



MT VICTORIA

Historical Society News

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Sunday, 11 March at 2.00 pm
Top of Mt Victoria, beside the lookout

Come dressed in Victorian costume, with a contribution to a Victorian afternoon tea.
Friends and families welcome.
(Cancelled if the weather is against us. If you feel a need to check, phone 027 7577 984).

A Victorian Picnic

In honour of Mary Taylor, and International Women's Day that week, MVHS is holding its second Victorian picnic. To find out more about the inspiration behind it, read the story of Mary Taylor over page.

Mt Victoria Heritage Study

The long-awaited Mt Victoria Heritage Study came out just before Christmas. Some of our members may already know this and even have received a letter from the Council if their house features in the report. As the Council says, it "has helped us understand what typifies the unique historic character of Mt Victoria's homes. It gives a fascinating insight into the development of your suburb and the history of various streets, areas and houses in Mt Victoria". While we might have hoped that it would cover more streets and houses, it is still a great piece of work.

Do check it out and let your neighbours know about it if they don't already. You can find it at www.wellington.govt.nz/mt-victoria-heritage-study-report. (At the same time, you could mention MVHS's significant involvement and even suggest they join the Society!)

Basin Reserve

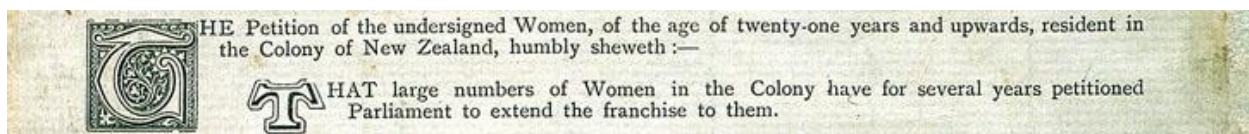
A number of people have expressed concern recently about the disappearing historic gates at the Basin Reserve.

Thanks to Historic Places Wellington, we can report that they are not being 'demolished'. The Council has apparently recently removed the internal timber ticket boxes to make them more open and easier to access and "resurfaced the tarmac within them". And as far as the Museum Stand is concerned, engineering firm Opus has completed an assessment of its condition and recommended a range of possible seismic strengthening options. The report is currently being peer-reviewed and a report is expected to go to Council before June. The report will present options to strengthen and retain the Stand, along with a demolition option.

Women's Suffrage Petition

Did any of your relatives sign the Women's Suffrage Petition 125 years ago? The Petition with signatures of 31,872 people was submitted to Parliament in 1893. Subsequently New Zealand became the first country in the world to grant the franchise to women. You can type in a surname and find out more at: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/womens-suffrage/petition>

Clicking on the page number will bring up a copy of the original petition image of that page.



<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/suffragist/jane-watt>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 8-Sep-2011

Mary Taylor and Mt Victoria connections

It seems appropriate, close to International Women's Day 2018, to celebrate the life of a Wellington resident who, 170 years ago, also forged a special connection with Mt Victoria. That young woman, Mary Taylor, may not be famous in the traditional manner but for adventurousness and achievement she is remarkable.

Mary arrived in Wellington in 1845. She was 28 years old and following in the wake of her younger brother, William Waring Taylor, who had arrived about two years earlier. Wellington was only five years old as an official settlement when Mary arrived, with just over 4,000 residents. Streets would have been alternately muddy or dusty; there was little intellectual or cultural life and few amenities. Mary's urge to leave her Yorkshire home, however, had been compelling.

Mary left behind in Yorkshire a close friend whom she had met at school and with whom she continued to correspond. That was Charlotte Bronte. She wrote about Mary (and Waring's) decision in a letter to her sister.

Mary has made up her mind up she cannot and will not be a governess, a teacher, a milliner, a bonnet maker nor housemaid. She sees no means of employment she would like in England, so she is leaving it. I counselled her to go to France likewise and stay there a year before she decided on this strange unlikely-sounding plan of going to New Zealand, but she is quite resolved. I cannot sufficiently comprehend what her views and those of her brothers may be on the subject or what is the extent of their information regarding Port Nicholson, to say whether this is a rational enterprise or absolute madness.

