Mt. Albert, S. W. *2.*

17 th September, 1963.

The Mayor and Councillors, Mt. Albert Borough Council, 615 New North Road,

MOUNT ALBERT, S. *Vif .* 1 •

Gentlemen,

Mt. Albert Domain

Recent publicity in a daily newspaper praising your Council for its tree planting etc" has prompted me to put down in writing a record of facts regarding what should be and, I still hope, will be a lovely Domain.

As I rode horseback through Mt. Albert 60 years ago my father drew mv attention to the "Mount" which he said a German expert had described as one of the finest volcanic cones in the world.

Fifty years ago I purchased land here where I now live and

48 years ago built a small hous e, married and, except for periods overseas, have lived ever since. So I may claim to have a fairly intimate knowledge 0f what has occurr ed over the years.

When I built here there was no formed road but already a small football field had been made at the Domain and a dressing shed built and the place beautified, including a fine wrought iron railing to· protect those on the knoll above from falling and some trees planted. The cost of the shed, fence and trees had been, I heard, donated by residents and the names of Caughey and Fowlds were mentioned.

Vandalism by Railways Dept. and Others:

The Railways Department and the Governments concerned were responsible for spoiling the "fin est volcanic cone in the world."

The Railways Department scoria pit was driven into the highest side of the mountain and finally brought the height down by at least 100 f t.

What now looks like a large crater was once the main shoulder of this lovely mountain. It was taken away in train­ loads over a number of years, leaving a great ugly hole, now usually referred to a "th e crater."

When the football ground was made over 50 years ago, it was formed on what was the actual volcanic crater.

Vandals have, over the years, broken down and removed the wrought iron railing and the dressing shed became a shelter for sheep and cattle.

The Council joined in vandalism by removing( twic e under pretext of lengthening the football field ) some of the rich top

soil and carted it away. On the second occasion protest by residents stayed the Council’s hands.

The work of destroying the mountain by the Railways Department continued until after our first child was born. I was then spurred into action, having returned home one evening to learn that during the day the "Railways" had been blasting (as they sometimes did) and a large stone weighing about *30* lbs had landed in our yard within a few feet of our little boy.

Although I was told it was a waste of time, I arranged a deputation of leading residents to interview the Hon. Gordon Coates, then Minister of Works. We were introduced by the local M.P. (Sir James Parr, Member for Eden) and I was supported in our case against further wrecking of the mountain by Mr. A. C. Caughey and Sir George Fowlds, both of whom had been to previous deputations.

Mr. Coates made a personal visit to the scene and decided that the Department must stop work immediately as the small football ground and reserve was in jeopardy (I believe that the Railways Department had always claimed that they could not successfully run the Railways without the supply of scoria from Mt. Albert).

The Railways land was then vested in the Mt. Albert Domain Board (Mt. Albert Borough Council).

During the slump the Mt. Albert Council employed labour to form fancy archways etc. in the scoria pit, as a means of improving the Park or just to provide work. Within a year or two, Council men pulled the decorations down and carted the scoria rocks away.

Council did, however, level the centre of the "Railways crater" and turned it into a rough playground (very short of soil). It is now used as a bow and arrow shooting range.

Lavatory and Trees:

Fifty years ago a few trees had been planted adjoining the football field. When Council erected a public lavatory very near our house I commenced planting trees on the Domain to give us some privacy. The trees (Puriri) grew although the lavatory isolated from the playing fields became a nuisance. I then offered Council

£250. towards erecting more suitable conveniences near the playing fields. Council accepted my offer and pulled down the old lavatory which had been a disg race for nearly 20 years. The trees I planted, however, had qrown well.

Soon after planting these first trees, I planted a number of trees on the western slope. These were Pohutukawa, Puriri, Rimu and red flowering Gums.

Then the Council took to tree planting in a big way and planted thousands of common Gum trees all round the mountain. Thes e soon outgrew the native trees (some had also been planted on the other side of the Mount), depriving them of soil and sunlight and killed most of them.

Within 20 years the common Gums had grown into huge trees and, following complaints, Council removed many of them and cleared an area near our house for which we are qrateful.

I then offered to giv e Council a large number of Kowhai trees which flower early and well, and the trees never grow big.

