

NEWSLETTER

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Another successful BBQ

Thirty members enjoyed what has become the Centre's Annual Barbecue held at the Pirongia Clydesdales on the warm, sunny evening of Tuesday 27 January. Barbara Walter and Marilyn Yeates made the necessary catering arrangements and produced a pot of boiled potatoes and buttered fresh bread, to accompany a delectable array of pot-luck dishes enjoyed with the steak and sausages barbecued by Robin Astridge.



A great turn-out for the barbecue.

The outcome was an enjoyable social occasion to launch another busy year for the Centre. Robin reviewed the many activities completed in 2014, beginning with the Pukehoua Bridge Centennial in February and ending with a finale at the Boxing Day Races, all of them depicted in photographs on display. He thanked those who organised the Centre's participation and also the many individuals who helped, pointing out the importance of individual commitment and working together.

We are grateful to Jill and Nick van der Sande for again hosting the gathering and also to Leeanne Unkovich who now leases the café premises, for making them available to us.

Barbara's book from our library

Not a Pioneer: Memoirs of Bernice Monrath Johnstone 1871-1960

Although Bernice Johnstone (nee Alexander) born in 1871, did not consider herself a pioneer, when reading her life story, one wonders what other hardships she might have had to endure to qualify. She was a year old when her family settled on fifty acres at Mangapiko where the stream bounded their farm and Bernice recalls the joy they had as children playing there. They lived in a two room slab hut with some out-buildings until about 1917 when a large and attractive home was built. It still stands opposite the Mangapiko Hall.

Bernice recalls her school days at the Alexandra (Pirongia), Mangapiko and Te Awamutu schools. After she left school in her 17th year she went on to teach at Huntly, Ararimu and again at Huntly.

Bernice's engagement to Lin Johnstone, lasted five years. Lin was farming in partnership with his brother Cam, the husband of Bernice's sister, Nina. Nina became very lonely and Bernice gave up teaching to be with her. She describes this part of her life as "The end of my girlhood". After having been engaged for five years, Lin gave her 11 days to prepare for their wedding!! No bridal salons, no hens' parties, no manicurists, no hairdressers or makeup artists. Plenty of time!! They were married at Mangapiko.

And so began a life of hardship and partnership for many years, with a baby arriving every two years; their first child was born in 1896 and the eighth in 1911. They farmed first at Te Haroto before moving in 1904 to Old Mountain Road, when Bernice was in her early thirties, where they built a home they called *Kelburn*. Life was hard. It was bush to pasture. As in all family histories, tragedies happened and I leave those for you to read. Readers will enjoy the stories and pranks of their children who were happy and cared for each other.

Moving from *Kelburn* to *Three Oaks* is an interesting episode that bears similarity to many partnership problems today. Bernice left *Kelburn* about 1924 and I leave the reader to discover the next phase in her life.

In 1959, at the age of 88 she made one last visit to Mangapiko to visit her brother, Walter Alexander, and passed away in the following year.

This book, by Patricia R. Roberts, is an excellent read that reveals much about the lives of women and farming in the wider district in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Do not be put off by its size and 190 page length. It includes well-selected photos and maps, interesting text boxes throughout to supplement the story, and it is very well-indexed.

Reviewed by Barbara Walter

Thanks for Support

- **Nick & Jill van der Sande** and **Leeanne Unkovich** who made it possible for the Centre to hold its BBQ in the Coach House Café.
- **Jane Finch & Marilyn Yeates** for the development of the *150 Years of Local History* mural.
- **Robert McWha, Joy McGregor & Marilyn Yeates** for their initiative in setting up and running the Centre's stall at the Boxing Day Races.
- **Sabina Owen** for managing the development of the panels about the history of the Racing and Golf Clubs.
- **Wendy Bain** who gave the Centre access to her father's records about the Golf Club, and has agreed to allow the Centre to copy them for its archives.
- **All those members** who supported initiatives by the Centre during a really demanding sesqui-centennial year.

