

OKAWA

*Early Tales
of the
Lowry Family.*

“Virtue Evergreen”

1846 - 1897

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A CHRISTMAS FAMILY PARTY AT "OKAWA."

Early Tales of the Lowry Family.

IT has been said that if a man, or woman, aspires to a part in the affairs of their country, they must have knowledge of its history.

Your forbears helped in making the history of New Zealand. Their doings you should know, for, some day, it may be your turn to take part in affairs. These tales of the early days of your family may, therefore, be of interest to you.

Thomas Lowry, second son of Thomas Lowry, D.D., was born in 1814 at Crosby-on-Eden, one of the beauty spots of Cumberland, England. He became the first of your line in New Zealand.

Before he left England, he became a graduate of Christ's College, Cambridge, and his wide knowledge of Latin and Greek did not prevent him from becoming a good New Zealand farmer.

He landed in New Zealand in 1846, and travelled in a party from Nelson to Canterbury, where Lowry Peaks, in the Amuri County, were named after him. Later he travelled to Wellington, and there, Lowry Bay, in the harbour, perpetuates his name. He was eager to add to his knowledge of the country and the Maori people, in preparation for the time when he would settle on his own land. (Quite recently, an ancient Maori told Jim Lowry, a grandson, of the time when he saw Mr. Lowry riding into Tokaanu on a mule.)

A letter which he wrote Home in 1847 gives some interesting details of life in New Zealand at that time. The letter was found by the children of Joe Hudson among their father's papers, and sent to his cousin in New Zealand.

Auckland,

April 7th, 1847.

My Dear Joe,

I received a letter from your Aunts Mary and Elizabeth by the vessel "Louisa Campbell" which informed me of the heavy loss you have sustained in the death of your poor brother, Sam. It was with sincere sorrow that I read the melancholy tidings; this loss must have made a great blank in the home, and it would be some time before you could be reconciled to the great change.

I am happy to tell you that I approve greatly of the choice I have made of New Zealand. It is a fine country, and very healthy. I only reached Auckland in the month of August last, and since my arrival in the country I have never been long stationary in the same place. I expect in the course of a few months to be finally settled in the country. There has hitherto been considerable difficulty in getting upon land, notwithstanding that the natives are all very anxious to have white settlers amongst them. A code of regulations, however, is about being drawn up, which will enable people to settle where they like. I have got a good many cattle and sheep, which are being kept for me in the country. I believe I have three and twenty cows, besides a good many calves, and about three hundred ewes and lambs together. The natives are a very lively set of people, and the best-tempered fellows I ever saw. They are quite civilised, and are working by hundreds, on the roads, and many of them are putting up stone buildings for Government.

They are quite an agricultural people, and produce vast quantities of potatoes and pigs. They have a singular custom of rubbing noses with each other. You would be amused if you saw them nosing each other. If two friends have not met each other for some time, they will rub noses and sob for half an hour. They generally sob and shed tears while they nose. I have seen girls sitting in the middle of the street, rubbing noses and making a sad moaning, for a long time. If two parties consisting of a good number of people meet, they shake hands and nearly make their noses meet, not spending any length of time on the ceremony.

I do not know yet exactly what part of New Zealand I shall settle in, but I think very probably in the "Wairarapa" Valley, about fifty or sixty miles from Wellington.

Captain Graham, brother to Mrs. Waddilove, is in Auckland at present. He commands the "Castor" man-of-war ship, and has been in New Zealand for some time. He does not come much on shore. There are two other men-of-war ships lying in Auckland at present besides the "Castor," one called the "Racehorse" and the other the "Inflexible."

The climate of New Zealand is really beautiful, and the country, with all its advantages, cannot fail, I think, to become great and prosperous. It is really wonderful how cattle and sheep thrive here. All the English fruits grow remarkably well in New Zealand. There are not finer apples and pears grown in the world, perhaps, than at a place called the "Bay of Islands." There is much more fruit produced at the "Bay of Islands" than at the other settlements, as it is of older standing. The other places have only sprung up within the last few years. Oranges, I believe, have not been produced in New Zealand yet, but if they grow in Devonshire, in England, they might surely be grown in the northern parts of New Zealand. I purpose going a journey shortly into the interior of the country. There are some boiling springs at a place called "Rotorua," at no very great distance from Auckland. I purpose going to Rotorua first. The most powerful chief in New

Zealand, called "Te Whero Whero," has been in Auckland during the last few weeks. He is a nice-looking old man, with a very mild expression of countenance. From his appearance, one would not say that such a man could ever have delighted in shedding blood—yet this very person has no doubt eaten many, very many, of his fellow-creatures. The New Zealanders are all the most dreadful cannibals, but since the introduction of Christianity amongst them, they have laid aside the dreadful propensity, and are patterns of good conduct to their white brethren.

