

Onslow Historical Society

Newsletter

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86 Khandallah Road, Wellington, 6035

Newsletter Spring 2024

Dear members, kia ora

The WCC Archives Manager, Adrian Humphris, is to host a visit by your Committee early next month to view the OHS archives, now securely transferred. We're grateful to Past President Judy Siers for having overseen that important project through to completion. She recently achieved the deposit of the Johnsonville Community Association archives as well. The transfers are to be commended, given the professional and accessible nature of WCC Archives, especially at its new site on Customhouse Quay.

The transfer has allowed us to adjust the main room display at KATE, and we're pleased to have added an early-telephone display. It's most fitting for the building, given the previous disappointment of some visitors to KATE without finding such information. George Walter and John Wilson are to be thanked for their efforts.

Thanks also to our regular KATE hosts, including especially to John Galloway for coordinating hosts and to Claire Bibby for making a useful report about how we can improve visitor experience at KATE.

We had a further successful book launch at KATE: Ian Stroud's Motor Transportation book which reproduced many of the photos from the Bell Bus collection held with OHS.

We have three upcoming events:

The Heritage Festival Walk hosted by Chris Horne on 28 October, which is pretty nearly full already, so please let John Galloway know if you wish to tour the historic and ecological sites of Moto Kairangi (Miramar Peninsular). jghalloway@slingshot.co.nz

Members are invited to visit the blooming Halfway House garden on **3 November** at 3pm. We will be hosted by Claire Bibby for afternoon tea.

Please diary the OHS Christmas afternoon tea party to be held on Sunday 24 November from 3pm at KATE. We will have some entertainment and delicious food for you.

OHS intends to have a stall at both the J'ville Xmas market (30 Nov) and the Khandallah Village Fair (8 Dec) to demonstrate our local presence and encourage new members.

It's been great to write a regular weekly "Onslow History" column for the Independent Herald. I've written eight now, drawing on Onslow Historians; our other publications; on the material in the Johnsonville archives; and from Julie Bremen's two informative books "Wellington's Northern Suburbs" 1840-1918 and 1919-1945. Copies of the later are available from OHS. One of my columns is reproduced below for your interest.

Committee member and professional historian John Martin will be editor of future Onslow Historian publications.

Viv Chapple, as Chair of the Ngaio Residents & OHS Joint Centenary Committee, has applied for WCC funding for next year's Ngaio Town Hall centenary celebration.

OHS's lawyer has written twice to Chorus, renewing our lease for a further five-year term as provided for in our formal lease. Chorus take the view however that our right to renew is a "typo" and that they are now treating us as if we are on a month-to-month arrangement. Short of putting our case once again, it seems something of a difference of views remains. However, acknowledging their generosity to us for many years and the inevitability of disposal, we will express our interest in seeking (somehow) to purchase the building. Of course that will need significant funding and generosity, firstly from amongst ourselves. I'm keen to hear from any members who are in a position to assist us financially with this. It's a wonderful building, and the identity of, and connection with, OHS is deeply felt and entwined.

We've got a positive and collaborative committee bringing together a number of skills. It's a pleasure to work with them and I thank them all. Also thanks to Geraldine Needham-Girven for keeping our website and Facebook up to date and informative.

Regards & nga mihi to you all,

Felicity Wong
President



Felicity Wong
On the TV One
news talking
about the
Dixson Street
Flats

Coming Events

28th October 2024. Wellington Heritage Festival.
Guided walk of MotoKairangi / Miramar Peninsular by Chris Horne.
Meet opposite former Mt Crawford prison gates, Maupuia, at 11.00am.
RSVP to onslowhistorical@gmail.com or to John Galloway 478 7603

3rd November 2024. The Halfway House Visit, Glenside.
Garden looks great at this time of the year. Cost per head: \$5.00
Meet at The Halfway House, 246 Middleton Road, Glenside,
Johnsonville, at 1.00pm
Bring cash for heritage seeds, Moth & Butterfly postcards or
vintage seed packets.

