

# NEWSLETTER

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Pirongia Heritage & Information Centre  
Te Whare Taonga o Ngaa Rohe o Arekahanara

798 Franklin Street, Pirongia 3802

Phone: (07) 871 9018

Email: [pirongia.hvc@xtra.co.nz](mailto:pirongia.hvc@xtra.co.nz)



## Sawmilling on Mount Pirongia

Many local people know that in the past, timber was milled on Mount Pirongia, but surprisingly little seems to be recorded about the mill locations, the names of the mill owners and workers, and the dates when they were in operation. Joy McGregor has been in contact with a member of the Ginn family in Auckland who operated a mill beyond the end of Mangati Road between 1946 and 1949. As a result, the Centre has obtained quite a lot of information about that particular sawmill, including photographs, a diary of events recorded by the manager and a memoir written by his son.



Ginn Bros Ltd was an Auckland building company which overcame a shortage of timber for constructing prefabricated housing at Papatoetoe by moving into sawmilling. The firm purchased a block of bush on Mount Pirongia and in August 1946 began processing logs into construction timber which was transported to Auckland from Te Awamutu by rail. The mill also supplied timber to Rickits in Te Awamutu and to State Advances.

The mill was on a flat area, about 2 km up a steep clay road from the end of the metalled road. Frequently, when it was wet, vehicles could get up to the mill site only when they were towed by the caterpillar tractor or a winch. Everything that came and went from the mill site had to be brought along this unmetalled track. Logs, felled by contractors, were hauled to the mill by tractor along a narrow ridge track. Trees were felled in adjoining gullies, some of which were not accessible by tractor. Logs were hauled to the ridge using a hauler winch and wire ropes. Getting the logs to the mill was an exacting task. In times of heavy rain, the narrow ridge track became unworkable. Roy Ginn's diary catalogues a succession of other interruptions caused by broken wire ropes which had to be spliced, mechanical problems with the old tractor, hauler winch and mill engines, and frequent punctures to the tyres of their truck.

There was a small settlement of houses and huts at the mill site, plus a school which seems to have functioned for less than a year. The teacher was the Samoan wife of the mill manager, Seth Franzen, but the arrangement did not work out. So, from 1948 the children had correspondence lessons. Most of the mill workers were from Auckland, but some local men, including Hiakai Uerata and Brown Barrett worked there. The mill closed in early 1949, when the bush block was cleared. Sally Uerata recalls that many of the buildings were left to slowly fall down.

## Basketball in the 1930s

In *Newsletter 25* we reported that while a number of local people remember nine-a-side women's basketball (as it was then known) being played locally after World War 2, little was known about the game being played by a local club in the 1930s.

Recently, we found columns in the *Waipa Post* from the early 1930s which indicate that a club was active here from about 1930. A "Birthday Ball", held by the Pirongia Basketball Club was attended by 200 people in 1931, indicating that the club had been active for probably a year. Arrangements for the ball were made by a committee of young ladies led by Reine Bell. On that occasion, appreciation was expressed to Mrs Shaw, Mrs A. Smith and Miss Phillis Sifleet for the repeated use of their cars for conveyance of the team throughout the season. The birthday cake was cut by Mrs Beet snr.

A well-attended meeting held in Bell's Store at the commencement of the 1932 season, elected the following club officers: Chair – Miss A. Macky, Patroness – Mrs Bell, President – Mrs A.E. Hood, Vice-Presidents – Mesdames E. Moeller, S.B. Sifleet, P. Allport and A. Chappell; Joint Secretaries – Miss L. Robson and Miss Reine Bell. Mrs A. Chappell was appointed Timekeeper. And most importantly, Mrs Moeller was appointed to supervise the afternoon tea arrangements. In the opening games for the season, Miss R. Bell was to captain the A team, and Mrs Kerr the B team.

