CHAPTER 12

William McWilliam Settles in New Zealand

About the year 1951 the second son of William McWilliam, Horace, completed his life's Memoirs. He named them 'By Rough Paths and Smooth'. He commences them with the following paragraph (69):-

> My father, William McWilliam, was born on 17th January, 1844, and was the second son of John McWilliam, who owned a small estate in County Roscommon, Province of Connaught, Ireland. There was a large family all of whom were born on the family estate. When my father was about 18 he decided to leave his home, to seek his fortune across the seas. This was a big step in those days, but young William had ambition, courage, faith and enterprise...

It will be noted that Horace writes that John McWilliam owned an estate in Roscommon. It has been suggested earlier in this history that ownership was not of the land (it was in the possession of the privileged landlord) but what was owned was the tenants right to work the land. How else could it be that John and his family lived in the lodge at the entrance to the Clanricarde estate ? Horace also reports in this passage that all the children of John were born on the estate. This required that John and Rebecca were there in Roscommon at the latest shortly after their marriage in about 1833, for the family would of course include the eldest son, also by the name of John, and he was born about 1838. In any case Mary's Death Certificate stipulates that she was born in England.

Horace has already been quoted as recording his father's arrival in New Zealand at Dunedin and immediate move to Greymouth (on the West Coast of the South Island) where an acquaintance advised him to obtain a post as clerk in the gold fields. The memoirs of Horace go on

> He then proceeded as suggested, and was soon comfortably settled in Hokitika and earning good money. He did not actually work in the gold mines, but learnt all about the process, and knew how to value the gold which the miners brought to the store to pay their bills. Later on he moved to another field, further in the mountains of this rugged country, and set up in business for himself.

Hokitika is not much more than thirty kilometres south of Greymouth which is on the West Coast nearly 180 kilometres right across the island, north-west of Christchurch. William did, at some stage at any rate, actually prospect for gold. He took the present writer to a nearby stream in the Blue Mountains of NSW about a year before he died and demonstrated the skill of panning for gold. He found no trace of gold, of course, but he did show clearly that he was a master of the art of searching by this method, ie panning for alluvial gold.

What does William himself say of his first arrival in New Zealand ? His brief autobiographical note (written in the year of his death, 1930) has already been quoted (page 40). It goes on:-

> I was not long idle (after arrival in New Zealand) and I was offered a position of bookkeeper at a fairly large business at Leithfield (a town not quite 40km north-east of Christchurch). Just at that time the great

> goldrush set in at Hokitika and Greymouth. Nobody could talk of anything else but the gold fields. I got the gold fever and was off with thousands of others. It took us fourteen days to walk, with a swag, the 180 miles (north-west) crossing rivers waist-high, and all bush country. We had nothing to eat for the last three days. There were no accommodation houses for most of the way. I may say here there were four of us in company, and before putting a pick in the ground two of my mates returned back to Christchurch. I stood out against any such course. There were now only two of us and we were on gold on the third day after arriving there. I was young and strong, and I loved the life. The bush was alive with pigeons and Kauka birds, so we had plenty to eat. I had a gun and used it for our daily meat.

Perhaps Horace meant that his father only commenced to work in the gold fields after he had been occupied as a clerk and before he 'got the gold fever'. What a joyous comment from an old man dreaming of long ago: 'I was young and strong, and I loved the life.' Although Horace asserts, or rather implies, that William went to the West Coast <u>from Dunedin</u>, it is clear from the above quotation of William that the party of four set out from <u>Christchurch</u>, because he recounts that two of the group 'returned <u>back</u> to' that City.

William one time explained to the present writer that although he did well out of his gold enterprise, he felt that the outcome was always chancy. Success depended so much on luck, as well as other factors. He considered that he saw more prospect of profit and security in providing services and goods for the prospectors, than in engaging in searching himself. Thus he established a store and acted as a gold buyer and retailer of necessities. As his son, Horace put it, 'later on he moved to another field, further in the mountains of this rugged country, and set up in business for himself.'

