



BLOCKHOUSE BAY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
INCORPORATED

NEWSLETTER

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THE BLOCKHOUSE BAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING IS ON WEDNESDAY 7TH FEBRUARY at 1.15pm at ARMANASCO HOUSE

For the PREMIER SHOWING of our newly completed video by Ian Printy entitled: ARMANASCO JOURNEY.

Followed by a CELEBRATION AFTERNOON TEA (seated) and the opportunity to delve into our extensive archives and ask any questions you may have on our local history. We warmly invite you and your friends to join us for this special social time together at the House.

Please RSVP by Monday 5th February, to ensure we have a place at a table for you!

Please note change of venue and the need to RSVP.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Happy New Year everyone. I hope you all enjoyed a wonderful Christmas. We look forward to catching up with you all.

As some of you will be aware, our Community Centre will be closed during February & March 2024 for roof replacement. So we thought this was an excellent opportunity to showcase Armanasco House at our upcoming meeting. And what better way to do this than with a celebration 'High Tea' - reminiscent of the early days when the community came together to save this special building.

A wealth of information has been gathered by the historical society in the ensuing years and this work continues today. We are indeed fortunate to have been able to research, interview and document the recollections of many people associated with the Bay. Coupled with the generosity of those who have long since left the area, sending us photos and written accounts of their time here, we are now able to 'join the dots' as it were, to build a comprehensive and fascinating picture of life in Blockhouse Bay through the years. Having access to multiple perspectives and being able to research official documents more easily online, has also given us the opportunity to correct little errors and throw some light on formally unanswered questions. Like a thousand piece puzzle, it takes time and effort, but is ultimately very satisfying.

When Ian Printy kindly offered to make a movie on the history of Armanasco House, I decided to pull together a comprehensive timeline to accompany all the images we had on file for him. I naively thought this would take me an afternoon or two. Some time later I am very pleased to say, it is now complete. The article following provides a short summary, if you are interested...

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Secretary; Eileen 627 4416
Treasurer; Anne 627 8619

Life Members;
Eileen Rusden, Yvonne Dabb, Alan Cole and Brian Goodwin
Visit our website; www.blockhousebayhistoricalsociety.com



Armanasco House Timeline in Pictures - the story behind the historic house in the heart of our village.

This house actually began life on 6 acres of land between Hill St (now Heaphy St) and Wynyard St (now Blockhouse Bay Road) down to Taylor St. The property was known as 'Windy Heights'. The home was built in 1890 by early settler Stefano Armanasco, and was located directly beside where the Medical Centre stands today, opposite the Community Centre.



Stefano originally came from the tiny village of Tovo di Sant'Agata in the Province of Sondrio in the Italian region Lombardy. About 120 kms northeast of Milan.

He left the village in 1863 at the age of 17 apparently destined for America. Our next official record of him is arriving in Melbourne, Australia, on the ship 'Florence Nightingale' in April 1865 aged 19. He lived in Australia for 19 years working as a carpenter/joiner, including time spent in the goldfields.



Photo taken at Melbourne Pier March 1884

In 1884 he came to New Zealand on the RMS 'John Elder', arriving 18 February and settled in the Waikomiti District (previously known as Whau Bay) and later Avondale South. The area we know today as Blockhouse Bay.

Lithograph by A D Willis, based on a painting by Charles Blomfield.

Two years later, on 10 June 1886, Stefano was standing on a hill approximately where the Hillsborough Heights Retirement Village is located today.

All of a sudden he heard mighty rumblings and saw smoke belching high into the sky. He later discovered he had witnessed the eruption of Mount Tarawera.



Stefano became well known in the district for his skilled workmanship. In 1895 the family moved out of their original house and into a larger home he had built on land he had purchased between Mitchell St and Taunton Terrace (then known as Marine Parade). This house, later known as Salisbury House, subsequently became part of Powley Retirement Village.

Upon completion of his house in 1890 Stefano, now aged 45 sent for his bride to be: 23 year old Maria Sicin. Although she came from the same village in Lombardy, she had never met Stefano. He had left Italy four years before she was born.

There was however a family connection through her father; Maria's second given name was Armanasco. She bravely travelled alone on the SS. 'Nurnberg' – a steamship rigged for sail - boarding at Genoa around January 1890; arriving in Melbourne, Australia 13 March and then Sydney on 17 March. It is understood Stefano greeted her there and accompanied her on the final leg of her journey to NZ.

They were married in St Patrick's Cathedral, Auckland a few weeks after her arrival in New Zealand on 14 April 1890.



Stefano and Maria with their first son William in 1896. Despite having never met before, their marriage by all accounts was a happy one.



They had two sons: William Stefano born 1894 and Victor Antonio born 1900. The two were known locally as Bill and Vic Arman.

Here the young family look out across Blockhouse Bay toward the Lynfield peninsula from their Marine Parade (now Taunton Tce) property in 1901. The little bay down the cliff from them became known as Arman's Bay. Located off the present day Te Ara O Tiriwa coastal walking track below Taunton Tce.



Meanwhile, their original home was used as the district's first school, while waiting for St Andrews Hall to be built on the opposite side of Blockhouse Bay Road. It was called the Avondale South Side School. Victor Armanasco was one of its first pupils. Their first teacher was Miss Cole.



In 1906 the Armanasco family sold the Marine Parade property and moved back to their former home in Blockhouse Bay Rd. Over time, the original timber shingle roof was replaced with corrugated iron and a new front veranda added.



