

# 3 Shipwrecked Sargisons

Samuel Sargison (1808-1891) arrived in Hobart from Wisbech in 1839, an unassisted immigrant<sup>1</sup>. One of his sons was called William Frederick Sargison (1848-1924) and was born in Hobart. There, on 18 January 1875, he married Ann Eliza Needham. It was not to be a long marriage!

William and Ann moved almost at once to Dunedin where they were living in Arthur St. Their son, Samuel Francis Sargison (1875-1952) was born late that year.

Less than a year later his mother Ann Eliza was dead, buried in the Northern Cemetery. In 2005 as part of a cemetery conservation initiative the wooden grave marker was found!



William Francis Sargison having had his life upturned decided to return to Hobart with his infant son William Frederick accompanied, it would appear, by his brother John and his son they<sup>2</sup> boarded the *SS Otago*. Unfortunately it was not a wise choice for on 16 December 1876 the *Otago*, ( which was rigged as a barque) was wrecked at the northern end of Chasland’s Mistake (Makati) on December 4th, 1876. The ship was in excellent condition and the master, Captain Calder, very experienced. This experience showed in his masterful management of the abandonment described below. The fact that no lives were lost is extraordinary.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> He was the 1<sup>st</sup> cousin 5x removed of Craig & Allan

<sup>2</sup> His brother was John Thomas so the initial “A” in the testimonial could well be wrong as there is not other J A Sargison known to us.

<sup>3</sup><https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/BH18761208.2.31?page=55&query=sargison&title=NZTR%2CAHCOG%2CBH%2CCL%2CCRO%2CMARG%2CDUNST%2CESD%2CLCM%2CLCP%2CLWM%2CME%2CMIC%2CMTBM%2CNOT%2COAM%2CODT%2COW%2COSWCC%2CSOCR%2C>

slight refreshment. Another half-hour or so and the wreck is sighted—in certainly one of the most apparently unlikely places in the world—the steamer's bowsprit being hidden in the foliage of the trees on a steep hill—it can scarcely be called a cliff—rising some 150ft or so from the sea-level. But the wonder ceases when the peculiar outline of the coast, which obtained for the place the name of Chasland's Mistake, is considered. It may be best described as forming a sort of corner, around which coasting vessels turn when going to the westward. But instead of only one headland there are two, divided by a little bay—the entrance of a shallow river—with a rock rising some 30ft or 40ft, about the centre, in a line between the two headlands, which are not more than a mile asunder. It follows, of course, that any ship mistaking the first promontory for the second, and attempting to “turn the corner,” would, at all events in thick weather, run into the second—not Chasland's Mistake, but—well, so far as we are aware, the headland is unnamed. We do not go near enough to see more just now, the first business being to take off the passengers, whose camp on a sandy beach, about a quarter of a mile from the wreck, is plainly

Captain Calder, orders are given by Captain Christian to pass a tracking line ashore, and the work of embarkation goes on steadily and quietly, although a rather nasty surf renders it dangerous. Once, in fact, one of the Otago's boats—those of the Express are not required—is capsized returning to the shore, but her crew of three cleverly climb her sides and sit astride the keel until rescued by another boat. The male passengers appear to have rather enjoyed their experience—wet through, barefooted and hungry, they are still “jolly as sandboys.” The ladies seem less cheerful—some are thoroughly exhausted and faint. The worst off are the little children—one tiny one—its father a widower—giving forth the most plaintive cries for impossible food, milk not being among the ship's stores. All having been

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The cause of the wreck has been already suggested, and but little can be said on the subject. The night was fine with occasional clouds.—Towards daylight a heavy fog drifted down along the coast. The officer in charge at the time—the second mate—presumably supposed the ship was clear of both headlands, or—and this is an important factor—the compasses were at fault, and the land was run into. Five hundred yards more to the southward and all would have been well. The first intimation the passengers received was when about 2 30 a.m. the ship struck heavily and went grating over the rocks until brought up by the cliff. Then there was a rush on deck—in varied costume—but only a momentary panic, for Captain Calder, ably seconded by Mr Donaldson, chief officer, maintained discipline and saw to the launching of the boats—an operation rendered difficult by the fact that the cliff on one side was so close as to render it necessary to carry the boats across. As a matter of fact all hands could have landed safely from the bows of the steamer, but the steepness of the cliff and consequent difficulty of moving about would have rendered their stay even for a few hours almost unendurable. It was thought best to cross the little bay and land them on the sandy beach at the other side. This done, provisions and a few spare sails for shelter were obtained from the wreck, and the passengers made as comfortable as possible. Meantime a party, consisting of the chief mate (Donaldson) Messrs Saunders and Melross, the last of whom fortunately possessed some knowledge of the coast, started with a crew of six for Waikawa. There they met with Mr Campbell, the pilot, under whose kindly guidance they made their way to Haldane's Beach, a distance of some ten miles, to a gold-miners' camp, where a man was found willing (having two fresh horses) to undertake the journey to Edendale (fifty-three miles) with the brief telegram referred to above. The

The infant was of course Samuel Francis Sargison.

Despite the upset to their lives the passengers seemed to have the highest admiration for the Captain and crew as shown in this testimonial:<sup>4</sup>

PRESENTATION TO THE CAPTAIN.

The cabin passengers met at the Douglas Hotel, Dunedin, on Wednesday afternoon, and drew up a testimonial, as follows, for presentation to Captain Calder ;—

“ Dunedin, December 8.

“ To Captain J. E. Calder,—

“ Sir,—We, the undersigned passengers by the steamship Otago, desire hereby to assure you that you have our profound sympathy in the unfortunate mishap which so deeply affects you. We beg to express our sincere gratitude for the promptness with which you realized the critical nature of our situation, and for the decision and firmness with which you pursued the only course that could lead to our safety. We desire to thank you for the frankness, cheerfulness, and courtesy with which you answered all inquiries—conduct which begets in all concerned a composure and quiet confidence rare on such occasions. For the labor

and danger encountered in taking off passengers' luggage, and for your anxious efforts to make our temporary residence on a barren and bleak shore as endurable and comfortable as possible, we lie under a very heavy obligation to you.

“ In conclusion we cannot refrain from expressing our feeling that the way in which your arrangements were made and carried out adds to the reputation for care and skill you have so long enjoyed ; and we trust that in future, whatever may betide you, success, prosperity, and good fortune proportionate to your high deserts will ever attend you.

“ We desire further to make a hearty acknowledgment of the valuable services rendered by the chief officer and all the members of the crew.”

Mrs C. Patten	Mr T. Hurt
“ E. P. M'Mahon	“ W. Melrose
“ H. Salier	“ W. H. Joyce
“ B. M'Cormick	“ P. Brooke
“ S. Clegg	“ D. Petrie
“ M. Brooke	“ W. F. Sargison
“ A. Martin	“ J. A. Sargison
Miss K. Coxhead	“ Wm. Taylor
“ B. Coxhead	“ H. Holder
Mr M. Somner	“ J. T. Fisher
“ A. T. Anderson	“ J. S. Adamson
“ C. T. M'Mahon	“ T. Block
“ G. H. Arthur	“ J. Preston.

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<sup>4</sup> BRUCE HERALD, VOLUME IX, ISSUE 861, 8 DECEMBER 1876