

# NEWSLETTER

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

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## A well-attended AGM

There was standing room only at the AGM of the Heritage & Information Centre on 18 June. The 44 people who attended exceeded the expectations of the committee who brought in extra chairs from next door as the Centre filled, but a few latecomers were still left standing. While the Centre stalwarts may like to think that the AGM was the drawcard, the real attraction was more likely the speaker who provided the "after-match entertainment". Mayor and local historian, Alan Livingston gave an informative and interesting illustrated talk about the history of the district West of the river Waipa. He focussed particularly upon the development of Harapepe, Karamu, Te Pahu and settlement of the Limeworks Loop Road area. His historic photographs which included reminders of days past were outstanding and stressed the importance to development in the area of roading and particularly the Te Rore bridge.

An efficiently-run AGM, completed in 30 minutes, received the customary set of reports, including a review of the year's activities by President Robin Astridge in which he made particular mention of the many duties undertaken by outgoing committee members and volunteers, the maintenance and re-painting of the Centre's building, and a record number of visitors.

A new Committee was elected, consisting of Robin Astridge (President), Marilyn Yeates (Vice-President), Sabina Owen (Secretary), Faith Haakma (Treasurer) and Committee Members: Basil Coles, Patricia Grierson, Garry Howard, Gloria King, Robert McWha, Nick van der Sande and Barbara Walter. Sally Uerata (Purekireki Marae) and Haupai Puke (Te Kauhanganui) complete the Executive Committee.

## Maintenance

Not only has Robert McWha become a member of the Executive Committee but he has assumed the maintenance portfolio which was so capably handled by the late Murray Walter.



At work on the Trig Station

Since volunteering to do maintenance jobs, Robert has begun work on the Trig Station which is yet to be repainted, but he has also completed a number of other small-but-important jobs, including fixing a hard-to-open door, installing a draft excluder and an automatic door-closer.

Maintenance is important for the Centre, not least because it is located in a building which is more than 100 years old. Robert's role is greatly appreciated.

## High visitor numbers

The trend toward higher visitor numbers noted at the AGM has continued throughout the first 5 months of the new financial year. Our visitor statistics for April, May, June, July and August each exceeded the best corresponding month since we began keeping records in 2004. As a result, the total for the year to date is more than 200 ahead of any other year.

## Expert help?

Sally August is a development officer of National Services Te Paerangi, a national organization associated with Te Papa Tongarewa which offers assistance and support to small museums like the Pirongia Heritage & Information Centre. During a recent visit, when she looked at our displays and archives, Sally suggested that it may be possible for the Centre to be offered some expert support for cataloguing archives under the National Services Te Paerangi *Expert Knowledge Exchange Programme*. If an application is successful this would locate an expert here to work with our volunteers for a short time.



Marilyn Yeates with Sally August

## Former residents

Roland Mounsey and Ruth Whiting (nee Beatson) are former residents of Pirongia who have remarkably clear and detailed memories of people and events from the early 1930s.



Roly & Ruth share more than 180 years of memories with Alan Hall

## Thanks for Support

- **Robert McWha** who cleaned the old Trig Station outside the Centre and plans to spruce it up in its original colours.
- **Berwyn Sterling**: who manufactured another display board for the Centre.
- **Pirongia Womens Institute** which gifted to the Centre a commemorative clock (1931-1981), minute books and a photo album.
- **Cambridge Museum** for the gift of two display cases already in use for displays.
- **Ray, from Pirongia Antiques**, who helped Faith unload the new display cases and carry them into the Centre. The age of chivalry is alive and well!

## Mary Scott

Have you visited the recently-unveiled pou for local author, Mary Scott on the Te Awamutu Walk of Fame?

## On Craft Day (28 Sept)

Don't forget to visit the Centre. Between 10:00 am and noon, **Richard Stowers** will be signing copies of his historical publications which include *Von Tempsky and the Forest Rangers* which we have on sale.

## Errata

Following publication of *Newsletter 32*, Ngaire Phillips drew attention to an error of detail in the report of Richard Rasmussen's reminiscence of the demolition of the old Public Hall which did not occur in 1957 as reported, but after November 1958 when the Methodist Youth Hall was opened.

## For your diary

### 2013-2014 Tours

- 16 Nov Southern Tour
- 30 Nov Northern Path of War Tour
- 19 Jan Pirongia Walking Tour No 1
- 01 Feb Pirongia Walking Tour No 2
- 08 Feb Southern Path of War Tour
- 22 Feb Pirongia Northern Tour

For details, costs and to make bookings, inquire at the Centre. Note that pre-paid bookings are essential for all except the walking tours.

## From the Committee

- As part of the 150th Year Commemorations, the Heritage Centre is making arrangements to commemorate the centenary of the Pukehoua (Baffin Street) Bridge on 16 February next year. Sabina Owen will appreciate any information on its construction and the history of its use.
- Fifteen volunteers who staff the Centre attended a training day on 29 August when they discussed and were updated on procedures and changes currently under way. Afterwards, they enjoyed lunch together at the Pirongia Café.
- A web page is being developed for the Centre. Its address will be [www.pirongiaheritage.org](http://www.pirongiaheritage.org). The home page has been designed. When the site is operational it will be maintained by the Centre. Keep a look out for it in the near future.
- The Executive Committee is keen to acquire the services of someone experienced with accounting systems who might serve as the reviewer of the Centre's Annual Financial Statements. Employing an accredited accountant to do the job has become expensive. So, consideration is being given to having the work done voluntarily by someone who is experienced with accounts, preferably a person who is not a member. If you know someone who might be capable and willing to do the job, please contact the Centre.

