

Notes on John Seed

(Great-great-great-uncle of Daphne, Laurence, Glenys and Lynette Hay)

John Seed born: At sea off the coast of France, May 1800.

Christened: 23 May 1800, Stoke Damerel, Devon, England.

Anne Franklin born: c1801, Devizes, Wiltshire, England

Married: c1825, Liverpool, Lancashire, England.

Arrived in NZ: 14 November 1840, Port Nicholson, in 'Martha Ridgway'.

Children: William, born c1827
Sarah Anne, born c1832

John Seed died: 3 May 1878, Milton, Otago.

Anne Seed née Franklin died: 21 June 1893, Milton.

John Seed is not in the direct Hay line of ancestry, being the eldest brother of Hugh Seed, our great-great-grandfather. However, John is important in the Hay story as the first of our forebears to emigrate to New Zealand, and as the reason that our direct Seed ancestor (Elizabeth Ellen) came to this country. Also, he and his family are interesting in their own right.

John Seed's birth and forebears

John Seed was born aboard ship off the coast of France, or so his death register entry tells us; what his father Thomas and mother Jane (née Smith) were doing at sea is not known. After they returned to their home in Stoke Damerel – a large parish adjoining Plymouth in Devon – John was christened in the parish church of St Andrew and St Luke on 23 May 1800, the church in which Thomas and Jane had been married some three years previously, on 22 March 1797. Church records suggest that Thomas and Jane both came from families well-established in the parish.

John was the second child born to Thomas and Jane Seed, their first, Elizabeth Eleanor, being christened in May 1798. After John, three more children were born of the marriage: William, Thomas and Hugh (c1817), but where or when these births occurred is not certain. Neither is it certain how long the family stayed in Devon, but by about 1830 a Thomas Seed is listed, along with a number of others of that name, in the Applotment Book for the parish of Kilkeel, Co. Down, Ireland, as farming in Leitrim townland, Thomas with 25 acres of 4th-grade land (there were seven grades). Seeds seem to have farmed in this area for a generation or so by this time, renting land from Lord Kilmorey.

Thomas Seed died in 1841 in Leitrim, aged 65, and was buried on 8 February. Jane survived him until March 1852, dying at the age of 75.

(For information about earlier Seed forebears see *Notes on Elizabeth Ellen Seed.*)

John Seed's work and marriage

For whatever reason, Thomas and Jane's eldest son John did not take up farming but was apprenticed as a cabinet-maker and carpenter. Marjorie Connell, in her *History of the Seed Family: early Wellington settlers*, published in 1994, provides the unsourced information that

in 1820, John Seed left Leitrim, Ireland, for England, settling like so many of his countrymen, in Liverpool. He married Ann Nash Franklyn late in 1824. Their first child William was born on the 23rd of November 1827, in Liverpool and baptised at St. Michael's Church, Upper Pitt Street. Their daughter Sarah Ann was born in 1832.

Certainly, he was in Liverpool by the early 1820s, as his death register entry provides the information that when he was 25 years old (1825 or '26) he married Anne Franklin in that city.

Pigot's Lancashire Directory for 1830 and for 1834 list a John Seed, cabinetmaker, at respectively 105 London Road and 192 London Road, Liverpool.

Emigration

No doubt lured by the somewhat over-ripe advertising of the New Zealand Company, on 5 July 1840, John and Anne Seed and their two children left their home at 11 Edmond Street, Liverpool, for London where they embarked on the 'Martha Ridgway' at Gravesend, and a free passage to New Zealand. The ship arrived in Wellington with 202 immigrants on 14 November of that year. It is intriguing to note that John, being a carpenter, was assigned the role of assistant surgeon for the voyage!

Sir Henry Brett records in *White Wings*, Vol.2, that

shortly after the 'Martha Ridgway' left England smallpox broke out, and during the passage to New Zealand the ship was never wholly free from cases.... Several of the passengers were suffering from the illness when the vessel reached Port Nicholson, so a quarantine ground was established on the eastern shores of the harbour. The ship was taken across and everybody aboard was placed in strict quarantine for three weeks.

After leaving New Zealand to return to England, the 'Martha Ridgway' was wrecked in the Torres Strait and abandoned.

John Seed's life in New Zealand

John Seed and family were landed probably on the Petone beach when they first arrived in Port Nicholson in 1840, but on 1 January 1841 John signed a 14-year lease for an acre of ground in Thorndon, Wellington, plot 537 on the New Zealand Co. plan, along what is now Mulgrave Street, for £8 per annum. (Plot 537 is now occupied by the Defence Dept headquarters and the north end of Aitken Street.) A condition of the lease was that he build a substantial dwelling on the front of the section.

