

# NEWSLETTER

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

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## Get ready for a busy year.

During next year, Pirongia will commemorate 150 years of development since its establishment in June 1864. That will mean a busy year at the Heritage and Information Centre. On 16 February, under Sabina Owen's leadership, it has accepted responsibility for celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Pukehoua Bridge. Joy McGregor and Gloria King are working on a display of photographs about local families for the Memorial Hall on the 1 March Festival Day. And Paula McWha is leading a group planning an Edwardian Ball for Queen's Birthday weekend when it is also expected that the Centre will mount some special displays.

We expect the special occasions to bring many visitors to the Centre, particularly former residents whose recollections will be worth recording.

These activities will be additional to our usual business and should not be left to executive committee members. Can you help?

## Pukehoua Bridge Centennial

The Pukehoua Bridge is 100 years old this year, and Sabina Owen is busily organising a centennial celebration to be held on Sunday, 16 February 2014. The bridge was built in 1912-13 to replace the first Waipa Bridge, 600 metres downstream, which was regularly damaged by floods over its 40 year life and was by 1909 unstable and fit only for pedestrians and light traffic.

Faced with the increasing costs of maintaining the old bridge, Waipa County Council proposed to build a new bridge above flood level, which its advisers believed could be built for £1,500 (\$3,000). But the Public Works Department intervened and drew up plans for a more sophisticated structure which would be safer and more durable. Of course it would come at a higher cost, estimated at as much as £4,500. In its 1909 estimates, the Government offered a subsidy of £1,500 meaning that the remaining £3,000 would need to be provided by local authorities. This sparked a lively set of interchanges between the Waipa, Raglan and Waitomo Councils. Waipa argued that Raglan and Waitomo should share the costs because residents of their districts would benefit from the new facility. However, the other councils were far from compliant.

In 1910, the Government appointed a Commissioner (Mr W.S. Short) to end the stand-off by hearing arguments from all the parties and recommending to the Government how the costs should be shared. Raglan County stalled the first hearing on 24 February, by citing Kawhia County to also share the costs. Because each party was legally entitled to 2 months lead-time, this delayed further hearings until April.

At the next hearing on 25 April, it was argued by Raglan that the bridge was unnecessary as



*Pukehoua Bridge during construction.*

there were few settlers west of the river who would be served by the bridge, and that the best way to meet their needs would be to construct a road from Alexandra West to the Kawhia Road to give them access to the Whatiwhathoe Bridge. They estimated that the new road could be constructed for £600, a figure which was contested by a Hamilton engineer who estimated the cost (including bridges over two creeks) to be £4,970. Waitomo representatives conceded that a bridge would probably cost less than the road advocated by Raglan, but considered the sophisticated nature of the proposed bridge and its cost to be excessive.

Waipa representatives said that a bridge in the locality would continue to give access to 8,000 acres of farmland, 700 of them in Waipa County, 4,000 in Raglan and the remainder in Waitomo. They argued that farms in the area were less developed than those elsewhere in the district and that this and lower land values were direct consequences of uncertainty about access.

The Commissioner recommended to the Government that the bridge should be built in accordance with the design approved by the Public Works Department, that Waipa County should build the bridge, that Raglan County should contribute 30% of the costs, less the government subsidy, and that Waitomo County should contribute 20%. It was agreed that Kawhia County had no direct interest in the bridge.

## Thanks for Support

- **Waipa District Council**, for a \$1,000 Discretionary Fund grant to upgrade displays.
- **The Department of Internal Affairs**, for a COGS (Community Organisation Grants Scheme) award of \$2,500 for volunteer travel.
- **Waipa District Council**, for \$1595 to fund the 100 year commemoration of Pukehoua Bridge.

## BBQ for Members

Join us at the Pirongia Clydesdales at 6:30pm on 21 January for a Heritage & Information Centre BBQ to get the New Year under way.

Bring meat to cook on the barbie, an accompanying dish to share, and your favourite tippie.

There will be no charge.

## Mac Bell

We were saddened recently to learn that Mac Bell had died. Although he was not a member of the Centre, he is remembered for carving and maintaining the Centre's sign. As a koumatua of Purekireki Marae he was also an important source of local Maori history who will be greatly missed. We share the sorrow of Pat and his family at his passing.

## For your diary

- 19 Jan Walking Tour around historic sites in Central Pirongia.
- 21 Jan BBQ for members at Pirongia Clydesdales
- 02 Feb Walking Tour in northern Pirongia (Matakitaki to the Cemetery).
- 09 Feb Southern Path of War Tour (Te Rore to Orakau).
- 16 Feb Pukehoua Bridge Centennial Commemoration.
- 24 Feb Northern Tour - Matakitaki, Paterangi, Grey Road Flour Mill, Homewood, Pirongia Redoubts & Waiari Pa.

