

NEWSLETTER

No. 62, May, 2021

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Keith Ormsby – Honorary Life Member

At an afternoon tea function organised by the Executive Committee on 13 April, Keith Ormsby became the fifth Honorary Life Member of the Heritage Centre. In this, he joined the ranks of four others who have given distinguished service to the Centre: Mary Hurst, Murray Walter, Barbara Walter and Sabina Owen. Twenty members were present for the occasion and president Marilyn Yeates who presented the award commented particularly on the roles Keith played in getting the former St Saviour's Church returned from Waikeria to Pirongia in 2000, and refurbishing and adapting the building for its new roles as a heritage centre. She noted that he has served on the Executive Committee and is still one of our volunteers who open the Centre for the public.



Keith with Margaret Ormsby
after the presentation

AGM Tuesday 29 June at 7:30 pm

The 2021 Annual General Meeting of the Pirongia Heritage & Information Centre Inc. will be held in the Centre at 7:30 pm on Tuesday, 29 June. As in previous years, it is anticipated that the formal business will be completed in about 30 minutes.

Following the formal business, at about 8:00 pm, Alan Hall will talk to the meeting about: Public Halls in Pirongia.



Recognizing that the Pirongia War Memorial Hall will be 100 years old in 2022, the Executive Committee has invited Alan to talk about the history of halls in the settlement and the roles they played in local life. He will focus particularly on stories of the Public Hall which served the community from 1876 and the War Memorial Hall, and comment on what we know about the changing functions of these and other public buildings.

The story of the Pirongia Sports Ground

We have been investigating the history of today's sports grounds in order to respond to an inquiry. In the process we discovered that in 1912, the Pirongia Domain Board purchased for £90 (\$180) five one-acre lots on Franklin and Kane Streets to create a recreation ground for "tennis courts, bowling green, croquet green and a field for football, hockey and other sports". Tennis courts were established and contracts were let to clear gorse and pine trees that infested much of the land, but the advent of World War 1 meant that activity lapsed between 1914 and 1920.

From 1920, significant development took place so that in October 1933 the Domain Board held a public opening, attended by more than 200 people, of what they named Matakītaki Park. The new park consisted of three hard tennis courts with a pavilion, football field, basketball (now netball) court on grass, with room for the future development of bowling greens, a croquet lawn, cricket pitch and hockey field. Basketball did not move onto the tennis courts until the 1950s. The rugby field ran parallel to Kane Street and made use of a piece of undeveloped road reserve for Ross Street. Development of the proposed bowling green and croquet lawn took place about 1939. The five acre Matakītaki Park remained in this form throughout World War 2, and was largely unchanged until 1960 when a further acre section was purchased from the Ormsby family at the eastern end on Kane Street.

About the same time, the Domain Board changed the name of the recreation reserve to Pirongia Park, apparently to distinguish it from the historic reserve on the other side of Franklin Street.

Further additions to the area of the park followed. In 1973, the paper road section of Ross Street was closed, legally adding it to the recreation reserve. A quarter acre adjoining the tennis courts was purchased from the Sibley family in 1984. And in 1988, the Domain Board purchased from the Catholic Church land to the south of the park, adding more than another 2 acres which eventually allowed the realignment of today's two football fields with a dedicated cricket pitch between them. Finally, in 1996, the Waipa District Council which had taken over the duties of the Domain Board, purchased the remainder of the Sibley property to create the sports grounds of today.

Thanks for Support

- **BRENT MEALING, ROBERT MCWHA & CHARLIE COLES** for their planning skill and workmanship in fitting out the new storage shed.
- **GARRY AND KAREN HOWARD** for their continuing commitment to cataloguing archival items.
- **ROS EMPSON** for her foresight and leadership in making the archive room fully functional.

Improved Visitor Numbers

Our record of visitor numbers at the Centre during the 2020-2021 financial year shows the inevitable effects of the Covid 19 Lockdowns. No visitors were recorded in last April, May and much of June, and apart from surges in numbers in July, October and January, the visitor totals for all the other months reflected the absence of overseas visitors. As a result, the annual total was 1112 below the total for 2020-2021.

