

NEWSLETTER

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

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Life memberships awarded

In recognition of their services to the Heritage and Information Centre, Honorary Life Memberships were awarded to Murray and Barbara Walter at a well-attended presentation function on Friday 22 March.

Murray's involvement began as a member of the Residents and Ratepayers Association which was instrumental in bringing the former St Saviour's Church back to Pirongia from Waikeria in 2000. He was involved in the restoration of the building and was a foundation member of the Executive Committee of the Heritage and Information Centre, serving as a committee member until recently when ill-health forced him to step down from the position of Treasurer. Throughout the life of the Centre, Murray fulfilled important roles in the maintenance of the building and grounds, functions which are easily taken for granted. The fine state of the building is a tribute to Murray's ability to get things done.

Barbara became a member of the Executive Committee at an early stage. Over many years, she has been a consistent volunteer who regularly staffed the Centre. She was involved with others in developing displays, notably those about Mary Scott and the Hughes Brothers Mine and the recording of oral histories. Barbara's contributions to the administration of memberships, the proof-reading of publications and her consistent participation in the Centre's activities have all been highly valued.

When awarding the life memberships, President Robin Astridge made specific reference to the degree to which the awards to Barbara and Murray recognised a team effort which is widely admired and valued in the community. "The awards", he said, "are richly deserved".



*Murray and Barbara
at the presentation*

St Saviour's Church moved to Waikeria in 1959.

Until very recently, only the most general details were known about the relocation of the second St Saviour's Church building from the AC Redoubt site to Waikeria in 1959. It was known that Mrs Pearson, the wife of the Prison Superintendent, bought the deconsecrated building for £25 (\$50) and that it was then moved to Waikeria, but little was known about how the removal was accomplished.

In April, the Centre was visited by William Towns who was the Corrections Department staff member responsible for the removal. A follow-up telephone conversation with him by Sabina Owen filled in some of the gaps.

The removal and reconstruction of the building was accomplished by Waikeria Borstal officers and inmates; no one else was involved. Initially, all the items in the church were numbered, removed and placed in temporary storage at Waikeria. The building was in poor condition, but Mr Towns and four inmates dismantled it in sections which were transported to Waikeria on Corrections Department trucks. This was a slow process which took weeks. It was fortunate that the weather remained perfect, with no rain.

At Waikeria, the numbered sections of the building were re-assembled and most of the contents were re-installed as at Pirongia. However, some pews were so badly rotted that they broke during removal, and some glass was broken.

The re-cladding and re-lining of the building which changed its appearance and condition, and the re-painting, was all undertaken by officers and inmates using Waikeria machinery, workshops and materials. In all, 22 inmates who worked on the building, took part in the Waikeria Interdenominational Church's official opening on 25 February 1961.

Annual General Meeting — 18 June at 7.30 pm

The AGM will be held in the Pirongia Heritage and Information Centre at 7.30 pm on Tuesday, 18 June. Following the business, Mayor **Alan Livingston**, who has been researching the history of the Harapepe-Te Pahu district, will give an illustrated talk on **150 Years West of the Waipa**.

Thanks for Support

- **Lottery Grants Board** which has approved funding of \$8,000 towards the Centre's projects and services.
- **Waipa District Council** for an increase of \$1,000 in the annual grant to cover operating expenses.
- **Pub Charity** for a grant of \$5000 for administrative staffing.

Murray Walter

It is with great sorrow that we record the death of Murray Walter, Life Member of the Heritage and Information Centre, who passed away at home on 9 May. In his quiet way, Murray performed distinguished service for the Centre from the time of its establishment. His contributions and his wise counsel will be sadly missed. Speaking at Murray's funeral, his brother-in-law, Charlie Coles spelled out the many community organizations and projects to which Murray has contributed. We are fortunate to have been associated with him. We share the sorrow of Barbara and their family at his passing.

Ngaroto Tour

Eight members joined Alan Hall for the Ngaroto-Hingakaka tour on 24 March. It included the hilltop site of Taurangamirumiru Pa on Paterangi Road, swamp pa sites around Lake Ngaroto and the Hingakaka battle site on Ngaroto Road. All these sites which occupy important places in the pre-European history of the area are worth visiting, but this particular package involves too much walking for older tour participants. The tour took over 3 hours and requires a reasonable level of physical fitness. We are unlikely to add it to our list of regular tours but could respond to specific requests.

For your diary

18 June. Pirongia Heritage & Information Centre AGM at 7.30 pm.

12 July. Join Robin Astridge on a Path of War Tour from Pukekohe East to Ngaruawahia, on the 150th anniversary of the day when General Cameron's British troops invaded the Waikato. Book at the TA iSite (Ph 871 3259). Only 10 seats are available.

From the Committee

Welcome grants from the Lottery Grants Board and Pub Charity will allow the Centre to continue to employ Faith Haakma as its administrator. Faith will now be on duty for 10 hours a week, on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

We are pleased to welcome members Bruce and Jan Kilham to our list of volunteers who staff the Centre. However, we continue to seek more people willing to be on the roster for this essential activity. Ask at the desk if you wish to find out more about what is involved

The Visitor Statistics for the financial year which ended on 31 March show that we had our best year to date. The total of 2755 visitors represented an increase of 243 beyond our previous best year in 2010-11. The best months were in September, January, February and March.

