



# MT VICTORIA

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## Historical Society News

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## **A Town Belt Ramble**

**Sunday March 14 at 2.30 pm**

**Meet Alan Olliver at the old Quarry at the top of Ellice St for a heritage exploration of the Town Belt between Ellice Street and Constable Street**

*The walk will end at Constable Street – duration about 2 hours. Alan will bring you back along the ridge by a different route, or leave you at Constable Street to find your own way back.*

*(A reasonable fitness level and good walking shoes required)*

*Rain day, Sunday March 21 – contact Alan Olliver if unsure.*

**Ever wanted to see inside the old Rehabilitation League Building in Hania Street?**

*The Historical Society has arranged a special guided tour with the architect for the new owners.*

**Meet at the Rehabilitation League Building at 5.00 pm on Thursday, February 11**

### **Mount Victoria Festival**

Saturday, February 27, is the second of Mt Victoria's new-style Inner City Festivals. The Historical Society will have a stall there, with lots of information, a quiz and possibly other activities. We will also be taking a couple of guided historical walks – Art Deco Mt Victoria and Northern Mt Victoria Heritage – if you are interested in joining one or both of those. Look out for Festival publicity for details closer to the time.

### **170 years since the first Wellington Settlers arrived**

170 years ago on January 22, now Wellington Anniversary Day, the first New Zealand Company ship, *Aurora*, arrived in Port Nicholson. Two of the original Mt Victoria land owners arrived on that ship: T J Drake and G T Palmer. Two more arrived on the second ship, the barque *Oriental*, nine days later: Dudley Sinclair (who bought four town acres in Mt Victoria) and R Augustus Eaton. Most Mt Victoria sections were bought before people arrived in New Zealand and many were absentee owners who never came to the country.

Eaton was a widower, aged 53 when he arrived with his two sons. Sadly, one of his sons met a tragic end. A fellow passenger reported that he was "speared by the natives, and died. It was his own fault, as I am informed. His father never looked up after" and died in October 1841.

Dudley Sinclair was the son of one of the New Zealand Company founders, Sir George Sinclair. In the New Zealand Company newspaper for emigrants, printed in London in September 1839, he was listed as a member of the committee of a Literary, Scientific and Philanthropic Institute to be established in the new colony. Its objective was to form a public library, with a general museum and scientific institution, and a dispensing hospital for the benefit of the settlers and "aboriginals". Sinclair probably had more pecuniary interests on arrival, however. Dr Dorset wrote home in November 1840 that "Sir George Sinclair's son, a few days after his arrival, sold five sections for thirteen hundred guineas; and he is now heartily sorry for the sale, the buyers of them declaring they are worth £10,000 as they are mostly low numbers". This may not have been his Mt Victoria sections because they were in the 300s and 600s.

Source: Ward, Louis, 'Early Wellington'

## Anniversary days in the 1840s

We celebrated anniversary days very differently back in the 1840s. There were fewer public holidays. A day off was a very valued thing. In the new, struggling, little settlement scattered along the Port Nicholson foreshore no-one could have ever imagined the variety of leisure options available to a modern Wellingtonian.

Instead, the first residents enjoyed an anniversary ball and, even more enthusiastically, a rather raucous fete on a large area of unoccupied ground just off present-day Dixon Street. These fetes continued until the area began to be built out in the later 1850s. After that, various public entertainments were still organised – most notably the anniversary regatta in the harbour just off the new reclamation wharf – but, as the city expanded and transport improved, there was in longer a single event that so effectively brought most of the town's residents together.

The fete and ball were organised by a committee of the town's self-styled leaders. Arrangements had gone awry, however, with the first anniversary in 1841. Then two rival cliques amongst the settlement worthies could not agree on who should be in charge, and so set up two entirely separate celebrations. From then on, though, despite occasional ructions and angry resignations, they all managed to work together.

