MEMORIES OF MAKARAU…..FROM MAVIS COTTER (NEE HOOPER)

I am the eldest daughter of Pat (Albert George) Hooper, youngest son of Clara Lavis (nee Clinkard) and Charles Hooper. My father was one of 14 in the Charles Hooper family. Dad always remembered my birthday, 27th July 1927, as I was born on the day his first lamb was born on his farm. I was also known as “Sis” to the majority of people as I was a sister to seven brothers – Bryan, Charles, John, Robert (Bob), Ron, Ian and Ray. I have a younger sister, Lois.

The Hooper family in the early days virtually had the whole of the Makarau valley under one “Blade of Grass”. The Makarau school and “Horse paddock” were on the site of the Pat’s original farm. I am not sure if the Hall site was on the farm also but it may have been on the original Clinkard (later Hooper) land. Tom and Florrie took over this original farm and lived above the hall. Horace and Jim each owned some 400/500 acres on land stretching from Manuel’s farm, about two miles from Granny’s home and the hall, which was the centre of most social activities, with the Post Office tennis courts etc. ….up and over the hills in the North, towards the Kaipara Harbour. Their only neighbours were the Woodcocks, Manuel’s and Flynns, all about two miles from the centre. Originally the 1000 bushmen’s camp and the Depression camp were in the centre too.

I was born in the pit-sawn kauri house built by Dad and Uncle Alf Hooper after my Dad returned from four years of battle during the First World War, including Palestine, the Desert where he fought on camels. He had purchased 450 acres of unbroken land prior to the War because he was a member of the Auckland Mounted Rifles. He left New Zealand in November 1915, returning in 1919. He had cleared enough scrub and bush to feed one cow, prior to leaving and my aunty Edith, his sister, milked and tended, whilst he was away.

As a signalman in the war he was involved in many brave and daring incidents and after one particular battle he was recommended for the Victoria Cross. However this wasn’t possible as all his officers had been killed so he was awarded the next highest honour, the D.C.M. He always maintained he eventually won the V.C. when he married Violet Constance McLean from Kawaka, whose parents owned and ran the Kaiwaka Post Office and Boarding House, just as the Hooper’s did in Makarau. It was Mum beautiful handwriting that was read on the Kaiwaka Post Office notice board telling the War news, which was telegraphed by horse and wagon around the district.

Many of Dad’s older brothers and sisters married school teachers who taught at the Makarau School and lived at Hooper boarding house.

Auntie Edith Hooper was engaged to one of these teachers, Kenny White, who was tragically killed in the war. She ran the exchange and post office and kept the boarding house going as well as caring for grandfather. He was bedridden, as was common in those times, after sustaining an accident with his horse and wagon, after which his broken limbs could not be re-set.

Uncle Tom Hooper farmed across the road from home, adjacent to the Makarau Hall and their cowshed was just across the road from our house. The house is still standing today. He married Florence Maxwell, a teacher at Makarau and their only son Max eventually married Kathleen Dye from Kaukapakapa, another teacher at the school. From what I gather, Harry Manuel and Alf Ranum had “fallen in love” with Florence as pupils of hers at the school but it was Tom who won the hand of this beautiful, elegant lady. I recall her coming home from croquet at Kaukapakapa with daughter-in-law Kath and running up the hill at the age nearly 80 yrs. Their youngest daughter Nessie was postmistress at Makarau while Granny Hooper, as she was known to everyone in the district, and Uncle Alf lived in the original Hooper house after Grandfather Hooper’s death in 1935. Nessie was like our “big sister” until the tall handsome Basil Jones, in his little baby Austin car, (we used to say he didn’t sit in it ….he wore it like a coat!) married her and took her off to the family orchard and farm at Kaukapakapa. I recall her lovely wedding reception in the Makarau Hall and my mother’s pretty youngest sister, Olive McClean, as a bridesmaid.

He survived into his eighties! My mother used to take us to see him and Granny every day and as a treat we were offered a choice of a large variety of acid drops, black balls or changing ball lollies. You name …it was there in a large air-tight jar.

Grandfather was an amazing musician and played the organ, piano, clarinet and violin. Old Mr Titford from Waiwera told me once, when I was a young child, he could even blow a tune on the bullock horns he had mounted on the wall. The Hooper family band was well known in the North and travelled extensively by horseback to play at various community dances. It consisted mainly of Uncle Frank on Cello and violin, Uncle Tom on violin, Grandfather Hooper on clarinet and Aunty Nellie on piano. In later years they always gathered at home at Makarau for an annual reunion of music.

