

WILLIAM SHARMAN CRAWFORD (BILLY) NICHOLL, THE  
PROSPECTOR WHO DISCOVERED THE MARTHA LODGE AT  
WAIHI: HIS LIFE, TOLD LARGELY IN HIS OWN WORDS

Philip Hart

**Te Aroha Mining District Working Papers**

**No. 57**

**Revised on February 18, 2025**

Historical Research Unit  
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences  
The University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton, New Zealand

ISSN: 2463-6266

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Contact: [prhart1940@gmail.com](mailto:prhart1940@gmail.com)



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

WILLIAM SHARMAN CRAWFORD (BILLY) NICHOLL,  
THE PROSPECTOR WHO DISCOVERED THE MARTHA  
LODE AT WAIHI: HIS LIFE, TOLD LARGELY IN HIS OWN  
WORDS

**Abstract:** *Billy Nicholl was that rare miner, one who recorded his life. Born in Ireland, when still a boy he arrived in New Zealand in 1862. After his father died at an early age, he acquired a stepfather, whom he disliked, with good reason; in her later years his mother's mind would fade.*

*From 1868, when he was aged 16 (or just possibly 14), until shortly before his death, he was a prospector and miner. Excited by the early Thames mining days, he learnt the skills needed to be a successful prospector, and during the 1870s worked with several mates on the Coromandel field, with some success. After briefly participating in the Te Aroha rush of 1880, he saw from the summit of the mountain the outcrops of the Waihi reefs and turned his attention to that largely unexplored district. Although there were claims and counterclaims about who first explored the field and who first found gold, Nicholl was the first to discover the famous Martha lode.*

*After telling his mates of this discovery, they marked out the line of reef and started to develop several claims. For a time, Nicholl developed his find, and took a leading part in attempting for form a company to work the ground, succeeding on the third attempt. For a while he operated the first battery. But in time he lost control over his discovery and, far from profiting from it, lost a large amount of money. After leaving Waihi, he would be forced into bankruptcy in 1884.*

*His first experience of overseas prospecting was in Fiji, where he found traces of gold but nothing payable. Returning to Waihi, he struggled to earn a living for his young family, taking contracts and owning a small farm to supplement his mining endeavours, notably at Maratoto in the 1890s. During that decade his wife abandoned him and their children, and to make his fortune – and because of the lure of another gold rush – he went to Klondike, where he had many exciting experiences but returned poorer than before.*

*In Nicholl's last years he still farmed in a small way, but his main interest continued to be prospecting, and he explored the Waitekauri area into his eighties until declining health forced him to desist. In his later years*

he recorded details of his life, notably several versions of the discovery of the Martha lode at Waihi.

## RECORDING HIS LIFE

William Sharman Crawford Nicholl, commonly known as ‘Billy’,<sup>1</sup> mined on several goldfields, and became well known for his prospecting at Thames, Coromandel, Waihi, Maratoto, Whangamata, Waitekauri and, overseas, in Fiji and the Klondike. In 1928, when introducing an extract from his memoirs, the *Auckland Star* described him as ‘one of the best known mining men in the Dominion’.<sup>2</sup> On his death, he was referred to in one obituary as ‘the best known and most experienced prospector in the North Island’.<sup>3</sup> His reminiscences provide a much more detailed account of his life as a miner compared with what can be discovered about most of his contemporaries.

‘The Thames today and as it appeared sixty years ago when I landed on it six months after the field was opened. I was then sixteen years old’.<sup>4</sup> These first sentences of Nicholl’s 1927 memoirs referred to his arrival at the Thames goldfield in 1868. He had written two earlier accounts. In 1901 he was ‘compelled to write’ about discovering the Martha lode because several people had made claims to have done so and the latest claimant was petitioning for a reward.<sup>5</sup> In 1921 he published a more detailed account of finding gold at Waihi in the *Auckland Star*, which gave him the by-line of ‘Prospector and Discoverer of the Martha’. ‘I am sorry for having to write this article, for I hate notoriety, and never met the man yet that was any good that was a lover of it. But in self-defence I have put pen to paper otherwise the facts as I know them would have been buried with me’.<sup>6</sup> ‘Advance’ found his article ‘very interesting reading to all old Aucklanders,

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<sup>1</sup> Whose name was commonly given as Nichol, Nichols, Nicholls, and even Niccol; for consistency, it is given in its correct form of Nicholl throughout.

<sup>2</sup> *Auckland Star*, 8 September 1928, Magazine Section, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Thames Star*, 10 August 1937, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> W.S.C. Nicholl, untitled memoirs, n.d. [1927], p. 1, MS 1714, Alexander Turnbull Library (hereafter Nicholl, 1927).

<sup>5</sup> W.S.C. Nicholl, ‘Discovery of Waihi Goldfield’, *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, n.d., reprinted in *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 24 July 1901, p. 2 (hereafter Nicholl, 1901).

<sup>6</sup> W.S.C. Nicholl, ‘Discoverers of Waihi: Glimpses of the Early Days: Opening Up the Big Lode’, *Auckland Star*, 8 September 1921, p. 7 (hereafter Nicholl, 1921).

also to the rising generation’, and hoped he would ‘publish his experience in book form’, for in recent years some of the most prominent early miners had died and losing details of their prospecting would be ‘a great loss to New Zealand’.<sup>7</sup> In response, Nicholl’s elder son stated that it was his father’s ‘present intention to write an article on his last experience in connection [with] and severance from the Waihi Gold Mining Co., and also to publish a book on the life of a prospector, including such goldfields as Coromandel, Thames, Te Aroha, Waihi, his experiences in Fiji, Maratoto, and the big rush to Klondike’.<sup>8</sup>

Three years later, a geologist wrote that Nicholl was living ‘in retirement at Waitekauri, where he is reported to be writing a history of prospecting in the Hauraki Goldfield’.<sup>9</sup> Nicholl completed these memoirs in 1927, and showed it to some of the residents at Waitekauri, one of whom, William Frederick Morgan, told his son that because of his bad handwriting ‘you couldn’t read it’.<sup>10</sup> That his handwriting was dreadful can be confirmed by perusing the (untitled) original, now in the Alexander Turnbull Library.<sup>11</sup> The *Auckland Star*, which serialised most of it during 1928, repeated some of his mis-spellings, particularly of people and places.<sup>12</sup> It also censored what he wrote about his marital problems by blotting out these two sections with a blue pencil, a note on the back of one of these pages instructing: ‘Some of this (personal portion) to be deleted’.<sup>13</sup> To prepare it for publication, a sub-editor also over-wrote some of Nicholl’s script to revise his spelling and sentence structure.

Just before Nicholl’s death in August 1937, James Prichard Wilson, then headmaster of the Waihi High School,<sup>14</sup> who had visited him at Waitekauri in the early 1930s to listen to his reminiscences, presented this

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<sup>7</sup> Letter from ‘Advance’, *Auckland Star*, 13 September 1921, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from G.G. Nicholl, *Auckland Star*, 16 September 1921, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> P.G. Morgan, *The Geology and Mines of the Waihi District, Hauraki Goldfield, New Zealand* (Geological Survey, Bulletin No. 26 (New Series), Wellington, 1924), p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Herbert John Morgan, Hamilton, 29 November 1998.

<sup>11</sup> W.S.C. Nicholl, untitled memoirs, n.d. [1927], MS 1714, Alexander Turnbull Library.

<sup>12</sup> *Auckland Star*, 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 September 1928, 6, 13, 20, 27 October 1938, Magazine Sections, pp. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Nicholl, 1927, note on back of p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> See *Thames Supplementary Electoral Roll, No. 1, 1938*, p. 44; *New Zealand Herald*, 11 August 1937, p. 15.

memoir to the Alexander Turnbull Library.<sup>15</sup> He also gave a typescript copy entitled ‘The Thames Today and as it Opened 60 Years Ago’, a misreading of the first line, to the Auckland Public Library. This typescript copied Nicholl’s misspellings of names and places but corrected many mistakes in the spelling of other words and added both punctuation and paragraphs.<sup>16</sup> These changes were necessary because Nicholl wrote in a ‘stream of consciousness’, usually without paragraphs and often using the words ‘and’ or ‘so’ instead of full stops. After leaving Waitekauri in 1935 to live with his half-sister in Auckland, he wrote an untitled addition to his memoirs, concentrating on his discovery of the Martha lode, with the same bad spelling but written in even worse handwriting because of his age and poor eyesight. He sent this to Wilson, accompanied by an undated letter: ‘I felt sorry ever since you called at my hut at Waitekauri that I didn’t dictate the start of mining at Waihi. I have written out a short account of it and if you can understand it, as I am very shaky and my eyes are a little dull, if you can do anything with it you can publish it. It is the best I can do’.<sup>17</sup> His eyes must have been extremely ‘dull’ if he considered it necessary to dictate his recollections. This new version of part of his life’s story was included with the 1927 memoirs presented to the Alexander Turnbull Library.<sup>18</sup>

An expanded account of his 1921 version of how he discovered the Martha lode was written, at an unknown date, and given to his elder son, George Grey Nicholl, who permitted its publication in 1969.<sup>19</sup>

All quotations taken from these various memoirs have corrected spelling, corrected or added punctuation, added or removed his random capital letters, occasionally replaced ‘and’ or ‘so’ with full stops when sentences became interminable, and added paragraphs. Changes to his expression have been minimal, and his words have been quoted verbatim to

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<sup>15</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 9 August 1937, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> W.S.C. Nicholl, ‘The Thames Today and as it Opened 60 Years Ago’ (typescript), New Zealand MS 582, Auckland Public Library.

<sup>17</sup> W.S.C. Nicholl to Headmaster, Waihi High School, n.d. [given to Alexander Turnbull Library on 7 June 1937], MS 1713, Alexander Turnbull Library.

<sup>18</sup> W.S.C. Nicholl, untitled memoirs, n.d. [c.1935], MS 1713, Alexander Turnbull Library (hereafter Nicholl, c. 1935)

<sup>19</sup> W.S.C. Nicholl, ‘The Discovery that led to the Development of the Waihi Gold Field’, *Ohinemuri Regional History Journal*, vol. 6 no. 1 (May 1969), p. 5 (hereafter Nicholl, ‘The Discovery’).

give the flavour of his recollections, which read as if he was recounting his life to an inquirer.

## PARENTAGE AND EARLY YEARS

Military conflict in Ireland has meant that Nicholl's birth certificate has not survived. His memoirs stated, and his death certificate confirmed, that he was aged 16 in 1868. His marriage certificate made him four years younger, but it is most unlikely that he went mining at the age of 12.<sup>20</sup> However, his age as consistently given on four occasions to the Waihi hospital would have made him 14.<sup>21</sup> His age as recorded at the time of the birth of his first son would also make him 14 in 1868; that as recorded when his second son was born would have made him 12.<sup>22</sup>

Nicholl was born at Garvagh, County Derry, to Presbyterian parents. His father, George, a farmer, was the son of another George, also a farmer.<sup>23</sup> He was named after William Sharman Crawford, an Ulster landowner who, both as landowner and as a Liberal Member of Parliament, devoted himself to improving the conditions of Irish tenants and, although a firm Protestant, was a persistent advocate of Catholic emancipation. He was an advanced radical and Chartist.<sup>24</sup> His mother was known in New Zealand as Martha Jane, her maiden name being given as George, but her marriage certificate gave her name as Margaret Lytle, daughter of Joseph, a Presbyterian clergyman.<sup>25</sup> As this marriage took place in March 1846, it

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<sup>20</sup> Death Certificate of William Sharman Crawford Nicholl, 6 August 1937, 1937/18390; Marriage Certificate of William Sharman Crawford Nicholl, 7 January 1885, 1885/191, BDM.

<sup>21</sup> Waihi Hospital, Register of Patients, 1903-1910, folios 20, 33, 55, ZABW 4935/1a; Register of Patients, 1911-1914, folio 37, ZABW 4935/1b, ANZ-A.

<sup>22</sup> Birth Certificates of George Grey Nicholl, 22 October 1885, 1886/1418; William Sharman Crawford Nicholl, 18 April 1888, 1888/13339, BDM.

<sup>23</sup> Marriage Certificate of George Nicholl, 24 March 1846, at First Presbyterian Church, Parish of Desertoghill, District of Coleraine at Garvagh, Co. Derry, vol. 4, p. 141, Church of Latter-Day Saints microfilm, Irish Marriages, vol. 4, 0101275.

<sup>24</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 5 (Oxford, 1949), pp. 58-59.

<sup>25</sup> Marriage Certificates of Martha Matilda Costello, 18 May 1882, 1882/3560; William Sharman Crawford Nicholl, 7 January 1885, 1885/191; Margaret Lytle, as for George Nicholl; Death Certificate of William Sharman Crawford Nicholl, 6 August 1937, 1937/18390, BDM.

might appear that she was George Nicholl's first wife and that Martha Jane was his second. However, a search of the indexes to Irish marriages and deaths did not discover a death of Margaret Nicholl, a marriage by Martha Jane George, or a remarriage by George Nicholl. 'George' is a puzzling change, for it was given as her maiden name when her children were married in the 1880s.<sup>26</sup> She must have preferred the name Martha and therefore was known by this name, not Margaret.

Obituaries stated that Nicholl was ten when his family landed at Auckland in 1862,<sup>27</sup> making his year of birth 1852, which, according to his elder brother Robert's death certificate, was the year that the latter was born.<sup>28</sup> It is likely, however, that the age of Robert, who was living alone in his old age, was wrongly recorded. The family arrived at the end of July 1862, on board the 'Queen of the North'; the press listed its members as 'George, labourer, Martha, wife', Robert, William, and Mary.<sup>29</sup> The birth of the youngest child, Sarah Elizabeth Jane, which cannot have been later than in that year and probably had occurred on the ship,<sup>30</sup> was not registered in New Zealand. Nicholl's semi-literate writings suggest that his education had been completed either by the time he arrived in New Zealand or shortly afterwards. Other members of the family were also badly educated: his youngest sister signed her marriage certificate with a cross.<sup>31</sup>

In January 1863, Martha, Jane (the younger daughter) and George Nicholl 'exercised' their Land Orders to acquire 100 acres of land at Mangapai, near Whangarei, and George purchased another 208 acres at £4 an acre.<sup>32</sup> The acquisitions made in George's name were granted posthumously, for on Christmas Day he had drowned, aged 42, when wading across a muddy tidal creek.<sup>33</sup> As his widow estimated his estate as being

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<sup>26</sup> Marriage Certificates of Martha Matilda Costello, 18 May 1882, 1882/3560; William Sharman Crawford Nicholl, 7 January 1885, 1885/191, BDM.

<sup>27</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 11 August 1937, p. 15; *Auckland Star*, 11 August 1937, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Death Certificate of Robert Nicholl, 8 January 1925, 1438/1925, Tasmanian BDM.

<sup>29</sup> *Daily Southern Cross*, 1 August 1862, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Marriage Certificate of Sarah Elizabeth Jane Nicholl, 8 April 1879, 1879/2734; Death Certificate of Sarah Elizabeth Jane MacLean, 11 September 1932, 1932/7312, BDM.

<sup>31</sup> Marriage Certificate of Sarah Elizabeth Jane Nicholl, 8 April 1879, 1879/2734, BDM.

<sup>32</sup> 'Return of all Lands Sold at the Waste Lands Office, at Auckland, from the 1st to the 31st January, 1863', *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 1 May 1863, pp. 75-76.

<sup>33</sup> Death Certificate of George Nicholl, 25 December 1862, 1862/205, BDM; Roger Blackley, *The Art of Alfred Sharpe* (Auckland, 1992), p. 22; Mabel Palmer, *Sarah Anne's Journal*

worth nearly £1,000,<sup>34</sup> he was more than just a labourer and his family was not impoverished as a result of his sudden death. What happened to this sizable sum is not known, but there was nothing to indicate that the family was prosperous in later years.

After his father's death, Nicholl's mother lived with but did not marry Lawrence Costello, a farmer.<sup>35</sup> The birth of Nicholl's half-sister Martha Matilda was not registered, but she, like her mother, used the surname of Costello over 20 years after his death.<sup>36</sup> When Martha Matilda died in 1955, she was reportedly aged 92;<sup>37</sup> if correct, this made the year of her birth 1863, uncomfortably close to the date of the death of George Nicholl. As she was recorded as aged 16 when she married in May 1882,<sup>38</sup> her date of birth was 1865 or early 1866. There are no records of other children being born to the couple. The reason why Martha Nicholl did not marry Costello, with whom she lived until his death, is unknown. One possible reason would be that he was already married, but if so, he was married before he came to New Zealand, for no marriage was registered here. It was possible that by not remarrying she was attempting to retain control over the estate she had inherited.

## THAMES

Lawrence Costello lived at Newton Road, Auckland, in 1865,<sup>39</sup> presumably with Martha and her children. In June that year, Bridget Costello, aged 55, Terence Costello, 21, and another 25-year-old male, arrived in Auckland from Tiermaclone, County Clare, Ireland; Costello and two other Aucklanders had provided a bond to guarantee payment of their passages.<sup>40</sup> It must be assumed that Bridget was his mother and Terence his brother. There is no reference to the family in early newspapers apart

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*1860 ...: The Carter family's first years in early Mangapai, Northland, NZ* (Whangerei, 1995), p. 78.

<sup>34</sup> Probate of George Nicholl, BBAE 1587/123, ANZ-A.

<sup>35</sup> Marriage Certificate of Martha Matilda Costello, 18 May 1882, 1882/3560, BDM.

<sup>36</sup> Marriage Certificates of Martha Matilda Costello, 18 May 1882, 1882/3560; William Sharman Crawford Nicholl, 7 January 1885, 1885/191, BDM.

<sup>37</sup> Death Certificate of Martha Matilda McQuoid, 17 December 1955, 1955/22509, BDM.

<sup>38</sup> Marriage Certificate of Martha Matilda Costello, 18 May 1882, 1882/3560, BDM.

<sup>39</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 8 April 1865, p. 6; *Newton Electoral Roll, 1865*, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> Register of Applicants for Passages 1859-1872, 134/64, REPRO 1615, ANZ-W.

from a possible one in January 1867, when ‘William Nicholl’ and another boy were charged with stealing 59lb of fat from a merchant’s house in Khyber Pass Road. ‘Prisoners pleaded guilty, stating that the fat was not taken with felonious intent’. As the prosecutor did not appear in court, ‘they were discharged with a caution’.<sup>41</sup>

According to Nicholl, the family moved to Thames six months after the goldfield opened on 7 August 1867.<sup>42</sup> However, Lawrence Costello’s only miner’s right for the period between the proclamation of the goldfield and November 1868 was issued on 25 November 1867,<sup>43</sup> three months after it opened. Nicholl’s recollections were always inexact about dates, hardly surprisingly, and it was possible that his family moved to Thames later, once Costello ‘had a share in Rickett’s Claim at the head of the Collarbone Spur and was working it’.<sup>44</sup> Warden’s court registers of claims do not survive before May 1868; Rickett’s Claim, an amalgamation of several claims, one of which may have had the same name, was registered on 18 June 1868. It was eight men’s ground at Collarbone Hill and Costello had one of the six working shares.<sup>45</sup> He did not have shares in any claims registered after May that year.

‘My parents got the Maoris to build a raupo whare on the Karaka Creek close to Bull’s one stamper battery, and we lived in it for a considerable time’.<sup>46</sup> Nicholl’s recollection of the length of time and the implication of poverty is misleading, for in the ‘Assessment Roll of the Kauaeranga Highway District for the Year 1869-70’ Costello was recorded as having a building and allotment with an estimated value of £124 10s.<sup>47</sup> Houses and allotments owned by other miners had much lower values, such as one of £26 10s recorded two pages previously;<sup>48</sup> presumably Martha’s

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<sup>41</sup> Police Court, *New Zealand Herald*, 15 January 1867, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Thames Warden’s Court, Register of Miner’s Rights, 1867-1868, no. 2385, BACL 14358/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>44</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Thames Warden’s Court, Claims Register May-June 1868, folio 231, BACL 14397/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>46</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 1; *Thames Star*, 1 August 1913, p. 5, referred to his sister Mary Ann as living at Karaka in 1868.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Assessment Roll of the Kauaeranga Highway District for the Year 1869-70’, *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 25 September 1869, p. 1159.

<sup>48</sup> *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 25 September 1869, p. 1157.

legacy provided the family with this superior accommodation. In their whare and then their later house lived the two adults along with William (now commonly known as Billy), his elder brother Robert, his sisters Mary Ann (born in 1855)<sup>49</sup> and Sarah Elizabeth Jane (probably born in 1862),<sup>50</sup> and his half-sister Martha Matilda, born either in 1865 or 1866.<sup>51</sup> A Robert Nickalls or Nicholls took out miner's right no. 8738 on 31 July 1868,<sup>52</sup> which must have been when Nicholl's elder brother started mining. Although a William Nichols took out a right in June 1868 and a William Nicholls took out another in September,<sup>53</sup> one or both of these were issued to William Nicholls,<sup>54</sup> a Pakeha Maori who was a storekeeper at Shortland, the southern end of the settlement.<sup>55</sup> As Nicholl was not working a claim and spent most of his time fossicking for gold,<sup>56</sup> he did not require a miner's right.

For the young Nicholl, life in the early goldfield town was exciting, as he recorded 60 years later:

The town soon got attractive to me, and it was a hard task for my parents to keep me away from the fun at night. Rose's Free and Easy soon got started and was a great attraction to me. I spent most of my time in it at night listening to songs and watching dancers. There were some good singers and dancers amongst them, and one could spend a pleasant night there.

Hammers driving nails and saws cutting timber were going night and day, and Pollen Street and Grahamstown [the northern end of Thames] soon got rid of their cloth houses [tents] and replaced them with wooden buildings and a plank footpath on each side of the streets.

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<sup>49</sup> Probate of Mary Ann Wick, BBAE 1569/11920, ANZ-A.

<sup>50</sup> Marriage Certificate of Sarah Elizabeth Jane Nicholl, 8 April 1879, 1879/2734; Death Certificate of Sarah Elizabeth Jane MacLean, 11 September 1932, 1932/7312, BDM.

<sup>51</sup> Marriage Certificate of Martha Matilda Costello, 18 May 1882, 1882/3560, BDM.

<sup>52</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Register of Miners' Rights, 1868, no. 8738, BACL 14358/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>53</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Register of Miners' Rights, 1868, nos. 6082, 10838, BACL 14358/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>54</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>55</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 10 August 1867, p.9, 31 August 1867, p. 6; evidence of J.W.R. Guilding, Maori Land Court, Hauraki Minute Book no. 19, Shortland hearing on 25 April 1888, p. 312.

<sup>56</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 1-3.

The diggers' dress then was a good whisker and moustache, red plush hat, Crimean shirt,<sup>57</sup> white moleskin pants and a digger's sash, coats only being worn by invalids and tenderfeet.<sup>58</sup> This was their full rig, hail, rain or shine.<sup>59</sup>

Charles Montrose, who mined in Victoria in 1859, later recalled the dance halls being 'filled with gamblers, and men attired in the gala style with cabbage-tree hats, elegantly stitched crimean shirts, Bedford-cord breeches, and red silk sashes'. The sash 'was the insignia of "flash" or display of wealth'.<sup>60</sup>

Nicholl recalled the miners as being 'a rough-clad, honest, and good-hearted kind of men, no dirty tricks in them like you will find in the men of today. Quite a different man, he had real grit and no put on. There was only one policeman on the field at the start and he never had a case'.<sup>61</sup> Very rose-coloured spectacles were being worn when these sentiments were written, for in July 1868 the Civil Commissioner based at the Thames complained

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<sup>57</sup> Because of Nicholl's terrible handwriting, this is usually read as 'crimson', but is printed as Crimean in *Auckland Star*, 1 September 1928, p. 1. For Crimean shirts being worn by miners in Australia and New Zealand, see Police Court, *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 August 1868, p. 8; C.O. Montrose, 'A Digger's Christmas', *Observer*, p. 148; 'Alpha, the Pioneer Prospector' [C.G. Bird], *Reminiscences of the Goldfields in the Fifties and Sixties, Victoria, New Zealand and New South Wales* (Melbourne, 1915), pp. 60, 84; J.A. Preshaw, *Banking Under Difficulties, or Life on the Goldfields of Victoria, New South Wales, & New Zealand* (Melbourne, 1888), p. 167. One historian noted that Crimean shirts, 'popular with working men and with miners, were made of grey wool and had a neckband rather than a collar: Geoffrey W. Rice, *Christchurch Crimes 1850-75: Scandal and skullduggery in port and town* (Christchurch, 2012), p. 195. But Crimean shirts could be crimson, or red: see T.E. Crowhurst, *Life and Adventures in New Zealand* (Auckland, c. 1920), p. 21, and Phil Garland, *Faces in the Firelight: New Zealand folksong and story* (Wellington, 2009), p. 91.

<sup>58</sup> For confirmation of the correctness of his account of the sartorial tastes of miners here and elsewhere, see *The Thames: 1867 to 1917: Fifty years a goldfield*, comp. Old Thames Boys' Association, (Thames, 1917), p. 17; P.R. May, *The West Coast Gold Rushes*, rev. ed. (Christchurch, 1967), p. 293; Stevan Eldred-Grigg, *Diggers Hatters and Whores: The story of the New Zealand gold rushes* (Auckland, 2008), pp. 270-271.

