

A MEMOIR - LAWRENCE VALENTINE POTHAN c.1980.

Written by hand for his son Kap Pothan. Notes added in [brackets] by Kap



J A Pothan Hastings Coach Factory established 1883. Corner of Market and Eastbourne Streets, Hastings

I was born in the house alongside our factory in Hastings on 14th February, St Valentine's Day 1901. My earliest memories there are as I played in the old busses and traps strewn at the back of our section. We used to swing out on a rope tied to an old willow tree in the yard stepping off from an old bus. Brother Willie put me on it and gave me a push. I fell, struck my head on a piece of iron and as a result of concussion I was confined to my bed for several weeks. I remember having to learn to walk again.

Owing to the fogs in low lying areas in Hastings Dad [John Alfred Pothan] was ordered by doctors



to the Havelock Hills. We bought a house [Belle Vue] in Duart Road which contained about five bedrooms, a lounge, a drawing room and all the necessary remaining amenities of the day, about 1906. Dad retained his business and went backwards and forwards in a horse and trap. We had about four acres attached to the house. Mother also had a horse and a small trap with seats on either side facing each other, carrying about six or seven.

We attended the Hastings Convent. We all went to school with Dad in the morning and usually walked home, as it meant waiting around until about five o'clock.

Later on, after the First World War the house next door to the factory was shifted to a section in Willow Park Road and a garage was built on the section. That was the advent of the commercial cars and truck to Hastings – in fact Hawke's Bay. They had the agency for the Overland, Austin and Willys Knight cars, Thomeycroft trucks and Massey Harris implements. This happened after the photo you have of his shop.





Dad – your grandfather – was at the height of his career. A year or so earlier my mother died and from then on the family fortune dwindled. Dad married again, a fine looking woman but a real ‘gold digger’. They had two sons, Ronny and Terry. They both died at a very early age in their forties. That marriage did not last long, she died about 1919. I remember I was at school when I got the news. It was in December, the ‘Great Plague’ [The Spanish Influenza Epidemic] was at its height. We were celebrating Peace. No one was allowed to travel. I remember our school army cadets took part in a march through Wellington. I was a sergeant and led my boys. It was a common sight to see people lying on the kerb having collapsed from the illness.

Our school was converted into an emergency hospital. I was allowed to go home as I had a wire stating my step-mother had died. When I got home, not a pleasant homecoming, ambulances and nurses were rushing around. All available space was taken for hospitals including the stand at the racecourse. All the private cars were commandeered. Those who could drive and owned a car had to drive the nurses and doctors about. I had to drive our car – all Dads cars were commandeered. Willie and Cecil Pothan were at the Great War. The whole place was in an uproar. Our family fortunately missed the scourge. I was relieved of my driving and spent the rest of the time gardening at home. They say it was the best thing I could have done. The rest of the family were isolated. Only Dad was allowed to attend his work in Hastings, such as it was. After the epidemic settled down and the boys came home from the War we bought a farm at Mangateretere milking about 30 Holstein fresian cows. None of us had any experience. I was kept home from school to farm. You can imagine the Rafferty's Rules! However Dad in the meantime sold his business and hoped to retire on the farm.

An economic slump struck us in Hawkes Bay. We had already engaged Mona as a housekeeper. Sister Zeta married Bill Fearn who incidentally died from septic appendicitis [?]. After a year or two on the farm Dad was offered a job managing another garage in Wairoa. Bill Fearn and Zeta were to come to the farm to help me. They declined at the last moment. William Pothan meantime had married and was living at Harmoana in one of Dad's baches, fishing for a living, and of course he was the next choice. A few months with him finished me. I was at the height of my football career, a sore point with the family. Jealousy I believe. There was a row each time I played rugby, let alone go on tour. I became fed up with everything.



Picnic in Wairoa c.1910 with Richard Pothan and family. Lawrence is seated eating a sandwich second left with the hated cousins!

