

BARTHOLOMEW: PETER BLAND

Born: 29 Aug 1840, Muiravonside, Stirlingshire, Scotland

Married: 8 Jun 1880, Feilding, New Zealand

To: Emily Roe (1861 – 1898)

Died: 30 Dec 1918, Levin, New Zealand

Buried: Levin Old Cemetery, Tiro Tiro Rd, Levin, New Zealand



Peter's parents were:

James Cochrane (1805 – 1849) & Ann Kater/Cator (nee Brown) (1801 – 1890)

Peter had 4 brothers & 4 sisters:

John (1827 – 1893)

Bland (1829 – 1859)

James (1831 – 1875)

Mary Anne (1833 -)

Sarah Margaret (1835 -)

Agnes (1838 -)

Ann (1842 -)

Thomas (1845 – 1918)

Peter & Emily had 10 children:

Peter Bland (11) (1881 – 1943)

Cecilia/Celia (1882 - 1883)

Mabel Nellie (May) (1884 - 1966) married David Stuart Mackenzie

Ivo James (1886 - 1975)

Frederick Charles (1887 – 1931)

Cyril (1889 – 1965)

Agness Whakahina (1891 – 1970) married Sidney Charles Gascoigne

Thomas John (Jack) (1893 - 1974)

Lillian (Bubs) (1896 - 1969) married John Patrick Neylon

Emily Margaret (Marge) (1898 – 1975) married Henry Hammond

Early Years

Peter left Scotland in 1862, during a period of mass emigration from that country. He boarded the *Wansfell* at Gravesend, England, and landed in Brisbane, Queensland, in August that year.

Five years later, lured by the West Coast gold rush at its height, he sailed on to New Zealand. Stormy weather prevented his ship from making port at Hokitika. He landed instead in Nelson, from where he made his way to Wellington. It's reported it was here that Peter entered the timber trade. He would establish himself as a pioneer of the sawmilling industry up the lower west coast of the North Island. He built the first sawmill in Palmerston North, with co-owner Peter Manson, in 1871 and three years later set up Feilding's first sawmill. Here he was in partnership with his eldest brother John Bartholomew.

It was in Feilding that he met and married Emily Roe. Her father Charles Roe ran the Denbigh Hotel where Peter boarded in the settlement. He was close to 40 and Emily was not quite 20 when they married in June 1880. Their first child, Peter Bland jnr, was born the following year.

Arrival in Horowhenua

In the late 1880s, Peter wrote to the Lands Department asking about cutting rights in the untouched Horowhenua district.

Up to this time, Horowhenua County Council still bought its timber from a mill at Ashhurst because no local supplier could be relied on. At first, Peter was told to wait until the government had bought the land from Te Keepa Rangihiwini. In 1887, he came down from Feilding to reconnoitre the district and without delay had a construction gang working here before the year was out. Sawmilling equipment was brought in by bullock wagons and operations were up and running by March 1888, when his friend and brother-in-law Frederick Roe (Emily's brother) joined him from Feilding to manage the business. The Feilding mill continued under the ownership of John Bartholomew until he died following an accident in 1893. It then passed to John's sons.

The First Bartholomew Mill in Levin

Initially the proprietors of the new Horowhenua mill were named as Messrs Dunn and Bartholomew, but the Dunn reference seems to have been deleted early on.

In a two-storey building of wood and iron, processing of the logs was to be done by the most modern machinery, steam-powered by two 30hp engines made by Haigh & Co. of London. In addition to a large circular saw bench, an imported band saw specially adapted for heavy work was capable of breaking down logs up to 8-feet in diameter. It was the only one of its kind in the Manawatu region.

