

Storyteller Margaret Copeland's Transcript from 'The Afternoon with the Pioneers'.

Sarah Bourton Masters 1827-79.

I were born in London. Me Da come from Derbyshire an me Ma from Warrickshire but he were a man o hopes and dreams, me Da so I were born in London. He never had nowt agin trying summat new. Me early memories are o helping me ma, packin up an shiftin 'ouse.

Me Ma were a straw bonnet maker. I were nowt five year old an I could pick an plait. straw. Id be working by fire, watchin me ma splittin straw, bein good, hopin me Ma id start singin or telling stories. Bout me Grandpa and his farm in Warwickshire, before he got into debt an lost it all. And me Ma as a lass, walkin through corn fields, milkin the cow, and having cream on her porridge.

Story of me Da were good as that new book by Mr Dickens. He were born, son of a breeches maker, growin up fine till his father got himself into debt and died in debtors prison. His Ma married money but his new stepfather were a wicked man who packed him off to live in poverty with his grandmother. He went to school but the master were cruel and he run away – so they set him to work in the silk mill, threading bobbins for the silk.

His Uncle Tom come, took him to be a coopers apprentice in Derby. There were a wide street there near the river Derwent and it were called the Morledge. He and his his friends was great swimmers - always swimming in the River Derwent – they was called Ducks – Morlege Ducks. But he never had nowt agin tryin summat new and soon as he were out of his time he enlisted in the grenadiers, got to guard the young princess, Victoria.

That's when he met my Ma – he all handsome in his uniform an her makin her way in the world o bonnet makin. They never knew which one fell in love first. He left off bein soldier to marry me ma. When I were born he were a porter but he give that up to be policeman - a Bow Street Runner, and then he got his place as turnkey at Tothill Fields prison and all before I were four years old..

Tothill Fields Prison weren't the best part o London for a bonnet maker, but we knew, me Da were a man o hopes and dream, he never had nowt agin tryin summat new that one day we'd be packin up and shiftin ouse and on our way to a better life. One day we'd have a place in the country wi cornfields and a cow and cream on our porridge. Meantime Bonnet makin were a fine trade for the wife and daughter of a man with hopes and dreams.

And sure nuff, one day, my Da, he comes in like a gust of wind, picks up me an my Ma and he says "Sarah, pack up your bonnets. We're goin to Van Dieman's Land." An he were off. Before me ma could say nowt.

It were one thing to be packin up from Tothill Fields prison and shiftin house but it were summat else to be going to Van Dieman's Land. But it were all set up. Me Da were engaged as a cooper to John Gore, shipping agent to the Australian Trade –

He'd gone and met a convict what had done his time in Australia and made his fortune an all. Well my Da - he never had nowt agin tryin summat new being a man o hopes and dreams - Reckoned he could make summat of hisself in Australia. He just went right down to that John Gore an offered his services. There weren't no grass let to grow under my Da's feet an we was all on our way to Van Dieman's Land, still dreaming of a little farm with corn fields, a cow and cream on our porridge.

It were a long way to Van Dieman's land and me Ma were too sea sick to tell stories but she told me a secret. We was going to have a new baby after we got to Van Dieman's land. One day I saw a whale and me Da told me bout whales and how the men hunted them in boats and boiled them down for oil. He were goin to be makin barrels for that whale oil In Tobago an apprentice fell overboard an me Da, being able to swim like a duck, jumped in water an saved im. Then carpenter got sick. That were lucky for us cos my da were able to do cartenter's work and he got paid £7 to start life in Van Dieman's land

Mary Anne were born in Hobart. Me da, had his cooperage, always smelling of fresh sawdust and wood shavings. Me Ma got out her straw splitter and blocks and started plaiting straw for bonnets - but Hobart weren't like London. Weren't no good having a trade in Hobart cos of all them convicts working for nowt. When my da's contract come to an end we never got no corn fields or a cow. There weren't no small farms for a man o small capital in Van Diemans land, just big stations, so my Da become a turnkey again. We left Hobart and went to Oatlands.

