



May's Diary 1887

The thoughts of
Mary Emily May Spencer
..... in her own words



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..... in her own words

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May's 1887 Diary

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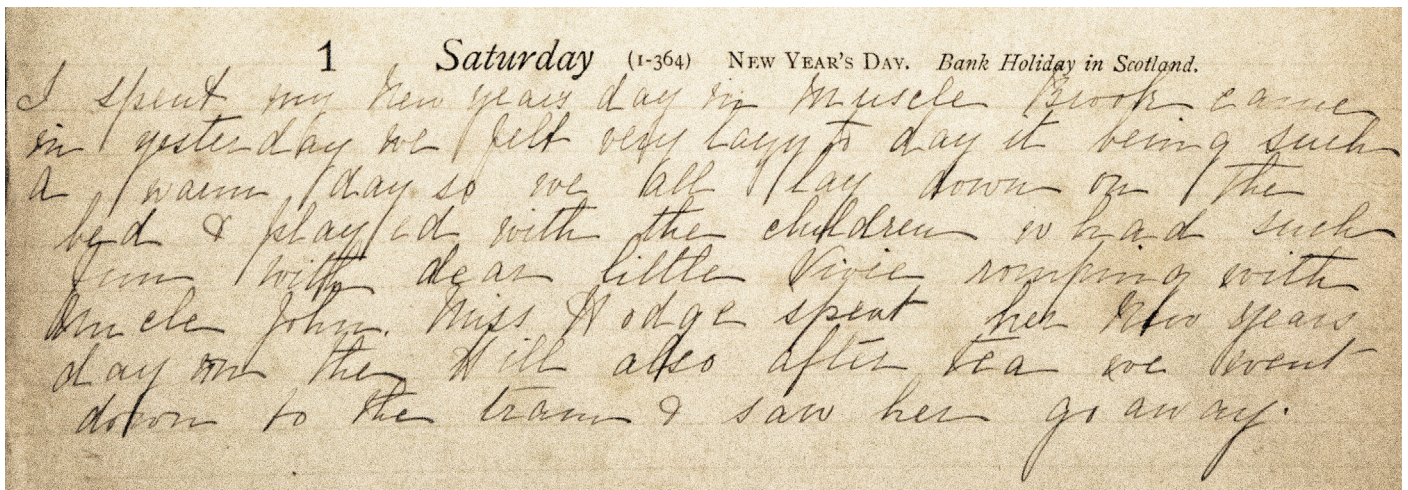
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Introduction to May Spencer's 1887 Diary

That May Spencer's 1887 diary has survived the 130 years since it was written is a minor miracle. What is more impressive is that May kept her diary writing going so well throughout the year, until she finally stopped in mid December. In all, she wrote almost 40,000 words with entries on about 300 days!

May was only 14 years old when she started the diary. She had a much more sophisticated writing style than most 14 or 15 year olds of today. May was constantly talking about writing, sending and receiving letters to a whole host of friends and family. Her letter writing experience is no doubt a key factor in the quality and readability of her entries. You could almost say her diary was her daily letter to herself.

May wrote about her family, friends and the daily life in the household and the wider community. It gives an interesting view of 1880's county life from the perspective of a young woman.



Detail from the first entry in the diary

There are some recurring themes.

- May struggled with her music lessons, did not practice enough and dreaded attending the lessons themselves.
- Throughout the year her father Thomas Spencer Jnr was in a melancholy state of mind. May never quite seemed to be given the full reason but it appeared to be financial.
- There was a never-ending cycle of housework and May is expected to be a significant participant. She was up at 5.30 am doing housework before she went to school. In general, May did not grumble but as a typical teenager wrote "Work and I are not on the best of terms at any times"
- Church, Sunday School, Church Choir and Choir practice and preparation for her Confirmation are all key parts of her week. May had a very fatalistic religion. God's will be done. The death of three of her siblings in childhood and of her mother at age 35, were no doubt contributing factors to this. Later in the year however, she commented several times that she was not sure attending church does anything for her soul.

May was obviously a very intelligent young woman, despite the Phrenologists prognosis. She was articulate, quick witted and sometimes sarcastic. More than once her words got her into trouble. Throughout the diary there are some fantastic quotes that show May's wit in full flight. The unanimous favourite of the transcription team is:

"It is enough to turn a pig away from potatoes to see the snobs of Muscle Brook. They think it would stifle them to breathe the (same) air as the poorer class. There is a shooting match today. Of course only for the upperten, refusing to let the lower class join. They want taking up for cruelty to dumb animals – shooting the poor little pigeons."

A selection of May's Classic Quotes follows the transcript.

The only known photo of May is from this school photo from Lower Rouchel School 1886. Many of the people mentioned in the diary are in the photo, including all of her siblings, apart from Vivie, and their much mentioned school teacher Grace McGregor, who lived at Rouchel Vale.



*Back Row: Miss G. McGregor (teacher), Andy Smith, Fred Spencer, Andrew Bridge, Don Bridge, Arthur Spencer, Lizzie Kennedy, May Spencer, Georgina Kennedy.
Front Row: Alfred Spencer, Ellen Bridge, Margaret Bridge, Maggie Kennedy, Ida Spencer, Elsie Spencer, Robina Kennedy, John K. Kennedy (visitor).*

Who was May?

Mary Emily (May) Spencer was born on 10th July 1872. She was the second child and eldest daughter of Thomas Spencer Jnr. and Rebecca Hooper. Her birth certificate says she was born in Scone NSW.

She probably spent about four years, from 1875 to 1879, living on the family property Cuttabunda, about 90 kms north of Brewarrina. Her brother Alfred Bokhara Spencer (Alfie in the diary) and Elizabeth (Elsie in the diary) were born at Cuttabunda in 1876 and 1878 respectively. We know from one of her mother's letters that, in November 1879, May travelled back to Muscle Brook with her mother and siblings. From early 1880 she was living at Rouchel Vale, as her grandparents had retired from the farm and moved into town.

May's grandparents Thomas Snr. and Mary Stark were pioneer settlers at the Rouchel in the 1840's. In 1855 Thomas Snr. bought the initial 140 acres that surrounded the Rouchel Vale homestead at auction, and the family lived there for the next 33 years. In 1855 and 1856 the Gardner, Kennedy and Cameron families also bought land at the Rouchel. Over 30 years later when May wrote her diary these families were still close neighbours and friends.

May kept up a friendship by letter with the Saunders children, who were neighbours at Cuttabunda. In February, May received a letter from Edie Saunders, who she has not seen in seven years.

May's mother, Rebecca, wrote in 1882 "May is the only one (of her children) that grows well. She is quite to my satisfaction in ability as well as stature."

In 1885 Rebecca wrote again. "May is my right hand. I have everything to be thankful for in her at present. I may say she does everything in the house except the washing and ironing and baking for although my baby is so young I am drawing quite near my confinement again and are more helpless than ever before."

She went on in the same letter to say "tell Edie she must excuse May writing so irregularly to her. It is not her fault, she is very fond of letter writing when she can make the time but that is not often."

Rebecca died on 25th May 1885 as a result of complications following the birth of twins. The twins also died shortly after.

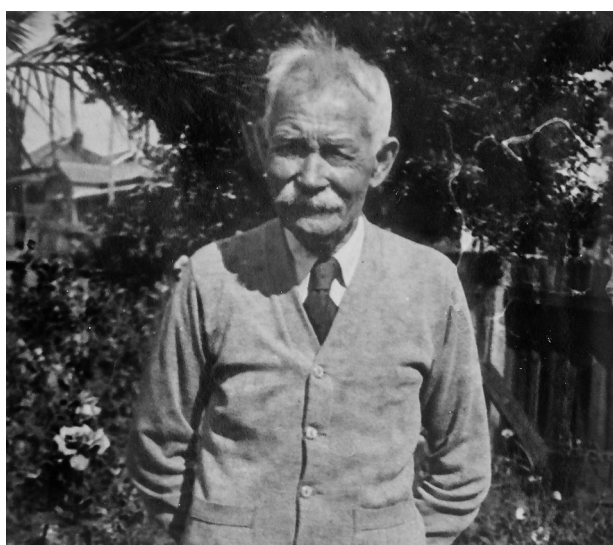
In August 1886, only four months before May began her diary, her father Thomas, married a widow, Mary Elizabeth Pritchard (nee Hayne). Mary had a son Thomas (Tommie in the diary) from her first marriage. The blended family of eight children forms the basis of the family setting of the diary.

Thomas and Mary had three additional children Gladys Mildred in 1889, Eugenie Millicent in 1890 and Reginald in 1891. Reginald died in his first year.

Notes on the Transcription:

The approach taken by the transcription team has been to keep the transcript as close to the original manuscript as possible, in both sense and spirit. Some spelling mistakes have been corrected where they do not impact on the essence of the story. Others like “sinse” (for since) and “altho” (for although) have been left unchanged throughout. May broke many words like “to day” and “every one”. These have been left as they were written. May always referred to Muswellbrook as Muscle Brook, even though the modern spelling was in common use in her time. Muscle Brook has been used in the transcript and generally in the notes. There are about half a dozen words that could not be deciphered. Mostly these have been omitted or replaced with an intelligent guess.

The biggest editorial license has been taken with punctuation. This is due to the almost total lack of punctuation in the manuscript. In particular, May wrote as a stream of consciousness and used the word “but” as a conjunction between often totally separate ideas. To make the diary easier to read, some of the “buts” have been removed and the parts separated into their own sentences. May almost never added an apostrophe to indicate a possessive, these have been added.



May's brother, Arthur Hooper Spencer (Artie) who lived in Muscle Brook most of his life and preserved his sisters diary.

May's diary is currently in the possession of Judith Conaghan. It was most likely kept by May's brother Arthur Hooper Spencer (Artie in the diary). It then passed to Arthur's daughters Iris and Sylvia. Judith who is the daughter of Arthur's stepdaughter Molly, acted as executor of Sylvia's estate in 1997 and retained some of the family possessions. She kindly made the diary available to Maureen Seve, who is the granddaughter of Vivienne Lauretta Spencer (May's youngest sister Vivie in the diary.)

A chance remark by Helen Ellis from Muswellbrook Historical Society (not a Spencer relative) to Maureen Seve brought May's Diary to Maureen's attention. Helen remembered Maureen's father, Maxwell Spencer Crabb borrowing the Diary to read over 50 years ago. Maureen tracked the Diary down to its current holder.

The Transcription Team:

The transcription of May's diary has been a collaborative effort. The majority of the transcription of the manuscript was done by Maureen Seve and Sandy Gibbney. Initial photography of the manuscript and a small amount of the transcription was done by Ian Spencer. Refinement and clarification of the transcription and notes was done by Sandy Gibbney and Ian Spencer. The final edit of the transcription was done by Sandy Gibbney and Ian Spencer who also did the document layout.

Invaluable assistance in development of the notes and maps came from Geoff Harrison, Rouchel historian extraordinaire and author of “The Rouchel – A History”. After several months of trying to work out exactly who May's friend Bella (McIntyre) was, Geoff finally put us out of our misery. Geoff proof read May's Diary and provided comments, corrections, suggestions and additional material. More than anything he helped us understand the spatial context of The Rouchel, the properties and the families.

Also thanks go to Clarrie Hayne who allowed access to his very comprehensive Hayne Family tree on ancestry.com.au. Without access to this tree we would never have worked out the intricacies of the extended Hayne family.

During the process of transcribing her words, Maureen, Sandy and Ian have all come to like May as a person and treasure her wit and intelligence. We hope you enjoy May's musings as much as we have.

January

1st January Saturday

I spent my New Years day in Muscle Brook. Came in yesterday. We felt very lazy to day it being such a warm day so we all lay down on the bed and played with the children, I had such fun with dear little Vivie¹ romping with Uncle John². Miss Hodge³ spent her New Years day on the Hill also. After tea we went down to the train and saw her go away.

2nd January Sunday

I must say I commenced the year good, going to church three times to day. I hope I shall continue it so. It has been very warm to day and very like rain this evening.

3rd January Monday

I went up on the Hill⁴ this morning with Aunt Eliza⁵

January 4-5 No entry

6th January Thursday

We were up about four o'clock this morning and Ma⁶ and Pa⁷ started to Scone. They took Lomie⁸ (or Lorrie) in with the intention of sending him to Tamworth but the Dr advice (advised) her owing to his ill state of health, he needs a cooler climate not a warmer. Bella⁹ came in the afternoon to stay with us and we passed a very pleasant evening with singing and music. She is such good company.

7th January Friday – no entry

8th January Saturday

Bella and I tried to have as much of the work done as possible, but Ma came home and caught us on the alert. They had a nice pleasant drive from Scone in the cool of the morning, but it has been a dreadful warm day. Bella took her departure shortly after their return. She is such a good kind girl at every ones request. She would be missed if she left the Rouchel.

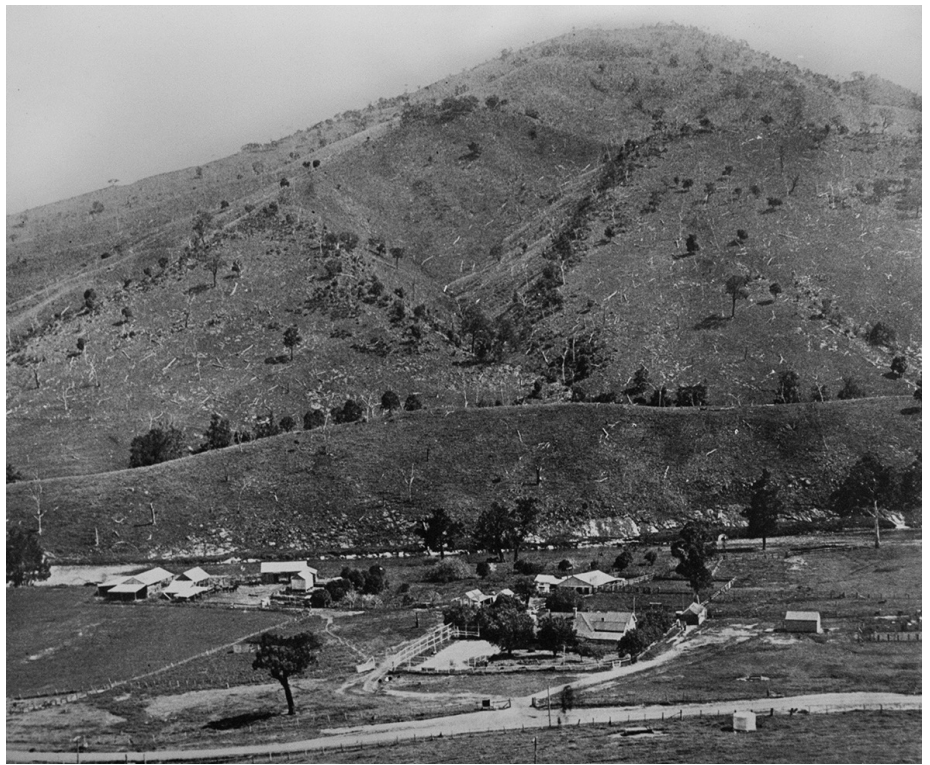
9th January Sunday

There was a service in the Church¹⁰ down here this evening and a very poor congregation. I think the singing went off a little worse than usual. Miss McGregor¹¹ arrived home from her holidays at dusk. I don't think she looked much the better of them.

10th – 12th January – no entry

13th Thursday

Pa drove into Aberdeen¹² this morning and brought Miss Prevost¹³ out. She seems a very nice person, not at all affected, as I expected to find her, coming from the city. She intends staying until after the bazaar.



The first half of May's diary is set at Rouchel Vale. The above photo of the Vale was taken in 1906. The large house in the foreground is the house May and her family lived in. None of the buildings remain today.

We intended having a game of croquet to pass the evening but business prevented Pa and Uncle Willie¹⁴ from joining us. And without them there would not be much enjoyment for us – so we postponed it.

14th January Friday.

I think I must have been called up before I was ready this morning but at all events I felt real wretched all day. It has certainly been the warmest day we have had for some time. I was not sorry when school was over and we were home out of the heat. We had a nice game of croquet after tea in which the opposite side were successful.

15th January Saturday

I arose a little earlier than usual this morning and Pa was very much surprised to see me come down (stairs?). We were not very busy to day and I think I took advantage a little. I put before me to do a small piece of work, but laziness got the better of me and I went off to sleep, but managed a game of croquet after tea in which our side won the victory. Pa seemed very anxious for some music so I played and Miss McGregor and Miss Prevost sang till bedtime.

16th January Sunday

We fully intended going to church the five of us but in the morning to our great disappointment it was raining so we contented ourselves by staying at home. It turned out a nice evening and we went for a pleasant walk to the bush.

17th January Monday

It has been rather cooler today than usual. I had arranged to go to the Creek with the (unreadable word) but I could not accomplish my assignment. Ma has been very ill today. I hope she will be better in the morning. Pa and Uncle Willie took Miss McGregor, Miss Prevost and I for a pleasant ride this evening, We all enjoyed it very much just arriving home at dusk. Miss Prevost felt very tired after on account of not being accustomed to riding.

18th January Tuesday

I think every thing has gone on in a usual manner today, nothing extraordinary arising. I wrote a long letter to Freddie this evening. I should have written to him before. Miss McGregor went down to Aunt Lillie's¹⁵ today and it blew up very windy and a heavy shower came which I should think made it rather unpleasant for her coming home in one respect but not in others. I went over to Uncle Matt's for a short time. I don't go very often considering it is so near. Tom¹⁶ slipped and hurt himself very badly on the head this afternoon. I hope it will be better tomorrow.

19th January Wednesday

It has been very warm to day but towards evening it broke over stormy. We were going to take Annette for a ride after tea but was prevented by a very heavy storm, the heaviest one I ever witnessed, and lasted for some hours. I received a letter from Edie¹⁷ and was pleased to find by its contents that poor Mrs Saunders is getting better. I would like to see them now. I was very much surprised on returning from school that Mr Crothers¹⁸ intends coming down. I don't know him but still he being a friend with them up country I feel a little interested in him.

There is a whole week with no entry

27th January Thursday

There was every appearance of rain this morning but none has fallen yet. It is rather lonely now while they are all away except Miss McGregor and Uncle Willie and they are not much company only for each other. My charges are not much trouble they are all very good. I was frightened Ruby¹⁹ might have croop (croup) last night but she is alright. I wonder when Aunt Sarah²⁰ is coming up. She doesn't seem to care about our company. She only came up once. Last time she was up Ma said she was going to bring Vivie out with her. I hope she does. It is such a long time since she was home. She will be forgetting this is her proper home which it is. Grandfather²¹ misses her so or we would have her home long ago.

28th January Friday

I got up early today and helped Miss McGregor with a little washing. I thought we were going to have some more rain but it cleared up nicely until evening when we went for a ride down to Mrs Cameron's²² by ourselves. No gentlemen with us when, as usual, we had many little mishaps. A heavy storm of wind blew but little rain fell. I

thought we were going to be lodged for the night with only Uncle Willie at home with the children. Artie²³ went over to Dalvey²⁴ and brought some peaches home. We also enjoyed the grapes very much but the rain are bruising them this year.

29th January Saturday

I tried the jam with the peaches and it turned out very well. We were expecting Ma home earlier this morning but Uncle Matt told me she would not come home until evening. I don't think the change did any of them much good. They had too many adventures with crossing the rivers going to Gundy²⁵ but never reached there. Bob Luscombe²⁶ came out with Uncle Matt²⁷ and the pair of them came over after tea and Uncle Edward²⁸ came out from the Brook²⁹ and such romping as there was but I did not join them.

30th January Sunday

I am thankful to say we spent the Sabbath a little better today. Never the less there was no less than six gentlemen here. We went for a quiet walk in the afternoon and after tea listened to Bob telling the most wilful stories that was possible.

31st January Monday

On account of Ma being away last week there was a fortnight's washing to be done. So we were up at 4 o'clock and hard at work before breakfast. Artie took Annette³⁰ down to the creek early and back before dinner. She turned too and helped us with the washing. The heat was something dreadful. I wish the weather would soon change but we are never satisfied. Bob³¹ and Uncle Edward went into Muscle Brook to day. I think the former has altered a lot in his personal appearance but very little in conduct. Will Gardiner³² was here this evening but I had not the pleasure of seeing him. I did not think twice about going to bed tonight. I felt too tired for any thing so the house was all closed early.

Notes:

- 1 Vivie is Vivienne Laurretta Spencer – Daughter of Thomas Spencer Jnr and Rebecca Hooper and much younger sister of May. Vivie was born in 1884 and so was only a toddler.
- 2 Uncle John is John Spencer, younger brother of May's father Thomas. At the time of this diary entry, John was in Muscle Brook but lived permanently at Cuttabunda north of Brewarrina.
- 3 Miss Hodge is Mary Hodge, born 1865, who married May's Uncle Edward Spencer in 1888.
- 4 The Hill refers to the home of Mays grandparents Thomas and Mary Spencer on or near Hill Street in Muscle Brook.
- 5 Aunt Eliza is Eliza Ann Spencer (nee Marsh), wife of John Spencer.
- 6 Ma is Mary Elizabeth Spencer (nee Hayne), second wife of Thomas Spencer Jnr and stepmother to May.
- 7 Pa is May's Father, Thomas Spencer jnr.
- 8 Lomie or Lorrie ~ unknown
- 9 Bella – Isabella McIntyre born 1862. Bella is the daughter of Hugh Macintyre and Helen Anne Cameron. After Hugh's death in 1864 Helen married Thomas Carter and is the Mrs Carter of the diary. Bella and the Carters lived at Oakfield which is upstream of Rouchel Vale.
- 10 "Church down here" is St Johns Anglican Church. It is located on Rouchel Vale about 1 km from the house where May lives. It was also used as the school. The church was located on land gifted by Matthew Spencer and was within the boundaries of Rouchel Vale - See map page 72
- 11 Miss McGregor is Grace McGregor born 1864. Grace lives at Rouchel Vale, is the teacher at the school and in 1891 married May's Uncle Willie (William Granville Spencer).
- 12 Aberdeen is the closest town(18km) to Rouchel Vale. Aberdeen has a railway station.
- 13 Annette E Prevost (sometimes referred to as Annette and sometimes as Miss Prevost).
- 14 Uncle William is William Granville Spencer, younger brother of May's father and later husband of Grace McGregor. See 11
- 15 Aunt Lillie is Elizabeth Frost (nee Spencer), younger sister of May's father.
- 16 Tom is Thomas Pritchard born 1880, son of May's stepmother by an earlier marriage.
- 17 Edie is Edith Mary Saunders born 1873, who was a year younger than May. Edie is the daughter of William and Eliza Saunders of Wirra Warra station. May and Edie were neighbours when Thomas and his first wife, Rebecca, lived at Cuttabunda from about 1873 to 1879.
- 18 Mr Crothers was a neighbour from the Brewarrina region and a friend of the Saunders.
- 19 The only children young enough for Croup would have been Muriel Ida Maud Stark Spencer, May's younger sister (Vivie is



May's Aunt Eliza Spencer
(nee Marsh)

away in Muscle Brook) or possibly her step brother Tom Pritchard. May says “she” is Ok next day so Ruby may be a nickname for Ida.

- 20 Aunt Sarah is Sarah Spencer, born 1856, the younger sister of May’s father.
- 21 Grandfather is Thomas Spencer Snr, born Wicklow County, Ireland in 1816.
- 22 Mrs Cameron ~ Sarah Cameron (nee Hayne), born 1854, Sister of May’s stepmother.
- 23 Artie is Arthur Hooper Spencer, younger brother of May. Artie was 13 at this time.
- 24 Dalvey, a property owned by the Kennedys, downstream on Rouchel Brook.
- 25 Gundy is a locality about 30kms north of Rouchel
- 26 Bob Luscombe ~ unknown
- 27 Uncle Matt is Matthew Spencer, born 1843, younger brother of May’s father. Matthew lived in a separate house on Rouchel Vale.
- 28 Uncle Edward is Edward Spencer, born 1862, the youngest brother of May’s father. He lives in Muscle Brook.
- 29 The Brook is the common abbreviation of Muscle Brook which is today spelled Muswellbrook. Muscle Brook formally changed its name to Muswellbrook in 1889, although the modern spelling was in common use much earlier.
- 30 Annette Prevost
- 31 Probably Bob Luscombe. See 25
- 32 Will Gardner – possibly William Irwin Gardner (born 1864), who lived at Rose Vale at the Rouchel.

February

1st February Tuesday

I was not up quite so early this morning and I rose with a bad headache but there was too much to do to muse that up. I am always complaining about something or other. To day has not been the slightest bit cooler. Annette will think this an awful hot place. There was all the ironing to go through we all did some but I am sorry to say mine was not done very well. Annette³³ arranged the music we are to have tomorrow. We were disappointed there is no consitina (concertina) to be had that would take some of the playing off our hands.



May's Grandmother (Mary) and Grandfather (Thomas Snr) Spencer probably taken just before the diary was written.

2nd February Wednesday

We were very busy all day today preparing for an evening party Ma kindly gave for the enjoyment of all the young people. I did not feel at all up to sitting all night but I managed splendidly, never feeling the least bit tired or sleepy until morning. I was never up at a party before but I tried to dance a good many. We were all enjoying ourselves immensely until about 1 o'clock. Miss Hodge took a fit of hysterics but not very bad. Still that threw a dampness on the whole affair while it lasted which was about an hour and then they all went on the same as usual. I had certainly the most dances with Albert³⁴ but he was nearest my own height and a good dancer. I think he was the prettiest figure of a gentleman, and the best lady dancer lay between Miss Prevost, Miss McGregor and Aunt Sarah.

3rd to 9th February- no entries .

7th February Monday

I was up at twenty mins to three this morning. Albert called Annette and I and told us it was later. We went into Scone with him and Uncle Willie. It was such a lovely morning but I can't say I enjoyed the ride much, as I fully intended having the pleasure of Uncle Willies company. Instead of that he rode with Annette. They were surprised to see us land in Scone. I enjoyed myself very much while in there. Mrs Hayne³⁵ is so nice and kindly. She gave us as much grapes as we could eat. I was thoroughly ashamed of myself when we were returning home (when) Uncle Willie informed me to my great astonishment I had given Maud (horse) a sore back. I felt that vexed I did not know what to do.

8th February Tuesday

I don't know I am sure what Annette thought of Uncle John and Uncle Matt teasing her, as well as me, about being stiff. I don't feel half so bad today. I was very much surprised, indeed, at a scrap of news I heard today relating to Aunt Eliza. I don't wonder she is tired of being down here. I hope she will enjoy her visit to the Rouchel more than she has hitherto done. We had a pleasant game of Croquet after tea in which Auntie and Uncle John accompanied us. We played until dark. All their children are far more affectionate to us than any other cousins – I suppose being away so long³⁶.

9th February Wednesday

I thought bed was far nicer than washing this morning and never woke until Ma called me. We were finished nice and early. Many hands make light work. I think I gave Annette rough riding going to Scone, she has not asked for one sinse. Ma went into Muscle Brook to fetch dear little Vivie home. I will be so pleased to have her home for a while. It is easily 12 months³⁷ sinse she was home. I hope Grandfather does not fret after her much. Annette

received a letter telling her she was welcome to stay longer. I am so pleased I will not have to go so soon. I would like to stay and see Uncle Willie and Aunt Eliza off first but I am afraid I will be going two or three days before them.

10th February Thursday

There was really only Ma away to day but we seemed quite lonesome without her, the head of the house is always missed more than the others. We finished our part of the ironing splendidly, although I felt a little tired afterwards. I pitied poor Annette with the tooth ache all day. We expected Ma home early in the afternoon but she did not come until dark and then not very early. I was very pleased to have Vivie home but still sorry that they should talk so to her about fetching her. I could see there was something wrong as soon as she came. I don't know what ever they act so towards us for.

11th February Friday

I did nothing much to day only feast on the grapes Miss McGregor so kindly sent us up. I am thoroughly ashamed of myself for being such a glutton. Pa was too excited this morning to think of anything but FitzGerald³⁸. I do hope he goes in for Pa's sake. I don't understand any thing about it myself. I am so thankful Maud's back is all right again and fit to ride. I hope I shall never do it again. I had the pleasure of seeing Mr Crother's photo to day but I ought to be ashamed to mention his name after the opinion he expressed. He was the first one I ever heard of giving me a bad name but I deserved it.

