

From the Archives

How Monument Hill acquired its name

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The name Monument Hill for the prominent spur immediately to the south of Boatshed Bridge in Pukekura Park is derived from a granite obelisk erected, probably in late 1903, to 777 Trooper Clement Edward Wiggins who, as a member of the 3rd New Zealand Mounted Rifles (the 3rd Contingent), served in South Africa during the Boer War.

Wiggins was a clerk for the Bank of New South Wales at both Eltham and New Plymouth. He had worked in Christchurch before being transferred to Taranaki in 1898. Wiggins joined No. 5 Company of the 3rd Contingent in New Plymouth in February 1900. The Contingent arrived in South Africa on 26 March 1900. Wiggins' war was short. He died, aged 27, from enteric (typhoid) fever at Germiston in South Africa on 13 July 1900. Enteric fever proved to be a more deadly foe than the Boer forces. Of the 3rd Contingent's total of 26 deaths, 20 were from the fever.

In September 1900, the Star and Tukapa Rugby Clubs of New Plymouth proposed a memorial to the three of their former players who had, at that stage, died in the war - Wiggins, Thomas Hempton of Okato, and Charles Enderby of Inglewood. Controversy soon erupted in the correspondence columns of the *Taranaki Herald* as to the siting of the proposed memorial. Ideas ranged from St Mary's Church to Te Henui Cemetery and the Recreation Grounds (as Pukekura Park was known then). One letter counselled that a monument to the three young men would be premature because Taranaki should wait until the end of the conflict, when a memorial to all local casualties could be made.

While it appears that the trio's rugby mates were suitably discouraged, Wiggins' banking colleagues in Taranaki and Canterbury were made of sterner stuff, and they persisted. In May 1903, the Bank of New South Wales Manager at New Plymouth, N. K. MacDiarmid, received consent from the Recreation Grounds Board to erect a memorial, to Wiggins alone, "on the tongue of land near the long island and the path leading to Mr King's."

In August 1903, the *Taranaki Herald* was finally able to report that "the many friends of the late C. E. Wiggins, who volunteered for service in South Africa with the Third Contingent, and died at Germiston, will be pleased to learn that the stone to be erected to his memory, by the officers of the Bank of New South Wales in New Zealand, has just been imported by Mr W. F. Brooking, to whom the work has been entrusted, and its erection will be proceeded with at once. The memorial is an obelisk of polished grey granite, and it is, by permission of the Board, to be placed in the Recreation Grounds" (*Taranaki Herald* 26/8/1903).

What became of the young bank clerk's memorial remains a bit of a mystery. The only real clue is a caption to the postcard photograph of the obelisk by Muir and Moodie (reproduced here) when it was published in the *Taranaki Herald* of 8 March 1962: "... Later the memorial became overgrown and in bad repair and was rolled down the hill and finally removed." It does, however, seem a little strange that such a substantial object was not transferred to somewhere like the Te Henui Cemetery. Maybe the fervour of Wiggins' banking and rugby colleagues had waned somewhat, and cash to complete such a transfer was not forthcoming.

Thus it is that only the name, Monument Hill, and the flattened spur near the Boatshed Bridge where the obelisk once stood, now survive. However, Clement Wiggins' name is recorded on two South African War memorials in New Plymouth, at St. Mary's Pro-cathedral and the fountain on Marsland Hill.