

Rotorua Rotary's involvement in Completing the Bathhouse



In the late 1890's the Government decided to appoint a balneologist (an expert on medicinal springs) to advise on the development of thermal areas as spas. The potential value of Rotorua's thermal springs as a source of revenue had been noted as early as 1874.

In 1901, responsibility for the spa and the administration of the small town of Rotorua was taken over by the Department of Tourist and Health Resorts. In 1902 they appointed Englishman Dr Arthur Wohlmann as the first Government Balneologist. Dr Arthur Wohlmann, had worked at the Royal Hospital at Bath after touring the spas of Europe.

Early 1902, Dr Wohlmann arrived in Rotorua faced with the challenging task of improving spa facilities in Rotorua. As well as overseeing development of the spa, including construction of the Tudor-style bathhouse, he visited and reported on thermal pools around the country. Dr Wohlmann wrote to the Tourist Department General Manager, Mr T.E. Donne, that: *"The building site selected is almost ideal, close to the centre of town, with a large open lawn in front, gay flower-beds, lakelets and winding paths, a belt of trees behind hiding the springs and mud pools, beyond this the blue expanse of Lake Rotorua, and circling all the green and russet and purple hills"*.

On 26 September 1902 Dr Albert Stanley Wohlmann M.D. Lon., L.R.C.P., B.Sc. (Hons), M.R.C.S., Eng, submitted the initial plans for the Rotorua Bath House to Mr B.S. Corlett, Inspector of Works for the Tourist Department, for a grand new bath house. Mr W.J Trigg and Mr J.W. Wrigley helped complete the plans. Dr Wohlmann urged that the "homely timbered buildings of Nauheim (Germany)" be imitated rather than "the cold glory of (English) marble palaces."

On 18 October 1905, the tender price from W.Hutchison Co. Ltd of Auckland was accepted with a bid of £25,750 – today the building is valued at over \$22M plus. Construction of the Bath House was started in 1906 by W. Hutchison. Native timbers of kauri, totara, matai and puriri were milled and used in the construction of the building. Despite disagreements over design between Wohlmann and Corlett, and disputes over materials, the building was ready to open on 31 May 1908.

When the Bath House was opened in 1908 the building was only partially constructed. As a result of funding shortages, the far end of the northern wing and most of the southern wing were not built.

The opening of the Bath House coincided with a visit to Rotorua by Rear Admiral Charles Stillman Sperry, commander of the United States "Great White Fleet" which was anchored at Auckland, and 200 of his officers. Following a rousing and colourful Arawa welcome and speeches by Prime Minister Joseph Ward and Admiral Sperry, members of the public were admitted to the new building. A string orchestra provided music during the day and 300 people later attended an evening concert in the Pump Room at three pence a ticket.

Dr Wohlmann wrote two publications, a popular guide to spas called, "*The Mineral Waters and Health Resorts of New Zealand (1904)*", and a work for medical practitioners, "*Mineral Waters and Spas of New Zealand (1912)*".

Because of his name, Wohlmann was the victim of misplaced anti-German hysteria during the First World War. He retired to a secluded house on the outskirts of Rotorua, and changed his last name to *Herbert*. Dr Herbert wrote several more books under the name of Arthur Stanley Herbert - his best-known work being, "*The Hot Springs of New Zealand (1921)*".

Dr Arthur Stanley Herbert returned to England in 1919 and died on March 3rd 1944 aged 77.

1 July 1947, control of the Bath House was passed to the NZ Health Department. In 1949 its annual report contained a damning statement that hastened the closure of the spa.

In the late 1950's, early 1960's the Bath House building was deteriorating from the effects of the sulphuric nature of the conditions under the building. Steam and water started to effect the building, and as a consequence, the building was virtually closed and abandoned. As well, the garden area also went to "rack and ruin". This Government decision was mainly due to lack of patronage for the use of the building, and that further funds would not be available for its preservation and maintenance

About this time, there was representation by several Rotorua Rotarians such as Doug Ewert, Garth Hocking, Doug Davys, Joe Buddle, Ian Bryce and others who convinced the Rotorua County Council to acquire the property from the Government.

On 1 May 1963, the Rotorua County Council took over control of the Bath House, together with two and a half acres of surrounding land, along with a grant of £64,000. In 1966 all treatments were transferred to nearby Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

The Rotorua Museum opened in the South Wing in 1969 and Rotorua Art Gallery in the North Wing in 1977. Weekly dances were held on the mezzanine floor of the Bath House – now Tudor Towers - with young people dancing to the popular Tai Eru Dance Band during the glory days in the 1970s. Two licensed restaurants, one upstairs and one down, and later a nightclub also occupied areas of the building until 1990.

