

In the year 1848, the ship Ajax left England for New Zealand taking three months to reach Dunedin which it did in January, 1849. My Grandmother and Grandfather (Mr and Mrs Samuel Woolley) one son, Samuel, and five daughters - Clarissa, Eliza, Maria, Jane and Lucy were passengers on the ship. Jane, a child of four took croup and died and was buried at sea. This caused Grandfather and Grandmother a great grief. The youngest of the family was Lucy, she was a baby of six weeks old when they left England. On arrival at Dunedin it was very cold. There was flax and scrub right to the waters edge and as there were no houses, the only place to go was the Barracks.

Grandfather acquired a piece of land at North East Valley where he and my Uncle, a lad of fifteen, built a house. There was a flood and the water of the Leith overflowed its banks, the water went in the front door and out through the back and the heavy rain caused the roof to leak and Grandmother had to keep the children on the bed with umbrellas up to keep them dry. Grandfather put the first bridge across the water of the Leith which was made by felling a tree on one side of the river and then felling another tree on the other side and nailing laths across to walk on.

It was very hard to obtain work in those days as Captain Cargill was not in favour of anyone getting work but the ones from Scotland as he reckoned it was a Scottish Settlement, but Dr Burns employed Grandfather and my Uncle and while employed they built him a boat.

Grandfather next brought a piece of ground and house in Manse Street opposite where Wain's Hotel stands. A boy who worked as boots in the Hotel and used to visit Grandfather, later became the owner of the Hotel. He was Job Wain and it is him the Hotel was named 'Wain's Hotel'. Grandfather sold out for a few pounds grounds that is worth a great deal of money today and shifted to Herbert, which was then known as Otepopo. While living in Dunedin two sons were born, Josiah and Phillip. That made the family of seven and they sailed from Dunedin to Otepopo in two open rowing boats, one for the family and one for the luggage. At Otepopo, Grandfather managed the dairy part of a large Estate for Mr Chas. Suisted. While working there Grandmother, who had learnt cheese making at "Home" made large quantities of cheese and when Mr Suisted saw how good it was he sent some "Home" and I think this must have been the first cheese sent "Home". That was in the year 1854, (95 years ago). While living at Otepopo, my Aunts Clara, Eliza and Maria often walked to Moeraki to visit ship mates. They would stay a night at Hampsteads and walk back again. My Mother (Mary Jane Woolley) was born at Otepopo. The family next moved to Goodwood where Grandfather worked for Mr Suisted and he then brought a place at Goodwood which he farmed for a few years. My Aunt Louisa was born while they lived there. The next move was to Waikouaiti where Grandfather had a Hotel. This Hotel was in Beach Street and during the Dunstan gold rush there was a great trade especially in home made bread. As the bakehouse oven fell in no bread was obtainable by the men who landed off the boat to go to the gold diggings until my Aunties started baking bread for which they received 2d a loaf and 2/6 for a meal and a bed.

The next move was to a Hotel on the main road as the coaches ran to and from Dunedin. Grandfather named the Hotel "The Plough Inn" after the "Plough Inn" in Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire, England and which they had sold to come out to New Zealand. The Plough Inn at Waikouaiti is still standing but has been converted into a dwelling house. Grandfather next built the Railway Hotel near the Railway Station and he conducted it until his death at the age of 82. Grandmother also died a few years before him. Altogether they reared a family of seven, three others died when young, Jane, the one who died at sea and Josiah and Phillip who died when an epidemic of Scarlet Fever broke out in Waikouaiti when they lived in the Hotel in Beach Street. All the family are now dead but they all lived to be 80 years and over, one Aunt being over 98 year of age when she died. The reminiscences they could tell would fill a book. When we think of what the old identities had to go through and what they put up with, without complaining, how thankful we should be for all the conveniences and advantages that we have now.

When Grandfather left England he went to book passages for Canada. He spoke to a man on the wharf and the man asked where he was going and he said 'Canada'. The man said he should go by the 'Ajax' to New Zealand as it was a new country. He persuaded Grandfather to change his mind and go to New Zealand and when he went back and told Grandmother she was in a great state - she said there were only wild people in New Zealand and it was no place to take a family.

Violet Park
33 Arun Street
Oamaru