



# Petone Historical Society Inc.

## April 2012 Chronicle

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As you can see we have had some changes to our format and also to our executive. At our A.G.M. we elected a new president in Nik Zangouropoulos.

Vera Ellen retired from presidency after 29 years because of her state of health. Because of her dedication and hard work over such a long time the society honoured Vera with a Life Membership. The first such honour our society has bestowed on anyone. An honour well earned.



Nik is a young Petone man who actually lived in Vera’s old house before she did. He attended Petone Central School and was a Junior Borough Councillor in 1978. At present Nik is a business consultant and is a keen local historian. He has two young boys and lives in Bay Street.

While sorry to see Vera move on we are delighted that Nik has found time to lead our society. He is the first of the younger wave that we need to revitalise us.

### Note from President

“My sole objective as President is to help foster an interest in the history of Petone, in the belief that such an endeavour contributes in some way to the future vibrancy and wellbeing of our town. Our Society has over the last three decades achieved an extraordinary amount in relation to its modest membership base – the result of the passion and dedication of a few key people in ty. It is time now to build on those achievements by expanding the membership base and embracing fun projects and activities that contribute to our overarching objective. I believe the experience will provide the combination of new energy with momentum to keep the Society prospering for the next three decades.” *Nik Zangouropoulos*



### Why we exist

Petone is a special place and its people are very loyal to the village. There is still much to do to show council that our local character is important and needs to be preserved. Petone is the heritage centre of the Hutt City, with Jackson Street being its centre. Our task is to show that local heritage is important to the local economy. WE still have great amount of work to do in recording local history and in getting Petone people to record their memories. The heritage month this year

will be in September and the theme is “ **Heritage & Our Stories**”. It is hoped to publish our book of people’s memories of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Petone. We have been collecting stories since 2000 but still require more and we need family photographs of Petone, its people and places. These will be used in the book and keep the costs down. If you can help us bring back more memories please contact our secretary Roy Hewson at 143 Esplanade.

## Future Activities

1. Last Thursday in every month there is a discussion on some aspect of Petone History. This year we are talking about decades. March 29 was the 1940’s and the arrival of the marines; Petone during the war; Ration Books and living in Petone.

**April 27<sup>th</sup> will be the 1950’s. May 31<sup>st</sup> will be the 1960’s** and so on. Anyone is invited to come to the Petone Community House at 2 p.m. until 4 p.m and have a talk along with a cup of tea. Cost \$2 for tea and hire of room

2 During the year we intend to hold four evening meetings with Lower Hutt Historical Society.. These meetings will be open to the public and it is intended to advertise them in the newspaper

3 WE are hoping that we can get up to 20 people to take a trip to Centrepont on the Wellington Wharves and join their FREE bus tour of the wharves. Using your gold card this whole trip is free for seniors. There is a little walk from the station up the concourse and across the overhead bridge. It is possible to travel by car. Basil and Zandra are the organisers and if you are interested ring Roy and he will pass on the message. Dates are Fridays at midday and the trip lasts one hour. Basil has found the trip most interesting.

## What else does the society do?

As I mentioned in the A.G.M. notice our society has a number of activities

We are the heritage committee of the Jackson Street Programme and have the use of their premises for our meetings. We organise the Walk of Champions which has proved very popular and we respond to Council notifications of changes in Jackson Street if they affect our heritage or character of Petone

We provide exhibitions for the Jail Museum. WE could do more but do not have the personnel to man the museum during 11 a.m and 3p.m which is the most popular time for people to visit. Most come from out of town or from overseas and they come to Petone for lunch

We take walking tours of the heritage sites in Petone during the summer months and when there is a group who books with us

We take part in the Heritage month activities .

All in all we are a busy society that needs more help from members and supporters

## Keeping Financially viable

Like most groups keeping financial sound is always difficult. WE have our subs but they do not provide enough to keep us active. We have come up with an idea that not only could provide some needed funds but also enable us to keep a historical record of the year. This could be important to future historians who may want to see what Petone was like in 2012.

WE are going to attempt to write a Petone 2012 diary with stories and articles about what happens in Petone this year. To accomplish this we need help from members and supporters. Much can be done at home without much effort but it will be of great importance. We need collectors of information about what is going on in Petone. What is your interest? We need a person to collect articles about Petone from the local newspapers and magazines; we need people to collect names of births; deaths and marriages in Petone. We need personal stories written by Petone people about their life. WE need articles about what happens in clubs and societies in 2012. WE need stories about local businesses today and we need photographs about everything. Some may be artists or poets . We would appreciate your contributions . If you can assist please register with Roy Hewson Secretary 5686449 or 143 Esplanade Petone. At the end of the year we will have a small editorial committee to put our efforts together and hopefully get some paid adverts. Before publishing the diary for sale in February 2013.

