

A HISTORICAL HĪKOI AROUND  
**Suzanne Aubert's**  
**WELLINGTON**  
 TE WHANGANUI-A-TARA



Suzanne Aubert (1835–1926), founder of the Sisters of Compassion.



**ISLAND BAY**

**Suzanne Aubert**  
 SPIRITUALITY CENTRE  
 2 Rhine Street, Island Bay



# ✦ Suzanne Aubert's Wellington Hiko ✦

IN JANUARY 1899, Suzanne Aubert and three Home of Compassion Sisters arrived in Wellington, with two shillings and sixpence between them. They immediately set about establishing works of charity that would win the loyalty and admiration of Wellingtonians from all backgrounds and strata of society. Wellington was Suzanne Aubert's city. This was the city where her pioneering vision was most fully realised and where her practical Christianity shone so brilliantly.

She and her Sisters became well-known and loved around the city, as they pushed their baskets on wheels to collect food and clothing for the poor. Suzanne was also a raconteur and master-influencer, winning the support of the governor-general of the day, as well as Wellington's politicians and community leaders, for her ambitious projects. Nowhere is Suzanne Aubert honoured more than in Wellington.

When she died in 1926, at the age of 91, the city stopped its ordinary business, the courts adjourned to honour her. Thousands lined Willis Street and Boulcott Street to pay their respects. This hiko is an opportunity to follow in the footsteps of this remarkable woman around Wellington, and appreciate just what a life of faith and compassion can achieve.

## 1 FIRST ARRIVAL

When Suzanne Aubert arrived in Wellington in 1899, she disembarked at the Te Aro Railway Station, situated at the foot of Kent and Cambridge Terrace near what is now the Courtenay Place bus stop. At that time, the Te Aro Station was near the waterfront. Apart from one break when she was overseas, Suzanne would spend the rest of her life in Wellington.

## 2 BUCKLE STREET

Now walk up Cambridge/Kent Terrace to Buckle Street nearby. This is the route that Suzanne Aubert and her companions followed when they turned up unannounced one evening to stay with a friend in Sussex Square. The next morning the sisters took possession of their cottage. Suzanne Aubert only rented the house in the beginning but was soon able to buy it, as well as some adjoining houses. It was right here that Suzanne Aubert's amazing vision and mission in Wellington started. Tory Street, Taranaki Street, Cuba Street, Willis Street, Courtenay Place were all familiar places where Suzanne and her sisters would have wheeled their three - wheeled "prams"

## 3 HOME FOR THE DISABLED

In 1900 Suzanne established the first Home for the disabled in Wellington, caring for the elderly suffering from chronic and degenerative conditions who had nowhere else to go. At one stage her property extended down Buckle Street to Cambridge Terrace. One of the houses was used as a home for disabled children, and another was the Novitiate for the formation of Sisters of Compassion.

## 4 NEW ZEALAND'S FIRST CRÛCHE

Another house on Buckle Street was used as a crèche, which enabled women to have their children looked after while they worked. This was New Zealand's first-ever crèche and took in up to 34 children. Women were able to leave their children in the sisters' care between 7 a.m and 6 p.m. The first building was demolished and replaced with a purpose - built crèche in 1914. This building was restored in 2014-2015 and now occupies a prime position in Pukeahu National War Memorial Park.

## 5 SOUP KITCHEN

In 1901 Suzanne set up a Soup Kitchen in Buckle Street. It was a humble dwelling - simply a porch adjoining the main kitchen, with a hatch between. The Soup Kitchen was for men who had come to the city for casual work on the wharves, but much of their time was spent unemployed. Suzanne couldn't bear the thought of anyone going hungry, so she opened a place where hot soup could be obtained morning and evening. The Soup Kitchen was eventually moved into another building, and operates to this day from upper Tory Street.

## 6 ST JOSEPH'S CHURCH

Suzanne's first parish church - St Joseph's Church - used to stand on the corner of Buckle and Tory Streets. This was an eye-catching landmark in its day, but sadly it is long gone. A modern St Joseph's Church now stands adjacent to the Mt Victoria Tunnel, just a short walk from Buckle Street. This spectacular church is well worth visiting. At the wish of the parishioners, a beautiful chapel in the new Church was dedicated to Suzanne Aubert to acknowledge her care for the "sick poor" in the Te Aro area.

## 7 ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE TERRACE

Through the back fence from Suzanne's properties was the grand, multi-storied St Patrick's College, established by the Marist Fathers in 1885. In those days it was a boarding school and the Sisters ran the infirmary. When the influenza pandemic hit New Zealand in 1918, St Pat's was used as a public hospital, staffed heroically by the Sisters of Compassion. One of the sisters, Sr Natalie O'Meara, contracted the deadly virus and died.

