

V/F Nelson - History

Features

- The courts, page 14
- Business, pages 15-17
- Farming, pages 18-20



ABOVE: Rose Frank, who was so often behind the camera, is here seen in her studio, where tens of thousands of Nelsonians were captured on film.
 BELOW: The first, modest Tyree Studio frontage in Nelson's Trafaglar Street in about 1885.

William Tyree branched out, building and promoting acetylene gas generators. In this 1897 photograph, the studio frontage has been repainted to promote "the light of the future."



The Rose of Tyree

When young Rosaline Frank began work in 1886 at the age of 21, she would scarcely have realised she was embarking on a career as collector of a national treasure.

Possibly she was excited at gaining a position as assistant to the photographer William Tyree — perhaps an unusual situation for a young female in those years.

It would be interesting to know if she obtained the position through being an ardent amateur photographer, or did she commence as receptionist, graduating to assistant photographer over the years?

William Tyree founded the Tyree Studio in Trafalgar Street, Nelson, about 1882 and was later joined by his brother, Fred. The first shop was a little building with the floor below street level where clients could sit for formal portraits or scan the collection of landscapes.

By 1890 Fred Tyree was roaming the countryside capturing scenic views, rural and farming activities, — no small task considering the size and weight of photographic equipment in the 1800s and transport methods. Perhaps it indicated Fred Tyree's love of the countryside; he later left photography to become a farmer.

For the Tyrees 1895 was a big year. Business was booming; the studio was dramatically enlarged and boasted a palatial new shop

CAROL PETERS, of Nelson, looks at the work of an early photographer whose work helped preserve history:

Photographs courtesy of the Nelson Provincial Museum's Tyree Collection.

front incorporating a plate-glass window for the projection of lantern slides.

Slides were used as advertisements for local businesses and for scenic views which appealed to the public who gathered outside the studio on Saturday nights when the shops were open until 10 o'clock. Sometimes the local band would take up position on the balcony and accompany the slide show which made for an entertaining evening and was good business for the Tyree Studio.

That same year William Tyree developed a scheme to encourage the tourist trade to the West Coast via Newmans coach route from Blenheim through Nelson and on to Westport. A series of views along the route were photographed (the tireless Fred again?). Large promotional display boards were made which were then exhibited in leading hotels throughout New Zealand.

Overseas tourists were wooed, promotional boards being distributed around the world by the

Orion Steam Ship Company and the New Zealand Steam Ship Company.

Meanwhile, Rosaline Frank must have been learning, watching and helping. No doubt many of the photographs of those years would have been her work and she must have become a competent photographer and businesswoman because in September, 1895, William Tyree signed a power-of-attorney to Rose Frank and left her to manage the business.

William Tyree was probably an eccentric man of varied talents. During his lifetime he devoted many hours to his inventions: life preservers which doubled as deck chairs; a new, improved egg tester; an apparatus for washing clothes; an improved mouse and rat trap; and the Tyree Headline, an ingenious contraption for teaching writing; plus others.

One of his more successful inventions was "the improved acetylene gas generator." The shop front in one Tyree photograph shows his preoccupation

with acetylene gas, the entire front of the building being devoted to the promotion of gas power, to the exclusion of photography.

William Tyree left for Australia in 1895 to sell his gas generator and develop property. He never returned to his photographic studio in Nelson. After managing the business for 19 years, Rosaline Frank finally purchased it from William Tyree in 1914 for the sum of £750.

However, Rosaline Frank did not purchase just a business. By now, she was buying history. In the collection filed in the strong-room were negatives going back to the early days of European settlement — portraits of early European settlers, scenes of the town in its infancy, including the old cathedral on the hill, and the windmill in lower Trafalgar Street.

Houses, public buildings, scenes, events and people, all part of the district's passing parade, were immortalised by

the Tyrees. Rose Frank was to continue her work and the collection until retiring at the age of 82.

Miss Frank sold her business in 1947 to Cecil Manson of London, but retained the massive collection of negatives taken by the studio, including copies of even earlier photographs. She presented her collection of negatives to the Nelson Historical Society in June, 1954, and in October the same year, the grand old lady of photography died.

Nelson Provincial Museum has the magnificent collection in its care, along with negatives of many other major photographers. There are more than one million negatives in the combined collection... the largest historical photographic collection in New Zealand.

It is a goldmine for historians, collectors, researchers of family history or fashion, and people interested in old houses or gold-mines, antique dolls or old cars, those seeking rural scenes or pictures or animals, or just for those who love to adorn walls with old photographs. This huge historical collection is priceless — a treasure of national importance.

Had it not been for a young woman who devoted her life to her chosen profession, a great portion of photographic history may well have been lost to future generations.



Fred Tyree, who by 1890 spent much of his time roaming the Nelson countryside taking photographs for his brother's studio.



William Tyree, who established the Nelson studio in about 1882 but left it in the hands of Rose Frank by 1895.



Fred Tyree under a photographer's hood at Devil's Boot, Collingwood, about 1897.