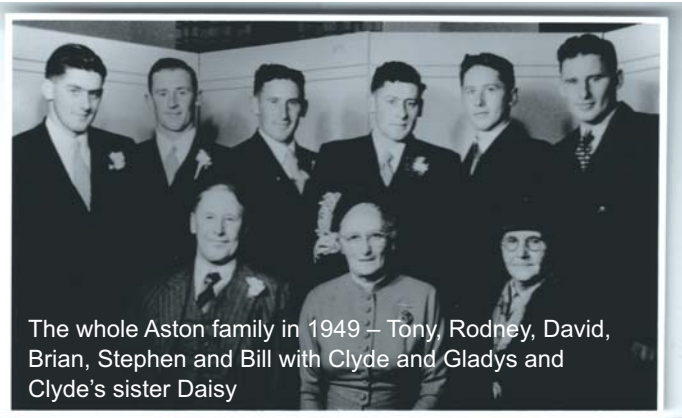




Gladys and Clyde Aston



The whole Aston family in 1949 – Tony, Rodney, David, Brian, Stephen and Bill with Clyde and Gladys and Clyde's sister Daisy

could not drive. She was one of the first motorists in Wellington. Gladys' sister Norah married a son of Dr Purdy, Robert, in 1915 at Lower Hutt. Judith, one of Dr Purdy's daughters, married Wilfrid Aston in 1919 and it is at this wedding that Gladys met her future husband Clyde.

Clyde and Gladys married in Lower Hutt on the 7th April 1920 and started their married life on the farm at Waikaretu. Initially Clyde was in partnership with a Mr Boone, but later obtained a Crown grant and bought Mr Boone out of the partnership. It seems Mr Boone had very little farming experience and as it turns out, neither did Clyde. Their 600 acres of land was in the centre of a large Maori community, one of four bush covered blocks bought from Maori by the government for farming settlement.

Gladys' first home as Mrs Aston was once a Mission House, a resting place for ministers who travelled from Port Waikato down the coast to Raglan. It was built of pit sawn totara with a ponga floor and consisted of two rooms, the larger having one open fireplace, where initially Gladys had to do all the cooking. The vestry served as Clyde and Gladys' bedroom, being so small that they could only fit in a double bed and had to climb over the end to get into and out of bed. Mr Boone slept in the other room, the lounge/kitchen. As the children started coming further rooms were added, one across the end and then down both sides.

The hard, slow process began to clear the land for farming, but Gladys had the advantage of a few acres around the cottage already cleared by Maori for their gardens. Water came from the roof of the house and in dry summers, was carried in kerosene tins from a nearby spring. Like other pioneering women, Gladys grew vegetables, preserved, made her own bread and butter, milked a house cow and dressed the farm's mutton to feed her family.

Between 1921 and 1929 Clyde and Gladys had six sons, all still living with the exception of Brian, their 4th son, who died in 2002. Their eldest son Rodney is now 88 and living at Patumahoe.

As the house at Waikaretu filled up, more rooms were added on, with the older boys moving to a sleep-out, which later became shearers' quarters. "Father built a woolshed where hay was stored," recalls Rodney. "When it burnt down, instead of building another, he built a cowshed and milked cows for the cream service to Tuakau." In such an isolated area, everyone organised their own social occasions and Aston's woolshed would echo to the sounds of music and laughter as the community gathered for dances.

Up until the 1950s Gladys always had the local schoolteacher board with her. The telephone came in 1925, with Gladys in charge of the exchange and by 1930 she was the local postmistress, a post she held for 14 years. One of her responsibilities was issuing government benefits to Maori. She was asked to stand for parliament for the Country Party, but declined, saying she was "too busy."

In 1933 she opened a store in one of the rooms of the house and the cream truck delivered the goods to her when they came to pick up the cream. Around this time there was a works camp for the men building the road and some had their families with them. Often the wives, and sometimes the men, would go to Gladys wanting to buy food. She put a slide into one of the windows and this became the 'shop', mostly stocked with staple foods like flour, sugar and rice. "I expect she was able to supply milk and butter as well, and any excess fruit and vegetables she had," says Rosemary. "She was a very good gardener and no doubt that helped to feed her growing family, school teacher and farm workers."

The Aston boys attended the first Kaawa School and then Matira School. Maori parents were keen for their children to learn English, but with only Maori spoken at home, it could be difficult for them at school, where they were not allowed to speak Maori. Pakeha children were just as keen to learn some of the Maori language, and the traditional games, though doubtless their teachers did not approve. The Aston boys were foundation members of the new Waikaretu School when it moved to the cottage on Waikaretu Station in 1930 – at Gladys' instigation. She suggested to the Education Board that the school be moved during the depression years as it had become impossible for farmers' children to be sent to boarding school. The population of the area was increasing and the Board agreed that the move to a more central position was a good idea. Four years later, a new one room schoolhouse was built. It wasn't until the late 1940s that power arrived at Waikaretu.

Gladys and Clyde parted in 1943 and Gladys and the boys remained on the farm milking cows by hand for some years, until it was converted over to sheep. Rod and David, her two eldest sons, took over the farm in 1946 and Gladys moved to Auckland. She had a two storied house built in Brighton Road, Parnell and lived there until her death, keeping busy with her grandchildren, the Parnell Lily Society (whose president was Rob Muldoon) and rushing around, visiting family and friends near and far and delivering Meals on Wheels, often to people much younger than herself. It was nothing for her to drive down to Taumarunui to visit family.

"She was a very good dressmaker and made most of my dresses," says Rosemary. "I'm not sure if she did this for all her granddaughters. I am her first grandchild and the family always tease me and say that I was very spoilt by her – and I probably was."

Gladys died, aged 87, on 19 Aug 1976. At the time of her death she had 22 grandchildren and several great grandchildren. ■