

# ISLAM IN NEW ZEALAND: HISTORICAL DEMOGRAPHY

---

By Peter Lineham

The focus of this paper is understanding the early Muslim population. My terminus is the date of 1950 when with the arrival of the new contingent of Islamic people from Eastern Europe, a new phase dawned which led to the formation of this mosque.

I want to set the early Muslim population in the context of the other immigrants, and to understand how they were viewed by other people. I want to understand this in the context of the huge detail provided by our census down to quite specific locations.

By and large before 1950 the main source of Muslims in New Zealand was the subcontinent of India, and they came among the migrants from two specific areas: the Punjabis and the Gujeratis who formed the dominant proportion. Fortunately for me there has been extensive research on Indians in New Zealand.<sup>1</sup>

## Stage One: Before the Goldrushes

There were Muslims in New Zealand from early in the European settlement of New Zealand. In this period, two Musselmans are mentioned in the Auckland census of 1855 and four Muhammadans are listed in the 1861 census but not with any location.<sup>2</sup> At the same time 3 Buddhists and 14 Hindus are also mentioned.

General attitudes were highly misinformed. Newspapers reported typical confusions. EG the *Colonist*, Issue 12, 1 December 1857, Page 4:

For Muslim prayer is a barren formula, a mere act of obedience, rather than a contrite offering or aspiration after better things; and some of the most accomplished graduates in the arts of deceit that I have met with in the East, were rigidly devout in performing their frequently recurring devotions—an anomaly, unfortunately\* by no means confined to their race and faith. But the difference is this, that while in the one case the religious exercises may be themselves a deception, the Mahomedan, especially of the lower grade, although also very familiar with the vice of hypocrisy, does not himself seem to think that repeating his prayers is incompatible or inconsistent with untruthfulness or roguery.'

But recall also the remarkable explorations and investigations of Islam under the great explorers of the Middle East and India.

The Timaru paper, coming from an area of intensely anti-Chinese sentiment, found a quotation from an Arab newspaper which praised the British government in 1877:

---

<sup>1</sup> Hew Macleod, Jacqueline Leckie, Tiwari, Shepherd.

<sup>2</sup> *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, Vol 3 No 28 (26 September 1855); *Census of New Zealand Population and Housing*, 1861.

"Whoever ventures to believe that the British had deceived the Ottoman Government, or that it has sought to humiliate it, or that it has treated it harshly, is greatly at fault. What Great Britain aims at is to induce the Porte to reform the administration of the empire, and to dispense equal justice to all its subjects, in order that Russia may have no plausible pretext against it. It is our fervent wish that our Muslim brethren in the East and West should be convinced on these points — that the English Government is eminently just and upright, adheres to its treaty engagements, fulfils its obligations, stands by its friends, sympathises with the harassed, protects the oppressed, and aids the helpless.<sup>3</sup>

There was also a deep concern about the Bulgarian atrocities and the sense of the poor Muslims mistreated by the Russian government.

What do the headlong champions of Muscovite 'Christianity' think to-day of the scenes furnished them by their proteges the evangelising Russians? Let them be men, not fanatical partisans, and let them frankly tell us what they have to say about those helpless Muslim women slashed with sabres and gored with lances; those innocent children spitted with Christian spears and mangled with, Christian grape-shot; those peasant fathers and sons handed over to Bulgarian knives upon false evidence in mock courts of justice. Is that the manner in which they expected his most Christian (Majesty would vindicate the blessings of the true faith; and if not, is their reception of it to be merely a reluctant admission that the war is "perhaps a cruel one"?<sup>4</sup>

They were often known for their unusual practices, which were the subject of much irony:

The Arabs, oh lady," was the reply, "call that man 'a brother of girls,' to whom God has given a clean heart to love all women as his sisters, and strength and courage to fight for their protection." Even polygamy is, according to Lady Duff Gordon, often merely consideration for the necessities of the "weaker vessel." Hearing that Hassan, the janissary of American Consulate, had married his brother's widow and adopted both her boys, she said the two wives did not sound to her very comfortable. "Ob, no," replied Omar, "not comfortable at all for the man, but he takes care of the women. That is what is proper. That is the good Muslim."<sup>5</sup>

Christian missions had always struggled in Islamic lands, and this was occasionally reflected on:

Nothing, therefore, can be more shallow, or more disingenuous, or more misleading, than to attempt to disparage Christian missions by pitting the bare number of converts whom they claim against the number of converts claimed by Islam. The numbers are, of course, enormously in favour of Islam. But does conversion mean the same, or anything like the same, thing in each? Is it in *pari materia*, and if not, is the comparison worth the paper on which it is written? The submission to the rite of circumcision and the repetition of a confession of faith, however noble and however elevating in its ultimate effect, do not necessitate, they do not even necessarily tend towards what a Christian means by a change of heart. It is the characteristic of Mohammedanism to deal with batches and with masses. It is the characteristic of Christianity to speak straight to the individual conscience. The conversion of a whole Pagan community to Islam need not imply more effort, more sincerity, or more vital change, than the conversion of a single individual to Christianity.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> *Timaru Herald*, Volume XXVI, Issue 1739, 28 May 1877, Page 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Timaru Herald*, Volume XXVII, Issue 1837, 19 September 1877, Page 4 citing *Daily Telegraph* (London).

