

## **Notes for Eleanor Baker Stephenson**

By Leena Taylor

*The following is the original article on which the condensed version Eleanor Hancock: Early New Zealand Quaker was based as published in the November 2022 issue of the Aotearoa New Zealand Friends Newsletter.*

Eleanor was born at Bristol, Gloucester, England, on 18 April 1808. Her father Joseph Hancock was a shopkeeper. Her mother's name was Ellen. The family was Quaker.

As a young person Eleanor attended the Quaker school at Sidcot, near Winscombe (from 1818-1821). It was here that she met John BAKER who was also a student. She was 18 when they married.

**John BAKER** (1802-1836). His family lived near the Somerset village of Cleeve. John was a shopkeeper and his family was also Quaker. He married Eleanor HANCOCK on 13 June 1826 in Gloucester, England. He died on 30th August 1836. It is known that John died after falling from a pear tree. He had been farming for just two years before this fatal accident.

I have not been able to verify the date of Eleanor's arrival in New Zealand. It was sometime between the end of 1836 and late 1839. According to information from Lorelei Hayes in her book *Waiaua to Kauri Cliffs* it is believed that Eleanor arrived in New Zealand before the Treaty of Waitangi was signed. She traveled by herself, leaving three young children behind in England in the care of the Quakers at the school at Sidcot.

She and John had the following surviving children (four other children—all boys—died in childhood).

**Ellen BAKER** (1827-1914) is known to have taught at several Quaker schools in England. She came out to New Zealand in 1867 as a widow, with two small children. She taught herself to use her husband's leather working equipment and lived above a shop that she owned in Union Street, Auckland at first.

She had three husbands: Charles HARDWICK (Married 1858; they had a boy and a girl), Joseph LAND (married 1870) and William BRAMLEY (Married 1899 at Maunu, Whangarei).

Her husband William BRAMLEY was a private tutor at Kaeo. He had trained as a teacher in England and had held several prominent jobs as headmaster and private tutor before immigrating to New Zealand in 1859. He had expected to take on the role of headmaster at Auckland Grammar School, but the position was already filled by the time they arrived. After talking to John Logan Campbell he decided to move north, where it was felt there would be plenty of good opportunities for him. They left Auckland by boat in December 1861, arriving in Whangaroa.

They lived on the Mission premises in Kaeo at first. William quickly set up a private school for the children of the settlers in 1871. In 1872, holding excellent testimonials, he was appointed master of the newly erected Kaeo Public School. He held this position for ten years. He was able to take up land under the '40 acre scheme' which provided 40 acres for each adult member of a family as an incentive for new settlers to immigrate to New Zealand. He received 180 acres, 87 of which he handed over to his eldest son. In 1875 he and

Elizabeth were living in their own home on their 75 acres of freehold land, known as 'Sherriff Park'.

**William BAKER** (1828-1908) became an apprentice teacher at Sidcot School but did not complete this training. He arrived in New Zealand on the *Sir Edwin Paget*, in 1853. Two years later he married Eliza COOMBE and gave his occupation as 'accountant'. He bought 11 acres (4.5 ha) of land on the corner of New North Rd in Auckland, which he called Rocky Nook. When the land was subdivided, he named the streets after his sons; William, George, Norman and Charles.

**Manfield BAKER** (1835-1915) arrived in Auckland in 1859, aged 24 years. He had traveled on the *Tornado*. In 1861 he described himself as a grocer. Four years later he married Joanna BOYD. Manfield bought Waiaua from his mother on 4 April 1862, however it is not recorded that he ever lived there. By 1862 he had taken over the Star Hotel in Otahuhu. He and his family moved around a lot over the next 20 years. Around 1868 they joined the exodus to Thames in search of gold. Then in 1877 he and his family were back in Auckland, where he worked as a store-man. He and his wife had 12 children. Manfield later left his family to join a religious group in Whangarei.

### **Eleanor's story in New Zealand**

On the 10 April 1840 Eleanor bought a piece of land from Mr John Monk within the upper reaches of the Hokianga Harbour on the Orira River, a tidal creek across the harbour from the Mangungu Wesleyan Mission Station. She said in a letter written in 1849 that she had arrived in the Hokianga in 1840, as the area was the only place where she could obtain a 'peaceful residence and food.' She would have been in the country for some time before settling in this area, but I have not been able to verify when and how she got here.

