

A letter dated 1969 about the Littles in New Zealand

A letter sent in 1969 from Margaret Colhoun Little in New Zealand to Lois Mary Moriarty (née Redman) in England. It concerns various past and present Little family members in New Zealand.

Transcribed and edited by
Dr Geoffrey H Henderson
North Yorkshire
October 2011

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569 Richardson Road,
Mount Roskill,
Auckland,
24th August, 1969

Dea Lois

Just before leaving Hastings, about three months ago, I made a hasty copy of the enclosed information about the family. Sorry about the gaps and omissions - I'll try to find further details if you need them. Poor Maria Anna - twelve years of perpetual pregnancy! I know so little about the first family. Henrietta (Aunt Hetty), who is now dead, had a daughter, Betty, I think, shortly after her father died. I met Hetty and Betty once when I was about thirteen and Betty, I think, in her early twenties. She was tall and very thin and quite unlike any of the rest of us in colouring - dead white skin that never freckled, burnt or tanned, and jet black hair. Betty is married now and has, I think, one child. I think I met Charles and/or Johnnie, but when I was too young to remember them. About Charles wife and possible children I know nothing. Rumours suggest Charles and/or Johnnie was/were eccentric. Mabel I knew quite well. She had trained as a nurse and, when I knew her, was a tall, thin old lady, very animated, with very thin hair and loose false teeth which clattered and rattled whenever she talked - which was often - and when she ate. She was very kind and so generous to me that I feared to admire her little ornaments for fear she would give them all to me on the spot. She may have been diabetic. Her sight was failing badly for years before she died. I remember her being lively and well informed upon a great variety of topics and I gather the second family did not regard her as being as odd as they appeared to regard her full brothers and sisters. She was living with Grandma Little for a period before Grandma died. Then Dad put up some of the money and built Mabel a little house of her own. I think before she retired she had been resident nurse to an old woman who left most/much of her furniture - including several pieces of some value - managed to scan them a bit and was sufficiently interested to wish to see them all properly and then arrange a meeting with me for a "discussion." Well, well, well. My first discussion. I'm not very hopeful, though. N.Z. buys the tag end of all the worst and a few good overseas programmes. It's cheaper than making them ourselves. The plays I presented to Noonan won't be suitable for N.Z. either - written with English outdoor locations and English and West Indian and American actors.

This is a terribly long letter. I hope that some of the family information is of some use to you. Do let me know how you are and whether or not you have sold the Edgware house yet.

I forgot to mention G & H's children - darling - Sophia (6) & Richard (Richy) (3). Richy after looks like the most appealing, expensive, cuddly, well-up toy that Harrods could possibly produce - but there are times when we wish he could wind down just a little. There is also a convalescent cat called Cindy. She mysteriously broke her leg several weeks ago. Humphrey gave her an affectionate look then to the vet who removed the protruding broken piece of bone. She limps but walks.

Love from Alargored.

The letter facing survives in its original typed form on thin airmail paper. Most is typed, but there is a short handwritten section at the end plus a few handwritten corrections in the body of the text. The pages have all been cut across the middle; the most likely scenario being that the fold was at the top of the envelope and my aunt Lois inserted a paper knife too far, inadvertently cutting the thin airmail paper in half. In addition to the letter, there are some typed sheets enclosed with details of the New Zealand part of the family.

The letter is very, very long, so I have edited the original to omit sections which have no genealogical importance; just typical "chat" between family members. Any changes by me are in *[square brackets]*; either to indicate where text has been cut, or to add an explanation.

