



Family re-union of the Flinn family in 1904 on the occasion of Mr and Mrs Flinn's Golden Wedding. Photo supplied by Mr A.E. Le Roy

The Malcolm's Lonely Life on Great Barrier

Part of a printed booklet of 1904 "My Own Story" in which Emile Monson Malcolm describes the sixteen years the family spent on the island from 1854.

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Introduction

Neil Malcolm was an English barrister and Mrs Malcolm the daughter of a retired British Army officer who lived near London on the banks of the Thames. She was married at 18 with, of course, little experience of the hardships of life, artistic, emotional and idealistic. He was unpractical, even quixotic, honest to a fault, trusting and optimistic and not the type to make a good colonist in a new, rough country, though capable of adapting himself to the demands of the isolated, do-it-yourself life of the Barrier. Both were excellent parents and mutually devoted. They suffered, so it seems, cruel neglect from the Provincial Government in Auckland and were doomed to lose the land and the farm they had worked so hard to develop.

After a farming venture on the banks of the Tamaki River, which was a failure, Mrs Malcolm admits that neither of them knew the least bit

about farming. They went to stay with a friend, Mr Barstow, on the Great Barrier Island for a few months. This led to the tragedy which, years later, Mrs Malcolm calls the result of 'more disastrous muddling'. The Barstow land, which the Malcolm's took over was at Rosalie Bay, near Tryphena, an area not surveyed on the Provincial Council charts, so that there was no official record of the Malcolm's farm, which was thus included in a later grant.

Life on the Great Barrier Island

It seems that Mr Barstow arrived in New Zealand with a large capital about 1854. He invested his money in a fine herd of cattle, imported from Twofold Bay and established them on the Great Barrier, then the property of the Crown in part and in part belonging to the natives. Mr Barstow spent some £600 on building stockyards so that the cattle could be herded and sent to market.

Mrs Malcolm was charmed with the beauty of the island and thought that her husband might go into partnership with Mr Barstow as he was a fine shot and had been a noted athlete.

The Malcolm's were invited to stay for a time in a cottage which had been occupied by one of the employees and this they did for three months while Mr Malcolm learned the art of cattle hunting and wild pig sticking. They enjoyed the beauty of the island, with its fine harbours, its magnificent forest and little sandy beaches. The pleasant interlude ended suddenly when Mr Barstow was offered a Government appointment as a magistrate and the whole family departed from the island, leaving the Malcolm's alone in the wilderness, miles from civilization. Mrs Malcolm was overcome with remorse and felt that she should not have urged her husband to take on such an isolated life, but eventually they decided to stay on and sent urgent requests to the Provincial Government to survey the land they occupied from the Barstow's so that they could build a good house, repair the fences, make a garden and other improvements.



The late Mr. R. C. Barstow

Mrs Malcolm organized the domestic routine and arranged to teach the girls each morning and they became adept in the domestic field, while for recreation they all learnt drawing and singing in parts. They enjoyed exploring the bush and gathering flowers, lichens and moss and in the evenings Mr Malcolm would read to the family round a cheerful fire, translating from a favourite Greek author or from the other classics. On Saturday evening the parents taught the children dancing.

The Malcolm's cleared a large space of forest and made a good garden; Mr Malcolm became an expert at catching the wild calves, boating, fencing, hunting with his two faithful dogs, enjoying the rough farming and the outdoor life.

Until a proper survey was made and a new house built they decided to live on in the old raupo dwelling, small as it was. In time they produced good crops and established a fine dairy herd with many calves, all hand-fed and very tame, seldom straying more than a mile from the homestead - only a title was needed to make a happy home.

Mrs Malcolm had one or two frights while living in this isolated place. One day she went fishing with her husband to the mouth of the harbour; they took a nice strong, four-oared whaleboat, which they left to come in with the tide. It was a clam evening so they cleaned the fish and went in to tea. Afterward Mr Malcolm went out to secure the boat by tying it to a tree and was away a long time, so, throwing a shawl over her shoulders, Mrs Malcolm went down to the beach where she was horrified to see her husband's coat, trousers and boots. She was greatly distressed, knowing that suicide would have been impossible for him. She returned to the house and put the children to bed, still acutely miserable.

