

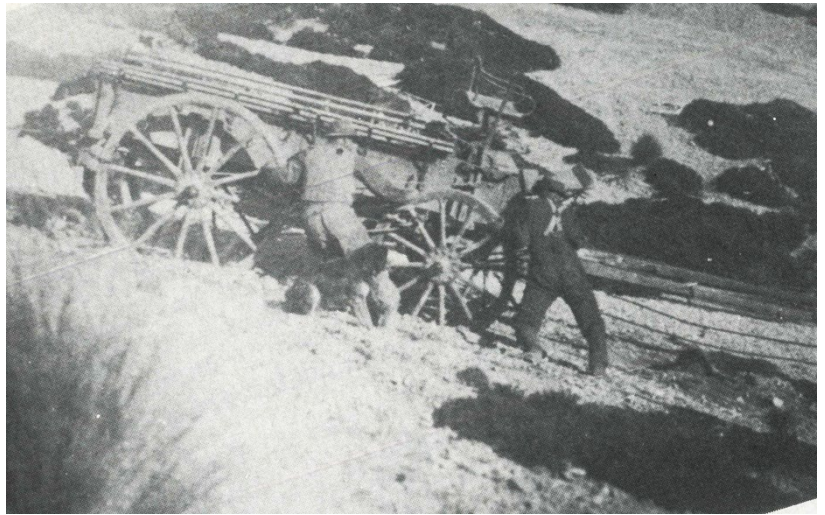
FOWLERS OF STANLEY VALE

By Joan and Lynley Fowler

William Longney Fowler was the third son of Thomas Fowler and Nancy Longney and was born at Church Farm, Stanley St Leonards in Gloucestershire in 1830. He married Eliza Thomas in 1851 and they had three children. The family emigrated to New Zealand, arriving in Nelson on the barque 'Chieftain' in 1858 along with William's sister Ellen and brother Edward. They settled into farming in the Richmond, Stoke, Nelson area. Eliza had another child in 1859 but died of consumption a few years later leaving William to care for Elizabeth Maria, William Thomas, Clara Eugenie, and Leonard Stanley. In 1866 he married his housekeeper Louisa Maria Parsons and they produced another thirteen children several of whom are remembered as the names of natural features in the area. Emily's Stream and Mounts Una, Clara, Maria, Laura.

Another brother Nathaniel arrived in 1863, and William and Nathaniel travelled to the Amuri County in North Canterbury where they took up blocks of land, William had 8080 hectares in the high country which he named Stanley Vale, and Nathaniel had 6475 hectares in Hopefield.

Farming was no easier then than it is now. There were no roads – sometimes not even trails, no way of getting supplies, as Christchurch was close to 150 Kms away, and Hanmer Springs had only just been discovered. There was no way of getting their stock out either except to drove them to Christchurch. And getting heavy equipment in was logistically "tricky".



To show how difficult it was to get anything large over Fowler's Pass was when William wanted to get a huge stone wheel in for grinding grain. The only way to do this was to load it on the back of his large white horse. The horse struggled up and over the Pass and down the steep zigzag of Rabbit Hill, but on reaching the bottom the horse collapsed, rolled over and died from a heart attack.

Scab disease was rife at this time. (brother Edward was a Scab Inspector in Nelson) Scab was a parasitic insect that could survive extreme temperatures and go for months without feeding. If left unchecked it caused green scabs and the wool to fall off the sheep. The runholders grew tobacco to boil up, with the liquid becoming an effective dip.

William's son William known as Bill carried on his fathers exploits with High Country farming and was known as a very colourful character. He was a wagoner, taking wool from the big sheep runs and it was some feat to take the loads over the passes without ever losing a bale. There was a time when he was asked to take a wagon out to the Ada, an outstation of the farm. Normally it was impossible to take a vehicle over Fowler's Pass, but Bill took the wagon to the top of the Pass with five horses in the shafts. To get down the shingle slide on the other side, Bill took the horses out of their traces, tying four to the back of the wagon, and kept one between the shafts at the front. He rode the vehicle himself, and headed his horse straight down the shingle slide to the bottom. It was the first time a wagon had been over the pass, and is probably the last.

In 1944 Bill died sitting bolt upright in the saddle on his way to the pub in Hanmer Springs. His horse knew the way and dutifully kept going right up to the door of the hotel. It was only then that they discovered he had passed away.