

‘Oakley’s Creek’. Te Auaunga Awa. Stories from the forgotten upper catchment. Part 1. The May Road Memorial Park tree history.

John P. Adam. March 2020.

This is short story about a small part of Mount Roskill that is part of a decade now of an ongoing landscape history research project that was begun soon after I moved to live in Mount Roskill about 2009. My landscape history focus has been the upper Oakley Creek Te Auaunga Awa was originally called ‘Oakley’s Creek’ and I focus on unpublished written archives and field visits.

I first visited Mount Roskill during an Auckland City sponsored ‘Urban Park Safari’ held in the early 1990s that was led by local geologist, Dr. Les Kermode (1929-1998), who walked over the Puketapapa volcanic cone on a rather rainy afternoon, from memory.

Once known as ‘Epsom South’ the Mount Roskill upper Oakley Creek catchment landscape history focus began on the land owners including the Wesley Mission Trust Board and the first farming families, the May and Hayr’s. Natural springs define the Upper Oakley’s Creek and the associated vegetation and wildlife found along all the old farm boundaries still visible here.

TO BE SOLD,

THE FARM known as **KENNEDY’S FARM**, in the vicinity of the **Three Kings**, consisting of **411 Acres of Land**; about fifty of which are fenced and laid down in Grass, thirty sown with Turnips, Oats and Wheat. There are **50 Acres of Swamp Land**, nearly enclosed with a ditch, which will be fit for cropping next season; **1½ acre of Orchard**, well stocked with fruit trees. Several raupo Warres are erected on the land.

The Farm is well wooded and watered, and situated about 5 miles from Auckland.

The purchaser may have with the Farm, if required, 50 head of cattle, a pair, or two of plough Horses, 130 breeding Ewes, and about 150 Pigs.

Apply to **JOSEPH MAY.**
Mount Saint John, April 21, 1851.

Figure 1. *Daily Southern Cross*, 25 April 1851. Page 1.

When I first began to search the National Archives held by Archives NZ at Mangere I was surprised to read how the rural catchment here was being drained to lower the water table so that ongoing seasonal flooding would not damage the new houses! I imagined walking along the open straight course drainage crossing the local street network and lined with volcanic stone and concrete. I had little knowledge then of the wetland environment that Ferdinand von Hochstetter would draw in the 1850s of a fertile landscape feature that will be a future feature story.

The management of urban trees have dominated the local news the past months. This has taken place as locally and regionally the blanket tree protection policies that had taken decades to put in place across Auckland were removed swiftly a decade ago and this opened the door to widespread removal of trees on private lands. All trees and garden vegetation was removed from the State Housing Projects about Mount Roskill until the mid 2019 that was explained away by linking any above ground vegetation retaining asbestos poisons in the roots of the trees growing in the soil. Trees actually remove poisonous chemicals from the soil.

There was a very different and positive view of trees when the development of Roskill took place after WWII with hedges the popular plant that the politicians could quote in the tens of thousands being planted along property boundaries. Along with these cheap live boundary markers (concrete and timber was in short supply post war) small orchards of fruit trees such as grapefruit, apple, plum, and Feijoa were planted for home use.

As the new community grew and expanded the new residents organised themselves and the Mount Roskill Borough Council to raise monies to buy trees and to plant them in the local streets and we can date the plantings from the recorded trees purchased in the archives from the genus chosen. Mount Roskill borough was one of the smallest by population size in New Zealand. From this combination came the first organised urban tree planting projects lead by an expert local horticulturalist Roy Thornton (1894-1969).

The new urban landscape replaced the rural landscape that held trees for livestock shelter and domestic firewood. The farms were the food bowl for Auckland with many of the first breeds of sheep (Merino and Lincoln Long Woolled) and cows (Holstein, Ayrshire and Friesian) grazed here. The dairy cows provided the first (1880s) local urban milk round supplies with imported technology bought from Scandinavia predating the organised popular dairy history of the Waikato such as the Anchor business.



Figure 2. ‘Storm water flowing successfully in the recently widened and deepening section of Oakley Creek, Mount Roskill. This area has always been subject to floods in the past.’ [Picture of flooded stream with cows grazing in background believed to be in the May Road Memorial Park.] Source: *New Zealand Herald*, 19 May 1954. MRB 127 Newspaper Clipping Book 1954-1960. Part 2. Auckland City Archives.

This ever changing urban landscape is more stable at times especially on the public landscape and this is the case for the May Road Memorial Park that’s form and function was designed by Ernst Plischke (1903-1992) about 1943 – the date of his beautiful modern plan that survives in Archives New Zealand, Wellington. The park was designed to link pedestrian access to the surrounding housing. This landscape had been a significant wetland/swamp with the Oakley Creek dissecting the place that

was owned by the Wesley Church Trust and leased as a dairy farm to a the William Tutt family for some thirty years.¹

This table records the trees planted in the May Road memorial Park. There are no naturally growing native trees that can be seen growing further upstream such as Mahoe, Cabbage tree and Karamu. The Kowhai was planted in 1959. See Figure 4.

Table of trees growing in May Road War Memorial Park December 2019				
No	Common name	Botanical name	Country of origin	location
1	Lemonwood	<i>Pittosporum eugenioides</i>	New Zealand	War Memorial
2	Sitka spruce	<i>Picea sitchensis</i>	Western coast to Northern California	War Memorial - two trees
3	Pohutukawa	<i>Metrosideros excelsus</i>	New Zealand	War Memorial
4	Casuarina	<i>Casuarina spp</i>	Australia	Memorial and stream side. ANZAC assoc.
5	Kowhai	<i>Sophora tetraptera</i>	New Zealand	Signature tree 1959. Sandringham Rd Ext.
6	Japanese Black pine	<i>Pinus thunbergia</i>	Japan	Stream
7	Moreton Bay Fig	<i>Ficus macrophylla</i>	Australia	May Road and Sandringham Rd Ext.
8	Pin oak	<i>Quercus palustris</i>	United States, Ontario	Stream
9	Silver dollar gum	<i>Eucalyptus cineria</i>	Australia	Foundation 1950s
10	Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	Europe	Stream
11	Raywood ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> 'Raywoodii'	South Australia	Stream
12	Bull Bay	<i>Magnolia grandiflora</i>	North America	Stream
13	Yellow leaved willow	<i>Salix spp</i>	Various	Stream
14	Macrocarpa	<i>Cupressus macrocarpa</i>	California	Stream/sick
15	Japanese cedar	<i>Cryptomeria japonica elegans</i>	Japan	Stream
16	Indian Bead Tree	<i>Melia azaderach</i>	Indomalaya and Australasia	Gifford Ave car park only
17	Dawn Redwood	<i>Metasequoia glyptostroboides</i>	China	Stream. Rare.

¹ William Tutt Obituary, Auckland Star 23 March 1923.



Figure 3 This is an example of an old wooden boundary post on Mount Albert Road. Picture John P Adam, January 2020.



Figure 4. A Kowhai, *Sophora microphylla*, that is a lone survivor from 1959 original tree planting when this tree was considered a regional thematic tree that when planted along May Road was vandalised. This tree on Sandringham Road Extension. It deserves to be scheduled because of its significance and beautiful form. Picture John P Adam, January 2019.