



MOUNT ALBERT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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Spragg Family 1897 Christmas Card

In 1897, the Spragg family of Mt Albert created a photomontage Christmas card. A copy of this card became a family treasure, and at the end of 2023 an enlarged, framed copy of the card was donated to the Mt Albert Historical Society by Jessica Beever, née Spragg.

The photomontage was made by laying out six photographs of the family home. A cutout calligraphic cartouche and banner were added, along with carefully cut clematis flower photos, then fronds from real maidenhair and other ferns were laid on top. The whole assemblage was then re-photographed to make a new image. The beautifully lettered text reads: *Xmas 1897 Turanga Mount Albert, Auckland NZ* and *With Greetings from Mr & Mrs Wesley Spragg and Family*. The NZ is added in handwriting: perhaps this copy of the card may have been intended to be sent overseas.



This framed card was given to Jessica by Wesley's granddaughter, Kathleen Hetty Spragg. On the back are Kathleen's handwritten notes (slightly edited here for clarity).

Top left: Top right side of bow windows of the drawing room. To the right of this, there are two acres of orchard, and at the rear there is a tennis court, stables and fowl house. On the ground floor are the stables, cow byre and carriage house. Upstairs there is a loft and with hay barn and tool shed and workshop.

Top centre: Two children on the lawn looking back towards the tennis court. On the right there is the orchard.

Top right: Front of house, the bow window of the dining room. The balcony surrounding Dorothy's bedroom and, in front, Annie Dearnley's bedroom. The sewing room and playroom where toys were kept in a 'sea chest.' Partial view of drawing room front bay windows.

Lower left: Hedge behind which is the drive up to the stables, cow byre and coach-house, and above it the hay loft and tool house and workshop. The fowl house and pigeon loft are behind the orchard.

Lower centre: View from front gate up to the house.

Lower right: Inside Annie Dearnley's fernery.

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In 1897, Wesley Spragg was the Manager of the rapidly expanding New Zealand Dairy Association. His first wife, Henrietta (née Neal), had died in 1889, leaving Wesley with five daughters; two years later, he married Henrietta's sister Annie Dearnley Neal, and they had two sons, one who died very young. The girl with the frilly white cap who appears in at least three of the photos would be 9 year old Dorothy Spragg; the little boy would be Wesley Neal Spragg, who would turn 4 soon after Christmas.

Turanga was one of Mt Albert's landmark homes. Its address was 1008 New North Rd (780 prior to renumbering in 1941). The land was part of the subdivision of Edward Allen's Allendale farm (Allotment 56). In March 1883, Wesley purchased the one acre section that the house was built on (Lot 32): *Turanga* was definitely built for the Spragg family on this section, although the exact date of construction is not certain. In December 1895, Wesley purchased the five lots that surrounded Lot 32 on all three sides (Lots 31, 33, 39, 40 and 41), becoming the owner of just over 6 acres that stretched right through to Allendale Road. In March 1897 Wesley transferred ownership of all 6 blocks of land into Annie's name (NA26/267 + NA76/236 – see plan to right). Wesley died in 1930 and Annie in 1934.

During the 1920s, most large properties in Mt Albert were subdivided and the land sold off for house building. This was true of the Spragg family property too. The first subdivided sections, fronting Allendale Rd, were sold in 1920; by 1944, all had been sold and houses were filling the paddocks and orchards that had once surrounded the house.

In January 1944 (NA26/267), *Turanga* was sold to local draper Ellena Dove, who did extensive redecoration to make it a modern family home with two lounges and six bedrooms. In 1950 she moved into a new house 2 sections away, and leased out then later sold the old house. It became the *Turanga Nursing Home*, providing rest home care.

The nursing home closed, and the property was sold in 1995. The old villa was removed, and the new houses at 1008 New North Rd were built: *Turanga*'s footprint on the section was approximately where 2/1008 stands. Up to 2014, two large palm trees stood on the front lawn of 1008, which were remnants of the entrance to the old house.