<sup>59</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 2-3.

<sup>60</sup> C.O. Montrose, 'A Digger's Christmas', *Observer*, 1 January 1881, p. 148.

<sup>61</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 3.

that one police sergeant and four constables were unable to enforce the law adequately:

Offences against property and disorderly and turbulent conduct are far more common than they were three months ago. I would point out that on Saturday evening last a very large number of men probably two thousand were assembled in various places in the township, and there was much riotous conduct which the small Police force stationed here were quite inadequate to control or cope with.<sup>62</sup>

Two months later he reported that the most the police could do was 'to keep the semblance of order in the township, and on many occasions, this is impossible'.<sup>63</sup> One former resident recalled that the police were 'quite inadequate to keep order', which 'induced the diggers to take the law into their own hands' when dealing with thieves.<sup>64</sup>

Nicholl's early mining experiences were discouraging, although he did begin to learn prospecting skills; he also had a foretaste of his financial future. He was first 'employed by a man by the name of Tom Scanlan, an old West Coast digger, to man a share in a claim for him, in a claim called the Dead Centre<sup>65</sup> on the Una Hill, called then Vinegar Hill before it took its name after the Una Company'.<sup>66</sup> Scanlan, then aged 49, had participated in the Bendigo rush in Victoria before going to the Otago and West Coast fields. He built the first battery at Karaka Creek in Thames.<sup>67</sup> Scanlan was first recorded as being on the Thames goldfield in 1868, taking out miner's right no. 198 early in September<sup>68</sup> and buying a share in the Golden Vane at

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<sup>62</sup> James Mackay, Civil Commissioner, to Superintendent, Auckland Province, 13 July 1868, Legislative Department, LE 1, 1869/133, ANZ-W.

<sup>63</sup> James Mackay to Native Minister, 3 September 1868, Legislative Department, LE 1, 1869/133, ANZ-W.

<sup>64</sup> I.H., 'Lynch Law', *New Zealand Herald*, 18 April 1896, Supplement, p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> No record of this claim has been traced for the period May to November (inclusive) 1868, but there is a gap in the warden's court records for part of August and September. Nicholl spelt the name of this claim as Head Senter, and the *Auckland Star* and the typescript in the Auckland Public Library reproduced this as Head Centre (*Auckland Star*, 1 September 1928, Magazine Section, p. 1), a most unlikely name.

<sup>66</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 5 October 1917, pp. 1, 6; see *Auckland Electoral Roll, 1869*, p. 180.

<sup>68</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Miners' Rights Register 1867-1868, BACL 14358/1a, ANZ-A.

the end of it. Registered on 5 August, it was later re-named Inglewood Reef. As Scanlan bought five more shares in it during 1868 and 1869, he needed others to work some of his interests.<sup>69</sup> Scanlan obtained a steady income from mining during 1868.<sup>70</sup>

Nicholl's first experience of mining was very brief. 'My job only lasted a fortnight, the claim was protected for three months, and the claim was shut down, so I was on the rocks again'.<sup>71</sup> (The granting of protection meant that the claim did not have to be worked in accordance with the labour regulations whilst capital was being raised.) 'I was out of work for some time. I tried to get a job at blanket washing' in a battery, a common occupation for teenage boys, 'but all were full-handed, so I had nothing to do but to go fossicking for gold. I went round to have a look at Hunt's claim', meaning the Shotover.

While I was there, I picked up eleven pounds of specimens in the Kuranui Creek. I put them in the breast of my shirt and went home. My stepfather seemed pleased when he saw them. I told him where I got them, and he gave me a shilling and told me to go and find more. I went next day and took a little bag with me, and I brought it home half full of good stone that I picked up on the beach at the mouth of the creek on the foreshore and up the creek. When I brought them home, I was rewarded with the liberal gift of eighteen pence. I kept on fossicking and managed to bring enough stone home to please my stepfather and get a bob [shilling] occasionally for pocket money....

One day, I was walking below the Manakau mine's tip; a truck of mullock [worthless rubble] was being tipped over the tip. One of the stones kept on rolling and stopped about a yard away from me. I picked it up, it was all covered with clay and in turning it round to look at it I saw where a pick point had hit it, and broke a chip off it and it was shining with gold. The stone was about three pounds weight and appeared heavy for its size and must have contained 8 or 9 ounces of gold, but what the old man got out of it I never knew. I only got my usual bob. I could always get a few good stones off this tip after heavy rain had washed the stones.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Claims Register June-August 1868, no. 720, BACL 14397/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>70</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Shortland Branch, Individual Accounts Ledger 1868, folios 315, 762, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

<sup>71</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 1-2, 3.

Still feeling aggrieved 60 years later at being inadequately paid by his stepfather suggests that they had an antagonistic relationship. Perhaps Nicholl provided much, or all, of the gold, valued at £7 9s 7d, that Costello deposited in the bank on 2 July 1868.<sup>73</sup> Any conflicts between the two were resolved, temporarily, by Nicholl leaving for Coromandel, and then permanently by the death, probably from what would later be known as miner's complaint, of Lawrence Costello in June 1870.<sup>74</sup>

At the end of July 1869, a new rush began to the Tokatea Range behind Coromandel township,<sup>75</sup> as Nicholl recorded:

News had reached the Thames that rich gold had been discovered by George McLeod and his party on the Tokatea range, Coromandel, and a stampede had set in for the scene of the discovery by land and sea. I was engaged by Tom Scanlan to man a share in a claim he had staked out on the north-east boundary of the prospecting claim.<sup>76</sup>

As registers of miners' rights issued for Coromandel for this period have not survived, the precise date that Nicholl arrived there cannot now be determined. It seems that his family remained in Thames, but after the marriage of his elder sister there, in March 1872,<sup>77</sup> his mother and her other children joined him. Her address was given as Coromandel in September 1872, when she was admitted to the Auckland Hospital.<sup>78</sup> Nicholl's family was living in the Upper Township (Coromandel was divided into an Upper and Lower Township) when his younger sister married

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<sup>73</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Shortland Branch, Individual Accounts Ledger 1868, folio 70, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

<sup>74</sup> Death Certificate of Lawrence Costello, 23 June 1870, 1870/523, BDM.

<sup>75</sup> See *Auckland Weekly News*, 7 August 1869, p. 19.

<sup>76</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 3-4.

<sup>77</sup> Marriage of Mary Ann Nicholl, 20 March 1872, 1872/9128, BDM.

<sup>78</sup> Auckland Hospital, Register of Admissions 1870-1885, p. 31, 360/1872, ZAAP 15287/2a, ANZ-A. For explanation of what she suffered from (lencorrhoea, or Whites), see *Black's Medical Dictionary*, ed. C.W.H. Havard, 38th edition (London, 1990), p. 727.

Alexander MacLean, another miner, in 1879.<sup>79</sup> The family was still living there in May 1882, when his half-sister Martha Matilda was married.<sup>80</sup>

Nicholl's brother Robert also mined at Coromandel in the 1870s, living with the rest of the family. As Nicholl, like many prospectors, preferred solitude, he lived from at least 1874 onwards in a hut on the Waikoromiko Track, on the Kennedy Bay side of the Tokatea range.<sup>81</sup> He did keep in touch with his family, for his memoirs mentioned his mother's dog accompanying him when he left in November 1880 to prospect at Te Aroha.<sup>82</sup> Robert's life has not been traced; he may have been the Robert Nichol who, in June 1873, participated in a brawl in the Scotia Hotel at Thames between men playing cards for money.<sup>83</sup>

It has not been possible to trace his mother's life between 1882 and 1 December 1903, when she was admitted to the Avondale Mental Hospital in Auckland. For some time, possibly years,<sup>84</sup> due to her mental condition she had been an inmate of Puriri Private Hospital, also in Auckland. When her excited ravings were too disturbing for the other patients, she was moved to the asylum. Although recorded as being aged only 62, her diagnosis was senile decay. Amongst her other ramblings, she said 'that her daughter who is married to three men, an Irishman, a Scotchman, and an Englishman has placed her as a vile murderer in Puriri'.<sup>85</sup> This was a confused reference to her eldest daughter, Mary Ann, who was indeed married three times: first to a Cornishman and then to an Irishman and, lastly, to a German.<sup>86</sup> She never left the asylum, from 1905 onwards working quite contentedly in its laundry until her death in April 1920. Her death certificate gave her age as

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<sup>79</sup> Notices of Intentions to Marry, Births Deaths and Marriages, BDM 20/24, p. 203, 23 March 1879, ANZ-W; Marriage of Sarah Elizabeth Jane Nicholl, 8 April 1879, 1879/2734, BDM.

<sup>80</sup> Marriage Certificate of Martha Matilda Costello, 18 May 1882, 1882/3560, BDM.

<sup>81</sup> *Coromandel News*, 27 August 1874, p. 2; *Thames Electoral Rolls, 1877*, p. 60, 1879, p. 60, 1880, p. 32.

<sup>82</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 12.

<sup>83</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 9 June 1873, p. 2, Police Court, 10 June 1873, p. 2, Police Court, 13 June 1873, p. 3.

<sup>84</sup> She was not listed on any Auckland electoral roll after 1893, but this can be explained by her mental state.

<sup>85</sup> Avondale Asylum, Admissions Register, no. 2918, YCAA 1021/4; Case Book, folio 25, no. 2918, YCAA 1048/10, ANZ-A.

<sup>86</sup> Death Certificate of Mary Ann Wick, 18 January 1918, 1918/434, BDM.

79,<sup>87</sup> which would have made her 21 in 1862, when her 42-year-old husband died, and she would have been the mother of Mary Ann when she was 14, of William when she was 11, and of Robert when still younger. Indeed, she would have been married at the age of five. Clearly the age recorded was incorrect; an alternative age was given in 1872, when she told the Auckland Hospital that she was 36,<sup>88</sup> which would have made her five years older than her death certificate stated. She was probably another ten years older again, for her marriage certificate stated that she was of 'full age' in March 1846, which means that she was at least 21 then.<sup>89</sup> This would have made her closer in age to Lawrence Costello, who was 30 in 1862,<sup>90</sup> and an age of at least 72 in 1903 would make the diagnosis of senile decay much more appropriate. The confusion over her age may have been assisted by her well-preserved appearance: the photograph of her in the asylum's casebook suggests a woman in her sixties rather than her seventies.<sup>91</sup>

Despite this confusion over her age, it is clear from the asylum records that she was indeed Nicholl's mother. These correctly recorded her daughter as Mrs Mary Ann Wick and her grandson as J.H. Moore of Waotu. A note written when she was admitted recorded that she was 'in event of death to be buried at Onehunga in plot under name of Mr George Nicks, stepbrother to Mr Moore at as reasonable [a] cost as possible. Account to be sent to Mr Moore or failing him to Mr Walter Brodie, BNZ, New Plymouth. Possibly no relatives at Burial'.<sup>92</sup> Clearly all her children apart from her eldest daughter had ceased to have any contact with her; Nicholl made no mention of her in his memoirs. The inquest recorded, incorrectly, that her only relative was the grandson listed in the asylum records, and therefore he

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<sup>87</sup> Death Certificate of Martha Jane Nicholl, 4 April 1920, 1920/11675, BDM [recorded as Nichol].

<sup>88</sup> Auckland Hospital, Register of Admissions 1870-1885, p. 31, 360/1872, ZAAP 15287/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>89</sup> Marriage Certificate of George and Margaret Nicholl, 24 March 1846, District of Coleraine at Garvagh, Parish of Desertoghill, Co. Down, Irish Marriages, vol. 4, p. 141, L.D.S. Microfilm 0101275.

<sup>90</sup> Death Certificates of Martha Jane Nicholl, 4 April 1920, 1920/11675 [recorded as Nichol]; George Nicholl, 25 December 1862, 1862/205; Lawrence Costello, 23 June 1870, 1870/523, BDM.

<sup>91</sup> Avondale Asylum, Case Book 1903-1906, folio 25, no. 2918, YCAA 1048/10, ANZ-A.

<sup>92</sup> Carrington Hospital, Medical Records re Martha Jane Nicholl, transcribed by Pamela Gilbert of Takapuna in June 1984 [this note was not transferred to ANZ-A].

was the only one to be informed of her death.<sup>93</sup> She was buried with her daughter Mary Ann, who had died in 1918,<sup>94</sup> at Waikaraka Cemetery, Onehunga.<sup>95</sup> (Nicholl would not be buried with his mother but in an unmarked grave in Waikumete Cemetery, Glen Eden, Auckland.<sup>96</sup>)

## COROMANDEL

Unnamed in Nicholl's memoirs, Scanlan's claim was probably the Champion, of five men's ground, not six as Nicholl recalled.<sup>97</sup> Registered by Scanlan and four others on 31 July 1869,<sup>98</sup> it was adjacent to the Prospectors' Claim in the 'Coromandel New Rush'.<sup>99</sup> Scanlan also held shares in two larger claims, Lucky Hit, of nine men's ground, registered on 12 August, and Harp and Shamrock, of 25 men's ground, registered two days later,<sup>100</sup> both being too large to tally with Nicholl's recollection. As Scanlan could not work all four of his interests in these three claims simultaneously, he needed others to work them, otherwise he would risk their forfeiture. Scanlan did not have shares in any other claims at this time, and Nicholl was never listed as a shareholder, indicating that he was working another's interest for wages. It must be assumed that Scanlan had returned to Thames between 31 July and 12 August, bringing Nicholl back with him:

We took boat for Coromandel at one o'clock in the day and got to Coromandel harbour at eight o'clock at night. We were landed in mud up to our waists, with small boats, and had to follow the Driving Creek channel for about a mile up to the township. Things were a bit lively when we arrived: there was a fight going

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<sup>93</sup> Inquest on Martha Jane Nichol, Justice Department, J 46, COR 1920/518, ANZ-W.

<sup>94</sup> Death Certificate of Mary Ann Wick, 18 January 1918, 1918/434, BDM.

<sup>95</sup> Plot 109a, Area 3, Block 10, Waikaraka Cemetery, Onehunga.

<sup>96</sup> Plot 62, Section 5, Lot G, Old Anglican Area, Waikumete Cemetery, Glen Eden: Pamela Gilbert to Philip Hart, 22 July 1997.

<sup>97</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 4.

<sup>98</sup> Coromandel Warden's Court, Instruments, Certificate of Registration no. 18, AAAE 15171/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>99</sup> Coromandel Warden's Court, Register of Claims 1868-1872, folio 18, BACL 14396/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>100</sup> Coromandel Warden's Court, Instruments, Certificates of Registration nos. 39, 42, AAAE 15171/1a, ANZ-A.

on and Piccolo Charley's whistle was going at top.<sup>101</sup> We had a look around for a place to doss for the night. As the beds were all full up, so we had to unroll our Blueys [swags]<sup>102</sup> and doss in an old stable for the night. We didn't sleep much [because] the rats and fleas were numerous. After getting breakfast at [James] Furey's pub,<sup>103</sup> we started off for Tom's claim. It was six men's ground, 300ft x 300, and required six men to man it legally. There were five men on the ground, and we had to be on the ground by twelve o'clock that day or Tom's share was jumpable. We got to the claim at eleven o'clock. There was a man there waiting to take his place if he had not been in time. Tom introduced me as his man to work his share and hoped they would make me manager. They agreed, and they called me manager while I was with them.<sup>104</sup>

This was an example of miners' humour. Not only was his mining experience limited to fossicking for specimens, which was quite inadequate preparation to manage even the smallest claim, his first task as 'manager' was both menial and unskilled:

Next morning they loaded me up with six blunt picks and told me to take them to Jack Millington's Smithy<sup>105</sup> and get them sharpened. It was in the Upper Township and about six miles to travel on a steep bush track. The claim was situated about 2000ft above the smithy, and it was a tough contract for a boy of sixteen [correctly seventeen?] to carry about fifty pounds up and down the range each day, wet or dry. My shoulders got sore, and I had to make a pack for them after the first day....

After I was carrying my pack of picks for six weeks, I saw an old fellow hammering at pick points and his mate blowing a hand bellows. I dumped my picks and went to look on. The old fellow asked me where I was bound. I told him that I was carrying picks to the smithy to get them sharpened. He said if I brought them over, he would sharpen them, and save me the walk, so I brought them over and the old fellow soon had them sharp. He told me if I would cut the wood and burn the charcoal, he would sharpen

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<sup>101</sup> For Piccolo Charley (Charles Evans) and his years of drunken vagrancy in the South Island after 1878, check 'Piccolo Charley' in PapersPast, 1878-1903.

<sup>102</sup> Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8 ed., edited by Paul Beale (London, 1984), p. 104 [Nicholl recorded this word as 'blues'].

<sup>103</sup> *Franklyn Electoral Roll, 1870-71*, p. 25.

<sup>104</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 4.

<sup>105</sup> John Millington was not listed in the earliest electoral rolls for the area, but in 1875 he was living at the Upper Township, Coromandel: *Thames Electoral Roll, 1875*, p. 47.

them every day and teach me how to do them myself, so I did it, and saved two-thirds of my journey.<sup>106</sup>

The 'old fellow' was Matthew Quinton, who was aged either 29 or 32 in 1869, depending on which of the ages recorded when he married and died was correct.<sup>107</sup> Quinton had arrived in New Zealand in the same year as Nicholl, 1862,<sup>108</sup> and went to Thames at the end of October 1867,<sup>109</sup> but they had not meet then. He was first recorded in the surviving Coromandel records on 24 September 1870, when he bought a share in the Emma claim at Tokatea.<sup>110</sup> His mate, James Naysmith, was first recorded in the Coromandel warden's court records as being a shareholder in the Siege of Paris, registered on 16 March 1871.<sup>111</sup> Naysmith then applied for a claim on the Waikoromiko Creek in July 1872,<sup>112</sup> an area that Nicholl was to prospect intensively later in the decade. (The only James Naysmith traced in the North Island was married in 1882, when he was a bushman living at Mangonui; aged 19 in 1869,<sup>113</sup> he was of similar age to Nicholl compared with 'old' Matthew Quinton. As Naysmith was not recorded as mining in either Thames or Coromandel after the mid-1870s, this change of residence and occupation was likely. However, a James Naysmith was a mine manager at Reefton in the 1880s and 1890s. By 1892 he had had 30 years of experience in quartz mining, and although his recent mining career had

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<sup>106</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 4-6.

<sup>107</sup> Notices of Intentions to Marry, Births Deaths and Marriages, BDM 20/20, folio 102, ANZ-W; Death Certificate of Matthew Quinton, 26 December 1903, 1903/7029, BDM.

<sup>108</sup> 'Addresses Presented to Sir George Grey on his 74th Birthday, 14 April 1886, by European and Maori Residents of Auckland Province', p. 201, Grey New Zealand MS 275, Auckland Public Library.

<sup>109</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Miners' Rights Register 1867-1868, no. 1631, BACL 14358/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>110</sup> Coromandel Warden's Court, Register of Claims 1868-1872, no. 256, BACL 14396/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>111</sup> Coromandel Warden's Court, Certificates of Registration of Claims 1868-1871, no. 670, ZAAAN 1159/1a; Applications for Protection of Claims and Sites 1870-1873, entry for 28 June 1871, ZAAAN 14044/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>112</sup> Coromandel Warden's Court, Instruments 1872, no. 95, AAAF 1158/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>113</sup> Marriage Certificate of James Naysmith, 27 September 1882, 1882/3513, BDM.

been in the South Island,<sup>114</sup> it was possible that he had been at Coromandel in the early 1870s.)

After his daily hard work on the hills above the township, Nicholl participated fully in the miners' social life:

Every night, after we knocked off work, all hands would go down to the township to hear the news and see the fun. The old claims that had been taken up during the Driving Creek rush left a lot of drums [buildings]<sup>115</sup> and old shacks that came in handy at Coromandel's second birth as a goldfield, and there was hot work in them while the rush was on. Everyone seemed to have money, and they were spending it freely.<sup>116</sup>

According to Nicholl, 'I could do the picks as well as Mat [Quinton] could in a fortnight's time and I got my mates to buy a bellows and I sharpened them on the ground'. However,

when the field had been going three months, most of the claims got protected and knocked off work. There were four of the claims that struck found payable gold, they kept working, and the rest all hung up and most of them never started working again. After our claim shut down, I went and bached with Quinton and Naysmith in the same ground that we were working ten years later. I took it on tribute from the Tokatea Company at ten per cent.<sup>117</sup>

Under this arrangement the company took ten per cent of all gold won by the tributers from the mine (probably the Poverty, registered on 6 October 1870).<sup>118</sup> As had already happened, and would be repeated later on, Nicholl did not receive the full reward for his labours:

The first week I worked it I broke out fifteen hundredweight that yielded two thousand one hundred pounds. The stone was put through the company's one stamp battery with coarse gratings. The tailings were as big as peas and shining with gold. I reckoned

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<sup>114</sup> James Naysmith to Secretary, Board of Examiners, Mines Department, 4 February 1892, Mines Department, MD 1, 92/385, ANZ-W.

<sup>115</sup> Partridge, p. 344.

<sup>116</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 5.

<sup>117</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 6.

<sup>118</sup> Coromandel Warden's Court, Certificates of Registration of Claims 1868-1871, no. 427, ZAAAN 1159/1a, ANZ-A.

that there was double left in to what they gave me. The company claimed them, and I am sure when they ran them through the berdans they got double the amount of gold that I did.<sup>119</sup>

This tribute was abandoned, at an unknown date, when the partners commenced another venture:

Quinton said he knew a terrace in the Waikoromiko Creek that he thought the lead of gold ran through and proposed that we should go and work it. We got a fortnight's supply of grub and started off through the bush for the creek. There was an old whare there to camp in, and [we] got there about three o'clock in the afternoon.

The next morning Quinton started to bring up a tailrace, and me and Naysmith started to bring a head race to supply the sluice box with water. Quinton had bottomed before night[fall] and we had the headrace finished ready to turn in the water. The terrace was ten feet deep, and we had six feet deep of stripping to get down to the wash dirt; we had no fall to wash it away, so we had to strip it all with the shovels. Next day we stripped a paddock and started sluicing, Quinton on one side of the box and me at the other, and Naysmith at the tail of the box, pitching tailings. After we had been running the box for a day, Quinton cleaned it for a half a pennyweight of gold.

It kept at this grade for six months and I had to go and sell the gold and bring back what flour, tea and sugar and tobacco it would buy. At last, the terrace was near finished: we had only half a chain to finish. This fortnight's run came down to four pennyweights of gold, just enough to buy tea, sugar and flour, so we decided to run the box on Sunday to get enough to get tobacco. We started on Sunday morning and kept the box running for twelve hours. We were expecting the usual half dwt, but instead, when Quinton started to run the box, he first found a specimen four oz in weight and over half gold, and when we cleaned the box and weighted the gold there was two ozs 15dwts of nuggety gold. We had enough damper and flour to last us for three days left, so we ran [for] another day and cleaned up for two oz of gold.

My mates on Tuesday morning were up bright and early in the morning ready to go to the store for the goods. We had been living on damper and black tea for six months and we were meat hungry. My mates reckoned they would go with the gold and bring back a good supply of grub and let me stop home and mind the camp.

They started off and they were to return that night. After I had waited for their return for three days I went after them to see

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<sup>119</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 6-7.

what was wrong. When I got to the store it was full, with a lot of drunk men, and my two mates spending money like dishwater. I managed to get two pounds from them, they had the rest nearly spent. I got some stores and got back to the camp and awaited their return. Four days later they came back into camp a sorry looking pair.<sup>120</sup>

Thus ended their partnership in this claim.

By this time the Tokatea had struck a new reef, and it was yielding a lot of gold, and the mine was opening up well and getting specimens in tons. I decided to start for the Tokatea next morning and try to get work in the mine. I rolled up my bluey next morning and started for the mine and bid my mates goodbye, they were still in bed. When I got to the mine, I went to Bob Kelly's office and asked him for a job.<sup>121</sup>

(Robert Kelly, who had mined successfully at Driving Creek from 1863 onwards,<sup>122</sup> by this time was a leading mine manager and company director, with shareholdings in several Coromandel companies.<sup>123</sup>)

He looked at me and said: "I don't think you're strong enough to push a truck." I told him that I wouldn't mind betting my first month's wages that I would lift more than he could. He told me to come in next morning and he would find me something to do. I went along to the storekeeper to hit him up for an outfit to start with. Mr Luks told me he would give me what I wanted, so I got a half-axe and a billy and frying pan and the goods I wanted to bach with.<sup>124</sup>

(This storekeeper, Renke Friedrich (otherwise Frederick) Luks, had prospected with 'Bismark Charley' at Coromandel in 1870; this prospector gave Luks his own interest in what later became the successful Bismark

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<sup>120</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 7-9.

<sup>121</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 9-10.

<sup>122</sup> J.R. Haglund, 'A History of the Coromandel Goldfield, 1853-1868: The Second Phase of Development' (M.A. thesis, Auckland University, 1949), p. 68; J.H.M. Salmon, *A History of Goldmining in New Zealand* (Wellington, 1963), p. 81.

