

NEWSLETTER

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Pirongia Heritage & Information Centre

Te Whare Taonga o Ngaa Rohe o Arekahanara

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Honours for Sabina Owen

Pirongia Heritage and Information Centre stalwart, Sabina Owen, was recently awarded two honours for her service to the Centre since its inception.

As a member of the Residents and Ratepayers Association Sabina played leading roles in the advocacy that resulted in the old St Saviour's Church being returned from Waikeria to Pirongia Village in 2000, where it was refurbished to become the venue for what became the Pirongia Historic Visitor Centre in 2003. Sabina was instrumental in establishing the Visitor Centre as an Incorporated Society and has served on its Executive Committee continuously, most of the time as Secretary. In the process, she has influenced most of the initiatives that developed the Centre into today's i-Site, now known as the Heritage and Information Centre.

In June, Volunteering Waikato recognised her services with a Commendation at their Volunteer of the Year Excellence Awards.

At its AGM on 17 June, following a unanimous vote at the AGM, the Pirongia Heritage and Information Centre acknowledged Sabina's outstanding service by making her a Life Member of the Centre. The presentation of her life membership took place at an afternoon tea at the Centre, attended by many who were associated with Sabina in its development and management. They included Alan Livingston, former Mayor of Waipa District who, like other speakers, talked of Sabina's commitment, persistence, and skills in her volunteer roles, before formally presenting her with the award.



Sabina Owen
Life Member

Another Successful AGM

The 2015 AGM took place at the Heritage and Information Centre on Tuesday 16 June with over 20 members present. President Robin Astridge reported membership at over 100 and reviewed a busy year of activities, the most significant of them commemorating 150 years since the settlement of Alexandra and the 100th anniversary of Pukehoua Bridge. He paid particular tribute to the contribution of the volunteers who organised and attended these events and to those who also continue to keep the Centre open on four days each week. The financial statements, reviewed by Jonathan Hurst and Associates, showed the Centre to be in a healthy financial position.

The election of officers for the new financial year returned Robin Astridge as President, Barbara Walter as Vice-President and Marilyn Yeates as Secretary. The new Executive Committee consists of Basil Coles, Patricia Grierson, Garry Howard, Gloria King, Brent Mealing, Sabina Owen, Nick van der Sande, and Robert McWha. The committee which has the power to co-opt, has since appointed Ian Poole as Treasurer and the Office Coordinator, Andrea Thrower, is providing secretarial support for Marilyn Yeates.



Social chit-chat over supper followed the AGM

On the recommendation of the Executive Committee, the meeting unanimously endorsed the award of a Life Membership to Sabina Owen.

Following the formal business, the meeting enjoyed a nostalgic address by author and newspaper journalist Kingsley Field about changes in the New Zealand way of life which has become increasingly a throw-away culture. He questioned whether ours will eventually be seen as the last No. 8 wire generation.

This double edition of our Newsletter is intended to compensate for our failure to produce an edition in August when we were overwhelmed with other duties.

Thanks for Support

- **Jonathan Hurst & Associates** who reviewed the financial accounts for the 2014-15 year.
- **Waipa District Council** for an annual grant of \$8,000.
- **Community Organization Grants Scheme (COGS)** for an annual grant of \$5,000.
- **Ian Poole** who is now our Treasurer.

Leslie Maurice Yeates

We were deeply saddened to learn that Les Yeates had died on 9 August whilst on holiday in the South Island. He was a loyal supporter of the Heritage Centre who, despite a serious hearing disability, regularly attended and participated in our activities. We share the sorrow of Marilyn and his family at his passing and miss his presence.

Can you help?

Information has been gathered about the origins of the names of streets in the village and roads throughout the district. But we are stumped by the name of **Kiwi Road**.

Anyone who knows when it was first known by that name and/or why is asked to contact Alan Hall at the Centre.

BBQ for Members

Join us at the Pirongia Clydesdales at 6:30pm on Wednesday 27 January for what has become the annual 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 tippie.

There will be no charge.