I was hoping tosee the western slope adjoining our property covered with Kowhais which would have looked well when flowering and been

a paradise for birds, such as Tuis. However, Council planted most of the Kowhais on the opposite side of the mountain and ran out of trees before they reached our side. I then gave Council some more Kowhais which were duly planted on the remaining area near us.

As a means of protection, Council had placed light wire netting round the trees and although this helped to protect them from the sheep, they, nevertheless, nipped all the young shoots they could reach.

Council then had trouble with sheep-killing dogs and re­ placed the sheep with cattle. These soon made short work of the netting, pushing under or over it and have killed most of the Kowhais. Those remaining could have been saved by transplanting to a smaller area and fencing it in. I suggested this but nothing has been done.

While the Kowhais were struggling to live against the sheep,

I offered a number of Pohutukawa trees, provided Council fenced in an area. Council accepted my offer, built the fence, and these trees were planted and are doing well.

About *3* years ago Council decided to make the walls of the old scoria pit less dangerous by bulldozing and at the sacrifice of a small part of the top-ridge gave the scoria pit area a better appearance..

This was an opportunity for landscaping and tree-planting, and I offered, and your Council accepted, a large number of flowering and ornamental trees which I bought from one of the Dominion 's leading Nurserymen (Duncan and Davies of New Plymouth).

About planting time I noticed with pleasure that Council had dumped a number of heaps of good soil across the scoria face of the area to be planted and, of course, expected that scoria would be re­ placed with this good soil when the trees were being planted and the trees planted in it.

Wh en visiting the site after the trees were planted I was shocked to see that most of the large and best trees (Liquid Amber) had been planted in almost bare scoria with a little soil and most of

the good soil remain ed in heaps where it had been placed before planting commenced. I drew the attention of the Mayor to what had been done (or not been done), and although most of the Liquid Amber trees then appeared to be dead, he promised to give instruction that the heaps of soil be put round the trees where, with the help of rains, would have greatly assisted the trees.

More recently I insp ected the area (and this has to be seen to be believed) and found that the soil had been spread out round where the heaps stood and not placed round the trees. A complete waste of labour and good soil.

This last " fiasco" has prompted me to write down the facts regarding the Mt. Albert Domain and some of the reasons why this Domain is what it is and not the beautiful place it could have been.

Stock:

It is essential that the grassed part of the Domain shall be stocked with either sheep or cattle, otherwise there will be out­ breaks of fire, as occurred some years ago, with resulting danger to life and property.

*As* an illustration of some of the careless work of Council men, I would mention what happened when the Council moved the old lavatories; the broken porcelain from lavatories and basins was . thrown down in the grass among the trees and was left there until I

protested, when most of it was removed.

A similar occurrence happened again recently when broken porcelain from the new lavatories was thrown under the trees across the road. In my opinion the Council would be liable for any accident which took place as a result of these disgraceful actions. Instances such as that I have just related, show irresponsibility or lack of common sense.

The Mt. Albert Domain has not been a credit to the Borough. usually a portion of the land is overgrown with gorse, thistles etc.

Road:

It is questionable whether it would have been better to have given the Domain a good walking path rater that a sealed road. However, the motorbike gangs seem to have gone elsewhere, but often cars are driven up and down the hill at speeds highly dangerous, particularly round the bend of Summit Drive.

Credit to Council:

It is only fair and right to say in this record that some years ago the Mt. Albert Borough Council took steps to stop hooliganism which was plaguing the locality. No longer do cars with drunken parties spend the night in the Domain. The Council’s Caretaker regularly closes the drive at Sunset and open again by 8 a.m. The Domain is now usually a quiet and decent place.

In closing I must emphasize that I have no complaint to make regarding my few personal contacts with the Council’s officers who have always been most courteous and what I have written is a record of happenings affecting the Mt. Albert Domain and not an attack against the Council or its officers. However, better supervisions is needed to obtain better results from money and labour (which also represents money) spent on the Mt. Albert Domain.

Yours faithfully,

(Sgd.) H. Turner.

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Harvey Tuner, C.B.E.,

40 Summit Drive,

MT. ALBERT, S.W.2.