

SPEECH ON ABRAHAM WALLY MOHAMID SALAMAN TO PUKEKURA
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Have you ever wondered about the magnificent Islamic Tomb in the Te Henui Cemetary? You really couldn't help but notice it if you walk through the cemetary - it's rather a distinctive landmark. This tomb is known as the Salaman Tomb and it is the last resting place of one Abraham Wally Mohamid Salaman, an Indian moslem and a most interesting character. His life story was brought to my attention by Dr. Allan Hayton and since then I've become quite fascinated by the Salaman history. The Salaman reserve on the corner of Frankley Road and Lower Govett Avenue is named after him.

Salaman came to New Zealand in 1912 from India as an enterprising 30 year old. He began trade in Wellington as a silk merchant and also manufactured dyes as used for dying cloth. Interestingly, he obtained a contract to supply the dye for khaki uniforms. It was in Wellington that he married his first wife. Somehow, he changed direction in his vocation and from a manufacturing chemist (making dyes) he became an Indian Herbalist and he also dabbled in colour therapy. He moved from Wellington to Auckland (where he married his second wife) and finally to New Plymouth, where he married his third wife. People consulted him for all manner of ailments and so, inevitably, he became known as Dr. Salaman, although he had no licence to practise medicine. I have it on good authority that people travelled by train from Hawera and as far away as Auckland to consult the good doctor, such was their faith in him.

Well Salaman gained notoriety for several cases where the patients either died or took him to court for falsely practising as a doctor. One such case concerned a young boy in his care who died - Salaman was charged with manslaughter and consequently spent time in the New Plymouth gaol. I'll not go into detail of these cases here - but they are documented in the Auckland and New Plymouth newspapers in the 1920's and 1930's.

In 1940 Abraham Salaman must have felt the need to put his affairs in order so he commissioned the New Plymouth firm Jones & Sandford to build his last resting place. He had to get special permission from the council as his tomb took up the space of 10 normal burial plots. The tomb was completed in late 1940 and Salaman died soon after on 8th February, 1941 at the age of 59. Now the cost of this tomb in 1940 was a staggering 2,200 pounds! He must have been quite a wealthy man by this time, in those days you could buy a more than adequate house for that sum!

After all this information about Salaman and his tomb, you can imagine how keen I was to see the inside of this mausoleum. A few weeks ago, Allan Hayton and I actually had the opportunity to enter Salaman's tomb. (Allan took photographs of both the inside and outside of the tomb and I have these for you to see together with an historic photograph of the Jones & Sandford foreman, Mr. Edmond Buckley and his apprentice, Phillip Christiansen taken late 1940.)

The tomb is built into the side of a hill and when you step down the 3 steps to the floor of the tomb and look up to the dome you get an awesome feeling of spaciousness. Sea green coloured tiles line the walls of the tomb and Salaman's coffin reposes on a tile-lined shelf - to think that he's rested alone in this tomb for the past 55 years! There's plenty of space in this tomb for at least 50 coffins! (His 2 daughters and third wife are still alive, I believe.)

He's actually in 2 coffins, a lead-lined one and an outer wooden one with brass handles. Over his coffin is draped a heavily embroidered cloth with tassels on each of the corners and sitting on top of this cloth is an open copy of the Koran and his wire-rimmed spectacles.

Also in the tomb are 4 floral tributes with cards from his funeral - these are all encased in 4 separate glass domes and the colours of the flowers are very well preserved owing to the fact that no sunlight penetrates the tomb, this also accounts for the tiles being so bright and unfaded after 55 years. A round marble table stands in the centre of the tomb and various Indian brass vases are placed on the floor. The most interesting feature of Salaman's tomb is a painted concrete frog - there are various theories on the significance of the frog - they are bringers of good fortune associated with the resurrection; they are associated with eternal life and the cult of the dead ; the Incas of Peru placed statuettes of frogs alongside corpses in tombs. Frogs are also said to protect people (or in this case, corpses) from evil - which may have worked because even though vandals have stolen the heavy iron outer doors to the tomb and the star and crescent symbols on top of the dome and tried to gain entry to the tomb over the years (there were rumours of treasure or valuables hidden inside) they have never managed to get inside.

So next time you walk through the Te Henui Cemetary and see the Salaman tomb, you will know something of the Indian Herbalist, Abraham Wally Mohamid Salaman who was laid to rest there 55 years ago.