functions and advantages'.

In 1898, Clifford argued for the affirmative in a debate on the question, 'Is the private ownership of land inconsistent with the principles of justice?' He trained as an analytical chemist and belonged to the Single Tax League. Jennie engaged vigorously in the society's discussions and gave recitations and readings – in 1895 from an unnamed journal that she was involved with in some capacity.

Jennie dabbled in writing, publishing in *The New Zealand Illustrated Magazine* (NZIM), a short-lived (1899-1905)

journal, which aimed to foster New Zealand art and writing. She also contributed columns to *The Graphic* and *The Weekly News*, using a male pen-name.



*Jennie published in the NZIM*

Her favourite subjects were 'sketches of Maori character and school stories', according to the *NZIM*.

'A Christmas Holiday' (1904) recounts the antics of a group of young people camping at Karekare. The men are called 'men', the women are called 'girls', and there is a good deal of quoting from Shakespeare. It is accompanied by photographs taken by Jennie's youngest brother, Maurice.

Jennie's second brother, Hermon, who married Edith Eleanor (Edie) Garlick of Ferndale, spent a few years in Northland prior to his marriage. His descendants own a set of remarkable photographs of Maori dating from that time. While most were taken by Hermon, some have the names of Maurice and Jennie Priestley on them.

Jennie Priestley died in 1909 in Cambridge while staying with Hermon and Edie. She is buried in Cambridge, while her parents' and other family members' graves are to be found behind St Luke's church, Mt Albert.

*Don Bassett, 2017*

## Notes

**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> July**, we enjoyed our mid-winter afternoon tea at Belmont House in Stilwell Rd, Mt Albert. Owners Diane and Alan McArde generously opened their lovely old home to us. Jan Gordon and members of the Ashton family who had lived there previously also attended. Diane and Jan spoke about the house and its history. This will be the subject of an article in a newsletter in 2019.



*Afternoon tea spread in the Belmont dining room*

**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> August**, at our AGM, Brian Corban, a member of MAHS and a former councillor, gave a most interesting talk about the Corban family, their role in the NZ wine industry and their involvement in community affairs. A most impressive record from one family.

**Our constitutional crisis** has been resolved. Judith Goldie will continue as Treasurer and relinquish some of her other roles. These have been taken up by other members of the committee, which was voted in for another year.

M.A.H.S Dates To Remember

**Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> October, Heritage Walk**, 2pm at Mt Albert Presbyterian Church, 14 Mt Albert Rd. John Childs leads this MAHS walking tour, looking at Pre-World War I homes and buildings in and around the mountain, which epitomise the cultural heritage of early prominent families who emigrated from the United Kingdom. Mt Albert Presbyterian Church, Mt Albert Methodist Church, and one historic object will also be visited. *Please register: [info@mtalberthistoricalsociety.org.nz](mailto:info@mtalberthistoricalsociety.org.nz) or 846 4509.*

**Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> November**, 2pm at Ferndale House, Session 5 of 'Exploring the history of your house'. Joanne Graves, Senior Librarian Local History, will talk on **Information available at Auckland Central Library and how to find it**. *Please register: [info@mtalberthistoricalsociety.org.nz](mailto:info@mtalberthistoricalsociety.org.nz) or 846 4509.*

**Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> November, High Tea**, 2.30pm at Ferndale House. Members only, \$25 per person. The Auckland City String Quartet will perform. To register, please contact Judith Goldie ([judith.goldie@xtra.co.nz](mailto:judith.goldie@xtra.co.nz) or 817 6279) or Mary Inomata ([maryinomata@gmail.com](mailto:maryinomata@gmail.com) or 846 4509).

**John Stacpoole 1919–2018**

John Massy Stacpoole, heritage architect, soldier, historian, writer, philanthropist, and member of the Mount Albert Grammar School Hall of Distinction, died peacefully on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2018 in his 99<sup>th</sup> year.

John attended Mount Albert Grammar School 1932–1935, when the school was a mere 10 years old. Mt Albert prides itself today in turning out well-rounded young men and women, a tradition that was established in John's day. He was a diligent student always near the top of the A class. But he was not just a swot. He also took a full part in the life of the school. He was head librarian, represented the school in middle distance running at the inter-secondary school sports, and was in the First Hockey XI.

After qualifying as an architect at Auckland University College and acquiring experience in firms in Auckland and London, John worked in the architectural division of the Government's Ministry of Works. His lifelong interest was the history of our land, its people, and its buildings.

He was appointed to supervise the restoration of historic buildings, some of which were under the control of the Historic Places Trust, of which he became a significant member. Among the numerous restoration projects he supervised are Waimate Mission House, Government House in Auckland, and Alberton.

