

**From the archive: Emily Harris Letters and Diary Excerpts 1860-63**

**Transcribed and edited by Michele Leggott and Fredrika Van Elburg  
from manuscripts at Puke Ariki Museum, New Plymouth**

Emily Cumming Harris was four years old when she arrived in Taranaki 30 March 1841 on the William Bryan with her parents Edwin and Sarah Harris, her older brother Corbyn and younger sister Catherine. The Harrises lived in and around New Plymouth for almost twenty years and the family grew to include four more daughters, Frances, Mary, Augusta and Ellen. Edwin Harris worked as a surveyor until 1855 when he became a bush farmer on the Grey Block, assisted by his son. Sarah Harris educated her children and later ran a school near the family property in Frankley road. Edwin was a trained draughtsman and artist who recorded scenes of early New Plymouth as well as drawing up survey plans for the settlement. He also taught his son and daughters to paint and draw, and to play the harp. Emily was already an accomplished diarist and poet when war broke out in Taranaki in March 1860. She, Edwin and Corbyn stayed in New Plymouth when Sarah took the younger girls to Nelson in April. Edwin and Corbyn Harris enlisted in the Taranaki Militia, and Corbyn joined the Volunteer Rifles. Emily continued to live with the family of Charles and Catherine Des Voeux as lady companion to Mrs Des Voeux. After New Plymouth was entrenched in July 1860, families whose homes had been burned by Maori raiding parties lived in crowded quarters within the lines, chafing under military occupation and the government's apparent lack of willingness to act decisively against the insurgence. Corbyn Harris was killed in ambush at Waitara 28 July 1860, and Emily's reconstruction of the family's wartime experience begins several weeks after her brother's death. She copies scraps of diary and letters in date order and inserts notes and some commentary. No date is given for the copying, and the present location of the original letters and diary is unknown.

A note on the text: spelling and punctuation have been silently corrected and paragraphing inserted. Square brackets indicate addition of missing words. Where Emily Harris has added a superscript or footnote comment on her main text, we have inserted the material in the place she intended it to occur.

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Letters, Scraps of Diary &c

beginning about six months after the first Maori War commenced in Taranaki

September 10<sup>th</sup> 1860

To day an Expedition went to the Waitara with the intention of destroying Wiremu Kingi's pa in the bush. They started from the town at 12 o'clock, upwards of a thousand men (1400) besides a large party of Volunteers and the mounted Escort. There were nearly fifty carts with luggage and four cannon. I saw them all pass, not all in one body, two strong detachments went first then the carts then another strong body and lastly the Volunteers who are mostly young men and seemed in good spirits. God grant that they may all return again in safety.

General Pratt went to take command of the force, with his evil genius Col. Carey. I think they had better have remained here and entrusted it to Major Nelson.

Sept 11<sup>th</sup> A poor woman, Mrs Miles, died of fever (another victim of this ill-fated war). Mr Leech was buried this afternoon, how very depressing so many deaths.

About six o'clock hearing an unusual stir in the street I looked out of the window and to my surprise found that the mounted Escort had returned. The troops are to return tomorrow covered with laurels from having achieved the glorious feat of attacking and destroying an empty pa. They were fired upon by Natives in ambush, one of the 40<sup>th</sup> soldiers was killed and five wounded. The fire was warmly returned and the Maoris dispersed. So tomorrow General Pratt returns in order to celebrate this important victory and to allow his men some repose after their long campaign. I must scribble a few lines in anticipation.

Come cast all gloomy cares away  
Wear nought but smiles this festive day  
Let garlands gay adorn the street  
And loud acclaim the soldiers greet  
Quick beat the drums,  
Behold the conquering hero comes  
Another such a victory won  
Another such achievement done  
And we may to our homes return  
And empty pas for pastime burn.

Sept 12<sup>th</sup> Very wet. The soldiers returned in pretty much the same order in which they went except that they gave a loud hurra as they entered the town and some sang snatches of warlike songs, a great deal

they have to be proud of, it is even asserted that some ran away; at any rate they left the dead body of their comrade to be mutilated by the Natives.

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New Plymouth

Dec 5th 1860

My dear Mamma

I have just returned from spending the evening at the Standishes with papa who has been paying a farewell visit, he expects the Airedale in tomorrow. I hope not, I should like to have him one day longer. I think I shall be very desolate when he has gone, the last link of the family chain so roughly severed, but do not think I am giving way or repining, I am more likely to take the other extreme and effect a gaiety I do not feel or drown care in dissipation, for Mrs Des Voeux has been very gay lately and as I am like the active verb to be and to do, I am too necessary an appendage to be left out. About three weeks ago Mrs R, Mrs K, Mrs Des V., Alice Reynolds and myself went to Glenavon to pick gooseberries. Mr Des Voeux wanted to bring in some cattle so it was a good opportunity as there were several mounted men and fifty friendly natives scattered over the place.