And now, my dear boy, I must wish you good-bye. I shall hope to hear from you. I hope that your sister Jane, and Mr. and Mrs. Hudson and your aunt, are well.

Believe me to be

Your affectionate Uncle,

THOS. LOWRY.

You will realise from the information in his letter that he was interested in the Maori people, and all his life, he was their friend. As guides in the journeys that he took, he found them very helpful, and his first introduction to Hawke's Bay was along the track, now known as the "Gentle Annie," between Taihape and Hawke's Bay, when friendly Maoris led the way.

Much thought was given to the purchase of land, and at one time, Mr. Lowry and Mr. John Chambers found themselves interested in the same block, known as "Te Mata." It was eventually purchased by Mr. Chambers, and in later years the son and daughter of those early settlers, Georgina Elizabeth Lowry and Bernard Chambers, married, and took up their residence there.

The land which Mr. Lowry purchased from the Maoris is now on the direct route to Taihape, and is known as "Okawa," meaning "Bitter Water," so named because of an iron spring found there. Three generations of your family have now lived there.

In its original state "Okawa" had no real bush, except on the banks of the Mangatarata Stream, which forms the boundary between "Okawa" and "Tunanui," the home of Sir Andrew and Lady Russell. Scrub and fern, often higher than a man's head, were everywhere, and work was hard and strenuous.

A two-roomed cottage was built, and in it all the treasures of silver and furniture brought from Home, were kept. Though the master was often away on business, nothing was ever taken. Maoris often looked through the windows, with the red curtains, nodding approval, and saying "Kapai," when they saw the knives and forks used at the table.

A housekeeper, Mrs. Howse, "did" for Mr. Lowry in those early years, and he was regularly given two eggs for his breakfast, and treated at times to Devonshire cream, for which Mrs. Howse was famous.

Mr. Lowry superintended all the work of the station, and he had among his employees people from his own home county of Cumberland. Three families, Hughes, Bicknells, and Howells, worked for many years on "Okawa," and the children of

their combined families followed on and prospered in the district. Paddocks and creeks bear the names of men who worked on the station, and any Lowry knows Porter's Paddock, Jones's Creek, etc.

While living in Wellington, Mr. Lowry had met and made friends with Mr. Wm. Couper, of "Kahuranaki," and it was while paying a visit to the family, that he met Miss Maria Townsend Beamish, and fell in love with her. She was born in 1834, the fifth in a family of six daughters and two sons, and was a fearless horsewoman.

Her family had left Ireland, because of the potato famine, and had a perilous passage in the ship "Eden," which had sprung a leak, and had to land her passengers in Nelson, instead of Wellington. On the same ship, the Herrick family arrived, and both families endured the hardships of pioneer life.

At one time Miss Beamish was to be bridesmaid to her sister in Auckland. She boarded a ship, on which she was marooned in the Wanganui River for three weeks, and then it took three months to reach its destination. The wedding was well over before she arrived, and her visit lengthened to a year before she saw her own home again.

When she arrived, as a bride, at "Okawa," a larger house was built, and the little cottage became, in turn, the schoolroom for the children, and later, the smoking room, adorned with silver cups won by animals bred on the station at various Agri-

cultural Shows. You may be interested to know that the first "Show" in Hawke's Bay was held in 1863, at Havelock North.

Her garden was Mrs. Lowry's special pride, and all the water used in the house was carried out to water the plants. Trees also were tended and watered through the dry weather. It was said of her that she never came into her home empty-handed—sticks and bark for the fire, flowers from the garden, and vegetables for the table, always something for her home in her hands.

