

Avondale
August 26th, 1917

Dear Harry,

You will be thinking that I have quite forgotten you and the letter you sent me, but we have had such a lot to do lately and so many to write to that the time slips by and have had a copy of a photo of our crowd taken the last time we all met together in Auckland before Ethel was married so that you will see what sort of a crowd we are since that all the girls are married except the youngest also Max our second boy.

I was in Exeter for about 7 years where I read articles etc mostly on school & church work and where I met my dear wife. I would see no chance of doing much in England and as John Snell was making a living in Durban Hotel I thought I would try if I could not do a bit too. Well I arrived there on Xmas day 1880 I met many good friends there and at first got some temporary work but seeing an ad for an Engineering Draughtsman I applied and got it on the maintenance department of the railway where I stayed for 6 ½ years but things got a bit bad so I left (we were married in Durban in 1882).

I had not been well or the wife and 3 children so we went off to the Barbaton gold fields by Bullock Cart. It took us 3 month's to get there but by that time we were all pretty fit I could walk 30 miles a day over rough ground with ease and those that I knew in Durban hardly knew me for the same. I was there working at civil engineering for Sidney Farrar mostly, these fields went down when Johannesburg started and I went to "Piggs Pink" gold mine to look after the building a tramway and erecting the Battery but just before that the wife had an attack of jaundice and had to be taken to the hills away from Barbaton she had to be carried about 10 miles in a chair on Kaffah's shoulders and was very ill there at the hotel for many weeks and I had to leave her there and go to my work about 40 miles away but she pulled through and when I returned she was getting fit again.

I only stayed a short while at the park as Jarrar and the area manager could not agree and it became an impossible job, just then about 70 wagons arrived from Dogoa Bay with machinery and mostly Boer wagons, but amongst them was a Hollander and his lady both whose people were large woollen manufacturers in Holland. He was engaged to a Miss Collenbrowder of Natal and he had some of his and her brother's wagons with his 4 wagons in all, and when I explained to him how things were he very kindly offered us a free trip down to Durban, so I loaded up the wife and kids and they went off from the park with him whilst I walked back to Barbaton (30 miles), settled up things and started back to catch them up as they had to stay at White Umlazi River, about 4 miles from the Georgic ring road, whilst lady Boer went to Delagoa and to pick up 2 disabled wagons he had left there and would be far away for 4 days.

I got back to the park and then started off with my donkey to carry my gear a 100 miles way. I slept out on the ground at night in the long grass and very comfortable it was but the sun rose too early and off I had to go again and should have caught the wife the night before Boer left but he misdirected me and I went a bit out of my way but met a fine fellow who I heard had been an officer in the life guards he was there with some wagons the owner of which was bad with DT's and was jumping up and down with his head in a net sling so this officer told me exactly where I should find the wagons next day.

He apologized for not asking me to stay with him the night but said I should be more comfortable further up the road where I could stay the night in the open again. I started off early on the road again and after enquiring from a native chief if he had seen any wagons that way he also told me they would be down at the drift and sent a boy along with me to see me along a bit we had not gone very far before he pointed out a white man coming towards us and he was paid satisfactorily and walked back, and to my surprise the man was one of the men who had worked for me on the park and he told me had seen Mrs Vibert at the drift all right and about a quarter of an mile later I came to her and they were glad to see me as she was quite alone with the drivers who had done all they could for her so we had a few days rest there and the children did enjoy it.

We went on from there to Natal and on the way Lady Boer had a dreadful cold, I do not think I ever saw a man so bad but we nursed her as best we could and she soon got round but if we had not been there I think she would have died. On our arrival at the railway terminus the first driver that saw me told me to telegraph to the engineer as he had a job for me and when we reached Durban there was a message for me to go the Lady Smith where I was 2 years on construction work where our 4 children were born (Mildred). I then went off as manager on some gold property in Zululand for 12 months but the property did not come up to expectations so we went back to Durban where after doing odd jobs I started on my own as an Architect and ran that for 14 years till the 2nd Boer war was nearly over and as we could see no future for our children and the nigger was getting no better fast we sold up everything and came here.

