



MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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A boy's letter, two photographers and a social network



On a warm Saturday October evening in Mt Albert 142 years, Artie Stone, aged 8 $\frac{3}{4}$, wrote a letter to his father who was away in Australia on business. In his father's absence, Artie was the man of the house, and he sat purposefully at the big wooden desk and chose a piece of fine blue letterhead paper, bearing the ornate SB logo of his father's company, Stone Brothers. He folded the paper in half and wrote, carefully and precisely, using his father's broad-tipped pen. His spelling and grammar show that his education was still at an early stage, but the story he tells opens several windows on his family and on friendships between families in old Mt Albert.

Stoneleigh
Oct 25th 1879

My Dear Papa

I am weeding the garden and Mamma is giving me three-pence every week. I have dig up my carrots and planted some cabbages which Webster gave me. On Wednesday I went to town with Mamma to hold the horse for her while she to went in to see Mrs Webster who is very ill, Webster has not been hear today and we think she is worse. I had to come home in the middle of the day because I forgot my lunch.

Mamma has promised to take Sissy and me to an entertainment next Thursday week. I hope it will be a fine night. I had a game of croquet on Saturday. Joli was eating the strawberries and Agness drove hime away but he came back. Sissy and I went up to Mrs Websters with a sitting Spanish egg to night. Our Exhibition is in November the 18 and I am going to make a bunch of flowers for it and so is Charlie Garlich.

Agness gave me my stamps what she promised me there is some good ones there there is a Canada ten-cent Natal and some others will you tell Charlie has he got a Hong Kong because I have got one of them. Mamma kept me at home to day to mind Violet because it was Agness day out.

Mamma gave me some of slips of the pansys. Mamma says that we either go to the circus or the entertainment but we would rather got to the boath. The chicks will be out to morrow Mamma sayed and Mamma herd them making a noise. I will right to ~~you~~ Charlie next week.

I remain, Your loving little son, Artie

The Stone family

Artie's father was Charles Burrell Stone (1841-1920), a director of Stone Brothers, merchants and shipowners. He was one of the first European children born in Auckland, a member of a large extended family, and was related to the Mt Albert White and Phillipps families by marriage. Artie's mother Elizabeth (nee Douglas) had died in 1874 leaving Charles a widower with three small children. Twenty months later, Charles Stone married Ellen Page (1852-1938), who is the Mamma of the letter.

Soon after their marriage, Charles and Ellen Stone and the three children spent a year in Adelaide where Charles ran the South Australian Branch of the New Zealand Insurance Company. They lost a baby there.

Between May 1878 and February 1882, the Stone family lived in a house named Stoneleigh, on 3 acres of land bordered by what is now New North Rd, Alexis Ave and Asquith Ave. There was a nice family home on this property, occupied and no doubt expanded and rebuilt by a string of young, entrepreneurial families between 1865 and 1878: the Clarks, then the Ogilvies,

then the Greenwoods. Charles would sell this property to the James family who occupied it for 40 years. The story of this property will be told another time.

It is not surprising that Charles and Ellen Stone made their home in Mt Albert after returning from Adelaide. Ellen knew the suburb well, having lived there with her family before her marriage. Charles's sister and brother in law had recently moved there, and they had close friends and family in the growing suburb.



Charles Stone travelled a lot for business, and Artie wrote this letter 2 weeks after he left for a two month trip that took in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. On this trip, he was accompanied by his 13 year old son Charlie (Charles John Stone, 1866-1941) who would go on to become a master mariner.

Artie was at home with his two sisters. Sissy (Annie Louisa Stone, 1868-1967) was 11. She would marry Dr Peter Lindsay in 1889. Violet (Violet Douglas Stone, 1878-1960) was 15 months old, the only surviving child of Ellen and Charles Stone's marriage. In 1903 Vi would marry Tom Atwood, Superintendent of Mercantile Marine in the Port of Auckland.