Dad had now been in Wairoa for about a year. I was picked in a Hastings-Napier [Rugby] team to play Wairoa. Knowing his objection to my leaving Willie I decided to ring him and to my surprise he was very enthusiastic and told me to go. I found out afterwards his drinking friends had congratulated him on my being selected in the team. However, I went and it was then that I met [your] mother, the start of a wonderful union and a lucky break for me.



Lawrence Pothan third left front seated with the Hawkes' Bay Representative Rugby team on tour in Rotorua 1928

My five years at Saint Patricks College in Wellington as a boarder, were until then, the happiest days of my life. When my mother died I was sent to live with my uncle Richard Pothan in Wairoa from 1913-1917.

He had two daughters who were horribly spoilt. I was treated as an unwanted cousin and nephew. I was never displayed any love from the family although my friends saw my predicament and were very good to me. I found out since they were jealous of the friendship others displayed to me. They were very unpopular, too proud to speak to the ordinary people.



Richard Pothan's coaching factory, Wairoa

We shifted to a house with a bit of land, they bought a cow and I had to learn to milk. Something happened, I can't just recall what. I was brought before the big chief, Uncle Richard. Anyway I cleared out and was caught climbing over the front gate. I broke away and ran down to my sister about two miles away. She had married Bill Taylor. I refused to go back and was sent to Saint Patrick's College, Wellington.

Mother has already told you of the commencement of our meeting in Wairoa. It was fate of which the subsequent years proved. My school and football career is well known so there is no need for me to dwell on it.

Our married life started in hardship; no work available. I was only 24 and was considered too young for any manual work which at the time I was only capable of doing. However, through sheer determination and love on the part of both of us, we created assets from virtually nothing. I obtained a job taking cars from Wellington to Wanganui. We lived in Wellington for about twelve months. Mother became pregnant.



Joyce Pothan pregnant with her second son Kenneth(Kap) in 1928

Fred Allardice and Rita, Mother's half-sister were now living in Dannevirke and wanted me to play rugby for a local team and offered us accommodation for as long as we liked.

Fred Allardice was in the grocery business and had built a big new house. His parents owned a lot of land and a good block of shops including the Masonic Hotel.

We did not stop long with them. I obtained a job with a speculative-builder. We rented a house with a few acres. I was able with the help of the Butter Factory to buy about four cows, and so started the beginning of a great ambition. We left there to mortgage a farm at a place called Umataroa. We spent about twelve months milking about 30 cows for no more than our keep. Mother had learned to milk in town on our four cows. She also grazed them on the roads. Doug was about two years old. Kap was not yet born when we shifted to the farm. He was born about a year later. Mother and Doug used to get the mail about two miles away; Mother double-backed Doug on a pony.

We spent about two years there and were able to accumulate £50 as deposit on another farm at Ruaroa. We obtained a stock loan from the Butter Factory. We paid £3000 for the farm and another £200 for the stock - a great hurdle for those days. Then disaster - We struck The Slump in the 1930s. Butter fat crashed to 5 pence a pound. I was not able to buy manure which was suicidal trying to farm without it on virgin land. We had to walk off after the Hawkes Bay Earthquake in 1931. We had an Essex car and a tin trunk of clothes. Incidentally we still have the trunk. Mother had it at her school. It is our dearest possession and it now contains Mothers clothes and jewellery.



Leaving the farm during the Great Depression, left to right; Douglas, Kap, Lawrence and Joyce Pothan with the family Essex

We left for Hastings. Our destination brought us further hardship. I was reduced to the 'dole' and our sole income was 30 Shillings per week. We were paying a pound a week rent. However I was able to obtain work with N. Cole, the builder who was building a new cool store at Tomona Freezing Works. That job finished. I spent the summer harvesting, long hours, allowing us to buy a house in Frederick St. I obtained a job carpentering on the new State House project, whilst there I was offered a job with full accommodation in Hamilton in Tauhei. The Government PWD scheme

absorbed the unemployed from Auckland. They were draining the peat swamp. I joined the survey gang. Jimmy Smith a school friend and a distant relative of Mother, was already in the team and got me in as a chainman. The wages were not a good as the work gangs were on contract. I got about £10 a week, after which, with accommodation, we were able to buy a small car, a Baby Austin and from there a Morris 8.

