

Notes on Joseph Wallace and Sarah née Spurdle

(Great-grandparents of John, Peter, Margaret, Randle and David Major)

Joseph Wallace born: 9 May 1853, Whanganui.

Sarah Spurdle born: 31 December 1854, New Plymouth.

Married: 10 December 1873, Trinity Wesleyan Church, Whanganui.

Children: *Sarah Esther, born 8 March 1875, Matarawa, Whanganui.
Frederick Oliver, born 5 June 1876, Matarawa, Whanganui.
John Alexander, born 1878, Matarawa, Whanganui.
Morris, born 1879, Whanganui; died 1879, Matarawa, Whanganui.
Charles Martin, born 1880, Matarawa, Whanganui.
Leonard Joseph, born 1881, Whanganui.
Garland, born 1883, Whanganui.
Florence Harriet, born 1884, Whanganui.
Alfred Gilbert, born 1886, Whanganui.
Maria May, born May 1887, Whanganui; died 5 July 1887,
Whanganui.
Emily Beatrice, born 1888, Whanganui; died 1889, Whanganui.
Nellie Grace, born 1890, Whanganui.
Ruby May, born 1893, Whanganui.
Mildred Jessie, born 1896, Whanganui.
Doris Daphne, born 21 June 1898, Whanganui.
Agnes Victoria, born 3 April 1901, Whanganui.

*Grandmother of John, Peter, Margaret, Randle and David Major

Sarah Wallace née Spurdle died: 21 March 1921, Whanganui

Joseph Wallace died: 25 September 1948, Whanganui

Joseph Wallace's birth, early life and marriage

Joseph was the fourth of the seven children of John Alexander McKane Wallace and Esther née Maise of Co. Antrim, Ireland. He was born on 9 May 1853 in Whanganui, where, in 1849, his father had bought his discharge from the British Imperial Army and was working as a sawyer felling trees for timber to build the growing town. The family home, where it is most likely that Joseph first saw the light of day, was on the corner of Ridgway and Churton streets (Churton St no longer extends to intersect with Ridgway).

By about 1862, Joseph was living with his parents, two brothers and four sisters on the family farm 'Fir Grove' in Matarawa, a hilly area south-east of Whanganui not far from the town. With a number of his siblings he attended the local school situated at that time along the Matarawa Valley Road. The early records of the Matarawa School have been lost, but it is likely that Joseph finished his formal education at the

age of 12 in 1865. What occupation he took up on leaving school is not known, but probably he worked on the family farm.

On 10 December 1873 Joseph married Sarah Spurdle of a well-known Taranaki family. The wedding was the first to be solemnised in the rebuilt Trinity Wesleyan Church in Victoria Avenue, Whanganui.

Sarah Spurdle's birth and forebears

Eight-year-old Oliver Cook Spurdle arrived in New Zealand with his parents, brother and two sisters in the 382-ton ship 'Timandra', which anchored off the New Plymouth beach on 23 February 1842, 113 days after leaving Plymouth. Oliver had been born on 16 March 1833 in Seaborough, Somerset, the birthplace also of his parents, William Spurdle and Sarah née Sibley. At 17, Oliver was apprenticed to a wheelwright, an occupation he continued in throughout his working life.

In the new colony Oliver met Maria Litherland, five years his senior, from Appleby Magna, Leicestershire; they were married in New Plymouth on 1 October 1854. Their first child Sarah was born to the eager couple three months later, on 31 December.

Oliver died, aged 78, on 18 September 1911 in Inglewood and Maria on 27 December of the same year; they are buried together in the Inglewood cemetery (Row E, Plot 11N).

Joseph Wallace, farmer and contractor – Matarawa

It would appear that for some years after their marriage Joseph and Sarah Wallace lived in Matarawa, as their first child, Sarah Esther, was born there in March 1875, and Wanganui directories for 1877-79 list 'Wallace, Joseph, settler/farmer' as living on No.2 Line, Matarawa, along with his father John and his eldest brother James – probably the two sons helping their father on the family farm.