We were seated in the cart with the exception of Mrs King who kept us waiting half an hour in the street with our guard of Officers. Meanwhile a gentleman came with rumours of Waikatos having arrived and tried to dissuade us from going, but in vain, we were longing to get out into the country, it seemed so fresh and green after the hot suffocating town. But I must now say something about the gentlemen; they were strangers to me Capt Stoney and Capt. Miller. The latter you will remember so bravely tried to rescue poor young Wakefield from drowning and nearly lost his own life in the attempt, the former I had never heard of until a few days before when Mr D. V. brought two books written by him, one on Tasmania the other on Melbourne. They were beautifully bound in blue and gold, nicely illustrated and very interesting, so I was quite prepared to see a clever man but I am sure I never [met] with any one so agreeable besides being very handsome.

When we got as far as the Henui church we were told that firing had been heard and we had better turn back but we still went on trusting to our advance guard for intimation of danger.

All seemed so quiet and peaceful, except a few houses burnt and a pa at the Waiwakaiho bridge the country appeared unchanged. Glenavon did [not] look so desolate as I anticipated though the windows were broken, the paper torn down and the garden overrun with weeds. We very soon began to gather flowers, strawberries & gooseberries. I detest picking gooseberries in general but with two or three officers to help I rather enjoy it. We did not stay very long and returned in safety, laden with flowers. The next day some of the rebel Maoris took up their abode there and ever since no one has been able to venture out.

The next day Mr Des Voeux gave a dinner party. Among the guests was Capt Buck, Mrs Govett's brother-in-law and Col. Wyatt, the queerest man I ever met: all action and grimace. The story goes that when he was in Paris he was arrested as a spy, the French people said it was impossible for him to be an Englishman.

The next evening Mrs King persuaded Mrs Des Voeux to give a little dance. It was such a sudden thought that you can imagine how busy I was all day and I could not come into the room until late, but that I was glad of. As soon as I came in Mrs Des Voeux gave me a most beautiful bouquet that Capt Stoney had presented her, she was unusually kind and polite so of course the gentlemen were very attentive. I fancy they take their tone from her. As I was obliged to be there it was satisfactory, I do not like to be taken for a sort of housekeeper or nursemaid. But Capt Stoney can understand my position for he told me that his own wife had suffered from paralysis for ten years and that now she had regained the use of her hand, he said she was more like an angel than a human being and had borne her sufferings without a murmur showing how afflictions brought out people's real character proving many to be possessed of far better qualities than they were ever supposed to have. He thought it must have had that effect upon Mrs Des Voeux, her unfortunate disease only tending to make her more & more amiable. Such is the result of a lively manner upon strangers for of course I did not undeceive him.

A few days after Capt Stoney gave a party at his own house, the stone cottage on the beach. He asked Mrs Des Voeux to be the lady of the house and bring me. I wrote to papa and also to Mrs Standish to know what to do. She was very much distressed at the idea but said I was so situated that I must go if Mrs D.V. wished it, the worst advice she could [have given] for even after I had persuaded Mrs Richardson to take my place and do all that was required Mrs Des Voeux said decidedly you shall go and laughed at the idea of taking Mrs R. instead of a young girl, but another time I mean to outwit her. But all these things must be very distressing to you now I should not have mentioned them only that I thought it right.

Mrs Standish has been very unwell she has been in bed for several days but she is better now. One day when I called to see her Mrs Leech was there so I took the opportunity of asking her for a few flowers for the grave, she said she was glad I asked and that as long as she had any I should have some once a week, she desired me to remember her to you.

We have not yet removed to Skinner's house, poor Mr Richardson has been getting worse this last week, I fear he will not survive this summer. I think he would not wish to recover but would gladly be relieved from the trials of this world. It is a great satisfaction to me now that I have never spoken ill of him and have always taken his part when others have done so.

I went with papa last week to spend the evening with Mr and Mrs Gardner, they have made up their minds at last to go to England for a year or two, they intend going next month. The Newlands have got into a very comfortable house outside the trenches, Mr Ronalds & Mr Diamond board with them.

Give my love to Frances tell her not to forget to write to me next time as well as Augusta & Ellen. I have not been able to get the ferns for Miss Mayling yet as it is unsafe to go far outside the lines. I have just seen a cart go by with the harp & I don't know to go & see papa as Freddy is ill in bed with influenza. Love to Kate, &c - - -

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Letter to Miss Hill in Liskeard, England

New Plymouth  
Dec 8th 1860

My dear Aunt Emma.

I have just passed a most dreary day. Papa has at last gone to Nelson. The Airedale came in this morning but owing to the weather being so rough was obliged to put off again so soon that papa had not time even to wish me good bye. I hurried down to the beach hoping to see him but was too late. I came back with a feeling of disappointment and loneliness I cannot describe. In war time we feel very acutely every thing is so uncertain. You part perhaps from a friend with a careless smile and a few hours after you may look upon his lifeless corpse. You go to Nelson leaving some one very dear to follow by the next vessel. And when hastening joyfully to the Port to receive her you are told that she is in her grave. Such things have happened so often that we grow fearfully anxious about those we love.

