



Church Steps have had many roles

By SALLY KIDSON

They are at the heart of Nelson city and the most-photographed Nelson landmark and tomorrow marks their 100th birthday.

The centennial will be celebrated on the steps at 4pm tomorrow. A panel about their history will be unveiled by Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage Chris Finlayson.

The celebrations will be led by the Nelson Cathedral Choir and will end with a haka from Nelson College. One hundred children from Nelson Central School choir will also be singing and releasing 100 balloons.

Nelson-based history writer Karen Stade has written a book about the steps: *Meet You At the Church Steps, A Social History of a Nelson Landmark*.

She will launch the book at the step's centennial celebrations.

Karen says that from the time Captain Arthur Wakefield arrived to set up a colony in Nelson and set up a post on the hill – Piki mai – right through to the current day the steps have been the centre for the Nelson community.

Events held on them since 1858 illustrate a time-line of Nelson's history and the things important to the region and its residents.

"I think that's what makes it quite special – that continuum."

Karen says Church Hill has fulfilled many roles for the city's residents for more than 170 years. The granite steps were gifted by philanthropist Thomas Cawthron and were formally opened in 1913, replacing wooden steps built in 1858.

"Nelsonians have gathered at the steps to celebrate royal weddings and jubilees, farewell and welcome home men from war, cheer royal visitors and VIPs, remember the city's war dead, celebrate and commemorate anniversaries, applaud sporting success, and to gather in protest over a raft of issues."

She says the steps remain a favourite space for community



History: Nelson author Karen Stade with her book *Meet You at the Church Steps*, sits on the Cawthron granite steps. The Church Steps were opened after being gifted to Nelson city by Thomas Cawthron on September 20, 1913.

Photo: MARTIN DE RUYTER

events; including Carols by Candlelight, protests, outdoor events, the spectacular Piki Mai light show and the mass haka at the start of Rugby World Cup 2011.

"They are also a place to simply sit in the sun, enjoy the view and chat with friends."

Karen says writing the book involved working with an image and then trying to find the story that went with it.

Some of the stories were easier to find than others and she spent hours trawling through the "fabulous resource" of Papers Past and hours of looking at older newspapers on microfilm at the library.

She got the idea to write a book about the steps while researching another book and discovering the plethora of images around the

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Gathering place: People gathered at the Church Steps at lunch-time.

Photo: MARION VAN DIJK

Place of protest: Christine Grove of Nelson played 76 Trombones during a DEMO4DEMOCracy protest on the Church Steps last month.

Photo: PATRICK HAMILTON



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