

Dorothy FITCH

(Froebel Travelling Teachers project – (FTT))



Figure 1 Miss Dorothy Fitch ca 1914, Kelburn North School Archives

TIMELINE

Family name	Dorothy FITCH
Other names used	Married name – Mrs George E Hunter
Date of birth (& death if known)	2.3.1877 Father: Arthur Wellington Fitch Mother: Laura Augusta Fitch
Nationality	British
Schooling	Schooled at home 1896 FEI Elementry Certificate 1903 FEI Higher Certificate
Employment (UK)	1901 - teacher at St Vincent Convent Orphanage & Industrial School (unconfirmed) c1899 - 1905 –Lecturer, Home & Colonial Training College
Employment (New Zealand)	1906- 1914 Dual position of Kindergarten Mistress at Wellington Training College and Head off the infant

	department of the Normal School, 1914 Appointed Head Mistress of Kelburn Normal School. 1916 – 1919 – Teacher Kelburn Normal School
Travel	1906 – March 26 th Arrives in NZ from UK 1909 - Returns home for short visit
Marital status	1915 – Marries George Ernest Hunter – retires from teaching
	Remains in New Zealand

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The long awaited Kelburn Normal School opened on Wednesday, 15th April 1914. It was the first stage of a plan to site Wellington's Teachers Training College and a practicing school close to the city's university and thus bring a 'more complete provision for the training of teachers.'ⁱ Present at the opening were Mr. John S Tennant the college's Principal and Miss Dorothy Fitch, the college's first Kindergarten Mistress and now Head of the new normal school. Small in stature at just over 5ft, Miss Fitch stood tall both in the implementation of modern beliefs built around the schooling of young children and in support of the current reforms of teacher training underway.

British born Dorothy Fitch had immigrated to the colony to take up the new position of Kindergarten Mistress for the Training College and Head of the Infant Department in 1906. Her arrival in Wellington was widely reported. Mention was made of her previous experience as Head of the Kindergarten department of the progressive British Home and Colonial College, that she held the Higher Certificate of the Froebel Educational Institute, and of her personal connection to one of the Empire's most respected educationalists, Sir Joshua Fitch, a keen advocate of educational reform. That she brought expertise in kindergarten pedagogy and up to date methods to the colony's new reforms in teacher training was highlighted.ⁱⁱ

In 1906, the proposed new training college and model school in Kelburn were both some years away. In the interim, the college and practicing school were temporarily located at Thorndon School in a newly adapted, up-to-date set of rooms. In addition to teaching Miss Fitch taught 'methods of teaching', a course dealing with all the work of the infant room, 'handwork' to all second year students and a special course on infant room handwork for women students. She supported the establishment of a kindergarten for 3-4 year olds so that the college trainees would be able to have a full record of a child's educational development from as early an age as possible.ⁱⁱⁱ

Miss Fitch was active in community matters. She served on the Richmond Free Kindergarten Council (RFKU) and was a member of the Women Teachers Association (WTA) in Wellington. In a comprehensive submission to the 1912 Royal Commission of Education Fitch, representing the WTA called for more staff in infant schools to permit opportunities for kindergarten work, for women inspectors and for properly organised education for children between the ages of three and seven years. Fitch also expressed support for the reform of the infant curriculum but argued strongly "that the unwieldy size of many infant classes prevented infant teachers implementing the reforms." Fitch cited examples of classes of 50 or 60 children, many with an assistant or pupil-teacher in charge saying 'under these circumstances all freedom or spontaneity of movement, which is the right of all children, becomes impossible. A desirable limit for any class of children under seven would be 30, but preferably much lower.'^{iv}

Miss Fitch brought these experiences to her new role as Kelburn School's first principal. The first year was not easy. The pleasure of a modern infant school and attached kindergarten was tempered alongside some parental opposition both to the school's lack of provision for older children and to the implementation of some modern methods. Measles and other sicknesses interfered with children's attendance and opportunities to learn. A matter recognised by the inspector who nonetheless presented the new school with a good report.

