

ARTHUR ALBERT FANTHAM

The marble statue facing all who enter Hawera's King Edward Park by way of the decorative iron gates pays tribute to a remarkable local resident, ARTHUR ALBERT FANTHAM. The words inscribed on the plaque - "energetic and enterprising settler" barely suggest the active life he led.

In common with great numbers of people coming from Britain in the 19th Century, A. A. Fantham was able to develop his interests and talents in a manner that would have made his grandparents incredulous and disbelieving!

As a 10-year-old boy, he arrived in Lyttelton from rural Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire with his eight brothers and sisters. At 25 he was farming at Spreydon, now an inner city suburb of Christchurch, and exhibiting pigs and cattle at the Canterbury Agricultural and Pastoral Association's annual show. An ambitious young man, he served on the Association's committee as well as being a successful exhibitor. A newspaper report of 1867 described one of his heifers as "by far the best specimen", and his well bred pigs provided an annual harvest of prizes.

A fresh challenge came to A A Fantham in 1877. At the age of 35 he took his wife and young family to the infant settlement of Cambridge in the Waikato where he bought a 700-acre farm from Richard Reynolds. Life at *Gwynnelands* was more spacious and grand than Spreydon. He became known for his pedigree Shorthorn cattle, and displayed an ability to diagnose and treat cattle diseases.

The first race meetings of the Waikato Turf Club were held in his house paddock, many of the patrons having come up-river from Hamilton by steamboat. The Pakuranga Hunt Club of Auckland made a noteworthy visit to hunt over his property.

After having demonstrated energy and leadership among the farmers of the district, A. A. Fantham sold *Gwynnelands* and moved to Hawera where his sister and widowed mother lived.

He bought *Egmont View* - a developed 600-acre farm between the Waihi and Turuturu Roads. In five years he had become the most active and prominent resident of Cambridge, and in Hawera he was to do the same.

Very soon he helped establish the Egmont Agricultural and Pastoral Association, take a leading part in the Roads Board, encourage the Racing Club to hold its meetings on his property, and become an active dealer in livestock and real estate.

In 1884, two years after arriving in Hawera, he decided to contest the Egmont parliamentary seat against the very popular Major Harry Atkinson, Prime Minister of New Zealand. He did well to achieve 403 votes against Major Atkinson's 874. Subsequently, the two men are said to have become the best of friends.

Eleven children grew up at *Egmont View*, but only the eldest, Frances, is well remembered. For Frances or Fanny as she was known, was one of "a party of six ladies and nine gentlemen from Manaia and Hawera" who ascended the secondary peak of Mt Egmont/Taranaki. The party decided to name it for her as she was the first woman known to have gained the top of this feature - Fantham's Peak.

Of the numerous very energetic and enterprising settlers of Hawera, only A. A. Fantham is remembered by a statue and three street names - Arthur, Albert and Fantham. His friends erected the statue to remember a man who died at the height of his powers, at the age of 62, recalling his continuous and enthusiastic promoting of Hawera's farming interests and community affairs.

Look at his statue. He is leaning forward as if to catch each bit of news and the latest story from the passers-by, and the customers of Bev and Allan Dietschin's service station.

