

# Paul Titchener

Paul has contributed to the North Shore through his long years in public life as a councillor and as mayor of North Shore City. He is proud of his family's deep roots in the area. His columns about North Shore local history, written over many years for the *North Shore Times Advertiser*, and his collection of those columns published in volumes entitled *Beginnings*, have been a significant contribution to building a feeling of community on the North Shore.

The Titchener family has been living on the North Shore since the 1890s. *My grandfather, Lionel, who lived in then rural Francis Street, Hauraki, was a councillor in the old Takapuna Borough Council in the 1930s.* His father's cousin, Jim Titchener, was the last mayor of Devonport Borough. Paul thinks that his own involvement in local body politics was pre-ordained: *It's obviously in the genes somewhere.*

Paul was born in April 1941 at a nursing home in Mt Eden. His father was serving in the Navy on board HMNZS *Kiwi* at the time. Upon his return from the war, the family returned to the Shore, living first in Milford and then in a house built by his father in Stanley Point. *We have always been a North Shore family.*

Paul is the eldest of four, with three younger sisters. My father was raised [in Takapuna] *and went to Takapuna Primary School and then on to Takapuna Grammar in 1928.* Paul also attended Takapuna Grammar in 1954; at that time the school took pupils from as far north as Warkworth, Devonport and the East Coast Bays. *I remember sitting with pupils who would milk cows in the*

*morning, got the bus to school, slept most of the day to go back at night to milk cows.*

Paul was keen to be a farmer; after leaving Takapuna Grammar in 1958 he went to Flock House, a farm training school, near Bulls for a year before working on a farm. He then attended Massey Agricultural College (now Massey University) in Palmerston North and did a three-year Diploma of Agriculture in sheep and cattle. After graduating he farmed at Tangowahine in Northland, where he managed a property. He quickly realised that there wasn't much of a future just working on farms. With his agricultural qualifications he became a sales representative for a company called Merck Sharp and Dohme, selling Thibenzole sheep and cattle drench. He worked for the company for four years.

In 1965 he and Prue married. The couple have four children. *An opportunity came up and I applied for and got a job as an agricultural marketing manager for a company called Pfizer, and was with them until the end of 1972.* When it seemed Paul would

be transferred to Hong Kong to work, *we decided we couldn't raise children in an apartment in Hong Kong.* Paul and his father decided to set up their own company, Titchener Export Ltd, exporting New Zealand-made dairy equipment, and did that very successfully for ten years. In 1979 the company was sold; *Prue and I thought we'd do something together, so we bought a little book and stationery shop in Devonport on Victoria Road. We ran that for just on 11 years.*

During this time Paul started to research and write on the history of Devonport; this eventually grew into writing about the history of the North Shore. Paul has had a lifelong interest in history. His grandfather would tell him stories of the early days of the 1890s onwards. *To him Stanley Bay was never Stanley Bay, it was always Brick Bay because that's where they had a small brick*

*works where the bricks were made for building Calliope dry dock.*

Paul realised that the memories of this generation had to be preserved. *I got very interested in talking to older people, interviewing*

*people, and their memories. I'm very pleased I did this because a lot of them are long gone. I wandered into the offices of North Shore Times Advertiser, then in Huron Street in Takapuna, and asked the editor, Pat Gundry, if she'd be interested in printing an article I'd written about the disappearing gun on the top of Mt Victoria.*

In 1977 he began writing a column called 'Beginnings', and he had written over 660 articles by the time he stopped in 1991. At one stage it was the longest-running column in New Zealand. The collected volumes of all the *Beginnings* articles are now sought after, as no new reprints have ever been published. As a result of his columns, Paul received many requests to speak to various groups on the North Shore about the area's history. He came to be known in the community, and this was *what stimulated me to get into Council and certainly for the mayoralty. People knew me; it was the power of the pen.* He regrets, however, that his early interviews were not