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Dear Lois

Just before leaving Hastings, about three months ago, I made a hasty copy of the enclosed information about the family. Sorry about the gaps and omissions - I'll try to find further details if you need them. Poor Maria Anna - twelve years of perpetual pregnancy! I know so little about the first family. Henrietta (Aunt Hetty), who is now dead, had a daughter, Betty, I think, shortly after Betty's father died. I met Hetty and Betty once when I was about thirteen and Betty, I think, in her early twenties. She was tall and very thin and quite unlike all the rest of us in colouring - dead white skin that never freckled, burnt or tanned, and jet black hair. Betty is married now and has, I think, one child. I think I met Charles and/or Johnnie, but when I was too young to remember them. About Charles' wife and possible children I know nothing. Rumours suggest Charles and/or Johnnie was/were eccentric. Mabel I knew quite well. She had trained as a nurse and, when I knew her, was a tall, thin old lady, very animated with very thin hair and loose false teeth which clattered and rattled whenever she talked - which was often - and when she ate. She was very kind and so generous to me that I feared to admire her little ornaments for fear she would give them all to me on the spot. She may have been diabetic. Her sight was failing badly for years before she died. I remember her being lively and well informed upon a great variety of topics, and I gather the second family did not regard her as odd as they appeared to regard her full brothers and sisters. She was living with Grandma Little for a period before Grandma died. Then Dad [*Hugh Gerald Little*] put up some of the money and built Mabel a little house of her own. I think before she retired she had been resident nurse to an old woman who left most/much of her furniture etc to Mabel - including several pieces of some value. Thus she was able to furnish her little house comfortably. When she died I was in Wellington, studying for my finals, I think - or maybe I'd just passed them. In any case, I missed all the horrible wrangling for possession of the possessions! I gather it was not pleasant. I think Dad and I were the only ones who kept out of the fray and waived our respective claims to our bequests. I know he wrote asking if I wished him to speak up on my behalf about some particular items she had specifically wanted me to have and I wrote back 'No' - much to his relief.

[...]

I'm sure that when Uncle Dennis was in England he insisted he was the eldest son of the second family. I was puzzled because I had always thought Stewart was the eldest - which, in fact he was. Dennis was the youngest son. From what information I can gather I think Grandfather Little was one of the last men who should have been allowed to father fourteen children. He liked to be the grand old gentleman (still remembered the days in Ireland when the local shopkeepers etc. addressed him as Master Johnny!), but he wasn't much of a provider. Stewart, as soon as he was old enough to work, kept the family fed and clothed - as well as they were clothed - at times very poorly. Robert went to work in the bank. I gather he kept his money to himself -

after all, he had to keep up appearances! Then Dad *[Hugh Gerald]* was earning a few shillings and Dennis and Marge were still at school - kept, largely, by Stewart and Dad. The first small amount Dad managed to save had to be spent on Dennis' school clothes and books. Grandpa appears to have been rushing round buying bad businesses and selling them when they became worse. What he bought them with I do not know - possibly with the money Grandma managed to raise when she began helping things along by mortgaging and remortgaging their various homes. Don't ask me how she got all the mortgages. I don't understand much about them and, I fear, neither did Grandma! However, at one time she managed to have three on the one building - or something equally extraordinary. Marge had to be maintained in a manner befitting a daughter of Master Johnny - though Master Johnny, now the grand old man, wasn't able to do any of the maintaining. Stew and Dad had to provide the first class tickets Grandma required for her daughter's journeys to and from training college. To give just one instance, Marge would bid her mother goodbye from her first class carriage and then, as soon as the train left, would join every other student teacher - second class! Pension time came and one would think the two young bread-winners might have been freed, but no, Grandma and Grandpa were too proud to queue up with the masses. Their sons continued to keep them. Finally, perhaps after Grandpa died, Grandma had to collect her pension. She collected it during the lunch hour so no-one (she hoped) would know that she had to have a pension. All these financial commitments kept Dad and Stew from marrying sooner and raising their own families. I don't think Uncle Stew ever really caught up. Grandma left him a flat sum in her (muddled) will, to make up for all his past efforts. The remainder, I think, was to be divided amongst all the children equally. What with all the mortgages I don't think there was any remainder - probably not even Stewart's lump sum. What he did get would have come via the famous will of Great Aunt Lou. From a very early age I seem to recall Grandma waiting to benefit from Great Aunt Lou's will. She was a missionary (I think) in China or/and Japan, and died either just before or just after World War II began. Apparently she left everything to Grandma Little "because she was the relative in greatest need ...". Odd that it should be Grandma Little who was to benefit - she was related only by marriage and the two never met although they must have corresponded. Ironically, part of G. Aunt Lou's estate consisted of Japanese railway stock - bombed during the war and therefore worthless. Even more ironically, the remainder (or most of it) was in whisky stock. Grandma was an ardent prohibitionist. I have a feeling that probate was not finally passed until just before or just after Grandma died. So she was unable to enjoy being a lady of means - of however reprehensible a source.

