

Leslie Stuart Mackie (1884 – 1943)

Leslie Stuart Mackie was born on 18 August 1884 at Kohi in South Taranaki, where his father leased a smallholding and from 1894 managed the local creamery. George Mackie, a descendent of Aberdeenshire wood craftsmen, had arrived on the *Edwin Fox* in 1875 and initially worked on railway construction at Whangaehu and then as a farm manager near Waverley. On 24 March 1877 he married Marie Louisa Johanna Domin (born Sieloff). The Domin family from Lauenburg (now Lębork in north-western Poland) landed in Wellington on the *Fritz Reuter* in August 1876, with more than five hundred other new arrivals from Eastern Europe.

Leslie Mackie was the sixth of George and Marie's ten children, six of whom survived childhood. He attended the small Kohi School, but like many of the other children, was often kept home for seasonal farm work. After Les's marriage in 1907 to Violet Mary Hone of Kohi, the couple moved north to Kaimata to help Les's father. George Mackie had been appointed manager of the Moa creamery in 1902; he also administered the post and telephone service from his home, and shortly afterwards built and established the first Kaimata store. Les and Violet's daughter Mara – their only child, was born in Kaimata. Back in South Taranaki in the employ of the Joll Dairy Company, Les was manager of its Otakeho branch from 1911 until his untimely death in Auckland on 4 July 1943.

His interests were many and varied, and his skills mainly self-taught; among his books *The Maori Canoe* by Elsdon Best (1925) and manuals on the New Zealand flora by both Kirk and Cheeseman. Interested in Māori culture and an early visitor to the Kohi Gorge shelter, he meticulously replicated its unique incised designs on a wooden panel. His better-known carvings are a set of bed ends and a

waka huia (treasure box) exhibited at the 1924–25 Wembley Exhibition in London, and a model waka taua (war canoe), all with intricate Māori patterns, but he also carved walking sticks and other items. He collected artefacts for his private museum, and Rigby Allan, Taranaki historian, art collector and museum director, recalled in 1973 that Les Mackie sparked his own interest in local history.

From a family visit to forester and horticulturist Ebenezer Maxwell at Rahotu, Mackie returned with cuttings, seedlings and inspiration for his own bush and garden developed from a rough gorse-clad hillside at his Otakeho home. He brought back plants, especially ferns, from fishing and hunting trips, and in 1928 donated a collection to the new Pukekura Park fernery. His "Small Coastal Plants on South Taranaki Coast" published in the *New Zealand Flower Grower* (5 August 1935) is further indication of his botanical interests and expertise. Nearly two hundred illustrated rhyming letters to his grandson Winston Miskelly (born 1936) reflect his day-to-day life and observations up to the early years of World War II. Scientist Colin Miskelly is a great-grandson.

Obituaries comment on Les Mackie's community involvement, in many cases assisted by his wife, and his unaffected kindness and generosity. A lectern in the Otakeho church, and gates to the cemetery, are memorials to him. Some of his carvings, artefacts and letters are in the care of Taranaki's Puke Ariki. H B Dobbie, in his 1930 edition of *New Zealand Ferns*, made several references to Les Mackie and named a variety of *Asplenium lucidum* after him, but as there was no description accompanying the photo, the name was not validated. Today Mackie's fern is included with the variable *Asplenium lyallii*. Nothing remains of the garden into which he poured so much labour and love.

Asplenium lyallii

Asplenium, spleenworts, are so named because of the old belief in the usefulness of some species for ailments of the spleen, due to the spleen-shaped sori on the back of the fronds. New Zealand species have elongated sori and indusia extending along the veins, often in a herringbone pattern. *Asplenium lyallii* (syn. *Asplenium anomodum*), which includes the fern Dobbie named *Asplenium lucidum* var. *Mackie*, is named after 19th century Scottish naturalist and naval surgeon David Lyall. It is a variable species of mainly calcareous soil or rock in coastal to subalpine areas, often in cave entrances.



PHOTO: Jeremy Rolfe