



Keeping in Touch

Newsletter for New Zealand History Federation Inc
Te Kotahitanga o nga Hitori o Aotearoa
KIT Editor: Lisa Truttman
nzhistoryfederation@gmail.com

www.nzhistoryfederation.org.nz

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The Ongarue Derailment 1923 - 2023



Members of Taumarunui Historical Society have been involved with planning for a memorial for the centenary of New Zealand's worst rail accident up to that time, and the Society has published a book in conjunction with the commemoration. Details inside. Photo supplied by Audrey Walker, Taumarunui HS.



ONGARUE RAILWAY ACCIDENT

6 JULY 1923

17 DEAD
28 SERIOUSLY INJURED

A TRIBUTE TO A PROMPT RESCUE
NOTES FROM PUBLISHED REPORTS
COMPILED BY LES G. DYNE

Ongarue Railway Accident:

a book compiled by Les G Dyne

On Friday 6 July 1923 the journey of 200 passengers aboard the overnight Auckland – Wellington express, Train No.221, ended abruptly when it derailed near Ongarue, 160 miles (257.5 km) south of Auckland and 14 miles (23 km) north of Taumarunui.

With 17 deaths and 28 others seriously injured, the derailment was at that time the worst accident to befall New Zealand Railways.

About 200 rescuers from Ongarue, Taumarunui, Te Kuiti, Auckland, and Wellington dealt with the aftermath, among them doctors, nurses, railway workers, and dozens of local residents who provided care and support for the injured and uninjured passengers.

The stories in this A4 sized, 112 paged book have been collated from newspaper reports and witness statements presented to the Official Board of Inquiry and is an acknowledgement to all those involved in the rescue effort, and to the railway staff who cleared the wreckage and relaid the track to ensure the swift resumption of train services.

Cost: \$30 each, plus postage.

Available from:

Taumarunui & Districts Historical Society

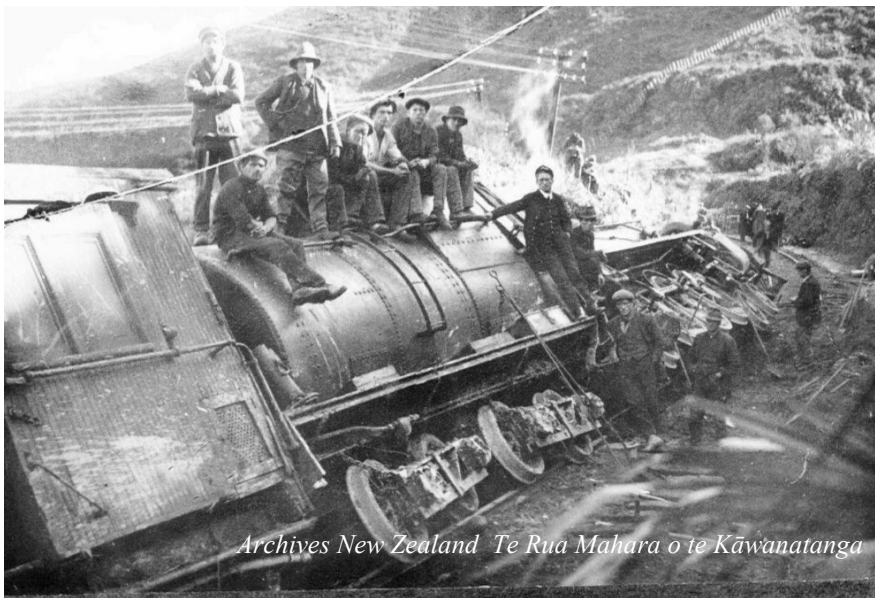
Box 329

Taumarunui 3946

Ph. (07) 894583 or 0272404450

www.rollbacktheyears.co.nz

tdhs08@farmside.co.nz



Press Release from KiwiRail, dated 7 July 2023.

