



## **Mt VICTORIA**

*Historical Society News*

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### **Sunday 17 April at 2.00pm Visit to Nairn Street Cottage**

Wellington's oldest original cottage was home to three generations of the Wallis family who lived there from 1858. Admission is free for MVHS members (\$8 for non-members) and includes a guided tour of the cottage, the exhibition, and the heritage gardens.

Please meet at the Cottage, 68 Nairn Street, Mt Cook at 1.50pm.

### **The moving story of Ettrick Cottage**

Built in the early 1870s at 7 Austin Street, relocated in 1994 to 19 Paterson Street, and now facing the prospect of another move if the Mt Victoria Tunnel Duplication project goes ahead, Ettrick Cottage has a special place in the landscape and history of Mt Victoria. It could be said to embody much of what has come to define Mt Victoria - an early settler abode, Victorian streetscapes, the occasional self-interested developer, community activism, tunnel and motorway plans - and, no doubt, domestic happiness and drama as well. It means a lot not only to Mt Victorians, who since the 1990s have been prepared to fight to preserve it, but also to descendants of one of the first residents, living overseas, who are keen to lend a hand in securing its future.

### **Wellington Town Belt Bill**

The Local Government and Environment Committee has reported back to the House of Representatives on the Wellington Town Belt Bill.

The Select Committee's recommendations include:

- clarifying that the Public Works Act 1981 applies to the Town Belt
- aligning the Council's licensing powers with those for leasing
- limiting the total amount of Town Belt land that can be leased at any one time
- requiring the Council to use any money it makes from leases for managing the Town Belt
- providing for notification of business activities
- requiring the Council to consider the benefits of a public service before deciding whether to grant an interest in Town Belt land

There are provisions in the proposed legislation to return former Town Belt land owned by the Council to Town Belt trust status, and scope to add land to compensate for land which cannot be restored.

### **Mt Victoria Heritage Study**

Last month, Jo Newman (who was home on leave from her job in East Timor) and MVHS/MVRA Committee members met with representatives of the Wellington City Council who are preparing to conduct a heritage study of Mt Victoria. The project involves collecting reliable, high-quality information on the characteristics and values of historic Mt Victoria buildings, for use as a baseline by the Council and ratepayers alike. To help reduce time and costs, we are sharing the knowledge and information we have collected over the years doing our own research.

### **MVHS newsletters**

Early copies of the MVHS newsletter, from the first (November 1995) edition, have been added to the collection on our website.

### **MVHS Committee**

Following his return to Wellington from Rarotonga, Alan Olliver has rejoined the MVHS Committee. Alan was the Convenor of the steering committee that formed the Society twenty years ago. Welcome back Alan!

<http://mtvictoria.history.org.nz/>

## *Ettrick Cottage: a little battler*

Number 19 Paterson Street has been known as Ettrick Cottage since the 1800's. Until 1994, it resided at 7 Austin Street, where it was originally built somewhere between 1871 and 1874. After a campaign to save the cottage and stop an oversized development on its site, which many in Wellington still remember fighting, in 1994 the cottage was moved to Paterson Street by the developer (later found to have carried out an illegal construction and who then disappeared).

Built of heart rimu and originally a basic rectangle, Ettrick Cottage was one of the first houses in Austin St. In 1874 it was sold by its builder-owner, Mr Storey, to Samuel Atkins. The double gable "U" shaped extension we see now was probably added some time in the very early 1880's.



Alice, Marion snr, Marion and Samuel Atkins at Ettrick Cottage, circa 1901

Samuel Atkins was a former sergeant in the Seaforth Highlanders, much decorated for his long military service in a number of campaigns. He and his wife, Annie, arrived in New Zealand with their children in 1873 as assisted immigrants. During his working life in Wellington, Sam was a night-watchman in the 'new' government building. Within a year of the family's establishment at 7 Austin Street in Mt Victoria, however, Sam came home after a night's work to find Annie dead in her bed. She was described as "somewhat corpulent" and was also an alcoholic, so her death was recorded as being from natural causes, although the result of "suffocation". Sam, who was now 51, married his second wife (who may have been initially employed as a housekeeper), 36-year old Marion, in 1876. She was born about 50 miles from Ettrick Forest in Scotland, which was also associated with a well-known Scottish poet, novelist and essayist, and this may be why they called their home Ettrick Cottage. Together, they had one daughter, whom they also named Marion.

Samuel retired from his government job in 1894, aged 72. Two unmarried daughters, Alice and Marion continued to live with him and his wife. Alice had a flourishing dress-making business, while Marion (May) was a clerk in the gas company's offices.

Clearly, in his later years, Sam was somewhat of an identity about town. In 1901 he was presented to the Duke of York during the world tour of the Duke and Duchess and congratulated on his splendid military record. That year, when the Seaforth Highlanders visited Wellington, The New Zealand Free Lance newspaper reported: "*Sam Atkins has been looking forward, with all the zeal and anxiety of a bride for her wedding day, to the coming of the troops, and from an early hour on Saturday he strutted the town dressed, like Hooligan, in 'his best suit o' clothes.'*" *The uniform was resplendent in its newness and cast something of a reflection upon those of the Seaforths at the head of whom Sam proudly strode. But not for long did he keep it up – the pace was too much for the old man, who found he was not so young as he used to be.*"



Sam died in 1917 at the age of 93 and the words engraved on his headstone in Karori Cemetery appropriately read, "Hold the Fort". Daughter, Marion, lived on in Ettrick cottage until she died in 1945. Alice was the last of the Atkins family to live at 7 Austin Street and she died there in 1955. This home, therefore, was in the Atkins family for an extraordinary 81 years.

Samuel was more prosperous than modest Ettrick Cottage would suggest. In addition to 7 Austin Street, he also built and owned 13 Austin Street (which you can still see) and owned a property in Majoribanks Street. Descendants' research indicates that this relative wealth may have come from his share of the spoils from the Defence of Lucknow in India. His portion would have been a middling amount based on his rank and was not awarded until some time after his retirement from military service.

Ettrick Cottage is now owned by the New Zealand Transport Agency and for many years the assumption has been that it will be moved or demolished to make way for a second Mt Victoria tunnel. In the latest round of activism – this time by much wider interests than just Mt Victoria residents – the focus has been on protecting Ettrick Cottage (along with the rest of Paterson Street) in the event that plans for a second tunnel go ahead.

Marion snr, Alice, Marion and Samuel Atkins on the verandah of Ettrick Cottage, c. 1901.  
(Photographs provided by David Best and Jim Atkins, descendants of Samuel)

By Joanna Newman