



MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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Partners in Office for 20+ Years: As simple as ABC

In 1936 Henry Albert Anderson was sworn in as Mayor of Mount Albert by the town clerk, Ralph Congalton, the beginning of a long collaboration of those two men with Wilfred Begbie, the Borough Engineer. Begbie joined the council in 1926, Congalton in 1931, and Anderson in 1933.

In 1926 the borough raised a large 'Works' loan to finance street improvements. Under Mayor Ferner, the Council approved a further \$40,000 loan to employ 160 Mount Albert men, and the Unemployment Board accepted this project as a 'special case' and paid all interest and sinking fund charges on the loan for the next five years. Ferner, Congalton, and Begbie thus 'kick-started Mount Albert's employment efforts' (Dunsford 2016:109). As borough engineer, Begbie was responsible for planning and supervising this development work, carried out during difficult times.

In 1936 Ferner became a magistrate, just like his predecessor Stilwell, and Anderson won the mayoral by-election.

He was another lawyer, had been a councillor for three years, Chairman of the Finance Committee, and Deputy Mayor. Then followed the unique "ABC" administration of Anderson, Begbie, and Congalton, and it lasted almost quarter of a century (Scott 1983:76).

More houses were built and land was purchased to sell sections. Parks were developed: Begbie showed great foresight regarding the provision of parks and open spaces in the borough (MAHS Issue 8).

The purchase of Ferndale and its parklike area was spearheaded by the Administration of ABC. In December 1943, Congalton reported to Council that he and Mr Begbie had, after several meetings with representatives of the owners, received a letter from Mrs Garlick, the owner, offering to sell on certain terms. Although Mount Albert had debt outstanding, Begbie was sent to make further investigations of the suitability of Ferndale as a community amenity. In July 1945 he reported very favourably, particularly as Ferndale would add to the borough's open spaces. At that council meeting they agreed to the purchase for £4000 to be spread over 5 years



*The ABC Administration
(Ralph Congalton, Wilfred Begbie,
Henry Albert Anderson).*

subject to consent being given under the Municipal Corporations Act. The acquisition of Ferndale proved very positive for Mount Albert (from MAHS Archives, paraphrased).

In December 1956, after 25 years in his role, Congalton retired. His 20-year partnership with the one mayor was said to be unique in New Zealand municipal affairs, and only one thing marred that partnership, according to Arnold Turner, the Deputy Mayor. Mount Albert, the borough of largest population in New Zealand, had no chain for its chief citizen to wear. Anderson often joked that he was not a member of the chain gang. This all changed in 1957.

On 17 September, the Council and citizens celebrated 21 years of Anderson's mayoralty with a special council meeting. They presented him with a mayoral chain and mayoral robes beautifully made by Mrs Ensor, wife of the new Town Clerk, and Mrs JC McKenzie.



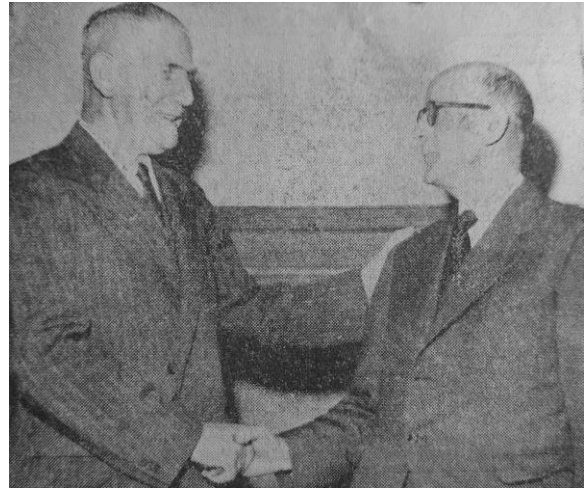
*Anderson in robes and chain with
Mrs Ensor and Mrs McKenzie, who made the robes.*

Deputy Mayor Turner commended the outstanding service Mr and Mrs Anderson had given Mount Albert and the Auckland community, saying they had won a unique place in the esteem and affection of their fellow citizens. They were presented with a magnificent Wedgewood dinner set, complete with a canteen of

cutlery and glasses. There were tributes from councillors, other mayors, and citizens of Mount Albert.

