

Higginbottom Fountain



Location: Virginia Lake, Whanganui

Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga

List Number: nil

Physical Description: a copper leafed fountain in the lake near the Wintergarden building.

Other known names:

Current Use: Fountain

Former Uses:

Heritage Status:

District Plan Class: Class B

Architectural Style:

Date of Construction: 1971

Materials: copper leafs on steel pontoon base

Registered owner: Whanganui District Council

Legal Description:

History: Virginia Lake is a 4.5 hectare lake located near the centre of Wanganui.¹ The lake is encircled by a path which traces its way between rose gardens and iris-studded levels and shrubs and trees.²

Register Item Number:

94

Building Type:

- Residential
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Recreation
- Institutional
- Agriculture
- Other

Significance:

- Archaeological
- Architectural
- Historic
- Scientific
- Technological
- Cultural

Thematic Context

- Early Settlement
- Residential
- Industry
- Agricultural
- Commerce
- Transport
- Civic/Admin
- Health
- Education
- Religion
- Recreation
- Community
- Memorials

¹ Bolith, H.H. 1920. *Wanganui – the river town of New Zealand*. Wanganui Borough Council, Wanganui.

² Ibid.

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☐ Military

Known to Maori as Rotokawau (Lake of the Back Shag).³ It was an eeling reserve, with young eels finding their way to the lake by the Mangawhero Stream.⁴ The lake stands on the top of a hill known to the Maori as Taiorenui.⁵ Toronui Pa was built on a small peninsula at the north-west end of the land.⁶ Maori legends recall that Ranginui fought Turere for the hand of Tainui in this location.⁷ Ranginui strangled Turere, and was himself killed by lightning as he started to prepare a meal afterwards.⁸ Tainui, who followed her beloved Turere, came to the spot where he died and shed tears in grief.⁹ These tears formed Virginia Lake.¹⁰

Governor Sir George Grey is reputed to have been so impressed with the beauty of the lake that he named his island home near Auckland “Kawau” after the lake.¹¹

The lake was named “Virginia Water”, by Henry Shafto Harrison, after a lake he had left in Surrey, England.¹² Harrison had purchased the Crown Grant lands, which including the lake, in 1839 via ballot in London.¹³ He arrived in Wanganui on the barque “Clydeside”, accompanied by two servants and a quantity of sheep stock, in 1841. “Virginia Waters”, the Harrison farm, covered an area of six hundred acres.¹⁴ Harrison built two homes on the farm, both of which were destroyed by fire shortly afterwards.¹⁵ The first, a small cottage, was burnt to the ground by Maori raiders.¹⁶ The second, a larger homestead, was razed by Captain Laya of the Militia in 1847, when it was decided that any houses of strategic importance to the Maoris should be destroyed.¹⁷ Harrison’s farm at the

³ Kirk, A.L. 1978. *Street Names of Wanganui*. Wanganui Newspapers Ltd, Wanganui.

⁴ McDonald, K.C. 1970. “Virginia Waters”. *Journal of the Whanganui Historical Society* 1(1).

⁵ Kirk, A.L. 1978.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ McDonald, K.C. 1970.

¹² Ibid. Kirk, A.L. 1978

¹³ McDonald, K.C. 1970.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

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time was considered to be the most complete and his house the finest in Wanganui.¹⁸

With his land occupied by the militia and his homes destroyed, Harrison went back to Port Nicholson.¹⁹ When he later returned to Wanganui he took up a large area of land that stretched from Fordell to the Whangaehu River.²⁰ He named this farm "Warrengate" after his ancestral home in Yorkshire, England.²¹ The "Virginia Waters" sections were broken up and sold in 1859 to William Russell and John Murray, and in 1862 to Mrs Hare, John Garner and William Park.²²

The lake was purchased by the Wanganui Borough Council in June 1874 as a potential water supply for the town.²³ The first piped water supply in Wanganui was drawn from the lake, but found so unsatisfactory that additional supplies were sought from Westmere Lake shortly afterwards.²⁴ In 1900, the lake levels fell revealing a large quantity of matai logs, subsequently removed.²⁵ A new water supply was commissioned in 1903 and the lake was left as a reserve.²⁶

Residents and members of the Beautifying Society on St John's Hill insisted that the Borough Council should do something with the abandoned reserve.²⁷ In 1904 a competition was held by the Borough Council for the best plan to develop the area.²⁸ The winning plan "Hercules", by Mr H. Sarjeant, Mrs E.A. Sarjeant and Mr. J.T. Stewart, was adopted and the Beautifying Society spent the next ten years carrying it out.²⁹ Finally on March 21 1914 the grounds were officially opened to the public.³⁰

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Kirk, A.L. 1978.

²⁴ Ross, W. D. 1968. "Wanganui: 1870-1965" in Saunders, G.R. (Ed) *Introducing Wanganui*. Department of Geography, Massey University, Palmerston North.

²⁵ Kirk, A.L. 1978.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Spurdle, F. 1971. "Virginia Lake Gates." *Journal of the Whanganui Historical Society* 12(1).

²⁸ Kirk, A.L. 1978.

²⁹ Ibid. *Wanganui Herald* 23/09/1903.

³⁰ Kirk, A.L. 1978. Spurdle, F. 1971.

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The Higgenbottom Fountain is a unique coloured floating fountain in the form of a huge water lily.³¹ The fountain floats on five steel pontoons and a submersible pump delivers 450 gallons of water per minute through 286 jets.³² The jets work in a cycle of spouting patterns.³³ At night, 15 lamps illuminate the jets in colours of amber, blue, green and red.³⁴ It was presented to the city by Peter Higgenbottom and first played in October 1971.³⁵

Architect/Designer:

History of changes:

Date Period: The fountain is a decorative but relatively new dating back to its installation in 1971.

Rarity / Special Features: The modern fountain is unique but modern in design and operation.

Integrity: The area is managed as a reserve by the Wanganui District Council. Buildings and structures are well maintained.

Representativeness:

Context/Group Value: Virginia Lake and the surrounds are significant from both a European and Maori perspective. The area should be holistically managed as an historic reserve.

Diversity (Form and Features):

Fragility / Vulnerability: The area is managed as a reserve by the Wanganui District Council and features within it are not considered to be under threat.

³¹ Kirk, A.L. 1978.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

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Summary of Significance:

Archaeological Qualities

The area has high archaeological value from both a Maori European perspective and should be managed holistically under a Reserve Management Plan.

Architectural Qualities

The floating fountain was installed in 1971 and has an interesting and modern design.

Historic Qualities

The reserve and the various features within it collectively contribute to the historic values of the area.

Cultural Qualities

Virginia Lake is a high amenity area for passive recreation for the community.

Reference Source:

Bolith, H.H. 1920. *Wanganui – the river town of New Zealand*. Wanganui Borough Council, Wanganui.

Kirk, A.L. 1978. *Street Names of Wanganui*. Wanganui Newspapers Ltd, Wanganui.

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Ross, W. D. 1968. "Wanganui: 1870-1965" in Saunders, G.R. (Ed) *Introducing Wanganui*. Department of Geography, Massey University, Palmerston North.

Spurdle, F. 1971. "Virginia Lake Gates." *Journal of the Whanganui Historical Society* 12(1).

Wanganui Herald

Wanganui District Council, 2009. "Virginia Lake Reserve Management Plan." Wanganui District Council, Wanganui

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Associated Pictures:



On-site map of Virginia Lake Reserve (2012).

Date of Survey: 2012

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