## 8 GOVERNMENT HOUSE

If you stand outside the restored crèche in Pukeahu National War Memorial Park and look across the Basin Reserve, you will see Government House, the official residence of New Zealand's Governor - General. Suzanne won the active support and admiration of a succession of Governor Generals and their wives, including the Ranfurly's, the Plunket's, the Ferguson's, and the Islington's.

## 9 ORIENTAL BAY

Oriental Bay is a must-see destination for every visitor to Wellington. This was where Suzanne once saved the lives of a mother and child. The mother had been sacked from her work, and in desperation wanted to end her own life and the life of her child. Suzanne came to the rescue of the woman, saving her life and taking care of her baby.

## 10 TORY STREET

Suzanne and the sisters were a very visible part of Wellington life. Walk down Tory Street and imagine them wheeling their wicker "prams" past you to collect food and clothing for distribution to the needy. In the early days there were hotels on just about every corner. The sisters received the left-overs from many of them and the sight of them pushing their wickerhamper on wheels was common place. These days the Soup Kitchen is still operating at 132 Tory Street.

## 11 WILLIS STREET

The sister's prams came from nearby. Mr. Edwin Arnold used to have a cane-maker's shop in Willis Street, and made the first "prams" for the sisters, used for collecting food and clothing in the city. His house still stands on the corner of Kensington and Abel Smith Streets.

## 12 TOWN HALL, CUBA STREET

Suzanne Aubert and her sisters would have also wheeled their wicker-prams down Cuba Street - the home of all things "alternative" in modern Wellington. At the harbour end of the street is the Town Hall, where Suzanne received a presentation of two thousand pounds from her beloved Wellingtonians in 1910, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of her arrival in New Zealand.

## 13 ST MARY OF THE ANGELS, BOULCOTT STREET

In the heart of the city, off Willis Street, stands Wellington's grandest church, St Mary of the Angels in Boulcott Street. Suzanne Aubert was a regular visitor here. As you inspect this imposing church with its gothic architecture, imagine her funeral which was held here on October 5, 1926. It was the largest funeral ever accorded a woman in New Zealand, with the crowds spilling out into Boulcott and Willis Street.

## 14 22 BOULCOTT STREET

Along the road at 22 Boulcott Street lived a close friend of Suzanne's, Elizabeth Seddon. She was the daughter of Sir Richard Seddon, New Zealand's longest-serving Premier. Suzanne frequently visited there to attend meetings of the Plunket Society and the Society for the Welfare of Women and Children.



## 15 FLAGSTAFF HILL

Up behind St. Mary's is Flagstaff Hill. You can get to it, either up O'Reilly Avenue, or from the Terrace, down Allenby Terrace to Terrace Gardens. This is where Suzanne and the sisters went one Boxing Day for an outing, which Suzanne later described in a letter: "... I took the sisters to the 'flag station' on Boxing Day. The wind was blowing hurricane and it was the greatest fun. We went up in 55 minutes, sat up there for about one hour, warmed our frozen teeth with bananas and came down in 35 minutes, the skirts of our habits acting like sails. We were back for dinner."

## 16 MOUNT STREET CEMETERY

While on the Terrace, you can also visit the Catholic Cemetery, situated nearby in Mount Street, which reaches back to the earliest days of colonial settlement in Wellington. The cemetery was consecrated by Bishop Pompallier on January 6, 1841. The first nuns and priests who worked in Wellington are buried here. Suzanne often visited Father O'Reilly's grave (the first parish priest of St Mary of the Angels), and the graves of pioneering French Marists.

## 17 BASILICA OF THE SACRED HEART

Take a stroll up Hill Street beside parliament grounds and visit the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, Thorndon's parish Church and the Cardinal's Cathedral. Beside the Basilica stands Viard House, the residence of Wellington's archbishops. Suzanne visited Viard House frequently to see her old friend and supporter, Archbishop Francis Redwood.

## 18 ST MARY'S COLLEGE, HILL STREET

This Catholic precinct in Thorndon includes Sacred Heart Primary School and St Mary's College. On the grounds there used to be a large house known as "The Providence". This was where some of the older girls from the home in Jerusalem came to stay until they were found positions as servants in the houses of the rich.



## 19 MOLESWORTH STREET

Opposite the main gates of Parliament House in Molesworth St was a boot-maker's shop, owned by a Mr. Brodie. He and his wife were great supporters of Suzanne Aubert, letting her store and mix her renowned herbal remedies in a shed at the back of their dwelling. Mr. Brogan's daughter married Mr. Whitaker, who owned a book shop on Lambton Quay. Suzanne frequently went to his shop to talk to the couple and to rest. While in Rome Suzanne wrote to him.

## 20 TURNBULL HOUSE

If you stand beside the Beehive and look across Bolton Street, you will see the warm, red brickwork of Turnbull House, one of Wellington's finest buildings and the birthplace of New Zealand's national library. It was built as the private residence of Mr. Alexander Turnbull, and housed his extensive collection of books, maps and documents. These formed the nucleus of the New Zealand National Library collection. Mrs. Scullin, Mr. Turnbull's housekeeper was a long-time benefactor of the sisters.

