



# NEWSLETTER

No. 57, August, 2019

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](mailto:pirongia.hvc@xtra.co.nz)

## Another Successful Year

The 2019 AGM took place in the Heritage Centre on 20 June with an attendance of 40 members and supporters. President Barbara Walter presented her third and final annual report, having intimated previously her intention to step down from the office. She commented on a number of achievements during the year, including the upgrade of the Centre's computer facilities, and expressed appreciation for the support of committee members. Treasurer Charlie Coles presented a positive financial report. The election of officers returned Marilyn Yeates as president, Barbara Walter as vice-president, Paula McWha as secretary, and elected committee members: Ros Empson, Patricia Grierson, Garry Howard, Robert McWha, Brent Mealing, Keith Ormsby and Nick van der Sande. Sally Uerata and Haupai Puke are the nominees of Purekireki Marae and Te Kauhanganui.

Following the AGM formalities, volcanologist Oliver McLeod from the University of Waikato gave an informative illustrated talk about his PhD research into the geological history of Mount Pirongia. He unravelled details of the birth, growth and eventual collapse of New Zealand's largest basaltic volcano over its one-million-year active lifespan which began 2.5 million years ago. Extensive fieldwork has enabled Oliver to complete the first geological map of the mountain, a draft of which he had on display. His talk generated discussion and many questions.



Oliver & Julieta McLeod with Alan Hall at the AGM

## Vernon John Tupara Roberts

The brothers Leo and Vivian Walsh of Auckland are credited with making the first controlled power flight in New Zealand, in February 1911. The flight by Vivian Walsh over 400 yards at 60 feet took place at Glenora Park, a private racecourse near Papakura. This culminated 5½ months' work by the Walsh brothers, their friends and other enthusiasts who built the aircraft, named *Manurewa*, using plans, materials and an 8 cylinder engine, all costing £750 [\$1500], purchased overseas and funded with the support of three Auckland businessmen.



Was Vernon John Tupara Roberts one of the men holding Manurewa back prior to its first flight?

October 1876, the son and second child of postmaster and telegraphist Vernon Roberts and his wife Mary Codlin. Their daughter, Edith Eliza, was born at Alexandra in 1874 and a second son, named George William Frederick, born in March 1878, died in April, soon after the death of his mother who died of tuberculosis. In August, Vernon Roberts married Mary's cousin, Frances Codlin, who had come to Alexandra to look after his motherless children. They later had three sons (Frank, George and Charles) as well as a daughter (Amy).

School enrolment records tell that five of the Roberts children attended the Alexandra School and that Vernon John Tupara was known as John, probably to avoid confusing his name with that of his father. They all left in 1890 when their father was transferred to become the postmaster at Mercer.

Electoral rolls show that Vernon John, as he was listed, later lived in West Auckland from at least 1905, becoming an electrical engineer, which probably helps explain his contribution to the construction of the Walsh Brothers' plane. He married Winifred Codlin in 1909. We are yet to establish any relationship between Winifred and the family of John's mother.

Evidence suggests that John, as he appears to have been known, was not Pōtatau's grandson. An account of the family recorded by his step-sister, Amy Gibb, tells that John Tupara's mother was the daughter of John Codlin and Mary, the daughter of a Waiuku chief named Taupara (Tupara?) whose wife's name is not recorded. Thus, Vernon John Tupara's grandparents were John and Mary Codlin. However, it is possible that Taupara, or his wife, may have been related to Pōtatau in some way, although Pōtatau's whakapapa makes that appear unlikely.

## Thanks for Support

- **COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION GRANTS SCHEME (COGS)** for a grant of \$5,980.
- **TRACEY HERBERT AND FINNZ Chartered Accountants** who reviewed the Centre's annual accounts.
- **SAM STEWART'S FAMILY** who made a generous donation in appreciation of research about their ancestor.
- **BILL REYMER** for ongoing assistance with the relocation and positioning of Nick van der Sande's wagon shelter at the Centre.

