

Mt Victoria Historical Society News

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For information contact:

Joanna Newman on 385 2254 (hm)

Alan Olliver on 385 1022 (hm)

Haining Street – Wellington's Chinatown

Sunday, May 27 at 2.00 pm
Crossways
cnr Brougham and Elizabeth Streets

Presented by Lynette Shum

Come and hear Lynette Shum talk to us about the history of the Wellington Chinese community, particularly around Haining Street, so close to Mt Victoria.

Based on oral histories she has conducted, she will give us a special insight into such things as the gambling and myths and attitudes towards the Chinese.

This promises to be a lively and fascinating presentation, accompanied by slides and tapes. Lynette may even bring the Chinese gambling game of pakapoo for us to try!

Hot off the Press! A must-read!

Philippa Swan, until recently a resident of Porritt Avenue, has just published her first book, Life (and death) in a Small City Garden.

That small city garden of the title is 6 Porritt Avenue.

Mt Victoria features large in it, as do so many other things related to gardens and gardening. It's written in a wonderful, humorous style and full of anecdotes about people, places and life in Mt Vic. If you love Mt Victoria or gardening, you must read it.

What's more, the Historical Society features in the first paragraph!

'Don't mention this to ANYONE,' I warned the dog through a mouthful of florist's wire as I carefully reattached a flowerhead back onto its stem. Even given my unorthodox methods of gardening this was weird, but I was expecting the local historical society for a garden visit any minute. My potted green zinnia had, until yesterday, made rather a tasteful display on the garden table; however, the unfortunate combination of a southerly and what looked to be a touch of collar rot had managed to dislodge the flower. . . .

Get hold of a copy soon!

Historical Note

Great Literary Connections with Mt Victoria

On July 24, 1845 a remarkable young woman arrived in Wellington aboard the *Louisa Campbell*. She was Mary Taylor, sister of Waring Taylor, who had arrived in 1842.

Mary was born in 1817 in Yorkshire and, while attending school in 1831, became a close friend of Charlotte Brontë. Mary's life took a dramatic turn in 1840 when her father died and the family household was broken up. By 1841 her unorthodoxy became apparent when she declared that she proposed to emigrate to New Zealand with her youngest brother, Waring (after whom Waring Taylor St is named). Family were confused by this decision, but Charlotte Brontë clearly understood Mary better. She wrote to her sister, Emily:

"Mary Taylor and Waring have come to a singular determination, but I think under the peculiar circumstances a defensible one, though it sounds outrageously odd at first. They are going to emigrate – to quit the country altogether. Their destination unless they change is Port Nicholson, in the northern island of New Zealand!!! Mary has made up her mind she can not and will not be a governess, a teacher, a milliner, a bonnet maker nor a housemaid. She sees no means of obtaining employment she would like in England, so she is leaving it!"

Mary delayed her voyage to New Zealand a few years, arriving in 1845, and her correspondence with Charlotte Brontë continued. After 1848 it increases markedly, prompted by her receipt of a first-edition copy of *Jane Eyre* from Charlotte.

Now the connection with Mt Victoria. After receiving the book, Mary wrote to Charlotte:

"About a month since, I have received and read *Jane Eyre*. It seems to me incredible that you had actually written a book. Your novel surprised me as being so perfect as a work of art . . . Such events did not happen when I was in England. After I had read it, I went on to the top of Mt Victoria and looked for a ship to carry a letter to you. There was a little thing with one mast, and also *H.M.S. Fly* and nothing else. If a cattle vessel came from Sydney she would take the mail, but we have had East wind for a month and nothing can come in."

Mary leased a section of land on the corner of Cuba and Dixon Streets and, by 1850, had erected a shop where Dekka stands today. The shop prospered and the business expanded. Charlotte Brontë died in 1855 and, while Mary doesn't dwell on the death of her closest friend, correspondence to another friend shows that this is when loneliness and depression lead her first to consider returning to England. By 1860 she was back in England, leaving her shop to be managed by her assistant. In 1868, she sold it to another assistant, James Smith, who changed the name of the shop to his own – James Smith's.

In her last years, Mary became a virtual recluse. She would not give any interviews about the Brontës, disapproving of the literary mania which had developed around the family. Shortly before her death in 1893, at the age of 76, she destroyed all the correspondence she had received.

With thanks to Gabor Toth, for providing the source for this historical note.