



MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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Mount Albert as it was: Change, and how to react

I came to Mount Albert as a four-year old at Easter 1943 and lived 70 years in the area. Even now I feel my roots are here. As Māori would say, Mount Albert is my *kainga*.

I've watched the area change over time. Sometimes just gradually, sometimes rather more abruptly. Not always comfortably for all of us, but tolerably.

Why do we notice change? Because mastering our immediate environment is one of the first things we do: it is an essential part of growing up. Change makes that personal challenge more complex. Having said that, we shouldn't be surprised by change: villages, suburbs, towns and countries are living organisms. We must expect things to alter, and be ready to adapt if it appears to be part of that indefinable thing called "progress".

We need to remember from history that there are distinct limits to trying to prevent change, let alone rolling it back. What President Trump is trying to do with the American Supreme Court, hoping to roll the modern world back to the early twentieth century by repealing this and that, and cementing a 1940s set of moral standards into the Supreme Court, is the sort of move that has caused revolutions in the past, and will again. And revolutions are ALWAYS harder to control for everyone's benefit than learning to guide gradual change.

Why has Mount Albert been such a distinct entity, and such a good place to live and bring up children? Many of us here have spent most of our lives in the neighbourhood. My own view, encouraged by Debbie Dunsford's excellent history, is that from early times Mount Albert was a reasonably distinct piece of geography, settled by a broad cross-section of earlier Auckland colonists. Public transport

by Michael Bassett CNZM QSO



*Michael Bassett in 2018
(Wikipedia)*

by rail, tram, then bus, was good. The area had a few top-drawer Anglicans and Methodists, then a thriving Catholic presence, and an active Baptist church, plus a fair smattering of ordinary working folk looking for affordable homes to bring up families. There was relative harmony at the local government level, especially during "Andy" Anderson's long reign.

Schools, and Mount Albert Grammar, were good, but not pretentious. Yes, it lacked a girls' secondary school until 2000, when Mount Albert Grammar went co-ed. Culturally, Mount Albert was fairly uniformly white, Anglo Saxon, lower middle class. It had a well-used playground on the mountain, but no public library until the 1970s. And no pubs until the 1990s. There was no public swimming pool until 1998. We tended to go out of our area for anything special. Adequate shopping in the Mount Albert village, but nothing ostentatious until St Lukes in 1969.

Because of its proximity to the city, Mount Albert became an ever more desirable inner-city suburb as the 20th Century ticked on. But it was often overlooked, so its village "feel" remained well into the 1970s. When Mount Albert families moved, it was often to somewhere else in Mount Albert. Since the 1990s, property values have risen more rapidly here than in other parts of the city, meaning that there is no longer the gap that previously existed. Since being absorbed into the central city we seem to have become more aware of what gave us our unique past, and maybe more nostalgic about the village.

Let's look at some of the detail of Mount Albert, and the gradual changes that we've noticed. Remembering 1945-46 (I'm partly indebted to Arnold Turner) I think I can still list the shops along the mountain side of New North Road from Mt Albert Road.

Hellaby's on the corner with its sawdust floor; then the Blue & White grocery, Cyril Walker's men's hairdresser, the Hazeldene dairy, Radonich's fish shop, ER Dove's haberdashery, the lending library, KW White's Chemist, SY Chan's fruit shop where Mum could sometimes get bananas if she smiled sweetly at the old man, the Four Square Grocery of Hoppy McGowan's, Miss North's stationers, another greengrocer, then a shop or two, and then the Marie Home Cookery: "We make all we sell, we sell all we make" emblazoned on the window.

Of them all, only the dairies, and there are three of them, remain, in changed form. And the Marie has long gone, being replaced, I think, by a Hong Kong or is it Shanghai noodle bar – which seems almost sacrilegious!