<sup>5</sup> *Te Aroha News*, Volume IV, Issue 197, 2 April 1887, Page 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Southland Times*, Issue 9729, 19 January 1888, Page 3 citing *Nineteenth Century*.

Dr Stuart, the Bishop of Waiapu and later bishop again in Iran, was well aware of these issues.<sup>7</sup>

## Stage Two: The Gold Rush Era

The first censuses after the gold rushes hardly mention external people, except Jews, who remained a category throughout the whole period. However later in the gold rush period the provincial government in Otago invited Chinese to come to Otago to rework the gold diggings. The first sign of this was a group described as “pagans, Chinese and heathens” in the 1867 census. There were 1111 of these, of whom all but ten were in the Otago Provincial district where they were 2.27% of the Otago population. So this was half a percent of the population. However the number of Muslims in this group would have been tiny, since the Chinese interested in the gold mining were from very limited parts of southern China, where the incidence of Islam was very low. Similarly in 1871, when the number of “pagans” had jumped to 2612, still almost entirely concentrated in Otago, there are still no descriptions of Muslims, although the chances are that there were a few.

The 1874 census for the first time recognised Mahometans, as distinct from Pagans and other religions. They accounted for 4764 Pagans, 135 others and 17 Mahometans. Of the 17 in the 1874 census all 17 were males, and a footnote explained that 15 Chinese were Mahometans (compared to 38 Christians, and 14 were in the gold fields. Fourteen Muslims were on the goldfields, thirteen were at Dunstan, and one was at the Nokomai field at Wakaia. None were at Wakatipu where many of the pagans were focused. Nor were any at Westland.<sup>8</sup>

In 1878 the figures had grown to 39 Muslims, compared to 4379 pagans and 103 others. This was the high point of non-Christian religions in 19<sup>th</sup> century NZ. At that time 1.4% of the whole of NZ was non-Christian, but of these Muslims only one was listed on the goldfields, and this one in Auckland at the Hauraki field.

Incidentally the 1878 census noted that 54 of the Chinese were Christians and the rest were pagans.

Life on the gold fields was rough and difficult. And Muslims were not well understood. I found an article in the *Tuapeka Times* saying that Muslims believed that women do not have souls.<sup>9</sup>

## Urban Muslims

Already in 1874 there were Muslims in other places.

There was a small urban presence in 1874. One Muslim was in Auckland City west and two were in Dunedin City in 1874. An unnamed Muslim Punjabi in Auckland taught Phuman Singh the confectionary trade, and this suggests the trades that they loved. Another example is a Mr Suliman, who had come to New Zealand about 1904 and was a hawker and herbalist.<sup>10</sup> Hawking was also very common among Sikhs and it probably represented a trade possible without capital.

---

<sup>7</sup> See his lecture in *Hawke's Bay Herald*, Volume XXIX, Issue 9602, 10 February 1894, Page 6.

<sup>8</sup> See Department of Statistics *Census, 1874*, p 57 (footnote) and p. 74.

<sup>9</sup> *Tuapeka Times*, Volume I, Issue 51, 30 January 1869, Page 5.

<sup>10</sup> Punjabi book, p. 56.

In 1878 there were 32 Muslims were in Otago, including one in Dunedin and one in Oamaru. In 1881 one of the Muslims was in Port Chalmers. Sultan Mahomet, born around 1836 and buried in the Linwood cemetery in Christchurch was born in Dera, India, (or perhaps Arabia) and came to Dunedin 1895 where the served as a hawker.<sup>11</sup>

Also in the 1878 census, one was in Thames, one was in Eden County in Auckland. One was in Dunedin, one in Oamaru, one in Wellington, and one in Auckland.

There was something of a concentration of Gujeratis in Canterbury. In the Canterbury towns, several Muslims lived. The first was Mohammad Kara, a Gujerati who emigrated to South Africa and then in 1907 came on to New Zealand, where he settled in Christchurch and opened a small shop. His son Ismail came to New Zealand in 1921. Kara, is described by Leckie as the first Gjarati Muslim in New Zealand and was later president of the Canterbury Muslim Association.<sup>12</sup> Leckie mentions a Punjabi Muslim, Sheikh Mohamed Din who arrived in Canterbury in 1890 and was a shop keeper in Akaroa, who married Gertrude Hill in 1904.<sup>13</sup> The son of Sultan Mamomet, Sali, born in Ceylon or the Punjab, became an ice cream seller in Christchurch where he was known as 'Ice Cream Charlie. He had a European wife and four children and died in 1943.<sup>14</sup>

Auckland was another minor Muslim centre. Leckie identifies a number of Auckland settlers, including the unknown sweetmaker, who taught Phuman Singh his trade. A small group from Gujarat including Ismail Ahmed Bhikoo (Bhikhu) who arrived in Auckland in 1911 from Manekpore (a Gujerati village) via South Africa but his wife remained behind.<sup>15</sup> Some were married with wives in India. In the 1878 census there was one Muslim in Eden County in Auckland. Another in 1878 was in Thames. Esup Musa a Gujerati who arrived in Auckland from Sitpon in 1910 and called himself Joseph Moses, is another of Leckie's Muslim settlers.<sup>16</sup>

Some Muslims were in the Central Indian Association, including M.F. Khan in the Taumuranui branch in 1926, Gulam Kedarmia in the Rotorua branch, and Muhammad Kara in the Canterbury branch.<sup>17</sup>

Leckie mentions a lolly manufacturer, Charlie Abraham in Wanganui c 1897. He had gone into business with a Sikh, Phuman Singh, who had come to New Zealand with his brother in the 1880s.<sup>18</sup> Singh took over from Abraham in 1897.