Tomorrow, on Saturday the 8th of July at 11:00am, the Ongarue Rail Accident Memorial will be unveiled to mark 100 years since the Ongarue derailment.

The derailment claimed 17 lives and seriously injured 28 others.

The memorial is sited near Ongarue on the Ongarue-Waimiha Road about 150m west of the intersection with Ongarue Village Road.

Consisting of five informative panels descending from 2.1m in height as well as a 5.2m tall totem, the memorial rests on a 15m long concrete slab and will be unveiled by the Ongarue Memorial Organising Committee.

The unveiling comes two days after the 100-year anniversary on 6 July.

Relatives of parties involved in the accident, including victims, rescuers, train staff and the New Zealand Māori Rugby Team will be present. Two hundred people are estimated to attend the unveiling.

The unveiling will run from 11:00am to 12:00pm. There will be finger food and hot drinks at Ongarue School from 12:00pm to 1:30pm.

This project received a \$6000 contribution from KiwiRail. Other funding has come from Ruapehu District Council, RMTU, Pub Charities, Taumarunui RSA, Ongarue Saleyard Company, and the Rail Heritage Trust.

About the Ongarue Rail accident:

After being delayed awaiting news about floodwaters in the rain-soaked Waikato, Train 221, the 7.10 p.m. overnight express to Wellington finally departed Auckland at 11.25 p.m. on 5 July 1923. On board were 200 passengers, with one private carriage playing host to the 1923 New Zealand Māori Rugby Team.

While rounding a curve just south of Ongarue at 5.52 a.m. on Friday 6 July the train ran into a landslide.

A large boulder buried within the slide derailed the locomotive, AB 748, causing the second, third, and fourth carriages to telescope.

Eleven passengers were killed instantly while another six later succumbed to their injuries. A further twenty-eight people sustained serious injuries. The Ongarue derailment was New Zealand's worst rail accident at the time.



Photos: Kauri Museum



New entrance and walkway opens at the Kauri Museum, Matakohē

(From their email, 28 July 2023)

“About 60 guests attended a dawn ceremony on Saturday July 22 to mark the official opening of the project ... The new walkway features a forest path through tall lightbox “trees” – which lead visitors through a newly-built space alive with a natural soundscape. The work was part of a multi-phase project supported by a \$3 million grant from the Provincial Development Unit.

Museum Board Chair Grant McCallum said the funds for redevelopment included creating a Research Centre where people can access the Museum collections and Archives, undertake genealogical research, and better understand the significance of Kauri. Director Barbara Hilden said the Museum was delighted that this stage of work was finally completed and could be unveiled for the public to enjoy.

“It’s been a long time in the making but we are thrilled with the result. The redevelopment and new forest walkway represents a significant shift in the types of stories we tell, how we present ourselves, and the sort of partnerships we prioritise. Everyone involved has done a wonderful job of modernising how we share information in a very experiential and powerful way.”

“Director Barbara Hilden explained the thinking behind the new entrance and walkway to the museum at its opening last week. Following is an excerpt from her speech.

“Every good exhibit starts with The Big Idea. This is the one thing you want every visitor who interacts with your exhibit to come away with. If they only spend 30 seconds, they should still take away one overarching idea that’s the heart of the exhibit. It’s one sentence.

Pithy. Focused. Easy to apprehend. Hard to do.

“In an OK exhibit the Big Idea might be something along the lines of, “visitors will appreciate the workmanship that crafted this furniture.” That’s fine. That’s a point of view. That’s something. It’s crucially important that an exhibit has a perspective. Because there has to be an audience. A museum by definition has an audience. If there are no people, then there’s no meaning. It’s just stuff. An “exhibit” of “something we have a lot of” isn’t an exhibit. It’s a display. It’s a shop window. It can be pretty. It can be valuable. It can even be Important-with-a-capital-I. But no one learns or grows or changes by seeing pretty stuff.

