

Eileen Alice Willa (1905 – 1999)

Eileen Willa, née Harrison, was born, educated and spent most of her long life on Stewart Island/Rakiura. Her maternal grandfather Tom Leask of Orkney, Scotland, arrived in 1862 as a ship's carpenter, did building work on the island and married Dinah Walschläger whose family had settled at Loneckers Bay. Together they raised ten children. Their daughter Rosa married John Harrison, the eldest son of Joss and Jane Harrison from Lancashire, who had built a fish-shed and smokehouse on the island; John worked there for 53 years, becoming manager at an early age. Eileen was the oldest of Rosa and John Harrison's family of five.

A love of nature had always been in the family. Rosa Harrison collected seashells and made frequent trips to Ringaringa Beach with her young children; Eileen later collected for her, but after botanising with Dolly Leask at Mason Bay, plants became her main interest. In 1924 she accompanied the Dawson family to Herekopare Island to look after the children while their parents caught, cleaned and packed muttonbirds. This was her introduction to both the muttonbird islands and her future husband, Percy (Buddie) Willa, who also went with them. After their marriage in 1928 they went to Kaikoura, Buddie's birthplace, where his father had left him a house, but the following year they, with their baby daughter, were back in Rakiura. Buddie returned to fishing from Halfmoon Bay and Port Pegasus, and while he fished, Eileen took opportunities to explore new areas, collect plants, and assist visiting naturalists.

She began collecting seaweeds early in 1943 after a request from Victor Lindauer, a teacher and well-known algologist, and sent him 60 different species from Ringaringa. After receiving back a named and mounted specimen of each kind, she collected, dried and mounted everything she sent – 6000 during ensuing years, many of them forwarded to American and European universities. Lindauer's three-week visit in 1946 to work the tides heralded shorter visits by several overseas specialists, and later she also collected with Nancy Adams.

Her work for Lindauer, Pocock, Papenfuss, Conway, Norris and others, led to her publication in *The World Who's Who of Women* (1982) and the presentation to her of a plaque. Three species of seaweed are named after her: *Ptilonia willana*, which she found at Port Pegasus in 1945; the large brown kelp, *Durvillaea willana* (Broad Bay, 1946) and *Crouania willae* (Ringaringa, 1960). The Dominion Museum's publication in 1974 of the booklet *The Marine Algae of Stewart Island*, which she co-authored, is another indication of her knowledge and the esteem in which she was held.

She helped in the Rakiura Museum from its establishment in 1960, recording collections of native flora. In 1963 she became curator and with Buddie's assistance worked there for 22 years. Their daughter Ellen died in 1975, and after Buddie's death at their Leask Bay home in 1985, "Gran", as she was then affectionately known, presented her herbarium of Stewart Island algae to the National Museum, Wellington. Reluctantly, she left the island to live in Invercargill, where she died in 1999.



Durvillaea willana

Durvillaea willana is a massive seaweed, up to 5 metres high with a solid cylindrical stipe bearing short stalked blades along its length. The blades are flattened and split into strap-like segments; lacking internal honeycomb tissue, they are very heavy and not buoyant. The holdfast is a domed, circular disc. The plant is dark brown in colour, with the stipes often a paler greenish yellow; the texture is leathery and pliable. *Durvillaea willana* grows on rock at and just below the extreme low tide mark in exposed situations, and where the two species grow together, below the *Durvillaea antarctica* (bull kelp) zone. Its distribution in New Zealand is the southern North Island (but not the Cook Strait shore), South and Stewart Islands.