Sons Victor and William, (Vic and Bill) both followed in their father's footsteps becoming apprentice carpenters.



During the first World War, eldest son: William (Bill) enlisted on 3rd July 1917 in the 1st N.Z.E.F and was deployed overseas to The Somme, France. His brother Victor (Vic), too young for active service, began his carpentry apprenticeship and joined the Home Guard.



Bill returned home due to injury in 1918. He had been hit in the arm by a German sniper's bullet, fracturing his left humerus (upper arm bone) causing permanent damage to the shoulder joint and soft tissue, following the battle for Bapaume, France.

With a weak arm, his trade as a carpenter was no longer possible, so after returning home he built large glass houses on their Windy Heights property and grew tomatoes for a living.

Stefano Armanasco loved walking and would regularly go out in the bush. He had a keen interest in native fern specimens and would often enjoy walking through the Waitakere Ranges. It is thought this interest is what led him to delve deeply into the dense bush area around Huia. He was last seen by a local resident named Bishop entering the bush on the 7th June 1918 and sadly never returned.

The affidavit of one, Daniel Ryan, Police Constable, states that on the 7th and 8th June 1918, Daniel, in company with constables Reid and McGlone, and local settlers thoroughly searched the bush around Huia Road for Stefano. All they found was a handkerchief identified as his, on the side of the road. And looking around, found an area of scrub which from the flattened appearance, was obvious it had been a sleeping place.

The conclusion was reached that Stefano had spent the night resting there. No footprints were found leading from the road into any of the bush tracks, but fresh boot heel marks of a person having slipped down a bank from Huia Rd toward the foreshore of the Manukau Harbour were found by the search party.

The road runs along the edge of the harbour in this place. It was Constable Ryan's belief that Stefano, being an old man and in a weak state, had slipped down the bank into the water, was drowned and carried out to sea by the tide.

Throughout the 20's and 30's Maria and her two sons lived quietly in their original Windy Heights house. They were well liked and respected members of the Catholic community.



Both sons were keen on boating, and were well known in and around the Manukau. One of their local friends John (Skip) Bailey sailed with them on their boat for a short time until he bought his own.

Bill & Vic sailing their yacht the 'Valdora' in 1926 (left). They bought the 'Valrosa' a 22ft Mullet boat yacht in 1936 and sold this to another local Bill Sissons in 1938 (below left).



Maria Armanasco died on the 11th August 1947 just before her 80th birthday. She was remembered by locals of the time as a gentle and generous lady, respected by everyone fortunate enough to have known her. Many people recall loving her delicious homemade toffee as children. Local Ray Kealey, who grew up next door to the Armanasco's said they were lovely neighbours.



The house was occupied by the Armanasco family from 1890 until 1988 – almost 100 years – apart from the few years they lived in their Taunton Tce property. Which is why today the house is known as ‘Armanasco House’.



In 1955 Bill Armanasco bought the boat ‘Waitia’ from his friend John (Skip) Bailey. He fitted a sliding hatch to the rear of the cabin to give more room in the cockpit and restored her to sail, with a trysail in cruising mode. Bill was regularly seen sailing out from the Bay, with his white sailors cap on, with various local mates, finally selling it in 1963 when he was 69. He passed away on 21st Sep 1978 aged 84. He never married, devoting his life to the care and comfort of his widowed mother and being a helpful and friendly neighbour.

In 1950, younger son Victor married his long time friend and neighbour Edith O’Brien and the original homestead became their home. The kitchen and bathroom we see at the rear of the house today, is what he built for his new bride. The bay window into the middle room, on the side of the house may have been added at this time too as it would have faced due north on the original site.

Our society member, Sheila Sekula, was good friends with Vic & Edy. She recalls that often when she walked by their house on her way to St Doms church, Edy would call out the window to invite her in for tea and freshly baked scones.

Victor and Edith lived in the original home right up until his death on 23 Jul 1987 at the age of 87. The two of them cultivated a beautiful garden, seen here in this ‘selfie’ taken by Victor using a piece of string to operate the camera. He was remembered mostly for his quiet, unassuming manner, as well as his meticulous excellence in his chosen field of carpentry and cabinet making. More than half his life was devoted to building Catholic Churches, schools and convents throughout Auckland. He was responsible for the planning and construction of major building projects in Owairaka, Avondale, Blockhouse Bay, Glen Innes, Mt Wellington, Onewunga, Panmure and other parishes.

A dedicated builder, he put all his skill and craftsmanship into his work, directing and inspiring others with his own enthusiasm.

After Victor’s death, his widow Edith left the house in 1988 to reside in St Joseph’s Home, Herne Bay. She passed away in 1990.



In February 1990, thanks to the concerted efforts of locals to save this historic home, approval was given for the Armanasco house to be moved to the north western corner of Avondale South Domain (now Gittos Domain) by the Auckland City Council Recreation Committee.

Following completion of a 15 month restoration of the house by the people of Blockhouse Bay, the house was officially opened on Saturday 21 Mar 1992.



**1991 Re-siting of the Armanasco House on the village green.
Ron EDWARDS; Marvis KIRKVERLY; Marjorie IKIUA; Robyn BARNABY
Members of the team responsible for the relocation of the house**

Excerpt from Armanasco Timeline compiled by Krystene Vickers.