We are still cooped up in the town, a few people live beyond the Trenches but they do so at a great risk and are obliged to come in whenever there is any cause for alarm. I do not like the idea of living in the town all the summer, it is so hot and dusty beyond anything a person living in England can conceive. We are often tempted to go outside the lines farther than prudence would allow, all seems so calm and peaceful one can scarcely suppose there is the slightest danger, until we come to some deserted home or to the site of some well known cottage now burnt to the ground.

However such wanderings are akin to madness, yet in spite of which I must tell you of our little expedition into the country. Mr Des Voeux occasionally rides out to his farm to look after the remnant of his property there. Glenavon is [or] was the prettiest place here. There is an extensive garden with a most romantic dell by the side of it with winding paths in every direction. Here and there the trees have been cleared away and rare shrubs and flowers planted. We had often petitioned to be allowed to visit Glenavon once more but Mr Des Voeux declared it was folly to run such a risk. At last we proposed a picnic one day to gather gooseberries when he was going out with an escort.

We set off early in the morning, five venturesome women in a bullock cart. Mr or rather Capt Des Voeux rode in advance with some of his mounted troop while we followed at a slow and steady pace in the cart, accompanied by several officers well armed and mounted.

Before leaving town it was rumoured that a large body of W--- were advancing and we were entreated not to go, but we had grown so incredulous about reports that we paid no attention to it except one lady sent for her husband's revolver and which I think she would have used with effect if necessary.

It was a lovely day and only those who have been shut up for months in a town almost in a state of siege can imagine how delightful it was to breathe again the pure air of the country. All seemed so still & peaceful so fresh and green that our armed party did not appear in harmony with the scene. When we were about half way it was said that someone had heard guns firing and we had better turn back, however we went on and at last arrived in safety at our destination. How changed since we left, the garden once so nicely kept now overgrown with weeds, the houses which for some unaccountable reason the Maoris have not burnt, with the windows broken and every scrap of paper torn from the walls. Still we spent several hours there very pleasantly and then returned to town laden with fruit and flowers. Two days after some of the rebel Natives made Glenavon their head quarters for a time. A boy was fired at near there but fortunately was only slightly wounded. And at the spot where we hesitated about going on another poor boy was dragged from his horse and tomahawked.

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(Notes)

I add a few notes from memory. I did not see Glenavon again for many years and then it was a perfect ruin so that I look back with interest to every incident connected with that visit.

There were five ladies: Mrs Richardson and her two daughters, Mrs Des Voeux, Mrs W. King, Alice Reynolds and myself. We were some little time waiting in the street before all were ready to start and in the meantime we received more than one warning message from the officers of the mess room on the opposite side of the street. The General I believe was very anxious about our going but he could not issue an order instantly that no one should go outside the trenches in the middle of the day. But we all considered the General an old muff and if Mr Des Voeux and Mr William King thought it safe it was all we cared for. Two of the gentlemen who accompanied us I had not seen before: Major Stoney and Capt Miller. We all felt an interest in Capt Miller from his gallant conduct a short time before in trying to save the life of a little child who had been swept out to sea by the tide. The child was drowned and he was

with great difficulty rescued by George Hoby who brought him to the shore quite insensible. I thought Capt Miller very noble looking and for a fair man the handsomest I had ever seen. Major Stoney was also a handsome man but much older.

A miserable little dog came running down the street with a tin paint-can tied to its tail. Just after it came an extremely tall slight young officer, Lieut Colonel Leslie, in full regimentals. I suppose it was his looking so very consequential that made Major Stoney say, pointing to the dog, Ah! Leslie is that some of your work? We were all amused at the haughty manner in which he strode by without deigning a reply. Major Stoney, taking out a pocket knife, caught the dog and freed the poor little thing from its encumbrance.

We were soon beyond the town, in the country which looked lovely but very desolate. Major Stoney spoke of Tasmania and drew comparisons on the scenery (he and Capt Miller had been quartered there for some years). Tasmania would be greener looking I said? No he replied, this is the greenest and freshest looking. Tasmania, a new name for Van Diemen's Land, had always been associated in my mind with the worst of convict criminals, a place hardly to be mentioned.

