

## **D 7384(L) The Reminiscences etc. of Sarah Jane Nihill**

### **Transcribed by a Volunteer at the State Library of South Australia, 20xx**

Sarah Jane Nihill died September 1, 1915, aged 89 years and six months, youngest daughter of Daniel James and Dymphna Nihill, late of "Rockville", County Adare, Limerick, Ireland.

#### **[Introduction.**

I was given a copy of this document by Susan Lloyd, of "Marybank", the historic family home of the Fox family. The copy was typed and bound. I understand that the true original was hand written, and so the text has now been transcribed twice — firstly by an unknown person of unknown skills, and secondly by a person whose skills are known to be suspect (me). So let the reader beware accordingly.

Some of the comments in the document seem to be a bit fanciful, and were investigated by my uncle James Mansfield Niall (1915–1986). Despite a lot of research (in Australia, Ireland and France) he was unable to prove or disprove them, and decided that they were "unlikely".

The document is largely framed in the third person rather than being a verbatim first-person account. Where first-person terminology is used, it is from Mary Hennessy's perspective. Thus the word "aunt" is Mary referring to Sarah Jane. Mary was Sarah Jane's adopted daughter.

Numerous references to Mary Hennessy can be found in the diaries of Margaret Nihill (Sarah Jane's elder sister): these diaries contain frequent references to "S. Niall and her adopted girl", and every time Sarah visits Margaret "her girl" is with her. Only once in the eight years of surviving diary (1879–86) is Mary referred to by name, which perhaps suggests a slight element of disapproval by the unmarried Margaret of her unmarried sister having adopted Mary.

The document is typed exactly as I received it, including the text of various receipts that seem to begin it. The only exceptions to this are a few clarifying notes I have placed in the text, all of which are enclosed in square brackets and begin with "RMN:"

Robert Niall May 2003.]

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The following reminiscences were dictated by the said Sarah J. Nihill while living, and written down by me.

Mary E. Hennessy, nee Brooks.

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Copy of Receipt for schooner "Lookin" chartered for Daniel James Nihill, Mrs. Dymphna Nihill (his wife), their son James, and daughters Rebecca Jane and Frances Ellen, household furniture, 4 working bullocks and Dray, a cow, ducks, geese, fowls, pig, a ton of flour, ton of potatoes, tea, sugar, cocoa, and other general stores; also boxes of plants.

George Town,

April 12, 1839.

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£200

Received from Mr. James Nihill and Mr. Horstell two hundred pounds, being the full freight of schooner *Lookin* to South Australia, as per agreement.

JNO. JOHNSON  
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The original of above is in the possession of Mrs. A.F.Cudmore, Robe Terrace, Medindie.

Daniel Joseph James Nihill, of Rockville, County Adare, Limerick, Ireland, who died at the age of 90 years, who could read without glasses, and retained his perfect set of teeth until his death, had two sons - Paul the eldest, and Daniel James, all Roman Catholics.

Paul married Lady Anna Maria Dunraven, of Dunraven Castle, Adare, and had one daughter, the Lady Anna Maria Dunraven Nihill, whose mother died at her birth, and who was reared by her grandparents, the Dunravens.

Daniel James Nihill, the second son, married Dymphna Gardiner, only daughter of Col. Gardiner, an officer in the Indian Army. He also had one son Robert, who, when his wife died, came to South Australia with his two children — Francis Cashell Gardiner, who died in Queensland, bachelor, and Henrietta Cashell (called after her mother) whose maiden name was Cashell, who died in Sydney, spinster.

Miss Bessy Butt, cousin to Dymphna Nihill, used to visit at Rockville a sweet little old lady dressed in brocaded satin, ruffles, and hair dressed high at the back with a tortoiseshell comb, with two ringlets hanging each side of her face, described to me as being like a Dresden China Doll. While visiting at Rockville met and married Squire Gubbins, of Limerick, a personal friend of Daniel James Nihill, and of the same persuasion. Many of the Butt family are, I believe, still living, and wealthy. Bessy Butt had several brothers and one sister who married a Pat Cox. Her descendents, and Gubbins of Limerick, are still living.

