

Martha White

Martha was the seventh of 11 children born to Thomas and Elizabeth Hansen at Hohi. She was born in 1826, and baptised by Rev William Yate in Paihia in 1829. Martha's life history was shrouded in mystery until modern day research uncovered the salient facts.

Martha married Robert Reed on 15th December 1845. The ceremony was performed by Rev Henry Williams. Both bride and groom made their mark in the register. Martha's father Thomas and uncle, John King, were the witnesses.

Martha and Robert had three sons, George, Robert and William, who were baptised by the Anglican missionaries. At William's baptism in 1850, the parents' address was given as Paihia with the father's occupation given as mariner. In September of the following year, a Public Notice appeared in two newspapers stating that Martha Reed, formerly Hanson (sic) had absconded from home abandoning her children. Her husband, Robert Reed, stated that he would not be responsible for any of her debts.

Mystery surrounds the father's demise, but a Robert Reed, seaman, died in Auckland in July 1852. If this person was Martha's husband, he had followed her down to Auckland and reconciled with her because Martha became pregnant once again with her fourth child. Horatio Maria Reed was born in Auckland in February 1853 and baptised in the Catholic faith at St. Patricks, as were her three older brothers.

This must have caused a degree of controversy within the Hansen family, who were all devout Anglicans. It may account for the lack of information family members had about Martha when research into the family tree was undertaken a century later. Information only came to light after researching the Catholic archives in Auckland after the 1990 reunion.

Martha married a second time, to American-born Charles Carmon Wood. They lived in Ponsonby and had three sons and one daughter before Charles died of pleurisy in August 1861.

Three months later, Martha exchanged marital vows with Jeremiah McGrath at St Patrick's Cathedral. The register states that he was a 'private soldier'. Martha was then recorded as living in Ponsonby. The pair had two children, a son and a daughter, Bridget, who only survived a few days. What happened to Jeremiah is unclear, but a death record has been found for Jeremiah McGrath in 1865.

In 1868, Martha marched down the aisle again at St. Patricks in Auckland. Her fourth husband was a labourer named William White. Martha and William had a son named Amos born in 1871. Martha was 45 at the time and had given birth to 10 children in the space of 27 years.

Martha died of senile decay and heart failure at Jermyn St (now Anzac Ave) in Auckland on July 3, 1902, aged 77. She was buried in the Catholic section of Waikumete Cemetery.

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