

# John Tollis Hansen

John Tollis Hansen was born in 1834, probably at Te Puna, and was the only Hansen child to be given his mother's maiden name. Like his brothers and sisters before him, John had no schooling and never learned to read or write.

John lived nearly all his life at Te Puna, apart from some time in Auckland where he met and married Maria Ann Lang on 4<sup>th</sup> June 1863 at St Andrews Church. Both John and Maria made their marks in the register.

There was a story circulating among the family that the tall Norfolk pine growing on the ridge at Te Puna was planted by Thomas Hansen to mark the birth of Hannah King Letheridge in 1817. But as Thomas did not acquire land at Te Puna until after 1830, this story is unlikely to be correct. A more likely scenario was that the tree was planted by Thomas to mark the birth of his son John in 1834.

Before the CMS mission transferred to Te Puna, Thomas Hansen was able to purchase the neighbouring Te Koutu block from the Māori. He built his new family home down on the foreshore, a short walk away from the home of his sister, Hannah King. After John and Maria were married, they built their house on the ridge overlooking the bay. When Thomas died in 1874, John inherited his father's land. John also purchased the adjoining mission site at Te Puna from the CMS for £48 when the last of the Kings had vacated.

John and Maria had 13 children between 1864 and 1886; all of them born in the Bay of Islands. Sadly, Henry Hansen who was born in 1878, died as infant two years later.

An even greater tragedy struck the Hansen family in 1886 when three cousins drowned in the sea near John's home. The children were 12 year old Charles Robert Hansen and seven year old Herbert Francis Hansen, sons of John and Maria, and their 12 year old cousin, Florence Mountain, the granddaughter of Hannah King Letheridge.

Maria Hansen died in 1887, the year after giving birth to her 13<sup>th</sup> child, Emily Maud. She was buried at Te Puna.

John Hansen lived to the age of 76, and died at Te Puna on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1910. He was buried on the family farm, possibly beside his wife and his two sons who had drowned in 1886. No headstones have survived, but a new plaque for John was placed on the burial site in 1991 by his descendants. By 2000, ownership of the ancestral land was changing and Mr Peter Cooper, the new owner, had a very substantial permanent fence erected around the gravesite at his own expense.

All 11 Hansen siblings reached old age and 6 of them lived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Amy Baker was the only one left alive when WW1 broke out in 1914. Four of her grandsons died as a result of the Great War.

*Researched by Kath Hansen. Written by Eric Hansen*

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