



# MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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PO BOX 77-002 MT ALBERT AUCKLAND 1350 • PH: 09 846 4509 • [WWW.MTALBERTHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG.NZ](http://WWW.MTALBERTHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG.NZ)

## Mel Ensor: Forty years of service to Mount Albert

On 1 November 1977, after 21 years as Mount Albert's Town Clerk and 40 years total with the Borough Council, Mel Ensor retired. In his letter of thanks for the gifts bestowed on him to mark this occasion, he described his retirement as the end of an era.

*My wife used to say that I lived for nothing but the council, and to a great extent, that was probably correct. But whatever one's chosen career may be, one can only gain satisfaction and a sense of fulfilment and achievement by giving one's all, to the best of one's ability.*

(Central Leader, 16 November 1977)

In 40 years of local body life, Mel said he had spent an estimated 2,000 nights out on council business. In spite of an occasional feeling of neglect, his wife Peg supported him wholeheartedly in his charity work, and her own interest in Plunket and the Ferndale Women's Club.

One farewell gift was a La-Z-Boy chair, presented to Mel with the quip, "it mightn't be appropriate, because he hasn't got a lazy bone in his body". On that occasion the Mayor, Frank Turner, described Mel as the most remarkable public servant Mount Albert had employed, adding that the Council had been lucky to "hold onto him since 1938".

Mel's successor, Denis Nash, had worked as his assistant for 21 years, and said he had a tenacity of purpose and attention to detail that had earned him a reputation among staff: they called him Hawkeye.

The council staff social club presented Mel with a welding and cutting set as their farewell gift – his hobbies from a young age, mechanical engineering and carpentry, meant that he would not be idle in his retirement. His intention was to redecorate his home.

### The young man from Thames

Mel (Melborne) was born in Thames in 1916, the eldest of 3 boys. His parents were Sidney (Sid) and Margaret Ensor. Sid was a fisherman and also very involved in the Thames community. He was Mayor of Thames 1931–59, and served many terms as a Thames councillor: 1917–23, 1925–31, 1962–65, and 1968–71. He was also involved in various community groups in Thames.

Mel had wanted to be a mechanic, and spent quite a lot of time after school at a local mechanic's, watching and asking questions. However, when they offered him an apprenticeship, Sid would not let him leave High School; he wanted Mel to finish with University Entrance.

Having successfully completed that Mel then started work, first for the Thames Borough Council, then in the Paeroa Council office as a Rates Clerk. In 1938, he applied for that same position at the Mount Albert Borough Council. It was Depression days and there were many applicants for the job, but Mel got it – he was 22. He described Mount Albert as a "nice quiet suburb."

*I used to hop into town during my lunch hour: 20 minutes in on the tram, 20 minutes in Queen Street, and 20 minutes back.*

When war broke out, "painful flat feet" prevented him from qualifying for active service. He served instead in the NZ Air Force as a mechanic, and his overseas posting was to the Pacific in Fiji. He ran the Flight Engineer's office and became a Technical Adjutant. He was released early as the council needed him back in Mount Albert. On retirement he still had his discharge orders in his wallet. At the bottom they read: "Manpowered to the Mount Albert Borough Council for employment."

Mel and Peg were married in Paeroa in 1942, and after the war they purchased a house in Harbutt Avenue, Mount Albert, where they stayed until 1964, when they moved to New North Road. They had one son and three daughters, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Mel was Rates Clerk until 1949 when he became Assistant Town Clerk, and in 1957 he ascended to Town Clerk.



*Mel Ensor receiving the keys to the Office from retiring Town Clerk, Ralph Congalton.*

Over the next 21 years both his career and the borough progressed steadily. He thought the most important project finished in his time was the St Lukes Shopping Centre.

# MT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

Mel saw a shift in council focus over time from bread and butter roading and drainage to the provision of social amenities: the Library, the War Memorial Hall, and the Recreation Centre, the first to be run by a local body.