John Seed's letters home would make fascinating reading, however, all but one of the letters which have been preserved (and are now held in the Turnbull Library) are from various relatives in the UK writing to John or to his son William. The earliest of these is from John's mother:

[The spellings and punctuation (or lack of it) are as in the original.]

Letrim April 11th 1843

Dear Son

I am happy to here that your all in a good state of heath, & that you are so comfortably settled I enjoy a midling state of health considering my age and the Death of your father [Thomas] your aunt has but midling health and is getting very infirm Hugh [John's younger brother] is married and has one child which is called for you to keep up the name and his wife [Mary Glenny] is very agreeable and industerous and I am as comfortable as sircumstances will allow all your friends in Letrim is happy to here from you and your Brother Williams family is all well and wishes they were all with you I hope you will write as every opportunity for their is nothing gives me so much plesure in this side of time as to here of my childrens wellfare I Conclud with My Blessing and prayers for you and Ann, and the family

I remain your affectionate

Mother to Death

Jane Seed

Obviously, John's reports of life in Wellington must have been positive. Being a carpenter, it is likely that initially he had plenty of work as every immigrant family would need a house built, and the business/administrative town centre also would have had to be developed from scratch.

'John Seed, carpenter' was listed on the town's rate return in 1845, but it would seem from what Thomas Seed writes to William, his nephew, in Wellington that matters had taken a turn for the worse. The letter is dated 17 June 1846; Thomas, in Chester, is replying to a letter from William and says, in part:

Dear William

.... As to your account of the state of things with you it is very painful to me to read it but I have seen similar statements in the papers & have often wondered how you were doing for you never told me in what way your father is imployed [sic] but I suppose you would think we knew as [sic] or at least thought we would conclude that he followed his own trade but we heard all the particulars from a Lady who came from Wellington & lived for some time in your house I did not see her as she had left for London before I went down though I went on purpose to se [sic] her but your Aunt Franklin told me & I was much grieved to hear that your Father was not steady as he ought to be for I know the effect that this will have upon your domestic comfort & expecially [sic] upon your Dear Mother. But you and your sister must be as good to her as you can & try to comfort her; but I know you will do this; I only wish theyt [sic] you were in England again - that I might help you. But tell me what you think of doing & if it is possible for you to get home again & tell me what your Father is likely to do & if you think he would be any better if he came back to England, but I fear it would make little improvement for he seems wedded to his Idol & I fear nothing but the grace of God will turn him & for this we must pray & I hope he will reflect & then - I know he will turn - I am sorry to say your Uncle W.F. is no better though I do not now see much of him But I hope God will turn his hart [sic] & then - there is no fear but his life will be changed; here we see the evils of turning from the service of God. now let me ask you have you yet given your heart to God & are you now walking in the fear of God, if so you can claim his guiding care, but if not you have no friend to help you & open your way for you but let me recommend to you Jesus Christ as the best friend for I have tried him for some years & now

he appears to me more precious than ever. Oh William go to him and make him your friend for your own sake & for the sake of your Mother & Father....

So praying that God may bless you I remain your Affect. Uncle Thos Seed

In the same post was a letter dated 20 June 1846 to William from his cousin William Franklin in Liverpool. William Seed's news to William Franklin had obviously been as bad as that in his letter to his uncle, as William F replies: 'Times are bad enough at home here but still not so far so as in your Colony – I am very sorry you ever went out if you could manage to get home if such a thing could be managed - I am sure you would come on a great deal better than out there'.

On 28 August of that same year Thomas, now in Liverpool, wrote directly to his brother:

Dear John,

.... ...also tell me what is the general state of Ann's health I fear it is not verry [*sic*] good for I doubt there is not all that kind attention towards her on your part which there ought to be at least if we are to believe the report which a person gave us who came from Wellington but of this I said enough in my last & now will only say in all things do as your concience [*sic*] bids you & then you will have that comfort to which you have be [*sic*] long a stranger Oh John fly back to Christ for you know there is no peace for the wicked, do not think I am dogmatical in thus addressing you – for it flows from a heart that can love & which is not lost to gratitude for I remember your kindness & the more than human kindness of Anne & nothing on earth would would [*sic*] give me greater pleasure to hear that you & your family are all comfortable & walking in the fear of God, now do tell me all particulars about your self & family spiritually & temporaly [*sic*] --