In his old age his most vivid memory was the threat of, and, on one occasion, the near actuality of encounter with, bushrangers. He ends his autobiographical memo (written in 1930):-

> ... a West Coast bushranger gang started their terrible murders. I had met one of those who fell into their hands. I met young Dobson who was examining the Grey River valley for a road from Greymouth to the Little Grey. They murdered him by mistake. If they stuck a man up, that was the end of him. They murdered Dobson because they were hiding in the bush waiting for a Mr Fox, a gold buyer who I knew personally. The bushrangers were expecting Mr Fox who did not go down that bush track (the one they were expecting him to take). They were Burgess, Levy, Kelly and Sullivan. Sullivan got a free pardon (by turning Queen's evidence) and the other three were hung.

William told the present writer about his giving up his associations with the gold fields. The goldmining fever is like the addiction of a drug-taker, evidently. There is always the temptation to have another shot. He had decided to give away the adventurous life and, come what may, stop his gold-seeking. He and a group of like-minded mates were journeying to (or was it from ?) Greymouth when they came upon an area of country which their experience as goldpseekers told them was highly auriferous. Their resolution weakened. The land rose up from a creek and the whole formation and appearance of the soil suggested to them that <u>this</u> was the place for gold. But what of their determination to <u>give up</u> !

As a result of a hurried deliberation a decision was reached which allowed them

to satisfy their curiosity and test their perspicacity on the one hand and hold to their resolution and keep conscience clear on the other. They would turn over ONE sod of the slate-like soil and examine it; but then they would move on whatever they found. The sod was duly turned, and, lo and behold, clinging to its underside glistened gold in abundance. Did they keep to their resolve ? Yes, to a man. At the time William recounted this experience the precious find was still there as far as he knew. Hopeful enquiries by the present writer elicited the fact from William that the location of the discovery was at a spot about five miles south-west of Greymouth.

Why did William decide to abandon his life on the gold fields when he was evidently prospering so ? We are left to guess. Perhaps his gold fever was in the process of being cured; maybe his youthful energy and adventurous spirit were beginning to dim. Perchance he saw better prospects for himself in a town like Christchurch. There was another possibility. It could be - indeed it was fact - that a girl was coming into the picture. His son, Horace, writes in his memoirs (70):-

> ... back in England, in the city of Leicester, there lived a... young lady, named Mrs (Charlotte) Pell, whose husband died suddenly, leaving her with a family of six small children... In due course she was wooed and married by a well educated young man named Edwin Frederick Barnett, a school teacher of Leicester. In time two children were born of this marriage - a son and a daughter*. The former died in infancy, while the latter grew up a strong healthy child. She was born 18 July 1853.** Her name was Rosina... The young couple decided to go to Australia to live, and so in due course, arrived with all their young children, in Melbourne. Here Mr Barnett soon found an opening for his talents as a School Master, in various schools in and around Melbourne. On her arrival in this new city little Rosina was nine years of age. Again, for some unknown reason, another "move" was made, this time to the West Coast of the South Island of New Zealand. Their new home was in a small town, at the mouth of a river (the New River), named Marsden... (Marsden is a town 13km south of Greymouth).

It was here that William McWilliam met the Barnetts, Edwin Frederick and his wife, Charlotte, and their daughter, Rosina. Horace continues the story:-

> William McWilliam being engaged in business in the neighbourgood, soon found Mr and Mrs Barnett and their daughter, most kind and hospitable to him, a lonely lad from Ireland.

William and Rosina were married on 29 March 1870, three and a half months short of the 17 -year-old Bride's next birthday. But first there was a hitch, as Horace explains:-

> The wedding was arranged, but there was no resident minister to perform the ceremony, so they just had to wait until he should arrive, which was a very uncertain quantity. Young McWilliam's occupation was away out in the dense bush, at a settlement called "The Saddle", where there was a rough dance hall, which was used for all sorts of gatherings, including Church Services. The Bridegroom-to-be had secured a nice little cottage for their future home, and eagerly awaited the visit of the Clergyman. At last, having heard that he was on his way thither down the mountains, young McWilliam sent an urgent message down to the Barnett family at Marsden. Rosina accompanied her father and mother (to the Saddle) that afternoon.