I never liked Oatlands much. We had lodgings in the big goal where they did hanging and all. Every day we saw them convicts with their legs in irons, going out to work, building. Me Da, he were away a lot and me Ma weren't happy in Oatlands. We didn't fit in with the soldiers, we didn't fit with settlers nor convicts neither. She still tried working with the bonnets but with all that convict labour, folks wasn't used to paying for work.

Then my Da got mixed up wi Chancery on account of his very good friend. That Chancery used up all his friends money and all ours too. That were the end of his hopes and dreams in Van Dieman's land but he had nowt agin trying summat new. He were off to Sydney leaving us to pack up house.

In Sydney, they told him about New Zealand. Startin a whole new country they was. Well my Da, he never had nowt agin tryin summat new. A whole new country. That were summat for a man with hopes and dreams. Weren't no grass growin under his feet, neither. He set out for New Zealand and sent for us to follow on the Maria Theresa. Reckon me Ma were right pleased to be leaving Oatlands. She were proper poorly but we was hoping she'd be better in New Zealand. I were 14, reckoned my prospects was better in Wellington than Oatlands. Mary Ann were 9 year old and never been on a ship before. Mr Richard Iorns, were on our boat. I liked Mr Iorns.

When we got to Wellington he went into business with me Da, makin Ginger Beer so we saw plenty of Richard Iorns. He had to take care of himself he did, keep himself warm on account of his weak chest – so I knitted him a warm vest. When I turned eighteen he come courting – and soon we was both of us dreaming of a small farm with a corn field and a cow and cream on our porridge. We got married in the little Wesleyan chapel in Manor St. We had a house in Cuba St and Richard give me a cow.

Me Da opened up a cooperage on corner of Lampton Quay and Mason Street. Our Ma and Mary Anne opened up a bonnet shop upstairs. Me Da, he were still a man o hopes and dreams. He joined militia in Hutt valley, saw all them corn fields, sheep and cows. But he reckoned land were too dear in Hutt Valley.

Me and Richard, we had our first baby. Christened her Mary Anne after my sister but we always called her Polly. And Polly were no sooner on her feet and talking than we had William. We was looking out for the kind o farm that were right for a man o small capital but land were all tied up in Wellington.

But they was opening up the interior. Making a road over them mountains. My da never had nowt agin tryin summat new. He had to go and have a look and my Richard were right behind him. I was worried a bout Richard. Me Da said the fresh air would do him good but the air were too fresh for my Richard. He weren't cut out for living rough.

All them big investors from Australia was taking up all the land in the Wairarapa, leasing it from the Maori -making big sheep stations– Richard and My Da, they weren't dreaming' of sheep stations– They was dreamin' o small farms, with corn fields, pigs and chickens and a cow so's they could have fresh butter and cream on their porridge. They started up the Small Farms Association - writing letters – campaigning for the man with small capital to invest in a small farm.

Mary Anne had herself a beau. That Bennet Pascoe Perry come courtin and Mary Anne got married in the little chapel in Manson St. She were just seventeen but Bennet were 28 and he were another one for the Wairarapa. But he reckoned there were more money in sheep than corn. We had another baby – called him Joseph after my Da.

My Da he didn't let the grass grow under his feet. He went to see the Governor. – told that Governor Grey he reckoned price o land were too high. Them squatters hadn't bought owt – but he reckoned they was keeping all the land locked up in big stations - just like they had in Australia. Reckoned if the price o land come down so that a man with 20 pounds could buy a small farm of 40 acres, well then there'd be towns and settlements.

Governor agreed, but he said no one had bought nowt from Maori so my Da he set off to negotiate with them Maori. Got em to sell land to the Governor but it weren't all in one piece. There was going to be two settlements. They was called Grey town after the governor and Masterton after my Da.

