

ORATIA HISTORICAL THEMATIC STUDY



Report prepared for Auckland Council

By

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June 2013

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INTRODUCTION

Auckland Council has commissioned Clough & Associates to undertake a study identifying key historical themes and resources relating to Oratia, West Auckland (Figure 1).

The key historical themes identified in this study are the Maori history of the area prior to European settlement ('Tangata Whenua'); early settler families who played a prominent role in shaping Oratia ('European Settlement and Migration'); the use of the land for timber, farming and horticulture ('Working the Land'); Oratia's community buildings, monuments and facilities ('Community Development'); and the various social, cultural and sporting activities of the Oratia residents ('Recreation and Entertainment'). The key information resources are listed in the Bibliography.

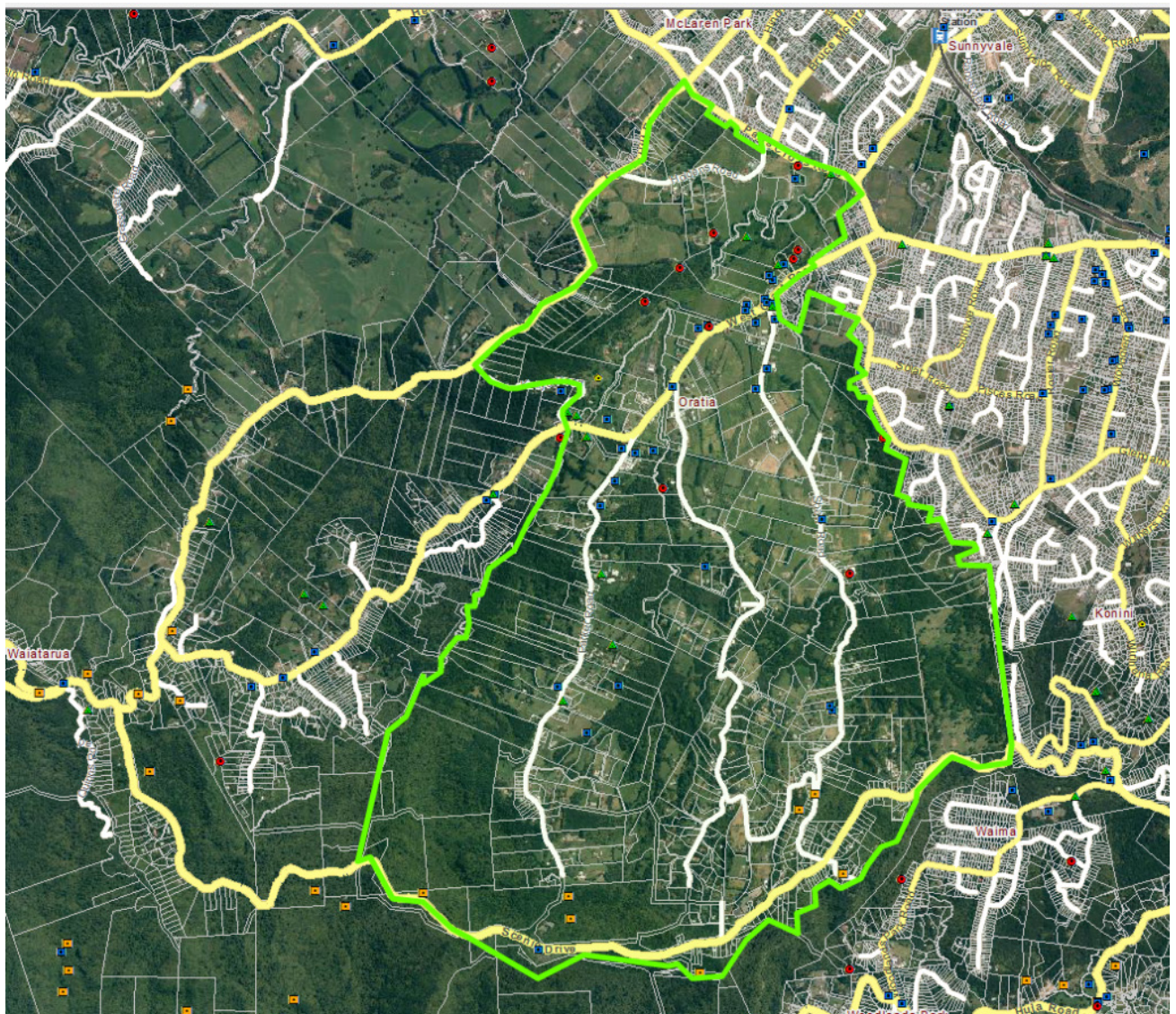


Figure 1. Oratia district boundaries (green line) (source: Auckland Council GIS viewer)

TANGATA WHENUA

The history of Maori occupation in the Waitakere Ranges can be traced back over centuries and is evidenced in the numerous archaeological sites and associated place names.¹ The area which later became known as Oratia (place of long-linging sun) was often traversed by traditional ara (walkways) including the significant Kaipara–Whau walking track which was located between the Riverhead and Whau (New Lynn) Portages.² The Oratia Stream also provided means of access and transport as well as a fresh water supply. Recorded Maori sites in Oratia are largely clustered in the block of land bounded by West Coast Road, Forest Hill Road, Parrs Cross Road and Kellys Road. Midden sites with substantial portions of cockle suggest collection was undertaken at sandy flats such as Huia, Mill or Kaitarakihi Bays and the presence of pits and terraces (R11/72) above the Oratia Stream indicates settlement and food storage.³

Several tribal groups were affiliated with the early occupation of West Auckland; however, Murdoch notes that mana whenua (traditional ownership) of the land is held by the iwi Te Kawerau a Maki.⁴ Their connection with the area was forged in the early 1600s when their eponymous ancestor Maki and his brother Matahu claimed and settled the Tamaki isthmus along with wider areas. Taua states that at this time control was taken of West Auckland ‘after battles at Waitetura (North Piha), Waihuna (Pararaha Valley) and Te Rauotehuia (Huia Bay). Following these battles Maki stamped his mana on the area by naming a hill in the north ‘Te Pou a Maki’ (inland of Taupaki) and a hill in the south Te Ka a Maki (Jackies Peak, Huia).’⁵ Te Kawerau a Maki named the land Hikurangi, and the forest which now covers the Waitakere Ranges was known as Te Wao nui a Tiriwa (the great forest of Tiriwa).⁶ The people of Te Kawerau a Maki trace their descent from several ancestral waka (canoes), in particular the vessel named Moekakara which was sailed by Tahuhunui and touched land near the present-day Leigh.⁷

Ngati Whatua also claim close association with the lands of the Tamaki isthmus and Waitakere. During the late 1600s and early 1700s several hapu (sub-tribal groups) of the iwi Ngati Whatua moved southwards and settled near the entrance to the Kaipara Harbour where they encountered Te Kawerau. Inter-marriage took place between the two groups over several years; however, conflict arose and Te Kawerau were ultimately forced south after protracted battles including Te Raupatu Tihore (the ‘Stripping Conquest’ or the ‘Conquest that Laid

¹ Graeme Murdoch, ‘Nga tohu o Waitakere, The Maori Place Named of the Waitakere River Valley and its Environs: Their Background History and an Explanation of their Meaning’, in James Northcote-Bade, ed., *West Auckland Remembers: A Collection of Historical Essays for the 1990 Commemoration*, Auckland, 1990, p.9.

² A.W. Reed, *Place Names of New Zealand: Origins and Meanings for over 10,000 Names*, Auckland, 2010, p.290; B.W. Hayward and J.T. Diamond, *Prehistoric Archaeological Sites of the Waitakere Ranges and West Auckland, New Zealand*, Auckland, 1978, p.95.

³ CHI Records No’s: 5834, 5963, 7505, 9705; Hayward and Diamond, p.83; Auckland Regional Council, ‘Intertidal Life Around the Coast of the Waitakere Ranges, Auckland’, Technical Publication 298, January, 2004, p.7.

⁴ Murdoch, p.12.

⁵ Te Warena Taua, ‘He kohikohinga korero mo Hikurangi’, in Finlay Macdonald and Ruth Kerr, eds, *West: The History of Waitakere*, Auckland, 2009, pp.32-3.

⁶ Ibid., p.23.

⁷ Ibid., p.29.

Bare'). During the skirmish several Te Kawerau pa were conquered by the Ngati Whatua war party, who were led by Kawharu. Following the clash, peace agreements and intermarriage between the two groups restored amity and cemented Ngati Whatua's position in south Kaipara.⁸ Paterson recounts that 'the most well known of the peace agreements between Ngati Whatua and Kawerau occurred when the Ngati Whatua rangatira Poutapuaka, moving south and defining the boundaries of his land, was met at Taupaki by the Kawerau chief Te Au-o-te-whenua, who was undertaking a similar exercise. Subsequently Te Au-o-te-whenua gifted taonga or precious heirlooms to Ngati Whatua at Te Korekore and Kahukuri to confirm peace between the two groups.'⁹ The combined hapu of Ngati Whatua subsequently took control of the Tamaki Isthmus; however, the settlements of Te Kawerau a Maki remained uncontested in the Waitakere Ranges.¹⁰

Te Kawerau a Maki faced further conflict in the early 1820s following raids by warring Ngapuhi parties armed with muskets. Significant numbers of Te Kawerau were killed and the survivors fled south into the Waikato. By the mid-1830s small numbers of Te Kawerau began to return to their traditional occupation areas in Waitakere, eventually re-establishing themselves in the district, but they soon faced pressures from European land speculators and the British Crown.¹¹ Iwi continued to occupy land along the coast and utilise the Ranges for harvesting food into the twentieth century, despite the rapid reduction of their original tribal area. After 1912 remaining members of Te Kawerau intermittently occupied a settlement at Te Henga until around the 1960s.¹²

⁸ Murdoch, p.14, Malcolm Paterson, 'Ko Nga Kuri Purepure o Tamaki, e kore e ngaro i te po', in Finlay Macdonald and Ruth Kerr, eds, *West: The History of Waitakere*, Auckland, 2009, p.50.

⁹ Paterson, p.51.

¹⁰ Murdoch, p.14.

¹¹ Ibid., p.15.

¹² Ibid., p.16.

EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT AND MIGRATION

Early colonial families began purchasing land in the Oratia area as early as the 1850s. Crown Grants were awarded for large tracts throughout the district, which was included in the Parish of Waikomiti. The name was later changed to Waikumete, which included what is now Glen Eden, and Oratia was eventually deemed a separate district in 1908.¹³ In 1933 Joe Shaw recounted: ‘looking back to those days when low tea-tree [sic] shrubs covered the clay hills of Oratia, a sign of kauri gum in the swamps here and there offering the only hope of livelihood to a prospective settler, one cannot pay too high a tribute to those who so successfully made their homes here.’ These early families established businesses and formed communities, and their role in the history of Oratia remains in the topography of the district, some of its place names and the stories of the land.

THE PARR FAMILY

On 1 April 1843 Thomas Bates Parr, aged 34, and his wife Jane Elizabeth Parr (née Davison), aged 31, arrived in Auckland on board the *Westminster* – the first planned immigrant ship to New Zealand.¹⁴ The couple had embarked from Plymouth, England over three months earlier with their daughter Jane Esther and sons Edward John, aged 13, Thomas Davison, aged 11 and John, aged 5.¹⁵ Another daughter, Sarah Elizabeth, was born soon after the Parr family’s arrival and was baptised on 15 October 1843 at St Paul’s Church. However, the infant died later that same month and was buried at the Symonds Street Cemetery on 30 October 1843.¹⁶ Thomas Parr Snr found work as a gardener and labourer, and by 1845 had acquired property in Mt Eden where he planted an orchard with seeds he had stowed in his luggage from England.¹⁷ Parr later sold the land and on 10 November 1854 he acquired Allotment 14, Parish of Waikomiti, by Crown Grant for the sum of £243.¹⁸ The property comprised 536 acres and incorporated land which is now part of both the Oratia and Glen Eden districts.¹⁹ Parr named his estate ‘Albion Vale’ (English Valley) and established a successful orchard and nursery on the land. Extensive farming was also undertaken up until the early 1880s. A herd of over 30 cows was kept and the butter sent to Auckland for sale. Crops of wheat were sent to Partington’s Mill to be ground into flour and additional harvests of maize, oats, field peas, millet, turnips, barley, mangels, onions, potatoes, parsnips and carrots were commercially produced.²⁰ Along with his commercial pursuits, Thomas Parr was keenly

¹³ Oratia Folk Museum (OFM) – 001-0007, Box 2, Oratia – General, manuscript by F. Whittaker, ‘Oratia’, no date, West Auckland Research Centre.

¹⁴ Auckland Area Passenger Arrivals 1838-1889, Auckland Libraries: <http://www.aucklandcity.govt.nz/dbtw-wpd/exec/dbtwpub.dll>; W.R. Allen, *Oratia My Valley*, Auckland, 1984, p.67.

¹⁵ Auckland Area Passenger Arrivals 1838-1889, Auckland Libraries: <http://www.aucklandcity.govt.nz/dbtw-wpd/passengers/passenger.html>.

¹⁶ Cemetery Records – Symonds Street and St Stephens, Auckland Libraries: http://www.aucklandcity.govt.nz/dbtw-wpd/exec/dbtwpub.dll?AC=QBE_QUERY&QF0=RecordID&QI0=7152&TN=SSCIndex&RF=Reportweb&NP=2, Allen, p.67.

¹⁷ OFM-001-0011, Box 2, Oratia Families, Folder 2, Parr, ‘Typed noted on the Parr family’ author unknown, West Auckland Research Centre; R.A. Harvey, ed., *The Little School in the Valley: Oratia School Centenary, A Journey Back in a Remarkable Place*, Oratia, 1982, p.32.

¹⁸ Deeds Index 7A/19, Archives New Zealand; Allen, p.67.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Allen, p.67.

involved with the development of the Oratia district and was a trustee for both the Waikomiti Highway Board and the local Combined Church.²¹

Around 1870 a flood dislodged some 500 logs from Andrew Kelly's logging yard and swept them down Canty's Creek (Oratia Stream) where they devastated significant portions of Parr's property.²² A mortgage of £1000 was raised to repair the damage; however, when Thomas Parr died in 1877 at 69 years of age, £500 remained unpaid.²³ Three of Thomas's grandsons (Thomas, John and Edward) cleared the debt and in return they each received portions of around 50 acres from the estate.²⁴

Thomas Parr's orcharding business passed to his eldest son Edward John Parr, who, as a young man had served as a volunteer soldier at the Bay of Islands during the Northern War (1845-46), before returning to Auckland and working as a gardener with his father.²⁵ Edward (known as E.J.) married Isabella Sharp, the daughter of another early Oratia family, in 1863.²⁶ The couple continued to reside at Albion Vale where they raised their extensive family. Incomplete birth records make it unclear how many children Edward and Isabella produced; however, those with known birth certificates included: Thomas (1864), John (1866), Edward (1867), Humphrey Sharp (1869), Agnes Campbell (1870), William Richard (1871), Edwin Humphrey (1872), Jane Elizabeth (1873), George Archibald (1876), Matthew Robert (1877), Alfred Edmond (1878), Isabella (1879), Edmond (1882), and Maria (1884).²⁷ Several of their children are said to have died in infancy, including Alfred Edmond and Humphrey Sharp.²⁸

Following Edward's death in 1889 at the age of 58, his son John inherited the property and business. In 1894 John married Jane Walmsley Holden, also from an Oratia settler family, and they had three children: Muriel Isabella Holden (1896), Hazel Christina Drummond (1898), and Alfred John (1900).²⁹ John Parr was involved with both the commercial and community progress of the district and was a foundation member of the Waikomiti Fruitgrowers' Association along with a member of the Oratia District School Committee.³⁰ Parr died at the age of 44 years in 1910.³¹ That same year the remaining Albion Vale property was subdivided into seven sections and passed out of the hands of the Parr family; however

²¹ *Daily Southern Cross*, 7 May 1870; Application File No. 36283C, LINZ.

²² Allen, p.67.

²³ Deeds Index 7A/19, Archives New Zealand; BDM 1877/257; Allen, p.67.

²⁴ Allen, p.67.

²⁵ OFM-001-0011, Box 2, Oratia Families, Folder 2, Parr, 'Typed notes on the Parr family', author unknown, West Auckland Research Centre; *Daily Southern Cross*, 7 February 1854, p.4.

²⁶ BDM 1863/3661.

²⁷ BDM: 1864/21438; 1866/23710, 1867/13368; 1869/12192; 1870/224; 1871/14841; 1872/14375; 1873/21683; 1876/220; 1877/3747; 1878/18292; 1879/10973; 1882/5655; 1884/1079.

²⁸ OFM-001-0011, Box 2, Oratia Families, Folder 2, Parr, 'Typed notes on the Parr family', author unknown, West Auckland Research Centre.

²⁹ BDM: 1894/2820, 1896/15475, 1898/1130, 1900/1713.

³⁰ Mate Marinovich, 'The First Fifty Years of Fruitgrowing in Oratia District (1896-1946)', *The Orchardist of New Zealand*, June, 1986, pp.179-80; *Auckland Star*, 26 April 1892, p.2.

³¹ BDM 1910/4306.

their impact on the early European settlement of the Oratia district remains and is acknowledged in the naming of Parrs Cross Road, Parrs Bridge, and Parrs Park.³²

Albion Vale Homestead & Ancillary Buildings

The first Parr homestead was built in the 1850s ‘on the highest point adjacent to their southern boundary’ near what is now Glengarry Road.³³ Around 1870 the house was shifted to a new site on the property (located behind the present house and in the vicinity of old magnolia trees) where the family continued to reside until after the death of Thomas Parr Snr.³⁴ The house was later replaced and converted into a packing shed before being demolished in the 1930s.³⁵

A range of dates have been suggested for the building of the second homestead at Albion Vale, which is likely to have occurred between 1879 and 1880 under the direction of Edward John Parr (Figure 2). The grand two-storey Victorian farmhouse featured a Welsh slate roof, Chicago-style windows and heart kauri frames and cladding.³⁶ Soft Whau bricks cemented with mortar of burnt shell made on site formed the building’s foundation.³⁷ The building was occupied by the Parr family up until the death of John Parr in 1910 when the property was divided and put up for sale. The land on which the homestead stood was advertised as 37 acre Lot 1, Pt Allotment 14 (which included 15 acres of established orchard), but failed to sell (Figure 3).³⁸ The property was eventually leased to John Harré who persuaded his sons, veterans of World War I, to use their returned soldiers’ loans to purchase Albion Vale.³⁹ A conveyance to William Knight Harré and John McFarlane Harré as tenants-in-common-equally was recorded on 9 September 1919.⁴⁰ From 1948 to 1968 the house was repurposed as the Town & Country Roadhouse, one of Auckland’s first and most successful restaurants.⁴¹ Twentieth century additions to the building included a lean-to at the back of the house and a new kitchen wing.⁴² Subsequent rot caused the breakdown of the lime mortar and the foundations have been removed, cleaned and re-cemented.⁴³ The homestead remains under the ownership of the Harré family, and the current owners, David and Barbara Harré, have undertaken careful and extensive restoration of the building. Albion Vale is scheduled in the Auckland Council District Plan (Waitakere Section) as a Category I heritage item and has

³² *New Zealand Herald*, 5 November 1910, p.12.

³³ Allen, p.67; R.A. Harvey, p.32.

³⁴ Allen, p.67.

³⁵ Dick Scott, *Fire on the Clay: The Pakeha Comes to West Auckland*, Auckland, 1979, p.183; CHI Record No. 3762.

³⁶ Sara Donaghey, ‘Remains of the Day’, in, Finlay Macdonald and Ruth Kerr, eds, *West: The History of the Waitakere*, Auckland, 2009, p.442; CHI Record No. 3762.