The case of Sliman Hakim, (or Muhammad Salman) has long awakened interest in the Islamic Community. A Punjabi, he came to Wellington about 1904, became a die merchant, (providing khakhi for army uniforms in World War One), moved to Auckland, where he was known as Sliman the herbalist, and then from 1929 until his death in 1941, was a herbalist in New Plymouth.

---

<sup>11</sup> Fuchs, Linkenbach and Malik, 'What does it mean to be Indian' in *India in New Zealand*, p. 86.

<sup>12</sup> Leckie, *Indian Settlers*, pp. 22-23; Shepherd, p. 151.

<sup>13</sup> Leckie, 'A Long Diaspora' p. 49; Leckie, *Indian Settlers*, 2007, p.22.

<sup>14</sup> Fuchs, Linkenbach and Malik, p. 86.

<sup>15</sup> Shepherd, in Tiwari, *Indians in New Zealand*, p. 151; Leckie, *Indian Settlers*, p. 23, 26.

<sup>16</sup> Leckie, *Indian Settlers*, p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> Shepherd, p. 151.

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.sikhs.co.nz/nzhistory/punjabi/chapter\\_3.shtml](http://www.sikhs.co.nz/nzhistory/punjabi/chapter_3.shtml). Leckie, 'A Long Diaspora' in *India in New Zealand*, ed. S. Bandyopadhyey, (Otago UP, 2010), p. 45; Leckie, *Indian Settlers*, p. 18.

Although charged with improper medical conduct in 1930, and although his wife was not a Muslim, he was a well known citizen.<sup>19</sup>

Muslim sources have suggested that there could be a number of other stories retrievable – family memories talk about a Muslim man with a non-Muslim wife in New Plymouth, and other examples of Muslims. They ponder whether more stories might be available through gravestones and other records.<sup>20</sup>

General attitudes to Muslims in the towns must have been fairly hostile although the lack of “paganism” and god-shelves doubtless helped. During World War One there was a report fearful that Muslims would come out against Christians.

Editorial: And what if, as is quite on the cards, the war should assume a religious character, and the green flag of Muslim is sent through the world and the worst fanatical passions are roused against the Christian people? Such a contingency is fearful to contemplate, and the other Powers could not help but interfere.<sup>21</sup>

## Rural Muslims

A major group of Muslims were the farm workers of Cracroft Wilson. Sir John Cracroft Wilson KCSI, CB was born in the Madras presidency on 21 May 1808, the son of Alexander Wilson, a judge in the Indian Civil service. Educated in Oxford he returned to India as a civil administrator in the Army, and took part in various battles, but before the mutiny his health broke down and he sailed to Australia, bought sheep and cattle, and then came on to Lyttleton. He bought land in what he named the Cashmere hills. He wanted Gurkha troops to be brought to NZ. A prominent Anglican, he was also a keen farmer.<sup>22</sup>

When he came to Australia in 1854 he brought an astonishing variety of produce.

‘A high case very powerful Arab

Two Bokhara Assess

Two Chinese pigs, Spotted deer, Hog Deer, Antelope.

Five Goats from the Agrah District

Eight Peacocks and peahens

Ten Hares

Three Rabbits

Some Kohillah Game Fowls

---

<sup>19</sup> Leckie, *Indian Settlers*, p. 23, and Muslim sources.

<sup>20</sup> This came out when the paper was given at the Ponsonby Mosque on 11 April 2011.

<sup>21</sup> *Grey River Argus*, Volume XXI, Issue 2716, 27 April 1877, Page 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, 1966; Tessa Kristiansen. 'Wilson, John Cracroft', from the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*. *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 8-Apr-2014 URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/1w31/wilson-john-cracroft>

Some Guinea Fowls

Two boxes of Grey partridges

One box of Black Partridges

One box containing three French partridges

Three Ward's cases of Scarlet Rhododendron

One Dozen cases of Bamboos

Various kinds of seeds.'

He also brought "20 persons in company: ourselves 3; Eurasians 2; Indians 13; Calcutta Free School Boys Eurasians "<sup>23</sup> A wonderful photograph from the Turnbull Library was supplied to me by James Beattie:



Wilson grieved when one of them died:

---

<sup>23</sup> Diary p 2 provided by James Beattie.