12th February Saturday

Uncle Willie and Miss McGregor started for Muscle Brook the first thing this morning. He was annoyed because I did not have his clothes ready and I know I ought to attend to him better than I do. I shall not have him long now. I fully expected Uncle John's family over to day but they altered their minds. The boys³⁹ spend a good deal of their time over here. I think they all such nice children, all of them.

13th February Sunday

Unfortunately the rivers were too high for Mr James⁴⁰ to attend Service and Annette was once more disappointed. We spent a very quiet Sunday not going for a walk even. I had a nice large family to wait for at tea. Just at dark rained heavily but not for long.

14th February Monday

I thought the rivers would be too high for Mr. FitzGerald to cross but they are down and he was able to ride through them in the evening. Pa was all excitement to day. Willie Gardener was here for dinner. I don't know whether he or Annette have lost their hearts but they act very friendly towards each other but I think she likes doing a mask⁴¹ with any young man. Aunt Eliza came over this evening for a short time. There is such a crowd of children when all ours and Aunties get together. Pa went up to the meeting to night and there was only us four stayed up till he came home, so to pass the time we had a game of cribbage. I think I shall soon be as great a card player as anyone.

15th February Tuesday

Once again we were disappointed with the bazaar. It was nice and fine overhead but the rivers were uncrossable. Ma and Annette were put out a little but I did not care. I don't like going amongst strangers and they are all strangers to me over there. Something strange we should have the same visitor to day as we had yesterday. He was so sorry business detained him from accompanying us for a ride after dinner. We went as far as Mrs Carter's⁴² and all enjoyed ourselves very much. I think they all ways make you so welcome when ever you go there. I met Miss Miller and Mr Miller⁴³ there. I think she has such a nice face, I would like to become better acquainted with her.

16th February Wednesday

It was raining heavily this morning when I woke I think we shall have a big flood before long. Pa has been laid up with a very bad cold and now I have the same complaint. Ma would not let me touch the washing for fear I should go out and get my feet damp. Freddie⁴⁴ came out to day with a letter to say poor Grandfather has been very ill again. I am afraid he will not last long. They say he misses Vivie greatly. I wish she was back again if she would be any company for him, although we all like to have her so. Uncle Willie went in to stay awhile with him. It is not nice for all his sons to be going away and leaving him in that state.

17th February Thursday

There was great excitement caused for a while over the bazaar to day. Uncle Matt heard the news and then he came tormenting us over whose tickets won and I really thought by what he said we were the fortunate ones, but to our great disappointment, not one of our tickets won a thing. We must only wish for better luck next time, but the bazaar altogether was a complete failure. I think one stall was sacrificed. The rain has been continuing all day. I wished it would come fine now, we cannot go for a ride or even play croquet. I would like to take Auntie⁴⁵ about as much as I could, she will not be staying for long.

18th February Friday

To day is all excitement for the gents. Its polling day and we had to do without Pa's company all day – he was too excited to leave. Will and George⁴⁶ accompanied them down and stayed all night. I am sure I don't know what attraction Will has for coming, unless its Annette. It is very amusing to watch them. I was so vexed to night to think I had gone against Pa's request but I don't like playing before strangers because I can't play. He was very much put out but I think an interesting game of cribbage made him forget it. I as usual was the cause of a little merriment. Ma went nearly into hysterics. We went to bed like larrikins.

19th February Saturday

Uncle Willie went in to see poor Grandfather⁴⁷ to day. He says he is sinking fast. God is calling him home to his eternal home. I intended going to New Castle⁴⁸ but I could not think of going now. I hope he does not miss Vivie very much but he wouldn't know her now, poor old man. Pa has not been into see him lately. He is not very well able to go about this last week with a very bad cold.

20th February Sunday

We all went to Church to day, there was no less than nine horsemen rode away from here and nearly all stayed for dinner. I was very much surprised at Auntie's conduct after tea but I suppose there was no wrong done.

21st February Monday

According to the arrangements I had made, I should be on my way to New Castle with Annette but could not possibly go and leave poor Grandfather in the state he is now lying, so instead I went in to see him. He knew neither Pa nor I and he seemed so upset because he did not but after a while he seemed to recognize me and he was so delighted to see me. Grandma⁴⁹ looks very bad indeed. They say in there that it is fretting after Vivie but it is not that. It is the worry of and sitting up. She knows she can have Vivie home soon. I could not help feeling how coolly they all treat Pa. I never saw as much before.

22nd February Tuesday

Disappointed as usual. We rose with the intention of leaving Muscle Brook by the early train but unfortunately there was none so we had to wait till the ten o'clock. I got in with two nuns but they did not convert me although they were reading books of the Holy Virgin. Mrs Gardner⁵⁰ came up in the same train and Pa drove her out. She looks very much better. I think it is only despondency is the matter with her. I was very thankful I did not have to open the gates when I came home. I found Ma completely knocked up and I was vexed to think she had done so much unnecessary work herself.

23rd February Wednesday

To day we have been busy jam making all day and it has been very warm over the fire. I cannot make Ma out at all. She never seems to be in good health and I try and save her all the work I possibly can. Aunt Eliza thought this would be her last day on the Rouchel so her and I went down to Mrs Kennedy's⁵¹. We enjoyed our ride fairly. Mary was away. She is the nicest of the bunch, the rest are such giddy senseless girls. They took us up to see the new house. I fancy they are very proud of it. After tea we managed to get Uncle Willie into playing a game of Crib. I never saw him play before.

24th February Thursday

I escaped from one washing day this week. Our family has grown so large that we are obliged to wash twice. Auntie and I tried to keep Ma from doing as much as we could. I was very sorry to see her fretting so but it must

be very disappointing to have every thing prepared to start on a certain day and then be disappointed. That her mother is very ill makes her feel it worse. The weather did not look very promising this afternoon but it cleared all off again. I hope it keeps fine now until they are safely landed at home

25th February Friday

I did not feel in much humour for work to day. I don't think I seem to care for any thing only talking of taking a trip up country. It would make anyone laugh to hear me. I don't suppose I shall ever have that treat unless we go to live out there but I do really set my heart on a visit. Auntie laughs at the thought of us ever living there⁵². I don't think down country agrees with her, she looks ever so much worse sinse she came down but the children all look nicely now.

26th February Saturday

It was all preparations to day for Uncle John's family leaving. I felt sorry at them going. I think partings are the hardest to bear in this world. All the children did not like leaving a little. Mr. James came over this evening. He looks very bad but still nice and jolly although he was disappointed at not seeing Annette.

27th February Sunday

Mr James pronounced our Sunday School open to day. I don't think there will be many attendance at it. The sermon was rather short but a very nice one. We were just calculating our number and we are just a dozen. Less than we were last Sunday.

28th February Monday

We will be alone after to day. Uncle Willie and Edward are starting up country⁵³. I hope they will have a pleasant journey up. Ma went down to Mrs Cameron's to day to get some figs and Uncle Willie and I were all alone until dinner time. I think he has quite forgiven me for past offenses. He has been very kind to me and I think it is very wrong of me to vex him in any way. I had a great mishap to day and broke one of Ma's favorite butter basins. I would not have it happen for any thing. I know she must have been grieved although she said nothing.

Notes:

- 33 *Annette Prevost. See 13.*
- 34 *Possibly Albert Edward Spencer, born 1877, son of John and Eliza Spencer. He was only 10 at the time but would have been at the party. Might also have been Albert Edward Smith born 1877.*
- 35 *Mrs Hayne ~ Probably Sarah Elizabeth Hayne, the mother of May's stepmother. She was also the mother of Uncle George and also Mrs Alex Cameron, who are both mentioned in the diary.*
- 36 *John and Eliza Spencer had six children at the time of this visit. Henry John Maxwell (born 1875), Albert Edward (born 1877), Ada Rebekah Adelia (1879), Celia Mabel (born 1881), Mary Amelia Violet (born 1883) and Absalom Earl Granville (born 1885). Up until 1882 they had lived at Rouchel Vale but had moved up to Cuttabunda. It is quite likely this was their first visit back to the Rouchel.*
- 37 *It appears that following the death of May's mother (Rebecca), in May 1885, Vivie (Vivienne Laurretta Spencer-born 1885) has been living with her grandparents, Thomas and Mary Spencer Snr, in Muscle Brook.*
- 38 *Mr. Robert George Dundas Fitzgerald J.P. Fitzgerald was nominated by May's father, Thomas Spencer, to be a candidate for election to the parliament of NSW. See note below*
- 39 *Refers to Mays cousins Henry and Albert Spencer. See note 34.*
- 40 *The Anglican Minster who preached at St John's Rouchel.*
- 41 *"Mask" in the sense of masquerade. Presumably Annette liked playing with the local boy's affections.*
- 42 *Mary Ann Carter (nee Cameron) lived at Oakleigh, which adjoined Rouchel Vale. Mary Ann Carter had previously been married to Hugh McIntyre. She was the mother of Bella McIntyre. She was also the sister of Alex Cameron and Mrs Gardner both of whom are mentioned.*
- 43 *Miss Miller and Mr Miller. There were two Miller families at Rouchel. It is not clear which Millers these are*
- 44 *Frederick Thomas Spencer, born 1870. Freddie is May's older brother.*
- 45 *I would like to take Aunty about as much as I could, she will not be staying for long. Refers to Eliza Spencer. See note 34*
- 46 *William Irwin Gardner, born 1864 and Andrew George Gardner, born 1854, from Rose Vale - They were next door neighbours.*

- 47 *Thomas Spencer Snr, born 1816, at Arklow, County Wicklow, Ireland. Thomas arrived in Australia in 1841 and settled at Rouchel. He acquired the land, which he called Rouchel Vale, in 1855. Thomas retired from farming at Rouchel Vale about 1880 and moved into Muscle Brook.*
- 48 *May spells Newcastle as two words in some places in the diary and as one word in others.*
- 49 *Mary Spencer Snr. (nee Stark), wife of Thomas Snr.*
- 50 *Mrs Helen Gardner (nee Cameron) from Rose Vale*
- 51 *Mrs Georgina Kennedy of Rock Hill (Georgina was the sister of Alex Cameron, Mrs Carter and Mrs Gardner.)*
- 52 *It's an interesting comment from Aunt Eliza, as in fact May lived "up country" at Cuttabunda (where Eliza lived) from about 1876 to 1879. Obviously Eliza did not think May's family would cope there now.*
- 53 *In the previous year May's Uncles William and Edward had acquired Homestead Leases for two properties of just over 10,000 acres each adjacent to Cuttabunda. This comment suggests that they were going up to Cuttabunda and the two new properties. This is the only documented suggestion that Edward ever visited the family properties "up country".*

Pa Plays Politics!

In February 1887 Thomas became involved in state politics, by nominating local Muswellbrook lawyer and fellow JP, Robert FitzGerald to stand for the NSW House of Representatives seat of Upper Hunter.



Robert FitzGerald
© State of New South Wales
through the Parliament of New South
Wales

Under the parliamentary system at the time, the seat had four sitting members.

Fitzgerald won one of the seats and went on to have a very long parliamentary career. First as one of the lower house members for Upper Hunter, then as the sole representative for the seat of Robertson. He later served for more than 30 years as a member of the NSW upper house.

William Spencer Dowell (son of Stephen Dowell and Mary Spencer and mentioned in the diary) worked for Robert Fitzgerald in his legal office in Muswellbrook in later years.

The following is an extract from the Maitland Mercury of 15th February 1887

Electorate of the Upper Hunter

THE NOMINATION (from our own Reporter.)

On Friday last at noon. In front of the Court House, Scone, the nomination in connection with the electorate of the Upper Hunter took place. There was a very large attendance but the crowd was very orderly, though the proceedings were enlivened by a number of interjections. Mr. J. J. Dodd was the Returning Officer. He commenced proceedings by reading the writ authorising the election, and his advertisement calling the meeting. They were called upon to elect two members, and he asked for each to a fair and impartial hearing.

Mr. THOMAS SPENCER nominated Mr. Robert George Dundas FitzGerald as a fit and proper person to represent the electorate in Parliament .

Mr. ROBERT BAKER seconded the nomination

(Source of quote from Maitland Mercury <http://trove.nla.gov.au>)

March

1st March Tuesday

It is nice and fine this morning but it has been a dreadful stormy night, a very poor prospect for the men, their journey only being commenced but they might have a fine trip up yet. I wanted Alfie⁵² to commence his music again. He has had a long holiday with his fingers being sore and the Annette here. I did not care about teaching him but he is too lazy. He says one in the family is enough to know how to play. Pa intended going to Muscle Brook today but he thought it was going to rain, I don't. He has a very settled mind somehow but I hope the winter will let us know what will be our home, here or elsewhere.



Ma - Mary Spencer (nee Hayne) May's stepmother - This photo was taken in August 1886

2nd March Wednesday

Ma, Vivie and I were all to ourselves today. Pa went to town and we certainly spent a very busy day. Ma always works till she almost drops. I am more lenient with myself than she is with herself. I cannot make her out at all. Pa promised to be home the same night. At the same time I did not expect him but I could not make Ma believe the same. She got that worried, and worked herself up to that state that she would not even go to bed but sat up all night by herself. I hope for the future she will either go with him or not expect him home.

3rd March Thursday

I cannot find much to write about. The days have been really all the same routines. There was a little house hold excitement caused for a while by Vivie coming into my room and I in my careless manner left the bottle of "Rough on Corns"⁵³ on the bed and she childlike came in and put it in her mouth. She evidently got the taste of it because she said to Ma it was nasty and that gave her a great start because she did not know how much she had taken, but I don't think there was any to hurt. She does not seem any the worse. Pa arrived home to my great relief. It was only what I thought detained him. Poor Grandfather takes such bad turns, he did not like leaving him. Pa says he is afraid he will get the upper hand of the women yet⁵⁴.

4th March Friday

I wrote a note up to Georgie⁵⁵ this morning in return for a kind invitation to an evening party she so hurriedly gave. But considering the state poor Grandfather is in I did not think it would show either much love or respect to him for me to attend. I hope she will not think it was my proud spirit kept me, for I was sure I would have enjoyed myself much. Uncle John bought out word that a little daughter had been born to Aunt Lilly⁵⁶ that is the 9th child⁵⁷. I cannot understand where they are going to put them all in that little place. Aunt Sarah is keeping house for her. She does not feel it too lonely to stay there by herself all day but she could not come and keep Pa company when he was so badly in need of it. I cannot help but notice it.

5th March Saturday

Uncle John pleaded hard for us to accompany him in to Muscle Brook this morning and I should have so much liked to have been able. But I thought it would seem cruel for me to leave so much work for Ma to do but we went in the evening. I felt as if they were all pleased to see me this time, what I have not done for some time. Poor Grandma. I shall never forget what she looked like when she walked out. She has a great trial on her hands with poor Grandfather. May "God" give her strength to try and bear up against it. I don't think she will be numbered with us long if she don't improve.

6th March Sunday

I did not go to Church this morning. I thought I would try and render a little assistance on the Hill as they all have their hands very full. This is my last day with Uncle John and Auntie. I wonder shall we ever meet again in this world. Evening came and we had to bid them all adieu. Grandfather seemed a little better and talked a little this afternoon.

7th March Monday

Pa is going away again this morning and promised Ma he would be home but not until late, so she is not nearly so anxious as she was before. It is natural with some people to be like that but I consider it is wicked because the Almighty can guard and keep them safe out of my sight as in it. Miss McGregor is completely tired out after her long ride but it never takes any serious effect on me. What worried Miss McGregor most was because she gave Maud a sore back and I hurt my mare a little but not much. We always do something rash when by ourselves. We did not feel very lonely to night with out Pa but Ma was very much after we left her.

8th March Tuesday

When I woke this morning my first thought was not a very pleasant one for there was a heavy days washing in the hot sun. I felt very tired after it. Pa still thinks of moving from here. I think he has nearly decided on going to Muscle Brook to live now so as to be able to school the children⁵⁸. Ma objects strongly to going but I don't think she will persist. I do not care about the locality but would like to be in town where we could all go to a good Public School, although there are many advantages to be had in the bush which is dispensed with in town.

9th March Wednesday

Ma has been very odd to day. I don't know I am sure what we shall do if she does not soon get better health. The heat really is enough to kill a priest. Uncle Matt and Auntie Emma came out from the Brook this morning and they left poor Grandfather much better, so we rested a little more contented until evening when we were very much surprised to see Ab Smith⁵⁹ arrive. I could not speak to ask him what his errand was for. I made sure it was very bad news he was bringing but not so bad as I expected. Grandfather had taken a bad change and is quite unmanageable⁶⁰. I am afraid he will do some damage yet. Uncle Matt is in with him now until Pa goes in. We have not seen much of him lately and I am afraid will see less for a while of him.

10th March Thursday

I thought a few weeks ago we were done with the warm weather but it seems as though the heat was only commencing. I had nothing to do in the heat fortunately but Pa was working in the paddock and he was almost ready to drop when he came up. Never the less I could not help smiling at his clothes, they were just dripping. He stayed in doors as after dinner he could not bear the heat any longer. I pity Miss McGregor down in that school. We have so many advantages at home and still complain. I think I have a very discontented mind. Contentment must be a very great blessing to anyone who has it. I have been trying to learn my lesson to day. I must try and work hard because I will be as backward if ever I go to another school.

11th March Friday

Another warm or even warmer day than yesterday I felt it so only with the exception of a little breeze. Pa wished Ma to go into Muscle Brook with him as he had to go in and let Uncle Matt home a while. So they took all the children with them and Artie and I rode. Ma is such a fidget if any of us are away. I gave them all a little start going in when a beast chased me I turned and went straight for the buggy horses. What I did it for I cannot tell but Pa shouted to me before I struck the buggy. It was very late when we arrived in Muscle Brook. Grandfather had a very bad day but is nice and quiet tonight. He takes such quick changes one can never tell.

12th March Saturday

Oh dear, when I woke this morning I felt all pains and aches and in the humor for another hour or two sleep but that would not do. I came in to assist Ma with the children and I must do my duty as well as I am able. I kept them all the morning while she was up the town and after dinner I took the whole six up the Hill. Everyone was laughing at my little family but Ma had a quiet afternoon from them. I just got them home after dark. Uncle George wished me to go to the play but I did not care about going.

13th March Sunday

After so many warm days I am thankful to say we have had a pleasant change today. I did not go to church in the morning but I went to night just after hearing that Grandfather had taken a very bad change and could not keep my mind from wandering during the service. But I was thankful to hear he is much quieter now and hope he will remain so.

14th March Monday

My first thought this morning was how I could ride home. I could not help it but I was mad at the thought of having J Bridge⁶¹ out with us. I know it is not right to have such a dislike to anyone as I have to him but Artie acted splendidly and rode with me all the way. I was very thankful to see home. It is always a pleasure to get back to our own home no matter how nice other places may be. Ma and I both had a nice long sleep after dinner. I know for my part I felt literally knocked up. Miss McGregor must have felt tired too but she is obliged to attend to her duties. I often think how thankful I ought to be and still I am always complaining and that is what she never does. Bed was very thankfully received at an early hour by all of us tonight.

15th March Tuesday

I could not rest this morning until Pa had looked at Maud's back and to my great relief found it much better. I cannot bear to hurt her back. I am not so particular about another horse but I am so fond of her. She is Uncle Willie's pet mare of course. I only hold second place now, still I am well satisfied with that. We were very much surprised to see Uncle Matt home this morning. It hardly seemed worth Pa's while coming home when he had to return so soon. It makes it so miserable for all of us when he is away for Ma is so dreadful nervous. I hope she does not follow her last plan and sit up all night. She was as timid as ever she could be tonight. When a knock came at the door that made her worse. It was a gentlemanly looking fellow. I think he saw she was frightened.

16th March Wednesday

The mornings are getting nice and cold now. It is much pleasanter to lie in bed than to get up about 5 o'clock. So the boys thought this morning when Ma called them up. She had sat up all night. Why she does it I cannot tell. She will be having herself knocked up. We were alone all day with Vivie the only little prattler we had. I waited anxiously for the mail to come and when no letters for me appeared I was disappointed. I fully expected one from Uncle Willie. I think I expect too much sometimes perhaps he will write next mail. I have written to all my relatives in Sydney and not one of them have condescended as yet to write to me. It makes me feel very uncomfortable when they are so distant. I wonder what has become of Fred Dowell⁶² or how has he turned out. I am afraid none too well. I hope none of my brothers follow his footsteps I don't think they will.

17th March Thursday

I am sorry to say I woke up a little annoyed this morning, for the first thing I heard was Ma walking about and I knew she had not been to bed or she would not be up at that early hour and sure enough she had not taken her clothes off all night. I will be so thankful when Pa comes home, for we will have her laid up on our hands very soon. There is a heavy day's work to go through to day. I wish Ma would let me do it for I am much better able to do it than she is. We have both been anxiously watching Uncle Matt mowing the Lucerne⁶³ and to our great disappointment it is going down very slowly. It is selfish of us I know because Auntie is all alone when he leaves and there is a houseful here but that's all we are.

18th March Friday

Another hard day's work at ironing today and then our week's work will be nearly ended. I am thankful to say I managed to keep Ma away from the ironing table splendidly. Miss McGregor was very kind as she always is and helped me well before she went to school. It makes her work harder on her then because she is tired before she commences it. I was so thankful to see Pa's ever welcome form riding up the road at dinner time and so was Ma. She laid down after dinner and had a nice sleep. I think we all followed her example afterwards for when I had finished my work I felt rather tired and fell off to sleep dressing. I am very sorry I have not practiced much this two days. I am quite disheartened with myself. I think if I went under a good teacher I would try and do my best.

19th March Saturday

This morning was so like rain we did not do much work. Ma has had a very severe headache all day, I wish she would go to the Dr and see about it. I have felt real miserable all day, I don't know why I am sure. Just those wearisome feelings comes over me sometimes. Received a letter from dear old Uncle Will to day. I was so pleased to hear from him and also that he had arrived safe and well. Tommie and Ida are very unwell to night⁶⁴. I think they must have been eating some forbidden fruit. We prevailed on Ma to have a game of Crib to night in which Pa and I won. It passes away a few pleasant hrs.

20th March Sunday

We intended going to church this morning but as I had a bad cough and very like rain Pa did not think it advisable for us to go. I was a little disappointed but what is that compared to the pleasure it affords me to comply with his wishes. There was Sunday School in the afternoon but very few attendances. I am afraid it will go the same as our choir did.

21st March Monday

I was surprised when I woke this morning to find it so late but then we deserve a little recreation when Pa is at home for when he is away the whole household is awake at a very early hour. It was nice and bright this morning to my sorrow, for if it had of have been raining Pa would not have to go away. As it is he will. I am afraid if poor Grandfather does not get any better, both he and Uncle Matt will be knocked up but God will give them double strength to do their duty while it is required of them. I expect poor Pa got drenched through going in for it has poured down ever sinse he left. I hope he will not catch a cold like I have. I was very pleased Uncle Matt was so kind as to take the cart down for Miss McGregor⁶⁵. It would be very wet for her coming home. Another lovely night. I wish someone would take pity on us and stay with us occasionally.

22nd March Tuesday

Five o'clock found us up this morning. I did feel so sleepy it seemed as though we had only just retired, for it was ½ past twelve when we dispersed from the dining room. Ma certainly went to bed but did not get much sleep. We had several callers to day and this evening Bella, George and Miss Miller called on us. The latter is around seeing how many pupils she can get to teach music. She plays very nicely. I think she has a very proud manner but still she may be a very nice girl. I was quite ashamed of myself, I fell off to sleep after dinner and slept for nearly four hours. I put before me to do a little sewing and instead I did not set a stitch till after tea. I feel very nervous to night. I don't think I am a bit better than Ma only I don't wish her to know it. There is a very heavy storm raging now, the place will be very sloppy in the morning.

23rd March Wednesday

This morning was very foggy but that indicates a fine day. It has been nice and bright until about midday when a heavy storm broke over and the rain came down in torrents. It is such funny weather. We thought last night would be our last night of loneliness for a time but to our great disappointment we received a letter from Pa stating he would not be home until tomorrow. I am thankful in one respect he is not coming this evening as he would get very wet. Night came and almost before it had closed in on us Ma had the house all secured in front and the lamps lit. We did not think it good to work all the evening as (all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy) so we had a pleasant game of Crib but that is not half as jolly as when there are gentlemen in it. Amused ourselves till 12 o'clock and at that late hour the mishaps of the day were not over for Ma burnt her finger very badly by the match box catching alight. It is a very painful thing.

24th March Thursday

Five o'clock now is very early to be leaving a nice warm bed and turning to the wash tub. I thought so this morning but remembered that Ma had had no sleep and therefore did not hesitate in dressing. Miss McGregor kindly helped me and we were finished almost before she went to school. She has not been at all well I think she worries a lot about her brother⁶⁶. He is going to be out alone in this wicked world but God will take care of him. I wonder how my poor old brother is getting on. I have not had a letter from him lately. I hope he is getting on well at school. He has many little annoyances to contend with but I hope he bears them patiently. Pa arrived home early leaving poor Grandfather about the same. I hope Ma will have a good nights rest, she needs it after working hard all day. George called tonight – I would have been very thankful for his company last night.

25th March Friday

I am the only one in a fit state to rise early this morning. Ma was completely done up last night and feels very fatigued to day. Poor Miss McGregor was unable to leave her bed until about 3 o'clock. I do hope she will be better tomorrow. Ma insisted upon ironing all this morning and then I finished after dinner. Bella prevailed in getting Ma to promise a visit this week so she fulfilled her promise to day. I hope she will enjoy herself she does not go out half as much as I would wish her. It has been dreadful warm to day. I hope we shall soon have a change. I felt very tired after tea but going to bed so very early last night I did not care about going so early to night altho I felt fitted for it. We expected Fred out to night but Pa said he did not intend coming home until Saturday. He has not been out for such a long time. He cannot leave as he is the only messenger they have on the hill.

26th March Saturday

All up early this morning in order to get the work done early as Mr James would be here to night and we expected some visitors to play croquet but did not arrive. A cricket match was played on the Rouchel in which Gundy won. Mr James was one of the party and therefore in good spirits when arriving here to night. No practice this evening. How ever will the singing go tomorrow. We had a good practice after tea but two or three voices does not sound much amongst the crowd. Freddie and Ab Smith arrived just at dusk. He isn't growing a bit, I wish he would grow a little taller⁶⁷.

27th March Sunday

We had it all arranged to ride up to hear Mr Wilson⁶⁸ preach this afternoon but only for the ride and that is why we are disappointed I think. For it is just misting rain all day not enough to wet. I am quite disgusted with the playing and Choir. I wish someone else would be kind enough to take my place. I would resign my honor any day

28th March Monday

I was very much surprised to hear Pa up before me this morning as he is getting such a late riser. As there is nothing for him to do I think he might as well take all the hrs he can easy. He makes me feel very miserable sometimes lately. I am sure there is something troubling him and he tells no one he keeps all his difficulties confined to himself too much. It has been quite chilly to day. Hope we have bade farewell to the warm days for this summer. Dear Miss McGregor has not commenced her school duties for the week in much better health. I don't think her health will permit her to perform her duty as a teacher much longer. There was only five children to day, well that is enough to dishearten any body. I think the parents might have a little more consideration for her.

29th March Tuesday

To day Tommie⁶⁹ attains to the great age of seven years. Ma made them some cakes and they were going to have a nice little party but Mrs Cameron⁷⁰ did not come up with her children. Aubrey⁷¹ came and spent the evening with them. I don't seem to get on a little with my crewel work, I hope to have it finished tomorrow. Ma was thinking of going to Newcastle and no doubt the change would do her good but she has altered her mind under circumstances I would be sorry to relate if such is the case. I am not writing tonight as I think all my correspondents owe me a letter. Pa has been pinned in that office the whole day and not satisfied with that he is in there again tonight. I wish he would go for a little more out door exercise. Would be better for his health.

30th March Wednesday

I thought I had not long been in bed when Ma called me this morning. It certainly was not light. They rose early with the intention of having an early start to Muscle Brook but just as they had the horses ready Uncle Matt informed Pa he could not have the grey horse. As it was rather late when they started I have been all day by myself with only dear little Vivie. Very anxious to receive the mail. I thought the best way to pass the time was to have a sleep and when I woke it had arrived. I was so pleased to hear from dear Uncle Willie and also Uncle John and Aunties photos. I think they all very good for a group. We were just (entry ended)

31st March Thursday

This morning gave promise of a wet day but it cleared off again. I was almost wishing for it to rain for then Miss McGregor could have a holiday, what she is badly in need of. I am sorry to say she is no better to day and to make matters worse was caught in a shower coming home from school and got quite wet. I have spent another lonely

day with no one but dear little Vivie to talk to but we managed splendidly. Expected Ma home this morning but she did not arrive until late this evening. They spent half the day with Mrs Cameron. I have worked constantly at my work to day to make amends for the time I lost last night but did not get it quite finished It is raining heavily tonight. I wonder if we are going to have some wet weather. Pa is a little more talkative than usual, Muscle Brook has made him a little livelier.

