

# NEWSLETTER

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Pirongia Heritage & Information Centre  
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## Another Successful AGM

The 2017 AGM, held in the Heritage Centre on the evening of Wednesday 28 June attracted an attendance of 30 people. After receiving very positive annual reports from President Barbara Walter and Treasurer Charlie Coles, the following officers were elected for the 2017-18 Financial Year: President Barbara Walter, Vice-President Marilyn Yeates, Secretary Marilyn Yeates, Treasurer Charlie Coles, Executive Committee: Robert McWha, Brent Mealing,

Garry Howard, Nick van der Sande, Patricia Grierson, Keith Ormsby and Joy McGregor. Haupai Puke is the Te Kauhanganui nominee and Sally Uerata represents Purekireki Marae. Subscriptions for the 2018-19 Financial Year will be: Individual \$20, Family \$25, Group and Corporate \$35.

Following the AGM business, the Meeting was addressed by Heritage Consultant, Dr Ann McEwan who talked about *Historic Places and Heritage Values*. Her talk stimulated much discussion which continued over supper.



Charlie Coles presents the Treasurer's Report



## Thanks for Support

- **COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION GRANTS SCHEME** for a grant for \$5,750.
- **PAULA MCWHA** who maintains our Facebook page and is doing development work on the Centre's website.

## Craft Day

The attention of members is drawn to the fact that this year, as the result of restrictions on road closure imposed by NZ Land Transport, the ever-popular Pirongia Craft Day will be held on a Sunday rather than a Saturday. It will take place, still following the usual format, on Sunday, 1 October. As usual, the Centre will be open. Come in and see us.

## A COGS Grant

The Community Organization Grants Scheme (COGS) is funded by the Department of Internal Affairs to assist voluntary and non-profit organizations which are recognised as necessary to build and maintain strong communities. Each year, the Pirongia Heritage and Information Centre applies for a grant to help cover its operational costs. We are pleased to announce that we were recently allocated a grant of \$5,750 for the 2017-18 financial year. Amongst other things, this grant will allow the Centre to continue to employ our office coordinator. We are most grateful for the continuing support of COGS.

## Online

Paula McWha reports that the Centre's Facebook page is fully operational and is regularly attracting attention. She adds material regularly. However, Paula is still working on how to make files such as newsletters, selected photographs and other documents available for users to download files from our Website.

## Wanted

More volunteers willing to do desk duty. Our present hosts do a great job, but staffing the Centre is problematic when people are away from the district. If you know someone who might help for even half-a-day at a time, ask them to contact Barbara Walter (871-9880).

## For your diary

**SUNDAY 1 OCTOBER** Pirongia Craft Day

## Volunteer Training

Further volunteer training took place at the Heritage Centre on Monday 10 July when Department of Conservation Biodiversity Ranger, Bruce Postill briefed those present on DoC activities in the area with the intention of ensuring that visitors to the centre receive up-to-date information. His talk focussed on current information about tracks and the 20-bunk Pahautea hut on Mount Pirongia but also included an interesting commentary on bird-life which continues to improve in the wake of predator control and is currently being enhanced with the re-introduction of kokako from Mount Pureora. Questions led Bruce to share in fascinating detail what research has revealed about the migratory behaviour of Kuaka (Godwits) from Kawhia and other locations throughout the country which fly to Alaska, via Korea for nesting, and then return to New Zealand on an 11,000 kilometre non-stop flight – the longest non-stop migratory flight undertaken by any bird.

Discussion with Bruce was followed by an opportunity for those who man the desk to share ideas and raise concerns before sharing a pizza luncheon.

## Joe Hughes—Okoko Road Miner

Late in June, we were saddened to learn of the death in Hamilton of Joe Hughes, aged 92 years.