(The information in the above paragraph comes from nzetc.victoria.ac.nz – the Cyclopedica of New Zealand)

The mill was located at the north end of the present town of Levin, specifically on the east side of what is now Roslyn Road and a few hundred metres north of the present railway crossing. This became the first European settlement in the Levin area, with the possible exception of a railway worker who might have lived here. A group of Maoris who lived just north of the mill refused to let it operate as they were afraid of the steam and sparks generated from the steam engine. Peter appealed to the government for help and Major Kemp, Te Keepa Rangihiwini, was sent with some of his men to keep guard at the mill until local Maori became accustomed to the machinery.

As an aside, when Kemp left Levin, he asked that if the Bartholomews' currently expected child turned out to be a girl, she be named after his own daughter, Whakaheni. Emily Bartholomew did produce a girl and she was named Agness Whakahina, who became known as Rena (1891).

Levin's first railway station was just on the other, western, side of the railway line, built as the sawmill was established. It gave ready access to the mill for workers, and to the station for the dispatch of timber, particularly to Wellington, where it was in demand both for buildings in the city and for export.

Initially there was some dispute with Muaupoko over timber rights. The arrival of the mill had coincided with the Crown awarding individual land ownership rights. Local Maori received some of these sections, negotiated on their behalf by Major Kemp. Some individuals, led by Wiremu Hunia, were dissatisfied with these

various European intrusions and began chopping up tramlines in protest. The dispute went to a Maori Land Court session at which grievances were resolved and milling was able to continue.

Tramlines eventually extended for miles through the bush. These were made of hard wood set on sleepers of rough timber hewn on the spot. One extension ran in line with what is now Oxford St north while another ran east in the general direction of today's MacArthur St, generally keeping to the future road lines. These routes would be the only means of access into the thick bush for early settlers.

Levin Settlement Life

Gradually, a proper settlement grew up around the Bartholomew mill – cottages for the workers, a rough punga hall used for concerts and dances, also for the first church services in Levin for several denominations.

In the year of his arrival, 1888, Fred Roe accepted a request to become postmaster without salary, so postal services also centred on this settlement.

As the community developed, Peter brought his family from Feilding to live here. The Manawatu Heritage website says this wasn't until 1894, by which time there were eight children, although he had built an impressive home for them in 1889. Constructed of kauri and totara, it still stands, and is occupied, today. Originally it was listed as 2 Roslyn Road. It has never moved. However, housing developments around it have brought a change of address – it's now 2 Newport Street.

There's a photo of the house surrounded by an irregularly-high fence for keeping in the kangaroos! Peter travelled to Australia on business around 1891-92 and brought back a young female kangaroo, seemingly pregnant at the time. A male baby was produced and in time a herd of 5, or 7, of the marsupials were in residence (reports of numbers vary). The fence failed to keep them contained. They absconded regularly and rounding them up became a very peculiar local amusement. But when they began attacking cattle and horses with their sharp claws, eventually severely injuring a bull, Peter had them all put down.

The Second Bartholomew Mill at Weraroa

This all happened up to 1895 by which time the timber in this northern area was milled out. Relocation was required, south to Weraroa, to an area that had been a clearing for hundreds of years before European settlement, possibly as a result of an extensive bush-fire ('weraroa' means a long-burning fire). Its only vegetation was ferns, manuka, flax and scrub, no logs or stumps, so not difficult to develop. The mill site was set up within a block bounded by modern-day Oxford St, Keepa St, Mabel St, and Hokio Beach Rd, with the main mill buildings just behind where Gypsy Caravans are today.

Peter had also purchased the land extending north of this block to Mako Mako Rd, and west beyond the current racecourse. He had this sub-divided for housing at around the same time. Its street names have obvious derivations – Keepa St for Te Keepa/Major Kemp, Mabel and Rina Sts for two of Peter's daughters (note

that Rina is a misspelling of Rena). Ward, Seddon, Ballance, Reeve and McKenzie were all supportive Liberal MPs of the period.

In 1902, the land that would become the racecourse was bought by the Horowhenua Park Co.

(This information comes from an article by F.C. Swanwick in *The News*, 11 May 1963).

