



In the Millers Flat cemetery stands a grey granite headstone which bears testimony to the deaths of three children of the Sillars family.

The headstone records:

In Loving Memory Of Margaret Sillars died 14 September 1889 aged 18 days. What cause lies behind this loss? We will probably never know.

The Tuapeka Times, 12 April 1890 records, as does the headstone, the other two early deaths:

On 6th April [1890] at Millers Flat, Susanna, youngest daughter of John and Jane Sillars, aged 5 years 10 months. Deeply regretted.

On 7th April, at Millers Flat, Thomas Samuel, youngest son of John and Jane Sillars, aged 2 years 10 months. Deeply regretted. – Jesus says: “Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for such is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

So the Sillars family lost three children in the space of eight months, the last two probably from diphtheria. However tragedy was still stalking the Sillars family.

The Tuapeka Times, 23 April 1890 recorded the following:

An accident of a very painful character took place in Lawrence yesterday afternoon, resulting in the death of a young man named Michael Mulkern, a farm labourer, in the employ of Mr John Sillars, settler, of Moa Flat.

The deceased was in charge of a four-horse team, carting barley, and when passing Mr Arbuckle's grain stores the team turned suddenly off the road as if making for the railway goods shed. Mulkern was at that moment walking a step or two in the rear of the dray, and, on seeing the horses heading for the right-of-way, rushed forward for the purpose of stopping them. The action of the horses, however, had been too rapid to enable him to do this, the dray going over the kerbing a yard or two on the western, or Mr Arbuckle's, side of the crossing, the near wheel coming into violent collision with the corner of the building, which is of stone, faced with cement. Before Mulkern could round this corner, and so reach the leader's head, he was pinned by the fore part of the dray, and mercilessly held against the wall. To increase the agony of the unfortunate man, the horses pulled fiercely at the traces, refusing to answer the calls of the driver. The result was that the chains snapped.

Assistance, however, was promptly at hand, and the shafter was backed, Mulkern, who was in terrible agony being at once released. The injuries which he sustained were of a fearful character, all signs of life being almost crushed out of the body, and he was at once removed to the hospital in a semi-conscious state. Dr Withers, who happened to have been in Lawrence at the time of the accident, rushed with all speed to the hospital, but only to find that the poor fellow was past all human aid and had succumbed to his injuries.

Mulkern, who was well-known at Tuapeka West, had been in the employ of Mr John Sillars for the past eighteen months, was a very steady, obliging, and industrious young man, and much respected by all who knew him. Both of his parents are still living in Ireland, his nearest relative in the colony being Mr Thomas Fahey, Evans Flat. He had only been about four or five years in the colony, and was 26 years of age. An inquest was held and it found “accidental death”.