

Bringing the Past to the Future

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

NEWSLETTER OF THE UPPER CLUTHA
HISTORICAL RECORDS SOCIETY INC.

(Upper Clutha includes Cardrona, Albert Town, Luggate, Queensberry, Tarras, Lindis Valley,
Hawea, Makarora, Wanaka and Lakes Wanaka and Hawea)

SPRING - VOLUME THREE

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RUBY ISLAND – The Jewel of Lake Wanaka



Photo courtesy of Thirst Quest and Rippon Winery

WANAKA'S JEWEL - RUBY ISLAND

Yes, I know, a bit of a pun but look at the photo! This little island (3.16 ha), not far from the Wanaka lakefront (about 1.7km), has an interesting history. No one knows for sure why it was eventually named Ruby but perhaps its shape like a teardrop-jewel has something to do with it.

Referring to newspaper articles published during the 1870 to 1918 period, including one written by the well-known local historian, George M Hassing, before it was called Ruby Island, it had been called:

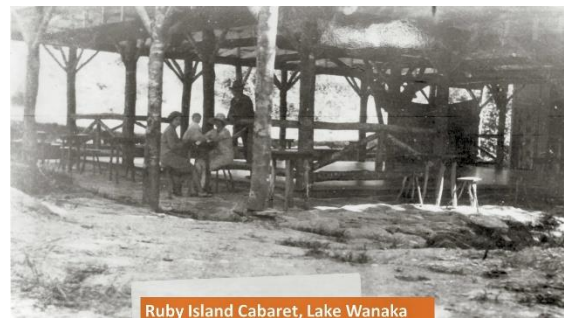
- Matakitaki (translates to mean ‘to gaze upon’)
- Merino Island (other islands in the lake were called Sheep Island and Ram Island)
- Roys Island (named after one of the earliest settlers)
- Eeley’s Island

The last name appears in newspaper articles in the 1870/80s and later on. It possibly originates because a gentleman named Banks Hokanson (locally known as “Old Eeley”) apparently leased the island at some stage. The newspaper articles are, admittedly, a bit confusing.

Ruby Island’s main claim to fame today is as a picnic place, tourist stop on lake tours and as a wedding place. There are some facilities on the island for visitors but there is a complete fire ban (apart from the supplied barbeque). Fires over the past 150 years destroyed the natural habitat, the last fire taking place in the early 1990s. Rabbits also caused havoc to the native vegetation way back in the 1880s despite the efforts of hawks and ferrets (Lake County Press 28 Jun 1888). Fortunately, many volunteers have turned out to replace the destroyed vegetation. Some of the early plantings were not exactly native fauna – “*Ruby Island, under the care of the Wanaka Domain Board, is a favourite resort for picnic parties, and the strawberry plants plentifully strewn across its surface add greatly to its attractiveness during the season. This season’s crop will be an unusually prolific one judging by the*

blossom scattered through.” (ODT, Wanaka Notes 27 November 1928).

A move by three local businessmen to develop Ruby Island for tourists led to the Saturday night Ruby Island Cabarets that became the source of many legends among older Wanaka folk. The Cabaret was operated in the main by the Hunt family from 1927 to 1930. Sybil Hunt, the wife of John Hunt, recalled for Ian McCrone in a newspaper article in 1982, that her husband got a permit to build a dance floor etc on the island and a 10 year lease. From the sawmills in the Makarora area, they got beech tree trunks for the roof pillars and timber for the dance floor. The logs were towed down the lake because of the lack of roads.



The following is quoted from his articles:

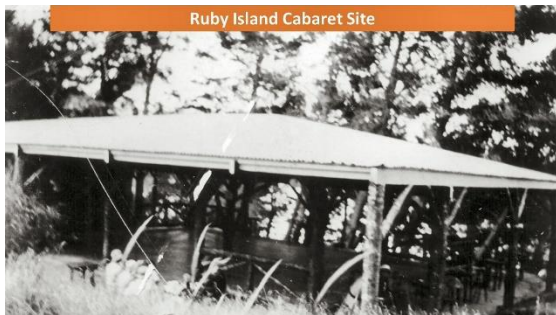
“There was a kitchen, a small shop, a one-time navy chef who had also worked at the hotel at Wanaka.”

He did all the cooking on an old Perfection kerosene stove,” Mrs Hunt says, “it was a three-burner with three funnels heating three different plates at the top. “On one side he’d make pikelets, on the next girdle scones and on the third he’d put a wee oven and cook the ordinary scones.”

“And they got jam and cream I made the jam and the Devonshire cream came from Wanaka Station, where they had a dairy herd.”

The 40 x 50-foot dance floor was sprung in the tradition of all good dancing surfaces in those days – “when you got 100 people on it, you’ve no idea how it bounced.”

Fancy dress parties became a New Year feature of the Ruby Island Cabaret with up to 200 people attending. Technically they were “dry” affairs. But some patrons brought their own supplies.



Word got around that there was liquor on the island and the village policeman used to lurk behind a willow tree on the waterfront and hop aboard a departing launch just as it cast off.

