

Timaru Herald. 29 March 1928 [November 2025]

DOMESTIC TROUBLES.

WIFE SEEKS SEPARATION

NO ORDER MADE.

Before Mr C. R. Orr-Walker, S.M., at the Timaru Magistrate's Court yesterday, Sarah Wood proceeded against her husband, James Wood, farmer, of Albury, for a maintenance, separation, and guardianship order, in respect to herself and five children.

Mr L. M. Inglis appeared for complainant, and Mr W. D. Campbell opposed the order on behalf of Wood.

Mr Inglis said that the parties were married in 1919, and there were five children. Defendant commenced to drink three weeks after the marriage, and several drinking bouts took place in later years. Defendant had been prohibited three times. Mrs Wood left the farm owing to her husband's bouts, but matters were patched up, and she returned. Defendant had knocked his wife about seven years ago, and on a subsequent occasion had ill-treated one of the children. Later on he had chased his wife with an axe, and in view of her own safety, she left him.

Complainant said she had spent the early weeks of her marriage in Timaru, later taking up residence at Albury. Her husband started drinking in Timaru, and during the first year had been drunk on several occasions, lasting for about three weeks at a time. Defendant was prohibited, but no sooner had that order expired, than his actions warranted another, which witness and her mother persuaded him to take out. While this order was in force, defendant had a motor accident which occurred when one of the children was only 16 days' old. Defendant was prosecuted for a breach of his prohibition order, his driver's license was cancelled for three months, and he was fined £10. Matters improved and for 12 months her husband kept off drink. He started again, however, and witness thought it advisable to be separated from him. She went back to him, however, and stayed until February 24th, when he began to drink again. On that day he came home and used violence. He chased witness with an axe, while her sister and sister-in-law were also molested. Her sister-in-law summoned a neighbour, and things became normal again. He always quietened down when there was a man about. About three years ago her husband had knocked her about, banging her head on a verandah post, and kicking her. He had also hit one of the children.

In answer to the Magistrate, witness said that if her husband was not drunk at that time, he was very wild. On another occasion he had chased one of the children with an axe, and on hearing cries, a neighbour had come to the child's assistance, only to be chased with the same weapon. To keep a watchful eye on her husband, she always accompanied him to town.

In answer to Mr Inglis, witness said she had a farm adjacent her husband's. She also had a mortgage on a property in Southland. Her income would be about £40 per year. Her husband received a soldier's pension of 10s per week for life. When on a bout her husband usually consumed a bottle of whiskey a day.

In reply to Mr Campbell: Her husband was only violent during a drinking bout. He disliked her sister all along. A man also came into the question. On one occasion her husband came home and found a man there. Her husband had occasion to order him off the premises, and when he went to Fairlie to summon the police, the man had disappeared. The man was employed twice at the farm previously, because he was a good worker. It was at her husband's invitation that the man was at the farm.

In reply to the Magistrate, witness said that she would expect maintenance for herself and children.

Eliza Winter, sister of the previous witness, said that she had first lived with Mr and Mrs Wood six months after they were married. Wood used to have a drinking bout periodically.

At the end of February, Wood came into the kitchen, and asked where his wife was. He then went into the sitting room and assaulted her. Witness went in to the assistance of her sister, but was thrown out of the room. They managed to get outside, but still he molested them, until they both took pokers to him. On one occasion witness said she had seen her brother-in-law with a rifle ready to shoot the horses. On another occasion he had unmercifully beaten one of the animals with a crow-bar, until it could hardly stand up. The farm had not shown a profit for many years. The reason that she had stayed on the farm was to protect her sister from being murdered. She had seen Wood throw one of the children across a room during a bout. He also threw a plate across the room and narrowly missed the child. During the last bout her brother-in-law had for the first time asked her to leave the house.

In reply to Mr Campbell: Witness said she bore her brother-in-law no animosity. The reason she had stayed in the house was to protect her sister. Witness had never made any mischief.

To the Magistrate: In between times Wood had kept sober.

Dr W. H. Unwin stated that he had examined defendant on one or two occasions. He was addicted to drink, but was not an habitual drunkard.

Mr Campbell said it was not denied that Wood had an unfortunate weakness, but he had been making some effort to free himself from the vice. He could not contest the evidence against the cruelty. The real question was whether the bouts were sufficient to warrant an order.

The Magistrate said that the case was a most unfortunate one. The best thing to do would be to put someone in charge of defendant. Information could be sent to the police each time defendant offended, and he could be imprisoned each time. As defendant was not an habitual drunkard under the meaning of the Act, he could not grant an order. At the same time he had every sympathy with the wife and family.

Timaru Herald. Thursday, February 7, 1929 (page 8 [07/02/2017])

SUDDEN DEATH

INQUEST ON ALBURY FARMER

An inquest touching the circumstances surrounding the sudden death of the late Mr. James Wood, aged 47, a married farmer of Albury, was held before Mr. C. R. Walker, S.M., at the Timaru Magistrate's Court yesterday morning.

Dr. R. D. King, of Timaru, stated that on Sunday, about 10 a.m., Mrs Ross had taken Woods [sic] to his house. He was almost dying from some cerebral or toxic condition. Deceased was not removed from the car, but witness ordered him immediately to Sister M. Arthur's hospital. He saw him within ten minutes and he was dead. By order of the Coroner, he had held a post-mortem on Monday, when he found the cause of death to be acute toxæmia, following rapidly spreading peritonitis, which originated from a ruptured gastric ulcer.

Mrs Daisy Pauline Ross, housekeeper for the late Mr. James Wood, of Albury, said that deceased complained of pains in his stomach at 4 p.m. on Saturday, and retired to bed. As the night went on, he became worse, and suffered all night. She was also ill during the night. On the advice of Dr. Loughnan, of Fairlie, she had brought him into Timaru on the Sunday morning. He had been under medical treatment for several months, but thought it was the liver that was causing the trouble.

Constable A. Herron, of Timaru, who had give[n] evidence of identification, said the body had been removed to the morgue at the hospital.

The Coroner returned a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence.