



Plaque in Army Drill Hall, Dunedin

Charles Henry was born Karl Auguste Henry ca 1843, in Dresden, Saxony, Germany.

On 28th May 1868, in York, England, he married Johanne Louise Heta "Louisa" GIESLER.

The couple had three children, one born in York 1869, and the other two in Edinburgh 1870 and 1872.

The Henry family emigrated to New Zealand in 1875 with their 3 children, and his wife's sister Dorothea GIESLER, on the ship "AUCKLAND" which sailed from CLYDE (Scotland) on July 31st and arrived Otago October 27th 1875.

Mr. Henry, who was a practical electrician, had been employed for a number of years in the electrical works of Messrs Siemens Brothers, and followed the profession of electrical engineer for several years in England before coming to Dunedin in 1875.

Living in Edinburgh during Charles' time was Alexander Graham BELL (who went to America to earn fame and fortune with the telephone). It is believed that Charles and he corresponded after they both emigrated from Scotland. Charles, himself, went on to make a name for himself with telephones as he manufactured the first two telephones used in New Zealand. These were a Bell design and were used to make the first telephone call between Dunedin and Milton in 1878. (These telephones now reside in the Settlers Museum in Dunedin).

It is entirely feasible that Charles was "headhunted" by the New Zealand Government to bring telephone technology to New Zealand. The famous parliamentarian Sir Julius VOGEL had a passion for building the transport and communications infrastructure in New Zealand and he was known to scour the world for people to achieve this task. It is believed that Charles was attracted to New Zealand to work on the establishment of a telephone network - he was the ideal man for the job when you consider his background. After working on the Dunedin system, where his telephones were used on the existing telegraph lines for the first testing, he then moved to Christchurch with his family where the telephone link between Christchurch and Lyttleton was being set up about 1879.

While he was working in Christchurch his wife, Louisa, died. Her sister, Dorothea, was still living with the family then, and she and Charles married soon after Louisa's death.

Sometime after his marriage to Dorothea, they moved back to Dunedin. In 1880 their first child (Charles Louis) was born.

Charles senior carried on the business he established as Electrical Engineer, Gunsmith and Locksmith, at 127 Princes Street, Dunedin. As a locksmith he won the contract for installing and maintaining the locks in all Government premises in Dunedin - including the prison! As an electrical engineer he constructed and sold telephones for the local trade. He also manufactured dynamos for cars so that they could run electrical equipment (such as lights).

Charles had been a sergeant-major in the Imperial [German] Army, and became a prominent member of the Military establishment in Dunedin. He joined the volunteer Engineers when they were started and was active with them for the rest of his lifetime. His rank in the Military was that of Sergeant Major. In 1901 he was presented with his Long Service and Good Conduct medal by the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall (the Duke was the heir to the throne at the time and became King George V). Comment was made at the time that the Duke and Duchess knew of his background.

He passed away in 1902 at the age of 59. It is indicative of his high standing in the community that he had a funeral with full military honours, including a parade down the main street of Dunedin with his coffin on a ceremonial gun carriage flanked by marching troops. The local military commander spoke at his funeral service. The whole ceremony apparently brought Dunedin to a standstill for the occasion. It must have been really something to be a part of! A proud moment in HENRY family history.

In the NZ Army Drill Hall at Kensington, Dunedin, on a wall is an imposingly large marble plaque erected to the memory of Sergeant Major Charles Henry.

Charles Henry died on 17 January 1902 aged 59 years and is buried in Dunedin's Northern Cemetery.

His eldest son Charles Henry took over the business on his father's death. He was born in Dunedin, and possessed much of his father's mechanical ability. He constructed several dynamos, and installed the fine system of fire alarms and thief detectors at the Seacliff Asylum. He had a contract with the Government to keep their safelocks in repair in Otago and Southland.

Charles junior died on 8 April 1925 aged only 56. He is buried in Dunedin's Andersons Bay Cemetery.

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand ([www.cemeteries.org.nz](http://www.cemeteries.org.nz)) from information supplied by family historian Donald Henry.