Two aspects of his work particularly admired are: his determination to



*John Stacpoole is inducted into the Mount Albert Grammar School Hall of Distinction, 14 October 2013*

preserve the original historical character of the buildings he restored, and his diligence in assembling superb antique furniture and fittings to refurbish them. Public recognition of his work in the field of historical conservation came in the award of the OBE, Officer of the British Empire.

John was an accomplished writer. As well as numerous articles and bulletins, he wrote seven books, including two

biographies, books on family and social history, and New Zealand's historic buildings. He was famously generous in his helpfulness to those who sought his assistance in their research; none came away empty-handed. John wrote nine biographies for *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*.

He was involved in the Auckland War Memorial Museum, which benefited from his generous gifts on the history and culture of Auckland. For two decades he was Chairman of the Mackelvie Trust at the Auckland Art Gallery. He donated hundreds of books on Irish history and life to Auckland City Library, along with choice collectors' items of first editions from his private collection.

(Courtesy of Mount Albert Grammar School. Adapted from [www.mags.school.nz/inductee-14-october-2013](http://www.mags.school.nz/inductee-14-october-2013)).

**MAHS remembers**

John Stacpoole was a good friend of our Society, always willing to share his early memories of Mt Albert. For us he sourced special prints, watercolours and photographs of various houses with their stories. He also gave us an extra special first edition of Dick Scott's 'In Old Mt Albert' (MAHS, Issue 10). We are sad to hear of his passing. A great life well lived. A font of historical knowledge now sadly gone. Our condolences were sent to his family.

## Celebrating our Women



The Electoral Act, passed on September 19<sup>th</sup> 125 years ago in 1893, granted all men and women in NZ the right to vote. The act, as Burdon (1918) says, epitomised our nation's egalitarian ethos and marked a historic moment in our journey towards gender equality.

A journey, as we know, that is still continuing.

84 percent of eligible women voted in the election in November 1893. They voted in larger numbers than men and have continued to do so ever since (Burdon M. The New Zealand Herald, 10<sup>th</sup> September 2018).

In Mt Albert we are proud of our own suffragists. We have the fine example of, among others, Annie Schnackenberg, the National President of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) when the vote was won, Lizzie Rattray and Sophia Kerr Taylor, both members of the Women's Franchise League. Lizzie Rattray was a compelling speaker and writer for the cause and was there when the successful petition was presented to the House of Representatives in 1893 (Dunsford D 2016. Mt Albert Then and Now, p74-76, MAHS Issue 36).

The vote was finally won on 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1893 by 20 votes for to 18 against. Between then and 19<sup>th</sup> September, those 18 men against, the Prime Minister Richard Seddon included, tried to influence the Governor not to sign the Act into law. Women gave their 20 supporters white camellias to wear in their buttonholes in the 11 hectic days before the Governor signed. The white camellia remains a symbol of women's suffrage.

In 1993, to mark the 100 year anniversary and to honour women who had worked in many capacities in this community, the Mt Albert Women's Probus Club planted a white camellia tree in The Alice Wylie Reserve. Fittingly the tree was planted in a reserve named after a woman who has played a major role in Mt Albert for more than 50 years, as a councillor, as Deputy Mayor, and in many other roles (MAHS, Issue 35). As our patron, at 94 years of age, Alice is still actively involved in our Society and still deeply interested in local affairs.

Women could become MPs in 1919, but the first woman MP was not elected until 1933. In 1960, when Clarice Anderson was Mt Albert's National candidate, she found it surprising that as she door-knocked through the electorate, some women told her they 'wouldn't vote for a woman at any price.'

In 1981, when Helen Clark, member for Mt Albert, was elected to Parliament, there were four women MPs, and the number increased to eight in that year. Now, 46 women are MPs, 38% of the Parliament.

We have a proud history in Mt Albert: Helen Clark, the second woman Prime Minister, 1999-2008, Jacinda Ardern, representing Mount Albert since 2017 and present Prime Minister, and Melissa Lee, National list MP based in Mt Albert since 2008.

Women have achieved much since 1893, a starting point, as the Prime Minister's message to us below suggests.



*As we look to the last 125 years, and the next 125, there's a large stack of things we need to keep progressing – our gender pay gap of around 9%, the overrepresentation of women in low-paid work, the underrepresentation of women on boards and still in politics. There is much to do. But there's also a lot to celebrate. I want to acknowledge the women who paved the way – not only for us to have access to vote, but to have the ability to stand for political office, to be represented, to use our voice. And so I really encourage you this Suffrage Day to jump online, and have a look at the thousands of signatures on that petition that ultimately helped bring around this significant change. See if you can find any of your family members. They were ordinary women who did extraordinary things, and the women around you day in, day out, are exactly the same. So this Women's Suffrage, let us celebrate the ordinary becoming the extraordinary, and all that women in Aotearoa New Zealand have achieved.*



Alice Wylie



Helen Clark



Jacinda Ardern



Melissa Lee