For your diary

- 26 December from 11:00 am: Alexandra Racing Club Boxing Day Races at the Pirongia Golf Course. Bring a picnic lunch (perhaps your Christmas Dinner leftovers) relax, and enjoy a fun occasion.
- 27 January at 6:30 pm. Annual barbecue at the Pirongia Clydesdales. See details above.

Book Reviews

Battlefields of the New Zealand Wars: A Visitor's Guide

David Green

Publisher: Penguin Group 2010

For those interested in the New Zealand wars that were fought from 1845 to 1869 this book is a valuable guide to finding and exploring battle sites and includes a condensed background to each incident.

The book is divided chronologically into seven chapters, each dealing with the battles of an era. This enables a traveller to find sites easily in a locality that they may find themselves in. Detailed driving directions also assist finding sites readily though having a companion to read and advise is always helpful to a driver!

Numerous photos (both past and present views) assist in orientating one in the field.

A valuable resource for those wishing to explore the period of unrest in our country's history.

In 2009, David Green accompanied a party, guided by me during a trip to North Taranaki. He freely shared his knowledge with us for which we were grateful.

Reviewed by Robin Astridge

Maia te Tupua: Whānau accounts of Waikato-Maniapoto World War 1 Veterans and one Conscriptee

Tom Roa & Maehe Paki

Publisher: Purekireki Marae 2015

This beautifully presented book commemorates World War 1 by telling the stories of seven Waikato-Maniapoto men who went to war, using accounts gathered in interviews with members of their families. Six went as volunteers and one was conscripted.

The book tells little about the war itself; like others who returned, these men were reluctant to talk about those experiences in any detail. Rather, its focus is on what life was like for the men and their families before, during, and after the war. It recounts why the six volunteers chose to serve. Those interviewed remember their ancestor and the legacy he left. In other words, this is mainly about the *effects* of World War 1 on seven families.

The stories are told through the voices of surviving family members, some of whom you will know. For example, Joseph Ormsby's story is told by his daughter Edith Dockery, his nephew Keith Ormsby and other family members, all of whom were present at the interview. Also included are excellent photographs of the men before, during and after the war, together with genealogy diagrams showing the relationship of those interviewed to their tupuna.

It is possible that because the book has a Maori title, it will be dismissed by Pakeha readers as not for them. That would be unfortunate. The book is easy to understand and offers alternative insights into World War 1 and its effects on men who served, through the eyes of Maori families. It also adds to our appreciation of the nature of Maori family relationships.

The authors make few intrusions into the seven accounts. However, when you read them, don't forget to read the authors' comments in their incisive *Word in Conclusion*.

As a bonus, the book is accompanied by a DVD of the interviews.

Highly recommended as Christmas reading.

Reviewed by Alan Hall

J.D.Hill – Alexandra businessman

John Douglas Hill, generally known as J.D. Hill, was a prominent citizen of Alexandra from 1865 until 1890. He was a storekeeper, commission agent and licensed auctioneer who, at various times was Postmaster, Registrar of Births Deaths and Marriages, Government Vaccinations Inspector and a JP, who also served for lengthy periods on public bodies including Highway Boards, the Alexandra Township Board, the Alexandra School Committee, and for two years in 1877-78 on the Waipa County Council, when he was based in Hamilton.

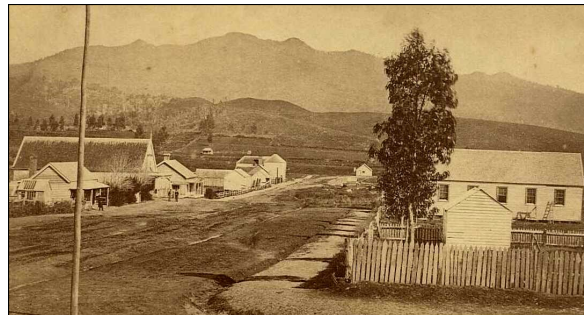
Hill was a Scot whose family migrated to Australia in 1847. He arrived at Alexandra in 1865, aged 32, with his brother-in-law Franz Scherff, with whom he established the trading store, Scherff and Co.

