

Women's Rest Hastings New Zealand by Fay Harris



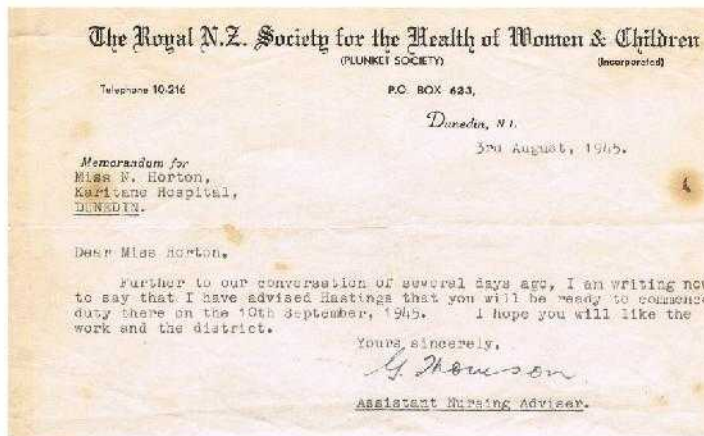
Women's Rest built 8th September 1921

The land on which it stood belonged to the Hastings Borough Council and conditions were stated by the seller of the land a Mrs. Garnett. She stipulated in the sale agreement, that a Women's Rest building was to be erected on some of the land. To start the ball rolling she donated seven hundred and fifty pounds. The building was designed by the borough's engineer S. B. Dodge. At that period of time it was the first building in Australasia which had been built for the needs of women. It was a place where women shopping in town could go to use the facilities provided. A toilet, a reading room, nursery room and a room with tables and chairs where women could eat. This room was very popular for many years as cups of tea and biscuits were provided at very reasonable prices. A woman could if she wished read some of the donated women's magazines that were scattered about. On the right-hand side in the front of the building the Plunket rooms were to be found.

In 1945 my Aunty Naomi Horton was sent by the Plunket Society to work with Alice Jones, the senior sister in-charge then, in these Plunket Rooms.

Aunty Naomi Horton

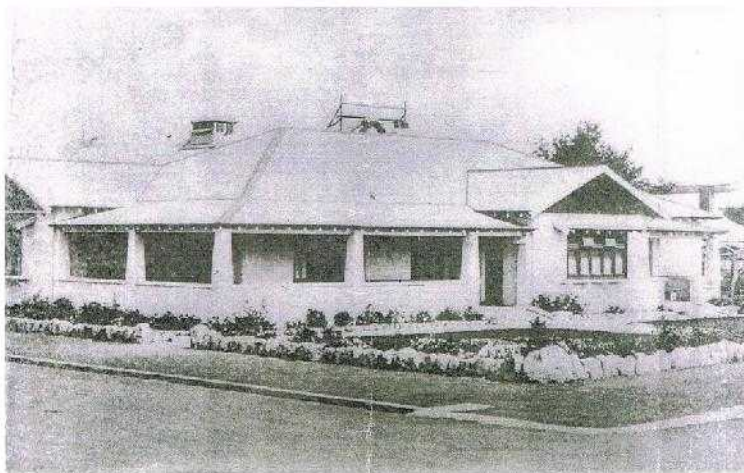




A copy of letter appointing Naomi Horton to Hastings.

I have often heard my Aunty affectionately refer to Alice Jones, as "Jonesy." A year later in 1946, Elsie Leipst joined them after Nan Sherwin resigned.

Apart from these three nursing sisters a matron was employed at this time she lived on the premises. Her name was Olive Skipper. She was responsible for cleaning the rooms and making the endless cups of tea. In those days of the 1940's it was only six pence a cup and you paid a penny to use the toilets. The toilets fascinated children as there were two very small sized ones specially for them. In those days everyone knew what you meant when you said, "I am off to spend a penny. As public toilets had penny meters on the doors.