Daniel James Nihill and his wife Dymphna resided with his aged father at "Rockville", the old family home, the old man being devotedly attached to his daughter-in-law and her children, whose names were as follows:—

Mary – who married Daniel Cudmore, of the Quaker persuasion.

Margaret – who died a spinster.

Dymphna – who married Fredk. Lester.

Rebecca – who died a spinster.

James – who married Elenor Mansfield.

Frances – who married Arthur Fox.

Sarah Jane – who died a spinster.

There were seven years between James and Frances.

Daniel James Nihill was a personal friend of the O'Connells, and when Daniel O'Connell, the Irish political agitator, got the *Emancipations Act* passed and the laws repealed in Ireland, and was chaired through the streets of Dublin, Daniel James Nihill was also chaired, as he had worked with O'Connell in the cause, and on leaving Ireland he presented Daniel Nihill with a bone snuff box, the property of his own father, as a keepsake. This box was back bone, decorated with a representation of the "Last Supper" on the cover.

When the church by law established was proclaimed, viz., Church of England, all who remained true to the Catholic Faith had to pay tithes to the Government, and one day an army of mounted men, soldiers, drew up and surrounded "Rockville" to receive the payment from Daniel James Nihill on his own behalf, and also that of the widow Lowe, who lived in a cottage at the gates, as her cow, one of the chief means of support, had been seized until the tax was paid, and she had no money to pay them. The Nihill family were very good to

her, her husband having been imprisoned for stealing a wild rabbit, and died in prison. Her only boy was a cripple, and her little daughter dying of consumption. The little Nihill girls used to go regularly with help to them, and no fear was entertained in those days of contagion. Daniel Nihill and his wife Dymphna were renowned for their charity.

Being anxious to upkeep a Catholic school for the children of the county, Squire Gubbins and Daniel Nihill maintained the school between them, after a weary fight with the powers and the payment of a heavy tax.

Paul Nihill, the eldest son of Daniel Joseph James Nihill, of Rockville, became a renegade, deserting his faith, and embracing the church by law established, which gave the eldest son the power to take all his own father possessed if he remained a Catholic, even to the coat off his back if he so desired. Hence the reason of the family coming out to Australia. When about to embark from Ireland, the aged father of Daniel and Paul became so ill and overcome at having to leave his home it was impossible to bring him, so his son Daniel and three of his elder daughters remained behind until his end had come, and he was buried, while the mother Dymphna, her married daughter and son-in-law (Daniel and Mary Cudmore), their infant Dymphna (afterwards married to Sydney Yeates), James, Frances, and Sarah Jane, voyaged to Sydney, which was to be their destination. This voyage took five months, and the ship had almost run dry of food and water when the land was reached. So low indeed had provisions become that the men had gone without in order to feed women and children. As soon as Daniel James could leave Ireland, he, with his daughters, joined the rest of the family in Tasmania. They only remained in Sydney a short time.

*[RMN: This must be Hobart, or George Town, not Sydney.]*

About the time of his father's death, remorse overtook Paul Nihill, he repented his act of deserting his faith, wrote a pamphlet of treason against the King, and to save his life had to fly from the country. He had in his possession a small red Carnelian Cross, carrying a legend of a talisman against evil, which had been in the Nihill family for generations. It is surmised some time afterwards he returned and lived the life clad as a fisherman, amongst the village folk who knew him as a boy and man. At any rate a very sad silent fisherman appeared one day and lived at Larry and Nancy O'Connor's wee home. One night a fire broke out at Dunraven Castle and the motherless infant's life was in danger, with little hope of saving her, when a man clad as a fisherman rushed into the burning building and after a time appeared at an upper window. All hope of helping him was out of the question. He leaped from the upper storey. When they rushed to him the child was alive, but he was dead, and inside where it had been hurriedly thrust was the red cross against the child's breast. Then his identity became known. The cross passed on to Daniel James Nihill, and at last to Sarah Jane, the last of that branch of the family, and is now in my (M.E. Hennessy's) possession, having been hung around my neck by my dear adopted aunt's hands on my 18th birthday as a talisman against evil. So this is how the Rockville Estate passed from the family, having been willed by Paul to his child.

They chartered the schooner Lookin, bringing over from Tasmania (year 1839) various animals.