By 1866, Hill was well-established in the community. In that year, he was granted a country auctioneer's licence, was elected President at the inaugural meeting of the Alexandra Literary Association that later obtained a Mechanics Institute grant to establish the Alexandra Library, and was commissioned as an ensign in the 2nd Waikato Regiment. He was the vice-chairman at the opening of the Alexandra Oddfellows Lodge in June and served as Treasurer when plans were made to build the first St Saviour's Church on Picquet Hill (afterwards the site of the Armed Constabulary Redoubt). Hill was later a church warden for many years.

The trading store of Scherff and Co was a conspicuous building on a section, initially owned by Scherff, in present-day Crozier Street when it was known as Queen Street. It appears that Hill ran the store and acted as an auctioneer, while Scherff, an Auckland merchant, bought and sold property, and engaged in the river trade. Eventually in 1871, their partnership was amicably dissolved with Hill becoming the owner of the store in which the Post Office had also been located between 1866 and 1868. In the early 1870s, he was joined from Australia by his younger brother, Kennedy Hill, who took over the auctioneering duties.

Hill formed a close friendship with Major W.G. Mair when Mair became Native Agent and Resident Magistrate at Alexandra early in the 1870s and leased to him, as a residence, the first Alexandra Hotel building which Thomas Finch had sold to Hill when Finch transferred his licence to the Doncaster Arms building in 1870. In 1872, Mair married Hill's step-sister, Janie Cathcart Black from Australia, who Mair met when she visited Hill at Alexandra in 1871.

Between 1872 and 1875 a Public Hall and Library Committee, on which Hill acted as treasurer, eventually succeeded in funding the construction of the Alexandra Public Hall which was opened in August 1875, shortly after J.D. Hill had married Catherine Elizabeth Harden, with whom he was to have five children. By this time, Hill was also an Alexandra Highway District Trustee.



Hill's trading store was the second building from the left. Another photograph shows a dwelling behind it.

In 1877, when construction of the railway from Auckland was approaching Hamilton, Hill leased his Alexandra store to Vernon Roberts and Rowland Lacon, and in partnership with Kennedy Hill, opened *J.D. & K. Hill, importers, auctioneers & commission agents* at Frankton. His family moved to Frankton for three years. During that time, Hill served a term on the Waipa County Council in 1877-78, acting as Chairman during a part of his term. In 1880, the brothers dissolved their partnership, allowing J.D. Hill to resume his business interests at Alexandra in time for King Tawhiao's declaration of peace in 1881.

Hill's business prospered in the 1880's, boosted by the development of Whatiwhatihoe and the establishment by Hill of a bacon factory that was in full production by 1882, processing pigs from the King Country. At the same time, he was the top polling candidate elected to the Alexandra Town Board when it was inaugurated in 1884, serving as chairman.

By 1886, when the Main Trunk Railway reached into the King Country, Hill established a branch store at Otorohanga which continued to function until about 1890 when he sold his store to Ahier and Gifford of Te Awamutu and left the declining township of Alexandra, moving to Auckland where he died in August 1893, leaving no descendants in this district.

It is surprising that despite his prominent public profile, no photograph of J.D.Hill has been located.

**Don't forget the BBQ on Wednesday 27 January:
6:30 pm at the Pirongia Clydesdales. See you there!**

Background to the Te Kopua Native School Investigation

This investigation was triggered by a request for information from Australia, sent to the Pirongia School from where it was re-directed to the Heritage and Information Centre. The request was from a retired Australian geologist whose grandfather, McRae (known as Rae) Cameron, taught at the school between 1912 and 1915 before he volunteered for military service from which he was not to return. His grandson, Roger Cameron is investigating his family's history.

The Te Awamutu Museum Archives produced useful documentation about the school's earliest days together with detailed newspaper accounts of a school jubilee celebration in 1933. The Te Awamutu Library also has a copy of a Waikato University thesis about the school by Jim Holdom that includes commentary about the times of the 23 teachers who taught there between 1886 and 1956.

The result was a lively exchange of information by internet between Alan Hall and Roger Cameron which was followed up by a visit to the site by Roger and Alan in August when they tried to work out where the school was located.