Mr Anderson immediately recognised the work of Begbie and Congalton, together with a council working as a team, while Begbie considered that Anderson's fair play and understanding had won him the complete confidence and loyalty of the council staff (The Mount Albert Enterprise, Oct 1957). Mrs Anderson acknowledged the wonderful work of the women of Mount Albert during those eventful years.

In 1959 the remaining members of ABC, Anderson and Begbie, retired, although Begbie remained on contract as Supervising Engineer until 1966, under the new Borough Supervisor, GK Jackson, adding up to forty years of service to Mount Albert.



Congalton installs Anderson as mayor for the 8th time, 1956.

The Andersons: Mayor and Mayoress for 23 Years From the family scrapbook

If there was a chocolate cake cooling on the bench, then it was not for us. Bran biscuits were. The cake was for a bring-and-buy for the Red Cross, the Girl Guides, Plunket, the Guild of Service, or another local good cause. So the cake would be off to King George's Hall for the Friday bring-and-buy.

I remember busy parents: Mother often on the phone or out; Father home from work with a long brown lawyer's envelope with a pink ribbon around it. The study at the front of the house often the dropoff point for goods for a fundraising venture. Our house was the centre of borough activities.

Those were the days when the Mayoress played as important a role as the Mayor and, in my parents' case, it was Mother who got an MBE first, and Father who was so delighted and even more delighted that she was presented with it by the Queen. He received one a year later. Both were honoured in this way for their many years of service to Mount Albert and Auckland.

They came from Taranaki and settled in Preston Avenue in the late 1920s. In 1939 they moved to Ainslie in Allendale Rd. In 1933 Father joined the council, taking on the roles of finance and Deputy Mayor. At the by-election in 1936, following Mr Ferner's move to the Bench, Father became Mayor and carried out that role for the next 23 years.

Father known to his family as Brandy, Mr A or HA, to his legal colleagues as Harry, and to others as Andy, managed all roles with equal passion. At home, at an Aunt's property in Titirangi, and at the bach in Torbay he had extensive vegetable gardens. In his legal office he worked tirelessly, often returning in the weekends and seeing people at home in the evenings. As he did not drive, Mr Congalton collected him from home two or three mornings a week so that he could begin his day at the Council Chambers.

He served on the Owairaka School Committee and on the St Luke's Church vestry. He was a member of the Emergency Precautions Scheme Organisation (EPSO), set up before the war in 1939 to organise firefighting and emergency services. He was a Deputy Chairman of the Auckland Provincial Patriotic Council, a Chairman of the Public Transport Association, a Deputy Chairman of the Metropolitan Drainage Board, and a Chairman of the Manpower Appeal Committee. His last national position was as President of the Municipal Association, 1957-59.

From 1936 to 1954 he was a member of the Auckland Transport Board, serving as Chairman in his last 6 years. He oversaw the change from trams to buses – which we possibly regret now. Not being a driver, he was always on public transport, and on many an evening people coming home to Mount Albert on the tram, or later bus, would be entertained by the conversations he held. It was on the tram that he suggested to Arnold Turner that he stand for council.



Father was the subject of many a Herald cartoon.

Father travelled by tram and Mother rode a bicycle. We did not own a car until 1952.

Mother too took on a number of roles. When the government lifted the age for children to begin school, she ran a kindergarten at home for local 5-year-olds. In 1936 she threw herself into the role of Mayoress. The birth of two more daughters in 1939 and 1943, creating a family of seven, did not seem to cramp her style.