Notes:

- 52 Alfred Bokhara Spencer, born 1875 – May's younger brother.
- 53 Wells' "Rough on Corns." Patent Medicine for corns, warts and bunions. See below.
- 54 Thomas Spencer Snr suffered from what was called "Brain Softening" in 1887. It was listed as his cause of death in January 1888. Most likely it refers to a condition where a stroke has caused behavioural change. It appears he is becoming violent.
- 55 Not sure which George this is. May be George Gardner
- 56 Elizabeth "Lilly" Frost (nee Spencer). See 15
- 57 Mildred Sarah Stark Frost, born 1887
- 58 Whilst this is a valid reason for Thomas Jnr and his family leaving Rouchel Vale for Muscle Brook, it is almost certainly an excuse rather than the full reason.
- 59 Probably Albert Edward Smith, one of the Rouchel Smiths. He was known as Ab.
- 60 See 54.
- 61 Probably refers to John Morrison Bridge, born 1868
- 62 Frederick Hooper Dowell, born 1865. He was the eldest son of Stephen Dowell and his first wife Sarah Hooper. He was May's 1st cousin via her mother.
- 63 The Spencer's were early Lucerne growers in the Hunter Valley and cut the Lucerne for hay production. In 1882 one crop of Lucerne produced 80 tons of hay. No wonder mowing it is a slow process.
- 64 Thomas Pritchard, born 1880 and is May's stepbrother. Ida is Murial Ida Maud Stark Spencer born 1882. Ida was May's younger sister.
- 65 Grace McGregor is the teacher at Lower Rouchel School. She lives with the Spencer's at Rouchel Vale and May describes her as like an older sister. Grace married May's Uncle Willie in 1890.
- 66 Probably William McGregor, born 1870
- 67 Freddie is May's older brother Frederick Hooper Spencer born 1870. He was quite short. He stopped growing following a bout of Typhoid Fever in 1882. Albert (Ab) Smith is a member of another Rouchel family, the Smiths. He attended Lower Rouchel School in 1884, so was a little older than Freddie. - probably born 1867.
- 68 Mr Wilson -probably Rev W N Wilson Free Presbyterian minister at Rouchel. He was appointed in 1886
- 69 See 62.
- 70 Probably Sarah Cameron. See 22.
- 71 Aubrey Sherwood Spencer, born 1883. Son of Matthew and Emma Spencer.



WELLS' "ROUGH ON CORNS."—Ask for Wells "Rough on Corns." 7½d Quick relief, complete, permanent cure. Corns, warts, bunions. Moses Moss and Co., Sydney, General Agents.

The Ad above is from the Illawarra Mercury of 17th June 1884.

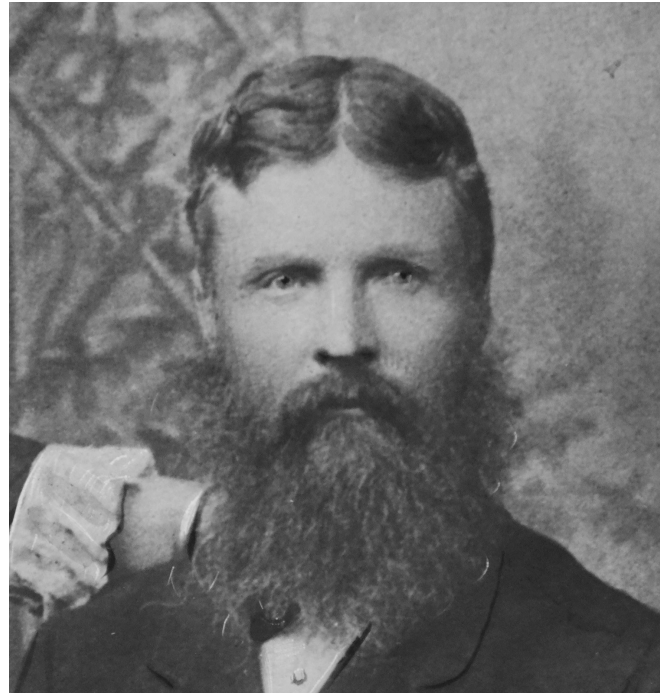
At left is the classic Wells' "Rough on Corns" trade card of the 1880s and 1890s. It advertised other Wells products on the reverse.

Thank goodness Vivie didn't drink another famous Wells' product "Rough on Rats", which contained Arsenic, and was known to kill people and pets, as well as rats

April

1st April Friday

Not one of us thought of what day this is until evening, perhaps our minds were better occupied. I finished my piece of work today to my great relief, it looks much nicer than expected. Whether it is my imagination or not I cannot tell but I fancy Ma has heard something that displeased her in Muscle Brook about me. She has not mentioned anything but I think I have an idea what it is. Of course, I want a little reprimand sometimes, just the same as all other girls in my position. Uncle Matt showed us such a large spider to day, the largest we had ever seen. It looks as if it would give a very nasty bite. This being mail night we were all very busy writing but managed to have a little game of Crib by depriving ourselves of an hour's rest. I like to see Pa join in a little amusement to make amends for the solitary hrs in the office.



*Pa - Thomas Spencer J.P. - May's father
This photo was taken in August 1886*

2nd April Saturday

There being a cricket match on the Rouchel today Mr Cameron⁷⁰ promised to bring Mrs C to spend the day with but we were disappointed. Artie went to the cricket match. He was so delighted to go. As this is Flora's last week amongst us, she promised to spend this afternoon with us. They arrived about 4 o'clock and we spent a rather pleasant evening with the exception of Flora and she had not a word to say to any one. No one could help pitying her although she is to blame. Yet, I think she is sorry for all now and poor girl, I am afraid will be sorrier still. She looks the picture of misery. They left after dark. It was nice for them going home.

3rd April Sunday

Pa escorted me away from home to Church but I am sorry to say did not keep me long or rather I did not stay. Mr Norman⁷¹ preached a very interesting sermon on the sufferings of Our Saviour on the cross. Not late to day for a great wonder. Miss McGregor not being able to go so had to go alone. There is a marked improvement in the singing. I wish I could say the same regarding our own choir.

4th April Monday

How dismal the rain sounded beating on the tin this morning, yet as the old saying is, it is an ill wind that blows no one good luck. In this case Miss McGregor was very thankful to hear it raining for she was not in a very fit humor for teaching school after being laid up all day yesterday. It was purgatory for the poor children to be shut in doors all day. One great advantage they have a nice big veranda to play in what many children have not got. The river is rising to day I would be at all surprised if it ended in a big flood. Uncle Matt managed to find his way over through the rain. They commenced talking about the way Maud (the horse) misbehaved herself. I am afraid she will be forbidden fruit to me very soon. I stand up for her but all my pleadings are in vain.

5th April Tuesday

No school again today I think there is a week's holiday in store for Miss McGregor. Still raining and no sign of easing. It is so miserable to be penned in day after day not able to step outside the door but you are mud to the knees. They (are) all now getting too much of what was the earnest prayer of all. Gods know what is best and sends us what he thinks we require. Ma thought of washing but that is out of the question today. It will be a very big one when we do it. Ma has been fretting for fear we have a wet Easter and that is just what I would like because the hymns are very difficult and no one will be kind enough to grace us with their company in the choir. Pa and

Ma went to bed early tonight and left us to entertain ourselves and we sat talking until late. What a blessing it seems to have a good night's rest from the mosquitos. They are so troublesome warm nights.

6th April Wednesday

It is fine overhead to day but very sloppy. There was great discussions whether we should wash or not. Pa said it was too wet but if we were so persistent he would make a fire on for us, so with that we commenced work. No school to day the river being too high for children to cross. I am sorry to say Ma has been very ill all day to day. Miss McGregor and I did the heaviest part of the washing finishing just at 4 o'clock. The roads were so heavy that the mailman could not travel fast consequently it was between 3 and 4 when he arrived. I received a letter from Annette but none from Uncle Willie. I suppose I must be content with one a mail. I will expect one from him on Saturday. Wrote to Fred to day. I hope he will be able to come home on Good Friday. We expect some visitors then but am afraid they will not come on account of the roads being in such a bad state. Feel very tired and fit for the bed very soon.

7th April Thursday

To day Miss McGregor wishes to go home for her holidays and the three young ladies will come to Aberdeen expecting to see their Uncle Tom waiting for them but will be disappointed. Pa did intend going but on examining the crossing found it impossible for any buggy to cross. I felt very sorry when he told us, for waiting for hours at that miserable station house is no great treat especially with a little baby. Artie and Miss McGregor rode in to Muscle Brook this afternoon. I was so sorry she could not go in the buggy for she will be completely worn out after ironing all the morning. Mr K Cameron⁷² called this evening to let us know the girls came out in Mr Jupp's⁷³ cart. Rather rough I should imagine. Bella and Will Mitchell⁷⁴ called tonight. She promised to be down to practice tomorrow. I hope she will come. She is such a nice girl far more sensible than the generality of girls on this creek.

8th April Friday - Good Friday. Bank Holiday

This being good Friday we had not much work to do. Pa drove down to Mr Cameron's for the girls but only Annie and Addie⁷⁵ came. It is such a dear little baby of Annie's⁷⁶. I am so delighted at the thought of having it to mind for a whole week. I cannot fully express my opinion on Addie she seems a nice jolly girl but rather proud I think. Will Lonsdale⁷⁷ told us the Kennedy's were not coming to practice, so I don't think we will trouble letting them know again. Bella and Sara⁷⁸ fulfilled their promise and we had a very good practice. I think the singing will go off famously on Sunday. I hope I shall perform my part properly. Will Roe and Al⁷⁹ came up this afternoon, then later went back again as he did not get Saturday a holiday. I think Will is such a nice young man, a real monster beside her. Pa and Addie have been romping all the evening. Pa dearly loves to have a girl to torment. Retired about ½ ten, rather sleepy.

9th April Saturday

Nice and warm all day today. It was such a delightful day for a ride that we took advantage of it. Addie was mad to get on horseback but before going for a long ride they thought it would be advisable to let her have a little practice, so Will caught the horse and mounted her. Shall I ever forget the picture she looked. We were all tired laughing at her. After dinner we went down to Mr Cameron's for a ride and Sarah Hayne⁸⁰ came back with us. We spent a very pleasant evening. They were amusing themselves having a few little dances and then at a game of Crib.

10th April Sunday

I never saw such a one for singing as Will. He had us singing nearly all day with the exception of Church since there was a very good congregation today and I am thankful to say the singing went off better than we have had it for some time, although our choir did not come, as under the circumstances they could not attend church.

11th April Monday

Easter Monday, an eventful day for poor Flora, for today "she ties a knot with her tongue that she cannot undo with her teeth" as the old saying is. Ma is going to Scone to day and thought they would see the Bride⁸¹ on their way in, but did not as they were delayed. Al and Will came up just before dinner and stayed until about 2 o'clock when they went for a ride to Carter's. Annie and I had the house almost all to ourselves. Pa did not get home till after dinner and then he is not much company for any one, as he stays in his office all his spare time. The poor little babie has been very cross today. I hope she will keep quite well while up here. I expect the change of milk will

make her a little cross. I was very much surprised this afternoon when Pa commenced joking with Al about some little paltry subject that he should get in such a paddy⁸². I can see his temper has not left him as yet.

12th April Tuesday

I did not hear a sound this morning until about 6 o'clock, not even the boys going away. They left about four. It must have only just broken day when they reached their destination. Pa intended going to Gundy to day but being so like rain he did not go. It would have been very lonely for us if he had have gone as there was only Annie and I at home. Poor little baby has been so cross all day and tonight. About tea time I thought there was something serious the matter with her she screamed so. Annie gets so nervous when she cries like that. She is only a young mother and not use to the many little changes babies are so apt to take. I slept with her tonight and I hope babie will be good. The mosquitos mark her so. The cold weather might drive them away.

13th April Wednesday

Up at five o'clock this morning that is early rising for me. Ma will be returning to day and I would like to have the washing finished before she arrives. Pa went to Aberdeen to meet her. Started about 9 o'clock and both Annie and I gave him strict instructions to take Ma to Mrs Camerons for dinner as she was bringing Miss Andson⁸³ out for a few days. Instead of complying with our wishes, he brought them straight home. Our feelings were easily imagined than described when they landed, and us up to our eyes in work, but we made the best of a bad doing and so every thing passed off until near night when dear little baby commenced her screaming fits but Ma was here to manage her and we did not feel so timid. She is worse to night than she was last night. Annie has come to the conclusion that it is the boiled milk that ails her, not being used to it. So from this out we will endeavor to give her raw milk.

14th April Thursday

Ma has decided at last on taking a trip to Newcastle. She has arranged to go on Tuesday next. I hope the change will do her good. She is thus very busily engaged making preparations for her visit. Mrs Cameron and the children came up to spend the day today. Mr Cameron intended taking the bees but unfortunately there was no honey to take. Pa took Milly⁸⁴ out for a ride to day. She manages very well. They arrived home just before dark. All town girls are alike for riding. I think she is a lamb, I never saw such a girl laughing. I thought I was bad enough but she is worse. Ma had a nice job to get either of us to play tonight. Milly plays very nicely. If I could play I am sure I would comply with their wishes with the greatest of pleasure. As it is I cannot and therefore don't like playing before those that can play.

15th April Friday

Miss McGregor and I have decided on going to the evening party at Mr Carters but it was not until after dinner that Annie decided. Poor little babie has been rather cross but she may sleep well tonight. Will Roe arrived here just at tea time he escorted us up. I wished myself somewhere when the dance commenced for I was asked up on the first dance and a bad partner but we managed to push through somehow, making a pair of apes of ourselves. I am surprised at Miss Millers conduct this afternoon. I did think she was a different style of a girl to what she is. Perhaps she thinks she is taking a rise out of the young men on the Rouchel but she is mistaken. There is a nice gathering to night and all seems to be enjoying themselves thoroughly. Every one is remarking how dull I am but I don't think I am unusually so.

16th April Saturday

Today comes the suffering after the nights rest we lost last night. It will take me sometime to regain my sleep. It was delightful riding down this morning in the cool. Miss McGregor had a short sleep after breakfast and then a rest after dinner. I just managed to keep up until after dinner and then I fell into a pleasant slumber for 3 or 4 hours, feeling very much refreshed when I woke. I did not feel very tired as I did not have so very many dances but quite enough for me.

17th April Sunday

How disappointed we three were at breakfast this morning when the rain appeared but it cleared off nicely before church time. Milly, Miss McGregor and I went to Church. George escorted us home. After dinner Ma and Pa took the children to Sunday school. Annie called for a few minutes on her way down. J Cameron⁸⁵ was here for a short time. We had a few hymns before he left.

18th April Monday

Ma was up before me this morning. I have got very lazy getting up since the party but I will have to be a little smarter when Ma is away. Milly as usual is mad for a ride. She tried to persuade Ma to let her go down the creek with Pa but she could not manage to do so. After dinner Pa got our horses and took the pair of us up the river for a ride. We went until I was tired and then when we returned could not manage Mill at all. She would insist on going further but when she saw Ma was not willing for her to go, she cantered over in the paddock. We had it all arranged for a game of croquet but the rain disappointed us. George came up to accompany us. After tea Milly gave us some music and I very unwillingly had to play a little, then a game of Crib but I did not join them.

19th April Tuesday

All up early this morning in order for Ma to be in time to catch the train. Dear little Vivie was delighted at leaving us. I hope she will be a good girl and not put Ma to much inconvenience. Milly and I had the house to ourselves and an idle day we spent. Done nothing scarcely but eat, talk and laugh all day. Pa arrived home about 2 o'clock I got him some lunch and then we had a game of croquet. I think he rather likes it. I do so like him to join us in any amusement. Bella arrived about 4 o'clock but she would not join us in the game. I played a little after tea and we had a little jig on the veranda. I would like to be able to dance. It is bitterly cold tonight. I think we will soon have frosts.

20th April Wednesday

Bella and I thought it the wisest plan to wash to day. Pa was very kind and put a fire on nice and early. Miss McGregor assisted us before she went to school so that we were finished by dinner time. I received a letter from poor old Fred. I have not had one from him for such a long time. I am pleased to hear he is going to play with the Muscle Brook boys in Scone, it will be a days amusement for him. He does not get much enjoyment in Muscle Brook. Pa had a letter from Ma to day stating she had arrived safely in New Castle. I do hope she will stay her month out and enjoy herself for she is well deserving of it although Pa seems so wretched and miserable without her. Will M and Will G⁸⁶ came over tonight and had a game of cards. Will G favoured us with a few songs. He can sing very well when he chooses.

21st April Thursday

It was quite late when I got up this morning but I felt a little tired after washing yesterday. Pa is busy salting the meat this morning as they killed last night. Mr Cameron and Milly went up the river for a while and then Bella and I went down with them. Left Pa at home alone. I don't care about leaving him as I know he has something preying on his mind. I feel sure he will never be happy until he leaves this place. Oh how I wish I could relieve his mind. Will Gardner kindly saw us home. I enjoyed myself very well. Called at Mrs Gardner's coming home and very sorry to hear poor old Granny had another bad turn. I am afraid she is not long to be numbered with us in this wicked world. It is nice and fine to night but may not continue for long.

22nd April Friday

Raining all day to day no school. The children are all at home therefore the house has been very noisy. Miss McGregor went down to the school but no scholars were present. Will G and Will M came over to play Pa a game of cards. After dinner Bella wished to go over to Aunt Emma's and I went with her but we could not prevail on Miss McGregor to accompany us. She said she did not feel in any humour for company to day. I think she gets very down hearted sometimes. Will stayed for tea and they (played) some music and singing and a game of cards. I am getting quite tired of both but still it passes away a few hours. Uncle Abs surprised us very much by walking in just as we were in the midst of a game so I gave him my place and I wrote to Uncle Willie.

23rd April Saturday

Still rain and no signs of any thing else this morning. The rivers are uncrossable and the mails cannot run. I wrote to Ma and so did Pa she will be disappointed when she does not receive word from home to say how we all are. Poor Uncle Willie will be again disappointed, more so from one party than from me. He will think that the mail could not run. But for me he will have no excuse as I have disappointed him so often but it is not very easy for me to write sometimes. Mail time came and no mail. This does not seem like Saturday. Poor Pa is quite lost without his papers.

24th April Sunday

No church down here to day. We are very unfortunate the rain always comes on our church Sunday. How miserable a wet Sunday in the bush seems. Nothing to occupy your time and can only read and one soon gets tired of that. The children had no Sunday School. Uncle Abs has been preaching to us all day. I don't know what he would do if he had not someone to talk to and tease.

25th April Monday

The mailman was able to run the mail to day but very slow travelling. The roads are in a terrible state with the rain. We cannot step out side the door but what we are up to our ankles in mud. That is delightful. It is almost impossible to keep the children in, for as soon as the weather lets up a little they are out. Pa thinks of going to Sydney tomorrow and then we shall be without a gentleman at all. I cannot make him out although sometimes he seems nice and jolly at others he seems as though every body was an unwelcome visitor. I think if he was to clear off the Rouchel he would be a changed man, at least I hope so. He received a letter from Ma to day that seemed to cheer him up a little. I expected one from her but did not receive it. Very pleased she is enjoying herself so well and hope she will only stay a fair time down.

26th April Tuesday

Up a little earlier than usual on account of Pa going. I thought he may like his breakfast early. I am ashamed of myself of late the hours I get up of a morning. I could persuade Pa to take the clothes I washed him but he knows best what he needs best. Ma will be surprised to see him in Newcastle this evening unless he sends her a wire⁸⁷. Uncle Abs went with him to Muscle Brook. Bella and I were alone all day but not quite so lonely after tea. George and Will stayed for tea and we spent a very jolly evening. Will Mitchell came over and I never saw Will G. so merry before. He can be a little comical when he likes. They sang and played cards till quarter to eleven. I don't know what Uncle Matt will say when he hears them going home tonight. George stayed all night and he was up to his tricks with Bella. After they left it must have been about one when we went to sleep and wants to be up early in the morning.

27th April Wednesday

I thought it was about four when Bella called me this morning and it was six. I did not at all like getting up. It was just misty rain when she woke but cleared up nice and fine after breakfast. Bella went into Aberdeen to see a friend of hers getting married. She went in alone. I should not care for the ride alone. For one thing the cattle are too wild but then it would not do for every one to be as timid of them as I am. I thought it was too lonely here by myself after Miss McGregor went to school, so I spent the day over at Aunt Emma's. Went over with the intention of assisting her but I was only a hindrance instead of a help. She is a woman I never could understand. Mail day, no letter from Ma. I was disappointed. Have wrote three and received no answers. Yet she kindly sent me three pieces of music. I was so delighted to see them rolled up, I am quite tired of all the old songs. We have had such a lot of company lately. Bella arrived home about eight. I was just beginning to feel uneasy. I thought something might have happened to her.

28th April Thursday

Fully intended washing to day but when we woke this morning it was so like rain. Bella felt tired and I lazy that we put it off until tomorrow. I do wish this weather would change it is either raining or shining. It was only eight when I came down to get breakfast, if that is not laziness. Will Mitchell came over to get some shoes. He is going to shoe Maud for me. I will be very thankful if he does. It was about 11 when we went to bed last night and I feel quite sleepy to day. Bella went and had a nice sleep after dinner I did not, for if I have one, I must have one every day. Miss McGregor must find it miserable walking down through the mud to school. I am afraid she will not be able to have the sewing done if it does not clear up. We thought we were going to spend the first night alone sinse Pa left but Will M made his appearance about 8 and stayed till ten. On going to bed we were very much surprised and amused at seeing a light in the darkness over the way. Lighting us to bed. Of course, larrikin like, we held ours up in return.

29th April Friday

This is the last day of school this week for Miss McGregor. She always seems thankful when Friday evening comes but it only ends to commence another week's work. It may not be so muddy next week. Bella and I were going to

do nearly all Saturdays work today but Will Gardner made his appearance about ten o'clock and did not leave until near dark. So that put a stop to our good resolutions. I must confess the three of us spent a very pleasant day. Just before tea Bella went over to Aunt Emma's for a few minutes when Georgie McDonald⁸⁸ called. I was very much surprised to see her. Such an unusual thing to happen. She did not stay long as it was nearly dark. Fred came out tonight. I was very pleased to see him. After tea Will M and George came over and played cards. Fred seemed very much put out about something but there is no harm in a quiet game of cards.

30th April Saturday

We were certainly called up early this morning but did not rise so early. It was very cold, I think we shall soon have frosts again. Altho later up we hurried through our work and got all finished before dinner and then Bella and Miss McGregor went for a ride as far as the Public School. On returning I was very pleased to hear Maud behaved herself so well. I like Miss McGregor to enjoy her rides as she has not much chance to go for many. We all felt done up tonight and intended going to bed very early but 11 o'clock found us only just returning to our rooms. It seems as though we cannot get there much sooner.

Notes:

- 70 *Alexander (also Alex in the diary) Cameron Jnr, born 1853. Married to Sarah Hayne (Ma's sister). Lives at Glenerne on Rouchel Brook.*
- 71 *Probably Rev P Norman, Presbyterian minister of Scone*
- 72 *Kenneth Cameron, brother of Alex Cameron*
- 73 *Mr Jupp's - unknown*
- 74 *William George Mitchell, born 1864*
- 75 *Annie Rebecca Roe (nee Hayne), born 1863, (Ma's niece) and Addie ~ unknown*
- 76 *Florence M. Roe, born 1887*
- 77 *William Lonsdale, Son of Robert and Anne Lonsdale – Lived on a property Merryvale, on Back Creek.*
- 78 *Probably Sarah Carter, Bella's Half sister*
- 79 *William George Roe, born 1863 and Jessie Alma (Al) Roe, born 1882*
- 80 *It could be Sarah May Hayne born 1868, a niece of Sarah Cameron (nee Hayne). See 75*
- 81 *The bride presumably being Flora Kennedy, who married Rev Philip Cuthbert Anderson, in Scone.*
- 82 *A "paddy" is a violent rage.*
- 83 *Miss Andson - unknown*
- 84 *Possibly May's cousin Mary Amelia Dowell, born 1876*
- 85 *John (also Johnny, JC and Jack in the diary) Cameron, born 1868. Son of Donald Cameron and Elizabeth McMullin from Glencairn, Upper Rouchel. John is obviously a close friend of the family and good cricketer. See December Notes.*
- 86 *Probably Will Mitchell (see 73) and Will Gardner. Will Mitchell and Will Gardner are 1st cousins.*
- 87 *Telegraph had been available for more than 10 years and was the only fast method of communication.*
- 88 *Georgina McDonald born 1863. Daughter of John McDonald and Jane Cameron. Lived at Upper Rouchel*

May

1st May Sunday

Church at Bingeberry⁸⁹ this morning. We were up early in order to be on time and for a wonder was the first occupants in the Church. Bella and I went and when we arrived back Al Hayne^{89a} was here. I was surprised as he always gets out in time for Church. Uncle Abs came out after dinner. He seems a little put out about something. Miss McGregor took charge of the children in Ma's stead.

2nd May Sunday

A fortnight's washing to be done today. That does not mean an idle day. Uncle Abs being our roustabout, as he called himself, helped out very well, carrying the water but sometimes a great hindrance. Finished washing about half past 3. Not at all sorry.

George Gardner came in the evening and stayed all night. Miss McGregor did not come from school till dusk. She very often makes it rather late. After tea, tired and all as we were, we had a few little dances on the veranda and then a game of cards. Bella and I played the two boys and they beat us. Uncle Abs and Miss McGregor had an entertaining game all to themselves and to Uncle Abs great disappointment he was beaten. I thought they would not object to some supper, so by the time that was finished it was past eleven.

3rd May Tuesday

We were not up quite so early this morning as I felt very tired after the work and the company yesterday. However Miss McGregor was the first to stir and was up and got the breakfast ready while I mixed the bread, which is not too good I am sorry to say. Bella would not let me do the ironing but did it all herself. We proposed going for a ride but had to postpone as circumstances would not permit us to go. We went and had a nice sleep after dinner, feeling very much refreshed after it. Late hours do not agree with me. We will have to alter them when Ma comes home I expect. I hope I shall get a letter either from her or Pa tomorrow. I wonder when they shall be coming home. It is so good and kind of Bella to be staying with us all this time.

4th May Wednesday

Eight o'clock this morning. What a shameful hour to be getting up but we are here now and the mistress does not object. Will is always very good and had a nice fire for us when we do come down. Well we thought we were sure of a ride today but was disappointed for the horses were nowhere to be found. Uncle Abs leaves for Muscle Brook, perhaps not to come out again before leaving. Received a letter from Ma but no word when she is coming home. I hope the changes will do her good pleased to see she is getting quite stout. I feel quite miserable about poor Pa, I don't know what ails him. Ma says he is as quiet as can be. I thought down country would make him better but it seems he is worse. Uncle Abs knows what is troubling him but will not tell⁹⁰. I suppose if I am to know, I will in due course of time and must only wait patiently until that time comes.

5th May Thursday No entry.

6th May Friday

All behind in our duties this morning. Late up as usual and then scarcely finished breakfast when an Indian came selling his wares. I felt real frightened when I saw him coming and sent down for Will Mitchell to come up. Bella was trying to make him lower his prices for about two hours. I was too much afraid to say anything to him. By the time he left, I got the children ready for school it was nearly dinner time. In the evening, Bella and I took



*May's mother Rebecca Hooper.
Rebecca died on 25th May 1885.
This photo was taken in 1869*

advantage of such a lovely day and went for a ride as far as Mrs. Gardner's⁹¹. Will Mitchell escorted us home. Will Gardner is staying tonight, I never saw him so merry before. We've all spent a very pleasant evening. I wonder will he visit us as often when Ma comes home. We are a noisy set when we do go to bed. He was calling us to order but we finished our bit of fun.

7th May Saturday

A busy day today as Saturday generally is. I intended rising early but was out of bed quicker than I bargained for. Bella landed me on the cold boards as a recompense for me putting my cold feet on her last night. Will Gardener said he could not go to sleep for hours with our talking. We worked away until the mail came and then of course there was a rush for letters. I received one from Uncle Willie but none from Ma, so I came to the conclusion that either Pa or both of them would be home. So just as we were seated at tea, Pa and Uncle Abs put in their appearance. Very pleased to see Pa, it seemed ages sinse he went away.

