



MT VICTORIA

Historical Society News

No 78
JUNE 2016

Sunday 31 July at 2.00pm
New Crossways, 6 Roxburgh Street

Using family history research sources

Using family history research sources, **Rachel Brown**, an amateur genealogist and history researcher for some 20 years, traced her family's journey in 1883 from Wiltshire in England to Moir Street, and its subsequent move to Newtown about 10 years later.

Update on the Mt Victoria Heritage Study

The Wellington City Council's Senior Heritage Advisor, Vanessa Tanner, reports that fieldwork for the Mt Victoria Heritage Study was undertaken in February and March, using a digital data-gathering tool to quantify attributes such as a building's historic integrity and streetscape value. Photographs were taken of every building within the study area.

Analysis and mapping of the field data is now being done, and three Victoria University Museum and Heritage Studies students are undertaking research projects that will contribute to the study report.

Concerns about demolition and development proposal

Last November, the Wellington City Council issued a resource consent to Juno Holdings Ltd for the construction of an apartment building on the corner of Majoribanks and Roxburgh Streets.

Concerns about the proposed development are being taken up by the Mt Victoria Residents' Association. They include: non-notification of the application for the resource consent; the Council's approval of a design that exceeds its own permitted height and bulk standards; and poor design features including the tiny size of the apartments and the lack of any provision for carparks. The proposed development also raises a broader issue of concern – the adverse effects resulting from the Council's designation of the foot of our suburb as Central Area.

The property was once owned by Charles Plimmer (c.1849-1930), the son of John Plimmer. From about 1895 until 1980 it was the site of a succession of fruit shops and laundries run by Chinese families. In the early 1900s a couple of bootmakers plied their trade at this location. It is currently occupied by a panelbeating business.

Street talk: Stories from Mt Victoria's colourful past

In 1996, the Wellington City Council discovered that two streets that it had maintained for a very long time were privately owned. A search by the Council for descendants of the owners so that a legitimate land purchase could be made proved fruitless. The estimated land value had to be weighed up against the potential bill for unpaid rates since 1893!

A Mt Victoria businessman and benefactor once owned a beautiful garden noted for having a pair of live storks which were of considerable interest to children in the neighbourhood. The story goes that on one occasion a stork mistook a small nose protruding between the surrounding fence palings for an edible morsel - with painful consequences for the owner of the nose.

To find out the names of this man (after whom two streets in Mt Victoria were named), and the privately-owned streets that were maintained by the WCC for so long, complete the crossword which accompanies this newsletter. And read on for another story of Mt Victoria's colourful history, written and contributed by MVHS Committee member David Lee.

When milk was delivered daily to households by horse and cart.

By David Lee

“Looking back again to the days when the Mt Victoria milk round was serviced by horse and cart. My favourite nag was “Paddy” who had a lofty neck and sturdy legs for hill work; when the southerlies came - enough to make “the galled jade wince” – Paddy would face it with soft reproachful eyes: his ears as sensitive as radar, twitching to sense the sound of his master’s steps or the rattle of bottles. I would pass him on my way up to morning mass when the soulful eyes of Paddy would look at me as much as to signal “say one for me”. So wrote author and Mt Vic resident, Pat Lawlor in his 1976 book *Pat Lawlor’s Wellington*.

Lawlor also refers to the Collie Stables in Hawker Street at the foot of Doctors Common, and of the horses let loose on Friday night: “... a thunder of hooves as they galloped down the street to take a quick turn up Majoribanks Street and reach the grassy slopes above” (a shoe, possibly from one of those horses, was recently found in the Town Belt by the Mt Vic Revegers). Another of Lawlor’s horse stories goes back to January 1879 when a dog burrowing in Austin Street (it wasn’t surfaced then) revealed that a dead horse had been buried there some weeks before! What sort of horse it was is not known but he went on to say that the burial ground in those days for old dobbins (presumably including milk horses) was in the sand hills of Lyall Bay.