My work at the beginning was cross-sectioning and measuring the quantities of the drainers; more congenial and interesting than in the drain. We had happy times there, though isolated. We were all very happy. By the way, you will have to forgive me if there are some passages which do not appear in sequence, or any grammatical errors. Mother is not here to correct or advise me. My greatest worry now is my lack of confidence in my writing and decisions. I am afraid without Mother's advice I will make a wrong decision. You will understand. Mother has said I taught her a lot, but did she need teaching? You are the judge.

We left the Public Works camps and went to a place called Ohaupo, a small town south of Hamilton. I obtained a job carpentering.

[Dad has got this out of sequence. We went to Ohaupo after they sold the house in Hamilton East, several years later. Kap.]

We didn't stop there long. I then got a job building a house for a farmer Mr Birch [?] at Matangi about four miles from Hamilton. We rented a house in Hamilton for a while but managed to raise a deposit on a new house in Brookfield Street, Hamilton East. We always had a desire to go back to Hawkes Bay however. We sold out after about three years and had then got word Laurie Pothan, my brother's only son had fallen over Cape Kidnappers and had died. We then set off for Napier. We missed the funeral through an accident at Waikaremoana and landed in Napier with our suitcases. We ended up in a flat in Hastings. I obtained work as a carpenter and eventually bought a house in Frederick St.

We spent about three years there and headed back to Hamilton again. We rented a flat on the outskirts of the main street. I worked in the country, built two farm houses at a place called Gordonton. Dad and Mona having bought the hotel at Te Pohue then sold out and shifted to King Edward Parade, Devonport, Auckland. We also shifted there also to a flat at Cheltenham. I worked on Dad's house for a few weeks helping a carpenter Bob Proud who proved a great help to me. He was well known in the trade and liked by all. We did casual work around Devonport for a while. By now the Second World War had reached serious proportions. The American forces were sent out here as a stepping-stone to curb the advance of the Japanese who had declared war on the Yanks and were advancing down this way. I was manpowered to work at Otahuhu for the army building latrines and huts for two contingents of Yanks on their way to the Pacific Islands. They were USA invasion forces sent against the Japs who were making great headway south. Our boys had already been mobilized and sent to Egypt, leaving us vulnerable. Conscription had started here and I was called up. I was turned down, Grade 3, not fit to live in camps and yet I was working eight to ten miles from home, working long hours on saw and carpentering as I have said at Otahuhu Domain. The doctors did not give any reason for my low grading but one of my mates saw a lump on my neck and said I had a swollen thyroid. I was sent to a specialist, Sir Carrack Robinson [?] and he immediately sent me to hospital for an operation. I had an internal goitre and if left would become fatal. He operated.



Hawkes' Bay A&P Fair left to right, Douglas, Lawrence, Joyce, young Gaye Donnelley, Jack Lee, Janet Muuro and Kap her fiance

The War had now ended. I was released from compulsory service and decided to build a house. I bought a section in Allenby Avenue. Devonport, built a two bedroom house and did casual work altering existing houses in the district for about three years. During this period our son Doug had commenced work as a Dental Technician for a firm. Before his apprenticeship period was completed he decided he wanted to join the Army Occupation Force in Japan. However we both agreed provided he remained in the Dental Corps. He spent several months in Japan and returned as a sergeant; quite a feat for such a young boy.

By then my health had deteriorated again. I had given up building work and we returned to Napier. I obtained a job in the Government Valuation Dept. We rented a flat from Mother's sister Rita Allardice on The Parade. My health did not improve and after spending a few weeks at the Rotorua Sanatorium I was sent home to have my tonsils out, however the specialist in Napier said there was no need to take them out if I gave up smoking as I had nicotine poisoning. I gave up smoking and was able to continue with my building.

