



### **Alexandre Rocard – Accused of Cattle-Stealing**

Alexandre Rocard, whose grave can be found in the far northeast corner of the Northern Cemetery, was born in the Vendee region of France in about 1840, and came to Dunedin some time during the 1860s. With his wife, Henriette, he had five sons and two daughters, and his occupation is listed on the electoral roll as ‘engineer’. He seems to have lived an unassuming life in Dunedin and very few facts about this French couple can be traced. However, one dramatic event occurred in the life of Alexandre Rocard when, in 1879, he ‘had his day in court’, accused of cattle-stealing, and charged on three counts with *“feloniously killing and stealing a bullock the property of John Waldie, at Waikouaiti, on the 6th of June.”*

According to the Crown Prosecutor, Mr Waldie, a farmer of Halfway Bush, had been running some of his cattle in the Waikouaiti district, all of which were branded. One of these had been missed, and its skin had subsequently been sold to a butcher at Blueskin by Rocard, who told him it had been shot in the Ranges. At the time of the transaction an alert constable had been in the shop, who proceeded to make some inquiries as to its provenance.

“The prisoner” (Rocard) freely admitted that he had shot the animal when it had rushed him, and accepted that it was to Mr Waldie’s property, but stated that he had had no intention of committing any offence, or “defrauding another of his property”. The incident had occurred when he had gone out pig-hunting in the bush at Waikouaiti. When the cattle appeared he had thought from their appearance that they were wild. He had shot one in self-defence as it rushed at him, and openly proceeded to dispose of the carcass and hide, believing that he had the right to do so. The defence further pointed out that the brand on the animal, indicating Mr Waldie’s ownership, was so faint it was “only visible on the inside of the skin”.

Fortunately, the credibility of this story, together with impeccable character references from no less a person than the City Treasurer, J.M. Jamieson, as well as from two officers of the Naval Brigade, worked in Rocard’s favour, and he was acquitted by the jury after an hour’s deliberation, bringing to an end what must have been a quite traumatic experience.

Henriette Rocard died in 1904 at the age of 45, and was buried in the Northern Cemetery. Each year on the anniversary of her death Alexandre Rocard placed a tribute to her in the Memoriam column of the Witness, generally accompanied by some lines of verse which make it clear that he loved his wife dearly and continued to mourn her. In 1918 he suffered a further loss, and an inscription was added to the grave to commemorate their son Amedee, killed in action in Belgium. Alexandre died

in 1926 and was buried with his beloved Henriette. He was 86 years old, and had spent 50 years of his life in New Zealand. – Helen Gilmore.

Prepared for the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand ([www.cemeteries.org.nz](http://www.cemeteries.org.nz)) by Helen Gilmore.

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