



**Issue 28**  
July 2025



# Auckland Council Archives

## Ngā Pūranga Kaunihera

### Auckland begins at the Archives

Kia ora and welcome to the July 2025 issue of our newsletter. We aim to keep you up to date with our mahi at Council Archives, as well as sharing interesting stories we uncover working with Auckland's records.

#### **In this issue:**

- Archivist Heléna Lunt writes about the Civil Defence Emergency Precautions Scheme.
- Team Leader James Armstrong delves into the 1937 housing survey of Auckland City.
- In staff news, we say goodbye to Conservator Aline Curtis and wish her all the best in her role as Collection Manager at Tairāwhiti Museum and Art Gallery. Also, we write about Marina Kukovkina, who joined us as part of Auckland Council's two-year graduate programme.
- We have information about our current relocation project. This is for records currently stored at our interim locations in Albany and Papakura.

## Civilian Defence: The Emergency Precautions Scheme

Heléna Lunt, Archivist

*2025 marks 80 years since the end of World War II. We acknowledge and commemorate the sacrifices made by New Zealanders serving overseas and by those on the home front.*

Today, in Aotearoa New Zealand, we rely upon the National Emergency Management Agency, or Civil Defence, in times of disaster. But did you know that this agency had its beginnings in the prewar and World War II periods?

With the risk of international conflict rising in the mid-1930s, the Committee of Imperial Defence brought together members of the New Zealand Defence Force, Police and Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) to create the Emergency Precautions Committee (Civil Defence NZ, 3). Membership later widened to include other government departments, and by 1939, handbooks detailing the Emergency Precautions Scheme (EPS) were distributed (Civil Defence NZ, 3). At the time, major concerns were 'emergency conditions arising from enemy attack, epidemics, earthquakes and other natural disasters' (Civil Defence NZ, 3). And by December 1940, the threat of an enemy attack became very real when our Pacific Island neighbour, Nauru, was attacked by a German raider (Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage, par. 4)

Extracts from a Meeting of Wardens and Sub-Wardens held in the Town Hall, Auckland, on 30 April 1940 (Auckland Council Archives, DBC 380/1), demonstrate the heightened concerns for local attacks. The document lists key locations likely to be targeted, such as North Head and the Naval Base, and it anticipates the aims of the enemy being to disrupt communications, destroy stores of supplies and to disorganise inhabitants (Auckland Council Archives, DBC 380/1). It even estimates that Aucklanders would only have an hour's warning to prepare for an attack, based off the speeds and locations of scouting planes. Fears and tensions were running high – it was time for civilians to mobilise.

The EPS relied on the cooperation of citizens and work of volunteers, having 'adopted from Britain the principal that community safety was largely a local responsibility' (Civil Defence NZ, 3). The structure of the EPS also reflected this, with the country split into three regions, which 'were in turn subdivided into 16 districts, each under a controller,' with 'committees of councillors were responsible for EPS organisation in each local body' (Civil Defence NZ, 3).

Poster encouraging people to volunteer to help the war effort, including to assist the Emergency Precautions Scheme. Eph-D-WAR-WII-1940-03, Alexander Turnbull Library.



Women and men who were not eligible to serve, were called upon to volunteer their time and skills. Devonport Borough Council distributed questionnaire forms (separate forms for women and men) to households in the area to complete, with then Mayor, H F W Meikle (the EPS Warden-In-Charge for the borough) urging for full cooperation. The different forms for women and men posed different questions. Men were asked, 'if you own a boat, how many people could you transport across the harbour?' and 'have you any camp gear, caravan or country cottage available?' (Auckland Council Archives, DBC 380/1). With the borough located in an area that was likely to be targeted by enemy attack, it was important to know how and where to evacuate citizens. Women were asked to choose training courses they would be prepared to undertake, such as first aid, cooking and motor mechanics, as well as to indicate the services they would be willing to provide, such as caring for children and telephone exchange work (Auckland Council Archives, DBC 380/1). Volunteers did drills and activities and warden systems for local areas were created (Civil Defence NZ, 4).

Header of the Borough of  
Devonport EPS  
Questionnaire Form for Men.  
Auckland Council Archives  
reference DBC 380/1.