While residing in Hobart Dymphna Nihill applied for the care of a post office in her son James' name, and having secured it, carried it on herself with the aid of her daughter, and the son James secured a position as tutor to a rich man's invalid son, and so they were enabled to save instead of spending, all their hopes and longings being centred on embarking for South Australia, which they did in the "Lookin".

The first home Daniel James and Dymphna Nihill settled in with some of their children was a three-roomed mud and paling roofed cottage, a short distance up from where the post pillar

stands at the corner of Highbury Street, later on the old home known as Sea View was built, and in that old home, (which is now in the possession of James Mansfield Nihill and his sons), (lived and died Daniel James, his wife Dymphna, Margaret, Rebecca, and Sarah Jane.) All the skirting boards, mantelpieces, doors and window frames were of cedar. The only means the family had of getting to the sea for a holiday was a bullock dray, and it took a very short time to make tracks across open country. Daniel James Nihill opened the first lime stone "Lime Kilns" about where Dr. Good's residence now stands, and old Mr. Harrington worked at the kiln for him, while his wife used to do washing for Mrs. Nihill.

Margaret, being accomplished and talented, took a position as governess to the Governor's children in Tasmania [*RMN: Adelaide?*]. Rebecca also went out as governess, salaries being very high. Sarah Jane remained at home with her mother, teaching a small school, in a room of Mr. Ridley's cottage, the inventor of the Ridley's reaping machine, Annie Ridley being one of her pupils a remarkably clever child of six years, who could read as well as many of 12 years. Later on Rebeccah came home to be with her mother, and Sarah devoted her life to her married sister Frances Fox, whose husband was drowned three months before her last child Frances (now Mrs. H. Makinson) was born.

About this time the copper boom was on, and Frederick Lester, realizing money could be made, sold up his land at Highercombe, and purchasing two bullock wagons and bullocks, each animal costing £40 in those days, started the carting of ore to the smelters, such as they were, driving one team himself and his man driving the foremost team. Lester's team followed the man's to the destination, but the driver was no where to be seen. On travelling back over the bullock track his dead body was found. Apparently he had fallen or stumbled and the load had passed over his body. Sarah Jane, her sister, was sent on horseback to Modbury to tell his wife, but on finding her sitting by the fire with her month's old baby on her lap and the other three, almost infants, about her feet, his dinner by the fire, she was unable to tell her, and making some excuse returned to her widow sister about to become a mother, who had to go and break this news. Dymphna Lester died, the youngest of all the daughters, never recovering from the shock.

Frances Nihill married Arthur Fox, a Catholic Irishman, who had passed all exams in chemistry, and who came to South Australia to seek his fortune when his mother married a second time, a Mr. Richard Eagle a wealthy London merchant. She had three sons by this marriage. The young men came to Mary Bank once on their way to America, where they made their fortune.

Robert Gardiner is buried at St. George's Cemetery with members of the Nihill family.

James Nihill, son of Daniel and Dymphna, is also buried there. Daniel James Nihill and his daughter Frances Fox, with members of her family, are buried at West Terrace Catholic Cemetery.

Mary Cudmore, buried at Mitcham Cemetery with other members of her family.

Dymphna Lester, buried at Walkerville Cemetery.

The mother, Dymphna Nihill, and her three daughters buried at North Road Cemetery - Margaret, Rebeccah, and Sarah Jane.

Dymphna Nihill, wife of Daniel James Nihill, became a convert to the Catholic faith many years before her death, and in her will — of which I hold a copy — she desired her remains to be interred in the Catholic Cemetery, West terrace, where her husband was buried, but

her wishes were not respected, and her daughters, Margaret and Rebecca, who were living with her at the time of her death, had her remains interred at the Anglican Cemetery, North Road.

This caused a lifelong coolness between them and the other sisters, Frances Ellen Fox and Sarah Jane, who resented their action. I relate these facts because I have heard very exaggerated stories relating to the affair, which my aunt, Sarah Jane Nihill, resented deeply.

(Signed)

Mary E. Hennessy (nee Brooks).

