

## LETTERS TO IRELAND

### Introduction

We are delighted to have obtained copies of some 15 letters or fragments of letters written by Dorothea Hamilton to her family in Ireland between 1878 and 1882. There is also a copy of a letter from Sarah Jane Hamilton to her uncle John Rainey written in 1878. Sarah Jane later married Alexander Burns who was clearly a friend of all in the family including Sam Hamilton. Dorothea also wrote regularly to Alex.

These copies were obtained by Philip Watt and his wife, Taita, when they visited England and Ireland last year. Philip is a great, grandson of Alexander and Sarah Jane Burns and he obtained the copies from another Hamilton/Burns descendent, Donald Wright, during his visit.

It is interesting to consider the potential chain of custody of the letters since they were written about 130 years ago. They would have been in the hands of the original recipients Sarah Hamilton, Sarah Jane Hamilton (later Burns) Alexander Burns and John Rainey. John Rainey died in 1909 and Sarah Jane in 1915. Custody passed to Alexander Burns who lived until 1943. The Burns house was then lived in by Jimmy Burns and the letters were there until he died in 1977.

Edith Wright (nee Kirby) obtained the letters when the house was sold and she retained them until her death. They then passed to her children and in particular Donald Wright. Donald allowed Philip to photograph the letters and from these he has meticulously transcribed them. This was not an easy task because of the unfamiliar handwriting, Irish turn of phrase, and often strange people and place names. It involved a great deal of Philip's valuable time.

We are very grateful that the family saw the value of the letters over a number of generations so that they were retained and not thrown out as is very often the case. Also, we are very grateful that Donald has been prepared to share the letters with the rest of the family and more broadly. We thank Donald and Philip most sincerely. They have both helped significantly by providing great value in constructing the life of Dorothea in New Zealand and also shedding light on the relationships in the Irish Hamilton family which otherwise would have remained the subject of continuing speculation.

For convenience we have arranged and numbered the letters chronologically. They have been loaded in three separate time periods:

<b>1878</b>	<b>1879</b>	<b>1880/82</b>
1.1878 July from Plymouth	4.1879 March to John Rainey	10.1880 July to Sarah Jane
2.1878 Sarah Jane to John Rainey	5.1879 March to Alex Burns	11.1880 November to Sarah Jane
3.1878 October to John Rainey	6.1879 July to Sarah Jane	12.1881 June to Alex Burns
	7.1879 to Sarah Jane	13.1881 July to Sarah Jane
	8.1879 to John Rainey	14.1881/2 to John Rainey
	9.1879 October to John Rainey	15.1882 July to Sarah Hamilton
		16. 1882 October to Sarah Jane