The bombing of Pearl Harbour in 1941 again heightened tensions and EPS units saw a rapid increase in volunteers along with the introduction of a fire watching scheme and Emergency Shelter Regulations (Civil Defence NZ, 4). But by 1942, the threats towards the country had diminished, and EPS activities lessened. By 1943, the scheme became known as Civil Defence, in 1944 the DIA had taken over control and by the end of the war, the EPS units had demobilised (Civil Defence NZ, 4). Despite never needing to respond to an enemy attack in Aotearoa New Zealand, the EPS still played an important role in strengthening communities and building skills and confidence during a challenging time on the home front.

#### Notes:

DBC 380/1 has been digitised and the documents and questionnaires can be viewed [here](#):

#### Sources:

Civil Defence NZ. *Civil Defence in New Zealand: A Short History*, 1990.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170811090600/http://www.civildefence.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/publications/Short-History-of-Civil-Defence.pdf>

Emergency Precautions Scheme Organisation - Agenda Paper, 1940, DBC 380/1, box 1 [Auckland Council Archives]

E V Paul (Firm). New Zealand: Volunteer for national service. The government offers every man and woman the opportunity of assisting in the war effort. Join a branch of the Emergency Reserve Corps - Home Guard ... Emergency Precautions Scheme ... Women's War Service Auxiliary ... There is work to be done. Join now! Apply to nearest town or country clerk. E V Paul, Government Printer, Wellington [1940]. Ref: Eph-D-WAR-WII-1940-03. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. [/records/36098806](#)

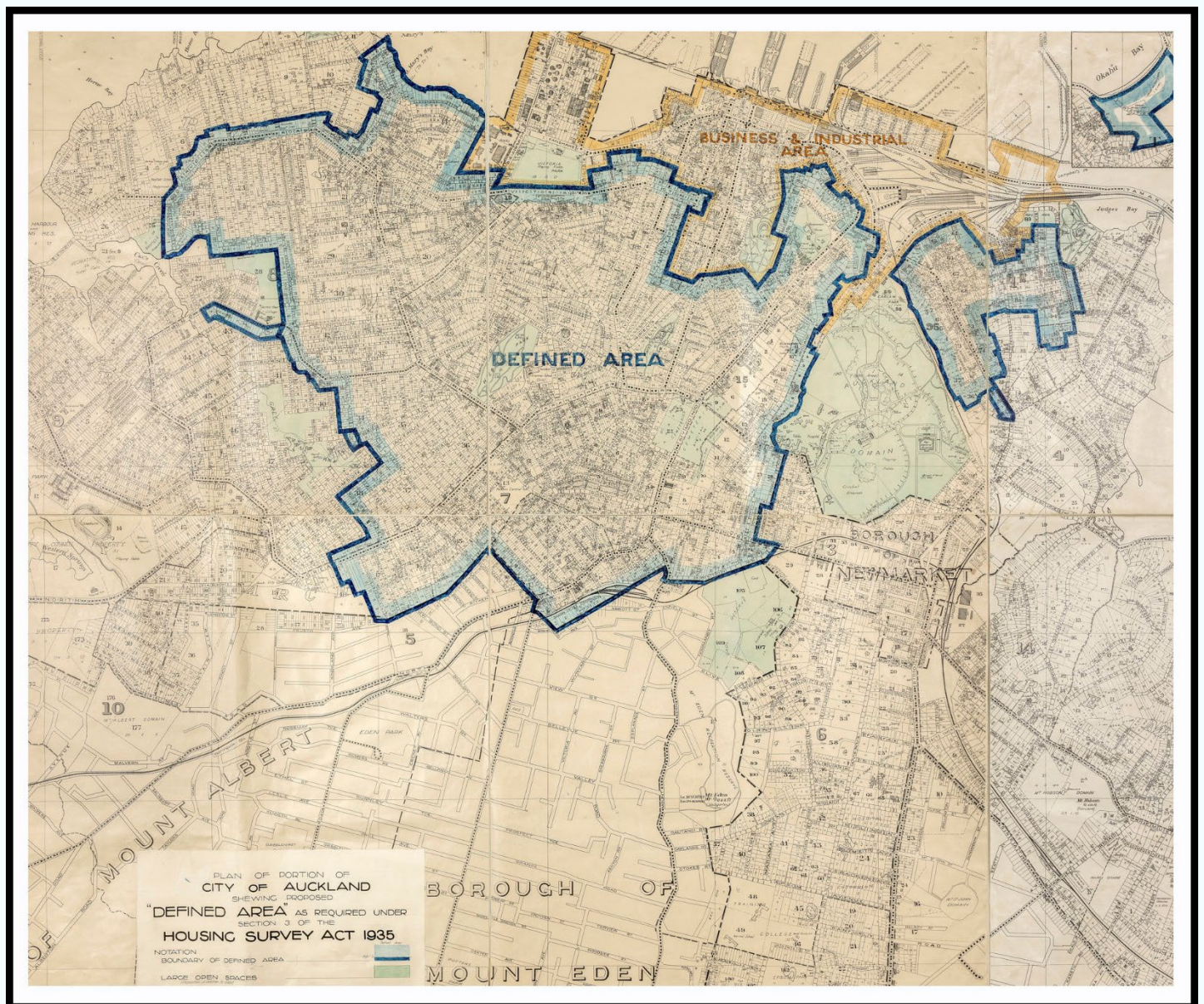
Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage. 'The Second World War at Home - Challenges,' 2 July 2024.

