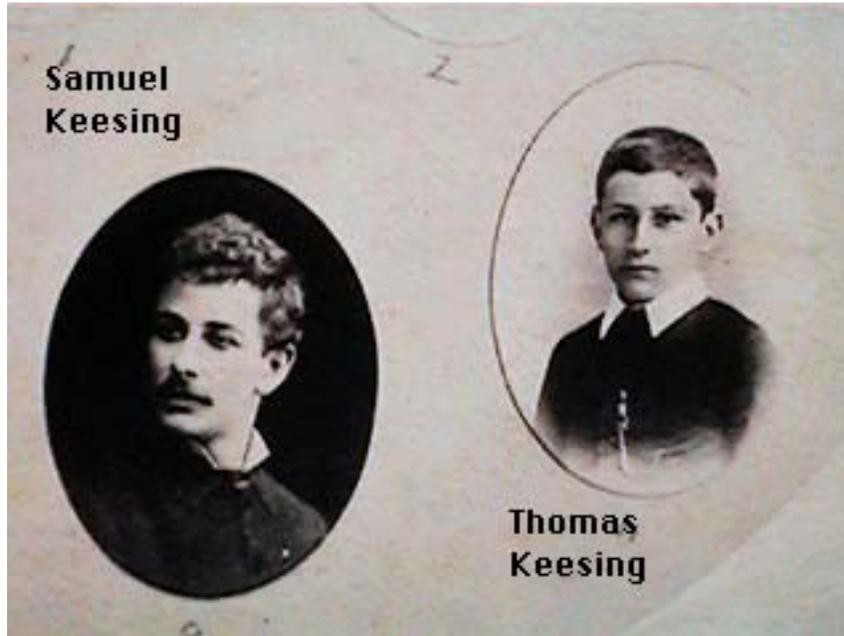


TOM KEESING'S MEMOIRS



TOM KEESING, THE AUTHOR OF THESE REMINICES

To record-at the age I begin these notes-sixty six years.-what I can remember of my earlier life, is going to be an interesting task, for me at all events and perhaps for others.

Auckland, New Zealand was my birth place. and as I remained there for forty four years, it is of my life in that city that these memoirs will chiefly deal.

I remember first my toddlings along the pathways of my house in Emily place, beating a toy drum and having many a tumble. The pathway was bordered with box and with dwarf red roses. And on each side of the front gate was a hedge of laburnum. I early absorbed the love of flowers. Across the road which seemed to my baby eyes very wide, .there were the residences of one of the Wilsons (of Wilsons and Horton, proprietors of the NZ Herald). And of the Van der Hydes, well known pioneer families both of them. All that part of town was cut away, before many years had passed. To provide spoil for reclamation. In connection with the new harbour works and railway station. Incidents in connection, therewith strongly impressed themselves on my memory.

Our house was a two story wooden house on the western side of the road. It had a verandah and balcony on the northern side with a clear view of the beautiful Waitemata harbour; here I can remember at least one regatta day party.with many female cousins entertained and regaled with traditional red and yellow coloured jellies in glasses and custards with raspberry jam, in glasses of another shape. Also, delicious ripe peaches

from trees that grew on the spot. Regatta Day in Auckland is 29th January, and peaches of flavour are then of their best in New Zealand just then__ the height of summer. As we moved from Emily place, 1878 to 1879. I could not have been more than four years old when the last Regatta day party took place. My brain at that age was alert, as I can remember the layout of the garden distinctly.__ at one side, next to Sommerville's, a tall Norfolk pine and passionfruit bower., at the other, an intriguing frog pond-the creation and hobby of one of my brothers Samuel.

And the aforesaid peach trees filling the back portion of the estate and tumbling one by one down the cliff towards what is now Fort street. These falling trees were the first sign, had we known it, of a compulsory early removal to another home.Of this, more anon. For first I must recall other early adventures.

Auckland's Jewish synagogue was almost at our door. And my father in those days was acting minister; he carried out that duty for a number of years, from the time of the Revd Elkin's departure almost to the appointment of Rev Goldstein to the position about the year 1880. Close to the "shool" was a stone wall with its top inlaid with broken bottle glass. This formed the boundary of Fort Britomart. Consigned as a protection for Auckland against the attacks of the Moaris whose settlement was at Orakai, near the mouth of Waitemata harbour. My older brother often took me for a walk toward the fort. I remember the old wall well and also a very steep flight of stairs called Jacobs ladder that led down from the top of Point Britomart to the harbour level. At the foot were Auckland's first swimming baths. Known as Hildtech's. My father and brothers were strong and keen swimmers.

