



MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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Mt Albert Gymnasium Club



*Daniel Hyde (instructor) and Russell Hyde (gymnast)
Mt Albert Gymnasium Club, King George Hall, c.1952. Hyde Family collection.*

The beginning of the MAG Club story really starts with the arrival in New Zealand of two families. Francis and Mary Ann (nee Adams) Heighway arrived in 1863. Their grandson Albert George Heighway married Caroline Stilwell in 1906, moving into their newly built home at 54 William Street (now Willcott Street). They had two sons, Alfred Jnr and Wilfred and a daughter Phyllis.

The other family was Daniel William and Rosa Fanny (nee Andrews) Hyde who arrived in NZ in 1906 and promptly built at 7 Vinter Terrace. Daniel had been a military man who served with the Gordon Highlanders during the Boer War. Their family also consisted of two boys Daniel and Fred and daughter Dorothy.

In 1919 Daniel William Hyde, along with George Fowlds and a few other likeminded citizens decided there was a need for a gymnastics club in Mt Albert. A committee was set up and the Mt Albert Gymnasium Club commenced in the Mt Albert Presbyterian Church on the corner of New North and Mt Albert Roads with 12 members, two of whom were the Hyde brothers Daniel Jnr. and Fred.

The club moved to the King George Hall in 1922 after the Mt Albert Presbyterian Church was moved to its current site further along Mt Albert Road, as during the gymnastics club tenure membership had increased considerably.

Phyllis Heighway was a member of the first girls club formed in 1925 and her shared interest in the gymnastics club with Daniel Jnr. must have been instrumental in culminating in marriage to each other in 1933 at the Mt Albert Methodist Church.

Daniel Snr. taught military style gymnastics which meant formation marching at the commencement of each session. Daniel Jnr. and Phyllis sons Russell and his brother Neil became members when they turned six and Russell well remembers his first night as a six year old marching at the tail end of the 2x2, 4x4 and 8x8 formation ending with the serpentine. All of the equipment was made by the members. The swinging rings made in the 1920s are still in use today. Russell Hyde built the vaulting horses which they also continue to use. The time and effort the members put in was and still is 100% voluntary.

The 1950s action photo (above) shows Russell Hyde in the King George Hall, performing a twisting somersault with his father Daniel (Chief Instructor). Note how close the audience sat to the performance as the hall was not that large.

In 1965 the club moved home to the Frank Turner Stadium (now known as the Mt Albert Community and Recreation Centre). The gymnastic club had fundraised

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Mt Albert Gymnasium Club contd...

one third of the total cost of the stadium, the balance coming from the Lions and the Mt Albert Borough Council.

From being the six year old at the tail end of the group Russell Hyde progressed to being President, a position which he holds to this day. His brother Neil was an instructor, is a life member and still attends the meetings. In 1971 Russell's father Daniel was awarded the BEM (British Empire Medal) for services to youth.

Russell has known his wife Barbara since they were teenagers. They both attended Avondale Intermediate and Avondale College. His wife Barbara joined the club when she was fifteen. Barbara's family home backed onto Anderson Park where Russell used to practise his tumbles in the sandpit. Barbara would sit in her family grandstand watching the activities. "Yes" said Russell "and I was one of them." To which Barbara admitted that "she thought he was a bit of alright." It all developed from there and following in the footsteps of Russell's parents they were also married at the Mt Albert Methodist Church. Barbara has been on the Executive Committee since 1964 and Secretary of the club on and off for 20 years. She was also the Keep Fit Instructor for some years. Five

generations of the Hyde family belonging to the club is something to be proud of. Although numbers have dropped considerably since those halcyon days there are still more than enough members looking forward hopefully to celebrating the clubs centennial in 2018. Well done to the Hyde family!

Mary Inomata, April 2012



Barbara and Russell Hyde. MAHS collection 2012.

Memories from Russell Hyde

"My patch" was 54 and 56 Willcott Street, Mt Albert, and the following briefs are a few of my many memories.

I recall my parents story of the runaway scoria truck that bolted from the top of Mt Albert mountain to finally crash by the Mt Albert Railway Station (this was sometime in the 1920s).

During the 1940s, land on the corner of Woodward / New North Roads was a large poultry farm – these birds were for show purposes. This was later followed by a timber yard where timber was stacked for air drying; and for some years, part of the land was used as a pony club and how I vividly remember the travelling international circuses that thrilled so many local kids and parents. From this area and up the rail station, was a plantation of blue gums – most of which I believe, were self sown. Hidden under those gum trees during the war years, was an entire area that zigzagged with 6 foot air raid trenches. We lost count of the endless times the grassed areas alongside the rail track caught fire from the steam engine sparks – created much excitement.

