

Name/Title Fuller, George

Department Archives

Parts

Restrictions

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1:	Part 1 - Part 1 Location Oral history/Archives/Level 2/South building/Puke Ariki/New Plymouth/Taranaki/New Zealand
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3:	Part 3 - Part 3 Location Oral history - Master copies/Archives Level 3.5 Photo Store

TARANAKI MUSEUM ORAL ARCHIVE

oral history agreement

NAME OF PERSON RECORDED	George Fuller.													
ADDRESS	6 Torbay St., New Plymouth.													
PHONE	06/7532882.													
NAME OF INTERVIEWER	public Address													
ADDRESS														
PHONE														
DATE AND PLACE OF INTERVIEW	28/6/97. Pakekura Park.													
<p>1. REPOSITORY: I agree that the recording/s of my interview and accompanying material will be lodged at the Taranaki Museum and copies will be held by <u>Self. Friends of the Park</u></p> <p>2. ACCESS: I understand that the recording/s and accompanying material will be made available to bona fide researchers within the Taranaki Museum with the exception of recordings and accompanying material specified in item 3 of this agreement.</p> <p>3. RESTRICTED TAPES AND ACCOMPANYING MATERIAL: I require that there be no public use/access without my prior written consent to the following numbered tapes and accompanying material before the release date:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>TAPE No</th> <th>DESCRIPTION OF RESTRICTION</th> <th>RELEASE DATE</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>I understand that after the release date, access, provision of copies and use of the above recordings and accompanying material will be at the discretion of the Taranaki Museum</p> <p>4. PUBLIC USE: I understand that the recording/s of my interview and accompanying material may be quoted in published work and in full and that the recordings may be broadcast or used in a public performance in full or part, object to any restrictions specified in item 3</p> <p>5. COPYRIGHT: Copyright for the recording/s and accompanying material will be held by <u>Taranaki Museum.</u></p> <p>6. RIGHTS TO AMEND THIS AGREEMENT: This agreement may be revised by mutual consent of the person recorded and the Taranaki Museum</p> <p>7. COMMENTS</p>			TAPE No	DESCRIPTION OF RESTRICTION	RELEASE DATE									
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SIGNATURE OF INTERVIEWEE	George Fuller.													
SIGNATURE OF INTERVIEWER	Ray Baines	DATE 30/6/97.												

Taranaki Museum, Ariki Street, P.O.Box 315, New Plymouth.
 Phone (06) 758.9583 Fax (06) 758.5485



- 1 Pine Tree on Southern Terrace (where one fell down.)
- 2 Norfolk Pine
- 3 Redwood
- 4 Norfolk Pine - planted by D. Sutherland
- 5 Pinus Torreyana
- 6 Puriri
- 7 Rimu
- 8 Camelia 'Pukekura White'
- 9 Camelia (single flower)
- 10 B.B. Boatshed
- 10 Rhododendron 'Robert Peel'
- 11 ~~Rhododendron~~ (with Tui) Camelia Verified by George
- 12 Oak
- 13 Fern Palm ? Fan. Verified by George
- 14 Cercis (Judas Tree)
- 15 Metasequoia glyptostroboides (Dawn Redwood)
- 16 Puriri
- 17 Parapara (bird catcher)
- 18 Miro
- 19 Pohutukawa
- 20 Oak
- 21 Rimu
- 22 Kahikatea
- 23 Lilly Pilly
- 24 Ginkgo biloba
- 25 Lilly Pilly
- 26 Totaras.

CATALOGUE	OH/PA/095
NAME	FULLER George
INTERVIEWER	nil
ABSTRACTOR	WALKER Judith
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RESTRICTIONS	nil
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INTRODUCTION

00.4 Opens with a welcome to the group accompanying him on a walk - tour of the lower part of the park, beginning at the sports ground and mentioning that not only did he work at the park for 25 years but he also lived there.

03.1 Explains that the gathering is as a consequence of Friends of The Park and that several present had been designated as official guides, including Heather Allen, Gordon Smith and Joy Hall.