My Dear Ellen joins me in love to you all & I remain yours affect'y Thos Seed

Goodwood

Whatever John's failing was can only be guessed at, but it did not seem to affect his skill and reputation as a carpenter and cabinet-maker. On 10 May 1849 John sailed from Wellington to Waikouaiti, east Otago, in the schooner 'Twins', with seven other carpenters and sawyers and a bullock driver en route to Goodwood. This was the property of Charles Suisted, a wealthy Swede who had recruited the best tradesmen he could find to build and decorate a mansion on his newly-acquired land; John Seed was employed as head carpenter for the project. On arrival at Goodwood John supervised the cutting of timber for and the building of a house for his own family, then a large barn (still standing in 2012), used initially as a residence. However, the building in 1851 of the 16-room homestead (demolished in the 1930s) was not supervised by John Seed; possibly he had moved on from Goodwood by then.

After building his own house, John returned to Wellington, sailing from there in the cutter 'Alpha' with his wife and daughter, along with a number of Suisted relatives, to arrive in Port Chalmers on 17 January 1850. (William remained in Wellington in employment with the New Zealand Co.) There being no road north yet, the party would have then sailed up the coast to Waikouaiti, landed from surf boats onto the beach, and rode horses or walked to Goodwood.

It was from the Seed house at Goodwood that Sarah Anne was married in 1850. Also, a letter is still extant from the five-months'-married William, written on 9

September 1850 from Goodwood, where he was visiting his parents, to his young wife in Wellington.

The country and prospects in Otago must have appealed to John, as by February 1855 his name was on the Otago Provincial Council electoral roll for the electorate of Tokomairiro [Milton]. To be eligible as a voter at this time John must have been a land-owner. Sarah and her husband William Black were also in Milton.

Napier – and news from home

But by December 1856 John and Anne Seed are to be found living in Napier, John described on the 1858 roll for that electorate as a settler owning freehold land in the township. The attraction here was that William had moved from Wellington to Ahuriri (Napier) in April 1855 where he was employed in government service.

While John was resident in Napier, word reached him from his brother Hugh of the hard time that the Leitrim Seeds were getting from the agent of their titled landlord. Strangely, Hugh wrote not directly to John but to William. The letter is from Leitrim (or Leatrim as Hugh spells it) and is dated 14 November 1857.

[The spellings and punctuation (or lack of it) are as in the original.]

Dear Nephew,

I now sit down to write these few lines in hopes that the will come to your hand for I have none that can assist me in forwarding a letter to you for Brother Thomas has gone out of England but to where I cannot tell and Brother William is dead this six years and Mother is dead also this five years so I am all alone and brothers part of the land was sold to strange people and the are so contentious that the Agent wants to break the lease so the bailiff came to us and demanded the lease of me and I got time to write to you. So I went to Liverpool to look for brother Thos so when I went to Birkenhead I went to the house where he was the last time I saw him the told me he was not in that part of the Kingdom this two years so mother give him the lease to keep as she thought it would be safer with him on account of the damp of our house so he has got it with him and I want a letter of life from your Father if he be alive and it will require to be signed by a Magestrate and come as soon as possible for we are in his power to [*i.e. until*] then and if that can be accomplished we can contend with the World a bit longer in it and if that cannot be got I think it will beat us for the agent we have he is a real tirant and very mutch on for having no leases so that he will have the whole parish under him and poor people cannot stand his opressoon so I hope you will asist me in forwarding a letter from your father and as for my little family I may let you know we have six children the Eldest is a boy his name is John and the next is a girl her Name is Jane next Sarah Anne next Elisabeth ellen and the next Anamaria next is Esther So as to tell their ages to sutch a list of names it would be to tedious to mention....but Meary [*Mary Glenny, Hugh's wife*] and all our family Joins me in sending our kindest love to you and family also to your Father Mother Sister and family So I remain Dear Nephew your very affectionate Uncle

Hugh Seed

PS please write as soon as this comes to hand

William obviously responded to this pitiful plea, forwarding the letter to his father, who sent Hugh the following statement sworn before Napier's resident magistrate on 25 March 1858:

I John Seed of Napier, Ahuriri, in the Province of Wellington, New Zealand, hereby solemnly declare that I am the person in whose name a Life lease was made out for certain lands in Leitrim in the parish of Mourne, County Down, Ireland, to my late Father Thomas Seed from Lord Kilmurray and now held by my brother Hugh Seed; and further that I left England for New Zealand on or about June 1840 in the ship 'Martha Ridgway' and am now living at Napier aforesaid.