The club also ran occasional dances in the Memorial Hall to raise funds. At a dance held in May 1931, attended by 140 people, the door takings were £12 (\$24). However, at another dance in August, the door takings were £1-19s (\$3-90). When expenses of £1-3s (\$2-30) were deducted, the profit was only 16s (\$1-60).

## Thanks for Support

- **Pub Charity** for a grant of \$3790 towards the cost of re-painting the exterior of our Heritage and Information Centre. With the \$5000 granted by Trust Waikato last year, this allowed us to proceed with the project.
- **Garry Howard** who breathed new life into the Centre's old computer which is now available in the archives room to supplement the main machine on a limited range of tasks.
- **Joy McGregor** who is using her invaluable local contacts to energetically make significant contributions to our research into local history.
- **Paula McWha** who continues to do sterling work managing our tour bookings.

## Summer Tours

The Centre has completed its programme of six summer tours, all of which were well-supported. The interest is encouraging because some of these tours are expected to be particularly popular next year when Waipa commemorates 150 years of development.



*Northern Path of War tourists at Mercer*

A bi-product of the tour programme has been an increase in the Centre's membership.

## For your diary

**24 March: Hingakaka & Lake Ngaroto.** Sites of early Maori settlement around Lake Ngaroto. Find out about the Battle of Hingakaka. 1:00 - 3:30 pm. Shared cars. Members only. Contact Paula McWha or leave a message at the Centre if you intend to take part.

## From the Committee

Plans are under way to establish a web page for the Centre. At the moment, funding options are being examined.

The Centre is now selling new postcard photos of Mount Pirongia and attractive aerial shots of the village and nearby countryside, at \$2.00.

*Historic Alexandra* has been updated, but with a rise in the costs of printing, it is now selling for \$3.50.

The recorded interview with Mrs Grace Shaw is now on CD. Ask at the desk to listen to it.

On 6 March, members of the Executive will attend a Funding Expo at the Hamilton Gardens Pavilion.

Council has been approached about locating i-Site signs on McClure Street to alert travellers who proceed directly to Kawhia and Waitomo without passing the Centre.

## Spruced Up

Have you noticed the difference the re-paint, in the same heritage colours, has made to the appearance of the Centre? It looks great. The work was done by Town & Country Painters of Ohaupo without interruption to the Centre's operations. We are particularly indebted to Greg Dunn (below right) and Steve for reducing their charges as a benefit to the community.



## A successful BBQ

The Centre is again indebted to Pirongia Clydesdales for hosting what has become our annual BBQ on 24 January. President Robin Astridge reviewed what promises to be a busy year and the 25 members present enjoyed some good food and fellowship.

It was particularly pleasing to have Murray and Barbara Walter with us. Our thanks to the van der Sande family for again acting as our hosts.

## Welcome new members

- Doug Dixon
- Margaret Farnworth
- Anne Hanham
- Diedre Harte Barry
- Dayne Laird
- Brett Pierce
- Lance Vernal
- Kath Wells

## Captain William Tisdall

**Captain William St Clair TISDALL** was the Adjutant of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Waikato Regiment when the frontier settlement of Alexandra was established in 1864. Although Colonel Haultain commanded the Regiment, Captain Tisdall was responsible for day-to-day decisions affecting the settlers until the disbanding of the regiment in 1867. Besides fulfilling his military duties, he was also the government factotum in the early years of the settlement. He sat on the bench of the Alexandra Resident Magistrate's Court as a JP and was also the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

Tisdall came to New Zealand in 1863 having served in the 47<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Regiments, serving mainly in Malta. He was in the Imperial army for ten years, ending up with the rank of Captain when he resigned his commission prior to his family's departure for New Zealand.

