

DESERTED AND STRUGGLING

NAME INC ALIASES:

Eleanor Almquist

NATIVE PLACE:

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RELIGION:

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OFFENCE:

Default of Maintenance

SENTENCE:

48 hrs

Eleanor, who was about 30 years old, and her three children were deserted by her husband in 1902. There was a warrant for his arrest but he successfully disappeared.

There was no government welfare system in New Zealand until social security benefits were introduced in 1938. Local Hospital Boards, the Otago Benevolent Institution, religious groups and private individuals would give food rations to help people in difficult times, but it is not known if Eleanor received anything.

The other form of charitable aid was accommodation, typically for children or the elderly. Children were sent to an Industrial School, which was similar to a workhouse. Girls were trained for

domestic service and boys for farm work. The Almquist children were committed to the Caversham Industrial School in 1902 for a shilling a week each.

By 1905, Eleanor had got hotel work and was earning 12 shillings a week, but the Caversham fees had grown to a debt of £2 5 shillings. It was generally accepted that the father or wider family should provide support and Eleanor told the judge that “it was not her place to pay for the support of the children”. The case was adjourned for a fortnight to give her a chance to pay - her failure to do so saw her jailed for 48 hours.

