

Russell Henderson

Russell Henderson was a prominent figure of the Alexandra community and gave a significant financial contribution to the development of Central Stories Museum & Art Gallery.

Russell McNeill Henderson was born in Dunedin in 1912 and left his education in Naseby unfinished to support his widowed mother and two younger sisters. He set up his first business, a general store, in Alexandra when he was 18. During his career he established and assisted with a number of successful businesses and organisations throughout the district. Russell served on many community organisations, including Rotary, Lions and the Freemasons. Russell was a part of the group which established the Ranui Rest home in the 1970's and was also a member of the local Borough council for a number of years.

He married Barbara, who was great supporter of culture and art in the town; they had a daughter, Virginia, who now lives in Golden Bay. Barbara and Russell set up the Henderson Trust in 1974 and, upon Russell's death in 1998, bequeathed their home in Bridge Hill to provide a retreat for New Zealand Artists.



Russell Henderson c1970's PAX02.65

Significant Events

1912	Russell McNeill Henderson was born in Dunedin	1973	Russell is elected President of the Lions Club
1925	Russell's Father died and he left school to help his mother in her Bakery and Tea Rooms.	1974	The Henderson Trust is setup
1930	Russell setup his first business, a general store, in Alexandra. He was just 18.	1976	Russell begins a 16 year term on the Alexandra Borough Council
1935	Henderson's Store continues to grow, the business moves to the co-op building for more space	1982	Lions international award Russell the Melvin Jones Fellowship
1938	Russell joins the Freemasons	1990	At the 150th Commonwealth celebrations Russell is awarded a medal for his contribution to the community
1969	Russell joined the Lions Club	1998	Freemasons acknowledge Russell's lengthy service with his 60 year Jewel
1970's	Russell was part of the steering committee that helped establish Ranui Rest Home	1998	Russell dies
1970	Russell became Chairman of Associated Service Club		



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Contributions

Central Stories contribution

Russell Henderson was a philanthropist who gave a large amount of money towards the development of a cultural centre in Alexandra. Russell, and his wife, were passionate about the future of Alexandra and assisted numerous community efforts to ensure progress occurred. Barbara especially, was fond of anything associated with the arts and worked tirelessly to encourage its profile in the community. The Henderson's pledge of \$500,000 to the development of Central Stories is still one of the largest private gifts ever made in Central Otago. Their contribution was gratefully received and we have named Central Otago's only public gallery in their honour.

Local entrepreneur

Russell Henderson's first business, his grocery shop, grew into a large General Store and by 1935 he needed more space and moved his business to the industrial co-op building. Russell was successful in a time when few others were capable; he was ingenious in business and identified niches to his advantage. During WWII for instance, Russell had three Henderson's General Store sales and delivery vans on the road, these were successful as they were largely serving the Ministry of Works' camps. After the national government abolished import licences in 1957, Russell began importing local necessities like curling stones and rabbit traps more economically. He created a flourishing mail order business and had an excellent eye for spotting upcoming trends. Russell was one of the first to predict the television boom, even selling them before people were able to watch anything.



Henderson's store front c1930s

Central Otago community contribution

Russell was active in the community and during the 1970's becoming became heavily involved in a variety of organisations. These included the steering committee that established Ranui Rest Home; The Associated Service Club, of which he was elected chairman; chairman of the Civic Centre Building committee; director of the Central Otago Freezing company; on the board of trustees for the Otago Savings Bank; and on the Reserves and Works committee. In addition to offering his expertise as an entrepreneur and small business owner, Russell served six terms (16 years) for Alexandra on the Alexandra Borough Council, nine of which he was the chairman of the Finance Committee.



Russell And Barbara on their wedding day

During their lives the Henderson's contributed financially to the community, millions in total. Of special note are those donations to: \$500,000 toward the development of the museum and art gallery; \$50,000 to the rowing club for new rooms; \$20,000 towards a

building (and numerous tomatoes) for the Salvation Army; \$30,000 to the Alexandra Musical Society to assist them with their building extension; and \$10,000 towards the Molyneux park pavilion and courts. In addition, upon his death, Russell also left the family home, a unique house designed by Austrian architect Ernst Plischke in 1950, to the Henderson Trust to become a residence for Artists visiting Central.

In 1982 Lions International awarded Russell the Melvin Jones Fellowship and he received a commonwealth medal in 1990. As a Rotary member, Russell was awarded the Paul Harris fellow in 1993. Five years later, shortly before his death, Russell received his 60 year service jewel from the Freemasons.



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Memories and Stories



Russell and Barbara at their home in the 1990's PD 10.003

“...being very community spirited, he was aware of the needs to progress Alexandra”

Bert Kemp, Chairman of CCCT

“when I first met him he was “high as a kite” “on a bar playing a fiddle”

Graeme Anderson, Friend of Russell's since the 1930's

“The philanthropist has several reasons for his generous bequest to the town [Henderson House and Land] He readily admits to being a reformed alcoholic who is grateful for the help ... “I want to repay my debt to society” he says, explaining why he is keen to help people kick the habit”

ODT Article, Trust Founder Plans to Give Away Home, August 25th 1990

“Our contributions to the community must rate at the highest” “will concentrate on morale and good fellowship” excerpt from Russell's first message to the Lions club as newly elected President, 26 July 1973

Esther and Colin McKay, Friends of the Hendersons

“he was an outgoing person, a business person, a shrewd business person”

John Belt, Life Member of the Lions Club

“Barbara was a great recycler, one year the entire CWI float was created from plastic bags she had collected.”

Esme Kilgour, Hendersons neighbour



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