<sup>123</sup> *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 5 December 1871, p. 333, 26 March 1872, p. 103, 12 April 1872, p. 118, 20 May 1872, p. 154, 12 June 1872, p. 172; *New Zealand Gazette*, 23 January 1873, p. 58, 25 September 1873, p. 553.

<sup>124</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 9.

claim, from which Luks extracted much gold. While he was mining, his wife established the 'German Store' on the Tokatea Saddle, where Luks, abandoning the life of a miner, erected his Bismark Hotel in 1873.<sup>125</sup> Luks become a leading investor in local claims.<sup>126)</sup>

I had no hut, so I had to build a mimi [a basic shelter, later known as a maimai]<sup>127</sup> under shelter of a rata tree alongside the creek that runs below the Tokatea mine.

When I got my mimi built I went to the creek for a billy of tea to make some tea. When I was dipping the billy into the water, I noticed a lump of quartz lying on the bottom of the creek. I picked it up to have a look at it, and, to my surprise, it was peppered all through with fine gold and weighed ten pounds. I lit a fire and boiled the billy and fried some bacon and had a good blow out of bread and cheese and bacon. After I had my mimi built and my bunk rigged up, I went up to the store and weighed the stone and sold it to Mr Luks for £10.-.-. I am sure it was well worth £30.-.-.

I bought a pick, dish and shovel and started fossicking in the creek next morning instead of going in to work with Bob Kelly. I followed it up till I came to an old tip. By this time, I had found 35lb of good stone. I thought it was better than working for seven bob a day.

Next day I went up on the tip. There were two tunnels one running east and the other west and the gully between the two. I got a stone with a blotch of gold in it in the clay in the gully. I started to navvy into it, and I wasn't long before I struck a leader eighteen inches wide showing blotches of gold. I knew nothing about pegging out ground and recording it, so I had nothing left to do but get my mates and take them in with me.

It was Christmas Eve in the year 1870 that I went to fetch my mates. I took some of the stone over to show them. They were excited over it and started with me on Christmas morning for the Tokatea to stake the French Republic claim and record it. They staked four men's ground on the line of reef, and we took another man in with us.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 434; advertisements, *Coromandel Mail*, 21 May 1872, p. 2, 24 March 1873, p. 1.

<sup>126</sup> For example, Coromandel Warden's Court, Application by R.F. Luks for license for Crown All Gold Mining Company, 7 May 1872, AAAF 1158/1a, no. 53, ANZ-A.

<sup>127</sup> Charles L. Money, *Knocking About in New Zealand* (Melbourne, 1871), on pp. 28, 40, 42 used term mimi for shelters in the South Island. See also G.W. Turner, *The English Language in Australia and New Zealand* (London, 1966), p. 42.

<sup>128</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 10-11.

It was called the French Republic because of having been formed after France lost the Franco-Prussian War, events then prominently in the news. Nicholl's recollection of the date of registration was inaccurate: it was 31 January 1871.<sup>129</sup> Four shares were held between the six original owners of the claim, Quinton having one share but neither Nicholl nor Naysmith owning any interest at first. On 20 February, Nicholl acquired one share from interests relinquished by others,<sup>130</sup> and in March sold half of it for £10.<sup>131</sup>

They 'started to drive on the reef. We drove a tunnel on it nearly up to our boundary and got good dirt all the way along it. Then we sunk a winze 50ft and crushed as a trial crushing six tons of the ore broken from it. It yielded six ounces to the ton',<sup>132</sup> a very good return. 'The Bismark was a claim of three men's ground between us and the Tokatea. They proposed to amalgamate with us and form a company to work the ground. We consented to join them, and the company was floated and worked under the name of the Bismark and French Republic Gold Mining Company'.<sup>133</sup> This was registered in November. Nicholl had 750 of the 8,000 shares, but neither Scanlan, Quinton, nor Naysmith held any; Luks held 1,000.<sup>134</sup> Nicholl recalled that 'it worked for five or six years, and its output of gold was about [£]70,000 worth of gold', an estimate confirmed in obituaries.<sup>135</sup>

Financial problems in late 1877 resulted in complaints against Nicholl in the Thames magistrate's court for £15 16s 7d and £100. As these cases were not recorded in the Thames newspapers and the Coromandel newspapers for these months no longer exist, all that can now be discovered is that he

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<sup>129</sup> Coromandel Warden's Court, Certificates of Registration of Claims, no. 631, ZAAN 1159/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>130</sup> Coromandel Warden's Court, General Register of Transferred Shares 1870-1872, folio 34, ZAAN 1160/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>131</sup> Coromandel Warden's Court, General Register of Transferred Shares 1870-1872, folios 33, 34, ZAAN 1160/1a; Instruments 1871, folio 686, AAAE 15180/5a, ANZ-A.

<sup>132</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 11.

<sup>133</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 11.

<sup>134</sup> *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 11 November 1871, p. 295.

<sup>135</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp.11-12; *New Zealand Herald*, 11 August 1937, p. 15; *Auckland Star*, 11 August 1937, p 3.

was required to pay the smaller of the two sums, the decision over the larger one not being recorded in the surviving plaint book.<sup>136</sup>

Details of his later prospecting at Coromandel were not included in his memoirs. The loss of almost all issues of the local newspaper for the 1870s makes it very difficult to reconstruct his time there, although some details can be uncovered. He held 1,333 out of 6,000 shares in May 1872 in the Frisco Route, at Paul's Creek, the largest holding apart from Quinton's 1,334, and had 2,250 of 10,000 in the Waikoromiko claim in July, at the creek of the same name. Quinton had 2,000 shares in the Waikoromiko, which suggests that they were the principal prospectors of both claims.<sup>137</sup> Naysmith was a shareholder in the latter with 500 shares, and Robert Nicholl held 375, the only indication that he was associated in any way with his brother's prospecting during the 1870s. The Frisco Route was forfeited for non-working in July 1873.<sup>138</sup> In the following year, Nicholl had one of 14 shares in the City of Cork, an interest he sold a year later.<sup>139</sup>

Quinton, a shareholder in the same claims, continued to work with Nicholl. In August 1874 the *Coromandel News* reported that the low level in the Who'd Have Thought It claim, granted to Quinton in February,<sup>140</sup> had been driven almost 150 feet, and had almost reached the leader:

The intersection of the lode in this level will enable Messrs Quinton and Nicholl to have another capital block of ground to take out, and there is no reason for doubting that the rich run of gold met with on the surface will be in hand when operations are carried ahead on the leader and stoping is subsequently followed. The whole distance of 150 feet will have been completed in three weeks, which is a considerable amount of work to execute in that short period.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Thames Magistrate's Court, Plaint Book 1875-1880, 146/1877, BACL 13737/15b; Shortland Plaint Book 1870-1884, 19/1877, BACL 13818/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>137</sup> *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 20 May 1872, p. 155, 16 July 1872, p. 216.

<sup>138</sup> Coromandel Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1872-1883, folio 3, ZAAN 14044/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>139</sup> Coromandel Warden's Court, Register of Claims 1872-1885, folio 23, ZAAN 14044/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>140</sup> Coromandel Warden's Court, Register of Licenced Holdings 1872-1883, folio 108, ZAAN 14044/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>141</sup> *Coromandel News*, 27 August 1874, p. 3.

This (typical) optimism was justified, for once, for a while, because between February 1874 and September 1875 they sold 173oz 12dwt of melted gold to the bank.<sup>142</sup> When the gold ran out, the claim was abandoned, and subsequently forfeited in October 1876.<sup>143</sup> After that, Quinton no longer mined with Nicholl,<sup>144</sup> and they would not be mates at either Te Aroha, Ohinemuri, or Waihi.<sup>145</sup> Nicholl obtained 1oz 9dwt from an unrecorded claim in December 1875, and then headed a party that tributed in the Tokatea Company's mine, selling 665oz 14dwt 6gr melted gold to the bank between May 1876 and March 1878.<sup>146</sup> In December 1876, 'Nicholl's tribute' obtained 24oz 10dwt from surface workings.<sup>147</sup> The following December, 'in Nicholl's tribute gold is still being obtained. There are now over 700lb of specimens and picked stone. The tributers in this part of the mine have only 30 feet long by the same distance in depth, therefore the company will be able, if deemed advisable, to proceed with the low level in order the cut the same lode.<sup>148</sup> Late in 1877, Nicholl and party were continuing to find good gold in the All Nations reef.<sup>149</sup> In February 1878, a winze was about to be sunk 'on Nicholl's reef, underneath where they got their gold', and the following month 'Nicholl's tribute party lodged 37oz 3dwt' in the bank after another crushing of Tokatea ore.<sup>150</sup> At the end of the

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<sup>142</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Coromandel Branch, Gold Dealer's Register 1874-1890, entries for 11 February 1874, 30 April 1874, 5 March 1875, 5 April 1875, 21 September 1875, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

<sup>143</sup> Coromandel Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1872-1883, folio 108, ZAAN 14044/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>144</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Coromandel Branch, Gold Dealer's Register 1874-1890, entries for 6 November 1875, 16 November 1875, 6 March 1876, 6 May 1876, 24 February 1880, 26 May 1880, 7 July 1880, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

<sup>145</sup> For Quinton's later career, see *Te Aroha News*, 19 January 1884, p. 7, 20 March 1886, p. 7, 27 February 1889, p. 2, 17 August 1889, p. 2, 22 June 1895, p. 2; Waihi Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 31 December 1903, p. 1.

<sup>146</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Coromandel Branch, Gold Dealer's Register 1874-1890, entries for 24 December 1875, 4 May 1876, 15 December 1877, 16 March 1878, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

<sup>147</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 23 December 1876, p. 3.

<sup>148</sup> *Thames Advertiser* 10 December 1887, p. 3.

<sup>149</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 20 December 1877, p. 3, 19 January 1878, p. 2.

<sup>150</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, Coromandel Correspondent, 4 February 1878, p. 3, 19 March 1878, p. 3.

year, the Tokatea Company's manager recommended that Nicholl's tribute be re-let.<sup>151</sup> In October 1879, it was reported that 'some very rich patches' had been found on occasions in the All Nations reef in the Tokatea Company's ground, 'latterly in Nicholl's tribute'.<sup>152</sup>

In 1878, Nicholl owned half the interests in the Marquis of Salisbury, which he later abandoned.<sup>153</sup> In 1882, when living at Waihi he was sued for the forfeiture of the Bonanza, Rough and Tumble, Quartz, and Lady Franklin, but the warden refused to forfeit them because the first two had been abandoned as from 1 December 1878, the third from 1 March 1879, and the last from 1 July 1880.<sup>154</sup>

In 1878, Nicholl was living at the Upper Township and the following year at the Waikoromiko Track, where Quinton was living also.<sup>155</sup> In 1880 the electoral roll recorded him as residing at both Kapanga and at Driving Creek.<sup>156</sup> Quinton was living at Tokatea in 1880 and Robert Nicholl was living at the Upper Township, presumably with the rest of the family.<sup>157</sup> Robert's mining was not mentioned in the surviving copies of the local newspapers, but by 1880 his younger brother was sufficiently experienced to be referred to as a 'well-known prospector'.<sup>158</sup> In February that year a Robert Nicholl pleaded guilty in Auckland to striking a man in the mouth when drunk, and unsuccessfully pleaded self-defence: he was fined 20s or, in default, seven days in prison.<sup>159</sup>

In 1935, Nicholl wrote that he 'had found a lot of gold in Coromandel'.<sup>160</sup> According to his concluding remarks about his years there, the money he made was soon spent:

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<sup>151</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 16 December 1878, p. 3.

<sup>152</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 13 October 1879, p. 5.

<sup>153</sup> Coromandel Warden's Court, Register of Claims 1872-1885, folio 83, ZAAAN 14044/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>154</sup> Coromandel Warden's Court, Complaint Register 1872-1895, BACL 14047/3a, ANZ-A.

<sup>155</sup> Coromandel Warden's Court, Applications for Sites 1870-1890, 1/1878, ZAAP 15150/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Electoral Roll, 1879*, pp. 60, 67.

<sup>156</sup> *Thames Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 32.

<sup>157</sup> *Thames Electoral Roll, 1880*, pp. 32, 35; Notices of Intentions to Marry 1879, p. 203, entry for 23 March 1879, Births Deaths and Marriages, BDM 20/24, ANZ-W.

<sup>158</sup> Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 24 December 1880, p. 3.

<sup>159</sup> Court of Petty Sessions, *New Zealand Herald*, 25 February 1880, p. 6.

<sup>160</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 9.

I stayed in Coromandel for ten years and found many good patches of gold amounting to thousands, but I had not learned to say “No.” What with wild cats and lending money, I could get rid of my money faster than I could make it. One of my claims paid me £40.- per week for two years and when it was worked out I was £30.- in debt. I did not spend the money, but others spent it for me.<sup>161</sup>

## OHINEMURI

Like all prospectors, Nicholl was always interested in new gold finds, and in 1875 he participated, indirectly, in the Ohinemuri rush. On 3 March 1875, he took out miner’s right number 208, and was one of nine owners of Scramble, a claim registered on 10 March. He abandoned his interest two weeks later,<sup>162</sup> and did not hold shares in any other claims. An unnamed miner subsidised by Nicholl had taken out the right and acquired the interest on his behalf, ‘as I was in a good claim at the time and could not leave it to go to the rush’.<sup>163</sup>

## TE AROHA

In November 1880, Nicholl set out from Coromandel to join the latest rush:

The report of gold being struck in Te Aroha got me on the move again. I rolled up my swag and started to go through overland; there was only a Maori track most of the way through. I started at daylight in the morning, my swag was sixty-three pounds weight. I tied up a little poodle dog of my mother’s before I started. He always liked to be with me, [and] when I got along as far as the Tiki, about seven miles from home, the little devil came yelping up behind me, fagged out. He had broken the string and followed my scent. He was knocked up, so I put him on the top of my swag and carried him to the Thames.

I arrived at the Claremont Hotel at ten o’clock that night and I admit I was a bit tired. My brother-in-law kept the hotel, and my

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<sup>161</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 12.

<sup>162</sup> Thames Warden’s Court, Miners’ Rights Butt Book for District of Ohinemuri 1975, BACL 14043/7h; Register of Ohinemuri Claims 1875, folio 19, BBAV 11568/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>163</sup> Nicholl, 1937, pp. 1-2.

sister was not long in getting me something to eat. I had a good night's rest, and my sister made me take a day's rest.<sup>164</sup>

(His brother-in-law was John Nicks, formerly a miner, who had married his elder sister Mary Ann in 1872.<sup>165</sup> Their daughter Martha Dulcibel had been born in December 1877, and their second, and last, child, Anthony George, in October 1879.<sup>166</sup>)

After the rest I started at daylight in the morning to swag it through to Te Aroha. There was only a Maori track through. I got to Te Aroha an hour and a half before dark and had time to pitch my tent before dark. I went to [George Stewart] O'Halloran's pub [the Hot Springs hotel].<sup>167</sup> There were about two hundred men standing about it. I met a few there that I knew from Coromandel. I learned that there had been nothing new, only what the prospectors had discovered.<sup>168</sup>

Tom Scanlan, his Coromandel mate, was one of those waiting for the field to open.<sup>169</sup> There is no record of Nicholl taking out a miner's right on opening day, 25 November, or subsequently. One issued to William Nicholls on that date was for a Pakeha Maori then living near Te Aroha,<sup>170</sup> who was a partner with several Maori in claims in the Tui portion of the field in December 1880 and 1881.<sup>171</sup> Nicholl did not acquire shares in any claims, and his prospecting was very brief. Scanlan and seven others pegged out a

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<sup>164</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 12-13.

<sup>165</sup> Marriage Certificate of John Nicks, 20 March 1872, 1872/9128; Death Certificate of John Nicks, 17 July 1886, 1886/3670, BDM.

<sup>166</sup> Birth Certificates of Martha Dulcibel Nicks, 23 December 1877, 1878/630; Anthony George Nicks, 5 October 1879, 1879/16423, BDM.

<sup>167</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>168</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 13.

<sup>169</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 975, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1b, ANZ-A.

<sup>170</sup> See Maori Land Court, Auckland Minute Book no. 3, p. 340; Hauraki Minute Book no. 10, p. 141; *Auckland Weekly News*, 10 August 1867, p. 9, 31 August 1867, p. 6, 21 December 1900, p. 24.

<sup>171</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 177, 189, BBAV 11567/1a; Plaintiff Book 1880-1898, 17/1881, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A.

claim,<sup>172</sup> but Nicholl was not one of their number, preferring to explore on his own:

I spent two [days] in prospecting above and below the township and only found gold in the Waiorongomai Creek. I was on my road to follow the gold up the Creek when I found that Johnny Werahiko<sup>173</sup> had found the reef at the head of the Waiorongomai Creek.<sup>174</sup>

This was a confused recollection. Hone Werahiko had not found gold at the head of the Waiorongomai Creek, though he would find a good outcrop high on the mountainside and well above the creek a year later.<sup>175</sup>

I decided to go up to the top of the mountain next morning to see what prospects I would have to explore the eastern side of the range, as I thought there were plenty of men already on the western flank of the range.

When I got to the top of the mountain, I could see Waitekauri to the north and what I took to be reef outcrops on some isolated hills on the north-east side of the Waihi Plains. So I decided to roll up my swag next morning and start up the mountain and drop over into the Waitawheta Valley and prospect creeks on my way through. I got a few colours of gold in the Mangakino Creek but not enough to induce me to follow it. I spent three days in the Waitawheta watershed and could find neither gold nor quartz, so I left there and made my way to Owharoa.<sup>176</sup>

His assessment that there was no gold to be found on the eastern side of the mountain was accurate. He would never return to the Te Aroha district.

### THE DISCOVERY OF THE MARTHA LODGE

The expanded account of his discovery of gold at Waihi that Nicholl gave to his elder son stated that he spent a week (not three days, as he wrote in 1927) in the Waitawheta and Mangakino valleys; the longer period

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<sup>172</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 26 November 1880, p. 3.

<sup>173</sup> Hone Werahiko, whose surname he spelled as 'Waieke'.

<sup>174</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 13.

<sup>175</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>176</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 13-14.

sounds more likely if he was doing more than a superficial assessment. After abandoning this unfruitful exploration, he left Te Aroha ‘at eight in the morning with a 67lb pack, and at 5 p.m. arrived at Mrs Read’s hotel at Owcharoa’. There the Farmer brothers, Daniel and Samuel,<sup>177</sup> ‘were working the “Smile of Fortune” mine on Tribute and keeping 15 head of stamps bumping’.<sup>178</sup> At this small goldmining settlement, beside the Ohinemuri River, he rested for that evening,

and next morning started out with a fortnight’s supply of grub to prospect the Waihi Plains. There was a Maori track crossing the plains to Homunga [to the north of Waihi beach] and the Waihi beach. It was grown over with fern and was hard to find. I pitched my tent on the eastern boundary of Compston’s lot, a squatter that had taken up land there and settled on it with his family.<sup>179</sup>

(George Compston, an American, was not a squatter. He had been granted his first 50-acre agricultural lease in Ohinemuri in September 1876.<sup>180</sup> With his wife Martha and their three daughters, he took up 200 acres of land in the Huaia Block in 1878, making them the first settlers on the Waihi Plains. ‘Mrs Compston was, for two years, the only lady resident in the district’.)<sup>181</sup> In his 1930s version, Nicholl omitted the stop at Owcharoa, and wrote, for some reason in the third person, that he ‘packed up his swag and carried it to Waitekauri next day and camped with the Hollis brothers’, William, Thomas and Frederick,<sup>182</sup> ‘that night. He then got an outfit of flour and had a run up the Waitekauri Stream as far was where

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<sup>177</sup> *Tauranga Electoral Roll, 1882*, p. 9.

<sup>178</sup> Nicholl, ‘The Discovery’, p. 5.

<sup>179</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 14.

<sup>180</sup> Paeroa Warden’s Court. Register of Ohinemuri Agricultural Leases and Rents 1875-1896, p. 42, ZAAP 13784/1b, ANZ-A.

<sup>181</sup> *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 917, 927, which gave their name as Cumpston; for obituary and funeral of George Compston, *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 15 October 1906, p. 2, 17 October 1906, p. 2.

<sup>182</sup> For some details of their prospecting at Waitekauri, see *Thames Advertiser*, 11 January 1881, p. 3, Ohinemuri Correspondent, 1 November 1881, p. 3; for biography of William Hollis, see *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 508.

[George] Murland's farm is now.<sup>183</sup> He found a few colours of gold on rim rock and then made a start for Waihi'.<sup>184</sup>

The version given to his son agreed that he explored Waitekauri before moving on to Waihi. In this fuller and more accurate account, after spending one night at Mrs Read's hotel he left in the morning to visit Waitekauri, where the Hollis brothers 'had the Waitekauri Mine on Tribute and were doing well':

After having a run up the Waitekauri stream with my pick and dish and finding only a few ounces of gold in the moss on the high reef, I decided to make straight to Waihi and put in a bit of time there. I bought 25lb of flour some tea and sugar and a lump of fat bacon (I am eating it yet).

I pitched my tent on the east side of Compston's hill and was wakened next morning by loud yells of "Sool him up" [a cry used when setting a dog on to a victim],<sup>185</sup> and saw two of the Compston girls rounding up their cows.<sup>186</sup>

In the 1930s, he wrote, still using the third person, that he

pitched his tent on the eastern side of Compston's lot and was roused with two girls yelling out "sool him up." They had a big dog with them, and he had a little poodle dog with him, and the girls asked me what he was doing with a snip like that, and they sooled the big dog on to him, and the little fellow got between his legs and caught him by the tender part and the little fellow hung on and he completely cowed the big fellow and I had the best of that deal.<sup>187</sup>

The memoirs given to his son then referred to Horatio Agars Walmsley,<sup>188</sup> who was to become one of his best friends. Walmsley was the second settler in the district, having acquired an agricultural lease on the north-eastern side of the future Waihi township in 1879, and apart from the

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<sup>183</sup> See *Leighton's Auckland Provincial Directory, 1930* (Auckland, 1930), p. 768.

<sup>184</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 3.

<sup>185</sup> Partridge, p. 1114.

<sup>186</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery,' p. 5.

<sup>187</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 4.

<sup>188</sup> For an outline of the lives of the Walmsley brothers, see Harry Armour, 'Early Waihi Bushland Settlers', *Ohinemuri Regional History Journal*, vol. 5 no. 2 (October 1968), p. 16.

Compston family was the only Pakeha living there when Nicholl arrived.<sup>189</sup> In 1881 he would be joined by his brother, Sheriff Benjamin Frederick; after first breeding cattle they worked as timber contractors for many years.<sup>190</sup> They leased a large section of bush-covered land at the end of the present-day Walmsley Road, from which in later years Nicholl would obtain timber for a contract with the Waihi Gold Mining Company.<sup>191</sup> The asoon-to-be-discovered Martha lode was half way between the Compston and Walmsley farms,<sup>192</sup> and when mining commenced at Waihi the two brothers recorded their occupations as miners, which was still the occupation given on Horatio's death certificate in 1911.<sup>193</sup> He was aged 29 when he first met Nicholl, who was approximately of the same age.<sup>194</sup>

In 1935, Nicholl explained that 'the Government had started to settle the Plains by leasing a 50-acre section for ten years at ninepence an acre a year with the right of renewal after the ten years expired. Compston and Walmsley had taken out sections at that time, Compston on the Waitekauri watershed and [Walmsley on] Walmsley's Creek'. 'There were a few Maori camped around the Ohinemuri River banks at that time and only one prospector on the Plains at that time',<sup>195</sup> namely himself. This account was slightly embellished in the account he gave his son:

Horatio Walmsley was settled at Walmsley's Creek about three miles east of Compston's. These were the only settlers at the time. A few Maoris camped on the banks of the river seemed to be hard

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<sup>189</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Mackaytown and Thames Letterbook 1876-1896, folios 12, 224, 225, BACL 14458/1b; H.A. Walmsley to Minister of Mines, 24 February 1890; Devore and Cooper to H.A. Walmsley, 30 July 1890, Inwards Letters and Memoranda and Telegrams 1870-1896, BACL 13388/1a, ANZ-A; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 917.

<sup>190</sup> *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 928.

<sup>191</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 2; G.H. Worth, 'The Waihi Bush', *Waihi Borough Diamond Jubilee 1902-1962*, ed. Nellie Scott Climie (Paeroa, 1962), p. 87; 'Waihi Street Names', *Waihi Borough Diamond Jubilee*, p. 124.

<sup>192</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 29 January 1881, p. 9.

<sup>193</sup> *Tauranga Electoral Rolls, 1882*, p. 28, *1885*, p. 29; Death Certificate of Horatio Agars Walmsley, 12 September 1911, 1911/5623, BDM.

<sup>194</sup> For Walmsley's age, see Death Certificate of Horatio Agars Walmsley, 12 September 1911, 1911/5623, BDM.

<sup>195</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 4.

up for grub [food],<sup>196</sup> so I gave them about 2lb of flour and the balance of the bacon. They remained warm friends of mine.

