

THE CHRONICLE

Coach House Museum

Newsletter of The Coach House Museum

March 2026

In association with Feilding & Districts Community Archive

Russian Jack, Barrett Crumen

The name Jack was applied to many New Zealand swaggers. Our roads were walked by Jack the Bear, Canterbury Jack, Spring-heeled Jack, Dublin Jack, Fistie Jack and Hellfire Jack - and more than one Russian Jack. 'Russian' was regularly applied to any swagger with a thick Eastern European accent. "Our Russian Jack died on the roadside at Ponatahi," said one informant. And there was a Russian Jack who worked the gumfields of Northland.

But the 'Russian Jack' known throughout the lower North Island was Barrett Crumen. He was born in Latvia, in 1878 and by the 1900s he was working as a seaman on small coasting ships in New Zealand. He then took to labouring on the back country stations of Wairarapa. He was an immensely strong man who worked as a scrub-cutter and shedhand at Awhea Station for many years in the period around World War I.

As the years moved on, so did Russian Jack, mostly through the roads of Manawatu and Wairarapa, but in the years after World War 2 also exploring much of the North Island.

He was originally very tall and strong, but as he aged, he seemed to be shrinking and his feet were giving him more and more trouble. In mid-1965, he was admitted to Pahiatua Hospital suffering from frostbitten feet. He was transferred to a geriatric ward, where he was asked why he had roamed the roads for so many years.

"Man oh man, I vos FREE! Free to have a beer, have a smoke, - happy what you can call all the time, you know. They was free days."

He died on September 19, 1968.



'Russian Jack' Display Opening

Please join us as we celebrate our new display and the hard work that Len Gray and the team have done to put this all together.

Wednesday 18 March 2026

5.30pm

RSVP to Piki by Monday 16 March

International Women's Day—March 8 2026

I thought this was a good time to celebrate some of New Zealand's history making ladies.

Elizabeth Yates 1845 - 1918 FIRST WOMAN MAYOR IN THE BRITISH EMPIRE

When she won the mayoralty of Onehunga in 1893 by just 13 votes, Elizabeth became the first woman mayor in the British Empire. She received congratulations from Premier Richard Seddon and Queen Victoria but, locally, opposition was fierce. Four councillors and the town clerk resigned not wanting to work under 'petticoat government'.



Cassia Joy Cowley ONZ DCNZM OBE b.1936 CHILDREN'S FICTION WRITER

Widely published and much celebrated, Joy is best known for her children's books. She is a creative and inspiring storyteller and, worldwide, generations of children have learned to love reading with her popular characters like Mrs Wishy Washy and Dan the Flying Man, and timeless tales like *Bow Down Shadrach* (1991) and *The Road to Ratenburg* (2016).



Yeah, I knew that!

Clearest Water: Nelson's Blue Lake has the clearest natural freshwater in the world, with visibility up to 80 meters, comparable to distilled water.

Unique Coat of Arms: The woman featured on the NZ Coat of Arms was modeled after actress Grace Kelly .

Hon Dr. Whetū Marama Tirikātene-Sullivan ONZ 1932 – 2011

FIRST FEMALE MĀORI CABINET MINISTER *Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Kahungunu*

For 29 years Whetū served her people as a trail-blazing Member of Parliament for southern Māori. In 1967, she cut short her academic career to enter politics following the death of her father, long serving MP Sir Eruera Tirikātene. In 1972, Whetū became Minister for Tourism, the first female Maori cabinet minister, and the only woman in cabinet. She was a pioneer in the fight for women's rights and the first New Zealand politician to be pregnant during the parliamentary session.



Dr. Elizabeth (Lizzie) Gunn MBE 1879 – 1963 FOUNDER OF NZ HEALTH CAMPS

For almost 50 years Elizabeth worked to improve the health of New Zealand children. Her most innovative initiative was setting up the country's first health camp in 1919.

After finishing at Otago Girls' High School, Elizabeth trained as a doctor in Edinburgh, returning to New Zealand in 1912 to join the NZ School Medical Service. She had to petition the Prime Minister, William Massey, to be allowed to serve in the NZ Army Medical Corp during WWI. After the war, Elizabeth began a legendary 30 years of service in the Whanganui- Manawatu School Medical Service.

The Master and the Apprentice

Manawatu Classic Motorcycle Swap Meet Sun 22 March

Coach House
Museum Carpark,
8am—1.30pm

Entry \$5 donation to
museum. Sellers free.

Sausage Sizzles,
coffee/tea & scones
available.





Edith Stanway Halcombe: New Zealand Grown by Polly Catlin-Maybury

Artist, farmer, nurse, mother and community leader, Edith Stanway Halcombe was a woman who took pioneer life in her stride.

One of the first true New Zealand artists, Edith Swainson was born on 27 April 1844 in the Hutt Valley, Wellington. She was the seventh child of William Swainson, the naturalist and artist, and the second child of his second wife Anne Grasby. Edith's childhood was spent in the Hutt Valley and on her father's estate in Rangitikei. Like many women artists of the time, Edith was taught to sketch and paint by her father. In those days women who didn't have an artist relative to teach them had no possibility of access to training in the world of art. At first Edith learnt by copying her father's drawings - the talented young woman became so adept at this that it is sometimes difficult to tell the

difference between the two artists work.

She developed a keen interest in recording her surroundings - no doubt an influence of her father - up until this point, most female artists had concerned themselves with painting their restricted lives or their personal activities. Edith's work was to open a window into the world of pioneer settlers that had rarely been seen before.

An odd pair Edith married Arthur William Follett Halcombe at St James Church in the Hutt on 3 December 1863, the couple settled at Westoe, Rangitiki. They were to have five sons and three daughters.

Arthur had a varied and interesting career which often took him away from home. He was at various times a farmer, inspector of schools, a member of the Wellington Provincial Council, editor and immigration agent.

Their marriage was one of independence. One family member commented: "I never saw such an odd pair as Arthur and Edith in all my life - no sooner does one return home than the other goes away." Despite having a husband and eight children Edith was able to continue her work as an artist throughout her life.

To be continued.....