ENVIRONMENT FOR SETTLERS

04.8 Recalls that flat area of any size were almost non-existent, nor were there any places suitable for recreation purposes.

08.0 Mentions that bush clearing had been so total that not one single tree remained in the valley

08.4 Talks of Brooklands being set aside in 1841-42, to create the first farm in the area.

BEGINNINGS OF PUKEKURA PARK

09.1 Tells of Solicitor Robert Clinton Hughes' enthusiasm in creating a trust which pursued the Provincial Council to set aside part of the valley as a recreation reserve.

10.1 Explains how, right from the outset, what was to become of Pukekura Park had a community initiative and describes the creation of the sports ground area.

11.1 Describes how one of the early acts was in 1878, to form a dam across the little stream, creating the lake, at that time, a swimming pool.

12.0 Mentions the importance of generating an income because no rates were involved. Lists fundraising activities and voluntary efforts.

14.0 States that it must be remembered that the Park was created as a recreational area, not a botanic garden, and was known as the recreation grounds, until 1907. Speaks of then use of the area.

17.3 Describes original access at Gilbert Street, Victoria Road junction.

17.7 Refers to the fountain and the main lake. He later asked that the main lake reference be altered to the fountain.

- 18.0 Explains that from 1876, when the park was first set aside, quite extensive tree planting took place, the dominant tree being the pinus radiata, which was planted on practically every one of the high points. Expands further. Tells of one falling down on top of the Southern Terrace. (1)
- 21.6 Identifies the Norfolk pine(2). Also one planted by Mayor Mr D V Sutherland (4) in 1976 at the centennial celebrations. Also the Redwood in front (3).
- 23.0 Talks of exceptional; growing rate of certain tree species and other details, including Pinus Torregane (5).

PARK OPENING

- 25.0 Describes Cannon Hill as being the hub of the wehole park development when it was opened on May 29 1875. Lists the commemorative trees planted there at the time, including Norfolk Pine (4) and Puriri (6). Also rimu (7).
- 28.3 Points out original specimen Camelia Japonica variety Pukekura white (8) growing on right hand of entrance way into the fountain lake. Also native beech behind

THE FOUNTAIN

- 30.5 Refers to the commemorative plaque beside the fountain lake, which marks the building of the fountain by the community in 1954 - to commemorate the visit of the Queen, and mentions the controversy associated with the project. Also relates stories and other details.
- 41.0 Refers to single flowered camellias (9) and their importance as a good food source. Also mentions that every significant tree in the area has been introduced, but there is a certain element of regenerative bush developing. Expands on the importance of retaining the natural characteristics of the park.
- 43.9 Speaks of the boatshed (9b) near the lake, now used by the Athletic Society, which used to house a boat for fountain maintenance. Relates further stories.

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TAPE	Two of four

- 01.3 Tape starts. Refers to rhodo - Sir Robert Peel (10) and its size.
- 02.0 States that he is standing at the landing at the north end of the lake. Points to Torry Pine by the pumphouse and the nest of a grey reef heron and speaks of the significance of the change from Pinus Radiata to the great variety of plants now growing - in terms of bird life.
- 03.5 Refers especially to the pigeons and tuis.
- 04.8 Also bell birds & waxeyes. Describes the difficulties of finding tui nests.
- 05.7 Mentions that the fountain lake was the second to be formed and increased even more the variety of wildlife, including kaka and native falcon. Refers to Deuduouus Scarlet oak of North America (12)
- 07.2 Speaking from one of the entrances to the Palm Tree Lawn. Points out different species including the fan palm(13). Also identifies the Judas Tree (cercis) (14) and Metasequoia Glyptostroboides (Dawn redwood) (15) with its interesting historical background. A puriri (16) was pointed out.
- 10.3 Describes why the Parapara or birdcatcher (17) is one of the parks most infamous trees. Demonstrates how the sticky fruit trap insects, then birds, which eventually die.
- 15.3 Identifies a miro (18). A very important food source for the pigeon.
- 16.5 Party moves back to Smith Walk, running from the Hatchery lawn around the Fountain Lake and out to Gilbert Street, so called after W W Smith, superintendent 1908 - 1920. Gives details relevant to Mr Smith.
- 18.8 Points out pohutukawa (19) and North American Oak (20), Also rimu and kahikatea (22). Talks about the Lilly Pilly (23), an Australia tree. Describes pigeon's undesirable eating habits!
- 23.9 Reaches the bridge access to the children's playground and point out the plaque recording a bequest from Eva Alice Wood, dedicated in 1978. Relates the story about the project.

