

*Hawke's Bay branch – Hereworth School Essay Competition winner  
'A new life in New Zealand' by Liam Spence*



## From Scotland to New Zealand

In April 1863, my ancestors George and Christina (Kirsty) Spence arrived in Auckland, New Zealand on a ship called the *Nimroud*, from Inverurie near Aberdeen in Scotland. According to my grandfather, Digby Spence, they left because Kirsty was an educated young woman and the man she married was a less educated person, he was a blacksmith, which was frowned upon. Their family was upset so they headed for New Zealand to start a new life.



The 'Nimroud'



George and Kirsty Spence

On arrival they went to Napier because they heard land was available for purchase.

They started their new life in New Zealand at Port Ahuriri in a boarding house and built their first house/hut in Meeanee. It was swampy land with lots of creeks and the land was often flooded by the Tutaekuri River. It was not a popular place to live because of the flooding.

Their first daughter was born in a raupo hut. In 1867 there was a really big flood that washed

down lots of slash and driftwood washed on to the beaches. There were some arguments with the Maori and English over who owned the wood. They both wanted to use it for buildings. Three years later in 1870 George and Kirsty moved to Puketapu and bought land and 300 sheep.

The family built a house at 'Seafield' near Petane. The Petane domain still exists and that's where I have played cricket in the Riverbend tournament. The house had two rooms with earth floors. Later they built a wooden house with two bedrooms upstairs, a dining room downstairs and a maid's room, the kitchen and pantry were separate. Many years later in 1931, the Napier earthquake destroyed this house in Seafield.

In the mid 1880s George sold his farm and moved to Tolaga Bay, George and his sons drove the cattle from Hawke's Bay, while Kirsty and her daughters sailed on the ship *Southern Cross* to 'Cook's Cove' it was a rough trip but they made it. Kirsty went to Gisborne pregnant with her last child and her daughters walked to Tolaga Bay. They were very hungry and only had briar berries along the way in a place called Hauiti.

Some Maori people gave them a big dish of potatoes and watermelon. When they got there they had to cook in camp ovens outside. Life was really difficult then.

George bought a hotel in Tolaga Bay but because his wife Kirsty was really religious she refused to live there. In 1904 George and Kirsty went to live in Te Aroha for health reasons. Kirsty died five years later. She lived in New Zealand for 46 years and was an amazing pioneer mother. George lived on for seven more years and had been in New Zealand for 53 years.

One of George and Kirsty's children was my great great grandfather, Thomas Bruce (TB). He went farming and managed Te Hau station (20,000 acre farm) for Captain Read, one of the first traders in the Gisborne area. TB and his brother John purchased Ruakituri station. The partnership was soon

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dissolved with TB keeping Ruakaka station (6,400 acres). He had a lot of staff to do his farming work for him.

One of TB's sons, Warwick was born on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1922 at Te Hau station and went to Whatatutu school and then on to Hereworth. He was head prefect in 1935 and won the Salvia Cup. One of the interesting things he did every year was to ride his horse from Whatutu to Ruatahuna through Rua's track to organise shearers to shear the sheep at Te Hau station.

After Hereworth he went to Gisborne High School and left school at 15. When he was 17 he joined the NZ Army Mounted Rifles. Just before he was about to go to WWII, it was discovered that he was only 17. His mother told the authorities his proper age so they wouldn't let him go. When he was old enough he went to war in the Pacific Islands. In 1943 he was sent back home because of Malaria.

He got married in 1946, and three children followed. He was a farmer until he retired at 64. One of Warwick's children, Digby Spence is my Grandfather.



*The Spence family*

In conclusion I think my ancestors lived a hard life especially Kirsty and George. They left everything and everyone they knew in Scotland, were on the Nimroud for 100 days, and were true pioneers who raised thirteen children, "that's a lot".

#### **References:**

Spence's history booklet  
Digby Spence (Grandfather)  
Ruth Spence (Grandmother)  
Guy Spence (Father)  
Family Tree.

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## **Research Award Book Launch**

*27<sup>th</sup> November 2021*



*Rose Chapman*

On a balmy Hawke's Bay afternoon, in the beautiful gardens at historic Duart House, Michael Fowler, Hawke's Bay historian, launched *A Beacon on the Hills*.

"When Duart was new, it stood out like a beacon on the bare hills of Havelock."

It is a new social history of Duart House and the McLeans of Havelock North

Author, Rose Chapman, recipient of the 2018 New Zealand Founders Research Book Award, was a former resident kaitaiki (caretaker and guardian) at Duart House from 2008 to 2013. Rose now lives in Waipawa, Central Hawke's Bay, and has been researching this book for over ten years.

Hawke's Bay Branch President Paddy Bayley and her husband Richard, Branch Secretary were honoured to represent New Zealand Founders Society at this launch.