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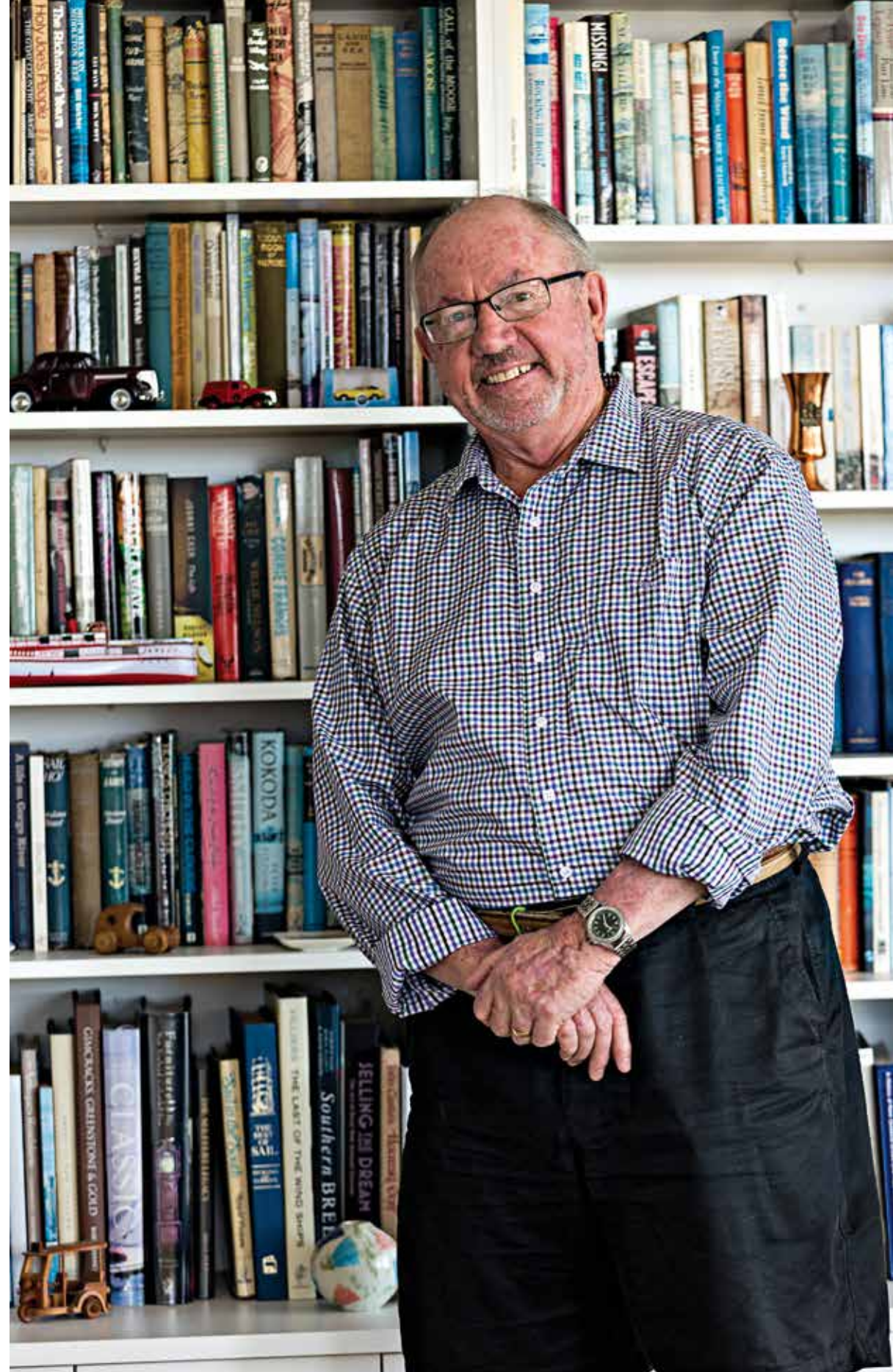
recorded as oral history interviews. *I sat there with my pad and pencil and jotted it all down, brought it home to handwrite it, and Prue would type it. There were literally millions of words.* Another by-product of the weekly columns was that people would give him papers, records, and other materials of historical significance. He has donated his unique collection, 'The Titchener Collection', to the Takapuna Library North Auckland Research Centre. *It's part of North Shore history and it's got to be looked after.* He co-wrote the book *The First 50 Years Of Takapuna Grammar School*; the school is located on Lake Road halfway between Devonport and Takapuna. He is particularly proud to have been part of a dedicated group of ex-pupils who successfully stopped the planned demolition of this classic North Shore landmark,

which was built from 1924 to 1927, because it was deemed an 'earthquake risk'. The building has now been earthquake-proofed and will stand for many years into the future.

With Rob Cornelius, and other like-minded people keen on local history, he helped organise the Devonport Historical Society in 1977. *We had nothing, but there was an old Presbyterian church in Upper Church Street in Devonport. When the Church pulled out, the building was vacant and we were given half of it.* The building was moved to the site of the old Mount Cambria quarry in 1978. *It's a difficult place to get to, it's not very well-known and tourists can never find it, but it sits in there very well.* The Society would have preferred a more central location, closer to the ferry and shops. Renovation of the building was done through one of the government's youth employment schemes at the time. Paul no longer has any involvement with the museum, but has donated material over the years.