Granny also played the organ and sang beautifully. I stayed with her frequently from when I was eight years old and she told me many stories of going with her mother, Great Granny Clinkard…(Nee Cox) who was a teacher and tutor of the Churchill (of Winston fame) family, to visit their home in Oxfordshire, England.

She remembered the coach coming to pick them up for the journey. Granny also told stories of coming out to New Zealand on the sailing ship Siam in July 1865 and the many varieties of fruit stones, including that of the Cox’s Orange Pippin apple, their own propagated variety and many other English plants and herbs. They planted an orange seed at the house which grew into an enormous tree, but which took 60 years to bear oranges! However when it did it was loaded and in season it was a treat for the local school to go once a week to Granny’s to harvest with a long pole the delicious oranges….BUT woe betide anyone who dared to try and steal fruit in between those times. That was when I learned…”Right from Wrong” after one such escapade!!!! To hurt my dear granny left me broken hearted…but I learned a great lesson in NOT touching other people’s property. Granny was loved by everyone and she was always known as “Granny Hooper”.

Great Granny Clinkard (nee Cox) taught in one of the first schools in Auckland before the family moved up to Makarau to start farming on 160 acres , later extended, establishing a large orchard and also opened the original Post Office and Boarding –house in the district. The original homestead farm was named ‘Waitangi’.

Granny’s sister Annie Clinkard (later Elvin) was born in a thatched cottage they first built when they arrived. She was also nearly one of the first white “cannibal” meals when Maori kidnapped her as a baby, but luckily later was found in a flax bush near the river.

Granny always wore, every day, a large beautiful, red stoned brooch, given her by Great Granny, which had been a gift of the Churchill Family on their departure to New Zealand.

The original home and post office became the social centre of Makarau, and was home to many school teachers and workers. Cliff Brooking and Molly, who was the teacher at the school, were Granny’s last boarders and Molly nursed her in her last stages of her life. She died on the 28th May 1939, two months before her last grand-child Ray Hooper, the youngest of my seven brothers was born in Helensville. The rest of us were born in our original pit-sawn kauri home, now occupied by the Pickette family. Their tennis court at the old place was always very busy, being straight across the road from the Hall.

I recall the excitement when the then Prime Minister, Gordon Coates, came to visit her and to speak in the hall along with Uncle Cecil Clinkard who was the Member of Parliament for Rotorua. He had also been the first Mayor of the town, elected on 27th February 1923. Later a street was named after him for his civic service. He even left a legacy for the maintenance of the famous Blue Baths. His wife Julie Hooper was a sister of Grandfather Hooper. Their son George Clinkard was High Commissioner in Brussels during World War 2 and he was evacuated prior to the defeat of Belgium. He was a survivor when a ship was sunk while escaping and I remember him speaking on the BBC after his rescue.

My mother, Violet Hooper, had been bed-bound with double pneumonia, for several months before Ray was born. This was the start of very indifferent health and later several heart attacks. After one serious attack she was taken by ambulance to Auckland hospital where she remained for six months. Dad had also suffered a heart attack two weeks prior and so he travelled to Auckland with her.

Thus it was my lot, at the age of 15 years, to look after the family, the cooking and washing etc. for several years. I earned my first money at age 22 when I started working in the telephone exchange at Kaukapakapa. Each weekend, when I wasn’t working, I was back home to catch up on cleaning, cooking gardening and helping to milk. After having to apply for leave every few months to help at home, Dad asked me to leave work as they could not mange at home.

After several months I persuaded Dad to go look for a flat farm down in the Waikato where all seven brothers could be treated equally in a company farm. One thousand acres of hard, hilly country in the north paid a deposit on three hundred and forty acres at Okoroire Railway, near Tirau, out from Matamata – on highway 27. It was then that I told everyone my name was Mavis and everyone since then has known me as that.

Undoubtedly it was big wrench for Dad who until his big lung illness, found to be caused by a “Bug” caught from camels in the first War, had ploughed from daylight to dark. Mum milked at night and I remember my eldest brother Bryan looked after us younger kids in a large tea chest in the separator room at the old shed.

I recall at about three years old trying to cook an egg. I poured too much metholated spirits into the cooker and it set alight to the kitchen, the flames rushing up the walls. Luckily the copper and rinsing water tubs were full in the washhouse and I can still see Dad and Mr Honey dousing the flames. We all went to sleep at Grandfather Hooper’s that night.

The Honey family worked for Uncle Jim Hooper just over the bridge. They later bought land further up Stony Creek Road - the original name of the road until it was changed later to Burnside. We could never understand why it was changed by someone’s influence that had only lived in the district for such a short time. In hindsight, with the number of Hooper properties covering most of the valley it should have been Hooper Road.

