

NEWSLETTER

No. 23, February, 2011

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

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Mary Hurst — Historian and Life Member

Members of the Heritage & Information Centre were deeply saddened in December to learn that Mary Hurst had died. Mary was the Centre's first and only Life Member, an honour given in 2006 in recognition of her many accomplishments in researching the history of the Waipa and her significant contribution to the establishment of the Centre.

Mary came to the Te Awamutu - Pirongia area in 1954, bringing a longstanding interest in understanding events of the past based on an interest in the history of her own family which she could trace back to 17th century England and which includes family connections to the West Indies and Australia.

Mary joined the Te Awamutu Historical Society in 1985 and quickly became an active participant in investigations led by the late Jim Mandeno. For some time, she served on the TAHS committee.

She was a long-time volunteer at the Te Awamutu Museum at a time when the archives were managed primarily by volunteers. As the result of her work there, she developed an appreciation of the quality and extent of resources available for research and, encouraged by others, she began her own investigations.

She was a member of the *Footprints of History* Journal Coordinating Committee from the time of its inception in 1988 until its final publication in 2004. During much of that time, she was Secretary-Treasurer.

Her research into local history spanned a variety of topics from the days of the Waikato War to a diary from World War 2. All involved disciplined inquiry with meticulous attention to detail, recognition of the wider context of events, and critical thinking. Many of her investigations involved field work, as well as document research. They resulted in the publication of 24 research reports in *Footprints of History* between 1989 and 2004. Many of these, particularly her careful investigation of the probable site of Raoera Pa, continue to be well-regarded by historians and archaeologists. In 1993, she also contributed four carefully researched entries to the publication, *Women of Waipa*, which celebrated 100 years of women's suffrage in New Zealand.

Mary was a leading member of a group of heritage activists who successfully challenged a district council decision and succeeded in having the site of the Alexandra East Redoubt made an historic reserve. They also convinced the Council of the need for an archaeological investigation of the site. This was an important step towards the residents of Pirongia re-discovering their own history.

The same events led to the establishment of the Waipa Heritage Council, of which Mary was a foundation member. On that Council, her cool, well-informed appraisal of heritage matters was always appreciated and she contributed fully to its initiatives. She resigned from the Heritage Council in 2007, although from time to time she continued to be consulted for her views and advice.

In 2000, Mary was a member of a group of past and present Pirongia residents who were successful in having the former St Saviour's Church moved back from Waikeria to its present site in Pirongia where it became the Pirongia Historic Visitor Centre. As a member of the initial Visitor Centre committee, she was involved in setting the Centre up and played a leading role in establishing the beginnings of its archives and library.

In 2006, the Pirongia Historic Visitor Centre recognised Mary's invaluable contribution by making her its first Life Member. In 2009, Waipa District Council recognized her contribution to heritage affairs with a richly deserved Heritage Award for Public/Community Service.

Mary Hurst continued to take an interest in local heritage affairs where she remained influential in an advisory capacity, encouraging and mentoring others and making sure that things were done properly at the Centre. Her inquisitive mind and lively intelligence continued to be appreciated by our members.

She will be sorely missed.



Mary Hurst as a student in 1945

Thanks for Support

COGS (Community Organization Grants Scheme) for a grant of \$2875 for volunteer travel and administration.

Trust Waikato for a grant of \$2000 for administrator expenses.

Julie Karsten for completing the Fire and Safety Plan.

Julie Karsten for the *Pirongia – Then and Now* display recently mounted on the rotary display rack together with an accompanying booklet.

In the Pipeline

On **19 March**, Robin Astridge will conduct a repeat of our **Northern Path of War Tour: From Pokeno to Ngaruawhia**. Travel will be by mini-bus so 10 seats are available. Costs are yet to be finalized. Enquiries should be directed to Robin Astridge. Phone 07 870 4424. E-mail chrisrobin@xtra.co.nz.

Stop Press

Heritage Centre activities for 2011 were launched on 22 February with a barbecue hosted at Pirongia Clydesdales by the van der Sande family. Twenty-five members gathered to enjoy some excellent food and fellowship. Our thanks to the van der Sandes for hosting what has become a most enjoyable annual event. See the next Newsletter for some photographs.