27.4 Comments on sponsorship

28.4 Group moves down towards the site of the water wheel. Identifies ginkgo bilboa (24) en route. Describes its features. Also points out another Lilly Pilly (25). Recalls steps taken to preserve vegetation while preparing site.

34.3 Points out site of the new structures pertaining to the flood protection measures, with comments.

38.7 Standing at the water wheel site, describes further history and features

43.6 Points out a grove of Totara (26)

44.3 Mentions that the squarish stones used in the water wheel and path construction came from the vault of the old post office.

44.3 Now standing in the childrens playground and pays tribute to John Goodwin's wisdom in forming the area. Also mentions 'JC's' (Junior Chamber of Commerce) and Lions who got behind the project and built the toilet facilities and paddling pool.

46.1 Refers again to personal feelings about sponsorship

47.5 Tape ends abruptly.

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TAPE	three of four

The tape starts with group standing under the big Torrey Pine in the children's playground, regarded as the biggest in New Zealand. Goes into detail concerning the tree.

- 01.9 Refers to kauri, also karaka and titoki
- 3.3 Moves toward gates at Victoria Rd entrance. Points out hinau tree as group passes. Details historical information relating to the gates, Hughes Walk and Skinner's impeccable surveying.
- 07.2 Recalls that the early maps of New Plymouth show Victoria Road ad Carrington Road and Carrington Road as Victoria Rd. Relates historical detail
- 8.6 Mentions target area of Militia rifle range near Poets Bridge and the 400 metre firing positions like to be about where Lower Victoria Road was formed.
- 10.0 Indicates a former path running up to Victoria Road and comments about more recent development of the area
- 12.2 Expresses views on technological advances of children's playground equipment.
- 14.6 Group proceeds up staircase towards Victoria Rd. Explains that the steps are formed by kerb stones originally quarried from the New Plymouth Prison.
- 16.5 Recalls that the area had contained one of the last big blocks of pines to be felled. Is now planted to a Japanese theme, including Acers, cyprus and Japanese Cedar (cryromeria japonica). Expresses regret that stunning dark views featured from the top of the track are not visible from the current re alignment. Mentions skyline Norfolk pines. Also delight to observe.
- 18.7 Also expressed delight over his discovery of a rare New Guinea Norfolk pine (araucaria Klinkii) flourishing amongst the others in the area, along with pohutukawa.
- 20.5 Points out section of the older higher track from which was seen a wonderful vista. Discusses the importance of preserving such views and the hope that an avenue might one day be cut to access that lookout.
- 23.0 Comments of the disbelief of visitors from countries of

origin on the growth of trees from their native habitat

- 23.8 Speaks from the Victoria Road lookout overlooking the fountain lake. Recalls the history of the creation of this site. Identifies a puriri and an oak.
- 27.7 Refers to a visit by Lord Baden Powell and the planting of a group of kauris by the scouting or guiding movement. Also mentions that all trees of significance in the park are numbered. Demonstrates with kauri (No86) and a coastal redwood.
- 29.1 Points out a genuine second World War slit trench. Recalls that a number were dug in the park as air raid precautions. Mentioned the existence of a Maori food pit some distance from this site.
- 31.8 Gives details of redwoods, again stressing the importance of vital protection given by tough natives such as pohutukawa and totara.
- 32.9 Tape ends