But she persevered and used her special interest in nature studies to bring the outside world into the school making nature study, animal and plant growth, the theme around which they operated the lessons that first year.^v A founding student Hazel Evans (Holmes) later wrote of her two-year enrolment at KNS over 1914-1915.

My sister at four years was able to start to as the school had a kindergarten. I was quite green with envy as I saw *her* classroom with all the Montessori equipment. I had very happy memories of Kelburn. We each had a plant pot and helped look after the school animals – birds – guinea pigs, and rabbits by feeding and cleaning cages. We had a large hall for eurhythmic and singing games – very new in New Zealand and new in Wellington too.^{vi}

Fitch's tenure was short. In late 1914, Fitch announced her pending marriage to George Hunter and in line with social convention, presented her resignation as of March 31st 1915; two months before her quiet wedding in May. Her departure however was short-term and within the year, Miss Fitch returned to the school as Mrs Hunter. The demands of military service had seriously depleted the ranks of male teachers and women teachers were sought to assist in the war effort and to return to teaching for the interim.

Tragedy struck in November 1918 when the effects of the influenza epidemic of 'Black November' spread rapidly through New Zealand with devastating results and the closure of all schools. Staff from school and the training college including John S Tennant and the then school principal, Winifred Maitland, volunteered their services. Under Mrs. Hunter's management, Kelburn School became the 'Receiving Home for children', accommodating up to 100 children whose parents had died or were ill.^{vii}

Following the war's end male teachers who had survived the war returned to take up their old positions. In 1919, Dorothy Hunter, now aged 41 years resigned from Kelburn School for the second and final time. She lived in New Zealand for the remainder of her life.

PRESENTATIONS & PUBLICATIONS

Presentations (sample of)

- 1912 Submission to The Education Commission (Cohen) AJHR, 1912, Session II – E12 p. 543-546
- 1913 June - presents address to Moral and Physical Health Society
‘Some needs of women’
- 1913 May - presents address to Moral and Physical Health Society
‘The Education of Girls’
- 1914 Oct – presents an educational lecture - YWCA

Publications

- Dorothy Fitch, First Impressions, *The Cooee*, Wellington Training College, Vol. 1, no. 1 (Dec. 1907). 7-8.
- Dorothy Fitch, Submission to The Education Commission (Cohen) AJHR, 1912, Session II – E12 p. 543-546

Publications– secondary sources

Kerry Bethell, Froebelian teachers abroad: Implementing a modern infant education system in colonial Wellington, New Zealand 1906–1925. In Helen May, Kristen Nawrotski and Larry Prochner (Eds.) *Kindergarten Narratives on Froebelian Education: Transnational Investigations*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishers), 2016, 51-66

Kelburn Normal School Golden Jubilee, 1914-1964 (Wellington : Wright & Carman, 1964)

Janet McCallum and Ginny Sullivan (eds). *Kelburn Normal School 75th jubilee, 1914-1989* (Wellington: Kelburn Normal School, 1990).

. Portrait of a school' *National Education*, April 1, 1964, 116.

FTT Links:

- FTT – Winifred Maitland
 - FTT – Ethel Burnett
 - FTT - Dorothy Whitbread Edwards
- See also Mary Hitchcock's *Occupation Book*,
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- i 'Training Colleges: Views of the Secretary of Education' *New Zealand Herald*, 7 September, 1903, 6
- ii 'Personal' *Evening Star*, 8 February 1906, 5
- iii Fitch, submission to The Education Commission (Cohen) AJHR, 1912, 543
- iv *Ibid*, 543
- v Kelburn Normal School Golden Jubilee, 1914-1964, 9
- vi Janet McCallum and Ginny Sullivan (eds). *Kelburn Normal School 75th jubilee, 1914-1989*, 85
- vii 'Influenza', *Dominion*, Volume 12, Issue 55, 29 November 1918, Page 6