Thank you Faith

We were sorry to learn in January that **Faith Haakma** had tendered her resignation which took effect from 17 February.

She has been the Administration Manager at the Centre, on Tuesdays, since September 2012, and the Treasurer for much of the time since then. Since taking up the post, she has been wonderfully efficient, using her financial management skills and computer competence to upgrade our financial systems and began developing our online presence.

Faith was particularly keen to support our volunteers and make them more confident about their duties when they open the Centre. The workshop she organized for volunteers last November was probably our most effective one to date.

Faith says that she is taking a break at the moment. That is deserved. However, we wish her well for the future and hope that whatever she chooses to do will be fulfilling for her.

We will miss her efficiency and her cheerful smile.



From the Committee

- The Committee plans to appoint an Office Coordinator to replace Faith Haakma as soon as funding for a further year is secured.
- The position of Treasurer became vacant when Faith resigned and Robert McWha has agreed to fill the role on an interim basis.

A River Boat Register

Bruce Kilham continues to research the history of riverboats in the Waikato / Waipa river trade. Recently he deposited at the Centre his *Register of Riverboats on the Waikato*. It contains his latest draft of information about every boat on which he has unearthed information from many sources, some of which he considers more reliable than others. Bruce is at pains to point out that while the register may be complete so far as his present knowledge is concerned, it is possible that further evidence will become available in the future. Thus, the register should be considered a work-in-progress. It is a useful addition to our collection.

New & Improved

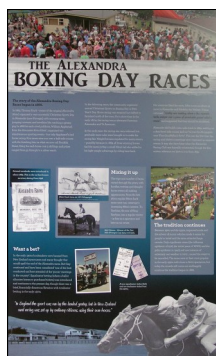
Have you seen the mural entitled *150 Years of Local History* on the fence outside the Heritage Centre? It was assembled by **Marilyn Yeates** using detailed sketches by **Jane Finch**, based on photographs and other material from the Centre's archives.

We are indebted to Jane for her countless hours of sketching, and to Marilyn and a small team for carrying the project to completion. Jane and Marilyn were formally thanked for their contributions at a function held at the Centre on 3 February.



Marilyn and Jane beside the mural.

Devoy Signs prepared the panels and mounted them on the fence. The project was funded by a sesqui-centennial year grant from Waipa District Council.



When next at the Centre, make a point of also viewing two new panels about the **Boxing Day Races** and the **Pirongia Golf Club** that were completed in a project managed by **Sabina Owen** and designed by Sonia Frimmell of *What's the Story?* The panels are brief resumés of the history of the two local institutions that share the same facilities. Of course, the Alexandra Racing Club that dates back to 1866 is far older than the Golf Club.

Two copies of each panel were produced so that a copy of each may be mounted on the Golf Club building that becomes the Racing Club HQ on Boxing Day each year.

The panels were funded by a Waipa District Council Community Grant.

Welcome new members

- Anna Gratton
- Harry Midwood

Gentry in the ranks

Willoughby Dickson (often spelled Dixon) was living in the area in 1854, in partnership with John Vittoria Cowell, running cattle on land east of the Waipa River, between the Manga-o-tama Stream (near Ngahinapouri) and the Puniu River. At that time, he lived in *Rākautahi*, a house at Te Rore that was burned down by Kingite Maori prior to the arrival of General Cameron's army in 1864.

Dickson was born in Lancashire, England, in 1826, a younger son of Sir Jeremiah Dickson, Knight Companion of the Bath and Colonel in the British Army, and Dame Jemima, and arrived at Auckland on the *Emmerdale* in 1849. He was known to receive mail addressed to "The Honourable Willoughby Dickson" and as a result, was often referred to locally as "Sir Willoughby" although this was incorrect. Like most other Europeans in the area he moved to Auckland during the invasion of the Waikato, but later returned to the district and lived in the Te Rore-Paterangi area until his death in November 1888, aged 64 years, although no record has been found that he owned land. The 1885-1886 Electoral Roll listed him as a resident of Paterangi, occupation "mailman".