Joe Hughes during a visit to the Centre

In 1950, as young men, Joe and his brother Tom obtained a Crown Lease to establish the Hughes Brothers Coal Mine on Okoko Road, Te Rau-a-moa. Initially they lived on site in a tent, washing in a creek and cooking on a 40 gallon drum. By the late 1950s, however, the mine was employing 10 men working two underground shafts, and production had risen to 10,000 tonnes of coal a year. The mine supplied three major customers: the Te Awamutu Dairy Company, Waikeria Prison and Tokanui Hospital, as well as local households.

Around that time, Joe and his wife Teresa, who married in 1953, are remembered as living on Beechey Street in Pirongia with a huge pile of coal behind their house.

In 1967, after 17 years of production, the mine was purchased by Glen Afton Collieries Ltd, a subsidiary of the New Zealand Co-operative Dairy Company, which then converted it to an open-cast mine until the coal extraction was exhausted about 1995.

After the sale, the Hughes brothers moved to mine in the Huntly area and Joe and Teresa lived in Hamilton. However, Joe retained his links with Pirongia, visiting the Heritage Centre on several occasions in recent years, recorded an oral history, and donated memorabilia of his mining days at Okoko Road that form the basis of the Centre's display.

We join Joe's family in mourning his passing.



A lake now fills the pit of the Okoko Road open-cast mine

## Miss Miller's Motor Car

Edward Ingleby Miller and his sister, Emily, both of whom lived in the district, were the owners of early motor cars. However, different accounts refer to different motor vehicle brands. Her niece, Rosalie Ahier, referred to Miss Miller's car as a Daimler, but others talked of a Cadillac, and it now appears possible that only one car may have been involved. In March 1913, the *Waipa Post* recorded that Mr E.I. Miller, who had moved from Te Tahī Road to live in Te Awamutu had taken delivery of a Cadillac 30 touring car, probably the 1912 model. In November, he is reported to have driven (or to have been driven) to Cambridge a few days before he became seriously ill and died on 27 November 1913. There is no evidence that his wife Bernice kept the car after his death and it appears that Emily Miller acquired her car about 1914. According to Rosalie Ahier, Miss Miller was driven by a chauffeur/handyman. This would certainly have been before 1919 when Rosalie's family left the district.

## An alien during WW1

Recent accounts of the centennial of World War 1 have included acknowledgement of how naturalised New Zealanders of German origin were subjected to discrimination and interned during the war. What is not recognised is that a local man, Ernst Johanne Thomas Moeller, spent two years in confinement on Soames Island in the Wellington Harbour.

Moeller grew up in Germany and was a graduate of Berlin University before he migrated to New Zealand in about 1904 to become a teacher of music at St John's Collegiate School in Auckland. Whilst living in Auckland he gave violin solos at concerts and also conducted choral and instrumental groups.

In 1909 he became a naturalised New Zealander living in Te Awamutu where he was the accountant for a local business and in 1910 the local agent for the Auckland Piano Importing Company. Again, he performed regularly in local concerts, conducted the Te Awamutu Brass Band, various local instrumental groups and St John's Church choir. He was also a Quartermaster Sergeant in the Te Awamutu Cavalry. Nevertheless, he continued to be referred to in the press as *Herr Moeller*.

He married Maria Mildred Prentice, a daughter of Mawai Wickham of Pirongia on 6 November 1912 and they appear to have lived in Pirongia from that time. However, they had no children.

During WW1 anti-German sentiment ran high and like many other New Zealanders of German origin, Moeller became regarded as an alien. His naturalised status was revoked and he was interned on Soames Island from May 1916 until the war ended in 1918.

Ironically, he again became a naturalised New Zealander in 1935.

After the war, Ernst and Mildred lived in Pirongia until he died, aged 76, in 1946. Mildred continued to live in Crozier Street until her death in 1958, aged 84. They both lie in the Alexandra Cemetery, Pirongia.