Artie (Arthur Francis Stone, 1871-1953) grew up to be a gregarious man who enjoyed social, sporting and community activities. He went farming at Inglewood and then Cambridge, was involved in the administration of dairy companies then worked as an agent, auctioneer, and publican. He married Emma Clarke in 1892. His spelling improved considerably.

Artie's world

In 1879 he was in Standard II at Mt Albert School (and had forgotten to take his lunch one day), played croquet on the weekends, collected stamps like his older brother, was encouraged to grow flowers and vegetables, and played with the Garlick boys from across the road. The family kept chickens and probably other animals. Ellen trusted him to mind the baby on the helper's day off, and to hold the horse for her when she went visiting. Artie proudly told his father he was being given 3 pence a week for weeding the garden (\$2.25 in today's money). This must have been a new arrangement with Ellen, looking for ways to motivate her step-son.

Artie refers to three upcoming events: an Exhibition, an Entertainment, and a Circus. What were they?

The Exhibition

The Third Industrial Exhibition of the Auckland Sunday-School Union was held in the Drill Hall in Wellesley St. It was a display of around a thousand items – needlework, woodwork, flowers and vegetables – made or grown by students from protestant denomination sunday schools across Auckland. As well as the displays, children could examine scientific equipment including galvanic batteries and microscopes. There were bands and speeches, concerts by sunday school choirs, magic lantern shows and lime lights. This was on every evening for a whole week.

Neither Artie Stone nor Charlie Garlick won a prize for their flowers, but Charlie's younger brother John did, and Charlie won a prize for a cabbage. The only other prize that went to the Mt Albert Wesleyan Sunday School was to Katrina Schnackenberg for a crocheted mat.

The Entertainment

The Entertainment that Ellen had promised to take the children to was an amateur fundraiser for the Mt Albert St Luke's Parsonage Fund, held on Thursday 6 November in the Choral Hall in Symonds Street. The programme consisted of musical pieces, two farces and a dialogue from Sheridan's play Pizarro. Special transport was available on Quick's Omnibus which left the Whau at 6.45pm. In his letter, Artie hoped that the evening would be fine, but in the event it was a wet night, and the newspaper reported that the audience was disappointingly small.

The circus

Chiari's Royal Italian Circus Troupe came straight from San Francisco. It set up its animal cages and huge big top in Wellesley St East, and ran a mix of matinees and evening performances to packed houses between 31 October and 17 November, varying the shows often to appeal to repeat visitors. It had 30 performers including jugglers, tight-rope walkers and clowns, and featured Shetland ponies, an American bison, two zebra, Bengal tigers, Patagonian guanaco (llama) and performing dogs. The Circus would have been much more exciting for a little boy than the Entertainment – I hope they did get to see it!

The Page family

Artie's stepmother Ellen was often called Nell or Nellie within the family. Born in Ventnor on the Isle of Wight in 1852, she was the youngest of seven children of architect and builder Thomas Page and his wife Jane Elgin. (They were not related to the well-known Page family in Kingsland). After Jane's death, Thomas brought his family to Auckland on the *Annie Wilson*, as part of the Albertland settlement scheme, arriving in September 1863, and took up a land grant near Tokatoka south of Dargaville. Ellen's brother George Elgin Page stayed in Auckland and became a photographer, and it is likely that Ellen and her sisters also stayed in the city. In 1868, Ellen's 18 year old brother was killed in a bush-felling accident, and her heartbroken father sold up and returned to Auckland, where he lost a second son to consumption in 1871.

In September 1874 Thomas Page purchased the land that runs to the west of today's Ranleigh Rd between Mt Albert Rd and Lloyd Ave, and moved there with his two younger daughters. In November his photographer son George died of typhus in Mt Albert, possibly at his father's house. Ellen and Charles Stone married at this house on 1 March 1876. Thomas passed away in August 1877 three months after his last surviving son had died of consumption. His three daughters Eliza Carter, Jane Elgin Page and Ellen Stone all lived long lives.

The Page house stayed in the extended family: after Thomas's death it was purchased by Ellen's sister-in-law Sarah Stone and her new husband Robert Fry.

