

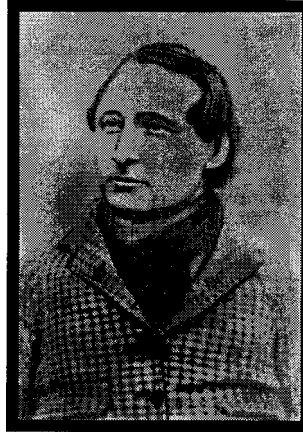
Luke & Frances Rachael Natrass

We know precisely when Luke Natrass was born, because the Natrass family bible records:

"Luke born 19 January 1804 at about 9 o'clock in the morning, baptised 19 February at St George's Church in Southwark."

Luke must have had a good education for those days, because in February 1819, Luke's uncle Timothy arranged a job for him at the counting house in Mr Fothergill's office. Timothy wrote to his brother Mark:

"It is now arranged between Mr Fothergill and self that one of your sons shall come into the counting house, I told him Mark was gone to sea but you had another son rather younger about 15 years old, that he was short of his age but wrote nearly as well as Mark, and I hope he is pretty quick in adding and casting up sums by rule of three and Practice ... I think Mr F will be well pleased with him if he is sharp and clever."



Perhaps it was Luke's early experience in the Corn Exchange that led to his abiding life-long interest in flax. In any event, it seems it was this interest which led to his involvement with the New Zealand Company and the early settlement of Wellington.

Some time in the 1830's (the record of their marriage has not been found) Luke married Frances Rachael Brown. She was born on 21 January 1811, the daughter of John Brown of London (described as a Master Mariner) and Sarah Brown. Some hint of her forbears, and also of her personality, is given in one of her Letters to her daughter, probably written about 1863. She says:

"Your great grandfather's name was Francis. I and you are named after him his wife the Honourable Miss Louisa Howard maid to Queen Ann. I thought you might like to know. I must say goodbye for I have got to bake bread."

Luke and Frances Rachael had a daughter, Frances Jane, who was born in 1836. However, in 1839 Luke, with his brother John, left Gravesend Dock on the *Adelaide*, bound for New Zealand. They arrived in Wellington on 7 March 1840, almost six months later. The *Adelaide* was the largest of the first six New Zealand Company ships, and the last to arrive. There were 37 cabin and 144 steerage passengers on board, but five births occurred during the voyage bringing the total number of passengers to 186. The voyage of the *Adelaide* was described by one of the passengers in his diary as "... rather an eventful one. In crossing the Bay of Biscay we encountered a severe gale, with a high tumultuous sea, and it was with great difficulty that the Captain saved the masts."

As a New Zealand Company settler, Luke had purchased Town Acre No 512, which was where Stewart Dawson's Corner now is, between Lambton Quay and The Terrace. He also had a rural acreage at Watts Peninsula, where he set about establishing a flax mill.

However, in May 1841 Luke returned to England on the *Brougham*. It was while waiting in Wellington Harbour for the ship to leave that he sketched early Wellington. The original sketch appears to have been lost, but a number of lithograph copies were made and survive. These are some eight feet long, and record in detail every building erected along the shore during Wellington's first year of existence. Both the houses of Luke Natrass, and his friend and neighbour the artist Charles Heaphy, are clearly shown.

Back in England, Luke formed a business partnership with William Edwards, a wealthy merchant. He returned to New Zealand with his wife and daughter, Frances Jane, who was aged eight or nine by then, on the *Caledonia*, which arrived in Wellington on 11 January 1845. With them came a second vessel, the *Slams Castle* carrying flax dressers and machinery to establish the flax industry in Nelson, where Luke went after selling his Wellington land. Also with them was William Edwards' son, Nathaniel Edwards, with whom Luke was to operate the partnership.