More map analysis followed, with the result that we now know the precise location of the 2 acre school site, and where the road line ran from present-day Cannon Road to Kiwi Road - the route followed by Arthur Ormsby's children who walked about 3 miles to and from the school daily.

Roger's grandfather taught at the school from July 1912 until December 1915 when he enlisted for war service. During that time, when three of their four children were born, Maisie, Rae's wife, was also his teaching assistant. Interestingly, one of their pupils in 1913 was Rae's younger brother, Victor, who, aged almost 16 years, lived with them and was said to be in Standard 7.

When Rae enlisted, his family moved to Whanganui and the school remained closed until 1922.

Before Rae enlisted, however, Victor, had "put up" his age from 18 to 20 and enlisted, only to be killed in France, on the Western Front, aged 19 years in September 1916 when Rae was in basic training in New Zealand.

The same fate awaited 2nd Lieut Rae Cameron who was killed in action near Ypres in Belgium a year later in September 1917. He was 27 years old.



Te Kopua teachers and pupils about 1900. The teachers are probably William and Lydia Frazer.

Requests for information such as that from Roger Cameron are not uncommon. On average, the Centre responds to one a week. However, most are less complex and can be dealt with within a relatively short time.

Te Kopua Native School on Cannon Road

There was a Native School (officially known as a Maori School after 1947) on present-day Cannon Road (near Tihiroa) from 1886 until 1956.

Following the Waikato War of 1863-4, the Te Kopua district was in Te Rohe Potae (the King Country), beyond the southern boundary of the 1864 government land confiscation. Thus, for 17 years, from 1864 until King Tawhiao's declaration of peace in 1881, the area was located beyond government jurisdiction.

Prior to the Waikato War, a Wesleyan mission was located on 40 acres in the vicinity of the memorial on the river side of Cannon Road. Like other mission stations, it successfully ran a mission school from the 1840s until the third missionary, Alexander Reid, left the district in 1863, immediately prior to the Waikato War. It appears to have been effective as a school. According to James Cowan, Te Wahanui Huatare was educated there before going on to the Wesleyan Three Kings College in Auckland, and a jubilee gathering in 1937 was told that Arthur and John Ormsby, Charles Searancke and Meri Turner from Kaipiha and Puketotara, were also pupils.

However, the mission school ceased to function after the departure of the missionaries in 1863. The land confiscations that followed in 1864 drove the bulk of the Maori population into Ngati Maniapoto territory which then became known as the King Country.

In 1884, following King Tawhiao's declaration of peace, Arthur and John Ormsby, supported by William and Walter Searancke, all second generation Pakeha-Maori with children of their own, made an approach to the government to establish a Native School on Te Kopua mission land to be leased for that purpose. Native Schools were separate from the schools administered by provincial education boards; they were administered directly from Wellington by the Education Department. However, Maori families in the area were much more cautious about cooperating with the government. Nevertheless, Arthur Ormsby calculated that there were about 30 children of school age in the district around the school.

Despite a reluctance to build schools on leased land, the government was eventually responsive to the proposal, probably because such a school would establish a government presence in the King Country where it appears to have been the first government school. By early 1886 a two-acre site was surveyed and by late September, a school building with attached teacher accommodation, had been constructed by Smith and Nelson from Auckland. The first teacher, James Ireland, aged 73 years, was transferred from a similar school in Southland and the Te Kopua Native School opened on 8 November with 5 pupils, all children from Pakeha-Maori families. Roll numbers increased in the following year until by 1888 there were 37 children enrolled, although reports by inspectors say there were few "pure" Maoris.

The school had a chequered history. Maintaining attendance proved difficult when children had to walk up to three miles (4.8 kilometres), traversing swampy areas and wading swollen streams during wet periods. Those travelling from the eastern side of the Waipa, crossed by canoe. Child labour was also used on struggling farms, and attendance fluctuated seasonally as a result, falling dramatically during times of intense farming activity, as well as at times of bad weather when streams such as the Moakururua flooded.