‘Poor Deedar Bukksh! If the 14£ 3 shillings which I had to pay for you after death could have restored you to life & health, how gladly would I have paid Sergeant Richard Conroy, the “filthy lucre”, but to enrich a denizen of Melbourne without doing you any benefit suited me not, speaking as a follower of the Prophet, “God’s peace and safety ever rest upon him”, imperilled your final salvation by burying you with your unhallowed toes instead of your head towards the Prophet’s Tomb. Powers of Islam! To be buried by Infidels and that in an [7] unholy position and at the expense of so many dinars. It is horrible to think of. Be your position, old faithful follower, what it may you rest in peace, happily ignorant of the imposition practised over your poor remains.’<sup>24</sup>

Cracroft Wilson had a low view of Maori: ‘They are with a rare exception here & there a lazy race, & are in my opinion inferior in energy even to an Asiatic.’<sup>25</sup>

When he returned to India in 1854 he felt he hadn’t got far:

on way to Lyttleton from Ch to take passage on Waterwitch, ‘for myself, the groom, the Dhobee, the cook, the Ayah & her little daughter now nearly six months old.’ P.58

He described his family as seven persons:

and how scattered they are. Two are in England, one is on board an Indiaman now most probably in the Bay of Bengal, two are in the Middle Island of New Zealand, one is in Burmah, and I am a passenger aboard a cattle ship in the South Pacific.<sup>26</sup>

The journey from the country posed some logistical problems:

‘For native Indian servants a deck passage...is accorded for the small sum of 25 each. What I am to do for the Ayah and her husband the cook I know not. The former has, (her youngest child being 13 years...) been adding to her family during our sojourn in New Zealand. The little dark stranger is now 6 months old, & neither mother nor child are fit to encounter a deck passage in the P & O Company’s Steamer.’<sup>27</sup>

Back in India he served as a magistrate during the Mutiny, taking responsibility for the trials of rebels and mutineers. Then in 1859, honoured by Queen Victoria, he returned to New Zealand. He became an MP (1861-75) and often drew on his Indian experiences to explain Maori problems. Among his entourage he seems to have bought a team of Indian workers, and current Muslims have traced themselves to these farm servants. Four Muslims are listed as in Selwyn County in the 1878 census. Another was in Ashley County also in Canterbury. These would have been servants of Cracroft Wilson, for he had runs at Broadlands, Steventon, Highpeak, Lochinvar, and Shepherd’s Bush.<sup>28</sup> Later he brought 17 servants to New Zealand, including Gujerati Sikhs.<sup>29</sup> He was Nabob Wilson, honest and straight dealing, but many of his Indian farm workers went on to earn higher

---

<sup>24</sup> Diary p 8.

<sup>25</sup> Cracroft Wilson Diary p 39.

<sup>26</sup> Diary, pp. 58, 60 [25 December 1854].

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>28</sup> *The Early Canterbury Runs*, cited <http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/name-209669.html>.

<sup>29</sup> [http://www.sikhs.co.nz/nzhistory/punjabi/chapter\\_3.shtml](http://www.sikhs.co.nz/nzhistory/punjabi/chapter_3.shtml).

wages elsewhere.<sup>30</sup> Leckie identifies the Sohman and Bussawan families among them,<sup>31</sup> but the Sohman family were active in the Salvation Army so must have converted at some point after the Army arrived in 1883.<sup>32</sup>

Another 32 overall are listed as outside boroughs in Canterbury. However these cannot be traced in detailed county returns and I wonder if this is a mistake for the figure nine, for in 1881 Muslim numbers are again six in Canterbury, and one in Otago Southland, making seven in all. Five of these are in Selwyn County and one in Ashburton County. Meanwhile the number of pagans has risen to 4936 and the total proportion of people of other religions is 1.4% of the population.

After 1881 Muslims were too few to be regularly reported in the census regional results. We know the gross figures.

## Slow Decline of World Religions

From the mid 1880s the number of people from other world religions slowly dropped in New Zealand and Muslims were among the first groups to drop out of sight. In 1896 43 Muslims were reported in the colony, but by then the number of pagans was down to 3391 and the total of people from world religions was 5031, but this was a small 0.71% of the population.

They were not well understood. They were variously called Buddhists, Pagans, Confucians or just Chinese. There were 41 Muslims in 1901, 17 in 1906 (when the census reported 10 "Hindoos, Brahmins etc."), 12 in 1911 (when Hindoos rose to 32) and a sudden rise to 47 in 1916 (where there were 90 Hindus). The regional figures show Buddhist, pagans and Confucians all together. So we don't know where the Muslims were but Heathcote and Paparua Counties certainly have some "other religions". They tended to congregate in the towns, small and large. There were 70 "other religionists" in Auckland borough, 23 in Mount Eden, 31 in Eden County, 33 in New Plymouth, 26 in Westport, 20 in Christchurch, 47 in Dunedin and 10 in Invercargill.

It was a period of great racial excitement. Massey introduced his astonishing language test in any European language. The editor of the Evening Post tried to encourage the community but in the process revealed current fears:

Shall there be, somewhere in the approximate future, a great inundatory movement of the East over the West, a horde of Oriental immigration, pouring over, if not sweeping away, in its search for room, the newer and more vigorous civilisation of the Teutonic and Latin races? Or, on the other hand, shall the West clutch the decadent East more and more in its strong grasp, until it has imposed its modes of thought and habit of life on systems hoary with age in which the life and sap, of independent development seem to have died out? These two questions sum up in extreme form the problem of the future relations of these two great divisions of the human race.

