



MT VICTORIA

Historical Society News

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Basin Reserve Heritage



NZ v. England at the Basin Reserve, 1930 [Alexander Turnbull Library EP-0655-1/2-G]

Sunday March 22, at 2.30 pm
Meet at the Wakefield Memorial in the Basin Reserve

With the Basin Reserve area under threat from a multi-lane motorway flyover, we're taking a guided tour to highlight aspects of its rich history and significance to Wellington. Stories of cricket, canals, great events and fascinating people, from Mother Aubert to Waring Taylor, will be woven into the trail and associated with the landmarks we see every day.

Contact Joanna Newman on 385 2254 or jnewman@xtra.co.nz to book

News

The MVHS Committee has recently written to the Mayor, Councillors and WCC regarding two potential encroachments on Mount Victoria Town Belt land, relating to the former Bandoliers Club Rooms and Chest Hospital. What is more concerning, we have just learned of another, potentially even more serious loss of Mt Victoria's precious Town Belt. The government is offering land it took for Wellington College, Wellington East Girls College and Government House in settlement of the Port Nicholson Treaty Claims, when it is under obligation to return this to the City of Wellington.

Three attempts in almost as many months to alienate the public from land which belongs to the people of Wellington – when much has already gone – is a wake-up call. If you would like to know more, contact us or David Lee at Action for the Environment on davidjohnlee2hotmail.com.

We also intend to make a submission on proposed District Plan changes, as they impact on Mt Victoria's heritage.

Historical Note

Overleaf is a little anecdote of Mt Victoria. It comes from the diaries of Charles Taylor, which were recently donated to the Alexander Turnbull Library. Charles was a 20-year-old carpenter and his diaries are a very lively record of his voyage to New Zealand in early 1879 and his new life here.

Youthful Heartache on Mount Victoria in 1879

From the diaries of Charles Taylor

On the voyage out to New Zealand, Charles had rather fallen for a fellow passenger called Jennie. She felt the same about him. But Charles began to feel guilty, realising he was really still in love with another, Clara, back in England. He liked Jennie, and they often explored the town together during their first days in Wellington. He hoped though, that she would realise “that our flirtation in writing love letters to each other would be forgotten when we came ashore”. On one such walk “I had intended to tell her of the promise I had made to Clara, but could not muster sufficient courage”.

They had met the Bennett family – “respectable & well off, they are very pleasant people & live in their own residence at Elizabeth Street, Te Aro, on the outskirts of Wellington”. They and other young friends from the ship spent several afternoons and evenings there, when they were not searching for work. On one such occasion he and Jennie decided to go for another walk, up Mt Victoria above the Bennett’s house. Here is Charles’ account, complete with his own idiosyncratic spelling, grammar, and punctuation:

... about 3 o’clock Jennie & I went for a ramble o’er the hills. She wished to go to the first Signal box, on Mount Victoria & to examine the cannon on the summit of the hill. It was very windy, & when we stood on the top of the hill, I had to keep my arm around her waist, to support her the wind was so strong, it was almost impossible to keep one’s footing.

We rambled passed the Signal Station, o’er the hills towards [blank], the scenery was grand. Kilburny which consists of about 9 scattered houses was away on our right. Wellington Harbour on the left, a few cattle came towards us, including a wild looking pig, but each in their turn beat a retreat when I faced them with my stick.

We gained the last hill & gazed down at the sea below & at the narrow sandy peninsula o’er which I am told Captain Cook once sailed, my telescope was very useful, & enabled us to discern the various objects most distinctly, especially a couple of coasters & a steamer away at sea, which after a while entered the harbour.



Mt Victoria from across harbour, February 12, 1877
Watercolour. Artist unknown
Alexander Turnbull Library A-090-021

Jennie & I were seated on the lee side of the hill, talking about Old England & the dear ones at Home. Jennie said, I am sure you must feel very lonely now.... & thinking this was a good opportunity to tell her of Clara Moore, I told her the Love Story of my life... [Which he does, in detail – that, unfortunately, we cannot include here.]

My voice is husky with emotion & the tears that I have tried my utmost to keep back, flow from my eyes, dropping upon the grass for I am in a half lying posture at her feet, my head bent down to hide the tears, every few minutes when I can manage to speak, I wipe my tears away & look into her face, which bears an expression of intense agony, which cuts me to the heart, to think what a cruel wretch I’ve been to thoughtlessly lead her to love me. I feel inclined to withdraw the words I have said, & try to think of Clara no more, but, then I would not be able to marry Jennie for 3 or 4 years, & girls are so few out here that within 12 months she will have plenty good offers. I tell her so & ask her if it would cause her much pain to break off our attachment, & consider ourselves only friends. I will always be a true & faithful friend to you Jennie in Protection, money & advice. [to which Jennie replies, perhaps somewhat sourly, that she admired him for being so true, especially seeing Clara has never replied to any of his letters].

We could plainly hear the sea breaking on the rocks below & it appeared to be moaning a dirge to our misery

Break break break
On the cold grey rocks, oh Sea,
I would that my tongue could utter,
The thoughts that arise in me (Tennyson)

We had not noticed the evening that had grown rapidly to a close night closing over the earth. We rise from our positions & beat a retreat homeward, going a short distance out of our path on purpose to avoid the dead horse, which we passed in the afternoon, Jennie being timid of it.

In forcing our way up the hill through the scrub Jennie’s dress caught 2 or 3 times, tearing the trimming off. We passed the Signal Station (which is a wooden building, with a flag staff shaped like the topmast of a ship for the Signals, it also possesses a telegraph from the other Station on the Head to the Town.) & descended the hill towards the suburbs of the Town. We had to be careful in our footing as it was dark, climbed the Stial in safety & crossed the little brook & arrived at the Bennetts about 7pm almost out of breath, through hurrying They asked me what made Jennie look so sad, what had I done to her. I simply said, I had told her a sad tale.