When about half way someone riding into town passed us saying we had better turn back for shots had been heard. We still went on when one of our advance party came riding back to know if we meant to go on. We halted at a pretty spot where some willows grew to consider but in a few minutes determined to go on. We arrived at Glenavon in safety and went all through the two houses. Some with painful feelings, a few months ago one of the houses had been just completed and both had been beautifully furnished. I could not help lingering with regret over a splendid engraving torn and dirty lying in the garden path. We had all assembled in a deserted drawing-room when Major Stoney produced some packets of delicately cut sandwiches, he and some young officers had spent an hour or two after breakfast in cutting them. We then went into the garden but very soon they all wandered away except Mrs Richardson, Capt Miller and I, we were determined to make the best of our time and he did not like to leave us, he was amused at the quickness with which my hand went in and out without injury while he was for ever getting scratched. When our baskets were full the rest of the party had returned from rambling with lots of flowers. Oh! I thought they will soon be going and I have not a single flower. I must have a few. So off I went straight for the dell, Capt Miller followed. I had often [been] warned [by] Mr Des Voeux not to go into the dell, for fifty natives might be in ambush there, but now all thought of danger had flown. I went on very quickly because I wanted to go all over it. Picking a flower here and there making a few remarks and lamenting the weeds that had grown so high, we came to one small open space, in the middle of which grew a pink hawthorn in full bloom. I had often seen the tree but not the flower, my exclamations of surprise and delight and efforts to reach the blossom made my companion smile, he got some of the flowers for me, we stayed a few minutes it was a lovely spot, beautiful ferns and native shrubs growing

all round. You should have brought a pencil and paper and written some lines here, he said. Strange to have said that to me, I believe I was at that time the only girl in all Taranaki who ever wrote a line. I did write some verses in the evening but never showed them to him.

Lines Written on Visiting Glenavon during  
the War 1860.

Oh! I could sit and gaze for hours,  
Musing alone  
Upon thy lovely blooming flowers  
Dreaming that fairies in their bowers  
First tinted them.

Or on that tiny winding stream  
O'er grown with weeds  
That erst would gaily flash and gleam  
Like silver neath the golden beam  
Of summer's sun.

Or upward turn my wondering eye  
Above the trees,  
To watch the gauzy clouds float by  
A snowy veil athwart a sky  
Of deepest blue.

But now my stay so short so brief  
I may not pause,  
To linger o'er one bud or leaf  
Or twine one fair or fragrant wreath  
With thy sweet flowers.

One rapid glance around me cast  
Noting the trace  
Of River's step I onward passed  
With painful thought that t'were the last  
For years perchance.

Sweet Peace we little knew how dear  
    Thou wert to us.  
Until we mark'd the widow's tear  
And saw extended on his bier  
    One gone for ever.

Oh! we may learn to wear a smile  
    And heedless laugh  
Twill but the careless eye beguile  
For still we feel beneath the wile  
    A mournful heart

One hour can loosen War's red hands  
    And set him free  
But grey exiles in many lands,  
Can tell how hard to clasp the bands  
    Strife once has severed.

We heard shouts and had to hurry on he complimenting me on my lightness in springing over every little obstacle. They were all in the cart when we came and did not fail to laugh at us. We had a pleasant drive and got a branch of white hawthorn from one of the hedges. Capt Miller quoted Byron and begged a few flowers from me. Miss Reynolds immediately insisted upon his taking all her flowers. I believe our safe return was quite a relief from anxiety about us to those in town.

The next morning I was helping Mrs Richardson to put the gooseberries in bottles when Colonel Wyatt called. He was a tall thin elderly [man] who looked as if he had been made of parchment however he was very pleasant and helped to do the gooseberries.

Who proposed it I do not know but Mrs Des Voeux made up her mind to have a dance the next evening. Col W. was delighted at the idea, and promised to send his man to help move the furniture he also came & helped himself. The Des Voeux's & Kings were living in a large store divided into rooms by curtains & rough boards. It was uncomfortably filled with handsome furniture from three houses. Two curtained rooms were thrown into one for the dance and the walls being lined with white calico it looked very nice. Mrs King and I spent some hours in making a very pretty thing out of a very primitive chandelier. For the Commissariat Department Mrs King got a first-rate confectioner to take command of the kitchen so that part was not likely to fail.

I came into the little drawing room very late in the evening. Living in the house I could not well stay away although everything connected with music or dancing recalled such painful feelings, however I thought I would not dance. Being in such deep mourning I had some difficulty in contriving an evening dress, none of my white dresses however much trimmed with black would do. I had a girl to come and make me a plain black barege skirt which, with a nicely fitting low silk body trimmed with crape & ribbon, full white sleeves and frill made I was told the most becoming dress I had ever worn.

I found Capt Miller in the room. He had just come and was teasing on a pair of white kid gloves which in consequence had split all to pieces. I can not ask you to dance with gloves in this state, but I can introduce you to a partner. I can send a servant to Mrs Hoskin's for another pair if you like I said. It was a pouring wet night, a joke was going about that to avoid getting wet and muddy some of the gentlemen had ridden across the road on their men's backs. All the servants would do anything for me so one of them went out in the wet & mud to get the gloves. After my first dance the gloves were given me with a message that they had been stretched and dried, Mrs Hoskin was sure those would not split.

Oh! thank you how very kind, said Capt M. and then with a change of countenance that made me feel deeply mortified he said why, they are enormous! and turned away before I could explain that being stretched made them appear so. He soon came back full of compliments: the gloves fitted beautifully, how could I have guessed the size. The party went off delightfully, I danced with Major Stoney, Capt Miller, Colonel Wyatt and many others. The temptation to dance was too strong; for a few hours I felt happy and forgot our great sorrow and troubles.