Whilst in Napier Mother and I travelled to Auckland and stopped with Mona and Dad. Doug was travelling too, and stopped with Eric Haden. Mother heard of a section for sale in Puriri St. Takapuna. With my consent she bought it, half acre, two sections surveyed, for £70. The government Land Sales was operating at the time and reduced it to 30 Pounds. We bought it. It was the start of my successful building career. I put a bach on it and we lived in it while I built a house. We lived in it for two or three years. I then built a house in Dominion St. We sold Puriri St. and lived in Dominion St. for a while. We then bought an old house in Mays St. Devonport. It contained three quarters of an acre. Kap having completed his studies as a surveyor and being qualified to issue land titles, we subdivided and produced another two titles. I built a house for Doug on one and another for Mother and I. We converted the old house in Tudor Street into four flats. I then continued with my building. Too much overwork and heavy lifting and I had a heart attack. By then Kap had married while we were in Puriri St. and was living in the old army hut bach beside the house. He shifted to a flat in the old Tudor Street house [where his son Scott was born]. Doug was also married and was living in the house I had built on the other section. Kap became discontented with his employment and decided to look afield with a view to starting on his own. [This is not how

it was. I enjoyed my time working for Fred Fraser but when I became registered he could no longer afford to employ me. It was time to move on. Kap.]

He settled in Kaikohe



The house Lawrence built for Kap, Janet and Scott in Kaikohe c.1957

I built him a house there but on advice from a Doctor friend decided to sell up and study in Dunedin at Otago University to become a doctor. Owing to government legislation reducing the student enrollment to half, Kap already being a registered surveyor, was told the doctor's sons would get preference. Kap left for Canberra, Australia. The rest is history.

[I have no idea where this story about my departure from medical studies came from. It was certainly not from me. I discovered that I could not get sufficient work in Otago during the University breaks to support my family. Australia offered better prospects. Kap]

Mother in the meantime was suffering from shortness of breath. Her Doctor advised her to leave Devonport and go to a warmer dryer climate. The smoke and smog from the boats and city were affecting her. Kap, now long settled in Sydney, we decided to sell up and go over to Australia also.

We bought a house in Wentworthville, Paramatta. After about twelve months there Mother's sister Rita died. Jack, another brother both in Napier became ill too.



Janet Pothan with Jack Lee and Scott Pothan c.1958

His wife had left him and he was to receive an operation. We became very lonely and home-sick and decided to return home to New Zealand. Doug still lived in Devonport and was practising as a dental technician in Hurstmere Road, Takapuna. We returned and bought an old house in Hastings Rd Mairangi Bay. I converted it into a modern bungalow. It was on the hill and doctor advised Mother to shift to the flats. With a sloping section and a good climb from the shops [it] was dangerous as I had already had a heart attack. Looking back I strongly doubt their advice. However we purchased a large house in Saltburn Rd Milford, near the shops and beach.

[At some stage between their time at Mairangi Bay and the purchase of the house in Saltburn Rd, they lived in a house in Napier. Kap.]

I could see the future in it but having a small mortgage saw the possibilities of two flats. After a long discussion with the local council I was allowed to go ahead. Everything seemed to fall into place. Even the lineings and ceilings turned out to be half inch fibrous plaster which complied with the bylaws and the dividing wall board was up to building standards.

We ended up with two units of seven hundred square feet. We live in one and let the other. Both Mother and I spent about six years of happiness there. I had then retired from outside work and we were able to meet our commitments with the rent from the other flat. Being in a select street and

sought after area the rates rose each year, but with good management on the part of Mother, we were able to enjoy life and happiness.

Mother's health began to deteriorate over the remaining years, after successive treatments from the cancer clinic. She was able to continue a normal life but the scourge began to take its toll. She died on the 10th of March 1979. {It is now twelve months}.

We buried her in Napier. It was always her wish to return home, as she used to put it. I remember a few months before she died she bought three expensive materials and as usual, made three frocks of the latest style. When completed she came out to me wearing one and said "Here I come Napier!" She never wore any of them.

