



# MT VICTORIA

## Historical Society News

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**No. 91, February 2020**

## A guided walk exploring historical Ellice Street

with Alan Olliver

**Sunday, February 23<sup>rd</sup> at 2.30 pm**

Meet at 'Bogarts Corner' at the bottom of Ellice Street, where Kent Terrace meets the Basin Reserve roundabout.

(Cancelled if wet)

### Next Event



On **Sunday March 8<sup>th</sup>** we will again hold our Victorian picnic at the top of Mt Victoria, to commemorate the day in 1848 when Mary Taylor climbed the hill to look for a ship to take a letter to her friend, Charlotte Bronte, in England.

Come dressed in Victorian costume, with a small afternoon tea contribution, to learn more about Mary Taylor and enjoy the company of Historical Society members and friends. Meet at 2.30pm at the top of the steps to the lookout. (Cancelled if wet.)

### One hundred years ago

The NZHistory.govt.nz website tells us that a number of notable things happened in New Zealand a century ago in 1920: our first female Olympian competed at the Olympics as part of our first team ever; the first flight across Cook Strait took place; and, in what was possibly also a world first, a murderer was convicted almost entirely on the basis of fingerprint evidence.

At a more local level, one of the most newsworthy events to take place in Mount Victoria in 1920 was the Pirie Street tram crash (see Newsletter No. 66 <http://mtvictoria.history.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Newsletter-66-June-2013.-Pirie-Street-tram-crash-1920.pdf>).

Browsing the National Library Papers Past website to see whether any other momentous events had touched on life in Mount Victoria, also surfaced this gem from the Dominion on September 10 . . . . .

Further requests that women workers should be paid the same cost of living bonus as is received by men were made in the Arbitration Court at Auckland on Wednesday, says the "Herald." "We are all the same," said Mr. G. Poore, who appeared on behalf of the Musicians' Union. "There is no differentiation between males and females. A woman might be playing lead in the orchestra, and a man might be playing the drums." Mr. Justice Stringer said it was not a question of wages, but of the cost of living bonus. It did not matter whether the wage was £1 or £5 a week.

"The girls would spend their lunch money on silk stockings," remarked Mr. Justice Stringer at the Arbitration Court at Auckland on Thursday, when considering a clause in the restaurant, tea, and refreshment room workers' award. The proposal was that a sum of 1s. per day should be paid to the waitresses and other employees whose employers could not provide a hot meal. His Honour added that the girls would pocket the money and content themselves with the cold meal provided, thus defeating the object of the clause. The decision of the Court was reserved.—"Star."

## A Second Mount Victoria Tunnel

This year marks one hundred years since the debate and pressure for a second Mount Victoria tunnel really started to heat up. (And, no, those dates are not wrong - the Pirie Street, Hataitai tunnel was number one and the current "Mount Victoria tunnel" would be the "second". Any new tunnel this century would be a third tunnel through the suburb of Mount Victoria.) In those days, the tram tunnel from Pirie Street through to Hataitai was often called the Mount Victoria tunnel.



*Coming of the motor age – family car, early 1920s*

From An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand edited by AH McIntock, originally published 1966.  
Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand

Figures for car ownership in Wellington in 1920 haven't been located but, in 1925, the year cars were first required to be registered in New Zealand, there were 71,000 in the entire country. By 1931, with one car to every 7.1 persons, Wellington East was the most motorised place in the entire country. (By contrast, in Wellington City alone in 2018, there were over 95,600.)

A second tunnel was first raised as a possibility in 1914, just seven years after the opening of the Hataitai tunnel. Then, the Mayor had proposed a loan of £70,000 to build one, but World War I intervened. The issue resurfaced in 1919.

From the start of 1920, however, residents to the east of Mount Victoria started serious agitation for another tunnel. The existing tram tunnel was considered a very "inferior orifice". They were feeling "seriously handicapped by the lack of a 'short cut'" and that "the disabilities under which some 10,000 people are labouring have become so acute that the authorities are now compelled to seek some better means to provide access to the districts on the east side of Mount Victoria."

A meeting of the Hataitai Municipal Electors' Association in February decided to convene a gathering of all residents east of the tunnel as soon as possible. Those present at that meeting agreed to send a deputation to the Council to press for a new tunnel for traffic and pedestrians and for funding for it to be included in the next loan schedule. The argument to be presented was that another tunnel was necessary to prevent the economic waste caused by cars having to drive an extra three-quarters of a mile via Constable Street, to remove the estimated additional £15 per household paid for cartage to the eastern suburbs, and to eliminate the delays experienced waiting in a single line to enter the existing tunnel.

In April, the deputation met with Council to put their case, including the hope that any tunnel would "fully cope with the requirements of the district". As a result, the City Engineer was asked to report on the matter.

Another group, the Eastern Suburbs Citizens' League, was formed in June to add its voice to the cause.

The Council duly presented the proposed loan schedule for its term in August but, although most councillors said they supported a second Mount Victoria tunnel, there was no provision for it in the document. During the discussion that ensued, it emerged that Mayor Luke did not agree with the proposal to make a loan for a second tunnel, and other Councillors also questioned how provision could be made for the suggested £160,000 when they did not know where a tunnel would go through. In the end, however, it was approved and the final schedule included provision for £161,250 for a tunnel.

At a public meeting in the Town Hall in September, the Mayor explained that it was still his view that the time was not right for a car and pedestrian tunnel but that, if it was going to happen, it should do so as soon as possible. Debate and lobbying continued until the public vote on the loan schedule in September. Among other contributions, the Eastern Suburbs Citizens' League announced that it had the opinion of a prominent engineer that it could be constructed for much less than £161,250.

In the vote on September 15, the whole loan schedule was approved by the ratepayers of Wellington City. Analysis revealed that "the energy of Hataitai and Kilbirnie and the Eastern Suburbs is indicated by the fact that more votes, for or against, were cast on the Mount Victoria tunnel proposal than on any other proposal save water supply."

In the event, funding for tunnel construction did not materialise until 1929. The £161,000 finally came from Government in the form of Unemployment Relief Works Loan No. 3, and the tunnel was finally opened in 1931.



Elizabeth Street, 1920s.

Wellington City Council Archives, 00117-1-13  
(New Century Hall on Kent Terrace to the right of  
Elizabeth St was opened by the Wellington Association  
of Spiritualists in 1900.)