Richard were set on Masterton. We was going to have our forty acres. . I called my new baby Sarah – after me Ma. Me Ma moved in for company because Richard and me Da were away in Wairarapa, building us a house. My little Sarah - She was going to grow up with corn fields, a cow and cream on our porridge. I had a heifer in calf and since it were going to be crossin them mountains I was training it to carry loads on its back.

One summer morning, as Me and Ma was having breakfast, Mr Dixon come with a letter to say Richard was coming to get me. We started packin up right away but that night after the children was put to bed there were a rumblin and our house started rockin and risin up. We run outside and saw Chimney come down – chairs and tables smashed flat as a pancake before our eyes. Children was all asleep out back and we was able to get them out through the window. They was quite safe but you should have seen our house.

When my Richard come and saw the mess we didn't wait no more. We left Ma with Mary Anne and packed what we had left into the bullock cart and onto the back of my milk heifer. By night fall we was at the Hutt. Had to cross that river in a punt and I thought that would be fine. bullock didn't think so. He just stood stock still and the heifer wouldn't move without him. We pushed and we pulled and he just stood stock still. We goaded, we threatened. Weren't nowt we could do to make him move so we got on the punt and the bullock and the heifer had to swim.

Next day we crossed them Rimutakas and on to Mangaroa. Couldn't take no bullock cart over the Rimutakas. Weren't nowt more'n four feet wide that path and that earthquake weren't no help. We had to load everything onto a couple of pack bullocks, with five year old William packed in a pannier on one side and three year old Joseph weighted down on the other. Mary Anne were seven – old enough to walk with me. I went first leading the heifer and carrying little Sarah. Richard followed with the bullocks. The going were long and steep and slow and that little Sarah, I swear she were getting heavier and heavier. We got to Mrs Burlings before the light went. Next day were easy – ground being level and the river quite low – and we stayed that night with Mr Kempton. Next day we crossed that river nine times and there was my da with his home made cart to meet us.

The Maori come to meet us, all singin and dancing to welcome us – They give me a kit – with two little rats in it – all white and clean and ready for the oven. Well waste not want not – I always say. They came in very handy for supper.

He took us to our new home. Snug it were and warm because my dad he were he weren't exactly a carpenter but being a cooper, he were very handy with a draw knife and he could make timbers fit close and cosy. We had slab walls, clay chimney, calico windows

They was building a room on the front for a store because the Maori had been promised the chance to buy pakeha goods. Richard and me, were gonna run that store. We had our 40 acres and Richard were planing to sow a corn field. He had bought us a pig and some chickens. I had my cow so we had butter and cream on our porridge. We was full of plans and settling in fine though I was worried that Richard might not be strong enough for the outdoor life. Made him some warm, flannel underwear.

Then the word come that there were a man drowned in the river and Richard went right out to dig a grave for the poor man. It were hot work, grave diggin and he took off his flannels – and then the weather turned to cold and he took a chill. When he come in that night her were shivering an all. Went to bed but the chill turned to pneumonia and within a couple a day he were dead.

Never were no drowned man in the river – nothing but a pair of boots. So, there we were, me and me four little ones and Richard buried in the grave he had dug himself. We hadn't in Masterton a year. I weren't destitute - We had a house and a cow. Taters and vegetables and half an acre o corn planted, forty acres only 'affenced. An there was the store. How's a woman supposed to manage with all that has to be done and my boys so small?

I kept on the store. I had my ma to help with the children. Mary Anne and her husband had come to Masterton too and they had quite a family. Well, I had to go to Wellington to sort out Richard's affairs so I left the children with me Ma and off I went over them Rimutakas. There men was working on the road, widening it and shiftin the slips that come down in the earthquake. They was right friendly. In Wellington they asked me if I could become the post mistress for five pounds a year so I took the first mail bag home. It had a letter in it and all. I passed the camp o the men working on the road over the Rimutakas at dinner time. One of the men invited me to have dinner with him. He were Henry Bannister

Weren' home more than a week when I opened the door and there were Henry Bannister. Were dinner time so I said he could sup with me. But the cow broke out through the broken fence. Henry Bannister he were away, after my milk cow. Neighbour took it very ill, wanted to know what he were doin on his property. Henry told him he was bring back the cow and going to fix the fence – Said a good neighbour would have fixed it already.

