My Early Life

A memoir written 1976 by Maud Hickson 1882 - 1978

My father spent the early part of his life as Paymaster in the British army and was stationed in Gibralter where he met and married my Spanish mother. Harry and Ted were born there before they left to retire in Clonmel Ireland, where their other 6 children were all born .

We were looked after by Irish maids who took us for walks along the river banks. On Sundays, we were taken to a lovely church , where we were all christened. We young folk were left to the servants, who I must say were all devote to us. Every year we were taken to the seaside , and I have always hated cockles , for when going round the rocks- and they were rocks - the tide was out and a maid stooped - got one - took a pin from her bodice - extracting the cockle - put it on the pin - and I had to eat it!. It was really the pin coming from her bodice!

When mother came to our bedside to say "Goodnight" she seemed a beautiful dream ; Father to my knowledge was always in uniform - and aloof ! Later in life we know he loved his boys and just suffered the girls of the family ; Harry then was a clerk in a big brewery and Ted(Eddy) at Kilkenny College. I knew when Eddy was home - a paper bag of bolied sweets - were under my pillow when I woke !
Miss Murphy was owner of the brewery & wanted to adopt me ! Later when I was almost grown up Mother told me she & Father considered - but then thought it would be too lonely a life for me! When in N.Z. Mother sometimes invited me to write her & then decided against it !

Well Father and Mother decided to come to N.Z. where Uncle Albert, Father's brother had emigrated to: Uncle got 2 farms in this district - one for Father and we sailed in the "Rimutaka" arriving in Auckland , on November 9th 1890, then an official holiday , Prince of Wales birhday! Uneventful trip out - fruit from the Canary Is- grown ups seing Capetown & Hobart - a concert on board , where 5 of us sang two items - encore being " when we two sailor boys….and the land lubbers lying down below, below, below ! Encored of course ! Mr Braithwaite who coached us left the boat at Hobart - he was a consumptive out for his health. The 3 Johnson girls also from Irelandwere also out for health - Harry would have married Lizzie if Mother hadn't prevented it - Lizzie died first - then Jeanie, then Dora ; friends of the early owners of Milnes and Choyce. The girls had the loveliest skins.

Well we came by boat to Tauranga: Oh - Mr Garrett met the boat - took us out to his lovely home in the suburbs (of Auckland) & then back to the boat; later they came to visit Pongakawa and lived where Mac and Marie now live - & their house- they had a large family was a big high roofed structure.
Came from Tauranga in a big coach (private) to Maketu - the driver kindly often stopped & gathered the teatree blooms for us - that grew by the roadside.
Lived in Mac Travers cottage at end of beach right on top of hill- for 2 years while Father & my brothers helped Mr Warmington (builder at Maketu) build our house - Kauri- very high ceilings - here. (at Pongakawa)

The morning after we arrived at Maketu a very tattooed old Maori woman appeared with a big milk dish of lovely strawberries: They taught Mother to make bread in a camp-oven. Mother soon became a good cook; but it must have been a hard time - she had never worked. She got a Maori woman to help with washing but the ironing must have been dreadful - the men had white shirts -cold-starch fronts.

Father had been to school in Ireland with Canon Jordan (in Tauranga)- every year they met to celebrate !
Well the Sec. of Education Board Mr ? …. was an Irishman so our school was soon built with Miss Gillibrand our first teacher ! a brilliant little teacher , she hated the country in a way -

Mother made carpets out of flour sacks - then coarse linen for kitchen and dining room; er had been allowed to bring just so much to N.Z. It meant a lot of stitching ! Rode side- saddle and was the chaperone for all the dances - in the school - always lead the Grand March, very very proper.
Had two beautiful dresses, I remember - one a black lace & another a lighter shade - of silk for lesser balls; she taught us all to dance in our dining room ! Miss G's sister Win was being coached in Auckland for scholarship dance - and I in Pongakawa, but I had a fall from a horse- away from school for months so didn't compete !

May had to leave school - she was our clever one - never had to learn anything - I did - to help Mother ! She married Jack Ball when 19 & I taught .
Began at Paeroa; married Hone(Jack) Hickson who had fruit farm at Otumoetai. Here endeth early life.

Gran's (Hickson) husband was a surveyor who also designed a rifle for N.Z. Govt - first one was taken by Cook- second he thought not enough money- went to America to sell - never returned ! Gran thought he married there ! She lived in Ellerslie - was a Martin - old English family of writers - poets (her father the painter Albin Martin)

This photo, was taken the day the Hickson's left Ireland in 1890
Maud Hickson, > my only sister, Mabel Hickson, > my Brother (the wife) Amelia 1yr (Milly on her knee)