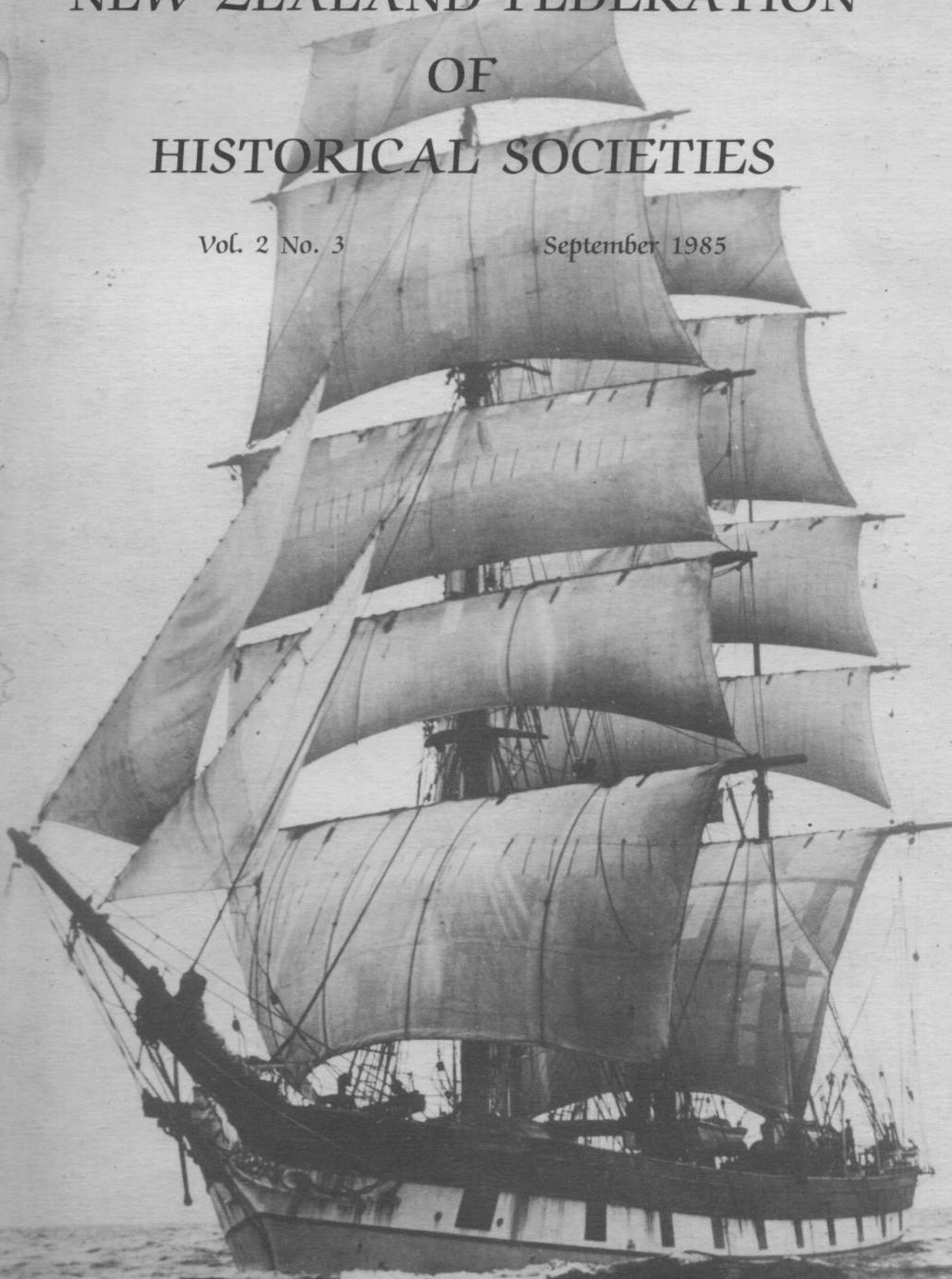


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they were small (75 scholars) compared with almost 600 in the schools of the British and Foreign School Society in the province, Ironside was determined to keep them open although Aldred had decided upon their closure at the end of his ministry. From July 1849 a three-issue debate was developing in Nelson. This involved (1) The system of education espoused by the British and Foreign School Society i.e. a scripturally oriented education, on the voluntary principle, supported by Government grants. (2) The continuance of denominational schools supported by Government grants. (3) The establishment of universal education on a free and compulsory basis — later secular basis.