I had two mates with me - a little poodle dog and a five-chamber muzzle-loading revolver that had seen service at Waterloo. I used it to shoot a pigeon when I got meat hungry, and when old "Waterloo" meant business the five barrels would go off together! I started with my pick and dish to explore the country and fetched up on the Waihi hills where I found reef outcrops. They were rooted about here and there by the early diggers, who abandoned them. The quartz had a hungry watery look and some of it was as white as a hound's tooth. I tested the rubble on these outcrops in various places and never failed to obtain a trace of gold, but not sufficient to be of any value. I started combing the drift of the reefs to find out whether they were shedding gold from any rich shoot they might contain.<sup>197</sup>

In 1921 he wrote that 'there had been prospecting done on all' the reefs 'cropping out', but 'work had been abandoned' on all of these. 'I tested quartz rubble long these outcrops and failed to find sufficient trace of gold to warrant further investigation'.<sup>198</sup> A mining correspondent later described Pukewhau hill, soon to be known as the Martha hill, rising

abruptly from the plain beneath to an elevation of some 250 feet, and in its entire length, from east to west, it is traversed by the main reef, which averages at the surfact from 30 to 40 feet in width; while the ground, which throughout the whole extent of the hill is composed of decomposed tufa and a compact ferruginous clay, without the intrusion of any hard rock whatever.<sup>199</sup>

In 1927, Nicholl wrote that

I could find no quartz till I got to the Waihi hills and my first impression of them was that they were bucks [barren], till I tried the drifts coming from them and found gold in them. There was a tunnel put into the reef on the highest part of the hill. It had struck a hard bar of flint with a seam of rubble on the footwall of the reef that had a few colours of gold in it by pounding the stone and washing the rubble but of no commercial value. The flint in the face of the drive was buck and of no commercial value.

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<sup>196</sup> Partridge, p. 508.

<sup>197</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 5.

<sup>198</sup> Nicholl, 1921.

<sup>199</sup> *Thames Star*, 2 July 1881, p. 2.

The reef kept the centre of the spur for about thirty chains and was covered with a wind drift. The friable quartz, having been weathered down, left nothing but the buck exposed above the wind drift of sandy loam.<sup>200</sup>

The tunnel he tested had been driven early in the previous year by John McCombie and Robert Lee.<sup>201</sup> McCombie was to become a leading mine manager and mining reporter,<sup>202</sup> but the career of Lee, an American, has not been traced. Lee owned a claim at Waitekauri in late 1881 and was mining at Waiorongomai from March 1882 until at least August 1883; he is believed to have returned to America in the later 1880s.<sup>203</sup> Alternatively, he may have been the Robert Lee who had been mining since 1850 and who left Ohinemuri for the new Kimberley field in Western Australia in 1886.<sup>204</sup>

In 1921, Nicholl wrote that ‘on the northern end of the hill the reef was hidden by a top burden of three to four feet of sandy loam with a flint boulder protruding here and there, and here I decided to prospect the reef as far as it was possible for me to follow it’.<sup>205</sup> Later, once again writing in the third person, he summarised the preliminary work:

He first worked on the northeast end of the hill. He had found this end of the hill shedding the most gold in its drifts and had started to open it up where he could find the best trace in the reef’s drifts. He had struck rich prospects in this part of the reef in several places and had started to open it up where it shed its best trail.<sup>206</sup>

After potholing ‘through the loam to the quartz drift’, he ‘washed a dish of it’, to be ‘surprised to find a tail of yellow gold that I estimated to be

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<sup>200</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 14-15.

<sup>201</sup> John McCombie, ‘The Discovery of the Waihi Mines’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 June 1896, p. 38.

<sup>202</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 471-472.

<sup>203</sup> Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Miner’s Right no. 1878, issued 21 March 1882, Miners’ Rights Butt Book, 1881-1882 BBAV 11533/1i; Miner’s Right no. 2001, issued 20 August 1883, Miners’ Rights Butt Book 1883, BBAV 11533/1l, ANZ-A; *Thames Star*, 17 August 1881, p. 3; J.B. McAra, *Gold Mining at Waihi 1878-1952*, rev. ed. (Waihi, 1988), p. 36.

<sup>204</sup> Paeroa Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 September 1886, p. 2.

<sup>205</sup> Nicholl, 1921.

<sup>206</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, pp. 4-5.

worth 4oz to the ton'.<sup>207</sup> The account written for his son provided more details: 'It was a considerable distance to carry my samples to water to test them, so I decided to cut up a sack into nine sample bags and sew and number them so that I could get along quicker. I spent a fortnight combing the western flank of what he recorded as Pukewa hill, which the newspapers called Pukewha,<sup>208</sup> but which was correctly Pukewhau.<sup>209</sup> He 'found rich sheds of gold in two places - one on the north end of the spur (richest), about 200 feet from McCombie and Lee's drive, and the other about 400 feet south. I cut the reef where it was shedding the best and obtained prospects that I estimated to be worth 4oz to the ton'.<sup>210</sup> 'I tested the reef as far north as I could and found it to be carrying payable values. I cut into the reef where I obtained the best prospects, and found it to be a good thing', so staked out his claim. 'As far as I had prospected the reef south of the ground I had staked, I thought it useless to me'.<sup>211</sup> In a longer account, having explored the exposed outcrop,

I decided that the best way to test the reef was to pothole down to her drift on the western flank of spur, as I found out that was the side she was shedding her drift, and, if I thought that the prospects would lead to payable gold, follow to where it was shed from. I found prospects in four places along her line that would lead to payable gold, but the best I found was on the north end of the spur about 125ft north of McCombie and Lee's drive.

I started to follow the gold to locate its source, and had just cut into the cap of the reef in a trench I made six feet deep and had struck quartz worth four ounces of gold to the ton and [was] flogging into it head down when I was clapped on the back with Mr Fred Hollis' hand. I nearly jumped out of the trench. I had no idea that anyone was within miles of me. He and Charley Gemmings<sup>212</sup> had come over from Waitekauri to hunt me up and found me delving into it on the Sabbath day.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Nicholl, 1921.

<sup>208</sup> For example, Waihi Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 29 March 1881, p. 3, 2 July 1881, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 2 July 1881, p. 2.

<sup>209</sup> George Thomas Wilkinson, diary, entry for 5 March 1881, University of Waikato Library; *New Zealand Herald*, 12 July 1882, p. 4.

<sup>210</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery', pp. 5-6.

<sup>211</sup> Nicholl, 1921.

<sup>212</sup> For Charles Gemming's involvement with Waitekauri in 1881, see *Thames Advertiser*, 16 May 1881, p. 3, Ohinemuri Correspondent, 11 July 1881, p. 3, 8 October 1881, p. 3, 1 November 1881, p. 3; for his taking up shares when Waiorongomai mining commenced,

In 1931 Nicholl stated that he did not occupy McCombie's claim 'but went along the western and northern sides of the Martha Hill, and potholed down where the Waihi Company's No. 3 shaft was subsequently sunk, with the result that he came on two or three runs of rich ore, the best being where the old Martha was pegged out on the northern slope'.<sup>214</sup> Later he wrote that he had been 'following the gold in the drift' in his trench 'and it was blowing a gale from the west as it generally does on these plains'.<sup>215</sup> He excused his breaking of the Sabbath:

I never could keep count of the days of the month or the week. I showed them the prospects I was getting. They thought it not payable, but I told them that I was one of those people that thought that where there was smoke there must be fire.

They stayed about an hour with me and I boiled the billy and I gave them a feed of buggers on the coals [thin cakes of damper, speckled with currents, baked in the embers of a fire]<sup>216</sup> that I had made that morning before going to work and a lump of tinned dog [bully beef],<sup>217</sup> and they said that I was out on my own at making buggers on the coals.

They left me and returned to Waitekauri, and I continued to follow the gold in the drift in the trench and it was improving as I was going ahead, till I had struck the reef, and it prospected for about four ounces of gold to the ton. I sunk a hole in the bottom of the trench and I still found the gold was going down. I levelled off the good dirt I had broken out and I buried it with the sandy loam that had no gold in it and trampled it down hard and started to work higher up where the drift was poorer, and worked the trench further ahead and left it at that till I could prospect the reef further ahead.

On the north end slope of the hill the reef here was covered with a light drift of sandy loam, and only a flint boulder [out]cropping here and there that did not contain any gold. I got a two-man auger and made twenty sample bags and numbered them and

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see Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 30, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 23 March 1882, p. 489.

<sup>213</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 15.

<sup>214</sup> Speech by W.S.C. Nicholl to Waihi Old Boy's Association, *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 27 October 1931, p. 2, and *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 31 October 1931, p. 8.

<sup>215</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 5.

<sup>216</sup> Partridge, pp. 148-149, 302. In 1871, Charles Money used the bowdlerised phrase 'beggars on the coals': Money, p. 31.

<sup>217</sup> Partridge, p. 1237.

bored down to the drift and brought up samples of it, and I dollied it off and found that the reef was payable on the north-east slope of the hill.

I then spent a month in boring along the southwest slope of the hill and found that the drift wouldn't lead me on to payable gold. But the gold I got on the southern slope seemed not so yellow as on the northern slope, so I decided to peg out five acres and go to the Thames and apply for it. The Martha pegs were the first pegs taking up ground on that hill.... I walked down to the Thames, and I applied for my claim and when I was asked where it was, I said it was in Waihi. I didn't know the Maori names of the place, so I always called it Waihi.<sup>218</sup>

In 1927, he wrote that he showed Hollis and Gemmings 'the prospects I was getting, and Fred Hollis pegged a claim on the north end of the Martha claim. It was called the Young Colonial and was worked after that by him and Jim Smith of Owharoa.<sup>219</sup> After I was satisfied that my prospects were highly payable',<sup>220</sup> he went either to an unspecified 'newspaper office' or to 'the Star office at Thames<sup>221</sup> and reported the reef [as being] 40ft wide [and] worth 4oz to the ton. There was a bit of a rush on, but they left it, thinking it not worth anything'.<sup>222</sup> This was compressing events greatly, for, like all sensible prospectors, he did not publicly announce his discovery until he had registered his prospector's claim, and the 'bit of a rush' did not occur until early the following year.

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<sup>218</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, pp. 5-7.

<sup>219</sup> Correctly Smyth, a prominent prospector; see James Smith to Superintendent, 8 January 1874, Auckland Provincial Papers, ACFL 8170, 906/75; James Smyth and Michael Coleman to Superintendent, 5 October 1874, Auckland Provincial Papers, ACFL 8170, 3755/74, ANZ-A; James Smith to Minister of Mines, 4 August 1894, Legislative Department, LE 1, 1894/5, ANZ-W; Thames Warden's Court, Ohinemuri Notes 1875-1877, Hearing of 12 March 1875, pp. 7-9, BACL 14566/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1875, p. 3, 31 August 1876, p. 3, 6 December 1877, p. 2, 7 September 1878, p. 3, 12 March 1881, p. 2; *Auckland Weekly News*, 27 February 1908, p. 45; *Thames Star*, 12 August 1913, p. 4.

<sup>220</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 15-16.

<sup>221</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 6; Nicholl, 1927, p. 16.

<sup>222</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 16.

ESTIMATED TIMELINE: FROM THE OPENING OF TE AROHA  
GOLDFIELD TO HIS REPORTING OF HIS SUCCESSFUL  
PROSPECTING AT WAIHI

Nicholl may not have known (or cared) what day of the week it was when he worked, but as the Sunday when his friends from Waitekauri visited him can be identified as being 19 December,<sup>223</sup> an estimated timeline of his prospecting can be devised:

*Thursday 25 November:* Attended opening day of Te Aroha goldfield and assessed its prospects.

*Friday 26 November - Saturday 27 November:* Prospected at mouth of Waiorongomai valley.

*Sunday 28 November:* Ascended Te Aroha and saw lodes shining on Pukewhau hill at Waihi; decided to prospect on eastern side of mountain before going there.

*Monday 29 November – Sunday 5 December:* Prospected in Mangakino and Waitawheta valleys.

*Monday 6 December:* Walked from Te Aroha to Owharoa.

*Tuesday 7 December – Thursday 9 December:* Walked to meet friends at Waitekauri and did small amount of prospecting there; bought sufficient supplies to enable him to investigate Waihi district for two weeks.

*Friday 10 December:* Camped on the Compston farm on Thursday night before walking on to Waihi.

*Saturday 11 December – Monday 13 December:* Investigated the sites where previous prospectors had worked and tested the ore in McCombie and Lee's tunnel.

*Tuesday 14 December (or thereabouts):* Discovered the Martha lode.

*Wednesday 15 December – Saturday 18 December:* Tested the value of the Martha lode.

*Sunday 19 December:* Two of his Waitekauri mates inspected his find.

*Monday 20 December – Wednesday 21 December:* Did final testing before covering up his workings and leaving to inform his mates of his find.

*Thursday 22 December:* In Thames, informs journalist of the morning newspaper that he had been prospecting at Waihi, but kept details secret.

*Friday 23 December:* Walked to Coromandel to ask his mates to return with him to Waihi to peg out claims.

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<sup>223</sup> 'Day Numbers for 1880', Epochconverter.com.

## WHO FIRST DISCOVERED GOLD IN THE WAIHI DISTRICT?

In 1937 a newspaper noted that the Martha 'lode was never really discovered in the ordinary meaning of the word because it was never entirely hidden. Its outcrop attracted prospectors long before' Nicholl arrived.<sup>224</sup> During the previous decade and more there had been rumours of gold being found in the Waihi plains, at undisclosed locations. In February 1869, after a Maori showed miners camped near the future Paeroa a piece of quartz allegedly from there, 'a number of miners' set out to explore, encouraged by earlier reports that prospectors from Katikati had found 'specimens of auriferous quartz'.<sup>225</sup> One geologist, James Hector, when examining the country between Karangahake and Waihi Beach in April 1870, saw signs of earlier prospectors in the Waitekauri valley but did not note the Martha outcrop.<sup>226</sup> He admitted that his examination 'was very cursory on account of the difficulties raised by the Natives'.<sup>227</sup> (Maori usually drove off prospectors exploring the plains in the early 1870s.<sup>228</sup>) In 1871 a reporter visiting Ohinemuri was 'told most confidently that through the gorge and to Waihi there is something considerable to be had' in the way of gold.<sup>229</sup> In 1873 Te Hira<sup>230</sup> ordered Maori who had seized an American prospector's swag near Waihi to return it to him.<sup>231</sup> More reports of finds were published in 1875, and in the following year prospectors were exploring the 'Waihi plains'.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> *Thames Star*, 14 August 1937, p. 2.

<sup>225</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 11 February 1869, reprinted in *Daily Southern Cross*, 12 February 1869, p. 4.

<sup>226</sup> James Hector, 'On the Geology of the Cape Colville District', *Reports on Geological Explorations during 1870-71*, no. 6 (Wellington, 1871), pp. 99-103, including sketch map.

<sup>227</sup> Hector, p. 102.

<sup>228</sup> For instance, *Charles Abraham's Travels to the Antipodes*, written 1919, transcribed by Joan Tidy (typescript, Taupo, 1991), pp. 42-46, Library of the Auckland Institute and War Memorial Museum.

<sup>229</sup> Special Commissioner, 'The Ohinemuri Country', *New Zealand Herald*, 20 May 1871, p. 5.

<sup>230</sup> See paper on Maori land in Hauraki.

<sup>231</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 15 April 1873, p. 2.

<sup>232</sup> *Thames Star*, 20 January 1875, p. 2, Ohinemuri Correspondent, 20 March 1875, p. 2; *Auckland Star*, 14 May 1875, p. 3; *New Zealand Herald*, 16 February 1876, p. 2.

In 1935, Nicholl wrote that, after the opening of the Ohinemuri field, ‘three men started out to prospect the country through to [the] East Coast instead of joining the mad rush to stake out ground on the Karangahake side of the river. They first struck a trace of gold in the Waitekauri Creek’.<sup>233</sup> The first of these men was recorded by Nicholl as being ‘Mick Mariman, better known as Mickey Teherey’.<sup>234</sup> He was Michael Marriman (or Marrinan), a prominent prospector who later participated in the Te Aroha rush.<sup>235</sup> The others were Thomas Corbett, who would prospect at Te Aroha in 1880<sup>236</sup> and was later associated with Nicholl at Waihi, and James Atkinson, of whom nothing is known. Did Nicholl mean Joseph Atkinson, who lived at Tararu during the mid and late 1870s?<sup>237</sup> Atkinson was ‘grub-staked’ by Nicholl to the extent of £25, meaning that Nicholl provided food and possibly tools up to that amount.<sup>238</sup>

They first found a trace of gold in the Waitekauri Creek. After they had struck the open fern plains they found a grown-over track leading to Mataora [on the coast to the north of Waihi Beach]<sup>239</sup> and followed it till they found the Waihi reef system, and spend a few days on them, and although finding gold in them, but not in payable [quantities] to induce them to stay with it and try it, and they reported them as bucks.<sup>240</sup>

(Buck reefs are barren ones. Corbett and Marriman had explored what became the Union-Silverton Hill.<sup>241</sup>) In 1876 four prospectors tested what

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<sup>233</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 1.

<sup>234</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 1.

<sup>235</sup> Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Miner’s Right no. 373, issued on 25 November 1880, Miners’ Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 20 October 1880, p. 3, 15 November 1880, p. 3.

<sup>236</sup> Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 202, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 20 October 1880, p. 3, 27 October 1880, p. 3; *New Zealand Gazette*, 30 December 1880, p. 1797.

<sup>237</sup> *Thames Electoral Rolls, 1875*, p. 3, 1877, p. 3.

<sup>238</sup> Partridge, p. 509.

<sup>239</sup> See ‘Topographical Map of Ohinemuri and Waihi North Survey Districts’, in pocket of Colin Fraser and James Mackintosh Bell, *The Geology of the Waihi-Tairua Subdivision, Hauraki Division: Geological Survey, Bulletin no. 15 (New Series)* (Wellington, 1912).

<sup>240</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 1.

<sup>241</sup> Fraser and Bell, p. 10.

would become the Rosemont-Silverton hills, but they did not test the future Martha hill, half a mile to the northwest.<sup>242</sup> After John McCombie and Robert Lee reported their discovery in May 1879 they were referred to in the press as ‘two of the Waihi Plains’ prospectors’.<sup>243</sup>

#### WHO FIRST DISCOVERED THE MARTHA LODGE?

Several other prospectors were to claim to have found the Martha lode before Nicholl, creating a dispute lasting for decades. An Englishman inspecting mines in 1897 noted ‘one curious thing about the Waihi mine – every mining camp in New Zealand possesses at least one man who will tell you most earnestly that he, and he alone, found the Martha lode – since when he has found no other’.<sup>244</sup> Nicholl, who never claimed to have discovered the Waihi reef system, reported Marriman, Corbett, and Atkinson finding what they believed was a buck reef there in 1875.

The next man that had a go at it was Dan Leahy.<sup>245</sup> He sank a hole on the top of the reef, and he didn’t get enough gold to stay with it. He thought it a buck. Many others knocked on the outcrop and all were satisfied that it was a buck reef.

Two or three years later when Waitekauri was supposed to be worked out and let on tribute to the Hollis brothers and there was no trade for selling beer to the miners, the late Mr McCombie got a subsidy from the Government to drive a level into the reef. He and a man by the name of Lee drove 80 feet and cut the reef. It was a face of glassy flint of no known value, only carrying a little gold on both sides of the drive, about three inches wide. They had a ton of it crushed in the Owharoa battery and they got a return of half an ounce to the ton. This could easily be Owharoa gold, as they used silver in the boxes in those days,

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<sup>242</sup> J.F. Downey, *Gold-Mines of the Hauraki District, New Zealand*, (Wellington, 1935), p. 235.

<sup>243</sup> County Council, *Thames Star*, 2 May 1879, p 2.

<sup>244</sup> Raymond Radclyffe, *Wealth and Wild Cats: Travels and researches in the gold-fields of Western Australia and New Zealand* (London, 1898), p. 158.

<sup>245</sup> See paper on his life; for his being one of the first prospectors of Ohinemuri, in particular of the Waitekauri valley, see *Auckland Weekly News*, 25 November 1871, p. 6; *Thames Advertiser*, 16 April 1873, p. 3, 15 August 1876, p. 3, 19 April 1878, p. 3, Warden’s Court, 6 May 1881, p. 3; Auckland Provincial Government Papers, ACFL 8170, 79/75, ANZ-A.

meaning that the re-used mercury (quicksilver) could have contained traces of gold from earlier crushings. ‘The drive was 200 feet south of the Martha claim and the drive was driven 80 feet, and the face of the drive exposed a bar of flint of no commercial value’.<sup>246</sup> He did not give a date for McCombie and Lee driving on a different reef from the yet-to-be-discovered Martha; and he was wrong to believe they had a government subsidy.

John Leydon, an auctioneer and mining speculator,<sup>247</sup> in 1923 told a journalist that in 1878 he had given a lift to an old swagger who gave him a piece of quartz that he had found on what became known as Martha Hill. As the crushed stone gave a promising result, Leydon and John Nicks decided to search for the reef. Leydon claimed that when they got to Waihi they picked up Nicholl and party and pegged out three claims.<sup>248</sup> This account does not concur with Nicholl’s, although Leydon was indeed one of a three-man party which acquired a claim in mid-March 1881.<sup>249</sup> The fact that the date he gave was two years too early and that he stated that the main claim was called Martha after John Nicks’ wife, who was in fact Mary Ann,<sup>250</sup> suggests that Leydon’s memory for details was shaky. This was a typical example of the desire of men only marginally connected with mining to magnify the significance of their involvement. Similarly, in 1939 Herbert Gordon recounted that in 1880, when helping to build a bridge at the foot of the hill leading to Waitekauri, he had met Nicholl, who was seeking a fellow prospector, William Hollis, then tributing at Waitekauri. ‘In the course of the conversation’, Gordon had informed Nicholl ‘that there was a big outcrop of quartz on the hill which later became known as the Martha Hill’. That night Nicholl found Hollis, and after obtaining more information about the whereabouts of the outcrop from both Gordon and Edward Mann

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<sup>246</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, pp. 2-3, 8.

<sup>247</sup> For his involvement in the Te Aroha rush, see Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 176, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 11 December 1880, p. 3, Warden’s Court, 23 December 1880, p. 3; for his involvement in Waihi mining, see *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1881, p. 3; *Observer*, 13 April 1927, pp. 4-5; for his life, see *Observer*, 7 February 1885, p. 4; *New Zealand Herald*, 22 February 1923, p. 4, 8 April 1927, p. 12.

<sup>248</sup> F.W. W[eston], ‘John Leydon’, *New Zealand Herald*, 22 February 1923, p. 5.

<sup>249</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1881, p. 3.

<sup>250</sup> F.W. W[eston], ‘John Leydon’, *New Zealand Herald*, 22 February 1923, p. 5.

Corbett, a leading Waitekauri mine manager,<sup>251</sup> they went to Waihi and within a few days found McCombie's and Lee's tunnel.<sup>252</sup> Had Nicholl been alive in 1939, he would have pointed out that his 'mate' (who was Robert Majurey, not Hollis) was at Coromandel, and would not be contacted until after Nicholl had found the Martha lode. Where Gordon was living in 1880 and 1881 is not known, for he was too young to be recorded in the electoral rolls until 1885, when he was working as an amalgamator at Waihi.<sup>253</sup> Gordon certainly prospected and mined at an early age, for he participated in the Te Aroha rush; with three young men, all aged under 21, he was an owner of the Our Boys claim, which they mined earnestly but unproductively for some months.<sup>254</sup> That he was mining at Te Aroha at the time he claimed to have been building a bridge in the Waitekauri valley invalidates his claim to have told Nicholl where to find the outcrop. In fact, Nicholl had already been told about it by the men he had grub-staked in 1875, and when standing on the summit of Te Aroha he had recognised it from their description.

#### JOHN McCOMBIE'S CLAIMS

John McCombie, whose tunnel Nicholl had inspected, published several accounts of his discovery to prove that he had been the first to find not just gold, but the Martha lode.<sup>255</sup> In 1902, he dated the start of his search to 'about the month of February 1878'.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> For his involvement in Waitekauri mining, see *Thames Advertiser*, 18 April 1876, p. 3, 15 July 1876, p. 3, 15 August 1876, p. 3, 31 August 1876, p. 3, 2 September 1876, p. 3, 23 October 1877, p. 3, 11 February 1879, p. 3, 23 April 1880, p. 4; *Thames Star*, 14 July 1881, p. 2, 7 September 1881, p. 2; for his acquiring shares when Waiorongomai mining commenced, see Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 30, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 23 March 1882, p. 490; for his life, see *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 501.

<sup>252</sup> *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 12 July 1939, press cutting in *History of Thames and Coromandel Peninsula: Newspaper Articles, 1937-1940*, Alexander Turnbull Library.

<sup>253</sup> *Tauranga Electoral Roll, 1885*, p. 11.

<sup>254</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 6 December 1880, p. 3.