Tararapa's Hill—named after the Maori guide who was always a special adviser and friend—was the first site chosen for the homestead, but the Maoris advised against it, and recommended the present situation because of the limestone foundation and better water supply. That the advice was good, has been proved from the fact that, through all the years the homestead has never been flooded. In the early days, a wicket gate led to the stream, and there were stepping stones across the creek. Where roads were rough, and no more than tracks, riding was the means of transport, and one time Mr. and Mrs. Lowry rode through the Seventy Mile Bush from Takapau to Turakina with a baby each in front on the saddle. Tararapa was their guide on that occasion.



Three daughters, Elizabeth, Mary and Alice, and one son, Thomas Henry, became the family at "Okawa," and grew up to have lessons in turn in the little house with the shingle roof, once used by their father.

Their first experience in riding was in panniers, which were sent out from England for them. They soon grew to know and understand the horses, and had no fear of them. In their rides, they were often completely hidden by the fern and manuka which met above their heads as they rode along the winding tracks. Sometimes they would be covered by green beetles which fell upon them as the ponies pushed their way along.

When Mrs. Hewson, a sister of Mrs. Lowry, died at Otaki, her small daughter, Maria Middleton, five years of age, was sent to "Okawa" to live, and be brought up with her cousins. She landed in Napier from a ship, and travelled by coach to Puketapu. From there she rode with Miss Hargreaves, who delivered her to the aunt and uncle who were to adopt her as their own.

Another cousin, Jimmy Wilson, who was orphaned by the Hau Haus, also joined the family circle, but that is another story.

Mrs. Lowry had often to be left alone with the servants, when Mr. Lowry was busy, and he was away on the occasion of the great earthquake in 1863. "Long Tom," the shepherd, and Bonnie, the cook,

were the staff, and she awoke to find herself alone with Bonnie. At the first movement "Long Tom" had departed, for he said "he had to gang awa" to look after the sheep! The walls of the sheep yards were built of limestone which had been cut on the place, and he thought the stones might fall and kill the sheep. What happened to Mrs. Lowry and the children was of minor importance to "Long Tom."

From the very beginning of its settlement, "Okawa" was planted with trees, both ornamental and useful. In 1859 we read in an old diary that seeds of raspberries and grapes were asked for by letter, and oaks were grown from acorns of England. Poplars, and willows, and elms were planted, and Point Paddock was planted with gums, which grew to be very fine specimen trees. A daily walk of the master of the house was from the homestead to Point Paddock. He noted that cabbage-trees were self-sown, but the ngaio had to be cultivated.

Poplars and willows were not favoured by a one-time gardener, for he had been known to remark that "h-oaks, h-elms, and h-ashes make a very fine h-avenue"!

Famous in Lowry history, "The Grove" was planted with poplars over seventy years ago. It has since been the family rendezvous for cricket matches, hunts, Girl Guides and just "plain Jane" picnics. Famous cricketers from England and Australia have played on "The Grove" pitch, and now

in 1946 the children's Pony Club is upholding the old traditions.

In the early days it was a favourite nesting-place for quail, where the trees were protected with batons until they made good growth. Partridges were also introduced, but owing to the absence of crops they did not thrive, and an attempt to introduce grouse was also unsuccessful.

Geese, which are still seen on the lake, called "The Serpentine," have flourished since the days when they were driven into the farm yard in July and kept there for a few days to lay. One goose, known to be twenty-three years old, was hatched in the oven.

Life in New Zealand was anything but easy for the settlers, and in the Waikato and Taranaki, war raged between the Maoris and the white settlers in quarrels over the ownership of land.

With his Maori neighbours, Mr. Lowry always had most cordial relations, and he pursued a policy of honourable and just dealing with them. They knew that his word was his bond, and were satisfied.

With others, this was not always so, and religious differences developed among some of the Maoris, who elected to follow the cult of Hau Hauism. The teachings of the missionaries seemed to be quite forgotten by these natives, and their actions caused much fear and unrest.

During the rising of the Hau Haus in 1868, it was thought wise for the women and children at "Okawa" to go into Napier for safety. All the silver and family treasures were buried in the garden, and Tom O'Flaherty was left in charge, the men being trained to defend themselves.

The family was driven in a bullock-wagon over the hills, and their stay in Napier lasted more than a year.

Here a daughter, Mary, while still a baby, had to be left, while Mrs. Lowry went to the help of her sister, Mrs. Wilson, who lived in Poverty Bay.

There, on November 10th, 1867, the rebel chief, Te Kooti, and his fierce band of warriors had attacked some settlers, and Captain Wilson and three little children were killed. The house was burned to the ground, and Mrs. Wilson had been left for dead, with seven spear wounds.

