

## **BOWEN: HARRIET EMMA**

**Known as: Emma or Daisy**

**Born: 18 July 1872, New Plymouth, New Zealand**

**Never Married**

**Died 4 August 1959, Levin, New Zealand**

**Buried Tiro Tiro Rd Cemetery, Levin, New Zealand**

### **Honours**

**1957:** New Zealand Red Cross 30 Years' Service Medal

### ***Emma's Parents were:***

James Roberts Bowen: b. London, England, 1845  
d. 11 Sept 1881, New Plymouth  
buried: Te Henui cemetery, New Plymouth

and

Mary Ann Cook: b. England, 1849  
d. 6 April 1928, Levin,  
buried: Tiro Tiro Rd Cemetery, Levin

James and Mary Ann were married 8 Aug 1867 in New Plymouth.

### **Emma had 7 siblings, two of whom died in infancy:**

Mary Ann (b. 1868, d. 1 July 1936, Levin)  
m. Alfred John Joyce, 1893

Ada Rose (b. 1870, d. 4 Sept 1890, New Plymouth)

Minnie Martha (b. 1874, d. 22 Aug 1910, Levin)  
m. Thomas Arthur Bertram Hudson, 1900

James Warren (b. 1875, d. 27 Oct 1901, Levin)

Joseph Harold (b. 1877, d. 11 Aug 1877, New Plymouth)

Alfred Louis (b. 1878, d. 4 Aug 1956, Hastings)  
m. Emily Fenton, 1904

Samuel Frank (b. 1880 d. 6 Sept 1880, New Plymouth)

Daisy Agatha (b 1881 New Plymouth, d 31 Dec 1954 New Plymouth)  
m. George Worth, 1907

Emma was third-born, in 1872, and the last to pass away, in 1959.

### **Emma's Forebears**

Emma's father, James Roberts Bowen, was born in London to Joseph and Harriet Bowen (nee Dunkley). When he was 7 years old his parents packed up the family and emigrated to Australia, arriving on the "Hydrabad" at Port Phillip in the colony of Victoria. James was a drapers' assistant in Geelong when he signed up to the Taranaki Militia on the 22 January 1864 as a private, which brought him to New Zealand. He met and married Mary Ann Cook who had emigrated to New Zealand as a child with her parents Thomas and Mary Ann Cook (nee Jones). Departing from Gravesend, they had arrived in New Plymouth on a ship coincidentally also named the "*Mary Ann*" on 15 October 1858.

They married in New Plymouth on 8 August 1867.

### **Early Years**

Emma was born in New Plymouth on 18 July 1872, third daughter to James and Mary Ann. James operated a drapery and clothing shop in Bell Block called 'Egmont House' and by 1880 had moved the business to Devon Street in central New Plymouth. He died suddenly in 1881 leaving Mary Ann to take over the business then called 'The Drapery Warehouse'. It evolved into a family grocery store also stocking drapery and clothing and known as 'M A Bowen'.

In 1892 the Bowens moved to Palmerston North. Two years later they purchased Kent's Post Office store in Queen Street, Levin. Emma later recalled that when they arrived here in those early 1890s, they alighted from a public works train at the only station then in existence, "a little flag station far up The Avenue. Dense bush crowded close to the railway line on both sides and the Bowens were glad to be met by a friend and driven back to the township".

Mary Ann was appointed Levin's postmistress and telephonist on 8 May 1894, and Emma emerged as her mother's successor, taking over as postmistress on 24 July 1896, having just turned 24.

She was often known as 'Daisy' to her family and friends.

### **Post Office Years in Levin**

On 18 August 1903 the New Post Office on the corner of Queen Street and Oxford Street was opened to great fanfare by Minister of Finance (and future Prime Minister) Sir Joseph Ward. Emma was appointed as its first postmistress and telephonist, not a popular choice as there were considered to be more deserving male candidates. The appointment "stirred up a hornet's nest in the

local press" with the Palmerston North morning journal apparently writing "a nasty editorial" and the Manawatu Daily Times condemning her appointment as "another of those little jobs characteristic of the present (Sir Joseph Ward's) administration".

In her defence, the 'Manawatu Farmer' wrote a strong article praising her for her "charming efficiency".

*As an aside, the same afternoon as he opened the Post Office, Sir Joseph Ward moved on to open the new Levin Courthouse.*

In January 1908 Emma passed the Civil Service Senior Examination, one of the few women who did so.

A year later, in March 1909, she received notice that she had to be prepared to transfer to Wanganui to take up the position of postmistress at the new Aramoho Post Office. A large gathering was held at Century Hall in Levin attended by the Mayor Basil Gardener and other worthies of the town to wish her well. The mayor presented her with a purse of sovereigns on behalf of the community, and delivered an appreciative address.

An extract reads:

*"The Residents of Levin and District desire to place on record their appreciation of your valuable service as Post-mistress of Levin during the past 16 years. We have admired the tact and business administration you have displayed in coping with the heavy increase in postal business in Levin in recent times. We also desire to sincerely thank you for you many acts of kindness to those who sought your advice and help, and for the great interest you have always taken in any movement to advance the district."*

Mr James Prouse, on behalf of the YMCA, presented her with a handsome writing case, an inkstand and a fountain pen in acknowledgement of her role of teacher of the shorthand class.