<sup>255</sup> Own Correspondent [John McCombie], *New Zealand Herald*, 25 January 1881, p. 6; Own Correspondent [John McCombie], 'Ohinemuri Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 16 September 1884, p. 2; John McCombie, 'The Discovery of the Waihi Mine', *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 June 1894, p. 38; John McCombie, 'Looking for Gold', *Thames Star*, 3

McCombie was based at Waitekauri during the 1870s, where he was a publican from 1876 to 1879;<sup>257</sup> in August 1878 he was appointed postmaster.<sup>258</sup> In the following February he helped to combat a bush fire there, being one of its 'chief victims', and in August that year he tendered, unsuccessfully, to erect a bridge on the Waitekauri road.<sup>259</sup> The only report of his involvement in mining was in April 1878, when he attended a Paeroa meeting about prospecting and joined the Ohinemuri Mining Association.<sup>260</sup>

In January 1881, when he was prospecting at Te Aroha,<sup>261</sup> as well as being a newspaper correspondent reporting on this rush,<sup>262</sup> McCombie first published some details about his prospecting at Waihi:

During the past week a good deal has been said and written respecting the large reef on the Waihi Plains. Now, it so happens that I formed one of a party who spent six months in prospecting the reef alluded to and consequently [I] am able to throw some light on the subject. It is situated on a bald spur named Pukeuhau,<sup>263</sup> midway between Compston and Walmsley's farms, and is distant about 5 miles from the Owharoa mining district. It has a general north and south course, with an easterly underlie, and would strike the Aroha mountain on the eastern or Katikati side. It will average 25 feet in thickness, and outcrops for a distance of ten chains along the cone of the spur. We cut it in

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May 1902, p. 6; letter from John McCombie, *Observer*, 6 May 1905, p. 5; John McCombie, 'The History of the Waihi Mine', *Mining Magazine*, vol. 8 (1913), pp. 136-140.

<sup>256</sup> John McCombie, 'Looking for Gold', *Thames Star*, 3 May 1902, p. 6.

<sup>257</sup> Thames Magistrate's Court, Mackaytown and Thames Letterbook 1876-1896, p. 119, BACL 14458/1b; Mackaytown Police Station Diary, entry for 23 October 1876, BAVA 4898/1a; Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Ohinemuri Holdings 1875-1891, BCDG 11292/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 9 May 1877, p. 3, 2 October 1877, p. 3, 20 October 1877, p. 3, 24 April 1878, p. 3, 17 February 1879, p. 3, 21 February 1879, p. 3; Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 13 February 1877, p. 2; John McCombie, 'Looking for Gold', *Thames Star*, 3 May 1902, p. 6.

<sup>258</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 7 August 1878, p. 2.

<sup>259</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, Waitekauri Correspondent, 21 February 1879, p. 3, 23 August 1879, p. 2.

<sup>260</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 24 April 1878, p. 3.

<sup>261</sup> For his holdings during the rush, see Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 173, 181, 192, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>262</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 471.

<sup>263</sup> Pukeuhau in original.

many places along the line of the outcrop and proved it to be auriferous at every point of intersection. Having satisfied ourselves beyond the shadow of a doubt that at least 8 feet of the hangingwall side of the reef was payable, we then proceeded to drive a tunnel – which, I believe is still intact – so as to cut the lode 50 feet beneath the surface. This work necessitated 150 feet of driving, which two of us accomplished in the short space of six weeks. We cut into the reef a distance of 8 feet, at which we were obliged to suspend operations, owing chiefly to the want of shooting material. We now determined on sending a trial crushing to the Owharoa battery, but not being possessed of the means necessary to meet the cost of transit, we appealed to the Thames County Council, which body, ever ready to assist the mining industry, voted the amount necessary to defray the cost of conveying 12 sacks of lumpy quartz – about one ton and three quarters (35cwt) – which, after treatment at the battery, yielded *one ounce of melted gold*, value £2 10s 6d. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that we did not retort the silver, nor did we crush the headings, so that the above return was obtained from the plates, tables, and stamper boxes only. We endeavoured to enlist capital with a view to further prospecting the reef, so as to develop it sufficiently to warrant going to the expense of erecting a suitable crushing plant, there being an abundance of timber and water for battery purposes close at hand, but unfortunately, we failed to raise a single cent and were reluctantly obliged to give it best.

The Auckland capitalists, unlike their Australian cousins, would rather drop thousands in scrip speculations than invest one solitary copper in legitimate mining enterprise.<sup>264</sup>

His comment that he believed their tunnel was still intact indicated it had been some time since he had worked in it; he provided no dates but specified that they had prospected for six months and spent six weeks driving a tunnel. In August 1881, he stated that after prospecting at Waihi for six months in 1879, ‘the good reports from Te Aroha attracted his attention, and he and his mate left the Waihi, but with the full intention of going back again some time or other’.<sup>265</sup> (In fact, not until late October 1880 did ‘good reports’ come from Te Aroha and he left from Thames, not Waihi, to go there.)

McCombie’s second account was published in September 1884, when he revisited Waihi as a mining reporter for the *Thames Star*:

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<sup>264</sup> Own Correspondent [John McCombie], *New Zealand Herald*, 25 January 1881, p. 6.

<sup>265</sup> Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 15 August 1881, p. 5.

In due course “Pukewhau,”<sup>266</sup> the mound upon which the Martha company’s operations are in progress, loomed up in the distance. The first sight of this hill called up in my memory some lively recollections of the past. Some six years ago, when on a prospecting tour in company with a brother fossicker, I pitched my camp upon the site of where now are built the comfortable homes of fifteen or twenty miners. There were then no Europeans in the district, and the local natives looked very “pouri” [‘dark; sad’]<sup>267</sup> at anything and everything in the shape of gold hunting. The head chief of the Ngatikoes – Te Keepa – gave us permission to prospect the reef now known as the Martha, which we carried out by means of trenches cut across the outcrop of the lode at various places for a distance of ten chains along its line. Although the prospects obtained therefrom were poor, the character of the country upon both walls [of the lode] was all that could be desired, and we determined upon driving a level so as to test the reef at a depth of 50 feet beneath the surface. Shortly after starting this tunnel, we were visited by a number of hoary-headed aboriginals, who informed us that “Pukewhau” was a “Wahi Tapu” [sacred place],<sup>268</sup> and who insisted upon our suspending operations at once. This we quietly but firmly declined to do, and after threatening us with all sorts and conditions of vengeance they took their departure for their “kainga” [village or home]<sup>269</sup> and we fondly supposed we had seen the last of them. It was not so, however, for the very next day they returned, accompanied by about a dozen colored ladies, who were armed with “Taiahas” [long clubs]<sup>270</sup> and other weapons of primitive warfare. As soon as I caught sight of the advancing amazons, I knew from experience that we should be obliged to throw up the sponge. They impeded our progress for a whole week, at the end of which time Te Keepa ordered them home, and henceforth we were allowed to continue our work in peace.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Printed as Pukewa.

<sup>267</sup> P.M. Ryan, *The New Dictionary of Modern Maori* (Auckland, 1974), p. 35.

<sup>268</sup> Ryan, pp. 42, 49.

<sup>269</sup> Ryan, p. 16.

<sup>270</sup> Ryan, p. 40.

<sup>271</sup> Own Correspondent [John McCombie], ‘Ohinemuri Goldfield’, *Thames Star*, 16 September 1884, p. 2.

(McCombie and Lee did not uncover any burials; but in July 1882 the land court would decline an application for ‘a reserve for a burial ground on Pukewhau, being the Martha and Dulcibel claims’.)<sup>272</sup>

Ten years later, McCombie gave an even more dramatic account of how Maori ‘impeded our progress’. After blaming the women’s intervention on ‘the grasping greed of a certain so-called white man’ (meaning, sarcastically, an honourable man,<sup>273</sup>) he described the women attempting to seize a wheelbarrow from Lee before threatening them with their weapons.

Believing discretion to be the better part of valour, under the circumstances, we sought refuge in the tunnel, where we remained for fully an hour listening to the tirade of choice epithets that was hurled at us by the excited viragos outside. While this was going on we had prepared a couple of charges of blasting powder with pieces of fuse attached thereto ready for emergencies. It was a happy thought, because, finding that they could not lure us out, the natives combined their forces to pull down the debris around the mouth of the tunnel, and it looked as if we were going to be buried alive. Within what seemed to us a very brief period, there was not more than 12 inches of space between the debris and the roof of the level, and we now considered it high time to retaliate.

Stealing quietly out under cover of the darkness caused by the filling in of the entrance to the level we lit the fuse attached to both powder charges, and watching our opportunity threw them out of the small opening just in time to see them well covered by a heavy fall of earth from the sides of the open cuttings. Then we returned to the face of the level, where we had scarcely ensconced ourselves when we heard a terrible explosion outside, followed by loud exclamations of surprise on the part of the natives. This was succeeded by a general hubbub, which gradually died away in the distance, and then we thought it advisable to make our exit.

After digging themselves out, they saw the Maori retreating ‘in the direction of the East Coast’, but the following morning they returned. One of them accused the two miners of

desecrating an ancient burial-place, where his ancestors had been consigned to mother earth long before there were any Pakeha thieves in the colony. Should we persist in our search for filthy lucre on sacred Pukewhau, our *whare* and other belongings would

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<sup>272</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 12 July 1882, p. 4.

<sup>273</sup> Partridge, p. 1332.

be burnt, and we ourselves would be slung like pigs on long poles and carried out of the district. *Utū* to the amount of £1000 would not assuage the grief of his people for disturbing the graves of their forefathers, and in his early days he had seen pakehas tomahawked for a lighter offence. To show this old chap that we were not entirely unprepared for anything that might eventuate, we exhibited our guns and a revolver, which I think had a soothing effect upon him; but still, when going away, he threatened us with all sorts and conditions of vengeance.

After some days waiting for the harassment to cease, the prospectors decided to work at night.

Superstitious to a degree, they never gave us any trouble after dark, and the level advanced just as rapidly as would have been the case had we worked in daylight. Now they began a succession of petty annoyances extending over several weeks, and culminating in a complete clearance of everything portable in our *whare*

by a party of Ngati Pou gumdiggers passing through the district. 'For fully a fortnight we took turn about in watching the *whare*, and driving the tunnel, and thereafter we were allowed to continue our work in peace'. Within four months, they had driven the crosscut through the footwall of the lode, 'which proved to be 17 feet in thickness, and good prospects of gold and silver were obtainable from any part of it'.<sup>274</sup> In this account the time taken to drive their tunnel was nearly four months, not six weeks as previously.

In 1902, McCombie wrote that, in 'about the month of February 1878', he and Lee decided to leave Waitekauri to prospect the Waihi Plains, then unoccupied apart from a few Maori. 'Long before arriving at the scene of our subsequent adventures, we could see the quartz forming the outcrop of the now famous lode [the Martha] glistening beneath the rays of the morning sun'. As testing some rubble in a stream 'yielded a fair prospect of gold', they 'hastened on to the outcrop of the lode looming up largely on the cone of the Pukewhau<sup>275</sup> hill, which rose abruptly out of the plain to a height of about 250 feet'. After taking 'about twelve different samples, from as many places along the line of the outcrop, we retraced our steps to the creek,

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<sup>274</sup> John McCombie, 'The Discovery of the Waihi Mine', *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 June 1894, p. 38.

<sup>275</sup> Once again printed as Pukewa.

where we commenced reducing and testing and soon proved that the ore carried a fair percentage of the precious metals. Being highly pleased with these results we returned to the outcrop for the purpose of making a thorough examination'. As the lode was encouraging and several other lodes outcropped on an adjacent hill, 'the place afforded better chances of success than Waitekauri, where we had been "gold hunting" for the previous six months with poor results'. They cut trenches across the lode, finding 'fair prospects of gold and silver', and at the northern end of the outcrop decided to test the ore 'about 60ft beneath the surface. To accomplish this, it was necessary to drive a crosscut from the western side of the spur, a distance of about 200 feet'. After driving five feet a day and attaining about 80 feet, 'the grasping greed of a so-called white man, who wanted to become [a] sleeping partner in the mine', caused the Maori attack he had described in 1894, repeated this story mostly in the same words. 'Within four months of the time of our starting we had driven the crosscut up to and through the footwall branch of the lode', from which 'good prospects of gold and silver were obtainable from any part' and spent £10 transporting two tons to Owharoa for treatment. Despite obtaining good results from this trial crushing, their hopes of raising capital were destroyed by the 'mining experts', a phrase he placed in inverted commas. 'The whole concern was reported unfavourably upon by almost everyone who paid the place a visit, and who considered themselves authorities on everything appertaining to gold and silver mining. Briefly, we were laughed at by all the knowing ones of the day whenever we made an attempt to enlist capital'. Although not claiming to have continued prospecting after this disappointment, he implied they remained at Waihi until October 1880.

While waiting for something to turn up, we heard that gold had been discovered at Te Aroha, and we hurried away to the scene of the new discovery. During our absence our claim was jumped, and subsequently a plaint was laid against us for non-compliance with the mining regulations in respect to the continuous working of the claim. Thus we were obliged to relinquish the possession of a mine, which after passing through many vicissitudes, is now the premier one of New Zealand if not of the Australian Colonies, and this is the experience of most goldfields pioneers.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> John McCombie, 'Looking for Gold', *Thames Star*, 3 May 1902, p. 6.

In 1905, McCombie wrote to the *Observer* because its Thames correspondent had praised Nicholl for having discovered the Martha reef:<sup>277</sup>

In a recent issue, your Thames contributor says the famous Waihi reef was discovered by Mr William Nicholl. This statement is not in accordance with facts, because the Waihi reef was discovered, opened up, and the first crushing taken out therefrom by Robert Lee and the writer in the year 1878 – two years before Mr Nicholl’s advent on the scene. During our absence at the “rush” to Te Aroha, in 1880, our claim, now known as the Martha Hill, was visited, inspected, and “jumped” by Nicholl and party. Subsequently, they laid a plaint against Lee and myself to make their titles good, and the records of the case are still in the Warden’s Court, Thames, to prove the truth of my contention.<sup>278</sup>

His letter clearly implied they had discovered the Martha lode two years before Nicholl arrived at Waihi (in December 1880), clearly stated that their first crushing had been made in 1878, and implied that both McCombie and Lee had remained at Waihi until the Te Aroha rush. The claim that Nicholl had jumped his claim before laying a plaint against him could be proved by checking the warden’s court records; as nobody did, his letter went unanswered. One of McCombie’s obituaries would state that he had taken the first crushing from the Martha lode.<sup>279</sup>

In 1913 McCombie repeated that ‘about the month of February 1878’ he and Lee left Waitekauri for the Waihi Plains and wrote that after ‘several weeks’ of prospecting and fending off Maori opponents they spent nearly four months driving their crosscut. ‘Altogether we spent nearly twelve months on our prospecting claim’ (previously he had stated they had spent half this time.) After Nicholl found their workings while they were absent at Te Aroha, he was ‘so favourably impressed with the showing that he induced his backers to apply for several claims along the line of lode, and these embraced the area contained within our prospecting claim’.<sup>280</sup> (In fact, Nicholl was unimpressed with the quality of the ore they had uncovered, leaving that portion of the hill for others to peg out.

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<sup>277</sup> Thames Correspondent, ‘Thames Jottings’, *Observer*, 22 April 1905, p. 18.

<sup>278</sup> Letter from John McCombie, *Observer*, 6 May 1905, p. 5.

<sup>279</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 4 September 1926, p. 12.

<sup>280</sup> John McCombie, ‘The History of the Waihi Mine’, *Mining Magazine*, vol. 8 (1913), pp. 136-138.

In 1894, McCombie wrote that ‘while waiting for something to turn up’, by implication while they were still at Waihi, he and Lee ‘heard that Hone Werahiko had struck gold at Te Aroha, and we hurried away to the scene of the new discovery’.<sup>281</sup> However, in July 1880 McCombie became the landlord of the Warwick Arms Hotel in Thames,<sup>282</sup> which meant that in the latter part of that year he was living there, not at Waihi, and left from there for Te Aroha. In August 1880 he was on a coroner’s jury there.<sup>283</sup> (He continued to be a publican until June 1881, when he became involved in Waihi mining once more.<sup>284</sup>) Werahiko had not made his discovery known until October 1880, and by late that month McCombie was prospecting at Te Aroha,<sup>285</sup> taking out a miner’s right on opening day.<sup>286</sup> He acquired interests in three claims and one company.<sup>287</sup> Lee did not take out a miner’s right until March 1882 and never acquired an interest in any claims.<sup>288</sup>

Contemporary press accounts clarify when McCombie and Lee found their reef and which one it was. When Nicholl returned from Waihi in late December 1880, a Thames newspaper reported he had inspected the reef ‘tested by Messrs McCombie and Lee about twelve months ago’.<sup>289</sup> The following month an Ohinemuri correspondent reported Nicholl finding gold 800 yards from where McCombie ‘tried the same reef about two years ago’, but had a ‘much better show’.<sup>290</sup> In February a report about the Dulcibel (adjoining the Martha) mentioned that ‘it was from this claim that

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<sup>281</sup> John McCombie, ‘The Discovery of the Waihi Mine’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 June 1894, p. 38.

<sup>282</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 26 July 1880, p. 2, 8 September 1880, p. 2, 27 October 1880, p. 3.

<sup>283</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 10 August 1880, p. 3.

<sup>284</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, Licensing Court, 22 June 1881, p. 3, 28 June 1881, p. 2; *New Zealand Gazette*, 24 February 1881, p. 258.

<sup>285</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1880, p. 3.

<sup>286</sup> Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Miner’s Right no. 611, issued 25 November 1880, Miners’ Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1e, ANZ-A.

<sup>287</sup> Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 173, 181, 192, BBAV 11567/1a; Plaintiff Book 1880-1898, 3/1880, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 24 February 1881, p. 258.

<sup>288</sup> Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Miner’s Right no. 1878, issued 21 March 1882, Miners’ Rights Butt Book 1881-1882, BBAV 11533/1i, ANZ-A.

<sup>289</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 24 December 1880, p. 3.

<sup>290</sup> Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 25 January 1881, p. 3.

McCombie and party took their crushing'.<sup>291</sup> In early March a 'special reporter' visiting Waihi noted that 'about two years ago this locality was prospected' by McCombie and Dan Leahy<sup>292</sup> (a mistake for Lee), who were both 'residing at Waitekauri at the time'.<sup>293</sup> In late March a Waihi correspondent reported that a trial crushing of Dulcibel ore had shown

that one-third of the gold is obtained from retorting of the silver used in the crushing. At the time Mr McCombie and party crushed their trial lot two years ago the silver was not retorted, so that they must have lost fully one-third of their gold. It is a matter for regret that this fact was not known at the time, as McCombie would probably have remained on his claim, and opened up on the reef like the Prospectors are now doing, instead of throwing it up after doing so much work and seeking "fresh fields and pastures green."<sup>294</sup>

Clarifying when they made their first crushing, at a meeting of the Thames County Council at the beginning of May 1879 received a letter 'stating they had discovered a large reef which they thought would be payable. They asked Council for some pecuniary assistance to get a trial parcel to the nearest battery'. Council agreed, 'the cost not to exceed £10'.<sup>295</sup> One councillor (and prominent miner), Adam Porter,<sup>296</sup> commented that 'they were hard-working, honest men, who had been prospecting in the district for a considerable time past'.<sup>297</sup> Later that month they wanted to test ten to twelve tons of their payable reef.<sup>298</sup> In 1894 McCombie wrote that two tons of 'average samples' were treated by the Smile of Fortune battery at Owharoa 'for a return of 1oz 3dwt of bullion, value £2 17s 6d per oz. This in round numbers was 31s per ton, which did not represent more than 35 per cent of the intrinsic value of the ore'. Previously, assays of similar stone made by the Bank of New Zealand in Thames had produced a value of £3

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<sup>291</sup> Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 17 February 1881, p. 5.

<sup>292</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>293</sup> Special Reporter, 'A Visit to the Waihi Gold Field', *Thames Advertiser*, 7 March 1881, p. 3.

<sup>294</sup> Waihi Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 29 March 1881, p. 3.

<sup>295</sup> County Council, *Thames Star*, 2 May 1879, p. 2.

<sup>296</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>297</sup> County Council, *Thames Advertiser*, 2 May 1879, p. 3.

<sup>298</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 24 May 1879, p. 3.

14s per ton;<sup>299</sup> another of his accounts gave ‘over £4’.<sup>300</sup> As they had obtained ‘something like half an ounce per ton’,<sup>301</sup> they ‘did not anticipate much difficulty in obtaining the needful to exploit the mine, but, unfortunately for us, we reckoned without our hosts – the mining experts’: almost all of these who visited Waihi ‘reported unfavourably’.<sup>302</sup> As McCombie wrote in January 1881, ‘we failed to raise a single cent, and were reluctantly obliged to give it best’,<sup>303</sup> meaning abandon the ground.

When licensed holdings were granted in August 1881 for ground that included their claim, McCombie, considering his title worthless because it had not been registered, took ‘no steps to regain the ground’.<sup>304</sup> To determine ownership of the claims, Adam Porter had laid a plaint against McCombie and Lee who had pegged out all or most of the ground ‘over two years since, but whose pegging has not been abandoned’. Nicholl, on behalf of his Martha claim, was one of the plaintiffs.<sup>305</sup> At the hearing, McCombie

deposed that he and Lee were prospecting at Waihi in December 1878 and January 1879, and during the latter month pegged out two claims. (Witness indicated their position on a plan produced.) After marking out, they stayed on the ground for six months, doing work on what was now the Dulcibel.... When the Martha and other claims were pegged out, he made no objection, as he did not consider his pegging entitled him to any right on the ground. He did not now claim the ground.... He offered a gentleman connected with some of the present claims to give a notice of abandonment, but it was declined, as it was not considered requisite. – Robert Lee, the other defendant, also signified his willingness to give up the ground.

After discussion, the ‘defendants signified their assurance that they had abandoned the ground’ and agreed ‘to have it recorded that they had abandoned the ground in August 1879, and therefore as they had no

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<sup>299</sup> John McCombie, ‘The Discovery of the Waihi Mine’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 June 1894, p. 38.

<sup>300</sup> John McCombie, ‘Looking for Gold’, *Thames Star*, 3 May 1902, p. 6.

<sup>301</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 17 February 1881, p. 5.

<sup>302</sup> John McCombie, ‘The Discovery of the Waihi Mine’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 June 1894, p. 38.

<sup>303</sup> Own Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 25 January 1881, p. 6.

<sup>304</sup> Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 15 August 1881, p. 5.

<sup>305</sup> *Thames Star*, 12 July 1881, p. 2, 13 July 1881, p. 2.

interest in the ground since that date, there was now nothing to forfeit. The companies were now in legal possession'.<sup>306</sup> In his 1913 account of this hearing, McCombie omitted the fact that he had told Kenrick that he had abandoned the ground, simply recording that 'the Warden decided in favour of the applicants'.<sup>307</sup>

(Finally, this hearing clarified that although their prospecting had commenced in February 1878, only in December was a crosscut commenced. It was completed in January 1879, when they pegged out two claims. Their only test crushing took place in May. Although some prospecting in what would become the Dulcibel claim may have continued, they abandoned the ground in August.)

In 1894 McCombie wrote that 'the new owners not only made use of our level, *whare*, and other belongings *sans* fee or reward, but one of them told us that we ought to consider ourselves very lucky to get off without the imposition of a heavy fine for non-compliance with the mining regulations'.<sup>308</sup> Some of these charges may be true, for Nicholl or members of his party may well have used the abandoned *whare*, but Nicholl did not 'use' the level, having already decided that it contained only low-grade ore.

Five years before his death, in responding to Nicholl's latest account of discovering the Martha lode,<sup>309</sup> McCombie noted 'a few incidents which he has evidently over-looked'. Nicholl had failed to mention that McCombie and 'the late Robert Lee' had spent '18 months prospecting in the Waihi district, commencing in the month of February 1878, fully two years before the advent on the scene'. Nor had he mentioned their 200-foot crosscut nor that they had taken out the first test parcel. He claimed that Nicholl's party had 'located themselves in the bush whare constructed by Lee and myself, and he found tools, wheelbarrow, etc, in the crosscut', and criticized Nicholl for not mentioning the case held in the warden's court in August 1881 when his 'titles were in question on account of our prior rights to the ground for prospecting purposes'. Instead of providing the outcome of that case, McCombie instead cited the summary of the discoveries given in the *Geological Bulletin*, which gave credit to McCombie for finding the lode and

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<sup>306</sup> Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 12 August 1881, p. 3; see also Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 15 August 1881, p. 5.

<sup>307</sup> McCombie, 'History of the Waihi Mine', p. 138.

<sup>308</sup> John McCombie, 'The Discovery of the Waihi Mines', *Auckland Weekly News*, 30 June 1894, p. 38.

<sup>309</sup> W.S.C. Nicholl, 'Discoverers of Waihi', *Auckland Star*, 8 September 1921, p. 7.

said Nicholl and Majurey visited their workings ‘and were so favourable impressed with the show that they induced their friends to apply for several licensed holdings’. The *Bulletin*’s account concluded with a curious comment about the warden’s court hearing: ‘Rather than oppose this suit the original prospectors surrendered the ground’.<sup>310</sup> Why? If McCombie had justice on his side, why would he not have fought for his rights? To have cited his statement that he ‘did not consider his pegging entitled him to any title on the ground’ would have destroyed his case, hence its omission. Nicholl did not bother to respond.

