



Keirunga Homestead (originally Stadacona) was built around 1907 by Robert Holt for Reginald and Ruth Gardiner using heart kauri and tōtara, hauled by bullock dray up Joll Road. The cottage was built for Reginald's sister, Emily Rose around the same time. The Gardiners played a pivotal role in the cultural life of Havelock North, initiating the 'Havelock Work' – a movement promoting music, theatre, literature, and art. With Harold Large,

they launched *Forerunner* magazine and helped inspire the founding of the mystical temple Whare Ra in 1912.

The homestead features simple, functional design, high timber ceilings, built-in window seats, and handcrafted details. The Cottage blended Arts and Crafts and bungalow styles and was a residence until the mid-1980s. Both buildings are listed as Category II Heritage Buildings.



In 1910, Charles Tanner, the son of Thomas Tanner the founder of Hastings, bought Stadacona and renamed it **Keirunga**, meaning "The Place on the Hill." He planted a scarlet gum, now a notable tree, and maintained picking gardens for floral displays.

In 1929, **George and Elizabeth Nelson** bought the property. George, a founder of the Hawke's Bay Herald Tribune, and a director of J.J. Nimon & Co was a civil engineer and conservationist, developed the landscape with paths, drainage, rock walls, and plantings to manage flooding and attract native birds. Elizabeth, a WWI nurse who served in Egypt, maintained her interest in the arts.

Arthur's Path named for Arthur Morris, who drained the lower part of the gully and formed the path along a woodland of oak trees that George had planted with oaks collected from all over Hawke's Bay.

In 1956, George and Elizabeth Nelson decided to gift around seven hectares of garden to the Havelock North Borough Council, with the area containing the Homestead sold to the Council for a nominal sum following George Nelson's death in 1964, aged 93

In 1966, Frank Bacon and Beryl Blackmore approached the Council with an idea to turn the property into a cultural centre. A public meeting attended by 60 people founded the Keirunga Gardens Society Inc, with Elizabeth Nelson, George's widow, as patron. This group would lease the property from the Council. Volunteers cleaned up the gardens and began fundraising to fix up the house.

In 1976 the Nelson Room – a multi-purpose area was built for \$27,000. The Havelock North Rotary Club commemorative garden was laid out.

In 1985 the 'new' wing annexed to the Nelson Room was added and provided a pottery, artists' studio, a caretaker's flat, drama meeting room and toilet facilities at a cost of approximately \$200,000. John Kingsford was the Architect for both buildings.

Keirunga Gardens is 17 hectares of both formal gardens and parklands and includes the Park Railway opened in 1992 consisting of a 846 metre mini-train track that winds its way around the park through tunnels and across bridges.

In February 2024 the \$400,000 refurbishment of the Homestead opened. the funding covered items such as wheelchair access, new kitchen and toilet facilities, heat pumps, lighting and sprinklers.