

# Branches

## Hāwera

Hāwera has just seen two statues commemorating the heroics of Hāwera boys John Gildroy GRANT and Henry John LAURENT unveiled. They each received their Victoria Cross one week apart in September 1918.

Hāwera Genealogy became involved four years ago, with the start of commemoration for the First World War. We approached the South Taranaki RSA and formed a subcommittee to formulate ideas to make people aware of this anniversary. We have run pop-up shops in various empty shops around Hāwera each year before Anzac Day. The idea of having a permanent feature in town developed, as well as something to celebrate the South Taranaki RSA turning 100 this year.

We proposed erecting statues on a piece of land on the edge of a housing subdivision that was developed to commemorate these two soldiers. The streets are laid out in the shape of two Vs and two Cs, and named Grant VC Street, Laurent VC Street and Dixon Avenue, the latter named for the mayor at the time, Edwin DIXON. At the High Street end was a grassed area that would make a perfect location for this memorial.

We approached the South Taranaki District Council for permission to use this piece of land. Hāwera Mayor Ross Dunlop was very supportive of our proposal. Having a keen interest in history, he prepared a letter of support to the Council for consideration. When this was granted we got quotes for the statues and applied to the TSB Community Trust for funding.

The garden, designed by David Bruce, curator of King Edward Park across the road, is in the shape of the Victoria Cross with three raised garden beds. Two seats had been provided. Most of the work for the garden was done by volunteers, including the block laying and paving. The Hāwera Fire Brigade volunteered at the weekends to fill in the garden beds with top soil. John Grant had been made a life member of the Hāwera Fire Brigade and they wanted to help where they could.

Hāwera Genealogy was involved in research to find living relatives. This was fairly easy with Grant and Laurent; not so easy with Edwin Dixon, as he had five daughters. Eventually, with funeral notices and contacting undertakers, we managed to find some great-grandsons who attended the opening.

The afternoon started with a parade from the South Taranaki RSA down the main street to the garden. Vintage cars carried the dignitaries and the 5th/7th Battalion Pipes and Drums led the parade with the colours marched behind, followed by members of the public. Military vehicles bringing up the rear. The Honourable Andrew Little, Minister of Defence, and Ruldoph Sambou, Aide to the French Embassy, spoke before the unveiling.

Many Grant, Laurent and Dixon family members were present. Some came from Australia. Peter Laurent, Henry Laurent's 91-year-old son, unveiled Henry Laurent's statue and three nieces of John Grant unveiled his statue. Hāwera's mayor Ross Dunlop unveiled the plaque that opened the Victoria Cross Garden.

Jill Williams



*The Victoria Cross Garden, 15 September 2018. Photo: Kevin Bone.*