This is an idea in embryo at the moment and will only work if we can get enough cooperation from our members and supporters. A major need is to get some people with editing skills who can assist putting the diary together in January next year. Do you know of anyone?

## MEMBERSHIP

While we need new and active members we value our existing membership. We have decided at the AGM that while our financial year is still the calendar year , our subscriptions will be from March 31 to the beginning of March 2013. WE would appreciate early payment. If you haven't yet paid for 2012 please complete the following form and send to

**Joan Hewson Treasurer Petone Historical Society 143 Esplanade Petone**

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### 2012 SUBSCRIPTION FOR PETONE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....PHONE.....

EMAIL.....

INDIVIDUAL \$15

FAMILY

\$20

Please circle the amount and include your cheque before posting

## A STORY FROM OUR LOCAL HISTORY – One boys memories of the arrival of the Marines,

### The United States of America Marines in Petone.

The second world War began in 1939. At first the only affect it had on New Zealand was that many of our young men signed up with the armed forces and began to leave for overseas. We got reports about the battles and the newspapers began to fill with lists of our soldiers, sailors and airmen who had been killed, missing or wounded.

We became much more aware of what war was when a large group of 1st Division U.S. Marines arrived in New Zealand. Soldiers went to Auckland and Marines to Wellington

The Hutt Park raceway was taken over for use as a camp, which was authorised in July 1942. By the months end 200 marines were accommodated in existing buildings while construction continued. By July 1943 the camp accommodated 1,200 personnel

The war had reached Petone. We grew used to seeing marines in their olive green uniforms driving jeeps and trucks or walking around Petone or parading through the streets. The marine hymn "From the Halls of Montezuma " was heard often. While the Hutt Park served as accommodation they also commandeered the reclaimed land on the eastern side of the Hutt River which was used to store much of their stores and equipment. They also took over McEwen Park on the Petone foreshore and used to practice landing craft, filled with armed marines, arriving on Petone beach. Children often used to go as close as they could to the beach to witness the landings and cheer or clap when they came ashore. There were stories about great holes being dug in the sand as the landing craft came in but this I am not sure about.

New Zealand people were now on rations and everyone had a ration book which had to be used to purchase most things. Meat, butter, cheese and all types of clothing and household goods which were in short supply. The marines on the other hand had plenty of everything. I was about 12 when they first arrived at the Hutt park and was living in the flats opposite the entrance to Hutt Park so I had a very good view of the comings and goings. Some things stay in my memory;

No matter where the marines were when the flag was lowered at sunset and the bugles were played they all immediately stopped and faced the flag and saluted. Even if they were in the middle of the road.

Sunday seemed to be a leave day and hundreds of marines would leave the gates to visit sites or just wander about the streets. It was very common to see large numbers of young women waiting at the gates for the marines to come out. Most young men from New Zealand were overseas with the army and young girls were lonely. Marines also were very generous and had many items that could not be obtained in New Zealand. The local dances were buzzing and new songs and dances were soon all the rage. The Marines also introduced softball to the area. They played games against the Ford Motors who had a number of war workers drafted from around New Zealand.

“Take me out to the ball game: On 31 January 1943, 20,000 spectators packed into Wellington’s Athletic Park to watch an exhibition game of baseball between two US Marine teams”

After school many of the young boys drifted past the gates and sentry points and were asked by the soldiers to get them things from the local shops. Many did and were rewarded with cash, badges and other pieces.

My mother helped out in the corner general store on which was frequented by marines. They loved milkshakes but they wanted everything in them –bananas, eggs and anything else that would whip up and they were expensive!

Many families invited marines in for a meal and a talk. Our family invited several of them , on different occasions ,over for a meal. All came with gifts of food and cigarettes. Two young men who came more than once were barbers whose job was to keep the soldiers hair trimmed. All were very polite and respectful with little arrogance. They once brought us a new record – I remember the tune “Don’t Fence Me In”

Unfortunately there were those Kiwis who tried to get as much out of them as they could. I saw one family bring carloads of American goods to their house where they stored them in an old stable which soon became overloaded. A sought after gift was a can of petrol which was severely rationed.

It wasn’t long before we suddenly realised that there were a large number of marines missing and the streets were often empty. They had been sent off to the Islands,. WE later found out that they went to Guadalcanal. Many of them returned but they were often not the gregarious people we had met when they first came. Many were injured and many others had drawn faces and a thousand yard stare in their eyes. They had been at war.

The next year a different division arrived but they were different. These were largely men on the draft and they often were different in many ways from those soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. Many were Negroes and they were not always treated very well by the white marines. There was a definite raciest element. They too went overseas suddenly .

The war came to an end. The camps were empty but there were mountains of gear left behind. These included trucks; jeeps and tents as well as many other items. Trucks

remained at Seaview for several years before they were sold off. The war had ended and we all slowly came back to normal but the yanks had definitely left an impression