8th May Sunday

Very like rain this morning but did not rain sufficiently to prevent Church. We were not late but I made the most foolish blunder imaginable, the people will feel inclined to dismiss me if I make any more mistakes. Mr James cheered me up a little but at the same time I think he was a little annoyed.

9th May Monday

Mr James did not leave until near dinner time today. He stayed talking down at the yard and helped them brake in a young cow. I was beginning to think we would have him for dinner how naughty of me but I could not help it. Aunt Emma was busy washing and no one to help her so after dinner Bella and I thought we would go and assist her a little but she would not hear of that. While over there Bella received a letter from Miss Miller inviting us all to an evening party they proposed having on Friday next and also asking us to go up on Wednesday, as she wished to see Bella particularly. I do not think I shall be able to go on Friday if I wished to. After tea, we had a game of cards. No one came over from Aunt Emma's so we had it all to ourselves.

10th May Tuesday

We intended washing today but as Uncle Abs sayed (said) this would be his last day with us we postponed it on his account. He was going immediately after dinner, so we thought we may as well go up to the school for a ride. I sayed good bye to him when we got up the road a piece. Who should we meet but Mr. James. The thought never struck me he would be down to day. I believe he stayed all the evening here. Went round by Mrs Carter's and very pleased to see neither her or Sarah⁹² the least put out at Bella staying so long. Miss Miller fully expected we would have a boy with us and seemed very much put out that we had not. I was very pleased we had not. I like vexing girls like her. On returning found Uncle Abs still here. Did I ever know such a man?

11th May Wednesday

Could not possibly detain the washing any later in the week, as Ma will be home on Saturday. How we shall miss poor old Bella, not to have her company again for a while. I expect it is a singular thing but every washing day sinse she has been here we have had some one here. Today Uncle Abs and George are playing draughts and to his great delight Uncle Abs is the conqueror. He is quite proud to be able to go up country and be able to say he is the best draftsman on the Rouchel. Poor old fellow has really started at last. We have enjoyed his company very much although he has given me enough lectures to sink a punt. Miss McGregor and Bella went down the creek this evening and they saw him going by at five o'clock. Rather late these cold nights when he arrived in, I should imagine.

12th May Thursday

Nothing has occurred to day and no body here. Bella and I did the ironing. Pa intended going to Muscle Brook but could not find his horses in time. He has been dreadful dull today. When there is any one here (it) seems to cheer him up. Poor Pa has more than I am aware of to trouble him. I am afraid perhaps he may be more cheerful when Ma comes home. Bella and I went over to Aunt Emma's for a short time. Pa went for wood and we were alone. We shall only have two more days together. Miss McGregor is thinking about going to Muscle Brook to morrow. I hope she does not. Riding always tires her so. Will came over after tea and had a game of cards. I was very pleased to see Pa a little jolly over them but he retired long before we did and it was half past eleven before we thought of bed.

13th May Friday

We are full of troubles to day. Uncle Matt came over and inquired who rode Salina last and Bella was the guilty party. Her back was hurt and he seemed in a great temper about it. I never heard him talk like he did, forbidding me or no other lady to even mount her again. I was real sorry for Bella because it hurt her feelings greatly. We were disappointed in our ride we intended having. Will Gardner was here but I think he saw we were put out and therefore did not come in. He is going to the party tonight. That's all Miss Miller wanted. I am pleased George is not going because he is one of her boys. We were just preparing ourselves for a solitary night with scarcely any fire, too frightened to go for wood, when John C and Fred came, which quite changed the scene. He came to spend the night but when he got a warm supper, he thought it would be nicer at the dance than here and so left about ten o'clock.

14th May Saturday

A real white frost this morning. I think we feel more refreshed than the people who were at the party last night. Will Mitchell came over and told us all the news, it went off splendid. Good music if nothing else and just an equal number of ladies and gents. If we had went there would be too many girls. Ma arrived home just before dark. Both her and Vivie looking decidedly the better of their trip, .Dear little Vivie is as fat as a little pig. We are pleased to have them home again. Bella took her departure shortly after they came. Her friends will be pleased to have her home again.

15th May Sunday

As the buggy is at the door Ma took advantage of it and went to Church. I was housemaid this Sunday. They heard at church Uncle George was out and had a bad fall. Not able to come up so Ma went down to see him. Johnny called for Fred after dinner, they started early. These nights are too cold to be out

16th May Monday

Ma, Pa and I went to Aberdeen to day to see the wonderful sights. On our road in we saw Uncle George. His face is in a terrible state all swollen and quite black. It is very cold driving but with plenty of wraps, very pleasant. We trespassed on Mrs Gregson's⁹³ kindness for dinner. She must have thought we only went there because we could not get dinner else where. It is such a long time sinse I saw them. Mr Gregson was very pleased to see us, he looks much better than he did when he left the Rouchel. It was about three o'clock when we got to Mrs Cameron's. Had some luncheon there and then came home being really dark when we reached here. Will came over after tea but did not stay as long as usual.

17th May Tuesday

Up early this morning as Mary Kennedy⁹⁴ wanted me to go up the creek to collect for the bible society⁹⁵. I thought only for one day but I found it was three days we were to be away. First route was round the Back Creek⁹⁶ reaching Mrs Kennedy's for dinner. I felt rather inclined for it too. Got to Mrs Gardner's about four o'clock and then Andy⁹⁷ kindly showed us the track round the mountain to Mrs Cameron's. I was afraid I had given Maud⁹⁸ a sore back but to my relief I found it was alright. We came across Alex Cameron⁹⁹ in the river mending a fence and he thought we had run wild. They were rather surprised to see us riding up and was thankful to be on my feet, I was tired of horseback. We have not collected much for such a long ride but must be satisfied with small mercies.

18th May Wednesday

When I awoke this morning and came to my senses, I found it was raining. That does not mean travelling over those hills today. We did not leave until after dinner. It seemed to clear up a little but only to come on a heavier shower. Alec came with us. I let down the slip rails. Maud frightened them a little by showing off her capers but it was the cold. I cannot say anything against her, she was splendid yesterday. Just arrived at Mrs K Cameron's¹⁰⁰ when it rained very heavily. They tried to frighten us by saying the river will be high to morrow but we would not die from loneliness where that little boy is. He is the greatest little cure ever I saw. I think we frightened Mr - (May left the name blank) away but about eight o'clock he got the better of his fears and came back. I did not think either of us were quite so ugly. Took some of the conceit out of me.

19th May Thursday

This morning gave promise of a lovely day so we were no longer weather bound. Mary was going to be very quick and be back to Mrs Cameron's for dinner but when she reached Mr Brooker's could not tear herself away until about 2 o'clock. Mrs Brooker seems a very nice person. I did not think they had such a large family but some of them are as intelligent looking as the poor little deaf and dumb boy. We called at Madden's and saw Joe's wonderful boy¹⁰¹. I believe he is very proud of it. Mary has been very careful of me and has not let me get off at any of the gates. I don't know what Bella and Sarah will think of me. I passed them almost on the road but it was entirely Mary's fault. I don't fancy they are on the best of terms with each other. Returned very early tonight feeling quite tired out.

20th May Friday

I did not feel much fatigued this morning but I have had a good day's rest. It is very chilly today and the warmth of the fire is very acceptable. It must nearly perish them at school. It will be a good thing when the new school¹⁰² is built. They will have a fire place in that. Mr Haynes¹⁰³ came up this morning and spent the day but that is all he does do, never stayed a night yet. It was quite dark when Miss McGregor arrived home tonight looking very tired. It makes me feel so miserable to see her going on the way she is. I hope after the sewing is completed she will be a little brighter.

21st May Saturday

We have been very busy today expecting Mr James for tea but he did not come. Pa kindly went down and fixed the organ for me so there will be no excuse for tomorrow. I have had no practice and do not know how they will manage. I have been building on a good practice with Mr James but am disappointed. Elsie¹⁰⁴ and Miss McGregor have been down at school sewing all day. I received a letter from dear Uncle Will and a quite unexpected one from Mrs Calder¹⁰⁵, thought she had quite forgotten me.

22nd May Sunday

At 5 o'clock Ma was bustling about. I felt quite ashamed of myself when I got up and found she had the breakfast ready and nearly everything done. Played correctly in Church but the singing was very bad. On coming out of Church was introduced to Miss James¹⁰⁶. I would not have played with such confidence had I known she was there.

23rd May Monday

Washing, the order of the day to day and a very easy day's work. We got through a fortnight's washing and then finished before two o'clock. I felt very tired but Ma does not seem so knocked up as she generally is. After tea George and Will came over. I do not play cards as often now when they come as when Ma was away but I am afraid I am getting too fond of them. After a good deal of discussion, Ma consented to have one game and only one but when it was finished she played three and won. I am pleased she did for she does not like to be beaten. I was a good girl tonight and done my work instead of playing cards.

24th May Tuesday

To day the celebration of the Queen's Birthday¹⁰⁷ is kept up. Ma and Pa went to Scone and left me quite alone. I do not think I should have remained all day had it not been for the bread but I worked all day at the ironing and not feeling the least bit tired until about eleven o'clock when a very unwelcome visitor came. My first impulse was to close the door in his face but then he would know I was alone, so faced him. The roughest looking man ever I saw, but then a book should not be judged by its cover. He only inquired his way up the creek. I spent another miserable day afraid of every sound. Will Mitchell came over after tea and stayed until half past eleven, so no more straggling men came that night.

25th May Wednesday

Another day alone. I could have went over to Aunties but preferred being alone as to day brings back to memory a very, very sad event only two years today since it pleased God to call our darling Mama¹⁰⁸ to her Eternal home and it seems ages now. Thankful children ought to be, who have never tasted that bitter sorrow and I am afraid half of them do not know the real value of a Good Mother and do not treat her as she should be treated. God has been

kind and blessed us with a good step mother, yet there is no one can fill the place of your own mother. Expected the inspector¹⁰⁹ to night but he did not come. I felt very thankful he did not.

26th to 29th May No entries

30th May Monday

Everything seemed upset to day with Pa going away. I do hope he will not have to stay long but Ma says he may be away for a whole month. What a miserable time is before us. It is strange Uncle Abs cannot do a little more business than he does. It commenced raining about twelve to day. I hope we are not going to have a wet week. It will be bad for poor Miss McGregor. What a terrible thing that neuralgia must be. She did not get a wink of sleep last night. As to day is Ida's birthday,¹¹⁰ they celebrated it by having a little tea party. Aubrey¹¹¹ came over, the only visitor. George is spending the night to night. It is not as bad as being alone.

31st May Tuesday

The children's sewing is at last completed. I do hope some of them take a prize after all Miss McGregor's trouble with them. It is all a great credit to them if they do not take a prize. Freddie is taking it in to day. He will have a very nice wet ride. It will be a pity if it rains show day. I am very sorry to say Miss McGregor's neuralgia is no better. I hope Fred gets the quinine¹¹², that might ease it. She looks as miserable and getting as thin as a sail. Just after tea Fred put in his appearance wet through and through. He would be tired after his ride and not up for any mischief but he is quite as bad as last night. All very diligent workers tonight, not playing cards at all.

Notes:

- 89 *A property just upstream of Rouchel Vale on Rouchel Brook. May's grandparents first worked on Bingeberry when they arrived in Australia. May's father and most of his siblings were born in a slab hut at Bingeberry. There is a Presbyterian church at Bingeberry which the family attended from time to time.*
- 89a *Albert Sydney Hayne, born 1866, Ma's nephew.*
- 90 *May's father had been in a distracted and at times melancholy mood. May is trying to work out what he is worrying about. The fact that Uncle Abs knows, suggests business problems as Abs (and the other brothers) are in business together.*
- 91 *Margaret Gardner is a sister to Alex Cameron and Mary Carter. She lives at Rose Vale, just downstream from Rouchel Vale.*
- 92 *Sarah Mary Carter, born 1867, Bella's half sister. Later married Malcolm Gardner, also mentioned in the diary.*
- 93 *The Gregsons were neighbours*
- 94 *Mary Kennedy (born 1866) daughter of Kenneth Kennedy and Georgina Cameron.*
- 95 *The British and Foreign Bible Society was a charity that collected money to provide bibles for colonial distribution. May's Uncle, Stephen Dowell was the treasurer of the local branch of the bible society.*
- 96 *Back Creek is a tributary of Rouchel Brook, upstream from Rouchel Vale.*
- 97 *Probably Andy Gardner.*
- 98 *Maud is a horse belonging to May's Uncle Willie. It was her favourite to ride.*
- 99 *Alexander Cameron, son of Donald & Elizabeth of Glencairn, born 1871. Brother of Jack Cameron*
- 100 *Kenneth and Mary Cameron (nee McMullen) live at Glenmore between Upper Rouchel and Davis creek.*
- 101 *Joseph T Madden - Can't find a reference to the son.*
- 102 *Lower Rouchel School was held at St John's Anglican Church which was not heated. Obviously, there were plans to build a new school.*
- 103 *Most likely James Hayne, Mary's father.*
- 104 *Elizabeth (Elsie) Spencer, born 1878. May's younger sister*
- 105 *Mrs Calder - unknown*
- 106 *Miss James – not sure which Miss James.*
- 107 *Queen Victoria's actual birthday (May 24th) was a public holiday in many parts of Australia. After her death, the holiday (or half holiday) was celebrated as Empire Day and then Commonwealth Day, until the 1960s.*
- 108 *May's biological mother, Rebecca Hooper, who died as the result of complications of childbirth on this day 1885*
- 109 *Possibly the School Inspector?*
- 110 *May's younger sister Ida turned five.*
- 111 *May's cousin Aubrey Sherwood Spencer born 1883 (son of Matthew and Emma) who is about the same age as Ida and lived at Rouchel Vale.*
- 112 *Despite being primarily a treatment for Malaria, quinine was used in the 19th century to treat a range of diseases including neuralgia.*

Bible Society Fund Raising

On 17th May 1887 May set off with a friend and neighbour Mary Kennedy (from Rock Hill) to travel up the Rouchel Valley to collect donations for the British and Foreign Bible Society.

Given May's often stated timid nature, this trip seems a very adventurous undertaking for two unaccompanied young ladies. May was not quite 15 and Mary was in her 19th year. The route shown on the following map is about 40 kms. May and Mary probably cut across country more than is shown in the map but it was still a long trip.

Rouchel historian Geoff Harrison used May's description to suggest a possible route for the trip. Geoff has kindly allowed the reproduction of a map from his book "The Rouchel A History". The numbers in the text next to a property name, relate to the numbers on the map on the following page.

Day 1. Rock Hill, Rouchel Vale, Glencoe (25) on Back Creek (Mrs Donald Robert Kennedy), Main Camp (21) on Rouchel Brook (Mrs W.I. Gardner of Rose Vale & Main Camp), Glencairn (47) on Rouchel Brook (Mrs Donald Cameron).

Day 2. Glenmore (48) (Mrs Kenneth Cameron of Rouchel Brook or Davis Creek),

Day 3. Studleigh (40) on Davis Creek (Mr William Brooker), Madden family downstream on Davis Creek, Rouchel Vale (7) & Rock Hill (4).

Mary Kennedy's father was Kenneth Kennedy and her mother was Georgina Cameron. Most of the people May and Mary visited were either Kennedy or Cameron relatives of Mary. These people were also well known or close friends of the Spencers. They spent the first night at Glencairn, which was the home of John Cameron, who often visited the Spencer's, both at Rouchel Vale and in Muswellbrook, throughout 1887.

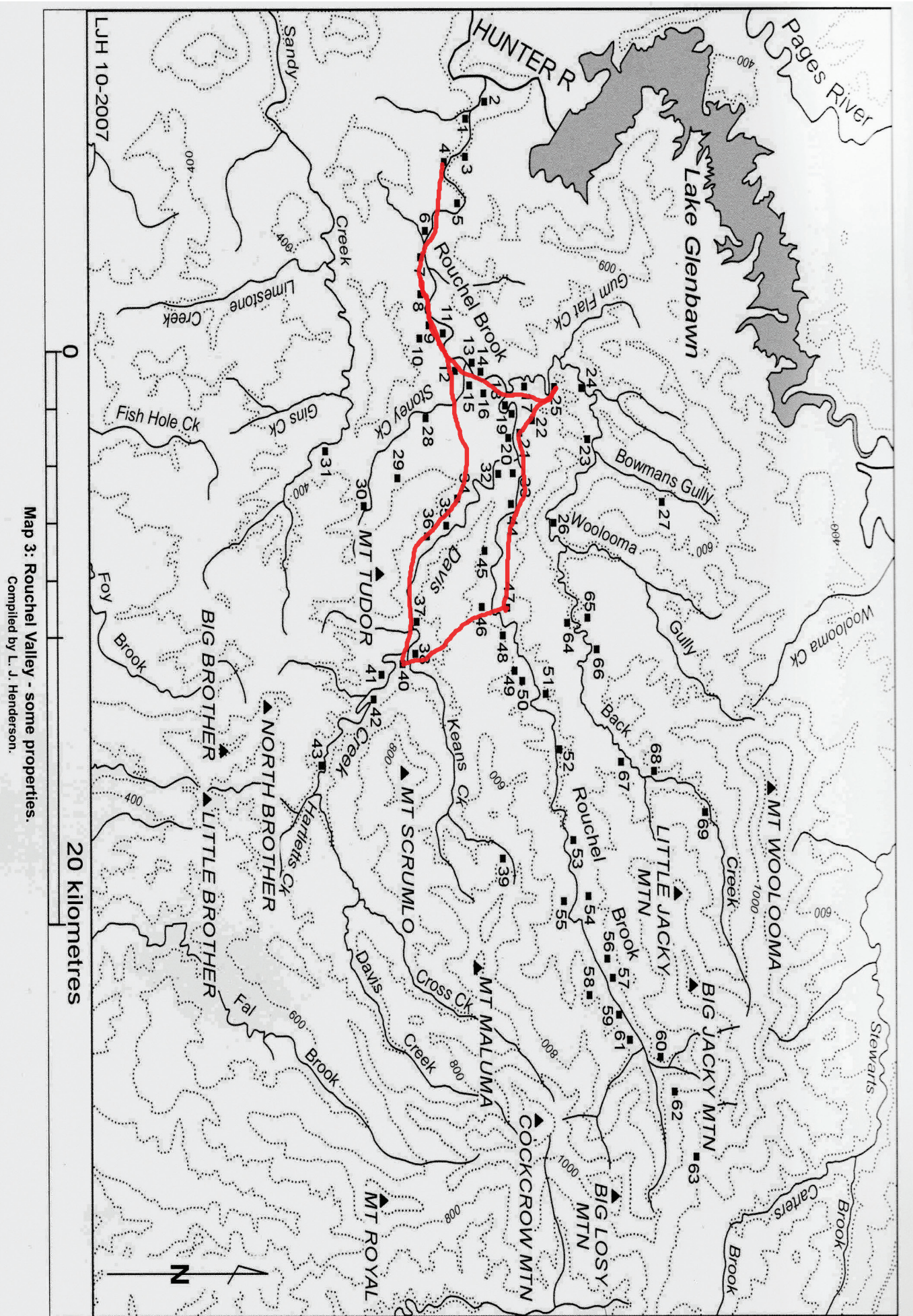
The trip undertaken on the pretext of collecting money for the Bible Society, was perhaps more social than business. This may explain May's comment that they rode a lot but did not collect much.

Whilst the trip to Upper Rouchel and Davis Creek shows the extended Rouchel community, the Muswellbrook Branch of the Bible Society contained a group of people who were part of May's day to day life in the latter part of 1887.

Present at the annual meeting of the Muswellbrook Branch of the Bible Society on 10th May 1887 were May's Uncle Stephen Dowell who was the Hon. Treasurer of the Bible Society (as well as the Mayor of Muswellbrook), Rev J.S. Laing, Hon. Secretary of the Society (the Presbyterian Minister in Muswellbrook who visits the Spencer house in August) the Reverend Canon White (Anglican Minister in Muswellbrook who presided over many Spencer Family ceremonies and instructed May in her Confirmation lessons), Mr E.C. "Charlie" Brecht (A friend of May's father and later became her next door neighbour) and Miss Laing (daughter of Rev. Laing who became both May's music and school teacher).

For the year from 1st May 1887 to 30h April 1888 the Lady Collectors raised the sum of 32 pounds one shilling. This equates to \$7500 - \$10,000 in 2017 terms. This amount would have included the small amount collected by May and Mary on their journey up Rouchel Brook and Davis Creek.

The source of the information regarding the Bible Society is The Maitland Mercury 10th May 1887 via Trove.



Map from "The Rouchel A History" is reproduced with permission.
The red line is the suggested route of May and Mary's trip.

June

1st June Wednesday

Not such a miserable day after all but very wet under foot for the show. I expect they are all busily inspecting the exhibits today. I wonder if our school will carry off any prizes. What an Honour if some of the little girls beat Muscle Brook school girls. We were all very anxious waiting for the postman for

a letter from Pa, but to our great disappointment no envelope addressed in his familiar handwriting. I hope he will send a line by next mail. All alone tonight. No one coming to break the monotony. Yet it was eleven o'clock before we retired. Poor Miss McGregor is nearly frantic with her face. It makes me miserable to see her suffering. I am one of Job's comforters for any one in trouble¹¹³.

2nd June Thursday

All excitement this morning. Nice and fine. Crowds of people on their way to the show. I think it will be scarcely worth the muddy ride in. I was very much annoyed to see Will Bridge riding away on Selina, when I wished to have her this evening, but a good Samaritane came along, so I was not disappointed in my ride. We went to Mrs Carter's and enjoyed a pleasant evening. Miss McGregor's face is much better. It is quite a treat to see her living up a little. She has enough troubles to bear than I am aware of without the face ache. Ma started packing, so we are really going to leave the old place. Muscle Brook may have its advantages, but it will have its disadvantages also. George, Miss McGregor and I had a game of Euchre. I was beaten shamefully.

3rd June Friday

A holiday for Miss McGregor today so she kindly assisted with the packing. I am afraid she will tire herself out. She is thin, weak with the suffering she has went through. I wonder where Pa is today and when he will be coming home. It does not seem home without him. Ma will worry herself to death. Certainly, there must be a great charge on her shoulders, but she is far better this time than last when Pa was away. I believe she goes to bed about 8 o'clock. I ought to be ashamed of myself for not practicing more, it is two days sinse I touched the organ. Rather cold for sitting playing at night without a fire.

4th June Saturday

No word from Pa again. I thought he would write today. A miserable day for all the household. I received a letter from Uncle Willie which contained a piece of news that hurt my feelings very much. I am so thankful to him for telling me. I might never have known. I know now what feelings Uncle Abs bears toward me. How delighted we were when we heard Elsie carried off first prize¹¹⁴. It is something for her to look back upon and a recompense to Miss McGregor for her patience and care she took in their sewing.

5th June Sunday

Church at Bingeberry this morning. George and Al came with us to church and we had the pleasure of hearing a new ministers first sermon in the colony¹¹⁵. His text was "How long halt Ye between two opinions". He is a splendid preacher. Coming home, Miss McGregor and Selena¹¹⁶ had a difference of opinion and decided upon separating. She is not very much hurt by the fall she says, but she is very weak. I am afraid it will tell (on) her.



Thomas snr and his wife Mary retired to Muscle Brook in 1880. This house in Cook St is believed to be the house referred to as the "Hill" in the diary. The house still stands today.

6th June Monday

Washing being the order of the day, six o'clock found us all facing the cold porch and getting about our work. A piercing wind blew all day, which nearly cut us in two out at the line. Finished about 2 o'clock and to our great surprise saw the children returning at an early hour from school. Poor Miss McGregor was unable to teach them all day. I suspect the fall has done some injury to her. Mary Kennedy came up for her horse. The Inspector rode up. She did not stay long, she said they were kept quite busy now entertaining such high visitors since they moved into their big house. Ma, the children and I were just seated at tea feeling very tired and lonely when we were brightened up by Bella and George. We tried hard to keep her all night but she could not stay. George even let her horses go, but had to catch it again. He stayed the night.

7th June Tuesday

No school today, Miss McGregor being very ill all day. I was so shameful she did not attempt teaching. A bitterly cold day and snow was to be seen quite plainly on Woollomu¹¹⁷. We were very busy ironing all day. It was certainly a very acceptable bill on such a cold day. I wonder where Pa is, and is he travelling in this wind. Ma is completely worn out, but not too tired for a game of Crib when Bill and George came over but was beaten. Miss McGregor came down about five o'clock and joined us in a game after tea. Joe Madden¹¹⁸ came to beg a night's lodging, and Ma had never met him before so he had to introduce himself. I was surprised to see him come. He is not a very frequent visitor. Well we can rest easy tonight, the heaviest of the work is finished. I hope Miss McGregor is better tomorrow.

8th June Wednesday

A very cold morning to leave a nice warm bed, but I like to be up before Ma. I feel sure she will sleep better as we received the welcome news of dear Pa returning tomorrow. What a long time it seems, and yet only a week. Bella and Sara promised to spend the evening, but only Bella came as her Ma was ill, Sara could not come. After tea I was asked to play. It is no use refusing. I must play what I can. Then Bella and I played George and Bill a game of euchre, and was beaten shameful. We will never be able to boast again. Served us right. Bella then favoured us with a few songs, while Miss McGregor and Ma had a game. The latter is in excellent spirits tonight, but poor Miss McGregor has not yet recovered from the effects of her fall. I am quite ashamed of myself. I am always saying something to hurt her feelings. I do it quite unintentionally, and am always saying I will never say the like again.

9th June Thursday

Bella left directly after breakfast. Very cold riding I should think. Ma need not have flurried herself getting up early to be in time for uncle Matt with the beast, for they did not come until after nine o'clock. And then when he did bring it, would not oblige by salting for us. I was so wild. Ma took it into her head to do it and nothing would stop her and she would not let me help her. Mrs Cameron called on her way up the creek and stayed for a while. Artie went up with her. She says she always has a boy to take her home whenever she goes out and sure enough she very often has two. Pa arrived home about three o'clock only four and a half hours from Muscle Brook. I think he enjoyed his trip. He said the scenery was magnificent with snow, the moonlight reflecting on the white cliffs.

10th June Friday

Choir practice this evening. I dread the thought of it but this will be my last practice so I must not murmur. Half past three was the appointed time, but the Misses Kennedy¹¹⁹ did not come until after four. My head is aching with their singing. They screeched terribly, but there is only one Hymn. I am afraid they will break down. Miss McGregor did not return from school until dark, and so lost that treat. She has been a naughty girl and fixed all those heavy forms by herself. She is not half careful of herself. There was a gentleman sent up for me to go down (to) spend the night with them. No name in the message, but I believe it was "O'Yeas". Pa seems awfully dull. I wonder what makes him so. He used to be so jolly one time, but not so now.

11th June Saturday

After dinner clouds rolled up and Miss McGregor said it was useless of thinking of going for a ride, but later on it brightened up and we ventured. George came up with us on our way up. Some gents passed us, and one of them passed some very rude remarks. No gentleman would say such things. Found Miss Miller in a remarkable good humour. Played and sang for us. It was very cold. We left it rather late, and was quite dark before we reached

home. Ma, Pa, Miss McGregor and George had a game of which Ma and Pa being the winners. I was good and did not participate in any cards tonight.

12th June Sunday

Rain, Rain was the first sound this morning. That is not like church. It continued showery all day and after dinner it poured down. Pa is unusually dull today. It makes everyone melancholy when he is. We played and sang for him in the evening, then after tea, some more singing, retiring to bed rather early.

13th June Monday

Another wet day and no school, and we are all busily engaged in stuffing the packs and packing them. How different it seems now. Our drawing room will not look half so nice in Muscle Brook. Small rooms never do up nicely. I think I am generally useless today. Does not seem much like getting away this winter. The river is rising fast. No cards or games of any sort now. Nothing but work until all is settled. Everything seems so dismal tonight, perhaps only my fancy. After tea they asked me to play. I played a little and the thanks I received was that the music was not worth the trouble to obtain, so I went to bed on the strength of it all.