When his father fell, the eldest child, Jimmy, eight years old, had escaped into the bush. For two days he wandered about, finding a little food in some of the abandoned houses, and having as a companion his sheepdog, "Punch."

On the third day, he went back to the site of his home, and found his mother still alive in an outhouse. She had had no food for three days, and the boy managed to find some eggs, and cook them under her direction. Over his nightshirt Jimmy was

wearing a coat of his father's, and in the pocket a few cards were found, on one of which Mrs. Wilson managed to write a message with a burnt stick. Twice the boy started to take this message, and turned back, but the third time he found his way, and was almost at Turanganui, now called Gisborne, when he was found by a reconnoitring party of soldiers, and brought in to the officer commanding the outpost.

Dr. Gibbs started off at once, with a relief party, to bring Mrs. Wilson in, and she was placed in Archdeacon Williams's cottage, and tended by Mrs. Jennings, wife of one of the military settlers, until Mrs. Lowry arrived. A fortnight later, the doctor urging the necessity, Colonel Whitmore chartered the "P.S. Sturt," and accompanied by Archdeacon Leonard Williams, Mrs. Lowry took her sister to Bishop Williams's house in Napier.

There she was attended by Dr. Spencer, but despite her marvellous courage and endurance, three days after arrival in Napier, and thirty-seven days after the massacre, she died.

Jimmy was taken by his aunt and uncle to live at "Okawa." With him went his dog "Punch" and his father's horse "Matakokere," which had been wounded in the shoulder by a bullet on the fateful day. Both dog and horse lived to a good old age and died at "Okawa."

Jimmy was awarded the Victorian Medal for his bravery, and later he was sent Home to Wellington College, in London, to be educated for the surveying profession. He later became a wonderful shot with his rifle, and won the King's Prize at Bisley.

On the return to "Okawa" from Napier, life on the station, with all its many activities, was renewed. The bees were the special care of Mrs. Lowry, and she also made the hop beer, and the sausages, and killed the rats. As with most pioneer women, sewing had to be left to the evening, and she often sewed far into the night.

Morning prayers were an institution and everyone assembled at 8 a.m., when the ship's bell was rung. Verses from the Bible were read in turn, and no one liked the hard words they sometimes found in their portion.

The terriers often caused amusement by jumping on Mrs. Lowry's bustle. Sunday School for all the children on the station was held on Sunday afternoons.

Puketapu was the parish church, and the parish stretched from Taradale to Kuripapango. The clergymen visited the back-country stations in turn, holding services in the house on Sundays. A cricket match was played later in the afternoon.

When possible, the family went to church at Puketapu, riding, or driving, the nine miles. Riding was often exciting, as the sawmillers, further up the river, usually chose Sunday to float the logs down the river, and the riders had to dodge these as they rode across. There was no road from Fernhill in those days. The inland road ran along the river Tutackuri.

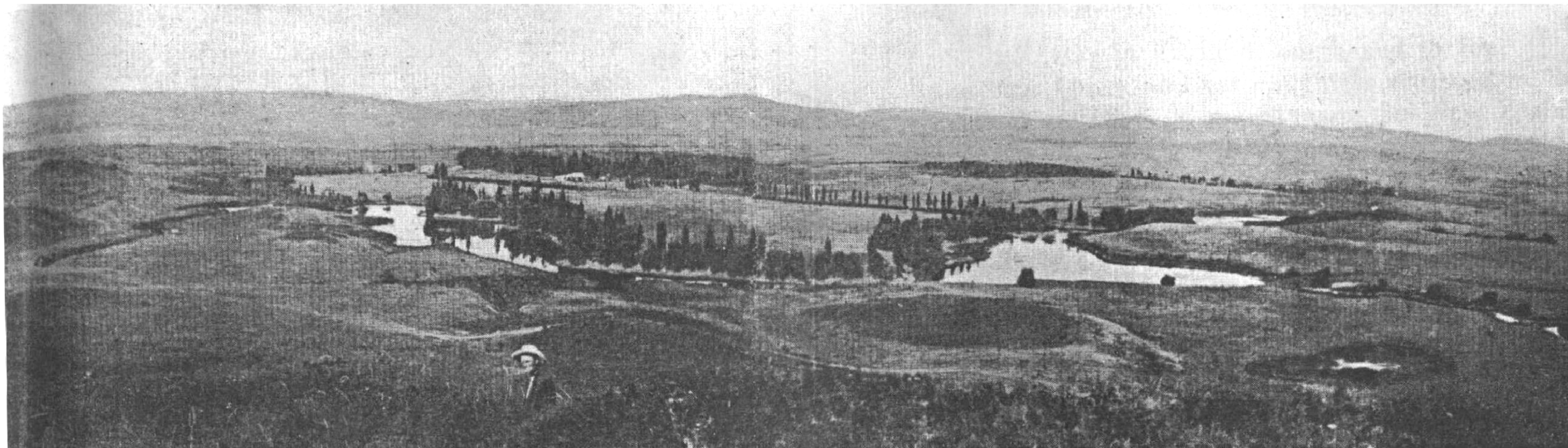
When he was old enough, Harry Lowry was sent to school in Napier, where Mr. Darcy Irvine had been appointed to the newly-established Grammar School. Though he was famous for the use of the cane, it did not deter the boys from playing larks, and one of their favourite tricks was to let the cows out, and drive them through "Denty" Wilson's garden in the town. It would then take a whole day to drive them home again.