³⁷ OFM – 001-0007, Box 2, Oratia – General, ‘Albion Vale’ information sheet, West Auckland Research Centre.

³⁸ Deed Plan Whau 76, LINZ; *Auckland Star*, 2 December 1910, p.2.

³⁹ David Harré and Drew Harré, *Roadhouse Days: An Account of a Family, a House and a Restaurant*, Oratia, 2009, p.13.

⁴⁰ Application File No. 30313C, LINZ.

⁴¹ Harré, p.6.

⁴² Pers. comm. David Harré, 2013.

⁴³ OFM – 001-0007, Box 2, Oratia – General, ‘Albion Vale’ information sheet, West Auckland Research Centre.

been registered as a Category II Historic Place by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust (NZHPT).⁴⁴

Several ancillary buildings are known to have existed on the property from the nineteenth century. The 1910 advertisement for the sale of the property listed ‘a House of eight rooms, glasshouses, complete outbuildings etc.,’ and a plan of the property, dated 1910s, depicted the location of a glasshouse along with a tennis court, front flower garden, and a hydraulic ram.⁴⁵ In *Oratia My Valley*, W.R. Allen recalled that the Harré brothers discovered an old waterwheel by a dam which they attempted to restore.⁴⁶ They were evidently unsuccessful, and the dam and waterwheel were among several other old structures subsequently destroyed.⁴⁷ A plan of the property in 1917, drawn by John (Jack) Harré, recorded nine ancillary structures including: a 100ft glasshouse, a wash house, a small brick building with fireplace known as the ‘Man’s Room’, stables with three stalls, a hayshed, a pigsty (under an old Oak tree), a dairy, a cow shed, and a packing shed (probably the original Parr home).⁴⁸ Some of these buildings were repurposed over the years, and the Man’s Room was possibly built as a cooler room originally.⁴⁹ Sara Donaghey notes in *West* that 14 outbuildings existed at Albion Vale, which included a deep well, a cellar and a blacksmiths.⁵⁰ In addition to heritage structures on the property the front garden retains many of the original specimens from the Parr nursery, notably persimmons, oaks, magnolias, and azaleas.⁵¹

⁴⁴ It is listed on the Auckland Council Cultural Heritage Inventory (CHI) as number 3762. The NZHPT register number is 2594. It is also a recorded archaeological site (R11/2430).

⁴⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, 5 November 1910, p.12; Deed Plan Whau 76, LINZ.

⁴⁶ Allen, p.42.

⁴⁷ Harré, p.13. The dam and mill site is listed under CHI number 11270 and as a recorded archaeological site R11/1457.

⁴⁸ OFM-001-0007, Box 2, ‘Handwritten plan of Albion Vale property and outbuildings’, 1917, drawn by Jack Harré, West Auckland Research Centre.

⁴⁹ CHI Record No. 3762; Dongahey, p.442.

⁵⁰ Donaghey, p.442.

⁵¹ Two remnant magnolias from Thomas Parr’s nursery are recorded under CHI number 12904 and are scheduled in the Auckland Council District Plan (Waitakere Section) as a Historic Botanical Site. OFM – 001-0007, Box 2, Oratia – General, ‘Albion Vale’ information sheet, West Auckland Research Centre.



Figure 2: Sketch drawing of the second Parr homestead at Albion Vale. (Source: W.R. Allen, *Oratia My Valley*, p.42)

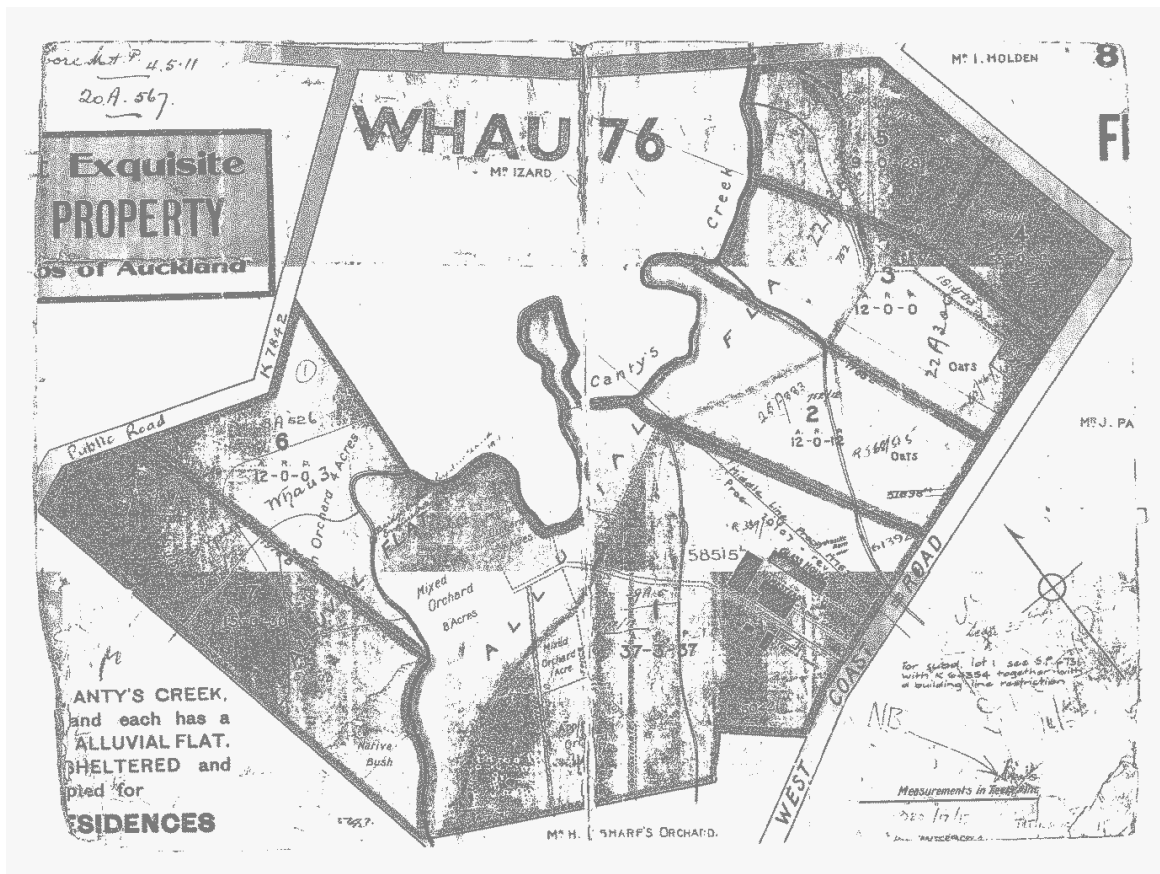


Figure 3: Deed Plan Whau 76, dated c.1911, showing the subdivision of the Parr property, land use, and the position of the homestead and ancillary buildings. (Source: LINZ)

THE KELLY FAMILY

On 20 March 1851 Scottish immigrants Andrew and Margaret Kelly arrived in New Zealand with their infant daughter Mary after a 121 day voyage from England on the vessel *Cresswell*.⁵² The family initially settled in Freeman's Bay where Andrew Kelly found work as a pit-sawyer at one of the extensive timber yards in the area.⁵³ On 21 December 1854 Kelly obtained a Crown Grant for 110 acres of land (now Pt Allotment 7) in the Parish of Waikomiti, for the sum of £50.⁵⁴ Kelly bought the neighbouring property (now Pt Allotment 8) soon after, and the family subsequently moved west to begin work on their extensive 200 acre property. Andrew Kelly added to his land in 1865 when he bought allotments 107 and 108 along Parker Road.⁵⁵ The Kelly family were actively involved in the development of the Oratia district; Andrew was one of the first trustees of the Oratia Combined Church and was appointed chairman to the Waikomiti Highway Board in 1873.⁵⁶ Andrew and Margaret raised four daughters, who were locally known as 'Kelly's gang' – Mary, Margaret, Elizabeth and Jane.⁵⁷ Jane married Thomas Cox in 1885 and the couple later became church trustees after her father.⁵⁸ Andrew Kelly died at the age of 89 years in 1907.⁵⁹ Following his death the land was transferred out of the family's ownership.⁶⁰ Reminders of the pioneering Kellys remain in the district with Kellys Bridge and Kellys Road (which runs through the original property) named after the settler family.

Kelly Homestead

The two-storey Kelly homestead was built of timber (probably local kauri) and featured simple weatherboard cladding, multi-paned sash windows and two chimneys (Figure 4).⁶¹ The date of construction falls between 1854 and 1872, although it is thought likely that the house was erected in the mid to late 1850s when the family arrived in Oratia. In April 1873 the house was used to host the wedding of Kelly's eldest daughter Mary to Joseph Stacey.⁶² W.R. Allen noted that this was due to the fact that the Combined Church had not been finished at that time.⁶³ In 1878 'Kelly's House' is included as a landmark on a plan which shows the residence in proximity to the church (Figure 5). It is believed that when Kelly's daughter Margaret died in 1883 the grave was positioned behind the church so that it could be seen by her family from the Kelly homestead.⁶⁴ The house is also depicted on plan 5063A dated May 1906 which shows other ancillary buildings nearby, including a stable (Figure 6).⁶⁵ The site was later developed and none of the original buildings are thought to remain.

⁵² Auckland Area Passenger Arrivals 1838-1889, Auckland Libraries: <http://www.aucklandcity.govt.nz/dbtw-wpd/exec/dbtwpub.dll>; Allen, p.30; *Western Leader*, 30 June 1983, np.

⁵³ *Western Leader*, 30 June 1983, np.

⁵⁴ Application File No. 5965, LINZ.

⁵⁵ Allen, p.30.

⁵⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 2 October 1867, p.4; *New Zealand Herald*, 14 August 1873, p.3.

⁵⁷ Allen, p.31.

⁵⁸ BDM 1885/2018; Application File No. 36283C, LINZ.

⁵⁹ BDM 1907/4782.

⁶⁰ Application File No. 5965, LINZ.

⁶¹ Allen, p.30.

⁶² *New Zealand Herald*, 3 April 1873, p.2.

⁶³ Allen, p.31.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.24.

⁶⁵ Plan 5063A, LINZ.

However, there are two scheduled trees, an oak and a kauri, at 1 Kellys Road that may relate to early plantings on the property.⁶⁶



Figure 4: Undated photograph showing the Kelly family outside their timber homestead. (Source: W.R. Allen, *Oratia My Valley*, p.30)

⁶⁶ The site of the former Kelly Homestead is listed under CHI number 3492, and the oak and kauri as CHI 2208 and 2301 respectively (Historic Botanical Sites).

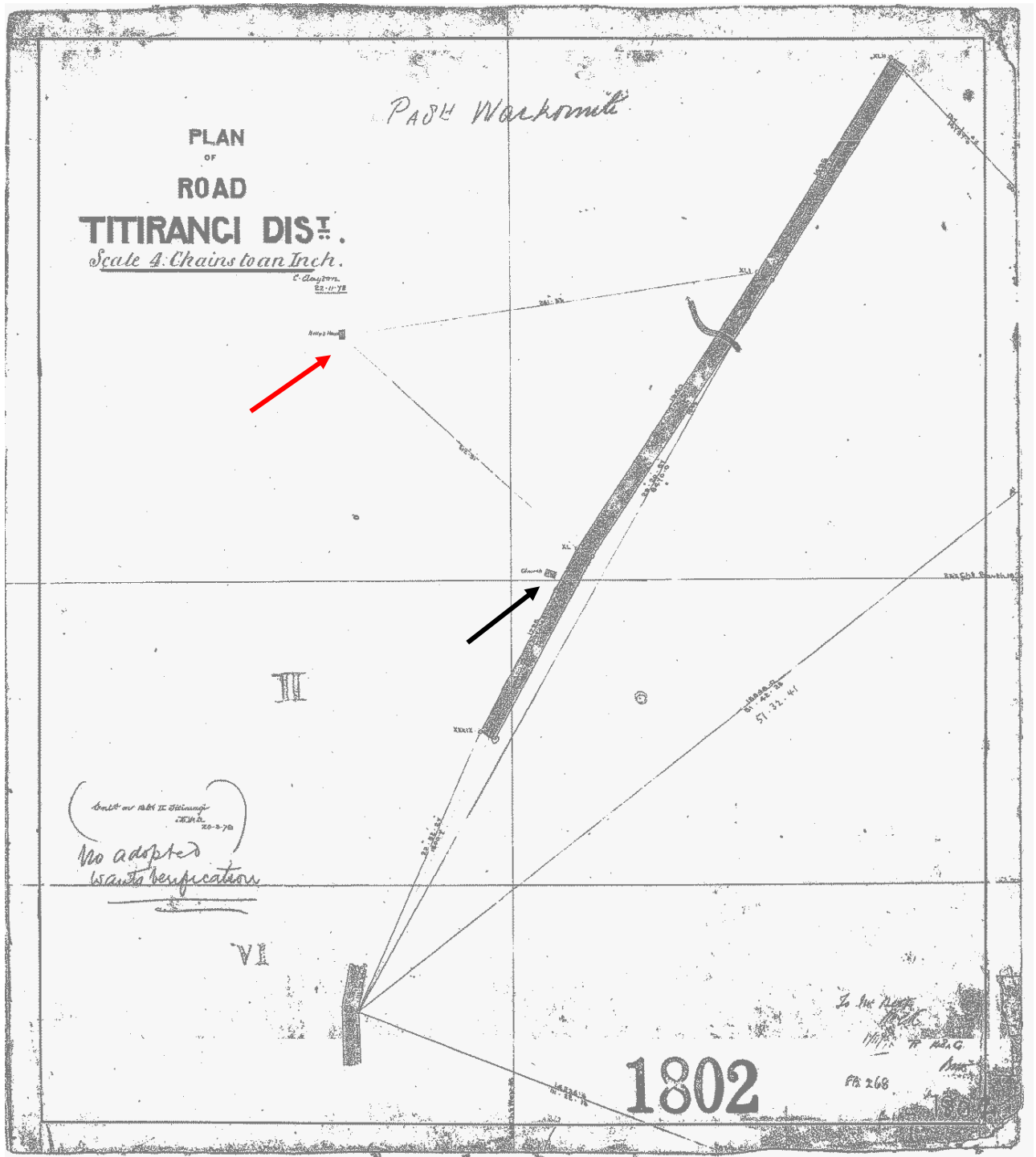
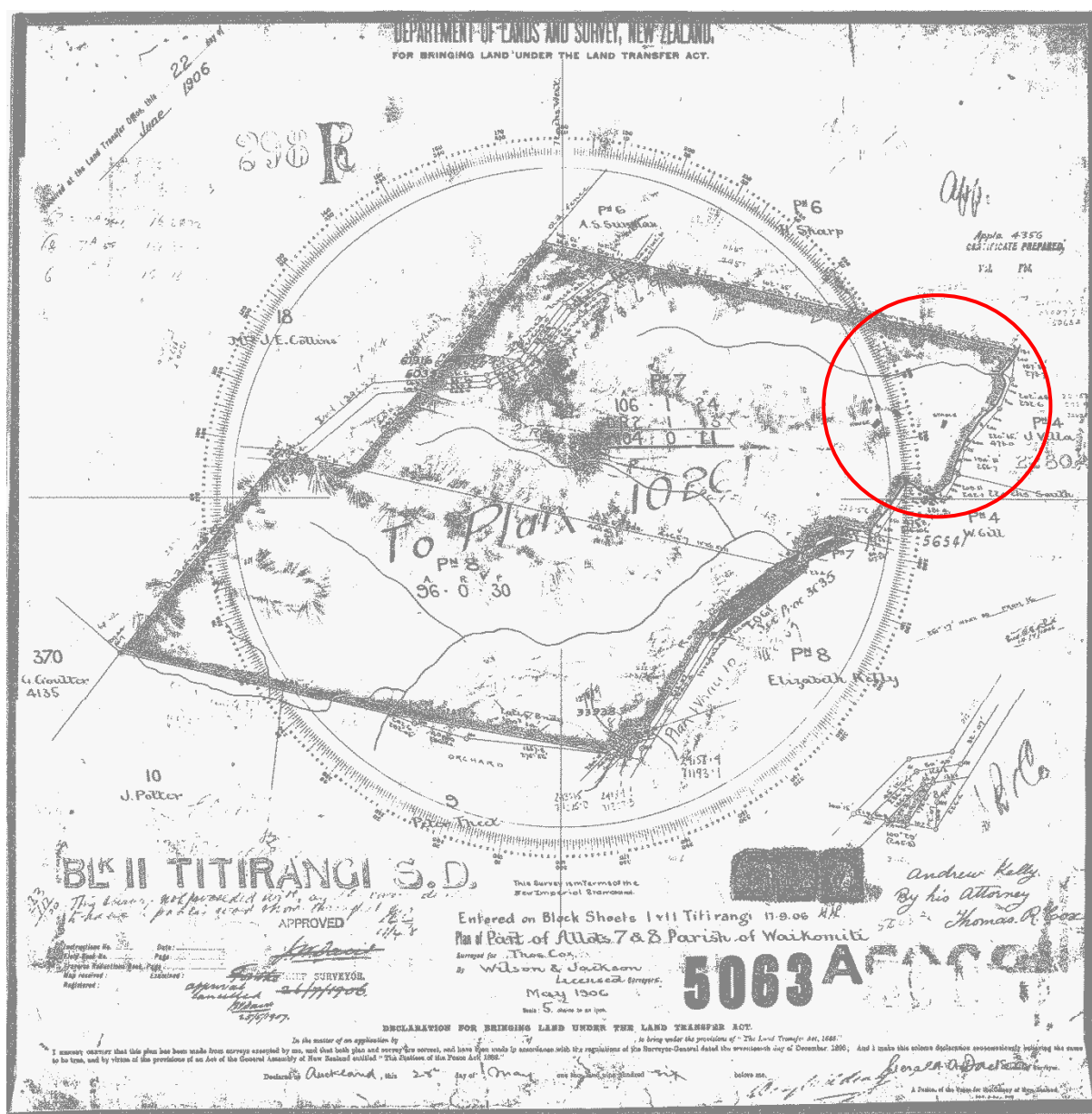


Figure 5: Plan SO 1802, dated 1878, showing the position of the Kelly homestead (indicated with a red arrow) in proximity to the Oratia Combined Church (indicated with a black arrow). (Source: LINZ)



married Mary Huston, the daughter of early settler John Huston.⁶⁹ The couple had a son named Alexander (Alec) in 1869 and he later worked the land alongside his father. In 1889 the *New Zealand Herald* described ‘Cochrane [sic] and Son’s Orchard’ as follows: ‘the orchard is well sheltered by hills and tall *pinus insignis*, with the ranges only a short distance away. They are under ten years planted, but with good attention and a moderate supply of manure the trees have attained a great size for the time they have been planted, and the immense crops of both apples and plums are wonderful.’⁷⁰ Alec was elected vice-president of the Waikomiti Fruitgrowers’ Association in 1896 and continued cultivating the family property following his father’s death in 1906 at the age of 75 years.⁷¹

Alec Cochran married Jane Ferguson in 1900 and their daughter, Mary Ferguson Cochran, was born in 1901 (Figure 7).⁷² Along with horticultural ventures, Cochran represented the Waikumete Riding as a County Councillor for 21 years (1896-1917), during which time he was appointed Waitemata Council Chairman from 1911 to 1914, and was made a Justice of the Peace in 1921.⁷³ Alexander died in 1923 at 54 years of age and following his death the property passed to his widow Jane and his daughter Mary.⁷⁴

In 1933 Mary Cochran married Fred Whittaker, a fellow member of the Oratia Church Bible Class and classmate at Oratia School.⁷⁵ The couple had one son, named John (Jack) Cochran Whittaker.⁷⁶ Fred Whittaker’s parents, Frederick Snr and Veva Annie Whittaker, had moved to Oratia in the early 1900s and lived on a property along Carter Road.⁷⁷ The land had been acquired unexpectedly by Frederick Snr’s father Thomas, who, out for a walk one day in Auckland, chanced upon an auction room selling deceased estates and put in a successful bid on a 24 acre block of land. On returning home Thomas informed the family that he had purchased a farm for his son at Oratia, and when asked where it was, he replied that he had no idea. Around 1906 Fred Snr and his wife Veva made a trip to inspect the property, which was covered in gorse and had an old house in a dilapidated condition. Notes on the family recount that Fred asked ‘will we just sell it again and forget it? But his wife, a refined lady who was not long out from England, said no Fred, lets clean things up and live here for a while and if we don’t like the idea we’ll go back.’⁷⁸ The Whittakers remained, and their descendants continue to live in the area today.