It was in the 1975-1976 Rotary year that Roger Brewster (President of the Rotary Club of Rotorua Lakes) formed the 50th Jubilee Project Committee of Rotorua Rotarians to celebrate Rotary's first 50 years in Rotorua. The three Rotorua Rotary clubs - Rotorua, Rotorua West and Rotorua Lakes - combined to raise money for the new art gallery in the North Wing of the Bath House. The committee were responsible for raising \$24,000 in donations to bring the North Wing up to a standard for storing the expensive art works owned by many Rotorua residents. On Saturday 15 October, 1977, the "Rotary in Rotorua (1927 – 1977) Golden Jubilee Dinner" was held at the Rotorua International Hotel to celebrate the success of the fundraising project. On 11th October, 1986, the North Wing Gallery Extensions, designed by Rotarian Peter Verrall's architectural company Hocking & Verrall, was opened.

Past President Doug Clemens had ascertained earlier from the 1963 Ministry of Works Conservation Report on the Bath House, that the building had never been completed – it was

lopsided! The North Wing was mainly finished, except for the Observation Viewing Area, and the South Wing had never been completed. With that in mind, and realizing that it was in 1978 that the Rotary Club of Rotorua fundraised to assist the then Rotorua City Council to establish an art gallery in Rotorua that it would probably be appropriate to see what interest there was in completing the Bath House to the original working drawings. It was from discussions with the Bath House Museum Curator Greg McManus, that at a meeting in 2004, P.P. Doug presented the “Bath House Completion Project” to Mayor Grahame Hall, Member of Parliament Steve Chadwick, Councillors, DGE Bruce Scott, ADG Ron Finn, and others. At this meeting Doug expressed his disappointment at the size of the Rotorua Art Gallery, and the fact that it could not exhibit paintings, nor could the Bath House complex show the art and treasures of this area because of the lack of space.

In 2006 the Rotorua Museum Centennial Trust was established to drive fundraising efforts for the completion of the Bath House building to its original design. Rotorua Museum gratefully acknowledges the role that the Rotorua Museum Centennial Trust played in raising the \$22 million needed to complete the Centennial Development Project.

The Rotorua Museum Centennial Trust consisted of Patron Dame Catherine Tizard, Chairman Mr Lyall Thurston, Trustees Hon Steve Chadwick MP, Rotarian Doug Clemens, Rt Hon Paul East, Mr Mike Johnson, Mrs Jo-Anne La Grouw, Mr Fred McRae, Mr John Sax, Mr Malcolm Short, His Worship the Mayor Kevin Winters, Treasurer Ms Maria Palmer, and Past Museum Director Mr Greg McManus.

Stage 1 was completed in March 2006 in which the North Wing Viewing Platform was reinstated. Originally this platform was in place when the building opened in 1908, however it was removed sometime in the late 1930s or 40s - probably for safety reasons.

Stage 2 of the Rotorua Museum Centennial Project, the North Wing extension, saw the construction of the Rotorua Trust Galleries, opened in November 2008.

On 4 July 2008, the Minister for Art, Culture and Heritage, Prime Minister Helen Clark, announced a major grant to complete the final stage of the Rotorua Museum Centennial Project. Announced during her speech (<http://www.beehive.govt.nz/node/33896>) at the “Roof Shout” for the North Wing extension (Stage 2), the \$7.5 million grant enabled the Rotorua Museum Centennial Trust to complete Stage 3 of the project, the south wing extension and refurbishment.

Stage 3 saw the final and most significant phase of the Rotorua Museum Centennial Development begin in May 2009 with a major extension to the South Wing of the Bath House. Stage 3 saw the building completed to the original footprint proposed by Dr Wohlmann in the early 1900s. The completed south wing was named after Rotorua historian Don Stafford, acknowledging the important contribution he made to the Rotorua Museum and to the wider Rotorua community. Unfortunately, Don Stafford passed away in April 2010 prior to the opening of the Don Stafford Wing in September 2011 when the Rotorua Museum Centennial Project completed the Bath House building to the original proposed specifications, greatly enhancing the Museum’s facilities.

This final stage has provided an extra 1260m² of floor space, and the opportunity to house a number of Tāonga associated with Te Arawa, the local iwi. These carvings, woven works, and works of art, now form long-term displays in the enlarged gallery spaces. Some of the works are associated with prominent ancestors, while others depict events in Rotorua’s history.

These stages also entailed installing air conditioning to improve temperature and humidity control, and rather uniquely, to remove all corrosive hydrogen sulphide in the exhibition spaces, to protect their precious contents.

The Rotorua Museum of Art and History at last reflects its original vision, with the finished project completed early, under budget, and very importantly, in time for the 2011 Rugby World Cup!