We first went to Christchurch as someone told us that Taranaki was as hot as Durban so we thought we would try a little further South but we shall never forget the dreadful cold and we only had the spring and summer. I had some work for the public works department for about 7 months and as we were all by that time nearly dead with the cold weather we picked up again and came north to Auckland. The wife then was almost a confirmed invalid but she gradually got better and is now as well as ever she as in her life and so am I and all the children. I got odd jobs here for a bit and have now been with the education as draughtsman for nearly 10 years and if they do not know when they have a good man, I know when I have a good job. We have had a great deal of rain this winter quite a record – but not very cold only seen one speck of frost one morning on my way to the station and that is quite as much as I want to see and it is not nearly so hot here as it used to be in Durban but there is nothing in the world I have stuck like South Africa where you get clear sunshine for 6 or 7 months and winter and thunder showers during the summer when everything wants to grow, it spoils one for any other country.

Now for an account of the family.

Ethel Mary now Mrs Jaton living a little way out of Sydney, New South Wales her husband was a Boer war veteran and got mentioned for saving an Australian from under fire he is now in the railway department as special constable, they have two boys the eldest Trevor Harry after our eldest boy and his father the second, Karl Vibert they came over for a trip about 4 years ago, the boys are fine little chaps but since they went back the youngest has had a bad leg, we think from the kick of a horse he had, but they put him into a hospital for sometime for TB of the hip but the last we heard he was getting on well and would soon be able to go without his crutches and his both legs are the same length as we hope he will pull round all right. They have bought a house and since have secured another section next door to enlarge their place as Harry is a great worker, always growing something.

John Trevor (we call him Trevor) was in my office for a bit as he was delicate when young but when he came here he said no more office work I am going to ask for a job in a foundry. And they did not want him to leave but he was too young the wife thought to leave on his own but I soon got him into another work here where he finished his time and then took up driving a hauling engine in the bush and after a while he returned to Auckland and worked at fitting till the war broke out. He had been in the garrison artillery here and directly had notice to stand by to go the Fort where he went the week after the war started and then he was picked out sent to camp and left for Egypt at Xmas 19th he landed in Gallipoli with the first gun met an old shop mate just being taken off with a shattered leg whom I met last Friday riding past our house, his leg is 2 inches shorter but he can drive his engine and do his work, Trevor was only there a few days when he was wounded in the arm by a bullet and he was laid up a few times with dysentery, and then back to Egypt and went on to France with his battery as fitter where as far as we know he still is.

Isabel Grace is a big happy-go-lunch girl about 14 stone in weight, she is married to Bob Johnstone and lives at Topton South of the north Island, she has one little girl Nancy Isabel 3 years old.

Mildred Frances was very ill when quite a baby but her mother pulled her through whilst I had to be away in Zululand she sat up with her for 3 weeks and when I returned I did not know which was the worst of the two. I took the baby from her and she sat down and went to sleep and when I got Mildred into bed I undressed the wife and put her to bed and she did not know anything of it until the next morning. Mildred is married to Jack Gillies he is a fitter on the railway and they live about 200 yards away from us

Max Trelevan always as strong as possible and walks about on his hands almost as well as on his feet, he is a farm worker of wood he was out of his time about 18 years old and has worked on his own or been foreman ever since he is at present working for a good firm at Le Kofura near Dargaville, they build houses, ships and bridges and he is like one of the form, he is married and has one little girl about 2 ½ years old and his wife's name was Betty Cain, she is here for a few weeks staying at her sisters and other relatives for a few weeks as Max has to build a house at Dargaville .

The roads are too bad for him to ride home every night so he stays put on the job, he also has the woodwork classes there for the technical school for which he gets 5 shillings a hour but he thinks he could do with more hours at that price, but he gets good pay from his firm and a bonus in every job he expects to be called up for the war in the 22nd division (but it may be a strange wish) but we hope he won't. Nancy Vera is rather short but very broad and strong, we think her growth was stopped from being bitten by a small snake in Durban. She worked at the photographers where the photo was taken and Ethel before her. They are all well especially Isabel who has painted scenes as frieze and panels in one room of the house she sent us some photos of the room and they look very nice.