The Makarau Hall was the focal point for all social occasions, farewells to soldiers and more importantly “welcome home” dances, 21st birthdays (including my own) and wedding receptions.

As the hall was just over the road, I could see it every morning from my bedroom window. It was our family’s lot to prepare, decorate and clean-up. Miss Dalrymple at the school had taught us how to cut paper decorations and Chinese lanterns and we used to cut Ponga ferns to place on the walls. Miss Dalrymple was well known of course for her red suits, red high-heeled shoes, red fingernails, red car…and RED FACE…when she used to jump up and down when she became frustrated with the older boys who were still at school. I can also remember Miss Dalrymple trying to drill into the rest of the school that my mother had christened me MAVIS and that was my name …NOT “Sis”. I think she failed, until I changed my name in 1950 when we shifted. By the way, we always said that “we brought the Ranfurly Shield down with us”, as that was the year Waikato took it off Northland.

I can still remember Charles, John and I pulling around Bob, Lois, Ian and Ray on bags of hay, some times over kerosene soaked sawdust, to polish the hall floor after sweeping out. Then of course we scraped candle wax onto the floor….and polished again. It was the envy of many dancers from other areas when they came to a dance.

I remember in earlier days, prior to when electricity came to the valley, Mum and Dad putting us down to sleep in the ladies cloak room. Of course once a month we used to have a church service in the hall and I remember Granny giving me a half Crown, which was lot of money then, for the plate collection. In fact our whole family was baptized in the hall at the Methodist Church services, probably after a “kitchen evening” that had been held there the night before. It was of course the venue for Sunday school often taken by Bill McLean from Kanohe.

The Great Flood was a disastrous event, when the water was gushing over roads and through Mr Woodcock’s cowshed. It was during this flood that the train was delayed bringing in Nurse Burns to attend my mother at birth of my sister Lois. Dad had to drive through the floods to the station to bring her home and on the way back was caught in the flood on a rise above Woodcock’s cowshed. He had to abandon the car and the two of them had to struggle through the pouring rain across hills and paddocks on the way back.

In the panic of waiting, Jim Mathews went out in search of them and found the car with just the roof showing above the raging torrent. Luckily both Dad and the Nurse both made it through at 1am, while many of the neighbours were out searching by lantern light. All of this tended to have an effect on Dad’s future health. Three months later was operated on for his lung problem and given only two years to live. Luckily he out-lasted the dire diagnosis.

We enjoyed many of the functions organized by the Woman’s Division of Federated Farmers (W.D.F.F) and I recall a vice-versa dance when Mrs La Page Robbie and her mother, Mrs Collie came dressed as tramps. They never spoke to anyone all night and no-one could guess who they were. That was also about this time when I first “trod the boards”, acting in division plays and skits from the age of about 16. I was the youngest member for several years.

One of the war efforts by the division was making a special quilt on which each member embroidered their initials. e.g. “V.C.H.” All the squares were joined together by Aunty Annie Smith, Dad’s sister, who used to do beautiful handwork. The finished quilt was sent to the Cairo Hospital and the first to use it was a local solider named Jim McAllister who had worked on our farm. Although it had to be shared around he was allowed most time with it. It caused much fun trying to work out whose names the initials were.

One of my Dad’s sad duties during W.W.2 was having to ride four miles to tell a very deaf Mrs Honey that her son Les was missing, believed to be a P.O.W. Others were the visits to Mr Brendon Clark, our teacher. His two only brothers, both Spitfire pilots, had been shot down and were missing. He was also Master of Ceremonies at most of the farewells, kitchen evenings and wedding receptions at the hall.

Referring back to our school days, which were very important to us, we were well served by the character, skills and knowledge of the teachers who taught there. Mr Brendon Clark B.A. taught us Esperanto as a language as he felt would be the future universal language! He extended our knowledge of geography by encouraging us to have overseas pen pals. Brother Ron had an Esperanto pen pal in Liverpool, England, to whom we sent food parcels during the War. They reciprocated by sending us postage stamps for our collections. Mr Clark had majored in English and Maths for his B.A. and was also a wonderful and accomplished flautist and music teacher. He extended my schooling beyond Proficiency as he knew I would be unable to go to secondary school.

Later, after I left school, the roll grew and the school qualified for a second teacher. During the war teachers were in short supply, and Mr Clark sent my reports and marks to the Education Department, to assist him with his teaching of the junior children, as I had done while at school. I was accepted for a short training course as a teacher, but I had to decline this wonderful opportunity as the family could not manage without me because of Mum and Dad’s indifferent health.

