

## The Legacies of Charles Score Sanders

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Charles Score Sanders

From: Robinson, Alison: *The Ngaere Story*, 1982

In 1933 the *Taranaki Daily News* reported that well-known rhododendron enthusiast, Charles Sanders, had left “large and generous public bequests” to various Taranaki organisations. Among them were contributions to Western Park, Reserve “T” [later re-named Sanders Park], the New Plymouth Borough Council [for the Rhododendron Dell in Pukekura Park] and Stratford Hospital. In addition to these “large and generous” bequests, any residue from the estate was to be “for the purposes of such permanent improvements to Pukekura Park as shall be of benefit to the public.” (TDN 15 June 1933)

Charles Score Sanders was born in Marwood, Devonshire in 1851. His father came to New Zealand a few years later and the family followed to Nelson in 1860 where Sanders was schooled. As a young man he then spent several lean years on the Collingwood goldfields before buying, about 1876, a farm on Bristol Road, Inglewood – a district which was then still in standing bush. (TDN 15 June 1933/TH 1 June 1933)

His stay at Inglewood was brief as he soon sold up and went to join his elder brother, Henry, then a builder in Hawera. (TH 6 Sept 1935) Tradition has it that Charles, while walking south to meet him, was so impressed with a picturesque

clearing in the bush at Ngaere that he later bought a 65 acre (26 hectare) block there. Henry<sup>1</sup> was apparently easily persuaded to buy a nearby block. (Robinson, A: *The Ngaere Story*, 1982)

It was about 1881 when Charles resolved to develop part of the farm as a garden – and what was to become Ngaere Gardens was established. Assisted by a local lad, Arthur Walker, he began by digging a lake, often at night by the light of kerosene lamps. After a decade of development Charles and Henry went to the United States for a year accompanied by Walker, then returned to set up a flourishing fruit tree nursery on the Ngaere land. (TDN 15 June 1933)

In 1912 Sanders left Ngaere<sup>2</sup> and moved to New Plymouth where he bought land in Westown. Here he created a house and garden – *Dartmoor* – which was described as “one of the finest gardens in the district.” (TDN 15 June 1933). Charles’ specialities were rhododendrons and waratahs and he was considered an authority on these trees which became a feature of *Dartmoor*.

After his death in 1933 a proposal from the Westown Progressive Association to re-name the upper end of Belt Road as Sanders Avenue was at first rejected by the Borough Council. (TDN 19 Sept 1933) The re-naming was, however, eventually agreed to in November that year (TH 7 Nov 1933) and the council’s Reserve “T” became Sanders Park. Nearby Dartmoor Avenue preserves the name of Sanders’ property.

Sanders’ bequest of £350 for the Rhododendron Dell was used, on park superintendent Thomas Horton’s advice, to establish the present Rhododendron Dell in Brooklands rather than to develop the smaller, confined Dell – then in Pukekura Park itself. Aably assisted by Sanders’ friends Arthur Walker and Victor Davies, Horton proposed buying some rare varieties in the United Kingdom. (TH 2 Sept 1933) Several of the Sanders-inspired *Rhododendrons* planted in 1934 still grow in the Dell and have been supplemented by later plantings.

In June 1937, £1500 of the ‘residue’ of the estate was allocated by the Borough Council for a new Liardet Street entrance to Pukekura Park. (TH 8 June 1937) The gates were designed with two pylons in an imposing neoclassical art deco style by Victor Griffiths<sup>3</sup> and Raymond Syme of the architectural firm of Griffiths and Syme. (ARC2011-

<sup>1</sup> Henry Sanders – probably assisted at times by Charles – built the Ngaere Hall in 1886. (Robinson 1982) It is one of the oldest surviving rural halls in New Zealand

<sup>2</sup> It was the later owners, Albert and Jessie Truelove, who transformed Ngaere Gardens into the well-known tourist magnet of the early 20th century with a zoo, water chute and paddling pool around the lake.

<sup>3</sup> Griffiths was also New Plymouth Mayor from 1927 to 1933.