Vera is married to M A Laing he is a queer mixture, he was brought up as a bushman and having then had to go through his exams at the training college and is now a school teacher and small farmer but I think he will eventually go on the land they have a solid specimens of humanity a boy Hugh Marshal about 4 years a girl Stella Agarita nearly 12 months old. Ralph Dinger: he was born a wee rat of a child and he never though he would be much more he went to work for a builder to start and was thrown out as being to light for his job (nominally) but it mostly was that Max would not continue to carve marble pieces for the builder when he got too busy on his own, anyhow I got him a job as a cabinet maker and he is pretty good as any shop in Auckland would like him. He was just out of his time when the war started on a Friday he put his name down on the Saturday was going round Avondale with an officer in a motor beating up all the boys he could find and on Monday went to camp and in a week or two was sent off to Samoa with the 1st expeditionary force. The transports dodged the 2 German gunboats and landed at Samoa safely he was there for some time and was sent home discharged as medically unfit there was something wrong with his internal machinery as for sometime his tongue was as white as a bit of soap. He then enlisted again in the artillery, went to England as a top notch gunner with a badge . There were only 2 of them and he beat the other chap by a few seconds when he left he was rather taller than I am and filling out fast. He was on Salisbury Plain for some time in training and most of the winter at Aldershot which he was very glad of as he said it was a dry camp and the other was all mud, he had a great time with his cousins in London and saw his grannies, he was for a time a wheelwright and then he got the papers as a fitter as he wanted to get to France in the same battery as Trevor and he has got there and they are together we had a short letter from him last Saturday in which he says he has been in action a few times and has had Trevor out with him he has had some narrow shaves and a taste of gas and does not like the latter. Ralph saw the zeppelin come down, Nina Maud still single but a boy is chasing her.

I had a letter about a fortnight ago from mother she is very well only had to stay in bed two days all last winter in spite of the extra cold weather and goes out in her chair into the parks and generally enjoys herself - she says she is always thinks of the boys.

I was glad to hear of Jack. I remember him when he landed in Durban with the regiment in the 1st Boer war and it does not seem long ago.

I remember Phillip as a fat little boy and I think Charley must have been a baby as I do not remember him at all or your sisters are quite lost to memory. Your swimming lessons I have quite forgotten, I have not had a swim for many years now there seems no time for anything in that way. Our daily round is we rise at 5.45, catch the 7am train to the city about 6 miles and I now catch the 4.14 back in the evening and after we have washed up and read the paper it is time to go to bed again and so it has gone on for the last 9 years with one exemption.

Last Easter Max asked us to spend a short time at Le Dopuna so I managed to get 2 days off before the Easter holidays and 2 days after we had a very pleasant trip train to Hellensville and by boat down one river nearly to the mouth where it joins the northern Wairoa and then after that we left home just before 9am and reached Max's place at 5pm.

I had a day in a launch near the mouth fishing one day we went by truck out to the west coast and other days trips somewhere and had fine weather all the time but it rained the day after we returned and has rained ever since.

I have enclosed a paragraph I cut out from a paper re glass I was thinking that if it would be made as stated and should have good roofing tiles as if it could be made cheaply as tiles are so liable to break and hold a lot of water and saw that corrugated iron here is £85.00 per ton, I do not see why the glass should not be coloured red or any other desirable tint. I am so glad the Americans are in this war but fear there is a tough time in most places over the W.W's and Germans for a long time to come they seem to stop at nothing and as the British are far too easy with such people. I am sending the account of grandfather's life and the account of the family. There is nothing more that I can think of just now so with love to you all in which my wife joins.

I remain your affectionate cousin. I still carry the knife I bought at Petrews in Biddeford when at the Devon County School.

Jack Vibert