24th November 2024. Christmas Party at KATE, 86 Khandallah Road at 3.30pm.
Come and see the changes at KATE.
Will this be the last Christmas Party at KATE? Not to be missed.

8th December 2024. The Khandallah Village Fair 10.00am -3.00pm.
We will have a stand there.

9th March 2025. Kapiti and Coffee, A visit to Waikanae Kapiti Museum.
Meet at 9 Elizabeth Street, Waikanae at 2.00pm. Follow by afternoon tea.

Next Committee meeting: Saturday 19th October.2024.

Enthralling talk on war history



Tom McGrath making his presentation to the Onslow Historical Society. Photo: Supplied.

By Frank Neill

Karori resident Tom McGrath captivated members of the Onslow Historical Society on 24 July with his talk on the impact World War One and World War Two had on his family.

Tom's father, Hugh, served in World War Two, and did not say much about his experiences.

Because of that his wartime story didn't unravel until Tom made a chance discovery of hundreds of letters, photos and postcards stuffed into boxes and attaché cases and scattered throughout a suburban house.

Recognising that war stories told from the

ranks were in short supply, Tom wrote a book on the subject.

Entitled "Wartime Secrets from the Family Home", the story that unfolds in the book was the basis of Tom's enthralling presentation.

Tom McGrath is a former teacher, factory inspector, union organiser, parliamentary research officer and polytechnic lecturer, and is now an author.

His talk was followed by a war-themed supper, which was also well received. The historical society is exploring food matching at its events as part of its cultural history.

The society welcomes new members and more information is on its website www.onslowhistorical.nz.

Good turnouts for the book launch of Tom McGrath's book *War time secrets*

The Society is now writing stories for the Independent Herald. This is a great way of recounting history and promoting the Society.

Job Vacancies. The Society still needs help with its website and Facebook. Someone must know of someone who can help, as this is now very urgent. A small honorarium is possible.

An additional Sunday KATE host is sought.

Must be friendly and keen to help others do research.

INDEPENDENT Herald

4 March 1985

Demolition threat halted by local historians

Khandallah may soon have a museum.

A visit by the Postmaster-General, Jonathan Hunt, has greatly benefitted the Onslow Historical Society's plan to set up a museum in the old Khandallah Telephone Exchange.

The building was marked for demolition, but now the Post Office are reconsidering.

The Herald of February 18 described how three locals wanted to save the exchange building which was to be demolished to provide three carparks.

They felt that the old concrete building would make an ideal museum for the Onslow Historical Society.

It is central, of a suitable size and close to Simla Crescent Station.

First, they met Post Office

officials and Cr Rex Nicholls to push their case.

They were told the building would be expensive to strengthen as it was an earthquake risk.

But they didn't give up. Don Barber, Julie Bremner and Judy Siers visited the Postmaster-General, Jonathan Hunt, who also lives in Khandallah.

"We were most sympathetically received by Jonathan Hunt," Judy Siers said.

"We're thrilled with the response we've had from the Post Office who are bending over backwards to help us."

The Post Office are now reconsidering their plans for the site and the possibility of the old building being retained.

They are negotiating with the city council to see if they

can come up with a satisfactory alternative.

Councillor Rosemary Young-Rouse also phoned the Herald after seeing the article about the museum proposal.

She was upset to hear the building might be demolished as its type of architecture was rare in the suburban setting and should be retained.

Although the Post Office was a commercial organisation she said it was owned by the country, and if a building was worth keeping, as she was sure this one was, it should be preserved.

Cr Young-Rouse suggested that the building could be put out to tender and converted into a charming home so that its architectural features would not be lost to the area.

The Post Office only had two buildings of this type in

by Sue Upton

the Wellington area. The other in Miramar has been altered so that this is the only one still free-standing," she said.

Cr Rex Nicholls who attended the first meeting between the PO and local historians admitted to feeling there was little hope of saving the building at that time.

"I admit I was rather negative but I am delighted locals have pushed the thing along," he said.

"It just shows what initiative can do."

However Judy Siers is not getting excited yet.

"The building is not saved yet," she said, "but the Post Office have been fabulous, reconsidering their plans at this stage for us."

