



Right: the front lake.
Above: a small section of the garden (now cleared)



Ngaere Gardens

Mountain Rd, Ngaere

1880's

Use: Residential
Materials: -
NZHPT Registered: Not registered
Legal Description: Pt Lot 11 DP 1942 Pt secs 20 21
 118 BkII Ngaere SD

Historic Value: 2 out of 5

Architectural Value: 1 out of 4

Technical Value: - out of 2

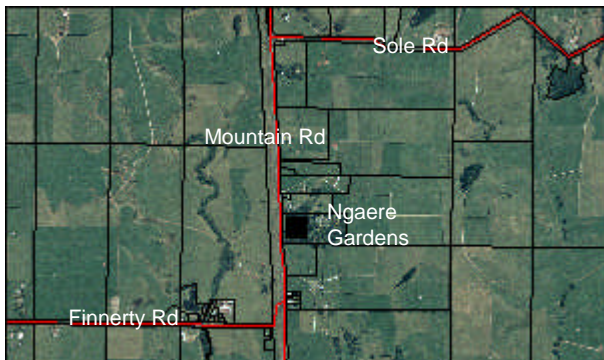
Symbolic Value: - out of 3

Rarity Value: - out of 2

Townscape Value: 1 out of 2

Group Value: - out of 2

Overall Heritage Value: 4 out of 20



Ngaere Gardens started in around the 1880s, as the brain child of Mr. Charles Score Sanders. Legend has it that 29 year old Charlie had bought a section in Inglewood, but upon hearing that his brother was working in Hawera; he sold his farm and went to meet him. Sanders stopped beside a stream in Ngaere to eat his lunch, and immediately fell in love with the spot – later buying it, with his brother taking a neighbouring section.

Mr. Sanders was a hard working and dedicated man – living life by mottos such as *“hard work and plenty of it”* and *“enjoy what you do”*. For this reason, after the first year of buying the property, he had (with the help of a young lad) cleared 12 ½ acres of his land. This was done in-between his 9-hour day working at the local saw mill. His work became even more intense in about 1886, when he hired 14-year-old Arthur Walker to help him. Together they dug a large ornamental lake – hanging lanterns in the trees when it got dark, and working a total of 16-18 hours a day. Walker and Sanders also started collecting fruit trees and rare plants – leasing the land in 1898 to go to America, returning within a couple of years with plants and Canadian Redwood seed. Arthur married Mabel Street in 1900 and they both lived at Ngaere Gardens.

The 58-acre section continued to be cleared for farming, with Arthur taking over the running of it, so that Charlie could focus on the Garden. At this stage the Garden was not open to the public, but many people walked through, admiring the Gardens and buying the fruit. In 1906 they subdivided the property, with Arthur taking 43 acres, the 10 acre Garden being sold, and Charlie keeping 5 acres to transform into a nursery (this section is now Amble Inn Motels). The nursery was very successful, but in 1912 Charlie sold it, and went to live in New Plymouth.

Charles Sanders passed away in New Plymouth in 1933, still a bachelor. His influence continued long past his death, and today Sanders Park, Sanders Avenue, and the Pukekura Park gates in New Plymouth are all memorials to him, and his service.

The Truelove family took over the Ngaere Gardens, with the owner being recorded as Mrs. Jessie Bertha Truelove. They were also dedicated and hard-working, and they made a large number of improvements and modifications to the Gardens in their time – trying (and succeeding) to make it into more of a tourist attraction. The Truelove’s opened the Gardens to the public, who could enjoy the half-acre bush, flowers, lovers’ lane and the three lakes shaped like the North, South and Stewart Islands. To this, the Truelove’s added ‘laughing mirrors’, paddling pools and changing sheds, a circular geometrical ‘carpet garden’, a bush look out, animals such as monkeys, lemurs, an emu and a wallaby, and a Magna Vox Orchestrala – with music that could be heard up Climie Rd. (This was housed on the front veranda – with a huge array of pipes for the effects of all the orchestral instruments. It was played from a perforated paper roll that needed someone turning the handle).

A water chute was also added, much to the delight of all the visitors. A flat-bottomed boat that held around 18 people was positioned on a trolley, at the top of a large, steep water slide. Mr. Truelove would turn a lever, which tilted the trolley forward, before he let go. The boat went down at considerable speed – hitting the water with such force that it almost flipped over backwards, before the front end crashed back down. The boat would then drift across to the other end of the lake, where the passengers would hop out, and the boat would be winched back into position with a petrol engine.

Mrs. Truelove started a tearoom and souvenir shop around this time – selling postcards of the Gardens, amongst other things. The Garden was opened for picnic parties – with schools,

Sunday schools, and other groups streaming through. The Railways also started special excursion trains, and every New Year's Day the entire district would meet there for lunch. This meant there were often around 2000 people in the Gardens, especially on Labour Day, which was the opening day for the season.

The Truelove's were able to put the Garden at its peak, and by all accounts they enjoyed doing it – with Mr. Truelove swimming in the front lake early every morning, all year, and usually in the nude. However, in 1918, they put it on the market, and it was sold to the Lesters just as the war ended.

Mr. Neville Lester and his sons were originally from Auckland, and had been running a bakery and store at Midhirst. They were a very musical family – one was an orchestral conductor, and another a clarinet player. This meant that the focus of the garden was changed more to entertainment, with live concerts from H.C.A. - an eight-piece orchestra from Hawera, and other popular bands. However, it is felt that the Lesters found it “*all a bit much*”, and focused only on entertainment, putting regular announcements of the Garden into the local newspapers, and opening up the Garden for weddings. Saying this, Mr. Lester was very attracted to the nursery, and built eight large glass houses, in which “*beautiful tomatoes*” were grown.

One amusing anecdote from this time was during the polio epidemic of March 1926, when children were forbidden to meet in large numbers. For this reason, a circus was stranded at the Ngaere Gardens – which meant tame elephants were spotted bathing in the front lake. Farmers did not find the situation amusing – as the roaring lions made their cows go dry, the elephants stole their hay, and at one point the monkeys escaped and were riding the neighbouring farmer's cows – causing chaos.

The popularity of the garden gradually waned. Many factors contributing to this, including the Eltham Toll-Gate closing in 1925, meaning that people were more likely to travel to the beach for a day out. The level of the main road was raised, also decreasing the number of visitors, as the road had spoiled the lake by creating a large sandbank underneath the water. Vandals became a problem – taking the rowlocks off the boats, giving the monkeys lighted cigarettes so they could set the hay on fire, stealing all the vegetables, and stripping a gooseberry bush of its unripe fruit. By the time two boys smashed the engine in the water chute in about 1935 the Lesters had had enough, and moved to open a nurseryman business in Stratford.

The Garden remained open, with numerous people taking ownership of it throughout the years. In 1969 the main lake was accidentally drained when the neighbour had a drain digger operating. The Garden was revived when the Pioneer Village Society leased the front part, but when they were unable to obtain the freehold they moved to the outskirts of Stratford in 1976.

The Garden has recently been demolished – with only a few mature trees, a part of the front lake and the original homestead remaining to serve as a memory of the prosperous and successful Garden it once was.