



MT VICTORIA

Historical Society News

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Heritage Panel Unveiling

Sunday, November 18, 2.30pm

Join us to celebrate the end of our major project to interpret and display Mt Victoria's history for the public. Famous Mt Victoria resident Gaylene Preston will reveal the panel. This will be followed by light refreshments.

(Further details on your personal invitation)

No. 62 Brougham Street

It's always exciting to see an historic house being restored and converted back to a single dwelling after many years as multiple flats. No. 62 was built in 1897 for Thomas Whyte Young on one of the three contiguous Town Acres he owned. Several years earlier he had built for himself the house at 46 Brougham Street (until a few years ago Crossways Community Centre). Young was a wine and spirit merchant with a business on Jervois Quay. He had arrived in New Zealand from Scotland in 1859, with his brother. They established their business in about 1865, and operated throughout the country from large premises on Jervois Quay.

Town Belt changes

To those who know and love Mt Victoria, the Town Belt is not simply an urban feature of Wellington. Our suburb is defined by it and for many of us it is a priceless treasure or taonga – rain or shine we walk its paths, alone or with friends (human or canine), delight in tuis and fantails, plant trees or in other ways enjoy it. In 1839 the directors of the New Zealand Company sent instructions to the surveyor-general, Captain W.M. Smith R.A, regarding the plan of Wellington and the reservation of the Town Belt. They it considered necessary to provide for "the beautiful appearance of the future city... rather than the immediate profit of the Company". They specified that the outside of the town should be separated by a broad belt of land "to be public property, on condition that no building be ever erected upon it". The 1873 Deed states that the Town Belt is to be kept forever "as a public Recreation ground for the inhabitants of Wellington".

Wellington City Council is proposing new legislation to govern the Town Belt, and the Town Belt Management Plan has been revised and is out for consultation.

A series of public meetings have been held recently but if you missed them and would like to know more, you can get a copy of the draft Plan and drafting instructions for the legislation from the Council's offices. Changes proposed are significant and will have a lasting impact. Mt Victoria Historical Society will be preparing a submission on these (due December 10) and if you would like to know more don't hesitate to contact us. We will also endeavour to prepare our submission in time to share a draft with members and you may wish to use it to prepare a submission of your own.

Basin Reserve Flyover

It appears that NZTA may be very close to announcing its plans to build a motorway flyover. MVHS remains opposed to this plan because of the irreparable damage it will do to the unique historic precinct of the Basin Reserve and Mother Aubert's crèche and to the heritage of southern Mt Victoria. We favour a transport solution which preserves heritage and offers better urban design outcomes. If you would like to keep informed or become more involved by being on the Save the Basin email list, contact tjonescan@gmail.com.

Annual General Meeting

At the annual general meeting in September the committee of the previous year was re-elected: Joanna Newman (Convenor), Sue Watt (Treasurer), David McCrone, David Lee and Judy Southworth.

Historical Note

In the last newsletter, we touched on the connection between 105 Brougham Street and Ace House next door, promising to reveal more. Turn over to find out more about distinctive Ace House.

Ace House, 111 Brougham Street



This elegant house was built in 1906 for Alexander Gray, on part of what was known as the Gray Estate – the last major subdivision on Mt Victoria – and next door to his mother’s house. At the time, Alex had not long been married to Mary Nelson, whom he had wed in 1904.

The house was of a quality and status befitting such a successful and well-respected lawyer. It was designed by well-known Christchurch architect, Samuel Hurst Seager.

When tender notices appeared in the local paper for its construction, James Walter Chapman Taylor put in a bid and was successful. The house was a classic Arts and Crafts masterpiece by Hurst Seager. Chapman Taylor was not yet the well-known architect he would become and it was a chance for him to display his high-quality construction methods and building management abilities. Chapman Taylor was later to become famous for his own Arts and Crafts architecture, though it was influenced by a slightly different style, and this was no doubt part of the attraction in seeking the job.

By 1900 Seager had become recognised as a leading designer of large houses in the English Domestic Revival style and many such houses are found throughout Canterbury. He was also influenced by the English Arts and Crafts movement and introduced the bungalow style to New Zealand. Seager was committed to the social role of architecture. In partnership with Cecil Wood (from 1906 until about 1912) he designed the worker’s dwelling which was built as part of the 1906 Heretaunga settlement in Petone. He was also a pioneering advocate for the preservation of historic buildings.



Samuel Hurst Seager, circa 1910, photographed by Herman John Schmidt Alexander Turnbull Library 1/1-001927-G

When Wellington architect, Martin Hill, visited the house in 2000 he commented “there is no sign today of timber movement in the extensive joinery and panelled walls, especially where concealed doors in the panelling still seem as new”.

“A very noble and upright gentleman, Sir Alexander Gray”



Evening Post 03.01.9133, Alexander Turnbull Library

Alexander Gray was born in 1860 while his family lived in New Plymouth. His parents and one son had arrived in 1852 and his father became Postmaster in New Plymouth. They moved to Wellington in 1870 when his father was appointed Inspector of Post Offices.

Alex was educated at Wellington Grammar School (which became Wellington College). His schooling ended when he was 14 years old, though, and he started work as a cadet in the Attorney- General’s office. He remained there for just two years before being articled to Francis Bell of Izard and Bell. Five years later, when he was admitted to the bar, he moved to the Wairarapa and became a junior partner in a Greytown firm. Then, in 1886 he returned to Wellington and founded a firm in which, with various changes in partners, he was still working at his death.

Alex married Mary Nelson, originally from Milton in Otago, in 1904 and they had two children.

Gray’s reputation grew over the years and in 1912 he was appointed a King’s Counsel. He was president of the Wellington Law Society, then president of the New Zealand Law Society from 1926. He took part in many important cases, notably the Auckland Hospital Inquiry of 1926, and was famous for his “cool, incisive mind, his wide grasp of the most complicated details and his patient and persuasive manner”. He was widely considered one of New Zealand’s foremost legal counsel and a man of “exceptional personal charm”. In 1933 he was knighted in the New Year’s Honours.

Alex Gray lived in this house until he died suddenly in April 1933. A service was conducted at his home and thousands of people lined the streets as his funeral procession of cars “several blocks long” passed through the city to Karori Cemetery. His wife, Lady Mary Gray, lived on there until 1938.

The house was then bought by a Mrs William (Isabel Joyce) Seater who had various boarders over the years until the last date we have researched, which was 1945.