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TAPE	four of four

- 0.04 Refers again to John Goodwin. Speaking from the Hatchery Lawn. Points out Kahikatea (white pine). Recalls a pigeon pair who used to nest there. Observes a protected lesser shag flying overhead.
- 04.0 Indicates a pine known as the Carrington Pine. Relates details relevant to Jane Carrington.
- 05.8 Also discusses the adjacent kauri tree and its possible connection with Robert Clinton Hughes.
- 06.8 Refers to Norfolk pine planted by Denny Sutherland and a kauri planted by Don Saxton.
- 07.7 Proceeds to Smith Walk. Describes its route
- 08.8 Towards the pumphouse, points out a gingko bilobar fastigiata. Relates relevant details, including the planting by Fred Parker (1976).
- 10.5 Also identifies a shag bark hickory. Describes features of the tree. Also a kauri planted close by
- 11.4 Talks of lookout - talks of vandalism.
- 12.0 Nearing the pumphouse. Talks of rimu planted by W W Smith and the silver fern.
- 13.2 Notes a Japanese cedar with incorrect label as a coastal redwood. Standing under an English yew, planted in 1876.
- 14.4 At the fountain pumphouse - talks about the fountain. Compares the fountain pumphouse to the one used to drive the water fall. Describes fountain workings and some problems experienced with the mechanism.
- 19.4 Points out a cherry laurel tree growing over the pumphouse.
- 20.7 Mentioned the planting to encourage birds - kowhai.
- 21.5 Talks of his efforts to stop people cycling in the park.
- 26.0 The tour ends at the entrance to the sportsground.
- 27.7 Mentions the A P Moore photographic exhibition currently on show at the Taranaki Museum
- 29.8 Tape ends

Life fuller than ever

DN 13.8.97.

By VIRGINIA WINDER

ACTION MAN dolls should look like George Fuller.

The former Pukekura Park curator, who retired seven years ago, is a project master.

"Retirement is just a big swindle," says George, whose life is fuller than ever.

The 68-year-old is now a grass scientist, inventor, historian, photographer, wood carver, park tour guide, writer, orchid breeder, patron, spokesman and awesome orator.

He spins such wonderful yarns, it's hard not get caught in his web of words for hours. Even watching grass grow can be interesting with George — really!

Within the Fullers' New Plymouth section in Torbay St (near Pukekura Park) he is experimenting with the native grass *Microlaena stipoides*, or meadow ricegrass.

Don't be put off by the long name, just know this — it could be a lawn mower's dream-come-true. "Indications are you'd probably have to mow it about half as much as other lawns," says George.

He's trying to turn his whole lawn into *microlaena*, which is a soft, silky grass with long roots. To do this, he has the mammoth job of pulling out all other types of grass.

Does that mean he gets down on his hands and knees to weed the lawn? "I've invented a special tool," says George, running (literally) off to get it.

He returns with a cruel-looking three-pronged device which he holds up for examination. Its handle is an old golf club and the claw is made from heavy fencing wire. "This is the decimator," he laughs, and attacks the lawn.

Because most other grass types are shallow-rooted, they are easily combed out, leaving just the miracle *microlaena*.

"It's sworn about more than it's blessed because it has that seed that gets into clothing, but it's a very desirable lawn grass — it's totally under-valued," he says.

Microlaena is drought-resistant, grows well in shade, and thrives in areas of low fertility, and seems to resist grass-grub invasions. "I don't think that any self-respecting grass grub would want to eat the roots of *microlaena*, which are like piano wire."

But George doesn't yet know how hardy it is, so, up on the street he has planted a verge with the native grass.

So, why doesn't everyone have *microlaena* lawns? "Because it's never been possible to buy the seed for it," he says. "The reason for that is it has low seed production."

George the scientist is exploring ways to remedy this problem. In the meantime,

he lets the grass grow tall on a steep bank area below the road so he can hand-harvest the seed for his lawn. He also visits other properties to gather seeds.

"If the problem of production can be overcome, I question whether people would want any other sort of lawn," he says, admitting he's getting enormous satisfaction out of his research.

That's because he's such a curious man. He simply has to have answers and is not the type to sit around waiting for others to supply them. All over his garden are experiments, some successful, some not, like designing flowers.

It's time to visit his glasshouse to learn about the hit-and-miss world of orchid breeding.

"Like *microlaena*, I have a passion for *masdevallias*," says George, picking up one of the dainty, cool-growing Andean orchids. The creation is called Angel Frost, an orange delicacy, with three petals appearing to be bejewelled with dew.

