

Historical Note

Great Literary Connections with Mt Victoria

On July 24, 1845 a remarkable young woman arrived in Wellington aboard the *Louisa Campbell*. She was Mary Taylor, sister of Waring Taylor, who had arrived in 1842.

Mary was born in 1817 in Yorkshire and, while attending school in 1831, became a close friend of Charlotte Bronte. Mary's life took a dramatic turn in 1840 when her father died and the family household was broken up. By 1841 her unorthodoxy became apparent when she declared that she proposed to emigrate to New Zealand with her youngest brother, Waring (after whom Waring Taylor St is named). Family were confused by this decision, but Charlotte Bronte clearly understood Mary better. She wrote to her sister, Emily:

"Mary Taylor and Waring have come to a singular determination, but I think under the peculiar circumstances a defensible one, though it sounds outrageously odd at first. They are going to emigrate - to quit the country altogether. Their destination unless they change is Port Nicholson, in the northern island of New Zealand!!! Mary has made up her mind she can not and will not be a governess, a teacher, a milliner, a bonnet maker nor a housemaid. She sees no means of obtaining employment she would like in England, so she is leaving it!"

Mary delayed her voyage to New Zealand a few years, arriving in 1845, and her correspondence with Charlotte Bronte continued. After 1848 it increases markedly, prompted by her receipt of a first-edition copy of *Jane Eyre* from Charlotte.

Now the connection with Mt Victoria. After receiving the book, Mary wrote to Charlotte:

"About a month since, I have received and read *Jane Eyre*. It seems to me incredible that you had actually written a book. Your novel surprised me as being so perfect as a work of art . . . Such events did not happen when I was in England. After I had read it, I went on to the top of Mt Victoria and looked for a ship to carry a letter to you. There was a little thing with one mast, and also *H.M.S. Fly* and nothing else. If a cattle vessel came from Sydney she would take the mail, but we have had East wind for a month and nothing can come in."

Mary leased a section of land on the corner of Cuba and Dixon Streets and, by 1850, had erected a shop where Deka stands today. The shop prospered and the business expanded. Charlotte Bronte died in 1855 and, while Mary doesn't dwell on the death of her closest friend, correspondence to another friend shows that this is when loneliness and depression lead her first to consider returning to England. By 1860 she was back in England, leaving her shop to be managed by her assistant. In 1868, she sold it to another assistant, James Smith, who changed the name of the shop to his own - James Smith's.

In her last years, Mary became a virtual recluse. She would not give any interviews about the Brontes, disapproving of the literary mania which had developed around the family. Shortly before her death in 1893, at the age of 76, she destroyed all the correspondence she had received.