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#### Relating to Residence in South Australia

Daniel Cudmore (late of Claremont), husband of Mary Nihill, came to Adelaide in '37, his only means of getting his belongings to the site of the city of Adelaide was to hire a barrow and pay the sum of £3 for it, and wheel his boxes up from the old Port. He built a little reed hut — close to where Government House gates now stand — of wattleticks and rushes out of the river — the banks were a dense mass of rushes. The site for the city was not then surveyed, and you could camp where you liked. He arrived in January '37, and in September his wife — and my aunt Sarah with their father came over in the Syren cargo sailing vessel — sometimes taking passengers, Captain Bell, on the voyages. James Cudmore (late of Paringa Hall) was born three months before he was expected. Arriving at old Port Adelaide one of the sailors walked to Adelaide to apprise Mr. Cudmore, who hired a bullock team from the S.A. Company for £10, and taking Dr. Everard, to whom he paid £10, they got to the Port, and placing his wife and infant on a feather bed, journeyed to Adelaide, arriving at 7 in the evening. All the campfires burning, the spring flowers everywhere, and the little black children playing about, it was a lovely sight, and one that aunty dearly loved to recall, and several of the little black children had rows of small animals' teeth strung and festooned across their foreheads, and when they laughed and shook their heads the teeth would rattle and shake. Later on Mr. Cudmore set up the first brewery where Primrose's brewery at Kent Town now stands. He built the first Pise house in Adelaide.

Meat and Milk were extremely dear and hard to obtain until the S.A. Company brought their cattle over — J.B. Hack in charge, and convicts for workmen (ex-convicts).

Eggs in '37 were 8/- per dozen. One old hen Mrs. Cudmore had, who never laid but one egg the size of a pigeon's, she sold for 12/- for a banquet to be held at the Government tent.

Milk (goat's) only obtainable 1/- for a quarter of a teacup; salt 1/- per lb. The only (Tasmanian) flour came over in great barrels, and the damp used to get in, consequently great lumps of mouldy flour were common. Barrels of brown biscuits and coarse cheese formed their common food for a time. Once the town was surveyed people got on their own allotments and settled themselves. Mrs. Cudmore soon made a nice vegetable garden. Her father fenced it with wild currant bushes woven in amongst wattle sticks, and the turnips were the wonder of the age. People used to come and beg her to sell bunches of turnips at 1/6 a small bunch. When the first fancy shop was opened (on North Terrace) it was a 12 ft. canvas and rush tent kept by Mrs. Wiggins, who went out as nurse, sold goat's milk, and did a day's washing for 9/-, selling a few toys in between. Aunty once saw a wicker work baby's rattle there, and enquiring the price found it was only 3/-; she thought a shilling would have been the extreme. Another day on taking the baby James for a walk by the river she espied



6d., and on looking round found several more and three shillings on an old log. Once when out she came across a poor black woman whose foot had been severely burnt. Three other black women were pouring water from the river, which they carried in an old tin, constantly over her foot. No nurse could have been more tender to a suffering patient. The means of baking bread in '37 was to dig out a large hole in the side of a bank and put a large fire in — when it got hot to take out the fire and put the loaves in. Sweeter bread you never ate, aunty always told me. One day she had several loaves so baked on a box table in the hut, and a tribe of warlike blacks, with loin cloths, appeared, with arrows cocked. The chief grinned at the doorway, and making for the bread, was repulsed by aunty, who screamed for help, which was soon forthcoming from the other huts. When the blacks saw them they made off with many whoops and yells, and as the chief withdrew he let fly his arrow, which just missed her head by an inch, and landed in the wall of the hut just above Mrs. Cudmore's head where she was in bed. For years the spear was in their possession, but has disappeared somewhere. When the first mob of Government cattle arrived so great was the excitement at the prospect of meat and milk, the day was marked as a gala day. The only way they had of collecting rain water was in wooden barrels, and the tubs were composed of wooden staves with iron bands, and unless kept constantly wet were always leaking. Great was the rejoicing and unbelief when iron was invented, and when the old home in Prospect was roofed in latter years with Morwood & Rogers' iron. It cost £45 a ton. The original roof was shingles.

