



# MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

Issue 51 • July 2020

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

## Mount Albert in 1950: Some Random Reminiscences

When it became known that Marjorie and I had celebrated our 70th wedding anniversary, I was asked to contribute some reminiscences about life in Mount Albert in 1950.

We were married in the Mount Albert Baptist Church, at 6pm on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> February, We were unconventional in that at that time, weddings were usually solemnised on a Saturday. The Church buildings comprised the large wooden auditorium with the Hall behind. A semi-circular drive in front of the Church enclosed a grassed area, in the middle of which stood a phoenix palm. (The Church did not acquire its corner site until a few years later.)

Prior to our marriage, Marjorie had been living with her parents in their large villa on (now numbered 20) Alexis Avenue. The house stood on a large site on the corner of Violet Street. (Some years later the land was subdivided into 4 Lots.) The house had been built in 1892 by Mr Noah Wood, and purchased by Marjorie's father, Charles Coles, in 1922.



*Marjorie's family's house  
in Alexis Avenue.*

Public transport between Queen Street and Mount Albert was by tramcar. Mount Albert was on the route which linked Meadowbank and Avondale, via Queen Street. The trams were often packed to capacity

by Arnold R. Turner CMG



*Arnold Turner as Deputy Mayor,  
with Mayor Anderson and  
Councillor Hewitt, 1959.*

during the morning and evening rush hours. (The trams were replaced by trolley buses in 1956.) Because of a shortage of overseas funds, few motor cars were being imported, and butter and meat were still rationed as they had been during World War II. (Rationing ceased in 1951.)

Local government in the Auckland metropolitan area was fragmented. Auckland City was surrounded by about 25 boroughs, each electing its own Mayor and Council. Mount Albert Borough included Kingsland and Sandringham.

For Council electoral purposes, the Borough was divided into five Wards, each electing 2 councillors. Alexis Avenue and Violet Street were in 'E' Ward. (Contrary to the beliefs of some people, 'E' did not stand for 'Elite'.)

Mr H.A. Anderson was Mayor, and had been since 1936. (He continued in office until 1959.) Mr T.R. Congalton was the Town Clerk and had held that position since 1933. Mr W.E. Begbie was Borough Engineer and had been since 1926. The Council owned Ferndale House. On entering by the front door, the room on the left was

occupied by the Mount Albert Kindergarten; the room on the right was headquarters of the Plunket Nurse. Mount Albert did not have a public library. My family used the library at Avondale, operated by Auckland City Council, which at that time was located in a wooden building adjacent to the theatre in St Georges Road.

Not all of the borough streets had been kerbed and sealed. That was proceeding, paid for out of loan moneys. (Authority to raise a loan of £1 Million had been given in 1926, and the funds had not yet been fully expended.) There were no traffic lights at any intersection. (Auckland City's first traffic lights were installed in 1956.)



*Trams passing Mount Albert shops, 1955  
(Dunsford 2016: 137).*

Driver licences were issued by the Borough Council and cost 5 shillings (5/-) per annum. Mount Albert Borough had its own two traffic officers. By 1953 (and maybe earlier) they were Mr Ferguson, an elderly man ("Fergie") who drove a car and was senior to Russell Gray (a younger man) who rode a motorcycle.

Not all of the land in the Borough had been developed. In particular the site of St Lukes shopping centre and the land now served by Wagener Place

# MT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

were rocky and covered with gorse and other weeds. In a similar condition were the sites later developed as Norrie Avenue, Francis Ryan Close and Kerr Taylor Avenue.

The site of the War Memorial Hall was a wasteland. Improvements to the street system had still to be made. St Lukes Road had still to be extended northwest from New North Road to Great North Road. (A block of 4 shops stood in the way.)

Morningside Drive did not exist. The northern section of what is now Morningside Drive was called Argyle Street, and at its southern end, it linked with Sainsbury Road. The railway overbridge in Gladstone Road had still to be built.

I knew of only one Maori family who lived in Mount Albert – there may have been more. The migrations of rural Maori and Pacifica people to the city did not start until the 1960s.

King George VI was our Monarch and Head of the British Empire. India, Bangladesh and Pakistan were one united country, and part of the Empire. The 1950 Empire Games were held in Auckland over 10 days in February at Eden Park. The facilities there then could be described as substandard.

Overland travel was usually by means of the railway network, the carriages hauled by steam engines. The present State Highway network existed in primitive form, with many lengths of unsealed road. There were no motorways. Overseas travel was by boat. There was a flying boat service to Sydney, which took about 8 hours to cross the Tasman Sea, but only businessmen and wealthy people could afford the fare.