**Emma in evening dress (Horowhenua Historical Society Inc.)**

### **Post Office Years in Weraroa**

Emma took up her appointment at Aramoho on 20 April 1909 and held the post for just three years. She was drawn back to Horowhenua to become postmistress of the Weraroa Post Office on 28 September 1912, and would remain there at Weraroa until her retirement due to ill Health in March 1927. Once again, a social gathering at the Weraroa Hall on 6 December was held to honour her long service to the area. This time she was presented with a very handsome rose bowl and handbag.

### **Karaka Lodge**

The house known as Karaka Lodge on Queen Street East, which still stands, became Emma's permanent home when she returned from her spell in Wanganui. Her mother, Mary Ann, and sister, Minnie Martha, already owned sizeable acreages of land here (Mary Ann 3 acres and Minnie at least 12) and the house had been built for Minnie and her husband Thomas Alfred Bertram Hudson.

In 1910, while Emma was away in Wanganui, Hudson went bankrupt and Minnie died. It must have been a harrowing time for the Bowens, especially Mary Ann. However, Emma was able to secure Karaka Lodge for the family, and it would remain their home for many years to come. She had been one of Thomas Hudson's creditors, holding a second mortgage of £250 on the property, and was able to buy it out. It consisted of 3 acres with a rating value of £1330 at that time.

Once back in Levin to take up her post at Weraroa, she moved into Karaka Lodge, sharing it with her mother until Mary Ann's death on 6 April 1928. They

were also joined by Emma's sister Mary Ann Joyce, a widow, who died there on 1 July 1936.

Karaka Lodge was the site of many garden parties and fund-raising events held over the years for the numerous charities and institutions with which Emma was involved. Today (2022), it remains in what is now Karaka Crescent, the house in poor repair, the grounds much reduced from their previous expanse and enveloped by modern housing.



**Karaka Lodge in 2022**

### **Community Service**

Emma was very active in the community. Every year she directed a concert in aid of the Anglican Sunday School. She was Sunday School superintendent and church organist at Weraroa and in the hall there in May 1904, 'her children' presented 'The Daisy Chain':

*"Numerous young maidens, robed in white, with chaplets of flowers, stood round the fairy queen, Miss Bowen, who sat in state upon her throne of purple ... As the small orchestra brought forth soft, dreamy music, the fairies forming a ring sang sweetly to swaying and waltzing music"* (New Zealand Mail, 18 May 1904)

In the early years, she assisted in the YMCA Women's Auxiliary and during World War 1 she was prominent in the district raising funds. She was on the Queen Carnival Committee in 1915 that helped families of wounded soldiers with financial support.

In 1917, she organised a garden party for Belgian refugees with a maypole, baby show and many stalls. The Boys' Training Farm Band led a street procession to her Karaka Lodge home where Mayor Blenkhorn addressed the crowd.

After the war, she was on the fund-raising committee for the Weraroa Domain Peace Gates that were opened on 11 April 1923. In 1931 she was elected to the Levin District High School Committee.

## **Levin's First Woman Councillor**

She then ventured into new territory for women when, on 8 May 1935, she was elected to the Levin Borough Council, polling 7th with 584 votes, and becoming its first female councillor. She stood for the welfare of women and children, an end to the demeaning sustenance payment, and a woman's voice in council. It would become a voice heard successively through until 1947. During her time, she deputised as mayoress for Philip Goldsmith whose wife became ill and subsequently died, and later for the unmarried Herbert Phillips when he was mayor from 1941 to 1945.

Ever resourceful, Emma wrote an ode to be presented at the inaugural Old Settlers' Reunion. This would prove to be a popular event repeated for several years from 1935. Emma was addressed as the 'Royal Chancellor' to Granny Retter's 'Queen of the Early Settlers'. Part of her ode reflected her first impressions when arriving in Levin in 1892:

*"... Do you remember the station on the hill,  
And somewhere nearby an old timber mill?  
See the bush in its beauty. Though 'a charge to keep',  
'Tis only a memory now! O early settlers weep."*

In 1939 she became president of the Home & Schools Association, and in 1941 joined the newly formed Levin Red Cross branch, a charity she had already been involved with prior to the Levin branch coming into existence. She was immediately elected president and remained so until 1946. Later, in 1957, she was presented with Red Cross's 30 Years' Service Medal.



**Emma, centre front, possibly a Women's Society gathering at Karaka Lodge, circa 1948 (Horowhenua Historical Society Inc.)**

In a Levin Golden Jubilee edition of the *Chronicle* in March 1956, Emma was interviewed about her life's work in this community. Although now 83, she was described as "a spry, petite little woman whose energy and activity belie her years". She revealed that her greatest regret was "the passing of the beautiful bush walks, the evenings spent at the boating club, the stands of timber round the lake".

Harriet Emma Bowen died in her Karaka Lodge home in Queen Street, Levin, on 4 August 1959 at the age of 87. A service was held at St John's Methodist Church on 6 August and she was interred at the Tiro Tiro Road cemetery beside her mother, brother James and sisters Minnie and Mary Ann. This family plot lies in the shade of the mature pohutukawa trees just inside the Mako Mako Road entrance.