Like Father she was very involved in the war effort, 1939–45, as Woman Warden in EPSO, Chairwoman of the local Women’s Patriotic Committee, and a member of the Overseas Gift Fund Committee. She was instrumental in setting up a canteen service at the Western Springs camp for the American Red Cross, and supported brides from overseas coming to the borough arranging regular ‘at homes’ for them. Our home was the venue for celebrations and fund-raising at that time (Dunsford 2016:117–118). Lady Allum, a former Mayoress of Auckland, wrote to thank Mother for all she had done during those years:

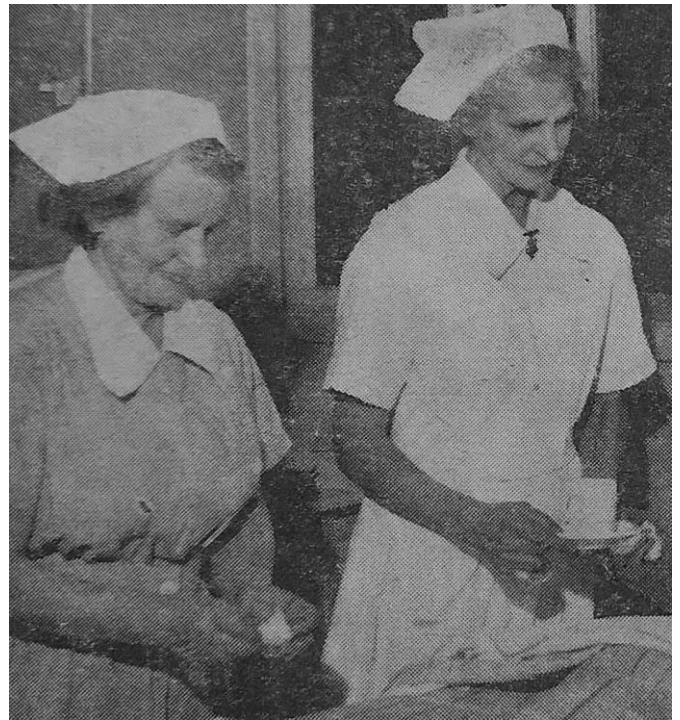
You little knew how you inspired me to go on in those difficult war years and the years which followed. I cannot ever remember you turning me down or ever finding an excuse when I asked for your help and I cannot find the words I need in which to express my thanks.

When Mother became Mayoress, there was no Plunket, no Kindergarten, no Mayoress’s Committee, and no Memorial Hall. She played a leading role in their creation, and the fundraising began at home. Somehow we all fitted around these efforts. The house was always full of extended family and friends; we were encouraged to bring friends home for meals and to stay. The ping pong table was always in use and there was always noise and fun.

In 1950 the Empire Games were held in Mount Albert and Sir Arthur Porritt, the then Governor General and Chairman of the British Empire Games Federation, thanked Father in a personal letter:

I am sure the outstanding success of the four days there must be as gratifying to you as it was for us. We were very conscious of and grateful for your continued and enthusiastic personal support.

1950 was also an important year for Mother’s contribution. The Chairman of the Auckland Hospital Board came to discuss the possible closure of a geriatric ward at Cornwall Hospital for lack of staff. She assured him that the women of Mount Albert would step into the breach, and so the Guild of Service was formed. Women from all over the borough, many former trained nurses, staffed Ward 10 at Cornwall Hospital, doing 8-hour shifts, for more than 10 years. Although they were prepared to do it voluntarily, the Hospital Board insisted they were paid, and for most of them it was the first money they had earned since they were married. Taxis collected them and dropped them home. Mother did at least one, sometimes two duties a week if needed. Organising the roster took many hours on the phone.



Mother and Mrs Grut on duty at Ward 10, 1952.

In 1953, the Queen’s Coronation was celebrated in Mount Albert at Gribblehurst Park. The phone rang far earlier than normal and Father answered but said nothing about it. A few hours later at the Park, as part of the Brownie contingent, I heard him announce that a New Zealander had reached the summit of Mt Everest. That phone call was something to be shared with the citizens of Mount Albert, not early in the morning with the family. In January 1954 when the Queen was in Auckland, Father proudly shepherded all seven of us into the Town Hall for Mother’s investiture.

One morning in 1957 Father commented that the Council had decided to build a War Memorial fountain. According to my brother Joe, Mother’s response was that we needed a hall, not a fountain, and Father said well then she had better do something about it. She was immediately on the phone and the fundraising began in earnest. Fundraising for all War Memorial projects was at the time topped up with a government subsidy (Dunsford 2016:133–134).