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Then there was another dairy, and then the De Luxe Theatre, beloved by little boys who occupied the front sixpenny seats at matinees. The De Luxe on a Saturday evening was a key social centre. Many couples had a regular booking. My neighbours always got into their best bibs and tucker for a De Luxe evening at the flicks. Then there was the end dairy. It was run by Rajah Daya in the 1950s and was the nearest thing to a hangout for Mount Albert's pale imitation of milkbar cowboys. I recall finding out in December 1956 that I'd passed my first year's university subjects in that dairy from a copy of the Star while I drank a large chocolate milkshake in Rajah's dairy with my mates. Then there was another butcher shop run by Mr Hopkins whom our neighbour insisted on calling Mr Hopkirk.

Across the road was another social centre, the King George Hall, one of those coronation halls, many of which still exist around the country, erected and subsidised by Sir Joseph Ward's Liberal government for the 1911 coronation of King George V and Queen Mary. The hall was used for balls, weddings and election rallies. Rob Muldoon, who grew up in Morningside, recalled going to one of Prime Minister Gordon Coates's campaign meetings in that hall as a small boy in 1928 where his Labour-loving grandmother threatened a few locals with her umbrella.

Outside the hall on a Friday morning in the mid-forties were bring-and-buys for a variety of good causes like the Family Planning Association and the local Labour Party. They were manned severally (womaned would be more appropriate) by some of Mount Albert's leading lights: Betty Holt and her sister Molly Leatham, Marjorie Evans, Clarice Anderson and members of her Mayoress's Committee. The hall was pulled down about 1970. Next to it was the old Post Office with its public phone and its stamp dispenser. Inside were queues with mothers uplifting their family benefits that became universal just in time for the 1946 election and a Labour win in the newly-formed electorate of Mount Albert. The Post Office building, too, went in the early

'70s. In the block below Gladstone Road was, first, the Farmers' Trading Co, then the Dayas' fruit shop. And who can forget Mr Schubert's stationery shop. He hailed from Tennessee and would always say in his southern drawl "Y'all come back see us" as we left with the Listener for Mum and Comic Cuts for me. And of course, Billy Atwell's chemist shop. He was the only JP I knew as a kid, and as such he always seemed to me to be a very important person. And there was the AMC meat company, a rival to Hellaby's, and old Mr Bowley's paint shop below Atwell's. ASB Bank was very much a Johnny-come-lately. I see its soon to be a Johnny-no-more.



Mr Bowley's Paint Shop (Mt Albert – Then And Now, p139)

Change came gradually. Old shops were sold, and sometimes the merchandise on offer changed. Then the pace stepped up in the 1960s because everyone by now had cars, and fridges at home. Shoppers could carry more goods in their cars, and with the fridge, food would last longer. With women rapidly joining the work force, it was a blessing not to have to walk to the shops every second day for food, and the vinegar needed to revive chops if they were starting to go slightly green in the safe.

The supermarkets at St Lukes from 1969 didn't immediately kill off smaller neighbourhood superettes: there was one at the bottom of Alberton Avenue, followed by the one where the King George Hall had been. But St Lukes eventually won the battle: big supermarkets empowered shoppers

with their large range of options (none of the winking at Mr Chan for bananas), and much of it was under one roof. And all the other conveniences in the mall nearby.

A noticeable change in my first 40 years of life in Mount Albert was the arrival of different ethnicities. We knew the Dayas and the Chans. But only in ones and twos. In 1974-5 the Labour government of which I was a part authorised a category of immigrant called an "ethnic chef". One or two Chinese restaurants soon appeared in the neighbourhood, then a Thai, and then an Indian. Change, yes. We welcomed it. They certainly broadened our horizons cuisine-wise.

For me, the different cuisines have been one of the discoveries in my life. One of its greatest pleasures. As a kid who became conscious of different races near the end of World War Two, who would have thought that probably my favourite cuisine today is Japanese!

As I think back, being confronted with change in my Mount Albert life did not involve adapting to a Māori presence. There just haven't been many Māori in our neighbourhood. Two Māori girls and their friends and family, who lived with Molly Leatham in Kitenui Avenue so they could go to Auckland Girls' Grammar, were the first Māori I knew.

