

ROE: FREDERICK GEORGE

Known as Fred

Born: 8 Mar 1859, Wellington, New Zealand.

Married: 8 Feb 1906, New Zealand

To: Emma Amelia Newton (1878 – 1962)

Died: 13 Nov 1944, Levin, New Zealand

Buried: Tiro Tiro Rd cemetery, Levin, New Zealand,

Fred's parents were:

Charles (b. 1833, Carrington, Hammersmith, London – d.1901),
and
Cecelia Sarah Carter (1833 – 1891).

He had two brothers & four sisters:

Charles Pimble Carter (1855 – 1929)
Lilian Cecilia (1856 – 1953)
Emily (1861 – 1898) married Peter Bartholomew
Annie Jane (1863 – 1944) married Arthur Walter Reeve
Ellen (1865 – 1948) married Edward Jerningham Wakefield
Joseph Edward (1872 – 1958)

Fred & Emma had five children:

Frederick Kenneth (1907 – 1987)
Charles Leslie (1909 – 1985)
Jack Nepia (1910 – 1997)
Erl William Thomas (1912 – 1982)
Patricia Amelia (1924 - present)

Fred's forebears

Fred's grandparents, Edward and Jane Roe, came to New Zealand on the "Adelaide" landing in Petone, Wellington, in 1840. Fred's father, Charles, arrived with them.

Edward moved to Te Aro flat and set up as a printer, publishing a new weekly Wellington Independent newspaper from April 1845. He took over the New Zealand Gazette, the Government's official newspaper, from Revans & Wade establishing himself in business on the beach, now known as Lambton Quay, Wellington.

In 1848, Charles (Fred's father) purchased a farm at Karori, Wellington. Three years later he took part in the gold rush in Victoria, Australia, working on the Bendigo and Ballarat diggings. He returned in 1854 and took over Edward's latest interest in Barrett's Hotel, which was close to the foreshore in Wellington. This hotel was abandoned after the earthquakes in 1855.

In 1859 in conjunction with J & E Bull and H Anderson, Charles published and printed the New Zealand Advertiser. He then worked on the Hansard staff at Parliament for 7 years.

In 1874 he settled in Feilding, building the Denbigh Hotel. He ran the hotel for 14 years, retired and moved to Kawakawa.

Fred's Early Years

Fred's early life was therefore spent in Wellington. When he left school, he worked at Wellington Mutual Investments Society. One of the directors was W H Levin, after whom the Levin town was named. From the Investment Society Fred moved to Feilding working with his father at the Denbigh Hotel.

In 1879 he became the 1st Secretary of the Feilding Jockey club.

During his time in that town Fred was part of the Feilding Regiment. In 1881 he joined the Manchester contingent that marched on Parihaka in Taranaki. This was a Maori settlement committed to peaceful resistance against the confiscation of native land by the Government. The 1600-strong contingent of volunteers and constabulary under the command of Native Minister John Bryce arrested the leaders of the Parihaka opposition, destroyed much of the village and cultivated fields, and dispersed the inhabitants. (New Zealand Government financial redress and formal apology for what happened has only been forthcoming in the early 2000s.)

Following his involvement in Parihaka, Fred returned to Feilding and joined P & J Bartholomew Sawmillers.

The Move to Horowhenua

Shortly after Peter Bartholomew purchased a block for milling at Levin (1887), Fred moved here in March 1888 to manage the sawmill of Messrs Dunn & Bartholomew. The erection of the mill at the Roslyn Road corner (as it is now) was just being completed when he arrived. There was no one living in Levin or Weraroa other than a few Maori across Lake Horowhenua.

The mill workers all lived in tents on the westside of the railway line. Thick bush bordered the line and, on many occasions, heavy winds and rain made things very uncomfortable. All were pleased when the mill began cutting timber for cottages for the men so that they could get their wives to come and live with them. A cook house was built, a living room in which to have their meals, and an office for Fred was erected. All their supplies came from Tomsitt's store in Manakau.

When settlers started to arrive, the mill operated as a community and service centre. Fred ordered goods, including groceries, in bulk from Wellington that were dropped off at the station and sold from his office to millhands, railway workers and Levin settlers.

Business

Realising that the needs of these visitors for accommodation and refreshment were a business opportunity, in January 1890 Fred and (older brother) Charles purchased six sections on the south-west corner of Queen and Oxford Streets for Levin's first hotel.

This was the Levin Hotel, which they sold on to James McCormick in late 1891.

An additional service taken on – without salary - by Fred was that of Postmaster, the 'town's' first. He performed most of this business on Sundays or at night, the only spare time he would have had for unpaid tasks.

As the settlement of Levin began to grow, so did the inconvenience of new residents having to walk up the forest-lined railway track to Bartholomew's mill to collect their mail. So, in 1892 the postmaster's role was transferred to shopkeeper Mr R Kent's premises in Queen Street West. (Two years later, in 1894, Kent's shop was bought by Mrs Maryann Bowen. She assumed the postal duties for the next two years before her daughter Miss Harriet Emma Bowen became postmistress for many years thereafter).