Despite people experiencing what are perceived as hardships today, life was happy and pleasant, with good schools and lively Churches. The community was not adversely affected by the presence of licensed premises. Mount Albert was an excellent suburb in which to bring up a family.

## Mount Albert Shops

The shop on the corner of New North Road and Mount Albert Road, now occupied by a real estate agency, was

a butchery, one of the R&W Hellaby chain of shops. It had sawdust on the floor and carcasses were cut into retail pieces on a large block, part of a kauri trunk.

Proceeding westwards, a few doors along, Ian McKay had a grocer's shop. (I remember him, because years later he moved to run the supermarket once it had been built across the road.) Further along, at intervals among the other shops, there were four which were parts of grocery chains, like Blue & White, and Shoprite.

Most shopkeepers required payment for goods immediately in cash, or by cheque. At that time, the currency used was in Pounds, Shillings and Pence (£ s d ). (The changeover to decimal currency was in July 1967.) However, Ian McKay permitted us to operate an account, which we settled each month by cheque. In later years, the supermarket required spot cash each time, no "charging up". I do not think many payments were made with credit cards, as they were not in general use. Cashflow cards (EFTPOS) did not come into use until the 1970s. The picture theatre was well patronised, these being the days before TV.

Across the road, the Post & Telegraph Office occupied a small brick building. There, one could make use of the usual postal services, send telegrams (delivered to the addressee by a boy riding a bicycle), receive payment of government old-age, widows', child or sickness benefits, pay one's telephone account and renew one's radio licence.

Next door stood the King George V Memorial Hall and then two houses occupied by railway workers. The Hall was used on Monday evenings by the

Mount Albert Gym Club. Dan Hyde was the gym instructor.

North of Gladstone Road, the shop at the northern end of the 2-storeyed block of shops was occupied as a chemist's shop owned by Wm Atwell. The site north again was vacant – the Auckland Savings Bank did not have a presence in Mount Albert at the time.

Going further north past the wooden shop building which had housed one of the earliest shops in Mount Albert, one crossed Lloyd Avenue, on the northern corner of which stood Mr Phillip's furniture shop. And again beyond the 2-storeyed building was a service station.

*Showing in Mount Albert in the 1950s (Mt Albert Enterprise, 7 October 1957).*

On the northern corner of New North Road and Mount Albert Road, on the site now occupied by a bank, stood another service station, with its forecourt aligned with Mount Albert Road.

At the corner of New North Road and Kitenui Avenue stood the Moyes' family homestead, with a sole Shell petrol pump in its forecourt, accessed from either street. Across Kitenui Avenue stood four shops, fronting the bend. The shop building set back from the footpath had not yet been built.



*Mount Albert Post & Telegraph Office (Auckland Star, 18 December 1930).*



# MT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

Nor had the shops fronting Alberton Avenue. The shops on the corner of New North Road and Wairere Avenue were already there, the corner shop operated by the Farmers Trading Company.

Arnold R. Turner CMG, July 2020

*Arnold Turner was a Mount Albert Borough Councillor 1953–1962, and a Regional Councillor 1963–1968. His CMG was awarded for “services to local government and the community”. For more, see MAHS Newsletter 22.*

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

### Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> August 2020

**MAHS Annual General Meeting, 2pm.** The Speaker will be MAHS member Michael Bassett, who will speak about “Mt Albert as it was: Change, and how to react”. Nomination forms for committee members are available at <https://mtalberthistoricalsociety.org.nz/annual-general-meeting/>, and included with this newsletter for those of you who do not use the Internet.

**Please note the venue:** Senior Citizens Hall, Rocket Park, Councillors Drive and Wairere Avenue, Mount Albert.

**MAHS Subscription Fees** for the period 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 – 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021 are now due. The \$20 can be paid by cheque, or directly to our bank account 12 3029 0402365 00.

**Members can renew online at** <https://mtalberthistoricalsociety.org.nz/membership-form/>.

### Auckland Heritage Festival: 2 MAHS Events. Booking is essential for both.

Please email [info@mtalberthistoricalsociety.org.nz](mailto:info@mtalberthistoricalsociety.org.nz) or 846 4509. Note that the walk is limited to 20.

### Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2020

**Peter Crossley** will give a talk on the lava caves in Auckland at the Mount Albert Baptist Church, at 2pm.

### Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020

**John Childs** will lead a walk, at 2pm, looking at older non-residential buildings including factories, shops and institutional buildings and sites in Kingsland. Meet on the corner of Bond Street and New North Road.

### Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2020

**Afternoon Tea at 34 Allendale Road, the old Tattersfield House, at 2pm.** Because of COVID-19, we had to cancel our Mid-Winter Christmas event, now a November event. The venue is the home of our members, the Whittaker family. Further details will be in the October 2020 newsletter.

### Friday 6<sup>th</sup> November & Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> 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/>. If you have any anecdotes from your years at the school, please email [janetvonrandow@gmail.com](mailto:janetvonrandow@gmail.com), as these would be great for the October 2020 newsletter.

### 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](mailto:janetvonrandow@gmail.com).

### Additionally, a request from Deborah Dunsford, author of Mt Albert Then and Now:

“I am starting work on a MAGS history of the past 25 years. Russell Stone wrote the history of the first 75. I will be interviewing past staff and students from the 1990s onwards. If you would like to talk to me about your years at MAGS during this time, please contact [d.dunsford@historian.co.nz](mailto:d.dunsford@historian.co.nz). I would also welcome any personal photos of people and events at the school during the same time period. Thank you.”



Mount Albert seat & overlaid plaque, commissioned by MAHS member Richie Afford.



View from Mount Albert across from seat at left, looking over Mount Albert Grammar School.



Some of us have memories of the mountain and our various exploits there. For many today it provides daily exercise and views over the city.

*At the heart of Mount Albert we have our very own special mountain. Climb it you must – cherish it you must. Small it may be, but as you challenge its slopes, it unfolds views of incomparable expanse from the Waitemata and North Shore to the Coromandel and the Hunuas, to the Manukau and the blue mountains of our Waitakeres. Remember, you tread the sacred ground of the early Māori, as indeed it should be for all of us.*

*Care for it accordingly.  
(Richie Afford, Mount Albert Community News, 5<sup>th</sup> October 2007)*

Richie had two seats placed there some years ago: one in honour of his late wife and one in honour of a dear friend, Marie Neverman, who had been a teacher at Kowhai Intermediate School and who left her estate to the Native Forest Restoration Trust. Richie also planted a kahikatea. He did not tell anyone about it, but said recently, “it is going well. I have done little bits like that. In 1937, as a Mount Albert Grammar School boy, I helped plant what are now the great trees at the entrance to Gribblehirst Park.”



*The trees at the entrance to Gribblehirst Park.*

In a NZ Herald article in November 2019, another local resident, Mary Tallon, described her grandparents’ planting of many exotic trees, and their history on the mountain. Her forebears came to New Zealand in the 1840s and 1880s, and her grandparents loved the mountain.

Mary’s grandmother planted the cherry grove and her grandfather planted pūriri, rimu and pōhutukawa, alongside olives, which grew from seeds sent home from Palestine by her father on leave for a week in 1940, prior to 4 years as a POW in World War II.

In 1927 her grandfather headed a successful deputation to the Minister of Railways, the Hon Gordon Coates, asking that the mining of scoria on the mountain be stopped.

Mary also remembers local schoolchildren planting trees on the mountain in the 1950s and ’60s, a special experience. (Mary Tallon, NZ Herald, 18<sup>th</sup> November 2019.)

In November 2019 the mountain made headlines when the Tūpuna Maunga Authority (TMA) announced its intention to remove 345 of its exotic trees in order to begin a major native tree restoration plan. They had given notice of their intent in a letter to residents on 29<sup>th</sup> October, and had also invited submissions on the wider management plan in 2016.

However, locals and many non-locals protested the felling. They were worried about the removal of so many trees at once as their pest trapping pursuits over the last years had meant more bird life in the trees. They were not averse to more native planting.

The TMA held a hui on the mountain to discuss the issue with the local residents’ group, Honour the Maunga. Paul Majurey, head of the TMA, explained that the owners of the maunga, on whose behalf the TMA manages them, are the iwi of Auckland, given the maunga in a Treaty of Waitangi settlement in 2014.

The TMA “had been advised by ecologists, arborists, archaeologists, noise and traffic specialists, all of whom provided information to support the consent application.” Majurey was “aware of public comment around harm to bird species.” These were “subject to some very detailed conditions in the resource consent.” He thought it was “relevant we have support from both the Tree Council and Forest & Bird.” He added that drawing the process out over time extends the pain. “Experts suggest it’s better to do it now.” (Simon Wilson, NZ Herald, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2019.)

In January 2020, Pouroto Ngaropo, tohunga and historian of Mataurangi Māori, added his support to the Honour the Maunga group, believing that all trees on the mountain both native and exotic need saving. (Pouroto Ngaropo, NZ Herald, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2020).

The exotic trees have had a stay of execution as the TMA has been taken to court to settle the matter, while frequent walkers and residents continue to enjoy the mountain.



*The mountain with all of its trees (Wikipedia).*