

The  
"Fitness Family"

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REUNION

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held at Hamilton

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**MAY 23rd, 1959.**



AUTOGRAPHS

E. Jennings  
 Elizabeth  
 Ella Carter  
 Isa J. New  
 Vida L. Taylor  
 Ebenezer Fitness  
 Bruce Murray  
 Florence Murray  
 Edna Morrison  
 Org Fitness  
 Maria Hamilton  
 G. Fisher  
 W. Hens.  
 Jay Fitness  
 Des Fitness  
 F. A. Fisher  
 C. Fisher  
 Bure White  
 Charlie Fitness  
 Fred Lipser  
 Eva Fitness  
 Dora Fitness  
 Lily Johnson  
 B. J. Harrison

Atthol Carter  
 James Hamilton  
 Lucy Burr  
 Jack Burr  
 Laphone Graham  
 Lynette & Robyn Graham  
 E. Harrison  
 Tessa Lord  
 Thornton Fitness  
 A. A. Hamilton  
 Eben. J. Boxhead  
 Fern. Boxhead  
 G. J. Fitness 51  
 David Carter  
 George Jennings (niece)  
 Peter Carter  
 Alan Carter  
 Joan Carter  
 Elizabeth Carter  
 Helen Carter  
 S. Keith Hamilton

"THE FITNESS FAMILY"

It is perhaps desirable at this time of reunion and celebration to reflect on the history of our family during the past 150 years. As a family we are more intimately concerned with events from the time of the marriage of Ebenezer Fitness to Ellen Lydia Wells.

The grandparents of Ebenezer Fitness, Thomas Fitness and Elizabeth Fitness, came to New Zealand prior to 1857 and both are buried at Queen's Redoubt Cemetery at Pokeno.

One of their sons, George, married Jane Hunnisett at Frant, Sussex, England, on February 8, 1842. They had one son, Ebenezer, who was born on August 9, 1843, and the family came to New Plymouth in the ship Eden in 1850, the son celebrating his seventh birthday on the voyage.

After five years the family came to the Auckland district and took up land at Karaka. Later the family moved to Auckland, and associated themselves with the Baptist Church in Auckland. George Fitness was an office bearer, local preacher and the first Sunday School superintendent, an office which he held at the time of his death in 1863. His wife, Jane, died on November 23, 1881, and both are buried in the Symonds Street Cemetery in Auckland.

In the 1860's another family associated with the Mount Eden Baptist Church was the Wells family, several members of which were Sunday School teachers.

Ebenezer Fitness learnt the trade of carpenter, joiner and cabinetmaker with the Kauri Timber Company and in 1865 he built the first Sunday School hall in Mt. Eden Road, opposite the present Grafton Library. In the year 1880 he built the first Mt. Eden Baptist Church and he served as office bearer, Sunday School teacher and organist.



On February 8, 1870, Ebenezer Fitness married Ellen Lydia Wells, who was born on February 26, 1848, at Saxmunden, Sussex, England, and came to New Zealand with her parents on the ship Hanover, which left England on May 29, 1862, under the command of Captain Rich. She was one of a family of seven daughters and two sons.

The marriage took place at the residence of the bride's parents at East Street, Newton, Auckland. The first home of the newlyweds was at Newton Road, and later at Mt. Eden. Ebenezer and Ellen were two of the 20 foundation members when the Mt. Eden Baptist Church was formed as a separate unit. Ebenezer took a keen interest in Friendly Society affairs and for many years he was secretary of a Foresters Lodge.

After continuing employment with the Kauri Timber Company for some years, Ebenezer met with a serious accident which prevented him from working for about two years.

The family moved to Opunake, Taranaki, in 1888, where Ebenezer set up in business as cabinetmaker, joiner, builder and undertaker. At an early age the eldest son, Charles, began assisting his father, and while building a house for a Mr Sellars, the opportunity came for the family to commence farming on an undeveloped property at Pihama, where Charles and Rosina lived after the property was partly developed. The family later moved to this property after disposing of the Opunake business.

After some time the Pihama property was sold and a farm purchased at Normanby, and at this time Rosina was married. In due course the Normanby farm was sold and another farm was acquired at Penny's Hill, Eltham, from where Charles left to go to Australia to train for service as an officer of the Salvation Army, and since that time each generation has contributed its quota of workers in the Church of God. Whilst in Australia Charles married a Salvation Army officer and brought her back to New Zealand some years later.

