

GRUNDY John William and COOPER Eliza

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(Also, see biography **GRUNDY John William – ‘Captain Extraordinaire’ and ‘The Man’**)

John William Grundy was born, 18 March 1819, in Durham, England. He was one of nine children, five of whom died young. His father, a naval carpenter, died (when John was but ten) leaving his wife Eliza with four children aged 12, 10, 3, and 1. John’s childhood must surely have been influenced by the reality of five of his siblings not surviving to adulthood (the four born immediately after him all died).

Around 1840, aged about 22, John arrived in Sydney, before continuing to New Zealand. By 1841, John was first mate on a ship and trading between the Bay of Islands, Mongonui, the Hokianga, Sydney and the Pacific Islands. In those days, the master of a ship was an entrepreneur, chartering the ship and taking the commercial risk on the sale of the cargo. It seems that John did well for seven or eight years before relocating to Auckland in 1849.

A 1960 article about his life states: “He learnt the art of seamanship in several famous windjammers plying between English ports and the far places of the distant seas. Early in his career he applied himself so assiduously to the study of navigation and all branches of his chosen profession that shortly after attaining his majority he qualified as first mate. At the end of several years acquiring deep-sea experience, he gains his Masters Certificate.”¹

John Grundy married **Eliza Cooper** in 1849. Eliza (born 30 May 1830, Birkenhead, England) was the daughter of another successful trader, **William Cooper**, who grew vegetables and owned his own ships to move them around the rapidly expanding settlements on the coastlines of New Zealand. According to William Cooper’s eulogy, published in 1883, it was he who gave Captain Grundy a start in the coastal trade. Certainly, a prosperous father-in-law could only be advantageous.

John was 30, Eliza 19, when they married. Within a year their daughter Mary Anne was born. Thirteen years later, their second child, William John Collis was born (1 Oct 1863), followed by Ellen Louisa (b. 17 July 1865, and lastly Alfred Owen (b. 8 Feb 1870).

While the large gap can be partially explained by John’s absences at sea, it is equally likely that they ‘lost’ several children during those years. We will never know. We do know that John both spent long periods of time away from his own family and made an effort to give the ‘juveniles’ a treat. (c.f. the *Lyttleton Times*’ obituary below).

An 1861 letter, from Eliza to John, gives an indication that theirs was a happy union. At the time of writing, Eliza was at home with Mary Anne, aged 11; John was in Otago. She writes: ‘I received your kind and welcome letter and was glad to hear that you arrived safe and well in Otago. We are all well and in good health, thank God, and hope this will find you the same. Things are nearly the same as when you left, with the exception of it being if anything duller than it was.’²

Eliza signs the letter ‘First and last, the true love until your death.’

John died suddenly of a heart attack (18 Aug 1883). He was at Te Kopuru, an inlet of the Kaipara Harbour, on board his vessel ‘*Annie Wilson*’ which was being loaded with timber.

Obituaries were published in all the main newspapers of the day. The *NZ Herald* reported: ‘as a token of respect to the memory of Captain J Grundy, flags on board the various vessels in harbour were flying at half-mast ... In Captain Grundy, the port [Auckland] loses one of its oldest and most respected hands, a respect that was so universally shown so soon as the news spread that the worthy skipper had sailed on

his last lone voyage ... His dealings were always noted for straightforwardness and honesty ... For some 14 or 15 years Captain Grundy has been a staunch advocate of the principles of temperance.’³

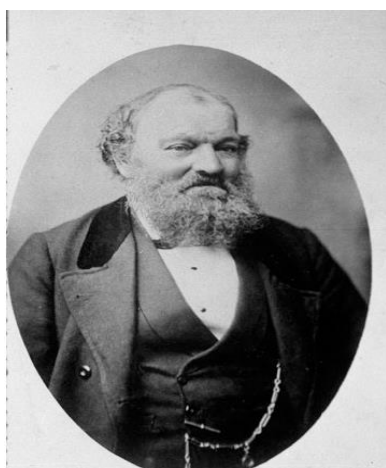
The *Lyttleton Times*’ obituary was equally respectful: ‘The news was quickly spread in this port and, it is almost unnecessary to remark, occasioned a universal expression of sorrow.’

Reference was then made to his ‘juveniles’: ‘His name is also associated with some holiday trips to the children in the *Canterbury Orphanage*, given them by him in his fine schooner, and among the many who will hear with deep regret of his death are the little inmates of that institution.’

The Obituary goes on to state: ‘He was one of the oldest coasting masters in the colony, in almost every port of which his name has been associated with warm friendship, kindly acts, and a love of his profession. He has left a wife and family, and old residents at Onehunga, where he had accumulated a moderate amount of landed property.’⁴

A notice in the *NZ Herald*, 22nd August 1883, requests: ‘Members of Masonic Lodges to attend the funeral of the late Captain Grundy, 3:30pm.’ We therefore assume he was a Lodge member.

John made his Last Will and Testament in 1868, leaving everything to ‘my dear wife Eliza.’



John Grundy’s home port was Onehunga, at the time a bustling harbour and developing settlement. Newspaper reports list the arrivals and departures of a long list of ships under the command of Captain Grundy carrying all sorts of cargo around New Zealand. The first record found of him sailing from Auckland is on the cutter ‘*Dart*’, in 1849; the last is on the schooner ‘*Torea*’ in 1883, just 2 months before he died suddenly at Te Kopuru, on the Kaipara Harbour, on board the brigantine ‘*Annie Wilson*’.

He is buried in the churchyard at St Peter’s, Onehunga.



Eliza Grundy (died 19 June 1902) is buried in the same plot, as is their daughter **Mary Anne McLeod** (died 30 Jan 1894). The first family member to be buried in the plot was Mary Anne’s first-born child, **Frances Mary Ellen McLeod**, who died 28 August 1873, aged 2, of whooping cough.

Endnotes:

¹ *Auckland – Waikato Historical Journal*, September 1988, No 53, page 16. First published in the *Manukau Progress*, 20 July 1960, based on information supplied by Alfred Grundy, son of Captain J W Grundy.

² *Ibid*, p. 2

³ *NZ Herald*, 10 Sept 1883

⁴ *Lyttleton Times*, Sept 1883