In September that year, at the special Council meeting to mark their 21 years in office (see page 1), when Father was presented with the mayoral robes, he commented:

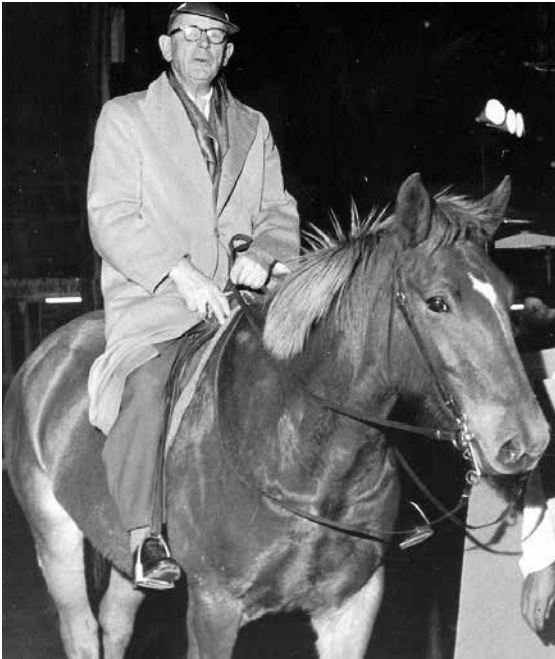
*I was not measured,
but I hope I will measure up to them.*

It had been a complete surprise and both parents were overwhelmed. It was a great celebration of those 21 years.

In February 1958, Mother was a judge on the Parade of Homes in Mount Albert. In 1959, Father retired from the mayoralty. Mother stood as the National candidate for Mount Albert in the 1960 election, after much persuasion from the local party committee and, much to the family’s relief, could not break Mr Freer’s run. In 1961 she became Auckland Provincial Commissioner of the Girl Guides.

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On a memorable evening in May 1959, as part of the celebrations for the opening of the Harbour Bridge, a carnival-like fundraising event was held on Mount Albert. Father rode a horse; Mother and other well-known women were pushed up the mountain in wheelbarrows. There were no limits to what they would do for Mount Albert.



Father riding a horse up Mount Albert.



Mrs Ensor, Mrs May, Mrs Dove, and Mother, heading up the mountain.

In 1967 the break from Mount Albert came, with their move to Torbay where we had had a bach since the late 1920s. Friends from Mount Albert came in droves to visit them, as did family and their many beloved grandchildren. Father travelled into his legal office in His Majesty's Arcade every day. Just before his death from cancer in 1973, he told the vicar that he just wanted him to say that he had been a 'good bloke'. In 1975 after Mother's death and at the opening of the library named in her honour, Alice Wylie spoke of all the 'good' that she had done. They had indeed both 'measured up'.

Janet v Randow

1. Dunsford D (2016). Mt Albert Then & Now.
2. Scott D (1983). In Old Mt Albert.

Thanks to Gaylene Morrison for materials and photos from the papers of her Father, Mel Ensor.



Farewelling Mother and Father as they leave Mount Albert, 11 October 1966.

We would love to hear anecdotes of the role that the mountain has played in your lives, for possible inclusion in a subsequent newsletter. Please email info@mtalberthistoricalsociety.org.nz.

M.A.H.S Dates To Remember

Saturday 22nd February 2020, 2pm, Ferndale House

Author Debra Miller talks about her book, *The Point* (on the history of Point Chevalier), OPEN TO ALL.

Sunday 15th March 2020, 2–3:30pm, A Kingsland Walk

John Childs will lead a walk looking at older non-residential buildings, including factories, shops, and institutional buildings and sites. Meeting at the corner of Bond Street and Great North Road, MEMBERS ONLY.

Sunday 29th March 2020, 1–4pm, Ferndale House

Mount Albert Historical Society Heritage Day: Activities for young and old, including a settlers' fancy dress competition, children's games, a photo display, research questions answered, local books presented by their authors and available for purchase, food carts, and more. See local press for details.