“Take our chainsaw collection, for example. Wonderful pieces, collected by Jim Downs. We’re very lucky to have it. You can see it artfully arranged next door in the Sawmill, displayed with some fabulous photographs of men wielding chainsaws and blokes being blokes. It’s a good collection. And a good display.

“But if we took that good collection, and suspended the chainsaws from the ceiling of this great hall [the Volunteers Hall], arcing around the carcass of this incredible tree behind me, silent, ominous, poised, blades angled inward, maybe you press a button somewhere and hear the motor start up—suddenly there’s an idea. There’s a story. There’s something interesting, challenging, contemplative, something that provokes thought and inspires action.

“When the Board, the exhibit designers, the Museum staff and Te Uri o Hau sat down about a year ago to discuss what this space, this forest could be, we had lengthy lists of ideas and we threw it all at the wall. As you do. We gathered everything up, all of the korero and knowledge and stories and research and learning and we went into a room and we tried to find the Big Idea for the walkway. What do we want people to know, do, feel, change as a result of their interaction here? In this space?



“Some Indigenous Nations in North America, particularly the Haudenosaunee, work in the paradigm of seven generations. Meaning that decisions we make today, in our generation, aren’t made for our generation or our interests, but rather for the next seven generations. You look backwards—draw on the elders’ and the ancestors’ knowledge, learn from them, take direction from them, appreciate that their decisions were made with you-at-this-moment in mind—and then you make a decision based not on what’s best for you today, but based on what will be best for the next seven generations.

“And arguably this is what museums do too. Conserve and preserve for the next generations. Facilitate understanding using items and objects from the past. Our responsibility, here at the Kauri Museum, is to make good decisions for the next generations. We do this by honouring the work and the decisions of our predecessors. They left us this magnificent legacy. They built this museum, this community, this district and this nation.

“And we cannot forget that in hand with that triumph, this museum also tells the story of a great environmental tragedy.

“And that’s the Big Idea.

“That’s the big idea of this walkway. The idea that we came together, Pakeha and Māori, in Aotearoa, hundreds of years ago, or 160 years ago, or one year ago, to build something wonderful. Together. The walkway exhibit is light on text. Deliberately. It’s abstract in its interpretation. Purposefully. It’s ethereal, it’s evocative, it’s emotional. But it is not blank. It’s a canvas for visitors to overlay their own experiences. To bring their own learnings and languages and ancestral knowledge and co-create something personal. Unique to them. Interpreting that Big Idea.

“As we’ve been starting to share this new exhibit with visitors over the past few weeks, it’s been absolutely fascinating to hear the individual interpretations of what they think this walkway is. Some people see superfeet in the square light boxes. Some people see pou. Some see ghost trees, lost forests. Some people see futuristic trees and hope. Kiawahakato-muri te haere whakamua: I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on the past.

“All of this is that. And it’s crucially important that it’s the start of the Museum. Because it frames all the stories that follow. It shades and affects and reimagines all of the wonderful and important stories that follow. And it’s emblematic of the fact that we are at the start of a journey. It’s not the centre of the museum. People are the centre of this museum. The centre of this museum isn’t even a tree. Matua Hone gently reminded me yesterday that in te ao Māori, kauri is not a tree but rather a tupuna. An ancestor. And those stories, the stories of all our ancestors even mine from an ocean away those stories are the backbone of this museum. And we’ll make our decisions for the next seven generations guided by their decisions, honouring their stories, and changing the world. Because it’s about stories. It’s about legacy. It’s about people. He tangata he tangata, he tangata.”

(Barbara Hilden has since left the Museum and returned to Canada, due to family illness.)



**NZ History
Federation Inc
Annual General Meeting
and
Conference
20 April 2024**

*to be hosted by the
Taumarunui
Historical Society*



At the moment, the Taumarunui Historical Society and the Federation Committee are finalising details as to programme and events, but the date has been set: 20 April 2024.

