

## **John Eura Horrell 1896-1987**

John Eura Horrell was born at Horrelville in 1896 and raised on land settled by his grandfather, John Horrell. Horrell Sr had arrived in Lyttelton on the 'Charlotte Jane' in 1850. The Horrelville area was named so by the railway authorities when the line was put through. John E. Horrell was educated at the West Eyreton primary school from 1901 to 1910, receiving his Proficiency Certificate. He spent a term at the Christchurch Technical College studying agriculture, as well as attending wool-classing courses on Saturdays for three years.

When John was 19, he volunteered and served with the Canterbury Infantry Regiment during World War One. In July 1916, he went overseas for four years service in France and Belgium. He was wounded at Messines. When fighting ceased, he acted as wool-classing instructor to the New Zealand troops in Germany and England, before returning home in 1920. During World War II, John was recognised as a very efficient company commander of the Cust-West Eyreton section of the Oxford Battalion of the Home Guard.

In 1921, he took up farming, fattening stock and growing wheat and was secretary of the West Eyreton branch of the Farmers Union for seven years. In 1931 John married Emily Elizabeth Petrie and they had three daughters.

John joined the Christchurch R.S.A. in 1919. He became a member of the Cust-West Eyreton branch from its formation in 1931 and was later vice-president from 1939 to 1944 and president from 1945 to 1950. He was a member of the Christchurch Returned Services Association lands committee when it formed in 1944, and remained on this committee until 1965, serving as chairman for 16 years. The committee aimed at assisting Government departments involved in settling New Zealand servicemen into farming after both wars. In recognition of his outstanding services to the R.S.A, he was awarded a Gold Star badge and Certificate of Merit in 1954.

Horrell was also extensively involved in local-body politics. He was a member of the Eyre County Council for 30 years, and its chairman for 21. Under his leadership, a drainage scheme was established and roading developed. He was also instrumental in having the voluntary scheme for eradicating hydatids introduced to the area, and his advice was also sought later in framing the Hydatids Act.

He spent six years representing the outlying districts on the Canterbury Museum Trust and was a valued member of the No. 14 Roads Board.

In 1954, he was appointed a Justice of the Peace.

Upon his retirement from the council, Mr Horrell took up a hobby that was to become a full-time job. He began tracing the history of the Horrell family land-ownership in North Canterbury. It expanded and he completed a detailed cross-reference of basically all rural lands between the Waimakariri River and Waipara River, as well as the residential areas of several small towns, including Oxford, Cust and Ohoka from 1859 to 1967. These works have all been bound and copies are held at the Canterbury Museum. His research took him to most parts of the South Island and he interviewed thousands of people. His cross-reference system allows the history of property sales to be traced either from a person's name or from the property details. In addition, he prepared hundreds of colour-coded maps to aid the tracing of successive transaction records in chronological order.

His work was widely recognised and he became the only life member of the New Zealand Genealogical Society at that time.

He was also involved in many other community activities, including extensive service as a Methodist lay preacher. In 1975, he was honoured for 60 years service, having conducted 1900 services throughout North Canterbury, keeping an index of all 240 sermons he used.

After 1975, he occasionally conducted services, and continued to take an active part in Church affairs until his death.

In 1985, he received the Queen Service Medal for his service to the community.

### **Sources Used**

"Mr John Horrell" Obituary, *The Press*, Friday 21 August 1987, p. 13.