⁶⁹ BDM 1865/5270.

⁷⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, 26 March 1889, p.6.

⁷¹ *Auckland Star*, 5 February 1897, p.3; BDM: 1869/12548, 1906/3998.

⁷² BDM: 1900/1137, 1901/6567.

⁷³ *New Zealand Herald*, 11 August 1921, p.9., Cyclopedia Company Limited, *The Cyclopedia of New Zealand [Auckland Provincial District]*, Christchurch, 1902, p.146; *New Zealand Herald*, 10 July 1923, p.8.

⁷⁴ BDM 1923/7570; NA 758/228, LINZ.

⁷⁵ BBAE A48 1569 Box 542 2587/63 – COCHRAN Alexander – Oratia – Orchardist, Archives New Zealand; Allen, p.23; Peter Dowling, ed., *The Little School in the Valley: 25 Years On, Oratia District School 1882-2007*, Waitakere City, 2007, p.12.

⁷⁶ Dowling, p.12.

⁷⁷ BBAE A48 1569 Box 542 2587/63 – COCHRAN Alexander – Oratia – Orchardist, Archives New Zealand; Allen, p.18.

⁷⁸ Vertical Files, Oratia – History, handwritten notes on the Whittaker family, author unknown, no date, West Auckland Research Centre; Allen, p.18.

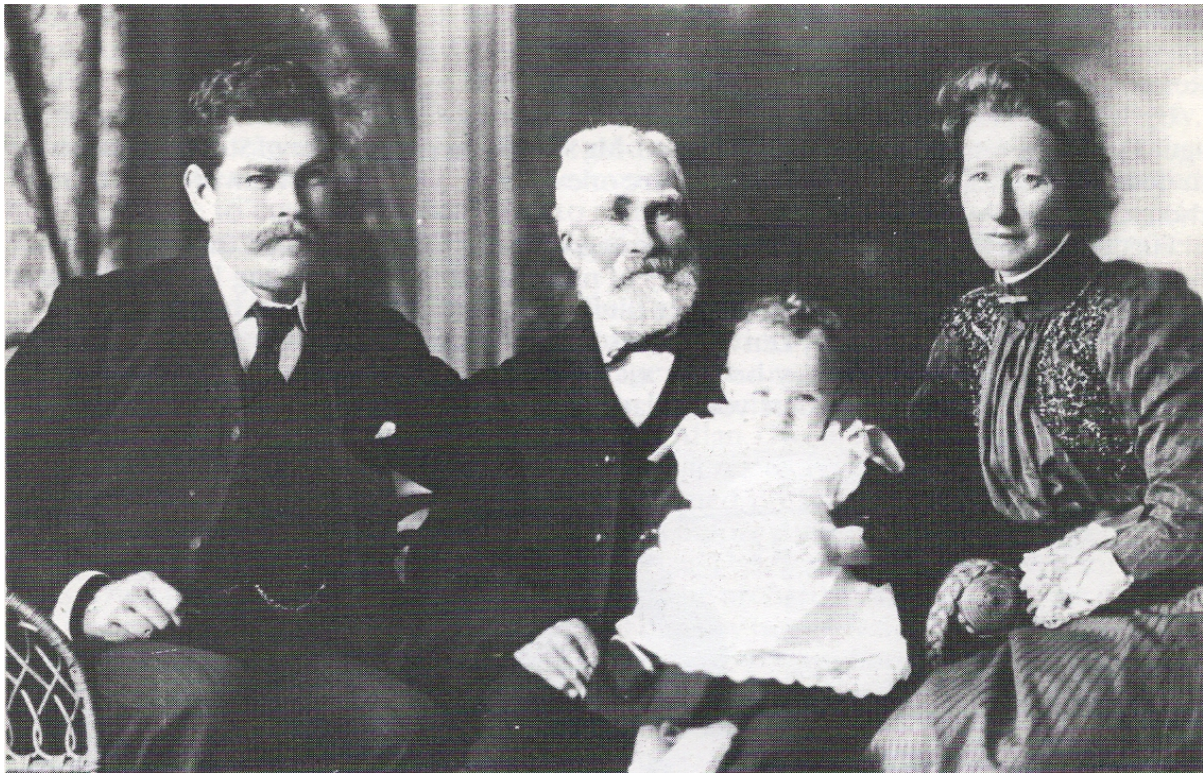


Figure 7: Photograph dated c.1901-5 showing Alexander Cochran Snr (middle) with his granddaughter Mary and her parents Jane (right) and Alec Cochran Jnr (left). (Source: W.R. Allen, *Oratia My Valley*, p.17)

THE SHARP FAMILY

Humphrey Ewing Sharp, aged 14 years, arrived in New Zealand on the ship *Mersey* in June 1859. He had immigrated with his parents John and Agnes Sharp, and two sisters – Agnes and Isabella.⁷⁹ The family originated from Dumbartonshire, Scotland, and upon arrival in Auckland they acquired land in the Parish of Karangahape, near Piha Road.⁸⁰ In the 1860s Humphrey and his father John bought land in the Oratia district, which eventually stretched from Parr's property along West Coast Road to the Kelly property at Forest Hill Road, and included what was later known as the Knock-na-gree youth camp.⁸¹ They established a nursery and orchards on the estate for which Humphrey would become renowned. His brother John Sharp Jnr also became a well-known orchardist after moving to Cambridge in 1873 and specialising in the hybridization of apples.⁸² In 1881 Humphrey married Margaret Laing (of Laingholm) and the couple had 6 children: John (1881), Jane Reid Laing (1883), George Laing (1885), Humphrey Ewing (1887), Ronald Gordon (1889) and William Campbell (1897).⁸³ Humphrey Sharp Snr remained in Oratia until his death in 1925 at 80 years of age.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Auckland Area Passenger Arrivals 1838-1889, Auckland Libraries: <http://www.aucklandcity.govt.nz/dbtw-wpd/exec/dbtwpub.dll>; Allen, p.69.

⁸⁰ Allen, p.69.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Scott, pp.183-4.

⁸³ BDM: 1881/151, 1881/10876, 1883/14840, 1885/16292, 1887/8830, 1889/11564, 1897/16490.

⁸⁴ BDM 1925/237.

He had been significantly involved in the local community, notably through his transfer of six acres to the Education Board in 1883 for the establishment of the Oratia District School.⁸⁵

THE SHAW FAMILY

Shaw Road was named after the settler John Shaw, who immigrated to New Zealand as a child with his parents Elihu and Mary in 1838. The family originated from Sussex and were transported to the Hokianga via Australia on the vessel *Coromandel*.⁸⁶ The Shaws remained in Northland until 1845 when they moved south and acquired land at 'Cabbage Tree Swamp', near what is now known as Morningside, Auckland.⁸⁷ John Shaw married Sarah Slater in 1862 and the couple produced 10 children: six daughters and four sons.⁸⁸ John had learnt the trade of market gardening from his father and subsequently purchased land at Karekare to undertake farming operations. The property proved too far from the central Auckland markets to be profitable and the family moved to Oratia around 1881/2.⁸⁹ Plan SO 11180 dated January 1898 records the Shaw name on a 42 acre block (Allotment 81) (Figure 8). The plan notes that the land had been cleared and a house and orchard are depicted. An area of road reserve can also be seen bisecting the Shaw property.⁹⁰ In 1933 John's son Joseph (Joe) recalled: 'my father's house was the only one on this road, which was later dedicated and named after him.'⁹¹ A Clough & Associates report dated 1995 identified the Shaw homestead at 131 Shaw Road and historical notes made on the family state that a water mill existed on the property.⁹² Three of John's sons – Charlie, Joe and John (Jack) – later purchased adjoining sections in the district and worked the land alongside each other. The Shaws were involved in the local community in various ways – John Shaw Snr was appointed to the Oratia School Committee, and Jack and Charlie were members of the Waikomiti Band. Joe Shaw was also musical and was proficient with the violin, cornet and accordion.⁹³ Such was the standing of the family in the district that when Joe Shaw died in 1950 at the age of 78, pupils from the Oratia School lined the road as the funeral procession went past.⁹⁴

⁸⁵ Deeds Index 7A/6, Archives New Zealand.

⁸⁶ OFM-001-0011, Box 2, Oratia Families, Folder 2, Shaw, handwritten letter to David Harré from Diana Farndon, 9 June 1988, West Auckland Research Centre.

⁸⁷ 'Elihu Shaw: a saga from Sussex to Northland to Cabbage Tree Swamp' by Lisa Truttman on Timespanner website: <http://timespanner.blogspot.co.nz/2009/02/elihu-shaw-saga-from-sussex-to.html>.

⁸⁸ BDM 1862/4982 & Births, Deaths, and Marriages birth search page:

<https://bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz/Search/Search.aspx?Path=%2FqueryEntry.m%3Ftype%3Dbirths>.

⁸⁹ Allen, p.45; OFM-001-0011, Box 2, Oratia Families, Folder 2, Shaw, handwritten letter to David Harré from Diana Farndon, 9 June 1988, West Auckland Research Centre; *Oratia Sporting Gazette*, 17 November 1933, p.1.

⁹⁰ SO 11180, LINZ.

⁹¹ *Oratia Sporting Gazette*, 17 November 1933, p.1.

⁹² Rod Clough and Don Prince, 'Archaeological Survey of the Oratia Valley, Structure Plan Area', Unpublished report prepared for Waitakere City Council, September 1995, p.4; OFM-001-0011, Box 2, Oratia Families, Folder 2, Shaw, handwritten letter to David Harré from Diana Farndon, 9 June 1988, West Auckland Research Centre.

⁹³ Allen, p.45; *Auckland Star*, 26 April 1892, p.2.

⁹⁴ Allen, p.45.

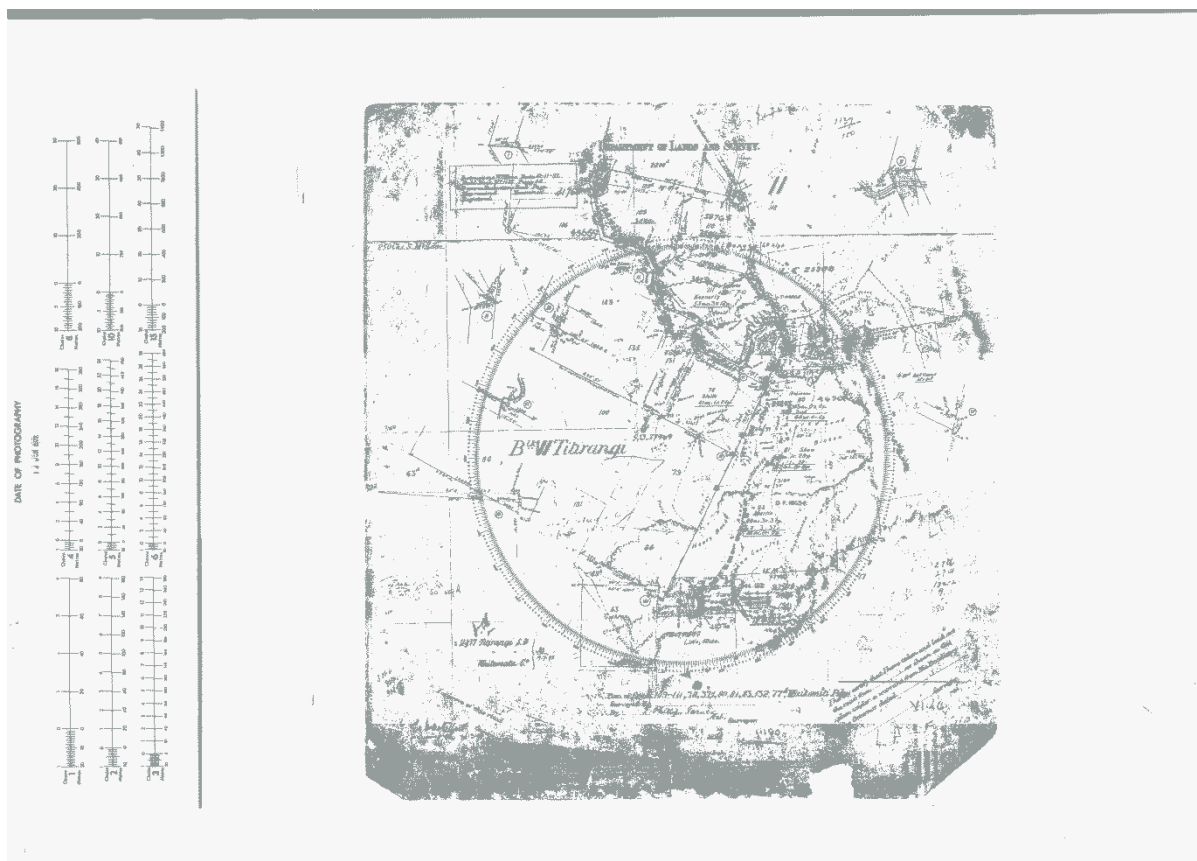


Figure 8: Plan SO 11180, dated January 1898, showing several blocks of land including Allotment 81 entitled ‘Shaw’ with house and orchard detailed. (Source: LINZ)

THE PARKER FAMILY

Very little is known about the settler James Knowles Parker, after whom W.R. Allen asserts Parker Road is named.⁹⁵ In 1886 his wife Jane Parker bought Allotment 103, Parish of Waikomiti, which was part of the deceased estate of William Cantwell.⁹⁶ The allotment comprised 34 acres and the couple utilised the land for orcharding.⁹⁷ In 1889 a reporter for the *New Zealand Herald*, visited the Oratia district and noted: ‘Mr Parker has nearly four acres of fruit trees in two parts. A few old trees have had very good crops of fruit on for several years. His young orchard is looking healthy.’⁹⁸ James is also credited with planting an avenue of oak trees along the drive to his residence in the 1890s.⁹⁹ The Parkers continued to reside on the land until 1898 when it was conveyed to Mary Wright Wilson.¹⁰⁰

Hexagonal Adobe House

James and Jane Parker resided in one of the district’s most unique houses – the builder of which remains disputed (Figure 9). The house was constructed in adobe-style, made with

⁹⁵ Allen, p.46.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Application File No. 34715C, LINZ.

⁹⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, 26 March 1889, p.6.

⁹⁹ Allen, p.46.

¹⁰⁰ Application File No. 34715C, LINZ.

local clay, which is thought to have been packed between wooden frames and then set alight to bake and harden the material.¹⁰¹ The front of the house was built in the shape of a half hexagon with a verandah which featured arches with wooden scalloping. Ornamentation was also present along the central passageway. French doors opened onto the verandah from both sides of the house, and the flooring throughout was parquet.¹⁰² The house was occupied by several subsequent families following the Parkers, including the Rayevskys, who had emigrated from Russia, and the Davidsons, who bought the land in 1932.¹⁰³ The Endt family were tenants of the house after their arrival from Holland in 1951.¹⁰⁴ Polish sailors were also said to have used the attic as a place of refuge for a short time. The men had deserted their vessel after docking at Auckland, and made their way to the Oratia district to hide, where they found the empty adobe house. Neighbours' gardens were raided and the men were eventually discovered and removed by police.¹⁰⁵ From the latter part of the twentieth century the house began to deteriorate significantly. By the 1940s side walls had been damaged by the collapse of the chimneys and the rear wall was crumbling. Extensive restoration was undertaken; however, the building continued to worsen and was used as a packing shed until the 1970s. The house was later demolished¹⁰⁶ and a packing shed (part of 64 Parker Road) now occupies the site.¹⁰⁷

Both William Cantwell and James Knowles Parker have been suggested as the builders of the adobe home. Cantwell was a notable local settler, who had immigrated to New Zealand with his wife and family on the *Mermaid* in 1859. In 1862 Cantwell was granted Allotment 103, Parish of Waikomiti, with two other blocks under the Waste Lands Act by Governor Grey.¹⁰⁸ The following year Cantwell mortgaged the property and Joyce McKenzie argues that this was to allow Cantwell to erect a dwelling.¹⁰⁹ Cantwell's daughter Elizabeth was married at her father's house in 1867, but no further details are recorded.¹¹⁰ Alternatively, W.R. Allen surmised that the house had probably been constructed between 1886 and 1898, under the ownership of James and Jane Parker.¹¹¹ In 1889 the *New Zealand Herald* described Parker's house following an inspection of his orchard: 'Mr Parker's new house is built on the side of a hill, and commands a view of nearly his whole land. Many would, no doubt, like to be able to see over all their land from their front door.'¹¹² It should also be noted that during the murder

¹⁰¹ Joyce McKenzie 'The Hexagonal House at Oratia', in James Northcote-Bade, ed., *West Auckland Remembers: A Collection of Historical Essays for the 1990 Commemoration*, Auckland, 1990, p.101.

¹⁰² Allen, p.46; OFM-001-0010, Box 2, Oratia Families – Folder 1, Cantwell, Endt, Parker, 'Oratia – An Unusual House', West Auckland Research Centre; McKenzie, pp.101-2.

¹⁰³ Allen, p.47; Douglas Lloyd Jenkins, 'To Move Right Out of the World', in Finlay Macdonald and Ruth Kerr, eds, *West: The History of Waitakere*, Auckland, 2009, p.360.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Allen, p.47.

¹⁰⁶ The site of the former adobe hexagonal house, along with several oak trees, is listed under CHI number 3465 as a Historic Botanical Site.

¹⁰⁷ McKenzie, p.102.

¹⁰⁸ Application File No. 34715C, LINZ.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.101.

¹¹⁰ *Daily Southern Cross*, 11 September 1867, p.3.

¹¹¹ Allen, p.46.

¹¹² *New Zealand Herald*, 26 March 1889, p.6.

trial of Parker's neighbour Alexander Scott in 1892-3, at which he gave evidence, Parker's recorded occupation was an architect.¹¹³



Figure 9: Photograph dated 1951 showing the front of the hexagonal house at 64 Parker Road. (Source: J.T. Diamond Collections, West Auckland Research Centre, JTD-13A-05374-1)

THE DAVIDSON FAMILY

The Davidson family were comparatively late settlers to the Oratia district. Thomas William Davidson, an engineer, and his wife Martha Annie (née Porritt) originally lived in Mount Albert before purchasing 40 acres (Allotment 134) along Parker Road in May 1907.¹¹⁴ Thomas had planned to farm the estate together with his brother-in-law Julius (Jules) Porritt, but died only four months after acquiring the land. His widow, who had inherited the property, adhered to Thomas's former plans, and in December 1907 arrived in Oratia with her three children (Mary, Dorothy and Ronald) and her brother.¹¹⁵ Annie and Jules cleared portions of the land and planted an orchard which contained 100 goldmine nectarine trees. The venture prospered and their commercial pursuits were later extended to dairy farming.¹¹⁶ The farm was transferred to Julius in 1934 and subsequently to his nephew Ronald Davidson

¹¹³ *New Zealand Herald*, 23 March 1893, p.6.

