

LANCASTER: ERNEST SAMUEL

Born: 27 November 1867, Karori, Wellington, New Zealand

Married: 9 Sept 1891, 'The Manse', St John's Presbyterian Church, Wellington

**To: Kate Brunger b. 18 May 1875, Makara, Wellington
d. 2 September, 1940, Levin, NZ**

Died: 22 Oct 1940, Palmerston North, NZ

Buried: Tiro Tiro Rd Cemetery, Levin, NZ

Ernest's parents were:

Stephen John Lancaster b. 1833 Blackburn, Lancashire, England,
d. 29 October 1899, Karori, Wellington

and

Sarah, (nee Eagle) b. 24 June 1834 Poplar, Middlesex, England,
d. 27 April 1906, Karori, Wellington

Stephen and Sarah were married on 5 November 1859 at St. Peter's Church, Wellington

Ernest was the 5th of 11 children, all born in Karori, Wellington. His 10 siblings were:

Thomas: b. 18 September 1860, d. 12 April 1928, Longburn
Stephen Robert: b. 12 May 1862, d. 25 February 1925, Palmerston Nth
Sarah Jane: b. 1864, d. 16 November 1906, Karori
Hannah Mary: b. 1866, d. 21 October 1906, Karori
Arthur: b. 18 May 1869, d. 6 February 1924, Palmerston Nth
Emma Etty: b. 21 January 1872, d. 1 November 1949, Inglewood
Amy Alice: b. 14 November 1873, d. 18 October 1952, Karori
Ada: b. 20 August 1875, d. 18 July 1945, Rotorua
Henry ('Harry') John: b. 26 July 1877, d. 13 November 1944, Palmerston Nth
Phoebe: b. 14 July 1879, d. 16 July ~~1949~~ 1950, Wellington

Ernest and Kate had 1 child:

Amy Isabel: b. 30 January 1892, Levin, d. 21 July 1978, Wellington

Amy married Ernest William John Smith, 23 Feb 1916 at St Mary's, Levin. Ernest was b. 12 May 1888, Christchurch, d. 10 October 1929, Wellington, aged 41)

They had two children:

Ross Lancaster Smith: b. 11 June 1922, Levin, d. 4 November 1989, Wellington,

Married: Nancy Elizabeth Russell, 28 September 1963, Palmerston Nth and

Barbara Helen Smith: b. 2 November 1923, Levin, d. 2 September 2013, White Rock, BC, Canada

Married: Thomas Guy Weston, 9 May 1944, Palmerston Nth

Amy later married Samuel Hedley Douglas ('Nunk') Lumsden, 12 May 1941 at All Saints, Palmerston North.

Samuel: b. 30 October 1871, Hobart, Australia, d. 26 January 1960, Auckland

Ernest's parents' background

Ernest's father Stephen arrived in Wellington, New Zealand, on 30 January 1857 on the "Indian Queen", just 2 months after the young woman who would become his mother, Sarah Eagle, had arrived - 19 November 1857 - on the "Gleanor". They were married on 19 November 1859 in St Mary's Church, Wellington, and settled in Karori where Stephen had a farm.

Stephen was very active in the community serving on the school committee, as a Councillor in the Hutt County, on the Wellington Harbour Board and as first Mayor of Karori, serving from 30 September 1891 to 1897.

Ernest's early years

Ernest was born in Karori and attended school there, after which he went farming, working for his father. He purchased a block of land (Block 47) in Horowhenua in 1889, covered in heavy bush which he proceeded to clear.

This was situated on what was then called Koputaroa Road, now Gladstone Road, opposite the eastern end of Queen Street, Levin. His younger brother Arthur farmed the block next door (Block 46).

In 1891, Ernest married Kate Brunger at "The Manse" (residence of Reverend James Paterson), St John's Presbyterian Church in Wellington. Kate was also from a Wellington farming family. Her father was a very early English immigrant, arriving in New Zealand in 1841 as a baby!

The newly married couple returned to Levin, where Ernest had built a house on the farm which he called "*Hill View*". Their only child, Amy Isabel, was born the following January.



Ernest as a young man

Farming Life and the Co-op Dairy Company

Ernest developed his farm running sheep and a milking herd of Jersey cows. He's recorded as being the second farmer to begin dairying in the area.

He bred '*Hillcrest Hope*' a 2-year-old Jersey heifer that produced over 600lbs of butter fat, the prized element of milk.

