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80/39 From MR Bryan Bartley
(Winskenes)
625 MT Eden Rd
MT Eden.
(Gt-Grandson)

MS1369

EARLY REMINISCENCES OF AUCKLAND

BY MR E. BARTLEY

My brother and I came to Auckland in 1854 by the good ship "Joseph Fletcher" and, there being no wharf, our vessel anchored in the stream and the passengers and cargo were taken ashore by lighters (large Cutters).

These cutters were run ashore and grounded on the beach at a spot where the Victoria Arcade now stands and we were transhipped into drays, which conveyed us up the sloping way known as the "Slip", and thus deposited us upon dry land just about where the ston staircase of the Arcade now is on the corner of Queen and Shortland Street.

Both my brother and I were carpenters and joiners by trade and we had no difficulty in obtaining employment, as builders were awaiting the arrival of our ship with the hope of securing the necessary labour to carry out prospective building.

We landed on a Thursday and commenced work on the following Monday, our first employer being A. Black, who was about to erect a building of five two-storey shops on the corner of Queen and Victoria Street East for J.S. McFarlane.

We started by placing into position wood blocks for the foundations, after which we proceeded with the wood framework, all of which work was so strange to us as Joiners and so vastly different to the employment we had been accustomed to at home.

There were no timber mills and therefore all the wood boards had to be hand planed and the tongue and groove worked by hand. This was termed "flogging of boards" and I found it anything but easy work to be constantly employed at from 6 o'clock in the morning until 6 in the evening.

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by
Mrs. Nola Easdale.
1979.

I was next employed by E. J. Matthews, a retired officer of the Royal Engineers Department, who had left the service to become a building contractor.

While I was with him, he built all the Government buildings, viz: Military Training Stables, Stores on Britomart Point, Large Stores in Princes Street, Huts in Albert Barracks, Powder Magazines, Mt Eden Gaol, etc.

The Military Stables were in Symond Street and occupied almost the whole frontage from Grafton Road to the present site of St Pauls Church.

Since those days the whole of Britomart Point has been removed and the Albert Barracks has become Albert Park.

The first portion of the Mt Eden Gaol was erected in about 1857, under the supervision of Mr Reader Wood, Architect.

Some of the good conduct prisoners were employed as labourers and occupied temporary buildings on the site.

These prisoners had plenty of liberty and I remember one, a shoemaker, who was allowed to mend and sole our boots, for which we ledged payment with the authorities to go to his credit. He must have lifted quite a goodly sum at the expiration of his term.

Mrs Bartley has already informed you of the gaol at the corner of Queen and Victoria Streets and of the hideous gallows erected in Victoria Street. I witnessed three executions which were carried out to the full gaze of the public who usually assembled in crowds of men, women and children. These sickening operations were conducted without any attempt being made to obscure the horrid sight from the public view, and there the unfortunate victim would remain hanging for an hour.

I must confess the first execution I witnessed made me feel squeamish, and looking back on those days, one can hardly conceive how such horrid sight attracted such numerous spectators.

The bodies were buried in the gaol yard, just inside the Queen Street wood wall and their graves were marked by a little head board. When the premises were no longer used for a gaol, these bodies, which were many, were removed and re-buried in the Symond Street Cemetery.

The site of the Post Office in Shortland Street was on a slope running down to the beach, and on the beach front was the first Customs House, merely a small four-roomed cottage with a verandah in front.

There was a narrow lane leading from Shortland Street to the beach, and on one corner was a low one-storeyed building, being the Victoria Hotel, and it simply had a path in front dividing it from the beach. This was known as "Poorman's Corner" on account of the labourers hanging about this corner waiting for a job. On the other corner of the lane in Shortland Street was Weston's Auction Mart, now the site occupied by Hobson's Buildings.

Weston was an Anglican who took an active part in church matters, and when the first St Matthews Church was built I remember he imported an hand organ with which he led the singing at the services. It was Mr T Weston we have to thank for the present stone church, he started the fund for this purpose and when it amounted to 500 Pounds the money was invested on mortgage at 10 per cent, which together with careful administration, resulted in this small beginning of 1860 producing the magnificent sum of 32,000 Pounds which built the stone church in 1904, and I may mention that the erection of the stone church was carried out under my supervision.

In 1862 I was foreman of my worthy boss E. J. Matthews and we built St Paul's Church on the site of the triangle now laid out with paths and shrubberies at the junction of Shortland Street with Princes Street. There was an old church on the site, which we demolished except for the front gable and tower.

Colonel Mould, of the Royal Engineers was the architect and church, when finished was always considered to be a very good example of true Gothic Architecture, the design and construction of the roof principals being especially good.

About this time the Maori War was in full swing and all men came to their work with their guns and accoutrement. I was orderly-sergeant of the No 5 Militia, but prior to the war I was a member of the Royal Rifle Company of Volunteers. I was ordered to the front but after a few weeks, I and ten others were brought back to town to complete the Fort Britomart "Stores", as hundreds of tons of military stores were landing and there was no place to store them.

