

RETTER: HANNAH (nee) STICKLE

Born: 12 Dec 1839, Port Jackson, Sydney, NSW, Australia

Married: 9 October 1861, in Wellington, New Zealand

To: Joseph (Joe) Chapman Retter (1838 – 1926)

Died: 2 Aug 1940, Levin, New Zealand

Buried: Tiro Tiro Rd cemetery, Levin, New Zealand

Hannah's parents were:

Thomas (Captain) (1804 – 1863) & Turikatuku (Eihei) (nee Te Hakeke)
(1817 –)

She had 4 brothers:

Thomas (Tiaki Tikara) (1837 – 1906)
Benjamin (1842 – 1920)
John William (1843 -)
William (1847 – 1943)

Hannah & Joe had 8 children:

Frederick Samuel Joseph Chapman (1862 – 1951)

George Henry (1864 – 1921)

Martha Florence (1866 – 1951) married John William Pemberton
Procter

John Benjamin Chapman (1871 – 1923)

Charles William (1875 – 1912)

Joseph Chapman (1878 – 1929)

Jane Capplyn Sybil (1880 – 1951) married John Alfred Roach

Nina Geraldine Chapman (1883 – 1973) married Henry Gill

Hannah was born two months before the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi and died as the treaty's centennial was being celebrated.

Hers was one of a number of families created along the lower North Island's west coast by unions between pakeha whalers and Maori women. Hannah's father, Thomas Stickle, traded between Sydney and the Cook Strait whaling

settlements. His wife, Turikatuku, was from Ngati Pariri hapu of Muaupoko who occupied land on the southern shore of Lake Horowhenua. She often took ship with her husband and this probably accounts for how Hannah, their second child, came to be born in Sydney in December 1839.

There were at least three other children to follow, and it's believed that Turikatuku may have returned to stay in the Horowhenua with one of these, Hannah's brother Ben.

Hannah, however, stayed with her father when he gave up the sea. In the late 1850's he was based at Taita in Lower Hutt as overseer in the formation of the road from Wellington over the Remutaka Range to the new small farm settlements in Wairarapa. As he was often away from home and objected to her running wild with the local children, he put her under the care of Mrs Buck, wife of the proprietor of the Traveller's Rest Home in Taita. Mrs Buck was a stern trainer, imbuing Hannah with high standards of housekeeping.

On 9 October 1861 Hannah Stickle married Joseph Chapman Retter in the manse of the Presbyterian minister John Moir in central Wellington. (Rev Moir is recorded as the second minister from the Free Church of Scotland to arrive in Wellington in the early 1850s, and established what was known as the 'Willis Street Church').

Hannah and Joseph were to have five sons and three daughters. In 1871 Joseph took up work on the large Rangitikei estate owned by prominent Wellington developer and politician William Waring Taylor, but in 1886 came a chance for independence.

Through her mother, Hannah had rights to Te Hou, a small block of Ngati Pariri land by Lake Horowhenua, and the family decided to settle there. It was a propitious moment, both because there were government moves to buy land in the area and also because the Wellington and Manawatū railway was on the brink of completion, bringing the prospect of economic growth to the district.

Martha, Hannah's eldest daughter recorded their first year in a diary. They built a cottage of wooden slabs caulked with clay and with a toi thatched roof. They were largely self-sufficient, farming a few cows and about 60 sheep, tending poultry and a garden, and harvesting the fish and bird life of swamp, bush, lake, stream and shore. Their neighbours, many of them relations, were mostly Maori, both Muaupoko and Ngati Pareraukawa. Pakeha families included the Somervilles at the coaching stables (on the beach), the McDonalds, whose house was a postal depot and a gang of railway navvies across the lake at the future site of Levin.

The railway opened only months after the Retters' arrival, and they were then able to attend the races at Foxton and events in Palmerston North.

In the village settlement of Levin, in 1889, the eldest son, Fred, bought a town section, setting up as a butcher. He and his father exchanged land in 1896, and Joseph took work in town at Prouse's sawmill.

The mill proprietor's wife, Christina Prouse, was active in healing and first aid, and had a regard for Hannah's character and nursing skills. She had a natural aptitude and a cheerful and kind disposition which made her presence welcome in many homes.

When Henry MacKenzie became the first long-term doctor in Levin about 1900, Christina Prouse persuaded Hannah to become attached to his practice as maternity nurse for the township.

Levin was emerging from bush to a civilised settlement, and the pioneers endured many hardships. Her service to the community in those times cannot be measured, but it was only rendered by the selfless sacrifice possible in one of Hannah's calibre.

Until 1926, when she was 86, Hannah, a devout Anglican, gave self-sacrificing service to the growing community, and entered fully into its life. Hers was an open home, in which she brought up several of her grandchildren with devotion and rigour.

After her husband died in 1926, Hannah lived with her daughters. She had never had a serious illness herself, and attended all dances and concerts until shortly before her death in August 1940, at the age of 100. She was survived by three daughters and a son.

To Levin she was "Granny Retter", who had cared for their first generation of mothers and babies. She was described (in a Horowhenua Chronicle obituary) as one of the best-known residents of the district and also a link with some of the earliest days of New Zealand's colonising history as well as a link with the past of both races.