While he was in Nelson, the Nelson Wesleyan day schools remained open. But when the chief opponent of the free, compulsory and secular system was transferred to New Plymouth, the Nelson Quarterly Meeting quickly fell into line with the Provincial Council's new arrangements which allowed for religious education in state schools outside of the school hours. This was the Nelson System that was to be followed by other Provincial Councils, and eventually nationally.

Project Sin

(The Wainuiomata Historical Society and The Restoration of The Sinclair Cemetery)

Abridged

Vicki Alexander

(Wainuiomata)

In 1981 when I joined the Wainuiomata Historical Society in pursuit of further local knowledge, I was already vaguely aware, thanks to a description and guided tour by an old ex Valley resident, of the existence of a disused and unmarked cemetery in the bushy area of a local reserve. The ex-resident, well into his 70's at the time, had taken me through what appeared to resemble a dense growth of bush but which on closer inspection revealed a square of holly trees, supplejack and seedlings, and it was only through persistent efforts on our part that we were able to work our way into its midst while my guide recalled the clearing which had existed 60 years before, when at least one wooden cross still remained, sufficient to earn the area its reputation of 'the ghost walk'. Sixty years later no crosses remained or, if they did, they were indistinguishable amongst the wilderness which had taken over in the interim.

The Historical Society was also aware of the existence of the Cemetery; word of mouth had at least ensured its verbal survival through the years. Copies of the cemetery plan showed the square of holly trees and seven names or graves laid out within. However, although Society Members were all in favour of some sort of recognition being given to the so-called pioneer cemetery, no one seemed to know exactly where the cemetery actually was — beyond the general description "somewhere at the end of Hine Road".

It was fortunate that at this stage, through some independent historical delvings, we happened to meet two descendants of the Sinclairs, the family who had pioneered a large region of Wainuiomata including that area "somewhere at the end of Hine Road". These descendants, although also vague as to the exact whereabouts of the graveyard, were quite definite upon being shown our ex-resident's childhood playground. We had found the Sinclair Family Cemetery.

Next came the hard part. Once it was finally established that the land in question was included in the Rimutaka Forest Park, and that we had Forestry approval for a restoration project, there were weekends without measure when a band of Society Members, who gradually whittled down to the usual hard core of workers, set to clearing the ground within the square of holly trees.

Nothing remained to indicate the whereabouts of the original graves.

This was a stumbling block. Initially we had hoped to suitably mark each of the seven graves with the appropriate name and date of death of those interred. However, our biggest problem was the lack of a compass bearing on any of the copies of the original cemetery map. All were identical in their layout of the graves, border of 'holly hedge' and inner fence, but none gave a north-south indication. As the present day holly hedge — now more of a wall than a hedge — formed a square it was possible (mentally at least) to lay the plan within its confines in either of two directions, which meant that the graves could be in either of two places within the plot. At this point our Committee decided to try two avenues in an effort to detect the individual burial plots; we wrote to a representative of the local Christian Scientists, and we approached the Wellington Parks and Reserves Cemetery Division.

Of the two, it seemed more likely that the latter approach would bear fruit but to no avail.

Our next bet, in the form of the Christian Scientists, was also a fizzer, though not through lack of trying on their part. Unfortunately, however, those concerned did not do their 'thing' within the holly trees square, but in a completely separate area. Surprisingly, they were still able to furnish us with an interesting account, vague but amusing, of activities which had taken place in their selected area many years before. Although their report raised all sorts of questions and possibilities, we decided we had enough problems on our hands

with the Present without taking on the mysterious doings of the Past, so we put that one aside for the time being. Maybe one day . . .

Well, we were no wiser. Commonsense told us that the original cemetery gateway was unlikely to have been sited on the corner over a bluff which dropped to a creek below, although whether this was the same scenario as had existed 100 years before was hard to say. Finally we abandoned the idea of individual grave markings, and decided to settle for a stone cairn centred within the holly square with a plaque which would commemorate all those interred. We still had to decide upon a present-day entrance to the cemetery and we chose the more conveniently accessed of the two holly-tree-less corners. As it later turned out, this was most likely the original gateway corner, for precisely the same reasons as we had chosen it.

