



MT VICTORIA

Historical Society News

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Next event

Tuesday 15 August at 7.00pm
St Joseph's, Brougham Street, Mt Victoria

Mt Victoria Heritage Survey

Mike Kelly and Vanessa Tanner present the results of the Mt Victoria Heritage Survey to a combined meeting of members of the Mt Victoria Residents' Association and the Mt Victoria Historical Society.

Mother Aubert in Wellington

In April, the Society hosted a talk by archivist and historian Sister Josephine Gorman, on the life of Mother Suzanne Aubert, the Catholic missionary now on the road to being declared a saint by the Catholic Church.

While Mother Aubert is most often associated with her work at Jerusalem, she was hugely influential and well known for her subsequent work in Wellington, which included setting up a soup kitchen for the poor, along with New Zealand's first crèche. When she died at the age of 91, thousands lined Willis Street for her funeral. It was – according to Sister Josephine - 'the greatest funeral accorded to any woman in New Zealand.'

Thanks to Sister Josephine for sharing her research with us. More information about the fascinating life of Mother Aubert can be found on the Sisters of Compassion's website, along with a Wellington pilgrimage map you can follow to walk in her footsteps.

Update on Wellington transport plans affecting Mt Victoria

Let's Get Wellington Moving (LGWM) has released its long-list of 12 possible scenarios for Wellington transport from Ngauranga gorge to the airport and hospital. You can see these scenarios at <http://getwellymoving.co.nz/assets/Documents/OIA-Information-about-long-list-scenarios/Long-List-Scenario-Development.pdf>

Of particular concern to the Historical Society are the possible effects of building another vehicle tunnel through Mt Victoria, which is included in four of the scenarios. This proposal would require removing or moving the historic houses currently on Paterson Street. The Society's website has information about the historic significance of several of these houses, including Waring Taylor's former residence and Etrick Cottage.

Sale of Ace House

We have been advised by Trish Given of the Mt Vic Hub that Ace House in Brougham Street has been sold and that the Wellington After-Care Association are moving at the end of August to a new home in the city. Built in 1906 for Alexander Gray, Ace House has for many years been Wellington After Care's facility for the provision of services to adults with intellectual disabilities, focusing on life skills and participation in the wider community. We understand that it will now be restored as a family home. For further information see <http://mtvictoria.history.org.nz/ace-house-111-brougham-st/>

Advance notice of the Annual General Meeting

Please pencil in your diaries Sunday 17 September at 2pm for the Society's Annual General Meeting to be held at the Friends' Meeting House, 7 Moncrieff Street (up the steps at the top of the street).

To be or not to be - the Museum Stand at the Basin Reserve

A debate has gone on for many years now about whether or not to restore and upgrade the once-elegant Museum Stand in the Basin Reserve. Unfortunately, it is now in a state of crumbling decrepitude from lack of maintenance, except for the New Zealand Cricket Museum, which is alive and well.



to have it removed.

Photo: Basin Reserve and grandstand c.1929, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/basin-reserve>

The present grandstand was not the first on the site. The original Caledonian Grandstand was built by the Caledonian Sports Association in 1868. The Caledonian Society flourished from the 1860s, organising major games and athletics events which included “foot race, 200 yards”, “throwing the heavy stone”, “vaulting with the pole”, and “tossing the caber”. These New Year gatherings were originally held in the Hon John Martin’s paddock opposite the Panama Hotel (Taranaki Street), but when floods from Polhill Gully turned the paddock into a swamp, the sports were moved to the Basin Reserve. Here the Society used tents and marquees for their meetings, until a severe gale caused much loss and damage, and a stand was proposed and built. The last Caledonian Society sports meeting was held on 1 January 1880, and subsequently the Grandstand was bought by the City Council in 1881 for £150. Here it remained until demolished to make way for the present Museum Stand.



Photo: Caledonian Stand, New Zealand Cricket Museum

One reminder of the old Caledonian Grandstand is the Edward Dixon Memorial Clock. You can just see it in the photo above in the central gable. It was presented in 1904 by descendants of Edward Dixon, a well-known Wellington cordial manufacturer who had a passion for cricket. Although the original disappeared during the demolition, a new electric clock was installed over the main door of the new stand when it opened.

