

NEWSLETTER

No. 51, February, 2018

Pirongia Heritage & Information Centre
Te Whare Taonga o Ngaa Rohe o Arekahanara
798 Franklin Street, Pirongia 3802

Phone: (07) 871 9018

Email: pirongia.hvc@xtra.co.nz

Website: <http://www.pirongiaheritage.org.nz>



Thirteenth Annual Barbecue at Pirongia Clydesdales

The Centre held its 13th Annual Barbecue in the Little Clydesdale Café at the Pirongia Clydesdales on February 21st. Because the occasion coincided with some other meetings in the village, the attendance was lower than usual, with only 17 attending. Nevertheless, those in attendance enjoyed excellent food and an evening of good fellowship.



President Barbara Walter brought members up-to-date on the Centre's affairs

President Barbara Walter brought those present up-to-date on developments at the Centre, and commented on the continuing problem of recruiting hosts. She thanked Jill and Nick van der Sande for their support since the establishment of the Centre, particularly for hosting the annual barbecue thirteen times. With the sale of their property likely in the near future, she pointed out that the 14th event will need to be held elsewhere. Honourable mention was made of Robert McWha's sterling work as barbecue cook and Marilyn Yates, who with Barbara organized the occasion.

Nick van der Sande then talked about his and Jill's plans for the future. They plan to sell their property and travel, but where they will settle is yet to be decided, although they would like it to be near water. Nick will continue to practice Bowen Therapy for horses which he explained, giving fascinating examples of what is involved.



Jill & Nick van der Sande

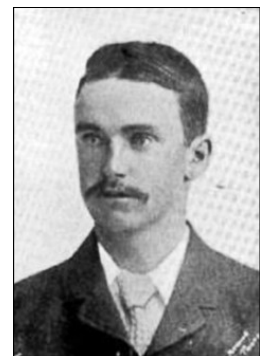
Robert Hall farmed at Te Rore

The NZ Herald reported in December 1869 that a Mr Hall of Mangere who had purchased Colonel Haultain's 400 acres also bought several military buildings of the disbanded 2nd Waikato Regiment when they were auctioned by J.D. Hill. The land in question was between the river and SH39 immediately beyond McGuire's depot.

Robert Hall was the farm manager who developed Logan Campbell's Auckland estate and eventually also farmed Puketutu Island which he purchased from Logan Campbell. Hall's wife was Dorcas Macky, so he was related to the Macky and Goodfellow families who also purchased land in the Paterangi area about the same time.

In 1891, a newspaper correspondent travelling to the Alexandra Boxing Day Races commented on the quality of the crops on the Hall property, managed at that time by Robert Hall's older son, Thomas, where "a large amount of cropping is being done, some fifty acres appeared as if just sown in turnips; a large breadth of wheat and oats is looking well. ... I saw the best crop of potatoes, about ten acres, that I have seen in the Waipa, level, clean, and with beautiful foliage; they promise a heavy yield, and are a pleasure to look at".

Later, management of the farm passed to Robert Hall's younger son, Robert (Jnr), who married Marion Susannah Scott of another Paterangi family in 1895. They farmed in the area until about 1908 when their children transferred from Paterangi School to Epsom School, Auckland.



Robert Hall Jnr

Hall must have purchased some other adjoining properties because the *Cyclopedia of NZ* tells that by the turn of the century, his farm consisted of:

"630 acres of fine rolling country, [that] carries a magnificent flock of Shropshire stud ewes. The homestead is situated on the top of a hillock with an extensive view of the Paterangi and Pirongia districts. One of the natural boundaries of the property is the Waipa river, which winds round a considerable portion of it. Turnips, oats, and potatoes are grown and yield excellent crops."

Their house on a hillock was later the home of Peter and Joan Scriven who Charlie Coles tells were enthusiastic early members of the Pirongia Golf Club. Olwyn Verhoef recalls visiting the derelict house with children from the Te Rore School not long before it was demolished.

Thanks for Support

- **ROBERT MCWHA** whose continuing attention to the maintenance of the Heritage Centre building is greatly appreciated.
- **LYN JACKSON** who, while acting as a volunteer, regularly does sterling cleaning work which helps keep the place spic and span.

Gloria King

Members were saddened early in January to learn that Gloria King had passed away. She was a valued member of the Centre who served on the Committee and was a regular host until health problems limited her participation. She will be remembered as the coordinator of a group of Ormsby family members who produced the display about descendants of Robert and Pianika Ormsby.



Gloria and others working on the Ormsby display

Because she was associated with the district throughout her life, Gloria was also a useful source of information about local people and events. She is remembered with affection and is greatly missed.



Gloria captained the Kiwi Basketball team in the 1950s. She was a fine player.

Fires in the settlement

News that the Pirongia Fire Force is to celebrate its 25th anniversary is a reminder of the ever-present danger of houses being destroyed by fire in the early years of settlement when cooking was often done over open fires, lighting was by candle or kerosene lamp, and there was no reticulated water supply to fight fires when they occurred. Newspapers record the destruction of at least 15 dwellings by fire between 1872 and 1886. Firefighting appears to have been left to neighbours, using buckets of water.

From the Committee

Glenda Bell is a welcome recent addition to our list of hosts who staff the Centre.

Long-time member **Ros Empson** is also regularly doing duty at the Centre where her computer skills are proving especially valuable.

Further volunteers will be needed to eventually open on seven days a week.

Support from DoC

Bruce Postill is a Department of Conservation biodiversity ranger based in Hamilton who has had a continuing association with the Heritage Centre since its establishment, keeping us informed about developments in the Mount Pirongia Forest Park and other DoC reserves in the wider district, as well as drawing our attention to new resources available to visitors.