As well as farm work, Joseph, in December 1872, put in a tender to the Wangaehu Highway Board of £100/year for 'the keeping in repair of No.2 line of road', and his tender was accepted. However, 18 months later the *Wanganui Herald* reported that the board had resolved: 'That the secretary write to the sureties of Joseph Wallace requesting them to put the No.2 line in repair in one week from date, or the Board would do the same and sue them (the sureties) for the amount.' A certain degree of ill-fortune – or fecklessness? – seems to have attended many of Joseph's enterprises throughout much of his life.

Matarawa School records would suggest that Joseph moved into town in 1880. The school centenary booklet lists Esther Wallace as a pupil, which must have been from March 1880 when she turned five, but the admissions and withdrawals record beginning in 1881 does not include her name. As confirmation, the electoral rolls for 1880 and 1881 record Joseph Wallace's 'place of abode' as Wanganui.

Financial woes and bankruptcy

But wherever they were living, it was clear that the cost of maintaining a wife and growing family on whatever income he had was too much for Joseph. As early as May 1876 a claim for £6 15s 'for horse hire' was made against him in the civil division of the Wanganui Resident Magistrate's court but was struck out by the magistrate when neither Joseph nor the plaintiff appeared. Then later that same month a further claim was made, for £2 5s 8d 'for goods', but for some reason the summons was not served.

However, these were straws in the wind, and *The Wanganui Herald* carried the following humiliating advertisement in its issue of 6 October:

Notice is hereby given that I will, on WEDNESDAY, the 11th day of October, 1876, at 10 o'clock in the forenoon, sell by auction, on the Market Square [*now Moutoa Gardens*], Wanganui, a quantity of FURNITURE, seized by virtue of a Warrant in the suit of Bridge and Ward *versus* Joseph Wallace.

G. F. HARTNETT
Bailiff

That same column of the newspaper included the following item under a heavy headline BANKRUPTCY GAZETTE: 'In the Liquidation of the Estate of JOSEPH WALLACE, of Wanganui, in the Province of Wellington, Labourer, a Debtor'; a notice of bankruptcy over Joseph's name followed.

But this manoeuvre did not end Joseph's financial woes. In January of the next year Joseph was again a defendant in a civil case, this time being ordered to pay the sum owing – £3 7s 6d – plus costs. And in April of that year, 1877, the same plaintiff had Joseph in court a second time, claiming £4 4s 6d, but the case was dismissed, 'defendant having proved himself a bankrupt'.

Over the next few years Joseph and Sarah, with three or four children, continued in poverty. On 23 May 1879 Joseph was in court once more, owing £3 15s 6d. When he pleaded bankruptcy, the plaintiff argued that the law required all creditors to agree before a debtor could be adjudged bankrupt and that he had not so agreed. But Joseph pleaded that he was earning only £1 15s a week and had a wife and four children to support. The magistrate gave Joseph a month to pay!

Bankrupt again? – and more financial woes

But there seemed to be no way that Joseph could get his head above water, and on 1 November 1882 *The Wanganui Herald* carried another notice from 'JOSEPH WALLACE, of Wanganui, a Debtor' stating once again that he was 'unable to meet his engagements with his creditors' and calling them to a meeting at the Court House on 'Monday, the 6th day of November, 1882, at 2.30 p.m.' Whether this meeting resulted in Joseph's being adjudged bankrupt for the second time is not reported.

By now Joseph seemed to have developed a taste for litigation, or maybe he just relished the thought of possibly turning the tables, as a report in the *Herald* of 6 November 1883 has him as the plaintiff claiming £2 2s as a week's wage from a previous employer.

Plaintiff [*ie, Joseph*] stated that defendant ordered him to leave without notice, while defendant on the other hand alleged that on the occasion referred to some words took place between them and plaintiff jumped off his cart and threw down the reins, and defendant ordered another man to take his place.

It was another humiliation for Joseph – 'judgement for defendant', the paper baldly stated.

It is hard to imagine how Joseph ever managed in these years to keep his income ahead of his expenses, having to house, feed and clothe a growing tribe of children eventually reaching a total of 16, and with his inability or unwillingness to find other than poorly-paid menial work.

Matters must have improved somewhat after the death of Joseph's father, John Alexander McKane Wallace, in December 1895. Joseph and a number of the other

children did not benefit from the sale of the family home and chattels, possibly an indication that they had already received financial assistance from their parents, but all of the children immediately began to receive a share of the rent from 'Fir Grove', the family farm on No.2 Line, and eventually a proportion of the proceeds when the farm was sold.