14th June Tuesday

I am making the order of the day and packing with it. Had a pleasant surprise to see Miss McGregor bringing her little family home for dinner. Johnnie Cameron called and told her their school received an extra weeks holiday in honour of the Queens jubilee¹²⁰. She is not going home till the end of this week, but kindly going to help us with the work. It is a lovely day today. A nice day for a ride. Intended going to town today, but will not go until the morning. Another solitary night. I wonder will Ma sit up until morning. After tea tried over some songs to pass the evening, but we do not sit up very late sinse Pa came home. He likes going (to bed) as soon as he has had his tea.

15th June Wednesday

Three good workmen to do the washing today. I am sure that things ought to fly along well. There is a very heavy wash, and everything finished by one o'clock, so that is quick work. Dinner well earned. I think Pa could not go away and leave us hard at work, so waited till after dinner. When everything was cleared up, we thought we were deserving of a little ride and took the opportunity of going down to see Mrs Gardner. I had no idea she was such a sufferer as she is. She seemed very pleased to see us and cheered up a little. She looks very pale. Poor old Grannie is just the same, jolly as ever. Mrs McDonald is going to stay (to) keep Bella company tonight. She has to sit up nearly all night. It was nearly dark when we reached home and just beginning to feel chilly.

16th June Thursday

Went through with one part of the ironing splendidly and was finished before dinner. After dinner I asked for something else to do and received what I asked for, the chairs to pack. Well if I wasn't tired of them. I could not get into the knack of packing them and almost lost my temper, when Sarah and Bill M came. I was pleased to see the former. I thought she was not going to come and see us at all, but her Ma has been very ill and Bella away she is excusable. I wonder how she will manage in the church, as she is to be my successor. I'm afraid it will be a good while before Sarah will play for them. After tea, Miss McGregor and I went over to Aunt Emma's to see if she has room for Miss McGregor to stay when she comes back after the holidays¹²¹. She says she does.

17th June Friday

Everything is very unsettled here at present. Miss McGregor has been in two minds whether she will go home today, but Pa did not arrive home in time for her to start. She must be longing to get home. I would like to keep her as long as I could, but yet I could not be selfish. There are others who long for her company as much as I do. Pa did not arrive home until very late and he promised to be home this morning. He brought home news that put Ma out and everything seemed in a disordered state. We were very tired after packing all day. Miss McGregor was disappointed as she thought of getting home tonight, if Pa had come early. But that leaves her one more night with me. My dear old companion. I shall never have another like her, but I suppose we are parted forever now.

18th June Saturday

Fred escorted Miss McGregor into Muscle Brook this morning. I could not go outside and see her really leaving, but then she is not going away from me forever. I shall often see her but only for a short time. Everything is nearly

packed up now. We are on very short allowances now. I received a letter from dear uncle Willie. He does not seem to be so much against me as uncle Matt. He thinks Pa will be better in there. I would give anything to see him jollier. George called tonight, but I went to bed soon after because being completely worn out.

19th June Sunday

This is our last Sunday on the Rouchel, so we went out for dinner. Artie and I went to Church, and Ma and the all the children went to Mrs Cameron's. A nice little crew when we all got together. I called at Rock Hill¹²² coming home and at Mrs Gardner's. This will be my last ride for a while I expect. How dreary everything seems at home after being out all day.

20th June Monday

This does really seem like leaving to see the first load in the wagon. I don't think there will be more than three loads now. Not a very promising day. Very like rain. I do hope it will keep fine until everything is in. The old house does look deserted now. Full of emptiness. I was very much surprised to see Malcolm¹²³ call to bid us goodbye. He said he could not let us go without bidding us farewell. Bella promised to try and come up for a short time. I was beginning to think she was not coming, when about 4 o'clock I saw her coming. George came up with her. She says poor Mrs Gardner is worse today. She is a great sufferer. No music tonight. The books are all packed. We gave them a farewell game of euchre and were beaten. I think it is time we lost conceit of our playing.

21st June Tuesday

A very miserable day for the Queens Jubilee today. I had no intentions of going to the sports today¹²⁴, but as Bella wished me to go (and) I did not refuse, there being not much to be done at home. We had a splendid ride up, the rain catching us first half way. The ride was the best part of the day's amusement. I think the sports were not very good, and the wind and rain was miserably poor. Miss Miller met with an accident and sprained her ankle, so that she was unable to walk on it the rest of the day. They intended having a party tonight to finish the day. I could not possibly stay to it as we intended starting at first light tomorrow morning. Just arrived home when a heavy shower came on. I wonder will they have their ball?

22nd June Wednesday

It was a little after four when I rose this morning, and then I was last to leave my bed. It was not near as cold before daylight as after. Packed all the little necessities we had been using, and got a start by nine o'clock. I wonder when I shall see the old Rouchel again. Not for some time I expect. Uncle Matt is very downhearted about us leaving¹²⁵. I expect it will be lonely for them now we are gone. Just arrived on the "Hill" in time for dinner and then went to our new home¹²⁶. Shall I ever forget the feeling that passed over me after leaving such fine large rooms and stepping into these little pigeon holes. It was a miserable day and a miserable house. Perhaps we may have a comfortable home some day, but not very soon. Our first night is very dismal. Went to bed early but no sleep with the mice.

23rd June Thursday

Pa started for the Rouchel very early this morning to finish loading the wagons. I expect the poor old house is left quite desolate after being occupied for over twenty years, but Pa would never live happily there again¹²⁷, and so I think it was best to leave it. Altho this looks a very miserable place, yet it might appear nicer when we are all settled. Wrote a letter to dear Miss McGregor. I wonder how she is getting on. I shall miss her very much. Just like an elder sister I could look up to in all my troubles, but will be very lonely for her as well as me, but by herself. I shall have my school companions I suppose. I will make up with some of them, but none shall ever be as dear to me as the ones I have just parted with.

24th June Friday

A Masonic banquet tonight¹²⁸. That will entice Pa home. He was to have been home last night. The mice are not getting any less here, but I am afraid they will have to clear out when the cases come as there will not be room for both in this little place. Artie and Fred arrived in with the cow and Pa came after dark. Ma was getting quite uneasy about him but he was so busy he said to come any sooner. They have nearly all now, no more loads to come. I thought there would be about half a dozen loads. Aunt Sarah came down to see us today. She seems very nice and friendly. I hope they are all going to be like that. It will be very disagreeable for us if they are not.

25th June Saturday

What a lot of gaping women they are across the road. One would think they had never seen loaded drays before. I expect they want to see what the goods are like. Had quite a large family for dinner today, and a nice place to put them into. Andy Gardner¹²⁹ came to dinner. He must have struck a patch very like rain today. I wish it would rain and fill our tank for us. Nights are all alike to us. No change. The same thing over and over.

26th June Sunday

It sounds odd to us hearing the church bells ringing. There are no bells to call us to church in the country. I went this morning. Pa felt too tired he said. We have no seatings of our own yet and there are none to be had, I don't think. Went up to see Mrs Gardner for a few minutes. She seems much better.

27th June Monday

A miserable day today, but it has been the same sinse we came in on a miserable house. How I wish Pa would insist upon that woman going out. He is too easy with her. We are crowded up in this little place. Just to wait on her. One little necessary which adds to our comfort Pa did today and that is put the stove in order and made the stand for the tank. Rain is the next thing that is required to fill it, but I do not think we shall have to wait long for that. Ma intended going to Scone today, but not feeling so well she postponed it. I have been working diligently at my petticoat. I have only this week to finish it. I think I shall have it finished by Saturday.

28th June Tuesday

Vivie has been very ill all night and did not seem much better this morning, until Ma spoke of not being able to take Viv to Scone with her. The words were no sooner spoke simptoms (sic) of illness vanished, and in a few minutes Vivie was busily engaged in putting on her new shoes. She promises she will be a baby and make Ma nurse her. I expect she will not be the best of children. Only poor old Tom¹³⁰ left at home to annoy us today. Elsie and Ida went with Ma. The former will not be home until Saturday. Ma bought down such a novelty. A bracelet made of all sorts of seeds. Very pretty and so uncommon. A friend from Tamworth sent it to her.

29th June Wednesday

Washing today but unfortunately had no wood. Had to wait for it to come so it was nearly ten o'clock when we commenced. As Ma was going to get a washerwoman next week, she only did half the clothes. I had to stand out in the open air. On a cold day like this, that was very pleasant, but we must put up with all these little inconveniences for a while. Ab came down in the four (o'clock) train (from Aberdeen). He is our first visitor I think. Returned by the midnight train. I felt very tired by that time and did not say no to bed. Given up card playing altogether and become good I think. Never had a game sinse we have been in here.

30th June Thursday

Oh dear. I am tired of town life if this is it. Over a week we have been in this muddle but I hope from today things will have a little progress. Hitherto there is not one article unpacked, nowhere to put them if they were unpacked. Pa asked Mr Witison¹³¹ to help him. They commenced painting the front of the house today. That will be a slight improvement. I saw Mr Gregson¹³² at Uncle Stephen's¹³³ today, and very much surprised to hear he is moved from Aberdeen to Cundletown on the Manning. That is a move, but a far supreme school to this one. Lizzie Kirk¹³⁴ will be going up to Aberdeen tomorrow with him. I should like to see her. It is ages sinse I saw her last.

Notes:

113 *A Job's comforter is a person who makes things worse by giving comfort.*

114 *Elsie won Mr E White's Special Prize for plain needlework at the Muscle Brook show. See next page.*

115 *Mr Davis.*

116 *Miss McGregor's horse, Selena, threw her.*

117 *Mount Woolooma (1325 metres) which is to the North East of Rouchel Vale. It is the source of Back Creek.*

118 *See 101.*

119 *This could have been one of many Misses Kennedy.*

120 *20th June 1887 was the 50th anniversary of Queen Victoria ascending to the throne. It was her Golden Jubilee. Celebrations took place across the British Empire.*

- 121 Grace McGregor lives with Thomas' family at Rouchel Vale. She teaches at the local school. She moves in with Matthew and Emma Spencer after Thomas moves to Muscle Brook.
- 122 "Rock Hill" was a Lower Rouchel property owned by Kenneth Kennedy
- 123 Probably Malcolm Henry Gardner, born 1867. He later married Sarah Carter, Bella's half sister
- 124 Jubilee Celebrations of all sorts were held around the Empire. The sports carnival was probably at Main Camp Rouchel, followed by a dance in the shearers quarters
- 125 Matthew Spencer is obviously not happy with Thomas leaving Rouchel Vale.
- 126 This was their new, much smaller house in Muscle Brook
- 127 We never quite get the reason why Thomas Spencer wants to leave Rouchel Vale, but later entries suggest it may have been financial. The family sold Rouchel Vale in mid 1888.
- 128 May's father, Thomas Spencer and her Uncle, Stephen Dowell are both active members of the Prince of Wales Masonic Lodge in Muscle Brook. Both are deacons of the lodge.
- 129 Andrew George Gardner, born 1854.
- 130 Thomas Pritchard, born 1880. May's step brother.
- 131 Mr Witison - unknown
- 132 Mr Gregson is a Rouchel neighbour and friend of May's father. They were both involved in Rouchel Union Cricket club. Thomas was the president in 1886.
- 133 Stephen James Dowell was married to May's Aunt, Mary Jane Spencer. They lived in Hunter Terrace Muscle Brook. Stephen's first wife, Sarah Ann Hooper, was the sister of May's mother Rebecca Hooper. He was the Mayor of Muscle Brook in 1887
- 134 Elizabeth Kirk, born 1860.

Elsie Wins the Mr E. White special prize for plain needlework

May makes several comments about the sewing prizes at Muscle Brook Show

"31st May Tuesday: The children's sewing is at last completed. I do hope some of them take a prize after all Miss McGregor's trouble with them. It is all a great credit to them if they do not take a prize. Freddie is taking it in to day. He will have a very nice wet ride."

"1st June Wednesday: I wonder if our school will carry off any prizes. What an Honour if some of the little girls beat Muscle Brook school girls."

"4th June Saturday: How delighted we were when we heard Elsie carried off first prize. It is something for her to look back upon and a recompense to Miss McGregor for her patience and care she took in their sewing."

The following notice appeared in the Maitland Mercury newspaper on 18th of June 1887 .

UPPER HUNTER PASTORAL AND AGRICULTURAL ASSOCIATION.

A special meeting of the Committee of the Upper Hunter Pastoral and Agricultural Association was held at the committee-rooms, School of Arts, Muswellbrook, on Tuesday morning. The following members attended: Messrs. W. Bowman, J. H Cox, T. Cook, C. E. Doyle, J. W. Humphries, and E. C. Brecht. The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed.

CORRESPONDENCE.-The Secretary read a letter from the Rev. Canon White, hon. secretary of the Jubilee Demonstration Committee, applying for the use of the show ground and buildings for the purposes of the children's fête on Monday and Tuesday next; the application was at once granted.-

Letters were also read from Mr. S. J. Dowell, on behalf of Miss Elsie Spencer, winner of Mr. E. White's special prize for plain needlework at the show, asking that the prize might take the form of a silver cup

Mr E White JP was a wealthy local landowner from Denman. He owned the Martindale property and bred horses.

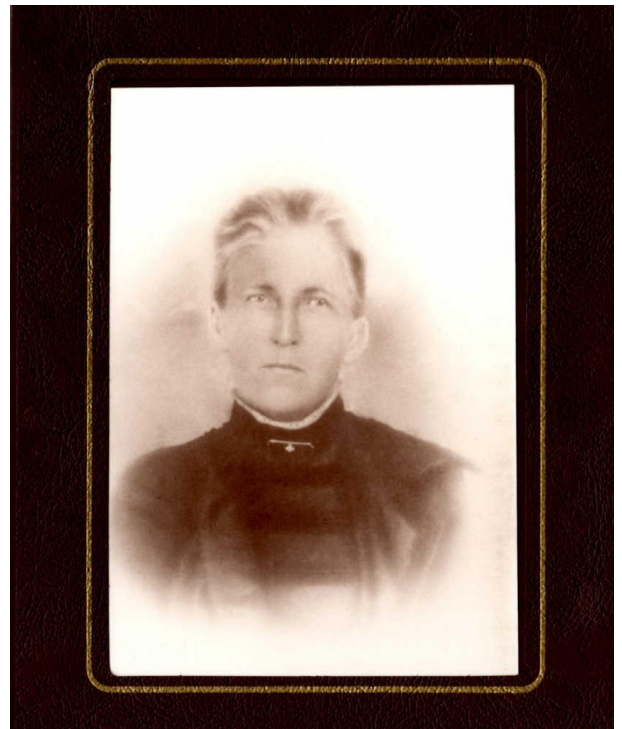
Mr S.J. Dowell is May's and Elsie's Uncle Stephen, who also happens to be the Mayor of Muscle Brook. There is no further mention in the paper as to whether the silver cup was awarded, but it helps to have friends in high places.

(Source of quote from Maitland Mercury <http://trove.nla.gov.au>)

July

1st July Friday

Partly expected Miss McGregor up today but I hardly thought she would come, still Fred went down to the train, but was disappointed. She is bound to be up tomorrow. I expect she found it hard to tease herself away from home until the last day, especially now there is a little baby boy in the family. I received a letter from Uncle Willie today. I think he is in very bad spirits not liking the old house being left desolate, and then the misfortune in business matters one thing or another. He is very low spirited now. I wish I were near him to comfort him, my dear old uncle. It is only two more months and he will be returning home again. That short time will pass very slowly to him I expect.



Elizabeth "Aunt Lilly" Frost (nee Spencer)

2nd July Saturday

Went to the train and met Miss McGregor this morning, but it is not like it used to be. I cannot have her all to myself as I have had. It only makes me sad to think my dear old friend and companion is going away to leave me. She will find it very lonely out there too I expect, although I was such a nuisance to her, still she said she always missed me when I was gone. Wrote to Uncle Willie tonight and also to Bella. Miss McGregor came and spent the evening with us and promised to come and spend tomorrow morning. My legs are very painful tonight. I never felt them as bad before.

3rd July Sunday

This being Sacrament Sunday, Ma wished to go but could not get Pa to accompany her. He says he will not go until he can get a seat so we all stayed at home. Miss McGregor was here all the morning but would not stay for dinner. Uncle Matt never as much as called to see us. It was after two when they started. Went down and spent the afternoon with Miss Chivers¹³⁶. She is on a visit to Aunt Mary's

4th July Monday

Commenced papering today. Pa thinks he will get the two houses finished in a week, but I do not think they will. School opens today, but it was too wet to send the children today. I will (be) very thankful when they all go off to school. I have another fortnights holiday, yet I hope we will be a little straighter by that time than we are now. Mrs English¹³⁷ left on Saturday so that we have the two houses clean now. Another wet day today. I wonder if we all are ever going to have a fine day again. After tea went down to Aunt Mary's and spent a very pleasant evening there, only I must say we entertained ourselves. Aunt Mary was very quiet. Minnie¹³⁸ and Mrs Chivers favoured us with some nice singing and the former with good music also.

5th July Tuesday

Ma sent me on an errand down town this morning and I, like a naughty girl, did not return until after dinner. Went round by Aunt Mary's and Minnie joined me there, but Ma told me I could spend the day with her if I wished. George went home this morning. He was weather bound yesterday.

After dinner Aunt Mary, Minnie and the children went for a drive. It is not at all a pleasant day for her to be out. Aunt Lammie¹³⁹ will be leaving there tomorrow. She has been a good while there. Lodge night tonight, but Pa felt too tired to attend. I expect he will feel tired a good many nights before his work is finished. How shall I sleep tonight with the thought of having to play before Mrs Chivers tomorrow night.

6th July Wednesday

Washing the order of the day. Mrs Brin¹⁴⁰ came about 1 o'clock to commence her days work, and a heavy one she has before her poor old body. It seems hard for them to come to that stage in life and then have to turn out and earn their own living. It was neatly five when she finished. There was a sale today. Pa bought two tables at it. One for the parlour and the other for the dining room. Very nice ones both of them. Mrs Chivers and Uncle Stephen called in for a few minutes. I thought he was coming to tea, but did not come until after and brought Uncle George with him. He is getting worse that man, I am sure. Mrs Chivers and I played Ma and Pa at crib and were defeated. Then we played Pa and Uncle George at euchre and were beaten both times

7th July Thursday

Finished all the ironing today and was just putting the last of them away when Minnie put in her appearance. She promised to come and spend the night with me but I had forgotten all about it for the time being. Mrs Chivers went up in the train this morning and Min has till Saturday. There is nothing like enjoying yourself while you can. We went round to Aunties like a pair of naughty girls and asked George Stacey¹⁴¹ up to have a little fun with the silly fellow. Ab¹⁴² and John Cameron came too and we had a few steps. Ab played for us. Min favoured us with some songs, but Johnny could not stay long as he had work to do, so took his departure about half past eight. Abs gave Ma and Pa a game of Crib and beat them. He had to drag little George away before he would go.

8th July Friday

A days holiday for me today. How good and kind of Ma to let me have all day with Min as it is her last day here. We spent the whole day rambling about feeling very tired at night fall altho we enjoyed ourselves thoroughly. I suppose all girls are the same. They like to be in the company of those about their own age. Minnie said she would very much like to come and stay the evening here if I would go around for her as Aunt Mary hardly cared about her leaving. So of course I jumped at the idea. Well Auntie was in a very good humour when I went there and took me up very short, but opoliged (sic) for it after. About 7 o'clock a knock came to the door and who should it be but John Cameron and George. I think they all enjoyed themselves as far as I could see. Finished with a game of Old Maid¹⁴³ which caused us a little amusement.

9th July Friday

I hope this will be my last outing for a little while. I have been out every day this week but it is an exceptional one. Of course it is only natural I must go and see her off. Fred is going up to the crossing so he will be that far with her. I guessed as much to see Mr C there after seeing Miss C¹⁴⁴. home last night that he should see her off in the train. Aunt Mary was very friendly with me. I would be very sorry to be anything else with her, for she has been very kind to me. Perhaps I only imagined she was cross with me last night. We were very busy until very late this evening. I felt rather tired when tea was over.

10th July Sunday (May's Birthday)

I thought Pa might take it into his head to go to church but not so. I did not like the idea of going by myself. I must alter and turn out to Sunday School with the others of a morning. Ma and Pa went for a walk out to Mrs Thornton's¹⁴⁵ this evening leaving me all alone in my glory. I laid down just in a nice sleep, when Uncles George and Stephen disturbed my slumber.

11th July Monday

Raining. Too wet for the children to go to school. What a treat to have them at home all day. They are like lunatics sinse they have come in here, whether we notice their noise or not, I cannot say. After breakfast it cleared off a bit and Ma wrapped them up and sent them off. They only run about in the wet when they are at school. Home it is nothing but work all day long and you cannot see any improvement. It will be like heaven when we are all straight again. Ma commenced dressing the front room today, but they have not them quite finished off yet. Who should call this evening and find us all in disorder but Mrs Wilson, but seeing Ma was not in a fit state to receive visitors she soon took her departure, promising to call another time.

12th July Tuesday

Which ever way you turn now is nothing but wet paint. Of course I am one of the unfortunate ones and am

daubing my dress on all sides. I think our workmen are getting very slow. They seem to do too much talking and smoking to attend to business much, but I must not complain. Pa has really worked well considering he has such a bad name. Very much surprised we all were when Pa told us he was going out for the evening and that meant twelve o'clock racket for us. I felt really tired and sleepy tonight just because I must sit up. The boys left us no wood to burn and there we sat nearly frozen with the cold when Pa came at ¼ to 12.

13th July Wednesday

As usual washing the order of the day and fortunately we had a good drying day. Ma helped Mrs Brin so as to try and get the ironing done, but she was disappointed they were not dry enough. Still she got some of the starched things done which will be a great assistance for tomorrow. Mr Frost¹⁴⁶ called on us this morning but I had not the pleasure of seeing him. I am sure I missed a great treat. Ma was completely worn out tonight and I did not feel up to much when Uncle George came. He did not stay long and I came into my room but did not go to bed until long after the others. I expect it is not right for me to stay up so long, but I do not feel the least bit sleepy.

14th July Thursday

Not a very heavy ironing at all this week and so we soon accomplished it. This is my last week at home. Next week I shall have to turn to school duties. It will seem strange to me for a while. Pa and Mr Windsor¹⁴⁷ seem to me to be working very slowly this week, but they say they will have the house finished by Saturday and then I hope there will be a change. Nearly all the front rooms are tidy excepting the parlour. Miss Laing¹⁴⁸ called this afternoon for a few moments. After tea Johnnie came over for a while. We had a game of cards. He and I played Pa and Ma and beat them. He says he has a night's lesson to do yet.

15th July Friday

Last week I had a real jolly week, but this I have never been outside the door no more than to assess. By the by this is Pa's birthday¹⁴⁹. Today he attains the great age of 46. Getting quite an old man now. Ma made him a present of a lovely meerschaum Pipe¹⁵⁰. He has everything complete now. Aunt Mary and all the children came up to tea. Ma made a lovely cake and other little sundries so that we had quite a little spread among ourselves. I expect there will be jealousy from other quarters. As no one was asked they must only get pleased again¹⁵¹.

16th July Saturday

I surprised Ma a little by getting up at daylight and was busy cleaning the verandah when she woke, but it was not a success as I had not the right kind of stone. Mrs Cameron came in today. She said Bella was coming soon but she did not put in her appearance. At night fall we were both quite done up, but thankful to find the house nice and tidy. Ma was lying down on the sofa when J C¹⁵² came. He said they all went away and left him, so he thought he would seek other company.

17th July Sunday

Fred and I went to church this morning, late as usual. I commenced school this evening and like it very well. There are other girls as big as me going. I thought I would be the eldest there. Minnie Brecht¹⁵³ seems a very nice girl. I got an introduction to her.

18th July Monday

Could hardly realize that I must really go off to school this morning. It seems so strange after staying away so long, but I must work hard while I have the opportunity and show my gratitude to my kind parents in sending me to a private school¹⁵⁴. Miss Laing seems very nice, I rather like her. Only little Belle Humphries¹⁵⁵ there beside my self today. Edith Hargraves is to be down tomorrow. Had my first music lesson today also. The piano seems very queer to me. It will be some time before I will get into the touch. I will practice well. Aunt Mary has kindly given me the use of her piano. I am so thankful to her.

19th July Tuesday

Six o'clock is rather cold and early to be turning out these mornings, but there is so much to be done in order to have the children away in time for school. I do not go in until half an hour after them. Only half a day's schooling for me as the other girls are not back. The home lessons are the hardest. I have no spare time after tea until bed time. The races are taking place today. Uncle Stephen went and left Aunt Lammie in charge. I fortunately wanted something that took me down, we had a nice little bit of fun to ourselves, as when the cats away, the mice will play.

William¹⁵⁶ is a real good fellow with the biscuits. He always hands me the tin. Wrote to Miss McGregor tonight. I wonder how the dear old soul is getting on.

20th July Wednesday

School again today, but a little addition to our number. Edith¹⁵⁷ is back. I shall have a companion now. I do not think I am so far behind now. I thought I would be a regular big dunce. There is a bazaar in the Sunday School this evening, Ma and Pa went. Mrs Brin and I just finished the ironing. I only came in at the tail end of the work now. I am pleased Ma has a woman in, it would be too much for her to do by herself. It is enough to turn a pig away from potatoes to see the snobs of Muscle Brook. They think it would stifle them to breathe the (same) air as the poorer class. There is a shooting match today. Of course, only for the upperten, refusing to let the lower class join. They want taking up for cruelty to dumb animals – shooting the poor little pigeons.

21st July Thursday

What a blessing. All the washing and ironing done, altho I have not to do it now. Still I cannot bear to see Ma working hard and I not able to help her. She is very ill I am sorry to say. Aunt Mary went out for a drive this afternoon and she wanted Ma to accompany her, but she felt too indisposed to do so. Pa has went to the races today. What a singular coincidence, some time sinse he went on the racecourse. My music lesson today. I had to go to the Manse¹⁵⁸ for it and got on very poorly I think. From there to practice and worse and worse there. Annie and Lil¹⁵⁹ came up in the parlour for a while with me, and Auntie just happened to come. If she did not storm I shall not forget it. Perhaps Annie deserved some of what she got.

22nd July Friday

The last day at school this week. I wonder what poor Miss McGregor is doing today. Lifting three heavy forms by herself. I wish she was coming in this evening, but that wish is vain. I have not been a naughty girl and neglected uncle Willie this week. I received a letter from him today. He is not vexed with me for not writing to him. I have a very tedious lot of sums to do tonight and just as I was in the midst of them John Cameron came and the worst of it I was showing the boys their lesson but he kindly paid me the compliment and looked over my lesson for me. I was very naughty but he only told me how to state them. I must tell Miss Laing I did not do them all myself.

23rd July Saturday

The first thought struck me when I woke this morning was the verandah. I like to have it done before the people are moving about much. I had it done before breakfast, which gave me a good appetite. Altho we have everything straight there always is plenty to be done. We were not finished much about three. I had to go down to practice. Aunty was in an excellent humour today. I don't know as I am improving with my music, but I practice until I am quite tired of it. Fred went out to the Rouchel today,

24th July Sunday

Sunday school this morning. No time to spare these short mornings, but for a great wonder I was early and knew my lesson only fairly for a big girl. Mary Watt¹⁶⁰ spoke to me and was very friendly. I don't think there are very many nice girls in Muscle Brook. Broke the Sabbath by losing my temper with the children, but they did really provoke me.

25th July Monday

Another attendant at our school today, "Lottie"¹⁶¹. I don't think she is a very nice girl. She seems very disobedient in school. I suppose we will have Mable Barklay¹⁶² soon now. I think we will soon drive Miss Laing out of her mind. My music lesson this evening. That is what I delight in now. I wish I could play nicely, but nothing but steady practice will ever make me perfect. Lessons as usual tonight. Not in bed till near eleven. I love sitting up by myself. I cannot say why.

26th July Tuesday - No entry

27th July Wednesday

Ma as usual has been slaving about all day today. She may as well have no women to work for her. But she likes to get the ironing done in the day. Mr Wilson¹⁶³ called to see us today. I could scarcely keep from laughing at the poor man talking. I will be getting really lazy going to school only plenty of brain work. I think I have lost what little brains I ever had. Perhaps they have turned to water. John Cameron came over for a while. A wonder he ever

comes over, it must be rather stale, nothing but lessons going on around him. I am sure he sees enough of that all day¹⁶⁴.

28th July Thursday

Music day today. I have practiced well but I don't please Miss Laing quite. Ma intended going out tonight, this afternoon, but could not on account of Mrs Windsor¹⁶⁵ not finishing the work, but I think she has finished now. Pa went out on the Rouchel for the buggy. I hope Ma will be able to go for a drive when it comes in. She looks so miserable. I am sure she is fretting about something. Certainly there is not much to cheer her. Auntie and Uncle George came round and stayed until bed time. They kept things lively for a while. We felt very nervous after they left, but I don't think anyone would bother taking us.