After years of comment on the dilapidated state of the grandstand, in September 1922 the City Council launched a competition to design a new pavilion to replace it. Designs were to accommodate at least 2,500 people, ten dressing-rooms, sanitary conveniences, and a refreshment room at a cost of no more than £10,000. Ten designs were lodged, and many months later amid rumours of “wirepulling”, the adjudicators lodged a report in late March 1923 noting it was impossible to meet the requirements within the money prescribed. The Historic Area Assessment prepared by the Historic Places Trust best describes what then happened:

The winner of the competition was architect P.H. Graham, but the City Engineer's Department, which seemed to have never even heard of him and was less than certain about the suitability of his design, paid him the £100 prize and indicated that his involvement was at an end. The aggrieved architect pursued the Council for the contract to prepare working drawings and supervision of the work - the usual outcome of a competition of this nature - and even involved the New Zealand Institute of Architects in his case. Nevertheless his protests were rejected and a whole new stand was designed by the City Engineer's Department. The contractors were Higgins and Arcus Bros. and work began late in 1924, supervised by the City Engineer. The new stand was opened a year later at a cost of £16,710.

Not everyone thought a new grandstand, let alone keeping the Basin Reserve itself, was a good idea. *The Evening Post* reported on 24 March 1923 on a letter from "Foresight," who said the day would come when "the City Council trams must pass through the Basin Reserve instead of around it; and quite, right, too. In time to come Wellington is destined to become a large city, and the waste of time and wear and tear of track will not be tolerated. The amount that could be raised by the disposal of the Basin Reserve would go a long way in procuring a playground in much better surroundings."

The "handsome" new pavilion was officially opened on 17 October 1925 by the Mayor of Wellington, Mr C. J. H. Norwood, in the presence of a large number of representative citizens and sportsmen. He is reported as saying it afforded him a great deal of pleasure to perform such a ceremony. The health and physique of the future generation depended very largely on sport, and for that reason the City Council aimed at the encouragement of sports in the community.

For nearly 60 years the pavilion was used as ground entry (from Sussex Street) and for team changing rooms, clubrooms, storage, offices, sports club meetings and social events. The latter included weddings, dances such as the Kit Kat Dance Club's, smoke concerts, military and other reunions, and fundraisers. In July 1930, about 300 Maori from all parts of the North Island camped in the pavilion for the Maori All Blacks game against the British and Irish Lions.

In December 1940 the largest choir ever assembled in Wellington – 600 voices – sang Christmas carols and choruses from Handel's *Messiah* from the pavilion as part of a concert to fundraise for the All Purposes Patriotic Appeal. Also during World War Two, an emergency work camp was set up at the Basin Reserve and three other sites, because of an acute housing shortage in Wellington and the need to accommodate workers from out of town for construction of military and coastal defences, as well as for earthquake repairs. The pavilion, kitchen and meeting rooms were used as kitchen and mess halls but bathing and washing arrangements were crude, and the lines of huts in front of the pavilion were an eyesore.

After the RA Vance Stand was completed in 1980, the pavilion continued to be used as seating, but the old dressing rooms were no longer used and the tea rooms had been taken over by the cricket umpires for their weekly meetings. One umpire, Stanley Cowman, had accumulated a collection of cricket memorabilia which he displayed in the tea rooms during the test against Australia in February 1986. This display sparked an idea, and within 21 months, with the City Council's approval, Governor-General Sir Paul Reeves opened the permanent National Cricket Museum in the old tea rooms.

Today, the Museum Stand, as the pavilion is known, is a familiar Basin Reserve landmark, and remains in largely original condition with some fine spaces such as its main entrance, vestibule, stairs, and reception room. Unfortunately, it is yellow stickered, and strengthening and repairs are estimated to cost \$5 – 8 million. No funding is set aside for it, and recent reports indicate the Mayor, some Councillors, and the Basin Reserve Trust are keen to see it demolished, although a plan with options is set to go out for public consultation in August.



Photo: Historic Places Wellington, 11 May 2017

- Sue Watt

Sources:

'Basin Reserve', URL: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/basin-reserve>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 29-October-2014

Don Neely, obituary for John Oakley (d. 2013), published in the Cricket Wellington Annual Report 2012-2013

Historic Places Trust: Historic Area Assessment of the Basin Reserve, December 1998

Peter Wells, City, *My City*, Series 4, Part 5, The Biggest Roundabout in the Southern Hemisphere http://www.if-9.de/zei_b340.htm

History of New Zealand in 100 places list No.30 <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/basin-reserve>

Papers Past, Evening Post, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Matauranga o Aotearoa