As soon as further details are available, these will be forwarded on.

Other news from the members

Avondale-Waterview

We've had our share of trials and tribulations, it has to be said. The lockdowns and Covid caution ripped great holes in our meetings schedule and cancelled an issue of the *Avondale Historical Journal*. Then, late last year, just as we were getting going again, Auckland Council needed to do a stormwater project through the grounds of St Ninians Hall, so we were homeless up until this month.

But, in April, we did get to have a meeting one rainy Saturday in the back of the old Avondale Public Hall, thanks to the kindness of the management of the Hollywood Cinema. A very cool experience for me, as I hadn't been inside what was once the township's library since the early 1970s, while I was in primary school. Even with changing times, Avondale still has a caring community at heart.

This month, with our AGM, we've started the process of reconsidering how often we do hold meetings, considering our aging membership. We had a very small turnout that day — but

the members are still keen to see our Society continue. Even to the extent of two new members coming onto our committee to help us through the upcoming constitutional changes and resubmission to the registrar. Your editor has now been president of the hopeful and helpful crew here in Avondale-Waterview for 20 years. Time flies when you're having fun.

Birkenhead

Birkenhead and Auckland has lost a great local heritage enthusiast in Ray Johanson, who passed away on 17 May this year. Speaking personally here, your editor viewed him not only as a valued member of the Auckland history and family history community, but as a very good friend. I won't forget how he kept in touch with me during an illness of mine in 2011, reaching out via phone and emails to make sure I got through things all right.

He was President of Birkenhead Heritage for years and years, until time does what it does to all of us and wore him down. Well past retirement age though, he drove visitor buses around parts of Devonport, and could always be counted on to know the details of particular spots, adding to everyone's appreciation of the area's story. He even came over the bridge to give my home society of Avondale-Waterview a talk, which was immensely well-received and still remembered.

Rest easy now, Ray and your beloved Flo. Thank you for being part of our lives.

Mt Albert

(From the Society's July newsletter)

"In 2017 MAHS took out a lease of two small rooms in the Annexe at the back of Ferndale House. We have used these for storage and Committee meetings, and we planned to offer a drop-in research service to the community. Covid lockdowns scuppered these plans, and since we have been able to meet face to face again the Committee has preferred to meet in better ventilated venues. These days, our research enquiries are coming in via email and the website, with no demand for inperson research assistance.

"Our 5 year lease came up for review recently, with the likelihood of a considerable rent rise. After reflection, we voted to relinquish our lease. We have moved our filing cabinets of information, boxes of our book *Mt Albert Then and Now*, and all our other collections into a local storage facility, which can be accessed by arrangement. We are part-way through a project to digitise our physical collection, which will enable us to support research enquiries more easily ...

"Ferndale is still our "home" in the heart of Mt Albert, and we will continue to use it as our regular venue for Events. "

Okato

Very sad news for the team at Okato with the recent passing of Society member and stalwart Anne Lorraine Bolton on 16 July, aged 75. From an email from the Society: "A dear Friend and a talented transcriber and typist, Anne was a valued member of our Historical Society group and was very missed when she and Colin returned to Christchurch. A great-grand daughter of Sgt Hickman who warned the Parihaka folk of the incoming invasion in November 1881, and part of the Julian -Jigsaw family, Anne's roots were deep in Taranaki soil."

Ōtāhuhu

Aside from their involvement with talks being given at the local library during the Auckland Heritage Festival this October, the Society are also organising a special display.

"Peace and protest on the Streets of Ōtāhuhu

Wednesday 27 September, Saturday 30 September, Wednesday 4 October 10am - 2pm

Visit the Ōtāhuhu Historical Society to view a display from the archives of parades and protests through the streets of Ōtāhuhu. This includes two movies of centennial celebrations held in 1948 to recognise the arrival of the Fencible settlers to Ōtāhuhu in May 1848. Come along to see footage of the centennial parade, donkey race, wheelbarrow derby and trotting race down the Great South Road, a sports meeting and band display at Sturges Park and folk dancing by the children of Ōtāhuhu Primary School. The archives hold photographs, ephemera and stories about parades with military connections, celebrating peace in 1945 and acknowledging community anniversaries. Ōtāhuhu has also seen various protest marches stemming from the many industries that were once within its boundaries."