Online

If you are interested in obtaining access to rare early New Zealand publications, there are two university websites worthy of investigation. **NZETC** (NZ Electronic Text Centre) is run by Victoria University. Amongst many other texts, it includes both volumes of James Cowan's *New Zealand Wars*.

ENZB (Early New Zealand Books) is run by Auckland University. It includes Gudgeon's *The Defenders of New Zealand* and St John's *Rambles in Maori Lands* which includes a visit to Alexandra in the 1870s.

To obtain access, simply google <NZETC> or <ENZB>. Both websites allow key word searches of their holdings

From the Committee



Robin Astridge

The Trust Waikato grant of \$2000 has enabled us to contract Debbie Courtney to continue with collection data input and other administrative duties.

I have been authorised to purchase a larger, lockable and weather-proof letter box. Our mail is not cleared daily and the old, rather small box which has inadequate capacity has been allowing mail to get wet.

The Residents and Ratepayers Association reports progress on the four panels for the noticeboard outside the Centre. Sonia Frimmel of *What's the Story?* has been contracted to produce them and she informs us that they can be fitted without interfering with the overlapping Maori kowhaiwai surrounding the noticeboard.

A backup external hard drive was purchased for the Centre's computer to be stored away from the premises to protect our growing electronic records in the event of a fire. However, because our computer system is aging, the external hard drive is not compatible. This may indicate the need to update our computer hardware. The matter is under investigation.

A Fire and Safety Manual for the Centre, completed by a subcommittee of Sabina Owen and Julie Karsten, was approved by the Committee.

Julie Karsten has tendered her resignation from volunteer work at the Centre. Her involvement has been "full-on" and we acknowledge both her assistance with staffing the Centre and her contributions to the development of archival and display material. In particular, her photographic and written record of Alexandra Cemetery graves, and the *Pirongia – Then and Now* display were significant contributions.

New and Improved

Have you seen the further enhancement to the Centre's Mary Scott display? A glass-fronted cabinet manufactured in the style of the 1940s, obtained with community grant funding, has been introduced to house our collection of Mary Scott novels. Members should note that although the cabinet is kept locked, they are eligible to borrow books from the collection. Simply ask the volunteer on duty, and make sure that your name is recorded in the loans book.

Don't forget to have a look at the new display of photographs in the rotary stand: *Pirongia—Past and Present* which Julie Karsten completed recently. Accompanying it is a booklet.

Volunteers Wanted

The Heritage & Information Centre is desperately in need of additional volunteers to help staff the Centre. The relatively few members who undertake these duties do pretty well until someone is away on holiday. Recently, when two members were on holiday at the same time, staffing the Centre became desperate.

The duties are not onerous and the job does not require a comprehensive knowledge of local history.

If you would like to find out more about what is involved, please contact Sabina Owen - Phone 871 9992. Email: sabowen@xtra.co.nz

From some old sports programmes

Recently we were able to make copies of some printed programmes for local sports meetings found in a suitcase of papers connected with the Chappell family. William Morton Chappell was a saddler whose saddlery (about the size of a garage) was located on the south side of Crozier Street between Franklin and Ross Streets. The family lived in a small house behind the workshop. He came to Alexandra, as it was then known, about 1880 and lived here until he died, aged 83 years in 1940.

The programmes were testimony to Chappell's interest in athletics and sporting events of all kinds. He helped to organize and run such activities locally. Four of the printed programmes were for Easter Monday Athletic Sports sponsored by the Waipa Amateur Athletic Club, held at Alexandra in 1895 and 1896, and then Pirongia in 1897 and 1898 after the change of the village name. They consisted of running races over distances from 100 yards to 1 mile (including events for boys), 120 and 440 yards hurdles, high jump and throwing the cricket ball. The officials and committee members included names of families prominent in Alexandra/Pirongia, Te Rore, Paterangi and Mangapiko, and the listed competitors appear to have come from all over the Waipa. These were clearly *district* sports meetings in the widest sense – probably one of a series of sports meetings held at various centres.