One by one the peach trees fell down the precipice as work proceeded on excavation for a flour mill to be erected for a miller named Lamb and little by little the edge of the precipice approached our house. When the wind blew gale force, as it can in Auckland at times, from the north east, our house would rock so alarmingly that the whole family would decamp and spend the night at our grandfather's house which was a short distance away. Those excursions took place in the Winter and to this day, I can feel my teeth chattering as I was carried in my mother's arms through the chilly blast.

My grandfather, Henry Keesing senr, was a native of Amsterdam. Where he was established as a carpet warehouseman. He had settled in London somewhere I suppose around 1830. but account of the serious depression which afflicted England before the repeal of the Corn Laws, he lost most of his money through a bank smash.and decided to emigrate to NZ where one of his sons, Barnet, had already settled. As a result, he bought the whole family with him to Auckland in the barque "Union" in 1842.

Along with merchandise, wherewith to trade in the new colony, he bought with him seasoned timber for a house. This he erected in Waterloo Quadrant, opposite Government House gates., and there, as far as I know, it still stands, perhaps the stoutest and staunchest wooden house in Auckland. I was too young to see much of my grandfather before he died at a good age, I think, of over eighty: but I remember him, setting his musical box going to amuse my brother Harry and myself.

Some of my early recollections before we moved from Emily Place after my father had come to a satisfactory arrangement with Lamb for compensation were preparation for amateur theatricals—the performance I afterwards learned was a comic opera “the Gouty Baron”. Of which my brother Maurice had composed both the libretto and the music. My sister Etta had presided at the piano, my brothers playing various instruments in the overture and afterwards acting and singing to piano accompaniments.

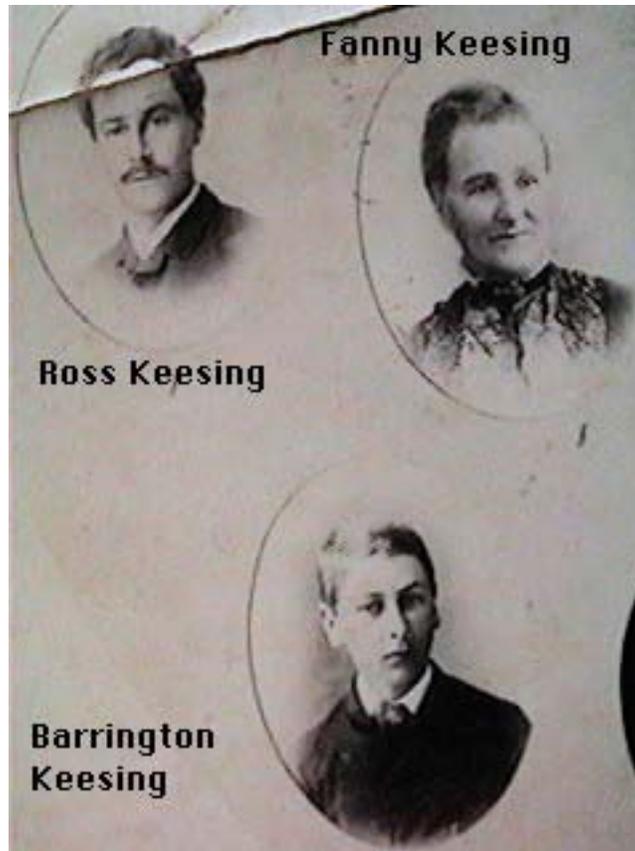
A special spectacle in Auckland of I suppose 1877, was a march of redcoats down Shortland Street or the Crescent as it was sometimes called.: this I think was the departure of the 58th Regiment, the last British regiment that had garrisoned the colony after the Maori wars.

My father’s store was in Shortland Street not far from our home and I can remember my brothers carrying hot mid-day meals, the plates covered with tea towels to keep the food clean and warm to the members of the family working in the store. I can also remember the tall shutters being put up and barred—a regular proceeding when the store was closed each night—police in Auckland in those days were scarce—“larrikins” loafers and thieves numerous. And carpet bags impressed themselves on my memory—a country store was established at Cambridge Waikato, and my brothers at times packed their carpet bags for the train trip to Hamilton.—then the railway terminus . And my disused perambulator was the medium for getting the packs to the railway station, a quarter of a mile or so away.

My father’s brother, Barnet and his wife, my Aunt Hannah paid a flying visit to Auckland by one of the new mail steamers—City of Sydney or City of New York—that for the first time connected the USA with Australia and New Zealand. This uncle had left NZ in 1849 for the San Francisco gold fields and with other lucky “forty niners”, he must have made good, for he reared a large family there in comfort. And his descendants are to be found in San Francisco and other parts of California today.

Besides his town residence in Waterloo Quadrant , my grandfather had owned a large property in Epsom, on the Manakau Road. It was called “Bird Grove”. I was so young when he died that I never actually saw this suburban home, which I understand was disposed of in the realization of his estate. My grandmother I never knew; she had died just before my appearance.

