

## The tale of Mary Wallis (Wallace) nee Coster

### A true Pioneer of Tasman.

*It is a June morning in 1842.*

*Mary is as quiet as a church mouse.*

*She quietly kisses her mother's forehead, as not to wake her sleeping father, who will surely attempt to stop his daughter from leaving.*

*Mary has come too far for that! Her brother patiently waits for her downstairs with his horse and wagon, en route to London with fresh fruits and vegetables for the morning market.*

*Mary is 19, and in love.*

*In love with a man much older than herself named John Coster.*

*John would fill Mary's head with tales of adventure and grandeur of what their life in a newly developed colony on the other side of the world. A fresh start.*

*Mary's head filled with dreams of these foreign lands.*

*A book that Mary owned in England talked of how "pigs in the new colony of New Zealand grow fat on wild peaches and waddle about helplessly, simply asking to be killed"*

*She was vocal about her goal and her parents tried in vain to discourage it. Hardship and difficulties held no fear for Mary. The adventure was worth more. She has the romanticized notion of the whole idea as one great big adventure with her lover.*

*At the time of the immigration to New Zealand from the motherland England, each land purchase was entitled to a "town" acre (suburban dwellings) , or a "Rural section"*

*After a long and tiresome journey to London on this early morning, her brother delivered her to John, who awaited his beloved by a small church.*

*They were married in a relatively "solemn service" and had a simple wedding feast to follow.*

*Soon, they boarded the ship and Mary's adventure truly began.*

*At first, it was just as glorious as Mary had envisioned.*

*The beauty of the sea, the freshness of the sky, the love of her new husband.*

*It was not long before the harsh weather made for a rough voyage and all of the passengers were ordered down below to batten the hatches. Conditions quickly became horrendous with people vomiting from the seasickness into the small, shared living spaces.*

*This too passed and Mary was back on her grand adventure.*

*She loved the children and was almost certain to be found helping out with the mothers, lending a helping hand where she could.*

*It was to be a 5 month voyage with two short stops.*

*One of the stops was in Port Nicholson (Wellington).*

*Whilst Mary and a friend were strolling on the shoreline during one of these short stops, they encountered a native “clad in nothing but his dignity and tattoo” they later recalled. She went on to say, that they “froze, then turned with a shriek and ran.”*

*What a completely unknown world Mary and her fellow travelers were now privy to.*

*Having docked into Nelson region, it was now summer. John and Mary chose “suburban” holdings and John built him and his new bride a home. John struggled but finished the project, and to Mary it was a picture of domestic perfection.*

*Mary soon fell pregnant and John treated her like a queen. She was not to lift a single finger, not even one saucepan while she was expecting the couple’s baby. Mary felt spoilt and loved her husband and her new life though laden with the unknown and hard work, was still sweet and simplistic.*

*Her dreams were coming true.*

*Until the first winter.*

*It came in fierce and with the fine weather passing, the hardships were now a more prominent reality.*

*At one stage, the rain pelted down upon the humble, hand built cottage. Mary sat on their large barrel containing all of their flour; she held tightly an umbrella, trying her hardest to salvage what she could, so they would not starve to their deaths as the heavy Tasman rain poured down, drizzling through the cracks of their settler’s hut, dampening everything including Mary’s spirits.*

*But like all things, the bad weather soon passed, a thatch was fixed and domestic bliss reigned once again through the Coster’s whare.*

*Come March, little Agnes blessed their lives.*

*In 1843, some trouble began brewing between some of the settlers and local Maori in the Wairau Valley.*

*A call was put out for the European men of the area to come forth to support the Wairau surveyors on a Brig. John volunteered, like many. Day and night Mary feared for her husband and wished for his safe return home. She anxiously passed the days caring for her daughter, tending to crops and domestic duties until eventually news soon came of the pending arrival of the ship, which sent Mary into a flurry.*

*Mary dressed herself, and little baby Agnes in their finest of clothes, embroidered and luxurious, and traveled to the port in Nelson.*

*Wives, children, mothers all excitedly awaited the soon to arrive Brig. However, like all great stories, with the sweet comes the sour.*

*The sight before them was one they had not envisioned.*

*Where were all the joyous men waiting on the docks, furiously waving to their families?*

*Fear started to set in amongst the crowd and angst whispers soon replaced the excitement.*

*News erupted of The Wairau Massacre.*

*The first serious and fatal encounter between Maori and British settlers since the signing of The Treaty of Waitangi, and the only one to occur in the South Island. Initiated by the British Settlers in an attempt to clear land, 22 British were killed, and 4 Maori.*

*John was one of the 22 men killed.*

*As stated in the book "Tales of Pioneering Women" edited by A.E Woodhouse, "Within one year Mary had become a wife, an immigrant, a mother and a widow. At 19 years old"*

*A story that is not an overly uncommon one.*

*Mary was very lucky to have neighbours such as the Redwoods, who were*

*Also ex-shipmates of the Coster's. Without them, she may have very well perished from lack of self-care, or sobbed herself to death in her heartache.*

*Mrs Redwood made sure that the young mother was occupied, keeping Mary busy with odd jobs. In this way, Mary made a small earn for herself and gained the independence that she needed now that her and Agnes were alone in a new colony.*

*Almost a year had passed by before Mary received word back from her Mother regarding her husband's death in Wairau.*

*On a spring day, Mary was surprised to receive a letter full of loving words as well as a return passage back to England.*

*This was a decision Mary did not take lightly and she spent the day weighing up the pros and cons of staying or returning. Even considering whether it may be best for little Agnes to return to England where she may have more opportunities and a more privileged life. One that she most certainly was unlikely to receive as a colonial child.*

*Mary later reflected on this period of her life with raw emotional anguish as if reliving that exact moment. Choosing financial freedom and everything she had ever known, or a life of a widowed settler in a colony that was only a fraction of the way established.*

*Mary spoke of how she lay in bed all night sobbing, sobbing for her husband, for her mother and father, for the familiarity of "home", for her daughter Agnes.*

*The next morning, she arose to a new day.*

*As a settler.*

*Wahine Toa, Wahine Kaha, Wahine Mana!*

*Mary soon returned to Nelson from the Valley where she opened a little grocery and supply store.*

*Shortly after this, she met and fell in love with a man named Richard Wallis and married on October the 2<sup>nd</sup> 1844.*

*They must have loved each other dearly, as they soon went on to have their first 10 children together.*

*Pioneer life could be a tad cold and a little boring at times.*

*The 1850's were an extremely busy period for the Wallis family.*

*Mary and Richard ran a small quaint area school for girls.*

*Alongside of this, Richard was also filling in his time with contract farm work over in Motueka where he would drive a Bull herd over from Richmond.*

*In 1866, Mary and Richard had chosen to remain in Motueka permanently and buying some land on Hursthouse street.*

*They names their property "Hulmers" and in 1867, they decided to open an orphanage.*

*The Wallis's achieved a many a great tasks and accomplishments during their pioneering years, but the Orphanage was definitely the family's legacy.*

*Mary and Richard, along with their 11 children, lived within the Hursthouse property and they all contributed to the successful running of the institute.*

*The Wallis's cared for not only orphans, but also children who had been neglected or that were "ill cared for". Financially the Wallis's relied on the money that was paid by the families of the neglected children, 7 shillings weekly.*

*However, this was rarely paid on time, if at all. The Nelson Provincial Government also contributed towards the children's medical expenses. Numbers increased steadily, so a move was imminent for the well-being of all involved. The move to a larger location was made in 1870.*

*Financially this would prove to be an unsuccessful venture and the Wallis's had to return back to their smaller dwellings on Hursthouse.*

*The orphanage took in babies and children, the eldest aged 12-14.*

*Boys were apprenticed and the girls were trained for service and would bring them up according to her strong Christian belief system, hymns and prayers.*

*Mary looked after each one of these children as if they were her own.*

*She loved every single one that walked through the door.*

*She clothed them, fed them - both emotionally and spiritually, and made sure that all of their physical needs and requirements were met.*

*Mary was to these children, an ever loving, stable and consistent mother. The younger of the biological children of Mary and Richard were educated along side the orphaned children and the high school pass rate was high.*

*Mary and her husband Richard went on to live many years together.*

*Richard would pass away on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 1882, leaving Mary and*

*three of her daughters; Penny, Mary and Eliza to go on and continue running the orphanage.*

*Mary Wallis died in Motueka on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May 1910.*

*She is laid to rest in Motueka Cemetery next to her husband and surrounded by her children and grand-children. Her succeeding ancestors were a huge part of the building and shaping of the Aotearoa we know today and her legacy lives on throughout the entire country.*

*Thank you Mary Wallis for your honour and service.*