### NICHOLL DEFENDS HIS ACHIEVEMENT

Because of the many rival claimants for the glory of having found the Martha lode, Nicholl had to defend his achievement repeatedly. In 1901 he wrote an article for the *Waihi Daily Telegraph* because ‘from time to time’ it had printed letters ‘from people laying claim to the discovery of payable gold in the Waihi goldfield. I wish to state that the Martha claim was the prospecting claim of the Waihi Goldfield.... Inside the four pegs of the Martha claim no sod was turned till I turned it’. After giving details of his discovery and its subsequent developments, he over-generously shared the credit of the discovery with others:

I don’t wish it to be thought that I am the only one that deserves credit for the discovery of payable gold in Waihi. My mate, Mr Robert Majury ... and also my brother shared equally in the discovery with me. With regards to the reef, even before I came to Waihi, many of the early-time prospectors had prospected it on the reef outcrop but failed to locate payable gold.

He listed eight leading prospectors who could confirm his statement, and concluded by stating that he had been ‘compelled to write’ because another prospector, Alexander Mackay,<sup>311</sup> had petitioned ‘for a reward for the discovery of all our Ohinemuri goldfields.’<sup>312</sup> I might as well tell you that

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<sup>310</sup> Letter from John McCombie, *Auckland Star*, 14 September 1921, p. 8.

<sup>311</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>312</sup> For an example of Mackay claiming to be the first to discover gold at Waihi, see *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 19 July 1901, p. 2; for his involvement at Waihi in 1881, see *Thames Advertiser*, 16 May 1881, p. 3; Waihi, 24 May 1881, p. 2, Warden’s Court, 22 June 1881,

I have known Alick a long time, and I have never known him to pan gold out of anything else but wind'.<sup>313</sup> Ironically, although Mackay's claim was ignored,<sup>314</sup> Nicholl's 1903 petition seeking a reward for having discovered a payable goldfield was rejected as well. Alex MacLean (sometimes McLean), of Coromandel, described as his 'principal backer' at the time of the discovery and who had helped him to find capital, was joint petitioner.<sup>315</sup>

(Alexander MacLean had assisted Nicholl not only because they had been fellow miners at Coromandel but also because, in April 1879, when aged 21, he had married Nicholl's 17-year-old sister Sarah Elizabeth Jane.<sup>316</sup> He became a mine manager at Coromandel, but, as he continued to live there, does not seem to have had a close association with Nicholl in later years, although he was a witness at his wedding in 1885.<sup>317</sup> They both had sons named after themselves, and these namesakes worked together at Waikino in 1906 and 1907.<sup>318</sup> MacLean continued to mine at Coromandel,<sup>319</sup> where he died in 1917.<sup>320</sup>)

The man Nicholl described as his mate, Robert Henry Majurey,<sup>321</sup> had arrived in New Zealand in 1870,<sup>322</sup> and mined at Coromandel during the

p. 3, 23 August 1881, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 2 June 1881, p. 2, 7 October 1881, p. 2, 8 October 1881, p. 3.

<sup>313</sup> Nicholl, 1901.

<sup>314</sup> *AJHR*, 1900, I-4, p. 2.

<sup>315</sup> Petition of W.S.C. Nicholl and Alex McLean, Goldfields Committee, LE 1, 1903/3, ANZ-W; 'Goldfields and Mines Committee', *AJHR*, 1903, I-4, p. 3.

<sup>316</sup> Marriage Certificate of Alexander MacLean, 8 April 1879, 1879/2734, BDM [recorded as McLean].

<sup>317</sup> Marriage Certificate of William Sharman Crawford Nicholl, 7 January 1885, 1885/191, BDM.

<sup>318</sup> Waihi Hospital, Register of Patients 1903-1910, folio 28, no. 89, ZABW 4935/1a, ANZ-A; Death Certificate of Alexander MacLean, 22 February 1907, 1907/375, BDM [recorded as McLean].

<sup>319</sup> For example, Bank of New Zealand, Coromandel Branch, Gold Dealer's Register 1874-1890, entries for 9 February 1881, 27 April 1881, 7 August 1882, 3 December 1884, 21 July 1885, 17 August 1886, 15 May 1888, 14 December 1888, 22 July 1889, 21 December 1889, 23 March 1890, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

<sup>320</sup> Death Certificate of Alexander MacLean, 10 March 1917, 1917/10577, BDM.

<sup>321</sup> The 'Henry' was never used. Although the family has long been known as Majurey, Majury was the spelling in almost all official documents as well as by Nicholl: Marriage Certificate of Robert Majurey, 27 April 1883, 1883/2837; Death Certificate of Robert

1870s. In 1879 and 1880 he was living on the Tokatea Claim with his brother James Arthur, also a miner.<sup>323</sup> Majurey, an Irishman from County Down, was aged either 27 or 30 in December 1880, depending on which of the ages recorded at the times of his marriage and death was correct.<sup>324</sup>

As noted, Nicholl did not claim to have found the Waihi field; what he did claim, repeatedly, for example as late as 1931 in a speech to the Waihi Old Boy's Association, was that he had found the first payable lode, the Martha.<sup>325</sup> Journalists agreed: for instance, in 1901 the *Thames Star* commented that there was 'some doubt as to whom belongs the honor of discovering the Martha lode at Waihi. We think that from the claimants who have yet stepped forward the veteran digger Willie Nicholl comes out on top'.<sup>326</sup>

In 1921, in his article on 'Discoverers of Waihi', Nicholl wrote that 'the only thing I am sorry for to-day is that the men that prospected there before me did not extend their energies 200ft further north, as they would have saved me a lot of trouble and had the battle to fight instead of me'. He concluded by reverting to the question of who had first found gold:

With regard to the first man that picked up the diamond and threw it away, there are so many who claim to have done it, and similarly it would be hard to say who was the first to discover gold at Waihi, but Robert Majury and I were the first to stay with it and prove its worth, and no man ever put a pick into the Martha claim before me. She was the prospecting claim of the Waihi goldfield, the builder of Waihi, and saviour of the Waihi Goldmining Co.<sup>327</sup>

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Majurey [recorded as Majury], 29 June 1902, 1902/4570, BDM; Nicholl, 1901; *Thames Electoral Rolls, 1879*, p. 47, *1880*, p. 26.

<sup>322</sup> 'Addresses Presented to Sir George Grey on his 74th Birthday, 14 April 1886, by European and Maori Residents of Auckland Province', p. 201, Grey New Zealand MS 275, Auckland Public Library.

<sup>323</sup> *Thames Electoral Rolls, 1879*, p. 47; *1880*, p. 26.

<sup>324</sup> Marriage Certificate of Robert Majurey, 27 April 1883, 1883/2837; Death Certificate of Robert Majurey, 29 June 1902, 1902/4570, BDM [recorded as Majury].

<sup>325</sup> *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 27 October 1931, p. 2; see also *Thames Star*, 14 August 1937, p. 2, and W.M. Wallnutt, 'Random History Around Waihi', *Ohinemuri Regional History Journal*, no. 30 (September 1986), p. 38.

<sup>326</sup> *Thames Star*, 27 July 1901, p. 4.

<sup>327</sup> Nicholl, 1921.

The controversy over who had first found payable ore at Waihi would continue into the next generation.<sup>328</sup>

### WHY THE *MARTHA* CLAIM?

Why did Nicholl call his claim the Martha? Before he died, he was living with his half-sister Martha McQuoid in Auckland, and one obituary reported that he had named the claim after her.<sup>329</sup> This may well have been the belief at the time, and she may have encouraged people to believe this version, which was repeated in other obituaries and later accounts.<sup>330</sup> Local historians have raised other possibilities: that it was named after his wife<sup>331</sup> (but her name was Mary Jane, she was then aged 17, they had only just met, and it would be more than four years before they married), or after his sister 'Martha Duncible Nicks'<sup>332</sup> (who was Mary Ann; Martha Dulcibel was her daughter). At Waitekauri, in the early twentieth century, it was believed to have been named after his wife, and that after their marriage ended Nicholl said that he had really named it after someone else.<sup>333</sup> As her name was not Martha, this belief indicated that her name had been incorrectly remembered once she left the district. Nobody noticed that Nicholl's mother was Martha Jane, or that his future mother-in-law was yet another Martha, an even less likely possibility. His memoirs did not give a reason for choosing this name, but in his 1901 newspaper article he wrote that the prospecting claim 'was christened after my niece, Miss Martha

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<sup>328</sup> Letters from George Nicks and C.A. McCombie, *New Zealand Herald*, 15 December 1962, Section 1, p. 6, 18 December 1962, Section 1, p. 6.

<sup>329</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 11 August 1937, p. 15.

<sup>330</sup> For example, *Hauraki Plains Gazette*, 11 August 1937, p. 4; Philip Rainer, 'W.S.C. Nicholl', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, vol. 2 (Wellington, 1993), p. 356; Nigel Smith, *Heritage of Industry: Discovering New Zealand's industrial history* (Auckland, 2001), p. 101.

<sup>331</sup> N.S. Climie, 'Pre Borough Times', in *Waihi Borough Council: Diamond Jubilee 1902-1962*, ed. Climie (Paeroa, 1962), p. 6.

<sup>332</sup> C.G. Sleeman and R.P. Bell, 'The Waihi Mine', in *Waihi Borough Diamond Jubilee*; p. 44; J.B. McAra, *Gold Mining at Waihi, 1878-1952*, rev. ed. (Waihi, 1988), p. 39, suggested the same 'sister', but correctly gave her second name as Dulcibel.

<sup>333</sup> Information provided at interview with Herbert John Morgan, Hamilton, 29 November 1998, who obtained it from his father, William Frederick Morgan, of Waitekauri.

Dulcible Nicks'.<sup>334</sup> As he had met his then almost three-year-old niece when resting with his sister while passing through Thames on his way to the Te Aroha rush in 1880, this was an obvious choice.<sup>335</sup> Martha Dulcibel's brother, George, in 1962 wrote to the press that 'the mine was called after my sister Dulcibel Martha Nicks, later Mrs Brodie. An adjoining claim was called the Dulcibel'.<sup>336</sup> The reason why George switched the sequence of her names was that during her adult life she was commonly known as Dulcibel or Dulcie, not Martha.<sup>337</sup>

### INFORMING HIS MATES

In 1901, Nicholl wrote that, after telling the Thames newspapers of his discovery, 'I proceeded to Coromandel to acquaint my mates, namely: my brother and Robert Majury ... and to obtain money to secure a lease of the ground'.<sup>338</sup> His return to Coromandel can be dated to 23 December 1880.<sup>339</sup> Although his find was not reported in either Thames newspaper, for he was keeping the discovery and its precise location secret until he had registered his claim, he told the Ohinemuri mining correspondent of the *Thames Advertiser* (not the *Thames Star*, as he recalled in 1927)<sup>340</sup> about his prospecting. This morning newspaper published, on 23 December, that 'a well-known prospector from Coromandel' had been at Waihi:

He visited the reef that was tested by Messrs McCombie and Lee about twelve months ago, which gave such a satisfactory yield at the Owharoa battery, but had to be abandoned for want of any assistance. This Coromandel prospector has gone back, to return after the holidays, to give this large reef another trial.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Nicholl, 1901; for photograph of Martha Dulcibel Nicks, see Henry Rawle, *Gold Country* (Waihi, 1985), p. 37.

<sup>335</sup> Birth Certificate of Martha Dulcibel Nicks, 23 December 1877, 1878/630, BDM.

<sup>336</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 15 December 1962, Section 1, p. 6.

<sup>337</sup> Information provided by Pamela Gilbert, of Takapuna, 11 November 1996; Martha's mother's will of 16 November 1917 called her Dubcible and omitted the name Martha: Probate of Mary Ann Wick, BBAE 1569/11920, ANZ-A.

<sup>338</sup> Nicholl, 1901.

<sup>339</sup> 'Day Numbers for 1880', Epochconverter.com.

<sup>340</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 16.

<sup>341</sup> Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 24 December 1880, p. 3.

Clearly Nicholl had not revealed the full significance of his find. The date of the report shows that he later recalled the amount of time spent prospecting at Waihi incorrectly. He could not have spent over a month doing so, as he claimed in 1935,<sup>342</sup> because this report was published less than a month after the opening of the Te Aroha goldfield. Since then, according to his various accounts he had spend three days exploring Te Aroha and Waiorongomai,<sup>343</sup> up to seven days in the Mangakino and Waitawheta Valleys,<sup>344</sup> and a few days in the Waitekauri Valley.<sup>345</sup> That meant a maximum of about two weeks at Waihi before his food ran out and he returned to Thames and then on to Coromandel.

In the account he gave to his son, Nicholl provided a detailed account of his trips to and from Coromandel, emphasizing the physical stresses he imposed on himself:

I struck out on foot to walk to Coromandel, a distance of 50-odd miles from Thames, to acquaint my mate of my discovery and to get him to come to Waihi to man his share in the ground I was taking up. I did the trip in 11 hours by running and walking. After consulting my mate, he decided to leave by boat next day, as he thought he might knock up on the road if he tramped it. I couldn't afford to rest, as I had to return to the claim as soon as possible, so I tied up the poodle thinking it might be tired of prospecting. He was a pest to me on a journey as I had to carry him most of the way, but when I tried to go without him, he soon let me know who was boss. He let out such unearthly yells that he brought all the neighbours crying, "Shame, take the poor thing with you!" I was beaten badly, as he had the public sympathy. So Topsy and I started on the road, but the muscles of my right leg were a bit strained, and if there was ever a man suffered hell with pain it was me! I arrived at the Claremont Hotel on the Karaka Creek at Thames, at 1 o'clock in the morning. My sister ... got me something to eat and drink and hot water to bathe my legs, which she rubbed well with salad oil. When I turned in, I slept till 9 o'clock the next morning, and finding my legs pretty good, decided to start at 11 a.m. to walk to Waihi. I arrived there at four the next morning, pulled my boots off and rolled up in my blankets.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 7.

<sup>343</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 13.

<sup>344</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 14; Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 5.

<sup>345</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 4; Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 5.

<sup>346</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 6.

'The road from Thames was formed up as far as Paeroa and the rest of the way from Paeroa was a Maori track with pukekos running across the track'.<sup>347</sup> In two of his versions, he wrote that Majurey arrived at Waihi two days later;<sup>348</sup> not so, according to the version given to his son:

The sun was going down when I awakened so I boiled the billy, ate a lump of damper and went to sleep again. I was wakened up by my mate opening the tent door. He had got bushed and slept in the fern all night about 200 yards from my tent. The overgrown Maori track was easy to miss by a tenderfoot in the dark. When my mate was rested, we went to the hill to see what had happened since I left. We found it well beaten with footprints, and samples had been taken from my workings. I went round my pegs and found that one claim had been staked on the north boundary of the Martha by the Hollis brothers of Waitekauri. My mate and I agreed to open up the find a bit and break out a crushing of 5 tons and get it dragged or packed to the Smile of Fortune Battery at Owharoa.<sup>349</sup>

On the following day, Thomas Gilmour, a miner who in 1891 became mine manager of the Waihi (formerly Martha) mine,<sup>350</sup> John Patton, who appears to have been a bushman living at Hikutaia,<sup>351</sup> Robert Potter ('Bert' to Nicholl), a miner who had been present at the Te Aroha rush,<sup>352</sup> 'and Jack Nicks (my brother in law) appeared on the field. They were the first I told of my find and they staked a claim on my north boundary and called it the "Dulcie," and then left for Thames'.<sup>353</sup> (In fact they named it the Dulcible;<sup>354</sup> everyone had trouble spelling Dulcibel's name.) In his last memoirs, Nicholl wrote that 'I found when I got back to the claim that a good lot of people had been there, and the fern was burned and that they had found my tools. But there were no claims staked out, because I had the

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<sup>347</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 9.

<sup>348</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 16; Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 7.

<sup>349</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 6.

<sup>350</sup> For his work diary from 1891 to 1894, see McAra, pp. 65-74.

<sup>351</sup> *Tauranga Electoral Roll, 1882*, p. 21.

<sup>352</sup> Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miner's Right no. 417, issued 25 November 1880, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880, BBAV 11533/1c, ANZ-A.

<sup>353</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 6.

<sup>354</sup> Nicholl, 1901.

good reef buried with sandy loam. My mate arrived two days later, and we started to unearth what I had buried'.<sup>355</sup> 'The cap of the reef had been rooted about a bit' by the visitors.<sup>356</sup>

His 1901 article gave a different account, stating that, after returning to Thames from Coromandel, he brought the above-named men to Waihi to mark out claims. They pegged out what in this version was the 'Duncible' claim, a name that in whatever spelling confirmed that it was indeed his niece who was being immortalised. 'This was the only claim pegged out for two months after the discovery. Further developments were effected when we discovered a seam in the footwall of the reef containing visible gold worth about 8oz to the ton, if saved by itself. The discovery caused a bit of a rush, which resulted in the pegging out of several claims'.<sup>357</sup> He recorded the shareholders in these as being Hugh Roberts Jones, nicknamed 'Manukau' because he had been mine manager of this profitable Thames mine,<sup>358</sup> William Hollis, a prominent miner, especially at Waitekauri,<sup>359</sup> James Smith, correctly Smyth, another prominent Ohinemuri prospector,<sup>360</sup> John Leydon, John McCombie, and Alexander Mackay.<sup>361</sup>

In 1937 he wrote of a moment of drama, in which another dog played a leading part, shortly after his mates started work on their claims:

A mongrel dog met me on the track as I was returning to Waihi and he would follow me as much as I wanted to drive him back,

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<sup>355</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 7.

<sup>356</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 16.

<sup>357</sup> Nicholl, 1901.

<sup>358</sup> See *Thames Advertiser*, 28 December 1874, p. 3, 15 February 1876, p. 2; *New Zealand Herald*, 26 August 1922, p. 1; for his involvement in the Te Aroha rush, see Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 170, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; for his involvement in Waihi in 1881, see *Thames Advertiser*, 28 February 1881, p. 3, Ohinemuri Correspondent, 2 March 1881, p. 2, 7 March 1881, p. 3, Waihi Correspondent, 10 October 1881, p. 3.

<sup>359</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 508.

<sup>360</sup> For his involvement in Te Aroha, see Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 193, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 20 January 1881, p. 111; for Waihi, see *Thames Advertiser*, 25 February 1881, p. 2, 12 March 1881, p. 2, Warden's Court, 23 September 1881, p. 3; for his life, see *Thames Advertiser*, 15 March 1875, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 12 August 1913, p. 4; *Observer*, 19 July 1929, p. 21.

<sup>361</sup> Nicholl, 1901.

and he claimed [me] as a friend and wouldn't leave me. When I got back to Waihi, I found that my brother-in-law Jack Nicks and John Patten and Bob Porter had arrived to start to work their claim, and we put up a nikau hut and a field bed on the floor, and we all turned [in] together.

At daylight the next morning we were roused up by the mongrel dog jumping into the hut on top of us, barking savagely. I got up and got my gun that was loaded in both barrels, and when I looked out and saw four figures running down the trail. I could have shot them, but I let them go free, so we had no more trouble with them.<sup>362</sup>

Presumably, the intruders were attempting to steal ore samples.

These early developments were imprecisely dated in his memoirs, but the sequence can be determined from newspaper reports. Early in January 1881, his party briefly became tributers in part of the Radical mine at nearby Owharoa,<sup>363</sup> no doubt to raise funds to meet expenses whilst prospecting at Waihi. On 17 January, Nicholl made the first public announcement of his find.<sup>364</sup> On 16 February, he applied for three acres, one rood, and 26 perches as the Martha claim at Waitete, as Waihi was then known after the stream near what, from 1881 onwards, was known as Martha Hill.<sup>365</sup> At the warden's court hearing on 24 March he was granted the claim, in his name alone.<sup>366</sup> At that hearing the Dulcibel claim was granted to his brother-in-law John Nicks, who soon transferred some of his interest to Potter, Patton, and John Costello.<sup>367</sup> (The latter was not a stepbrother of Nicholl but a publican who was a friend of John and Mary

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<sup>362</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, pp. 9-10.

<sup>363</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 12 January 1881, p. 3.

<sup>364</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 17 January 1881, p. 3.

<sup>365</sup> *Thames Star*, 16 February 1881, p. 3; *Thames Advertiser*, 18 February 1881, p. 2.

<sup>366</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1875-1882, folio 122, BACL 14397/10a, ANZ-A.

<sup>367</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings, 1875-1882, folio 121, BACL 14397/10a, ANZ-A.

Ann Nicks.<sup>368</sup>) Between 28 March and 27 May 1881, nine other claims were registered; Nicholl had no interests in any of them.<sup>369</sup>

### PRELIMINARY WORK ON THE MARTHA LODGE

When making his discovery public in mid-January, Nicholl encouraged others to visit his find and to stake out claims:

Mr Wm. Nicholl reports that he has discovered a reef in the Waihi Plains,<sup>370</sup> 50 feet in width, which, according to the prospects he has obtained, promises to yield several ounces to the ton. The reef is open for 90 feet along the cap, and there is a pestle and mortar on the ground for any inquirers to test the quality for themselves. From a bit of stone the size of a marble a good prospect can be obtained, even when no gold is visible to the eye. Gold is, however, occasionally seen in the stone. Mr Nicholl has taken up two leases of 12 men's ground. The reef can be traced for half a mile on top of the spur and runs downward on each side to the plains.<sup>371</sup>

'Considerable excitement was caused' at Thames by the report of 'a rich reef' being found, it was stated, 800 yards from the 1879 discovery with 'a much better show than ever McCombie had'.<sup>372</sup> The Paeroa correspondent of the *Thames Star* reported fleeting excitement at Ohinemuri:

A number of persons have been out to see the reef on the Waihe Plains, and most have returned disappointed. It was a matter of surprise to miners at Owharoa to hear of the new discovery, for, to the majority, the existence of the reef was known, and months ago a trial from it was crushed for a yield of 8dwt to the ton,

a reference to McCombie's crushing of 1879.

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<sup>368</sup> *Thames Electoral Rolls, 1887*, p. 6, *1893*, p. 12; Death Certificate of John Nicks, 17 July 1886, 1886/3670, BDM; Avondale Asylum, Register of Admissions 1902-1906, no. 3121, YCAA 1021/4; Case Book 1903-1906, no. 3121, YCAA 1048/10, ANZ-A.

<sup>369</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings, 1875-1882, folios 123, 128-131, 133, 136, 138, 141, BACL 1437/10a, ANZ-A.

<sup>370</sup> Printed as Waihe.

<sup>371</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 17 January 1881, p. 3.

<sup>372</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 22 January 1881, p. 3.

The quartz is seen cropping up on the surface and is not of a very promising character. About sixty feet from where the stone crops out a drive has been put in, and in it the reef has been cut. The footwall casing is a black looking quartz similar to that found at Waitekauri, and usually carries gold, but the middle of the reef, a body of quartz five or six feet thick, is of crystallised character, and very poor looking. Mr McCombie, of Shortland, prospected the place many months ago, but was not satisfied with the results of his labor. A claim has been marked out, but I have not heard of any of this being taken up.<sup>373</sup>

There was a small rush of miners from Thames, but ‘they did not consider the prospects sufficiently good to warrant their taking up more ground’.<sup>374</sup> These responses were typical of the caution with which the new find was greeted, the contemporaneous rushes to the new Tiki field at Coromandel and to Te Aroha receiving much more publicity. Some did take the find seriously, as in a brief comment on 21 January that if the stone was ‘only half as good as some people think, it will pay well’.<sup>375</sup>

According to Nicholl’s memoirs, two days after Majurey reached Waihi ‘I decided to take out a trial crushing of five tons and get it dragged to the Owharoa battery and run it through to prove its value’.<sup>376</sup> They had ‘five tons paddocked at the mouth of the drive’ three or four weeks before anyone else arrived.<sup>377</sup> His party was reported, on 22 January, to be ‘determined to put the stone to the test at once. They have started to pack a trial parcel to the Smile of Fortune battery’ at Owharoa. ‘An ounce to the ton is confidently expected’.<sup>378</sup> On the last day of the month, the Ohinemuri Correspondent of the *Thames Advertiser* reported the result:

The exact quantity of stone put through was five bags, being one bag less than a ton. Had there been a ton and the headings ground up, which has not been done, the yield would have been fully half-an-ounce more. The yield, 1oz 1dwt, is an excellent one, when the size of the reef is taken into consideration; and the prospectors are perfectly satisfied with the result, although at one time they expected a better return. In the claim the reef is cut

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<sup>373</sup> Pigeongram, *Thames Star*, 18 January 1881, p. 2.

<sup>374</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 22 January 1881, p. 21.

<sup>375</sup> *Thames Star*, 21 January 1881, p. 3.

<sup>376</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 16.

<sup>377</sup> Nicholl, 1921.

<sup>378</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 22 January 1881, p. 3.

into twenty feet.... The reef yields splendid prospects for the whole of the way. The smallest piece of stone taken out and pounded up fine will yield a good percentage of the precious metal; in fact, their show is second to none.

An unnamed ‘practical miner’ after inspecting Nicholl’s claim had ‘said he would not be afraid to spend £5000 in the erection of machinery on the ground if need be’. The result encouraged others to peg out claims alongside the Martha.<sup>379</sup> The other Thames newspaper agreed that the result was ‘a fair payable return, and when the road is made to the claim and quartz can be brought to the battery at a cheap rate, the claim will pay very good wages’.<sup>380</sup> However, it did not report developments in any detail during succeeding months, indicating that it was more cautious about the prospects than its morning rival.