Two hours later, he returned. The spring tide and a breeze had carried the boat nearly out to sea; it could just be seen as a speck on the outer edge of the bay. He seized a small dug-out and a couple of pieces of wood as paddles and managed to rescue the boat but had to paddle it back and tow the canoe.

The Malcolm's suffered another trial at the end of the 1860's, when, anxious to post a letter to Auckland they suffered a near disaster. Mails to the town could be sent only by passing ships at this time (the Barrier was very isolated in the 1860-70 period)

so, one day, when they saw a ship passing by they decided to sail into the next bay to get their letter sent to Auckland. The return trip proved hazardous, a stiff south-west wind having given rise to a very rough sea. The sail was carried away and Mrs Malcolm, terrified of rounding the last point begged her husband to shelter in the bay so that they could both walk home, a distance of only three or four miles. The boat next capsized on a sunken rock but they managed to make the shore and tie the boat up. The rain then came down in a deluge and Mrs Malcolm fainted from exhaustion. Unfortunately they had no matches so Mr Malcolm put his coat round his wife and they sat under a tree in the rain until daylight.

Next morning they walked home and soon met their eldest daughter, greatly distressed and still weeping bitterly. She had put the little ones to bed, kept the fire going, filled the kettle and then paced the beach all the evening.

After much work the Malcolm's succeeded in rearing a fine herd of calves and they had 35 hives of bees, many fowls, countless turkeys, a good dairy and vegetable garden, some crops and there were numerous wild cattle in the bush.

Weary of waiting for the surveyors they took the plunge and built a new house, papering the rooms and hanging curtains but the surveyor who was to survey the ground never made his visit. When the Malcolm's had been some 16 years on the island and had reared eleven children the Provincial Government made a number of 40 acre grants to new settlers, one of them claiming the Malcolm's house and farm. The new arrivals paid nothing for the land and were allowed to cut timber and shoot wild cattle - the Malcolm's hand-fed cattle were all shot.

This extraordinary story ends with a description of the ruin and desolation of the family, Mr Malcolm ill with fever and gored by a bull, for once taken unawares and with his gun out of reach for a moment. As late as 1904 Mrs Malcolm seems to have been trying to get redress for her grievances; she was then a widow, living in Avondale and addressed her plea, the booklet "My Own Story" to a member of the House of Representatives. Her story, based on her old diaries and, as she says, strictly true in every particular certainly shows a few of the trials of the first settlers from the want of shipping, roads, bridges, schools and telegraph.

MY OWN STORY: AN EPISODE IN THE LIFE OF A NEW ZEALAND SETTLER OF 50 YEARS BACK

Emilie Monson Malcolm

1904

PREFACE.

(MY OWN STORY.)

"To him that hath shall be given; from that hath not shall be taken away even that which be hath."

The following narrative, strictly true in every particular, sets forth how the imbecile and incompetent officials who held office under the Provincial Government some fifty years ago, used the powers vested in them to make or mar the future of *bona fide* settlers, which resulted in two broken lives.

The actors in this drama of real life have all but myself passed away. I must beg my readers to acquit me of egotism or any desire to pose as a heroine or a martyr. Not being blessed with literary merit, all imperfections will be overlooked, as "My Own Story" is compiled from an old diary, not originally intended for publication.

For the authenticity of "My Own Story," there may still be found in the archives of the province the full correspondence. The result, partly owing to want of political influence, and partly to the then bankrupt state of the provincial exchequer, I need hardly tell my readers, ended in failure.

The only individual who was deeply concerned was the surveyor, who, at my husband's constant solicitation, was sent to cut a few lines, the only survey made. He, in his desire to serve us at the time of sale, as a forlorn hope, *posted a Gazette*, which we received a month after the calamity; but not the slightest notice from the authorities in office. We always felt a keen sense of gratitude for his desire to serve us.

A tribute to the memory of him who reigned for fifty years lord of my bosom's love, whose many virtues endeared him to those who best knew him, and whose sense of failure preyed heavily on a sensitive and refined nature, embittering the later years of a virtuous life.

"Adieu, adieu, my Native Land;
My Native Land, good night."

Full story at

www.enzb.auckland.ac.nz/document/?wid=3323&page=0&action=null

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