Incidentally, Horace then interpolates an enigmatic and tantalising sentence: 'Round about these dates (ie 1870-71) two brothers and two sisters of William came out

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* According to her son, Neville, she was born in Hampshire and spent her young girlhood near Leicester (at Narborough).

** It seems Horace was wrong here. She was born in 1852.

William and Rosina McWilliam.
Their Wedding Day 29 March 1870.

Rosina's father, Edwin Barnett
c. 1815 – 1894

Below: William and Rosina. Their GOLDEN Wedding photograph.

Above: Elvira (aged 18) and her sister (right) Daisy McWilliam. Below: Three generations, William, Horace and Ronald McWilliam, 1928.

from Ireland and settled on the West Coast and in Christchurch, on the East Coast respectively.' These girls could have been the two younger daughters of John and Rebecca but more likely Horace is referring to Mary and Emily, though, as we have seen, they would have come out from Ireland five or six years earlier than the dates indicated. It should be noted that, according to Horace, it was the girls who settled in Christchurch. It was there, of course, that both Maria and Emily were married.

Soon after the birth of their first baby, Frederick William, on 21 March 1871, William and Rosina McWilliam moved to Christchurch where they remained for about 18 years.

Neville McWilliam, William and Rosina's eighth child, sums up the events recounted in the preceding half dozen pages by writing (March 1954):-

> In 1862 my father, William, left home for New Zealand, partly from an acute attack of "the gold fever" and partly from dissatisfaction with the poor prospects offered by the worked-out farm. He ultimately "tried his luck" on the gold fields of the South Island of his adopted country. Here he met, and in due course, married my mother, the daughter of an English schoolmaster. He (the schoolmaster) had abandoned a comfortable living at a preparatory school for the great Public Schools of England, in the search for gold, a pursuit for which he had no qualifications whatever.

Edwin Frederick Barnett was a man of standing and accomplishments. His precise qualifications, though nil, according to his grandson, Neville, for gold seeking, are real but uncertain. There is in the possession of the present writer an imposing-looking document, measuring some 470mm by 380mm and reading:-

NEW ZEALAND EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

(British Coat of Arms)

Teachers Certificate of Attainments and Efficiency

Class E Division 3

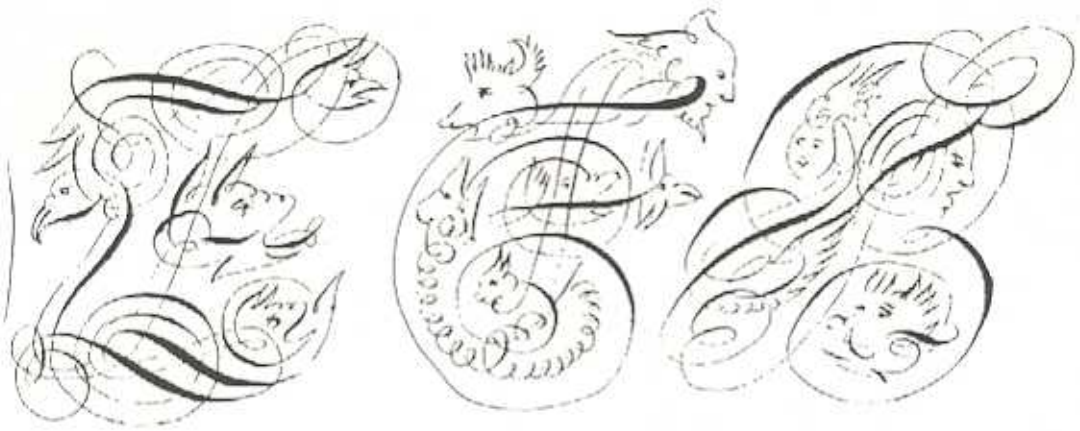
(Abstract of Class Standards 1878 E. The subjects of instruction in the Public Schools of New Zealand.)