Later, Harry Lowry went to Christ's College, in Christchurch, and there one day, in 1881, he received a message telling him to return to Hawke's Bay, for his father was very ill. He left, at once, by ship, for Napier, and on arrival, found that his parents and his eldest sister were at "The Spa," Taupo. His father was dangerously ill, and so, accompanied by Dr. de Lisle, and only a lad of fifteen, he set out to ride over the ranges to see him. The illness ended fatally, and a sorrowing family brought their father back to be laid at rest in the little churchyard at Puketapu.

To take his son home to Crosby-on-Eden, and to show him the glories of England, and then to attend Cambridge University, had long been the desire of Mr. Lowry, and after he died, Mrs. Lowry decided that she would carry out his wishes, and take some of the family home to meet their people. Passages were booked on the "May Queen," and the ship supplied for the long cruise. Sheep, hens, ducks, were housed on deck, and eaten as required on the voyage.

Mrs. Lowry and her son, Harry, with two daughters, Lizzie and Mary, her niece, Middleton Hewson, Mrs. Sainsbury with her three boys and a nurse, Mrs. Duncan, an aunt of Mrs. Herrick's, and a son of Mr. R. P. Williams's, were the only passengers, and the voyage lasted three and a half months. Usually it was fine, and everyone enjoyed the trip, after the first seasickness was over, though one passenger can remember lying on a sea-chest feeling very sorry for herself, while she was exhorted, like Mrs. Dombey, to "make an effort" to overcome her misery.

When she did make an effort, she found life on board ship full of fun. The children had the run of the ship, and the sailors made a great fuss of them. A sudden squall, one day, just as dinner was served, turned everything, including the passengers, upside down, but the first mate rescued Mrs. Lowry, helped her up, and soon a fresh meal was served. When the ship eventually arrived at Til-



"Okawa," in the very early days, when the Serpentine formed a lake, on which the children could row for a mile and a half to the first bridge. Two boat harbours were passed on the way. In a flood "Okawa" riverbed was so lowered that a waterfall formed, and the lake flowed down the river, and was no more.

bury, the children had grown tall and plump, so that their clothes would not fit, and they were hurried up to Carlisle to buy new outfits. People knew them for strangers and watched them in the streets, one policeman remarking audibly, as Miss Mary passed by, "What legs!"—much to her embarrassment.

The stay in England lengthened to four years, and Mrs. Lowry and her daughters returned to New Zealand in 1886, a year famous in New Zealand history, for, on June 10th, the Tarawera eruption occurred, and the famous "Pink and White" Terraces were destroyed.

Harry Lowry stayed six years, attending Cirencester Agricultural College, and Jesus College, Cambridge.

While Mrs. Lowry was away, Aunt Ellis kept house at "Okawa," and Alice stayed with her. Mr. Nat Beamish managed the station, but on returning to New Zealand, Harry decided to try and manage the station himself.

The trustees of the estate, Mrs. Lowry and Mr. Willie Couper, were in accord with his desire, and Johnson, the head shepherd, was instructed to train him in care of sheep, and other duties on the station.