The top end of Willcott Street provided the locals with a long hill for their much loved hilarious trolley derbys – can't you just hear the noise from those screeching steel wheels? Not every trolley owner was fortunate to have the quiet rubber pram tyres.

Many residential homes in the district had their own private tennis courts ie. Number 54 Willcott had a single lawn court whilst number 50 boasted two x tar sealed courts.

Let me touch on the subject that perhaps is not known by many residents in Mt Albert. At the driveway entry to number 56 Willcott Street was an entrance to a very large self created cave (caused by the lava flow from the mountain). There were obvious signs that in much earlier years, its interior had been inhabited by Maori, as seashells from the food they had consumed were visible, along with greenstone and other artefacts. The cave was fully opened up during the war years for all Willcott Street residents as an air raid shelter – thankfully, it was never needed for that purpose.

Russell Hyde, 2002



Albert Heighway Jnr outside the family home at 54 Willcott Street, Mt Albert. Note the lawn tennis court on left. c.1910. Hyde family collection.

The above is an extract from a document that Russell wrote in 2002 and has been published here with Russell's permission.

M.A.H.S Dates To Remember

5th May (Saturday) 2pm: Show And Tell. Ferndale House, 830 New North Road, Mt Albert. This is a MAHS classic annual event. Bring along any memorabilia, artefacts, photos, maps or stories and memories. Items will be labelled and displayed. Guests are welcome to either share their story or memory verbally with the group or alternatively items can be labelled and placed on display. Entry \$2.00 Light refreshments provided. Everyone welcome. Bring a friend.

7th July (Saturday) 2pm: Speaker Lisa Truttman with a talk entitled 'Lively Tales.' Ferndale House, 830 New North Road, Mt Albert. This presentation will feature 'the antics' of some of the very well known Mt Albert residents around the early part of last century. Lisa is a well known and highly regarded historical researcher and is both a forceful and entertaining speaker. Expect a Mid Year Christmas atmosphere to enhance the afternoon's activities. Entry \$2.00 Light refreshments provided. Everyone welcome.

25th August (Saturday) 2pm: MAHS AGM and Presentation by Sir Harold Marshall. Ferndale House, 830 New North Road, Mt Albert. The AGM will commence at 2pm followed by the presentation. Sir Harold will illustrate experiences enjoyed by his extended family, centred around their iconic 'Kiwi Bach' which has been in his family for 71 years. Refreshments provided. Gold coin door donation appreciated.

Please contact Brian on 626 6664 if you have any queries on the above events.



Postcards from New Zealand Past

In late February approximately 35 MAHS members and friends gathered at Ferndale House to hear and view a presentation by Ted Scott on Postcards from New Zealand Past.

MAHS member Irene Douglas brought along a treasured family album of postcards which covered some of the varied travels of her late parents, John and Ellen Cheetham. The album includes both New Zealand postcards and overseas destinations including Australia, Egypt and the Suez Canal.

Tidbits

- Did you know? There have been three NZ Prime Ministers who have resided in Mt Albert.
1. Robert Muldoon 2. Helen Clark 3. Who is the third?
(Answer will be announced at the Show and Tell event on 5th May).
- Mt Albert Grammar School 90th Jubilee will be celebrated on the 8th and 9th June 2012. For further details visit www.mags.school.nz

News from the Past...

A HALL FOR MOUNT ALBERT.

Meeting of residents.

At a meeting of Mount Albert residents, held in the Methodist Schoolroom last night, it was decided to push forward the work of erecting a social hall as speedily, as possible.

The Mayor, Mr. M.J. Coyle, who took the chair, said that there seemed to be some danger of the scheme falling through. He felt sure that it would be a great mistake if the matter was neglected, more especially as the Government grant of £250 lapsed at the end of June. Several of the more prominent residents of the locality had given most generous donations towards the fund, £380 having been promised, including two sums of £100 and one of £50. They had had a sketch plan of a suitable building prepared, which he thought would meet every requirement. The dimensions were as follows: - Length of hall 50ft by 30ft broad, with a 12ft deep stage at one end, and two small dressingrooms.

