

104 years old and Thriving!

Ormond Greensill

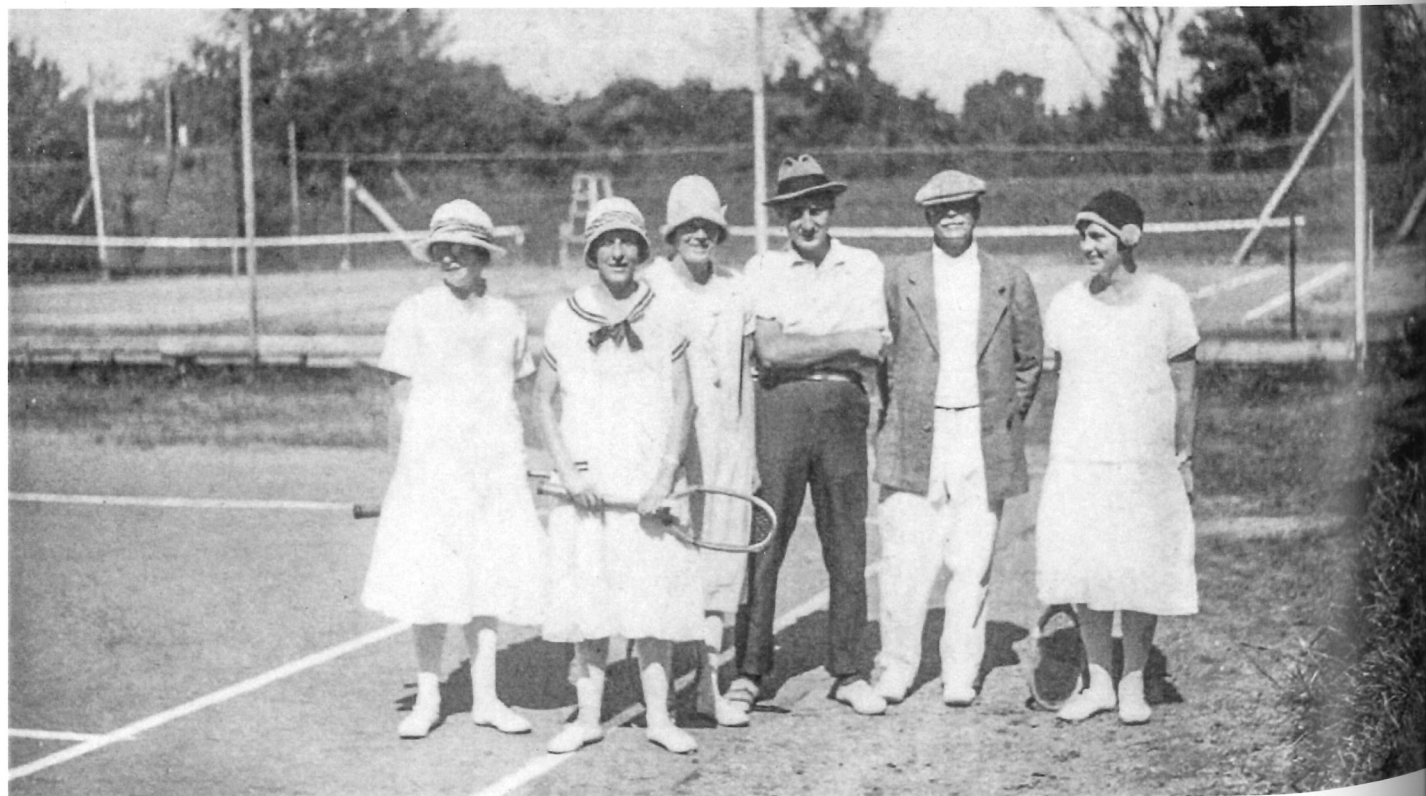
Proceed up Victoria Road in New Plymouth, with Pukekura Park on your left as you ascend the steep hill. As the road flattens out cast a glance over to the left and the Park. Can you picture six tennis courts and two croquet greens, guarded by the members' clubroom and an Eleagnus hedge? Probably not. But for just over forty years from 1910 to 1950 this was the home of the Pukekura Park Tennis and Croquet Clubs. Today you will view a plantation of predominantly native trees and shrubs in the area where the clunk of a mallet or the ping of catgut on a ball would regularly be heard from Labour Weekend until the following Easter. The tennis courts were located adjacent to the Shortland Street entrance with the croquet greens on the seaward side of them alongside the present Victoria Road parking area.

Why did the club relocate? The facts that answer this question may vary from one elderly identity to another. It is my understanding that the Park curator and those involved in the Park administration sought to transform this area of land – one of the few flat expanses in the Park – into an arboretum for native trees. Another suggestion is that wind needed to be kept out of the Park when the pine trees were felled, so robust species were planted.

Naturally there was a strong resistance to this proposal – with well known New Plymouth Boys' High School master and Club President Bob Penny, leading the opposition. Indeed, in his 1952 Annual Report Bob challenged the Council, stating "Sports Clubs occupying sites in public reserves should not be made chopping blocks for changing City Council policies."

But all entreaties to save this location from the planned development were unsuccessful. Three alternative sites for possible relocation were referred to the clubs' committee. One possibility was a site adjacent to Her Majesty's Prison at the end of Robe Street, where the quarries, no longer being worked, offered excellent shelter from the wind. Another proposed site was on land available where Vogelstown Park is now located. The third and least preferred site was the current home off Upjohn Street. Despite the club committee expressing its preferences for the former two sites, the City Council deemed where the relocation was to be – in Upjohn Street.

The club has regularly competed with distinction in the provincial interclub activities, and the Soffe Cup, symbol of supremacy amongst the clubs in Taranaki. This trophy has graced the trophy cabinet on eleven occasions since 1930. One New Zealand Championship can be claimed, with Barry Boon winning the Junior Boys' Singles title in 1951.



Included in this picture in no particular order are:
Rere Thompson, Mr Baker snr., Laurie Thompson, Ezma Pepper, Pauline Baker.

A quick history of the evolution of the Pukekura Park Tennis Club reads:-

1910, 25th June. Tenders invited for the laying of four tennis courts and a croquet lawn at the Victoria Road site, and a public meeting called to form the club.

1910, 27th December. Opening Day. The first club President was Mr Richard Cock.

1920, 2nd June. Pukekura Park Board approves an application for extension to the courts.

1933. Existing clubhouse is replaced with a new building at a cost of 337 pounds.

1950. The club learns that it is to be relocated to Upjohn Street.

1953. The club pavilion is removed in sections from Victoria Road to Upjohn Street. This building is still used today. The concrete steps remain near Victoria Road. Five tennis courts and three croquet greens are provided at the new site.

1965. The croquet club ceases to function at Upjohn Street with the lawns being converted into two tennis courts.

1972. The grass courts were replaced with sealed surfaces.

1975. Club name is changed to Pukekura Park Tennis Club Inc – i.e. croquet is dropped from the name.

1955. Grass courts dug up and laid as hard courts.

1987, 7th March. 75th Jubilee celebrated.

My grateful thanks to club stalwart Bruce Davidson for his help in compiling this article.



Above: Standing on the croquet green looking past the clubroom to the tennis courts.

Below: The pavilion steps.

