



The Odd Fellows Hall on Lambton Quay, Wellington. A big crowd gathered there on a late-summer Saturday night in 1876 to see Catherine Wiltshire compete against William Edwards, one of Australasia's best pedestrians. She walked six miles around the inside of the hall, then Edwards walked seven. He just managed to beat her time, by 15 seconds. Photographer unknown (ATL ref. PAColl-4558-1-34)

After the 100-mile walk in the Auckland City Hall theatre there was another male challenge, this time from J. Mahon, a local walker of lesser ability than Edwards, for £20-a-side, over six miles. Over 600 people crowded into a small Lorne Street hall to watch. Mahon went first, starting fast and finishing in 65 minutes. Catherine started more slowly and was soon behind schedule, but then increased the pace. There was 'quite a furore', wrote the *Auckland Star*, with "her sprightly tripping in the last two miles", but she finished three minutes outside Mahon's time. A reporter commented that she would have done better if she had waited another week to recover from her 100-mile effort.⁴⁶ Catherine must have agreed because she challenged Mahon to compete over the same distance again, this time for £100-a-side, but he refused.⁴⁷

The Wiltshires' final Auckland engagement was much less successful. The promoter of the Ellerslie Gardens track, the main venue for professional foot-racing in Auckland at that time, hired her to do a demonstration walk. Catherine was backed £20 to walk a mile in seven-and-a-half minutes, and £30 to do two miles in 16.5 minutes.⁴⁸ Those were times she could have done on a hard hall floor, but she had never race-walked on an outdoor course before, or worn the spiked shoes necessary for the rough and damp surface. Her mile took a disappointing 12 minutes. Most of the small crowd had left before the two-mile attempt began.⁴⁹