History of Yatton Park

The area around Yatton Park was originally known as Tutarawananga. After the battles of Gate Pa and Te Ranga in 1864 gifts of land were made to Maori who had not fought against the Imperial troops. One of these, Hamiora Tu, who had guided the 68th Durham regiment to the rear of the pa, was allocated land in this locality.

This land was bought by John Chadwick in 1867. By 1872 John and his son John Alfred had purchased most of the area between 18th Avenue, Cameron Road, Church Street and the Waimapu estuary.

A four-roomed homestead was erected by the Chadwicks on the high ground overlooking the Waimapu river, the southern arm of the Tauranga harbour. There was sufficient depth of water for small steamers to lie alongside the wharf at the foot of the bluff. The homestead block was beautified by plantings of exotic trees, including both camellias and the Australian trees which survive today.

By the 1870s the farm was producing wheat, which Chadwick processed with his own threshing, winnowing and reaping machine. J.A. Chadwick took an active part in Tauranga life: he was a captain in the Tauranga Light Horse, a member of the Highway Board, was instrumental in obtaining a school for Greerton, and served on the school committee.

Chadwick prospered during the 1870s, even entertaining Governor George Grey at Yatton in 1878. Disaster seems to have struck in the early 1880s. The furniture and personal effects were sold in 1883. Then in 1884 the farm itself was bought by immigrants on the “Northumberland”, members of a party for the Bay of Plenty arranged by George Vesey Stewart. John Alfred, possibly already suffering from ill health, went to Fiji. His wife, Mary, and daughter remained in Tauranga, where his father and mother owned the Tauranga Hotel. John Alfred died of heart disease on passage from Bau to Levuka in 1886.
Lucy Mansel, who bought Yatton from Chadwick, was a single woman who emigrated to New Zealand from England bringing with her six of her nephews to help run the farm. She enlarged the original building to a commodious residence occupying three sides of a square, with a courtyard in its centre. Out buildings provided accommodation for guests, servants and farm workers. There was an enormous barn, part of the barracks from the redoubt erected on the site of the Gate Pa in 1864 by the Durham Light Infantry, in which memorable dances were held. Dancing "on a splendid floor" was accompanied by a string band, the hall was decorated with Chinese lanterns, ferns and evergreens, with about 40 couples joining in the festivities. Lucy also continued the tradition, begun in Chadwick’s time, of inviting church and school groups to picnics in the grounds, where she had planted flower beds edged with box hedging, ornamental shrubs and many varieties of fruit trees.

Subdivision of the land began in 1898, although Lucy retained the homestead block, which passed to one of her nephews, Herbert Benbow Mansel on her death in 1916 [MS 80/8 V. Macmillan].

Charles Edward Rackham purchased 37 acres from Herbert Mansel in 1918 [BOPT 15 May 1918 AMS 80/8]. The original homestead was unfortunately destroyed by fire in the same year.

In 1919 Rackham sold 24 acres, including the homestead site, to John Boyd, a timber miller from Taranaki, who felled and milled both the avenue of pines leading up to the house and other pine trees scattered around the property. He built a house in which he lived. Early in 1920 he made the property over to his daughter, Myrtle, and son-in-law, Phil Douglas.

Phil Douglas c.1940s
The first moves towards turning the area into a park came in 1954, when the Hon. E.B. Corbett was taken by George Walsh, MP for Tauranga, to view the area. He described it as a “perfectly placed, ready-made park of such beauty as I have rarely seen”. Later that year 17 ½ acres were purchased from the Douglas family for the people of Tauranga by the Department of Lands [AMS 80/8 V. Macmillan]. In 1963 when the addition of Greerton allowed Tauranga to become a city, responsibility for the park passed to the Tauranga City Council.

In the late 1960s the park area was badly overgrown with gorse, brambles and bracken. In 1970 the City Council parks staff cleared the weeds, pruned the mature trees, and created a loop road around the perimeter. The ornamental waterfall, ponds and stream were constructed at the entrance to Yatton about 1973.

In more recent times volunteers, under the leadership of Gordon Petersen, have spent many hours clearing the banks alongside the Waimapu River. Beautification and replanting of this area has also been undertaken.

The park also plays a commemorative role for the Tauranga district. Notable among the memorials are an olive tree for the war in Crete, Kate Sheppard camellias for the centennial of Women’s Suffrage and gardens denoting the relationship with our sister cities of Hitachi, Yantai and San Bernadino.

Further information on the historical nature of Yatton Park is available through the Tauranga City Libraries’ New Zealand Room or Yatton Park Recreation Reserve Management Plan.