The next day Major Stoney and Capt Miller called, they were so pleased with the party that they also determined to give one in a few days. They invited us all & asked Mrs Des Voeux to kindly come early to receive the ladies. Major Stoney brought a book he had promised to lend Mr Des Voeux. It was a work on Tasmania written by himself.

It was handsomely bound & illustrated, Mrs Des Voeux and I soon skimmed through it with great curiosity & interest but we came to the conclusion that the poetical quotations at the head of each chapter were the best part of it. Yet the book had great influence on our future life.

I wrote at Mrs Des Voeux's request a note to papa asking him to allow her to take me to the party. He wrote back saying that he had no objection to my going anywhere with her.

Major Stoney and half a dozen others lived in a stone cottage close to the beach outside the trenches. No one was permitted to go outside the gates after a certain hour. Major Stoney promised to tell the guard to let us pass, but when we got to the gate he had not been told and he would not let us through, so we had

to go a long way round to another gate and then we had some trouble in getting through: the guards had been changed and one told and the other not.

We found a little dressing room nicely fitted up for us with pins, hairpins etc and a bouquet of lovely flowers for each lady. We found everything beautifully arranged, the rooms tastefully decorated with flowers and ferns. Besides those I had met before there were some nice young officers, papa had no chance of being invited to the one or two parties given. One poor fellow was shot in a fight a very short time after. Mr Des Voeux about ten or eleven o'clock was walking in the garden, it was moonlight, when a shot came whizzing over his head and rattled upon the roof of the house. There was hardly time to wonder what it could mean when Major Paul came in, quite out of breath. He explained that he could not get away from his duties earlier and when he got outside the gate he set off running. The sentinel on Mount Elliot seeing a man running along the beach challenged him and after repeating it twice or three times & not hearing the answer fired, but happily without effect or our pleasure would soon have changed.

The party was quite a success and was followed in a short time by one given by Mr & Mrs King, also very delightful but of which I only remember one incident. The store had a sort of cellar which, divided, made a large kitchen and store room. The stairs to go down to it were outside but which in wet weather were so inconvenient that the servants used to get down a trap door in the corner of the passage. It was so dangerous that it was ordered to be kept shut but on the night of the party the servants would keep it open. I heard a scream and seeing a group of ladies all looking down the trap door I thought one had fallen in so I swung myself down in a moment. To my surprise I saw some one in a red jacket picking himself up from the ground. We looked at each other then I said, will you allow me to pass. Knowing the way I soon ran up the stairs outside and came in at the door. To be both quizzed and praised for jumping down to help a gentleman. The poor fellow was terribly shaken but when he had recovered a little he came and thanked me very warmly and begged me to let him have one dance with me. I saw him once after in the street after a very severe illness brought on partly he thought by the fall.

These three parties broke for a time the sadness and weariness that was wearing our lives away. Some people thought it heartless but it was not so and those who gave them ever proved themselves ready and willing to help and sympathize with their more afflicted neighbours.

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Letter to my sister Frances in Nelson

Jan 3rd 1861

My dear Frances

It is so long since you or any of my sisters have written to me that I feel myself quite forgotten. I was terribly disappointed when the steamer came in last and no letter for me. Please to remember that I am very lonely and that sometimes can scarcely endure to remain and that your letters are everything to me. The little change I had a few weeks ago did me good at the time. I cannot give you a description of the parties now. I had every reason to be pleased and gratified. I'm told that my dress was most becoming and I certainly had as many partners as I wished.

We have removed into the house above John Veal's but I do not altogether like it. Poor Mr Richardson is very ill and not likely to recover. He has suffered a great deal. He is now free from pain but getting weaker daily, he is quite resigned and would be glad to be released. Mrs Richardson has been unwearied in her attendance on him day and night.

Mrs Leech has been ill but she is getting better now. Mr and Mrs Gardner intend returning to England by the first opportunity, which may perhaps be in a few days. Mr Des Voeux is at the Waitara and will probably be there for some time. You must try to get a paper with an account of this last expedition. There are bands of Natives roaming about the country so that it is not safe to go out. Mrs Standish has been very unwell. I think she has too much trouble and care. Frank has got a commission as ensign in place of Mr Gardner. Have you any chance of attaining another situation and what is papa doing? I am longing to hear & ask him what I am to do with the boxes left with Mrs Tatton. Tell the little girls to write to me. Give my love to papa & mamma and the girls & to Mr Moore and believe me

your affectionate sister

Emily

P.S. I had written a long letter but on reading it over thought best not to send it.

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Jan 14th 1861

My dear Mamma.

I received your letters yesterday morning. I cannot think why I had not received the others sooner, perhaps owing to Mr Smith's indisposition or from their not being properly stamped. Since writing my last letter poor Mr Richardson has breathed his last. After long and great suffering he died as quietly as a child going to sleep. I have been and am still exceedingly busy, busy about the mourning.

Mr Richardson was buried on Friday, Mr Des Voeux came up from the Waitara for a few days; he returned yesterday.