29th July Friday

I will fly past the events of today. They are to be compared to my evenings pleasure. Just after tea I heard a loud knock and thinking it was Fred's nonsense I impatiently remarked you do not deserve letting in, frightening me so. But on opening the door who should I behold but my darling Miss McGregor. I felt so delighted I could hardly contain myself, but she only stayed for a short time. Come to leave me. John Cameron came over also, and then we all went up on the hill. He went to Bible class and was only going to stay a few seconds, but when the time came it was over an hour. Had to do penance for it and sit up until eleven learning my lessons.

30th July Saturday

Up not as early as I ought, to do my verandah. It was bitterly cold. Ma and Pa went for a drive and I went to my practice after dinner. Very much annoyed to see my brothers out in the street playing marbles. I consider that one step to the wrong place. Miss McGregor came to spend the night with me. We had a nice old conflag, but I shall only miss her the more. Poor thing, she is worrying and fretting over yarns and I am sure anything ever anyone said against her is false.

31st July Sunday

Ma very ill today. I know I ought not to go to church, but she will have me go late for Sunday school and lost a mark. Went to church in the evening also, the first time I have been in. I hope Ma will be better in the morning. She is very ill tonight.

Notes:

136 Miss Chivers. See 138

137 Sarah English.

138 Minnie Chivers born 1868 and her father Joseph Chivers (a widower). They were Muscle Brook residents.

139 Aunt Lammie is the family affectionate name given to Susan Spencer. At several places in the diary May refers to Susan also as Aunt Susie. See 235

140 Mrs Brin was the very talkative washer woman.

141 George Strecy - unknown

142 Ab -this is not Uncle Abs - probably Albert (Ab) Smith -see 67

143 The origins of the card game "Old Maid" trace back to the 17th century, with players trying to form pairs out of all of their cards until someone - the loser - is left with the lonely, unmatched, single old maid.

144 Miss C - May is quite protective of her suitors names. In this case she applies the same principle to a lady friend of her brother Freddie.

145 Mrs Thornton - probably the wife of Sydney Joseph Thornton

146 May's Uncle Billy (never mentioned in the diary) is William Frost, married to Aunt Lillie. This is probably a reference to one of his brothers, Richard Charles Frost or John Thomas Frost.

147 Mr Windsor - Possibly Eli Windsor or one of his family

148 Miss Agness Laing, daughter of Presbyterian minister James Samuel Laing, is May's school and music teacher.

149 This is the only record of Thomas Jnr's birth date, as he has no birth certificate.

150 A pipe made from Meerschaum stone - often carved.

151 There is tension in the extended Spencer family.

152 John Cameron. See 85

153 Wilhelmina Adelina Susannah (Minnie) Brecht, born 1872. Minnie is the niece of Charlie Brecht, who lives next door.

154 Despite his financial problems, Thomas sends May to a private school for girls run by Agnes Laing.

- 155 *Belle Humphries - unknown school friend*
- 156 *May's cousin William Spencer Dowell born 1879*
- 157 *Edith Hargraves*
- 158 *The residence of the Presbyterian minister, Mr Laing and his daughter Agnes, in Muscle Brook*
- 159 *Mays cousins, Annie and Lil (Elizabeth) Dowell*
- 160 *Mary Watt - unknown school friend.*
- 161 *Lottie - unknown school "friend".*
- 162 *Mable Barklay - unknown school friend.*
- 163 *Mr Wilson. See 68*
- 164 *John Cameron is a teacher. See 85*
- 165 *Mrs Windsor. See 147*

August

1st August Monday

A Bank holiday today, but not a school holiday. Nothing stirring in Muscle Brook. I think it is almost as dull as the bush. Mr Gardner was in today but I did not see him. I did not go to school, but stayed at home and was nurse and I think I acted up to the standard. Auntie Lammie gave me orders what to do and I fulfilled my directions and I think my patient is improving slowly. I went to music this afternoon and on my way up I told Auntie how I acted and she laughed at poor simple me. It is getting quite a common occurrence to be without Pa now. I expect we will be getting a fright some of these nights. I am as timid as I can live.



Wedding photo of May's Uncle Matthew (Matt) Spencer and Emma Walker. They were married in 1882.

2nd August Tuesday

Ma is going up by the mail train today, as it is Mrs Hayne's birthday¹⁶⁶ (with) friends from New Castle to keep it up. She has reached her three score years and ten today. Vivie is up with Grandma. We all went there for dinner. She said she felt quite happy with all the children round her. It is a miserable day, cold and rainy. I felt a little impatient when I came home and could not light the fires, the wood was all wet. Auntie Lammie is staying with us tonight. She is really mad with her tooth. I am sure I don't know how she will suffer the pain of it. Pa ordered us off to bed early tonight. He is on for writing and I have not finished my exercise, but must obey his wishes.

3rd August Wednesday

Washing day today and Ma away. I must get up early and see to the breakfast. Alfie was very lazy and had not the fire on for Mrs Brin when she came, but she says that does not signify as she is well used to making her own fires. On other plans, Pa thought it was too wet for the children to go to school this morning, so they did not go until evening. Auntie must have had a treat with them. Pa wants a lot of children bothering him or something to rouse him from his deep study. I think he is going melancholy. He is equally as bad here as he was on the Rouchel. For a time he seemed to brighten, but the old way has come over him again. They are all going to a party. I hope they will enjoy themselves. We are all alone. I don't know if we will see morning safely. Doubt it.

4th August Thursday

Well, I am spared to see another day, and was just as safe in God's keeping by ourselves as if we had thousands with us. Altho every one does not meet that into consideration. Aunt Lammie is very much annoyed at us not going up there. I should certainly have gone, had Fred been willing, but he is older than me and I suppose I must give into him a little. Ma and Pa are very much fatigued after their night dissipation and have not done anything but sleep all day. I think that those that remained at home are the best off now. Aunt Lammie danced all her toothache away, so that was worth going for. Bed found them at an early hour tonight and I am left to my own devices.

5th August Friday

The last day at school this week. How I wish I could recall last Friday when my dear old companion was with me. I suppose it is best that we should be separated. It never rains, but it pours. Last Friday plenty of company, this none until after hours- They flocked in. Ma had gone to bed and I was busily engaged writing, Fred fast asleep when suddenly there came a rap at the door. I hesitated whether to open it, but after all it was only Johnny. He came on important business. Shortly after, another. Mr Thornton¹⁶⁷ came to see Pa. Surprised to find him retired he only

stayed a few minutes. I am shaking like a leaf from the fright and thought it was someone playing with me.

6th August Saturday

Moon light when I woke, but still I got up and went to work. Just finishing the verandah at breakfast time. I feel quite fatigued tonight. Bella came in today, but only stayed a short time, hers is only flying visits. After dinner went up and checked dear Mamma's grave¹⁶⁸. It is so neglected. I am going to try and keep it nice now I am living here, the last thing I have to (do) for my darling Mamma in this world.

7th August Sunday to 14th August Sunday – No Entries

15th August Monday

A lovely bright morning so I shall not have a holiday. Miss Dixon¹⁶⁹ said she wishes I had not to go to school, but I do not think she means it. She is very lively. I like her much, yet still very high in her notions. Ma and she went down the town this afternoon to see Bob, principally. I think she seems very much interested in him what ever the reason. I was very much surprised on answering a summons at the door to see standing before me no less than Mr Laing,¹⁷⁰ the reverend gentleman himself. Something unusual to be visited by him. After tea, though we had nothing less to occupy our time, we started foolishly laughing at each other, then I left them to their own devices and went to my lessons.

16th August Tuesday

A change from yesterday morning. Had a beautiful fire and the breakfast ready by 7 o'clock. Too good in fact, for it caught the chimney and set that alight, but did not do any damage. Ma is far from well today and laying about. It makes me mad to see her drudging in the kitchen, and me marching off to school, but I suppose it is all in a lifetime. Perhaps I might hold the same position someday. What nonsense I write sometimes, but luckily I am telling one who will never repeat. Mr Bob put in an appearance tonight. He had an excuse to bring some books but forgot them. They will serve as an excuse some other time. Had a half holiday this afternoon but did not escape my home lessons.

17th August Wednesday to 21st August Sunday – No Entries

22nd August Monday

All excitement today at the cottage as it is Millie's¹⁷¹ birthday and Auntie intends giving a little party. All the children are anxious for the time. I do not feel inclined for a dance and am going to be a good girl for once. Miss McGregor is staying in for it. I am so pleased because I can have a talk with her well. Ma and Pa left Miss Dixon and I alone dressing not long, so when Bob appeared on the scene. Bob got there about 8 o'clock and what a gathering of children. I was amusing them nearly all night. The bigist (sic) child was Mr N¹⁷². They said it was he I were paying the most attention to. I think everyone enjoyed themselves. I did for one.

23rd August Tuesday

Ma did not come home last night. She was too tired and arrived home about 7 o'clock, looking the picture of misery. I insisted upon staying at home and sending her off to bed. She had a good mornings rest and got up in time for dinner looking much the better of her sleep. How ever (will) poor Miss McGregor will manage to ride out and keep school. Poor girl. She will be laid up for a week, but then there is a comforter who will sooth all troubles coming down soon. I did not have a sleep, but felt very tired. Bob came as usual and I was wishing him to Halifax¹⁷³ for I felt badly in need of the bed.

24th August Wednesday

The first salute at school this morning was how is N. However the news travelled there is a mystery to me, but someone was interested in me. To day is washing day and I stayed this afternoon and ironed, while Ma, Flo¹⁷⁴ and Pa went for a drive. They were not gone long when a storm overtook them, but only enough to spoil their evenings drive. Finished the ironing and then went to practice. Not in much humour. A little goes a long way with me. As usual Bob sent us to bed tired laughing. I don't know what we shall do when he leaves. Of course when he goes we see no more of him. They all are a strange pair. Cannot make them out at all at all.

25th August Thursday

A public holiday today to celebrate the Singleton show¹⁷⁵. There does not seem to be a great number going from Muscle Brook. None of our family are going. About 11 o'clock Bob came up returning home for his dinner and then back again. It looks very suspicious the way Miss Dixon and he are carrying on, in a way that I should not care about. They all went for a drive, 4 in number. Just a pleasant number. I took charge of the children and went to my practice. On my walk who should I pass but S¹⁷⁶. Bowed very politely to me. When I returned found Bob and Flo comfortably seated in the parlour. We never lack a visitor now, morning, noon or night.

26th August Friday

School this morning. I ought to work all the harder on that account. On my way to my duties (I was) very much surprised to see at Grandma's, my two Uncles, but I must say (I) looked very disappointing round for my dearest old Uncle. The thought struck me he was hiding from me but I must only wait with patience. I am not first on the field now, as I was once. Very good girls tonight and went to Church. Our little friend was there, whether expressly to see us or not, cannot say. About 8 o'clock when I was in the midst of my home lessons, heard a step and who should I embrace but my dear old Uncle Willie. Words cannot express my joy at seeing him. Though perhaps to outward appearance I may not show much.

27th August Saturday

All excitement over horses today. Poor Bob, returning to and fro, to see about a horse for his dear little Flo to ride, when to his great disappointment could procure none. Uncle Willie bought Maud for me and we went for a pleasant ride, both enjoying ourselves extremely. On returning found Bob only just leaving. Miss McGregor called round to see us after tea. She did not stay long. My dear old friend, I can not see much of her company now.

28th August Sunday

Rain, Rain. How heavy it sounds on a Sunday morning, but we were not dry weather Christians and went to Church in the morning. Tried all manner of schemes to try to go tonight, but all in vain. They said it was not religion that prompted our motive. Flo acknowledged it was the truth for her part.

29th August Monday

A fine day today altho the ground was very damp after the rain fallen yesterday. Miss Laing wanted to know if I went to Church yesterday. Of course, I said yes, and to Sunday School too, and to my great surprise who should be there but N¹⁷⁷. I did not think he attended Sunday School, and never there before. Miss Dixon wanted me to go out for a walk with her this afternoon, but I had my music for an excuse and so drew out of it. I am not particularly fond of going out with her because I know she only wants my company when there is none better and prefers a boy's company any time to a girl's. I suppose that is only natural.

30th August Tuesday

I am getting quite tired of school. What a bad girl I am. But there seems to be no change. The same thing for ever and a day after. But everyone tells me it is the happiest time of my life, so I must try and make the most of it if I am to have no more happiness. Altho one cannot find much pleasure at the time having dry old lessons drilled into them every day. I might have harder tasks I have been set me some day, so I must just cease this foolish talk. While thus engaged at my night lessons, who, sitting down with a head suddenly popped in at the window and caught Miss Dixon trying herself with Bob, and it happened to be Bob who came so he had a little smile over it when he saw it.

31st August Wednesday

The same pleasure every Wednesday to look forward to. Poor old Mrs Brin. I pity her. To see her standing staring at the washing one cannot help feeling sorry for her. To think that at her time of years she still has to earn a living for herself. I stayed at dinner time and helped iron all the afternoon. She is constantly talking. A wonder her tongue does not get tired, but she generally has the same topic every washing day. Ma and Miss Dixon went out for a drive, but they were driven home by a storm, but they may have had their full drive for it was not very heavy. Went to church tonight and disgraced ourselves shamefully laughing at a drunken man, but I am sure the most sedate old crone could not help smiling if (they) saw him.

Notes:

- 166 *The mother of May's stepmother turned 70.*
- 167 *Sydney Joseph Thornton, 1842-1918*
- 168 *May's mother ,Rebecca (nee Hooper), who died in 1885, is buried in Muscle Brook cemetery.*
- 169 *Florence May Winship Dixon, born 1869, daughter of Rev. John Dixon (Anglican minister of Newcastle)*
- 170 *James Samuel Laing D.D. was a prominent Presbyterian Minister. At the time of the diary he lived at the Presbyterian Manse in Muscle Brook.*
- 171 *May's cousin, Mary Amelia "Millie" Dowell. It was her 11th Birthday.*
- 172 *Mr N is an admirer of May. May does not divulge who it is.*
- 173 *The phrase "go to Halifax" is a polite euphemism for the blunter request, go to hell!*
- 174 *see 169*
- 175 *The Northern Agricultural Association annual show had been held every year at Singleton since 1868*
- 176 *Another un-named admirer.*
- 177 *See 172.*

September



May's Uncle John Spencer

1st September Thursday

Ma and Miss Dixon spent the day in Scone today leaving Tom up with his Grandma. They spent a very pleasant day today judging from accounts, and to crown all came down in the carriage with the handsomest man they ever set eyes on. Poor Bob was forgotten for the time when he came up and was told this. He said "O that I was that handsome young man". I am afraid Miss Dixon thinks him far handsomer than she ought, considering she has a beau ideal in Newcastle and kisses his photo every night before retiring to rest. Tomorrow will be Miss D's¹⁷⁸ last day here as she will be returning home Saturday

2nd September Friday

Well today has arrived that we have been long looking forward to. What silly things girls are. I got up and scrubbed the verandah, so that is off my mind. Our first class was today. There was not a great number there. We went to Church tonight, but was it for the good of our souls we went? I am afraid not. W (or N)¹⁷⁹ was there. I notice he attends very regularly. He manages a nice little scheme. After Church he stays and speaks to Flo to bid her a last farewell I expect. Just as we got to the railway gates returning home, we met a drunken man. We both took to our heels, but to our great surprise it proved to be Bob. What a laugh he had at our expense. It was nearly 11 o'clock when he left tonight, leaving us all quite tired laughing at his foolish antics.

3rd September Saturday

A great commotion in next door this morning, and about dinner time we heard the news that Mrs Brecht was delivered of a son. Won't Charlie¹⁸⁰ be proud to think he is the father of a bouncing baby boy. Bob came directly after dinner to see his beloved for the last day and gave her a valuable keepsake. What does that mean more than a quiet flirt. We all went down to see her off. She was very lonely. No one in the carriage but herself. She was wishing a gent would get in. The place is quite lonely tonight

4th September Sunday

It is Sacrament Sunday today. Ma and Pa went to Church and I was cook. After Sunday School I went down to see Aunt Beckie. She was very pleased today. The boys and I went to Service to night and saw Miss Hodge. I was very good and did not smile once, I don't think.

5th September Monday

I have not been very punctual at school lately, but I will not have so much to do now we have no visitors. They make a lot of extra work. School today again as usual, and did not know my lessons very perfectly, all my exercises badly done. A day of troubles and to crown all, my music incorrectly played. I am quite disgusted with myself. I don't think I shall ever be able to play any better than I do now. Perhaps I might improve as I get use to their piano. I don't know what I should do, only for Aunt Marys kindness in letting me have the use of her piano. Perhaps I may be able to return her kindness some day.

6th September Tuesday

Pa went out to the Rouchel yesterday and we were alone last night but no one run away with any of us. If they did they would drop us at the first lamp post. Uncle Matt came in today to see his first born, baby girl¹⁸¹, the finest little thing ever breathed, with long black curly hair. Auntie is quite well and also baby. I have not seen Uncle Matt

yet to congratulate him. He always said Granville is to be the last. It is awful windy weather we are all having lately. I wish it would soothe down.

7th September Wednesday

I went in this morning to see Mrs Brecht's baby. He is a fine fellow, but nothing like Aunties, but I suppose she thinks there never was such a one as her own. It is very windy for them washing today but they all dried and Mrs Brin and I did the ironing, while Ma went down the town. I wonder her poor old tongue does not get tired. She is always talking worse than me. I finished about 4 and then went to practice feeling rather tired. Lessons as usual after tea. Thank goodness not the beautiful ones we had to do last night.

8th September Thursday

Nothing but the same daily life. To day my music day. I do hate the thought of that day coming round. I do not seem to improve one bit. The psychologist said I never would be a brilliant player¹⁸³, but I would not like it said that Pa threw his money away on me, for we want every penny badly enough now. I don't know what we are coming too(sic). The end will be the estates will be sold and each man do for himself. Time will alone answer this question. Pa is turning as gray as possible lately. I am sure it is with the worry he will never be fit to manage the station affairs anymore, if they do recover themselves which I am afraid they never will¹⁸⁴.

9th September Friday

I always look forward to Friday with pleasure as we have our class meeting today. There was sixteen, the number is improving. I know I am very sinful and in no way fit to take upon myself the solemn vow and promise, but I must try and by Gods help, I trust He will, I may be able to perform my duties. I went to Church tonight and I hope entirely for the love of hearing Gods word. If I thought it was only to go and see (if) some particular person may be there I would certainly not go. Uncle Willie came in to day. I am sure Miss McGregor will feel very lonely without him. Very sorry to hear she had been so ill and hope she is better.

10th September Saturday

As usual a very busy day with us. There always seems to be a lot to do on Saturday. I hope we have enough for breakfast (for) Ab, George and Uncle Willie. Ab was at the dance last night and of course is rather tired to day. They both went up in the eleven (o'clock) train. It was 4 o'clock or after when I finished my work and then had to go and practice. I felt completely knocked up, but then I am sure Ma is tired, for she has been cooking nearly all the evening and I can stand twice(sic) the work she can.

11th September Sunday

It is some time sinse I went to Sunday School in the morning and am going for a change to day. Ma and Pa were at Church. I shall not forget the awked(sic) position we were placed in. Nowland¹⁸⁵ was in our seat and of course not room for all. He quietly picked up his hat and walked out. I hope he was not offended, it might lower his dignity a little.

12th September Monday

Well the beginning of another week and a very sad one for poor Mrs Allwood¹⁸⁶. Her little boy died last night after a very short illness. His time was very short on this world of trouble. I think Monday seems the longest day of the week. When it is passed, the week seems to fly past. One thing, it is my music day. I dread the thoughts of that. I don't seem to improve one bit. I am such a big girl to be so backward. I feel quite disgusted sometimes with myself. Pa got our heads read by the phrenologist¹⁸⁷ to day. They are all middling good. Ma was disappointed in mine, but pleased with the boys, especially Freds.

13th September Tuesday

It is very cloudy and rained a little to day. I hope we are not going to have a wet day tomorrow. We are generally very fortunate. Ma and Pa went out for a drive, but I do not see any fun in it. I hope Ma will be better tomorrow. She does not look so ill. I am sure it makes Pa miserable, and when the father and mother of a house is doleful, the rest do not feel in excellent spirits. Uncle George rarely comes up to see us now. Ma went down to see them. Our friends do not visit us much, in fact there are very few who come here. I suppose we are too quiet for them.

14th September Wednesday

Ma being far from well to day, I begged of her to let me stay at home and help Mrs Brin. We did not think she would come as it was raining slightly, but she does not let a mist frighten her. We finished about 12 o'clock, but unable to get anything dry. Ma is worse this evening. Hope she will be better tomorrow. I went down to practice and cleaned the stove, so I do not think I did so badly. After tea I managed to draw a few sounds out of the organ. I am such a naughty girl and scarcely ever touch it. There is always such a crowd of larrikins out at the Butchers shop and I do not care for playing as they are very likely to pass remarks. I know Pa does feel annoyed with me for not playing.

15th September Thursday

The rain has cleared up this morning, but it is very dull looking. Ma did not do the ironing, but folded down. This is getting washing done by degrees. I managed to get down as far as the shops this afternoon. It is ages since I was there last, but I could not get what I went for, but the shopsman said it would be a good excuse to (come) again tomorrow as they were getting a fine stock of goods up.

17th September Saturday

I had my verandah to greet me at first light this morning, but it is all over now. Uncle Willie and Miss McGregor came in yesterday. Drove in. They are staying tonight. Treat to have my darling old pet in bed with me. I must indeed chalk it up today, for Pa has gone for a load of wood. I am sure there will be a great change. I hope it shall be for the better. It cannot be for the worse

18th September Sunday

Church bells are ringing calling us to Church. I think it sounds so nice to hear the various church bells peeling out their notes, calling people to various forms of worship, all striving to reach the same place, one no better than the others.

19th September Monday

Another week opening. I wonder what it shall bring to me and whether I shall improve in my school duties or home duties. There is plenty of improvement needed in both instances, although I must confess I very rarely get spoken to. Miss Laing is really good to me and so is Ma. There is not a better or kinder step mother under the sun¹⁸⁸. She is too good to us all and makes too much of us. There is not many mothers would allow me so many privileges. I know I am enough to try any guardians temper sometimes. I suppose I have been spoilt like a good many others.

20th September Tuesday

There was a funeral to day. Mrs Allwood's little boy called home to his Eternal and Everlasting home, left this world of misery and trouble to dwell (I hope) among the happy, happy Angels. Only a few short days illness. How little did he think (that) when in his full health and strength last week, that he should be a corpse to day. Ought it not be a warning to us to prepare ourselves, for we know not the day, not the hour that Christ shall call us to Him. But I am afraid there are a great many who never think of that awful day when it is too late for repentance¹⁸⁹.

21st September Wednesday

Poor Uncle Abs has been very ill. He looks very pale to day. He has went up the town. He says he cannot rest quite. Ma is very ill to day also. I have begged of her to day to keep me at home and help wash. It is a very miserable day, raining slightly, but we are very smart workmen and had the clothes out early so most of them dried. I went round for my practice as usual and on returning found Ma still lying down. She seems much better to day. I hope she will still continue to improve. I am always down spirits when she is not well.

22nd September Thursday

Ma is much better to day. They went out to the Rouchel to see Mrs Cameron. She has a little baby girl. Ma was waiting just 3 hours before the buggy was ready. I would have been inclined to take my clothes off and not go. I think it is my music day. I do dread Thursday. I am not getting on a lot with my lessons. I do not think I will ever be a good player. We are all scattered tonight. I am staying with Aunt Beckie. It is so rarely I come down that I

thought I would avail myself of the opportunity. I will not say much for my lesson tomorrow, for I have done nothing but talk tonight.

23rd September Friday

Well instead of being home at daylight it was nine o'clock and kept Fred home from school, but I think there was a little scheming attached to it. Ma came home about 5 o'clock. There was no Confirmation Class for me to day because when I got to Aunt Marys she told me they had broken up. What a fraud after going so long. I wished Mr White¹⁹¹ would truck us to Scone and have it over there. Ethel¹⁹² is staying here tonight. She came to Church with me. She did not seem to care about going. When we got back Mr T¹⁹³ was here and he carried on his tasks until I was quite ill. I am sure he is unequalled when he takes a job into his head.

24th September Saturday

Saturday always brings plenty of work. I dread the day with the prospect of a brighter one before me and generally feel fatigued because it is the only day I can do anything and then I feel it worse. Uncle Willie is not in today. Elsie was to have been home but did not come. Bella gave us an unexpected surprise by coming in today. Ma is laid up with a very bad headache. She seems to be never free from them.

25th September Sunday

I am sure I am a picture for punch¹⁹⁴ to day. What I look like I cannot say, but I feel the most miserable being on the face of the earth. My tooth has kept me awake nearly all night, but it improved a little towards night. Still annoying enough to keep me away from church, so I did not go at all to day and only to Sunday school in the afternoon.

26th September Monday

I feel quite a new girl today without the toothache. I am really a wretched looking mortal when I have that companion. Mr and Mrs Hayne¹⁹⁵ went up today. They cannot leave home for long and only themselves too. You would think they would go for a month's holiday but there is always the chickens or something to look after. Grandmas as a rule are never happy, only when pottering about with pets. My Music day to day. What a treat. I am such a dreadful player. I will put my whole heart to my lessons next quarter and see what progress I will make. I am not fond of playing and therefore will never make a good one.

27th September Tuesday

There is not much life stirring in this little town, altho I seem to pass my time fairly well with school and music. I must make good use of my time as all the learned people say Childhood is the happiest time of one's life. I am afraid that as not so gay at all times. At all events music is not. I have many little worries about some affairs. A poor unfortunate has put a rope round their necks to day. Millie brought Elsie home the same wild old stick she is. Elsie has grown. I think she will not like settling down home now after being out so much. I expect she will be very prim. Aunt Lammie is going to help Ma with some sewing this week.

28th September Wednesday

A very important day to day for Miss English¹⁹⁶. She is going to take upon herself those solemn vows and promises and may it be hoped he shall never break them. She looked very nice and had a lovely day with the exception of being a little too warm. Mill and I went down to the train. She did not look nice in her travelling costume. Ma and Pa went down to Aunties tonight and left us to our own devices and that was rather noisy. I am afraid the people in the street will think we have a lunatic just escaped. I am just as bad when I have a companion, but life is too short. We may as well enjoy ourselves having a little fun when we can.

29th September Thursday

Edith tried to prevail upon Miss Laing to give us a holiday to day, but she said we were not deserving of one, but said it with a smile so I do not think she meant what she said. Church twice today. Mr White keeps up all the saint's days but there are never many attend service. I went to night. There were more than usual. Poor Milly¹⁹⁷ sailed away in the mail train. She had a very short stay this time. I wonder when she will come up again. She wants me to go down at Xmas, but I cannot sight that lot at all. It is a long time to look forward to. Bob came up tonight but rather low spirited. Has not heard from his dear Flo lately. I am beginning to think absence makes the heart grow colder in her case.

30th September Friday

I went to Church last night so I cannot expect to go tonight, altho I would like to, but Ma and Pa are going to a talk in the School of Arts. I hope they will enjoy themselves. Ma looks very nice in black and cardinal¹⁹⁸. I wonder who will be bell of the ball. Mr Beech has just come over to ask Pa to drive him out to the Rouchel tomorrow. I should like to see him riding very much. Miss McGregor and Uncle Willie came in this afternoon quite unexpectedly. They will be company for me to night and could I ask for better. Poor Uncle Will seems a little downhearted tonight. I would like to know his troubles but no doubt they are quite familiar to me.

Notes:

178 Miss Dixon.

179 see 172.

180 Ernest Charles (Charlie) Brecht, born 1857. Charlie is a friend and fellow Mason of May's father. The Brechts live next door. Charlie Brecht married Agnes Bussell on the same day, and in the same church, as Thomas Spencer married Mary Hayne.

181 Ivy Ethel Spencer, born 1887.

182 Darcy C. Brecht, brother of Charlie Brecht.

183 19th century psychology, particularly in rural NSW, was definitely in its infancy as shown by some quotes from a Psychologist George Romanes, in the June 25th 1887 Maitland Mercury: "Women are therefore less able to sustain the fatigue of serious or prolonged brain action." And he went on to add. "To this fundamental difference (slight difference in brain size) our author ascribes the lack of creative imagination, the inferiority of judgment, and the infirmity of will with which he credits women."