¹¹⁴ Allen, p.24; NA1/71, LINZ.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Allen, p.24.

in 1943. The Davidson family retained ownership of the original property for 55 years before it was eventually subdivided in 1962.¹¹⁷

Sunnydale Homestead

When the Davidsons bought the land on Allotment 134 they inherited an old dwelling which was found to be in a neglected state and surrounded by gorse.¹¹⁸ The homestead, known as ‘Sunnydale’ was subsequently cleaned and refurbished, and is now thought to be the oldest standing residence in West Auckland.¹¹⁹ The two-storey rectangular cottage was built of local kauri, which was pit-sawn on the site, and featured a gable roof clad in galvanised iron (Figure 10).¹²⁰ The original build did not include verandahs, although all of the downstairs bedrooms and parlour (three sides of the house) were fitted with French doors instead of conventional windows. These rooms opened into a central hallway, including a kitchen dining room which was located on the southern end of the house. The upstairs loft was accessed by a staircase built near the kitchen, and contained several small rooms. Portions of Sunnydale’s foundations were built on large boulders, likely to have been sourced from the property. While the structural profile of the dwelling has undergone minimal alteration since its construction, several noted modifications have occurred. Among the most significant were the addition of verandahs to the western and northern sides around 1900, and to the eastern side in 1976. The kitchen was also rebuilt during the twentieth century.¹²¹

A range of dates for the original construction of the house have been suggested in local histories. Thomas Parr recalled a house in the vicinity of the Sunnydale property when he arrived in the district in 1854/5; however, a Crown Grant for the land was not issued until 1864.¹²² That same year Robert Inglis, the Crown grantee, sold the property to John Reid Thompson, a farmer. During renovations to the house in the twentieth century the name ‘John Reid’ was uncovered on one of the scrim boards written in chalk. In addition, early *New Zealand Herald* newspapers dated late 1864 to early 1865 were found adhered to an upstairs partition wall.¹²³ These features appear to identify John R. Thompson as the builder of Sunnydale. Thompson owned the property from 1864 until 1871, when he sold the land to John Huston, who later transferred the estate back to Thompson in 1874.¹²⁴ Sunnydale passed through the hands of many subsequent owners until it was purchased by the Davidson family in the early twentieth century. In 1962 the land was divided into two lots and the house (and 20 acres) was acquired by Diederik and Annemarie Endt.¹²⁵ The family continues to retain ownership and Sunnydale is now alternatively known as Endt Cottage. The house is scheduled in the Auckland Council District Plan (Waitakere Section) as a Category II

¹¹⁷ NA463/30, LINZ.

¹¹⁸ Allen, p.24.

¹¹⁹ Allen, p.25.

¹²⁰ Donaghey, p.442.

¹²¹ Vertical Files, Oratia – Houses – Sunnydale – ‘A Brief History of Sunnydale’, author unknown, West Auckland Research Centre.

¹²² Allen, p.25; NA1/71, LINZ.

¹²³ Vertical Files, Oratia – Houses – Sunnydale – ‘A Brief History of Sunnydale’, author unknown, West Auckland Research Centre.

¹²⁴ Allen, p.25; NA1/71, LINZ.

¹²⁵ NA2084/14, LINZ.

heritage item, and three Black Pine trees thought to relate to early planting on the property are also scheduled. The building has also been registered by the NZHPT as a Category II Historic Place.¹²⁶

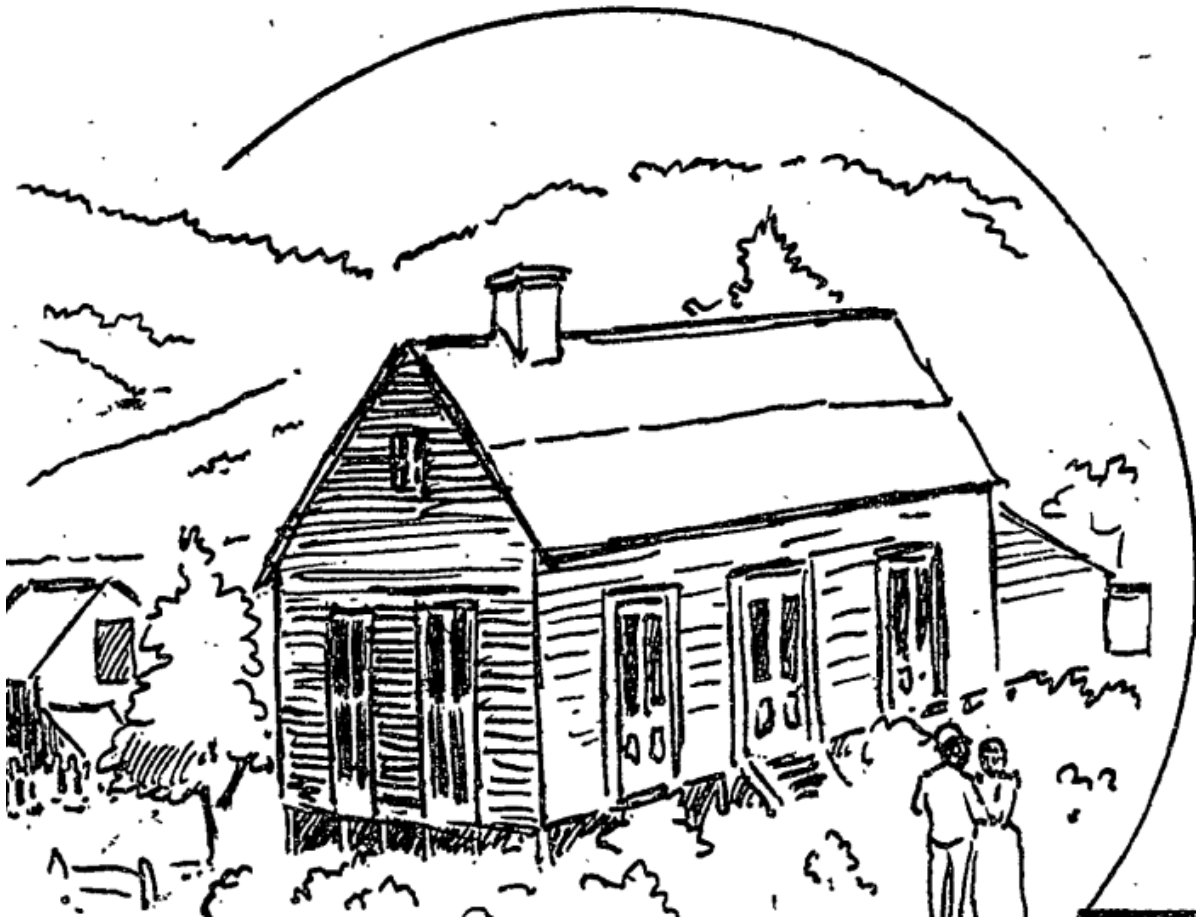


Figure 10: Sketch drawing of Sunnydale Homestead, dated 19 November 1892. (Source: *Observer*, 19 November 1892, p.5)

MURDER!

Sunnydale gained notoriety as the scene of a crime when its occupant William Thompson was found dead on the morning of 31 October 1892.¹²⁷ Thompson, a solicitor, had acquired the property in 1889 and moved into the district with his wife, Sarah Alice, and their two children. In 1892 Sarah fell pregnant with her third child and went to stay with an uncle in Thames. During her 8 week absence, Thompson fell ill and was frequently visited by neighbour Alexander Scott, who prepared meals and even administered medicine on occasion.¹²⁸ It was Scott who roused locals James Knowles Parker, John Moorehead and Eliza Carter following Thompson's death, saying he believed that Thompson 'was about to

¹²⁶ Sunnydale /Endt Cottage is recorded under CHI number 3763 and the Black Pine trees under CHI 2316. The NZHPT register number is 7350.

¹²⁷ *Auckland Star*, 12 December 1892, p.4.

¹²⁸ NA 1/71, LINZ, Matthew Gray, *Tales from the Crypt: Bewitching Stories from the Cemeteries of West Auckland*, Waimauku, 2010, p.40.

kick out'.¹²⁹ A post-mortem revealed significant portions of the poison strychnine in William's stomach, and detectives began to investigate. It was soon discovered that Scott had been in close contact with the victim's wife for over a year and had been surreptitiously purchasing quantities of poison under various guises since March 1892.¹³⁰ With a motive in hand, the police ruled out suicide and accused Scott of the wilful murder of his neighbour. A trial ensued which dominated the headlines of newspapers around the country for months and gripped the nation. Several key witnesses were examined from the Oratia district, including Messrs Parker and Moorehead and Mrs Carter, who were the first on the scene. The trio related that after finding Thompson in his bedroom they had taken a detailed inventory of the contents of the room (Figure 11). The list did not record a silver topped glass phial, which was later found by the doctor, and which it was argued Scott had placed deliberately to suggest suicide.¹³¹ A final piece of damning evidence was produced in the form of a letter written from Scott to Mrs Thompson and found in the pocket of Scott's trousers. The note contained the lines: 'Oh, my darling, what opportunities I am getting. I can do it any time, dear, and I wish to God it was done, so that I could call you my very own.'¹³² The jury concurred with the prosecution's case and a guilty verdict was handed down. The judge passed the death sentence and on 22 May 1893 Alexander Scott was hung at Mt Eden prison.¹³³ His body was later buried at Waikumete Cemetery. Sarah Thompson fled the country during the trial and left her children behind, although a relative was later sent out from England to collect them.¹³⁴ Sunnysdale passed to Sarah following her husband's death. She transferred the land immediately to a Mr Nightingale; however, for some time afterwards the Sunnysdale property was known as the scene of 'that grim tragedy which was enacted on the small farm under the shadow of the Waitakere Hills.'¹³⁵

¹²⁹ *Auckland Star*, 12 December 1892, p.4.

¹³⁰ *Southland Times*, 22 March 1893, p.2; Gray, p.40.

¹³¹ *New Zealand Herald*, 23 March 1893, p.6.

¹³² *Southland Times*, 22 March 1893, p.2.

¹³³ *Auckland Star*, 22 May 1893, p.3.

¹³⁴ Gray, p.40.

¹³⁵ *Auckland Star*, 22 May 1893, p.3; NA 1/71, LINZ.



Figure 11: Sketch drawing of Eliza Carter (left), James Knowles Parker (middle) and John Moorehead (right) taking the inventory at the scene of the crime. (Source: *Observer*, 19 November 1892, p.8)

DALMATIAN MIGRANTS

The influx of Dalmatian immigrants to the Oratia area from the early 1900s had a significant effect on the land and community. Many of those who settled in Oratia were from the village of Podgora, which was situated in the province of Dalmatia and often earned migrants the nickname ‘Dallys’. Formerly part of Yugoslavia, the province is now within the Republic of Croatia.¹³⁶ Early Croatian settlers were attracted to the semi-rural landscape of Oratia in part for its similarity to their homeland, and for its proven horticultural suitability.¹³⁷ Blocks of land purchased by Croatian families were transformed into productive ventures, mostly with fruit and grapes, and Allen acknowledged: ‘the Dalmatians were the best spade men I have ever seen. In their own country they had few horses and they had to do everything with a spade. They could dig a drain as straight as an arrow, and when they came here they could outwork anybody!’¹³⁸

THE VELLA FAMILY

John Stephen Vella was the first Dalmatian immigrant to settle in Oratia around 1903 with his wife Kate and four children: Victoria, Stephen, Samuel, and John.¹³⁹ John Vella Snr was born in Dalmatia in 1862 and in 1882 immigrated to New Zealand, where he initially took up

¹³⁶ R.A. Harvey, p.20.

¹³⁷ Keith Stewart, ‘Into the West’, in Finlay Macdonald and Ruth Kerr, eds, *West: The History of the Waitakere*, Auckland, 2009, p.108.

¹³⁸ Allen, p.37.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.36-7; *Auckland Star*, 23 July 1935, p.10.

farming in Wellington.¹⁴⁰ After moving northwards, John purchased 49 acres between West Coast Road and the Oratia Stream (Pt Allotment 4) and began cultivating the land for growing grapes and later peaches and apples.¹⁴¹ Victoria Vella was the first Dalmatian pupil to attend Oratia School, followed by her brothers. Samuel Vella later recalled: 'although the school was surrounded by orchards I don't remember, in those days (1910), the children finding any temptation as fruit was so easy to come by and we almost lived on it.'¹⁴² John Vella Snr was one of the first Dalmatian members of the Waikomiti Fruitgrowers' Association and was a pioneer in the viticulture industry of the district.¹⁴³ He died in 1935 at the age of 72 years.¹⁴⁴

THE SUNDE FAMILY

The first member of the Sunde family to arrive in the Oratia district is believed to be Ivan (Jack) Sunde, who was recorded as having purchased 160 acres of land with four others around 1904.¹⁴⁵ In 1908 16 year old Philip Sunde (cousin to Ivan) immigrated to New Zealand and travelled north to the Dargaville gumfields where he was later joined by his brother Dick in 1908. The brothers had emigrated from Podgora, Croatia, and were part of a large family of two daughters and nine sons. By 1913 Philip and Dick had saved enough money to purchase land and they bought 28 acres of scrubland from Frank Firth in Shaw Road.¹⁴⁶ Dick's son Rudy later noted: 'their early lives in Oratia must have been bleak and hard. Accommodation had to be built. This was usually in the form of a small shed where they slept, ate and which also doubled as a store shed for their tools and other items such as packing materials.'¹⁴⁷ The brothers constructed a simple 200ft shed which they resided in for nine years.¹⁴⁸ A house was eventually built in 1922 from milled kauri felled on their neighbour Vranjes' property.¹⁴⁹ Another brother, Adam Sunde, immigrated to Oratia around the same time and in the 1930s the fourth Sunde sibling, Tony, also arrived. By the 1950s the Sunde brothers and their families had purchased around 100 acres of land at Oratia which they cultivated with orchards and vineyards.¹⁵⁰ The Sundes were active members of the Oratia community and involved in the school committee, the local bowling club and the Oratia Fruitgrowers' Association, of which Philip Sunde was a life member and Adam Sunde was President.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁰ *Auckland Star*, 23 July 1935, p.10.

¹⁴¹ NA102/53, LINZ; Allen, p.37.

¹⁴² R.A. Harvey, pp.18-19, Allen, p.37.

¹⁴³ Marinovich, p.179.

¹⁴⁴ *Auckland Star*, 23 July 1935, p.10.

¹⁴⁵ R.A. Harvey, p.21.

¹⁴⁶ Allen, pp.37-8. Part of the Sunde family farm and orchard at 67 and 90 Shaw Road is recorded under CHI number 3675.

¹⁴⁷ Rudy Sunde, 'Apple Groves at Oratia', in Bruce and Trixie Harvey, eds, *Waitakere Ranges: Ranges of Inspiration*, Auckland 2006, p.284.

¹⁴⁸ Allen, p.38.

¹⁴⁹ Sunde, p.285.

¹⁵⁰ Allen, pp.38-9.

¹⁵¹ Allen, p.39, Marinovich, p.180.

WORKING THE LAND

Oratia's natural landscape enticed many early settlers to the area who saw the potential of working the land to earn a living. Situated at the foothills of the Waitakere Ranges, the Oratia Valley produced fine stands of native kauri, kahikatea, rimu and totara, along with significant tracts of manuka and fern scrubland.¹⁵² Freshwater streams, including the Oratia Stream (originally Canty's Creek) wound through the valley and supported alluvial flats which proved highly suitable for horticultural endeavours.

TIMBER EXTRACTION

Timber merchant Thomas Canty (after whom Canty's Creek was named) and sawyer John Bishop were among the first Europeans to arrive in the Oratia area sometime between the late 1840s and early 1850s. The pair undertook timber extraction throughout the valley and logs were floated down Canty's Creek or hauled by teams of bullocks to Henderson Creek, where they were sent to Freeman's Bay, Auckland, to be milled and sold. Logs cut on steep and inaccessible terrain were often pit-sawn into boards on or near the felling site, which would require a pair of bushmen to work long hours to complete the job.¹⁵³ By 1851 Canty's business was thriving and an advertisement placed in the *Daily Southern Cross* read: 'the Undersigned begs to intimate to his numerous friends and customers, that he had received large Rafts of Logs of all lengths and dimensions from the Kauri Forests, and has resumed cutting, as usual, in Freeman's Bay...he need not mention the superior quality and condition of the Timber he can supply, from its entire freedom from dirt and sand of all descriptions.'¹⁵⁴

Scottish sawyer Andrew Kelly also felled timber in Oratia from the 1850s and established a logging yard on his property near where the Knock-na-gree youth camp was later sited. Kelly marked the initials 'A.K.' onto his logs, which suited the purpose of identifying both the sawyer and the timber's destination – Auckland.¹⁵⁵ Kelly continued extracting timber from the district for several years before turning to horticultural interests.¹⁵⁶ In 1889 the *New Zealand Herald* noted that Kelly's property featured an orchard that was 'situated alongside a creek, and stands in the place where some years ago Mr. Kelly had a saw mill.'¹⁵⁷ Another small timber mill was operated by Lovatt and Watson from the early 1900s until around 1913.¹⁵⁸ The mill was situated at the southern end of Parker Road and processed timber from the local area, including some rimu and kauri from Cochran's and other neighbouring properties. A large steam boiler powered the mill, and was hauled to the site along Parker Road by a team of eight draught horses. Allen recounted that while tending to cattle on

¹⁵² Allen, p.29; Clough and Prince, p.2.

¹⁵³ Allen, p.29; *Daily Southern Cross*, 5 February 1856, p.4; Duncan Mackay, *Working the Kauri: A Social and Photographic History of New Zealand's Pioneer Kauri Bushmen*, Auckland, 1991, p.27.

¹⁵⁴ *Daily Southern Cross*, 18 February 1851, p.1.

¹⁵⁵ Allen, p.30.

¹⁵⁶ *Daily Southern Cross*, 7 February 1860, p.4; Allen, p.30.

¹⁵⁷ *New Zealand Herald*, 26 March, 1889, p.6.

¹⁵⁸ The site of Lovatt's Mill is recorded under CHI number 1301.

Cochran's land some years after the closure of Lovatt and Watson's mill he had 'stumbled right through the sawdust of the old mill, and took shelter in a neglected hut, presumably ...the manager's.'¹⁵⁹

The influx of timber workers to the area in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries benefitted local business and early Oratia residents recalled that a licensed hotel was constructed near to Kelly's logging yard to cater for thirsty sawyers and settlers. The proprietress was said to have been a Mrs Sarah Howard.¹⁶⁰ The pub was still standing in 1909 when W.W. Dumper purchased the land on which it was located, (Pt Allot 4; now 649-663 West Coast Road) and Dumper is said to have resided in it while building his house in 1911. When Percy Allen bought the property in 1919 the old hotel no longer existed; however, relics from the building, including bricks and the top of the old camp iron, were later found on the land.¹⁶¹

Gum digging was a subsidiary occupation of the timber industry which attracted small numbers of prospectors to the Oratia area. Joe Shaw recounted that around 1882 'the whole district then was a mass of gumfields and tea-tree [sic] hills' and in 1899 two men were charged with the theft of two shillings worth of kauri gum from Humphrey Sharp's property.¹⁶² By the turn of the century gum digging at Oratia was undertaken primarily as a supplementary means of income.¹⁶³

FARMING

Large tracts of land were cleared by Oratia settlers in the nineteenth century in order to facilitate farming. Many properties supported mixed farming, which combined arable crops such as wheat, oats, barley and potatoes, with the running of dairy cattle or sheep. At the Moorehead property along Parker Road, brothers John and Andrew managed cattle, cut ti-tree for firewood, and processed oats for horse chaff. The oats were grown on a secondary property in what is now Glen Eden where they were harvested and then transported to Parker Road. The sheaves were stored in a shed before being run through a chaff-cutter and bagged. Allen described the machine as follows: 'the chaff cutter was powered by horses walking in a 30 foot circle, attached to 3 fifteen feet poles. The poles were bolted on to a heavy 5 foot cast iron cogwheel, which drove a long underground shaft extending well under the shed. On the end of the shaft were pulleys and a long belt up to the cutter.'¹⁶⁴ John Moorehead sat on a stool above the cogwheel and would crack a whip to keep the horses moving.¹⁶⁵ Along with

¹⁵⁹ Allen, p.32.