Work began. While husbands were roped in for digging, boxing, concreting and picket fencing, the less able were painting or begging and borrowing (on a long term basis of course) holly seedlings to fill in the gaps along the sides of the outer square. Of the inner square, only three macrocarpa trees remained, although the stumps of six others helped define the outline. These had served many purposes throughout their years, from housing forts for the local juvenile population, to providing firewood for their parents. Vandalism was one of the worst factors we had to contend with in our initial work on the project. We put up a sign indicating our intentions and advising what the area once was. The sign was gone by the following weekend. We erected Sign Number Two but obviously our tree-climbing abilities had declined since our youth — or maybe today's youth is more daring, either way Sign Number Two disappeared within two days. Sign Number Three didn't even last that long! By this time, however, thanks to the support of our local rag, locals were being made aware of our work and most appeared supportive — vandalism during our work on the Cemetery Project gradually died away to just a few initials and a bare footprint in the wet concrete — all fortunately discovered before the concrete went off.

Meanwhile we approached the Officer in Charge of the Rimutaka Forest Park for assistance in two areas — a supply of their distinctive square boulders with which to build the cairn, and the removal of a large macrocarpa stump which hung over the cairn site in a very threatening manner. Forestry were most obliging — they dumped the boulders at a mutually arranged point — presumably with a bulldozer as the ute which we used to transfer the stones to the site was later sold with concave springs and a very audible knock under the bonnet. Forestry brought in a gang to top the offending stump, and the resulting firewood gave pleasure to locals for miles around. The work went on.

By now it was time to be thinking of the bronze plaque which we planned to sit atop our cairn. Two of our Members were actively involved in archival research on various subjects, and it was deemed their job to "put the meat on the bones of the names we had". In fact, the bones were very bare. From the information given on the copies of the original Cemetery Plan, we knew we were looking for: — Hugh Sinclair, Agnes Sinclair, Isabel Sinclair, John Hugh Sinclair, Isabella Sinclair, Mr Richard Prouse's child, McIlvride child.

No dates, no indication of anything on which to base our search. In fact, not very promising at all. Fortunately, however, our correspondence with just two members of the Sinclair Family led to a vast library of letters to the many descendants of the two pioneers, and with their help, plus chance discoveries at National Archives and in Family Bibles and diaries, we were able to flesh out the bones of the Sinclair Family, and this is their story:

Hugh Sinclair was by no means well-off when he arrived in New Zealand in 1839 in the employ of James Coutts Crawford, latterly of Miramar fame. It was to be some eight or nine years before he could afford to buy land in Wainuiomata and build a house. Two houses in fact; the first was swept away in a flood, so the second was established on higher ground and was called 'Moness'. Here Hugh and his wife Agnes raised their four children, two boys and two girls. As he became established Hugh extended his land holdings to some 2500 acres, and set up a timber mill where he employed some 50 workers. Ten years after settling in Wainuiomata Hugh was able to invite his niece Isabel and her husband John McIlvride out to join him in this new land, and to assist them in establishing a home he gifted Isabel 25 acres of his property. Here John McIlvride built a typical one and a half storied house of the period and it was here that Wainuiomata's first Post Office began in January 1870, with John and Isabel's daughter Christina later riding over the narrow winding track which constituted the Wainuiomata Hill Road two or three times a week to collect the mail from Lower Hutt. Christina made this ride from the age of 12 in 1872 until her marriage seven years later.

In the meantime Hugh had also arranged for one of his sisters, Isabella, to join the Clan in Wainuiomata, where she was given a little cottage and two acres of Hugh's ground for her own. Auntie Belle, as she was known, was in charge of the dairying operations on the Sinclair estate, and 'no man dared set foot in her dairy'.