The house was relocated to a rural property at 40 Mile Rd, Bombay, where it has a beautiful view looking north towards Auckland. The new owner had plans to make it into a museum called *Villa Turanga Taonga*, recognising Wesley Spragg's contribution to dairying in the Bombay region. This did not eventuate, and in 1998 the property was sold and *Turanga* is now a private residence. It is a Category 2 Historic Place listed with Heritage New Zealand (List Number 7407).

Mt Albert Historical Society is continuing to work with Jessica and her family to gather together the stories of *Turanga* and the Spragg family. If any of our readers have information or memories, please share them with us. *Article by Lynley Stone and Jessica Beever.*

The photo to the left shows Jessica speaking about the 1897 Christmas Card (on the mantelpiece) at the MAHS Christmas Party.



MAHS MARKETING EVENTS

We have had two very successful marketing events since the last *Newsletter*, getting out into the community, chatting with people about local history and MAHS, and selling copies of *Mt Albert Then and Now* by Deborah Dunsford and *Jack's Voice* by Mary Tallon. On 2 December, Janet and Anne had a

table in Mt Albert Library (left), and on 17 February,

Lynley, Cathie (above), Janet and Mary had a stall at the Mt Albert Community PopUp Market at Mt Albert Baptist Church. After the last few years when we were wary of being out and about, it is a joy to be engaging with the public and promoting local history again.



MAHS PAST EVENT REPORTS

26 November 2023: MAHS Christmas Cracker

We finished 2023 off with a Christmas extravaganza at Ferndale House, where your Committee and friends sang, danced, read, recited, played up and fooled around for the entertainment of a very receptive audience, who were then incited to sing a rousing round of Carols. We are very grateful to Fred White for accompanying us on his keyboard. The entertainment opened with a wonderful Morris Dance by Anne McKenzie (right) accompanied by Monica Holland. Sue Aitchison-Windeler took us to a north of England winter with a reading from James Herriott, then Eric McKenzie returned us to heartland New Zealand, singing *Taumarunui*. Jessica Beever transported us right back to Mt Albert, introducing the 1897 Spragg Christmas Card. Cathie Hutchinson swept us to the beach with a reading of *A Kiwi Night before Christmas*, and then Mary Inomata, supported by Anne and Eric, had us in stitches performing her version of The Mikado's *I've Got a Little List*. Judith Goldie rounded out the entertainment with an eye-wateringly funny *Twelve Days of Christmas Turkey*. Lynley Stone as MC mostly managed to keep things together but failed miserably to light the Christmas pudding at the end of the Carols, seeking advice from the audience and promising to practise for next year! A slap up festive afternoon tea followed in the Pink Room.



18 February 2024: Picnic in Alice Wylie Reserve



Twenty MAHS members attended an informal, bring-your own-picnic at the Alice Wylie Reserve. The afternoon was reliably warm, dry, still and sunny. It was a very pleasant way to spend a couple of hours, enjoying the fresh air and company of friends and acquaintances, sitting on the lawn under shady trees and having conversations about this and that. A handout was provided including *A Walk through the Alice Wylie Reserve*, and some history of the area of land where the reserve is situated. It is interesting to note that a lava flow had been a feature of the original garden design, although most of it has been overgrown by plantings. I am sure that those of us who knew Alice Wylie, our former Patron, think fondly of her when visiting this special patch of Mt Albert.

Photos of Anne and the Picnic by Sue Aitchison-Windeler. Photos of Jessica, Cathie and the Christmas crowd by Lynley Stone. Photo of Janet and Anne from Mt Albert Library Facebook feed. If anybody would like photos from MAHS events they have attended, please contact us.