Several members of the audience objected to the hall only being 30ft wide as, if at any time it was required to add to the hall the breadth would be inadequate. It was also suggested that the hall be plainer in appearance, and of greater seating capacity.

It was resolved that the architect be approached with a view to ascertaining the probable cost of an additional 10ft in width.

It was further resolved that some of the leading residents be asked to contribute to the fund at once, with a view to giving the other residents a guarantee that the work be proceeded with. A committee meeting will be held next Friday, when the question of the calling of tenders will be gone into.

The committee consists of the following: - Messrs. A.C. Caughey, B. Bollard, A. T. Garlick (sec), L. Brookes, S. Brookes, A. Jenkins, and J. Astley. The meeting which had been very enthusiastic throughout, then broke up. The estimated cost of the hall is from £800 to £900, £630 of which is already guaranteed.

New Zealand Herald p9 26th April 1912



King George Hall, Mt Albert c.1958. Hyde Family Collection.

‘Valhalla’ 10 Woodward Road

Tucked behind a low scoria wall and a tall Tecoma hedge at 10 Woodward Road on the corner of Jersey Avenue is one of Mt Albert’s architectural gems.

It is a house designed by one of New Zealand’s foremost architects in the first part of last century, James Walter Chapman-Taylor (1878 – 1958).

Chapman-Taylor in his biography by Judy Siers (i) was described as an “architect, craftsman, furniture designer, builder, photographer, astrologer and family man” who designed hand crafted buildings. He described himself as an “Architect Craftsman”.

Chapman-Taylor was born in England in 1878 and came to New Zealand at the age of two. He later trained back in the UK and was very much influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement.

He is the nearest thing to a Kiwi Frank Lloyd Wright, for like Wright, he designed houses down to the furniture in the house. His furniture was usually honey in colour and this contributed to the warmth of the houses in which it was placed. He was very much a man of detail and a craftsmanship.

Ninety seven of his distinctive houses were built, only eight in Auckland and only one in Mt Albert.

The house in Mt Albert was built between 1924 -1925 and was known as Valhalla. The name comes from Nordic mythology and was the hall of Olin where warriors killed in combat went to battle all day and feast all night, forever. (ii)

It was one of two designs for the site, one two storeyed and the second on one level. It incorporates the features of Chapman Taylor’s later houses including:

- Concrete exterior
- Orange tiles

- Jarrah posts and beams
- Steel easement windows
- Pergola
- Pitched roof
- Square form
- Economic use of space
- Adequate sunlight
- Enclosed patio

The house contains a motto on the beam above the hearth ‘Exaltavit Humiles’ or ‘He has raised the humble’.

The site at 10 Woodward Road included several large trees most of which still survive, and a low stone wall with a hedge behind. The house was designed to respect these trees including two Norfolk Pines. A pergola extended from the building towards Woodward Road. The site has a sympathetic single garage behind the house.

The first owners were Mr and Mrs John Kelly. Mr Kelly, a businessman, unfortunately died in 1925 and his wife Ellen moved out of the house shortly afterwards. Subsequent owners have included Edwin and Edith Carr who lived there for about forty years, and Allan Michener, an architect and university lecturer,

It is an important part of Mt Albert’s / Auckland’s architectural heritage given its generally unaltered design. It is a local landmark complemented by its corner location and the tall trees which largely remain. It is a fine reminder of one of New Zealand’s great craftsman architects.

The building is registered by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust and the Auckland Councils District Plan for its exterior and interior.

John Childs, April 2012

- The Life and Times of James Walter Chapman-Taylor by Judy Siers*
- http://halo.wikia.com/wiki/List_of_Norse_Mythology_References_in_Halo



Enclosed patio. Photo courtesy of Gilderdale family (current owner) 2012.



House exterior. Photo courtesy of Gilderdale family (current owner) 2012.

Alberton – Volunteers Needed

Alberton, the historic house located at 100 Mt Albert Road, Mt Albert (a Historic Places Trust property), requires volunteers of all ages to help now and into the future.

Volunteers at Alberton assist with doing jobs such as hosting visitors, household tasks, helping with school groups, tea parties, functions, weddings and light

gardening duties. Ideally, volunteers help at Alberton at least one morning or afternoon per fortnight.

Volunteer Training Sessions are being held on Wednesday 30th May, Thursday 31st May and Saturday 2nd June 2012. (You need only attend one of these sessions.)

Please contact Penny Reason at Alberton, on 846 7367 for further information and an application form.