Nicholl recalled that ‘this return started people thinking, and there were two more claims pegged out: one by John Nicks and party, on the Martha South boundary, and one on the Young Caledonian North boundary by John Leydon, James Darrow, and Evan B. Fraser’.<sup>381</sup> (Darrow had been a battery manager who was then a timber merchant;<sup>382</sup> Evan Baillie Fraser was an Auckland investor whose stated occupation was ‘gentleman’.<sup>383</sup>)

On the day Nicholl applied for his claim, a *Thames Star* columnist commented that ‘Little Billy is death on Waihe; “Never saw such a thing in my life. Biggest thing out. Worth millions. Wouldn’t take a pot for my show.” Your show, indeed! Why, William, you have not a peg to stand upon’.<sup>384</sup> The ‘pot’ being, undoubtedly, a ‘pot of money’, and the ‘peg’ comment, apart from being a pun on ‘leg’, suggests that others were already claiming credit for the discovery.

In mid-February, the prospectors, still working near the surface of the lode, considered

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<sup>379</sup> Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 31 January 1881, p. 3.

<sup>380</sup> *Thames Star*, 27 January 1881, p. 3.

<sup>381</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 16-17.

<sup>382</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 893-894; *Thames Advertiser*, 18 September 1879, p. 2, 10 March 1880, p. 3, Magistrate’s Court, 29 January 1881, p. 3, 26 February 1881, p. 3; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 21 September 1903, p. 2.

<sup>383</sup> See *Auckland City East Electoral Roll, 1879*, p. 9; *Thames Electoral Rolls, 1879*, p. 26, 1880, p. 16; *New Zealand Gazette*, 28 July 1881, p. 978.

<sup>384</sup> ‘Unemployed’, ‘At the Corner’, *Thames Star*, 18 February 1881, p. 2.

they have a good thing in hand and are of opinion that were a battery erected convenient to the claim nearly the whole of the quartz broken from the lode would pay well for crushing. They are at present engaged in breaking out a large parcel which will probably be taken to the Smile of Fortune battery to be crushed. During last week the indications met were very encouraging, and it was thought that the stone taken out was improving in quality.<sup>385</sup>

This stone, from their upper tunnel, was estimated by a mining reporter to be worth from two to three ounces to the ton.<sup>386</sup> On 23 February, Nicholl's application for a water race was accepted.<sup>387</sup> By late February, doubters who felt that prospects did not warrant the construction of a battery were being reprovved, and the prospectors were preparing to test 50 tons at Owharoa. To assist them, the council had started to build a road to the mine but, 'when about half finished, knocked it off on account of some misunderstanding between the Foreman of Works and the prospectors'.<sup>388</sup>

There are a great many visitors every day to see this new find. Mr Nicholl is losing no time in getting everything in good working order. A battery is to be erected at once. The road is good at present, and no time will be lost in getting machinery on the ground during the fine weather. A great many prospectors and working men went out to the Waihi last week to try their luck.<sup>389</sup>

So many visitors were inspecting the claim and, no doubt, taking samples that, when not working, the prospectors had to nail shut the mouth of their tunnel.<sup>390</sup>

After his visit, in late February McCombie could not

resist the temptation to say a few words in favour of the district, and of the few brave spirits who, despite the difficulties by which

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<sup>385</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 19 February 1881, p. 9.

<sup>386</sup> 'Waihe', *Thames Star*, 19 February 1881, p. 2.

<sup>387</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Register of Rights, Tunnels, etc, 1875-1882, folio 177, BACL 14431/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>388</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 26 February 1881, p. 3.

<sup>389</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 28 February 1881, p. 3.

<sup>390</sup> G.T. Wilkinson, diary, entry for 5 March 1881, University of Waikato Library; see also *Thames Advertiser*, 14 May 1881, p. 3.

they are surrounded, and the unfavourable opinion regarding the prospects of the reef expressed by certain Thames mining experts, are endeavouring to develop the mineral wealth of that region. The bald spur, which comprises the principal feature in the scene of mining operations at Waihi, is about 300 feet in height, and is strewn from base to cone with quartz boulders, being the *debris* of the immense reef running through it.

The first claim met with on the northern end of the spur was the Martha, ten men's ground, Nicholl and party proprietors. This party have driven several surface levels, ranging from 10 to 30 feet in length. In one of these the reef has been cut into for a distance of 13 feet, and upon examination I found strong blotches of gold showing in many places along both walls in the present face of the tunnel. Several large lumps of quartz, showing gold freely, were broken out in my presence. These were afterwards broken up into fragments, scarcely an ounce of which but showed gold freely, indicating that the precious metal is evenly distributed throughout the whole body of the quartz. This section of the reef, so far as it has been tested in the tunnel above referred to ... is estimated to be worth at least 2oz per ton, but stone could be picked therefrom to yield a much higher average.... The development of this reef is, of course, but a mere bagatelle to what it should be, and will be, but there is sufficient development upon it to convince those who are not afflicted with prejudice, that it is all the most sanguine believers in its worth could have hoped for.<sup>391</sup>

Because Ngati Koi's their cultivation reserves had not been surveyed, some of them tried to prevent prospecting.<sup>392</sup> On 4 March George Thomas Wilkinson, the Native Agent,<sup>393</sup> held a long meeting at the Ngati Koi settlement at Mangakiri, Waitete, to explain the advantages of a goldfield to them. 'They eventually agreed to have their present cultivation surveyed and removed from Gold Field Regulations so the diggers now at work at Pukewhau might not encroach on their cultivations'. There was no mention of any burial sites on what was now commonly referred to as Martha hill.<sup>394</sup>

Early in March, the *Thames Advertiser's* Special Reporter described the district and its claims in some detail. After a 'long dreary ride', he found

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<sup>391</sup> Own Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 25 February 1881, p. 5.

<sup>392</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 24 October 1881, p. 5.

<sup>393</sup> See paper on Merea Wikiriwhi and George Thomas Wilkinson.

<sup>394</sup> G.T. Wilkinson, diary, entry for 5 March 1881, University of Waikato Library; *Thames Advertiser*, 8 March 1881, p. 3.

a long fern spur running out into the plains, and the visitor at once perceives, from the burrows in its side, that goldmining is being carried on there. This spur, although of some length, is only a few hundred feet across, and can be ascended with little difficulty in about ten minutes. At the time I arrived there, work had ceased for the day, and most of the men had gone to Owharua to spend the evening.

No doubt in Mrs Read's hotel, and probably Nicholl was with them, for the reporter did not meet him, instead being shown around the claims by Potter and Compston. The first claim they visited was the Martha, ten men's ground situated at one end of the spur. The Nicholl brothers and Majurey<sup>395</sup> had by now driven

two tunnels into the lode, both of which are more than halfway up the rise. In the upper drive, which is, perhaps, 45 feet in length, the reef has been driven into for about 25 feet, and gold has been carried all the way along. At the time of my visit gold was visible in the face. The other tunnel is not many feet below ... but has not been driven so far. The lode looks equally as well as in the upper drive. In addition to the drives, there are four or five trenches on the claim, and in all of them the reef has been uncovered.... The lode has a different appearance to any yet discovered on this peninsula, and a person looking at stone taken from it could hardly believe that it was auriferous, let alone payable. The colour is white, and portions of it are very soft, resembling pipe clay.... On Saturday a start was made to drive a low-level tunnel on the side of the spur opposite to that on which the drives are situated, for the purpose of proving the reef below. It is estimated that about 120 feet will have to be driven before the lode is intersected, and that the work will occupy three or four weeks. Great interest will be centred on the undertaking, as it will decide whether or not the gold goes down. Should the lode be found to be auriferous at that depth, the persons who have taken up claims on the line of reef will have a good thing in hand, as the lode is so large - 40 or 50 feet wide - that 10dwt to the ton will pay handsomely. Nicholl and party are sanguine as to the result.

The reporter concluded by discouraging a rush to the district until Nicholl's low level had proved whether the gold went down.<sup>396</sup> Also in early

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<sup>395</sup> The typesetter could cope with Nicholl's name, but Majurey became McGoorey and 'Mr Nicholl's brother' became 'Mr Michalls, Arother'.

<sup>396</sup> Special Reporter, 'A Visit to the Waihi Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 7 March 1881, p. 3.

March, an Owharua correspondent wrote that, when he visited, he ‘saw a very good show of gold. I think there is nothing in the district to equal it, and I hope crushing power will soon be provided, as I have no doubt it will be the mainstay of the Thames’.<sup>397</sup> A few days later the Ohinemuri correspondent of the same newspaper wrote that the news from Waihi was ‘encouraging. There are rumors afloat that the present finds of Nicholl and others are as nothing to what we are going to hear of one of these days - something that will put the 200oz reef, alleged to have been found at Te Aroha,<sup>398</sup> ‘in the shade’.<sup>399</sup>

The *Thames Star* wrote in early May that ‘unless the Waihi folk are terrible “skiters” [boasters],<sup>400</sup> the new goldfield is really something wonderful. We hear of the prospectors’ show being worth 4oz per ton’.<sup>401</sup> Shortly afterwards, a special reporter of the *Thames Advertiser* inspected the field and filed an enthusiastic assessment of its potential:

The prospects in this district are undoubtedly excellent, and we may expect to see a large quantity of gold coming from it before many months have elapsed. The claims taken up there have been visited by numbers of experienced men - judges in such matters - and one and all agree that the district has a bright future before it and will prove one of the most permanent goldfields in the North Island.<sup>402</sup>

At the end of May, the *Thames Advertiser* sent its special reporter to Waihi once more to write another detailed account of the field, for ‘the Waihi gold discovery has been the absorbing topic of discussion of late, and opinions have been pretty evenly divided as to the payable or non-payable character of the same’. He reported that gold had been found both in ‘quartz of a brown decomposed formation’ and in ‘milky white, and crystalline’ quartz, but despite this ‘uninviting’ stone the prospectors had opened-up one of the largest quartz bodies yet found on the peninsula. This important

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<sup>397</sup> Owharua Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 7 March 1881, p. 3.

<sup>398</sup> For this false rumour, see *Thames Advertiser*, 20 October 1880, p. 3.

<sup>399</sup> Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 11 March 1881, p. 2.

<sup>400</sup> Partridge, p. 1080; printed as skighters.

<sup>401</sup> *Thames Star*, 5 May 1881, p. 2.

<sup>402</sup> Special Reporter, ‘Mining in the Upper Country’, *Thames Advertiser*, 14 May 1881, p. 3.

find ‘should be followed up with a sufficient display of energy and capital to prove its value’.<sup>403</sup>

### FIRST ATTEMPT TO FLOAT A COMPANY

At the beginning of March, ‘several gentlemen interested in mining matters left for Waihi Plains, one of them going with the intention of offering to erect a battery on certain terms’.<sup>404</sup> The latter were not revealed, but one day later it was reported that the offer made by ‘certain gentlemen’ had been declined.<sup>405</sup> One potential investor was Adam Porter, and another was William Fraser,<sup>406</sup> a former warden and investor in several mining districts.<sup>407</sup> According to an Owharoa correspondent, they seemed ‘well pleased with the prospects’.<sup>408</sup> In early March, a special reporter understood that negotiations were ‘pending for the erection of a first-class battery in connection with the Prospector’s mine’. Two unnamed ‘gentlemen have offered to put up a 21 stamper mill, with 10 or 12 berdans, and construct a tramway and flume, for the sum of £3000, on condition that they receive one-third of the mine’.<sup>409</sup> The following day it was reported that James Darrow and Henry Christian Wick had agreed to meet half the cost of a drive on the northeast side of Nicholl’s claim; if it proved ‘satisfactory’, they would immediately erect a 16-stamper battery.<sup>410</sup> (Wick was a prominent miner, battery owner, investor, and, in partnership with Darrow, a timber merchant who would become Nicholl’s brother-in-law in 1896.<sup>411</sup>)

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<sup>403</sup> Special Reporter, ‘A Visit to Waihi’, *Thames Advertiser*, 31 May 1881, p. 3.

<sup>404</sup> *Thames Star*, 3 March 1881, p. 2.

<sup>405</sup> *Thames Star*, 4 March 1881, p. 2.

<sup>406</sup> See paper on Harry Kenrick.

<sup>407</sup> For his involvement in the Te Aroha rush, see Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 176, 192, 202, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, Te Aroha Correspondent, 27 November 1880, p. 3, 17 December 1880, p. 3; for his involvement in Waihi in 1881, see *Thames Star*, 7 October 1881, p. 2, 20 October 1881, p. 3; *New Zealand Gazette*, 3 November 1881, p. 1442.

<sup>408</sup> Owharoa Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 7 March 1881, p. 3.

<sup>409</sup> Special Reporter, ‘A Visit to the Waihi Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 7 March 1881, p. 3.

<sup>410</sup> ‘Pukewha: The New Goldfield’, *Thames Advertiser*, 8 March 1881, p. 3.

<sup>411</sup> For his life, see *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 442; for his involvement in Waitekauri mining, see *Thames Advertiser*, 26 January 1876, p. 2, 15 July 1876, p. 3,

Nicholl wrote that ‘after the news got around Thames, mining magnates appeared on the scene. These gentry were Adam Porter, Jimmy Darrow, and Evan Baillie Fraser’.<sup>412</sup> In the 1930s he used the word ‘prigs’ to describe them,<sup>413</sup> meaning, in the slang terms of his youth, cheats and swindlers.<sup>414</sup>

They told me that their business was to try to get an option over the mine and build a battery of 15 stampers and two berdans, for a third share in the mine, providing we put a tunnel in through the reef at a depth of 50 feet below the surface. For this they were willing to advance £50.

They selected the site for the tunnel and where the reef was to be cut. I was to go through the reef 80 feet south of the point where I struck the gold on the surface. We agreed to this and walked into Owharoa and drew up the agreement and signed it at Mrs Read’s pub. Majury and I set off back to work next day. We were a good distance along the track before either of us spoke. Majury at last broke the ice by asking me what I thought of the whole business. “Well,” I said, “they have licked us.”<sup>415</sup>

In 1921 he recalled a longer response: ‘ “Well,” I said, “they have licked us all over, swallowed us claim and all, and I am just waiting to be digested. I don’t know how you feel” ’.<sup>416</sup> Clearly he feared that those who provided the capital would take control of his find and receive most of the profits. In 1927, he added another name to the party of investors, John Watson Walker,<sup>417</sup> a leading mine manager whom he always referred to as Long

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‘Waitekauri’, 11 August 1876, p. 3, 27 June 1877, p. 3, 25 November 1881, p. 3; for his involvement in Owharoa mining, see *Thames Advertiser*, 15 October 1877, p. 3, 19 January 1878, p. 3; *New Zealand Gazette*, 28 September 1876, p. 675, 23 November 1876, pp. 810, 811; for his involvement in the Te Aroha rush, see Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Applications 1880-1882, folio 102, BBAV 11505/3a, ANZ-A; for his marrying Nicholl’s sister Mary Ann, see Marriage Certificate of Henry Christian Wick, 17 March 1896, 1896/4016, BDM.

<sup>412</sup> Nicholl, ‘The Discovery’, p. 6.

<sup>413</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 10.

<sup>414</sup> Partridge, p. 922.

<sup>415</sup> Nicholl, ‘The Discovery’, pp. 6-7.

<sup>416</sup> Nicholl, 1921.

<sup>417</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 17.

Drive Walker because of his management of a famous early Thames mine.<sup>418</sup>

‘We started the tunnel next morning in earnest. It was good going ground, and we completed the 200ft inside a month. The reef at this point was 56ft 9in, with a little gold in the hanging and footwall, the balance of the reef flint’.<sup>419</sup> By late March the press reported the low-level tunnel was in 120 feet, ‘through first-class gold bearing country’. They expected to reach the hanging wall of the reef shortly, making the lode 70 feet wide, ‘one of the largest gold-bearing reefs ever opened up in the peninsula’.<sup>420</sup> One mining reporter believed the lode from wall to wall might be ‘upwards of 100 feet. A lode of this dimension would not very easily pinch out or be cut off by a slide’.<sup>421</sup> At the end of the month, they were crosscutting on the eastern side of the hill to strike the underlie of the reef. Having driven 155 feet, they expected to strike this in another 15 feet. ‘No less than nine leaders have been cut in this drive, averaging in thickness from six inches to nine feet’: their values were yet to be tested.<sup>422</sup> By mid-April, this drive was in 176 feet, 18 of them into the reef: that these 18 feet had been driven in four days proved the reef was ‘easily worked’. Most of it yielded ‘small prospects’.<sup>423</sup> Nicholl was driving from the hangingwall towards the footwall, and the shareholders expected to meet ‘the shot of gold which shows freely in the foot-wall of the lode in the upper working’. Should the footwall ‘prove as rich at this level as at the surface’, Darrow and Fraser would erect the battery immediately.<sup>424</sup>

Because the reef looked so encouraging, the prospectors refused an offer of £3,000 for an interest in the claim.<sup>425</sup> At the beginning of May, Nicholl’s party and the investors formed the first mining company at Waihi, the Martha Gold Mining and Quartz Crushing Company.<sup>426</sup> The prospectors were required to provide most of the capital: Nicholl held 7,000

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<sup>418</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>419</sup> Nicholl, 1921.

<sup>420</sup> Waihi Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 29 March 1881, p. 3; see also Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 18 March 1881, p. 2.

<sup>421</sup> Waititi Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 21 March 1881, p. 2.

<sup>422</sup> *Thames Star*, 1 April 1881, p. 2.

<sup>423</sup> *Thames Star*, 13 April 1881, p. 2.

<sup>424</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 18 April 1881, p. 3.

<sup>425</sup> *Thames Star*, 7 May 1881, p. 2.

<sup>426</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 3 May 1881, p. 3.

of the 18,000 shares, his brother Robert had 1,000, and Majurey had 4,000. Three other shareholders inaccurately gave their occupations as miners and their place of residence as Thames: Fraser, who had 2,000 shares, Darrow, with 2,000, and Porter, with 1,000. John Frater, a Thames sharebroker, had 1,000.<sup>427</sup> The directors included Nicholl and his brother Robert, Majurey, and Fraser.<sup>428</sup> Being ‘anxious to have the mine tested as soon as possible’, the syndicate’s first decision was to re-erect the Karangahake battery near their claim.<sup>429</sup>

A special reporter described developments in mid-May:

Waikato and Auckland capitalists are much pleased with what they have seen so far and are investing their money in the development of the field... With the expenditure of a large amount of capital the field will be thoroughly prospected, and will, in the opinion of men competent to judge, prove itself to be the steadiest gold producer on the peninsula.

In the Martha, better known as the Prospector’s, no work is proceeding at present in consequence of arrangements having to be made for the erection of a battery in connection with the claim. At the time of my visit the low level tunnel was locked up, and I was unfortunately prevented from seeing the “show,” but I was informed by a gentleman who saw it before the prospectors left for Grahamstown, and on whose veracity I can rely, that it is really first-class, gold being plainly visible for several feet along the drive, but looking much better in the face. The tunnel is over 220 feet in length, and the lode has been cut through for a distance of 36 or 40 feet. During the progress of the work several reefs were intersected, two of which proved to be auriferous. The country through which the tunnel has been carried is first-class working ground, and only six weeks were occupied in putting it in. There are 130 feet of backs, and thousands of tons of stuff can be obtained from the block. In fact, the supply of quartz is unlimited, and the Martha will be able to keep the battery going for years. The shareholders have, undoubtedly, a fine property, and should the quartz continue to maintain its present quality they will make their fortunes.

Fraser had broken out

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<sup>427</sup> *New Zealand Gazette*, 12 May 1881, p. 546.

<sup>428</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 3 May 1881, p. 3; *Waikato Times*, 30 June 1881, p. 3.

<sup>429</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 3 May 1881, p. 3.

several pounds of stone from different parts of the lode on Thursday and has taken them to the Owharoa battery to test. Tenders for the removal of the mill from Karangahake, and re-erection at Waihi, will be opened to-day, and no time will be lost in pushing on the work. The site chosen for the battery is less than a mile from the claim, and the motive power will be water, of which there is an abundant supply in the neighbourhood. The connection between the mill and the workings will be a tramway, which can be easily constructed, the formation of the country being very suitable. Should all go well, the plant ought to be at work within two months.<sup>430</sup>

Three days later it was reported that ‘the owners of the battery have been examining the claim, and testing the lode at the various levels, and one of them at least is not satisfied with the prospects’.<sup>431</sup> The following day, a Thames correspondent was

sorry to say that one of the proprietors of the battery which was to have been erected (I say *was* advisedly) in connection with the Martha claim has withdrawn from the agreement. I ought rather to say never really consented to the terms. The reasons given for holding back are that the prospects are not sufficient to induce capitalists to undertake the erection of a battery.

This step, he considered, would delay the erection of a battery, for if experienced men like Darrow, Fraser, and Porter abandoned their plans, others would ‘exercise great caution’ before agreeing to meet the cost.<sup>432</sup> In his final memoir, Nicholl gave a clear reason for the collapse of this first attempt to form a company:

We signed the option and made a start at the tunnel next day to drive the tunnel where they had laid it off, and we struck a reef on our way in, four feet wide and not a colour of gold in it. When we struck the hanging wall of the Martha reef it only had a few colours of scaly gold in it for four feet wide, but nothing payable. We drove through to the footwall, and there was only three feet of it that carried gold but not payable, so we sent them word that we were through the reef and that we wanted them to come up and see it. The reef was 56 feet nine inches from wall [to wall], and all buck flint, and all that carried gold was three feet on the footwall.

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<sup>430</sup> Special Reporter, ‘Mining in the Upper Country’, *Thames Advertiser*, 14 May 1881, p. 3.

<sup>431</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 17 May 1881, p. 6.

<sup>432</sup> Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 18 May 1881, p. 3.

They came up the next day and they got a fright when they saw it, and after prospecting it reckoned that we were worse than mad to be wasting our time on a buck of that kind. I told them that no reef carried values generally, and that she would have rich patches in her somewhere, and that I was going to stay with it till I had it tried, and that if I struck a patch I would have it carted to the Waitekauri battery till we had enough gold to build our own battery.

They laughed at us and paid us the £50.- and wished us luck and left for the Thames.<sup>433</sup>

In 1927 he wrote that where they struck the reef it was 'very low grade, only a little payable on each wall'.<sup>434</sup> The version he gave to his son recorded that 'it was good-going ground, and we completed the 200 feet inside of a month'. They 'sent word to the Thames that we had finished the drive, and Long Drive Walker came up to get samples and took them with him', clearly for testing on behalf of the syndicate. 'A few days later he sent up word that he had chucked in the sponge'.<sup>435</sup>

Once these investors abandoned their intention to erect a battery, 'Prospector' accused them of casting doubt on the value of the ore:

Those gentlemen who, not long since, spoke so highly of the prospects of Waihi, and who were to build a battery for the prospectors in consideration of receiving as a bonus one-third of that party's claim for so doing, have taken all sorts of care that the results of the test crushings at the Kuranui battery should become well known. In fact, the few pounds weight of stone treated at that battery have been magnified into as many hundredweights, whilst nothing, or next to nothing, has been said respecting the return obtained by Mr Porter, at the Owharua battery from 80lb of stone, which yielded at the rate of 5oz per ton. The parcel crushed at the Kuranui battery was treated or rather experimented upon - no [quick]silver being used in the grinding process; and considering that the gold is as fine as flour, I will leave it to the decision of those who are competent to judge of such matters whether the trial test was a fair one or not. The very fact, however, of Nicholl and party, and Porter's party, having obtained an average of *one ounce per ton* from separate trial crushings taken from the reef in question, and treated at the Owharua battery, is sufficient to prove that it contains payable gold.

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<sup>433</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 10-11.

<sup>434</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 17.

<sup>435</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 7.

‘Prospector’ cited McCombie’s account of the good gold he had obtained in 1879 to prove the value of the ore, and concluded that it was ‘quite evident, even to the most casual observer, that the old game of “Freeze out” is being played’. This game would fail, for the shareholders in all the claims would unite and, at their own cost, erect a small battery to prove the field was payable.<sup>436</sup> ‘Old Victorian’ agreed with this prophecy, writing that when Darrow and Fraser ‘discovered that the prospects are not good enough for them to risk their money over’, the *New Zealand Herald* rushed into print with details of the hitch,

thus damaging the Waihi as much as possibly can be done, and of course injuring the Thames in proportion. It appears that the curse of this field is the narrow-mindedness of the capitalists; they must have the whole egg or none, and they care very little about the future of the Thames. I have thought, many times, that Scrip Corner [where share trading took place] is the cancer of our township; the moment gold is found in our township in new ground, the shareholders rush to form a company, with so many scrip, and instead of working the claim, they work the scrip [shares], and generally, ruin is the result. If the Waihi was situated in Victoria, the shareholders would find plenty of capitalists who would furnish the requisite machinery for so much of the gold produced out of the claim and would never dream of demanding such absurd terms as those carried out in the Waitekauri battery arrangement; and such as demanded from the Waihi prospectors.<sup>437</sup>

At the end of May, after marvelling that 20 or 30 tons had not been sent to Owharoa for testing, the special reporter of the *Thames Advertiser* gave a different explanation of why plans to erect a battery had failed:

Arrangements were made between the prospectors and certain speculators for the transference of the Karangahake battery, the speculators to receive, in consideration thereof, a one-third interest in the ground and £3000 payable in instalments of one fourth of the crushings until the amount was liquidated. This arrangement progressed satisfactorily until it was found that the prospectors laid considerable stress upon the importance of their maintaining the balance of power in the proposed directory. The unsatisfactory system of working shareholders and managing

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<sup>436</sup> Letter from ‘Prospector’, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 May 1881, p. 3.