083) It was proposed that they be faced with Mt. Somers stone but the tenders for using stone were all above £3600 – far more than that available. The architects then proposed “what was called waterproof stone with a tinted plaster finish, marked out and pointed to resemble stone.” (TH 13 Oct 1937) They assured the committee that “this would give identically the same finish as the Mt. Somers stone.” Committee member William Short – the local monumental mason – argued vigorously for maintaining the stone facings but the tender of Boon Bros for £1575 was eventually accepted. (Pukekura Park Committee Minutes, 12 Oct 1937<sup>4</sup>)



Sanders' Gates – 1939? - WD.053115

This is the earliest known photograph of the gates – a copy of a somewhat battered c1939 print. (Note that the present bronze plaque at the right-hand gate has not been installed and that six attachment studs(?) may be seen on the left side where the plaque has been removed for amending(?))

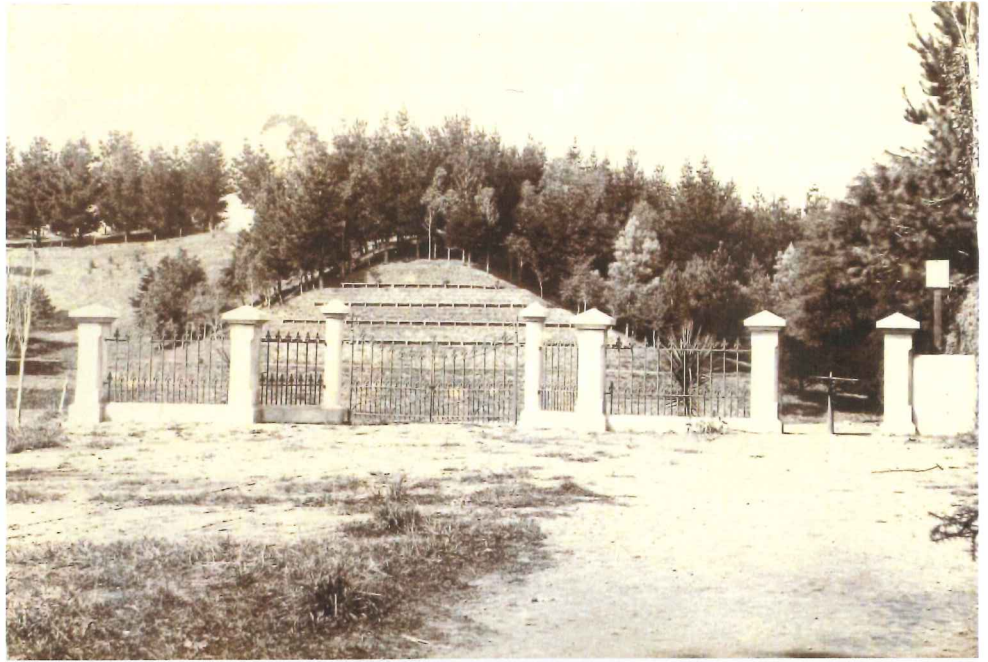
The new Liardet Street gates were completed in 1938 however...

.... in an enigmatic 1939 committee minute, a sub-committee was given the authority “...to submit a report as [to] the names of the benefactors who should appear on a plaque at the main gates....giving attention also to the removal of all names other than that of the late G.S Sanders on the plaque already erected.” (Committee Minutes, 21 Feb 1939) Further equally enigmatic minutes over the following months suggest that the plaque was cut down in size to remove the names of other donors added without authority. This does help to explain the somewhat strange difference in font size of Sanders' name and also the unusual placement of the attachment studs on the present bronze plaque at the gates. The amended plaque arrived in February 1940 and was installed soon after. (Committee

<sup>4</sup> ARC2003-862, Puke Ariki Collection

Minutes, 13 Feb 1940)

The new gates replaced the smaller wrought iron ones presented by Robert Hughes (Robert Clinton Hughes' father) in 1890. Part of these earlier gates is now at the Victoria Road entrance to the park where they were erected in 1940. (Scanlan, A B: *Pukekura*, 1978)



1890 Hughes Gates - about 1896, ARC2003-859/3

And so horticulturalist Charles Score Sanders' name and "large and generous" bequests live on in both Pukekura Park and Westown.

Sanders Gates Plaque

1938 Sanders Gates in 2013

