

Statue of Tainui



Location: Virginia Lake, Whanganui

Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga

Lsit Number: nil

Physical Description: a limestone rock

Other known names: “weeping maiden”

Current Use: Natural Rock Sculpture

Former Uses:

Heritage Status:

District Plan Class: Class B

Architectural Style:

Date of Construction: 1978

Materials: limestone

Registered owner: Whanganui City 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:

95

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

☐ Military

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.

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 statue of “Tainui” is a sculpture by Joan Morrell.³¹ It was commissioned by the Wanganui Historical Society as a memorial to Max Smart, a well-known historian.³² It was unveiled by Mrs Smart on June 4 1978.³³ The statue commemorates the Maori legend of Tainui and Turere.³⁴ There are birds on the statue that represent how the two communicated their love for each other using the language of birds.³⁵ The full story is inscribed on the statue.³⁶

Other statues around Virginia Lake include a statue of Peter Pan, a replica of the one that stands in Kensington Gardens, London;³⁷ a statue of “Leap Frogging Children”, presented on the 69th anniversary of the city; and a tiki canoe on the site of Toronui Pa.³⁸

Architect/Designer: Joan Morrell

History of changes:

Date Period: The statue was erected in 1978 as a memorial to Max Smart. It commemorates the Maori legend of Tainui and Turere.

Rarity / Special Features: This is **Integrity:** The area is managed as a European commemoration of a Maori reserve by the Wanganui District Council. Buildings and structures are well maintained. The involvement and acceptance of tangata whenua in the design, location and interpretation is unknown.

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.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Kirk, A.L. 1978.

³⁸ Ibid.

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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.

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

A modern statue created by Joan Morrell constructed as a memorial to a well-known historian.

Historic Qualities

The reserve and the various features within it collectively contribute to the historic values of the area. The statue commemorates a well-known historian by depicting the myth of Tainui and Turere. The statue is not considered to have heritage value.

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.

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

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

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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.

Associated Pictures:



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

Date of Survey: 2012

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