Shortly after his return home, he received a letter from a College friend, Lowry North, who had been training for the Church, asking if he could come out to "Okawa," and learn farming.

He was a keen sportsman, having won his "Blue" at Jesus College, Cambridge, at Association football. He worked for some years on the station, and helped to plant the first pine tree at Ngamahanga, a boundary of "Okawa," and which are now a landmark in the district. Later he married Maria Middleton Hewson, and lived at "Silverford," Puketapu.

With the return of the family, "Okawa" became renowned among the settlers for its hospitality. Musical evenings and dances were often held, and were looked forward to with glee by the young cadets from the neighbouring stations. Among the number were three Keillers, who were nicknamed "The Marmalades." Wild turkeys were plentiful, and picnic parties were often made up to hunt for eggs, which were cooked and enjoyed for lunch. Wild pig hunting was also a sport thoroughly enjoyed by the men.

Tennis was introduced into New Zealand by Lady Vogel, in 1878, and it quickly became a very popular game in Hawke's Bay. Afternoons for tennis were held regularly at "Frimley," "Waikoko," and other homesteads, and everyone who played in Hawke's Bay, and many who didn't, met at the Farndon Courts on Saturdays, where later, New Zealand Championships came to be played.

A yearly event, which occurred on the second Saturday in February, was a race-meeting held on a natural race-course at "Woodthorpe," about five miles from the homestead, in which there was always a large house-party for the race meeting. It was attended by all settlers for miles around, and those who drove from Napier had an exciting time fording the river, for it had a nasty quicksand.

Owners tended, and rode, their own hacks, and a natural terrace, formed by the river, made a splendid grandstand for the picnic parties watching the races. "Johnny Armstrong" was the racing name of a Napier banker, named Fawcner, who was a keen sport. Mr. Lowry North sold him a mare, "Dainty," for £100, after she had won every race at "Woodthorpe." He entered for the Hawke's Bay Bracelet, but she failed to win, and indeed never won another race.

In later years, a wagon furnished with garden seats, and drawn by five horses, was used to convey the guests who did not wish to ride from "Okawa," and great tales were told of the day when all the cabs from Napier were stuck in the river.

Mr. H. M. Sanders, who married Mary Lowry, was, as a cadet, the secretary for the Woodthorpe races, the cadets on the various stations being eager entrants for the races.

The story is told that it was on the road to "Waikoko" to play tennis, that Harry Lowry first met Miss Helen Watt. Mr. William Nelson introduced them, and it is on record that in a discussion of the many beautiful girls living in the district, Harry expressed his conviction that "the Watt girls took a lot of beating."

He proved his contention for, in 1897, in Napier Cathedral, he married Miss Watt, and a new generation began for "Okawa."

Mrs. Lowry built a new home for herself at Havelock North, naming it "Crosby." From 1897 until 1927, she lived there, reaching the great age of ninety-four, loved and honoured by all.

The churchyard at Puketapu is also her resting-place, where memorial windows for these two great pioneers make the church a thing of beauty. Truly it can be said of them: "That the path of the just is as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

Compiled by R.M.L.S.—1947.

CLIFF PRESS, HASTINGS

53 Hunterbrown St

Wairoa

9.Jan.1991

14 JAN 1991

To The Lowry Family,

I hope you don't mind me dropping a line to you all, but maybe you are able to help me in my search for some history of my 3rd great grandfather James George WILSON, who was born to James WILSON & Alice BEAMISH on the 3.Sep.1861 in Turakina-Wanganui.

We have the early accounts of his life up to the time his parents died in 1868, but we are a bit wavy during the time he had with his aunt Maria (BEAMISH) LOWRY. It is during this time in his life you may be able to help us.

If you feel you have any information we would appreciate it very much, and finally we might be able to fulfil the missing pieces to the life history of my great great great grandfather James George WILSON.

Yours faithfully

PETER ROBINSON

Genealogical Tree

THOMAS LOWRY, D.D., m. BARBARA WELLS,
of Crosby-on-Eden, Cumberland. of Carlisle.

Richard Thomas Stamper John Jane Elizabeth Mary Barbara
m.
Maria Townsend Beamish
1861.

Georgina Elizabeth Thomas Henry Mary Jane Alice Burnell
m. m. m.
John Bernard Chambers Helen Caroline Watt Hugh Maurice Sanders