



MT VICTORIA

Historical Society News

For more information contact:
Joanna Newman on 385 2254 (hm)
www.mtvictoria.history.org

No. 84, June 2018

A MIDWINTER SHOW AND TELL

Join us for a convivial afternoon tea and bring along one or two heritage items that mean something to you, or have an interesting story.

Share their stories and hear the tales behind items brought by others.
Items with Mt Victoria or Wellington connections particularly welcome!

Sunday, June 24 at 3.00 pm. Friends Meeting House, Moncrieff Street

To help with catering, if you think you'll be coming please RSVP to jonewman@xtra.co.nz

Forthcoming events

September 23 - AGM, followed by a presentation on the amazing stories from one of the smallest streets in Mt Victoria: Stafford Street.

There may also be a late August event – watch for news.

Government House visits

Some of us are used to waiting for special open days at Government House to have the privilege of visiting, so we thought we'd let you know that you now have many more options for a two-hour visit. You can either join a public tour, or organise your own group of more than 6 people. For more information go to: <https://gg.govt.nz/government-house/government-house-wellington/government-house-tours>.

Intensification pressure

There's lots of pressure coming on historic Mt Victoria. We discovered, at a meeting recently organised by MVRA, that the Council has very little interest in curbing the exuberance of developers or respecting the heritage values of the suburb and the margins of Mt Vic along Kent Terrace are particularly under threat. With the very large site of Rowena's backpacker hostel recently sold, along with four adjacent properties, we will be watching plans for those sites carefully.

A restoration

On the other hand, another 'developer' is privately restoring the old Ace House. Although the old oak tree has sadly been removed, it is wonderful to see this important Chapman Taylor house being revived. Check out Newsletter 63 for more information on its history: <http://mtvictoria.history.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Newsletter-63-November-2012.-Ace-House.pdf>.

Sale of another significant property

Another very prominent building which has changed hands in the last month or so is No. 56 Pirie Street. It's fate is not yet known, but it has a fascinating history and we can only hope it will be renovated to a standard befitting the company it keeps next door.



Historical Note

56 Pirie St

In 1883, Eleanor Waters purchased a vacant lot where this once-grand house now stands. Eleanor Waters was Eleanor Tutchen before her marriage. This land was once part of her family's dairy farm where, from about 1854 to 1882, the Tutchens farmed cows for town milk supply here and in the 1870's owned seven town acres. When Eleanor's mother died in 1882, the last three acres were sold for subdivision.

The nine-room, two-storey house, called Dorset House, was built around 1887 on the site of an earlier cottage. In 1889 the property was bought by William Harrington Atack.

William Atack was Manager of the United Press Association. He had come to the colony as a small child with his family, who settled in Christchurch, in 1859. He later joined the literary staff on the *Lyttelton Times*, where he was sub-editor. After eleven years there he left to accept the Press Association position in Wellington in January 1886. He was 29 years old when he joined the Press Association and was credited with pioneering its work throughout the country. He was manager for 44 years. He was also a prominent member of the Press Gallery.



Left: Board of the United Press Association 1902, WH Atack back row, 2nd left.
Alexander Turnbull Library
PAColl-D-0744

Below: Father Alexei Godyaev in 1950.
Alexander Turnbull Library
114/192/08-G

Atak was a keen amateur sportsman and became a well-known rugby referee. But his real claim to fame is that he was the first to introduce a whistle on the field. (The Press Association was only wound up in 2011, after 132 years.)

From 1953 to 1995 the house hosted the Russian Orthodox Church.

The first immigrants to New Zealand after the Second World War included Soviet people. The first Russians, who arrived by sea in June 1949, were placed in Pahiatua Camp but a few months after their arrival they started to move to Wellington and other centres. Those who settled in Wellington wrote to the Australian Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, asking to have a priest sent to New Zealand. In September 1950, father Alexei Godyaev arrived in Wellington, the only Russian Orthodox priest in the country. The first services took place in an Anglican church in evenings because father Alexei, who had qualifications in chemistry, worked in a dairy factory during the day. Both he and his parish longed to have their own church.

They found the house in Pirie Street. Quickly, they turned it into a church and regular services started immediately. The Church linked the people with the land they had lost and with their culture, especially important during the Stalin era when most had no hope of returning home.

The house was paid off in 1955, with funds for the purchase and refurbishing coming from donations, paying concerts and the rent paid by the tenants in the rooms upstairs. Father Alexei worked for the Church for almost 40 years and the church in Pirie Street survived for 40 years. In 1995, the building was sold and the church moved to Webb Street.

Since then, and until it was sold this year, the house has been in flats.

By Joanna Newman