The location was isolated by poor access from Alexandra/Pirongia along an undeveloped roadway from the end of present-day Kiwi Road to the end of today's Cannon Road, and at times, the school site was unhealthily wet. Both teachers and pupils suffered from health problems. Because it was administered from Wellington there were also problems with slow decision-making and maintenance left much to be desired.

As a result, there were frequent changes of teacher and the school remained closed for lengthy periods on four occasions, presumably because of staffing difficulties and unsatisfactory attendance. It was closed for 4 years and 6 months between February 1891 and July 1895, for 8 months in 1909-10, for 10 months in 1911-12 and for 6 years and 6 months between February 1916 and July 1922. Altogether, it was closed for 12 years and 6 months in its first 34 years.

The school operated continuously from mid-1922 until the end of 1956, probably because road access was developed via Cannon Road, Tihiroa and Te Kawa to Te Awamutu. However, the school building was dilapidated and the original teacher residence became unusable and teachers had to board with local families. Teachers at the school suffered from isolation, loneliness, difficult access, a lack of professional support and a lack of contact with other local teachers who worked for a different authority. Nevertheless, three teachers each taught there for over 6 years. They were Emily Churton (1923-29), Georgina Rutherford (1929-36) and Sarah Mauriohooho (1936-43). Towards the end of her time, improving roads meant that Sarah Mauriohooho was able to live outside the district and travel to the school daily by car.

By 1950 a new school site, remembered by Keith Ormsby, had been acquired on the western side of Cannon Road where a new teacher's residence was constructed, and a prefabricated classroom was added in 1951 when electric power first became available in the district.

The decision to open a new school at Tihiroa in 1956 was followed by the closure of the Te Kopua School in December 1956. The children from Te Kopua then travelled to Tihiroa by school bus. The classroom was moved to the Ngati Haua Native School near Tauwhare.

From the Committee

- Consideration is being given to how we might include displays about more families who contributed to the development of Alexandra. At the moment, only two are highlighted. One possibility is that more family displays might be on standard-sized boards, which would allow them to be rotated in our limited display space.
- Thought is also being given as to how the attention of more educational institutions might be drawn to our resources, with the intention of attracting a wider range of visitors.
- Following the success of the recent training day for volunteers, it is planned to hold such occasions more frequently as a way of supporting our volunteers.
- Andrea Thrower is the Centre's Office Coordinator. She deals with day-to-day administration at the Centre and provides secretarial support to the Executive Committee. Andrea works at the Centre for half-days on Tuesdays and Thursdays and caters for visitors while she is there.
- The Executive Committee would like to formally open the Centre for the full day when Andrea is there, but that will depend upon us recruiting and training more volunteers to staff the desk.



Memberships

A reminder that a small number of subscriptions are still outstanding.

A successful training day

The Centre continues to hold training days for its volunteers. The most recent occasion was organised by Barbara Walter, Alan Hall and Andrea Thrower on 26 November, involving 16 participants. Chris Atkinson from Volunteering Waikato talked with the group about the importance of volunteers to community life, pointing out that international comparisons indicate that the level of volunteer activity in New Zealand is high when account is taken of population differences. Barbara Walter conducted a satisfaction survey which solicited suggested improvements to the present arrangements. Alan ran a workshop session, based on commonly-experienced inquiries, encouraging those present to talk about how they deal with such problems and where other relevant information might be obtained. The training day ended with lunch at the Persimmon Tree Café.

Improved Visitor Numbers

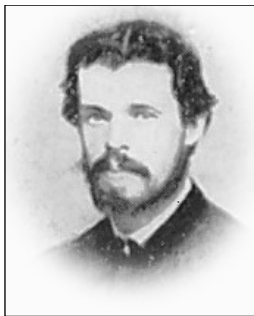
In *Newsletter 40* we reported a decline in visitor numbers for the 2014-15 financial year. It is pleasing to report, however, that at the end of November this year, our visitor numbers have recovered so that after 8 months of the 2015-16 financial year, we are now slightly ahead of the total at the same time in the 2013-14 year, which was our best year ever.