184 May is indicating that the Spencers were in dire trouble financially and Thomas feels responsible.

185 Possibly Mr G Nowland J.P. or one of the other mebers of the wealthy Nowland family, who were major landowners in Muscle Brook.

186 Sarah Ann Allwood's son, Arthur Colin Allwood, died on 11th September after a short illness. One of Sarah's other children Clara Lavina Allwood, married May's cousin Henry Maxwell Spencer in 1907. Henry is mentioned (but not in name) as one of John and Eliza Spencer's boys, earlier in the diary. See 35.

187 Phrenology was the 19th century pseudo-science of evaluating a person's intelligence and character from the shape and bumps of their skull.

188 Despite some tension between May and her stepmother at times, May acknowledges she is a good and kind person.

189 May's fatalistic religion coming to the surface

190

191 The Reverend Canon White. Canon White was an Anglican minister living in Muscle Brook. He officiated at numerous Spencer family weddings and funerals, including May's own funeral in 1901.

192 Probably May's cousin Ethel Rebecca Dowell, born 1878

193 Mr T sounds or smells like the night soil carter.

194 Picture for punch – The origins of this saying are unclear. It is clear May means she thinks she looks dreadful, perhaps like one of the caricatures printed on Punch magazine.

195 The parents of May's stepmother are going "up" to Scone where they live.

196 Sarah English married Joseph G. Sparkes.

197 Not sure who this Milly is.

198 Vivid red colour.

October

1st October – small notation: “Published this day, this Diary for 1888. May be ordered of all Booksellers and Stationers”.

1st October Saturday - No Entry

2nd October Sunday

I tried to prevail on Ma to go to Church this morning but she would not foresee that, so I went. Did not know my Sunday lesson. Ought to be well thrashed for them, a big girl like me taking imperfect lessons, but then I did not know what they were. Ma went to Church to night leaving me in charge of the small fry. It was rather lonely by myself.

3rd October Monday

I must say the beginning of a new quarter and a fresh week dawned very cloudy on me and I intended trying to be such a good girl, quite a different girl, but I have not strength in myself to keep to my good resolutions and must pray to God to give me strength. Pa is away and we are all alone but just after tea Mr C put in an appearance which passed away a few pleasant hours. He has not been over for such a long time. I supposed some flea has bit him. My tooth is very bad to day but I could not get anyone to go with me to have it out. I would do anything rather than suffer torture with it.

4th October Tuesday

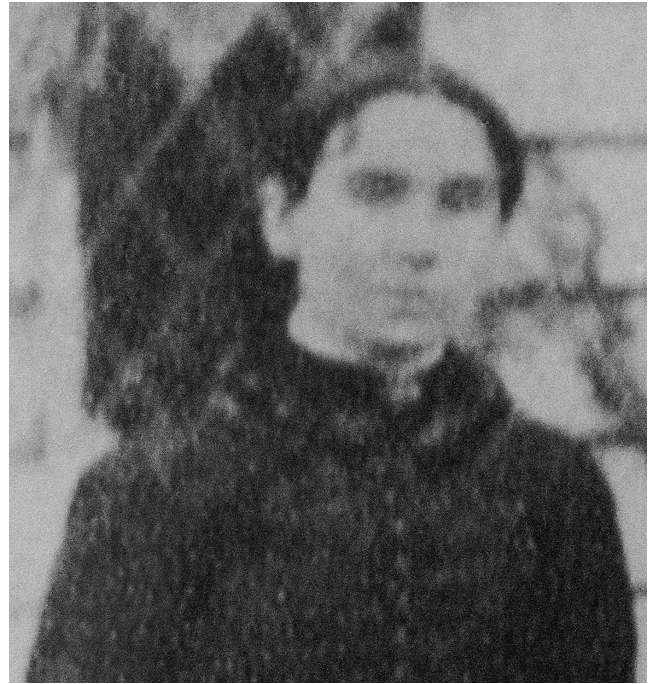
I must note this day in particular as I shall long remember it. Perhaps not much notice would be taken of (it by) spectators but this morning I made a remark quite unintentionally but still I think it must have been taken as an impertinent question but the answer was “quite as well as you do, I think”. Those words, not much in themselves, but the tone which they were said stung me to the quick. I felt really hurt and all day in school. They keep resounding in my ears. I hope the party is not vexed with me. I will try and forget the remark if I seek forgiveness. Altho I deserve a reprimand in one inst. for not minding my own affairs.

5th October Wednesday

I was quite overcome with sleep this morning and had to be called twice. I had a very restless night with great troubles in my sleep. I suppose I went through my day's trouble in a different form but I will try with the help of God to be a better girl and then I would not be disturbed in my slumber. Mrs Cameron went up to Scone to day. She did not stay long, the baby is a very little girl¹⁹⁹. Received an invitation to Mrs Brecht's party to day but I hope I shall not have to go to it, for I don't feel as tho' I ought to go, preparing for Confirmation but Pa wishes me to. Al Hayne²⁰⁰ was down to day. John came over and stayed a while. I am afraid my lessons stand a very good chance of being said rather imperfectly tomorrow (what excuse).

6th October Thursday

All disturbances this morning. Fred is under great difficulties having lost the almanacs Mr White entrusted him to distribute. He is a strange character and has some peculiar ideas. He seems to think it would be degrading him self to take those round. At all events he will have to answer for him self. My mind has been very unsettled to day – Pa expressed a wish last night that I was to go to the party and that would be acting very contrary to my conscious (conscience) for I think it would be wrong. So I went and asked him if he would mind letting me stay and he go. I feel quite at ease now on that subject but not on others.



May refers to Grace McGregor as Aunty Grace in October. Grace was like an older sister to May and did eventually become Aunty Grace when she married “Uncle Willie” - William Granville Spencer in 1891.

7th October Friday

I wonder will Uncle Willie bring me a horse in. I am not deserving of one and I know he does not like me to treat him like I have done this week but I think it is better in every respect that I should not go out. I went to see the baby Christened to night and Ma & Pa have went to the Ball. I will not even write what happened tonight. This book may reveal my secret to some one. Perhaps I have sinned but I do not think there is any sin in it all. At all events, I must try and not do the like again, until next time. I hope we are staying by ourselves tonight with occasional visits from the Ball people. I hope they all enjoy themselves. I will soon be in the land of Morpheus and dream on what took place tonight.

8th October Saturday

I woke up very tired this morning. I did not hear a sound coming home last night. I suppose they danced till morning. I scrubbed the verandah and by the time Ma was (in). She is well in for parties. I am afraid they will tell on her but she always comes home about ½ past 2 so she has a sleep before morning. John C came over for a while and was playing his violin. I did not have a practice this evening. I must try and practice Monday or my lesson will be as badly done as ever.

9th October Sunday

Sunday School again this morning (and) me going with my lesson rather imperfect but I managed to pull through. Did not go for a walk this evening. I hope we had enough gentleman here tonight, no less than 6. Ma went to Church. It is a month since I went at night. George came in this afternoon.

10th October Monday

Just because I wanted particularly to rise early this morning we were very late. I went to practice this morning but it did not seem to improve my playing much this afternoon. I feel more disheartened every lesson. I do not think I get on a bit. Ma is very ill to day. I wonder if the Balls have done it. She will not have it but I think she is too weak to dance much. Little Harry Brecht was in with me putting the children to bed. He is such a little cure, will say any mortal thing. Bob came up tonight but did not stay long. He comes and goes when the spirit moves him.

11th October Tuesday

Ma is very ill this morning and not able to get up at the usual hour. I am afraid the Ball the other night has knocked her up. She is not as lively as she used to be but then I suppose when one gets married, a lot of kids to look after, they soon lose their girlish mirth. I was quite shocked this afternoon in the attitude I found my intended Aunt. Some people might not think it out of place, but I would think it dreadful to show a man my bare foot and allow him to handle it. I was just amusing myself playing to night when Master Cameron caught me. He came over to tune his violin. Pa has went to a play to night and did not arrive home until eleven o'clock. I was very sleepy. I am afraid my lesson as usual will be very imperfect.

12th October Wednesday

I was rather pleased with my lesson to day. They were said better than usual. It is disgraceful the way poor Norah²⁰¹ says her lessons. Whether it is too much trouble for her to learn I cannot say. Miss Laing was not very good tempered today but I cannot blame her when she had a set of larrikins like us to deal with. I consider I done a very good evenings work to day and left very tired after. A little work goes a long way with me now. Ma is much better to day, I am thankful to say. I did not go down to practice this afternoon, I must go in the morning. Pa went to a meeting to night but was home in a decent hour. Perhaps he thought Ma would be tired and not able to sit up long for him.

13th October Thursday

It was very chilly this morning but I do not think the cold will trouble us much longer. The heat seems to be gradually creeping upon us. My music to day. I do feel so disheartened with myself for not making more rapid progress than I do. Altho I practice well, still I don't seem to get on. Miss Laing says I play well but then she only tells me that for encouragement. Lucy and Mary Jane Cameron²⁰² were here this afternoon. Lucy says she is coming in to stay for a while shortly. John came over after tea and Ma & Pa out of course. Uncle Abs came and I don't know whether he spied the visitor or not. Time will tell that. Received a letter both from Uncle Willie and Aunty Grace²⁰³. He is going to bring a horse in for me tomorrow.

14h October Friday

I was up betimes this morning and got through a little work before school. I would like to be able to assist Ma as much as possible before I go. It is very warm to day. About dinner time Uncle Willie came to take Ma out to the Rouchel with him. We did not start until 4 o'clock and then it was very warm, rode very slowly just getting there before dark. I cannot say how I felt on nearing the dear old house but on passing it my dream seemed to pass away and the stern reality stared me in the face. The house was quite desolate and uncared for. It seems dreadful that it should be closed after so many years being inhabited but I suppose all things only last but for a time and then pass away.

15th October Saturday

How strange I felt this morning when I opened my eyes. – Seemed as though I was in dream land but I had my dear old companion by my side to comfort me with the tooth ache during the night. We made an excursion down the river to day, visiting all the friends as we proceeded on our journey back. We seemed a complete company in ourselves and no desire to add any more to our number, at least that is what I think. Aunt Emma has a very bad head ache and there fore not in very high spirits.

16th October Sunday

No Church bells resounding this morning to call you to church. We rode up to Bingeberry and went to Carter's for dinner. I was so disappointed Bella did not ask Miss McGregor over. I like to be in their company as much as I can of course, when I am with one I am with two

17th October Monday

This morning when I woke I found myself at Mrs Cameron's sleeping with the baby²⁰⁴. I made sure I would (not) roll on it before morning. They are very dangerous articles to deal with but there is a wonderful improvement in the baby. She is growing a fine child. There is a large brown snake hung up in the tree to meet your gaze as you may step outside but better to see it there than alive. I was beginning to think Uncle Willie would never come but I must not forget that there are others to think about now. We had a pleasant ride in, altho a little warm. Still we had an interesting conversation between us and so the time passed only too quickly.

18th October Tuesday

I felt much refreshed after the nights rest but I have had the toothache very badly. I hope it soon intends to have a rest. If it does not visit me during the night, it will in the day time. I felt quite ashamed of myself to day. I was moaning a little with my tooth and Miss Laing asked me if I was ill. She is a martyr to neuralgia so we can sympathise with each other. I do not feel very tired after my ride, only sleepy and had just went off in a quiet slumber and Uncle Abs came to see me. He was in a great hurry, but could not leave for two hours. He cheers me up a little sometimes. I think there is a faint hope of recovering lost time, then again I think every thing must go smash.

19th October Wednesday

Not in much humour for school or anything else to day but I suppose I must live and bear the misery of toothache. It is really driving me out of my mind. Pa went out to the Rouchel yesterday and arrived home very late tonight. Mr J Hayne²⁰⁵, Uncle George and J.C. were here quite a little party. They were all seated down at a comfortable supper when Pa walked in, quite surprised to see such a noisy crew here. My lessons stand a poor show tonight, the map wants such a lot of attention to do it properly. It was nearly midnight when we went to bed. Made the night a little shorter to be sleepless.

20th October Thursday

I went round and practiced before school this morning and while there Millie asked me would I go to a little party in honor of Walter's birthday. We all gladly consented. After music I went down finding quite a little assembly of them already there. I think it is so nice to have a little amusement for them sometime. Ma & Pa came down to tea. After tea, I joined them in some games, Fred would not. Whether he thought we were too young for him or too foolish I cannot say, but at all events he did not join us. It was past 9 o'clock when we parted after spending a very pleasant evening. I tried to rival some of the little girls but was not pretty enough for that. Its such fun to watch the antics of them and their toys.

21st October Friday

Ma went up to the hospital to see Aunt Lammie to day. I do not know what ever ails her. She looks worse every day. A friend of hers is going down to night, she went to see their passing. On returning home she must carry Vivie. I was so mad. She is scarcely able to crawl along herself let alone carry a big child. Millie is staying with me tonight. I like them staying here, they are company. I intended going to Church tonight but could not, felt a little disappointed. I think I am very foolish indeed but I hope time will change my ideas. It was eleven when we went to bed. I love sitting up late, every thing is still and quiet.

22nd October Saturday

Of course, plenty to do to day. I dread Saturdays work and I am troubled with the toothache so bad. I wonder how Miss McGregor feels this morning, very tired I expect. I hope she spent a pleasant evening. I think our companionship is at an end. How I wish I had her in here. She would be such company for me. I don't know what she will do when Uncle Willie goes home. She will be twice as lonely then.

23rd October Sunday

I tried to learn my lessons (while) doing my work this morning and managed to pull through. Then I went for a bit of a walk this afternoon with the children and then to Church. It is 5 Sundays since I went at night. I was so sleepy, dozing every chance I possibly could get.

24th October Monday

Well I feel quite light headed now that we have prevailed upon Ma to go and see the doctor. She said she is only just going to satisfy us and I feel quite sure there is something very serious the matter with her. It is very cloudy to day, so cloudy that I am disappointed. I was looking forward to a pleasant walk down town with Edith but perhaps I am better at all. When I arrived home from music lesson found that Ma had been to the doctor and back again. He wants to see her tomorrow at the house. There will be a general surprise to know who is ill when they see the buggy here. They are such a lot (of) gossiping girls this end of the town. They think of nothing else, only talking nonsense. Of course I could not do any thing.

25th October Tuesday

A holiday for me to day. I am afraid I shall have a good many now. The doctor came to see Ma to day and afraid he thinks her case rather a serious one. I do hope he will soon make her better. I have never seen her quite well since she has been married. I do not think I shall ever get married²⁰⁶ if that is what married life does. I think old maids are the best off, altho they don't think so. Well, I will set an example for my younger sisters and always remain at home to keep Ma and Pa company in their old age, if we are all spared. Pa says there's no one good enough in this country for me so that is a good hint.

26th October Wednesday

Another day for poor old Mrs Brin and I together. This is my first day of house keeping and I resolved to be as good as it was possible, but this resolution like all my others, only good in the theory. Ma gave me orders concerning the dinner while she went down town and on her return, came to see how things were progressing and found me only then just thinking about doing her orders, when of course too late. I was so annoyed with myself but I think I had too many irons in the fire. Mrs Brin and I got on much better than usual. I am beginning to understand her. She has the same old tale to tell about her hard day's work on Tuesday. Poor old soul must feel tired after her week's work.

27th October Wednesday

Pa is going out to the Rouchel and Ma much worse to day. I stayed at home. I am afraid I ought to leave school. It is the happiest time of my life. I never expect such happy days anymore. I have spent many a pleasant day at school and have always been fortunate to get a nice teacher. I felt really tired this afternoon when I went for my lesson and could not play very well. I am so ashamed of myself for not improving better at my music than I do. I ought to but I don't take much interest in music. Very fond of hearing anyone else play. Elsie seems to have a good taste for music.

28th October Thursday

I have had a week's holiday and to day I feel quite tired out. Work and I are not on the best of terms at any times. I hope Ma will soon take a change for the better, altho I am afraid she will be a long time before she is quite well. It seems rather strange no Church tonight. I always like going on a Friday night, altho I hope what happened on one occasion will not happen again. It was kept strictly secret. I made sure it would find a way out somewhere, but there I will not dwell any longer on this subject. There was really no harm done. I hope Miss McGregor and Uncle Willie will be in this evening. I would so like to see them. Its seems ages sinse I saw them.

29th October Saturday

I have not had extra much to do to day as I lightened Saturdays work yesterday but still quite enough to satisfy me. Elsie has been so industrious and done everything she possibly could. Ma is much worse to day. The heat is enough to kill any body today. I went to my practice and found Auntie just leaving, so I had the house to my self with the exception of Lill and Annie²⁰⁷. The latter accused me wrongfully of something. She does not seem in the best of humors.

30th October Sunday

My morning Sunday School and Church are ended for a time. I have as much as I can do to be ready by evening. I went for a walk down the Maitland Road to day and took Aunt Beckie's children²⁰⁸ with me. They are very good children to take for a walk, quite a pleasure to take them.

31st October Monday

I am going to school very contrary to my wishes to day. Artie is staying at home but then he cannot do every thing, altho he is a very good boy when he likes. He only met with a few accidents, very good for the first time. Ma says he would be very useful in the butchers if he had much to do. My dreaded music to day. I don't think I shall ever get on. I do not take interest enough and then when I do know my lesson, I can never play well before Miss Laing. I suppose that is self conceit, too heavily balanced. I said my lessons fairly well. I don't think I (can) learn the hymn.

Notes:

- 199 Mrs Sarah Cameron (nee Hayne) took her newborn child, May Cameron (born 11th September), to Scone to see Sarah's parents.
- 200 Albert Sydney Hayne, born 1866. A cousin of May's stepmother
- 201 Norah - unknown.
- 202 Lucy Cameron and Mary Jane Cameron, were sisters of John Cameron.
- 203 May's use of the phrase "Uncle Willie and Aunty Grace" was a little bit cheeky, as William Spencer and Grace McGregor did not actually marry until 1891.
- 204 She was staying at Glenerne, home of Alex and Sarah Cameron and sleeping with newborn May Cameron.
- 205 James Hayne, born 1859 was a brother of May's stepmother.
- 206 May never married.
- 207 Elizabeth (Lil) Dowell, born 1873 and Annie Dowell, born 1869. Elizabeth and Annie are children of Stephen Dowell's first marriage to Sarah Ann Hooper. Sarah Hooper was the sister of May's mother Rebecca. May was a 1st cousin to all of Stephen Dowell's children.
- 208 Rebecca Spencer and George Hayne had five surviving children at this time, although Dorothy Hayne was a newborn and Rebecca Hayne was only one year old.

November

1st November Tuesday

We are taking our turns this week. I think Fred is kitchen maid today and a bright one he is. I think he looked at the fire once. I shall be staying tomorrow. Fred is busy helping Pa with the timber. He has at last managed to get enough to commence with. I hope we shall soon have it finished now the weather is terrible hot. I think the summer will bake some of us alive. We had a jolly day at school today. I have never laughed so hearty for years as I did during our little intercession where Miss Laing leaves us for a time. I think girls are the most unwieldy beings possible to keep quiet when they take it into their heads.

2nd November Wednesday

Poor old Mrs Brin came trudging up to her toilsome day's work at 6 o'clock this morning. I asked her if she had any objection to me being a toiler under him (sic her) and she said, not the slightest. I think I have improved a little or at least in my own estimation. We were finished in nice time. It is such a relief to have all the washing put away. I went round to practice and nine o'clock only found me home. I was so vexed at keeping Ma & Pa waiting up for me. It has been dreadfully warm to day and tonight. The heat is oppressive but withal, it does not keep me from having a good night's rest.

3rd November Thursday

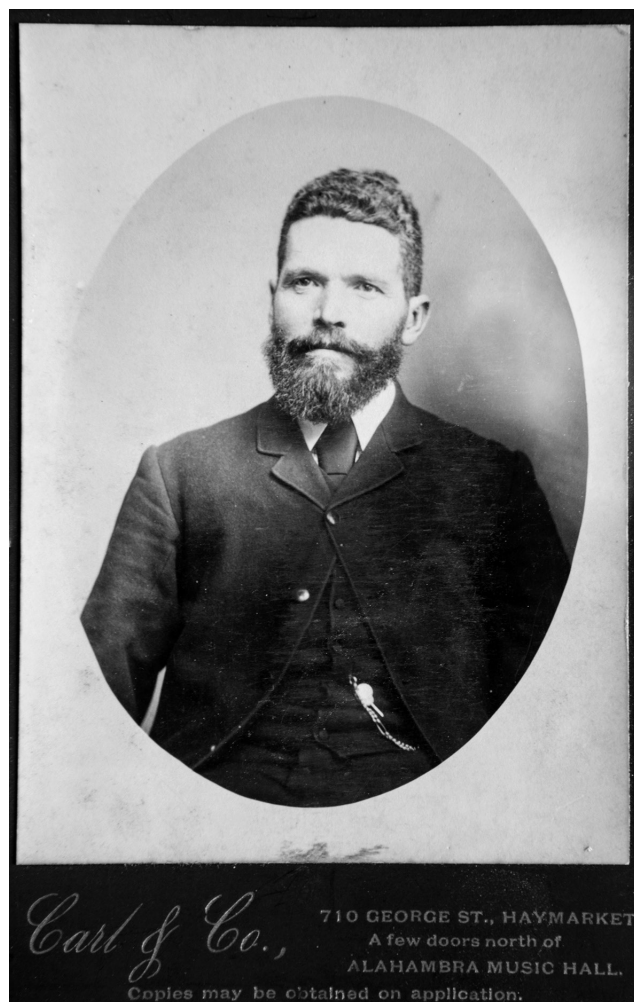
I did not think on Tuesday that that was to be my last day at school for some time but such is the case. I am not able to go now and must make up my mind to turn to the house work with a good will, as that is the work God has appointed me to do. I liked school very much and don't think I shall ever have the same times again. My music to day. I do not like those days at all but Miss Laing is very nice to me. She spoke about the subject, I have long been expecting her to but I hope I shall settle it next day.

4th November Friday

Scrubbed the verandah first light this morning. It will be dirty enough before Friday, I am sure. Artie stayed at home to help me. He is such a help when he likes but he also can be very nasty when the turn takes him. Bob came up to day to bid "Good Bye". I suppose some one will miss him from here, altho generally speaking I do not think the town will miss him. It has been very warm to day. Ma is quite knocked up with the heat. Pa is getting on slowly but surely with the verandah. It will be very comfortable in hot weather. I don't think he cares about working these hot days.

5th November Saturday

Today is Aunty Mary & Uncle Abs's birthday²⁰⁹. I think they are forty to day. The former thinks she is getting quite old now and she really looks the youngest girl in place of the eldest, in the family. I don't think there is much chance of Aunt Susie and Sarah ever changing their names²¹⁰. It is the wisest plan not to, I think. I went down the



The only known photo of Absalom Spencer (Uncle Abs) was taken at Carl & Co studios in Sydney. The address on the frame indicates the photo was taken in 1887 as Carl & Co studio was only at that address in that year. It is quite possible the photo was taken on his November visit.

town this afternoon, every thing was very quiet. Everyone seemed to be at the cricket match down on the flat, the Muscle Brook won I think. Jack Cameron²¹¹ is getting quite proud of his cricketing.

6th November Sunday

The Sunday was generally about the same routine for me but to day I took quite a little crew for a walk. All Aunt Mary's and Aunt Beckie's, there was 16 in all²¹². I am very sorry little Aubrey²¹³ got his feet wet but he followed the elder boys and I could not control them. I am afraid Auntie and Uncle²¹⁴ will be very much annoyed with me. I do not think I will take them again.

7th November Monday

Rain, rain, what a melancholy sound as it resounds through the long hrs of the night but happily I am not awake much to listen to it. My tooth has not troubled me of late and that is the only companion I sit up to keep company. As I have all to do now, I may as well take an interest in the work. So today I tried my hand at some sweet cakes for the first time. They turned out fairly well for me. I am sure I will make a good cook yet, when the moon changes its colour. It blew up a very stormy day towards evening (so) that I did not go to my music. Minnie is going away tonight, she came to say good bye. Uncle Willie came in drenched, he and Uncle Abs are also going down²¹⁵. I wish they were taking me with them.

8th November Tuesday

What a miserable morning, I do not think we shall stand much chance of getting our washing done tomorrow. I have not much to do to day, so I can rest for tomorrows work. After dinner Ma said she wanted me to go down to the store for her and also to Walter Smith's, so of course I did not object. It is Uncle George's birthday and also Uncle Willies. He is in Sydney to day. I hope he was not ill going down last night²¹⁶. It was a very rough night I think. I expect I shall hear enough about this afternoon, but I could not help it and told Ma & Pa. Worst of all, who I should meet but Elsie and a host of school children. I am very thankful Uncle George did not see me, for my companion only left me at his door.

9th November Wednesday

My first thought this morning was the washing, which will have to be left undone this week as it is too wet for to wash. It will be very heavy next Wednesday. Pa is going down to Sydney if he gets a telegram. It will be lonely for us when he is away as no one ever comes and stays with us when he is away. Miss Hodge visits every place frequently but here. I have no wish for people to come who do not call for us so I suppose she is better away. It will seem rather stiff when she enters the family I think²¹⁷.

10th November Thursday

I was so dreadfully late for my music lesson to day. Miss Laing said she quite gave me up by so being so dillertery (sic dilatory). I had no time for a new lesson and must keep to the old one until next time. Pa went down to Sydney to night. We shall be all alone now until he comes back. I hope and trust they will succeed it is their last effort but I think it is all for the best. They have had so much trouble, perhaps it will teach them a lesson. God does all things to a good purpose²¹⁸. Millie had the dear little baby up to day. I do love him, he looks just like a little Angel. Auntie is very proud of him. I think one would think it was her first to see her fondling him about²¹⁹.

11th November Friday

The Dr. here to day. Auntie Mary came up. He says Ma is improving but very slowly. I try and keep as much work off her hands as possible, altho I feel very queer this morning. Artie stayed at home to help me. He has been such a good boy to day. Ma went down the town and left us to our own devices. I practiced an hour on the organ. How nice it would be if I had a piano for myself but I am afraid I shall be left off music lessons before that happens. Bella surprised us very much by coming in this afternoon. We all went to hear the Primate children²²⁰ and all it was amusing to see them all fast asleep – Miss McGregor came in also poor girl, she is quite knocked up. They rode so very fast in & there was no occasion for it.

12th November Saturday

I have been busy all day to day making all sorts of mistakes in the household work. I am sure Ma must have been dreadfully annoyed with me. It is Auntie's²²¹ birthday and she is giving the children a little party. It does not take long to have a large gathering round you. On reaching home, found that Bella's horse had escaped by someone

leaving the gate opened. Al Smith came up and promised to try and find the horse for her on Sunday morning.

13th November Sunday

From morning till night I have been disappointed. I want to break the sabbath and go for a ride and could not. Then I wanted to go to Sunday School and Ma wished me to stay at home. It was simply because I had done wrong in making arrangements with a certain party. Mr. C and I had the house to ourselves during church. I am afraid I answered him a question wrong.

14th November Monday

All draw backs to day there seems. Johnny left Bella his horse to ride home and it would not carry her the right road but instead going the other way, so she was obliged to turn around and come home again. Uncle Abs fortunately was going out to day and neither of them objected to the arrangements. They started about 12 o'clock. I hope they arrived home safely. Ma is much worse to day and laid up all day. I hope she will be better in the morning. My music to day. I do hate it simply because I play so very badly and especially in front of Miss Laing and she is so nice. Never gets the least bit cross with me and I am sure she has reasons for it.

15th November Tuesday

When I awoke this morning, I could not make out who my companion was in bed and when I came to myself found it was Miss Miller²²². She was sound asleep. I think I forgot we had such an early riser with us as Mrs Hayne²²³. She was up long before me and then she said it was very late for her to be getting up. I was very much surprised and pleased to have a letter from Sarah. As I was all alone after tea I went down to Aunt Beckie's, Aunt Lammie accompanying me. On our way, we met Uncle Edward and Miss Hodge but they said they were above speaking to people who laugh in the street and so did not recognize us.

16th November Wednesday – 19th November Saturday - No entry

20th November Sunday

I am sure I am getting worse and worse dressing. Just an hour getting ready for Sunday School and shall never forget my mistakes after I got there and then that was not the worst of all. Indeed, the mistakes of my life have been many. Auntie took us to see the hospital. I would have liked it much had it not been for the events of the day.