## Welcome new members

- Grant & Collette Burr
- Kerry & Julie-ann Foreman
- Kevin Paul

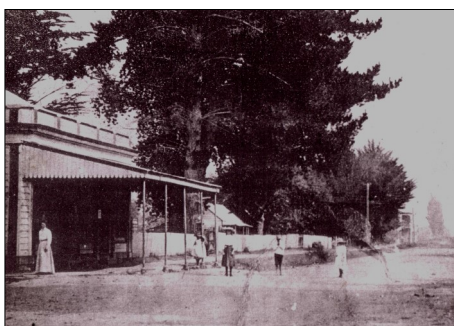
## Early Buildings: Rozel and Aubin's Store

Recently, Robin Wood gifted to the Centre a framed architect's plan and sketches, dated 10 October 1918, of a villa to be constructed for Mrs A E Aubin whose previous dwelling had burned down in July. Originally named *Rozel*, like its predecessor, the resulting house is the building that local people know today as *The Bell Homestead* on the corner of Franklin and Belcher Streets.

The house is located on Town Lot 25 that was initially granted to Captain Freer, Quartermaster of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Waikato Regiment. Freer took up his land grant early in 1865 and received freehold title to the property in July 1867, a few months before the 2<sup>nd</sup> Waikato Regiment was disbanded in October. Soon afterwards, he sold up and moved to Auckland, passing ownership of the property to Jean (known as John) Aubin. Fragments of information suggest that the original dwelling on the property was built by Freer and then occupied by John Aubin and Anne Lempriere, who had married in August 1867. They probably extended and enhanced the dwelling which became the home of their family until it was destroyed by fire in 1918. The name *Rozel* is from the English Channel Island of Jersey, from where both John and Anne migrated in 1863 and 1865 respectively.



*The original Aubin family home:  
early 20th Century*



*Aubin's store on the corner  
of Franklin and Belcher Streets  
was demolished in 1917*

In 1873, John Aubin had a new store built in front of Rozel, at the street intersection. This replacement for an earlier store building elsewhere in Alexandra, became Aubin's very successful trading store that was later extended to incorporate a dispensary when he was also licensed to practice as a chemist. Following John's death in 1889, Anne and their second son, Eugene, continued to run the business until 1906 when the business was sold to newcomer J E Skuse, although Anne Aubin continued to own the building. Despite attempts to resuscitate the business after Skuse left late in 1910, the building fell into disuse and was dismantled in 1917. In the meantime, by 1914,

Anne Aubin had had a new store building constructed on the corner of Franklin and Crozier Streets (the site of today's convenience store) where Moon and Co traded before it was taken over by her son-in-law W H Bell, followed by his sons Reg and Eric and then Eric's son Larry. Bell's Store passed out of family ownership in 1973.

The plan and sketches for the second Rozel dwelling were drawn by architect Archibald MacDonald, then of Te Kuiti, who went on to practise in Hamilton in the 1920s and early 1930s. Although the plan makes no explicit reference to this, it is easy to see how the new building incorporated the former Alexandra Masonic Lodge building that was moved to the property for Mrs Aubin.

Anne Aubin died, aged 92 in 1933, outliving her husband by 44 years. Rozel became the family home of her grandson Reg Bell and his wife Dorothy (nee Simms). They continued to live there until Reg died in 1980 after which it passed out of family ownership. Nevertheless, it continues to be remembered locally as *The Bell Homestead*.



*Anne Aubin and daughter Reine  
outside the second Rozel  
in the late 1920s,*

## When did World War 1 end?

A sharp-eyed resident asked recently why the dates of World War 1 at the top of the Memorial Hall façade are 1914-1919 while those on the Roll of Honour plaques flanking the doors read 1914-1918.

The Great War hostilities ended with an armistice that took effect from 11 November 1918, so that date is commonly regarded as the end of the war. However, in reality, the Armistice was simply a truce agreed to by the warring nations; there was always the possibility that hostilities might be resumed. It was not until the Treaty of Versailles was signed, seven months later, that agreement was reached on the terms of peace. So, technically World War 1 was not completely over until June 1919.

It seems that the two sets of dates reflect two different interpretations of when the war ended.