My father and mother married, as was the fashion in those days, very young. My father at the age of twenty three paid a visit to Sydney and met and married my mother whose name was Fanny Magnusson. Her father was a professor of languages and one time taught Lord Macauley. In NSW my mother had lived with her stepfather and his family named Soloman at Eden Twofold Bay.



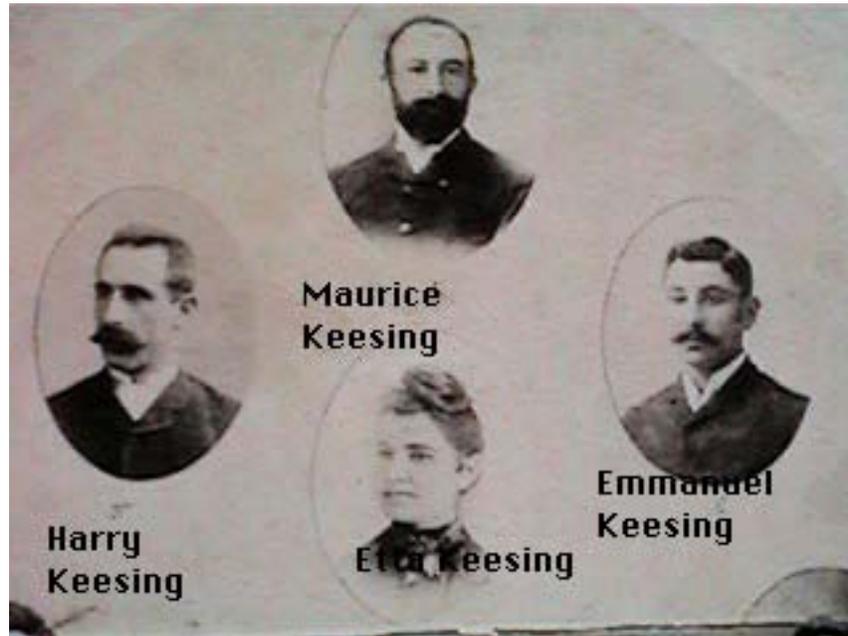
**FANNY KEESING, TOM'S MOTHER ALONG WITH ROSS AND BARRINGTON,
HIS BROTHERS**

It was in 1853 that my parents were married, in the York St synagogue, Sydney; the family they reared consisted of eight boys and one girl—my beloved sister Etta and I was the youngest.

My advent into the world, coming twenty years after my parents' marriage the doings of my older brothers in their youth only came to my knowledge much later when eventually I learned that the whole family had resided in London for some years, while my father did the buying of English goods for the Auckland Store. Nearly all my brothers therefore had their early education in London. When they returned to reside in Auckland, making the trip in the "Ida Zeigler", a noted sailing clipper of those days—a trip, by the way, that occupied ninety days from London to Auckland—their dress was that of the English high school boy, complete with top hat. Their photos in this garb can be seen in my family album.

My oldest brother Maurice, when I was quite young, left for Australia and practiced his profession of lawyer in Bourke NSW. He later returned and practiced in Cambridge Waikato and later in Auckland. He was an accomplished linguist, published two books of

his poems and plays in verse. He was particularly fond of music, the piano being his principal instrument.



the other brothers I remember better as youths as they mostly lived in Auckland as I grew up. Harry excelled at figures and remained the man of the business though also extremely fond of music. He played the violin well; and had a fair tenor voice. Along with other brothers, he was a pupil of Gordon Gotch, who enjoyed a reputation in those days as a singing master. On Harry's death at Napier NZ in 1915, he left a widow and a son. A daughter beryl had predeceased him in sad circumstances over which he worried greatly. His friends were surprised at his somewhat early death: as he was a man of fine physique: in his young days, he had been amateur boxing champion of NZ; and had fought Jem mace, who had presented him with a cup to commemorate the event. He had also been a runner and was a pioneer of bicycling in NZ. As a heavy Indian Club exponent, he was one of the feature performers at Prof Carvelo's gymkanas—one of Auckland's entertainments in "the eighties".

