



MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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Mt Albert Changes its Face – 1970 Remembered

After the relatively stable post-war period, New Zealand underwent a period of great upheaval during the 1960s and 70s. Population growth and social change transformed Auckland, and Mt Albert faced new pressures, including major infrastructure projects, housing intensification, and an increasingly high transient population of short-term renters who lacked a stable connection with their communities. These issues resonate with us today.

On 27 July 1970, the article below was published in the *Central Suburbs Leader*. Its author was Alice Wylie JP, who was then a member of the Mt Albert Borough Council, and today is the Patron of the Mt Albert Historical Society. It gives us a glimpse of how it felt to live in Mt Albert 52 years ago, and it reminds us that progress is an ongoing cycle. In 2022 we repeat Alice's call to Mt Albert residents to be part of making good things happen in our community.

MT ALBERT CHANGES ITS FACE

"Mt Albert was once known as a quiet residential suburb, ideal for the elderly, and a good place in which to bring up a family. It was unpretentious and respectable.

The past ten years have brought great changes, some of them to the distress of home owners who thought they were settled for life, living where they could afford, only to find that major roading changes would lose them their homes or completely alter the character of the area.

Flat development, too, has caused many changes. Some are "own your own", mostly for retired couples who want quiet pleasant surroundings. Many more are for rental, catering for working couples, couples with a child who are filling in time until their house is built, but nearly always transitory with no interest in the neighbourhood or borough.

The last census figures showed a population drop of 1.1 per cent in Mt Albert. With all the new flat building why should this be? Because the average age is older and there are fewer occupants in one house? Because the value of the land is high, the houses are old and young couples cannot get loan monies?

Who could have foreseen the changes that have taken place at the New North Rd entry to the borough from the Symonds St end? Twenty years ago, pleasant, soundly built villa houses lined the road. This is now a commercial area, and an old resident returning would never recognize it.

Where is Mt Albert heading? What do its residents value and wish to retain? Where have the old families who gave their names to streets and parks gone, and why did they leave Mt Albert?

Gracious homes have been pulled down, the sections sub-divided and the trees that broke the sky line and roof lines have been cut.

The Mt Albert Borough Council has tried to cater for those who still wish to live in a family dwelling surrounded by trees and shrubs and among others who wish the same manner of living, by zoning an area Residential A1. No more than two housing units may be built in this "protected area."

With the high price of land in the suburbs surrounding the Auckland City area, it is inevitable that there will be higher density and more flats. This makes the protection of our parks and the encouragement of recreational amenities increasingly important.

If sufficient people care and are prepared to make their views known, good things can happen in Mt Albert. It is never good enough to leave it to someone else."



Alice Wylie, 1970

Redevelopment Of Old Borough Council Building

On 20 May, MAHS Committee members Mary Inomata, Janet von Randow and Lynley Stone visited the former Mt Albert Borough Council Building at 615 New North Rd, which has been redeveloped by Avenue A. We were shown around the building by Harry Gould, who is passionate about retaining the heritage character of buildings he works on.

The main building (built 1927) and two storey annexe out the back (1979) have mostly been turned into open plan office spaces. These are occupied by organisations including media, e-commerce and architecture and design companies. Developer Avenue A's vision for the project is outlined in this website: <https://avenue-a.co.nz/the-chambers>. In fact, more heritage features have been kept than these concept drawings suggest.

The old Council Chamber has been left in almost original condition. A false ceiling was removed, revealing the white vaulted ceiling with pink accents, which have been retained. The walls are still clad in the original dark oak panels, and architectural features such as windows have been kept. The upper level of the walls still has the rings that were used to suspend pictures of former Council officers.

In places, original plaster and concrete surfaces have been left uncovered to provide an explicit link to the heritage of the building. This large airy room, once the heart of Mt Albert Borough, has been turned into a common space where people who work in the building can eat and drink, socialise, and meet informally. There are tables and sofas, and a kitchen area is hidden behind wooden screen, made from panels that were once part of the main staircase. It is a very pleasant space.



