

AWATUNA CHURCHES

Awatuna has been unique in that in the early days it possessed two Protestant Churches: Methodist and Presbyterian.

The first service was held in the Awatuna Hall on November 29, 1898. The service was conducted by Mr Thomas Gray. He remained minister for six months but his health couldn't stand the hard climate and he moved on.

The Awatuna Methodist Church was built on land adjacent to the Hall on land acquired from Mr S. R. Farquhar on May 2, 1901 (of 1 rood). The church was constructed of wood with an iron roof and seating for 60. It was opened on February 23, 1902 at a cost of £131/13. A debt was still outstanding of £35. It was in the Opunake Circuit.

In 1907 Kaponga became a circuit and Awatuna became part of that. The original trustees appointed in 1901 were George Watson, Alfred Oliver, Richard Pepperell, John Gordon, Matthew and Charles Grainger, William Townsend, Charles Allenby and Duncan Poole.

The Awatuna Methodist Church building was dismantled on October 11-13 1937, removed to Kaponga and re-erected as a school hall at the rear of St John's Kaponga Methodist Church in October 1937. It now forms the foyer of the St John's Co-operating Parish Church in Kaponga.

The section was sold to Mr S. R. Farquhar, Awatuna for £7 in December 1938. Proceeds were paid to the Kaponga Sunday School for equipment.

The first recorded weddings are of Robert Surrey and Alice Grainger, Robert Henson and Emily Burgess both in 1894 at the residences of the bride's parents.

The Presbyterians held services in the Awatuna Hall until their church was eventually built by Mr S. R. Farquhar in 1915. Built on an elevated site on the Eltham Road by Mr Greenhill a builder from Auroa. The church was handed over to the Presbyterian Church debt free. The organ was donated by Mrs Graham and the rimu pews were donated by the folk in the district. They cost £1 each. It is reported that the Presbyterian folk were glad to shift out of the draughty old hall into the church for worship. It is interesting to note that 91 years on the church is still maintained by the locals in the same manner as our forefathers.

The stained glass window and the piano was purchased with legacy money from Mrs D. Graham. Rev. Hoskin from America dedicated the window in June 1964.

In January 1976 the Awatuna Church being part of the Opunake Parish was to form a Co-operating Parish with the Methodist Church. In December 1983 we had a fire in the church. Someone had entered the building after the Christmas service and had relit the candles on the communion table. They left without extinguishing the candles. As the candles were in gold plastic holders they eventually burnt through to the communion table. The miracle was that after burning half an inch into the rimu table the fire went out. The church was a terrible mess and had to be repainted and varnished inside. Services

were held in parishioners homes for about three months while the damage was repaired.

It seems fitting that 95 years after the first service was held and 91 years after the first church was built in Awatuna that the two churches are now combined into one parish now worshipping in the lovely old Awatuna Presbyterian Church for their fortnightly services.

(Thanks to ex-local folk Methodist Church and Blank Cheque to Life).



Awatuna Co-operating Parish Church.

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