Another chance of the Eastern peril is the possibility of a great fanatical rising of the Muslim world of North Africa, Western Asia, and perhaps India, against European control or interference. We are told that the movement is simmering and seething, and must ultimately burst forth like lava from a volcano. Here again we might invite speculation to

---

<sup>30</sup> Tessa Kristiansen, "Wilson, John Cracroft", DNZB.

<sup>31</sup> Leckie, 'A Long Diaspora', p. 48.

<sup>32</sup> Leckie, *Indian Settlers: the Story of a South Asian Community*, Otago University Press, 2007, p. 22.



descend from its cloudy heights, and contemplate its humble fact or two. We have had a fairly characteristic specimen of a fanatical outburst within the last twenty years, in the Mahdi movement in the Sudan. It threatened for a while to expand into a real danger, but, after degenerating into a regime of ordinary brutal greed, it eventually crumpled up before the masterly actions of a few British generals and the compact organisation of a few thousand British and Egyptian troops.

Let us do our duty by those people; let us show them a good example, trade with them, on equitable terms, teach them our religion and our secular learning so far as they can absorb them, and deal firmly and resolutely with their trickery and "wile. But let our expectations be chastened by the thought that there were Eastern civilisations before we were heard of, and that the depths of the Eastern mind must for ever remain impenetrable to our gaze.<sup>33</sup>

In 1921 no Muslims were listed, but I don't think they had left despite the racial excitement of that year when Massey reached the height of his ingenuity to exclude foreigners. For in 1926 there was a large growth of Hindus and Buddhists – the figures show 2602 Jews, 1194 Confucians, 353 Hindus, 169 Buddhists, 25 Baha'i and 76 Muslims. Of the other religions, 75 were in the main urban areas,

Finally in 1936 Mohammadan reappears in the list, with 35 in Auckland province 2 in the Hawkes Bay, 2 in Taranaki, 6 in Wellington, 1 each in Nelson, Westland and Southland, three in Canterbury and none at all in Otago. They say this makes 51. There were 11 in the main cities but no details are given for counties and boroughs. So this is quite a drop in numbers, perhaps reflecting depression circumstances. Certainly in the same period all groups except Hindus dropped. Hindus rose to 591.

It seems reasonable to guess that Muslims also rose in Pukekohe, with the advent of Indian labourers from Fiji after World War One.

The last census to report was 1951, which provides no regional details but lists 67 Muslims along with 34 Bahai, 29 Buddhists, 661 Hindus 715 Confucians and 3470 Jews.

The great transformation came in 1951 when Muslims jumped to 205. But that is another story.

## Largely Indians

The critical aspect of this is that they were largely of Indian descent. There were a few Chinese, but it was people of the empire who could make it into New Zealand. But some of them came via Fiji, and from 1912 this became increasingly important. Muslim Indians had rather less to do with the Sikhs and Hindus (Sikhs, p 67) but they were still part of one community.

So how did they maintain their religion? Leckie reports the struggles of Ibrahim Bhkoo, who sought to maintain his pattern of salam, of prayer five times a day, and the Ramadan fast, but struggled. She also cites Mahumad Musa who had initially lived in a country district in New Zealand and realised that he "knew very little about Islam. When we came to Auckland in 1953, we realised that the Muslim community was here – and we were few."<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> *Evening Post*, Volume LXVI, Issue 148, 19 December 1903, Page 4.

<sup>34</sup> Leckie, *Indian Settlers*, p. 1554.

## Conclusion

Muslims, although a tiny minority, were part of the Indian community in New Zealand for most of the period of European settlement. Although they knew that they were in a Christian dominion, they were, as in many parts of the Empire, mostly accepted and respected. This was part of the paradox of an Empire which embraced India. The white New Zealand settlers may have wished that it was not so, but they were the beneficiaries of this Empire, and there was in fact little change in actual status as the numbers began to rise, for although the country was nominally Christian, no formal rules excluded the Muslim minority.

APPENDIX: INFORMATION ABOUT SALAMAN from the web and correspondents:

Though he ended up infamous in Taranaki, Salaman's story really begins in India. Born at Amritsar in the Punjab around 1885 or 1886, his parents were Muslim and his father a herbalist.

I suspect the man in question is Abraham Salaman who arrived in New Zealand about 1903 and eventually found his way to New Plymouth, where he died in 1941.

I have sent you a link to one of the stories about him on our website, please see below:

<http://www.pukeariki.com/Research/TaranakiStories/TaranakiStory/id/540/title/the-monument-builder.aspx#print>

There is also a story about him in "Epitaph II", foreword by Paul Gittens, published by Random House in 2001. The chapter on Salaman is written by Graeme Lay. It appears we also have a video of the actual Epitaph television episode (ARC2002-1026)

We also hold an archive (ARC2003-12) about Salaman – a brief description of it follows:

Abraham Walley (Wali) Mahomed Salaman was born in Amritsar, Punjab, India, probably in 1885 or 1886. He arrived in New Plymouth around 1930 having been embroiled in court cases over his treatment of patients by means of herbal remedies in Auckland. Salaman remained in New Plymouth until he died in 1941 and is buried in the Te Henui Cemetery.