Mr Chilman told me this afternoon that the Jane will sail for Nelson tomorrow and with his kind assistance I think I shall be able to send the things for papa. You must excuse this hurried scrawl, I have hardly a moment to spare & my head aches intensely. I am anxious to hear how the girls are. Give my best love to all, yours aff. Emily.

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New Plymouth

Feb 4th 1861

My dear Mamma

I was quite delighted to receive such a budget of letters. I immediately made inquiries about Dr Nield but found to my great disappointment that he had not arrived & I could learn nothing about the lithographs. I suppose he means to come in the next steamer. I hope you have not been similarly disappointed.

I got very anxious to hear how the girls were as diphtheria has been fatal in this place. Thomson's little girl died from it last week. Several children have died lately. Mrs Elliot has lost her youngest child. Mrs Hood's little girl the eldest was drowned in the river. Mr Single, clerk of the works, has lost his only child, a girl about ten years old, but the most melancholy is poor Mrs Ritchie's death; she was buried today, she also died of fever. She had been ill a long time; some weeks ago they hoped that she would recover. Prayers were offered in church last Sunday for several persons who were dangerously ill but their names were not familiar to me. I delivered your letters to Mrs Bayley & to Mrs Gaul. Poor Maggie's baby is a pretty little thing, she is very fat and her hair is beginning to curl all over her head.

Mrs Gaul seemed quite put out when I called. There had been two or three alarms and she has been obliged to come inside the trenches which seemed to have quite upset her. Catharine and Lizzy were both very unwell from nervousness and fright. But for fear you should be uneasy I assure you there is not a bit more danger now than there has been often before. We have not been the least alarmed but then we have had no real occasion to be, I never get the chance of being frightened. But I suppose I take it all too coolly.

I am afraid your dream of seeing me in Nelson will not be soon realized. I too have been tantalized with a vision, the same save that mine was a daylight dream. Mrs Richardson made up her mind to have a month's change. She thought of going to Nelson but Mrs Des Voeux will not move an inch unless she goes for good. However Mrs W King determined to accompany her mother and they at last thought of

going to Auckland, but they have been obliged to give up the idea for the General will not grant them permission to return.

I should like to hear of the safe arrival of the box I sent before I venture to send anything again. In the box is a letter and some verses of mine which I should like to have returned as I have not even time to copy or even to write out correctly.

There are very few officers in town now and most of them are new officers from India so I do not know them and I do not get so many bows now when I walk down the street. Before they went to the Waitara I knew seventeen. The worst is that I am obliged to be more particular with my dress; my boots & gloves cost more than I could wish.

In going down to the beach the other day to my surprise Mr Edward McKellar came and shook hands with me. He had just returned from Nelson. He said he had done himself the pleasure of calling on you, that you seemed very comfortable, that papa was looking so well etc etc, at which I was very much pleased.

The first fortnight after Mr Richardson's death I did nothing but go from one shop to another buying mourning, and from one dressmaker to another. I was sent backwards and forwards like a shuttlecock between a pair of battledores. I had no idea it was so difficult to get anything done.

I have had my share to do too. It was unfortunate for me that I was so handy with my needle for I was very much imposed upon. Freddy's dress to make, three hats to trim, one bonnet to trim, Mrs Des Voeux's mantle to make, but I have not done it well. But she should have given it to someone who understood crape.

However to make up for that I have made her such an elegant crape bonnet that she has not been able to find a single defect in it. She is very much pleased and says that other people admire the bonnet very much.

She gave me a shape and some crape to make myself a new bonnet which I have done. I have had several things given me so I have been well requited for my trouble. Mrs Richardson is not at all well. I hope that she will be able to go away for I am sure she needs change. I do not think I have mentioned how very ill Mr Adams has been, their oldest child died about three weeks ago. It must be a happy release both for the mother & child, the little boy too has been dangerously ill.

I took tea with Mrs Newland last Sunday, their house is very comfortable. Mr Diamond and Mr Brewer live with them. Mr Brewer is a young gentleman from Auckland sent down to assist Mr D. McKellar. Mr

Ronalds boards there but does not sleep there so Mrs Newland has plenty to do. John is at the Block House at Mahoetahi, he has a situation in the commissariat as issuer or dispenser of stores.

I think I have now given you all the news. I hope papa will sell his pictures and get some pupils, I wish Augusta and Ellen would make me some crochet edging. Give my love to the girls, tell Kate & Frances that one letter was as much as I could write. I wrote to Aunt Emma last mail & intend writing this

Your Affec daughter

Emily

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New Plymouth

Feb 20th 1861

My dear Mamma and Papa.

I have a more melancholy letter to write than I ever thought to have written from New Plymouth, so sad I scarcely know how to begin. But I must not make too long a preface or you will be alarmed and pained with suspense yet most likely you will have heard of this last fearful tragedy before reading my letter.