Two programmes for Pirongia Axemen's Carnivals and Sports in 1907 and 1908 reveal that these meetings were affiliated with the NZ Axemen's Association. The 1907 carnival was held in March, as was the 1906 meeting which we know about only from a *Waikato Times* report. The 1908 Carnival was held in November. The 1906 event was held in Mr Prince's paddock but in 1907 and 1908, Mr Steele's paddock was used. The programmes consisted of a series of serious chopping and sawing races, interspersed with what appear to have been mainly fun, athletic-type events: running races and hurdles, including events for boys, young ladies, and married women, a women's nail driving competition, a bottle breaking competition, and a 'duffers chop' in which unpracticed members of the community took part in a handicapped chop. Again, the Pirongia Axemen's Carnival seems to have been one of a circuit of events around the Waipa and King Country.

A bonus in the Axemen's Carnival programmes is the inclusion of advertisements by sponsoring businesses. Thus for example, John E. Skuse advertised the Pirongia General Store which he took over from the Aubin family in 1906, A. Jones advertised as butcher in 1907, but C.C. Berry apparently owned the butchery in 1908. A.L. Higgins was the proprietor of the Alexandra Hotel, Sam Stewart operated the Pirongia to Kawhia Royal Mail Coach, J.W. McConnachie ran the Pirongia Forge, and Mrs Wickham's Boarding House advertised meals at all hours.

In the same tradition as the Boxing Day Races, each sports meeting was followed by a concert and dance in the evening.

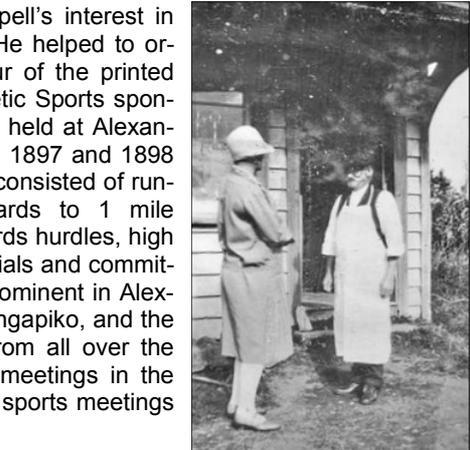
The Potts family at Ngutunui

School jubilee booklets and programmes for local events are useful sources of information when people visit the Centre seeking information about family members who are known to have lived in the district. This was highlighted again recently when a descendant from Auckland came to the centre looking for information about Frederick Potts who was believed to have farmed in the area – "probably on the way to Kawhia".

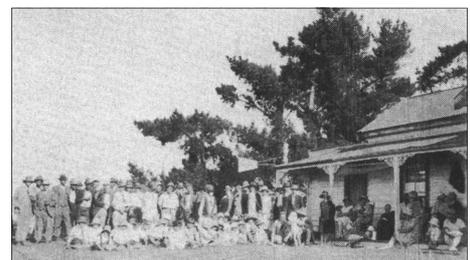
The Ngutunui / Te Rauamoia jubilee booklet contains a very useful map with names of early settlers where they farmed. On it we found two instances of the name Potts. It turned out that they were brothers and that Frederick Potts farmed on what is now appropriately named Potts Road. There is even a photograph of a school picnic at the Potts farm which was used annually for event. Later, in the sports programmes referred to above, we discovered that Frederick Potts competed in 100 yards foot races at the Pirongia Easter Monday Sports in 1897 and 1898, that he was made a JP in 1917 and was still listed as such 10 years later.

The account in the Ngutunui jubilee booklet makes it clear that school picnics were district events attended by everyone, regardless of whether they had children at the school, or not.

Everyone dressed up for the occasion and brought baskets of food and white serviettes! There were lots of fun events such as three-legged races, stepping the chain, thread the needle, pole vault, high jump, a cross country race., and always a lolly scramble. The day ended with a social at the school..



Alice Kay and William Chappell outside his saddlery about 1929



A Ngutunui School picnic at Potts farm.