At Mount Albert Grammar I can only recall a few Māori fellow students – Judge Mick Brown and (I think) Sir Bob Mahuta, the adopted son of King Koroki. I was obliged to adapt

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more to foreign influences. Even today, Mount Albert isn't a centre for Māori. Indeed, even in Auckland as a whole, Māori numbers lag behind Asians, and in many parts of the city, behind Pacific Islanders too. The decade I spent sitting on the Waitangi Tribunal introduced me to the complexities of Māori history beyond Auckland, and it has made me think more recently about our mountain and the changes thrust upon us not by an influx of Māori into our midst, but by the government. For its own purposes, it established the Tupuna Maunga Authority in 2014. This modern issue I want now to engage with, because it brought sudden change to the mountain and to a cultural amenity enjoyed by us all.

My contention is that a mistake was made by the government when Mount Albert was included with the other Auckland mountains in the Maunga Authority. My reason for saying this is that Mount Albert has no spiritual or property significance to Māori. For more than 200 years they abandoned it. The period when Māori inhabited the mountain was only brief, and it ceased about 1750AD, before there was any colonisation. That was when Ngāti Whatua swarmed down from the Far North. The small number of Māori on Mount Albert were beaten; some were eaten. The remainder escaped in a southward direction towards Waikato, never to return, or to manifest any further interest in te maunga, Ōwairaka.

The victors, Ngāti Whatua, were not numerous. As late as the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 there were only 800 Māori grouped in small numbers on the one million acres spread out between south Kaipara and East Tamaki. No Māori had any need for Ōwairaka. They had plenty of other resources.

From 1750 to 1840, the area of the mountain and its surrounds reverted to scrub and light bush. Nobody "kept the fires burning" on the mountain as the Māori would say. No one maintained "ahi kaa", a vital principle relating to who owns Māori land.

To all intents and purposes, Māori had deserted Mount Albert. It remained deserted until Pākehā came to the environs of the mountain in the 1840s. Gradually, they planted exotics and natives around the edges of the mountain, and the government proceeded to slice off 13 metres from the top of the mountain.

Scoria was carried down the mountain in wagons to the spot where I grew up – 2 Toroa Terrace. Our section was where wagons were filled and dispatched down a rail track to the Mount Albert station, and from there they were sent as ballast for the Northern Rail line to Whangarei. Not only had Māori deserted Mount Albert; the maunga no longer existed in any recognisable form. A rather reduced version of the mountain gradually revived, courtesy of settlers in the area, and it became home for cattle grazing for many years, and for a huge underground water reservoir constructed on the south side in 1947–48.

Using Māori principles of land tenure once more, the people who established "ahi kaa" over Mount Albert were the growing number of Pākehā settlers in the area. They eventually rescued what remained of the mountain and continued with the plantings on the mountain, and made it what it is today.

No historical justification was ever produced to include Mount Albert in the Maunga Authority established in 2014. In my view, our mountain should be removed from the Authority's jurisdiction. We should ask our local MP to liaise with Auckland Council and remove Mount Albert from its jurisdiction. We need to get our mountain back. While many changes that have occurred in our area over time have been for the good, and others have been tolerable, kidnapping our mountain for political purposes is not. Gathering a petition to Jacinda might be a good way to start rectifying what amounts to an egregious, poorly researched, political error of judgement.

Address to the MAHS AGM, 2020

M.A.H.S Dates To Remember

MAHS Subscription Fees for the period 1st July 2020 – 30th June 2021

If you have not yet renewed your subscription: \$20 can be paid by cheque, or directly to our bank account 12 3029 0402365 00. **Membership form:** <https://mtalberthistoricalsociety.org.nz/membership-form/>.

Sunday 29th November 2020: Afternoon Tea at 34 Allendale Road, the old Tattersfield House, 2:30pm.

The venue is the home of our members the Whittaker family. This event is for members only, with a limit of 50, at a cost of \$10, *payment details as above*. To secure your place, contact Judith Goldie (judith.goldie@xtra.co.nz, 09 817 6279) or Mary Inomata (maryinomata@gmail.com, 09 846 4509).

