



REMUERA'S LUSH VALLEYS, sunny ridges, and sweeping views of the Waitemata Harbour have long been admired and coveted. Early European settlers, quickly recognising their value, made futile attempts to obtain them. In his memoirs, John Logan Campbell, the Auckland businessman and philanthropist, recounted his rapture upon gazing from the summit of Remuera/Mount Hobson over the north-facing slopes in 1840: 'Ah! I shall never forget the feelings of gratified amazement with which I gazed on the wonderful panorama which lay revealed to my sight for the first time on that now long-ago day.'³ But his offer to purchase a piece of this glorious prospect was firmly rejected. For its Maori owners Remuera was a treasured tribal asset, to be retained in perpetuity. Despite this aim, over the next two decades, almost all of it had been sold.

From 1844 on, whenever Remuera land came on the market, it was snapped up eagerly by settlers and speculators. During the land sales of the 1850s, competition was particularly fierce and prices were high. The beauty of the area was indeed, as Campbell had enthused, 'pre-eminent, unequalled, unsurpassed',⁴ and its location ideal. Close enough to Auckland but far enough away (some five miles) to be a leafy rural sanctuary, it was the perfect place for successful merchants and professionals to set up in expansive style. Allotments were necessarily big (usually three to five acres but some much larger) to enable the stabling and grazing of horses necessary for transport. As this involved considerable ongoing expense, prospective residents needed to be relatively prosperous. From 1844 they could travel west into town or east to St John's College and the surrounding farmland by way of the newly cut Tamaki (later Remuera) Road. This major thoroughfare, which followed a ridge long used as a track by Maori, was soon augmented by other roads. Those on the picturesque

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An artist's view of lower Remuera in 1879. The large house at centre right is Joseph Liston Wilson's 'Roselle'. Watercolour by M Elwes.

Above

Auckland Harbour looking towards Rangitoto from Remuera. Painting by Maurice Crompton Smith, 1889.



harbour side, such as Arney Road, Orakei Road and Victoria Avenue,⁵ also followed the natural ridge pattern down to the sea.

Early photographs of Remuera show a verdant landscape, dotted here and there with grand residences set in park-like grounds. In addition to illustrious, influential farmers and landowners such as Robert Graham and James Dilworth, the area was also home to a range of prosperous but less wealthy residents, such as professional people and businessmen, as well as rural labourers and domestic servants. The community was small, tightly knit, and characterised by an interesting mix of working farms, humble cottages, and a growing number of elegant and imposing homes.

Domestic life among the more wealthy sectors of the community was smoothed by the labours of maids, cooks, housekeepers and grooms, and made convivial by a range of pastimes such as hosting balls and hunting with hounds. Men often conducted business affairs in the city and undertook several public roles, but also found time to attend parties, concerts and sporting engagements accompanied by their wives. The Northern Club, a favoured bolt-hole in the city, was the preserve of gentlemen only. The Remuera Road Board took care to ensure that the neighbourhood remained a spacious residential suburb unsullied by any industry apart from agriculture. The numbers living within the board's administrative boundaries rose from 555 in 1874 to 1802 in 1886.⁶

The community weathered the severe financial depression of the mid-1880s, although several of its more speculatively inclined merchant princes went bankrupt and disappeared from view. During the late 1890s and the buoyantly expansive early years of the twentieth century, Remuera was, by all contemporary accounts, an exceptionally pleasant place

Above
Panoramic views in the 1880s, looking northeast over Remuera from Mount Hobson with Remuera Road (foreground), Hobson Bay (left) and Orakei Basin (right distance).

to live. Despite acquiring more streets, houses, and people (the population had soared to 5284 by 1911⁷) it remained remarkably rural in ambience, with green vistas and expansive views. Florence Barnes recalled:

Born in 1900, I was the youngest in a family of seven and lived in Remuera until I married in 1922. I can remember when Remuera was like open country: all paddocks and native bush . . . In those days there were gypsies who used to arrive in quaint caravans and camp for days in a clearing where Clonbern Road is today, not far from King's Prep School.⁸