OHS Membership is now open.

Now is a good time to get your friends and family to join.

As a financial member of the Society we hope you will encourage other people to join.

If we do not invite them they may not join.

For an annual subscription of only \$35.00, they get the Historian Magazine, a quarterly emailed newsletter, trips, meetings and access to K.A.T.E.

Join them up now

Halfway House and Heritage Garden

3rd November



The Halfway House is an old name given to an Accommodation House on the Porirua Road, halfway between Wellington and Porirua. The first Halfway House was licensed to sell alcohol and was occupied by the Wall family, from at least 1842, possibly earlier. They sold to Anthony McKain in 1849. McKain's Halfway House was licensed and situated in the vicinity of the entrances to present day Twigland Gardeners World and Glenside Reserve.

We know this, as its location was marked on a surveyor's map by Thomas Henry Fitzgerald when the military men and Māori upgraded the road to Porirua between 1846 and 1849. In about 1855, the Halfway House came into the hands of the Clapham and Edwards families, hoteliers, related by marriage. From 1866 the mail and passenger coach between Wellington and Porirua stopped at the Halfway House twice daily. In the 1870's the house was bought by Alexander and Margaret Brown. They built the big house we know today as the Halfway House and named it Gowan Bank. It was likely built as a private home however the name Halfway House continued to be used by locals and is still used today! The old Halfway House burned down in 1891. It had been tenanted and was described in newspapers as having four rooms and a brick chimney.

After a succession of owners, the big Halfway House and farm was bought by Wellington City Council in 1951 for a reserve. Glenside Reserve now comprises 13 hectares (35 acres). Council restored the house, and it was officially opened in 2017. The public rooms are furnished with antiques by the Glenside Progressive Assn. Inc. and are available for hire to small groups. The gardens have been lovingly created and maintained by volunteers from the Glenside community and the Halfway House Heritage Gardeners, with the orchard planted in 2016.

The gardeners only use plants that were in New Zealand before 1900. Many are treasured plants from family gardens, handed down through the generations. The gardeners maintain an online register of pre 1900 plants in the garden.

<https://www.glenside.org.nz/heritage-gardeners.html> Some of the history about the early days of the Halfway House is also on the Glenside website <https://www.glenside.org.nz/halfway-house.html> The house is heritage listed on the District Plan and the section on which it stands is gazetted Historic Reserve. The Heritage Gardeners are looking forward to hosting the Onslow Historic Society in the gardens for an interesting walk and talk and will open the public rooms for viewing.

To help promote the Society Felicity Wong has been writing a series of articles for *The Independent Herald*.

We also have new events coming up, and have reorganized the displays at KATE.

Onslow history: story of Bell Bus Co

By Felicity Wong

The Bell Bus Company started in 1921 by providing tours around marine drive and in 1925 extended to regular services to Ngaio and Khandallah.

For 11 years owners Mr and Mrs Norman Bell ran profitable services between the cenotaph and the hill suburbs.

Mrs Ada (Pixie) Bell was an experienced World War I ambulance driver and became New Zealand's first woman bus driver.

Her skilful driving was admired and trusted when the Ngaio Gorge road was a narrow steep track and one vehicle had to reverse to let another pass.

The then liberal Government planned the deviation of the Main Trunk railway (via Johnsonville) through new tunnels to the Tawa Flat.

The "Tawa deviation" would bypass the extraordinarily steep incline to Johnsonville which required double steam engines to haul the train up the hill.

The Railways proposed offering the old Johnsonville train track to the Wellington City Council for a tramway.

In 1934 residents mobilised and set up a committee chaired by H I Cummings, (Ngaio Progressive Association and Superintending Engineer with the Post Office), and members of the Khandallah Progress Association and the Johnsonville Town Board.

The committee lobbied to retain a branch link for commuters and welcomed the 1935 Labour Government plan to keep the line and electrify it.

"Opposition was raised" however as the general public was just beginning to realise that "under the protection required by the railway" the Government would require the private bus service to stop running.

Khandallah residents who lived distant from the railway line but were well served by the bus expressed concern.