On the afternoon of Feb 8th Mr William King went out as usual for a short ride. Happening to meet his man Thomson coming from Woodleigh, Mrs W. King's property, he asked him if he saw any Maoris out there. Thomson said that he had not seen any Maoris or traces of them. Mr King had mentioned in the morning that he was quite tired of the rides he had been lately & longed for some fresh place to go. He certainly had no intention of going to Woodleigh when he left the house for he always took his revolver with him and he was then unarmed. He reached Woodleigh but while he was in one of the fields before the house he was fired at by a party of Maoris in ambush, three shots took effect, one in the back, two in the side. With almost super human strength he rode several hundred yards and then fell exhausted. The Natives ran to secure the saddle & bridle, two others, more bloodthirsty than the rest, came up to Mr King, and now the accounts vary so much that I cannot say exactly which is most correct. He is reported to have said to one of the Natives, a man who had worked for him, 'Leave me I am badly wounded'. The man wished to save him but the other Maori pointed his gun close to him and shot him through the head. Dr Wilson says from the nature of the wounds he, Mr King, could not possibly have spoken a word. Nearly the whole of this fatal scene was witnessed from the barracks and as fast as they could run the Militia went out. Some gentlemen on horseback got there first but too late to render any assistance, poor Mr King was beyond all human aid. In the meantime I was quietly reading on the beach and when it was time to return walked leisurely into town. When Mary Elliot (a child) asked me if it was true that Mr King was shot at I went on & met Mrs Richardson hurrying down to Mrs King's. She said as she passed 'Mr King is shot', in her excitement she spoke the truth for she did not then know that he was dead.

In a little while after the sad procession entered the town and his body was at once taken to his own house.

The horror stricken grief of his wife and the fearful blow to Capt & Mrs King I need not speak of, you can so well imagine what they felt. On Sunday he was buried by the side of Mr Richardson. The funeral was a private one but a greater number of people have never I think attended a funeral here before. Capt King (R.N., William King was his only child) was pleased to see so many. He bore up well on that day, but now that it is over he seems to be pining away.

Mr King's untimely death has made a great and sudden change in all the plans. It was his often expressed wish that if he died that his wife should leave New Plymouth with the children, which she will do as soon as she arranges matters a little. Mr Des Voeux has given up his commission and intends going to Sydney by the next mail steamer and from thence to Van Diemen's Land to Hobart Town with Mrs King & Mrs Richardson but perhaps not all together. Mr Des Voeux's first wish and intention was to take me. He afterwards thought of going to Wellington, then if I liked he would have taken me there on his way and tried to get me another situation and if he could not, send me on to Nelson, so Mrs Des Voeux told me. I then went to Mrs Dingle and made her an offer of taking her children to Nelson. But she could not make up her mind to part with them, she strongly recommended me to open a school here, she said that I should be certain to get plenty of scholars. I felt very much inclined to try and consulted Mrs Standish about it and she was of the same opinion. Mrs Dingle also offered me a home for a few weeks. They live in part of Richard Brown's house, but where to get a school room is the great difficulty.

Mr Des Voeux again determined to go direct to Sydney & Mrs Des Voeux again asked me to go with them but she did not seem to be very earnest about it. I was so little inclined to accept her offer that Mr Des Voeux thought it necessary to speak to me one evening. He spent an hour pointing out the advantages while I opposed the disadvantages, he was I saw thoroughly in earnest, he said he was quite surprised at my hesitating, he thought I would have been glad to see a little more of the world. But the stumbling block how to get back again. Mr Des Voeux said that the move that he was about to make was a very expensive one and that after taking me there he could not afford to send me back. But I said If after you are settled in Hobart Town you should find some one you like better & I had not the means of returning? He replied that he would never do any thing so unjust.

After some further consideration he said first he would give me ten pounds towards returning then that he would pay half & also that when the war is over he [manuscript breaks off]

I left. Mr Brewer took charge of my three important baskets much to my relief and carried them down to the saloon. Mr Brewer came on with D. McKellar.

The first thing we did was to choose our cabins. There were two ladies' cabins with six berths in each. Mrs Des Voeux, Freddy & myself with two other passengers & the stewardess occupied one cabin. It was a very small room choked up with boxes & carpet bags. You may fancy how awkward it was, in the morning we were obliged to get up one after the other. The first thing we did was to put the children to bed and then we went up on deck for the odour of the cabin was intolerable. I never could make out what it was, oil or paint. When I went down to the cabin again the vessel was fairly on her way. The dreadful noise and motion of the screw soon made me feel very angry disgusted and ill. I went to bed to prevent myself from being sick. In bed it was not much better, the vessel seemed to be an immense churn & I a lump of butter continually thumped about in it while the waves splashed like gallons of buttermilk.