Ruth Whiting

A recent visitor to the Centre was Ruth Whiting (nee Beatson) who was the fourth daughter, and the sixth child of Vera and Alan Beatson. The family came to Pirongia from Kopaki in the King Country in August 1931 and Ruth was immediately enrolled at Pirongia School where she completed the requirements for *Proficiency* before leaving school. She then worked as a home help caring for the Oakshott children at Te Rore until she was offered a position caring for an elderly Oakshott relative in Auckland. Ruth returned to the Waipa to marry Roy, the son of Fred Parsons who moved from Auckland to Paterangi to set up a motor transport service in 1922, employing a youthful Auriel Mounsey as a driver. In 1924, Fred Parsons moved his business to Te Awamutu, leaving the opportunity for Auriel Mounsey to set up the first motor transport firm based in Pirongia (See Newsletter No 29.) Fred Parsons later became the Mayor of Te Awamutu in 1941.

Multiple Connections

Brett Pierce recently became a member. He lives at Waikanae but has an interest in the Centre because he is a descendant of Major W G Mair who was not only Alexandra's Resident Magistrate in the 1870s but also responded, on behalf of the government to King Tawhiao's laying down of arms in 1881. When he took out membership, Brett was given copies of some old newsletters.

A few days later he sent an email saying that "We were intrigued to read [in No 24] the article about Henry Charles Morrison as it refers to his friendship with my great-great-grandfather William Mair ... Morrison married Ellen Tregear, sister of Edward Tregear. Edward Tregear is my wife Diana's great-grandfather. Small World!"

In the 1870s, Tregear was a surveyor, based at Kihikihi, who played cricket for Alexandra. Later he became a significant political reformer. Read about Tregear online in the *NZ Dictionary of Biography* which describes his varied career as a soldier, surveyor, linguist, Polynesian scholar, writer, public servant and political reformer. He was a remarkably accomplished man.

Welcome new members

- Linnie and Peter Jones

Two local midwives

The licensing of midwives in New Zealand did not begin until the New Zealand Midwives Act was passed in 1904. Before then, as in all societies, there were traditional lay midwives without formal qualification. Their knowledge and techniques were passed down from one generation to another, usually by working in association with an experienced older person.

Such a local lay midwife was referred to in the memoir of Rosalie, the eighth child of Aubin and Julia Ahier who lived on Te Tahi Road.

"All my older sisters and brother were born at home and brought into this world by Auntie Turner, as she was known to all the mothers in the district. She was a very big woman, a Maori, about six foot tall and very strong. She would ride on horseback for miles in all weather, and on un-metalled roads to attend her patients. Her method of delivery may not have been too hygienic judged by modern standards. The mother-to-be knelt on the floor, Auntie Turner squeezed and the baby was born. No one seemed any the worse and in a short while, Mum was back in the cowshed, milking 9 or 10 cows by hand."

Auntie Turner in Rosalie's account was **Mary Tuhituhi Turner**, a daughter of William Turner, whose obituary in 1926 referred to her as "Nurse Turner". A present-day midwife has told us that the birthing technique described was a traditional one, often used in Maori society. It is now regarded as potentially dangerous if the mother-to-be is not fully dilated, or if there are other complications. However, it was widely used and inappropriate use is likely to have contributed to the frequency of fatalities associated with childbirth which led to the registration of midwives from 1904. Nevertheless, many healthy babies were delivered. Rosalie Ahier was the first child in her family to be born at a maternity home (in Te Awamutu). The previous seven children were all delivered at home, at Te Tahi, in this manner.



Mere Tuhituhi Turner

Another local midwife was **Vera Beatson** who practised in the district from 1931 until about 1947. She was licensed as a Class B Midwife. She was not hospital-trained as required for Class A registration, but acquired registration by working under the supervision of local doctors in the Owango district of the King Country for 3 years. In 1931, Vera and her husband, Alan Beatson bought a 50 acre farm at Kaiphi, on Ormsby Road, in the vicinity of the Turner Urupa. Their house was built by Vera's brother, Alf White, and from there Nurse Beatson initially travelled by car throughout the district to assist with home births. Later a room was added to their two-bedroom cottage to serve as a lying-in suite. Her daughter, Ruth Whiting, recalls that Vera wore a white nurse's uniform with her badge and veil when attending patients. The many local children born under Nurse Beatson's care at the modest nursing home included offspring of the Beet, Bell, Turner and de Thierry families. Doctors Hiskins, Blundell, Rogers and Robertson were regular visitors.



Vera Beatson

Nurse Beatson ceased practising as a midwife about 1947. By that time, midwifery services in Te Awamutu had become more accessible to local women. In retirement, Vera and Alan Beatson lived in the house at 670 Beechey Street, built for them by Edwin Bell. Vera died in 1951 and Alan in 1956. They are both buried at the Alexandra Cemetery.

Reminiscences

Richard Rasmussen was a small boy in 1957 when the old Alexandra Public Hall building in Crozier Street was demolished. The Rasmussens lived across the road from the derelict building which was no longer being used for Methodist church functions. The local children sat on Rasmussens' fence as the drama of the old building's demolition took place. Richard recalls that because the old hall was so unstable that it had been braced at the corners with wire ropes, it was assumed that when the wires were snipped, it would be easily toppled by pushing, and pulling with ropes. However, such was not to be. Although the building could be rocked, the morticed joints in the framing resisted all attempts to bring it down. Eventually, Johnny Boggis' winch truck, affectionately known as Cackley, according to Denis Rasmussen, was brought around to pull it over. But it did not go easily.



The Hall immediately prior to demolition

Richard also shed new light on the story of the buried traction engine on Section 56, across the road from where the Envirocentre is now being established. As reported in Newsletter No 28, the remains of the traction engine were buried, but not very deeply, as it later turned out. In the 1950s, when Denis Rasmussen was having the paddock rotary hoed, some of the buried parts of the traction engine inflicted serious damage to Ron Hopping's rotary hoe. As a consequence, at least some of the buried traction engine was excavated and removed.