

NZ trip: chatting to Mum

Ten days after returning from NZ, I spent some days with Mum. It was great to be exchanging memories with her when my mind was still so full of the days we spent at Otunui, Taumarunui and Ohakune. These are some of things we chatted about.

Ohakune

She remembers the day of Uncle Horace's funeral. She had whooping cough and was just getting over it. All the others went off to the Cemetery, and she was allowed out of bed to sit in front of the fire while they were away. (Uncle Horace died two days before Mum's 7th birthday, on 14th April 1916.)

The move to Otunui

This was obviously the subject of huge family negotiations. Mum remembers a river trip with Granma Hill to see Uncle Harry, and I wonder if this trip was part of those negotiations. (But where would they have got onto the river boat? Surely it would have been easier by train? Train to Taumarunui, then river boat?)

The decision to move to Otunui was taken even though they knew the land was less good.

- 1) Aunt Kate (nee Cameron) would not leave her family in the valley, and
- 2) Uncle Harry said he preferred sheep to cattle.

Otunui

The house was built in 1917, and was just about ready when they arrived. At least it had a roof by that stage, though they camped in the garden to start with. It was a couple of weeks, or longer before the Kitchen range was fitted. Mum remembers the day it arrived, by river boat, and of course enormously heavy, so it was a huge job to install it. After that the house was truly habitable.

Aunt Kate and Uncle Harry lived "just round the corner but out of sight" ie exactly the place where you thought the house had been, beside that big walnut. It was burned down some time after the family left, by roadmen who were living there while doing work on the roads.

Uncle Arthur had his "whare", as Mum called it, above the house, again, just where you thought it was. The famous phonograph produced music from a cylinder. (Edison's Cylinder phonograph?) Mum remembers the music "Tales from Vienna Woods", and says how much Mother would have loved them to have had a piano. But money didn't run to a piano.

Garden: Father planted peaches, nectarines, apples, pears, gooseberries, and a quince. The trees we saw were the remnants. The vegetables were grown beside the fruit trees and all were well fenced off from the rest of the farm. They all grew wonderfully well: Father loved the garden and probably would have been happier in horticulture than farming animals.

The family were easily self sufficient in fruit and veg. Father tried to sell the surplus when times got difficult, but Taumarunui was too far away, and shops there already had their regular supplies.

Nectarines grew specially well round Uncle Harry's house.

The Wool Shed.

Mum remembers the year of the first great depression in the early 1920s. Father and Uncle Harry could not afford the Shearing Gang so were doing the shearing themselves. Mum's job after school was to trim the fleeces, fold them in three, then pack the fleeces into a sack in the wool press. They were compacted, first on one side, then on the other. The bales were then taken away by cart to ... Taumarunui ???

The Twenties

The wool money was their only income, and through the twenties it wasn't enough to keep both families, plus Granma Hill, Uncle Arthur, Aunt Nancy and Dorothy. Both Father and Uncle Harry worked on the roads, often living away from home during the week, in order to pay the grocery bills. Then in 1927, Mother got out Father's Banking certificates, and he applied and got the job in Raurimu. Uncle Harry stayed on on the farm, but not for long: The bank foreclosed in 1927. He too got out his banking certificates and left.

Aunt Kate, says Mum, was not as careful with money as her own mother was! But the families obviously got on well, and the children grew up together, and went off to school together. Mum was closest to Aunt Isabel of course and shared a bed with her. This led to rows as Mum wanted to read in bed while Isabel wanted the light out!

Aunt Nancy married a widower, Mr Harrison – I get the impression this was not a love match: she needed financial security, and he needed a housekeeper. They moved back to the UK.

Liz Ramsay, December 2012.