



MT VICTORIA

Historical Society News

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You are invited to our Annual General Meeting this year on

**Sunday, September 18 at 4.00 pm
at Crossways**

and

Wellington's Hellenic Mile

The AGM will be followed by a presentation by Zisis Bruce Blades on his history of Wellington's Greek community and the milk bars, restaurants and fish and chip shops they established in the central city. Many of the owners of these businesses were residents of Mt Victoria, and the story of their contribution to our vibrant city life is also part of the history of Mt Victoria.

Bruce's presentation will be followed by wine, olives, cheese and other Greek-style nibbles.

This edition of the Historical Society's Newsletter is a bumper one. Thanks to Owen Watson of Queen Street, and his relative Lesley Kiel, we have the wonderful story of the Watsons to tell. It was important to do it justice and include the photographs at a good size, so an expanded format was called for. We hope you enjoy it.

Lost lanes, steps and byways

Once, it seems, there were a number of public lanes, steps and byways criss-crossing Mt Victoria between the main thoroughfares. Today, most of them seem to have disappeared. Those of us who have recently settled here are even unaware that these once existed, let alone where they were.

Mt Victoria Historical Society is keen to hear from anyone who can tell us of lanes or steps they remember being in general use, which have now gone. Even better if you can tell us when and why you think they disappeared.

If you have lived in Mt Victoria for many years and can help us document these lost byways, please contact Joanna Newman on phone 385 2254 or email jnewman@xtra.co.nz.

HISTORICAL NOTE

The Watsons of Mt Victoria¹



MOUNT VICTORIA

*In my Cottage on the hill
Peace and plenty now are mine
Here I can be happy still
And improve each happy hour of time
Here no idelers will be found
Each exerts their little skill
Happy faces beam around
In my Cottage on the hill*

*Joyfully each morn we arise
And our cheerful meal prepare
Grateful for each day's supplies
Then to labour all repair
Here by ties of nature bound
To each other all are still
Here may we in peace by found
In our Cottage on the hill*

By Mrs John Watson 1848

Emma Ann Watson was born on August 7th 1815 to Captain David Young and his wife, Margery, in Whitechapel London.

Emma's love of writing poetry in later life has left behind a treasure trove of family history. Her father was lost at sea in the Gulf of Florida when his ship the "Isle of Thanet" went down in a storm just two days after she was born. Her mother remarried but when Emma was about 13 her stepfather was declared bankrupt and sent to debtors' prison. With all their wealth gone and the property sold to pay debts, the servants had to be dismissed. The family plate had already been sold by her drunken stepfather. In a Cinderella-like story, her half sisters went to a kind paternal aunt but Emma went into service. She, who had been brought up to look down on servants, spent more than three years as a servant girl.

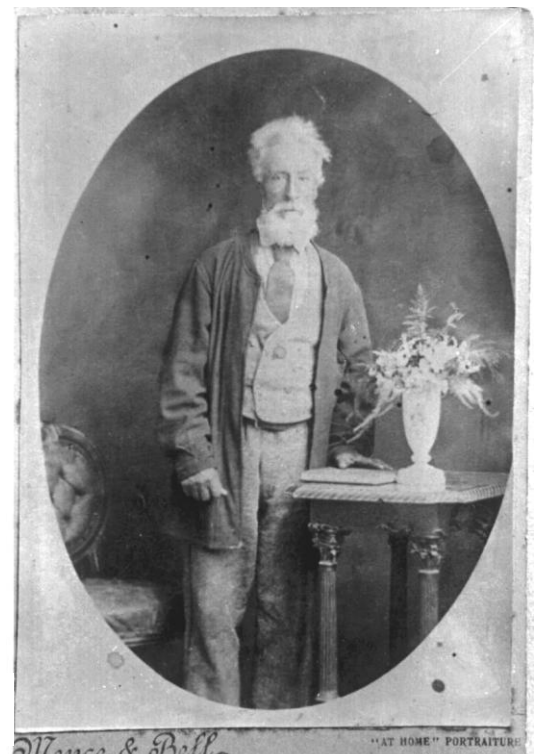
Then Emma met a young printer named John Watson. She was 5 months pregnant and just 18 when she married John, aged 20, a young man she felt beneath her. Life was difficult in those first few years of marriage. They suffered a great deal of hardship as they moved around the City of London in search of a living. Their second son was born in 1836, a third in 1839 and a fourth in 1841.