Next thing they was fighting – Grown men fighting over a cow. But the fight got mean when the neighbour picked up a piece of Totara and broke Henry's legs. Well I couldn't do nowt but take him in. Me Da come and fix up a splint, and I found him a place to sleep. He stayed here until the leg were mended and once he were up and about he were right handy. You get to know a man when he got a leg broke and can't go nowhere and I got to like him well enough too. Nuff said. We was married.

It were beautiful in Masterton in them days. Every morning we woke afor the dawn to the call of the tui – and then thousands of bellbirds chimed in – you'd hear the kaka screeching, pigeons cooing, parrots and fantails. In Spring, we heard the call of the shining cookoo, the bush were allus cool and green in the heat summer and the river ran clean and clear. Then in the Autumn, little Henry Bannister were born. He were going to have playmates – my sister Mary Anne had a baby too.

Mr Crayne opened a school for my Polly and William. The Road over the Rimutakas was finally finished and opened for summat bigger than a wheelbarrow. They could take a bullock cart to Wellington in a couple o days. The cost of cartage halved and the mail come twice a week.

But me Ma were proper poorly. She were all wore out with following a man o hopes and dreams, all that packin up and shiftin house. She died in the late summer of 1859 just four weeks before my John were born.

Folk was comin and settling. There was thirty five families in Masterton now. Most of them was working; shearing, fencing, road making because Wellington was still too far away for a good market. Bennet Perry had bought himself land on the South side of Waingawa. He had 600 sheep. Me Da were running sheep on the commons in Masterton too till folks objected. He were on the provincial Council. We had a horse. I had a baby boy, George and Mary Ann she had a baby too

Masterton was growing. Miss Emma Jones come and opened a drapery shop and we had a Roads Board with Mr Renall as chairman. Mr Renall, he had a water wheel and a mill so we could get our wheat ground. Me da, he disagreed with Mr Renall. He disagreed with him on the future of Masterton. He disagreed with him on farming He disagreed with him on public works. There was no subject that me Da dodn't disagree with Mr renal. . And I had a baby son – Edwin – and Mary Anne she had one too.

Bennet Perry were doing so well with his sheep that my Henry went and got himself some sheep too. Mr Tuck come to Masterton. He got himself a licence and built a hotel – Called it The Prince of Wales so now we has an hotel and public house. And me I had a baby Charles and Mary Ann she had a baby too.

We had our worries with the Maori. They formed a militia and built a stockade. Soldiers come but no one really wanted a war and it didn't come to nothing. Now that we had a road there was a coach service – four horses and twice a week to Wellington. We was no longer isolated. Me I had a baby – Richard and Mary Ann she had a baby too.

We used to have fine picnics. The whole settlement would turn out and there'd be games and races. Then we had a race meeting. The starting post was at Hydes Corner in Dixon Street. They raced down Church St, round Colombo Rd and up Bannister St. A Maori boy with bare feet and a supplejack for a whip won the hurdles with a horse called Poto Poto. There was always something new happening. Looked out the window one morning and there was a sparrow on the ground – Mr Cave had brought them – and rabbits – My Carter brought them. We had gorse for hedges And I had a baby girl. We called her Phebe.

They was starting to build the first of the main street bridges but I were proper poorly with tooth ache. Never was one for doctors – Reckon they does more harm than good. I were expectin and After Little Thomas were born I never pulled round proper and my tooth were bad as ever. They brought a doctor to pull the tooth but it never done me much good

Sarah died of blood poisoning caused by the infected tooth. She was 41. She left 12 children. The four Iorns were near adulthood but 22 year old Polly was left with the care of eight little Bannisters.