Mt Albert 100 Years Ago: November 1923 to January 1924

- Mt Albertians were contributing generously to the fund to build Auckland's War Memorial Museum.
- 63 orphans were resident in the two Mt Albert Methodist Orphanages, which were at their full capacity.
- A Paddy's Market and Fancy Dress fundraising carnival was held at Kowhai Junior High School. 2000 attended.
- Rev Ray Turner was appointed Pastor of Edendale Baptist Church.
- Pattison Bros Builders offered seven newly built shops at Mt Albert Terminus ready for lease or purchase.
- The Civic League cited the damage done to Mt Albert as an example of why Rangitoto should not be quarried.
- Sections were for sale in Mt Royal, Springleigh, Roganville, Glen Tui, Rugby, Harbutt's, Homeland, Westcliffe, Prince of Wales, Lincoln Park and Linwood Estates, as well as subdivisions of Woodward Rd and Vincent Tce.

Ōwairaka: Statue of a Cloaked Woman by Christine Hellyar



The story of this statue is told on an information board that was installed in Alice Wylie Reserve in 1995, alongside the statue of Ōwairaka:

In 1994 the Mount Albert Women's Memorial Committee commissioned Christine Hellyar to create a bronze statue to commemorate the women of Mt Albert. The memorial represents women past and present who have settled in Mt Albert, raised families and helped shape the area. The women of Mt Albert were invited to contribute \$1 for every year they had lived in the area to fund the statue, the balance was paid for by the Mount Albert Community Board.

Christine Hellyar cast the 3.6m sculpture on site so the public could watch. The mould was made of sand with a rock placed in the centre and vegetation pushed into the sides. The plants were removed before the liquid metal was poured, leaving a texture on the surface. Once set the sculpture was lifted into place with a crane. The statue sits on a mound of scoria representing the significant volcanic history of the area, Mt Albert/Ōwairaka having erupted more than 30,000 years ago.

A bronze plaque at the base of the sculpture reads:

This sculpture is a tribute to the sterling efforts of women who worked for the betterment of the community. Artist Christine Hellyar 11 March 1995.

Ōwairaka was Mt Albert's women's suffrage centennial memorial. She stood quietly in a rocky garden bed surrounded by trees and shrubs, on the edge of the Reserve near the Burch Street intersection with New North Rd. The dappled light played across her organic surface, and the green patinated bronze melded into the natural surroundings. She was formed of the earth of Mt Albert, and was a soaring 3.6m tall part of it. As the shrubs grew around her, many people using the park did not even notice her, and viewers had to climb through the garden to read the plaque.

On 4 May 2022 Ōwairaka was vandalised, one of five Auckland sculptures that were attacked around the same time, probably to be sold for scrap. She was toppled but not removed, and Auckland Council placed her into storage for safe-keeping. The Council and the sculptor now have a project underway to re-cast her using the damaged sculpture as a mould. She will be returned to the Reserve in mid 2024.



Lynley has arranged to interview Christine about this project for MAHS, and would love to speak with any of our readers who were involved in the sculpture's commissioning, or have other stories to share about the work.

Photo on left and text from the information board from: Bronwyn Holloway-Smith (2021). Public Art Heritage Aotearoa New Zealand, <https://publicart.nz/artworks/christine-hellyar-1995>.

Photo on right of bent-over sculpture and orange cones from: Tina Molyneau (2022, May 5). Five sculptures vandalised across Auckland as thieves target parks. New Zealand Herald. <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/five-sculptures-vandalised-across-auckland-as-thieves-target-parks>

MAHS DATES TO REMEMBER

Sunday 17 March 2-4pm, Ferndale House. Chris Hagon "A Stately Experience." Chris will talk about life behind the scenes living in a stately home in the UK, whilst employed by the National Trust, and then working in two privately owned castles. It concludes with a mention of Heritage New Zealand and reasons to support it. Afternoon tea will follow. A gold coin donation is appreciated. Masks are encouraged to protect our vulnerable members. No need to RSVP.

Sunday 14 April 2-4pm. Historical Walk around the Prince of Wales Estate led by Mary Inomata and Lynley Stone. This will be a gentle, flat walk giving an overview of the history of the suburb and exploring some stories about the area. Numbers will be limited, so please RSVP to janetvonradow@gmail.com