21st November Monday

I am dreadfully miserable to day and dread to pour out my troubles even to my closest friends for it would sound so strange repeated but still the afternoon brought a few comforts for me. Uncle Abs favoured us with his company all the morning and even stayed to dinner. I will admit he comes more regularly than many others do. I had such a delightful conversation with Edith and Bella to day. Edith wants me back to school sadly. I thought Uncle Willie would keep his promise, the dear old soul. He was in ample time to take me for a nice ride, which I enjoyed very much. It is such a treat for me to have a ride now. A storm blew up shortly after we returned.

22nd November Tuesday

It is such a pleasant day for a ride to day but I must be content now for some time still. I could not help wishing I was going with Uncle Willie when I saw him catching his horses to go home. He stayed for dinner. He stays here more than any of the rest and I am sure I am very pleased to have him. This is a very miserable week for me as I have not yet forgotten Sunday. I have been asked several times what is the matter with me but I keep the real truth to myself. Sarah came up this afternoon and we went for a walk. I met an Indian at Aunties and he offered 1,000 Pounds for me but she would not take it. I think it a very good price for myself.

23rd November Wednesday

As regularly as this day could, it brings back a hard day's work for me. Since Ma has been ill I have it all my own way. I feel very tired at night. Just at dinner time Miss English sent word for me to go up and have my dress fitted. She could not (have) chosen a more inconvenient day but at all events I went and could hardly manage to crawl down there. Ma and Pa went out after tea, I had company while they were away. I expect I deserve a good talking to but they know I behave myself. It is a very warm day to day but then we cannot complain about the heat this summer, it has been very mild as yet.

24th November Thursday

My music of course to day but I rather like that how if it is the only day I can have a sly chat with Edith. She will be leaving at Xmas. It is my evening out to day. I am going down to Aunt Beckie's for tea. Vivie is delighted always to go down and see Mealie (Amelia Hayne) they are twin cousins. I was just walking, or as every one terms it waddling, down the street when we caught J C. I could not help walking with him. To crown it all Uncle George saw me and he was telling every one how I walked. Mrs Edwards went down to night. She is a case if ever there was one. I do not care for her – too much vulgar talk coming from a woman's mouth, it is bad enough from men. I suppose she only does it for fun.

25th November Friday

I was just caught nicely to day. Serves me right for being so untidy but one cannot always be clean when there is work to be done. I was just in the act of going into my room when a knock came at the door. Pa opened it and Lizzie Kirk was the visitor. I was very pleased to see her but would (have) liked her to come in a little later. She only stayed a little time as she is going down by the mail tonight. I promised to go down and see her off but circumstances alter cases and I was not able to fulfill my promise. It was class this afternoon. I do not know when we are going to be Confirmed but I think I ought to be well prepared. I went to Church tonight accompanied by Sarah. I don't know whether our soul benefited any by it.

26th November Saturday

I simply dread Saturday but then my work is not as hard as some girls and I have not a hard mistress, so I have not much to complain about. There is a traveling troupe in Muscle Brook now and they played cricket in fancy costumes this evening. One was dressed as a lady. He did look ridiculous. I went down to see them. It was only just to draw them tonight. Pa & Ma went. I believe it was very good both nights and the hall packed. I am not a lover of plays and do not have any wish to go to them.

27th November Sunday

I am left in full charge to day. Ma left at daylight for the Rouchel. The children have been very troublesome. Fred minded them this evening and I went to Sunday School. I was told I was being naughty but them that told me only felt a little jealous I think. Auntie could not come and stay with us so we went up on the Hill. I expect Ma will be annoyed with us leaving the house.

28th November Monday

Came home early and got the children off to school. Auntie Sarah stayed awhile with me and then left me to my own devices. I am so terribly down hearted to day, I suppose being by myself I have time to reflect on days gone by and they are not very pleasant reflections. About dinner time dear old Uncle Will came in. I was so pleased to see him. He is going down to Sydney tonight. I wish he would take me with him. I was taking Vivie down the street this evening when some horses ran away in a baker's cart. I was some distance behind and the horses were making towards us. I thought I would never reach my dear little pet until the horses were over her but the driver turned them before they reached us. I have not got the better of my fright yet.

29th November Tuesday

Another change last night for me. I stayed at Aunt Mary's. I know she would like me to stay with her. She had half a mind to go to the play but a better one to stay at home. It was only ½ past five when I came home and had the fire made and breakfast ready for Ma when she came home. She was very much annoyed with me for leaving the house. I know I deserved a good scolding for disobeying her. Every thing seemed to be wrong to day. I had to tell her I got the paint on her beautiful fur cape and spoiled her good brush. She ought to have punished me severely. I think I was in a manner by being disappointed in going for a ride. Fred got the horse in for me and a storm came on so I was unable to go. I could have cried but must learn to bear little disappointments patiently.

30th November Wednesday

I can go to work with a much better spirit sinse my mate has passed such a good opinion about me. It is something to be proud of to get into old women's good graces. They are generally so very hard to please but I must not boast too much and only try and fulfill my duty. There is a circus in town tonight, also the play. The town seems all life

and I too tired to enjoy any of its amusements. Pa wished me to go to the circus with (him). He took the boys but I preferred staying at home. Ma would be all alone if I left her. The church bells rang for evening services but every one was too wrapped up in their own enjoyments to think of church, so it was lit for nothing. Even the Minister closed the doors when no congregation came and went to seek them in the Hall.

Notes:

- 209 *Aunty Mary and Uncle Abs are twins, born 1847.*
- 210 *Susan and Sarah Spencer both remained Spinsters. Also this is the only time May refers to Susan Spencer as Aunt Susie. Everywhere else she calls her Aunt Lammie.*
- 211 *Jack Cameron was one of the top batsmen for Muswellbrook Perseverance Cricket team. Also see 225*
- 212 *All of Aunt Mary's and Aunt Beckie's does not add to 16?*
- 213 *Stephen Aubrey Dowell, born 1883.*
- 214 *Aubrey Dowell's parents, Stephen and Mary.*
- 215 *They had business in Sydney. This may also have been when Absalom had his portrait taken.*
- 216 *To go to Sydney required a boat trip from Newcastle to Sydney, as the rail bridge on the Hawkesbury River was not opened until the following year.*
- 217 *May did not seem very fond of Miss Hodge from various comments. May Hodge was engaged to her Uncle Edward Spencer. They married in 1888.*
- 218 *May's father had gone to Sydney to join William and Absalom. It seems they were trying to resolve business (financial?) problems.*
- 219 *George Sherwood Dowell was Mary's 7th child.*
- 220 *Primate children relates to children to be baptised by the Anglican Primate (bishop) of Newcastle, who was on a christening tour of the Hunter.*
- 221 *But which Auntie?*
- 222 *Not sure which Miss Miller.*
- 223 *Probably the mother of May's stepmother.*

A travelling Troupe of Players come to Muswellbrook.

On 26th November May comments; *"There is a traveling troupe in Muscle Brook now and they played cricket in fancy costumes this evening. One was dressed as a lady. He did look ridiculous. I went down to see them, it was only just to draw them tonight. Pa & Ma went. I believe it was very good both nights and the hall packed. I am not a lover of plays and do not have any wish to go to them."*

Despite May's disinterest the troupe was back in December as covered in the Maitland Mercury on Saturday 10th December, with patronage from the Mayor, May's Uncle Stephen Dowell.

The Kennedy "Called Back" Dramatic Company, which played here to three full houses last month, have returned, and are playing every night this week to an appreciative audience. M'liss was produced in capital style last night, Mrs Kennedy as the heroine scoring a deserved triumph. The versatile J.J. and other members of the company have acquired a personal and professional popularity never before attained in Muswellbrook, An afternoon concert is announced for Saturday under the patronage of the Mayor and other leading residents, and from the splendid musical ability of the orchestra, a rich treat is anticipated.

The Kennedy "Call Back" Dramatic Company were a typical travelling theatrical troupe of the time. They visited many country towns in from Melbourne to Cairns (where they did not get good reviews!) and also toured New Zealand. They were primarily a light comedy troupe. The troupe was led by Irish Australian comedian J.J. Kennedy but also contained actors and actresses from the Theatre Royal in both Sydney and Melbourne. The troupe reportedly brought about 10 tons of props and scenery with them on tour.

(Source of quote from Maitland Mercury <http://trove.nla.gov.au>)

December

1st December Thursday

I am very tired to day but a great blessing there is not much to be done, but one great piece to be seen to is my music lesson. I am heartily sick of them. I would not mind if I thought I was improving any, but I don't seem to improve a little. I had a talk with Edith and Bell, our little chats will soon be at an end now. They told me something about a certain party which hurt my feelings very much if it be true, but I think I must have further evidence before I believe.

A very heavy storm blew up this evening. I knew a certain party who went out for a pleasant ride and was caught in it and drenched through. Uncle Willie came in again to day, his visits will soon be at an end, as he proposes starting tomorrow from here.



Uncle Edward Spencer photo taken in 1905

2nd December Friday

It seems hardly fair that I should have to bade farewell to dear Uncle Willie after having so little of his company during this visit, but I must be content and only hope Miss McGregor had much of his company. Poor thing, she will be very lonely out there now. I wish I were there so she was with me, but she never seems to make herself at home here. I suppose she has her reasons for it. We have had a most terrifying storm this afternoon. I do hope they were not caught in it but it may only have been a passing storm. I was down at Aunt Mary's during it. Coming home I met somebody whom I took exception to. Sarah and I went to Church. There was not many there, it was too damp I think. Auntie Beckie said she was very pleased to see we were such good Christians to go out on a night like this.

3rd December Saturday

It was too wet and stormy looking this morning to do the verandah but it turned out a nice day. I am so sorry I did not do it. There is a great cricket match on today. I did not go down to see it, I think you can employ your time much better than looking at cricket. Jack C.²²⁵ is delighted tonight, he made an unusual good score, more by good luck than good management. George²²⁶ is staying in town tonight. People will think he comes to see me. I am sure I could never learn to love him any better than I do now.

4th December Sunday

Ma went to Church this morning. It was not so warm. After dinner, we went to Service and then for a walk. A nice lot too. I am sure Milly and Ettie will be doing wrong by not going (page torn) first but Annie said they had permission so that (page torn) to Church. May(or Mary) was with us but on coming (the rest of the page has torn away)

5th December Monday

I was very much surprised, when Ma came home from being round at Aunties, to find that she was very much annoyed with our Sunday's adventure. I little expected she would be that put out. For the future I shall take our own and no more, then you will be sure of not offending any body. After dinner, as usual I went for my music lesson. When I got there, I found them equally vexed with me there, for our sudden disappearance from Church. I feel slightly flattered at Uncle Edward's kind remark, that when I am with giddy girls, I am equally as bad as them. I am finding out by degrees, by relations high opinions of them, but I had no bad motive in doing what I did last night. It was purely accidental.

6th December Tuesday

To day poor Uncle Willie takes his final departure from Rouchel Vale. I do hope and trust God will keep them safe and help them to their journey's end. It will be a long and wearisome one, but they may be rewarded for the trouble in the end. Poor Miss McGregor will miss her darling very much. One blessing, the holidays are close at hand now, she will be going home for a short time. It must be very lonely for her out there but let her lot be as it may, she will never complain. I only wish I would take pattern by her. We were very much astonished by a visit from Mr James²²⁷. He is spending the night with us poor fellow, he looks so bad. He says he is nearly worn out. It is a hard parish for a delicate man like him to work. He tries to please everyone and never takes a moments consideration for himself.

7th December Wednesday

I was up unusually early this morning but found that I was not the only one who thought it time for rising. Pa was busily engaged with his building and Mr James was making preparations for his day's journey. He left us before breakfast. It seemed a long day before breakfast was ready, but long as the day is, there is work enough for all the daylight. Mrs Brin told me I ought not think of rising before 6 o'clock. I don't think Ma and Pa would agree on that point. We were finished nice and early after tea. Tired as I was I managed to go to Church. Mr White²²⁸ delivered a very interesting discourse altho there was not many present to benefit by it. Ma expected Lucy C²²⁹ to spend the night here but her two brothers came to excuse her as she had made other arrangements. She is going to Maitland tomorrow. I am afraid they will have another (page torn) M. is very... (pages torn)

8th December Thursday

The Bugle went round the town this morning to call the volunteers up²³⁰. Every one heard it but me and I slept too soundly for any audinary (sic ordinary) noise to disturb me. Auntie Mary was to go down to day but she was too ill. I am sure I don't know what to make of her and Ma. They seem to have a similar complaint. One day well, and another laid up. I am thankful to say I am not like that, for I rarely know what it is to be ill. After tea Ma & Pa went down to see Auntie Beckie. I have not been to see her, yet I do love little babies. Still there is a lot of worry and anxiety attached to them. Some mothers seem to make more fuss over their children than others. I don't believe in taking too much care of them, they are better not pampered up too much.

9th December Friday

The Dr. called on Ma this morning. She is improving nicely now. He says he hopes to be able to leave off attending her by the New Year. She went up to Scone this afternoon taking Viv and Tom with her. The latter she intends leaving with his Aunt Patty²³¹ for his holidays. I am left in sole charge now for a few days. The children went into Mrs Brecht's for tea. I am going to be a kind mistress to them and myself too. I went down to Auntie Beckie's to see the new arrival²³². She is a fine little baby. Auntie is not very well, the heat will be greatly against her getting strong. Sarah and I, as usual, went to Church. There was not very many there they sang one hymn kneeling. I think Mr White is a little off colour. When I arrived home found Pa quite alone with the exception of some papers. I then felt sorry for having left him but perhaps I may not have been much company to him.

10th December Saturday

I am my own mistress to day, still there seems the regular routine of work to be done. The children seem to be enjoying themselves thoroughly. All Mrs Brecht's are with them and the noise they are making is deafening but there is only Pa to be annoyed by it and he glories in seeing children merry. It was past 3 o'clock when I finished up, being interrupted by visitors directly after dinner. I indulged in a quick nap after which we all went up on the Hill for tea. Grandma kindly invited us for dinner tomorrow but I know Pa prefers staying at home. I sat up until after eleven by myself. Pa went down town and Fred went to sleep. I felt very timid but no one touched me.

11th December Sunday

I must give myself a little credit for smartness this morning, for the first bell was ringing before I commenced dressing and then there in ample time. Went down to see Auntie Beckie after school. Pa spent the evening in solitude. I felt annoyed because he promised me he would go for a walk. Sarah and I went to Church tonight. I feel quite fatigued and fit for a good night's rest.

Final entry for the year.

Notes:

- 225 John Cameron top scored for Muswellbrook Perseverance Cricket team in both innings. – see story below.
226 unknown.
227 Anglican Minister who preached at St John's, Rouchel
228 Reverend Canon White, Anglican Minister
229 Probably Lucy Cameron, born 1866. The sister of John Cameron.
230 Probably the 4th Volunteer Infantry, a militia regiment based in the towns of the Hunter River. Robert Fitzgerald (see note 38 and page 15) was a Captain in the 4th Volunteer Infantry in 1887.
231 Patience Poole Hayne, sister of May's stepmother.
232 Dorothy A Hayne.
233

John Cameron – The Cricketer

Of the many friends that drop in for dinner, a game of cards or a few songs, John Cameron is somewhat unique in that he continues to visit May's family when they move to Muscle Brook. John or Johnny or JC or Jack is obviously a good friend of the family. He even helps May with her homework.

He is also a very good cricketer. Even though, from a range of comments, May thinks cricket is boring, she makes several comments about John Cameron's cricketing prowess.

On 3rd December she says "There is a great cricket match on today. I did not go down to see it. I think you can employ your time much better than looking at cricket. Jack C. is delighted tonight, he made an unusual good score more by good luck than good management."

May although obviously pleased for her friend, has understated Jack C's performance. In a match between Muswellbrook Perseverance and Murrurundi, Jack top scored in both innings with the bat and took seven wickets with the ball. Muswellbrook won and the write up in the Maitland Mercury included the following.

"Of the local players it was a treat to witness the masterly style in which Cameron defied the efforts of the whole bowling strength of the visiting team to dislodge him in the second innings, until he had compiled the very respectable score of 42. Moran and Hodges, too, did yeomen service with the willow for the home team, while Marston, Cox, and Cameron were equally effective with the sphere. Altogether "our boys" have every reason to congratulate themselves on the way in which they scored yet another victory over their old friendly antagonists."

(Source of quote from Maitland Mercury via <http://trove.nla.gov.au>)

John was the son of Donald and Elizabeth Cameron of Gencairn, at Upper Rouchel- born 1868. At the time of the writing of May's Diary, John had just begun his career as a teacher. He left the Upper Hunter and taught in Glen Innes, Walgett and many years in Armidale. He finished his teaching career at Springwood in the Blue Mountains.

John came from a family of cricketers including his brothers Alec and Bill. John was for many years the President of the New England Cricket Association. He died in Haberfield Sydney in 1939 aged 70.

Source of John Cameron's later life detail from Geoff Harrison from notes by Betty Clydesdale.

In the years following the Diary:

On 14th January 1888 May's grandfather Thomas Spencer Snr died.

On 22nd May 1888 Rouchel Vale was sold at auction for £3,410 to the Holmes family. The Spencer family left the Rouchel completely until Edna Mary Spencer (a granddaughter of Matthew and Emma Spencer) married Dave Adam and moved to Upper Rouchel in 1944.

Uncle Edward Spencer married Mary Hodge in 1888. Mary died in 1903 and Edward married Alice Matthews in 1905.

Thomas Jnr, Mary and their family continued to live in Muswellbrook until 1899.

From 1888 onward the family's pastoral business was centred on the three properties north of Brewarrina. Thomas Jnr definitely visited Cuttabunda from time to time. It is not known if May ever went "up country" again

Uncle Willie married Grace McGregor in 1891. They had two children. Willie died of a heart attack at Cuttabunda in 1894. He was buried there in an unmarked grave. Grace continued to be a teacher and then post mistress at Quirindi north of Muswellbrook. She died in 1942.

In 1892 Aunt Mary died aged just 45.

In 1893 Bella had an illegitimate child (Colin McIntyre). Bella never married and died in 1911 aged 49.

In 1893 May's stepmother had one leg amputated. She died in 1896.

In 1896 May's prediction "The end will be the estates will be sold and each man do for himself" came true. The Spencer Brothers Pastoral and Homestead Lessees had their loan for just over £10,000 foreclosed and they lost the properties. None of them ever owned an agricultural property again.

In November 1896 Uncle Abs was killed when a horse he was riding at Bourke, fell on him, breaking his neck. He is buried in the Historical Section of Bourke cemetery in an unmarked grave.

In 1899 May's father was appointed Town Clerk of Aberdeen and the family moved there to live.

In February 1901, after suffering tuberculosis for 2 years, May died aged 28. As was her prediction she did not marry. She was buried in Muswellbrook cemetery near her mother. Rev. White presided over the burial.

Mays grandmother Mary Stark also died in 1901 aged 83.

May's father, Thomas, died in 1917 aged 75, just 3 years after retiring from his role as Aberdeen Town Clerk.

All of May's other siblings lived well into the 20th century.

Her last surviving sister Ida, died in 1975 aged 92. Ida, like May, did not marry and spent her whole working life as a music teacher. I am not sure what May would have made of that?



May's father, Thomas, with his daughter Vivie and Vivie's husband George Millar Crabb. The photo was taken not long before Thomas' death



May's sisters (L to R) Elsie, Ida and Vivie with their two half sisters Millicent (Mish) and Gladys (in front) taken in the 1940's

Pa - Thomas Spencer's Family

Thomas Spencer was the son of Thomas and Mary Spencer who arrived in Australia as free settlers in 1841.

Thomas was the eldest of eleven children most of whom are mentioned in the diary.

Thomas Spencer (Grandfather)

B: 1816 - Arklow, County Wicklow, Ireland

D: 1888 - Muswellbrook NSW

Married Mary Stark about 1840

Mary Stark (Grandma)

B: 1817 - Vale of Avoca, County Wicklow, Ireland

D: 1901 - Muswellbrook NSW

Thomas Spencer Jnr (Pa)

B. 1842 - Rouchel

D: 1917 - Aberdeen

Matthew Spencer (Uncle Matt)

B: 1843 - Rouchel

D: 1910 - Muswellbrook

John Spencer (Uncle John)

B: 1845 - Rouchel

D: 1924 - Burwood NSW

Absalom Sherwood Spencer (Uncle Abs)

B: 1947 - Rouchel

D: 1896 - Bourke NSW

Mary Jane Spencer (Aunt Mary)

B: 1847 - Rouchel

D: 1892 - Muswellbrook

Elizabeth Spencer (Aunt Lillie)

B: 1849 - Rouchel

D: 1913 - Parramatta

Rebecca Spencer (Aunt Beckie)

B: 1851 - Rouchel

D: 1914 - Mosman

Susan Spencer (Aunt Lammie or Aunt Susie)

B: 1853 - Rouchel

D: 1894 - Muswellbrook

Sarah Spencer (Aunt Sarah or Sarah)

B: 1856 - Sandy Creek

D: 1912 - Mosman

William Granville Spencer (Uncle Willie)

B: 1858 - Rouchel

D: 1894 - Cuttabunda

Amelia Spencer

B: 1860 - Rouchel

D: 1861 - Rouchel

Edward Spencer (Uncle Edward)

B: 1862 - Rouchel

D: 1915 - Wee Waa

denotes mentioned in the diary

Ma - Mary Elizabeth Hayne's Family

Mary Elizabeth Hayne was the daughter of James Hayne and Sarah Elizabeth Smith. James, Sarah and their first 5 children arrived in Australia in 1848. They had another four children in NSW of which Mary was the second youngest.

Mary married Thomas Pritchard in 1878 They had two children Thomas Jnr (Tommie in the diary) and Stanley who died as an infant. Thomas Pritchard died in 1882 and Mary married Thomas Spencer in August 1886.

James Hayne (Mr Hayne)

B: 1814

D: 1896

James Hayne married Sarah Smith in Somerset England in 1837

Sarah Elizabeth Smith (Mrs Hayne)

B: 1817

D: 1901

Philip Vaughan Hayne

B: 1838

D: 1906

Patience Poole Hayne (Aunt Patty)

B: 1840

D: 1906

Henry Hayne

B: 1843

D: 1904

Caroline Hayne

B: 1846

D: 1895

Thomas Hayne

B: 1850

D: 1871

George Hayne (Uncle George)

B: 1852

D: 1921

Sarah Hayne (Mrs Cameron)

B: 1854

D: 1942

Mary Elizabeth Hayne (Ma)

B: 1856

D: 1896

James Hayne Jnr (Mr J Hayne)

B: 1859

D: 1923

denotes mentioned in the diary

May's Family

May was the daughter of Thomas Spencer and Rebecca Hooper. Thomas and Rebecca were both born in NSW and were the children of free settlers. May's mother Rebecca died in 1885.

Thomas Spencer Jnr (Pa)

B: 1842 - Rouchel

D: 1917 - Aberdeen

Thomas Spencer married Rebecca Hooper in 1869

Rebecca Hooper (Mamma)

B: 1850 - Muswellbrook

D: 1885 - Muswellbrook

They had ten children, seven of which were alive in 1887.

Frederick Thomas Spencer (Freddie)

B: 1870 - Rouchel

D: 1943 - Bowral

Mary Emily May Spencer (May)

B: 1872 - Rouchel

D: 1901 - Aberdeen

Arthur Hooper Spencer (Artie)

B: 1874 - Rouchel

D: 1953 - Muswellbrook

Alfred Bokhara Spencer (Alfie)

B: 1876 - Cuttabunda

D: 1959 - Hamilton NSW

Elizabeth Spencer (Elsie)

B: 1878 - Cuttabunda

D: 1945 - Scone

Cecil William Spencer

B: 1880 - Rouchel

D: 1882 - Rouchel

Muriel Ida Maud Stark Spencer (Ida)

B: 1882 - Rouchel

D: 1975 - Lindfield

Vivienne Laurretta Spencer (Vivie)

B: 1884 - Rouchel

D: 1954 - Parramatta

George Granville Spencer

B: 1885 - Rouchel

D: 1885 - Rouchel

Una Rebecca Spencer

B: 1885 - Rouchel

D: 1885 - Rouchel

denotes mentioned in the diary

May's Classic Quotes

2nd February: Of Miss Hodge's hysterics at the party: "We were all enjoying ourselves immensely until about 1 o'clock. Miss Hodge took a fit of hysterics but not very bad. Still that threw a dampness on the whole affair while it lasted, which was about an hour and then they all went on the same as usual."

10th March: On contentment: "I think I have a very discontented mind. Contentment, must be a very great blessing to anyone who has it."

10th April: Of a friend Flora's wedding : "an eventful day for poor Flora, for today "she ties a knot with her tongue that she cannot undo with her teeth"

11th May: Of her Uncle Abs: "We have enjoyed his company very much, although he has given me enough lectures to sink a punt."

20th August: On the snobs of Muscle Brook: "It is enough to turn a pig away from potatoes to see the snobs of Muscle Brook. They think it would stifle them to breathe the (same) air as the poorer class. There is a shooting match today. Of course only for the upperten, refusing to let the lower class join. They want taking up for cruelty to dumb animals – shooting the poor little pigeons."

8th September: On the state of financial affairs: ".....we want every penny badly enough now. I don't know what we are coming too(sic). The end will be the estates will be sold and each man do for himself. Time will alone answer this question. Pa is turning as gray as possible lately. I am sure it is with the worry he will never be fit to manage the station affairs anymore, if they do recover themselves, which I am afraid they never will."

26th September: On Grandmas: "Grandmas as a rule are never happy, only when pottering about with pets."

29th September: On Love: "(He) Has not heard from his dear Flo lately. I am beginning to think absence makes the heart grow colder in her case."

11th October: On bare feet: "I was quite shocked this afternoon in the attitude I found my intended Aunt. Some people might not think it out of place, but I would think it dreadful to show a man my bare foot and allow him to handle it."

25th October: On her stepmother's health and marriage: "I have never seen her quite well sinse she has been married. I do not think I shall ever get married if that is what married life does. I think old maids are the best off, altho they don't think so."

28th October: On Work: "Work and I are not on the best of terms at any times."

9th November: On her future Aunt Miss Hodge: "Miss Hodge visits every place frequently but here. I have no wish for people to come who do not call for us, so I suppose she is better away. It will seem rather stiff when she enters the family I think."

10th November: More on the state of financial affairs: "I hope and trust they will succeed it is their last effort but I think it is all for the best. They have had so much trouble, perhaps it will teach them a lesson. God does all things to a good purpose"

16th November: On Uncle Edward and Miss Hodge: "On our way we met Uncle Edward and Miss Hodge but they said they were above speaking to people who laugh in the street and so did not recognize us".

30th November: On old women: "It is something to be proud of to get into old women's good graces. They are generally so very hard to please".

Rouchel Brook Map

The map on the following page is derived from two historic parish maps. It shows the location of the Spencer's property Rouchel Vale in pink. The house at Rouchel Vale as shown in the picture on page 7 is just above the "u" in Rouchel. See the modern photo below for comparison.

Other properties highlighted include:

Oakfield (in green) where Bella lives.

Rose Vale (in blue) where the Gardners live.

Rock Hill (in Yellow) where the family of Kenneth Kennedy live. This includes all the Kennedy children in the school photo and Mary Kennedy, who May collects for the Bible Society with.

Dalvey (in grey) where the family of Donald Kennedy live including Flora who gets married at Easter.

Glenerne where the family of Alexander Cameron live including Ma's sister Sarah Cameron (nee Hayne).

Bingeberry is shown in purple.

Rouchel Brook is shown in blue running through the valley.

Rouchel Today

The photo below shows the "The Vale" as Rouchel Vale is known today and St John's Church which was built on land belonging to Matthew Spencer in 1878. The original Church which doubled as Rouchel Vale School at the time of the diary was demolished and replaced in the 1950's. *source - Google Earth imagery by CNES / Astrium 2017*



Map on following page shows the location of the properties at The Rouchel where main characters in the diary lived. May lived at Rouchel Vale, Bella lived at Oakfield. Alex and Sarah Cameron lived at Glenerne and Mary Kennedy lived at Rock Hill. Coloured overlay is indicative only.

source http://www.lpi.nsw.gov.au/land_titles/historical_research/parish_maps - Reproduced with the Permission of the Office of the Registrar General, a unit of the NSW Department of Finance, Services & Innovation. May not be reproduced without permission.



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