The work areas are all bright and airy, emphasised by high ceilings. Full use has been made of the large windows letting in natural light. Everywhere, the history of the building is celebrated rather than hidden. The original wooden floors have been kept, and if repairs have been necessary they have been with wood that matches as closely as possible. One such area is where the old staircase, which originally rose from just inside the entrance off New North Rd, has been removed. Access to the second floor is now through the link between the main building and the rear annexe.

The old strong room that was underneath the stairway has been retained and turned into a cool, quiet meeting room with a glass door which allows the thickness of the walls to be clearly seen. The original metal door on the eastern wall is still there, very thick and heavily studded, it is now a decorative rather than functional feature of this room.

The respect with which the building's history has been treated is evident outside as well. Out the back the exterior wall of the main building has not been plastered or painted. Instead, the concrete cladding is exposed, and you can see where an earlier building was once attached and other evidence of the building's history.

Readers may be interested to look at Auckland Council's Heritage Assessment of this building, undertaken in 2016/17 by Salmon Reed Architects Ltd, at:

<https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/UnitaryPlanDocuments/pc7-02809-mt-albert-borough-chambers.pdf>



EVENT REPORTS

MAHS Members' Meeting Ferndale 21 May 2022

About 35 MAHS Members gathered at Ferndale for a relaxed, entertaining afternoon. Masked and socially distanced, attendees were invited to speak for a few minutes, sharing a story about their history in Mt Albert, and more than half of those present spoke. Many focused on when they first came to the area, including some stories about various nursing homes, flatting and new house purchases. We finished off with refreshments and plenty of time for socialising. It was a special treat to be able to meet together again, and the large turnout showed that it was appreciated by our members.

Oral History Meeting Via Zoom 12 June 2022

Using the online platform Zoom, we played a pre-recorded video on the subject of Oral History. This was a presentation by Sue Berman, Principal Oral History Advisor at Auckland Council, titled *The Stories We Tell*. If you were unable to attend and would like to listen to Sue's presentation, it can be found at <https://soundcloud.com/auckland-libraries/the-stories-we-tell-with-sue-berman> (or do a web search for **the stories we tell with sue berman** and choose the Soundcloud result). Auckland Libraries' Soundcloud has a huge variety of free recorded information and entertainment options which we encourage you to explore if you like listening to audio content.

A very enthusiastic group of attendees enjoyed Sue's presentation, then stayed on afterwards for a lively discussion on how MAHS could re-start our Oral History programme, which was active in the early years of the Society's history. The MAHS Committee endorsed the idea of a renewed Oral History project at its June Committee Meeting, and planning is now underway. We will be in touch with our members about this soon.

Mt Albert Grammar School Book Presentation Via Zoom 16 July 2022

MAGS turns 100 this year, and as part of the celebrations the School has commissioned Debbie Dunsford to write a book celebrating its centennial history. This will be published in September, and will be available for purchase from MAGS.

Debbie spoke with MAHS members on a Zoom talk. She gave us an overview of the history of the School, and shared some of her experiences in researching and writing the book. Her lively, fascinating talk was illustrated by a slideshow of historical and contemporary photographs.

Initially planned as a face-to-face session, we changed to Zoom a few days before the event because of the

spike in community Covid infections. Debbie has generously offered to repeat her talk in person when we can get together again. It is a treat to look forward to.



AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS OF MT ALBERT

Debbie's slideshow included a 1938 aerial photograph of MAGS (above). As well as the school, it also captures crisp images of surrounding houses and landscapes – you can see the line of the old driveway of Alberton House and the extent of house building at that time. MAHS is often asked whether we have any old photographs of particular properties, and aerial photographs like this are a goldmine.

This photo is part of the Whites Aviation archive, housed at the Alexander Turnbull Library. This has aerial photographs covering the whole country from the 1930s onwards. These photos are available online, and high resolution images (which allow you to zoom in on details) are available – some for free, and some for a small fee.

I was delighted to find the back view of my own house in a 1956 photo from this collection. This photo lets me see the original design of our now-covered-in sleeping porch, which I wrote about in the July 2021 Newsletter.