When Mrs. Nihill and her son and four daughters came over in the Lookin, which they charted, one of the sailors was sent up to tell Mr. Cudmore the boat was in port. He, however, had set out to walk to the Port. The sailor arrived just at sunset the worst for drink apparently, and as soon as he discovered Mrs. Cudmore was alone with aunty, a mere girl, he became offensive, and demanding money, threatened to break in the door; placing the baby in aunty's arms she picked up one of the old blunderbusses they had brought, and brandishing it fled out the other door of the hut calling for help as she ran towards another hut. The situation had no terrors for aunty, who could do nothing but laugh. However the man ran off, and Mrs. Cudmore was credited with being the bravest woman around.

Mrs. Nihill brought with her a quantity of mushroom catsup made while in Tasmania, and aunty used to be sent with bottles of it to Col. Light, who boarded with a dear old Quaker lady. She often described her trim Quaker costume and the solemn sad looking Col. Light sitting at his breakfast in the wee dining room of the tiny cottage. The said catsup proved a very saleable article, brought as much as 5/- for a pint bottle. The suite of dining room chairs brought in the Lookin were sold at £5 a chair — some to furnish the first Government House and other to private families. The pieces of cloth spun and woven in Ireland somewhat resembling poplin, and brought out for girls' dresses were sold at a high figure for curtains, everyone's first aim being to turn anything saleable into cash, while there was no competition.

The means of carting water ('37 to '38) from the Torrens for sale was a barrel on its side secured on a beam fixed into two wooden wheels, and a pair of shafts. The first to be placed on the roads or beaten tracks was pulled by a man named Adare — a fine upstanding handsome old man. When I saw him 16 years ago before he died he was a picture — tall and thin, kind grey eyes, snowy white hair, gracious in manner, and had reached the age of 88; he lived to be about 90.

The price of the water was 5/- for a small cask, holding a couple of buckets, and woe to you if your cask was not properly tight and well swelled — being composed of staves which opened if dry. Of course these water carts were afterwards drawn by bullocks in yoke, but for nearly a year they were pulled by the men who sold.

Fish could be bought at the rate of 6d. (six-pence) for a whole schnapper. An old man named Bristow owned a boat (a priceless possession), and used to go out, with two black women, somewhere about where the Glenelg jetty now is and catch them.

One Sunday a religious service was being conducted under the gum trees when the cry was given — another ship sighted (between the year '38 and '39). Needless to say the service had to be "concluded in our next" that day, for everyone fled to hear tidings or meet relations coming out to join those who had left old England by earlier boats.

The native blacks were on the whole very friendly. They would creep up to your hut or tent door and squat down and plead for a piece of "sugu" (sugar) bag. The molasses like sugar arrived in these bags, and for a piece cut out of one, which they would suck, they would give you a big armful of sticks which they had gathered, but they were great thieves. If your axe or tomahawk were anywhere handy they were clever at drawing it up with their toes and concealing it under their native skin rug or covering, and on their retiring you would find the axe or tomahawk had also gone.

One day a fine upstanding young lubra rushed up with a piccaninny in her arms, and with many gestures made Mrs. Cudmore and aunty understand she wanted to hide it while she went some long way off. She seemed in fear of the king of her tribe. On returning and finding her baby safe and aunty nursing it, she was overjoyed, and tried to embrace her saying, "You Goomitie, me Goomitie — you my sister."

When the family came in the "Syren" they brought a goat, and great was the grief. One day almost immediately after arrival she disappeared, and was mourned as lost, when lo! one day she came up to the reed hut followed by some dear little kids. She had hidden herself in the river rushes, so thick and dense on the river banks. The kids were sold for £3 and £4 each.

(Signed)  
Mary E. Hennessy (nee Brooks)

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All these items are written just as they were told to me by Sarah Jane Nihill, who died on September 1st, 1915, aged 89 years and 6 months.

*[RMN: The copy I was given has the name C. Frances Porter hand-written across the top of the first page. In the same hand-writing at the bottom of the last page is written "Mary Hennessy died 192—", and the last digit looks very vaguely like a 4. (I have since discovered that Mary Hennessy died on 18th April 1926, at 31 Highbury St, Prospect, Adelaide.) I take C. Frances Porter to be Clara Frances Niall Cudmore, who married Arthur Frederick Porter. Her father was Arthur Frederick Cudmore, youngest son of Mary Cudmore (nee Nihill) and Daniel Cudmore, and so she was niece to Sarah Jane Nihill.]*