<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/second-world-war-at-home/challenges>



## ‘The Past Neglect of Property’: The Auckland City Housing Survey of 1937

James Armstrong, Team Leader Archives Management



Auckland City Council plan of portion of City of Auckland showing proposed ‘Defined Area’ under the Housing Survey Act 1935 (Auckland Council Archives, ACC 005/466)

A recent Stats NZ report on housing in Aotearoa unsurprisingly confirmed for those who live there that the Auckland region has the country’s least affordable housing. Problems with housing long pre-date such reports. The Housing Survey Act of 1935 was intended to determine ‘the extent to which the existing housing accommodation in the Dominion falls short of reasonable requirements’. In particular, the government sought information on the type, construction and condition of dwellings and the extent of overcrowding, as well as quantities for substandard dwellings and the numbers of those whose health and comfort were jeopardised by poor accommodation. A consequence of cross-party concern about substandard and slum housing, it led in 1936 to the creation by the first Labour government of the



Department of Housing Construction and to completion in 1937 of that administration's first state houses.

The Housing Survey Act and its associated regulations required local authorities to conduct surveys of housing in any town or city that had on 1 April 1934 not less than one thousand inhabitants. Of 119 towns and cities, almost all had been surveyed by March 1939, encompassing some 901,000 people living in just over 225,000 dwellings.

The housing survey within Auckland City Council's boundaries (on the Auckland isthmus) was restricted to a defined area of about 692 hectares (1710 acres), encompassing the older parts of the city that included inner portions of Grey Lynn, Parnell and Ponsonby and the whole of the Arch Hill, Eden Terrace, Freeman's Bay, Grafton, and Newton districts. Excluded were areas not thought to contain significant quantities of unsatisfactory dwellings and commercial and industrial areas where there were few houses. Surprise at the extent of substandard housing revealed by its investigators led the council to request permission from the government to survey beyond the areas originally agreed. Council was allowed to extend the survey to a further 117 hectares (290 acres) in Grey Lynn, Parnell and Ponsonby, and a small part of Remuera. The survey's full defined area represented 11 per cent of the territory for which Auckland City Council was responsible and included what was then known as the Orakei Native Settlement and market gardens 'run by Asiatics'. Council terminology reflected the times – poor housing was characterised as 'residential decadence', while the terms 'Natives' and 'Asiatics' were used to describe those who were not of European ethnicity. Council's City Engineer was responsible for the survey, acknowledging it to be 'the largest statistical enquiry yet undertaken by the Council' since its creation in 1871.