This is to certify that Edwin Frederick Barnett has given satisfactory evidence of attainments in learning entitling him to be placed in Class E of Teachers holding Certificates under the Education Act 1877, that his experience as a Public School Teacher and his practical skill in the art of Teaching and School Management qualify him for Division 3 and that he is accordingly rated as of Class E Division 3.

Wellington July 1st 1879 (Signed) E. Grey (?)
Entered, Vol.I Folio 246 Minister of Education
Wm Jas Habens(?) Inspector General
of Schools

Put simply the fact of the matter is that the 'Class E' indicates 'attainments in learning by examination' of a minimum for teaching purposes; though the 'Division 3' was the middle of the range (1 - 5) and depended upon 'experience and practical skill' in the classroom. It is probably a fair summary of its meaning to say that EF Barnett, though academically inclined, was specially noted for his teaching and practical skills.

There is some evidence to verify this latter statement. Held by the present writer is a book of Penmanship. Its contents is beyond the dreams of today's hand-writers. It is above all a work of art as will be seen from the reproduction of the first page shown below.



The initials of the Caligrapher 'E F B'

The artistry of which the book is composed is entirely the creation of Edwin Frederick Barnett and executed with a quill and in the best tradition of the copper-plate caligrapher. Upstrokes are thin and pressure strokes gracefully adorn the patterns as they widen to broad. Thus the first page of the book shown here consists of the three letters, E F B, though the ornamentation is bewildering in its complexity. Woven into the first letter, E, can be seen a swan's beak, head and neck, the body being the lower 'leg' of the E. This leg, it will be observed, ends in a face, a distorted face, with a gargoyle-like grimace. The three letters contain a bemusing assortment of forms and shapes, faces, spirals and swirls. A total of thirteen actual visages can be counted, all interlaced with, and an integral part of, the three letters E F B. In this book of Penmanship there are no less than 42 pages. A couple of them are, interestingly enough, incomplete. The book is dated from 20 April 1843 to 12 May 1870. Thus it could be described as a lifetime's work.

In writing to his brother, Horace, in February 1948, Neville says:-

> Some further facts about Grandfather Barnett may be of interest to you, if you do not already know them. In England he was a master at a school (prep. school) which prepared boys for Eton and other public schools. From my personal knowledge I should regard him as a ripe scholar for his time, as well as a first-class teacher. As an old man (Neville was eleven when his grandfather died) he taught me the intricacies of "Long Division" in about half an hour, a subject which had previously (been) hopeless to me. (Neville was, of course, without sight). On the same afternoon we went through the "Lays of Ancient Rome" (Macauley) for English Grammar. He gave me a thorough understanding of the rules of Syntax, which made the mastery of both Latin and French Grammar comparatively easy.

Neville then takes the account of his maternal grandfather further in the same letter to his brother:-

> It has been said that Grandfather opened the first private school in

> Melbourne in the sixties of last century at what was then Emerald Hill (now South Melbourne). Father told me that although Grandfather had given up teaching for some years (in New Zealand) he sat for an examination for "Board School" masters without preparation, and was immediately successful, being appointed to a school at Gibbs Valley, and later at Governor's Bay out of Christchurch. Thereafter, as you know, he established his own school on the North Belt (Christchurch).

The reason that Neville is able to write that his brother 'would know' for sure about Edwin's own school on the North Belt is that Horace attended that school and his brief account, which follows, supports the claim that EF Barnett was a skilled teacher. This is how Horace expresses it in his memoirs (71):-

> ... as I was growing to be a big boy I was sent to my Grandfather's private school, which he conducted at his home, ... on the North Belt ... the school was held in a nice, light airy room, which he had built at the rear of his two-storey home. He had about 20 pupils, who were bright and happy boys. I learnt much from his teaching, though I was still quite young. Besides being an excellent classical master, as well as an outstanding historian, he was a brilliant 'penman' with the quill...

Horace ends his account of his maternal grandfather, with some bathos, as follows:-

> He was also a writer of plays which he intended for dramatisation. In fact he produced one himself, in one of the smaller theatres in Christchurch, and I still remember the night I was taken to see it produced and how, at the interval, the audience shouted "author", "author" and how thrilled I was when my grandfather nervously appeared in front of the curtain. It was not a financial success, and so the many other "efforts" which he had spent so much time upon never saw the light of day.