*Details and tours bookings at the Centre.*

## From the Committee

- **Gloria King, the Centre's Librarian**, reminds members of the variety of books available for them to borrow. The procedure is very simple. The volunteer on duty takes the card out of the back of the book, writes your name and the date on it for filing, and you take the book to read at your pleasure.
- **Wanted:** An individual or small group of volunteers to look after management of the Centre's collection of archives which are mainly documents and photographs. This interesting job is vital to the effective operation of the Centre.
- **Still Wanted:** Someone familiar with accounts to act as the Centre's Financial Reviewer.
- **Visitor Numbers** are 200 ahead of our best previous year, although October proved quieter than last year.
- A very successful **Training Day for Volunteers** was held on 29 August, followed by lunch at the Village Café. During the morning, 14 volunteers were updated on the Centre's resources and procedures which they are expected to follow. Some suggestions were made for improving procedures.



*The volunteers at the training day*

## Down Memory Lane

Recent visitors with connections to Pirongia's past included:

**Terry Williams** from Brisbane, Australia, whose family owned Bell's Store which they sold to Tony Hodgson about 1971.

**Michelle Olsen**, daughter of Tom and Rose Dennis who, in the 1970s, owned the garage next to where the Heritage Centre is now located.

**Mere Roberts** from Auckland, a descendant of Lavinia, daughter of John Vittoria Cowell who in about 1840, built and, until 1863, lived in Heather Garret's house, 'Homewood' on Hodgson Road.

**Wilfred Leopold (Buck) Pound**, who lives near Thames, is the son of Oscar Pound who taught at the Te Tahi and Te Rore Schools and married Louise, the daughter of Aubin and Julia Ahier.

**Mike Anderson** of Coorparoo, Queensland, is the great nephew of Tom & Cissie Anderson who farmed at Farm 12 on the Pirongia West Road.

**Don't forget the BBQ for members on 21 January.**

## Matewai Wickham

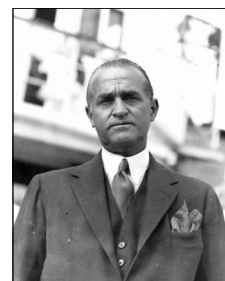
In December 1898, the former Shamrock Hotel, standing on the south-east corner of the present-day intersection of Franklin and Crozier Streets was purchased for £25 by Matewai Wickham, the wife of Ernest Wickham. The building had been unoccupied for some time and the price paid reflected the economics of a time when the settlement was yet to shake off the effects of 10 years of economic stagnation.

Matewai Wickham was born at Mahia, near Wairoa, the fourth of fifteen children born to Mere Riripeti Whakaraurahi and George Down, a cooper and whaler at Wairoa. She was baptised Hannah Down. Her Maori whakapapa linked her back to Ngati Raukawa, Ngati Tuwharetoa and Ngati Kahungunu.



*Hannah Prentice  
(nee Down)*

Matewai Wickham. Ernest Wickham had lived in the Alexandra area from at least 1878, when his name featured in St Saviour's Church records. He worked initially as a clerk who was the local agent for the Waipa Steam Navigation Company and NZ Insurance. He was also the scale clerk and a steward at Boxing Day Sports. In 1867, he moved to Te Awamutu and then to Otorohanga where he became a storekeeper, possibly working for J.W. Ellis who eventually established the Otorohanga timber millers Ellis & Burnand.



*Ernest Wickham*

In 1892, Ernest and Matewai Wickham, with several Prentice children, moved to Alexandra where two of the children enrolled at the Alexandra School – parent Mrs E Wickham. Ernest worked as a storeman but was also the auditor for both the Waipa Amateur Athletic Club and St Saviour's Church. The family moved to Te Awamutu briefly in 1897 but

returned to Pirongia in 1898 about the time that Matewai bought the former hotel to set up the boarding house which she ran with her daughters. Ernest died less than a year after Wickham's Boarding House was established. He is buried at the Alexandra Cemetery.



*Ma Wickham circa 1914 with  
Alice Kay (nee Wood) who  
lived at Wickham's Boarding  
House while teaching at  
Mangapiko School.*

Wickham's Boarding House appears to have been a great success. Ma Wickham, as she was affectionately known, enjoyed a reputation as an hospitable hostess who was ably assisted by her daughters. She was regarded as "second to none at the kitchen stove" by Martha Hattaway who boarded there for 4 years while teaching at the school. Martha recalled sing-songs around the piano and good log fires in the smoking room.

Matewai sold the building to Arthur Sydney Ormsby in 1917 for £275, and he ran it as Ormsby Lodge. The building was eventually demolished in 1930.

Hannah Prentice, a.k.a. Matewai Wickham, lived in Pirongia until 1937 and lies alongside Ernest Wickham in the Alexandra Cemetery.

## An ambitious project

Volunteer Karen Howard is making excellent progress with a project which will eventually be very helpful to visitors seeking information about family members who lived in the Pirongia district. She is creating a computer file listing the various places in the Centre's archives where information, including photographic images about a particular individual may be found. This requires Karen to working painstakingly through the various electronic, paper and photographic files and record the information sources in a computer file which may be searched electronically.