

Hoofing It – Ōtaki Horse Tales

Memory Session

Ōtaki Library 16 November 10.30-11.30am

Session started with a round-the-room discussion where people were invited to introduce themselves and share personal connections to the topic.

Arabella R. – Said she was new to Ōtaki and didn't have much personal experience with horses, but her daughter and son-in-law were "horsey people".

Ann G – Remembered riding her horse to school when she was growing up on the Wairarapa Coast – it was 7-8 km ride.

Janice Pain – Said she wasn't ever a horse person, but more of a "bicycle girl". She recalled that a lot of local people did horse work for The Lord of the Rings when it was being made.

? Walker - Moved to Otaki in 1953 to teach at the primary school. At that time there was a horse paddock for students who rode to school. She doesn't recall people riding to school but the facility was there. There was a big pond in the centre and it was very wet in winter. Alexander Place is now on the site of the horse paddock.

Heather Watson – Was born and bred in Ōtaki. She shared a souvenir programme from Levin Racing Club's Coronation Meeting held at Ōtaki Racecourse on Tuesday, 2 June, 1953. It featured a photograph of a young Queen Elizabeth II on the cover. The father of her sister-in-law Pat Watson (nee Enoka) had two horses racing at the special meeting.

Heather also recalled the night-soil man, a Mr Snowden – who used horse and cart to collect up buckets of waste. He fortunately had no sense of smell.

Alan Stead – Found it interesting when he first moved to Te Horo that there were so much stock out on the roads – including horses. He also recalled the trains passing through frequently with their freight of live sheep and cows.

Alan also recalled that his neighbour Rod Clifton, on the Main Highway, had a horse that he sometimes tied to a peach tree in the yard. One day the horse ate a few too many peaches, he crossed his front legs and staggered around drunkenly.

Nan Heginbotham – Lived in Waitara as a young girl and her father trained trotters there. Waverley was well known for its stables – the Melbourne Cup winning Kiwi was raised there. Nan rode her horse to school daily - which meant her teachers couldn't keep her at school late - as it was important to get her horse home on time.

Nan spent her holidays in Otaki with her grandparents and has clear memories of the “dunny-man” coming around on his horse and cart – her grandmother would always leave him a ½ crown at Christmas time.

Noel McBeth – Remembers his father being “mad on horses”. He also recalls horses being used to gather and move firewood.

During Noel's childhood farmers still took their milk to the Rahui factory by horse and cart. Noel also recalled seeing horses being ridden down to the racecourse for track work – three at a time – with one rider in the centre and the other two horses rider-less on either side. Others also mentioned that it was a regular sight to see horses being run on Otaki Beach.

Meredith (?)– recalled that milk was still being delivered by cart in Karori into the 1950s.

Meredith's husband – Was born in Invercargill. His father was a forest ranger in Hokonuis at a time when there was still a bit of sly-grogging going on – the famous Hokonui Moonshine. His father had a lot of workers during the depression years and often used a Clydesdale to get about his district.

During the Second World War he rode a big ginger stallion named Panzer – which wasn't a popular name considering it was also the name given to German tanks. He would have to "mount the beast".

Joan Ludlum – Her father Jack Taylor of Te Horo was the last drover in this area. As a child she was involved with the Pony Club and Hunt Club. When she was in standard three at Otaki School her classes were held in the old Masonic Lodge building. She rode to school and used the horse paddock next to the school.

Patsy Whenuaroa (nee Kemsley) – Patsy's father raced horses with different trainers. He was also an agent for a local bookmaker ("who shall remain nameless"). As a child she would travel with father "off-loading" money at different racecourses.

Patsy's husband was a rodeo and show-jumper – he also worked for a horse-trainer.

When Patsy was pregnant with her first child (in the 1960s) her husband dropped her off at the maternity hospital at 4am and went off to do track work.

She recalls that when she was young Mrs Royal's bakery on Main Street had a hitching post outside.

Patsy told Joan Ludlum that they had an early connection that Joan might be unaware of. When Patsy's mother was young she used to bike between Waikanae and her home in Reikorangi. Her pushbike had no brakes and she used her feet to stop the bike – which was pretty tough on her shoes. But one day she ran directly into Jack Taylor (Joan's father) herding a mob of sheep. She came off her bike and ended up with a broken jaw.

Glennis Balloch– Glennis' father was a policeman in Foxton during the 1940s & 50s. Her father often did duty at the Foxton racecourse which was always busy. She and her brother would collect up all the discarded tickets hoping for a winner amongst them.

Di Hakaraia – Di did not grow up in Otaki, but her husband Peter did. He told her a story about unhitching the night-soil man's horse when it was outside his family home in Aotaki Street. Peter and his accomplices gave the horse a “giddy-up” and the “night-soil” went flying all over the road.

Joey Te Wiata – Grew up at the back of Tainui Marae. His home had no electricity or running water. The family had three work horses that they would harness to go and get firewood at the beach.

Joey's father worked on the trams in Wellington. One day his father had a dream about a winning horse. Because he was busy Joey's father asked him to ride his bike down to the bookies on Tasman Road to put the bet on. They had no radio so didn't find out until later that they had won 125 pounds off the “dream horse”. Joey remembers being shouted ice-cream sundaes at Bill Connor's Ritz Milkbar.

When Joe was young all the hotels in Ōtaki (including The Central) had stables and there were numerous trainers with stables as well, including George Salt on the corner of Aotaki and Temuera Streets

Joey also recalled his son, Joseph, being caught out once for skipping from school. Joey picked up the newspaper one morning to find a front-page photo of Joseph at the races reading the form guide.

General discussion about people involved in the horse industry in Otaki:

- Jimmy Diddum
- George Walton
- Mick Preston was a trained based on Freemans Road. Kaye Carkeek recalled his apprentices drinking her milk that had been delivered to the letterbox.
- Sam Bryce was also based on Freemans Road.
- Wally McKeown had the stables on the corner of Aotaki and Kirk Street which were later owned by Ken Thompson (now the site of Ian Peter Way).
- Clem Bowry – Well-known jockey and a trainer. Rode for George Walton. Had stables on Rahui Rd hill.
- Sonny Enoka – trained horses on Convent Road.
- Bill Calder from the Railway Hotel had a successful horse the raced in Australia.
- George Walton had two great horses - Commanding and Castlerae. Commanding was sold to America.
- Noel Eastwood originally from the South Island – he was New Zealand's shortest jockey when he rode in the 1950s and 60s. Local kids liked to wrestle with him.
- Doug Debreceny who had the Ideal Tearooms also owned horses and travelled with them.

- Arda Hakaraia also trained horses out on Rangiuru Road
- Cunningham horse floats operated out of Ōtaki
- Heather Watson recalled Cunninghams had a trotting track roughly where the “green belt” is behind Kirk Street. Apparently if you look closely enough you can still make it out. Local kids were paid to pick up the stones off the track.
- Barney Lumsden was another Otaki trainer. Jean Albert mentioned that he was her uncle.
- Eric Ropiha was another well-known trainer and owner. He was later based at Woodville. Joey Te Wiata recalled the horse Via Con Dios being raced at Otaki with a Maori trainer (Erica Ropiha), a Maori jockey (Herbie Rauhihi) and a Maori owner (Sir Howard Morrison).

Please note this was a memory-sharing session – where people willingly shared their personal reminiscences and memories of old Ōtaki. However we have learnt that not everyone remembers the same thing the same way. Please do not think that the information provided here is definitive.