

Families retrace forebear's steps

BY **ROBBIE KAY**

NORWEGIAN Harald Oskar Andersen's life story has more twists and turns than a Jo Nesbo detective novel.

Born in the small rural town of Nannestad in 1881, as a young man he fathered two children, got into a fight in which a man died, panicked, and so disappeared on a London-bound ship to avoid being hung for the murder.

Ironically, as it turns out, it was a

murder he didn't commit, The man died by accident after falling and hitting his head.

But unaware no-one would be charged with the man's death, he became lost to his Norwegian family forever.

In 1904, after sailing around the world for about a year he landed in New Zealand – as far away from Norway as he could get – and was immediately thrown into prison, doing two months' hard labour for stealing a suit to cover up the fact he'd just jumped ship.

On release he moved around until he came to the King Country and in 1916 married Andrina (Rene) Sanderson and settled near Mangapehi.

Perhaps it was because it was a rugged rural place similar to his hometown where his secrets could remain hidden.

Mrs Andersen, whose leg was removed in her 20s as a result of polio, turned out to be a remarkably tough pioneering woman.

She raised five children deep in the bush at Pukemako – 14 miles from Mangapehi and a two-day journey on horseback.

Every year the couple came to Te Kuiti for supplies and a brief holiday.

When they retired from the bush, they became proprietors of the Grand Central Hotel in Taupiri St from 1941-42.

They returned to the hotel in 1961 and Mr Andersen died there a year later.

He didn't tell his New Zealand family about his 'other' life and never contacted

his parents or children in Norway.

But what happened to him obviously haunted him.

On his deathbed, aged 81 years, he tried to get up shouting: "They're coming to get me. They're after me".

At the time his family didn't understand his fear and put it down to delirium.

They didn't know, even on his deathbed, he was trying to escape the Norwegian authorities and punishment for the crime he had never committed.

TE KUITI VISIT

His past remained buried with him for more than 40 years . . . until 2010.

On Tuesday two writers, one Kiwi, one Norwegian and several cousins – all descendants of Mr Andersen – visited Te Kuiti and the Grand Central Hotel.

The story of how they came to be tracing his footsteps together is remarkable.

When his granddaughter, Kapiti author Kathy Callaghan began researching her family history the only things she knew about Harald were his name and that he came from Norway.

She discovered his christening record, the real names of his parents (whom he'd always lied about to cover his tracks) and the names of his half siblings.

In 2010, she decided to tour Scandinavia and visit Nannestad Church where he was christened.

A month before leaving she emailed the Nannestad newspaper asking anyone with information about Harald to contact her.

The story was assigned to reporter Magnar Haraldsen and read by a cousin, who realised their great-grandfather was also called Harald Oskar Andersen.

What were the chances of there being two men with the same name born on the same day?

TO P11



SECRET SIBLINGS: Rosa (left) and Magnar Haraldsen, Kathy and Ross Callaghan, Vera, Roar and Wenche Haraldsen were in Te Kuiti retracing the life of their forebear Harald Andersen (below left) who lived and died in the town's Grand Central Hotel. Norwegian brothers Magnar and Roar had no idea their great-grandfather had another family in New Zealand until four years ago.



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For more information, contact us on 0800 805 505.



Families retrace forebear's steps

FROM P3

As the pieces came together they realised Harald had had two families – one in Norway and one in New Zealand – with neither knowing the other existed.

Magnar and Kathy therefore were cousins.

An excited exchange of emails and photos followed. They even looked alike.

Mrs Callaghan struggled with how her “sweet grandad” could father two children, and then leave them forever.

But once the story spread in Norway, older family members connected and the facts about the unfortunate fight and Harald's obviously panicked flight surfaced.

Mrs Callaghan says her brief 2010 trip to Nannestad was wonderfully emotional with 50 family

members celebrating together.

She returned for a longer visit in 2012 to get to know them better.

“Now we are mirroring their magnificent welcoming gesture, by showing Magnar and our cousins Harald's New Zealand life,” she says.

Standing in front of the Grand Central Hotel Magnar says seeing for the first time where his grandfather lived and died had been an emotional journey.

“Coming to Te Kuiti brings all the threads together for us as a family.

“My great-grandfather was happy here and seeing how he spent his life has enabled us to embrace him for the man he became.”

Mr Haraldsen is making a video of their journey so his family in Norway can share Harald's NZ story.

IN BRIEF

Classic trucks in Kawhia

A CARAVAN of classic trucks is heading for the coast on Saturday. The Northern Classic Commercials which visited Otorohanga two years ago, are travelling from Cambridge through Te Awamutu to Pirongia for morning tea, then on to Kawhia for lunch at the Kawhia Boating and Fishing Club. Raglan is the next stop on their journey.

Aria trail ride

METSERVICE forecasters say this weekend's weather is set to be a scorcher, perfect for Aria School's two day trail ride fundraiser. The annual ride gets underway on Saturday at 9.30am, and offers three 40km loops over farmland, a 1.2km motocross track and kids' track. For more information visit the websites – silverbullet.co.nz or aria.school.nz

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TKT1455
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\$219,000
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TKT1512
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TKT1514
A PLACE WITH SPACE
23A AILSA STREET - TE KUITI
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TKT1510
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