Breeding orchids has also given George a chance to remember those people who have touched his life. He indicates another flower called *Memoria Alex Arms*, named after a good friend and orchid grower in Waitara.

Alex's wife, Grace, who still lives in Taranaki, also gets her place in history, for George has named a striped flower after her.

The fruit of his labours will be out there forever, with a huge international register holding the names of every orchid. If George is the first to create a new cross-breed, the name he chooses will be that flower's for keeps.

He holds up an un-named orchid, a crimson bloom striped with magenta and a centre of gold which blurs into the petals.

"That's the thrill I've had this week but they don't all turn out. This one's particularly precious to me, because one of its parents is Grace Arms. This is the second generation. It sort of projects on and on. Now I'm thinking 'what will I cross with that?' Life's too short for a breeder," says George.



PARK MAN: George Fuller in front of the waterfall he helped develop in Pukekura Park. "Pay very careful attention to how changes will affect the simplicity of what is Pukekura Park," he says

Photos: TREVOR READ

It takes up to four years for a new orchid to flower, with each plant beginning as seeds of fine dust which are germinated in sterile laboratories. George has orchids at all stages of their life cycles, with the babies tucked up in the garage.

So personal are these plants, it feels like they should have faces — the next orchid family actually does!

The end of the glasshouse is plantsylvania, where Draculas lurk.

"I have got a bit of an obsession with Draculas. They aren't common," says George of the character plants, "but I have a reasonable collection of them."

"Some of them are really funny — I can always come out here and have a laugh." George picks up one a specimen. "Look at that for a ridiculous flower."

Draculas have a centre which looks like a painted cartoon face, surrounded by a malevolent-looking cape of petals.

"These are the oddball ones that you can't help smile at," says George, giggling one. "The grandkids love them — see how the tongue flops."

George also loves to shoot the plants, not with silver bullets, but with his camera. He is recording his own plant history with clear, vivid photographs. "That's one of my problems in life, I take things on fairly intensely."

There's also another history captured by George — his detailed knowledge of Pukekura Park's past.

Sitting in the sun on a bench outside the home he shares with his wife, Doris, George leans back and becomes a great oral historian.

Clearly, the park, which was the Fuller family home for 24 years, means the world to him. "You don't have to be employed in Pukekura Park for very long before you realise it's a very special place. Daily, people would say 'this is the most beautiful park'."

George says he was compelled to find out why the park had such a powerful effect on people. He believes the answer lies in the park's simplicity.

"The most frequent compliment that's put to the park is that it's so natural, and then you have to analyse why a totally artificial park has been able to hoodwink so many people into believing it's totally natural," says George.

What! "Yes, it's a total contradiction. Its physical make-up, except the topography of the land, is man-made."

What! "When it was set aside in 1875 there were no trees, no water except a little stream, and hardly a square metre of flat land, which is why it was not developed residentially."

George's historical tales span many years. He tells of how a group of citizens, led by Robert Clinton Hughes, had the foresight to give New Plymouth a park for a heart; of the uproar when the fountain was first mooted for the bottom

lake — the citizens of the day weren't keen to let their beautiful park be tainted by a fancy fountain; of how an island in the middle of the lake was the place where kiwis were first bred in captivity; of how the soil from the island was moved to fill in a water lily pond to become the Hatchery Lawn.

George himself was directly responsible for the development of the waterfall and the water-wheel. But that's another story...

This month George gets to tell it all to a tape-recorder while walking around the park. This request has come from the Friends Of The Park, of which George is the patron. "I babble so much they want me to record it, talk about the history."

He also takes guided tours through the park, something his family (he has five children) is not always keen on.

"In some sense it's not a pleasurable experience walking in the park with me — the family have to put up with me assessing the current state of the park or recalling my involvement in some development. I also talk to them about the past of the park so, hopefully, somebody will pick it up. I'm more positive with visitors."

George has incredibly strong feelings about the future of the park, and has made detailed submissions on different subjects. "I'm a bit of an extrovert. I get into things and speak my mind if I feel strongly about it."