“The old grey mare” in Abel Smith Street

(Note the wooden roller chained to the rear wheel to stop the cart slipping backwards on slopes)

Photo: *The Evening Post* collection Alexander Turnbull Library

A brief history of Wellington’s milk supply system

From the early days of Wellington until the mid 1950s milk was delivered daily to households by horse and cart. At the beginning of the 20th century Wellington’s milk system was in a poor state. Seasonal supply and transport problems, lack of pasteurisation, health risks and loss of cans led to the Wellington Milk Supply Act of 1910 which allowed for the municipalisation of the city’s milk supply.

In 1918 the Wellington City Corporation milk station was set up in Dixon Street and a dairy factory was leased in Otaki. These operations were carried out under war time regulations, which expired when peace was declared. It was then necessary for the WCC to get fresh authority, duly obtained by the Wellington City Milk Supply Act of 1919. Among the progressive features of the Act were the supply of free/subsidised milk to the poor, and funding for “visiting nurses”. In 1922 the WCC decided to introduce the bottle system of distribution and called for tenders from existing vendor companies. This meant the end of the ‘dipping system’ (milk dished out into householders’ billies and cans). No tenders were received so the Wellington Municipal Milk Department took over the whole of the milk distribution system, which was divided into blocks (that was an era when the WCC was proud to own enterprises providing services to the public). Fifty horses for drawing the four-wheeled milk wagons were purchased and the milkmen driving them had to go through a rehearsal of their duties for what was a seven-days-a-week job.

Milk was bottled in one pint, one and half pint and one quart clear bottles. Cream was put in amber tinted glass bottles. Householders were initially given bottles free of cost. Filled bottles were exchanged for empty washed ones and milk tokens (bought from local dairies - there were summer and winter tokens for the relative seasonal prices). The summer tokens were made of German silver and the winter ones bronze. In 1931 a new milk treatment station, with a large stable to house the horses, was opened in Tory Street.



Wellington City Corporation milk tokens



A rare find: cardboard tops for the original milk bottles discovered by the writer in a Milk Department file in the Council's archives. The tops were often used to make pompoms. This was done by holding two tops together, winding wool evenly around them and through a hole in the middle, cutting and tying off the wool, and then removing the tops.

Improving the welfare of horses

The welfare of horses was also a consideration for the municipal distribution system, as private vendors had previously been fined for ill-treating them. *The Evening Post* in 1937 reported complaints that milk horses were still being raced up the hills rather than being permitted to walk. The SPCA at the time was concerned about horses slipping on steep streets in the rain. It made representations to the City Engineers Department to "roughen up" such streets to give horses better footing (Ellice Street was mentioned). The horses got to know their rounds just as well as the drivers and knew just where to stop and start. The average working life of a milk horse was eight to 10 years. After that they were still useful for light farm work.

Milk horses gave character to Wellington neighbourhoods. When a horse was seen stopping longer than usual browsing someone's hedge, the jokes would start about the milkman having an affair there! As children we would give the horses carrots and sometimes have to collect their droppings for the garden. Many of us who remember those stoic animals were sad about their passing – except perhaps the light sleepers! One correspondent to *The Evening Post* wanted milk horses to be provided with galoshes: "... in the early hours my sleep is broken and terminated every morning by the clop, clop, clop of the old grey mare, as her dainty feet strike the sealed surface of Abel Smith Street".

What happened to them when they finished their last rounds in 1956? According to Chris MacLean in his *Wellington Tales*, "The Dominion asked farmers interested in having a horse to contact the Council. There were only two replies. One from an Ashhurst farmer who said he had 'a soft spot for any animal that has given yeoman service to mankind. Three of these horses could grow fat and lazy on my farm'. The other was from Edith Baverstock, an 11-year-old Foxton girl, who wrote: 'I see by the paper you have some horses you want homes for. My dad said we have room for one and I could look after it myself'. The fate of the other horses is not recorded. Did they 'grow fat and lazy' on farms? Or did they make the shorter journey to the Ngauranga meat works?"

Acknowledgement: Thanks to Avon MacDonald of the Wellington City Council Archives for her assistance.