

Laura Heath

b. Birmingham 1859

d. Masterton 1942

Sailed to New Zealand in 1876 aged 18 with her sister Lilian. They stayed for a while with cousins on a farm 'Kia Ora' about 40 miles out of Gisborne. Laura went to Napier Hospital as a nurse in 1884, before coming to Wellington Hospital in 1885. She had an interest in chemistry and studied botany and materia medica with Mr George Wilton, a Newtown chemist, and she learned chemistry with a schoolmaster at Newtown School. She was awarded a gratuity of £5.5.0 by the Wellington Hospital



Trustees "towards the expense attendant on her prosecuting her studies as a chemist". For six of the eight years that she was at Wellington Hospital, she was the Dispenser.

Reporting in 1885 Dr Grabham recorded "I found the dispensing done by a female nurse under the supervision of the Medical Superintendent and I am satisfied that after examining her she is competent for this duty and the knowledge which she has gained of drugs and their uses is very creditable to her."

In 1888 the Hospital Trustees voted for an increase in her salary from £60 pa to £70 pa.

Laura was the first female pharmacist in New Zealand to qualify by examination (1887) and she achieved registration on 6/7/1888 (reg. # 349).

She left Wellington Hospital in 1893 to set up in business as a chemist in Petone. Below is the poster that she created to advertise this new venture.

MISS LAURA HEATH,
Member of the Pharmaceutical Society of N.Z.
(By Examination.)
-- DULY + CERTIFICATED --
Medical & Surgical Nurse
+ + DISPENSER + +
FOR THE LAST EIGHT YEARS AT THE WELLINGTON DISTRICT HOSPITAL.

*Begs to announce to the residents of Petone,
the Hutt, and adjacent townships, that she has
purchased the business of Mr. A. Sykes,
Chemist, of Jackson Street, Petone, where she
trusts by strict attention to the wants of her
customers and the utmost care in dispensing
prescriptions entrusted to her, to merit a share of
their patronage and support.*

The Stock is entirely New and of the very Best
Quality procurable.

Laura's pioneering endeavours caught the attention of the Press.

Fair Play 2/12/1893, p4.

MISS LAURA HEATH.

Miss Laura Heath is in herself one of the strong arguments in favour of throwing open all the professions to women. She is at present the only lady in the colony acting as a professional dispensing chemist, and she has won the position through untiring application and genuine hard work. Born in Birmingham, she came to the colony when very young and received her training mostly in Wellington, although she resided for awhile in Napier. She studied botany and the materia medica under Mr. Wilton, and chemistry under the schoolmaster at Newtown. Having a natural liking for chemistry and medicine she decided to further forward her education by going into the hospital where she served for eight years, and during six years of that period was attached to the dispensary. Miss Heath only left the hospital a short time back to go in business for herself and has succeeded in gathering together a good connection in Petone. Her pet idea is the establishing of a private hospital, which she can supervise as matron and manage the dispensary. An institution of this character would be a valuable addition to Wellington, and probably no better person could be chosen to superintend it than this clever little lady. If New Zealand evolves a few more women like Miss Heath, we shall soon expect to see them arguing in our Courts and presiding on our benches, and why not? We have an able precedent in literature in the character of Portia; surely no more able counsel ever defended a client in the extremity of peril.

She was elected to the Central Pharmacy Association in April 1894. Later that year she travelled to England and worked at the City of London Lying-in Hospital. On return to New Zealand she was appointed to Palmerston North Hospital (1895-1897).

In June 1897 she married Thomas George Mason, a chemist of Masterton. They travelled to Sydney and then England. On returning to New Zealand they took up farming at Oparure near Masterton. They had two sons.



Mrs Laura Mason

Laura was registered as a nurse in May 1902, reg. # 165.

Her sister Lilian trained and worked as a nurse at Wellington Hospital (1887 – 1896) and was Matron Masterton Hospital 1896 - 1898. She then did private nursing 1903 – 1909.