Mr Clark’s wife, Veronica, taught the girls singing, played the piano and sang at functions in the hall. Kath Hooper (nee Dye) played at our Church services, farewells etc. and she also accompanied my Dad when he sang and played the violin at functions.

Phyllis Hooper (nee Thompson) was also a talented pianist who coincidentally later taught my mother-in--law, Sarah Cotter (nee Malligan), when they were in Helensville. She also taught my sister Lois.

When I learnt the piano, at about age ten, I had to walk two miles down the road at 7 am on a Saturday morning, to meet Bob Sands with his milk lorry at the corner of the main Kaukapakapa-West Coast road. From there we travelled side roads to Jordan’s Island farm and arrived in Helensville at 9 am. I would have a lesson from Mrs Kelly, the assistant headmaster’s wife, for what was supposed to be an hour. On most occasions, the return milk truck driver, Bob Wenzlick was tooting his horn for me after about a 40 minutes lesson. It was then time to return to Kaukapakapa to pick up mail, bread etc. and deliver them and the empty cans back to all the farms on the side roads. I would eventually arrive home at about 1 pm. After about 18 months, I sadly remember getting a letter from Mrs Kelly from the Helensville Maternity Annex. She had had her third young child and sadly for me was no longer able to teach.

However I played my first public recital on the stage in the Makarau Hall and recall playing “Remembrance” and “Barcarolle”. I was promised a gold watch by Mum and Dad, as a bribe to get me to perform, but I had to wait several years until after the war as gold watches were unavailable until after that period. I still have the watch, which unfortunately does not work now.

Mr Clark taught Bob to play the concert flute, me the piccolo and the rest of the brothers and their school mates flutes and fifes. We annually played a concert in the hall and on one occasion we recorded several pieces that were broadcast over the Auckland radio station, presumably 1YA. He also coached us at chess and sports. Brother Ron held several cross-country running titles and all of us, girls included, played football and cricket.

The boys used to get Mr Brooking on to politics…and that was the end of normal school work for the day, but he was also a very learned, gracious and hospitable person who boarded Ron when he later attended Mount Albert Grammar in Auckland.

Any children who had sustained injuries at school were brought to our house for whatever medical assistance we could give. I remember Lester Adams being brought over with a broken leg. I asked Lester if it was painful but he said “ No …but it hurts like hell”. Brother Ron had the end of his toe cut off and Kathleen Hooper and I had to take him in to the doctor in Helensville.

Teaching ourselves to swim, by clutching a 4 gallon tin was always a challenge, as was crossing the river by walking on the kauri logs floating in the river below the cowshed. Some of the largest kauri trees were felled in the Makarau district.

I have an early recollection of standing on tip-toes looking out the window looking towards the hall, watching a sow and litter walking down the road, with Mum standing behind me. Suddenly we heard the pheasants start crowing up the valley and everything seemed so still and eerie. My fingers rippled on the window sill and Mum said “There’s an earthquake!” It was just before 11am on the 3rd. February 1931 - the Napier Earthquake. I was always petrified when young if I saw a crack in the ground in the summer. I thought I was going to fall into it.

Having to swim the cows across the river at flood time was another challenge and also the fishing up barrow loads of mullet and kahawai when they were on the “run”. There was quite a skill in going upstream with a net and swimming down with the current.

As we grew up the boys were allowed to go to dances at the hall. It was some time before I was allowed, or had time to go after washing and ironing sometimes fifteen shirts and polishing all the shoes. Of course they all had to look smart for all the girls so my brother Charles would cut the hair of all the local youths. I added haircutting onto my skills list and I even used to do perms for Kath Hooper and set the hair of Veronica Clark, the school teacher’s wife, before the dances.

Another happy event was my 21st birthday in the hall. I had made all the sandwiches with Mrs Geoff Flynn helping me. My eldest brother Bryan assisted by purchasing cakes as I was busy preparing and serving 22 roast meals at home for the many relations and friends, prior to the party. Many of these had arrived on the 6.30pm train. Dad and Bryan had to receive the guests at the hall as I was busy doing the dishes at home.

May Hyde and later Mrs Woodcock helped me design my 21st birthday frock which I made up. The hall was packed and Arthur Stevens and Mrs Keith Kemp from Kaukapakapa were the band. That night I was given, by Aunty Nelly Floyd (nee Hooper), Granny Hooper’s engagement ring, which I treasure. I have since passed it on to my third daughter who has a very similar personality as Granny’s, with a request that it be kept within the Hooper family descendants. It would now be some 120 years old.

In the words of the old TV Series….”There are a thousand stories in the big city… (of Makarau)…and this has been one of them”.

Mavis Cotter, nee Hooper.

10th October 2006