

## **Beach Haven / Birkdale Residents and Ratepayers Association Inc.**

### **Early Beginnings**

The early history of associations in Beach Haven Birkdale is one of formation, combining, squabbling and separation.

The area that we now know as Birkdale was one large market garden growing fruit, strawberries and some vegetables which were shipped to Auckland City, fruit trees were in abundance but strawberries were the main crop.

There were also sawmills in the area the largest being at the bottom of Kahika Road and up to some twenty or so years ago pieces of machinery could be found buried in the area along with buried mounds of sawdust, these sawmills supplied the boxes and pallets for the fruitgrowers.

The Birkdale Fruitgrowers Society (then Association) was formed on August 23 1912 and its first President was Mr E C Walton, Secretary Treasurer Mr T M Shepherd.

They became a very strong voice in the area on all matters pertaining to fruitgrowing and the marketing of them, and also those matters that were civic and related to the Birkenhead Borough Council, which incidentally was just 24 years old in 1912.

The Fruitgrowers Society were frequently at odds with the Government and Council of the day. The leaders were very strong minded men (no women names are mentioned) with only a deep seated interest in the organisation that was in fact their livelihood.

With regards to a Residents and Ratepayers Assoc, first mention of this organisation that I could find, was in the Birkenhead Gazette of 1929 along with a picture of the Mayoress of the day opening the childrens play ground in the park at the bottom of Rambler Crescent, which the Residents Association had been involved in.

On the 16 July 1930 the Fruitgrowers Ass. called a public meeting to discuss Civic matters and invited The Beach Haven / Birkdale Residents Assoc. the Island Bay Residents Assoc. and the Birkdale Womens Institute.

From this meeting a strongly worded letter was to sent to the Birkenhead Borough Council and a deputation of the three organisations met with the Council on the question of metering the water supply to all users in the area.

The representatives from the Beach Haven Birkdale Residents Assoc were Mr Rowlands and a Mr J Brown , from the Island Bay Assoc. Mr F Anderson and Mr Cole and from the Fruitgrowers, Mr E C Walton and Mr F Kay.(August 6 1930) no mention was made of the names of the Birkdale Women's Institute delegates.

At about this time a Combined District Fruitgrowers and Ratepayers Assoc was formed being an amalgamation of the three Associations., but no sooner than this was formalised, the Fruitgrowers Assoc. formally removed the word Ratepayers from title and reverted to the Fruitgrowers Assoc. (1931)

They did however donate 5 pounds 5 shillings (\$10.50) to a Ratepayers Assoc which from what I can ascertain remained in existence, nevertheless the Fruitgrowers Assoc remained a very potent force in affairs of the community The Residents and Ratepayers Assoc remained in existence and active until 1939 when due the war it became "dormant" as did most organisations.

The minutes of the Fruitgrowers Assoc. from September 6 1930 are not reported and it would seem that this Assoc went into recess until 19 July 1939 when a Public Meeting was called and the following motion was proposed by Mr R G Faulkner Sec Mr A Merz "That the Birkdale Fruitgrowers Assoc be resusitated" carried unanimously the new President being Mr W A Christensen.

Incidentally there was no mention of World War 2 being imminent or declared, meetings continued through the war years mainly for horticulture reasons with no civic matters being discussed.

A disagreement between the two bodies seems to have arisen over the building of the concrete bus stops around Beach Haven / Birkdale (1945-47) when the Fruitgrowers demanded that they take over the building of them as Quote "they would only be used mainly by Fruitgrowers and their families" Unquote, they demanded that funds raised by the Ratepayers be handed over, it is not clear what happened after that but in later years the Beach Haven / Birkdale Res. & Ratepayers Assoc. were always under the impression that the bus shelters were built by them.

Incidentally the Beach Haven Residents and Ratepayers Assoc. supported a plan by a Mr. F. J. E. Jollie in 1958 for the wharf / beach area in Beach Haven to be upgraded and beautified.

The plans were submitted to the Birkenhead Borough Council for the western face of the cliff to be terraced, pine trees to be removed and new sheds and conveniences to be built also better access to the beach, so that the public would be able to make the fullest use of the area.

The Council accepted the plan and authorised 1,350 pounds to be spent on the project, it is not known if any of the plans were started.

On the basis of a Residents and Ratepayers Assoc. being in existence in 1929 and it being active (on and off) over the years the committee decided that 1979 would be the 50th anniversary of the Assoc. A dinner was held at the Ranch House in Birkdale (now long gone) with MP's and North Shore Mayors in attendance along with as many past officers that could be located a total of 150 attended.

This was reinforced in 1988 (B'head City Centennial) when a plaque commemorating the 50th anniversary, was unveiled in the small park, that had been developed by the Assoc. in Sunnyhaven Ave.

So in 2005 the Assoc. has been in existence for 76 years, and a feature is that they have met regularly since the 1950's, and own and operate the Community Hall on behalf of the community.

Keith Rogers  
Birkenhead (2005)