



MT VICTORIA

Historical Society News

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Sunday, September 22 at 2.30 pm
Crossways, 6 Roxburgh Street

Annual General Meeting

followed by

Where did I Go? Tips on preserving your digital photos for future generations

(Refreshments will be served)

Membership renewals

Membership renewals are coming to you with this newsletter. If you have joined the Society since January 1st this year, you can ignore this as your subscription extends to cover the 2012-13 year.

Board of Inquiry on the Basin Reserve flyover

Mt Victoria Historical Society will be making a submission to the Board of Inquiry to be held by the Environmental Protection Agency into the resource consents for the Basin Reserve flyover. Our key focus will be the impact of the project on the unique heritage of the Basin Reserve. This land is meant to be an open recreation space for all Wellingtonians, owned by us. It is not only an iconic world-class cricket ground, loved by cricket fans around the world for its special character, but an historic site registered by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust (NZHPT). New Zealand Transport Agency and Wellington City Council acknowledge that the flyover will have a significant impact on the heritage. Once completed, our initial submission will be placed on our website for all to read. A detailed submission will then be developed, which we will speak to at the Board of Inquiry, along with an expert heritage witness. If you would like to make an individual submission, the deadline for submissions is Friday September 6. If you'd like assistance in doing this, feel free to contact us via our website.

Second Mt Victoria tunnel

We were concerned at the editorial in the Mt Victoria Newsletter this month which said that a second tunnel would have little effect on the southern end of Mt Victoria, and particularly on Paterson Street. It will affect properties on Ellice Street, which back onto the road leading to it and, based on current public information available from NZTA, will require removal or moving of most houses along Paterson Street. These houses represent important Wellington heritage - particularly Waring Taylor's house built in 1869 (where the original wooden shingles were recently discovered under the corrugated iron roofing). It could also result in damage to Landscape Apartments at the south end of Austin Street, home to many residents.

MVRA has organised a meeting at which NZTA representatives will speak about the proposed second tunnel after its AGM, on Thursday September 5 at Crossways, 6 Roxburgh St (AGM 7.30 pm; speaker about 8.00 pm). You are welcome to attend, even if you're not a financial member of MVRA.

Harcourts building

If you're interested in wider Wellington heritage, you may have been following the Harcourt's case, at least as it is reported in the DomPost. This is an extremely important case for heritage nation-wide, centring as it does on proposed demolition of a Category 1 registered historic building. As you might imagine, press reports do not tell the full story. NZHPT is fighting the demolition, supported by Historic Places Wellington and others. Historic Places Wellington, the new organisation formed to replace NZHPT branches, is now nearly one year old and thriving. It will only get stronger in its support of Wellington heritage and organisations like ours which also work hard to do so. If you would like to join and enjoy some wonderful experiences exploring wider Wellington heritage you can do so through the Historic Places Aotearoa website:

<http://historicplacesaotearoa.org.nz/>.

Mt Victoria demolition

We are opposing resource consent to demolish 69 Hawker Street. The proposal includes building into the property at 71 Hawker Street, in a way which also appears to heighten the risk of demolition of No. 71. You can find more information about the history and significance of these two buildings on our website under Historical Notes: www.mvhs.wellington.net.nz

“A medieval castle overlooking the city”

As construction neared completion on the top of Mount Victoria in 1927, this is how the Evening Post newspaper described the new radio broadcasting station for 2YA.



2YA under construction 1927. *Alexander Turnbull Library EP-0997-1/2-G*



2YA, circa 1930. *Alexander Turnbull Library 1/2-046043-G*

“The four concrete walls and the concrete roof, which is flat and surrounded by battlements and surmounted by a little tower, are now practically finished . . . There is nothing remarkable in the building itself except the large amount of window space; in fact the four walls may be said to be all pieces and windows.” It also reported that the men who had been working on the building “can now speak with authority on the subject of the velocity of Wellington’s winds, of how the rain is dashed against the hillside, and blown over their heads like sea-spray or fog.”

The launch of the new radio station was awaited with excitement throughout the country. This was still the early days of radio - national broadcasting in New Zealand had only become a real possibility with the introduction of legislation and regulations in 1924 and 1925. This new station was the first intended to reach across the whole country, with its 5 kilowatt power and location on Mt Victoria. (It proved not to be the case, however, as the manufacturer’s promises did not take into account the geography of New Zealand which meant, at the time, that the West Coast was essentially part of Australia’s broadcasting audience rather than being able to receive anything from within New Zealand borders.)

This radio station, and 2YA, were established by the Radio Broadcasting Company Ltd. It was a private company, which had been established in 1925, but it was largely funded through radio dealers’ licences and licence fees, heavily regulated by government and had, of necessity, a close relationship to the State. It became the national broadcaster.

The Radio Broadcasting Company was established by Ambrose Reeves Harris and William Goodfellow. Harris had his own electrical engineering and importing company in Christchurch, A.R. Harris Ltd. Harris had worked with Thomas Edison in the US on various of the famous early experiments in the transmission of sound. When he returned to NZ, he represented Edison’s interests here. Almost as interesting as Harris’s own background is the fact that the person chosen by the company as clerk of works for the construction project in Wellington was Mrs R.M. Dixon, the accountant in his Christchurch firm. Mrs Dixon had gained her first experience as a clerk of works in construction of the Harris Building in Christchurch. “It was here that she gained the intimate knowledge of awards which stood her in such good stead for her work in Wellington. Not only did she source all the material for the station at Mount Victoria, attend to all accounts, and pay the men their wages, but it was she who first approached the City Council for the building permit, and obtained it in quick time. “Wellington is a very businesslike town”, Mrs. Dixon declared.

On opening night, July 16 1927, The Evening Post was at pains to point out that “in order to broadcast their talent on the ether it will be quite unnecessary for performers to ascend to the “castle” on Mount Victoria, as some people seem to think will be the case”. 2YA started with two hours programming from 8-10 pm. A very small number of staff had to do everything to run the station. Like all radio stations at this time, it depended largely on volunteers for programme content – locals who came in to sing, recite or play music. There was little understanding of programming, although a few people were employed as announcers. For a while, though, because of the novelty, the audience was satisfied just to hear broadcasts. Music became the mainstay but regulations permitted only a small amount of recorded music.

The first broadcast from 2YA had occurred before the official opening, however. It was a sports commentary on 9 July 1927 on a Ranfurly Shield match between Hawkes Bay and Wairarapa. Although it was only a test, because of the power of the new transmitter it was heard by many parts of the country and gave a great boost to the popularity of sports broadcasting.

By New Year’s Eve 1927, 2YA was broadcasting from 3.00 pm in the afternoon until close-down at ten minutes past midnight. The programme ranged through Children’s Hour with Aunt Gwen and pupils of Miss Gwen Shepherd (including the delightful sounding recitation, “The Soliloquy of a Chicken”), vocal selections rendered by members of the Wellington Renshaw Quartet, humorous recitations by Mr R. Walpole, steel guitar duets by Berthold and Bent, comedian Mr Doug Stark, Sherwood singing “Queen of My Heart”, weather and cricket results at 9.00 pm and, to round out the night, a relay of New Year’s Eve Watch Night Service from St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church.