

James Speden (1870 – 1952)

James Speden was born in Opoho, Dunedin, on 28 September 1870, the third son of James Speden and Helen Laurie, and the first of their ten children born in New Zealand. The Spedens were border Scots, and James' parents lived in Galashiels before emigrating with their two infant sons on the clipper *James Nicol Fleming* in 1869. James senior worked as a carpenter and builder until 1877, when he tendered for a 199-acre block of land at Knapdale, 12 km north of Gore. After attending North-East Valley School, young James was a first-day pupil at Knapdale School when it opened in 1879. He and his brothers helped establish the farm, but it could not support them all, and James took up a carpentry apprenticeship with William Willis of East Gore.

After travelling to Scotland and England in 1892, he returned to building, and in 1894 took over the business of a previous employer, Mr W A McCaw. In 1895 he married Margaret Christie, with whom he had a family of three daughters and two sons. A major early contract was the rebuilding in 1896 of Gore School, which had been destroyed by fire. Along with an expanding timber and hardware business, James became interested in native plants, especially alpine herbs and shrubs. In 1906 he bought a four-acre section on which he built an impressive home and developed an extensive and unique garden. Wood carving, building design, tramping, painting and photography complemented his interest in collecting, studying and cultivating native plants. With Dugald Poppelwell of Gore, he collected extensively in the Garvie, Eyre and Remarkable ranges of Fiordland, and elsewhere in the South Island, especially around Arthur's Pass.

His rhododendron expertise evolved from his friendship with David Tanno, superintendent of the Dunedin Botanic Garden, who asked him to propagate seeds of Himalayan species sent from Scotland by collector Frank Kingdom-Ward. Speden later devoted over an acre to the cultivation of rhododendrons. Always ready to share his knowledge, he contributed numerous articles to scientific and horticultural journals.

As he became interested in local affairs, he eased his son Gordon into management of the business. In 1928 James was a foundation member and first president of the Gore Garden Club, and was active in the district's Early Settlers Association. In 1929 his wife Margaret died, and in 1932 he married Ellen Jones. They moved to Opoho, Dunedin in 1946 and shortly before his death in 1952 he was elected an honorary member of the Institute of Horticulture. Ellen died in 1973. James Speden's passion was reflected in his substantial bequests for the cultivation of native plants, and sixty years on, Ian Speden of Lower Hutt, who provided this information about his grandfather, credited him with triggering his own interest in botany.

James Speden was awarded the Loder Cup in 1943 for his collection and cultivation of native plants. The speargrass *Aciphylla spedenii* in 1922, and the needle-leaved daisy *Celmisia spedenii*, which he located in 1939 in the Eyre Mountains after seeing the species in cultivation in Gore, are named after him. A large speargrass weevil *Lyperobius spedenii* and a large southern New Zealand land snail, *Powelliphanta spedenii*, also honour him.

Celmisia spedenii

Speden's mountain daisy, a montane to alpine ultramafic endemic of sparsely vegetated rock strewn ground, fell field and rock outcrops, is locally abundant in its few known locations on West Dome in northern Southland. It is a woody-based perennial herb, forming small to large mats from which arise many stiff erect linear silvery leaves about 7 cm long with inrolled margins. Flower heads from December to February are 3–4 cm wide, on slender erect stiff stems up to 10 cm or so tall. The species was formally described and named after its discoverer by George Thomson in 1945.