These early fete programmes combined a mix of horse races, boat races, and other sports, all well reported in the town newspaper, the *New Zealand Gazette and Wellington Spectator*. The fete area was decorated with banners and flags and a temporary grandstand erected "for the ladies". For the men, all the town's hotels set up booths around the ground, for heavy drinking was always a part of these early anniversary days. Not everyone joined in, though. After one fete the newspaper reported that the "teetotallers and temperance men" held a separate gathering at Mr Wilkinson's tea house where, it added with a slight note of puzzlement, they "evidently appeared to spend the evening after their own fashion to their hearts' content".

For the richer young men, the horse racing was the main attraction, and a chance to show off. Owning a good horse and knowing how to ride it were signs of social status. It was usually a hurdle race, and there were always a fair few embarrassing falls and horses refusing to jump, all gleefully reported in the newspaper. For lighter relief there was the donkey race. One year, for example, "Don Pedro took the lead at too hasty a pace, overthrew his rider who broke his pipe. Nothing daunted he soon remounted and after innumerable difficulties ... he came in first, thereby losing the race." "Tomasino", however, "beautifully decorated with carrots ... arrived half an hour after the others, thereby winning the race easily".



**Third Anniversary Fete.**  
**A**T A MEETING of the Subscribers, held at Barrett's Hotel on Monday evening January 16, 1843,  
 Mr. GEORGE SMITH in the Chair, the following programme was agreed to:



**TO START AT ELEVEN O'CLOCK.**  
 Sailing match, by Boats under 30 feet keel three to start or no race. Entrance, £ Prize, £15.

**TO START AT HALF-PAST ELEVEN.**  
 Rowing match, by Whale Boats—three start or no race. Entrance, £1. Prize, first boat, £10 10s.; second boat, £5 5s.

**TO START AT HALF-PAST TWELVE.**  
 Foot race—distance one mile. Entrance, 5s. Prize, £5. Three to start or no race.

**TO START AT ONE O'CLOCK.**  
 Wheel-barrow race. Entrance, 2s. 6d. Prize, £2. Three to start or no race.

**TO START AT TWO O'CLOCK.**  
 Hurdle race; three horses to start or no race. Heats. Entrance, £2 2s. Prize, £20. Second horse to save his stakes.

**TO COMMENCE AT HALF-PAST THREE.**  
 Rifle match. Entrance, £1. Prize, £5. Distance, 50, 100, and 150 yards. Three competitors or no match.

All entrances for the preceding sports are to be added to the stakes.

The following Rural Sports will come off at convenient intervals:

Jumping in sacks. Prize, £1 10s. or a new Hat.

Climbing a greasy pole. Prize, £1 or a quarter of Mutton.

Catching a soaped-tailed Pig. Prize, the Pig.

Canoe race, by the Natives. Prize, £5.

Extract from the advertisement for the 1843 fete, *New Zealand Gazette and Wellington Spectator*, 18 January 1843.

At the other end of the social scale were the "rural sports", very much for the working classes. They included foot races, including, some years, a race from the top of Mt Victoria, across the swamp, past Te Aro Pa, to the fete ground. Other sports included jumping in sacks, grinning through the horse collar, jingling (a sort of blind man's buff but with everyone except the jingler blindfolded), and chasing the soap-tailed pig. In 1843, however, the newspaper commented that it hoped the latter sport "will in future be omitted as we understand the poor animal was literally torn limb from limb." From then on, the competition was for soap-necked geese, already dead (and the details of how that worked are not yet discovered).

Well before the fetes had faded away they had already lost another part of their early character. By the mid-1840s the local Maori from Te Aro Pa, Pipitea and Petone had begun to join in, competing in separate canoe races and other events. By the end of the decade many Maori were horse owners and the Maori horse race was popular with the spectators. But the fete organisers were always rather ambivalent about such participation. After the 1850 fete the newspaper lamented that the exciting Maori horse race had only been added as an afterthought and said "yet the Maoris are purchasers of horses to large amount, and are equally interested with the settlers with the prosperity of the colony, and if encouragement were given to them would enter with considerable spirit into these amusements...." It was not to be. The town was more interested in encouraging Maori to move away, and that brief opportunity for bi-cultural engagement disappeared.