After nearly eight years of poverty and with four sons, the family applied for a free passage to New Zealand on the Clifton and arrived in Port Nicholson in February 1842.

Settling in Wellington, their fortunes changed and John became one of the first pressmen for the "Spectator" and then for the "Independent" and the "Evening Post". Nine more children were born between 1843 and 1859.

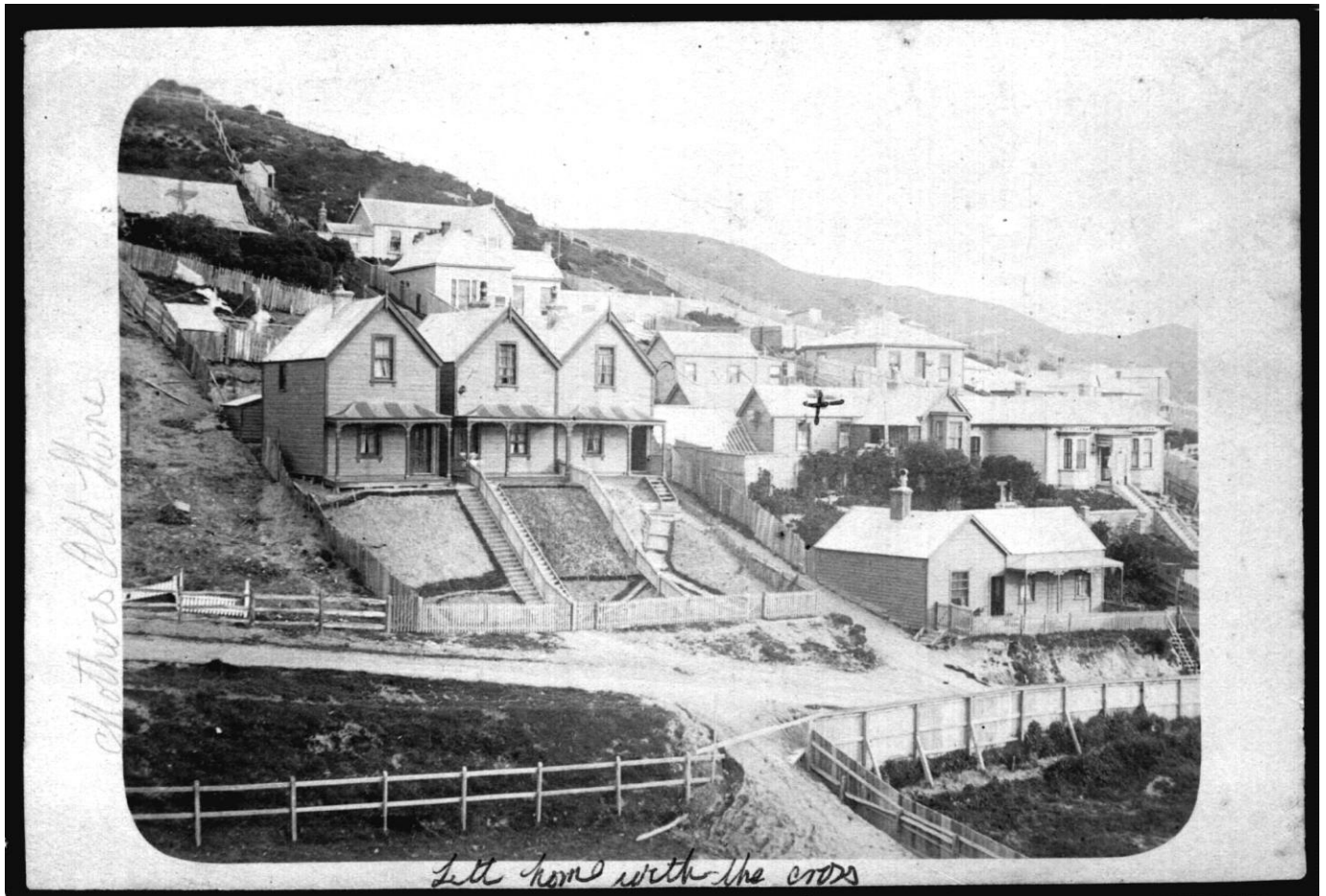
John Watson was granted part of Town Acre 400 on Mt Victoria in 1852. It seems that John may have had other sources of income than printing because in 1852 he was a "Bellman or Town Crier" -and grazed a few cows for milk and butter. From 1856-58 he was a chandler. He also made medicines for sick people and earned the nickname "Doctor Watson", which may have been influenced by the fact that the Watson house was off Doctors Common, the steps going up from Hawker Street.

