

John Springall

This information has been provided by John Macdonald, the great, great grandson of John Springall.

John Springall was born 3 December 1825 at Hounslow, Middlesex, England.

Before coming to New Zealand he was a commercial traveller for tobacco in Shrewsbury and a Provincial Grand Master of the Independent Order of Oddfellows.

John was a clerk in the The Great Barrier Land, Harbour and Mining Company's office in Canada Buildings, Queen St, Auckland between 1863 and 1867. When the company went bankrupt he, like other employees, received land on Great Barrier Island. He ran sheep on some and cattle in the bush.



(I had read somewhere that John Springall farmed at Claris, but note that in 1890 he is registered as "John Springall, residential, Owana, settler". Later when the pigeon post was started by Miss Springall, they flew from "Owana". I presume this to be Awana? And I note that in 1889 JS took A J Vogan 7 miles up the "Oneha Creek" presumably near his residence. He appears to have led a somewhat peripatetic life. In 1880-81 he is listed "John Springall, residential, settler, Tryphena Lot 7" and in 1887 I find one "John Springale, Harotonga, Great Barrier Island".)

He brought with him, to the Barrier, his wife Emily (formerly) Kent, and brought up a family of three sons, and three daughters who were considered "the belles of the Island". John Springall was in charge of the three polling booths on the Island, and was also the Government Land-valuer for Great & Little Barrier, and the Crozier Islands. His diary, recording his first year on the Island, is preserved now in the Alexander Turnbull Library. One of the Springall girls was post mistress at Okupu, at the time of Pigeon Post. I hope this is of interest and will happily send on any more precise details. My great grandmother was the eldest daughter, Ada. Her eldest brother Sidney, later a surveyor on the island, married Miss Winklemann of Tryphena.

There were certainly times that he spent in Auckland. From 1863-68 he served in No 1 Company, Auckland Rifle Volunteers, receiving a commission as Lieutenant in 1866 when he was "thanked for his onerous services during the war. He died in Auckland Hospital 28 November 1890, having sailed from The Barrier the previous day.

John Springall's diary Wednesday Feb 29th 1860

Left Auckland about 11 o'clock per the Mary Ann White (W McHugh Master) with Mr Heale a very fine day but with little wind. The others on board were workmen and their wives & children in the evening we found that we could not reach the mine so we put into Nagle Bay to the cattle station. Mr Heale and myself got on shore about 8 o'clock quite dark. Mr Moor soon got us a capital tea boiled beef, pork, pickled fish (Mullah) preserves & honey to which we did justice having had but a slice of bread and a rasher of bacon since our breakfast. I was quite tired and when we were shown our room that we were to sleep in I thought how sound I should sleep But alas for human speculations it proved to the contrary for after being in bed but a short time a few minutes I was attacked myriads of fleas almost enough to carry me

away at all events they carried away all my sleep for that night all I could do was to scratch and wish for morning at the first dawn I got up and welcomed

March 1st 1860

It was hardly light when I stepped out of the house but I was soon able to discover that I was in a very pretty & romantic place we were embosomed in mountains some with their feet in the harbour some more like or put one in mind of the ruins of immense castles and abbeys the harbour being without a ripple looking when the sun rose over the mountains like polished silver and the vessel laying at anchor is looked as a picture or fairy tale. Our host Mr Moor soon joined me while I was opening some oysters of which there was plenty and very fine they were I quite enjoyed them. Mr Heale then joined us and after looking at the cattle which were in capital condition and what they find to feed on in the bush I cannot tell as there is not a blade of grass to be seen . it must be shrubs of some kind. After breakfast at which there was some nice hot cakes after paying respect to them we went on board and was soon under weigh there was scarcely any wind so that it took us over four hours to reach the mine. We were skirting the coast a bold and romantic one the rocks rising abruptly from the sea with a goat here and there on the west was the Little Barrier (which has its best face on the opposite side) looming darkly over the sea a mass of inaccessible rocks crowned with timber down to the waters edge in places. There seemed to be no bay or place that any one could land with safety. The Mine is at the north extremity of the Great Barrier on rounding a point you come to a small bay exposed to the west & SW winds so much so that no vessel can enter when the wind is in that quarter but safe enough with east winds. On the beach is the store and on the flat of about two acres are the miners cottages quite surrounded by mountains some of them daresay 1000 feet high and most of them covered with timber principally pohutacoua & puririi. We made fast to the buoy and then landed in the dingy. Mr Heale then introduced me to Mr Turner, the Storekeeper, quite a superior young man that had been educated as a surgeon and served as such in the Turkish Contingent in the Crimea War for which he has three medals. I was soon quite at home with him. I next saw the Captain of the Mine A W Trewren who was very pleasant but by his conversation should say he is wedded to old notions nothing go ahead in him. Mr Heale then introduced me to the books which are in a very bad state. After tea Turner & self returned to the store where there was a blanket for me. He then produced a bottle of rum to which we paid our respects and a pipe and then slept soundly.

Wednesday March 7th 1860 ---we went along the level into the mine a dismal walk or rather grope having to feel your way for the most part of the distance suddenly we came to where the miners were at work they have hollowed the rock out almost like an immense dome the first workings serving as windows about 120 feet from the present level. It was quite worth seeing with the veins of copper cropping out here and there particularly towards the top which gave the light quite a soft green tint the rock that the copper runs in is a very hard conglomerate almost like granite of a slaty color---

Sunday March 25 - the craft not going today I went with a crew & Turner to Nagle Harbour, a very pleasant trip we put in to Mohunga and then on to get some peaches there were plenty there we got about 8 bushell

March 26 --left the Barrier in the Mary Ann White

John Springall returned in 1860 with his wife & infant son Sidney as clerk & storekeeper to the Great Barrier Mining Co. I have examined entries for other early Barrierites in paperspast and I note that most of them had every bit as much dysfunction in their lives as the Springalls. His diary entries show that he was not an uncaring husband, but the grog got to him. And there were numerous occasions the sons had to go up to Auckland and bring their father home. His diary gives a fascinating account of his voyage to NZ as steerage passengers on the "Mermaid" in 1859, and his hopes and frustrations on arrival, and his journeys to the Waitakeres-

John Macdonald

COPYRIGHT in its entirety.