¹⁶⁰ Allen, p.30.

¹⁶¹ OFM – 001-0007, Box 2, Oratia – General, manuscript by Mr Allen, 'Old History' (Oratia), no date, West Auckland Research Centre; Allen, p.30, Dowling, p.15; CHI Record No. 3463.

¹⁶² *Oratia Sporting Gazette*, 17 November 1933, p.1; *Auckland Star*, 30 November 1899, p.4.

¹⁶³ Allen, p.36.

¹⁶⁴ Allen, p.33.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

commercially grown crops, livestock also provided settlers with a viable income from the land, and many Oratia families sold milk, butter and eggs to the Auckland market.¹⁶⁶

ORCHARDS & NURSERIES

From the 1850s increasing numbers of successful orchards dominated both the Oratia landscape and the Auckland fruit market. Horticultural ventures became a well-known feature of the district, in part due to the regular visits from newspaper correspondents who were sent out to inspect the progress of the 'Waikomiti Orchards'. In 1891 one wrote: 'a walk through the various orchards is one of the most interesting and instructive sights I know of, and in the ripening season must present a pleasant, if not grand, spectacle.'¹⁶⁷ By the twentieth century Oratia had become synonymous with the production of fruit and earned the title of 'The Fruitbowl of Auckland.'¹⁶⁸

Albion Vale – Parr & Sons

One of the largest and earliest orchards in Oratia was established by the Parr family. Thomas Parr's original orchard was planted around 1855 and comprised 3 to 4 acres near to present day Parr's Corner.¹⁶⁹ The trees were planted within a deep ditch and embankment which Parr had dug around his residence.¹⁷⁰ The house and trees were shifted to the present day Albion Vale property around 1870 and a second orchard was planted on 10 acres of alluvial flat land alongside Canty's Creek (Oratia Stream). A large commercial nursery was also founded in the 1870s to provide stock for the orchard, which included apples, pears, plums, peaches, mulberries, walnuts, persimmons, quinces, lemons, figs, almonds and blackberries among others.¹⁷¹ The varieties were selected to appeal to colonial settlers – a taste of home – and were marketed under the name Albion Vale Nurseries (English Valley). By 1877 the Parrs employed several workers and when Thomas died later that same year the business passed to his son Edward John.¹⁷² Edward expanded the nursery and by 1888-89 the Albion Vale Nurseries catalogue listed over 600 varieties of apples along with peaches, nectarines, pears, plums and gooseberries. The catalogue noted 'our stock of all kinds of Fruit Trees this season is more extensive and superior in quality to any we have previously offered, well rooted, and in the best condition to bear removal, an inspection of which is cordially invited.'¹⁷³ Also offered were a collection of flowering plants such as azaleas, camellias and rhododendron.¹⁷⁴ The orchard, now under the name E.J. Parr & Sons, was visited in 1889 by a reporter for the *New Zealand Herald* who noted: 'Here are some tremendous pear and apple trees of nearly 30 years of age, bearing each year heavy crops. They have a great variety of fruit trees,

¹⁶⁶ See: *New Zealand Herald*, 23 March 1893, p.6; Allen, p.67.

¹⁶⁷ *New Zealand Herald*, 22 December 1891, p.5.

¹⁶⁸ Dowling, p.24.

¹⁶⁹ Allen, p.67.

¹⁷⁰ Scott, p.183.

¹⁷¹ Allen, pp.67-8; OFM-001-0010, Box 2, Oratia Families – Folder 2, Parr, excerpt from 'Pioneer Nurserymen of New Zealand', West Auckland Research Centre.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Vertical Files, Oratia, Albion Vale Nurseries Catalogue, 1888-89, West Auckland Research Centre.

¹⁷⁴ Allen, p.68.

almost the largest in the colony, and sending young trees to all parts of New Zealand. The orchard is situated by the side of a strong creek, and the soil is of very good quality.’¹⁷⁵ Following Edward’s death that same year, his son John took over the running of the orchard and nursery, which was sending fruit to many parts of the country and exporting to Covent Garden, England. In 1904 the Parr family established the Atherton Canning Company, which was named after John Parr’s sister-in-law Martha Atherton (wife of John’s brother Thomas Parr) (Figure 12). The factory was situated in what is now Glen Eden and was formed after the Parrs experienced a year of low fruit prices. The cannery operated until 1910, the year in which John Parr died at 44 years of age. The Albion Vale property was put up for sale soon afterwards and the Parr family business, which had spanned over 50 years, was ended.¹⁷⁶



Figure 12: A fruit label from the Parr family’s Atherton Canning Co. which operated between 1904 and 1910. (Source: OFM-001-0010, Box 1, Ephemera – Folder 2, ‘Fruit Label’, West Auckland Research Centre)

Sharp’s Nursery¹⁷⁷

Another of the early ‘Waikomiti Orchards’ was established by John Sharp together with his son Humphrey Ewing in the early 1860s. The property was situated alongside the Oratia Stream, a little higher up the valley from the Parr family, and planted over several acres. By 1867 the nursery produced a variety of shrubs and fruit trees which were sold at Auckland by auction and included peaches, pears, plums, nectarines, cherries, quinces, almonds, and figs.¹⁷⁸ In 1884 a correspondent for the *New Zealand Herald* stated that the Sharp’s nursery contained a total of 780 apple varieties and noted: ‘a tramway bisects the orchard, so that fruit can be taken from the trees, placed in the trucks, and run with ease to the various fruit store-rooms. At the time of our visit a new store-room was being erected.’¹⁷⁹ The tramway was mentioned by another reporter who visited the orchard in 1889 and wrote ‘there is about an acre of very large trees, nearly 30 years old, which bear each year good crops of fruit. The

¹⁷⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, 26 March 1889, p.6.

¹⁷⁶ Allen, pp.67-8; Pauline Vela, ed., *In Those Days: An Oral History of Glen Eden*, Auckland 1989, p.11.

¹⁷⁷ Sharp’s nursery is listed as a historic structure under CHI number 3505.

¹⁷⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, 18 July 1867, p.3.

¹⁷⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, 6 March 1884, p.6.

younger orchard, of about 3 acres, is now in full bearing, and some trees have to be propped up to prevent breaking down. He [H.E. Sharp] had nearly all kinds of apples and plums in bearing, or just coming on to fruit. Mr Sharp attends more to the nursery business, and, having a great variety of trees, equal to any in the colony, sends them to all parts of New Zealand.¹⁸⁰ Along with fruit, Humphrey grew and exhibited flowering plants, including rhododendrons, which won him first prize at the Auckland Horticultural Show in 1905.¹⁸¹ Sharp's specialty, however, was daffodils and their value was outlined in 1917 when Sharp claimed £6 from a Mr Herbert Ingram for cutting several bunches and rendering damage to the bulbs. Sharp argued that 'as a result of labour and experience, he had a large bed of valuable daffodil bulbs growing on his property, one of which alone cost him £7 10s to import.'¹⁸² Humphrey's stock subsequently recovered and in his 1923 daffodil catalogue he listed several varieties including Yellow Trumpets, White Trumpets and Bicolor Trumpets.¹⁸³ Following Humphrey Sharp's death in 1925 his land was sold on to various purchasers; however, significant portions of the property were retained in orchard by owners such as the Sunde family.

G.J. Glucina & Sons

Brothers Steve and George were the first members of the Glucina family to emigrate from Croatia to New Zealand in the late 1890s, and they initially found work in a coal mine at Hikurangi. Their youngest brother Mate eventually joined them in 1902 and together they went in search of opportunity in Northland's gumfields before moving south and settling at Oratia.¹⁸⁴ The brothers bought land in Shaw Road, and G.J. Glucina & Sons was established at 37 Shaw Road in 1908.¹⁸⁵ The orchard produced plums, nectarines, pears, peaches and apples – some of which had been originally purchased from local resident Alec Cochran.¹⁸⁶ Mate Glucina also cultivated apples, and was responsible for producing the 'Oratia Beauty', which was grafted from an Albany Beauty of the Gravenstein variety in the 1930s.¹⁸⁷

WAIKOMITI FRUITGROWERS' ASSOCIATION

On 29 December 1896 a meeting of Oratia orchardists was held at the local school 'and a unanimous opinion was expressed that the time had arrived to effect a closer union of those engaged in the fruitgrowing business.'¹⁸⁸ The Waikomiti Fruitgrowers' Association was formed as a result, and the cost of membership set at a subscription of 2 shillings.¹⁸⁹ The first

¹⁸⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, 26 March 1889, p.6.

¹⁸¹ See: Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, AWNS19051123-7-2.

¹⁸² *Otago Daily Times*, 3 January 1917, p.7.

¹⁸³ OFM-001-0010, Box 2, Oratia Families – Folder 1, Sharp, H.E. Sharp, Daffodil Catalogue: 'Season 1923, H.E. Sharp Daffodil Specialist', West Auckland Research Centre.

¹⁸⁴ R.A. Harvey, pp.21-2.

¹⁸⁵ Vertical Files, Oratia – Businesses – G.J. Glucina & Sons, West Auckland Research Centre.

¹⁸⁶ Dowling, p.12; Vertical Files, Oratia – Businesses – G.J. Glucina & Sons, West Auckland Research Centre.

¹⁸⁷ Vertical Files, Oratia – Orchards – Glucina, West Auckland Research Centre.

¹⁸⁸ *Auckland Star*, 5 February 1897, p.3.

¹⁸⁹ Marinovich, p.179.

officers elected to represent the group included John Parr as President, Alec Cochran as Vice-President, James Knowles Parker as Secretary and William Carter as Treasurer. Meetings were held in the school room once a month and were formed around a programme whereby ‘some paper will be read or a lecture delivered on some subject of interest to fruitgrowers, and on which free and full discussion will be invited.’¹⁹⁰ Delegates from the association were sent to represent Waikomiti at annual conferences, such as the Auckland Fruitgrower’s Union, which were held around the country, which was attended by John Parr and Humphrey Sharp in 1900 (Figure 13).¹⁹¹ The association continued throughout the early 1900s; however, meetings became intermittent and none were recorded from December 1906 to March 1909 and again between 1910 and 1916. In July 1916 an urgent meeting was called by Mr E. Parr (President) and Humphrey Sharp (Secretary/Treasurer) to decide whether the association should continue or disband. Members unanimously voted to continue and the following year the name was changed to the Waikumete Fruitgrowers’ Association.¹⁹² The name was formalised under ‘The Industrial and Provident Societies’ Act, 1908’ which recorded the registered office of the society at F. Firth’s premises in Oratia and noted that the objectives of the society were ‘to acquire by correspondence, experience and otherwise any knowledge likely to be of practical service to the industry.’¹⁹³ The form was signed by William Carter, J. Russell, R. Spencer, Thomas Sisson, Eugene Brain, Julius Porritt, Edward (Eb) Parr and F. Firth (Secretary), all orchardists. In the 1920s the association was actively engaged in the control of fireblight in the district which attacked pipfruit trees and affected almost every local orchard. In order to support orchardists the association began to supply its members with fertilisers, sprays and other necessary items. Records from the Waikumete Fruitgrowers’ Association note that in 1921 the most commercially successful apples grown in the area were Delicious, Gravenstein, Ballarat and Willie Sharp.¹⁹⁴ In 1923 the society underwent a third name change and became the Oratia Fruitgrowers’ Association.¹⁹⁵ Throughout the Depression the association worked to alleviate hardship and distributed Delicious apples among the needy. The association also worked to support growers through the Second World War which saw government regulations and rationing on essential items – such as gumboots.¹⁹⁶ In 1950 the association held the first Oratia Fruitgrowers’ Ball, which became a highly anticipated annual event.¹⁹⁷ By the end of the twentieth century the Oratia Fruitgrowers’ Association had become an institution in the district and had actively aided and promoted the interests of local growers for over 100 years.

¹⁹⁰ *Auckland Star*, 5 February 1897, p.3.

¹⁹¹ See: Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, AWNS-19001123-8-7.

¹⁹² Marinovich, p.179.

¹⁹³ Vertical Files, Oratia – History – Fruitgrowers Association, ‘Under “The Industrial and Provident Societies’ Act, 1908”, The Waikumete Fruitgrowers’ Association Ltd., Rules’, West Auckland Research Centre.

¹⁹⁴ Marinovich, p.179.

¹⁹⁵ Vertical Files, Oratia – History – Fruitgrowers Association, ‘The Waikumete Fruitgrowers’ Association Ltd.’ West Auckland Research Centre.

¹⁹⁶ Marinovich, p.180.

¹⁹⁷ Fiona Drummond, ‘The Apple Picker’s Ball’, winner of adult research category in J.T. Diamond Essay Competition, 2010, West Auckland Research Centre.



MEMBERS OF THE AUCKLAND FRUITGROWERS' UNION CONFERENCE, NOVEMBER 14, 1900.

Figure 13: Delegates at the Auckland Fruitgrowers' Union Conference, 14 November 1900. John Parr is standing third from left (middle row) and Humphrey Sharp is shown seated second from right. Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, AWNS188991210-5-1

Co-operative Packing Shed

The Oratia Fruitgrowers' Association was also instrumental in the construction of a timber co-operative packing shed sited opposite the school (Figure 14). In February 1924 the *Auckland Star* reported that a start had been made on the construction of the new building and observed: 'these packing sheds are becoming a feature in the various fruitgrowing districts, and amongst other things mean that a better class of fruit will be offered for sale.'¹⁹⁸ Growers utilised the shed for washing, grading and packing local market and export fruit by hand.¹⁹⁹ The building doubled as a community hall and was frequently used for local dances, meetings and concerts. In 1928 the packing shed was burnt down following a dance the evening prior. Along with the building, two pianos, chairs, tables, crockery and several flags were lost in the blaze.²⁰⁰ The packing shed was not replaced as many growers had erected their own facilities by that time; however, the Oratia Settlers' Hall was later constructed on the same site.

¹⁹⁸ *Auckland Star*, 14 February 1924, p.12.

¹⁹⁹ Marinovich, p.179.

²⁰⁰ *Auckland Star*, 7 May 1928, p.8.

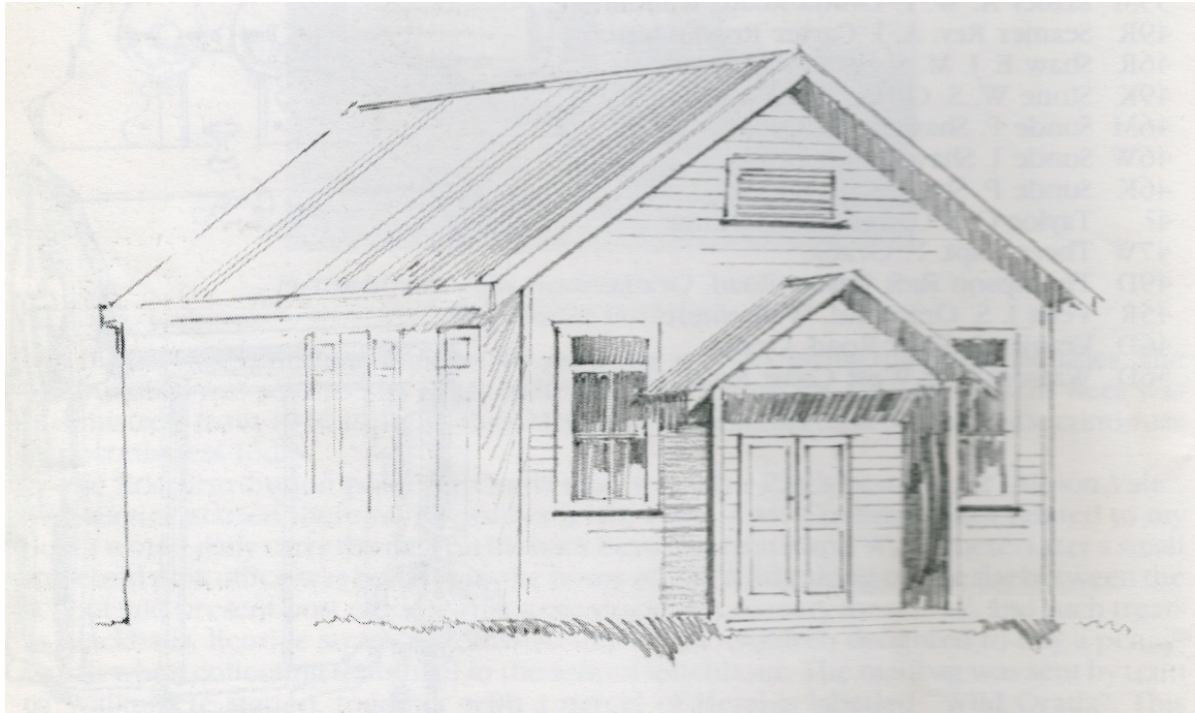


Figure 14: Sketch drawing of the Oratia Packing Shed which operated between 1924 and 1928. (Source: W.R. Allen, *Oratia My Valley*, p.28)

DIVERSIFICATION

Landsendt

In 1962 horticulturalists Diederick and Annemarie Endt purchased part of the former Sunnysdale estate at 108 Parker Road. The property included the old homestead and 20 acres (Pt Allotment 134) on which they planted tamarillo and macadamia nuts along with many other fruit crops.²⁰¹ From the 1970s the Endts began trialling plants from South America and Landsendt now holds an extensive subtropical collection including various bamboo, palms, ginger, bromeliads and babaco.²⁰² Along with the commercial aspect, Landsendt also provides an important refuge for many plants in the collection, some of which are so scarce they have been given refugee status.²⁰³

Oratia Native Plant Nursery

The Oratia Native Plant Nursery was established by Geoff Davidson in 1978.²⁰⁴ Originally situated along Parker Road, the nursery began as a hobby in response to conservation interests but grew into a highly successful venture. In 1990 Geoff and his wife Bev purchased a nursery site at 625 West Coast Road and for a number of years both sites were utilised 'with

²⁰¹ NA2084/14, LINZ; Allen, p.74.

²⁰² Landsendt website: www.landsendt.co.nz.

²⁰³ Dowling, p.24.