“He thought he would be sure to catch them, but he never did,” Mrs Hunt says. “Years later, my husband told him frankly how he had not found any liquor. Although he looked at the riding lights and things, he never looked at many masthead lights John had going. We always kept a lookout on the island If they saw that the masthead light was dimmed down, with just one light instead of two, they knew the bobby was on board.”

The tea dances became so popular that a third launch, the Aotea was brought on to help maintain a shuttle service to the island during the summer months.

With the help of a Dunedin electrician, the Hunts devised a novel system of providing dance music. Amplifiers were rigged up to a gramophone. Mrs Hunt stood by to keep

the machine wound up and to change the records.

Power for the sound system and lighting from jetty to dance floor was provided by old car batteries and a generator.

For the New Year’s Eve parties, McNamara’s Band used to come up from Cromwell.

Missing the last boat home could prove a costly business but was not entirely uncommon. “There was always a warning siren about half an hour before the last boats were due to go back to the mainland.” Mrs Hunt says. *“There was another siren 10 minutes before and we would wait another 10 minutes after that time was up. Anyone who was still in the bushes just had to stay there. If they wanted to be taken off they had to light a fire. If we saw it, we would go out and pick them up, provided they paid treble the fare. That was fair enough, I think.”*

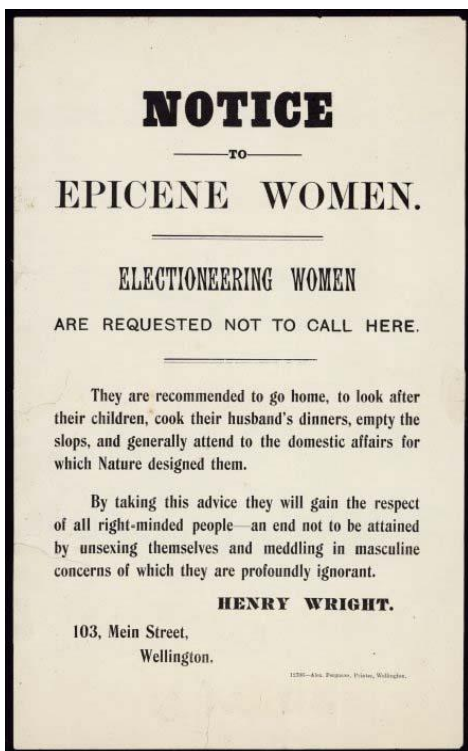
The venture ran successfully for three years, until John Hunt decided to go into farming at Maungawera.

It would seem that the island reverted to bush and the occasional fire (1970s and 1990s) but an extensive planting project by local residents following the 1990s fire helped the island become what it is today.

125 YEARS OF WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE

On 19 September 1893, nearly 125 years ago, the Governor General, Lord Glasgow, signed into law the 1893 Electoral Act which gave women the right to vote for Parliament candidates (though they could not stand as a candidate until 1919). New Zealand was the first self-governed country in the world to grant this

fundamental right. Truly something to celebrate. But not everyone agreed, especially Henry Wright of Wellington. He became a wealthy businessman (who eventually became impecunious) and he became upset at 'electioneering women' knocking on his door and penned his infamous poster in 1902. Not only did he see women get the vote, but the right for women to become candidates and the election of the first woman parliamentarian.



Now Henry wasn't all bad – he was a substantial benefactor to Wellington City. His mother apparently brought him up on Cod Liver Oil for his first 11 years of life – not likely to have enamoured any boy to his mother! He did marry three times (maybe that says something?) and was survived by a daughter and a son. His son, perhaps wisely, moved to Vancouver.

So how did women in Wanaka celebrate the 100th Anniversary? Well they 'beat the gun' a little and on Saturday 14 February 1993 more than 90 women,

young and not so young, climbed Mt Iron to celebrate the century of women's suffrage. The climb was organized by Mrs Liz Hall and there was "*singing and champagne*" on the summit and cellphone calls to other women groups making similar climbs throughout the country. Mothers with babies joined the climb and Doreen Murie, one of the first all-women team to climb Mt Cook in 1953, led a blind walking companion, Betty Gillespie, up the track to the summit.

On 19 September 1993, three commemorative camellias were planted by Elizabeth Ironside, Eva Harris, and Elizabeth Blanc in the Wanaka Station Park and during the week there were a number of other events celebrating the anniversary.

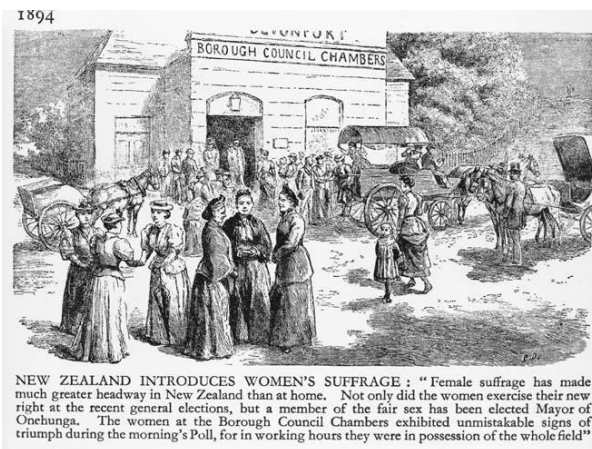
The event also triggered the publication of "*Skirt Tales – 100 Historical Stories of Women from the Upper Clutha Area*".