Friday 6th November & Saturday 7th November 2020

Mount Albert Primary School is having its 150-year celebration. For details please see its website at <https://www.mtalbertprimary.school.nz/150th/>.

May 2022

Mount Albert Grammar School is holding its Centenary Celebration. Registration of interest can be made at <https://www.mags.school.nz/mags-centenary-celebrations/>. Again, if you have any anecdotes from your time at the school, or Old Boys you would like to see profiled in the MAHS newsletter, please email janetvonrandow@gmail.com.

President's Annual Report

We live in strange and changing times, unknowing of what the future holds for us all. It is times like these, no matter how unprecedented, that we can look back on the past and gain comfort from the knowledge that those before us made it through frightening times.

Yet with that we are truly blessed to live in a country where people are valued above all else. In that spirit, I must first thank the many people who help keep our society functioning and without whom it would be impossible to continue.

Judith Goldie – our faithful treasurer, doing a great job year after year. Janet von Randow – newsletter editor, events organiser, minutes secretary. How could we ever function without you Janet?

Our committee members Anna, John, Victoria and Caroline who throw themselves wholeheartedly into whatever is on the agenda, and to our Patron Alice Wylie who is, as ever, always supportive.

Our thanks to Caroline and her husband Kevin for their interim holding of our books at their home. To Ann McKenzie for selling our book “Mt Albert Then and Now” outside Mount Albert Library over a number of weekends and delivering our journals. We also appreciate Alberton allowing us community space at their market to sell our book. And thank you Phyll Belsham for your journal deliveries before you were forced to retire.

Our thanks to Bayleys Real Estate for their financial support for the fête that was postponed due to COVID-19 and to Rosie Sherman who designed the wonderful poster for the fête.

A sincere thanks to our members who have contributed their memories and stories to Janet for our journal over the past year. I'd like to encourage you all to share your memories and stories for future generations for what is history, if it is not recorded?

A special thank you must go to our member Lynley Stone – herself a descendent of Charles Stone of Stone House.

Lynley is helping our society get into the tech age and has redesigned our website to enable us to join and pay online and to expand our ability to educate and reach out to more people.

Our events last year commenced with a most interesting talk on October 19 by Dave Veart on toys, and the following day the Morningside walk hosted by John Childs.

December 1 was our High Tea Party at Ferndale where the Auckland String Quartet once again entertained us. Feb 22, 2020, Debra Miller talked about her book “The Point” and March 15, John took a members only walk, looking at older non-residential buildings of Kingsland. Sunday March 29 should have been our Mount Albert Historical Society Fête day but this was scuppered by lockdown for the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have only to look at the rapid changes taking place in our beloved Mount Albert to know how very important it is to keep our historical society functioning and endeavouring to record and save our history and so for that I thank you all for being members.

We lost two wonderful men in August. **Tony Mayes** our loved and valued committee member who died in early August. Tony was our fix it man. If no one else knew what or how to do it Tony would step in and solve the problem and he always knew someone who could help. He is a great loss to our historical society committee and we will miss seeing his cheerful and positive face each month. Our condolences to his wife Pam and their children.

Richie Afford, our Life Member, who also died in August, was with us right from the beginning by starting us off financially and right at the end of his long and well lived life, was still supplying us with stories and pointing us in the direction of archival material. His enquiring mind will long be remembered.

Truly the Māori expression Kia Kaha, Be Strong, is one we need to keep close to us all in these trying times.

Mary Inomata, President

Mount Albert Primary School Sesquicentennial

We have proudly provided primary school education to our local community for 150 years!

Our first school-based celebration, the Heritage Photography Exhibition, took place in July. Our students and families learnt that an important part of family heritage is represented by photographs. They are the most valuable items for preserving history and heritage, because they represent so much of people's lives and relationships. They are records of not only physical appearance but also family relationships, events, activities, living conditions, interests, and transitions through life.

Our students have used photographs to go back in time to look at how life was between 1870 and 1969. From this information, staff and students created their own heritage photograph as a tribute to the School's Sesquicentennial.

Marian Caulfield, Principal