But to get up the next morning was no easy matter. It was an effort to dress myself & then to dress Freddy and help Mrs Des Voeux who although not sick was worse than useless with her lame arm & leg. Freddy & I at last managed to crawl upon deck and then down again to breakfast. It was a very nice salon with paintings & mirrors and couches of crimson velvet. The breakfast was quite a sumptuous repast & most tempting to anyone with an appetite, everything so clean & such nice silver and china, the waiters so attentive and throughout the voyage the fare was equally good. I was told one day that we were fortunate in having Mr Clark on board (the agent or manager of the New Zealand steamers) for that the master, cooks & in fact everyone was on their best behaviour whenever he was there. Mr Clark was very much liked by all the passengers he was so gentlemanly and obliging. But to return to the breakfast. Freddy & myself forced ourselves to eat one egg each of which we soon repented. It was several days before we ceased to think eating a dreadful nuisance. After the first day I was not sick but I could not get over a feeling of faintness during the whole voyage. Miss Tyhurst was a very bad sailor, Mrs Richardson was quite ill, Jane was pretty well. Mrs Des Voeux & Mrs King were very well. You could not have helped smiling could you have seen us, sitting on deck in the most forlorn attitudes feeling unspeakably miserable, unable to [manuscript breaks off]

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Dec. 24 1861

My dear Frances

This is Christmas Eve, I was just going to bed very tired but thought I would write a few lines first. I wish I was with you now as I suppose that you are all at home tonight, perhaps you are having a nice little supper now or papa is playing the harp or like me you may be thinking of days gone by, but we will not

look back, it is too painful and I cannot look forward it is too dreary, there is but one way to look and that is above.

This will be the third Christmas I have spent away from home the last at home was when Dr Renshaw dined with us.

I have been all day helping to decorate All Saints Church. There were about a dozen young ladies in the school room making wreaths, crosses and various other devices, they all appeared to have so much taste that I found it would be difficult to distinguish myself in the flower line, however I made one little cross with violet coloured flowers, with a small white wreath round it that was greatly admired.

Christmas day Mr & Mrs Des Voeux & myself received the sacrament early in the morning at All Saints, we went to church again at eleven, Mrs Richardson & Mrs King dined with us.

I saw Mrs Gore Browne at a concert on Monday, she appears to have made a favourable impression on the Hobartonians, The ladies say she dresses very plainly, a great contrast to lady Young who could carry off any amount of dress being tall stout and very dignified.

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Holbrook Place

March 29 1863

My dear Frances

I received your kind letter yesterday and you may imagine that I was not a little surprised at the contents. I was going into the town when I met our little postman with three letters for me, so nervous that I was obliged to go into a friend's house to read them. I had been looking forward to Kate's marriage so long that at last the thought of it got entangled with the proverb 'many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip' and when the news did come it seemed quite unexpected.

I am really rejoiced that they have received the reward of all faithful lovers and hope they will live as long & happily as the beautiful princesses & kings' sons in fairy tales do. How I wish I had been at home, it must have been such fun to get ready for a wedding in such a hurry, how you managed I cannot tell. Why did the ceremony take place in the Scotch Church? I hope you do not prefer it to the Church of England. The bride's dress must have looked very pretty. Were they not both pleased with the presents? Did they know beforehand what they were? I like what you bought for mine very much indeed.

Give my very best love to Kate & Alfred & tell them I hope some day to pay them a visit. It happened rather strangely about the beginning of March it might have been on the fourth that I was buying some flowers and by mistake bought a beautiful piece of myrtle not thinking that it was a bridal flower.

I received a letter from Aunt Emma by the last mail with a pretty neck ribbon enclosed in it. She says she has received a very well expressed letter from you and wishes to include you in her list of pupils if you have no objection. She begs me to ask you, I am sure you will be very glad. Aunt Emma always criticizes my letters and points out the faults which I consider a great advantage. Do you ever write to Mrs Standish? I am sure she would be so glad to hear from you, she writes such kind letters to me. I hope Mary writes.

You must not believe all you hear about Frank, he has bitter enemies who are straining to destroy his character altogether. I have not heard any thing myself against him but I know evil reports have been circulated and which have been proved to have originated only in malice.

I received a letter from Susan last post, containing a lock of her baby's hair (such a pretty colour). The letter was scarcely two months coming. I hope I shall see your dolls' house some day, you have quite made my fingers twitch to make one myself.

One evening during lent I went to the Roman Catholic Chapel. I was not much edified or shocked, a great part of the service consisted of prayers similar to our own, but [the] principal thing lay in rising up & kneeling down which I most devoutly did fourteen times & also in repeating part of the Lord's prayer, the Priest saying the other half the same number of times. Easter will soon be here, I wish I could go somewhere for a holiday. I would willingly give up all the expected amusements for a quiet [time] with a quiet cheerful family. The Opera company is expected, the circus & goodness knows what besides. I shall have plenty to put in my next letter. Tell mamma not to try her eyes writing to me. Tell Mary I like her essay on Charity, I have not written mine yet.

I have sent the verses you asked for. Mr D.V. said they were very good so I was not likely to lose them.

I meant to have written a very proper affectionate letter to Kate but alas! though the spirit was willing the brain would only suggest vile rhymes, so if Kate is indignant I will write very properly next time.