Even with his commitment to the council, Mel managed to be involved in the community. He was a member of the Mount Albert St John's Ambulance division, carrying on his involvement with St John's from his younger days in Thames.



*Celebrating the first Mount Albert Borough Council meeting at Allendale, 1A Mount Albert Road.*

*Councillor Kenny, Mayor Frank Turner,  
Councillor McGehan, Mel Ensor*

He was also a charter member of the Mount Albert Rotary Club from 1966, and served various roles there over the years, until his death. They were actually planning to present him with a life membership on the day of his death, 29 June 2005 in Aranui Rest Home in Woodward Road, but he had the last word on that.

Mount Albert was his passion and with the faithful support of Peg and the family, he served the borough for 40 years with steadfastness and distinction.



*After retirement with Mayor Frank Ryan & Alice Wylie.*

Memoir & photos provided by Mel's daughter and MAHS member, Gaylene Morrison.

## Dick Scott, 1923–2020

Dick Scott, journalist and historian, died on New Year's Day 2020. His book 'In Old Mt Albert' first published in 1961 is the one that most of us in Mt Albert remember. It was a history of the district from the earliest times, more particularly the struggles of the pioneers to bring civilisation to the wilderness, published on the occasion of the borough's Golden Jubilee, 1911–61.

An enlarged edition in 1983 was commissioned by the Mt Albert City Council in response to continuing demand for a book long on the rare book list. Dick Scott added much to the second edition taking a deeper look at the social history of the district and previously unavailable diaries, letters and scrapbooks give additional – sometimes surprising – information. The additions give local history a dimension that will engage readers well beyond local boundaries. (from dust jacket of second edition).

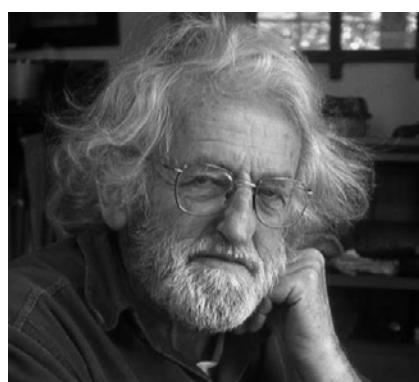
New Zealand-wide Dick Scott is remembered for two seminal books among many published works – one on the 1951 waterside workers' strike; '151 Days' (1952) Penguin and 'The Parihaka Story' (1954) Southern Cross Books. The latter was revised as, 'Ask that Mountain: The Story of Parihaka' (1975) Heinemann.

In *Ask That Mountain*, Scott "is credited for opening up people's eyes around colonisation and bringing what happened at Parihaka and the non-violent Māori resistance to European occupation to the attention of Pākehā".

This was seen by many, including historian Dr Jock Phillips, as a turning point for many historians, who started looking at both sides of the story.

Massey University historian Associate Professor Kerry Taylor described Dick Scott as a "literary giant penning two absolutely iconic 'must-read' books".

He received the Prime Minister's Award for Literacy Achievement (Non-Fiction) in 2007 and was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Massey University's College of Humanities and Social Sciences in 2016.



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dick\\_Scott\\_\(historian\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dick_Scott_(historian))

### Sources:

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## Recalling the Polio Epidemic: 20 November 1947 – 19 April 1948

Thanks to Mike Bassett, Judith Goldie, Robin MacKay and Glennys McGlashan for their memories.

The polio epidemic did not have the dramatic consequences of the Covid19 pandemic and New Zealand's and the world's response to it this year.

Mike Bassett, in a combined Standard 3 and 4 class at Owairaka Primary School at the time, says it is surprising how few people in authority today know anything about it. The school closedown lasted from about 20 November 1947 until 19 April 1948.

Judith Goldie was at a small country school of 120 for a year and, when the isolation started after the Christmas holidays, was homebound.

*But being on a farm and with two brothers,  
I recall life continuing as normal.  
We all had our daily chores, and mine was  
to feed the hens and collect the eggs.  
Two boys from our school got polio  
and one was left with a bad limp  
while the other was not. It's a bit different  
being in lockdown in a city than on a farm.*



Judith and her brothers.