Contact otahuhuhistorical@gmail.com for details.

Papakura

(From the Society's June/July newsletter)

"The Museum has been a hive of energy. In the last two months, the Anne Frank exhibition has brought large numbers of thoughtful visitors, work is proceeding on the new Rings Redoubt standing exhibition (drawing much outside interest), a growing team of committed volunteers is working on the collection, and scientists Andy and Laura provided a lot of excitement and interest for children and adults with the 'gee-whizzery' of the International Day of Light, which is becoming an annual fixture. (Imagine air-powered rockets shooting up the outside of the building and rides on airblower-powered hovercraft.) There have been several sessions with teachers and students. The new quarterly Museum Talks got under way, the first being a Virtual Heritage Walk—the talk of the walk, which took place on a very wet evening ... The PDHS and Museum staff hosted the Local Board to express appreciation for their continued support."

Parnell Heritage

(From their June quarterly newsletter)

“We are delighted to report that Parnell Heritage has found a base! For some time now we have been looking for local premises to store artefacts and publications, and to hold meetings and some events. We are in the process of finalising a hire agreement with the Parnell Cricket Club for the use of the Bloodworth Pavilion. We are confident we can tidy up the Pavilion and make it a pleasant venue for us all to meet.”

Parnell Heritage are also embarking on a heritage House Name Plaques project. From their notice to members, emailed in August: “Parnell Heritage has been exploring ways in which to increase the heritage value of Auckland’s oldest suburb, the heritage of which is now under constant threat of high rise development. Our concern is the loss of streetscapes in special character areas by the building of high-rise townhouses or apartments in the midst of clusters of heritage homes. We felt it was essential that the Parnell community be involved in any initiative we decided upon. We are sure this new initiative will enhance and identify heritage and older homes by providing the owners with an added appreciation of the history of their residence and at the same time bringing back an old forgotten tradition.”

They have an exclusive arrangement with a supplier of pottery and sculptural ceramics for provision of the name plaques, and back-up research on known named properties in the area completed by one of their researchers. The Society aim to contact property owners via letter this month.

Tauranga

July saw the launch of the Orokohanga Poutama Heritage Together Kotahitanga heritage strategy for the Western Bay of Plenty, a project with which the Society’s President Debbie McCauley has been involved. Debbie wrote in a recent email: “The outcome of the Western Bay of Plenty Heritage Strategy is Next Steps which includes a proposed Heritage Month starting in October 2024. Interest is rapidly mounting and The Elms | Te Papa Tauranga, Athenree Homestead and Western Bay Museum, along with several schools and libraries, have already registered their interest.

“The proposed Heritage Month will be a fabulous opportunity to showcase Brain-Watkins House Museum as a key part of the Western Bay heritage experience. The concept received unanimous support on 24 July from the around 35 representatives from across the Western Bay of Plenty, including James Denyer, the WBoPDC mayor. Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga and Taonga Tū | Heritage Bay of Plenty will facilitate the project alongside a team of representatives from the local heritage sector.”

The full strategy can be read here:

https://www.taongatauranga.net/uploads/1/1/8/8/118801554/orokohanga_poutama_-_a_western_bop_heritage_strategy_20.7.23.pdf

Debbie continued: “Heritage month celebrations are important as they provide the opportunity to teach and learn about our shared histories through a variety of events across the heritage sector. They are also a way of celebrating and supporting our heritage organisations and our diverse communities. Heritage Months are being successfully run across various regions within Aotearoa New Zealand. They provide an amazing opportunity for places like Brain-Watkins House Museum to shine through a connected project.