As with mortgages, I don't understand much about wills. However, apart from the war delaying probate, there were other delays - such as the contacting of various other relatives throughout the world, in case they wished to contest the will. (I suppose they had closer blood ties than our lot.) Dad recalls that only one showed any interest in disputing the will, and that one, he thinks, was a woman living (at the time) in either Kenya or the Sudan. No comment. It has been very difficult to get facts rather than opinions about the family. One scrap of information that really horrified me was that Minnie (1s

family) "who was always difficult ... always whining and complaining about stomach pains ..." used to be beaten by Grandpa with a trap whip! Charming gentleman. Minnie finally died of kidney or liver or other internal disorders. I'm not surprised.

Dad has not yet sent me a copy of the family photograph he promised to have made for you. I don't like to bother him about it just now because he is not well. [...] Marge and Stewart both died of cancer and Dad has long had a dread of being similarly afflicted. [...] He has just completed a three week course of radiation treatment at Palmerston North - about 200 miles south of Hastings. I've just remembered - when I mentioned Aunt Vi and the British Israelites Dad said one of the first family (poss. Charles or Johnnie) was a British Israelite, too. Someone definitely was, but I'm not sure who.

It has been more difficult finding out more about my mother's family, and I'll digress from those in the past, for a moment, while I speak of some present, because it will then be easier to explain what little I do know of the Kent family. When I arrived in Auckland three months ago [...] my cousin, Mary Cassé (daughter of my mother's sister, May) [...] whisked me away to stay with her. She trained as a nurse, was married, is now separated and lives in an attractive house in Mission Bay with her two young sons [...] - the boys are teen and near-teen. Unfortunately, Mission Bay is miles from Mt. Roskill, where I work. [...] By chance, my cousin Humphry de Lautour, is a doctor in Mt. Roskill. He is about five years younger than I am and we haven't seen each other since he was a little schoolboy. He is Mary's brother. I met him again and met his wife, Suzy, for the first time. Suzy was keen for me to stay with them.

[...]

While I was staying with Mary we discussed our families at length. She was always a great favourite of my mother's and, whenever Mary stayed with us, Mum was always at her most amiable. Therefore I was most surprised recently to learn that after visiting us Mary used to be almost in tears because she was so upset by Mum's harshness towards my brothers and me. Apparently even Mary's mother used to remark upon this extreme severity of Mum's.

[...]

Suzy and Humphry are so kind and Suzy will take what seems to me only a very nominal sum for my keep. It is a pleasant though slightly chaotic atmosphere. Now that I am here I can child and phone mind while Suzy gets out to the occasional film, theatre, or P.T.A. meeting - things which she just couldn't do before. My main problem is that I can't get much time to myself to write. I'm not good at writing while sharing. Humphry inherited two surgeries (and a very fat nurse) when he bought this practice from a husband and wife doctor team. I sleep in the spare surgery - which does not look like a surgery and is very comfortable. I write at nurse's desk which is just outside my room but I don't like to work there while Humphry has surgery - most evenings until about 8 pm and on Saturday mornings. Suzy is very keen for me to get on with my writing. She finds her relatives by marriage very amusing and interesting - "fascinating!" was her word. As soon as one

family feud or scandal fades another takes its place! One of the funniest (though also sad) happened some years ago while I was away. A girl cousin knowingly made a bigamous marriage. Her husband's other wife saw the wedding photograph when she visited mutual friends in Australia, took steps to divorce him, and then the whole thing blew up over here. Unfortunately for the bigamous bride her family name is so well known that the news didn't just hit the headlines and then fade, it went on and on and on. The fact that she was an heiress made matters worse - or more newsworthy - and the papers went into all the details of how and where the money came from, mentioning all the other members of the family who had inherited, how much they had, and, even worse, suggesting that they had all connived at this marriage when, in fact, none of them knew the groom was already married until just before the court case came up. So, instead of the fairy-tale honeymoon, he spent several months in clink. But the part I think was so funny was that the bride-to-be made a point of writing to the Bishop of Waikate asking expressly that he (and no ordinary parson) should officiate at what (she knew) would be a bigamous marriage! As far as we know the groom has now managed to un-marry wife one and legally marry wife two. We hope. There are children.

