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Parks and Reserves Department

PRIVATE BAG
NEW PLYMOUTH
NEW ZEALAND

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THE CENTENNIAL OF PUKEKURA PARK, NEW PLYMOUTH

The Centennial celebrations of the New Plymouth Borough in 1976 coincide with the Centennial celebrations of Pukekura Park, the central recreation area of the city.

This occasion was marked by a ceremonial planting on May 1 at which the Mayor, Mr. D.V. Sutherland, planted a Norfolk Pine on Cannon Hill with the spade used by Miss Jane Carrington when she planted the first tree near the same spot on May 29, 1876.

In doing so the Mayor stepped into history alongside Miss Jane Carrington who was the daughter of Fredrick Alonso Carrington, the surveyor for the New Plymouth Company. Four commemorative trees were planted on sites around Cannon Hill and the Fountain lake 100 years ago - an Oak for Britain, a Monterey pine for America, a Norfolk pine for the Pacific and a Puriri for New Zealand.

It is believed that all but the Norfolk pine are still standing. The 1876 ceremony saw Pukekura Park opened to the public of New Plymouth.

To further mark the Centennial a new waterwheel feature was commissioned by the Chairman of the Taranaki County Council, Mr. L.D. Hickford. This waterwheel is a reconstruction of the one which provided power for the Omata Dairy Company for many years and was donated by the Company. All site and final construction assembly was carried out by Parks Department staff, although the woodwork of the wheel itself was fabricated to the exact pattern of the original wheel by a local construction firm. The wheel, 12 feet in diameter and 5 feet wide, is accommodated below the Fountain lake outflow stream and provides yet another water based focal point of considerable charm. Not only has a further feature been created, but an integral part of Taranaki's provincial history has been preserved.

Chairman of the Parks & Recreation Committee, Councillor Mrs. A.N. Gale, commended the County Council for its contribution of \$500 towards the project, the advisors and Parks staff for the effort, initiative and patience put into the creation of the feature.

In addressing the gathering of citizens, staff and Councillors prior to the Centennial planting Mrs. Gale traced the history of the Park. Had there been a town belt with parks and terraces, the people of New Plymouth might not have been encouraged to secure the land now known as Pukekura Park, she said. Pukekura, 'the hill of the red parrot', a name applied to the area in 1907, was established upon the request of Robert Clinton Hughes as the last act of the Provincial Council in 1875. Hughes, a young solicitor, had asked in 1874 for land to be set aside for recreation purposes and it was he who sought townsfolk to act as trustees to control the area when the Town Board developed cold feet at the prospect of levying rates for the upkeep of the reserve.

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This system was to administer the Park until 1929 under the guidance and enthusiasm of Mr. Hughes who charged the then Mayor, Mr. H.V.S. Griffiths, to treasure the Park for the town, to regard it as a sacred trust and never to part with an inch of it. That occasion in 1929 was marked by the planting of a Kauri tree on the lawn of the Stainton Dell.

In her address Mrs. Gale paid tribute to the many people who had cared for the Park, its administrators, staff and benefactors. These included Thomas King the first Chairman of the Park Board, Mr. D.F.C. Saxton the last Chairman of the Pukekura Park Committee as a separate entity, and Mr. P.E. Stainton who served as Secretary for 40 years from 1919.

Successive Curators have loved and cared for the Park she said. The early ones worked with their hands to lay the foundations. A Scotsman, naturalist Mr. W.W. Smith served 13 years from 1908; and during Thomas Horton's 25 year term in office the fernery and teahouse were built and numerous other developments were achieved.

The present Director, Mr. J.W. Goodwin, who retires in 1977 having served since 1949, was complimented by Mrs. Gale for his work, tremendous co-operation, help and courtesy. Tributes were also paid to the present staff and to the many benefactors who had served Pukekura Park well.

Six trees were planted to commemorate the occasion - a Norfolk pine by Mr. D.V. Sutherland and a Kauri by Mr. D.F.C. Saxton, former Chairman of the Pukekura Park Committee, assisted by Mr. A. Brodie. Well known plantsman and longstanding Committee member, Mr. F.L. Parker, planted a Ginkgo biloba fastigiata in an area where previous Park Committees had emphasised colour. The great grandson of Thomas King the first Park Chairman, Dr. Peter Allen, assisted by the daughter-in-law of Newton King, Mrs. Dorothy King, planted a lime tree Tilia euchlora. A further historical link was forged in the planting of a swamp cypress, Taxodium adscendens nutans, by Mrs. Darcy Cameron a great grand niece of F.A. Carrington and direct descendant of Jane Carrington. The final planting was made by Councillor Mrs. A.N. Gale whose subject was Magnolia grandiflora 'Goliath' which was sited near the outfall of the Fountain lake in an area where a future aqueduct water feature will be developed.

And so Pukekura Park steps into its second century with a reputation for its informal and natural beauty. From neglected gullies, swamps and fern clad hills the people of New Plymouth have created an area of parkland to which the words of Robert Clinton Hughes must still apply - that is, 'that we must treasure the Park for the City, to regard it as a sacred trust and never to part with an inch of it'.

A.D. JELLYMAN
Deputy Director- Parks & Recreation