By 1867 the Sinclair Clan was well-settled in Wainuiomata when a young mariner, John Mowlem of the Mowlems of Swanage, sailed 'The Electra' into Wellington Harbour. A chance meeting with Hugh's daughter Agnes led to their marriage the following year with the couple sailing for England to settle. Evidently, however, Agnes was badly homesick and the couple returned within the year. At that time Hugh gave them a block of his land on which John Mowlem built 'Northbrook', a large two-storied home of distinctive style and some character. Family tradition records that the Mowlems built the house using timber from the Sinclair mill, but furnished it with imported fittings — windows, slates, wallpapers, carpets and lamps were all brought out to New Zealand via the Mowlem Line. Upon his retiring from the sea to be a 'Gentleman', John Mowlem is reputed to have had a telescope installed in an upper room of his home. Perhaps this was to keep a check on the local goings-on as John would certainly not have been able to view the sea from 'Northbrook'!

In September 1869 Hugh's niece Isabel gave birth to a daughter whom the McIlvrides named Catherine. Unfortunately however, Catherine died of convulsions and complications at three weeks of age, and it must have been about this time that Hugh Sinclair set aside the plot of ground which was to become the family cemetery. Little would he have realised, however, that he would be the next contender for interment. On the night of 10 November 1871, in the face of a howling southerly, Hugh was riding home from business in Wellington. He was last seen within a mile of home when he shared a drink with another Valley resident. The next morning he was discovered lying peacefully on the ground, with his horse standing beside him, and no indication of foul play. In fact the subsequent autopsy revealed that Hugh had died of a stroke, at the young age of 61 years.

Things in the Sinclair Cemetery were quiet for a time after Hugh's interment. His sons John and Duncan continued the sawmill, importing a locomotive to lug the timber wagons down 'Sinclair Valley' to the mill itself. In 1868 John Sinclair had wed another Valley resident, Isabel Wood, and the following year their daughter Catherine Elizabeth, known as Kate, was born. Unfortunately however, TB was a weakness in the Wood family, and Kate's mother died of this in January 1875 at the age of 30.

In 1878 the Reaper again called, this time summoning Hugh Sinclair's widow Agnes whose cause of death was described — "... a general break-up of the system, caused by being suddenly laid up with a broken leg, which was the result of a fall about eighteen months since . . ." Agnes was 70 years old, a good age for those hard pioneering days.

1879 saw Christina McIlvride's marriage to Richard Prouse III, son of another local pioneer, and the couple moved 'over the hill' to Whiteman's Valley where Richard and his brother were also running a sawmill. At Christmas 1879 Christina and her husband rode back to Wainuiomata to visit her family and it was after reaching her parents' home that Christina was delivered of a son, three months premature. Despite his early arrival Richard Prouse IV put up a good fight to live 36 hours. The wee mite was buried in a corner of the Sinclair Cemetery.

A year or so after his wife's death John Sinclair remarried, this time the governess to his sister Agnes' children. Louise Hill is reputed to have been a lovely person who bore John Sinclair two boys and two girls. Unfortunately, however, 20 month old John Hugh Sinclair, during a remiss moment on the part of his nurse, ate Lucifer matches. The child died four days later on 19 October 1881, and the Coroner's Report, held in National Archives, is quite heartwrenching to read.

After the taking of 'Sinclair Valley' under the Public Works Act for the establishment of a dam for the Wellington water supply, the Sinclairs were now finding it difficult to run their sawmilling operations. Timber was able to be brought from the Wairarapa on the new railway cheaper than the Sinclairs could supply it, and although John and Duncan borrowed to save their family fortunes, a sale of their land through bankruptcy was forced in the early 1880s. John took his family to Taranaki, and later did well there, while Duncan took his family first to Lowry Bay, and finally settled in Palmerston North.

With the death by 'natural decay' of Hugh's sister Isabella on 20 February 1882, aged 79, the last interment took place in the Sinclair Cemetery.

Hugh and Agnes' fourth child Elizabeth also married, though she lived out of the Valley. Her first husband 'went out one morning and hanged himself' and many years later Elizabeth married a childhood admirer. There were two children from her first marriage but despite their relatively recent existence, tracing this branch of the family has proved even harder than tracking down the Sinclair Pioneers. To date we have no records of this line.

The McIlvride home and farm was leased then later sold after Isabella's death in 1899 and thus the last family link with Wainuiomata was severed.

