

Hannah King Letheridge

Hannah King Hansen was born at Hohi on January 11th 1817. She was named after her aunt, Hannah King. Hannah was baptised by Rev Samuel Marsden in 1819. Amongst those baptised at the same time were her brother Thomas, cousins John and Jane King, and Dinah Hall, the first European girl born in New Zealand. Dinah moved back to Australia as a young girl and never returned. This led to the misunderstanding regarding Hannah being the first white woman to be born in New Zealand. While Hannah was the second girl, unlike Dinah Hall, she was to live most of her life in New Zealand.

Like her brothers and sisters, Hannah was brought up in a bi-lingual and bi-cultural community with English as their first language, but also being fluent in Te Reo Māori. Hannah never attended school despite living close to the mission school at Hohi, and later at Te Puna. The mission school was only for Māori children and the children of the missionaries. Because the Hansen children fitted neither category, they were denied access to the school. Consequently, they all grew up illiterate other than being able to sign their names in just a few cases.

As a young girl, Hannah would have no doubt helped her mother with the many household chores and assisted looking after her 10 brothers and sisters who were born between 1818 and 1834. The experience of looking after her siblings would have no doubt helped Hannah secure a position as nursemaid or housemaid at the Busby's residence at Waitangi in 1834 when Hannah was aged 17.

Hannah was married three years later by Rev Henry Williams to Captain George Clapham, a whaler. Her uncle, John King, and cousin Philip were witnesses. In 1838, George purchased 200 acres from Chief Temara at Okura, near Kerikeri. A house was built here for Hannah and their new-born baby Maryann. Two other children were later born; Thomas in 1841 and Hannah in 1844. In addition to farming his land, George also continued to trade around the Bay of Islands in his schooner the *Jane*.

With the outbreak of warfare and sacking of Kororareka in 1845, George decided to take his family to safety, first to Auckland, and then on to Sydney.

The years that were spent in Sydney proved to be tragic for Hannah. In 1848, her husband George was killed along with the rest of the crew of the *British Sovereign* in Vanuatu. Her infant grand-daughter, Maryann Jones, died a decade later, followed by her own son Thomas Clapham who drowned in Sydney harbour after falling from a wharf.

Soon after the death of George Clapham, Hannah had married Jeremiah Letheridge. In 1862, Jeremiah fell on hard times and the decision was made to return to New Zealand. Accompanying them was Hannah's remaining child, Hannah and her husband, George Mountain. Together they settled on the Purerua Peninsula, close to Te Puna where her father Thomas Hansen was still living. However, Jeremiah did not live long after arriving in New Zealand; he died in 1867, leaving Hannah a widow for a second time.

Hannah Letheridge lived the rest of her long life on the Purerua Peninsula, finally dying in 1907 aged 90 years. She was buried in the Russell cemetery.

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