My own memory is being a very annoyed five-year old unable to start Owairaka Primary School in February 1948 as planned. My sister Helen remembers her best friend, Ann Gulley, helping her come to grips with maths. My sister Robin remembers the summer holidays at the beach as always, and no stringent lockdown:

*Polio was called infantile paralysis in those days  
because it mostly affected children, and caused  
paralysis of the limbs and/or respiratory system.  
Children in the polio wards were allowed no visitors  
at all, not even their parents.*

*Schools, Sunday Schools, Kindergartens, and  
day nurseries were all closed and people were  
“advised” not to let children stay in motor camps  
or travel between the North and South Islands.  
Other than that, people went to work as usual  
and shops and businesses remained open.*

*When it was the usual time to go back to school  
we did correspondence lessons and were told  
to listen to the school broadcasts, which I loved.  
We got our lessons in the mail, and when we had  
done them we posted them to our local school,  
where the teachers were sitting in empty classrooms  
to mark our work.*



Helen, Robin, and friend Anne, busy with correspondence.

The summer of 1947 began for Glennys McGlashan with the prospect of six weeks of holidays and the excitement of Christmas. Her family were very concerned about the epidemic, and were warned that as the disease was very contagious, children must be kept at home.



*Glennys McGlashan.*

Parents were told not to take their children on public transport, join any crowds, or attend any group gatherings, even church services.

*I was mystified about this 'polio' disease but became frightened when my family explained that it crippled people for life and even caused death, especially in children.*

*I was happy to stay home and as the school holidays progressed I was permitted to play with two or three neighbours' children but could not go off our street.*

*My older brother Ernest, and I kept ourselves amused and were never bored. I spent wonderful days playing in a tent on the back lawn, having neighbourhood children to play and visiting them. We created endless games, built trolleys, and created an adventure playground in our backyard. My brother, eight years older than me, patiently joined in my games, and helped organise an athletic sports day for my friends. We had great fun attempting the high jump, sprint races, and forward rolls on an old eiderdown on the back lawn.*



*Glennys and her brother Ernest.*

*Throwing the cricket ball was a challenge too, with throws measured using mother's tape measure.*

When they were told that they could not start the new school year in February 1948, because the polio epidemic was at its peak, Glennys was disappointed as she was looking forward to Standard 1. Correspondence lessons were a much enjoyed novelty, at least.

*The pages included arithmetic, reading, writing, and drawing. We spent each morning sitting in our sun porch, completing the tasks set from our correspondence packs using crayons and coloured pencils. We posted our completed lessons to the correspondence school, and each week our marked work was returned with another set of lessons to be completed. When the epidemic was over and we returned to school, our education had not suffered from a term of correspondence lessons, and it was the best summer holidays that I can remember.*

(Janet v Randow)

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

### Friday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2020

Marjorie & Arnold Turner celebrated their 70<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary. On behalf of MAHS, our President Mary Inomata congratulated them, "Platinum is precious, strong, and enduring, and a wonderful representation of your relationship over the years. We treasure you and the richness and shared knowledge you have brought to our historical society, since we commenced in 2006."

In response, Arnold said, "The Mount Albert community has contributed a great deal to our life experience. It was and is a great community in which to bring up a family. We thank God for the family and the experiences He has given us. And we had very happy celebrations with family and friends over the anniversary time." Arnold has agreed to contribute a piece on Mount Albert 70 years ago for a later newsletter.

### May 2022, Mount Albert Grammar School

The School is holding its Centenary Celebration, and you may already register your interest at: <https://www.mags.school.nz/mags-centenary-celebrations>.

### Auckland Heritage Festival, September – October 2020, dates subject to confirmation

**John Childs** will lead a walk as the MAHS contribution to the festival looking at older non-residential buildings including factories, shops and institutional buildings and sites in Kingsland. **Peter Crossley** will give a talk on the lava caves in Mt Albert and this will be held at The Mt Albert Baptist Church.