Hartley and Elizabeth Webster

Artie's letter talks of the Websters with intimacy. This is not surprising, as Charles and Ellen had both known them since they were children, and Ellen, in particular, seems to have had a close association with them.

Hartley Webster (1818-1906) and his wife Elizabeth (nee Chandler, 1820-1897) were a childless couple who lived in Mt Albert Rd, next door to the Fry (formerly Page) home. In 1852, Hartley had been the first photographer to permanently set up in Auckland, while Elizabeth ran a millinery shop, and they would have known Charles Stone's parents who were resident and working in central Auckland at the same time. There is a daguerreotype photograph of Charles as a teenager which may have been taken by Webster.

The Websters returned to England at the end of 1860. Hartley was away for a year, while Elizabeth stayed until May 1863. She returned on the *Annie Wilson*. The Page family, including 10 year old Ellen and 20 year old George were also on this ship. There is no evidence that the Pages knew the Websters before this journey, but the families seem to have been close after it. In the year after arriving in Auckland, George Elgin Page established himself as a photographer, and it is likely he was encouraged and possibly trained by Hartley Webster.

The Websters purchased 9 acres of land on Mt Albert Rd in 1865. It ran from today's Ranleigh Ave to the eastern boundary of what is now 34 Mt Albert Rd. It was tenanted for much of the next 10 years, but they were back living there by the end of 1875. Frail, deaf Thomas Page may have purchased his property in Mt Albert because the Websters were next door. Hartley mostly did less photography and devoted himself to farming, purchasing a block of land across the road (around what is now Ferner Ave) and leasing a further 62 acres across the back of the mountain, where he ran cattle and pigs.

In retirement, the Websters were well off and seemed to have lived a happy and comfortable life although Hartley's eyesight deteriorated as he aged. It is likely that he mentored amateur photographer John Brooks, who moved in across the road in 1890. Elizabeth Webster was active in church and social circles, and bred persian cats. She was one of the signatories of the 1893 Suffrage petition.

Reflection

Artie Stone was my great grandfather. His father kept his letter and it has been handed down in a battered tin cashbox with the daguerreotype and other family documents. This article has been written during COVID19 Lockdown when we are all at home, unable to meet face to face and very aware of our own domestic activities, our mortality, and the importance of friends and family networks. It seemed like the right article to write.

Written by Lynley Stone

Key References

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The photographs of Artie (c1884), Charles and his children (1874), and Ellen (c1880) are from Margaret and Harry Coatsworth's research on the Stone family.

In the course of researching this I have explored the Page and Webster families as well as my own. I have had wonderful conversations with members of the extended Stone, James, and Garlick families, and have drawn heavily on the advice and publications of Lisa Truttman and Keith Giles. I have made extensive use of Papers Past, Ancestry, FindMyPast and the land records from ArchivesNZ, and LINZ, and have had generous support from the National Library of New Zealand, HeritageNZ, Auckland Council Heritage Team and the Northern Wairoa Genealogy Group. There are, of course, still many loose ends to follow up and a huge amount of information that did not make it into this article: I will share this in other ways.

MAHS PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I hope that you are all well and coping with level 3 lockdown as well as you can. We are certainly well over lockdown and having had our vaccinations just want to get on with life. The most common complaint I hear from everyone is the stories about their hair. "How come," one lady said to me "your dog has had a haircut and I can't?" One short haired friend has been driven to allowing her husband to cut her hair and commented that he didn't make too bad a job of it. I don't know about you but I have missed two haircut appointments and no matter what I do, as my wavy hair grows longer, I constantly look like I have been dragged backwards through a hedge.

I am sure you all have stories you will retell in the years to come about COVID19 in 2020 and 2021. We look back and realise what a good life we had in this country before it arrived and hope that we will appreciate it all the more when the good times come back.

In terms of MAHS we had to cancel our AGM in August and our Heritage Walk in October, and have been unable to plan future meetings not knowing what will be happening down the track, but we look forward to seeing you all, when more normality resumes.