²⁰⁴ Allen, p.74.

about two hectares of open nursery, some 2000 metres of shade houses and 1000 square metres of plastic growing houses.²⁰⁵ The demand for native plants has steadily increased over the last few decades and the Oratia Native Plant Nursery remains one of New Zealand's few sizeable nurseries in private ownership.²⁰⁶

VINEYARDS

Viticulture in the Oratia area was predominantly undertaken by Croatian settlers, who endured back-breaking work to prepare and tend the vines. John Vella Snr was among the first to plant grapes and by 1913 his vineyard covered 6 acres of land (Figure 15).²⁰⁷ In 1925 Vella and his son exhibited at the Winter Show, where it was reported their wine had been well received: 'rightly so, too, because Mr. Vella, senior, is one of the pioneers of the wine industry in the Auckland Province. The vineyards at Oratia have been well known to the public for many years, and the reputation of the firm has never fallen below the highest standard.'²⁰⁸ On show were a muscatel sherry, and two types of port. The Sunde family were also involved in Oratia viticulture from 1910 and were highly involved in the establishment of the Viticultural Association.²⁰⁹ They supplemented the meagre income from wine by growing other crops and saved money by building their own wine barrels and wine press. One of the most well-known wine labels to be produced from Oratia – Artisan Wines – was founded by Rex Sunde in 1999. Following the 'European tradition of single vineyard production for each of its wines', the resulting wine has been awarded several distinctions and the vineyard (Parrs Cross Road) now remains one of the few left in the area.²¹⁰

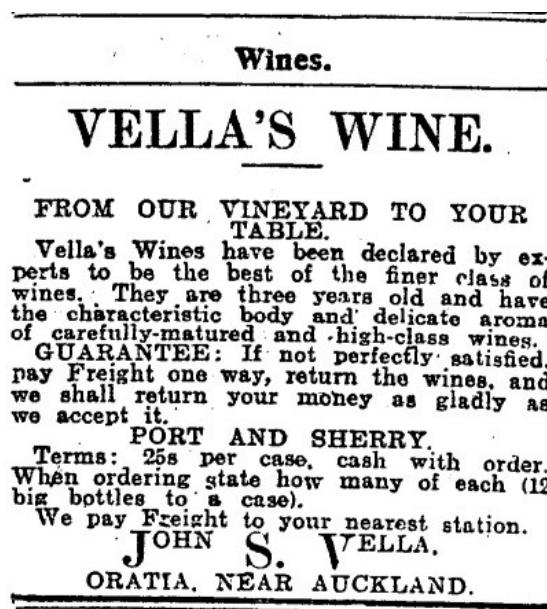


Figure 15: Advertisement for Vella's wines dated 1916. (Source: *New Zealand Herald*, 12 December 1916, p.3)

²⁰⁵ Oratia Native Plant Nursery website: www.oratianatives.co.nz.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ R.A. Harvey, p.21.

²⁰⁸ *Auckland Star*, 25 August 1925, p.9.

²⁰⁹ Allen, p.39.

²¹⁰ *Western Leader*, 12 October 2004, p.11.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

In 1865 Oratia was described as a ‘secluded but rising district’, and indicators of its growth were evident in the development of amenities and services.²¹¹ The establishment of local places of worship, burial, education and commemoration strengthened the ties of early settlers to the area and revealed the unique characteristics of Oratia’s community.

ORATIA CEMETERY

The land on which the Oratia Cemetery is sited, along West Coast Road, was part of Thomas Parr’s 536 acre property, and was predominantly used as a family graveyard throughout the 1860s and 1870s.²¹² Known as the old Waikomiti Cemetery, the first burial to take place within the grounds was that of seven month-old Thomas Henry Carlquest in 1867.²¹³ On 1 November 1881 Edward John Parr transferred the title for the one acre parcel (Pt Allot 14) to the Anglican Church of New Zealand, represented by Bishop William Cowie and other Trustees of the Church. The deed of conveyance specified that the land be used ‘for religious and charitable purposes for the use and benefit of the Ecclesiastical District and Parish’.²¹⁴ Burial plots were made available for purchase; however those settlers who acquired plots after 1904 were obliged to conform strictly to Anglican burial practices.²¹⁵ Around 1908 the name of the graveyard changed to the Oratia Cemetery, in response to the formation of a separate Oratia district. From 1911 to 1920 the cemetery went unused; however, burials continued from 1921 and that same year kauri entrance gates were purchased from the Kauri Timber Company Ltd for £3.10.9d.²¹⁶ A second period of disuse occurred between 1960 and 1977 during which the area deteriorated and became overgrown with scrub and gorse.²¹⁷ Efforts by local Oratia residents regenerated the cemetery, and the site remains a significant memorial to many early families in the district including: Sharp, Parr, Mills, Parker and Holden.²¹⁸ The Cemetery is scheduled in the Auckland Council District Plan (Waitakere Section) as a Category II heritage item.²¹⁹

Jewish Prayer House

The Jewish Prayer House in the cemetery was originally constructed at the new Waikomiti (now Waikumete) Cemetery in 1886.²²⁰ Plans for the chapel were initiated in April 1886 when the *New Zealand Herald* reported: ‘A number of the members of the Hebrew community, with the Rev. S. Goldstein, proceeded to the Waikomiti Cemetery on Sunday last, for the purpose of consecrating the ground, and selecting a site for the erection of a

²¹¹ *New Zealand Herald*, 13 January 1865, p.4.

²¹² LINZ Deeds Register 33M/566, Archives New Zealand; Application file 36752C, LINZ; Allen, p.69.

²¹³ Gray, p.39.

²¹⁴ LINZ Deeds Register 33M/566, Archives New Zealand.

²¹⁵ Allen, p.69.

²¹⁶ OFM-001-0009, Box 2, Oratia Cemetery, ‘The Oratia Cemetery’ by Paul Schlotjes, no date, West Auckland Research Centre.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Allen, p.69.

²¹⁹ The Oratia Cemetery is recorded under CHI number 3501.

²²⁰ OFM-001-0009, Box 2, Oratia Cemetery, ‘The Jewish Prayer House: Waikumete to Oratia’ by Paul Schlotjes, no date, West Auckland Research Centre.

mortuary.’²²¹ Once the site had been agreed upon drawings of the building were drawn up by a Mr J.R. Keesing who presented them to the Synagogue Committee on 4 July 1885 for approval. Various tenders from building companies were received soon afterwards and by 25 July 1886 the tender of £100 by contractor T.H. Jones was accepted. The money was raised by members of the Synagogue and work on the chapel began immediately.²²² The Prayer House was built entirely of kauri and located at the north-east corner of the Hebrew section. The first recorded use of the building was for a Mr F.H. Lewisson on 15 June 1887. The chapel remained an integral part of the Jewish section of Waikumete Cemetery for 106 years; however, in the later twentieth century it was subjected to frequent attacks of vandalism. Following the construction of a new Jewish Prayer House in 1990, the old chapel was relocated to the Hoani Waititi Marae in Glen Eden on 3 July 1992. The intended use for the Prayer House was as a tractor and implement shed; however, subsequent negotiations saw the building acquired by the Oratia Folk Museum Society Incorporated, and on 27 November 1992 the building was relocated again to the Oratia Cemetery.²²³ Restoration work on the chapel was undertaken by Oratia resident David Harré, who directed the replacement of 18 rafters with kauri obtained from demolition yards, and the installation of a new iron colour steel roof, cut to traditional specifications.²²⁴ The Prayer House is now utilised as a non-denominational cemetery chapel, and remains a unique and scarce example of nineteenth century Jewish building in the Auckland area.²²⁵ It is scheduled in the Auckland Council District Plan (Waitakere Section) as a Category II heritage item.²²⁶

ORATIA’S CHURCHES

Combined Church

In January 1865 a public meeting was held at the residence of Captain Cable, along West Coast Road, to discuss the establishment of a local place of worship. In order to incorporate the various religious denominations of residents it was agreed that the land should have ‘vested trustees elected from among the settlers of the district, who would be empowered to allow the clergymen of any denomination, that might offer to give the district the benefit of their service for the occasion.’²²⁷ Trustees Andrew Kelly, William Cantwell and Thomas Parr were eventually awarded a Crown Grant for Allotment 238, a parcel of 4 acres, on 15 July 1867.²²⁸ The land was situated at the corner of Parker and West Coast Roads, and the grant specified that the allotment be held ‘in trust for the purpose of building a place of public

²²¹ *New Zealand Herald*, 20 April 1886, p.4.

²²² Schlotjes.

²²³ Waikumete Cemetery Conservation and Reserve Management Plan, May 2003, ‘History of Waikumete Cemetery’, pp.26-7, see: <http://www.waitakere.govt.nz/cnlser/pbr/plans/pdf/waikumete/parttwo.pdf>; pers. comm. David Harré, 2013.

²²⁴ Schlotjes.

²²⁵ CHI Record No. 3513.

²²⁶ The Jewish Prayer House is recorded under CHI number 3513.

²²⁷ *New Zealand Herald*, 13 January 1865, p.4.

²²⁸ Application File No. 36283C, LINZ.

worship and for the purpose of building a schoolhouse in which the English language shall be taught.’²²⁹ In October 1872 tenders for the construction of the church building were advertised, with the note that plans and specifications were available to view at Andrew Kelly’s residence.²³⁰ W.R. Allen recalled that the commission to erect the small timber church went to George Gunson, a preacher based in Glen Eden. Kauri timber was donated by the local community and pit-sawn by Kelly and Cantwell. Solid kauri pews 12 inches wide and 2½ inches thick were constructed by Gunson, and Oratia resident Terence Donnelly supplied shingles to complete the roof.²³¹ In July 1873 the annual report of the Whau district for the year 1872-73 noted that ‘a new church had been erected at Waikomiti, and was now almost free of debt.’²³² Part of the land on the north side of the church was set aside as a graveyard and members from some of Oratia’s oldest families were laid to rest in the plot, notably Cantwell, Carter and Kelly.²³³

The new church attracted various Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian ministers to conduct services, many of whom were obliged to travel from the city on horseback. In addition, a regular Sunday School, which had been established before the construction of the church, was administered by a local superintendent and attended by many youth in the district (Figure 16). Steadily increasing congregation numbers necessitated the addition of two rooms onto the back of the church in 1922 and the strengthening of the walls, which were said to have sagged like ‘Noah’s Ark’. Another two large rooms were built onto the front of the church in 1956 (Figure 17).²³⁴ The ownership of the church property passed from surviving trustee Kelly to local residents Thomas and Jane Cox and Gabriel Goulter before being transferred to the Oratia Religious and Educational Trust Society in 1954.²³⁵ The society was managed by an elected president and appointed trustees from each contributing denomination. In 1967 the church was lifted and moved 92 metres to the south to make way for a new combined church, designed by Russell Gash with seating for 150 parishioners. The graveyard was also repositioned and now lies behind the modern church.²³⁶ Community groups continue to use the original combined church, which is now administered under the Oratia Church Trust Society.²³⁷ The church is scheduled in the Auckland Council District Plan (Waitakere Section) as a Category II heritage item.²³⁸

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ *Daily Southern Cross*, 25 October 1872, p.1.

²³¹ Allen, p.20.

²³² *Daily Southern Cross*, 9 July 1873, p.3.

²³³ Allen, pp.23-4.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ NA945/283, LINZ.

²³⁶ Allen, pp.22-4; R.A. Harvey, p.8.

²³⁷ NA945/283, LINZ.

²³⁸ Oratia Combined Church is recorded under CHI number 3789.



Figure 16: Photograph dated 1923 showing the members of the Oratia Bible Class. Standing (left to right) are Ron Davidson, Freda Stone, Fred Whittaker, Martha Blackbourn, Charlie Taylor and Ray Allen. Seated (left to right) are Ivy Gash, Mavis Gash, Frank Firth (leader), Dorothy Davidson and Mary Cochran. (Source: W.R. Allen, *Oratia My Valley*, p.23)



Figure 17: Photograph dated 1954 showing the old Oratia Combined Church and graveyard. Several modifications are visible, the middle section is the original 1870s construction. (Source: J.T. Diamond Collection, West Auckland Research Centre, JTD-13A-01009-2)

Church of SS. Cyril and Methodius

By the late 1920s Oratia was home to the largest community of Croatians in New Zealand, and the need for a local place of worship became increasingly apparent. In February 1929 a church committee was formed to support the Croatian Catholic Mission with the task of constructing its first Auckland chapel.²³⁹ One rood of land with a frontage along West Coast Road was acquired by the church in January 1930 for £50, and a further £280 was donated by Croatian parishioners towards the costs of the new building.²⁴⁰ The one-storey chapel was constructed with timber weatherboards and featured four pane timber casement windows and a small gable over the entrance way (see Figure 26).²⁴¹ The interior of the church was fitted out with various generous donations which included carpet, vases, candle holders and Stations of the Cross. The altar was donated by a Mr Rafo Berković.²⁴² On 4 May 1930 the new Church of Saints Cyril and Methodius, named after the ninth century Apostles of the Slavs, was blessed by Bishop Liston, and the opening mass was held in the ancient Croatian liturgical language: *Glagoljica*. Following the sermon, the Bishop presented a gold chalice to the church 'in memory of the late Bishop Cleary's work among the Dalmatian people' along with a set of gold cloth vestments.²⁴³ The church was able to accommodate a congregation of around 100, and over the first three days around 150 Holy Communions were administered.²⁴⁴ The church has since been rotated and moved back from the road to provide space for carparking, and is now known as the Oratia Small Hall, which is utilised by community groups.²⁴⁵ The building is scheduled in the Auckland Council District Plan (Waitakere Section) as a Category II heritage item.²⁴⁶

POSTAL & TELEPHONE SERVICE

Oratia fell outside of the postal delivery boundaries during the nineteenth century, and this meant that settlers were obliged to arrange the collection and distribution of mail amongst themselves. One of the earliest mail carriers was Humphrey Sharp, who transported the Oratia mailbag weekly after selling his daffodils at the Auckland market. For his service to the Oratia community, Sharp was presented with a satchel in 1879.²⁴⁷ The Parr family's Albion Vale homestead was used as the first distribution point for a mail service to the area from December 1905, and enabled the daily delivery of mail. Sometime later the post office was incorporated into a small store run by Joe Wild (formerly located along West Coast Road between Shaw and Carter Roads), and the mail arrived labelled 'Wild Oratia'. As the Oratia

²³⁹ Msgr Ante Klarić, *History of the Croatian Catholic Mission in Auckland, New Zealand (1904-2004)*, Auckland, 2004, p.165.

²⁴⁰ Klarić, p.165; NA25A/302, LINZ; NA21A/321, LINZ.

²⁴¹ CHI Record No. 3506

²⁴² Klarić, p.165.

²⁴³ *Auckland Star*, 5 May 1930, p.3.

²⁴⁴ Klarić, pp.165-6.

²⁴⁵ See: <http://oratia.org.nz/oratia-church-hall/>

²⁴⁶ The Oratia Catholic Church of SS. Cyril and Methodius is recorded under CHI number 3506.

²⁴⁷ Allen, p.69.

District School was located nearby, school children would often collect their mail during the lunch break, along with a penny-worth of sweets from the store.²⁴⁸

A separate telephone office was opened in July 1912, which enabled Oratia residents to make toll calls and send telegrams. The office was situated in the house of Charles Mills, located along Parker Road. His daughter Amelia Mills worked as the telephonist until the office was closed temporarily in 1917.²⁴⁹

That same year Oratia's first dedicated Post Office was constructed at the corner of Carter and West Coast Roads (Figure 18).²⁵⁰ The tiny one-roomed timber building was erected by the local community on a quarter acre parcel of land leased from Stanko Marinovich.²⁵¹ Gladys Carter undertook the role of Postmistress, which initially required attendance daily between noon and 3pm. The new facilities did not include a telephone and Oratia remained unconnected until 1920 when the line was re-opened at the house of John Vella. The telephone was only operated between noon and 1pm daily; and not on Fridays at all.²⁵² The need for a combined postal and telephone service as well as full hours of attendance prompted the original lessees (A. Cochran, M. Brain and P. Theet) to offer their interests in the building and land to the Crown.²⁵³ The offer was accepted and the land transferred in December 1921 for the sum of £50. Miss Carter was retained as Postmistress with a negotiated salary of £70 per annum, and the hours of the combined office set at 9am to 5pm daily.²⁵⁴

In 1956 the original building was removed from the site to make way for the construction of a larger wooden Post Office.²⁵⁵ The new building provided a full postal service until declared surplus to requirements by New Zealand Post in 1988.²⁵⁶ The land was subsequently sold and the building retained as a private residence.²⁵⁷

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p.26.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p.27.

²⁵⁰ The Oratia Post Office is recorded under CHI number 3500 as a historic structure, but the building is no longer located on the site.

²⁵¹ Ibid., p.26; NA147/179, LINZ; BAEB A387 22761 Box 29 d 7/129 – Buildings – Oratia Post Office, 1917-1920, Archives New Zealand.

²⁵² Allen, p.27; BAEB A387 22761 Box 29 d 7/129 – Buildings – Oratia Post Office, 1917-1920, Archives New Zealand.

²⁵³ BAEB A387 22761 Box 29 d 7/129 – Buildings – Oratia Post Office, 1917-1920, Archives New Zealand; BAEB A387 22761 Box 56 b 16/129 – Post Office sites and leases – Oratia Post Office Site, 1920 – 1969, Archives New Zealand.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.; NA147/179, LINZ, NA345/108, LINZ.

²⁵⁵ Allen, p.26.

²⁵⁶ BBAD 1054 Box 1324 c 18/133/0 1 – Post Offices – Oratia Post Office – Land, 1965-1970, Archives New Zealand.

²⁵⁷ NA345/108, LINZ.



Figure 18: Photograph dated 1950s showing original Oratia Post Office located on the corner of Carter and West Coast Roads. (Source: J.T. Diamond Collection, West Auckland Research Centre, JTD-13A-01442)

ORATIA SCHOOL

In 1867 the need for educational facilities was discussed at a meeting of Oratia residents who argued that ‘there are a number of children belonging to resident settlers, to whom the establishment of a local school would be a very great blessing.’²⁵⁸ Land was granted later that same year for the purpose of building a church and school house; however, the first lessons were not given until 1882. Pupils attended three days a week and were taught by a Mr Holloway, who divided his teaching between Oratia and Titirangi (also a half-time school).²⁵⁹ Plans for the erection of a state school building were begun soon afterwards and in 1883 Humphrey Sharp conveyed 6 acres of land to the Education Board.²⁶⁰ The property was sited at the corner of Shaw and West Coast Roads and plans were subsequently drawn up for a ‘Waikomiti School House’.²⁶¹ The building was constructed of kauri timber and comprised one room and a cloakroom. Pupils were transferred from the church to the new school house around 1886 and the school register recorded the following pupils: Edwin Shaw, Charles Shaw, Kate Shaw, Agnes Shaw, George Parr, Robert Parr, Kate Carter, Rosalie Cantwell and Elizabeth Moorehead.²⁶² Former pupil Bruce Levy (from 1897-1906) recalled that ‘an open

²⁵⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, 2 October 1867, p.4.

²⁵⁹ Application File No. 36283C, LINZ; R.A. Harvey, pp.8-9.

²⁶⁰ Deeds Index 7A/6, Archives New Zealand.

²⁶¹ R.A. Harvey, p.6.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p.9.

fire provided some warmth during the winter; the desks sat two scholars apiece, and were arranged in rows 4-5 deep and some 6-7 rows across the room; slates and slate pencils were the order of the day for general work, with inkwells set in the desk, and pens provided for bookwork.²⁶³ The school roll steadily increased throughout the late nineteenth century, and by 1894 the average number of pupils attending was 27.²⁶⁴ In 1906 another room was added to the original building and the extension sufficed until 1938, when another classroom and staff room were erected (Figure 19).²⁶⁵ The 1883 school house was utilised for lessons until 1962 when it was re-sited on the school grounds and repurposed as a library and hall. The building remained in use until it was destroyed by fire on 29 December 1974. A replacement library and purpose room were constructed the following year.²⁶⁶ The present-day Oratia School (renamed from 1908) operates with a history of over 130 years and remains a focal point for the community. Since the construction of the first school house, the buildings have been utilised for local meetings, dances, concerts and socials and the grounds for sporting pursuits and commemoration. Many generations of Oratia families have had long associations with the school, as pupils or committee members, or both.²⁶⁷ The 1940s 'Sunshine block' and memorial school gates are scheduled in the Auckland Council District Plan (Waitakere Section) as a Category III heritage item.²⁶⁸



Figure 19: Photograph dated 1956 showing the old Oratia School House. (Source: J.T. Diamond Collection, West Auckland Research Centre, JTD-13A-01029-2)

²⁶³ Ibid., p.10.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p.75.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., pp.44 & 75.

²⁶⁷ See: Peter Dowling, ed., *The Little School in the Valley: 25 Years On, Oratia District School 1882-2007*, Waitakere City, 2007.