Welcome new members

- Pat and Alison Todd
- Jan and Angus Smith

Remembering George and Mary Ann Harper

The life and times of George and Mary Ann Harper, spanning 50 years in the Alexandra/Pirongia district, were remembered on 14 November at a re-union of 77 of their descendants who gathered for the day at the Alexandra Hotel, and many of them visited the Centre. The gathering was convened by Judith Harper and Centre member Garry Howard, both of them descendants of George and Mary Ann. There were five generations of descendants present from as far away as Nelson, Palmerston North, Tauranga and Auckland.



George Harper

In September 1863 George enlisted in the 2nd Waikato Militia in Otago to become a soldier settler. Two years later, in December 1865, George married Mary Ann Hanify who was also from Ireland. For his Waikato war service, George was awarded the NZ Medal, and was granted a town acre in Alexandra West together with a 50 acre farm lot on today's Frontier Road, about 1 km from the Burns Road junction. By 1869, he had sold his town acre adjoining the river, and appears to have concentrated on developing his farm lot.

Like many of his contemporaries, George accepted paying work whenever it was available. He worked on the construction of the bridge between Alexandra East and Alexandra West and later on contracts to repair flood damage. In 1873-74 he was the Waikato Steam Navigation and Coal Mining Company's agent at Te Rore where he was also "keeper" of the ferry to Harapepe. Such work would have supplemented the meagre income from the farm that had to support a family of 5 children: Eliza, John, Kathleen, Ethel, and Eva, born between 1866 and 1875. Nevertheless, their income was sufficient for George and Mary Ann to go into debt to buy two adjoining farm lots, expanding their farm to 160 acres.

The Harpers were keen for their children to be educated. Initially, the oldest children travelled from Frontier Road to the new Alexandra School where daughter Eliza was probably on the initial roll. Later, in 1880, both Mary and George, who was its first School Committee Chairman, played leading roles in the establishment of the Mangapiko School that was attended by their younger children, and where daughter Eliza became a pupil-teacher. Another daughter, Ethel, was also to become a teacher.

However, the Harpers suffered the effects of the long depression of the 1880s and, like other settlers, appear to have experienced difficulties in servicing the debt on their farm so that by 1882, their farm was on the market, advertised as "160 acres, all in grass, subdivided into 7 paddocks with wire fence, well-watered, 4 acres orchard, 300 fruit and ornamental trees, a five-roomed house and other outbuildings, 2½ miles from railway station [at] Te Awamutu".

Mary Ann Harper

By 1884, George had bought Young Wellington, a draft-horse stallion that he took around farms servicing mares, but precisely when the family left their farm is not known. It was probably in 1885, as enrolment records indicate that in July of that year, the younger children, Ethel and Eva, enrolled at the Alexandra School. At Alexandra George and Mary Ann purchased five separate town acre sections that they probably farmed and they seem to have lived on a town acre on today's Crozier Street where there was still a house in 1899. George chaired the Alexandra School Committee in 1894.

An interpretive panel for the Memorial Hall

The Harpers saw Alexandra develop from a military camp into a thriving frontier settlement in the later 1870s, but they then witnessed its decline in the 1880s, with the resulting loss of town status in 1889 and eventually the change of its name to Pirongia in 1896. Mary Ann died in 1905, aged 67 years. George was in his 84th year when he died in 1918. They both lie in the Alexandra Cemetery, Pirongia.

The Pirongia Community Association (formerly the Residents and Ratepayers Assn) is funding the production of a panel with brief interpretive information about each of the men listed on the Roll of Honour at the front of the Memorial Hall. Information from military records is being used to correct some spellings and complete the details of several other names.

The panel to be mounted inside the building will also include information about a further six men who are not listed, but who were publicly named when the Roll of Honour was unveiled at the opening of the Memorial Hall in August 1922.

Wherever possible, the information about each soldier will be accompanied by a photograph, but of the 48 men to be listed, we still seek pictures of 7 men.

Alan Hall researched and provided the information for the panel that is being designed by Sonia Frimmell of *What's the Story?*.

George's NZ War Medal was proudly worn by a descendant