Armed with the above our Historical Society arranged with a patternmaker to have a plaque cast, and it was duly uplifted and carefully (and permanently we hope) attached to the cairn before anyone realised

that the year 1880 for Isabella should read 1882. Panic! Fortunately however, the patternmakers were very good about coming out to the cemetery and making on the spot repairs. The resulting correction was so good that even those forewarned would have trouble discerning the amended year.

Saturday, 24 March, 1984 — Finally, the day of the Re-Dedication, after a year of work. For a number of months previous our secretary had been writing to every Sinclair descendant she knew of (and a few who sounded likely relatives) letting them know about the project and inviting them to take part in the unveiling of the cairn. The response was staggering. Not only were the descendants thrilled to learn that the family cemetery was at last being acknowledged, but they were even prepared to assist financially, and upwards of \$1000 was donated by the various branches towards our work. Twelve members representing different lines of the family from as far afield as Nelson, Auckland and Hamilton flew in for the occasion, while good wishes were extended from as far away as Australia and Brazil.

There still remains replacement tree planting to be done around the Cemetery and the coaxing on of flowers in the garden around the Cairn itself, while the establishment of a groundcover which will eliminate the need for grass mowing is of prime importance. However, nearly 115 years after the first burial in the Sinclair Family Cemetery, the Wainuiomata Historical Society and the many descendants of the Sinclair and McIlvride families are thrilled to have had a part in the Re-Dedication of this site, as a tribute to our pioneering forebears.

For those wishing to know more about the 'Sinclair Cemetery' the Wainuiomata Historical Society has produced a booklet detailing the Project priced at \$2.00 plus p&p, and available by writing to 16 Enfield Road, Wainuiomata.

The Chinese Community's Contribution to Mangere in Half a Century

**Address by Mr Harry Luen to the Mangere Historical Society
(The report was sent by Mrs H. Alford, President of the Society)**

About a hundred years ago, a combination of factors in their homeland made the Chinese people look elsewhere; land-pressures were building up — holdings were becoming smaller, and with the lure of gold found in the Yukon, Australia and New Zealand, it meant that young Chinese set out to find their fortunes abroad. Most came from the villages of the Canton District, and with the recession in China, New Zealand seemed the "Golden Mountain". But when the immigrants arrived here, life did not turn out to be quite as easy or golden as they may have imagined; many went down to Timaru and Oamaru to join the goldrush. Those who struck it rich would have returned to their homeland but others chose not to go back with empty hands, but instead use their natural talents in gardening. Market-gardening has been carried out on the Mangere foreshore since the 1930s. By the 1940-50s, it reached its peak — about 500 plots with an average of 10 acres; some larger ones were approximately 50-60 acres! The soil was volcanic, very friable, leached well, but was it ROCKY!! which made ploughing very hard on ploughs and horses. In the depression times, those who had nothing else to occupy themselves with were co-opted to remove rocks and put them aside to form walls or boundaries, and in return for a day's work, received a bowl of good hot soup and some slices of bread. The overall result was better crops, and beans, peas, lettuce, cauli's, cabbages were all grown, but not potatoes. Crop-rotation was practised; blood and bone was the main fertilising-agent, but when applied year after year, it eventually tended to pug up the soil; like most other 'old-timers' it was not easy to change their well-tried and established practices, "it took a while to convince my Dad to buy a tractor".

Life in the early days was far from soft and easy; imagine yourself working half an acre of rootcrop, on your hands and knees, weeding! The life style WAS hard, but no different from others. There WERE days off: TWO per year — Chinese New Year's Day and October 10th, the Chinese Public Holiday. Saturdays and Sundays were normal working days.

Housing too, was rather primitive; just a shack, covered with tarpaper or corrugated iron; cooking done over an open fire, out in the open. And there was no sexist discrimination: Mr Luen's parents would come in from the fields, take off their boots, put them side by side by the door, as they worked side by side in the fields.

But this hard way of life and the deprivations had their reward; it built character, it tends to make you into a philosopher, it becomes part of you and once a sparse way of life is ingrained, it makes you prudent always. Concepts such as FREEDOM, very precious and lacking in many nations, are worth being guarded jealously before they are lost by taking them for granted.