45 workers were employed at the Weraroa mill in 1896, and 48 in 1905.

Again, tramlines were extended out into the bush for log transportation – one ran west to CD Farm Rd, another south to Kimberley. Bartholomew had timber rights to 800 acres at CD Farm, a government-run experimental farming project, also to the forest block south of Hokio Beach Road and another where the Weraroa Boys Training Farm, east of the railway line, was established at Kimberley (now Speldhurst).

Bartholomews worked in cooperation with the Prouses who had an equally large milling business on the eastern side of the railway. The Prouse family had rights to the bush from Queen St in the north to Gladstone Road in the east, and in line with Beach Road to the south.

Ohau River Bush Milling

By 1905 all the flat land had been denuded of millable timber. Prouse's Weraroa plant closed in 1907. But for Bartholomew, there were several years left by migrating operations further inland. Peter had a tramline constructed to the upper Ohau river valley to cut rimu from the tributary streams. A breaking-down plant was built there, turning logs into flitches to be further sawn and planed on arrival at Weraroa. In 1913 this plant shifted further upriver to the Makahika tributary where remaining timber was rapidly cleared. A horse team was killed when a bridge over a deep chasm collapsed.

Lake Horowhenua Bush Milling

On the western perimeter of the district, Peter had also negotiated with Muaupoko for the right to mill bush around the eastern and southern shores of Lake Horowhenua. An historian, James Cowan, who visited Levin in 1903 on a government contract to identify areas of interest to tourists, argued for milling near the lake to be disallowed so its scenic beauty and historic legacy could be preserved. However, the Muaupoko owners, in debt to lawyers and with few sources of income, couldn't afford to turn down Bartholomew's royalties. Equally, the government was disinclined to buy out the land, so milling proceeded. Anthony Dreaver, in 'Levin: The Making of a Town' concludes that "the degradation of the lake had begun."

The End of Milling

By 1916, Bartholomew's mill had also come to the end of its life. The machinery was moved to the King Country but, for some years after, remnants like concrete foundation blocks and rusting bandsaws could be found in the grass of

the Weraroa mill block, which was now used as a holding paddock for stock. In 1924, it would be subdivided for housing.

But while the industry left town, the Bartholomews stayed. They were well-endowed with farming and property investments, and continued to participate in local government, church and social life. Bartholomew Road was named after Peter, he being effectively the town's first businessman. As well as the original homestead on Roslyn Road, the home of Peter's eldest son, also Peter Bland Bartholomew (II), still exists on the corner of Hokio Beach Road and Mabel St.

Other activities

According to the Cyclopedia publication, Levin's first hotel, the Levin, was established by Peter Bartholomew in 1890, and sold to Mr F.L. Garland in 1893.

Anthony Dreaver reports that the site, consisting of six sections on the south-west corner of Oxford and Queen Streets, had been bought by Fred Roe (Peter's mill manager) and his brother, "realising the needs of visitors for accommodation and refreshment were a business opportunity".

In 1903, Peter, along with Fred Roe and the Horowhenua Park Co (owners of the racecourse), opposed initial plans to transform Levin from a county town to a borough which would urbanise it with modern town facilities of sanitation, sealed roads, footpaths and lighting etc. Families like the Bartholomews and Roes owned larger blocks of land on the edge of town which petitioners for the borough had included within its boundaries. Some were small dairy farms, poultry farms and grazing paddocks for sheep, cattle and horses. The counter-petitioners, including Bartholomew, believed that through constant borough rates increases, they would have to help pay for, but receive no direct benefit from, the town's improvements. A commissioner appointed to consider the arguments eventually (in 1905) excluded these larger blocks from the borough. The new urban area would be contained within a compact rectangle bounded by Kawiū, Bartholomew, Makomako and Tirotiro Roads, with a southern extension to include Weraroa. (Dreaver – 'Levin: The Making of a Town').