1862. About this time I remember an incident in Shortland Street when a number of men-o-warsmen from the "Maranda" and "Esk" under the command of a young midshipman marched to the front of the "New Zealander" printing office and then demanded from the editor an apology for a statement in reporting the taking of Gate Pa. The paper accused the crew of the "Maranda" and the "Esk" of cowardly forsaking their officers.

The men threatened that, failing the apology, they would wreck the building, and with this in view I saw on sailor mount the shoulders of a mate and by this means he entered one of the top-storey windows. He took with him a stout rope and came out again by another window, and tying the rope securely he descended to the street. Then the men took up their positions on the rope awaiting the orders, but the middy came out of the building with the desired document of apology in his hand, therefore the rope was removed and the men marched back to their respective boats.

I remember the wreck of the H.M.S. "ORPHEUS" February 7th, 1863, which took place on the Manukau Bar. The first we knew of the affair was by seeing drayloads of sailors being brought into Auckland.

Commadore Burnett and 189 officers and men were drowned and for days after the wreck, bodies were being washed ashore. Three officers succeeded in reaching the shore on a plank of teak from the wreck, and from this I made for them several mementoes such as picture frames, paper knives, etc., I made for myself a model of a book which I still have in my possession.

It was about the same year 1863 that we started the eight-hour movement. It was started by a Mr Griffin, a painter who was a "Chartist" and in consequence had been transported for life from England for being a leader of that movement. He was a fine noble man with a large heart for his fellow working man. Probably his only crime in the Mother Country was the "one man one vote" proposition or otherwise aiming at the betterment of the conditions of the working classes, with a view to reducing the great distress that existed, thereby causing bread riots and almost creating a revolution.

Yet such a man who would endeavour to find a remedy for such defects was hunted out of his native country, but he found a more favourable field for his labours in little New Zealand, and I am proud to be able to say that I worked as one of his committee-men and thus helped to lessen the working man's burden from 10 hours to 8 hours a day.

The movement was first established in Auckland after which it became law throughout the land and also throughout the whole of Australia.

I also feel proud of being associated with our FREE Secular, and compulsory system of Education by which the poorest lad in the land may pass from the primary to the secondary schools and thence to the University, by which every lad has the opportunity of becoming qualified for any position in life. I have been a member of the Devonport School Committee for over 35 years, and I am thankful that it has been my privilege to help in maintaining the principles of so noble a cause.

We have had to fight many times in keeping our Educational System free from the clerical element, and this has been more especially the case in respect to the attitude assumed by the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church.

As a case in point only a few weeks ago, when Bishop Brodie was laying the foundation stone for two new catholic schools, certain addresses were given in which the following statements were made

- (a) The Catholic school was in reality the vestibule of the Church, which did not bring up children on homeopathic doses of religious instruction given once a week, but they were so taught every day, which was the reason that the school was the entrance to the church
- (b) That the ceremony in which they were taking part was an assertion of principle that education without religion was seriously defective and incomplete.

Now I maintain that sound education is one thing and religious training, with all its party strife and denominational antagonism, is quite another thing and the two must be kept apart at all costs, for the mixing of the two must be with fatal results to the former.

I have always taken a keen interest in Technical Education and in 1891 started, in connection with our Devonport School, evening classes for Architectural drawing, and a year later we provided a workshop in which I taught the lads two evenings a week for two years.

When I could no longer devote the time to the matter we employed an expert carpenter and joiner as instructor, and at the Auckland Exhibition in 1898 our scholars obtained first honours for quite a number of well-made and useful articles.

In 1895 I was one of the 10 who founded the Auckland Technical School, which was maintained for many years by private subscriptions until the Education Department took it over.

It may be interesting to some to know a little respecting the history of Auckland Society of Arts. I was one of the sixteen who founded the society as far back as 1869 and have continued to be a member throughout its existence and for many years have filled the position of Hon. Treasurer.

It is now a good many years since I contributed to the exhibits but in former years I was a constant exhibitor and in 1872 I won "Honourable Mention" at the Sydney Exhibition for a water colour landscape.

It cannot be said that the early Aucklanders neglected the fine arts in any degree, for I not only came in contact with many fine artists of the picturepainting world, but I was also associated with many gifted musical friends.

I joined the Auckland Choral Society in 1856, in which I assisted vocally and also as an instrumentalist on the "Cello" and Double Bass. I have still a copy of the first book of rules printed in 1855.

I was also one of the four who formed the original Male Glee Party, then termed the "Orpheus Glee Club" and for many years the same four kept together and assisted at the principal musical functions.

Now I trust I have not wearied my readers and I hope that the little past information I have been able to furnish will assist in linking up the early history of Auckland with that of the present day.

Ed BARTLEY
Architect.