Sadness and memories have dogged my life since. I have fought to live alone in our flat under extreme difficulties. Learning to provide for myself has been an ordeal. Mother did everything for me; even compelled me to buy something new. In fact she would come home with often two garments to try on and choose the best or both.

We all miss her. I often go to Napier to visit her grave. High costs and my overhead expenses here compel me to restrict my visits to a week or two. I get homesick, wishing to return to Mother here. I have not removed anything of hers. I still feel Mother's existence here but am terribly lonely. I am hoping time will heal and Kap and family will return home. Without Doug and family I don't know how I could have existed. They love me and are wonderful to me. I see or hear from them every day. I have not bought a paper for months. They are dear folk, not forgetting meals. Kap and family with their letters have been an inspiration also.

I attribute my long life to Mother's love for me and tender care. She cooked and bought for the welfare of our health but she had *that* one thing she couldn't combat.



Joyce Naomi Vaughan Lee – Mrs Lawrence Potlun 1950's

She was a good woman. I cannot remember her ever doing anything or saying anything that wouldn't meet with the approval of the most discerning person. I told her just before she died, she was going to her parents, brothers, sisters and friends. The priest standing with me at her bedside said she was sure to go to heaven. I am sure he was right. She was a perfect wife, mother and grandmother. May God bless her. I pray every night for her and I go to communion on Sundays. I will try not to do anything that doesn't meet with her approval.



Joyce Lee aged around 18

She taught me how to preserve fruit and cook and even left me well supplied with provisions and cash in the bank. Looking back, she must have known months before that she was going to die and prepared me for it without mentioning it to me. I didn't know until a few weeks before she was leaving us. I must have been in shock during the last few weeks. Looking back, I could have done much more for her. It hurts me to dwell on it. The relations say I am a saint the way I nursed her. I didn't see any signs of grief. She even enquired from Doug, about Kap's progress home and was relieved when told he would be home and even said she was pleased he was back with Janet. Two or three hours before she died I saw her open her eyes. She smiled at both Doug and I and I didn't even give her a kiss. I sat back in shock.

The doctor {lady} told me she wouldn't feel any pain and would take it well as she was a nurse. She certainly did.