From Penny's Hill the family moved to a house in Mountain Road, Eltham, and lived there while a house was built in Mills Street, Eltham, where Annie looked after her younger brothers, and conducted a boarding house, while her father was engaged in farming at Hunter Road and her mother and sister Edith were conducting a nursing home for Dr. Harrison in Eltham.

The next move was to a smaller house in Mills Street and then to a farm at Ngare, from where Nellie was married and went to live at Christchurch. After disposing of the Ngare property, another farm was purchased in Mountain Road, from where both Annie and Edith were married.

Frank also joined the Salvation Army as a serving officer, and Theo acquired a property in Mountain Road and later transferred his farming activities to Fraser Road and at this time he was married. The family later transferred to Fraser Road from where Celia was married. The youngest son, Ralph, went to assist his brother Theo after finding work in a solicitor's office in Eltham distasteful.

Ebenezer and Ellen then returned to Green Lane, Auckland, and lived in retirement until going to a small property at Wiri, and then on to a house at Drury where the last years were lived. On July 17, 1927, Ebenezer answered the last call and in less than three months, on October 12, 1927, he was joined by his wife, who died of a broken heart, feeling that her life's work was completed with the passing of her partner.

Both are buried in the Symonds Street Cemetery, where the Fitness and Wells family plots are close together.

The names of the family that reached adulthood are:—

Annie Amelia (Hamilton), Pukekohe, born January 16, 1871.  
Rosina (Askew), Taranaki, born September 2, 1872.  
Celia (Harrison), Matamata, born March 26, 1874.  
Edith (Jennings), Tauranga, born February 25, 1876.  
Charles George, Tauranga, born March 1, 1878.  
Eva Nellie (Carter), born March 12, 1880, died July 14, 1937.  
Frank Arthur, Auckland, born December 10, 1883.  
Theodore Walter, Hamilton, born November 15, 1885.  
Ralph Edwin, North Auckland, born June 2, 1890.



As a family we have perhaps tasted more adversity than prosperity, through sickness and misfortune, but we can count our blessings that the four brothers and four sisters whom we seek to honour, with combined ages of over 642 years, still enjoy excellent health, and that the talented sister who passed to her reward in 1937 after a distinguished career as teacher, painter, wife and mother, has left a fine family to carry on the traditions of the family. We are proud of the scholastic attainments of her sons and of the daughter who is serving as a missionary in the Pacific Islands.

We are proud of those members of the family who are active as officers of the Salvation Army, or who have retired from active participation therein. They have served both in New Zealand and in distant lands across the seas, taking the message of the Gospel to many.

We are proud of the contribution made by members of the family in active service for King and country in two world wars, and thankful for the efforts of those who seek to serve their fellow men and women in church, community and civic spheres.

Let us labour for the Master from the dawn till setting sun,  
Let us talk of all His wondrous love and care;  
Then when all of life is over, and our work on earth is done  
And the roll is called up yonder, let's be there.

## AUTOGRAPHS

### *Fitness Family (160 in All) Gets Together*

Staff Reporter                      Hamilton

The Fitness family, which was established in New Zealand in 1850, held a reunion in Hamilton on Saturday to honour its older members and to introduce them to their younger relatives.

The 160 members of the family came from many parts of the North Island and from Christchurch and Westport. Eight of them were the sons and daughters of the late Mr Ebenezer Fitness and his wife. Five of this group were more than 80 years old.

The combined ages of the group was more than 642 years. The oldest was Mrs A. A. Hamilton, aged 88, of Pukekohe. Her brothers and sisters are: Mrs R. Askew (Taranaki), Mrs C. Harrison (Matamata), Mrs E. Jennings (Tauranga), Mr C. G. Fitness (Tauranga), Mr F. A. Fitness (Auckland), Mr T. W. Fitness (Hamilton) and Mr R. E. Fitness (North Auckland).

Members of the family have served for many years as office-holders in the Baptist Church and in the Salvation Army.

At the reunion, Mr S. K. Hamilton (Pukekohe) related the history of the family and Mr C. G. Fitness replied, thanking him. Then an iced reunion cake, which was in the form of an open book, was cut by Mrs Hamilton.