Family woes

As well as long-term financial worries, Joseph had to deal with a number of domestic tragedies. Three of his children died within three months of their birth, two of them consecutively in the period 1887-89 from 'lack of breast milk' (i.e. starvation) – a clear sign, surely, of maternal malnutrition. Then in 1896 his son Leonard, aged 15, drowned while bathing (he couldn't swim) in the Whanganui River.

It is interesting to note that the newspaper report of Leonard's drowning speaks of Joseph as 'one of our most respected residents' – possibly an indication that he was by 1896 a soundly converted brother attending the Gospel Hall, Bell Street.

Joseph and family lived in a number of localities in Whanganui. The electoral roll printed in December 1882 gives Bell Street as Joseph's 'place of abode', and the roll of July 1887 has the family living in Victoria Avenue. By November 1896, and at least until October 1914, the family lived at 4 Lowther Street, Aramoho, Whanganui, and Wallaces (possibly Joseph and Sarah) were still in the house in 1916.

In 1901, on a daughter's marriage certificate, Joseph was described as 'Labourer'. By 1908, at the age of 55, he was still languishing at the lower end of the labour market, though it would appear that his social standing, anyway, had definitely improved. A news item in *The Wanganui Herald* of 7 May of that year reads:

The very many friends of Mr Joseph Wallace, the well-known carter employed by Mr Alf. Smith, carrier, Taupo Quay, will regret to hear that he met with a serious accident this morning.

Apparently six bags of oats being winched up to a first floor store-room slipped from their sling, fell on Joseph standing in the cart beneath, and broke his thigh. By this time there would have been only three or four dependent children in the Wallace household, nevertheless it must have been a most difficult time for the family with its principal wage-earner, such as he was, out of action for some months.

On his death certificate, Joseph Wallace's occupation is given as 'carrier'.

Joseph's community and social life

However, the name of Joseph Wallace did not feature in the newspapers of Whanganui only in matters demeaning or disastrous. According to an item in the *Wanganui Chronicle* of 2 March 1882, a Joseph Wallace had been elected some days before to membership of the Union Boat Club. A wise move? – it was later that very year that Joseph attempted to declare himself bankrupt – for the second time!

Also – and this might well have been the cause of his financial woes – it seems likely that Joseph had an interest in the horse-racing industry. As early as 11 March 1872 the *Wanganui Herald* records a horse owned by a Mr J. Wallace being entered for the Aramoho races, and an article about the local racing scene published in the *Herald* of 7 June 1906 mentions 'Flatcatcher (afterwards called The Diver), a horse which was once owned by Mr Joseph Wallace, of this town'!

For the record, it would appear that Joseph was not a teetotaler: in June 1892 he appeared before the local licensing committee to support the renewal of a liquor licence for the St John's Hotel:

Joseph Wallace, a resident in the locality, considered that the house was required.., particularly in cases of sickness where alcohol was necessary.

Religion

Joseph was raised in a nominally Presbyterian family, and was married in a Wesleyan church, the Spurdles being devout Methodists. What place religion played in Joseph's adult life is not clear, but the newspaper report of the funeral of Leonard Wallace in December 1896 states that amongst the 'large concourse of mourners' were 'the members of the Salvation Army'; the service was conducted by the Wesleyan minister, Rev. George Bond.

It is known that in later life Joseph was a staunch member of the local Brethren Assembly meeting in a chapel on the corner of Bell and Plymouth streets (in 2009 an Elim church). The story of his conversion would undoubtedly be an interesting one, but is unlikely now ever to be told. Joseph was buried by a celebrant from the Brethren.

As implied above, the family did have a connection – though tenuous – with the Salvation Army through the marriage in 1902 of Joseph and Sarah's fifth child, Charles Martin Wallace, to Catherine Annie Irwin, in the Salvation Army Citadel, Wellington, with the bride resplendent in her Army uniform.

Further to this, there is a tantalising undated Whanganui photograph in the Major family collection of a young unidentified couple who could well be John Alexander Wallace (Joseph and Sarah's third child) with his eldest sister Sarah Esther – and the young man is in full Salvation Army uniform.

