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# The Land Endures

Compiled by John V. McIntyre M.B.E.

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Foundation Chairman

The L.A. Alexander Agricultural College Trust Board Inc

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## FOREWORD

The L.A. Alexander Agricultural College Trust Board Inc. is deserving of a chapter in any history of education in Taranaki. It will also be one of the more fascinating ones and John McIntyre has done the benefactor and the trust a service in setting down the record of an idea and a purpose that took time, single-mindedness and good judgement to realise. Allen Alexander had a very healthy regard for education, the community good and old-fashioned independence from the state. His will was generous, yet not generous enough. His wish to establish a college of agricultural education in Taranaki was proudly parochial and far-sighted: but it was also apparently unrealistic, even in a province whose economy is rooted in farming and horticulture where the established university of Massey only three or four hours' distance by car, provides all the agricultural research and expertise and all the degree and diploma courses required.

Alexander had bequeathed a problem and that problem was compounded because his estate at Wynthorpe was a horse racing and breeding stud. For all the quality of one of New Zealand's great breeding stallions, Copenhagen II, and his progeny including the brilliant racing mare, La Mer, racing and an educational trust were an unlikely alliance. When frustration and uneasiness among the various educational bodies, which were heirs to the estate but which for twenty years following Alexander's death hadn't received a cent, threatened to lead to acrimony and the swallowing up of everything in expensive litigation, in stepped a group of men who in three years accomplished a rescue mission. They were, by chance, men like Alexander, farmers mainly, independent but dedicated to education and determined to give practical effect to the will.

This is the story of how it was done. The property at Tikorangi survives and careful investment of funds ensures a flow of income to provide student bursaries and financial support for agriculture/horticulture programmes at local secondary schools and the Taranaki Polytechnic. The trust was born to serve a partnership between education and agriculture - and like the land that generated the wealth, long may it endure.

T.T. Ryder  
Headmaster  
New Plymouth Boys' High School

## SECTION I

### A BIOGRAPHY OF ALLEN ALEXANDER

*By Donald B. Sarten - Nephew*

Allen Alexander was born at Kent Road, New Plymouth on 26 September 1903, to David and Hannah Alexander and was the seventh child of a family of eight. He was christened Leonard Allen Alexander but was always called Allen or 'L.A'. Allen's family moved to Tikorangi in 1908 having purchased the farm situated on the corner of the Ngatimaru and Faull Roads. His schooling started at the Tikorangi primary school. It is clearly remembered by one elderly lady on the day she took her lovely coloured marbles to school and they were taken by one of the school bullies. She thought she had lost them forever, but the next day they were returned to her by a small kindly boy, Allen Alexander. His education was continued at the New Plymouth Boys' High preparatory school, but he had to leave school at the early age of twelve to help on his father's farm as his older brothers had gone overseas to fight in the First World War. One was killed there. At the time there was a great shortage of labour because of the war.

In his youth, Allen played tennis, the original homestead having tennis courts in front of it. He also played cricket for the Tikorangi A cricket team at the time they successfully held the Taranaki Country Association shield. He was an excellent fielder and a very steady batsman: not quick, but very hard to get out, very stubborn, as he was with many things he did throughout his life.

On 2 June 1925 he married Marjorie Gertrude Sarten at St John's Anglican Church, Waitara. Marjorie was the daughter of Charles and Ellen Sarten, whose forebears came to New Zealand in the first settler ship to arrive in New Plymouth, the *William Bryan*, from Plymouth, England.

They had one child stillborn, on 23 June 1938. Marjorie was unable to have any further children.

Allen took over the running of the farm in 1925 on the retirement of his father and continued dairy farming until 1930. However, to improve his income he set up a piggery, which grew until he required extra assistance. This he advertised for and received many enquiries, and it was during the depression when jobs were so hard to get. The job was given to Albert Tiplady, who had walked all the way from New Plymouth to get the job. At this time they still milked four cows and the cream was sent to the Tikorangi Dairy Company, which entitled them to collect surplus but-

termilk. Surplus whey was also collected from the Waipapa cheese factory at Motunui. The piggery grew to become one of the largest pig farms in Taranaki. To feed the pigs, he collected dead and surplus cows, horses and sheep, which were skinned and boiled down. The by-products of hides, tallow and bones were sold. Copra and molasses were also fed, along with barley, ground up on the farm to produce meal. He also grew about 10 acres of carrots for the pigs and was one of the first farmers to use an electric fence to break-feed pigs on carrots. Being a pioneer in the use of electric fencing, he had some difficulty at first as the pigs would not shift into the new area allocated to them.