Will we hear singing voices from Mt Iron again? Perhaps not but we have heard that a morning tea will be held at the Wanaka Library with readings from "*Skirt Tales*" and it was hoped to arrange the planting of a Kate Sheppard Camellia.

But did you know?:

- NZ Women had the right to vote in Local Body Elections since 1876 (as long as they owned land);
- Elizabeth Yates was elected Mayor of Onehunga on 29 November 1893 – the first lady mayor in the British Empire;
- It took until 1957 for the next Lady Mayor to be elected – Annie Huggan of Petone;

- Otago was one of the first provinces to allow women to vote in local body elections.



100 YEARS AGO

The Cromwell Argus reported on 12 September that the weather *“has been beautifully fine and sunny during the past week but on one or two mornings the ground has been white indicating that the frost is still in the air. The general opinion is that the past winter has been the worst for many years”*

From the Waimate Daily Advertiser – *“A fine specimen of red rainbow species of trout was exhibited at the Lakes District Acclimatisation meeting says the Lake Wakatip Mail. The fish, which would probably weigh 12lb or more, was obtained from Lake Hawea.”*

Mother: Johnnie, what did I say I'd do to you if you touched that jam again?

Johnnie: Why, it's strange ma, that you should forget too! I can't remember either.

ANECDOTES FROM THE PAST

Coming Events

11 November at 11am – the 100th Centenary of the WW1 Armistice.

Commemoration events will be held locally at Lake Hawea and Wanaka.

October through to December - Centenary of the start of the Spanish Flu epidemic that killed 9,000 New Zealanders – more than were killed during WW1.

The New Phenomenon – Freedom Camping?

Whilst not wishing to have the newsletter become involved in local politics, I could not resist including this gem from over 30 years ago. Local newspaper reporter, Ian McCrone reported in December 1985 - *“Free lakefront camping took on a new dimension recently when a visitor pitched his tent on the reserve near the launch wharf, ran his old car up onto rocks and spent several days overhauling the gearbox.The Wanaka Promotion Society said the Council was worried about a large number of little things but was doing nothing about a growing problem of lakeside camping which was causing litter and pollution. The Council was investigating its powers to curb camping along the foreshore.”*

Some things take time!

LATEST NEWS

The slide-show at the Library appears to be popular and work is being undertaken to add more photos.

QLDC through Jan Maxwell, the Arts and Events Facilitator, has funded the purchase (\$650) of the printer/scanner used for digitising our records and has supplied two large replacement PC screens. The Council's support is very much appreciated – thanks Jan.

HELP!

A listing of the Upper Clutha servicemen who served in WW2 (Army, RNZAF, Navy and overseas forces) is being researched. This follows on from our WW1 project (where we found some 15 names missing from local memorials). Believe it or not, WW2 records are harder to discover than WW1 records, so we need some help. If you know of a WW2 service person (females included!) who had a connection with the Upper Clutha, please forward an email with any info you have, to Ken at uchrsoc@gmail.com

JO'S NOTES AND UPDATES

Wednesday morning Research Days have been a bit quiet over the winter period with some lucky volunteers having headed overseas to warmer climes. Barbara Chinn and Bruce Foulds have volunteered to help Ken with scanning our records – a slow process. There is still much other work to be undertaken so if you have some spare time.....

Jo recently came across documents that disclosed that the Society has its roots in the meeting of the Wanaka District Museum Committee held in the Records Room at the Lakes County Office, on 9 September 1985. The UCHRS came officially into being on 28 September 1985 with the following committee:

President – Stan Kane

Secretary/Librarian – P Matheson

Committee members: - P Aspinall, J Aspinall, D Love, and I Hayman.

MEMBERSHIP FEES

A reminder to members – membership fees of \$10 are due please.

WHO ARE WE?

President: Graham Dickson

Vice President: Jo Wilton

Secretary: David Simmers

Treasurer: Ken Allan

The Society was established in 1985 to collect and preserve records and images of the history of the Upper Clutha region and make them available to members of the public. The records are held in a special room in the Wanaka Library and a team of volunteers provides research assistance (appointments are necessary) to members of the public who may be looking for their family history or for persons searching for aspects of NZ history. Copying costs apply.

Please contact a Librarian at the Wanaka Library who will pass on the request – or send us an email to uchrsoc@gmail.com.

The Society is Incorporated and is a Registered Charity.

Funding is reliant on the assistance of a variety of community funders and individual gifts. Donations are very welcome, as are new members.

Donations may be made to our bank account 03-1739-0012311-00 with the reference – Donation. As we are a Registered Charity, donations are tax deductible – please ask for a receipt.

Membership Subscriptions for year ending 31/3/2019 are \$10.

Website:

<http://www.uppercluthahistory.org/>

Email Address: uchrsoc@gmail.com