## 21 HOME OF COMPASSION, ISLAND BAY

The original home for children, an enormous building, was opened in 1907 at 2 Rhine Street, Island Bay, following a huge fundraising effort. It was initially for the care of disadvantaged children and babies, a number of whom were transferred from Jerusalem. The numbers soon increased as further ex-nuptial children were admitted, along with disabled children. More than 2,000 people attended the opening. Many were impressed with the sisters' practical brand of Christianity and their non-sectarian approach.

## 22 THE RESERVOIR

Soon after it opened, the new Home for children at Island Bay was severely affected by a water shortage. A spring was found on the hillside, and a large cross-section of Wellington society turned out to help construct a reservoir on the property. Even the Governor-General of the time, Lord Plunket, came to help.

## 23 DEE STREET

Suzanne frequently travelled by tram from Island Bay into the city. On the corner of Dee Street, where the new town-houses are, there used to be a Chinese market garden. The Sisters often went down to the gardens to gather celery plants that had become too old to sell. Needless to say, they had celery for breakfast, dinner and tea.

## 24 HOME OF COMPASSION SCHOOL

On the left as you go up the driveway at the Home of Compassion is where the school for the children was situated. It had formerly been a laundry before serving as a school for over fifty years!

## 25 COMPASSION HOSPITAL

The original Home that Suzanne Aubert built in 1906-7 was demolished in 1987 and replaced by Compassion Hospital, which provided outstanding nursing care to the people of Wellington over many years. In June 2002, the hospital was closed and converted into the present complex.

## 26 NURSERY, CHILDREN'S HOME, DAYCARE CENTRE

In April 1941 a new nursery was constructed to house babies and toddlers, because the nursery in the Home could not accommodate all the unwanted babies who needed care as a result of the war. This building was declared a health and safety risk and was demolished during the early 1980s. It was replaced with a new Children's Home, which opened in March, 1982. However, with the rapid changes in childcare, a residential home for children was no longer needed. A Daycare Centre was open in 1990. This building was demolished in 2015 and replaced with Sisters' Units.

## 27 ISLAND BAY GROUNDS

The sisters worked hard to create spaces of peace and serenity in the grounds at Island Bay. In the spring of 1911, Suzanne Aubert inaugurated a large tree-planting scheme all along the boundary of the property. Suzanne hoped the Soup Kitchen clients would dig the holes but unfortunately they did not arrive. The Novices gladly dug the holes and planted the trees. Two thousand one hundred trees were planted.

## 28 SUZANNE AUBERT HERITAGE CENTRE

The Suzanne Aubert Heritage Centre, opened in 2011, is a "must-see" for anyone interested in this remarkable woman. The Centre has an extensive collection of memorabilia and visual displays that chart the stages of her to reflect on Suzanne's extraordinarily productive life and pass an enjoyable morning or afternoon.

## 29 SUZANNE AUBERT'S RESTING PLACE

Attached to the Chapel of Our Lady of Compassion is the Resting Place where Suzanne's remains were re-located in 2016 from further up the hill. When Suzanne died in 1926, she was buried in the Karori Cemetery. Twenty-five years later her remains were transferred to the Home she founded in Island Bay. The Resting Place is a reflective contemplative space of faith acknowledging Suzanne Aubert and telling her story.

## 30 CHAPEL OF OUR LADY OF COMPASSION

Chapel of Our Lady of Compassion was opened on the 25 March, 1990. It is a beautiful chapel and the first permanent chapel the sisters ever had at Island Bay. The Stations of the Cross and other stained glass window were designed by renowned local artist John Drawbridge, and crafted by Peter Kirbyof Paraparaumu.

## 31 OUR LADY'S GROTTTO

On the Island Bay site is a miniature replica of the famous grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes in France. It was built by Mr Bill Kraus, a tireless supporter of the Sisters. From 1921, Bill spent many hours improving and maintaining the grounds and driveways of the Home of Compassion at Island Bay.

## 32 SUZANNE AUBERT SPIRITUALITY CENTRE

A major redevelopment of the Island Bay site is took place in 2017 to expand the Heritage Centre and enhance the Suzanne Aubert Spirituality Centre. The Centre offers individuals and groups opportunities for spiritual renewal and to learn more about the dynamic spirituality of Suzanne Aubert. To find out more about the programme of seminars and workshops available, visit [www.compassion.org.nz](http://www.compassion.org.nz)

SHARE THE JOURNEY / TOHAINATE HAERENGA

TO FIND OUT MORE about the inspirational life of Suzanne Aubert and her journey to sainthood, visit

[www.suzanneaubert.co.nz](http://www.suzanneaubert.co.nz)