Nineteen full-time temporary staff were employed to conduct door-to-door enquiries and process the information collected, based in a makeshift office at Auckland Town Hall. The survey took six months, from April to September 1937. A Department of Labour wage subsidy met part of the costs for field and office work. Permanent council staff re-inspected over 3780 substandard houses. Information was collected on the type, construction and condition of residential buildings. The survey also collected details of occupancy levels, facilities for cooking, washing and sanitation, number of rooms, bedroom sizes, and the rents paid by those who were tenants. It sought to establish if dwellings could be repaired or were in such poor condition that demolition was the best option. Although the survey contained personal questions and involved investigators taking internal measurements, only one householder refused to cooperate and successfully fought in court to resist what he saw as intrusion into his privacy. Anecdotes by staff about their reception while conducting the survey included being frequently mistaken for insurance collectors and on one occasion, thanks to their papers and measuring tape, for a priest and an undertaker.

Nationally, about three per cent of the approximately 225,000 dwellings surveyed were held to be totally unsatisfactory and about 14 per cent to be unsatisfactory but repairable. Some 12 per cent of dwellings surveyed were considered to provide accommodation below the minimum standard, probably affecting over 108,000 people given that each dwelling had on average four occupants. About 10,700 buildings were surveyed by Auckland City Council, including single-family homes, apartment, boarding, and lodging houses. These housed approximately 48,200 people. Some 90 per cent of those surveyed were built from wood and almost all had no more than one or two storeys. Over two thirds were occupied by tenants rather than owner-occupiers. Seven per cent of buildings were held to be beyond repair, while 26 per cent were unsatisfactory but capable of repair. Almost 120 detached outhouses were being used for residential purposes contrary to the city's by-laws. Probably reflecting their age, about 35 per cent of houses in the defined area of Auckland provided accommodation below the minimum standard, significantly higher than the national average. The City Engineer noted that overcrowding was made worse by sub-letting and was suspicious that some rooms had been temporarily emptied prior to the survey. Other concerns included single-room occupancy, where people cooked, ate and slept in one room, often in attics or basements, lack of domestic facilities, and sharing of one bath and lavatory by upward of twenty people. The City Engineer remarked, 'One is amazed at the past neglect of property'.

In a decade scarred by high unemployment, he further noted, 'It is probably safe to observe that the problem presents possibilities of sufficient repair work to keep all the workers connected with the building trades in the City in constant employment for some years'.

<b>DWELLING SURVEY.</b>				[Form No. 2.]
<b>I. REFERENCE DATA.</b>				
A. Name of street: <u>23 Carruth Rd</u>	C. Card-number of Dwelling Survey: <u>13</u>	E. Name of occupier: <u>G. Thompson</u>		
B. Street number or numbers of premises: <u>23</u>	D. Number of dwelling units in building: <u>1</u>	F. Name and address of owner (if not occupier): <u>Miss Mc Kinley</u> <u>15 Gordon Rd Mt Eden</u>		
<b>II. DATA RELATING TO ENTIRE STRUCTURE.</b> <small>(Whether of one or more dwelling units.)</small>		<b>III. DATA RELATING TO DWELLING UNIT.</b>		
G. Class of Dwellinghouse— 1. Private dwelling ( ) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2. Apartment-house .. <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Boardinghouse .. <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Lodginghouse .. <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Combined dwelling-house .. <input type="checkbox"/>		L. Physical Condition— Satisfactory .. <input type="checkbox"/> Unsatisfactory but reparable .. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Repair impracticable .. <input type="checkbox"/>		
H. Materials of Construction— 1. Wood .. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2. Brick .. <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Concrete .. <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Stucco .. <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Other materials .. <input type="checkbox"/>		O. Occupancy— Owner .. <input type="checkbox"/> Tenant .. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Vacant .. <input type="checkbox"/> If rented, weekly rental: <u>5/6</u>		
I. Number of Storeys in Building: .. <u>1</u>		P. Sanitary Equipment— Washtub .. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Basin .. <input type="checkbox"/> Bath .. <input type="checkbox"/> Water-closet pan .. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sink .. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
K. Open Spaces. Dimensions. Front yard .. <u>80x40x6</u> Side yard .. <u>48x24</u> Rear yard .. <u>80x136</u> Distances. Frontage .. <u>80</u> Rear lot .. <u>200</u>		Q. Domestic Equipment— Water supply .. <u>8</u> Food storage .. <u>8</u> Utensil storage .. <u>8</u> Cooking .. <u>8</u> Heating .. <u>8</u>		
M. Relating to Apartment-houses only— 1. Partitions: .. <u>1</u> 2. Common ways: .. <u>1</u> 3. Fire-protection: .. <u>1</u> 4. Garbage disposal: .. <u>1</u>		R. Number of Rooms— Bedrooms .. <u>1</u> Kitchen .. <u>1</u> Other living-rooms .. <u>1</u> Bathroom .. <u>1</u> Water-closet .. <u>1</u> Lavatory .. <u>1</u> Washhouse .. <u>1</u>		
N. Relating to Boardinghouses and Lodginghouses only— 1. Sanitary accommodation: .. <u>1</u> 2. Common ways: .. <u>1</u> 3. Fire-protection: .. <u>1</u> 4. Individual kitchens: .. <u>1</u> 5. Proprietor's kitchen: .. <u>1</u>		S. Sizes of Bedrooms— <u>114x10</u> 7 <u>x</u> 2 <u>x</u> 8 <u>x</u> 3 <u>x</u> 9 <u>x</u> 4 <u>x</u> 10 <u>x</u> 5 <u>x</u> 11 <u>x</u> 6 <u>x</u> 12 <u>x</u>		
		T. Lighting and Ventilation— Number of rooms without proper windows: .. <u>1</u> Number of rooms without direct daylight: .. <u>1</u> Number of rooms without proper ventilation: .. <u>1</u> Signature of Investigating Officer: <u>JH Wells</u>		