Two of Emma and John's children died in infancy and were buried in twin graves at the back of the property on Mt Victoria (though probably later disinterred and re-buried.)



John Watson c.1813-89
Marlborough Historical Society Ref 3419

¹ From "The Watson Family of Mount Victoria and Beyond . . ." by Lesley Keil, ISBN0473-040670
Thanks also to Lesley for providing copies of the photographs used.



Hawker Street circa 1878, showing John Watson's house marked with a cross (from the collection of Lesley Keil)

All was not well with the Watsons, however. Emma seems to have undergone some trauma or crisis. Her poetry tells how her second son, David, gave her shelter in Wellington in her distress and then son Charles helped her leave Wellington on the steamer "Taranaki" in 1867. They arrived in Picton at 9.00 pm at night and had trouble finding a hotel room. The next morning they set off for Renwick on the top of a man's wagon but had to spend two nights at Hathaway's Ferry Hotel on the Picton road because heavy rain had flooded the plain. Eventually they got to Blenheim on horseback and on to Renwick by trap, where she lived with her son George for a time. Charles then set Emma up in a nice home with his brother Sidney and himself in Renwick.

Whatever it was that happened, and we cannot know from this distance, Emma was very bitter towards her husband, John. Twice she put bogus death notices for him in the Evening Post and Marlborough Express. She also referred to herself as a widow long before John actually died in 1889.

John owned the part of Town Acre 400 probably until 1876, though he also owned other property in Mt Vic by then, in Queen Street and Roxburgh Street. In 1880, he married a 45-year old widow, Eleanor Ford, though he had never been divorced from Emma.

Of their children, John Watson, the eldest, established a bakery on Mt Victoria at least twice. He named it Blackwall Bakehouse after the place he had left from on the Clifton as a seven-year old, Blackwall Buoys in Gravesend. His mother wrote a poem titled "The Exile" about John in 1868, saying that he was small of stature, sometimes drank heavily, that his very fault was the softness of a woman and that he wrestled with besetting sin. In another poem three years later she said that he would share his last shilling with her and, though not of strong mind, was kind and a true friend.

Second son, David, also learned the baker trade and set up his own bakery business in Ghuznee St in 1857 making bread and meat pies. His first wife died and he made application to marry again in 1874 but the marriage was not solemnised – his younger brother Sidney had had a daughter by the same woman in 1866, although she was not registered as illegitimate. David then had a child by another woman and, after she died married twice more, fathering a total of 26 children.

George Henry Watson, the third child, was three when he came to New Zealand with Emma and John and left Wellington early. By the time he married in 1863, aged 24, he was a farmer and had been living in the Wairau Valley for two years. He and his wife had moved to Renwick by 1864.

Charles, the fifth son who helped Emma flee Wellington in 1867, was born here in 1843. He served an apprenticeship as a printer at the Independent before crossing Cook Strait to settle with his brothers in Marlborough in about 1865.

Emma died in 1896, aged 82 at the Wairau Hospital in Marlborough. She had become well-known in the Marlborough District and many of her poems and letters to the editor had been published in the 30 years she lived there.

BOOK REVIEW

Looking for a good read? A new novel with a basis in Mt Victoria's local history is the latest to be published by New Zealand author, Denis Edwards.