Dr Alan Hayton's research and reminiscences plus notes relating to Salaman. Typescript.

## The Monument Builder

by Rhonda Bartle

Though he ended up infamous in Taranaki, Salaman's story really begins in India. Born at Amritsar in the Punjab around 1885 or 1886, his parents were Muslim and his father a herbalist. Perhaps that's what made him decide to go into the same kind of business.

But first, at the age of 14, he set out to travel the world. When he arrived in New Zealand around 1903, he became a silk merchant in Wellington and married Scottish born Marjory Cardno. By the time their first child was born, Salaman was producing the dyes for khaki uniforms worn by soldiers during World War II.

The couple divorced within five years. Salaman turned to selling herbal remedies in Auckland's Khyber Pass Road and soon called himself a chemist. His standard reply when asked about his lack of proper qualifications was, 'I know, that's all'.

### **Trouble brews in a bottle**

People recommended the tall, well-built man to friends and Salaman's business grew. In 1924 he married Gladys Richards and had two more daughters.

But trouble began in 1924, when one of his patients nearly died. His mixtures were discovered to be hardly herbal - most had little herbal in them and some were opium based.

New Plymouth's Dr Alan Hayton believed people were being deceived. "Dick Christie the chemist told me Salaman would buy the cheapest pill by the gross, Blaud's Pill, ferrous sulphate, and paint them with gold paint and sell them at great profit," he said.

Sal ammoniac, used for soldering irons, was purchased from Dr Hayton's father, a plumbing merchant. "When he asked Salaman what he used that for, he was told it went into his remedies," the doctor said.

### **The patient testifies**

At a dramatic hearing, Salaman's patient was so weak she had to be stretchered in. Agnes Stewart told the court how Salaman had treated her for goitre for almost a year, after first examining her by putting a stethoscope to her neck and pronouncing her kidneys and lungs were failing. After giving her several mixtures to take, not only was she not cured, but she'd become addicted to opium.

But just two weeks after winning the case and being awarded £600 Agnes Stewart died. Salaman was found guilty of falsely pretending to be a doctor and was sent to Mount Eden prison for a month. Though he petitioned Parliament for compensation, the committee came back with no recommendation, and no money was awarded either.

### **A clear case of charlatanism**

When Salaman's youngest daughter died of diphtheria and his wife developed tuberculosis, he moved to New Plymouth to start a new life. Again he hit the headlines when another patient died.

Six year-old Lyall Christie had been a diabetic. Salaman said he'd treat him only if his insulin stopped. Sadly, the boy died in a coma, which resulted in a guilty verdict and harsh words from the judge.

The Taranaki Herald of 25 September 1930 reported under the headlines

Salaman Guilty

12 Month's Imprisonment

PLAIN CASE OF CHARLATANISM

Chief Justice's Outspoken Comment

...Addressing the prisoner, his Honour said he would take all these matters into consideration. 'I cannot, however,' he said, 'lose sight of the fact that this is not an isolated case of charlatanism. The prisoner is plainly a charlatan.' Referring again to the English case which his Honour cited during the hearing of the case, he said that the learned Judge, in delivering the judgement of the court in that case, said it was essential that such quacks as the prisoner should not be allowed to go free. 'With those sentiments, I am in complete agreement,' added the Chief Justice, and the sentence of the court is that you be detained to prison and kept to hard labour for a term of twelve calendar months.

### **Supporters cry foul!**

More than 500 outraged New Plymouth citizens got together at several public meetings to read testimonies from satisfied patients.

Salaman wasn't to blame, they said, but a medical profession intent on shutting down the competition. Crowded meetings at Moturoa, Eltham and Woodville followed. Even the Prime Minister was approached to ask his cabinet to reverse the court decision but the cabinet wanted nothing to do with it and opted not to get involved.

When Salaman's wife died of tuberculosis soon afterwards, he decided to go back to India to live. He returned in 1933 and married Annie Perreaux. At 24 she was much younger than Salaman. He took his new wife and remaining children back to Amritsar and set up a medical practice. However, his family found they couldn't adjust to the strange new environment and they came back to his house in Gill Street, New Plymouth.

### ***An illustrious monument for a shady man***

In 1940, worried by his own bad health, Salaman put his affairs in order. As a Muslim, his death would fall under the teachings of The Koran, which made it necessary to be buried on Muslim soil. Since none was available at Te Henui Cemetery, he created his own.

He designed an exotic resting place which covered 10 plots and needed special planning permission. He contracted Jones and Sandford workmen to build it at a cost of £2500.

Te Henui Cemetery records show it as being made of painted concrete, sitting nearly 15ft square, with a large blue dome on top and four blue corner plinths for ventilation. The entrance had both double iron gates and double wooden doors, each decorated with a star and a moon design. Two beige clay urns with BISMULLAH engraved on their rims were placed inside and the inscription above the door carried Salaman's name in full and the date he died.