Mr Todd said "the dangerous thing is that if the railways get power to have an absolute monopoly there will then be no moving them. At present if we are not satisfied with the buses we can get a change.

"We have a certain amount of control.

"Nobody wants to block the children," he said, referring to the argument in favour of the railway electrification, and the Bill that secondary school children would be carried free "but I do not see why they should block us".

He suggested a public meeting to "let the public speak for itself".

While the committee had been successful in persuading the Government not only to retain the branch line but to electrify it, in October 1935 the news reported that residents "had not been consulted".

A meeting was held soon and a resident said "the trouble was that many people ... had not foreseen that the buses would be forced off.

"It had come as shock and it took some time for people to reconcile themselves and it had been asked whether the Bell Bus Company had ever been given an opportunity to state what service it could put on".

There were differing recollections about Mr Bell's position, and about fares, capacity and the need for any

subsidy. Concerns were expressed about the unemployment of the drivers.

The local Independent (conservative) MP, Robert Wright, said he "hoped there would be fair value given" to the owners.

The Ngaio Residents lobbied for the bus drivers to be taken on by the Railways Department.

The Labour Government passed the Government Railways (Wellington to Johnsonville) Act.

The law subjected each passenger to a ten pound fine (\$1,400), and a stiffer penalty for the company, if they travelled on a bus in: "ALL that area in the Wellington Land District: Bounded by lines commencing at the intersection of the Kaiwarra Stream with the western boundary of the Hutt Road; thence ... to the boundary of the Wellington-New Plymouth Railway; thence by a right line to Mitchel's Trig. (Johnsonville No. 1); thence ... to a point on Aurora Road, ... Paparangi Settlement" etc.

The Act made provision for compensation.

The owners could require "the Government Railways Board to purchase all motor-omnibuses and other property used by him ... at a price to be agreed on between the parties, or, in the event of their being unable to agree, at a price to be fixed by a Compensation Court under the Public Works Act, 1928."

The business was valued and by agreement the Railways Department paid £25,436 for 11 buses, £3,530 for buildings and plant, and £12,368 for goodwill (about \$5.7m).

From 1 July 1936, the 14 Bell Bus drivers (who had been paid more than the Railway bus drivers)



One of the Bell buses that served Ngaio and Khandallah. Photo: Supplied.

became employees of the Railways Department.

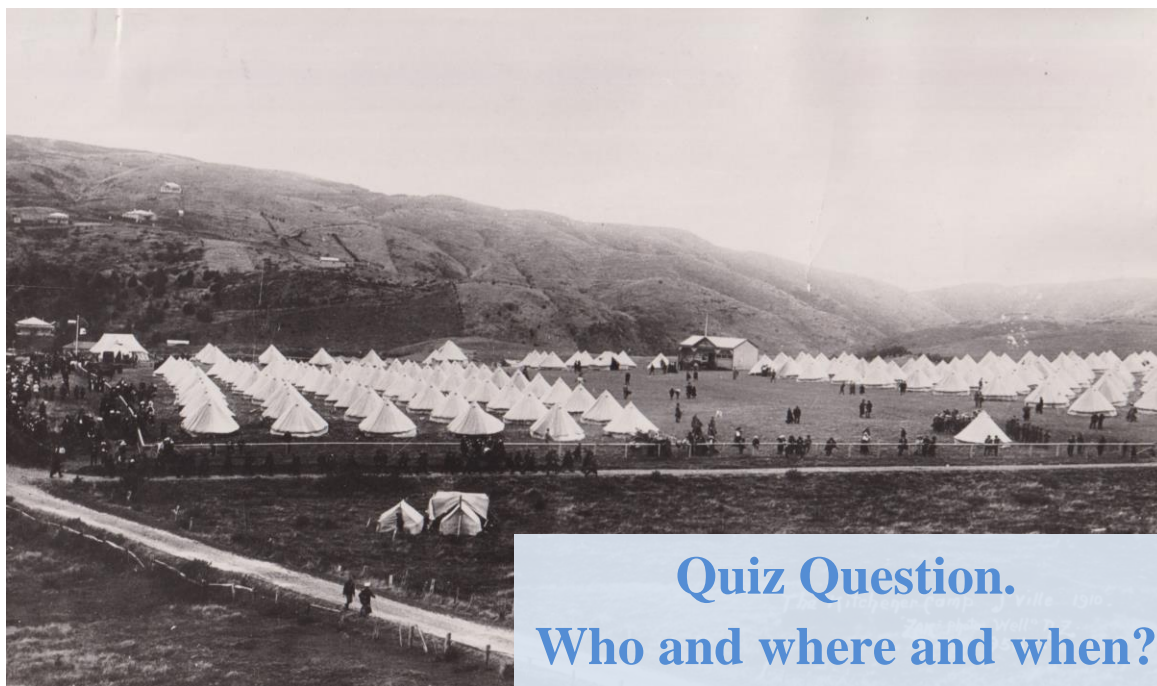
A party was held at the Ngaio Town Hall with staff and the public presenting the Bells with gifts and expressing regret about the "separation".