Children

Joseph and Sarah produced a total of 16 children: 13 lived past their first three months, but a son, Leonard, drowned at 15 years of age and a daughter, Agnes, died at the age of 18. The full list is as follows:

- **Sarah Esther**, born 8 March 1875, Matarawa, Whanganui; married George Major, 30 April 1901, Whanganui; died 1 January 1951 and is buried in the Kopuatama Cemetery, Stratford, Taranaki.
- **Frederick Oliver**, born 5 June 1876, Matarawa, Whanganui; married Amelia Gillespie Stewart, 8 June 1899; died 30 December 1960 and is buried in the Aramoho Cemetery, Whanganui.
- **John Alexander**, born 1878, Matarawa, Whanganui; married Margaret Emily Clark, 26 December 1903; died 2 September 1949 and is buried in the Hamilton East Cemetery, Hamilton.
- **Morris**, born 1879, Matarawa, Whanganui; died 1879, at 2 months.
- **Charles Martin**, born 1880, Whanganui; married Catherine Annie Irwin, 7 April 1902, in the Salvation Army Citadel, Wellington; died 2 August 1946 and is buried in the Taruheru Cemetery, Gisborne.
- **Leonard Joseph**, born 1881; died 10 December 1896 (drowned in the Whanganui River).
- **Garland**, born 1883, Whanganui; married Alice Bertha Cole, 1907; farmer, died 21 August 1933 and is buried in the Okato Cemetery, Taranaki.

- **Florence Harriet**, born 1884, Whanganui; married George Mumby, 9 November 1906, Whanganui; lived in Stratford; died 1962 and is buried in the Kopuatama Cemetery, Stratford.
- **Alfred Gilbert**, born 1886, Whanganui; married Emily Trueman, 1910; died 1950 and is buried in the Kelvin Grove Cemetery, Palmerston Nth, Rangitikei.
- **Maria May**, born May 1887, Whanganui; died 5 July 1887 ('lack of breast milk').
- **Emily Beatrice**, born 1888, Whanganui; died 1889, at 3 months ('lack of breast milk')
- **Nellie Grace**, born 1890, Whanganui; married Jonathan Clark, 1918; died 1977 and was cremated at the Karori Cemetery, Wellington.
- **Ruby May**, born 1893, Whanganui; married Ira Stenberg, 1914; died 1981 and was cremated at the Karori Cemetery, Wellington.
- **Mildred Jessie**, born 1896, Whanganui; married John Fitch, 1915; died 1957 and is buried in the Aramoho Cemetery, Whanganui.
- **Doris Daphne**, born 21 June 1898, Whanganui; married Thomas Price, 1920; died 15 October 1990; died 1990 and is buried in the Hamilton Park Cemetery, Hamilton.
- **Agnes Victoria Alice**, born 3 April 1901, Whanganui; died aged 18 on 1 April 1919, Whanganui; 'She was in the best of health until a few days ago.' Buried in the Aramoho Cemetery, Whanganui.

Last years

Joseph and Sarah had, by June 1919, moved from their Lowther Street house to a place in Jones' Lane (maybe the street now called Somerset Road), Mosstown (now Springvale), Whanganui. On the electoral roll of that date it is pleasing to see that Joseph dignifies himself as 'gardener'. Nellie Grace and younger members of the family continued to occupy the old family home.

Sarah Wallace née Spurdle died of heart disease 'at her residence' (according to *The Wanganui Chronicle*) in Jones' Lane on 20 March 1921. She was 66 years old. The *Chronicle* goes on to say: 'The deceased lady was of a kindly disposition and much beloved by all who knew her'. She is buried in the Aramoho Cemetery, Whanganui.

Joseph Wallace, gardener, was still in the new house in October 1922 (Patea no.1 supplementary roll), but by August 1925 (Rangitikei roll) Joseph Wallace, retired, was living with his daughter Mildred Fitch at 24 Kitchener Street, Whanganui East, where he remained until his death some 23 years later. At 95 years of age, on 25 September 1948, Joseph died of senility and arterio-sclerosis. He is buried with his long-suffering Sarah and their daughter Agnes in the Aramoho Cemetery, Block A, Row 9, Whanganui.