Three marble steps led down inside the tomb. Coffin supports, like park benches, ran around the walls. A red circular table held two wreaths, also in the shape of a star and moon, plus two brass vases and an ornate brass dish filled with incense ashes. Two candles lay on the table top and set at the bottom of each table leg were porcelain wreaths in glass domes.

On the floor, scattered around the room, were several more vases and a large green clay frog, and the only light in the room came through the door.

### ***A tomb to die for***

Salaman died on February 8, 1941 at the age of 59 and he took his copy of The Koran and his reading glasses with him to the grave. His embalmed body lay in state at home for a week in a white satin gown and silver-patterned green wrap.

More than 2000 mourners turned his burial into a public event, complete with a picnic-like atmosphere and the service was conducted in both Arabic and English.

As the Reverend Wilson later told the Taranaki Herald: 'It might seem strange to some of you - a Christian minister conducting the funeral of a Mohammedan but no clergyman of his faith is in New Zealand and we should like to think that, were we to die in some land of Islam, similarly situated, there might be found some Sheikh of their religion who would give us a Christian burial.'

### *Epilogue*

In 1943, Annie Salaman married Kwong Simpson and together they set up another herbalist business, trading as Salaman-Simpson until the early 1970s.

Though Salaman's estate was valued at £8000 and his will asked that his tomb be kept in a rightful manner, neither prevented vandals from attacking it. The brass star and moon disappeared and thieves also stole the hefty gates which were likely sold for scrap.

Though the television program Epitaph brought a flurry of renewed attention in 2003, like any other grave it needs family permission to be opened.

Today Abraham Walley Mahomed Salaman's tomb stands as a rare memorial to a man who so obviously wanted to be remembered. It's a shame it was more for his notoriety than for his healing talents.

First published 14 January 2005



Big send off: More than 200 mourners attend Salaman's funeral. Image: Taranaki Stories Database



Submit

[ADD TO MY STORIES](#)

### Tags for this Story

[Charlatan](#), [Medicine](#)

### Add A Tag

[Please sign in to add a tag](#)

Though he ended up infamous in Taranaki, Salaman's story really begins in India. Born at Amritsar in the Punjab around 1885 or 1886, his parents were Muslim and his father a herbalist.

Perhaps that's what made him decide to go into the same kind of business.

But first, at the age of 14, he set out to travel the world. When he arrived in New Zealand around 1903, he became a silk merchant in Wellington and married Scottish born Marjory Cardno. By the time their first child was born, Salaman was producing the dyes for khaki uniforms worn by soldiers during World War II.

The couple divorced within five years. Salaman turned to selling herbal remedies in Auckland's Khyber Pass Road and soon called himself a chemist. His standard reply when asked about his lack of proper qualifications was, 'I know, that's all'.

### *Trouble brews in a bottle*

People recommended the tall, well-built man to friends and Salaman's business grew. In 1924 he married Gladys Richards and had two more daughters.

But trouble began in 1924, when one of his patients nearly died. His mixtures were discovered to be hardly herbal - most had little herbal in them and some were opium based.

New Plymouth's Dr Alan Hayton believed people were being deceived. "Dick Christie the chemist told me Salaman would buy the cheapest pill by the gross, Blaud's Pill, ferrous sulphate, and paint them with gold paint and sell them at great profit," he said.

Sal ammoniac, used for soldering irons, was purchased from Dr Hayton's father, a plumbing merchant. "When he asked Salaman what he used that for, he was told it went into his remedies," the doctor said.

### *The patient testifies*

At a dramatic hearing, Salaman's patient was so weak she had to be stretchered in. Agnes Stewart told the court how Salaman had treated her for goitre for almost a year, after first examining her by putting a stethoscope to her neck and pronouncing her kidneys and lungs

were failing. After giving her several mixtures to take, not only was she not cured, but she'd become addicted to opium.

But just two weeks after winning the case and being awarded £600 Agnes Stewart died. Salaman was found guilty of falsely pretending to be a doctor and was sent to Mount Eden prison for a month. Though he petitioned Parliament for compensation, the committee came back with no recommendation, and no money was awarded either.

### ***A clear case of charlatanism***

When Salaman's youngest daughter died of diphtheria and his wife developed tuberculosis, he moved to New Plymouth to start a new life. Again he hit the headlines when another patient died.

Six year-old Lyall Christie had been a diabetic. Salaman said he'd treat him only if his insulin stopped. Sadly, the boy died in a coma, which resulted in a guilty verdict and harsh words from the judge.

The Taranaki Herald of 25 September 1930 reported under the headlines

Salaman Guilty

12 Month's Imprisonment

PLAIN CASE OF CHARLATANISM

Chief Justice's Outspoken Comment

...Addressing the prisoner, his Honour said he would take all these matters into consideration. 'I cannot, however,' he said, 'lose sight of the fact that this is not an isolated case of charlatanism. The prisoner is plainly a charlatan.' Referring again to the English case which his Honour cited during the hearing of the case, he said that the learned Judge, in delivering the judgement of the court in that case, said it was essential that such quacks as the prisoner should not be allowed to go free. 'With those sentiments, I am in complete agreement,' added the Chief Justice, and the sentence of the court is that you be detained to prison and kept to hard labour for a term of twelve calendar months.