MIRAMAR MORNING BY DENIS EDWARDS, published by Penguin

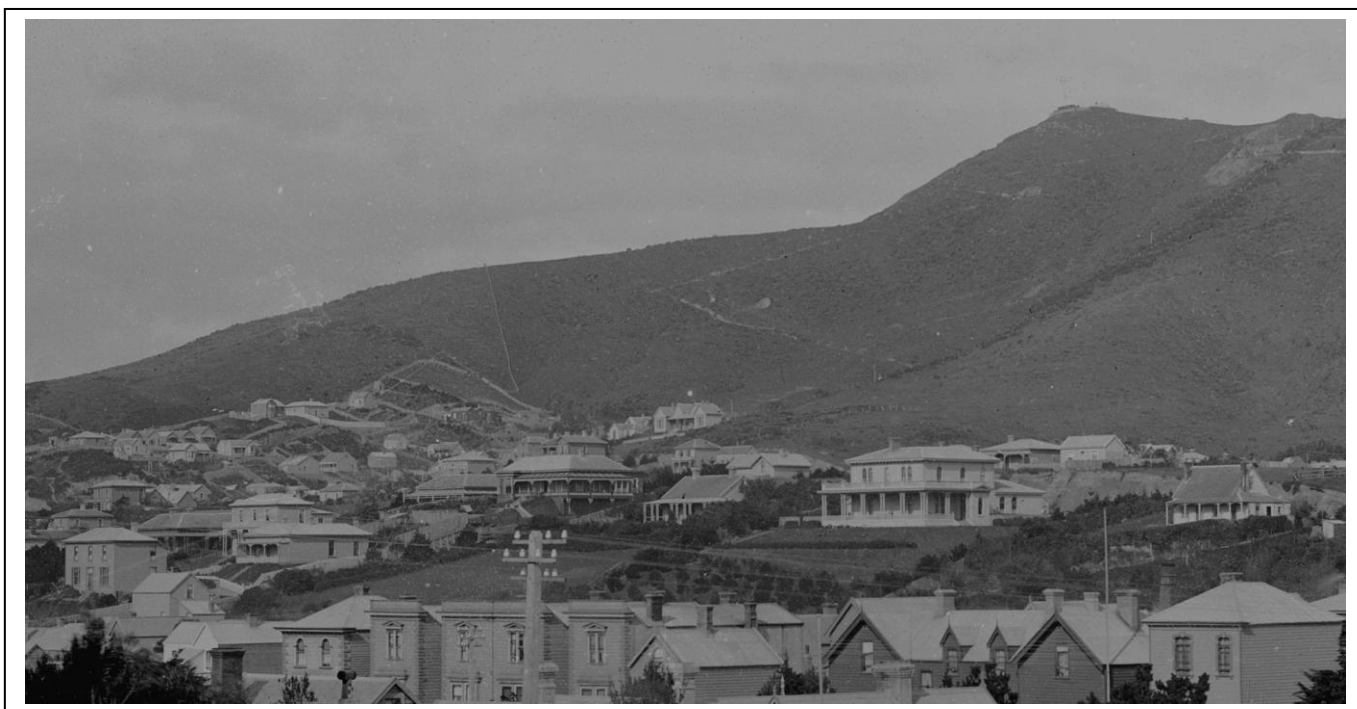
The blurb on the back cover sets the scene:

In 1947 a young woman is found murdered on the slopes of Wellington's Mt Victoria. The events that follow create a frightening undertow of corruption, menace, lies and violence. In 1972 a woman in Sydney is blown to pieces by a letter bomb. A few days later her sister in Auckland receives a suspicious parcel at work. What is the link between the two crimes? Meanwhile, Catholics and Protestants jostle for power inside the New Zealand police force, and good cops and bad cops square off against each other.

Ripping along at a breathless pace, Denis Edwards's Miramar Morning bares the underbelly of New Zealand society in what were supposedly innocent times. Delving deeper into themes explored in Miramar Dog, this darkly humorous novel reminds us that the sins of the past may come back to haunt us at any time.

Seventeen year old Marie West was found strangled on Mt Victoria, three months after her death, in 1947. Her family lived at 13 McIntyre Avenue and their house backed onto the town belt. Her body had been pushed under a bush just 60 metres from her home. The death is still a mystery. The murder was revisited by journalist, Bill Cameron, in an article in North & South magazine a number of years ago and it makes for fascinating reading itself. While Denis Edwards may have constructed a different story from the one arrived at by Bill Cameron, or suspected by the police at the time, who's to say it's not possible? And it's a great read, blending a racey detective story well with New Zealand colour and history.

An interesting view of Mt Victoria from the 1880's



Detail from Wellington Mount Victoria, circa 1880's. Burton Bros Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library [Ref G-2295-1/1-BB]

The grand, white house which dominates this photograph taken by the Burton Brothers from the Basin Reserve belonged to businessman, William Dawson. It no longer exists but was once on the left at the top of the rise where Pirie Street meets Brougham Street (Town Acre 298). Dawson was an ironmonger with a business on the corner of Featherston and Grey Streets and bought the land on Brougham Street and built the house on it in 1878 or 1879. He was still there in 1889/90, owning what was the largest property on Brougham Street at the time.