On arrival, Mary went to live with her brother in Te Aro. When Charlotte Bronte heard that conditions in Wellington were worse than expected, she sent her a gift of 10 pounds. Mary used this to begin buying and selling cattle. Later, she built a house on Cuba Street and leased it out for 10 shillings a week. She also earned money teaching the piano.

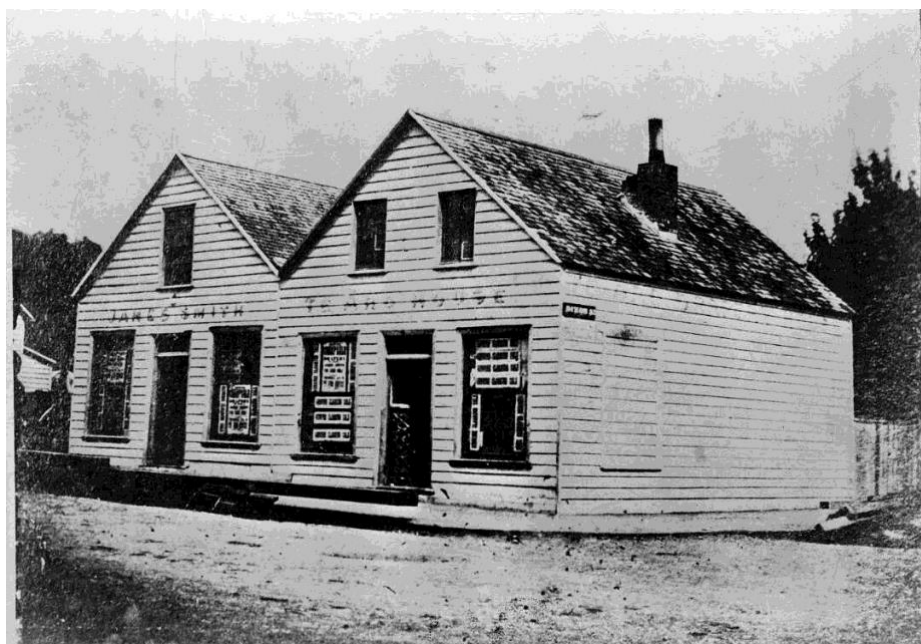
In 1848, Charlotte Bronte sent Mary a copy of her ground-breaking novel *Jane Eyre*. Mary was clearly excited and wrote:

Dear Charlotte. About a month since I received and read 'Jane Eyre'. It seemed to me incredible that you had actually written a book. Your novel surprised me as being so perfect a work of art . . . After I had read it, I went to the top of Mt Victoria and looked for a ship to carry a letter to you. There was a little thing with one mast, and also H.M.S. Fly and nothing else. If a cattle vessel came from Sydney she would take the mail, but we have had East wind for a month and nothing can come in.

The following year Mary's cousin, Ellen, arrived in Wellington. With financial assistance from Mary's brothers in England, the two opened a drapery store on the corner of Cuba and Dixon streets. They were successful and prospered despite hardships - 1855 saw the magnitude 8.2 earthquake and in 1856 the Cuba Street fire wiped out a number of warehouses and only because of unusually calm weather did not destroy much of the town. It was extraordinary, at the time, for women to be running such a venture. Ellen wrote to Charlotte Bronte:

Our keeping shop astonishes everybody here. I believe they think we do it for fun, some think we shall make nothing of it, or that we shall get tired, and all laugh at us.

Ellen died of tuberculosis in 1851 and for a while Mary continued to run the business alone. She extended the store, took on an assistant and seems to have been the first person in Wellington to import a sewing machine. The 1853 Wellington Almanac listed her enterprise as one of Wellington's principal stores.



James Smith's shop (formerly Mary Taylor's), cnr Cuba and Dixon Streets, 1866. ATL ½-003732-F

In 1858, however, she returned to England. Her shop was taken over by a Miss Smith and her sister, then bought by James Smith (no relation). That name lived on in Cuba Street retail history for over 100 years.

Between her return and her death in 1893, Mary published strongly worded articles advocating women's rights, continuing work she had begun in Wellington. In 1870 they were published as a book, *The first Duty of Women*, arguing for women to become independent by earning their own living. She also wrote a feminist novel.

In her 13 years in Wellington, Mary contributed significantly to its development and later wrote she expected that on her deathbed she would find that her time in Wellington was the most agreeable of her life.

Joanna Newman