The third eldest of the family was named Samuel Rothschild. As far back as I can remember he was an artist and musician. He became an excellent pianist and an accomplished baritone singer. Whilst as a painter in oils, he carried off many prizes in the Auckland art exhibitions., including the only gold medal I think awarded up till then. He painted mainly landscapes, which included the famous terraces at Tarawera and Rotomahana which he visited shortly before these wonders were destroyed by the eruption of 1882. His figure painting was notable also, and he was adept at painting flowers on porcelain and on panels—those he did mostly as gifts for friends. Through lack of buyers for pictures in those days, he took to retouching photographs for a living and it affected his eyesight. He became restless and left home for Australia, whence he went to America. There in the first place, he earned a living as an actor in a stock

company. At home, he always had a fancy for impersonating women on the stage and of masquerading in skirts. His cleverness in both drama and opera in America as "Hal Cyril Vernon" bought him some fame. But it was later when he turned his special attention once again to the piano, that he made money as a teacher and appeared with conspicuous success as a concert pianist in New York, Chicago, St Louis and other capital cities of the US., his professional name at that time being "Narcourt Vern". Becoming restless again, he left America for Italy to develop his vocal talents and from there to England. Just as he was to appear in Grand Opera there, he took ill of meningitis and died at the early age of 37.

Next in the family came the only girl, my dear sister Rosetta. Victoria, known always as Etta. From my earliest recollection, she was imbued with the deepest religious sense and with frequent pride in the history and destiny of the Hebrew race. She was my first teacher, both religious and secular. When we were forced to leave Emily place at a time when I was five to six years old, we took up temporary abode in a large two story house in Symonds st. On a small lawn at the side of it, we set up a small tent and there Etta taught my brother Barry and myself the ABC and a little further and installed into us some religious sense and our responsibilities as Jews when we grew older. A close study of the Old Testament and a love of the Psalms was continued under her guidance. for many years. My dear mother too looked after my spiritual welfare but when Barry and myself were babies, she had already bought up and to some extent educated a large family. Etta was a large help to our mother therefore in looking after our young needs and altogether in all domestic duties. She was an excellent cook her dishes and cakes were the envy and admiration of all our relations and friends. So we were well looked after in the eating line.

There came a time when a suitor for her hand arrived and she became Mrs Myer Caselberg. Her marriage caused her to live in Masterton, capital town of the Wairapa district of NZ. Myer Caselberg was one of nature's gentlemen and one of it's esteemed businessmen. His first family consisted of a number of boys and girls, and to etta were born three daughters. Their home was a very beautiful one, and my first proper holiday was spent there, giving me my first chance to see currants, red, black and white fruiting in quantities, and the chance to enjoy raspberries, gooseberries, mulberries and almost all NZ summer fruits ad lib. The house party was a numerous and gay one, with tennis on the spot in the day time, music and games in the evenings.

I spent part of a holiday there on other occasions, one of them on my honeymoon in January 1901. After the death of her husband, one of the pioneers and a most respected citizen of the Wairapa, Etta achieved a life long ambition by making a trip to Palestine. She had been a regular contributor to Zionist funds and to tree planting in the settlement. On her trip she represented the NZ branch of the WIZO and laid the foundation stone of a hospital wing in Tel Aviv. Etta was an accomplished pianist and in her single days, was a wonderful help as accompanist for my musical brothers.

My brother Ross who came next in the family, I remember as a young man while in the employ of LD Nathan and co in Auckland. Later he made the trip to England and on his

return remained in Australia, first in Brisbane whence he made a visit to us at home and afterwards in Perth, where he died. He possessed a nice baritone voice and on the visit I have mentioned, gave me some singing lessons.

After him came Manny, clever at book keeping, literature, caricaturing and music. At one time, he left Auckland to act as a secretary companion to an old uncle of ours in Brighton England. On his return, he lived at my house for some time, and though it may have been somewhat hard on Blanche catering for him and hard for our piano which he used for composition and scoring with, we derived a lot of pleasure from his singing and his accompaniments to my efforts on the violin.

Jos (Joshua Cobden) came next in the family. He was a surveyor but also tried his fortune in Australia where he made a living by playing as a concert violinist. In orchestras. On his return to Auckland, he accepted an appointment as a surveyor to the government of the then "Federated Malay States". He resided at Perak for some years and his two sons were born there. The older became an anthropologist and winner of a Carnegie exhibition under which as Dr Felix Keesing, he travelled to the Phillipines and is the author of books on the lives and manners of the Phillipines.



JOSS KEESING ALONG WITH RALPH KEESING (TOM'S FATHER)

My brother Barry (Barrington) was my constant playfellow until I was fairly well grown up. He was only two years older than I and waited for me to be of school age, seven, before he attended any school. He was my ideal in many respects, being fair and particularly good looking with a charming personality as a boy and young man. He was an excellent mimic and the family thought a genius at charades etc. he was naturally clever at sports, at which all my brothers were enthusiasts. He was a tip-top bot cricketer and in later life, an excellent tennis player. After a long service with P Hayman and Co in Auckland, he was put in charge of a new branch they established in Napier. He afterwards went to Wellington where he has ever since resided. His wife Ida, and my own dear wife Blanche are sisters. His one child, a daughter Zelma has now two grown up children, Robin and Richard Johannsen.