At its peak, the piggery had over 400 sows and Allen had a contract with Newton King's stock firm to supply 28 fat pigs a week for a number of years. The breeds he used were Tamworth, a large red pig, and a Berkshire Black pig with a white dash down its nose. These two breeds were crossed and the resulting cross-bred piglets were fattened and sold as porkers or baconers. The farm also ran 350 ewes and about 50 head of cattle.

Allen was one of the first to use kerosene as a spray on carrot seedlings to kill the weeds as they germinated. Many of his new farming ideas were ahead of the times. Making use of a Morrison hay sweep to sweep hay bales from the paddock to the 10 metre-deep silage pits not in use on the farm at the time, was another innovation. However, while it meant the bales were easy to manoeuvre, later, when it was time to feed them out, they were hard to untangle.

One day whilst digging a drain by hand in to the creek which runs under the Karaka Road, he uncovered the door lintel from a whare matoro. History tells us that the Maori placed their treasures into swamps to preserve them. The lintel that Allen uncovered was donated to the Taranaki Museum for posterity.

When World War II was declared, Allen was unable to enlist for service as his farm was classified as essential for the production of food. As part of the contribution to the war effort, he grew vegetables on the farm, mostly carrots. He was very patriotic and felt that he was the only son in the family who had not worn the King's uniform. However, he helped in every possible way to give support to our country's war effort during that time. He was on the Appeal Board, Patriotic Committee, the Home Guard, and helped to organise "farewell functions" to the men departing for overseas service and later when they returned, "welcome home" functions. When Albert Tiplady was called up for service in 1940, Allen could not appeal against him being drafted, because of his involvement on the Appeal Board. A short time later his other employee, Tony Russell was also called up for war duty. This meant that a large piggery could not continue, as more labour could not be recruited because of the large number of men who had gone to the war.

After World War II he became a member of the North Taranaki Rehabilitation Committee, which assessed the suitability of eligible ex-servicemen to receive finance to purchase farms. The chairman at this time was Mr Jack Winter, a tall man, 6 feet 6 inches. Allen was short, only 5 feet 4 inches. The nicknames for this pair when together were Dot and Dash. Allen later became chairman of the Rehabilitation Committee.

Allen took a great interest in education and the affairs of many organisations in the district. He was a member of the Farmers Union (later to become Federated Farmers), and chairman of the Tikorangi Branch for nine years, and a member of the Taranaki and New Zealand Executives. He was the Federated Farmers' representative on the Automobile Association. Allen enjoyed motoring, owning a Ford "49er", which was the envy of all the young lads in the district. It took him four hours to travel from the farm to Wellington in this car, a distance of 360 km, on a road with a lot more bends than today's highway.

One of the problems dealt with during his term of office with Federated Farmers, was caused by impressing farmers' trucks for the Army and the detrimental effect this was having on the production of farm produce for the war effort. In 1948 when the then Labour government nationalised the Bank of New Zealand, he was an instigator, with Harry Blyde, in encouraging people to transfer their accounts to other banks as a means of protest, which many people followed.

Allen Alexander's association with the Clifton County Council began in 1944, when he was elected to represent the Tikorangi Riding. Two years later he became county chairman, a position he held until his death in 1968. He was a member of the Works and Finance Committee throughout his council term. Further distinction came in 1964 when Allen was appointed President of the New Zealand Counties' Association for a period of two years. He also served the Taranaki Electric Power Board for 17 years, four years as Vice Chairman; Taranaki Harbours Board for nine years; Number 7 District Roads Council (1946-68); Taranaki Regional Planning Council; Egmont National Parks Board - North Committee; and was New Zealand Counties' Association representative on the New Zealand Fire Council and the New Zealand Hydatids Advisory Council.

One of the things which he helped to achieve on the Council was to change the council crusher on the Turangi Road from an encumbrance around the neck of the council, to a very profitable operation, able to sell surplus metal to farmers and others. In agreements and contracts for the Council he was a hard and honest bargainer: every t had to be crossed and every i dotted before he would agree to anything. He would never go back on his word once the contract was signed.