²⁶⁸ The 'Sunshine block' is recorded under CHI number 3509, as are the gate posts and plaques (see below under Commemoration).

COMMEMORATION

The conflicts of World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945) involved dozens of young men from the Oratia district, many of whom were injured, and some who never returned home. For those who were unable to enlist the local war effort continued, and residents banded together to support those abroad. The return of soldiers from the First World War was warmly celebrated and on 13 July 1918 the *Observer* reported: 'The Oratia Tennis Club, assisted by friends held a "Social" in the local schoolroom, the occasion being a "Welcome" to some returned soldiers of the district...stretched across the ceiling was a banner on which Mrs Needham had worked "Welcome" in red, white and blue. Captain Peter Theet then made a brief speech, Corporal Brain replying on behalf of the returned soldiers. Honour was then done to the fallen heroes by everybody standing in silence for a short period.'²⁶⁹ During the Second World War the children of the Oratia District School participated in a concert to aid the work of the Red Cross and later raised funds for the War Memorial Committee. With threats of a Japanese attack, the students were also made adept at digging trenches and air-raid shelters, many of which were constructed in the bush near the school.²⁷⁰ Following the end of both wars, the community organised the construction of two memorials in order to commemorate those Oratia residents who had served – the Lord Kitchener statue and the Memorial School Gates.

Lord Kitchener Statue

In 1922 the Oratia War Memorial Committee commenced discussions on a suitable war memorial to remember those men who saw action in the First World War. The sculptor W.F. Feldon was eventually commissioned to produce a statue of Lord Kitchener to be erected at the corner of Shaw and West Coast Roads.²⁷¹ Horatio Kitchener, 1st Earl Kitchener, had served as a British Field Marshal in the Great War and died in the conflict in 1916. Lord Kitchener's image was known to most New Zealander's as the face of the recruitment poster: 'BRITONS, (Lord Kitchener) WANTS YOU!' The statue was fashioned from Oamaru stone and stood on a 10ft high pedestal built by J. Tombes of New Lynn from boulders found in the district.²⁷² The plinth featured three scrolls on which were inscribed the names of those Oratia residents who had served in the war. On 6 December 1922 the memorial was unveiled by the Governor General, Viscount Jellicoe who officiated in naval uniform and placed a commemorative wreath (Figure 20).²⁷³ The *Auckland Star* noted that 'the memorial...is a life-size of the late Field-Marshal Lord Kitchener, wearing the full uniform, with earl's robe and orders, and holds in his right hand the Field-Marshal's baton.'²⁷⁴ The memorial cost the Oratia community more than £140 and remained part of the community until 1931 when the statue was attacked with an axe and the head removed.²⁷⁵ The statue was dismantled and the

²⁶⁹ *Observer*, 13 July 1918, p.8.

²⁷⁰ R.A. Harvey, p.29.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.27.

²⁷² *Ibid.*; p.28, *Evening Post*, 6 July 1931, p.8.

²⁷³ *New Zealand Herald*, 7 December 1922, p.11; R.A. Harvey, p.28.

²⁷⁴ *Auckland Star*, 6 December 1922, p.8.

²⁷⁵ R.A. Harvey, p.27; *Evening Post*, 6 July 1931, p.8.

base left to serve as a memorial; however, this was also removed in 1948 to make way for a new school house.²⁷⁶



Figure 20: Photograph dated 6 December 1922 showing the official unveiling of the Lord Kitchener statue (draped in the Union Jack) at the corner of Shaw and West Coast Roads. (Source: W.R. Allen, *Oratia My Valley*, p.43)

Memorial School Gates

The War Memorial gates situated at the entrance to Oratia District School were officially opened by Rex Mason, local MP, on Anzac Day 1948 (Figure 21).²⁷⁷ The phrase ‘Lest We Forget’ was fashioned into the main iron gates which were hung on two main brick pillars. Commemorative plaques mounted on the pillars were inscribed with the names of local residents who had served in World War I and World War II. The names were listed under three headings: Those who paid the supreme sacrifice, Old scholars of Oratia and Men other than old scholars. In total the memorial records 50 names under those who served in the First World War, and 43 names (including nurse Gwen Malcolm) under the Second World War.²⁷⁸ For many years Oratia residents placed wreaths at the gates on Anzac Day, following the local service at the nearby Oratia Settler’s Hall.²⁷⁹ The gates remain outside the school as a poignant reminder of those who served. They are scheduled on the Auckland Council District Plan (Waitakere Section) as a Category III heritage item.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ R.A. Harvey, p.28; Allen, p.44.

²⁷⁷ R.A. Harvey, p.30.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Allen, p.44.

²⁸⁰ The memorial school gate posts and plaques are recorded under CHI number 3509, together with the 1940s ‘Sunshine block’.



Figure 21: Photograph dated ANZAC Day 1948 showing the Oratia Memorial School Gates with commemorative wreaths. (Source: W.R. Allen, *Oratia My Valley*, p.44)

ORATIA'S WAR HEROES

William Campbell Sharp (1897-1918)

Among the names of those commemorated on the Memorial School Gates is William Campbell Sharp, the youngest son of Humphrey Ewing and Margaret Sharp (Figure 22).²⁸¹ Following two attempts to enlist which failed on account of his age, 17 year-old William was eventually accepted into training at the Trentham army camp in 1915 after posing as his older brother, 26 year-old Ronald Gordon Sharp.²⁸² William was subsequently posted to Egypt and served with the Auckland Infantry Regiment, 1st Battalion before participating in campaigns in both France and Belgium. In late 1916 Sharp was hospitalised for some months, but had recuperated sufficiently by September 1917 to be sent back to the front in France.²⁸³ On 26 March 1918, 20 year-old Private Sharp was killed in Mailly-Maillet, France, while attempting to repel a German advance.²⁸⁴ Unaware that Sharp had assumed the guise of his brother, the army duly notified Sharp's parents by telegram that their son R.G. Sharp had been killed in action. The consequences of the duping proved problematic. The real Ronald Gordon Sharp was required to prove his identity in front of a judge before the family was able to execute William's will. Further, later war memorials in both the Auckland Museum and in France

²⁸¹ BDM 1897/16490.

²⁸² Gray, p.42; BDM 1889/11564.

²⁸³ Gray, p.42.

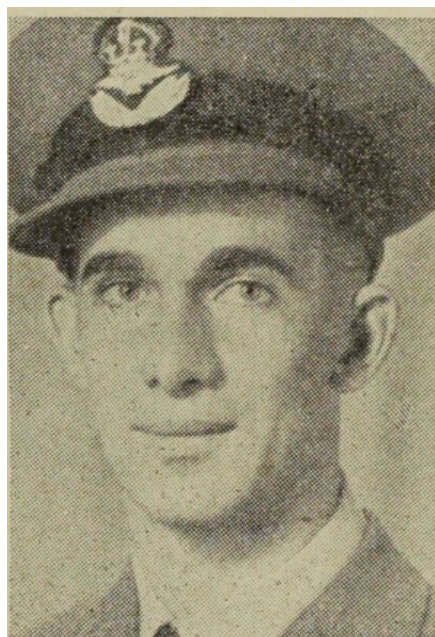
²⁸⁴ Auckland Museum Cenotaph Record of William Campbell Sharp, see: http://muse.aucklandmuseum.com/databases/Cenotaph/14246.detail?Ordinal=2&c_surname_search=sharp&c_firstname_search=william, New Zealand War Graves Project, Private William Campbell Sharp, see: <http://www.nzwargraves.org.nz/casualties/william-campbell-sharp>.

incorrectly recorded R.G. Sharp among the fallen. The correct details of William Sharp's death are inscribed on the family gravestone, located in the Oratia Cemetery.²⁸⁵



PTE. W. C. SHARP,
of Oratia.
Killed in action.

Figure 22: Portrait of Private William Campbell Sharp (aka Ronald Gordon Sharp), dated 16 May 1918. (Source: Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, AWNS-19180516-41-34)



Flying-Officer I. Marino-
vich, of Oratia, Auck-
land, missing on opera-
tions.

Figure 23: Portrait of Flying Officer Ivan Marinovich, dated 20 October 1943. (Source: Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, AWNS-19431020-20-20)

Ivan Marinovich (1917-1943)

Also recorded on the Memorial School Gates is name of Ivan Marinovich, the third son of local orchardists Lovre and Mary Marinovich (Figure 23). Following the outbreak of World War II, Ivan attempted to enlist in the New Zealand Navy but was refused on the grounds that his father was not a British subject by birth.²⁸⁶ In 1940 Marinovich turned his attention instead to the New Zealand Air Force and was the second New Zealander of Croatian descent to receive a commission.²⁸⁷ Training was undertaken in Canada under the Empire Flying Scheme, and following its completion Marinovich was posted to the 200th Royal New Zealand Air Force Squadron in England with the rank of Flying Officer. The first campaign in which Marinovich was involved was named 'Ferry Command' and required planes to be flown across the Atlantic Ocean from America to Britain. Ivan was later transferred to the 'Coastal Command' base at Dakar, now the capital of Senegal, on the coast of West Africa,

²⁸⁵ Gray, pp.42-3.

²⁸⁶ Vertical Files, Oratia – History – Marinovich family, unpublished manuscript entitled 'Flying Office Ivan Marinovich', West Auckland Research Centre.

²⁸⁷ Auckland Museum Cenotaph Record of Ivan Marinovich, see http://muse.aucklandmuseum.com/databases/Cenotaph/28999.detail?Ordinal=1&c_surname_search=marinovich&c_firstname_search=ivan, *Auckland Star*, 3 November 1943, p.6.

to patrol the southern Atlantic for German submarines. Formidable Liberator bombers were used in the campaign, and Marinovich was given the role of navigator under the leadership of Flying Officer Lloyd Allan Trigg. On 11 August 1943 Marinovich and Trigg encountered anti-aircraft fire from a German submarine on their first ‘acclimatisation’ flight. Faced with a fatally hit aircraft and more than 200 miles from the base at Dakar, Trigg made the decision to direct the final descent of the plane towards the enemy ship. The impact caused the U-boat to sink and killed all members of the crew on board the Liberator which included five New Zealanders, two from the United Kingdom and one Canadian.²⁸⁸ The Captain and First Mate of the German submarine were the only recovered survivors of the conflict and based on their evidence Trigg was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for ‘outstanding service on convoy, escort and anti-submarine duties.’ The names of the Liberator crew, including that of the 26 year-old Ivan Marinovich, were later commemorated on the Malta Memorial.²⁸⁹

ORATIA FOLK MUSEUM

The Oratia Folk Museum was established in 1977 to commemorate the early history of the district. The museum is housed in one of Oratia’s earliest permanent settler cottages, which was moved from its original location at 125 Parker Road and re-sited in front of Albion Vale, along West Coast Road. Careful and extensive restoration was undertaken by the local community on the old building, which now offers a glimpse into the domestic life of Oratia’s early settlers.

The Folk Museum is a unique example of a simple gabled box cottage, constructed entirely of locally pit-sawn kauri with a steep pitched shingle roof.²⁹⁰ The central door opens onto a small sap kauri lined hall either side of which are two main rooms – the master bedroom and the Sunday parlour.²⁹¹ As its name suggests, the use of the parlour was restricted to Sundays and formal family occasions such as weddings and funerals, in keeping with the English tradition. In the case of funerals, however, the entrance to the parlour room often proved too small to accommodate the coffin, and it would be transported through the front window.²⁹² The kitchen and scullery are constructed off the central hall at the rear of the house, with a narrow winding staircase at one end leading up to two connecting attic bedrooms.

The cottage was likely to have been built between 1855 and 1870 by a Mr Terence Donnelly, an early Irish settler. Donnelly arrived in New Zealand in 1845 as a soldier with the 58th British Regiment, which was involved in the New Zealand Wars at Kororareka, Kapotai Pa, Ohaeawai Pa, Ruapekapeka Pa, the Hutt Valley and Whanganui. In 1855 Donnelly purchased

²⁸⁸ Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, <http://www.cwgc.org/>; Vertical Files, Oratia – History – Marinovich family, unpublished manuscript entitled ‘Flying Office Ivan Marinovich’, West Auckland Research Centre; Auckland Museum Cenotaph Record of Ivan Marinovich, see http://muse.aucklandmuseum.com/databases/Cenotaph/28999.detail?Ordinal=1&c_surname_search=marinovich&c_firstname_search=ivan

²⁸⁹ *ibid*, transcription of Lloyd Allan Trigg’s VC citation.

²⁹⁰ Donaghey, p.444; Dowling, p.29.

²⁹¹ OFM-001-0013, Box 2, Unpublished manuscript, West Auckland Research Centre.

²⁹² OFM-0001-0002, Box 1, Articles/Newsletters/Publications, ‘The Oratia Folk Museum’, West Auckland Research Centre.

Pt Allotment 43, Parish of Waikomiti, in Parker Road from Robert Austin. The land was halved in 1860 and Donnelly continued to farm the remaining 91 acres until his death in 1889 aged 78 years.²⁹³ In the late 1880s the Moorehead brothers lived in the cottage. The bachelor brothers resided in the cottage until their deaths in the 1930s, when the property passed to their nieces. A nephew, Robert Blackbourne, later took up residence in the cottage with his family around 1945.²⁹⁴

In the 1950s the property was sold to a Mr Gordon Sutherland. The dwelling proved too small for use as a residence and a larger house was moved to the site. The original cottage fell into disrepair and was offered to the local Fire Brigade for practice; however, the building was spared demolition by an appeal from local residents and the homestead was given to the community.²⁹⁵ In 1969 a parcel of land on the old Parr property was offered by Margery Harré, and the Izard family donated the costs of re-siting the cottage (Figure 24). Restoration work on the building was led by David and Barbara Harré, and involved the replacement of the original round boulder foundations with concrete blocks, new roof beams and about 4,800 roof shingles. Old bricks were used to form a pathway around the cottage, and a picket fence salvaged from the Avondale Hotel was constructed along the perimeter of the site.²⁹⁶ In addition, a garden containing plants which were popular among early settlers' cottage gardens was established. The Oratia Folk Museum opened to the public on 11 December 1977 and continues today as a commemoration of Oratia's nineteenth century pioneers.²⁹⁷ The building is scheduled in the Auckland Council District Plan (Waitakere Section) as a Category II heritage item.²⁹⁸



Figure 24: Photograph dated 1969 showing the former Donnelly homestead in the process of being re-sited as the Oratia Folk Museum. (Source: J.T. Diamond Collection, West Auckland Research Centre, JTD-13A-03987-1)

²⁹³ OFM-001-0002, Box 1, Articles/Newsletters/Publications, 'Just who did build the Oratia Folk Museum?' Unpublished manuscript by Mike Butler, West Auckland Research Centre.

²⁹⁴ Dowling, p.28.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ OFM-001-0013, Box 2, *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, 4 June, 1973, pp.38-40, West Auckland Research Centre; Allen, p.43.

²⁹⁷ OFM-001-0002, Box 1, Articles/Newsletters/Publications, 'Just who did build the Oratia Folk Museum?' Unpublished manuscript by Mike Butler, West Auckland Research Centre.

²⁹⁸ The Oratia Folk Museum is recorded under CHI number 3803.

RECREATION AND ENTERTAINMENT

For early Oratia settlers recreation and entertainment played a vital role in the community. As well as relieving the toil of work on the land, the organisation of concerts, dances, sports teams, and clubs encouraged residents to unite in local fun, frivolity and friendly competition.

Local musical groups have enjoyed a long tradition in Oratia, with the earliest established in the late nineteenth century. Orchardist William Levy, a clarinet and cornet player, formed and conducted the Waikomiti Band from local settlers in the early 1890s (Figure 25).²⁹⁹ Its members wore military style uniforms and were regular guests at concerts and balls in Oratia and the surrounding districts. The band drew the attention of musical groups from neighbouring areas and on 23 May 1891 the *Observer* wrote: 'I see that the Henderson Combination Tin Band are thinking of having a contest with the Waikomiti Band. The Waikomiti boys are ready; they have just got the first lot of brass instruments for the brass band, so are just wishing to try them. Mr Levy has been appointed bandmaster, and H.E. Sharp is hon. secretary, so if the Henderson boys don't mean bluff they know where to send their challenge.'³⁰⁰ The Waikomiti String Band, another local group formed by W. Levy, also faced competition when it played at the wedding of Miss Agnes Parr and Mr S.T. Jonker at Albion Vale on 10 April 1891.³⁰¹ The incident was reported in the *Observer*: 'The Waikomiti String Band was in attendance and played for the dancing, assisted by several ladies and gentlemen on the piano. In the early part of the night a tin band arrived, composed of Henderson and Lower Waikomiti performers, when it looked lively for a bit; but the Chairman of the School Committee being present, he interviewed the leaders, the result being the tin band moved out on to the road, where they banged, bawled and shouted, but were only laughed at...after several visits to look in at the windows, the night being cold, they lifted their drums and left in disgust.'³⁰² The arrival of Dalmatian settlers to the Oratia area at the turn of the century introduced new styles of music to the district and groups such as the Swing Kings and the Winola Band, a children's orchestra, formed from these early Croatian families.³⁰³ A member of the Winola Band, Rudy Sunde, went on to write and record music, including 'Seasons in the Valley' – the Oratia School song.³⁰⁴

²⁹⁹ Tara Jahn-Werner, 'The Children of Hauaaru', in Finlay Macdonald and Ruth Kerr, eds, *West: The History of Waitakere*, Auckland, 2009, p.341; *Observer*, 9 March 1889, p.12.

³⁰⁰ *Observer*, 23 May 1891, p.17.

³⁰¹ *Auckland Star*, 15 March 1888, p.1.

³⁰² *Observer*, 25 April 1891, p.18.

³⁰³ R.A. Harvey, p.38; Allen, p.59.

³⁰⁴ Rudy Sunde Musical CV website: <http://www.kiwifolk.org.nz/artists/rudysunde.htm>.



Figure 25: Photograph dated c.1905 showing the members of the Oratia Band. From left to right, back row: Will Carter (senior), John Shaw, Alex Cochrane, William Carter (junior), Jim McCaull the drummer in civilian dress, Humphrey Sharp, Charlie Shaw, Ernie Carter; seated centre is Bandmaster Levy; front: back left, Bob Parr; front left, Henry Carter; back right, Ebb Parr; front right, Jack, Johnny Sharp. (Source: J.T. Diamond Collection, West Auckland Research Centre, JTD-13K-01015)

Dances were commonly organised as weekend entertainment in the Oratia district and attracted residents from as far afield as Piha, Swanson and Bethells, many of whom would dance through the night and arrive home in time to begin milking.³⁰⁵ Local barns and sheds were utilised as makeshift venues, along with the school and the co-operative packing shed, which often doubled as the Oratia Hall.

ORATIA SETTLERS HALL

A dance was the last event held in the co-operative packing shed, sited along West Coast Road, before the building was destroyed by fire in May 1928.³⁰⁶ That same year, Mr W. Potter headed a deputation of local residents which suggested the constitution of a special rating area in the Waikumete riding to raise a loan of £1800 for a new hall. In petitioning the council, Potter noted that ‘the lack of a hall was severely felt in the district, as it had played a large part in the social life of the residents.’³⁰⁷ The Oratia Settlers Hall was eventually constructed on the same site as the former packing shed by voluntary local labour and officially opened in July 1931 (Figure 26). The opening celebrations attracted a crowd of 250

³⁰⁵ Allen, p.28.

³⁰⁶ *Auckland Star*, 7 May 1928, p.8.

