

PROUSE: CHRISTINA (TINA) (nee) McILVRIDE

Born: 1 Feb 1860. Wainuiomata, New Zealand

Married: 22 May 1879, Wainuiomata, New Zealand

To: Richard G Prouse (1855 – 1921)

Died: 19 Mar 1951, Levin, New Zealand

Buried: Tiro Tiro Rd cemetery, Levin, New Zealand

Christina's parents were:

John (1833 – 1906) & Isabella (nee McGregor) (1833 – 1899)

She had 5 sisters & one brother:

Grace (1863 – 1938)

Isabella Agnes (1866 – 1947)

Catherine (1869 – 1869)

Catherine Elizabeth (Lizzie) (1871 – 1951)

Mary Drummond (1872 – 1942)

Peter John (1874 – 1954)

Christina & Richard had 9 children (three of whom died very young):

Richard Allan (1880 – 1880)

Isabella Grace (1880 – 1922) married Charles Cecil Nation (div 1912)

Jesse Agnes (1883 – 1961) married Frank Ernest Parker

Gertrude Mary (1884 – 1956) married Edward Stephen Webley

Christine Mabel (1885 – 1976) married Tom Selwyn Goldsmith

Richard (1887 – 1887)

Eunice Annie (1892 – 1892)

Richard Allan John McGregor (1894 – 1973)

Phyllis Elizabeth (1898 – 1983) married Trevor Clive Taylor

Christina's parents were married in Scotland and travelled to New Zealand on the "Oliver Laing" arriving in Wellington in 1856.

They had a 20 acre (12 hectare) farm in Wainuiomata. Their farmhouse, built close to the crossroads, became the post office for the local settlers.

As a child, she played with the local Maori children and attended a one room schoolhouse.

She raised her beloved horse 'Donald' from a foal. From the age of 12 to 19 she would ride over the hill to Lower Hutt and back with the mail. The twice-weekly trip of 9 miles each way was made in all weathers, and if someone was taken ill at night she would ride to Lower Hutt in the dark to fetch the doctor.

At the age of 19 she married Richard, a member of a family of sawmill owners in nearby Whiteman's Valley. Tree felling and milling was dangerous work and she set about learning how to treat injuries and illnesses.

The first four daughters and two sons were born during this time. The two sons died as babies.

In 1891, Richard and his brother James decided they would move to the new settlement of Levin and build a sawmill here. Christina, the children and Fanny the maidservant, took two days to travel to Levin by buggy, train and on foot.

Christina planted an orchard and garden. Besides fruit and vegetables for the table and flowers for the church, there were plants used for medicines and for dyeing wool to be spun and knitted into garments.

Two more daughters and a son were born in Levin. Sadly, one of the young girls died before her 2nd birthday.

Christina became a skilled bush surgeon, nurse and midwife to the community. She rode out on horseback in any conditions whenever her knowledge, medicines and care were needed, to deliver babies, set broken limbs, dress bad cuts, listen to people's problems – health related or otherwise. She discovered the uses of medicinal plants, and treated accidents and injuries among the local tree fellers. Early on she invested in a flesh needle and full medical kit. Once she reattached the toe of a bushman who'd accidentally severed it with an axe.

She's thought to have delivered hundreds of babies.

During World War 1 she was Matron of the Weraroa Soldiers' Hospital, and was sub-matron of the local Influenza Hospital during the 1918 pandemic.

Christina was ahead of her time when, for daily chores, she preferred to be comfortable in a pair of her husband's trousers and one of his jackets, rather than a confining corset and long dress. Sometimes, with one of Richard's hats plonked on her pinned-up hair, she was mistaken at a distance for a young man.

She had an amazing capacity for work and took the responsibility of men in her stride. She had no time for idle chatter when there was work to be done. She could be blunt of speech yet understanding, gentle and ever

ready with her renowned wit. This deep sense of humour she retained until her last hours.

In the 'Petticoat Pioneer' series of books Christina is described as: "hospitable, hated fuss or sham, never broke a promise and couldn't tolerate dishonesty. She felt if nothing could be said about a person, it was better to remain tight-lipped."

The workers in her husband's mill and neighbours far and wide looked to her instantly in time of trouble or sickness, and when she walked into their houses in response to a call for assistance, they were content to sit back and leave everything to "Granny Prouse".

Her love of flowers, and particularly native flora, gave impetus to her constant battle to prevent the stretch of native bush around their Weraroa homestead from falling under the axe of her husband's mill hands. Native bush was common in these parts and nothing was thought of feeding rata and matai into the furnaces of locomotives.

Many of the larger trees around the homestead fell victim to storms when the cutting out of surrounding timbers left them exposed. However today much is owed to Christina Prouse for the retention of this small oasis of the original podocarp forest which she bequeathed to the people of Levin

It is known as Prouse Bush Reserve, through which there is a public walking track easily accessed from the end of Totara Street, off Prouse Street, at the southern end of Levin.

Both Christina and Richard along with brother James and his wife, were foundation members of the Methodist church. She held various offices during a period of some 55 years until her death.

Her other interests included the St John Ambulance Brigade, Levin Horticultural Society (of which she was a foundation member), and the Native Flora Club.

Christina enjoyed her life to the full and looked forward to her birthdays with as much enthusiasm as in her youth. She confided to a Horowhenua Chronicle reporter, who interviewed her on her 90th birthday, "It may be grand to be 19, but it can be just as grand to be 90." She passed away a month after turning 91.