Mr Bell said that his "impression of many years suburban transport operation was the wonderful loyalty of the staff and the generous support of the public of Wellington, particularly of Ngaio and Khandallah."

By 1937 there were complaints in

the news about the poor standard of the bus service operated by the Railways. The buses being used were said to be broken down and unclean.

The Bells were capable business people and after the nationalisation of their business they left for South Africa. A large trunk of their papers and photos are with the Onslow Historical Society, a selection of which are on display at its rooms, 86 Khandallah Rd, open on Sundays from 1pm to 4pm.



Quiz Question.
Who and where and when?

The Full Story: 28th October 2024.

As part of the Wellington Heritage Festival, OHS is running a guided walk of Moto Kairangi / Miramar Peninsular by Chris Horne.

Meet opposite former Mt Crawford prison gates, Maupuia at 11.00am.

- Before the ca. 1450 AD Hao Whenua earthquake, Miramar Peninsula was an island - Motu Kairangi.
- The north end of the peninsula from the former Wellington Prison / "Mt Crawford" has several distinct flattish areas - these are raised marine terraces:
 1. The area around the old prison and Mt Crawford/Matai-moana - 163 metres;
 2. The site of the women's prison, prison officers' training school and filming some *Lord of the Rings* films;
 3. The site of the WW2 anti-aircraft gun battery;
 - and 4. The site of Massey Memorial.
- We will alight from the no. 24 Miramar Heights bus opposite the entrance to the former prison built in 1927 closed in 2012.
- We will walk through the Miramar Community Garden, on the site of the former prison garden.
- The area was the site of Te Mahanga Pa, Puhiranga Pa, Mataki-Poinga Pa, Puhirangi Pa; Kau-whakaara-waru Kainga, a midden, Maru-kai-kura kainga. (*The Great Harbour of Tara*. G. Leslie Adkin. Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd. 1959).
- The area was the site of Fort Ballance, built in the 1880s to counter the threat of an invasion by the Russian fleet. It is still standing - north of Scorching Bay. A gun pit from that era exists under Massey Memorial.
- Growing under the pine plantation on our walk past the munitions bunkers we will see some native plant species regenerating.
- As we walk to Chocolate Fish Café - walk in single file - we will see earthworks being done to restore the landscape following the removal of some former RNZAF WW2 buildings, and a dilapidated wharf linked to the seaplane base; also the site of the *Sawtooth Building* - destroyed by fire.
- Walking along Shelly Bay Road - often no footpath, so please walk in single file - we will see several boxes containing traps placed by Predator-Free Miramar.
- Climbing the Piki ki Maupuia Walkway up through Carter Park, we will be in regenerating native forest. Beyond that we will walk along a terrace with fine views of Evans Bay, Kilbirnie and Roseneath.
- We will wait on Maupuia Rd for a no. 24 Broadmeadows / Johnsonville bus back into town. ETA at bus stop ca. 18 minutes past each hour.

The Answer to the Quiz Question.

Kitchener's Army. Alex Moore Park, Johnsonville, 1910.

--- Chorus is the Society's major sponsor ---