## Roland Mounsey 1925-2019

We were saddened to learn that Roland Mounsey passed away in March, in his 94th year. Roly was not a member of the Centre but visited from Naike on a number of occasions a few years ago.

He related to us detailed recollections of life in the village in the 1930s and 40's and allowed us to make more than 50 scans of photographs and documents from his collection. They included many about Mounsey Transport which his father, Auriel Mounsey ran here between 1920 and 1944 when it was taken over by Butler Bros and later Flemings, before the large storage shed burned down. Mounsey's Transport Depot was located next to the tennis courts in Franklin Street and the family lived in the existing cottage next to the tennis courts where Auriel planted the two phoenix palms that now dwarf the house. Roly's mother was Ethel, daughter of the saddler William Morton Chappell and Margaret Burns.



Roland Mounsey

## A Reminder

Subscriptions for the 2019-2020 financial year are now due.

Individual	\$20
Family	\$25
Business	\$35

Membership renewal forms are included with this Newsletter to those members yet to pay.

## From the Committee

The Heritage Centre is represented by Barbara Walter and Marilyn Yeates on an informal local museums consultative group, convened by the Te Awamutu Museum, which also includes representatives of the Cambridge Museum and the Kihikihi Police House. The group facilitates the sharing of ideas and discussion of common problems. Its most recent meeting took place at our Heritage Centre.

## New & Improved

Visit the Centre to see a new and more comprehensive display about the **Alexandra Redoubts** based on information put together by Barbara Walter and Marilyn Yeates and formatted by Sonia Frimmel of *What's the Story*.

Outside the front door of the Centre, look for a newly-installed, up-to-date **noticeboard** displaying the opening hours.

## In the Pipeline

The Centre will soon have on display a traditional wagon, the last one built by Cooper & Curds, coachbuilders of Pukekohe, for Mr Cooper of Roto-orangi about 1940. Eventually it passed to the custodianship of Nick van der Sande who fully restored it, and displayed it under a shelter at Pirongia Clydesdales, occasionally giving it an outing, drawn by his horses. Provisions are now being made to locate the shelter outside the Heritage Centre where the wagon will be housed in the future.



*The wagon on display under its shelter at Pirongia Clydesdales*

## The War Memorial Hall

When Waipa District Council representatives reported to a Community Association meeting on 7 August about the future of the War Memorial Hall, we were disappointed to find that little more appeared to have been done to investigate the building's structure than was reported in December of last year.

Those at the meeting made it clear that the community expects to know the results of a thorough analysis of the current state of the ferro-concrete structure and the cost of strengthening it to meet the requirements of the NZ Building Act 2004 to enable a decision to be made about its future.

They wish to resume use of the building, re-instated and upgraded, to meet the needs of a growing community which is likely to double its population in the foreseeable future. They are mindful of its war memorial status, that it is a physical landmark, with commemorative, educational and social value for present and future generations.

We urge members to attend future community meetings about the hall and to make their views on the matter known.

## Disclaimer

*Views expressed in items published in this issue do not necessarily represent the views of the Heritage and Information Centre.*

## Sam Stewart – Coach Driver

*There is a photograph of two coaches outside the Alexandra Hotel in 1908. The larger coach to Oparau, drawn by a five horse team, is said to have been driven by Sam Stewart, a well-known coach driver. Kelvin Cooper, a descendant of Sam, spoke about him at the Pirongia Dawn Observance on ANZAC Day and has since shared information and photographs with the Heritage Centre which undertook further research to fill out his story.*

Sam Stewart was born at Akaroa in 1872 and later worked on his family's farm at Barry's Bay until the 1890s when he and two of his brothers moved to Stratford in Taranaki where they established a livery stable and carrying business. Sam married Rachel Rutherford at Stratford in 1902 and their first daughter, Irene, was born in 1905. Soon afterwards, Sam walked from Waitara to Kawhia in search of fresh opportunities and Rachel, with baby Rene, as she was known, followed on the small coastal steamer *SS Rawara*.