Recently, as a part of an up-dating tour of iSites in the DoC district, he met with staff at the Centre where, amongst other matters, he talked about the current threats to bio-diversity posed by Kauri die-back disease and myrtle rust, and indicated what visitors to native forests can do to minimize the likelihood of spreading the diseases. He also shared good news about the re-introduction of kokako on Mount Pirongia and the benefits to numbers of kereru when predatory species such as rats and possums are controlled.

We were informed that this was Bruce's last visit before his retirement. However, he introduced his replacement, Jane Hughes, who will continue DoC contact with the Centre.

The Greenstone Door

The Centre is in the process of obtaining a copy of what is regarded as New Zealand's first novel about Maori-Pakeha relationships. It was recommended by visitors for inclusion in our library.

William Satchell's *The Greenstone Door* was first published in 1914, but has been reprinted a number of times, which testifies to its enduring significance. The main character is Cedric Tregarthen, a Pākehā boy growing up in a Māori community in our wider district in the mid-19th century. During his time there, he and a Māori lad of similar age, Rangiora, put aside their racially charged enmity. They take an oath of peace in which the symbolic greenstone door of the book's title is closed, representing the end of conflict.

As a teenager, Cedric is sent to live in Auckland so he can immerse himself in Pākehā culture. War breaks out, and Cedric is present at the siege of Ōrākau in 1864, where his beloved foster sister Puhi-Huia is killed. Friends on the government side are also killed, and the strain of Cedric's divided loyalties cause him to fall ill. He is nursed back to health by Helenora, with whom he had fallen in love in Auckland. Their relationship enables the closure of the greenstone door for good.

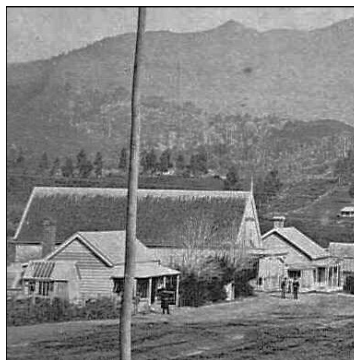
The Greenstone Door has been recognised for its sensitive treatment of Māori and Pākehā characters and its portrayal of warm relationships between two peoples.

Welcome new members

- Vilagrad Wines - Institutional membership

Anne Aubin and Stores in Alexandra/Pirongia

By the late 1880s, at a time of serious economic depression, Alexandra, with its population reduced to less than 90, still had two stores, one owned by John Aubin on the corner of Belcher and Franklin Streets, and the other, owned by J.D. Hill, on Crozier Street, opposite today's building



*Hill's Store in 1876,
between the former Sloane's
Chemist Shop and the BNZ*

destined to become an envirocentre. Both storekeepers had traded in the settlement since 1864, each playing leading roles in the community. However, the death of Aubin early in 1889 and the departure from Alexandra of Hill in 1890 were the precursors of change. It is likely that at that time, neither business was performing very well.

Anne Aubin, John's widow, became the owner of Aubin's store and in November 1890, Hill sold his store to Ahier & Gifford of Te Awamutu. The Ahier of this partnership was John Aubin's nephew, G.M.A. Ahier. Thus, in effect, both stores became owned by the wider Aubin family and within a year, a newspaper advertisement indicates that Anne Aubin had purchased the entire stock of Ahier & Gifford which she was selling at bargain prices.

In effect, this meant that Pirongia was then reduced to a single store, Aubin's which continued to trade with Anne as the storekeeper but without the dispensary part of the business for which John Aubin had been licensed. Her son Eugene appears to have worked for her until he moved to farm at Waotu, about 1895.

At that stage, Anne owned considerable property in Alexandra, on the eastern side of Franklin Street, between Belcher Street and the Alexandra Hotel. It included the butchery located where the hot bread shop trades today, although the butchery buildings were leased.

In August 1897, Anne's son, Emile Aubin, returned to New Zealand from England, where he had qualified as a doctor. He set up a medical practice in Auckland and in November, Anne, with her daughters, moved to Auckland to join Dr Aubin. Before her public farewell from Pirongia at a concert in her honour, Eugene Aubin returned to run Aubin's store. However, although she was moving, Anne retained ownership of all her property in the village and it is likely that when she left, Eugene lived in Rozel, the family home.



Aubin's Store - late 1880s

Eugene was well-known and popular as a sportsman, a man with a fine voice who regularly sang at concerts, a wholehearted supporter of the Racing Club and the Captain of the Pirongia Troop in the Cavalry Volunteers.

In August 1899, Dr Emile Aubin was appointed surgeon at the Thames Hospital. This meant that he moved away from Auckland, but electoral rolls indicate that Anne and her daughters continued to live in Ponsonby until at least 1901. By 1905, however, they had moved back to Pirongia.

Late in that year, a decision was made to sell the store business to John Skuse from Pukekohe. He appears to have been sponsored by L D Nathan, who, at that time also owned the Alexandra Hotel building. This meant that the store business, but not the building, moved out of the ownership of the Aubin family. Skuse ran the store until 1910, when he moved away from the village, and the building stood largely unused, although it was used as a polling booth in 1915.



*Bell's Store - late 1930s. Walter Bell on the right,
next to Reg Bell. Eric Bell on the left.*

By 1925, Anne Aubin's son-in-law, Walter Bell, had taken over the Moon & Co store, running it as W H Bell & Co, with the former owner, W G Moon, as his bookkeeper. From that time, the business became known locally as *Bell's Store*, trading under such names as W H Bell & Sons, Bell Brothers and Bell & Son, as different members of the Aubin-Bell family took over the business.

Anne Aubin died in August 1933, leaving Bell's Store in the ownership of her descendants, still the only store in Pirongia when the building and the business passed out of family ownership in 1972.

In the meantime, the old Aubin Store building was demolished in 1917.