

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



More about Whatiwhatiho

We know of Whatiwhatiho as the settlement located across the Waipa from present-day Alexandra, where the Kingitanga was centred in the 1880s, after King Tawhiao had proclaimed peace in July 1881. It was not far from the southern boundary of land farmed to the south of Alexandra West. A report in the *NZ Herald* in May 1882, about the first important Kingitanga hui held there, provides additional information. It says that before the establishment of the Kingitanga settlement, the site was known as *Te Pae o Ruahine* while *Whatiwhatiho* was the name of a site, further up-stream. The latter is shown on the 1872 sketch map by Charles Edenborough where Whatiwhatiho is marked at a bend in the Waipa, beyond the confluence of the Puniu with the Waipa, and south of the confiscation line. According to the 1882 report in the *NZ Herald*, the name was appropriated for the Kingitanga settlement. Other *Waikato Times* reports in 1881 and early 1882 refer to the location of what became Whatiwhatiho as Ruahine; it seems that the name Whatiwhatiho was used from the time of the 1882 hui.

The same *NZ Herald* article also includes other interesting snippets. It suggests that the traditional Maori name for the land to the east of the first Waipa bridge (between East and West Alexandra) was *Kiorenui* where the native vegetarian rat was trapped and preserved as a delicacy. It also tells that the first Whatiwhatiho bridge giving access to the new settlement was named *Tawhara-kai-atua* by King Tawhiao at the ceremony when the first pile was driven in April 1882. It was in use in October of the same year.



Whatiwhatiho in 1886

Thanks for Support

- **Karen Howard** who created a computer catalogue identifying the locations of archives items with information about early residents.
- **Community Organization Grants Scheme (COGS)** for a grant of \$4,500 to assist with administration costs.
- **Waipa District Council** for a Community Grant of \$1,500 to fund display panels about the Golf and Racing Clubs.

Tours

You may have seen an article in the *Te Awamutu Courier* intimating that the Centre is trying a system of responding to requests for tours, rather than advertising a tour programme, as we have in the past.

The reason is that over the last 12 months, many of our advertised tours failed to attract enough participants, leading to cancellations.

BBQ for Members

Join us at the Pirongia Clydesdales at 6:30pm on 27 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 tipple.

On Sale at the Centre

Waipa Home of Champions, by Kingsley Field & Richard Stowers. A 294 page, lavishly illustrated and beautifully presented publication celebrating 150 years of development. The Centre has a limited number of copies, so you will need to be quick to obtain a copy. Because it has been heavily subsidised by sponsors, it is selling at the remarkably low price of \$25 that belies its quality. A real bargain!

For your diary

- 26 December from 11:00 am: Alexandra Racing Club Boxing Day Races at the Pirongia Golf Course. Bring a picnic lunch for the final 150th year event.
- 27 January at 6:30 pm. Annual barbecue at the Pirongia Clydesdales. Details above.

Barbara's Book from our Library

Who Planted the Tree - by Christine Chaplow

The Hursthouses, Richmonds and Atkinsons, known as "the mob" because of their strong inter-relationships, soon found that life in New Zealand was not what they had expected. They settled in New Plymouth and many of them became prominent citizens. One member, Wilson Hursthouse, became a surveyor and his life is woven through this story. That is not surprising because it is about land and warring about land in Taranaki, Waikato and the King Country.

Wilson Hursthouse soon discovered that surveying was often a dangerous occupation. He was employed by the Government and was expected to survey confiscated land. The ruthlessness of the Government indiscriminately confiscating millions of acres led to bitterness and hatred.

Confrontation and war between the Crown and Maori was ongoing; Parihaka became a sanctuary for local tribes who had lost their land. The peacemakers, Te Whiti and Tohu, set up marae and soon a large, peaceful village was developed. The rest of the story I leave you to read. It is not a good one but every New Zealander should read it.

The author writes about the Waikato troubles and gives a good account of the battle at Orakau. Those famous words exchanged at the battle site have been filmed and recorded in most history books. They are there again for you to read.

