

Catherine's debut came a year later, in Dunedin. Joseph was attempting his second 1,000-miler, this time inside a marquee beside the Princess Theatre in High Street. Catherine set about walking 500 miles, a half-mile every hour, during her husband's rest breaks. The novelty of a woman pedestrian meant much more public interest, and the newspaper coverage provides some insight into what the spectators saw. She 'was dressed in a very neat walking costume', reported the *Otago Daily Times*, 'and occasionally shook her beautiful jet black curls as she advanced on her journey'. Other little details add to the picture, such as the 'knobby little stick' she carried, 'which she occasionally makes good use of by knocking the heads of little boys who endeavour to peep through the canvas'.<sup>30</sup>

It was, those visiting the marquee were told, 'the greatest pedestrian feat ever performed in the southern hemisphere', but in the end they both failed to finish. After 630 miles Joseph fell sick, 'becoming very dizzy, and ... going into several fits'. He recovered, although at times 'his unsteady gait ... was proof he could only be partly conscious'. Catherine was struggling too – 'on one occasion there was a difficulty in rousing her – she having to be carried into the ring and roughly handled'.<sup>31</sup> Around about this time a local doctor volunteered to give his services free, because of 'his scientific view of the subject'.<sup>32</sup> Many spectators shared his fascination, although the *Otago Witness* columnist failed to see the point of it all. 'Mrs W. may faint, Mr W. may get dizzy', he wrote, but the doctor was the only one to gain as 'he will be able to inform the public in a neatly got up pamphlet how many miles and half-miles it takes to kill a man and a woman in a given time'.<sup>33</sup>

At around the three-quarter mark Catherine gave up.<sup>34</sup> Without the main attraction Joseph soon withdrew too, even though he had done 800 miles and was walking well again. He was penniless, he explained to the press, and had he continued 'others would have reaped the benefit'.<sup>35</sup> By then there were court charges against him for the non-payment of printers' bills.<sup>36</sup> Most likely costs were outrunning gate takings once Catherine succumbed.

This disappointment did not dissuade the Wiltshires. They turned instead to shorter pedestrian performances, more suited to the professional theatre and music hall circuit. Quite likely inspiration came from the benefit concert organised for them after their Dunedin failure by sympathetic local thespians. The Wiltshires took part, each walking a timed mile for the audience's entertainment.<sup>37</sup> The next month Joseph organised a similar two-night variety show at the Masonic Hall in Oamaru, their home town. He headed the bill, doing a three-quarter mile in 6.25 minutes, with support acts of singers, comedians and dancers. On the second night Mrs Wiltshire, 'in a suit of tartan', joined in with a five-minute half mile. The local paper gave it a very mixed review, but it was the start of the Wiltshires' unique brand of theatrical pedestrianism.<sup>38</sup>

There was a lull in their performing careers in 1875. Catherine had their first