Signed John Seed

To the UK and back

Ian Church in his invaluable *Otago's Infant Years* records that the barque 'Equator' left Gravesend, England, circa 23 July 1858 carrying general cargo and, amongst the few passengers, C. Suisted and John Seed. Church states that the ship 'was damaged in bad weather and arrived Wellington 20 Jan [1859] after 181 days' – about twice the length of a normal voyage. John could have been in the UK for not much more than a month. Why he would have made such a brief visit 'home' is not known.

More news from Leitrim

It would appear that John had not travelled to Co. Downe while in the UK, as on 12 August 1858 Hugh wrote again from 'Leatrim' to William, making no mention of having seen his father. Hugh's situation back in the 'Old Country' was obviously still not good, though at least the land had not been taken from him. The letter in part reads as follows:

[The spellings and punctuation (or lack of it) are as in the original.]

Dear Nephew

I now sit down to write these few lines in answer to your kind and welcome letter for which I give you many thanks for your goodness to me but your will never be forgot.... you wish to know if that we will go out to you and respecting means I am very hapy to think that I have a chance of getting out but our family is yet to small [*i.e. too young*] for to go to a strange country with yet for another year and then if I am spared I will embrace the proposal...but at the present all we would get for our bit of land would do little for us and if that we can make any better preparations respecting Education to our children and in puting in all the crop we can but since last wrote to you I had the misfortune of loosing my fine horse which was a loss of about £12 to me and not well prepared for repleasing him as I have some money to make up this year for when Brother William died he left me in some dept that I bailed him in so now I have it to pay the letter that you sent of your Father has left us all wright I have written him a long letter at this time so as he may see how things go on with us here.... I remain your ever affectionate Uncle to death

Hugh Seed

Farmer Seed of Milton – and a couple of nieces

In November 1858 the Napier newspaper lists John as subscribing £1 towards the erection of an Episcopalian church in the town (though at this time he would have been still on the high seas), but certainly by February 1861 he was well established back in Milton, Otago, his name appearing then in a list of the members of the Tokomairiro Agricultural Society, along with that of his son-in-law William Black. The

1862 electoral roll for the Bruce electorate lists John's voting qualification as 'Freehold, 50acs, sect. & house, Tokomairiro.' His will describes the land as Block XI, Section 95, on the NZ Company's map of the area.

It was here on his farm at Brooklands ('along the Back Road, Milton, about a mile or so from Springfield Road corner', according to Sarah Hamilton née Murphy) that he welcomed two of his nieces from the Leitrim townland, Hugh's daughters Elizabeth Ellen aged 19 and the older Jane, who had arrived in Port Chalmers on 15 March 1869 after a rough passage in the ship 'Edward P. Bouverie'.

Three years or so later, Elizabeth Ellen Seed married William Murphy in Milton [see *separate essays*] to produce, amongst others, Mary Seed Murphy. Jane married George Capstick in 1870. Almost certainly, without their Uncle John being well established here, the girls would never have come to New Zealand – his importance to the Hay story in New Zealand is obvious!

Final years and death

Despite some rather rocky patches along the way, John Seed had managed to maintain or regain the 'comfortable' lifestyle that he had reported to the folks back home in the early 1840s. Possibly a useful source of income had been his investment in the Bruce Coal Co., as notified in the *New Zealand Government Gazette* of 1874 (p.321).

John Seed, farmer, continued to live at Brooklands until early 1876 when he let his house – 'a good four-roomed cottage, two-acre grass paddock, large orchard and kitchen garden' according to the newspaper advertisement – and he and Anne went to stay with their son William in Wellington. Two years later they returned to Milton and were staying with their daughter Sarah Anne and her husband William Black, when John Seed took ill; he died on 3 May 1878 at the age of 78, and is buried in St John's Anglican churchyard, Milton. The cause of death is given on his death certificate as 'Atheromatous disease of the blood vessels of the brain' leading to 'Apoplexy' 24 hours before his decease.

John's newspaper obituary includes the following appreciation:

There are many in the district who will not hastily forget the genial humour of the old gentleman, which, coupled with his unostentatious mode of life, and his straight-forward and upright conduct, will cause his name to be held in high respect as one of the early pioneers of the Colony.

The official, nationwide *Return of Freeholders* of October 1882 includes the name of Ann Seed of Milton shown as owning 52 acres worth £700 in Bruce county – no doubt the family farm at Brooklands.

Anne Nash Seed née Franklin survived her husband by 15 years, dying (of 'Old age') on 21 June 1893 in Milton aged 92, and is buried with him.

John and Anne Seed's children

The Seed children accompanied their parents to New Zealand in 1840, William aged 13 years and Sarah Anne, 8. [For further information see Notes on the Children of John Seed.]