

# NEWSLETTER

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

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## At the Annual Barbecue

On 21 January there was a good turnout of members for what has become the annual Heritage Centre Barbecue held in the Little Clydesdale Café at Pirongia Clydesdales, to begin what promises to be a very busy year for the Centre.

Those present enjoyed an excellent meal with even better company, and President Robin Astridge used the occasion to remind everyone about the commemorative events planned for Pirongia this year:

- Sunday 16 February, a centennial celebration for the Pukehoua Bridge,
- Saturday, 1 March, a Reunion Day and Street Parade.
- Saturday/Sunday, 31 May/1 June, events to commemorate the founding and development of Alexandra with a Founders Commemoration, a Grand Ball and a Non-denominational Church Service.
- Friday, 26 December— Special activities at the traditional Boxing Day Races.

Robin asked members to support the initiatives by attending and Alan Hall made a special plea for people to assist with the organization of events as it appears that the Centre will be the major sponsor of many of them.

We are indebted to Jill and Nick van der Sande and their family for again making available the facilities at the Little Clydesdale, as well as to all those members who made the occasion such a success.



Robin speaks to members at the Barbecue.

## Pukehoua bridge centennial

The Pukehoua Bridge (Baffin Street) Centennial will be celebrated on Sunday 16 February.

From 10:00 am until 4:00 pm, at the Heritage Centre, there will be a special display about bridges and boats plying the Waipa from 1864.

At 2:00 pm, dignitaries, including local MP Shane Ardern, Waipa Mayor Jim Milchreest and other Council representatives will travel to the bridge on a Pirongia Clydesdales wagon where the 100 year old bridge will be officially re-opened and a local identity will cut the ribbon. The Te Awamutu Brass Band will be present. After the re-opening, a representative set of veteran vehicles will make a symbolic crossing of the bridge.

At 2:45 pm, the ladies of St Saviour's Church will host a traditional afternoon tea, with croquet on the lawn at Auburn Homestead, the home of Nick and Roz Empson, 839 McClure Street. There will be no charge, but a koha will be appreciated.

The day's events are being sponsored by the Heritage Centre and it is hoped that members will take part. Come along and enjoy the fun. Enquiries should be directed to Sabina Owen, phone 07 871 9992 or [pirongia.hvc@xtra.co.nz](mailto:pirongia.hvc@xtra.co.nz).

## Street Parade

A street parade to celebrate the development of Alexandra/Pirongia is planned for Saturday, 1 March. The event is being coordinated by Joy McGregor working with the Residents & Ratepayers Association. Franklin Street will be closed for the parade from Baffin Street to Belcher Street starting at 12:00 noon. It will then return to the Franklin/Crozier Streets intersection via Ross Street. The parade will include old-time vehicles and it is hoped that Pirongia Clubs will be represented.

On the day, there will also be a *Recall the Past* display of Art and Photographs in the Memorial Hall, arranged by Shirley Scott, Gloria King and Joy McGregor, as well as displays at the Heritage Centre.

Joy hopes that the day will attract former residents back to help us celebrate 150 years of development. We hope to see you there too!

## Thanks for Support

- **DAVID TUSON**, who assembled re-vamped panels for the display about the initial survey of Alexandra and changes to Pirongia as we know it.
- **JILL AND NICK VAN DER SANDE**, who again hosted our annual BBQ.
- **BARBARA WALTER**, for repainting the display board backgrounds where new displays are being mounted.
- **BRUCE KILHAM & ROBERT MCWHA**, who established the height of the Pukehoua Bridge above the summer river level.
- **ROBERT MCWHA**, who mounted the notice about 150th Jubilee events on the front of the Heritage Centre building.
- **GARRY HOWARD**, who used his computer skills to enhance a photograph of Alexandra in the early 1870s, giving access to very useful detail.



Pirongia has seen some great street parades in the past.

## For your diary

- 2 Feb **Walking Tour No.2:** Matakītaki to Alexandra Cemetery.
- 6 Feb **WDC Free Expo and Concert** at Karapiro Mighty River Domain to start the 150th Jubilee Year.
- 8 Feb **Southern Path of War Tour:** Te Rore to Orakau.
- 14 Feb **Pukehoua Bridge Centennial** celebration.
- 22 Feb **Northern Pirongia District Tour.**
- 1 Mar **Pirongia Reunion Day and Street Parade.**

## Hotel history

Keep your eye open for an up-dated version of the Hotels Display to appear soon on a display board re-surfaced by Barbara Walter. It will include a photograph of the initial Alexandra Hotel built on Town Lot 82, where Miss Miller later built her stylish villa, *Sedgemoor*, now known as *The Maples*, on Parry Street.

The section was allocated to Sgt Thomas Finch who built the first Alexandra there in 1865. A recently acquired image of the first bridge contains excellent background detail which has allowed us to identify on that site, a building matching that in an old photograph which was thought to be the *Dorchester Arms* when Finch took it over and re-named it in 1870.

## Get dressed up

When you attend this year's Jubilee events, consider dressing up in a style of former years. Sabina Owen suggests that this will add to the atmosphere and the fun of the various occasions.