Since then, however, our visitor numbers suggest that things are improving. While the total of 458 for April was not a record, it was only 17 short of our April record posted in 2018-2019, and numbers in May compare favourably with previous years. It is encouraging to host more New Zealanders, some of whom tell us that our centre was recommended by others. That is the best form of advertising.

An informative slideshow

If you are interested in finding out more about the history of the sports ground, make an appointment at the Centre to see on the computer the informative slideshow and commentary about its development since 1960, compiled and narrated by Charlie Coles for the Rugby Club Jubilee in 2001.



The area of Matakītaki Park until 1960

The Archive Room

In Newsletter 61, we reported that a kitset shed had been erected outside the Archive Room for the storage of chairs, spare fittings and other equipment currently cluttering the Archive Room. It was always intended that the temperature-controlled space in the archive room should be for the storage of archives where work with them might proceed uninterrupted and volunteers might do research and prepare new displays.



Brent Mealing, Robert McWha and Charlie Coles have now completed extensive work on the storage shed, insulating it, installing timber lining and sealing it to make the metal building vermin-proof and fit for purpose. The result is impressive.

The storage shed interior ready for use

Work has now begun on sorting out the archive room. Under Ros Empson's

supervision, the stacked chairs, taking up a lot of space, have been removed, the cleaning cupboard is to be re-located, no-longer-needed items are being removed and more compact storage of stocks of publications will free-up space to create separate areas for work on archives and another where work may be carried out on new displays.

At the same time, in this space, Garry and Karen Howard have been working on cataloguing archive items which have been neglected for some years. At present, they are slowly working their way through items in the vertical files behind the reception desk to clearly identify separate items and make them more accessible for research purposes.

Two new publications

Te Pahu – A History is member Alan Livingston's awaited publication about the development of the district around Te Pahu, including Karamu, Kaniwhaniwha, Harapepe and Te Rore West. It will be launched in Te Pahu on 13 June and the Centre expects to have a copy available in our library soon after that. An advance copy shows it to be well-organized, wonderfully detailed and illustrated with a comprehensive set of photographs and maps, all beautifully presented. It will be a must-read.

The Asmuss Story is the recently launched centennial publication of H J Asmuss and Co by Maria de Jong. Henry John Asmuss was the son of Mathias and Jane Asmuss who were early settlers when Alexandra was settled in 1864 and de Jong tells of the life of the family in Alexandra between 1864 and 1869. Henry attended school here, trained as a saddler, and then moved to Westport in 1885, and later overseas to Australia and London, working in the early oil industry. He returned to Auckland in 1913, eventually establishing H J Asmuss Ltd which became the nationwide business of today, still run by Asmuss descendants, which is the main focus of this sophisticated publication. The Centre which assisted with her research was given a copy by the author. It is now available for borrowing by members.

Welcome new member

- Cynthia Dickey

John and Elizabeth Ross at Te Pahu

Early this year, the Centre received from a descendant a request for information about John and Elizabeth Ross who are both buried in the Alexandra Cemetery. We were told that they farmed at Karamu.

It turned out that John, a Scottish ploughman from Eastern Ross-shire, aged 30, and his wife Elizabeth (nee MacAndrew) aged 25, who married in Glasgow earlier that year, arrived in Auckland on the sailing vessel *Famenoth* in September 1879. As assisted migrants, after their arrival they moved to Hamilton where John obtained employment as a ploughman, honed his skills for work in local conditions and by 1882 had purchased 150 acres of land near Te Pahu, on what is now Martelletti Road. At that time, however, the location was said to be at Karamu.