Fred, meanwhile, was pursuing further business interests. In November 1896 he took over the Weraroa Hotel, but relinquished the licence to James Smith in December 1897.

After the felling days were over Fred took to farming. Some of his land was on Hokio Beach Road, immediately east of the racecourse, and this is where, in 1905, he built the house that was to become his family's home after he married in 1906. It was made of fine quality hard woods (matai and totara) from Bartholomew's mill, had two bedrooms and a maid's room.

Marriage and Family Life

He was just short of his 47th birthday when he married Emma Amelia ('Millie') Newton in 1906. Millie was a teacher at Ohau and Muhunoa East schools and, according to their daughter Pat, probably met Fred at the railway station which they each would have frequented ... Millie coming and going from school and Fred seeing off consignments of Bartholomew's timber mostly bound for Australia in those days.

They would have five children – four boys, followed 12 years later by a daughter, Patricia Amelia, who remarkably is still alive at the time of writing this biography (July 2021). Pat is 97 years of age and has distant but clear memories of her father and their home life. These can be heard in full in the Videos section of this website.

Pat recalls Fred being a very quiet man. He loved playing billiards – they had a table at home – and he rode a bike into town and around his farmland each day. He was passionate about everyone receiving a good education, and she remembers him constantly encouraging both people and industries to come to Levin.

These memories would be from the 1930s and early '40s, however Fred wasn't always selfless in promoting the development of the town.

Local Politics

Back in 1903, a petition was organised to the Government to support Levin being transformed from a county town to a borough. Fred, along with his sawmilling partner Peter Bartholomew, opposed these plans and the opportunity they brought to develop modern sanitation, sealed roads, footpaths and lighting facilities. Families like the Roes and Bartholomews owned larger blocks of land on the edge of town, used for small dairy farms, poultry farms and grazing paddocks for sheep,

cattle and horses. The petitioners for the borough had included these blocks within their boundary plans. But the counter-petitioners, like Fred, believed that constant borough rates rises, which they would be liable to pay along with everyone else to finance the town's improvements, would bring them no direct benefit. A commissioner appointed to consider the arguments eventually (in 1905) excluded these larger blocks from the borough.

It is ironic that some of the counter petitioners, including Fred, became councillors when the new Borough did come into being in 1906.

In an interview in later years, one of the "Yes" petition organisers, Edward Graham, stated "The movement was met by a great deal of opposition, which was led by the present Councillor, Mr Fred Roe. I consider now that the criticism by Mr Roe in those days was largely responsible for the sound position of the town today. Mr Roe fought a clean fight; and although both he and I were hard hitters, we were on the best of terms towards each other."

In the year he married, 1906, Fred was one of a group of farmers and businessmen who launched the Levin Meat and Cold Storage Company. They bought out a small butcher at Weraroa, leased some paddocks, built a slaughterhouse, shop and freezing facility, opened a branch in Wellington and even exported to London. The business closed down in 1917 and two years later was wound up. This meat company was a forerunner of the Lakeview municipal abattoir (now Alliance Meats) of 1929 and the Lakeview Farm, run continuously by the Everton family since the end of World War I through to the present day.

Lost Causes

There were two projects Fred fought for, but ultimately lost.

The first was the formation of a direct railway line from Levin to Greatford, a small station just south of Marton. Such a venture would have enabled trains to by-pass Palmerston North and shorten the North Island Main Trunk by 19 miles (31km). This never happened.

The second was the founding of Massey College at the CD farm (Central Development Farm for Research & Instruction) at Weraroa. Fred was tireless in his efforts to promote this. Ultimately the Government chose Palmerston North, and a once-only opportunity to develop Levin as a higher education hub was lost. Because of his opposition to the breaking up of the CD farm Fred was denounced as an 'old fossil'.

When the Levin Council decided to build a new council building (commenced in 1924) Councillor Roe was so loyal to Weraroa that he refused to support any project not built there, and consistently voted against any payments to the project.

But Fred was a person who gave to his community:

First Secretary and Life Member of the Levin Racing club.

One of the promoters of the Horowhenua A & P Association.

Chairman (for many years) of the Levin District High School Committee.

Levin Borough Councillor 1923 – 1935.

Foundation member of the Levin Druids Lodge, Horowhenua Masonic Lodge and Mangahao Masonic Lodge.

Life Member of the Levin Club.

One of the promoters and first guarantors of the Levin Tennis club. (The Roes had a tennis court at their Hokio Beach Road home too).

A Justice of the Peace (JP) for over 40 years.

With his sister, Emily (Mrs Peter Bartholomew) closely associated with the erection of the first Anglican church in Levin. Interestingly, according to daughter Pat, they never really attended the church because it was too far to bike from Hokio Beach Road!

Fred was 85 when he passed away on 13 November 1944. Millie lived until 1962 and, as previously mentioned, his youngest daughter Pat is still with us, in Levin (2021). He has grandchildren Peter, Penny and Briar also still in the town.