

Gates and Avenue of Palms at entrance from Virginia Road



Location: Virginia Lake, Whanganui

Heritage NZ Pouhere Taonga

List Number: nil

Physical Description: The entry gates comprise a timber post and rail fence with lancet shaped palings, a central, open aluminium double gate with a timber paling gate to the immediate west of the aluminium gates. The main posts have timber cappings and the palings reduce in height from the centre.

Other known names:

Current Use: Entrance gates (south-west entrance)

Former Uses:

Heritage Status:

District Plan Class: Class B

Architectural Style:

Date of Construction: modern

Materials: Timber posts, cappings, railings, palings and aluminium gates

Registered owner: Whanganui District Council

Legal Description:

Register Item Number:

96

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
- Military

Built Heritage Inventory



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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

Known to Maori as Rotokawau (Lake of the Black 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

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

² Ibid.

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.

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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 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 "Hercurles", by Mr H. Sarjeant, Mrs E.A. Sarjeant and Mr. J.T. Stewart, was adopted and the Beautifying Society spent

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

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* 121).

²⁸ Kirk, A.L. 1978.

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the next ten years carrying it out.²⁹ Finally on March 21 1914 the grounds were officially opened to the public.³⁰

When the reserve was officially opened in 1914, everyone passed through a set of ornate wrought iron entrance gates at the south-eastern side of the lake. The gates were copied from an Elizabethan design by Mr. H, Smith and made by Mr. W. Stewart.³¹ Set in a substantial wall, the gates were paid for by the Beautifying Society.

In the early 1930s the council dismantled the wall and tall piers and sold the gates for scrap.³² The gates were bought by Mrs. H. Smith and taken to the Smith home on the Great North Road in 1937.³³ Smith's plans to use the gates as an entrance to their large garden never eventuated.³⁴ Despite council interest in re-acquiring the gates in later years, they were eventually sold to a Wellington buyer.³⁵

In 2005, a set of new wrought-iron gates were installed as part of improvement works to the south-east (main) entrance of the park.³⁶ The gates previously at this location were relocated to the south-west entrance.³⁷

Architect/Designer:

History of changes:

Date Period: The original gates and gate posts were dismantled in the 1930's and replaced with new gates in 2005

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

³⁰ Kirk, A.L. 1978. Spurdle, F. 1971.

³¹ Spurdle, F. 1971.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ *Wanganui Chronicle* 31/10/2005.

³⁷ Wanganui District Council, 2009. "Virginia Lake Reserve Management Plan." Wanganui District Council, Wanganui.

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Rarity / Special Features:

Integrity: The area is managed as a reserve by the Wanganui District Council. Buildings and structures are well maintained. The gates are modern and are of no historic value.

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.

Summary of Significance:

The gates are of no historic value.

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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Associated Pictures:



On-site plan of Virginia Lake features.

Date of Survey: 2012

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