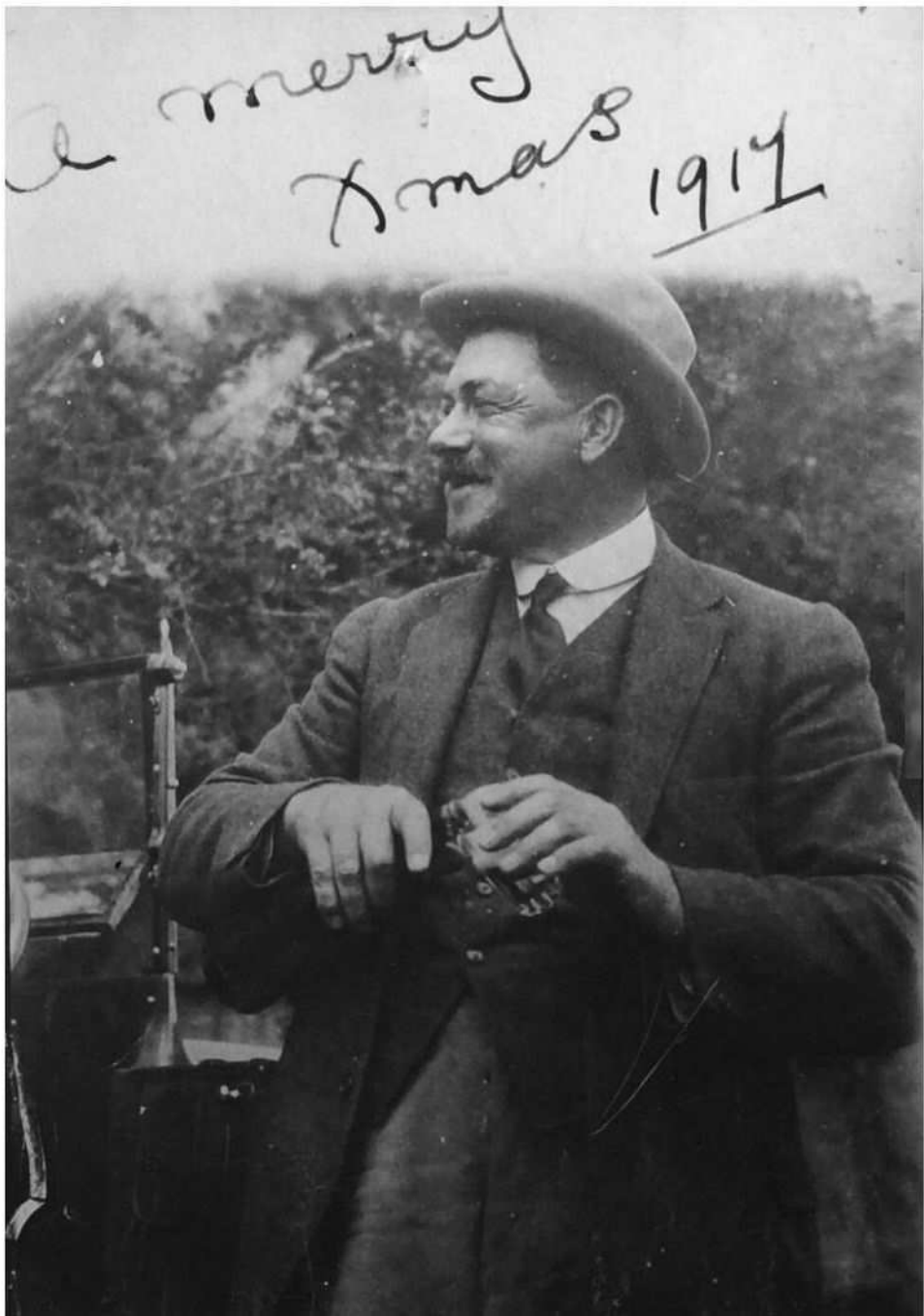
I write this with great pain but am doing it in memory of a wonderful woman. I cannot recall any time when she was covered by anyone. She had her enemies, particularly in the family. I remember one person who questioned her background. She left in shame and never returned. Mother always knew in an instant what answer to give. I don't think I met anyone with such an alert brain.

Whatever Mother took part in she reached the top. She was very interested in the Womens Guild and became President in Devonport. I recall a meeting held in the Auckland Town Hall of all the Presidents and assistants in the Womens Guild in New Zealand. The main topic was whether Dental Technicians should be allowed chair-side status. It was Mother's pet subject. She didn't need to make a study of it, she had studied it for years. Her son Doug was practising as one. The audience had a number of Dentists wives who were furious. She stood up and gave her speech in the affirmative {?} You could hear a pin drop. The applause at the end was deafening. Congratulations came from all sides. I wish J.A.Lee had heard her.

She was always popular with both men and women alike. She spoke beautifully and had a wonderful flow of English. She was a fluent speaker and reader and could not understand why

people wanted to read a book the second time. She always said once she had read a book she never forgot the theme. Her later years were spent reading the local and Australian magazines. I bought her two or three each week until her eyesight began to fail and the scourge began to take its toll. She has left her mark and her example which is an inspiration to the rest of the family. They look with pride for attributes of her in their own families.

Mother's father, uncle and grandfather were English gentlemen. They were wealthy sheep and cattle farmers. Prior to the First-World War her father, Fred Vaughan had over three thousand sheep



and cattle according the records of "Old Wairoa" obtained from Takapuna Library. They lived at Nuhaka a few miles north of Wairoa H.B. Mother also lived there periodically with her Grand Mother. They also farmed. Her father's wife disowned her. They had two daughters and a son. When her father died the grandfather took over the farm and built them a house nearer town on the sand dunes at Whakaki. It was a comedown for them. She married again and went to Hastings.