IMAGES:

TOP: Mt Albert Grammar School, Mt Albert, Auckland 1938. Whites Aviation Ltd: Photographs. Ref: WA-55908-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/22574611>
BOTTOM: Detail from: Mt Albert Grammar School, Auckland City 1956. Whites Aviation Ltd: Photographs. Ref: WA-42808. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. [/records/32051183](https://natlib.govt.nz/records/32051183)

New House History Resource

In June, Auckland Council's Heritage Unit published *Researching the history of your house in Tāmaki Makaurau /Auckland*. This is an invaluable guide to key places where you can obtain information about your house's history, including land records, aerial photos, Council Archives and heritage organisations. It tells you where to start looking for information on architects, house types and garden features, and gives tips on how to search for information about people, and the communities they lived in. Do have a look.

It can be downloaded from:

<https://knowledgeauckland.org.nz/media/2387/researching-history-of-our-house-in-tamaki-makaurau-auckland-june-2022.pdf>

MAHS Membership Renewal Due

It is time to renew your Membership of MAHS. \$20 for an individual, or \$40 for a family.

Please click on the MEMBERSHIP JOIN OR RENEW button at the top right of our website homepage <https://mtalberthistoricalsociety.org.nz/> This will take you to a form to fill in your details. Click the SUBMIT button and you will see a page with our bank account details. We regret that we are unable to accept cheques any more, and cannot take payment through the website.

If you would prefer to renew manually, or pay by cash, we are happy to help. Please contact us on 09 846 4509 or info@mtalberthistoricalsociety.org.nz or use the website contact form.

May-July 1922: Mt Albert 100 years ago

- The typhoid epidemic ended with just a few ongoing infections in this period. Schools reopened.
- Mt Albert Grammar School was officially opened by the Governor General, Lord Jellicoe, on 25 May, after being postponed due to the epidemic.
- Plans to make Kowhai School a Middle School were firmed up and public consultation continued.
- Drainage, sanitation and water supply dominated the Council's agendas.
- Sadgrove's Hillside Estate, consisting of 30 building sites on the slopes of the mountain, was auctioned late July.
- Mr and Mrs Penman were on holiday in Sydney, while Mr and Mrs Clay were touring Europe.

President's Message

The mission of MAHS is to "protect, preserve and educate on all matters historical in and relating to Mt Albert." The greatest treasures and most valuable resources that we have in Mt Albert are you, our people. We have therefore reluctantly decided not to hold face-to-face meetings this winter, to avoid the risk of spreading Covid19 and influenza amongst our members. We have trialled Zoom meetings as an alternative, but low attendance shows us that this is not popular with the bulk of our members. We have postponed our AGM for two months in the hope that it will be less risky to meet together in the Spring, and have rescheduled other planned speakers – 2023 will be a superb year for MAHS events. Unfortunately Ferndale House will be closed for several months for refurbishment, so we will be using the Senior Citizen's Hall near Rocket Park as our venue for the rest of 2022.

Stay safe, everyone.

Mary Inomata

MAHS EVENTS FOR AUGUST-DECEMBER 2022

MT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING. Sunday 16 October 2pm. Senior Citizen's Hall, Mt Albert. Please join us for our AGM. Our speaker will be Bill Hodge, retired Professor of Law at the University of Auckland. Everybody welcome. *NOTE the date and venue have changed from those previously advertised.*

FOWLDS PARK AND ITS ENVIRONS WALK. Saturday October 22 2-3.30pm. John Childs will lead a walk exploring the history of this special area. This is part of the Auckland Heritage Festival. Open to all, but bookings are essential, and we encourage Members to book as soon as possible to secure a place. Please contact Janet on janetvonrandow@gmail.com or 021 188 3726.

OAKLEY CREEK WALK. Saturday 12 November 10.30am. Wendy John will lead this walk which should be suitable for most people. Further details will be sent to you closer to the time.

MAHS CHRISTMAS GATHERING. Sunday 4th December 2pm. Senior Citizen's Hall, Mt Albert. A relaxed Members event where we will share reminiscences of Christmases past, and experiences of Christmas in other countries. Afternoon tea to follow.