

Deposited with Friends Meeting Records, in the University Archives, by Devon Historical Society, for the Wells family, 1992
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WILLIAM L. WELLS

JOURNALS AND CORRESPONDENCE

1884 - 1893, 1910

William Levitt Wells (1853-1918), and his wife Elizabeth (Bessie) Lucy Lidbetter (1852-1925), both Friends (Quakers), sailed for Tasmania in 1884 on the SS. Bonnington with their children, Edith (1879-1917), Frank (1880-1957), Arnold (1882-1938) and baby Mary (born 17 Sept. 1883). Two more children were born in Tasmania, Martin (1885-1965) and Hugh (1888-1922). W.L. Wells was the son of William Wells, draper and tailor of Kettering and his wife Mary (formerly Levitt) both members of the Society of Friends (Quakers). Bessie Lidbetter was the daughter of Martin Lidbetter headmaster of the Friends School, Wigton, Cumberland, where she also had been a teacher. The Wells family were accompanied by two Friends (ie Quakers), Margaret Elizabeth (Maggie) Greer (1854-1901) and Mary Ellen (Minnie) Greer (1859-1939), daughters of Thomas Jackson and Eliza Greer of Belfast. Maggie Greer married William Lewis May in 1887 and Minnie married Richard P. Furnage in 1888.

On arrival in Hobart the family were welcomed by the Mather family, also Friends and relatives by marriage (J.Francis Mather had married Margaret Ann Lidbetter in 1874). William Wells worked in Mather's store for a time. In February 1886 Wells was appointed manager of the Don branch store of the Don Trading Company by John Henry, the owner, and about 1888 he took over the store, which became William Wells & Co. Wells moved to Latrobe in 1893.

William Wells wrote a journal in little duplicate books to send a copy back to their families in England (possibly both copies were originally sent - one to the Lidbetter family and one to the Wells family), together with letters from Bessie and himself, so his writing is more descriptive and readable than many diaries. Bessie wrote in her first letter to her family on the voyage that she intended to keep a "log" to be sent round the family, after Father and Mother to Robert and then Tom and Aunts Anne and Fanny, but she found that the "log will fall to William's care" as she had little time but would keep a letter in hand. The "log" or journal for 1884, illustrated by sketches, describe the voyage giving an amusing account of life at sea with little children, their arrival in Hobart, the Mather family and visits to other Friends, including the Shoobridges at Bushy Park and the Cottons at Kelvedon, Swansea. After a gap the journal resumes from March 1886 to December 1888 describing, with sketches the family's life on the Don, including excursions "up the tram", observations of natural history etc.

Letters fill in some of the gaps in the journal and continue the story to 1893. These are mainly Bessie's letters addressed to her parents (but intended for circulation amongst the family), but there are also some letters to a brother and sister in law and to William's father. Owing to the Quaker habit of treating relatives by marriage as close kin and addressing in-laws as "father", "brother", "sister" etc. it is not always clear which family was addressed.

The journals have been published as *Immense Enjoyment, the illustrated journals and letters of William L Wells 1884-1888, the life of an early Quaker family in Tasmania* edited by Faye Gardam and published by the Devon

Historical Society (1987). This includes a complete transcript of the journals, including illustrations, and relevant parts of the letters to supplement or fill gaps in the diaries, together with notes about the family and some family photographs taken by Wells. A copy is held in the Quaker Collection in the University Library (call number: Cent.Quaker DU 194.3, .W45, A3 1987).

JOURNALS

DX27/
1-7

Diaries of William Wells 1884, 1886-1888

Diaries, illustrated with sketches, written in duplicate copy books, using a lead point on thin copying paper with a blue "carbon" pad which printed both on the back of the copying paper to darken the faint impression made by the lead point as well as on to the slightly thicker copy paper pages which were perforated to tear out (the copy being darker and clearer writing than the "top"). In the last volume, however, the top flimsy pages were removed to send overseas (possibly now written with a pen) and the copy made with a blacker "carbon" was retained.

1	Voyage to Australia	30 Apr.1884 - 30 May 1884
2	Voyage, arrival in Hobart Also visit to Bushy Park	31 May 1884 - 6 July 1884 7 Oct. 1884
3	Bushy Park cont., Kelvedon visit Also River Don	[8] Oct. 1884 - 12 Nov.1884 14 Mar.1886
4	Don store	14 Mar.1886 - 6 June 1886
5	Don store	6 June 1886 - 31 Oct. 1886
6	Don store (volume partly unused)	31 Oct. 1886 - 9 Feb. 1887
7	Don store	11 Feb 1887 - 30 Dec. 1888

(7 duplicate copy books (copy removed), 6 octavo booklets, 1 quarto vol.)

LETTERS

8-44

Elizabeth Lucy (Bessie) Wells to father, Martin Lidbetter, and mother 1884 - 1886

Bessie's letters to her parents were intended for all her family, as she says in her first letter on the voyage (6 May 1884) which was addressed to Father, Mother, Robert & Sophie, Tom & Lizzie, Willie, Harry & Mary. Her first letter was written from Greenhithe before sailing and describes their boarding, seen off by the Wells father, Prissie, Uncles James Wells, Henry & Louie and her two children, Mabel and Arthur. Her letters supplement the journal of the voyage and describe their lives on the voyage, in Hobart and later at the Don River. There are references to the children's schooling, their hopes for a Friends School and eventual arrival of Samuel Clemes and family and the start of the School and the attendance of Edith and Frank, although the expense was almost too much but Edith gained a scholarship. There are references to visits from other Friends and occasionally relatives, visits to Melbourne, etc. A letter of 13.12.1891 was written on Wells Store printed letter-head.

8-12	1884	voyage
13-18	1885 - Jan. 1886	Hobart
19-25	1886, Feb.-Aug.	Don River store (inc. incomplete letter from Melbourne with postscript from Don 8 June 1886 - Arnold's eye)
26-44	1887-1893	Don River (inc. 2 undated letters c 1891- Edith got scholarship, c 1892 wedding of Walter Lean at Table Cape, Minnie Furmage and 2 children, Willie going to Latrobe daily, Frank possibly not returning to Friends School after Christmas as fees £50 now he had turned twelve)

(37 letters)

DX27/
45-46

William Wells to Father 25 Sept. 1885, 8 Jan. 1888

Hobart: Mather family, job prospects, Thomas Lidbetter there - reminds them of Martin Lidbetter, children and new "young Tasmanian" Martin (1885); Don: birth of Hugh (1888).

(2 lttrs)

47-52

William and Bessie Wells to Thomas & Lizzie 1885 - 1888

William to sister and brother in law, with notes and one letter enclosed from Bessie: Baby 12 weeks old, Frank and Edith attending Miss Johnson's school, wishes Edith could go to Ackworth school with Fanny, Father & Prissie (Sept. 1885); Hobart house with sketch of verandah railings and "frieze" made by W.L.W., E.O.Cotton, Mr Henry's business offer, Thomas Lidbetter and son staying after birth of another son for T.L. (18.10.85); family life; birth of fourth son Hugh, business (24.1.88); Miss Greer to be married (5.9.88).

(6 letters)

53

William L. Wells to "Sister" 17 July 1910

Grandson, Frank and Isabel's child, William Walker Wells, little Francie, Arnold, Ella.

(1 letter)