Mother was loved by everyone. She was spoken to by rich and poor. As a young girl her uncle, Fred's brother on visiting Wairoa took her out as his favourite niece. One time he bought her a gold watch, and another time a gold ring. During Carnival Week he would put her on the circus merry-go-round and leave her there until she became tired. He owned several farms and houses and the racecourse in Wairoa. It was said she was going to inherit all of his property. But he hated Catholics. When her father sent her to Napier Convent he was very annoyed. She became a convert and then married a Catholic. That finished him. He left his fortune to his sister Mrs Roach of Hastings, the owners of Roaches Store
Mother was always immaculately dressed. She was never caught untidy.



Joyce at left, with friend at Nursing College, Dannevirke Hospital

My grandparents came to New Zealand around about 1860. My mother's parents, the Steers landed in Nelson and settled a mile or so out of the town known as Stoke. My Grandfather Steer set up business as a boot repairer. They had three sons and two daughters. The eldest son Jess took on butchery in Greymouth, was mayor for a time. He is in the photograph of our family standing nursing his son whom I understand was a sick boy and died a short time afterwards. His wife is sitting between Dad and Ella.

One other son went to Sydney. I think he also set up business as a boot repairer in Bondi. On one of our trips to Sydney Mother and I saw his sign in front of a shop. We intended calling on them but a subsequent trip found they had left.

The third son Wally came to Hataitai in Wellington, just through the tunnel. I used to call on them for lunch on a Sunday while I was at College. They had no family. I heard they retired at Lower Hutt. They bought an adjoining section and sold cut flowers.

The eldest daughter Fanny married a publican called Revington. The hotel was also called The Revington. We saw it when Mother and I made a short trip to the West Coast. He died early in life and Auntie spent flatting and visiting her family and relations. She stopped with us on many

occasions. She had two sons Willie and Eddie. They both took on engineering and spent a great deal of time at sea. Bill [Willie ?] married a Jewish girl and retired in Christchurch. Eddie lived in Auckland, became hear engineer at Sandfords. He had two sons, an Engineer in the Public Works and the other an Electrician. I never met the boys but saw Eddie on a few occasions. They retired to Whangaparoa.

I fancy there may have been another daughter as we have relations called McConachies living in Nelson. The seemed close relations as I remember a boy stopping with us and Auntie Fanny always spoke of them as close relations.

Then were was my mother Ivy. She worked in Greymouth, married Dad and left for the north. Not being a Catholic my grandmother, Dad's mother disapproved. She also became unpopular with her parents when she became a Catholic. So for a number of years they were out on their own. They shifted to the North.

Memories of my childhood up until my mother died were happy. Cecil Phillips, Tom and Alec Mossman, Basil and myself roamed the Havelock Hills. There was scarcely a house there then. We made several trips to the Te Mata Peak playing hares and hounds, paper chase and just roaming around during our holidays. Sliding down the hills on flax was another sport which did not meet with the approval of our parents. Bird nesting was also part of our leisure hours, while flying kites was our specialty. We became quite professional. Mother was always missing her cotton; that was our greatest handicap. I remember using two large reels of cotton in one flight. It looked like a small speck in the sky. I am amused at the effort today of the youngsters, although our field was unlimited.

END





Catherine Pothan nee Finn husband of William Pothan and mother of all New Zealand Pothans, Wairoa pioneer cemetery.

Lawrence (Laurie) Pothan died a decade later, on 23 March 1990. He is buried with his beloved wife on Napier Hill. The wider history of the pioneer Pothan history is currently being collated by various family members. Hawkes Bay Museum (MTG) hold various photographic and archive records and an important coach gifted to the museum (once a permanent and popular display item). Wairoa Museum also have archives and a permanent display on Richard Pothan and his coaching factory. The Pothans operated AARD service cars to both Taupo and Wairoa and for this reason owned the Te Pohue Hotel also, as a service accommodation stop for its patrons. Richard Pothan was Chairman of the Taradale Town Board, and his younger brother John Alfred was one of the first elected councillors of the Havelock Town Board. Both were very involved in civic enterprise and community facilities in Taradale, Hastings, Havelock and Wairoa in the early 20th century in Hawkes' Bay.