However, within a year her home had burnt down and she moved across the river to the Mission Station. She was described by the missionary Rev James Buller as 'a very singular widowed woman of the Society of Friends who is living in a very solitary place in the Orira Creek in an open hut with no other company than a native boy'.

She married George Stephenson on the 27 October 1842 at Mangungu. After her marriage to George the couple lived at Te Wharau until the property was lost in a fire in 1846. They moved to Auckland as a result, and while there, in 1849, Eleanor wrote to the Colonial Secretary requesting an exchange of her land at Hokianga for an allotment in Wakefield St, Auckland. In this letter she mentions the children still in England, hinting that she wants to provide a home for them here.

George Stevenson had arrived in New Zealand in 1835 and first lived on Motiti, a small island where the Waihou and Mangamuka rivers join the upper Hokianga harbour. He was a carpenter and sawyer, and he completed the Wesleyan Mission Chapel at Mangungu. He became known as the "preacher who sang hymns as he worked". He also assisted as a lay preacher, taking services at the small mission stations set up around Hokianga and Kaipara (Hayes, 2004).

Eleanor and George bought the property 'Waiaua' in the Far North, from Philip and Charlotte King (who were the first European owners) on the 8 March 1854. It was named this after

Waiaua Bay. It was later renamed 'Tepene' the Maori word for Stephenson. The land conveyance between Eleanor Stephenson and Philip King was unusual for the times as it stated 'that the land was to be in Eleanor's name and to be free from all control of any present or future husband' (OLC 610, Land Information New Zealand (Formerly Land Registry Office), Auckland).

Eleanor still had to have her husband's consent to own the land, however, as women had few rights at this time, and were considered to be their husband's property! Altogether there were about 3276 acres (more or less) of land involved. The sale was made under the Land Claims Settlement Acts. As a Quaker she had been brought up with the idea of equal status with men, and it was also clear that she was a woman with considerable means. She had been the major beneficiary of her father's estate, which possibly enabled her to leave her elder children at the school at Sidcot and purchase land in New Zealand. He died in March 1836 - the same year as her first husband.

George and Eleanor had two sons, Albert and Edward, and three daughters, Fanny, Cecilia and Emily. Cecilia was later removed as a beneficiary from her mother's will because she married an Irish Catholic, William Day Leslie, in May 1872 who had immigrated to New Zealand in 1865. Cecilia and William are my children's great-great grandparents. The Leslie children were brought up in the Church of England faith instead of involvement with the Society of Friends (Hayes, 2004).

One of her great-granddaughters mentioned that Eleanor found living at Waiaua primitive and lonely. She missed the companionship she had found in Auckland and at the Mission Stations. George was often away, which meant she was left with the responsibility of the family and the property. The Stephensons also kept a small store at Waiaua.

In the winter of 1857, John Stewart, a surveyor who worked for the Government at Wanganui stayed with them. In a letter that he wrote to his brother in Scotland he spoke about the loneliness and deprivation Stephenson's had to deal with. He wrote 'he has rather a pretty place and some good flat land, keeps pigs, a few sheep and cattle, and a small store for the natives.'

The Stephensons lived at Waiaua for about ten years. There were some unpleasant events with local Maori that also upset Eleanor and in 1862 she sold the property for two thousand, five hundred pounds to Manfield Baker, the youngest son from her first marriage.

She went on to purchase more land, including Moturoa Island. Eleanor died 7.6.1883, at Rocky Nook, Auckland. This was land that her son William Baker owned.

I became aware of Eleanor's story about ten years ago when I began to research our family history more seriously. After joining the New Zealand Society of Genealogists I had greater access to information that had not been passed down our branch of the family. It was intriguing to learn of this fascinating woman who must have been indomitable to deal with. She provides an inspiration for my granddaughters who can see from Eleanor's determination and faith that tragedy and difficult circumstances need not stand in the way of a life well-lived.

References

Hayes, L. (2004) *Waiaua to Kauri Cliffs: The story of a Northland Sheep Station 1833-2003*. Lorelei Hayes: NZ.

I accessed information from various genealogical sites such as *Ancestry*, *Family Search* and *My Heritage*, plus online records from Archway and NZ Births, Deaths and Marriages.

NZ Electoral Rolls were also consulted and OLC 610, Land Information New Zealand (Formerly Land Registry Office), Auckland.