Housing Survey Act 1935 dwelling survey card for 23 Carruth Road, Papatoetoe (Auckland Council Archives, PTT 003/43)

Survey records for individual properties in Auckland city do not appear to have survived, even though the council bought cabinets for their storage. Examples of cards and their associated forms in a Papatoetoe Borough Council subject file (PTT 003/43) demonstrate what a valuable resource they would have become for understanding domestic life in Auckland in the 1930s and for genealogists. They include information such as age and occupation like that collected during the national census but also record why people lived at their present locality and contain detailed information about dwellings and their facilities. Dunedin City Council Archives is fortunate to hold survey cards for almost 8500 Dunedin houses. Auckland Council Archives has copies of Housing Survey Act plans created by Auckland City Council and associated subject files kept by its City Engineer and Town Clerk.

A pamphlet entitled *Slums of Auckland* (1942) complained that the rents for state houses were beyond reach for people living in the worst areas of Auckland city surveyed in 1937. Most state houses were designed as single-family detached dwellings and there continued to be limited provision by central or local government for single people and pensioners. Pre-war proposals by Auckland City Council to build pensioner flats on Ponsonby Road and multi-storey flats on Grey's Avenue came to naught. The Decadent Areas Committee was established by the council as part of its response to the 1937 housing survey. The committee toured parts of Auckland city in 1938, noting that many living in slum conditions in streets off Cook Street, Nelson Street, and at Airedale Street (colloquially known as the 'Māori Pa') were Māori families. In 1942, the Auckland City Housing Act was passed at the behest of Auckland City Council, which then produced designs for new houses and details of a scheme for borrowing to fund their construction using the council's assistance.

Auckland has continued to survey and attempt to address its housing issues. Substandard housing and slum areas remained a problem after the Second World War. In 1947, a new housing survey by Auckland City Council commenced. Transit housing used empty American army buildings to house those waiting for permanent accommodation. In 1950, Freeman's Bay was declared a housing reclamation area. The first tenants moved into council's Surrey Crescent pensioner flats in 1952. In 1955, the Māori Women's Welfare League conducted a survey of Auckland houses occupied by Māori, looking at the condition of

buildings and occupancy levels. Auckland City Council resolved to sell its rental houses and pensioner units to Housing New Zealand in 2002. Stats NZ's new housing report notes that housing density has increased in every one of Auckland's local board areas over the decade since 2013. Home ownership is higher for those of European ethnicity than for Māori and Asian or Pasifika ethnicity and rates of home ownership increase with age. In 2024, average annual housing costs for households in Auckland increased by 31 per cent compared to those for the previous report in 2020.