It is hoped particularly, that people will dress up for the Grand Ball which a group, led by Paula McWha, are planning for the evening of Saturday 31 May, at the War Memorial Hall where the programme will include old-time dances.

Paula has hopes that gentlemen will also dress up and grow suitable facial adornments. Prizes are proposed for the best beards and whiskers as well as the best costumes.

Now is the time to start thinking about what you might wear.

## A useful resource

Member Bruce Kilham has done extensive research into river boats which plied the Waikato and Waipa rivers in the days of river steamers. He has given the Centre a copy of his meticulously assembled catalogue of river craft which worked on the Waipa. It includes an entry for each vessel with details about what Bruce has discovered about where, when and by whom it was built, specifications about its size and details about its owners and activities on the river system. Included are vessels like the *Avon* from the Waikato Flotilla during the Waikato War through to the river craft operated by Caesar Roose. Bruce is now working on obtaining photographs to accompany the entries.

Ask at the desk to see it.

## A recent visitor

**Ross Buddle** from Auckland is a descendant of the Rev Thomas Buddle, the missionary who established and ran the Te Kopua Wesleyan mission (on today's Cannon Road) between 1841 and 1844. Ross is researching his ancestor's activities in the area and having seen the Centre's copy of the publication about the mission, *Rose Petals for God*, would dearly love to acquire a copy. If anyone knows where he might obtain one, please let us know at the Centre and we will advise Ross.

## Welcome new members

- Mike Anderson
- Paul Ganbrill

## The Alexandra Creamery

The creamery at Alexandra/Pirongia was located next to the Public Library, where the public toilet and off-street parking are now sited, on public land leased from the Waipa County Council. It was established at the commencement of the 1894 dairy season, using skimming technology to separate cream from whole milk by leaving it to stand in shallow containers until the cream could be skimmed off. Afterwards, the cream was taken by river to be processed at a newly established butter factory at Ngaruawahia, and the remaining skim milk was used for other purposes such as feeding pigs.

For the local farmers who hand-milked small dairy herds, seldom exceeding 10 cows, the transport of milk to the skimming plant was part of a daily routine, which also included bringing skim milk back to their farms to feed pigs. This occurred six days a week, but creameries stayed open late on Saturdays to receive milk from the afternoon milking because no milk was received on Sundays.

Basically, this was the same technology that had been used for butter-making by individual subsistence-farming families since Alexandra was first settled, the difference being that instead of processing it themselves to make butter for home consumption, with any surplus sold to a trading store, farmers sold their whole milk to Reynolds & Co who extracted the cream and sent it by river to a butter factory at Ngaruawahia where there were cool store facilities. By this time, the export of refrigerated cargoes to the United Kingdom had begun.

By 1911, separators were being used in more up-to-date creameries and it was proposed to close the Pirongia Creamery because its technology had become outdated. However, a large attendance of local milk suppliers attended a meeting with Wesley Spragg of the New Zealand Dairy Association, which had taken over Reynolds & Co., and convinced him that the number of cows supplying the plant in the 1911 season would exceed 600. In light of that, he agreed to update the creamery by installing two separators and a patent skim milk processor for the forthcoming season. The creamery was updated as planned by the commencement of the season on 1 October.

The updated creamery must have been a success because in July 1912, the old creamery was demolished and a new, fine-looking creamery building was erected in a record time of five days by White Bros. of Cambridge. It remained on the site until the creamery closed in 1925.

Who was the first manager of the creamery is not known. However, J. Scott Chalmers was its manager from at least 1904 when he was listed on the Electoral Roll, until April 1917 when his children transferred from the school to Auckland. Chalmers married Vivienne Berry from Thames who appears to have been a niece of C.C. Berry.

## New and Improved

Several of the Centre's display panels are being upgraded for Pirongia's 150<sup>th</sup> Jubilee which is expected to attract visitors.

The display about the establishment of Alexandra in 1864 and its changing fortunes, including the change of name to Pirongia in 1896, was replaced recently with new panels planned by Sabina Owen and assembled by David Tuson.

Sonia Frimmel has been contracted to complete a display about Bridges over the Waipa which will be up in time for the Centennial of the Pukehoua Bridge on 16 February.

Marilyn Yeates is planning an updated version of the Hotels Display which will also be up by mid-February.

Call at the Centre to see a handsome period jacket and skirt which are more than 100 year old. They were the property of Elizabeth Tims (1886-1972) who, after her mother died, lived on a farm owned by her mother's family, the Holliers, at 416 Frontier Road. Bessie, as she was known, attended Mangapiko School between 1892 and 1900 and at age 25, when her grandmother died, became responsible for the care of her three elderly uncles, all of whom still lived at home. The last of them died in 1924 and Bessie moved to Auckland, leaving her brother to run the farm which is still owned by a Tims descendant.

Bessie's niece, Helen, lovingly cared for the treasured outfit until she died and the family decided that it should be placed for public admiration at the Heritage Centre.



*Wagons delivering milk to the Alexandra Creamery*



*Bessie Tims' 100 year old jacket and skirt*