A copy of the Entry of Death of 'Edwin Barnett' has become available, but some doubt has been expressed (though only a little) as to whether it refers to Edwin Frederick Barnett, the father of Rosina or to some other. The main anomaly on the form is that it shows the wife as 'Charlotte Hall'. First of all it should be said that there is no reference in any of the surviving records to the given name of Edwin Barnett's wife, ie Rosina's mother. Let us presume it was Charlotte, as the Death Certificate records. As for the surname, Hall, there are two possibilities. Family tradition gives only her name after her <u>first</u> marriage: it was PELL. One possibility is that, handwritten, this name has been mistakenly transcribed as 'Hall', a more common surname, no doubt. The other possibility is that Charlotte's <u>maiden</u> name was in fact <u>Hall</u>. The present writer inclines to the first explanation of the anomaly.

Another discrepancy in connection with Edwin's death certificate is that the deceased's occupation is set out as <u>settler</u>; yet we know that he was a schoolteacher most of his life. Edwin's father, William, by name, is also described as a 'settler' and this perhaps implies that he set out from England (with his son) and both took up land, or, more likely, that at first they made an attempt to search for gold. Maybe Edwin was a 'schoolteacher-settler'. !

The third detail leading to the doubt about whether the Entry of Death refers to Rosina McWilliam's father is that, under the heading of surviving issue, three males are shown and one female. The age of the latter would be approximately correct for Rosina at the time of her father's death, but what of the three males ? EF Barnett and his wife had only two children and the boy died in infancy. The simple

explanation that comes to mind is that the supplier of the details of the Death Certificate included three of the six children of the wife's former marriage. What of the other three of the six of the first marriage ? They might have predeceased their step-father. It is possible. The youngest of these, however, was born about 1848, consequently EF Barnett must have married his wife after this date, but he married at the age of 24, ie about 1839, according to the Death Certificate. Was this, then, another Edwin Barnett and not Rosina's father at all ?

The view of the present writer is that the document does refer to Edwin Frederick Barnett, Rosina McWilliam's father. Otherwise there would be too many coincidences to accept. Two Barnetts, both by the Christian name of Edwin, born about the same year, who arrived in New Zealand at approximately indentical times and passed away almost simultaneously, as well as having daughters of similar age.

An interesting memento is held by one of Edwin's great-granddaughters, Barbara Golder (nee Levick). It is an impressive-looking pen and ink stand, bearing the informative inscription:-

Presented to E.F. Barnett Esq.

by his old pupils

on the occasion of his leaving

Victoria for New Zealand August 1864

In summary, then, EF Barnett's story is that, born about 1815, he married a young widow of Leicester, probably Charlotte Pell by name. Charlotte (nee Hall?) had six children by her former marriage and two by her second, the older dying in infancy. The younger was named Rosina and was born in Hampshire, as Neville 'distinctly remembers' her mentioning. The couple migrated to Melbourne.

According to Neville, Rosina did not join them until later, but resided with a brother of her father, Joseph Barnett, at Narborough, a town some ten kilometres sou' sou' west of Leicester. From this emerges another inconsistency. Neville's sister, Elvira Levick, enquired by letter of the Rector of Narborough in 1937 about the records of her mother's relatives. She received a reply that at the church is an inscription:-

> In a vault beneath rests the body of Joseph Barnett, who died Feb 8th 1839 aged 53 years. Also of Martha Barnett, relict of the above, who died Jan 3rd 1855 aged 66 years.

Now Rosina was not born until 1852, consequently she could not have lived with the person mentioned above who died in 1839. Perhaps the explanation could be that this Joseph was the father of the Joseph Barnett with whom little Rosina lived till she joined her parents in Melbourne. He might also have been the father of Edwin Barnett as well as the next mentioned, Robert. The same Rector reported:-

> On a stone to the left of this was engraved Robert Barnett, who died 1st Dec. 1881 aged 72 years...