A story illustrating the rudimentary nature of Horowhenua life then tells of Ernest and Arthur setting out to Levin one morning in a spring cart which tipped into a big hole and hit a matai root at the corner of Oxford Street. The shock broke the hame strap, the horse jumped out of the harness and bolted as far as the railway station which at that time was at Roslyn Road, leaving the two men floundering in the mud behind the cart.

These were the early 1890s, and there were about 20 'creameries' or skimming stations across the district that farmers in the surrounding countryside delivered their fresh milk to daily. As the decade wore on, butter and cheese were becoming increasingly valuable export products to rival refrigerated meat. In order to improve the consistency in quality, and efficiency of production, farmers were won over by the cooperative dairy movement. This meant combining their resources into far fewer processing plants that would collect their milk

each day and streamline the path to markets in Wellington and abroad.

The Levin Co-Operative Dairy Company was thereby established in 1899, with Ernest becoming a founding member and shareholder. The shares were £2 pound each and based on the number of milking cows the farmer had. As Ernest had 20 cows, he acquired £40 in shares. The local newspaper reported the first list of shareholders.

On the 13th of May, at 8.30 p.m., the
their meeting held in guttering candlelight
indicates the length of their day.

The first list of shareholders was opened
as follows:—

S. G. Cole: 20 cows, 20 shares, £40.
E. S. Lancaster: 20 cows, 20 shares, £40.
P. E. Palmes: 30 cows, 30 shares, £60.
S. A. Broadbelt: 20 cows, 20 shares, £40.
F. E. Burnell: 20 cows, 20 shares, £40.
G. H. Hawkins: 25 cows, 25 shares, £50.
J. Windelev: 10 cows, 10 shares, £20.
T. Hirst: 15 cows, 15 shares, £30.

Ernest was elected the company's first Chairman of Directors. By the first annual meeting in July 1900, land costing £120 had been bought, their first dairy factory built in Queen Street (costing £291), and machinery and plant purchased for £703. In the first 10 months of production, 52½ tons of good quality 'Lake Brand' butter was dispatched. A factory was started at Koputaroa and the creamery at Ohau bought over.

As well as being the main processors of local milk, the cooperative quickly became a hub for training farmers to develop their skills in processing, management and marketing. The loading bay was a daily meeting place, where the sharing of profit from a good export price or a quality award was an antidote to sharing the burden of hard times.

In his book, *"Levin: The Making of a Town"*, Anthony Dreaver describes their decision to form a cooperative dairy company as "the biggest influence on Levin's economic growth until the industrial promotion campaign of the late 1950s", and "a shot of adrenalin for the little town".

Ernest held the chairman's post for those first three years until 1902, relinquishing it after selling his farm and moving into Levin. But he still

took a great interest in breeding quality Jersey milk cows and his stock was sought after by farmers requiring good milkers. He regularly attended A&P shows around the lower North Island and won awards for both cattle and sheep.

Tararuas

Ernest had a great love of the outdoors and exploring the Tararua Ranges. In February 1901 along with George France he climbed Mount Dundas. On Saturday 13 February 1909, along with Leslie Adkin and France, he completed the first planned and recorded crossing of the ranges from Levin to Masterton, by way of Mount Dundas and the Waingawa River gorge. Two years later, the feat was repeated by this time tramping south to Mount Holdsworth before emerging onto the Wairarapa plains.



Ernest at the summit of Mt Dundas, Feb 1909 (Adkin collection, Te Papa)

On 12 February 1910 Ernest, accompanied by his nephew Thomas Lancaster, a botanist, and Leslie Adkin, arrived at Tongariro National Park and over a period of some days climbed Mounts Ngauruhoe, Tongariro and Ruapehu, returning home on 23 February.

When the Levin-Waiopahu Tramping Club was established in 1927, he joined Leslie Adkin as a founding member and served as the club's first president from 1927 to 1929, taking an active part in its early development.



Building the first Waiopahu Hut, 1927, Ernest is 5th from left with brimmed hat (Adkin Collection, Te Papa)

Their first project was the building of the Waiopahu Hut which was completed and officially opened 4 March 1928.

Thanks to his tramping colleague, Adkin, Mount Lancaster (1504m) in the Tararua ranges bears his name. The New Zealand Geographical Board (Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa) officially recognized this name in July 2020 following a submission instigated by his great grandson.

He was involved in many search and rescue operations. On one of these, in January 1928 he led a party into the ranges searching for airmen Captain Hood and Lieutenant Moncrieff who had set out from Sydney to fly the Tasman Sea and whose plane disappeared in the region. It was believed to have crashed either into the sea or in the Tararuas as there were many witnesses who swore they had heard the plane over land around Manakau South Road and Otaki area. No trace of the men or their plane has ever been found.