³⁰⁷ OFM-001-0007, Box 2, Oratia – General – photocopied article entitled ‘Hall needed at Oratia’, West Auckland Research Centre.

people and the *Auckland Star* noted: ‘the building, which was erected by voluntary subscription among local settlers, is well-finished and commodious.’³⁰⁸ Following speeches by Captain Theet, along with representatives of the Fruitgrowers’ Association and the Dalmatian community, an inaugural dance was held.³⁰⁹ W.R. Allen recalled that ‘when the Oratia Settlers’ Hall opened it became the centre for dances – Red Cross charity dances, R.S.A. dances, and the fruit growers’ annual ball.’³¹⁰ Regular Saturday night dances at the hall drew around 200 patrons, and after one such event in 1932, the *Auckland Star* reported the headline ‘Disturbance at Dance, Trouble at Oratia’.³¹¹ The article related that five men had appeared in the Police Court facing charges of disorderly conduct following a dance at the Oratia Settlers’ Hall. A statement from Detective Sergeant Kelly said ‘all went well until the five accused arrived with a girl. One, was not allowed to enter the hall on account of his conduct at previous dances. He made a scene, and the other four defendants came out of the hall and started to abuse the caretaker. They challenged him to a fight and generally acted in a disorderly manner for about half an hour.’³¹² However, the notoriety of the venue was limited to rare occasions, and along with dances the hall was also utilised for a range of other events by Oratia locals including Labour Party socials, Catholic Women’s League concerts, galas, meetings and Anzac Day services.³¹³ The hall³¹⁴ was extensively renovated in 1987 and continues to be used by the community for a wide variety of local events.³¹⁵

Organised sports teams and clubs emerged in Oratia from the twentieth century, and matches were regularly held between competing districts. Local residents provided playing fields from spare land, and in 1910 the *New Zealand Herald* related that Mr Parr’s paddock had been used as the venue for a return football match between Waikumete and Oratia, a ‘game from start to finish [that] was fast and exciting.’³¹⁶ In 1929 George Glucina lent his paddocks to the fledgling Oratia Football (Rugby) Club which also made use of Mate Marinovich’s shed for their meetings (Figure 27).³¹⁷ The formation of the club was recounted in the *Oratia Sporting Gazette*: ‘It was on April 21st, 1929, that a party of Oratia youths, walking on a dusty road, decided they would buy a football and do some sensible exercise...a public meeting was convened on May 17th of the same year and its enthusiastic attendance showed that a football club in Oratia could really be formed.’³¹⁸ The committee comprised Captain Theet as patron, R.H. Maryatt as chairman, Mark Marinovich as secretary and Bill Potter as coach.³¹⁹ The levelling of a horse paddock at Oratia School made new playing fields available, and in June the Oratia Football Club played its first friendly game against a Parnell

³⁰⁸ *Auckland Star*, 15 July 1931, p.15.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Allen, p.28.

³¹¹ *Auckland Star*, 16 December 1932, p.3.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ *Auckland Star*, 7 July 1936, p.17; *Auckland Star*, 27 May 1935, p.10; *Auckland Star*, 4 April 1936, p.23; Allen, p.44.

³¹⁴ The Oratia Settlers Hall is recorded under CHI number 3508.

³¹⁵ *Western Leader*, 13 July 1987, np.

³¹⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 11 October 1910, p.7.

³¹⁷ *Oratia Sporting Gazette*, 17 November 1933, p.2; Allen, p.59.

³¹⁸ *Oratia Sporting Gazette*, 17 November 1933, p.2.

³¹⁹ Allen, p.59.

team.³²⁰ The club went on to enter teams into the Auckland competitions throughout the 1930s.



Figure 26: Photograph dated 1956 showing the Oratia Settlers' Hall (left) and Oratia Catholic Church (right). (Source: J.T. Diamond Collection, West Auckland Research Centre, JTD-13A-01011)

The Oratia Basketball (Netball) Team was also established in 1929 and used the Oratia School courts for practice.³²¹ The team played others from around the Auckland area mostly through the Point Chevalier Basketball Association, which controlled the majority of the Western districts.³²²

In 1933 the *Oratia Sporting Gazette* printed the notice: 'If any ladies want to lodge a complaint on the ground that their husbands are developing a bowling craze – Mr Firth is the right man to get hold of...Mr Firth [has helped] to convert many residents to that sport, with the result that remarkably fine talent has been discovered in the district. The talk of depression and orchard pests is often replaced with a discussion regarding various rinks.'³²³ In 1943 a block of land sited along West Coast Road was purchased for £150 and work began preparing the land for the establishment of an Oratia Bowling Club.³²⁴ A row of pines was

³²⁰ *Oratia Sporting Gazette*, 17 November 1933, p.2; Allen, p.59.

³²¹ Allen, p.59.

³²² R.A. Harvey, p.37.

³²³ *Oratia Sporting Gazette*, 17 November 1933, p.2.

³²⁴ Allen, p.65.

felled and in May 1945 work commenced on the construction of a brick pavilion.³²⁵ Grass specialist Gus Levy was appointed superintendent of the grounds, and the club elected Marin Simich as its first president and Mark Marinovich as secretary.³²⁶ The club was officially opened on 17 November 1945, the refreshments including '20 gallons of wine and 10 dozen bottles of beer.'³²⁷ Additional land sited behind the pavilion was purchased by the club from Margery Harré in 1969 and later alterations to the clubhouse saw the addition of a members' lounge.³²⁸ The Oratia Bowling Club remains a focal point for recreation in the community, and has produced several winners of national championships.³²⁹



Figure 27: Photograph of the Oratia Football Team dated 1929. (Source: R.A. Harvey, *The Little School in the Valley*, p.36)

Local women's groups often formed in response to social or charitable need, and also provided an opportunity for fellowship and recreation. In June 1931 the Oratia branch of the Women's Institute was formed with the objective of improving 'the social and general standing of the women by organising meetings, lectures, various demonstrations, etc.'³³⁰ The group supported various Auckland charities and often made donations of clothes and food. Meetings were held once a month and overseen by an elected president who directed a programme of events. These commonly included demonstrations of domestic ability

³²⁵ Allen, p.65; OFM-001-0007, Box 2, Oratia – General, 'Oratia Bowling Club 50th Jubilee Programme', West Auckland Research Centre.

³²⁶ Allen, p.65.

³²⁷ OFM-001-0007, Box 2, Oratia – General, 'Oratia Bowling Club 50th Jubilee Programme', West Auckland Research Centre

³²⁸ OFM-001-0007, Box 2, Oratia – General, 'Oratia Bowling Club 50th Jubilee Programme', West Auckland Research Centre; Allen, p.66.

³²⁹ Allen, p.65.

³³⁰ *Oratia Sporting Gazette*, 17 November 1933, p.2.

including knitting and embroidery shows, flower exhibitions and lectures on various topics.³³¹

For Oratia family groups, organised picnics were among the most popular forms of leisure. A particular highlight was the annual New Year's Day picnic held at the Parr family's Albion Vale. The event attracted large crowds of local residents and included games and activities for children and adults alike. In 1910 the *New Zealand Herald* noted that a good attendance had been seen at the Parr picnic and 'a large and varied programme of races was arranged and passed off most successfully.'³³² The yearly event disappeared from Oratia's social calendar soon afterwards, but was later revived in 2006 with the help of the Oratia Ratepayers Association and the current owners of Albion Vale, David and Barbara Harré.³³³

KNOCK-NA-GREE

On 1 September 1937 the Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Auckland purchased 31 acres of land in Oratia for the purpose of establishing a youth camp.³³⁴ The property (Lot 5, Pt of Allotments 6 and 251, Parish of Waikomiti), which had originally been part of Humphrey Sharp's nursery, was acquired with the help of a £1000 donation by Mr T.J. Buxton, father of the Reverend Dr Buxton, administrator of St Patrick's Cathedral.³³⁵ Buxton intended the money to be gifted in memory of his late wife, Mrs Annie Buxton, and the camp was subsequently named 'Knock-na-gree' after her birth place in Country Derry, Ireland. Translated from the Gaelic, it means 'Hill of the Brave'.³³⁶ In October 1937 the *Zealandia* described the property as an ideal location for 'summer camps which young people may enjoy under Catholic protection and supervision, with Holy Mass and the sacraments available each day.'³³⁷ The development of the property included the construction of a bunk house and kitchen and the conversion of old railway carriages into accommodation and dining facilities.³³⁸ The extensive planting of native trees was carried out to convert the property into scenic parkland, and recreational features also included a glow worm cave and swimming hole.³³⁹ In 1941 Father George Marinovich was appointed Camp Director, and through his efforts the church raised £4000 for the erection of a new camphouse.³⁴⁰ The block comprised two wings, each with sleeping accommodation for around 24 campers, and a large social hall.³⁴¹ An official opening of the new facilities was subsequently abandoned in December 1941 in an effort to conserve petrol stocks. Following the announcement, the *Auckland Star* reported 'with the extension of the war to the Pacific, it was believed that no good purpose would be served in causing the consumption of petrol. However, the full

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² *New Zealand Herald*, 6 January 1910, p.3.

³³³ Dowling, p.20. *Western Leader*, 31 October 2006, p.12.

³³⁴ NA355/295, LINZ.

³³⁵ NA355/295, LINZ, Allen, p.44; *Zealandia*, 7 October 1937, p.7.

³³⁶ *Zealandia*, 7 October 1937, p.7.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ *Auckland Star*, 30 October 1941, p.3.

³³⁹ *Zealandia*, 7 October 1937, p.7; Allen, p.44.

³⁴⁰ Allen, p.44; *Auckland Star*, 10 December 1941, p.8.

³⁴¹ *Auckland Star*, 30 October 1941, p.3.

schedule of camps arranged for the summer months is to proceed.³⁴² The building programme at Knock-na-gree was completed in March 1945 with the construction of a chapel large enough to accommodate around 47 people.³⁴³ The chapel was blessed by Bishop Liston, who dedicated the building to Our Lady of Peace and announced that plans were under way to allow the camp to be utilised as a retreat for mothers with young children.³⁴⁴ Knock-na-gree provided recreational facilities to Oratia and the wider districts for 70 years³⁴⁵ during which time the camp had catered to thousands of people from various church organisations.³⁴⁶ The property passed out of the hands of the church in 2007.³⁴⁷

³⁴² *Auckland Star*, 10 December 1941, p.8.

³⁴³ *Auckland Star*, 7 March 1945, p.6; *Auckland Star*, 12 March 1945, p.3.

³⁴⁴ *Auckland Star*, 12 March 1945, p.3.

³⁴⁵ The former Knock-na-gree camp is recorded under CHI number 3678.

³⁴⁶ *Auckland Star*, 30 October 1941, p.3.

³⁴⁷ NA355/295, LINZ.

SUMMARY

Oratia district has a rich and unique history from which key themes have been identified for this study. The first inhabitants of the land, or tangata whenua, were Maori, whose occupation of the landscape is evidenced by archaeological sites such as food storage pits, living terraces and midden. The area was traversed by ara (walkways) and the Oratia Stream provided further means of transport. Ngati Whatua and Te Kawerau a Maki have close affiliations with West Auckland and maintain mana whenua (traditional ownership). The introduction, first, of musket warfare and then of European land speculators in the 1800s significantly diminished the West Auckland Maori population and their tribal lands, and by the mid-twentieth century the settlement of Te Henga remained one of the last areas in Waitakere over which Te Kawerau retained ownership.

Early colonial families began to settle in the Oratia area from the 1850s. These pioneer settlers predominantly originated from the British Isles and bought up large tracts of land issued by Crown Grant. Notable early families included Parr, Kelly, Cochran, Whittaker, Sharp, Shaw, Parker and Davidson, many of whom are memorialised in the names of streets, bridges and geographical features of Oratia. Other notable vestiges of these families can also be seen in remaining nineteenth century residential structures such as Parr's Albion Vale Homestead, and Sunnydale Homestead (or Endt Cottage). In the early 1900s another surge of migrants to the Oratia district occurred when Croatian families began to settle. Many of the families came from the village of Podgora in the coastal province of Dalmatia, and they were often referred to as 'Dallys'. The semi-rural and horticultural landscapes of the Oratia district were attractive features to the new settlers, and by the 1920s Oratia held the largest community of Croatians in New Zealand.

Both groups of European migrants made a significant impact on the Oratia landscape through working the land. Originally cloaked in native bush such as kauri, rimu, totara and manuka, large tracts of land were cleared from the 1850s to facilitate timber extraction, mixed farming, and horticulture. The establishment of orchards and nurseries dominated production in the district and proved highly successful, earning Oratia the title of 'The Fruitbowl of Auckland'. Nurseries and orchards in the area cultivated a wide range of produce, with apples, pears, and stone fruits among the most popular and well-known yields. In 1896 the Waikomiti Fruitgrowers' Association formed to support local fruitgrowers, and the association was instrumental in the construction of a co-operative packing shed in 1924.

The construction of several other public buildings, facilities and monuments was undertaken by locals from the nineteenth century, and these represent the character and development of the Oratia community. The Oratia Combined Church was among the earliest built and provided a place of worship and assembly for local residents. The church was also used to establish the first school in the area and, following the erection of a state school house, both buildings were regularly used for meetings and social occasions. A Catholic church was built by Croatian settlers in 1930 to serve their faith and to cement their place in the community. Provision for local burial was made on the Combined Church land from the 1870s and the Oratia Cemetery (originally a family graveyard from 1867) along West Coast Road was

conveyed to the Anglican Church for public use in 1881. Monuments to those who fought in overseas conflicts were constructed to indicate the shared experience of war and included the Lord Kitchener statue (built in 1922 and destroyed in 1931) and the Memorial School Gates which were unveiled on Anzac Day 1948. The Oratia Folk Museum was also established as a community commemoration to the early settlers of the district, their domestic way of life, and the construction methods of a simple colonial dwelling. Community progress was represented by the Oratia Post Office at the corner of Carter and West Coast Roads. The first was constructed in 1917 and eventually replaced by a new structure in 1956. The Post Office provided local postal and telephone services for residents as well as another location to meet and socialise.

Community recreation and entertainment are an important feature of Oratia's history. Sports teams, musical groups, dances, picnics and social groups gave locals an opportunity to unite in friendly competition and frivolity. The Oratia Settlers Hall, built by Oratia residents in 1931, was a focal point for many of these social events and continues to be used as a venue for local functions today. In addition, private fields were commonly offered up by residents to facilitate sporting events, dances or picnics and the Oratia School grounds were also used by sports teams. One of the largest areas used for recreation in Oratia was the former Knock-nagree Catholic youth camp. Established in 1937, the camp accommodated scores of children and other campers until its closure in 2007.

These varied components have contributed to the development of Oratia's history and community, and demonstrate the distinctive heritage and character of the area. A brief timeline of significant events relating to that history has been appended to this study.

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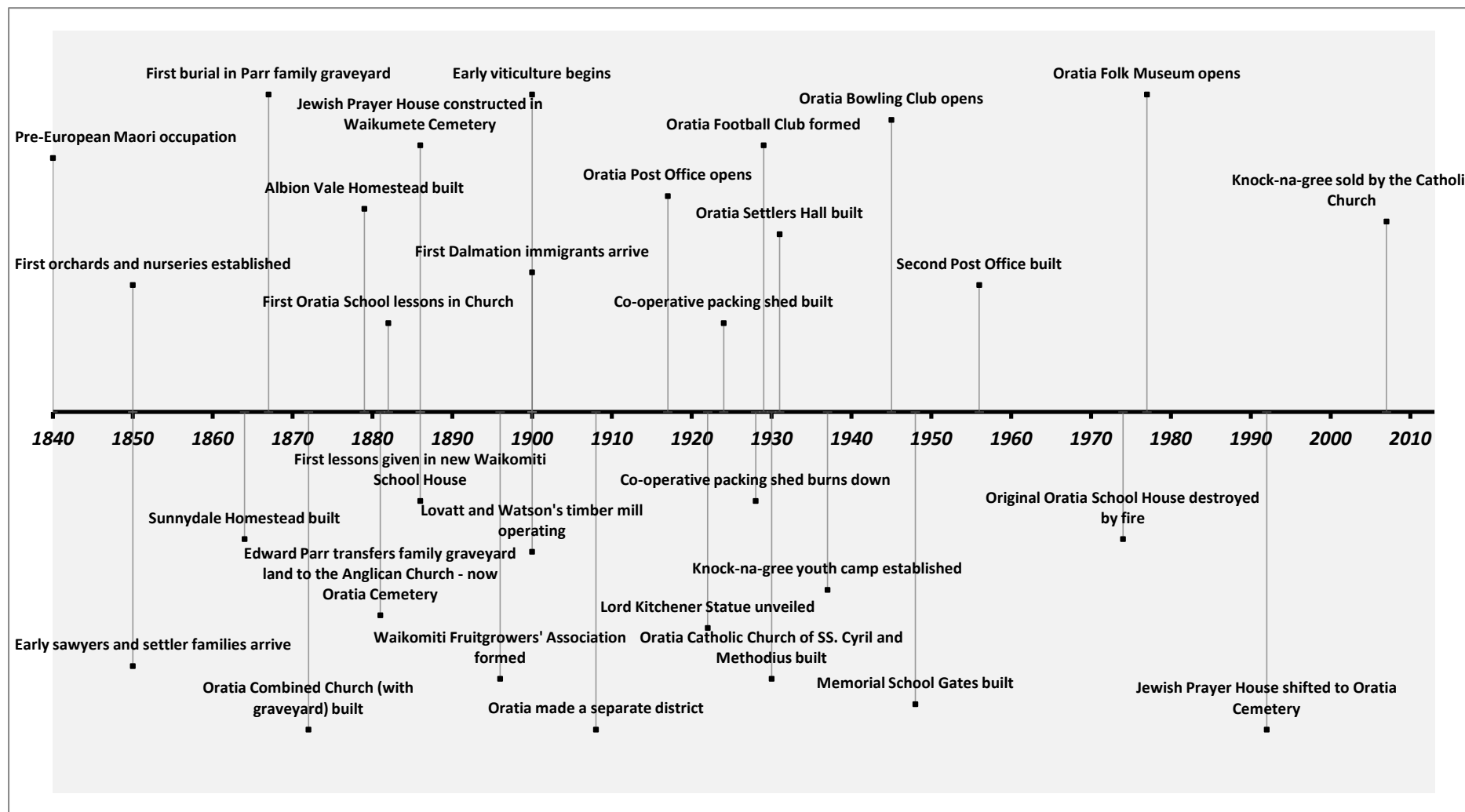
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APPENDIX A: TIMELINE (POST 1840)



Date	Event
Pre-1840	Maori occupation
1850s	Early sawyers and settler families arrive. First orchards and nurseries established.
ca. 1864	Sunnydale Homestead built.
1867	First burial in Parr family graveyard.
1872-73	Oratia Combined Church (with graveyard) built.
1879-80	Albion Vale Homestead built
1881	Edward Parr transfers family graveyard land to the Anglican Church - now Oratia Cemetery.
1882	First Oratia School lessons given in Church.
ca. 1886	First lessons given at the new Waikomiti School House. Jewish Prayer House constructed at Waikumete Cemetery.
1896	Waikomiti Fruitgrowers' Association formed
Early 1900s	First Dalmatian immigrants arrive. Lovatt and Watson's timber mill operating. Early viticulture begins in Oratia.
1908	Oratia made a separate district.
1917	Oratia Post Office opens.
1922	Lord Kitchener Statue unveiled.
1924	Co-operative packing shed built.
1928	Co-operative packing shed burns down.
1929	Oratia Football Club formed.
1930	Oratia Catholic Church of SS. Cyril and Methodius opens.
1931	Oratia Settlers Hall built.
1937	Knock-na-gree youth camp established.
1945	Oratia Bowling Club opens.
1948	Memorial School Gates built.
1956	Second Post Office built.
1974	Original Oratia School House destroyed by fire.
1977	Oratia Folk Museum opens.
1992	Jewish Prayer House shifted to Oratia Cemetery.
2007	Knock-na-gree sold by the Catholic church.