The ages of these four, father Joseph Barnett (born c.1786), and his three sons, Robert (born c.1809), Joseph and Edwin (born c. 1815) harmonise satisfactorily with the above supposition.

The same English Rector of Narborough reports that there are several graves in close proximity to the Barnett group, this juxtaposition suggesting strongly that those buried there were all related. They are William Mortimer, died 27 May 1797;

Elizabeth Mortimer his wife who died 1 May 1835; Mary Mortimer who died 16 October 1837; and 'Martha, the daughter of the late Thomas and Mary Mortimer, died June 25th 1785, aged 23 years'. There are others all by the name of Mortimer: John (died 1772), Mary (1773), James (1767) and Thomas (1769). This connection with the Mortimer family supports the contention mentioned by Neville that the Barnetts were related to the Mortimer family, as had been the de Burgh-McWilliam family with Edmond Mortimer, Earl of March back in the fourteenth century. (See page 11).

Reverting, then, to the story of Rosina, it seems likely that if she did not travel with her parents, she must have voyaged to Victoria very soon after them. Even had she been aged 9, as Horace alleges, or 8 as Neville asserts, she would have been in Melbourne by 1861 at the earliest and no later than 1862. As the inscription on the presentation memento to Edwin states,he (and presumably all his family) left for New Zealand in August 1864. Incidentally, there was until recent times a well-established independent school, with a good reputation, in Emerald Hill (now South Melbourne) known as St Kilda Grammar School. Rosina's newspaper obituary (30 December 1924) states:-

> Mrs McWilliam was the daughter of the late E.F. Barnett of Leicester (England), founder of the first private school in Emerald Hill, Victoria, now known as St Kilda, Melbourne.

William and Rosina McWilliam had eleven children altogether, the first, Frederick William, while they were on the West Coast of New Zealand and the youngest, Norman Carrington, in Sydney. All the rest were born in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Moving from the West Coast of the South Island about 1871 'my father settled in the capital of the South Island, Christchurch, where as a merchant he prospered,' wrote Neville. Horace, their second son, and third (surviving) child, was born at 'Rose Cottage', Conference Street, Christchurch (on 27.11.1877), but the family moved a number of times, to such locations in Christchurch as the North Belt, Bryce's house, opposite the River Avon and finally, to the two-storey house 'which father bought from Dr Britten in Victoria Street,' to quote Horace's words.

Of the eleven children, three died in infancy. They were Lucy (aged six), Mortimer (about six months) and Walter (aged two). The remaining eight, who with their children, will be dealt with in several of the following Chapters, were as follows: Frederick William, Annie, Horace, Daisy, Elvira, Neville, Ruby and Norman.

This was a happy, vital and successful family, but there was one calamitous bane which struck to mar it. Some of the children were born blind and <u>all</u> of them had defective eyesight, to a greater or lesser degree. Those congenitally sightless, or nearly so, were Neville, Norman and Walter. Horace eventually had an unsuccessful cataract operation and was blind for the last 26 years of his life. That the cheerfulness and achievement of this family continued in spite of the deadening handicap is a glowing tribute to the personal resource and courage of William and Rosina, particularly the mother, as events were to prove. The liveliness, vigour and enterprise of the children is also a measure of their determination in the face of this great adversity. What was the cause of this uniformly poor eyesight which afflicted every member of this family ? As will be described later William had near perfect vision up till the time of his death, barely needing glasses to peruse the newspaper at the age of 86. Rosina had good sight. The only feasible hypothesis, it seems to the present writer, is that put forward by Rosina McWilliam's eldest living granddaughter, also Rosina - Rosina Howells (nee Levick). She suggests that it was an incompatibility of

blood types between the parents, ie opposing blood groups. However that may be, of the 27 grandchildren of William and Rosina McWilliam none has (or had) the same poor eyesight, nor have the great-grandchildren.

References

(69) McWilliam, Horace. Page 1. See (66), page 39.

(70) Ibid. Page 1.

(71) Ibid. Page 3.