Of all my de Lautour cousins Humphry and Suzy seem to be the only ones who are on good terms with all the others. Humphry has six brothers and sisters and his parents are divorced. The father, Uncle Doug, remarried several years ago. May has not remarried. They visit Auckland but at carefully different times. I think Doug gets along with all his children but May does not. Not all the children get along with all the other children. They all get along well enough with us. This is the sort of neutral meeting place - but NOT for a full scale grand family re-union! They come separately, in ones and two's. The estranged wife of one cousin came to dinner last week with a little son. Her husband, my cousin Bruce, came on another occasion when his wife wasn't here. One can see that Suzy can find some entertainment in all this. On occasions one has to be careful what one says about who was here yesterday! Mary and Carol visit each other; Carol and Bruce are very close; Mary won't have anything to do with Bruce ... and so on. All of them have always been very pleasant to me and it makes me sad to see all the petty strife. I suppose, to them, it isn't petty, though. Carol is a widow - her husband, a pilot, was killed in a flying accident several years ago in Australia. Uncle Doug's second marriage sounds as if it may not be too happy. He has built a tiny cottage on the farm and, I gather, he bolts there when the atmosphere in the house becomes too strained! May is staying with us at the moment so we don't talk about Doug. Bruce can't visit us while his mother is here because she feels very bitter about him. However, she is on very good terms with his estranged wife, Pat. I found Pat rather difficult to talk to when we met.

While I was staying with Mary I learnt that she, too, had been trying to learn more about our mutual antecedents. Grandmother Kent was a Mazengarb. By chance, both Mary and I had suggested to our respective mothers that perhaps the Mazengarbs were Jewish. Suzy had the same idea. Well! My mother said she didn't know much about her ancestors and that, in any case, she didn't see that it mattered ... and rambled

on about how she had always led a respectable life, didn't owe anyone anything, had worked hard and always kept her head above water. (Whatever that meant!) However, when I persisted, she did recall that while one of her Mazengarb uncles was in Europe during World War I he was questioned at some point about his foreign name. Some expert (I'm told) investigated further and decided that it had originally been a Polish name. May, taxed by both Suzy and Mary, had said "Oh dear, I would really much rather think it was French". (As opposed to Jewish). By now she must have convinced herself it is French because the other evening, when I was trying carefully to draw her out on the subject, she said it was definitely a French name and there is a town in France call Mazengarb. One of my maternal great-grandmothers was originally a Smith, the other a Chapman. "Ah", said Suzy; "that's Jewish". "Oh, I think it was English", said May. By the way, Suzy's maiden name was Robinson - "But I can't help wondering if it might have been Robinovitch before it came to New Zealand", she said.

What we have managed to establish - roughly - is that our great-grandfather was Isaac Kent, soldier, adventurer, goldminer and storekeeper in the early days of N.Z. He came from England. He also had contacts/relatives in Australia and Tasmania because on two occasions he went to Australia and Tasmania to collect various legacies. He also wrote a book - "The History of the East Coast Maori Wars". I haven't yet been able to get a copy but I believe it is more a diary or note-book than a real literary work, and has been of great use to scholars of that period. Apparently he was a reasonable and greatly respected man during his first marriage and my grandfather was one of the six children of that marriage. Then the first wife died. Old Isaac married again, changed character, spent all the money on drink and sent the little boys out to work - little kids of eight or ten. We can only surmise that they must have done some sort of farm work. May told Suzy that Grandpa Kent "had a very hard life because of his father and stepmother" that he had had to work very hard from a very early age and "that that was why he was like he was". This is very tantalising because, as Suzy giggles, "We still don't know what he was like". I was carefully working up to discovering more about this the other evening when we were interrupted. I still don't know. Anyway, this rather unknown personality married a Miss Mazengarb. Her mother (my great-grandmother) was the daughter of a ship's captain, May told me the other evening. Apparently both my great-grandfathers on the maternal side had the Christian (?) names of Isaac. And that's about as far as we got with that lot.

[...]

This is a terribly long letter. I hope some of the family information is of some use to you. Do let me know how you are and whether or not you have sold the Edgware house yet.

I forgot to mention G & H's children - darlings - Sophia (6) & Richard (Ricky) (3). [...]

Love from Margaret.