The Tisdall family (William, his wife Mary Ann, and three children) arrived in Auckland in September 1863. Also on the passenger list was Edward Caulfield, who was probably his brother-in-law. Almost immediately after arriving at Auckland, William volunteered to serve with the Waikato Militia and on 9 October, he was gazetted Captain and Quartermaster. Initially, he was based at Otahuhu, but in January 1864, when he was made Adjutant, Tisdall moved to the Waikato, leaving his family in Auckland. He was not involved in the military engagements at Te Rore, Rangiaowhia or Hairini, and was stationed at Kihikihi with his company during the Battle of Orakau. The fact that he was not awarded a NZ War Medal suggests that he was never under fire during the conflict.

On 20 June 1864, when the HQ of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Waikato Regiment met the surveyors appointed to lay out the settlement of Alexandra on the river Waipa, Tisdall was present with Colonel Haultain, and from that time, he played a leading role in the development of the community as a military settlement.

The task facing Tisdall was complex. On one hand, the government needed a successful soldier-settler scheme to provide a bulwark against any Kingite attempt to regain confiscated lands. But on the other hand, the government faced a financial crisis and was determined to strike the 2<sup>nd</sup> Waikato settlers off pay as soon as possible. To this end, Tisdall was directed to begin striking militiamen off pay as soon as their town acres were allocated, but before the allocation of farm lots was finalised. The government cancelled the promised allocation of rations to wives and children, halved the promised rations to the men and reduced government expenditure in other ways. This caught Tisdall between the two competing sets of expectations that he should facilitate the development of the settlement and at the same time, dramatically save expenditure. In 1866 he was censured by his political masters for providing rations to ill settlers who no longer qualified for them. However, he refused to provide a coffin for a young soldier-settler who died of tetanus, or even to supply timber for his fellow-settlers to make one. As a result, he was far from popular amongst some settlers who were quick to question his decisions as well as the propriety of a senior military man like him sitting as a JP in the civilian Resident Magistrate's Court. They also suggested that he took advantage of his military rank in the development of his family dwelling in the settlement. After all, he too was a military settler, but one who remained on pay despite his having taken up land.

As a military settler, Tisdall was allocated a very desirable town acre on the corner of present-day Parry and Crozier Streets where early photographs show a two-storied dwelling which appears to have been later extended to become the Royal Telegraph hotel. He was also allocated a farm lot of 400 acres, adjacent to the 200 acre farm lot of his brother, Gordon, who had enlisted as an Ensign in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Waikato Regiment in 1866. The 50 acre farm lot of his brother-in-law, Edward Caulfield, who also enlisted in 1866 as a private, adjoined their holdings and was bought by Captain Tisdall. Within a few years, the brothers had consolidated their land grants into one property which was extended by purchasing other adjoining farm lots until they had accumulated 900 acres. The farm, known as Auburn, was managed by Captain Tisdall's brother, Gordon.

William Tisdall's family was based in Alexandra until 1869, living in their house on Alexandra East Town Lot No 60. Two more daughters were born during those years. Tisdall was an active member of the St Saviour's Anglican Church congregation and in 1867 was a subscriber to the construction of the original church building.

When the Waikato Militia was disbanded in 1867, Captain Tisdall remained in charge of the settlement at Alexandra until 1868 when he joined the newly-formed Armed Constabulary as a Sub-Inspector. However, when the Alexandra No. 5 Division was ordered to the West Coast soon afterwards, he remained at Alexandra and in 1869, the family was transferred to Auckland where he became Quartermaster in the Auckland Militia with the rank of Major. Shortly afterwards, he retired to join the Public Service, becoming a Government Auditor until his death in 1892. As Government Auditor, Tisdall regularly visited the Waikato to audit the accounts of government offices at Ngaruawahia, Hamilton, Cambridge and Te Aroha. He died at work in 1892, aged 62 years.

## Those 75th Jubilee Photos

A number of older residents and former residents have visited the Centre to try to identify people photographed at the 75th Pirongia School Jubilee in 1948. As a result, we have names to go with a number of the photographs. In the near future, we will display them, together with the names.

Amongst those who visited was Ruth Whiting (nee Beatson), now in her mid-90s. We talked with her about her midwife mother, Vera, for the next Newsletter.