The establishment of the King Country makes interesting reading. Ownership of the land in Te Rohe Potae (The District of the Hat) was agreed to without another shot fired. Indeed, King Tawhiao may have regretted not having had a bigger hat! However, The King Country was still closed to Europeans, which presented problems for the Government who wanted to build the Main Trunk Railway through that territory. Much is written about that. The author suggests that it was perhaps the saving grace of Te Kooti ('the bad guy turned good') that allowed the development of the Main Trunk Line to proceed. This proved to be one of the most difficult jobs Wilson Hursthouse undertook. By now he had become very sympathetic to the Maori cause. There is a lovely tender ending to the story after so much bloodshed and strife.

Review by Barbara Walter

From the Committee

- New panels about the Alexandra Racing Club and the Pirongia Golf Club, funded by a Community Grant from Waipa District Council will be completed before the end of the year. Duplicates will be mounted on a building at the Golf Club that also serves as the headquarters of the Racing Club.
- Development of a timeline to be mounted on the fence between the Centre and the Fire Force is also under way.
- National Archives has granted permission for us to reproduce and display the 1872 Sketch Map of the district within 5 miles of Alexandra. It will be on display soon. Amongst other details, it includes the locations of 56 farms .

Volunteer Training Workshop

Another training day for volunteers was run at the Centre on 18 November. It took the form of a workshop, organised by Faith Haakma, and attended by 21 members, with a focus on bringing everyone up-to-date on procedures to be followed when volunteers are on duty. There was general agreement that the activities were very helpful.

In attendance was Karen Howard who introduced her new computer-based utility for finding material on families in Alexandra.

It was also pleasing to have present our latest volunteer, **Andrea Thrower**, who recently moved to Pirongia from Auckland. She also plans to help at the Pirongia School Library. Welcome Andrea.

Following the workshop, the volunteers enjoyed lunch together at the Persimmon Tree Café.

New and Improved

The Centre is frequently visited by people seeking information about ancestors who lived at Alexandra in the early years of settlement. We have a growing set of archival items that contain relevant information, but as our collection grows, it becomes increasingly difficult to locate everything about a particular family which may exist in a number of different parts of our collection.

Member **Karen Howard** decided to do something about this and has used her considerable computer skills and a great deal of persistence to create a simple electronic database where the entry of a family name will produce a list of resources where information about that family may be found. She unveiled the programme to volunteers earlier this month, pointing out that the database will continue to be extended.



Well done
Karen

Such utilities that are so helpful are produced at the cost of countless hours of work at the keyboard for which the Centre is extremely grateful.

Memberships

A reminder from Faith Haakma that a small number of renewals of membership are still outstanding.

Welcome new members

- Pirongia School (Corporate membership)

The Higginsons

Local connections with a number of families whose members played important roles in the community were lost when those families left the district, leaving no local descendants. The Higginsons were one of those families.

William Willson Higginson was a militiaman who enlisted, age 18 years, a few days after his arrival in New Zealand from England with his father, mother, four brothers and four sisters on the *Owen Glendower*, in September 1863. He served in the 2nd Waikato Regiment throughout the Waikato War and when Alexandra was settled, was granted a town acre in Alexandra East and a farm lot near Ngahinapouri. His family joined him at Alexandra in late 1864 and his father, John, aged 47 years, together with his brother John Andrew, aged 18 years, also enlisted as replacements in the militia, making them eligible for land grants. John Senior's farm lot was immediately outside Alexandra, to the left of the road to Te Awamutu, where its location is marked on the 1872 sketch map referred to in *Newsletter 37*. William and John Junior were granted adjoining farm lots at Ngahinapouri. But by about 1870, they appear to have sold those properties and purchased 74 acres at Te Rore to which other land was added.