“Taonga Tū has been supportive of the Tauranga Historical Society and Brain-Watkins House Museum and is a member organisation and heritage partner. An extremely successful recent project has been Footprints on Te Papa which has just been reprinted due to high demand. Although Taonga Tū receive funding for projects, much like the Tauranga Historical Society, they are volunteer run and operated.”

On top of this, the Society are “undertaking a strategic review with an aim of creating a five-year (and beyond) framework to support the integrity and future of the Society and the Brain Watkins House.” Looking forward to seeing what transpires from this.

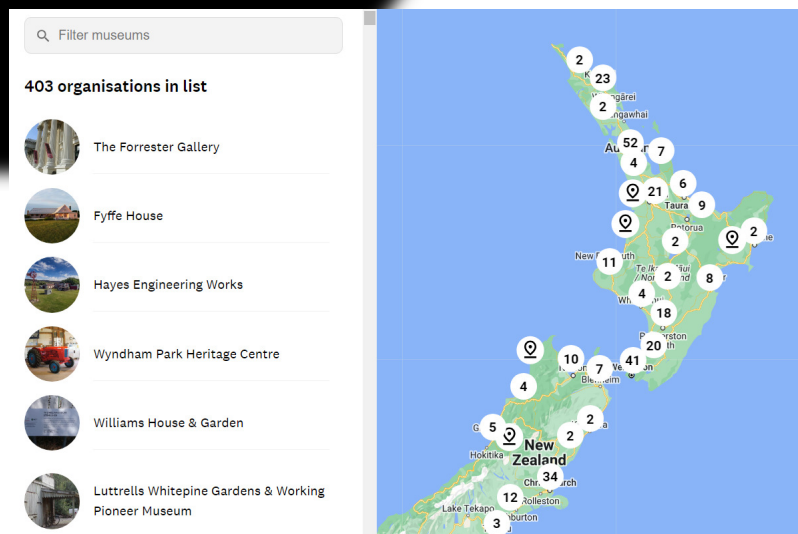
Torbay

(From the Society’s July email)

“We have been continuing with sorting out and rearranging at the Vaughan Homestead with our hard-working team. It is looking good and clean. We hope to have the Homestead ready for September to have open days for the Public and also to hire out and have Devonshire Teas again. The next task will be to get the kitchen area in the Caretakers’ Flat available for small groups to hire. We will need grants for some of this work.”

West Auckland

While the internet has brought its challenges for historical societies, it has also a number of real benefits to assist us. The West Auckland Historical Society’s website has proven to be a boon, making it easy for the public to get in touch with research questions. According to President Gai Bishop in a recent newsletter, “... we have had a number of interesting and engaging questions from people seeking help for their research: Laidlaw College wanting to find out about the past ownership and land use of what was previously known as Waitakere Central (2–6 Smythe Road, Henderson), visitors to Mill Cottage for New Lynn history, a school enquiry and a number of genealogical and background family history items asking for help finding people either related, or school pupils they’ve known...and that’s just in June this year.”



In July National Services Te Paerangi, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa launched **Kōtuia ngā Kete**, a “collections portal into the world with a view to creating a collaborative space for museums, where taonga and galleries to share their collections and practice of care.”

The site, which has details on 403 organisations, a number of which are member organisations of the NZ History Federation, includes an interactive map, directory, and a specific section for taonga Māori.

The website directly from the old NZ Museums website which was launched 15 years ago in 2008, and contains similar features, but upgraded in collaboration with collection managers, educators, researchers and curator Māori. According to the site’s “About Us” page:

“We relaunched as Kōtuia in 2023 to create a richer picture of our national collections – enabling more collections to be shared, and more stories to be linked to collections. We also wanted to create a space that reflects Aotearoa’s aspirations as a bicultural nation.”

www.kotuia.org.nz