The family settled in Nelson where their second child, Luke Nelson Nattrass, was born on 26 October 1845. However, no sooner had they done so than Luke once again returned to England to attend to family and business affairs. He had been working with flax around the Kaipara Harbour, and left there on the *Mary Catherine* in May 1846, but the vessel was wrecked on the Kaipara Bar, and the passengers rescued and sent back to Auckland. He finally got away again later in 1846 on the *Cecilia*. In a letter written on board the *Cecilia*, dated 24 August 1846 and addressed to "my dear wife", he wrote: *"I am about dead with anxiety and the delay of getting forward. Here we are not more than half loaded, and expect to be here 3 or 4 weeks longer and then to go to Auckland for stores. The Cecilia will! think make a quick passage when she makes a start."*

Their baby son would have been less than a year old then, and later in the letter he says: *"Let me know how the little rascal is, also your dear dear self ..."* and he signs off *"I shall write again at the first opportunity and believe me your true and affectionate husband... ."*

Luke spent the next couple of years in London trying to advance his business interests from there. He seems to have had little success, and returned to New Zealand for the last time on the *Pilgrim*, which arrived in Wellington on 22 August 1849. No doubt his wife and children, by then aged 13 and almost four, were pleased to see him back.

Luke continued his enthusiasm for the flax industry, which involved the processing of flax for uses such as making paper and ropes and sails for sailing ships. Although it seems he was both innovative and persistent in his efforts, unfortunately, his business was not a financial success. As the book "Nelson - A History of Early Settlement" records: *"... in January 1845 the Slains Castle and the Caledonia arrived from England with the flax company of Nattrass and Edwards complete with staff and machinery... . The company began with ambitious plans and high hopes, which gradually faded as the months passed in unsuccessful experiments with the machines. Finally in 1846 Nathaniel Edwards sold all the gear... for a few pounds of tobacco."*

The "Jubilee History of Nelson" puts it this way: *"On anniversary day in 1845, prizes were awarded for the best dressed flax - an industry that was already beginning to attract considerable attention. Its history has not been a success in Nelson. Nattrass & Edwards brought out some expensive flax machines in 1845"*

Luke continued to write extensively about the flax industry, and his proposals and ideas for it, and many of his papers on the subject, as well as some of his letters and personal papers, remain in the Auckland Museum, the Nelson Institute, and within private family collections.

Although both in their forties, Luke and Frances had another daughter, Katherine Ann, who was born on 13 July 1853. By that time, Frances Jane was 17 and Luke Nelson was eight. Some idea of their family life in later years can be seen from another of Frances Rachael's letter in 1863 to her daughter Frances Jane (whom had recently married), where she writes: *"Won't you be surprised to hear I gave a little party on Katie's birthday. She said I promised one when she was 10, so as I could not escape I set to work with a will I made a large cake some tarts and some sponge cakes... Laughter was a proof and we had plenty in fact my little party went off well no sulks no crying. Papa decorated the room with flowers made everything look its best... . I made myself as great a goose as the children. Katie received little presents from all which she is anxious you should see her doll."*

Luke's early education proved useful later in life, as he was appointed librarian of the Nelson Institute on 20 April 1865. Perhaps after his earlier adventures he was ready for a quieter life. In 1866 he gave evidence at the trial in Nelson of the Maungatapu murderers. On 19 September 1874 his services with the Institute ended due to ill health, and he died on 4 June 1875.

Frances Rachael continued to live in Nelson until she died on 11 March 1884. They are both buried at Wakapuaka Cemetery in Nelson.

Their daughter Katherine Ann married Nicholas Raven - they had no children. She died in Wellington on 31 October 1918 and is buried at Karori Cemetery.

Children of Luke and Frances Rachel Nattrass

Frances Jane Grove, b. c1836, m. James Grove 1 November 1862, d. 12 June 1910.

Luke Nelson Nattrass, b. 26 October 1845, m. Marie Antoinette Hayes 8 May 1872, d. 11

July 1919. Katherine Ann Raven, b. 13 July 1853, m. Nicholas Raven, d. 31 October 1918.