The Higginsons came from a farming background in England and William was skilled with horses. During the 1870s he travelled around the district each week with a draft horse stallion to service mares, going from Te Rore down the west side of the Waipa to Whatawhata and then back via Ngahinapouri, visiting farms on request. After a day back at Te Rore he then travelled from Paterangi to Rangiaowhia and Kihikihi, returning via Alexandra. In 1876, he advertised "Wilson's Hotel" in Alexandra (the Royal Exchange) as a weekly stopping place.

He was also the owner of riding horses and was a keen participant in early Boxing Day Races where his hack, *Bob Higginson*, entered and ridden by Frank Woodward, another former militiaman who later married William's sister, Betsy, won the second race, over 1½ miles, in 1869. From that time, until the mid-1880s Higginson's name continued to be associated with the annual races as both an official and the owner of horses running. In 1875, his horse, *Larry*, won the premium race, the *Alexandra Plate*.

Soon after the Waikato Militia was disbanded in 1867, William was one of those keen to establish a local volunteer cavalry unit. Eventually this was established as a troop of the Te Awamutu Cavalry commanded by Major Jackson and William was its Sergeant. They provided backup for the Armed Constabulary in the local area until Tawhiao's declaration of peace in 1881. By that time, Higginson had become Sergeant-Major, the senior Cavalry NCO, a position he held for many years. At the same time, he also served as a member of the Mangapiko Road Board and was an active member of St Saviour's Church. In 1884, he was a member of the organizing committee for a function that celebrated the 20th Anniversary of the settlement of Alexandra.

In 1873, William married Louisa Meredith, from another local militia family, with whom he had eight children. Their children attended schools at Ohaupo, Te Rore, Paterangi and Alexandra, suggesting that the family dwelt in different places before they moved in late 1888 to Whatawhata where a new property was developed at the river end of today's Higginson Road. He and Louisa farmed there until they retired to Onehunga about 1918. William died in 1923, aged 78, and Louisa lived until 1947 when she died aged 98 years.

John Senior died in 1887 and Eliza, his wife, lived in the area until she died in 1898. She is buried alongside her husband in the Alexandra Cemetery.

John married Mary Shrimpton in 1887 and they farmed at Te Rore until 1902 when the family moved to another property on Ulster Street, Te Rapa. By the 1880s, John's brothers Thomas, Nicholas and Richard had all moved to South Taranaki, and their sisters had married into other settler families. Betsy married a former militiaman, Frank Woodward, Anna and Selina married the former Forest Ranger brothers William and Thomas Bond who were granted land at Kihikihi and Mary married Pascoe La Trobe from Te Mata. Of two younger brothers who were born after the family arrived in New Zealand, Frank attended Alexandra School and eventually qualified as a teacher and taught in the Whangarei area. The youngest son, Walter joined his brothers in South Taranaki about the time his father died, before later returning to farm at Walton.

Also on the Owen Glendower

The *Owen Glendower* was the sailing ship that brought the Higginson family to New Zealand. Also aboard, but in more up-market cabin accommodation, were five members of the family of Captain Tisdall who later became Adjutant of the 2nd Waikato Regiment and an important figure in the early years of Alexandra. A more careful examination of the passenger list was triggered by a couple of less-usual names that also appear in the early Alexandra records; those of Francis Piesse and Philip Pistrucci. Piesse, whose previous occupation was as a "perfumier", was a member of a group who performed plays (mainly farces) and wrote one of his own – *Spooney's Courtship* in the early years of settlement. He was also a member of a committee chaired by W.A. Gray (also on the *Owen Glendower*) that represented the settlers when they protested in 1865 at the treatment meted out to them by the government. Pistrucci, at age 22 and listed as a former surgeon, was a militiaman who deserted from Alexandra in June 1865, making him ineligible for a land grant. However, it seems that he later returned to the area because in 1878 he was a member of the committee that organised the Annual Sports and lived at Te Rore until at least 1896. In all, it turned out that on the vessel there were 16 migrant men who, within a couple of days of arrival in Auckland had enlisted in the 2nd Waikato militia, no doubt attracted by the prospect of land grants at the conclusion of what, at the time, was expected to be a brief military action.