Stay well and carry on with courage.

Mary Inomata

Fire at Owairaka Primary School

We recently asked MAHS Members for memories of this event, and had several replies. Having piqued your interest, we thought we would share what we found out.

Early in the morning of Good Friday, Friday 12 April 1963, thieves broke into the Owairaka School office and forced open the safe. They then set a fire which resulted in catastrophic damage to most of the main school building.

The school had opened in 1929, and the roll grew quickly, with additional buildings being added over time including the school hall (1946) and the primers block (1949). The block that was destroyed had been completed in 1939, built of wooden weather boards, with timber floors and a tiled roof. It consisted of two wings: when built, the long wing facing Richardson Rd housed five classrooms, then the Principal's office with an entrance hall, and two more classrooms on the right. Adjoining this was an angled connecting 'alcove', and three more classrooms here housed in an angled wing. This wing survived the fire and is still in use today.

Ultimately the fire benefitted the school, as the new block, erected in 1964, was more modern and better suited to teaching and learning.

The following account of the fire is from the *New Zealand Herald*, 13 April 1963.

SCHOOL FIRE AFTER SAFE BREAK

Fire destroyed the main administration and teaching block of the Owairaka District School, Mt Albert, early yesterday morning shortly after thieves had forced open the school safe. Police believe the intruders could have started the fire which razed half of the building and damaged the rest beyond repair. The wrecked safe was found in the ruins. There had been £25 in it.

Strong Hold

When the brigade received the call at 2.55 a.m. the fire had a strong hold. Firemen used four hoses. People in nearby houses were warned to watch for falling sparks and cinders. Ninety feet of the building was burned down before the fire was under control, just before 4 a.m. One classroom was left standing at the south-west end, and two at the far north-

east end. Two of these three were burned out and the third severely damaged by smoke and water.

The whole building was a write-off, said the headmaster, Mr F.W. Coleman, yesterday. He did not know what it would cost to put up another block, but the old one would have probably been worth £10,000. It had been used to house all of the standard two, three and four pupils – about 250 of the total roll of 400.

Temporary Rooms

He said loss of office and teaching equipment would amount to several thousand pounds. He estimated the classrooms' libraries alone to be worth at least £3000. Members of the school committee and staff spent yesterday attempting to salvage what they could. Arrangements had been made to set up six temporary classrooms during the week-end, said Mr Coleman. "With these and our school hall and the use of a nearby church hall we will be able to accommodate all of our pupils.



Detail from: Owairaka, Auckland. (17 August 1961). Whites Aviation Ltd: Photographs. Ref: WA-55692-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. /records/23247958

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ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FEES: Reminder:
Membership fees for the 2021-22 year were due on 30 June. Many thanks to all of you who have renewed. If, in these uncertain times, you have overlooked this, we would be grateful if you renewed now using the MEMBERSHIP JOIN OR RENEW link on the Society's website.

August-October 1921: Mt Albert 100 years ago

- A Bill was before Parliament to create the Auckland Electric Power Board - a single power board for the Auckland isthmus.
- You could buy a cow for £16.
- Lightning damaged the chimneys of two houses in Ethel St, and destroyed 40 foot of fence between two. The same storm fused a dozen telephones near Page's store in Kingsland.
- A fire destroyed Coulter Bros motor garage and bicycle shop and engineering workshop at the Terminus.
- Mt Albert School was fundraising for new football and cricket ground, and a play area for infants.
- Sections in several subdivisions were for sale: Euston Estate, Maybeck Estate, Sadgrove Estate, St Lukes Estate.
- To prevent a Plague infection, Mt Albert Borough Council asked residents to keep their properties clear of rubbish, distributed free rat poison and paid 3d a head for dead rats.
- Hawthorne was declared a noxious weed.
- The Mt Albert Lawn Tennis Club was ready to open its new courts at the Terminus in November.
- MAGS was on track to open at the start of the next school year, and was recruiting a Headmaster

Source: Papers Past