In 1888, at 64 years of age, Dickson drowned tragically, in an intoxicated state, while mistakenly attempting to ford the Puniu River on his way home, after spending the day at Kihikihi celebrating the Prince of Wales' birthday. He lies in the Paterangi Cemetery. There is no evidence that Willoughby Dickson ever married or left descendants.

Sir Charles Wentworth Burdett, was the 7th Baronet of Burthwaite who arrived in Auckland as a cabin passenger on the vessel *Owen Glendower* (See *Newsletter 38*) in September 1863. According to an obituary, he had been a lieutenant in the 54th Regt and the 2nd Staffordshire Militia before coming to New Zealand. However, in December 1864, when he enlisted in the 2nd Waikato Regt as a substitute, he became *Private Charles Wentworth*. His enlistment made him eligible for Town Lot 297 in Alexandra East and Farm Lot 232 in Tuhikaramea Parish. Following the disbanding of Waikato Militia late in 1867, Burdett enlisted as an Armed Constable under his real name, and served in the Waipa until 1874.

In April 1871 he married Grace Grant in Auckland. Grace was locally believed to be the daughter of Alexander Grant, a retired Scottish Supervisor of Inland Revenue who arrived in Auckland with Grace and her younger brother Robert in November 1867, although it is more likely that he was a member of their extended family (probably an uncle). Alexander settled at Alexandra where, in a short time he became the owner of 39 Town Lots and some farm land purchased from militiamen leaving the settlement when the Waikato Militia was disbanded. He was elected a Mangapiko Highway Board Trustee in 1869 and played prominent roles in local politics until his death in 1888.

Charles and Lady Burdett, as Grace became known, lived in Alexandra until the late 1870s. Their three children, Angelina, Harriet and Charles Junior, were born here in 1873, 1875 and 1877, but the family's living arrangements between 1879 and 1882 are not known. They must have lived elsewhere because, in 1882 the children enrolled at the Alexandra School from another unnamed school and their enrolment cites their parent as Lady Burdett. At that stage, she and the children appear to have been living apart from Charles, probably living with Alexander Grant until 1884 when they left for Waipawa in Hawkes Bay, and later Dannevirke, where they lived with Grace's older brother, the Rev. Alexander Grant, a Presbyterian minister who had come to New Zealand in 1883. Two of the children did well educationally, winning scholarships. Harriet became a teacher and Charles qualified as a dentist at the Otago College of the University of New Zealand, eventually being elected President of the NZ Dental Association. His father died when he was 16 years old and he inherited the family title, becoming Sir Charles Grant Burdett, the 8th Baronet of Burthwaite.

Meanwhile, their father fell upon hard times. Sir Charles moved to Auckland about the time Grace and their children moved to Hawkes Bay. There is some evidence that he may have developed a mental affliction because in 1887 he was reported to have escaped from the Whau Lunatic Asylum and in the following year he was convicted of stealing two roses valued at two pence from the Albert Park Gardens, for which he was imprisoned for two weeks with hard labour. The severity of the sentence caused public outcry. Following his release, and in a poverty-stricken state, he was cared for at the Costley Home at Mt Eden where he died on 18 May 1892.

On Boxing Day 2014

The 2014 Pirongia Boxing Day Races were the last hurrah in the Waipa District's 150 year celebrations and the Centre made a significant contribution to the occasion. Research by Alan Hall provided the basis for several newspaper articles about the history of the races, Charlie Coles produced a number of photographs about the history of the Golf Club, and the Centre mounted an historical display of photographs in a stall organised by Marilyn Yeates, Joy McGregor, and Robert McWha who were supported on the day by other members, all appropriately attired. The stall that was centrally located, attracted much interest between races and some publications were sold.



The Heritage Centre Stall at the Races

Since the race day, the two panels referred to elsewhere in this newsletter have been handed over for mounting at the clubhouse, and research into the history of the Alexandra Racing Club continues with the intention of producing a publication later this year.