Women's Rest 1950

Aunty Na as the family referred to her, worked there as Plunket nurse until 1956. She left then to take up a position as Plunket nurse in Johnsonville. It is possible that before this time she became senior sister there as upon reading

some notes given to me about Elsie Leipst, I found that she and Alice Jones left the Plunket rooms in 1949 for a trip to England, whereas Aunty Na did not leave until 1956. That was seven years later when she left to take up a Plunket nursing job in Johnsonville. By the time Elsie came back in 1969 to work once again as Plunket nurse in the Women's Rest, my aunt would have retired. But like Elsie, Aunty Na came back to Hastings to live and they continued the friendship they had begun in the mid-forties until Naomi died on the 19th May 1999.

In the early sixties I made good use of these rooms as I had two small children and lived in a country area so to be able to change nappies, warm bottles and drink a very much needed cup of tea was wonderful on the days we came into town. I continued using this haven even after we came to live in Hastings. Coffee shops were being opened but I found that raising a family did not leave any money spare for such a luxury. The Women's Rest provided a place where I could take my cut lunch when I went back to work at a later period of time in my life. I think the cups of tea fizzled out about the end of the seventies.

For a period of time I lost interest in the women's Rest area but I remember rekindling my interest in the middle 1980's when I discovered that the building had been taken over by, "The Heretaunga Women's Centre". They had rearranged things. The old eating room and reading room were now being used for classes to encourage women to learn new skills and continue with hobbies they already enjoyed. I joined in a class teaching relaxation, techniques, in 1987 as my marriage had broken up and I was in need of this kind of help. The ladies running these groups were very helpful and I was able to borrow books out of their small library to help me adjust to my new circumstances as a single woman once again. There was also a free counselling service that I was able to call on a few years after that time when I struck another difficulty that I felt unable to deal with alone. About 2010 I enjoyed a couple of painting lessons with a group of other ladies interested in this hobby in a room put aside once a week for a few hours to be used this way

One time I had an upsetting incident in town and felt a bit disturbed and wanted to share the experience with someone so I rushed along to the Women's centre. I had acted in rather a bold way as I had been walking down the street when I saw a young man deliberately steal an item of clothing out of a bin and start to take it to a man, I could see in a car parked nearby. I was horrified he just looked like one of my grandchildren misbehaving, before I had a second thought, I heard myself say, "You put that back". This young man whom my second glance revealed wore a hood, looked at me, then the man in the car. He then calmly turned back to the bin and returned the item. Next thing I knew he had jumped in the car and taken off with the man. Then I started to shake as I realised how that incident could have turned out nasty had the young man pushed or struck me. So I needed a quick cup of tea and someone to talk to. The first thing that came into my mind was the women's Rest as I needed some coffee and sympathy. The ladies at the rest room certainly lived up to my expectations.



Now in 2015 I made another trip to the Women's rest and found it had changed again. The whole place had been given a fresh coat of white paint which had an uplifting effect and had taken away the drab brown look peculiar to the Victorian age which had stayed with the building since its beginning but had not spoil its homely atmosphere. Where the Plunket nurses had been on the right hand side there was now a big airy looking office with a counter all around two sides behind which two ladies stood with all the paraphernalia associated with a modern

office. The Manager Margot Wilson, one of the ladies behind the desk came out and proudly showed me around the building. I was impressed with the effort that had been put into refurbishing it and felt sure that had Mrs. Garnett been able to see how her dream had been kept going, for nearly one hundred years and so improved on, she would have clapped her hands in appreciation. That seven hundred and fifty pounds she donated to refurbishing way back in 1920 had given the Women of Hastings a friendly place to go for many years and it is still going strong. It now has modern toilets a new nursery equipped with toys, a fresh, clean eating room, where a hot water and a sink and cups mean that women now can make their own hot drinks. Several vacant rooms which are used for activities dear to the hearts of women of all ages and interests.

Women's Rest Rooms



I certainly appreciate the support our City Council has given to this fine, old building which has been well looked after as it sits in the towns central reserve which it shares with our modern library.