

## GEORGE Elizabeth (nee ROWE)

(c.1814 – 4 April 1902)

Hotel Owner, Businesswoman and Community Leader

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**Elizabeth Rowe**, daughter of **Sarah Netherton** and her husband, **Henry Rowe**, a carrier and later a landowner, was baptised at Bodmin, Cornwall, England, on 6 April 1814. Nothing is known of her until her marriage to **Edward George** at Battersea, London, on 21 September 1841. They arrived in Auckland, New Zealand, in May 1842 on board the *Louisa Campbell*, and shortly afterwards Edward George became manager of the New Zealand Trading Company's bonded store. Within a year or two of his arrival he bought the Royal Exchange Hotel, sometimes known as the Exchange Hotel, in Shortland Street, but sold out to Henry Hardington, and in 1848 Elizabeth and Edward George moved to Onehunga with their four sons. George bought land in lower Princes Street, Onehunga, near the beach, and built the two-storeyed *Royal Hotel* in 1848. At the suggestion of his wife, he incorporated a meeting room in the plans, which provided a much-needed amenity

for the town and gained prestige for the hotel. Referred to as the *Long Room*, it was used for lectures and political and business meetings, also serving as the venue for the coroner's court.

**Edward George** died on 13 October 1855 at the age of 39. Elizabeth George had worked in partnership with her husband and so, supported by the local merchants and residents, applied for and was granted a hotel licence in her own name. In 1856 she leased out the hotel, and from then on the *Royal Hotel* had a succession of landlords, including her sons John and Edward. She owned other property, and it was in her large store adjacent to the hotel that the first concert was held in Onehunga on 30 September 1857. She gave the use of the building, and the proceeds from the concert, together with her personal donation, went to the Reverend Dr A. G. Purchas, Vicar of St Peter's Church, Onehunga, to help towards the cost of building a stone schoolhouse.

In 1863, the families of settlers in the outlying districts around the Manukau Harbour, threatened by the war in Waikato, fled to Onehunga for safety. Elizabeth George, distressed by their plight, set about billeting, clothing and feeding them, initially at her own expense. As the number of refugees increased, she asked Dr Purchas to convene a public meeting. At this meeting the **Onehunga Ladies' Benevolent Society** was founded, with Elizabeth George as its first Chairperson. It was to become the oldest institution of its kind in New Zealand with a continuous record of public service and is one of the first recorded organisations of Pakeha women.

In later years Elizabeth George again exhibited her resourcefulness when fire destroyed the hotel and, later, its replacement. In 1880 the kauri shingles on the roof caught alight, flames swept through the hotel and in 30 minutes the building was completely gutted. Undaunted, she established temporary

premises in a building she owned nearby until a new hotel was opened in 1881. In 1887 fire raised the hotel again. She built once more on the same site and this hotel was to stay in business until about 1909.

Elizabeth George died aged 88 on 4 April 1902, in Onehunga and was buried beside her husband in St Peter's churchyard, (Plot Number 425).

**Also buried in Plot 425 are:**

**John George** (Edward (snr) and Elizabeth George's son), died 3 Feb 1943, aged 97  
and

**Grandsons** (sons of **Edward** (jnr) and **Annie George**)

**Leonard**, died 28 Dec 1880, aged 15 months

**Roy**, died 11 Aug 1882, aged 7 months

**Leslie**, died 14 March, 1884, aged 4 months

**Harold**, died 19 February 1885, aged 7 weeks