

Mt Victoria Historical Society Inc

www.mvhs.wellington.net.nz

ANNUAL REPORT 2011-12

The past year has been another busy one for the Society. Despite its small size, the committee has managed to provide a full programme, work on the Embassy panels project, maintain the website and keep abreast of advocacy issues relating to the heritage of Mt Victoria. A summary of our key activities and achievements is set out below:

Newsletters

Last year we produced five newsletters - one more than our standard four - to keep members informed of our activities and share history on the suburb. They included Historical Notes on Lipman Levy, the Queen Victoria statue, Tutchén's dairy farm, Freyberg and the Embassy Theatre. It was great to have two articles offered by non-committee members, and we encourage others to do so in future as well if they have historical information they'd like to contribute.

Events

There was something for everyone in the events we organised over the year. We had a talk on the history of the Tararua Tramping Club from a founding member, in the Tramping Club rooms in Moncrieff Street. The last meeting of the calendar year was more social – a 'Show and Tell' where people brought along heritage items that had significance to them or had an interesting story and shared those stories. In the 'walking season' we had a guided tour of northern Mt Victoria, led by Natasha Naus. In April, we marked World Heritage Day, celebrating the role of local communities in heritage, by holding a Victorian picnic to commemorate Mary Taylor's walk to the top of Mt Victoria in 1848 to look for a ship to take a letter to her friend Charlotte Bronte. We were very pleased to get some press coverage for this event, as it helps to raise the profile of the organisation and Mt Victoria's heritage. We also hope to make it an annual commemoration, if only to add value to the tourist experience (though we may never strike such perfect weather again). Our last event for the year was a special showing of Gaylene Preston's film, *Mr Wrong*, featuring Mt Victoria as one of the principal characters and which left some of the audience afraid to walk home in the dark!

Heritage advocacy

It has been a very busy year on the advocacy front.

We made a substantial submission on Wellington City Council's Long Term Plan, focusing on heritage issues, and a submission on the draft guiding principles for the management of the Town Belt. In October we wrote to Wellington City Council about our concerns for 69 and 71 Hawker Street, which have significant social and built heritage value to the area and were being promoted by real estate agents for potential demolition.

On the issue of the impact of roading plans on heritage around the Basin Reserve and the proposed second Mt Victoria tunnel, in August 2011 we provided feedback on New Zealand Transport Agency's (NZTA) plans following its 'public consultation' and we endeavoured to obtain more information about the relationship between it and the Basin Reserve Trust through Official Information requests to NZTA and the Basin Reserve Trust. In May this year, we made a submission on the Greater Wellington Regional Council's Draft Land Transport Programme 2012-15.

We were also invited by Wellington City Council to participate in a workshop on earthquake-prone buildings and heritage and to provide input into the summarised history to be attached to the revised Town Belt Management Plan, which we felt were significant acknowledgements of our interest and the value of our input.

Individual members have also taken action. Thanks to a quick response by one of our members, Jim Harper, the last tram switch in Wellington was saved from destruction by road works on Kent Terrace.

Website

Content was added to our website throughout the year, although unfortunately we had some down-time owing to a virus attack. Again, we'd like to thank Stanley Wing, who has donated a significant amount of time to working on our website, and Historical Society member Owen Watson, who updates content for us. Our webmaster, David McCrone, also set up a Facebook page for the Society.

Embassy panel

By the end of the reporting year, very good progress had been made on developing the large heritage interpretive panel to be mounted on the side of the Embassy Theatre. Work has been slow, but many hours of research and planning have been required and that is rather the nature of things with a small volunteer force. Our grant application to Wellington City Council was unfortunately unsuccessful but we have, on the other hand, been delighted with our choice of design company, Station Creative. The Society committed \$5,000 of its funds to this project because we believe the panel is a unique opportunity to share the heritage of this special area with residents and visitors.

Other

Joanna had the pleasure of meeting Jim Atkins, the American great-great-grandson of the owner of Ettrick Cottage in Paterson Street. He and other descendents from around the world are keenly following the fate of this cottage in relation to motorway building plans. While Joanna showed him the cottage, another property built and owned by Sam Atkins in the nineteenth century, the cemetery and other sites of interest to his family history, in return he has shared all his research on the occupants of the cottage with us. Furthermore, he promises to mobilise descendents around the world should the cottage be threatened.

At short notice, Joanna also stepped in to provide a talk to a local Rotary group on highlights of Mt Victoria history.

We have had considerable interaction with other historical societies this year and it is great that such groups are meeting and sharing information and experiences more.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to particularly thank the committee of the past year – Judy Southworth, Natasha Naus, Trevor Bleakley, David McCrone, David Lee and Sue Watt - for all their work. Trevor unfortunately had to leave the committee after a few months, due to other commitments, but had done a wonderful job as secretary till then. Thank you also to members for your support and we look forward to your continued involvement and support.

Joanna M.A. Newman
Convenor
September 2012