At Kawhia, they first lived in a tent at Oparau, at the end of the road from Pirongia, where Sam was employed as a mail carrier between Oparau and Pirongia on two days a week, travelling to Pirongia at 6:00 am on Mondays and Thursdays, returning on Tuesdays and Fridays. Two children were born to Sam and Rachel while they lived at Oparau, Goldie in 1907 and Annie in 1909.

Soon afterwards, the Stewarts moved to Te Rauamoia where Sam became the proprietor of the boarding house where the coach horses were changed, and Rachel, who ran the boarding house, provided meals for travellers, and was also employed as the postmistress at £25 [\$50] a year. By that time, Sam reportedly added a "commodious stable for the benefit of the travelling public" and was driving the coach, now on three days a week, as the mail contractor who also carried passengers paying 12 shillings [\$1-20] to Pirongia or 6 shillings [60c] to Te Rauamoia.

The challenge of driving coaches between Pirongia and Oparau at that time should not be underestimated. By 1885, 42 miles of unsurfaced roadway was surveyed and cut by Armed Constables and Maori contractors as a bridle track over which mail was carried by packhorse. The first four-in-hand coach did not complete the crossing until 1892, but it was not until 1900 that the first mail coach travelled between Oparau and Te Awamutu. In the following years, coaches followed the rudimentary, unsurfaced roadway when conditions were reasonably dry, but during winter, fallen trees, slips and flooded creeks meant that mail continued to be carried by packhorse. It was not until 1906 that the coach service continued throughout a winter.

Coach drivers had to cope with difficult conditions which were not for the faint-hearted or the unskilled. In 1907, for example, when Sam's coach to Pirongia could not cross the flooded Mangati Stream, he still got the mail through, riding one of his coach horses.

Sam drove this route until September 1914 when he enlisted for service in World War 1, reducing his age from 42 to 34 years to qualify for enlistment in the NZ Field Artillery as a driver of horses used to move guns. This meant leaving Rachel to care for their children and run the Te Rauamoia establishment in his absence although the mail coach contract changed hands. He left New Zealand for Egypt with the 1<sup>st</sup> NZEF with the horses, probably on *HMNZT Nova*, to be quartered at Zeitoun Camp near Cairo until the Gallipoli Campaign in 1915.

He is credited with participation in the Gallipoli Campaign, but precisely where he served is not clear. At some stage, he was kicked and trampled by a horse, and admitted to Cabbassia Hospital in Egypt in November 1915 with partial paralysis of his right arm which resulted in him being invalided home to New Zealand in January 1916.

Following repatriation, Sam returned to Te Rauamoia, but by 1919, he and Rachel had separated. She moved to the Bay of Plenty and by 1928, when they were formally divorced, was living at Tapu in the Coromandel with their son Goldie. Sam attempted to break in an isolated and difficult returned soldier's land grant west of Te Kuiti but, like others around him, walked off his land during the 1930s depression and returned to Kawhia where he again worked with horses.



*Rachel Stewart, postmistress, collects mail from the coach driven by Tom Steel at Te Rauamoia in 1918.*



*Sam Stewart's coach to Oparau at the Alexandra Hotel in 1908.*



*Sam in NZFA uniform*



*Sam's military medals. The three on the left are for his service in World War 1. The two on the right are for service in the Coast Watch*

In 1939, during World War 2, Sam, aged 66, again volunteered as a member of the National Military Reserve Coastwatch at Kawhia in which he served for 6 months.

At Kawhia, Sam lived in a modest bach, built by his family in Waiwera Street, until the 1950s when, in failing health, he moved to Te Aroha where he lived with his daughter, Rene Cooper, until he passed away in 1956, aged 84. He lies in the RSA section of the Kawhia Cemetery.