### ***Supporters cry foul!***

More than 500 outraged New Plymouth citizens got together at several public meetings to read testimonies from satisfied patients.

Salaman wasn't to blame, they said, but a medical profession intent on shutting down the competition. Crowded meetings at Moturoa, Eltham and Woodville followed. Even the

Prime Minister was approached to ask his cabinet to reverse the court decision but the cabinet wanted nothing to do with it and opted not to get involved.

When Salaman's wife died of tuberculosis soon afterwards, he decided to go back to India to live. He returned in 1933 and married Annie Perreaux. At 24 she was much younger than Salaman. He took his new wife and remaining children back to Amritsar and set up a medical practice. However, his family found they couldn't adjust to the strange new environment and they came back to his house in Gill Street, New Plymouth.

### *An illustrious monument for a shady man*

In 1940, worried by his own bad health, Salaman put his affairs in order. As a Muslim, his death would fall under the teachings of The Koran, which made it necessary to be buried on Muslim soil. Since none was available at Te Henui Cemetery, he created his own.

He designed an exotic resting place which covered 10 plots and needed special planning permission. He contracted Jones and Sandford workmen to build it at a cost of £2500.

Te Henui Cemetery records show it as being made of painted concrete, sitting nearly 15ft square, with a large blue dome on top and four blue corner plinths for ventilation. The entrance had both double iron gates and double wooden doors, each decorated with a star and a moon design. Two beige clay urns with BISMULLAH engraved on their rims were placed inside and the inscription above the door carried Salaman's name in full and the date he died.

Three marble steps led down inside the tomb. Coffin supports, like park benches, ran around the walls. A red circular table held two wreaths, also in the shape of a star and moon, plus two brass vases and an ornate brass dish filled with incense ashes. Two candles lay on the table top and set at the bottom of each table leg were porcelain wreaths in glass domes.

On the floor, scattered around the room, were several more vases and a large green clay frog, and the only light in the room came through the door.

### *A tomb to die for*

Salaman died on February 8, 1941 at the age of 59 and he took his copy of The Koran and his reading glasses with him to the grave. His embalmed body lay in state at home for a week in a white satin gown and silver-patterned green wrap.



More than 2000 mourners turned his burial into a public event, complete with a picnic-like atmosphere and the service was conducted in both Arabic and English.

As the Reverend Wilson later told the Taranaki Herald: 'It might seem strange to some of you - a Christian minister conducting the funeral of a Mohammedan but no clergyman of his faith is in New Zealand and we should like to think that, were we to die in some land of Islam, similarly situated, there might be found some Sheikh of their religion who would give us a Christian burial.'

### *Epilogue*

In 1943, Annie Salaman married Kwong Simpson and together they set up another herbalist business, trading as Salaman-Simpson until the early 1970s.

Though Salaman's estate was valued at £8000 and his will asked that his tomb be kept in a rightful manner, neither prevented vandals from attacking it. The brass star and moon disappeared and thieves also stole the hefty gates which were likely sold for scrap.

Though the television program Epitaph brought a flurry of renewed attention in 2003, like any other grave it needs family permission to be opened.

Today Abraham Walley Mahomed Salaman's tomb stands as a rare memorial to a man who so obviously wanted to be remembered. It's a shame it was more for his notoriety than for his healing talents.

First published 14 January 2005

### *LIBRARY RESOURCES*

[Macdonald, Christina, Garden herbs for Australia and New Zealand: their history and cultivation, their use in cookery, perfumery and medicine \(1984\), Reed, Wellington.](#)

[Neil, James F, The New Zealand family herb doctor a book on the botanic eclectic system of medicine... \(1889\), Mills, Dick & Co., Dunedin.](#)

[Roberts, Margaret, Herbs for healing \(1989\), David Bateman in association with Child & Assoc. Auckland.](#)

[Woolley, Benjamin, The herbalist: Nicholas Culpeper and the fight for medical freedom \(2004\), HarperCollins, London.](#)

### ***ARCHIVES***

[Research and reminiscences relating to Salaman by Dr Alan Hayton.](#)

[\(Ref: 2003-12\)](#)

Epitaph: Stories that will not rest - 'Salaman's Tomb' (Video tape)

[\(Ref: 2002-1026\)](#)

AWM Salaman - Vertical File. Taranaki Research Centre.

### ***WEBLINKS***

Puke Ariki is not responsible for the content of these external websites.

[National Council Against Health Fraud](#) - Article "Some Notes on Quackery" looking at the "hows" and "whys" of medical fraud.

[The Q Adams Center for the History of Otolaryngology \(Head and Neck Surgery\)](#) - Provides an "Introduction to Popular Medicine" including a selection of quack remedies from the past.

[The Complete Herbalist](#) - full text of book published by Dr O. Phelps Brown in 1878.

### ***PLACES TO VISIT***

Salaman's Tomb

Te Henui Cemetery ALLOC Plot 000 - Salaman's tomb can be found on the main loop road a short distance behind the main chapel.