[This is the "hasty copy of the enclosed information of the family" referred to at the start of Margaret Little's letter to Lois Mary Moriarty (née Redman) dated 24 August 1969]

COPY OF BIRTHS, MARRIAGES AND DEATHS
taken from
FAMILY BIBLE of JOHN STEWART LITTLE

JOHN STEWART LITTLE born 6 August 1851 at Lifford, Co Donegal, Ireland, died 11 December 1940 at Hastings, New Zealand.

Married (1st) Maria Anna PIERCE, 19 March 1877, who died 16 February 1895.

Married (2nd) Mary Annie BATES, 17 March 1898.

Family born of first marriage:

<u>Child</u>	<u>Birth</u>	
William Henry	29 May 1878	died ---
John Robert James	27 Sep 1879	died ---
Maria Catherine	11 May 1881	died ---
Henrietta	11 Feb 1883	Married (<i>One daughter Betty</i>)
Charles	14 Jul 1884	Married
Mabel	30 Sep 1885	Unmarried died 1957
Johnnie	10 Dec 1886	died ---
Minnie	23 Mar 1888	died ---
Reuben	4 Oct 1890	died ---

Family born of second marriage:

<u>Child</u>	<u>Birth</u>	
Stewart Alfred	6 Jan 1898	(Dead since original)
Robert Winston	26 Dec 1900	
Hugh Gerald	10 May 1903	
Dennis Rupert	10 Aug 1906	
Margaret Annie Louise	1 Jan 1910	(Dead since original)

(*Marge*)

Copied from Family Bible by
Annie M Little 24 June 1946

Robert Little MD TCD, born 23 June 1814, died 23 June 1881. Married Henrietta COLHOUN, born 12 December 1813, died 11 February 1874. Family of their marriage were: Robert, Martha, Charles Colhoun, Henrietta Catherine, John Stewart, Mary Anna, Eugenie Louise, Margaret Eliza. All of whom have died before this date - 24 June 1946.

[Compiled by Margaret Little in 1969]

SECOND FAMILY OF JOHN STEWART LITTLE - THEIR MARRIAGES, ETC

Stewart Alfred, born 6 Jan 1898. Married Keziah Frances Mary WHITE in 1936. Two daughters:

- Robin Mary, born 1937, married Within (Win) Cornelius VAN DER BEEK, 1961.
- Shona Jessie (year or two younger than Robin) married Stephen EDWARDS in 1963. They have one son - Wayne Stewart, born 31 Aug 1964.

Stewart Alfred Little died 3 Jan 1962 - of cancer. He was an engineer.

Robert Winston (now retired bank manager), married Nola STUBBESFIELD about 1930-31. Nola's mother was Maori - half-caste, I think, and very high class - had the tattooed upper lip. Nola actually looked fairer than Uncle Bob who was the only dark one of John Stewart Little's children. Robert and Nola have two children:

- Judith Ann, born 1932, married, six children.
- David, born about 1935, married, two children.

Hugh Gerald (Building contractor - 'supposed to be' semi-retired! Also, owner and lessor of flats). Married Effie Margaret KENT 17 Feb 1931. Three children:

- Gerald Bruce, born 20 Jan 1932
- Margaret Colhoun, born 20 Aug 1933
- Michael Hugh, born 14 Sep 1936, married Ngaire DAVIES in 1956. Ngaire is part Maori - about one quarter, I think. Her father is European - Welsh, I think, and her mother was part Maori, probably half but possibly less. One of her grandparents, I think her mother's mother, was French. Michael and Ngaire have had seven children:
Carole, John, Stephen, Martin, Craig (now dead, drowned at age 3-4), David, Anne Margaret.

Dennis Rupert (Company Director). Married Nola CARROLL. They have six children:

- Peter John.
- Suzanne Mary, married David SARTEN, one daughter Kerry Belinda.
- Colin Rupert.
- Sally Carrol.
- Ross.
- Timothy.

Margaret Annie Louise (Marge) (School teacher and very good athlete), married (about 1938-39) William Ian ROBERTSON (Ian). Marge died of cancer in 1958. They have five children:

- Janet, married, two daughters.
- Margaret (Peggy), married, no children, now separated.
- Hugh, married.
- Colleen.
- Andrew.

Ian has since remarried Eve.

Uncle Stewart's daughter, Robin, reminds me a little of Gail in appearance - though Robin has blue eyes - slightly upslanted - v. attractive & a v. likeable young woman.

Since I returned I haven't seen Marge's children but, as youngsters, they were all particularly good looking.