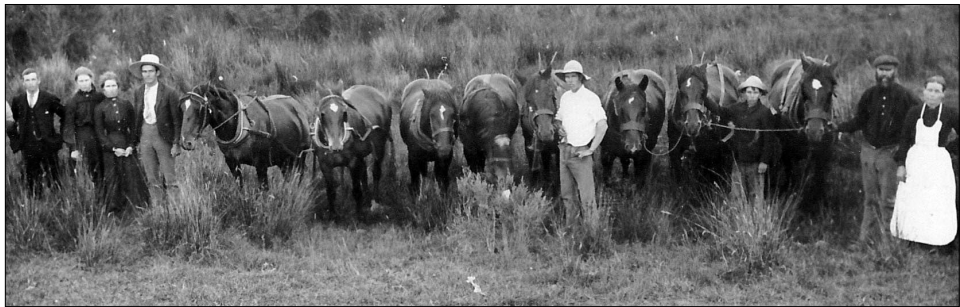
John was a successful ploughman and farmer. According to a newspaper account published in March 1940, at the time of his 94th birthday, he was credited with having broken in some 500 acres of land in the area around Martelletti Road - presumably land on neighbouring properties as well as his own 150 acres.

John and Elizabeth raised four children: Flora (born 1880), Bill (born 1883), Louisa (born 1887) and Jack (born 1892). Flora and Bill probably attended the Harapepe School which closed in 1892 because John was a member of the school committee, at least in 1888. Louisa, who did not turn five until 1892 when the school closed, may have later attended the Karamu School which opened in that same year. Jack was certainly a pupil in 1903-4, and was probably there in earlier years.

Tragically, Bill, who worked on the family farm, died in the Waikato Hospital in 1905, aged 22. He lies in the Alexandra Cemetery, Pirongia. Elizabeth is said to have been deeply affected by his untimely death. Her health declined with the development of pernicious anaemia and she died, aged 55, in 1911 at Manawaru, at the home of Flora and John Thomson, where John was managing another creamery. Elizabeth was regarded in the district as having played an important role in the successful conversion of virgin land into the splendid farm of 1911. She was buried beside Bill at Pirongia.

A year later, in 1912 Jack Ross married Ruby Munro from Te Rore. They farmed at Te Pahu on the family farm until 1918 when they moved north to Ruawai in search of other opportunities for Jack as a farmer and blacksmith.

In 1913, widower John Ross aged 64, who was living on another property at Whatawhata, married Mary Cameron, aged 59, a native of Inverness-shire, Scotland. They were married by the Registrar of Marriages in Hamilton with a photographer and the registrar's clerk as witnesses; we have no evidence of any family involvement and it is possible that the event presaged a split in the family. John and Mary lived at Whatawhata, while Jack and Ruby farmed at Te Pahu until they moved north about 1918. The Te Pahu property was then sold about 1922 to Severino Martelletti after whom the road was later named.



All the Ross family members are in this photo taken in 1904. L to R: John Thomson (manager of the Harapepe creamery who married Flora in 1908), Louisa (born 1887), Flora (born 1880), Jack (born 1892), Bill (born 1883), an unnamed youngster, John and Elizabeth.

Louisa married Mick Corcoran of Harapepe in 1914. They had a daughter (Mary) in 1915, but tragedy again struck the family in 1917 when Louisa died in Waikato Hospital when Mary was only 2 years old. Louisa also lies at Pirongia. Mick remarried in 1922.

John and Mary Ross continued to live at Whatawhata until about 1935 when, both in their 80s, they moved to Bandon Street, Frankton. Mary died there in 1939 aged 85, and John aged 96 died in 1942. Each was buried at Pirongia, John with Elizabeth and Bill: Mary is buried a few rows away.

Flora and her husband John Thomson also lie in the Alexandra Cemetery. So, in fact there are seven members of the Ross family buried at Pirongia: John Ross and his two wives - Elizabeth and Mary, Bill Ross, Louise Corcoran, Flora and her husband John Thomson.

Disclaimer

Views expressed in items published in this newsletter do not necessarily represent the views of the Heritage Centre.

For your diary

30 Jun at 7:30 pm. Heritage Centre AGM.
Speaker: Alan Hall - Public Halls in Pirongia
Bring a friend.