#### Sources:

Auckland City Council plans for the Housing Survey Act 1935, circa 1936-1938 (Auckland Council Archives, ACC 005/466-467, 1064)

Auckland City Council Town Clerk's Department subject file on Housing Survey Act 1935 and regulations 1938, 1935-1938 (Auckland Council Archives, ACC 275 record no 35-294 box 202)

Auckland City Council Works Department subject file on Housing Survey Act 1935 and regulations 1936, 1934-1955 (Auckland Council Archives, ACC 219 record no 35-425 box 100)

Papatoetoe Borough Council subject file on housing survey and shortage, 1936-1946 (Auckland Council Archives, PTT 003/43)

W B Bland, *Slums of Auckland* (Wellington: Universal Printing Products for the Progressive Publishing Society, 1942)

G W A Bush, *Decently and in Order: The Government of the City of Auckland, 1840-1971* (Auckland: Collins for Auckland City Council, 1971)

J G Coates, *Housing in New Zealand: An Outline of Policy* (Wellington: Government Printer, 1935)

Cedric Firth, *State Housing in New Zealand* (Wellington: Ministry of Works, 1949), pp.4-6

Penny Isaac and Erik Olssen, 'The Justification for Labour's Housing Scheme: The Discourse of "the Slum"', in *At Home in New Zealand: Houses, History, People*, ed by Barbara Brookes (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2000), pp.107-124

Stats NZ (2025), *Housing in Aotearoa New Zealand: 2025*. Retrieved from [www.stats.govt.nz](https://www.stats.govt.nz)

## Staff News



We said farewell last month to our Conservator Aline Curtis, who is returning to Gisborne to become Collection Manager at Tairāwhiti Museum and Art Gallery. Aline began work in Council Archives in 2022, becoming full time in May 2023. She has a Bookbinding National Diploma from Paris and an MA in book conservation from Camberwell College of Arts, London, as well as an MA in history from the University of Florence and a BA in history from the Sorbonne in Paris. Her work experience before joining council included

internships in bookbinding, paper and book conservation in France and Italy and teaching conservation at the Ecole de Condé and EAC School in Paris. Aline had worked as a freelance book and paper conservator in France, Spain, Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon (a French island off Newfoundland), and in New Zealand. She had also worked on site conserving objects at the Scott Base in Antarctica for the Antarctica Heritage Trust. We will miss Aline's enthusiasm, friendliness and energetic attitude to her work, particularly her meticulous approach to planning for the relocations of some of council's archives.





In March, Marina Kukovkina joined the archives team for a three-week rotation, part of Auckland Council's two-year graduate programme within Data Services. Originally from Russia, Marina gained a bachelor's degree in applied mathematics and computer science before moving to New Zealand where she graduated from the University of Canterbury with a master's degree in applied data science.

During her time with us, Marina worked on several small projects; checking transfer lists of archives from the legacy Manukau City Council, as well as describing a series of One Tree Hill Borough Council aerial photographs using map books to check former street names. She also researched some historical photographs from Ellerslie Borough Council, using microfilmed newspapers and online resources to confirm the identities of some of the subjects.

She found checking the storage locations of some of our records in the archives database particularly interesting, *'this task inspired me, as it allowed me to think of some simple non-programming ways to optimize the process of checking the information on the website'*.

*'Overall, I enjoyed my time with the Archives, as I was given a chance to communicate with fascinating people, learn more about Auckland and the documents stored in its libraries, and contribute to the work of the team'.*

Marina, from everyone in Archives, thank you for all your work and we wish you all the best for the remainder of council's graduate programme.

## Archives on the move: Relocation

Auckland Council Archives has begun a relocation project for records currently stored at our interim storage locations in Papakura and Albany. As part of this process, some archives will be temporarily quarantined to ensure their safe transfer.

Please be advised that access to archives being relocated or quarantined may be limited during this period.

We appreciate your understanding and patience. Please email [archives@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:archives@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz) or phone (09) 890 2427 for assistance.



### Find out more

Visit: [aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](http://aucklandcouncil.govt.nz)

Enquire: [archive@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:archive@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz)

Phone: 09 890 2427

Write Auckland Council, Private Bag 92300

Victoria Street West, Auckland 1142 | DX CX 10032