Another community facility that he helped establish is the Depot in Devonport's Clarence Street. He attended a meeting

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called by the Devonport Borough Council to discuss establishing a community house. The suggested site was the villa on the slopes of Mount Victoria, but it was not really suitable because it was difficult to access. Paul suggested the Borough Council's old depot site in Clarence Street. *Out of that comment came the Depot, as it's called today. Once the Devonport Borough Council folded, it was one of the things we made sure was locked in tightly, that North Shore City couldn't sell it off.*

Paul first stood for the Auckland Harbour Board in 1980; he narrowly missed being elected. In 1983 he stood again and won, holding the seat for two terms until the Harbour Board was phased out during a local body reform by the Labour Minister of Local Government, Michael Bassett, in 1989. Paul was also a member of the Auckland Regional Authority (later called the Auckland Regional Council) from 1985 to 1991. While some people did not agree that councillors should be elected to more than one body, Paul feels that the North Shore had to be adequately represented on these regional organisations and that it helped the public *to look past your own boundaries.*

As part of the 1989 local body reforms, the number of Auckland local bodies were reduced from 47 boroughs to four cities across Auckland. These new cities were North Shore, Waitakere, Manukau and Auckland. North Shore City was formed out of the boroughs of Devonport and Northcote, and the cities of Birkenhead, East Coast Bays and Takapuna, and the North Shore Water Board. *I stood for one of the two positions on the Devonport ward, and was duly elected. Devonport made every effort, in fact became quite famous, for trying to avoid being taken into the North Shore City. The Republic of Devonport was formed, and there were barriers put up and there were*



*Paul, with his wife, Prue, hearing of his election results success, October 1992*

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North Shore City Council  
1989 – 1992



Auckland City Council Archives Ref: 868-1

BACK Row: H. Ryburn (QSO), J. Thomas, B. Putt, E. Stewart, J. Hinton, P. Kelly

MIDDLE Row: J. Simpson, P. Hadlee, R. Aberhart, E. Davis, G. Becroft, J. O'Connor

FRONT Row: P. Titchener (JP), J. Sampson (OBE, JP), A. Hartley (Mayor, JP), P. Thomas (Deputy Mayor, JP), D. Norris, A. Clark

ABSENT: R. Morris

*even going to be passports issued.* The anti-amalgamation movement was organised by the late Terry Sheehan and others. *We had this situation where Devonport was dragged screaming and kicking into North Shore City.*

The new North Shore City Council had 19 councillors, and Paul felt that, to begin with, they were rather parochial. *They didn't see things from a North Shore City perspective—was it good for the city?* This made some meetings rather tense. Paul had been elected on the Alliance Party-aligned ticket. The other significant group was the councillors, including Mayor Ann Hartley, from Team North Harbour, which was aligned with the Labour Party.

Paul stood for election in 1992 as mayor of North Shore City; he was elected, replacing Ann Hartley. Paul was mayor for one term, from 1992 to 1995. He found it a very satisfying but also demanding. He made sure to attend functions all over the city. *I felt that doing this was healing the wounds of the parochial differences. That was my ambition on that Council. It was not always easy.* Paul offers the example of the Council buying land so that the public could have access to Takapuna Beach. In order to fund the purchase the Council sold its Auckland Airport shares and, as mayor, Paul signed off on the agreement. *I remember taking quite a lot of criticism and flack from people in the Northcote/Birkenhead area who were saying, 'Why has the Council spent money on buying land at the back of Takapuna Beach? It should have been spent in our part of the world.' You ran into this the whole time.* He feels that some people were unable to think of North Shore City as a single entity; rather, they were still focused on the needs of their own area.

During his time as mayor, Paul supported previous mayor Ann Hartley's community development initiatives. *It was a good policy the first Council set up.* Paul did not, however, support the location of the North Harbour Stadium. He felt that there was no proper planning involved in the development of Albany. *Perhaps, if anything, it's a good example of how not to develop an area.*

Paul attended meetings in Wellington with the Minister's mayoral advisory committee. The committee was concerned that the old borough council concept should not be lost; Paul explains this concept as, *a council where people could come to a local council or know a councillor down the road and bend his ear if they were having problems.* Paul was also on the executive of the Local Government Bodies Association, and chair of the Roding Structure Group for New Zealand.

Paul argues that this role of the community boards dubbed 'the eyes and ears of the Council' was to make sure that councillors were still accountable to the people they represented in their communities. *The mayor had the right to sit on any community board, which I used to try and do, but you often felt that you weren't really wanted there because they wanted to run it in their own way. However, local attitudes have now changed. It's all part of maturing and growing up. A city growing up from primary school, to teenage years, to adult years. Unfortunately, I think North Shore City was just getting into its adult years when the whole thing was chopped off at the knees and became part of Auckland City. The city never really had a chance to establish its own identity.*

In 2001 Paul and Prue sold their house in Bayswater to move to Tairua. They had been running their old home as a bed and breakfast for ten years. They lived in Tairua for ten years before returning to Grey Lynn in Auckland to be closer to family. Today, Paul and Prue both volunteer at the local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB); she as an interviewer, he as a justice of the peace. Paul still writes the occasional article for *New Zealand Memories* magazine, but says he now prefers to read rather than write. He values the importance of oral history. *It's very important to hear a person's voice, who may no longer be with us, actually talking about what they were doing. A lot of the interviews I've done over the years the people have now gone.*

*Opposite: Paul Titchener with his wife, Prue*