On that note George has some words of wisdom: "The park will never remain stagnant and must continue to change. But pay very careful attention to how this is going to affect the simplicity of what is Pukekura Park."

George warns against: Copying other parks around the world; having sponsorship signs threatening the beauty of the park; building any structures which dominate the natural landscape.

He is also totally opposed to building a flash entrance to the fernery: "The magic of the fernery is hunting around for a hole in the wall, walking through a dark tunnel and there's nothing there, and suddenly there's this wonderful world."

In his retirement, that's exactly what George has created for himself, a busy world full of plants and people. But he does whittle away some of his time.

On winter evenings he sits with a pocket knife carving beautiful Maori-style pendants and brooches out of native woods like lacebark, matipo and kohekohe.

"I'm very taken by the beauty of the Maori form, the simplicity, the beautiful balance and the nice flowing lines — no straight lines for me."

He could be talking about Pukekura Park.



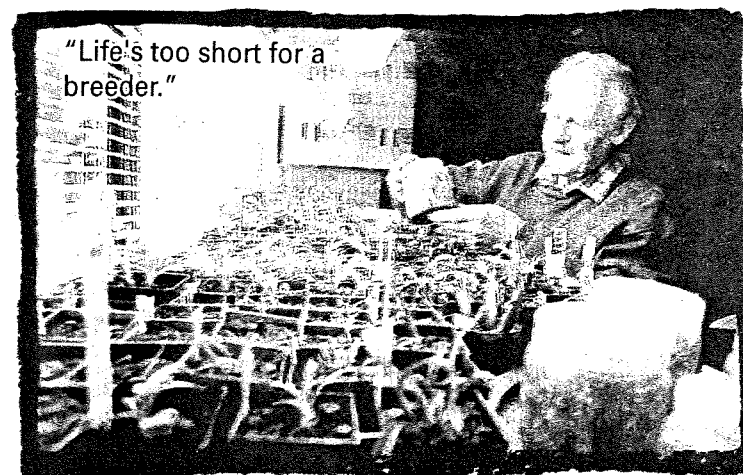
HISTORIAN: George holds some old postcards of Pukekura Park.



CAMERA MAN: George, fully focused on orchids, records his own plant history.



DRACULA MAN: George, with *Dracula, cordobae* "cheeky", admits to being obsessed with the orchid family.



SCIENTIST: George's baby orchids are tucked up in his garage laboratory.



DECIMATOR MAN: George uses his simple invention to cull the lawn of all grass-types, except the miracle *Microlaena*.



WOOD CARVER: George whittles away winter evenings making Maori-style pendants and brooches.

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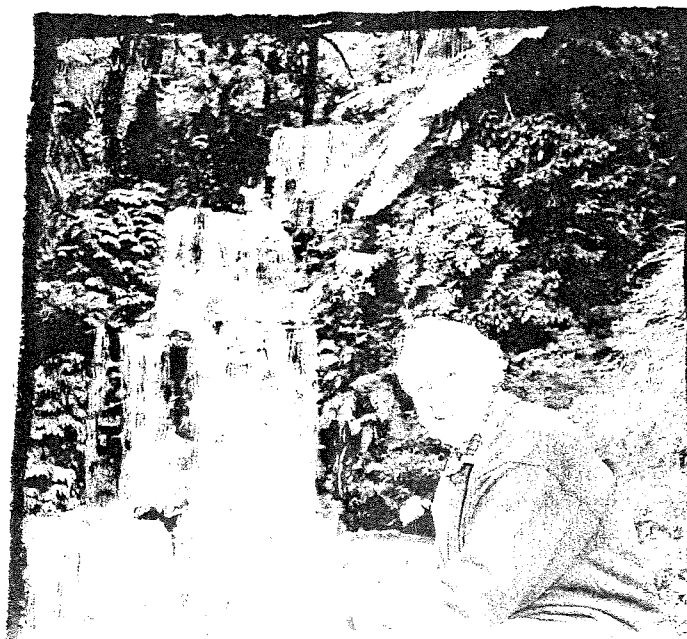
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