In October 1913, Peter was among local objectors to a looming Wellington waterfront strike. At the largest gathering of farmers ever seen in Levin, Peter drew cheers as he called for support of the Massey government opposed to the strike. He pledged to provide men and horses to descend on Wellington to keep the port open. (Horowhenua Chronicle, 3 Nov 1913) Along with volunteer forces from other districts, they became known as "Massey's Cossacks" and would help end the strike two months later.

Personal Details

In 1880, just before reaching the age of 40, Peter Bartholomew married Emily Roe, the sister of his business partner Fred, in Feilding. They would have ten children together, five sons and five daughters. Emily was the daughter of Charles and Cecilia (nee Carter) Roe, whose families had both emigrated to New Zealand from London. They met in Feilding when Peter was boarding at the Denbigh Hotel of which Charles Roe was the proprietor.

Emily died young, aged only 37, while giving birth to their last child, Emily Margaret (Marge) in 1898. Marge would be brought up in Feilding by aunts on the Roe side of the family.

A stained-glass window in memory of Emily was erected in the St Mary's Anglican Church in Levin. When the church was demolished in 2019, the window was preserved and is stored away.

Peter survived until the end of 1918, passing away on December 30th. Only shortly after, his fellow saw-milling pioneer James Prouse died, in April 1919. On both occasions the town's councillors stood in silence as a mark of respect.

An obituary notice to Peter in Palmerston North library read: "A man of great business capacity, tireless energy and upright character, he was held in high respect throughout this coast as one who had done his part worthily to lay the foundations of settlement in this section of the dominion."

In a letter written in 1979, Peter's grandson Jim Mackenzie recalled: "I still have the fondest memories of Peter 'Barty', as Peter was known to both Maori and pakeha around Levin. He must have been quite fond of me as he used to take me with him in his gig, drawn by an old horse called 'Fathead' on many occasions – especially to tangis. I enjoyed the good things to eat, especially the oranges. My father told me Peter could drink a bottle of whisky a day, that he was a great scholar (of Greek and English) and had a wonderful library. He was most interested in naval history and military campaigns and had read the Bible through three times. Although a Presbyterian, he gave the timber for the Church of England in Levin and later did the same for the Catholic Church. As far as I know he never went to church."

Peter's great-great grand-daughter, Jenny Hainsworth of Hamilton, has had passed down to her other personal recollections of the man. It's recalled that he was a well-read person, strategically minded with a knack for improving his financial footing by being "able to see into the future". For example, his establishment of the sawmill in Feilding before the town was even built, a venture he would repeat in Levin. Then the building, establishing and quick turnover of the Levin Hotel within the space of 3 years (1890-1893). Each opportunity would yield him the funds to move on to the next project.

His engineering skills were used to investigate quartz mining, harvesting of flax and timber, and the use of tramlines to ease the removal of logs from the bush to his mills.

There have now been 4 generations of Peter Bland Bartholomew in New Zealand.

The eldest son of our subject, Peter Bland II, was born in 1881 in Feilding. He was married to Mary Agnes 'Queenie' McDonald and died in Levin on 28 June 1943. The marriage created a direct link between two of the most eminent Horowhenua pioneering families, as 'Queenie' was the eldest daughter of John Roderick McDonald of Heatherlea, son of Hector and Agnes McDonald.

Their son Peter Bland III was born on 17 Feb 1912. He married Marie Patricia (Pat) Sloan, and passed away on 28 June 1987 (the same date as his father!) at Ayers Rock (Uluru), Australia. Pat died as recently as February 2018, aged 90.

Their only son, who followed four daughters (Susan, Pauline, Flora and Wendy) is Peter Samuel Bland (IV), married to Karen, and is farming. Three of his sisters (all being great grandchildren of Peter) are also still living (and farming) – Susan (Finlayson), Pauline (Wardle), and Flora (Tulloch).

Wendy, who was farming on Kawiu Rd, Levin, passed away in 2004.