## At Bell's Store

Older residents may recall a boar's head hunting trophy with marbles for eyes, mounted high on a wall in Bell's Store. Judith Harper of Nelson, who lived in Pirongia as a child, remembers it vividly. She says that it terrified her because she was convinced that the eyes followed her when she moved around the shop. "I didn't think of the eyes as marbles at the time - they looked very real to me. Whenever I hear mention of Bell's store, that head is the first thing I think of. Does anyone know what happened to it?"

Judith adds that "My older brother on the other hand is made of sterner stuff - his abiding memory of Bell's Store is popping out to the back store-room with whoever was slicing the bacon and getting scraps and off-cuts which he wouldn't have been allowed at home (the bacon being exclusively for Father)."

## New and Improved

Joy McGregor and Alan Hall have collated all the information received about people on the 1948 School Jubilee photographs which were displayed in the Centre. The photos have been reproduced, together with information about each in a display book which also includes an extensive and detailed report about the event from the *Te Awamu-tu Courier*.

Look out for a folder of prints of a set of photographs donated by the Pirongia Women's Institute, collated by Sabina Owen. It is hoped that interested visitors will write the names of women they recognize in the space beneath each picture. Ask about the folder at the reception desk.

## Welcome new members

- Linda van Eyk
- Angela Wickham

## McMinn of the Harapepe Forest Rangers

Harapepe was originally settled by Major Von Tempsky's No.2 Company of the Forest Rangers in February 1865 and a tent settlement was quickly established on the 100 acres surveyed to become a village on present-day Corcoran Road. However, although town acres were allocated, and farm lots were surveyed on the surrounding land, by the end of March, Von Tempsky had been assigned to command a company of Forest Rangers made up of men from both his and Major Jackson's companies in the Whanganui district. This meant that the remaining Harapepe settlers fell under the command of Staff Sgt McMinn who from that time until his death in 1883, became a significant local figure.

At age 16, Edward Graham McMinn had come to New Zealand from his native Northern Ireland. In August 1863 he enlisted in Von Tempsky's company of Forest Rangers where he was promoted to Corporal in December and Staff Sergeant in March 1864. He took part in numerous actions in the field, including Waiari, Rangiaowhia, and Orakau and his rapid promotion indicates that he was considered an effective soldier with leadership potential.

In early 1866, the Forest Rangers returned to the Waikato from the Whanganui West Coast area and the East Coast where some had fought campaigns against Hauhau. Many of those from Harapepe took up their land grants and most were then struck off pay. The Forest Rangers were disbanded by the government in October 1867 when the Armed Constabulary was formed.

From 1865, McMinn became increasingly active in advocating for the development of a road from Harapepe to Raglan via Aramiro and the Waitetuna valley, following a route surveyed by Richard Todd, and although some settlers volunteered labour to develop it, the government was unwilling to commit resources, pinning their hopes on the more difficult route between Raglan and Whatawhata following the present day Old Mountain Road which led more directly to the Waikato Regiment HQ at Hamilton and did nothing to reduce the isolation of Harapepe.

Early in 1868, McMinn and a number of the other Forest Rangers from Harapepe enlisted in No 5 Division of the AC, commanded by Von Tempsky, which was assigned to the conflict with Titokowaru's force in South Taranaki. When Von Tempsky was killed in an action at Te Ngutu o Te Manu, many members of his AC Division were openly critical of the tactical decisions of Col. McDonnell commander of the government force. Although he was not party to the criticism, McMinn as a senior NCO wrote a letter on behalf of his men and was then considered by his superiors to have participated in a mutiny. As a result, No 5 Division was disbanded, never to be replaced, and its members were dishonourably discharged in Whanganui and left to find their own ways home. Another important outcome for the men involved (including McMinn) was that they were later denied NZ War Medals for their earlier, often distinguished service as Forest Rangers.

McMinn returned to Harapepe where, although he remained unmarried, took a leading role in the social life of the settlement and threw himself into local affairs to become a member, later Chairman of the Pirongia Highway Board and a Raglan County Councillor. Throughout the 1870s, he continued to campaign for better roading access and for a bridge over the Waipa in the Te Rore area. At the same time, he added to and developed his farm which had grown to some 700 acres in the 1880s.

In the 1870s, he stood for parliament unsuccessfully but became the Waipa MP in 1878-79, initially supporting Sir George Grey's policies with which he later became disillusioned.

McMinn played key roles in having the first Te Rore bridge built. He continued to live at Harapepe until his untimely death at age 43 in 1883. He lies in the Alexandra Cemetery.



*McMinn's house at Harapepe - originally built and occupied by Sgt Southey*

## Identified by Hat?

When Joy McGregor was gathering information to identify people depicted in the collection of photographs from the 75<sup>th</sup> Pirongia School Jubilee in 1948, she was told that two of the three women in one photo were Mrs Jane Beet (nee Moore) and her sister Mrs Lizzie McAuliffe. The third woman was said to be probably Mrs Lizzie Charleston of Te Pahu, a claim that was later confirmed by a descendant. However, soon afterwards, the Centre was visited



*The 75th Jubilee photo with Lizzie Charleston or Bernice Johnstone right.*



*The Johnstone family photo with Bernice in the middle.*

by Pauline Sexton from Morrinsville who said that she thought the third woman was her grandmother, Bernice Monrath Johnstone (nee Alexander), wife of Lindsay Johnstone of Waitetuna, who was originally from Mangapiko. To back her claim, Pauline produced two photographs, taken on other occasions. One of those photos seems to be the clincher. It includes Bernice Johnstone wearing what appears to be the same hat and jacket worn to the Jubilee celebration. What a coincidence!