

## **Marco Fosella**

Marco was one of the first storekeepers in Levin.

He was born in Florence, Italy in 1846 & after a boyhood in Italy travelled Europe for several years settling in Paris.

With the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war in 1871, Marco enlisted in the International Ambulance, served in the Battle of Sedan and later as a franc-tireur.

He married Ottavia Ciarulli (b 1856) in 1875 and sailed for NZ in the Gutenberg arriving in Wellington after 100 days and after nearly ending the voyage on the rocks of Stewart Island.

They had five children: Ida (1876-1947), Hector (1877-1880), Hector John (1881-1882), Anita (1887-1951) & Lelia (1888-1940).

As he had experience in the clothing trade he established a factory in Wellington and was very successful with awards from several international shows.

Once the railway came to this part of the country he decided to move. He bought 80 acres in Block 14 of the Mt Robinson area (Koputaroa), milked cows and then sold the farm about 1900.

In 1896 he purchased a quarter acre section in Weraroa & leased a quarter acre section on Oxford St W and built a general drapery & clothing store. This store was about half way along Oxford St, between Queen St & Bath St. He sold this lease around 1901.

At some point we have found he operated a theatre in Oxford St, known as the Cosmos Theatre (see photo P 83 of the Chronicle Jubilee supplement 1981) which subsequently became an auction mart.

He was involved with many organisations in Levin, patron of some and chair of others. He was a prolific letter writer to the Chronicle.

He also served as a Borough Councillor from 1911 to 1913. During WW1 he pushed very hard for the compilation of a Fallen Soldiers Honour Roll for Levin, because of his own war experiences.

Right up till he left Levin Marco & Ottavia owned property all over Levin. In particular he bought a 10 acres block in 1901 and set up an orchard (including apples, plums & pears) & a very successful vineyard. This 10 acre block was on the western corner of Queenwood Rd & MacArthur St (although at that time it was still known as Kawi Rd).

In 1919 Marco & Ottavia decided to move to Tahiti for his health. However it was too hot for Ottavia so they returned to live in Wellington. He died there in 1921 & Ottavia died in 1923.

Before they left Marco presented to the Borough Council all the curios & historic articles he had collected & made during his time in New Zealand. It was his wish that they be displayed in the Library & used as a nucleus of a museum. The Council adopted a motion & the Mayor spoke to the acceptance of the gift for display & for a museum.

He also gifted a seat for the memorial garden.

What has happened to the curios & historic articles & the seat & what about the museum? Does anyone out there know?

Does anyone know of any descendants of Marco & Ottavia.

He was a fascinating character and pioneer of Levin.

A photo of Marco & some customers, outside the shop is on P 72 of Anthony Dreaver's book "Levin the making of a town".