Through all the time he spent there, Ernest gathered a wide knowledge of the Tararua's native flora and fauna. Many native trees, including kauri, would be planted on the properties he owned across Levin over the years.

Town Life

Going back a little, and following his move into Levin, Ernest took up the building trade, building many houses around the town. At first, the Lancasters lived in Kawiu Road on 30 acres of land.

While away in the United Kingdom and Europe for several months in 1907 (April to September), their home, having been rented out, burnt to the ground. On his return, Ernest rebuilt and sold the property.

For six months the family lived in a house Ernest had built in Queenwood Road before selling it to a Mr Abraham. Then during 1908, he purchased a 10-acre block in York Street, with its western boundary on Weraroa Road. Here he built a new home for the family which he called "*Hillcrest*".

He ran a small herd of eight Jerseys on this 10-acre block, also a vinery growing grapes and tomatoes, and fields of early potatoes for the Wellington market. In one year, it's recorded that half a ton of tomatoes were sent to market from this site.

After 1919, Ernest gradually sub-divided and roaded the farm. When, in March 1927, "*Hillcrest*" was put up for auction, it consisted of the homestead and just 1½ acres. In the century since, this land has been further carved up for new housing, but "*Hillcrest*" still stands proudly and in good condition today on the hill overlooking York Street from the north and accessed via Lancaster Street, a street obviously named for Ernest.



Hillcrest in 2020, still featuring the kauri planted by Ernest (courtesy of Harcourts)

For the rest of their lives, Ernest and Kate lived just below, on Salisbury Street. In keeping with his habit at their previous homes, Ernest planted more native trees on this site, at the corner of Salisbury and Devon Streets, and one of his kauris still stands there in 2022 (pictured below).

The house they lived in has gone, though, replaced by a new one at 48 Salisbury Street.



A Lancaster-planted kauri still standing near central Levin in 2022

Other Roles in Public Life

13 May 1904, Ernest was elected to the committee of the Levin Horticultural Produce and Industrial Society at its first annual meeting. Both he and Kate remained members for the rest of their lives, participating in activities, Ernest with his prize Jerseys and Kate with flowers and home produce entries.

April 1910, elected to the Levin High School committee and served until 1915, the latter years as chairman.

April 1911, at a meeting to reform the Levin Chamber of Commerce, Ernest was elected Vice President of the revived body. By 1912 he was the President and remained an active member for a number of years.

1909 to 1915, and 1917 to 1919, elected as a councillor to the Levin Borough Council. He was away from Levin in 1915 and missed the nomination closing time for that year's local elections.

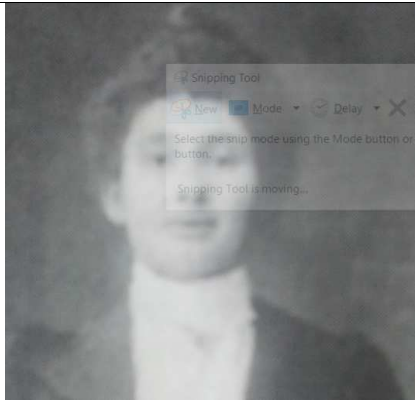
An interesting item of trivia arose from Ernest's first year as a Councillor -1909. With a colleague, he moved that when the council began extracting from a 10-acre block they had bought on Bartholomew Road for future gravel needs, they make it no deeper than 5 feet, so that it could be turned into a boys' bathing pond. There were no municipal swimming baths in the town yet. Their bid was unsuccessful. But within three years, in 1912, a proper pool with changing sheds, the Coronation Baths, was built on the south-east corner of Levin Domain. The Bartholomew Road pit would later become the northern end of Playford Park sportsground.

Ernest became a prominent member of the Horowhenua Masonic Lodge and was a Past Master.

In 1917, he was elected president of the Levin Bowling Club, serving a year, then vice-president in 1920, and president again in 1921.

On 22 August 1919, he was appointed a Justice of the Peace and sat at the Levin Magistrates' Court, hearing numerous cases from driving offences to fraud and cattle rustling.

Kate Lancaster



Kate was an avid gardener and an early member of the Levin Horticultural Society winning many prizes for floral decorations, preserves and baking at local fairs. She also participated in the Levin and District Beautifying Society being elected to the committee when it was first formed in 1912.

She was a keen player of both croquet and bridge.

Kate passed away on 2 September 1940.

Ernest survived his wife by just seven weeks before his death on 22 October 1940. They are interred together in the Tiro Tiro Road Cemetery, Levin.

