

LEISURE

A matter of life and death

Waitara historian **Graeme Duckett** tours cemeteries looking at the people who settled our region.

Charles Stuart Curtis

Charles was born at Omata on December 15 1850. His parents George and Eliza (nee Newsham) emigrated from London early in 1850. His parents settled in Omata and took up farming. George became senior partner in Curtis and Watt, wholesale merchants in New Plymouth. On the outbreak of the Land Wars, Eliza and the children moved to the safety of New Plymouth. George remained at the Omata stockade, and saw his homestead burned.

The family moved to Nelson until the hostilities ceased in 1861. Charles worked with his father in their Omata store. In October 1878, Charles and his brother Herbert opened the first permanent building in the new bush settlement of Stratford. Herbert and another brother, George, ran a butcher's shop in the nearby settlement of Inglewood, and he

and Charles opened a similar shop in Stratford, which also included a merchant store and bakery. Curtis Bros replaced this building with a two-storey shop in January 1879. In 1880, Charles married Emma Clara Lowe at Omata Church, and together had 2 children.

Charles became a member of the Town Board in 1882, and was elected chairman in 1885, replacing his brother George. He made a name for himself as an explorer on the eastern slopes of Mt Egmont (Taranaki) and helped cut the track on that side of the mountain. Emma was also a mountaineer and was the first known woman to reach the summit from the Stratford road track.

Retiring to New Plymouth, the Curtis home at 19 Bracken Street (known then as Glen Road), was built in 1911 and was named "Glen Stuart". This beautiful home, pictured, survives today and is of the Italianate style. Charles died in 1923 and he and Emma are buried in the Te Henui Cemetery.