He had a lifetime interest in Freemasonry as a member of the Sir Donald

McLean Lodge No. 1646 (E.C.) in Waitara. He took part in all of its activities and was its Master in 1945. On many trips to Wellington on public business he made use of the travelling time to learn lodge ritual to perfection.

As a citizen he was very studious, very correct in line of thought and when debating a subject at a meeting he would listen intently, but would not give an opinion, often saying: "It's all very fine for you chaps to say we should do this or we should do that; nothing is ever any good off your left shoulder. My suggestion is that we come back later to make a move on this subject after due consideration and I guarantee 80 percent of you will have changed your minds on this subject. If you are going to make your mark on any particular procedure, give it thought." This favourite saying was heard many times from him over the years.

His participation in his local National Party branch was keen and during Mr Broadfoot's candidacy of the Waitomo electorate, which included much of Taranaki, Allen was the man-on-the-spot to deal with any problems. He was appointed a member of the Legislative Council of New Zealand until it was abolished in 1950. He was nominated as a candidate for selection as the National Party representative for the new Stratford electorate seat in Parliament in 1954, but was beaten in the final selection by Tom Murray, by a very small margin. Because of some mistaken boundary lines, votes by some delegates not in the new electorate were counted against his tally, a big disappointment to him at that time.

Allen's start into horse racing began when his friend Joe Mooney was called up for war service in 1940, and he asked Allen to look after his breeding mare Cute Melody, in foal to Mr Standfast. The foal was born and named Mr Cute. Mr Cute was the first stallion used on the farm. Allen Alexander developed the Wynthorpe stud in Tikorangi and bred many high class racehorses and was responsible for importing Copenhagen II to New Zealand, which at one stage was New Zealand's leading thoroughbred sire. With Allen's interest in racing he became steward of both the Taranaki Jockey Club and the Taranaki Trotting Club, was an executive member of the Thoroughbred Breeders Association of New Zealand and chairman of the Taranaki branch of that association. Although Allen loved breeding and racing horses, he was not interested in betting or gambling on them. He used his ability, with the help of Marjorie, to breed and race top horses, which was the key to the success of their Wynthorpe stud.

Allen was a very hard working man and led a very busy public life: however, he could not have achieved so much, had he not had Marjorie's continuous help. She cared for the farm workers, milked cows and fed pigs, cleaning their pens when farmhands were sick or involved with other essential farm work. She grew a wonderful garden, making use of old rotten hay, which produced a great range of vegetables and beautiful flower borders. Her cooking skills always meant that

ample, generous meals were served to the men and to the many visitors who visited them over the years. Her kindness always made everyone feel very welcome. She was very interested in the racehorses and was able to recite their breeding lines with ease and great accuracy. She was also able to tell the ancestry of anyone who lived in, or had lived in the district. She was a keen church goer. She regularly supplied and arranged the church flowers, which was a real interest she had in St Luke's church, Tikorangi. The church linen, altar drapes and cloths were also cleaned, washed and ironed with much care. On her death on 24 May 1976, she left a generous bequest to St Luke's. Marjorie had constantly striven to maintain the smooth running of the Wynthorpe stud farm and had helped Allen to achieve a life of distinction.

Allen Alexander died on 21 August 1968. His estate was left in trust to the New Plymouth High Schools' Board. Today it is administered by trustees: two from each of the Taranaki Polytechnic, New Plymouth Boys' High School, New Plymouth Girls' High School, and Spotswood College, as is extensively recorded here.

### The Alexander Family

David Alexander              b. 14.01.1866   m.   Hannah Taylor

### Children

Hannah Jane Alexander   b.15.04.1888   m.   Roy Pearn  
 Henry John Alexander     b.03.03.1890   m.   Rose Jury  
 Alice May Alexander      b.23.06.1891   m.   Albert White  
 Ida Grace Alexander      b.20.12.1892   nm. Spinster  
 Harold David Alexander   b.03.06.1894   m.   Gladys Cashmore (d)  
    m.   Ada Thomson  
 Eric Douglas Alexander   b.08.10.1896   Killed WWI  
 Leonard Allen Alexander   b.26.09.1903   m.   Marjorie Sarten  
 Wilson Elwel Alexander   b.03.02.1906   m.   Rita Cowper