<sup>437</sup> Letter from ‘Old Victorian’, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 May 1881, p. 3.

directors was fully exemplified in the early history of this field [Thames], and the promoters of the proposed Waihi battery were consequently reluctant to assent to a repetition of arrangements which had been found so unsatisfactory in their experience.... It is nonsense to talk of grasping speculators, and a recurrence of Waitekauri and other experiences so long as nothing is done to convince those who would be willing to invest their money in crushing machinery that the necessary outlay is warranted. Dearly bought experience has taught the capitalist that it is an easy matter to be made the victim of unscrupulous or over-sanguine individuals. Instances have not infrequently occurred where these persons have made tools of the capitalist to further their own interests, perhaps in the realisation of a good round sum from shares made saleable only in consequence of the risk run by the capitalist. Not that we wish to insinuate that this is likely to be of such a character. We believe that the indications are sufficient to warrant the necessary outlay for machinery ... when adequate steps have been taken to prove the value of the discovery.<sup>438</sup>

This defence of the capitalists' caution was followed by a letter from Fraser, written to 'contradict false reports, and place the facts before the public'. He described anonymous correspondents as 'the warts upon a new goldfield, the mining parasites' who exaggerated its prospects 'in order to palm off their wild cats upon the unwary stranger', and explained nature of the agreement with Nicholl's party:

To pay them for driving a low level and cutting through the lode to the footwall; should the prospects satisfy us, the mine owners to enter into an agreement with us for the erection of a 16-stamper battery, we to receive one third of the shares in the mine, and 25 per cent of net profits until the cost of the battery was paid. The statement that we withdrew from all arrangements because the Prospectors wanted to have the balance of power is false. Mr Darrow proposed the directorate, and it would have been composed of three mine owners and two battery owners. I am sorry to say the first hitch occurred immediately after the Prospectors struck gold. One of them declined to drive to the footwall, and considered we should say "yes or no" on the prospects as they stood, even going so far as to suggest that we should accept a sum of money and retire from the matter altogether. On consideration, however, they decided to carry out their contract, but instead of having to go, as they expected, a distance of four to eight feet, the footwall was reached in about

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<sup>438</sup> Special Reporter, 'A Visit to Waihi', *Thames Advertiser*, 31 May 1881, p. 3.

six or nine inches. Mr Darrow having paid a visit to the mine after the footwall had been reached was the first to withdraw and offered me his interest. Before accepting a double responsibility, I determined to still further satisfy myself; and as Majury, one of the prospectors, informed me that other people were willing to take our places (on, I think, even better terms) I, too, was as expeditious as possible in giving my decision. Nicholl, on hearing it, expressed his regret that I should have gone to expense and lost time in anything he was connected with. He was strongly impressed with the value of his find, and I am glad to say that on my last visit to Waihi I found him of the same opinion regarding the future of the mine. I am sure no one wishes him or the field better luck than the writer of this. One of the warts accuses us of trying to freeze out the prospectors. I may inform this person that no one on the goldfield had more bitter experience of that process than - Yours, faithfully,

E.B. FRASER

P.S.- The battery contractors paid the prospectors their own price for putting in the low level, made them a present of a water right (or rather, the fees), and on withdrawing from the concern offered them at cost price the battery which had been purchased. So I will let the public judge where the swindle comes in. - E.B.F.<sup>439</sup>

None of Nicholl's party responded, and Nicholl's later writings placed all the blame for the difficulties in erecting a battery on the investors.

#### MORE TESTING

According to Nicholl's memoirs, when the investors told him that, as the sample was not payable, they were giving up their option, 'I was pleased'.<sup>440</sup> This was not just a retrospective view, for he had expressed it at the time. A Waihi correspondent wrote in late May that the prospectors had told him they were 'very thankful' that Darrow and Fraser had 'backed out of their arrangements re erection of battery, which, in all probability, would be nothing better than a second edition of the Waitekauri business' (a reference to a troubled attempt to erect a battery there).

Besides, they are now free to carry out their original intention; and that was to join the proprietors of the Dulcibel in erecting a small battery - say eight head of stampers - which could be added to in course of time. The shareholders in these claims are all

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<sup>439</sup> Letter from E.B. Fraser, *Thames Advertiser*, 2 June 1881, p. 3.

<sup>440</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 17.

practical men, and comprise an engineer, carpenter, and blacksmith; men who will be able to do the whole of the work in connection with the erection of the proposed battery at a comparatively trifling cost to themselves.<sup>441</sup>

In preparation for erecting a small battery, in late May Nicholl was granted a water race to provide motive power.<sup>442</sup> He told the *Thames Advertiser* that they intended to send five tons to Owharoa for a trial crushing. The ore would be ‘taken out partly from the upper, and partly from the lower levels, with a view of ascertaining the real value of the lode’.<sup>443</sup> Another report said it was intended to crush 20 tons.<sup>444</sup> By the end of that month, about 50 tons had been stockpiled ‘in readiness for the battery’, and the claimholders were ‘highly encouraged with the result’. The quartz being stacked came from the upper workings, and it was ‘estimated that the whole face of this peculiar looking lode will yield an average of an ounce to the ton’.<sup>445</sup> A Thames correspondent considered it ‘not improbable’ that another attempt to erect a battery would be made ‘either by the proprietors of one of the claims or perhaps by the proprietors of two or three conjointly’. The withdrawal of Fraser and Darrow ‘from the first battery scheme caused a good deal of disappointment at first, but this feeling’ was ‘wearing away’.<sup>446</sup> Nicholl confirmed this correspondent’s statement in a letter to the newspaper which it summarized. He expressed

pleasure at the arrangement having fallen through. He says the mine has been opened out at a cost of six months’ hard work and under great difficulties. Gold has been traced for 1000 feet, and satisfactory results have been obtained at a depth of 100 feet from the surface, so that he and his mates had no intention of leaving it.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>441</sup> Waihi Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 25 May 1881, p. 3.

<sup>442</sup> Paeroa Warden’s Court, Register of Residence Sites and Rents 1875-1886, folio 56, ZAAP 13787/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>443</sup> Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 25 May 1881, p. 3.

<sup>444</sup> *Thames Star*, 23 May 1881, p. 2.

<sup>445</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 31 May 1881, p. 3.

<sup>446</sup> Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 2 June 1881, p. 6.

<sup>447</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 June 1881, p. 3.

Nicholl's 1901 article stated that when the investors 'failed to complete their contract', his party was 'reduced to living on pancakes'.<sup>448</sup> In 1921 he wrote that after the 'happy release' he 'could see that there was nothing for it but to get our five tons of quartz dragged or packed to Owharua and crushed'.<sup>449</sup> Six years later he recalled a larger crushing. 'The only thing that was left for me to do now was to break out a crushing of 100 tons, have it carted to Owharua and crushed, and keep on until we had sufficient funds to build a five head stamp battery'.<sup>450</sup> He planned to 'work where I got the best gold on the hanging wall of the reef'.<sup>451</sup>

At the end of May, 'notwithstanding the break down in the negotiations for the erection of the battery, the miners do not seem to have lost heart, and are building comfortable winter residences, laying in stocks of provisions, and generally seem satisfied with their prospects'. The ore to be sent for a trial crushing should be payable, as gold was 'freely seen'.<sup>452</sup> Two days later, 'private advices from Waihi' stated that picked stone (meaning carefully-selected high-grade ore) was being broken out 'during the past day or so. As much as 2dwt of gold was washed from one dish of dirt'.<sup>453</sup> An unnamed 'gentleman' told the Auckland press that the Martha was producing 'better quartz than any yet obtained in the district from the low level', and prospects had 'improved greatly' in the past few days.<sup>454</sup>

During June there was much newspaper speculation about the likely value of the lode. On 8 June the *Thames Star* reported that a parcel of stone taken from the upper workings was estimated to be worth 20 ounces per ton.<sup>455</sup> This dramatic claim prompted 'Argus' to state that there was 'not a word of truth in the reported rich finds', which were 'merely an attempt to raise the price of certain shares, in order that persons who did well in the same line at Te Aroha may do the same there'.<sup>456</sup> When a miner who had just returned from Waihi supported the estimate,<sup>457</sup> 'Argus' responded by

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<sup>448</sup> Nicholl, 1901.

<sup>449</sup> Nicholl, 1921.

<sup>450</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 17.

<sup>451</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 11.

<sup>452</sup> *Thames Star*, 30 May 1881, p. 2.

<sup>453</sup> *Thames Star*, 1 June 1881, p. 2.

<sup>454</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 1 June 1881, p. 6.

<sup>455</sup> *Thames Star*, 8 June 1881, p. 2.

<sup>456</sup> Letter from 'Argus', *Thames Advertiser*, 9 June 1881, p. 3.

<sup>457</sup> *Thames Star*, 9 June 1881, p. 2.

asking why the prospectors did not take 40 or 50 tons 'to the Owharoa battery, only three miles away, if they imagine it is as valuable as represented'.<sup>458</sup> An immediate reply came from a miner, Francis Creighton,<sup>459</sup> who 'was present with the two prospectors and two other independent witnesses when the stone alluded to was struck'. They all were convinced the half ton taken out would yield from 18 to 20 ounces to the ton, and when he 'left the claim two days ago, almost equally rich stone was being broken down'. He challenged 'Argus' to reveal his identity, and attacked him for publishing 'false reports calculated to injure the character and property' of the prospectors.<sup>460</sup> The *Thames Star* stated that 'several disinterested parties' supported its claim about the great value of the ore, a man named Clarcken<sup>461</sup> saying that 'he saw "gold washed from the Prospectors' that rattled like shot in the dish," while Mr Mackie [Alexander Mackay?] saw "half an ounce washed from a dish of dirt." Neither of these gentlemen were interested in the Prospectors',<sup>462</sup> meaning that they did not own any shares.

'Argus' replied that he did not want to damage the field, just wanting 'the truth told, and not lies, for the benefit of the share transactions',<sup>463</sup> and fell silent for the remainder of the month. One of his critics criticised his 'lame and simpering remarks' and ignorance of mining, while a lawyer with shares in two claims stressed that the prospectors and claimholders were 'so well satisfied with their chances' that they did not want to part with their interests unless 'necessary to provide funds'.<sup>464</sup> The *Thames Star* agreed that 20 ounces to the ton was a high average, and 'would be inclined to take the statement of our correspondent with caution were he not backed up by numbers of totally disinterested parties. The gold is there right enough'.<sup>465</sup> As a parting shot, 'Miner' of Waihi wrote that claimholders were

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<sup>458</sup> Letter from 'Argus', *Thames Advertiser*, 10 June 1881, p. 2.

<sup>459</sup> See Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 15 November 1888, p. 3, 23 March 1888, p. 2, 11 May 1888, p. 2, 17 April 1891, p. 2; advertisement, *Thames Advertiser*, 4 April 1888, p. 3.

<sup>460</sup> Letter from F[rancis] Creighton, *Thames Star*, 10 June 1881, p. 2.

<sup>461</sup> Either James, John, or Owen Clarcken, all Thames miners: *Thames Electoral Roll, 1882*, p. 4.

<sup>462</sup> Paeroa Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 10 June 1881, p. 2.

<sup>463</sup> Letter from 'Argus', *Thames Advertiser*, 11 June 1881, p. 2.

<sup>464</sup> Letters from F[rancis] Creighton and J[oshua] Cuff, in *Thames Star*, 11 June 1881, p. 2.

<sup>465</sup> 'Mining Review of the Week', *Thames Star*, 11 June 1881, p. 2.

‘determined in most instances’ to give their ground ‘a fair trial before asking outsiders to help them, as could be seen from the work being done. Hundreds of feet were being driven in the mines, which was ‘creditable to the owners’ and proved ‘their faith in the district’.<sup>466</sup> This controversy over the value of a new goldfield was typical and could only be resolved by the crushing of large and representative samples.

The delay in testing the ore was caused by the poor state of the roads, damaged by recent bad weather.<sup>467</sup> The *Thames Star* added that using Maori carters meant ‘rather slow work’, which does not agree with Nicholl’s recollection that a farmer named Marsh did the carting.<sup>468</sup> This newspaper first reported that ‘in the opinion of a competent authority’ the five tons would yield at least five ounces to the ton, and nine days later that it would produce over three ounces.<sup>469</sup> The *Thames Advertiser* wrote that ‘a large portion of stone’ had been stockpiled, that gold was seen in it, and that ‘a yield of several ounces’ was expected.<sup>470</sup> ‘Argus’ continued to doubt that 20 ounces was likely, and continued to regret that the prospectors would not take 50 tons of their best ore to Owharua ‘to demonstrate its richness’.<sup>471</sup> At the end of the month, a Thames correspondent anticipated that the ore should return over three ounces.<sup>472</sup>

On 2 July the *Thames Star* reported that because of the nature of the ground it was possible to drive 12 feet a day ‘at a cost of from 3s to 5s per foot’. The work done so far had fully tested its value.

The first discovery of gold was made on the northern boundary of the mine, and at this point a tunnel has been driven into the reef for a distance of 16 feet, the quartz showing gold freely and yielding stone which it is estimated will average, when crushed, from 10 to 15oz per ton at lowest estimate.

At a point 30 feet below this a second tunnel has been constructed, for a distance of 60 feet, and here the lode, which is

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<sup>466</sup> Letter from ‘Miner’, *Thames Star*, 16 June 1881, p. 2.

<sup>467</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 22 June 1881, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 29 June 1881, p. 2; *New Zealand Herald*, 1 July 1881, p. 6.

<sup>468</sup> Nicholl, ‘The Discovery’, p. 7; *Thames Star*, 29 June 1881, p. 2.

<sup>469</sup> Waitete Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 20 June 1881, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 29 June 1881, p. 2.

<sup>470</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 22 June 1881, p. 3.

<sup>471</sup> Letter from ‘Argus’, *Thames Advertiser*, 30 June 1881, p. 3.

<sup>472</sup> Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 1 July 1881, p. 6.

about 4 feet in thickness, has been cut and stone of an exceedingly rich character is now being obtained.

Altogether the reef has been opened out at no less than seven separate places within the boundaries of the Martha Claim, and at each point stone averaging 2 to 3oz per ton has been obtained from the surface.

In order to prove the permanent value of these discoveries, a third tunnel has been driven from a low level on the southern boundary of the Claim for a distance of 200 feet. In this level the reef has been traversed through a width of 37 feet, and quartz of an equally rich character as that in the upper levels is being obtained, thus proving payable stone to exist to a depth of over *one hundred feet downward from the surface*.

It is further proposed to open out a low-level tunnel (below the third), which will give about 250 feet of "backs" on the reef.

The character of the reef as showing in the lower workings of the Martha claim may thus be described:- It forms a well-defined, compact body of white friable quartz of over 37 [feet] in width, and for a distance of 25 feet gold is freely disseminated throughout the stone, which in the richest portion, which extends for about nine feet towards the footwall, the stone, which shows gold freely, is estimated to yield throughout – taking a low estimate – from 2oz to 3oz per ton, the gold being of a coarse, nuggety character, and of first-rate quality.

Unlike most formations of its kind, the Waihi reef is entirely free from all deleterious minerals, so that the process of saving the gold may be carried on with the minimum of loss.

Setting aside the present rich character of the stone now being obtained, it is calculated that, from the vast amount of quartz easily accessible and workable at a cheap rate, a percentage of gold equal to an average yield of 8dwt to 10dwt per ton would secure a handsome and permanent dividend.

Owing to the friable character of the reef, which requires no blasting, it is estimated that as much as 30 tons of payable quartz could be taken out per day from the present workings of the mine, and that before the erection of the battery at least 1000 tons of stone could be stacked.

The cost of mining the stone would not exceed 1s 6d per ton, and 2s 6d for crushing would bring the cost per ton of stone put through the machine up to about 4s.

It is further stated that the erection of the Battery and Machinery will not exceed £1500; and, as the Mine is already sufficiently opened out for the supplying of an adequate quantity of stone to keep the plant going, it is anticipated that no more than one-half of the amount it is proposed to raise will be required.<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> *Thames Star*, 2 July 1881, p. 2.

On 11 July, the *Thames Advertiser* wrote that, ‘if the report which was current’ at Thames was true, ‘the owners of the Martha claim at Waihi are certain of making their fortunes. It is said that the trial crushing’ had ‘yielded 22oz 15dwt of gold, or at the rate of four ounces to the ton. If the report is correct the return is a splendid one and sets at rest all doubts as to the auriferousness of the main lodes in the Waihi district’.<sup>474</sup> In the same issue, its editorial complained of the Thames goldfield being neglected in favour of the imagined prospects of new find.

The almost certain continuance of known rich lodes goes for nothing in the face of prospects of a questionable character elsewhere, because there are a class of adventurers who make periodical “rises” out of the credulity of investors by magnifying the prospects of these untried localities. Legitimate speculation is not in their line. The bulls and bears of the field would have little or no occupation through such undertakings as the one we have suggested, hence it will receive no favour at their hands. They are interested in keeping before the mind’s eye of the investor some will o’ the wisp rather than a legitimate venture. They encourage the marking out of ground and the formation of paper companies for out-of-the-way places rather than advance the welfare of the old field, with its vast resources lying undeveloped.<sup>475</sup>

Responding immediately to this editorial, ‘Waitete’ complained that the newspaper seemed to have ‘made a dead set [absolutely against]<sup>476</sup> on Waihi, why or wherefore cannot be ascertained. It may be that the prospectors, respecting their Sunday’s rest, refused to allow that paper’s “own” to inspect their works on that day’. He wrote that this newspaper appeared to disbelieve the report of the first crushing, just received, ‘although the news was brought into town by a near relative of the leading mine manager of this field. This in itself is sufficient evidence of there being some animus on the part of the paper in question’.<sup>477</sup>

The following day’s editorial described ‘Waitete’ as ‘a blowhard’. ‘As to our dead-set against Waihi, that only exists in the weak intellect of “Waitete,” who is either fool or knave to jump to such a conclusion. If we

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<sup>474</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 11 July 1881, p. 3.

<sup>475</sup> Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 11 July 1881, p. 3.

<sup>476</sup> *The Free Dictionary*: Google.

<sup>477</sup> Letter from ‘Waitete’, *Thames Star*, 11 July 1881, p. 2.

must disclose the locality referred to it was the 'Tiki', a new goldfield to the south of Coromandel township, 'and not Waihi, because we have witnessed the exertions of the Auckland people to crack up that district at the expense of the Thames'. Judging by 'Waitete's' letter, it now expected 'to see rival "bulls" button-holing Queen-street pedestrians and singing the praises of newly pegged out areas in that promising locality'.<sup>478</sup> In the same issue, the official result of the long-awaited trial was reported in breathless tones in its 'Mining Matters' column:

MARTHA (Waihi). - The crushing of five tons of stuff from this mine gave the excellent return of 22oz 9dwt retorted gold, which was reduced after melting to 21oz 17dwt. The gold was lodged yesterday morning at the Bank of New Zealand, and an assay by Mr [Thomas] Heron [assayer for this bank at Thames]<sup>479</sup> disclosed the fact that its value was £3 7s 6d per ounce. The intelligence of the astounding price paid for the gold speedily got abroad, and the splendid prospects of the district was the principal topic of the day. In this district the highest price ever realised for gold has been for that obtained in the Tararu and Karaka Creeks, which has never been valued at more than about £3 6s per ounce. The extraordinary price of the Waihi gold seems therefore still more brilliant by contrast. In the face of this there can be no reasonable doubt but that there is a great future in store for that district. Even if the present average yield of the quartz (four ounces to the ton) is not sustained - which there is no reason to suppose will not be the case - dirt of the lowest possible grade can be made to pay handsomely as soon as the battery is erected.<sup>480</sup>

In his next letter, 'Waitete' accused the newspaper of 'venting some personal spite. It very clearly appears from the article in this morning's paper that a *particular person* was aimed at'. That it 'wilfully distorted the truth respecting the Waihi field' was proved by that day's report of the Martha crushing 'untruthfully' giving 'the value of the gold as £3 7s 6d, whereas the assay of Mr Heron was £3 14s 6s, the price paid by the Bank of New Zealand for the parcel'.<sup>481</sup> The newspaper's monthly summary of developments on the goldfields did correct this report, giving the average value as nearly 4 1/2 ounces per ton, worth £3 14s 6d per ounce, the same

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<sup>478</sup> Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 12 July 1881, p. 3.

<sup>479</sup> *Thames Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 20.

<sup>480</sup> 'Mining Matters', *Thames Advertiser*, 12 July 1881, p. 3.

<sup>481</sup> Letter from 'Waitete', *Thames Star*, 12 July 1881, p. 2.

figure as given in Nicholl's 1901 account.<sup>482</sup> It described the result as 'an unparalleled price for gold in this portion of the province, which has seldom realised more than £3 5s, while the general average does not exceed £2 12s per ounce'. Excitement had been 'increased to the highest pitch'.<sup>483</sup> (This excitement did not extend to Auckland, where the *Herald's* Monthly Summary of the goldfields reported that 'there has been little change of any moment at the Waihi'.<sup>484</sup>) The *Thames Star* wrote an editorial on the 'excellent yield', which 'should set at rest the carpings of some persons who have consistently run down the new field, and in many other ways discredited the statements made by the prospectors and others interested in the district'.<sup>485</sup>

The account Nicholl gave to his son described how this test was made after the failure of the investors to erect a battery:

I could see there was nothing for it but to get our 5 tons of quartz dragged or packed to Owcharoa. I saw the Farmer boys and they agreed to crush it for me, and I also went to see Mr Marsh, a farmer at Turner's Hill,<sup>486</sup> and he agreed to drag it if it was possible. On my way back I bought 30 sacks from [James] Hosie at Owcharoa,<sup>487</sup> made a pack of them and started for Waihi next day. We filled and tied them, and Marsh came next day with two horses, a sledge and a trolley. He broke a trail through the fern with dragging his sledge along the old Maori track and finished getting the 30 sacks of quartz into Owcharoa in five days. Mr William Farmer<sup>488</sup> attended to the treatment of the quartz and the result of the crushing was 5 ounces to the ton. We had 25 ounces of gold valued at £3.16.6 per ounce, this being the richest value bullion found in any reef in the northern goldfields. People doubted the truth of it and sent a yarn round Thames that I

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<sup>482</sup> Nicholl, 1901.

<sup>483</sup> 'Monthly Summary', *Thames Advertiser*, 16 July 1881, p. 3.

<sup>484</sup> 'Monthly Summary', *New Zealand Herald*, 15 August 1881, p. 5.

<sup>485</sup> *Thames Star*, 11 July 1881, p. 2.

<sup>486</sup> Presumably William Marsh, a farmer of Otara, Ohinemuri, in 1880: *Thames Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 27; according to Nicholl's elder son, he was a farmer at Karangahake: letter from G.G. Nicholl, *Auckland Star*, 16 September 1921, p. 3.

<sup>487</sup> A miner at Owcharoa: *Thames Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 21.

<sup>488</sup> James William Farmer of Owcharoa was recorded in the electoral roll as a bushman, and Daniel and Samuel, of the same address, were miners: *Tauranga Electoral Roll, 1882*, p. 9. Nicholl's elder son confirmed that William Farmer of Owcharoa had done the crushing: letter from G.G. Nicholl, *Auckland Star*, 16 September 1921, p. 3.

salted my crushings with sovereigns. I heard a group of men talking on Scrip Corner when I was on my way to the bank with my gold, but did not know they were alluding to me.<sup>489</sup>

In 1921 he phrased the last sentence slightly: 'I heard a group of men on the footpath at the scrip corner at the Thames while on my way to the bank with my gold talking of salting with sovereigns, but luckily I did not know it was me they were alluding to'.<sup>490</sup> Six years later he wrote that the 30 sacks held only about four tons and that the 24 ounces obtained (according to this account) was not 'a fair trial, it was run through very coarse mesh gratings and I suppose only half of the gold was saved'.<sup>491</sup> Later he wrote that with a 'modern appliance it would have yielded three times as much'.<sup>492</sup> This yield 'enabled us to hang out longer'.<sup>493</sup>

### THE SECOND ATTEMPT TO FORM A COMPANY

For his son, Nicholl wrote that, at the time he overheard the men at Scrip Corner doubting his honesty, he

had walked through from Owharoa that day. The only road was from Puriri to Thames but from Paeroa there was only a bridle track along the foothills. After settling with the bank, I made my way to the Claremont Hotel, dog-tired. I drank a long beer and, before my sister had finished cooking me a meal, I was in good enough spirits to take on the return journey. I started off next morning as fresh as a lark for Waihi. When I fetched up at Owharoa that night my mate was there, so I stayed in Mrs Read's pub and had a really jolly time.

Next morning we started off for Waihi to get ready to break out a 50-ton crushing. We were cutting out a paddock to stow the quartz when we saw a man with an overcoat on and wearing long whiskers coming up the track towards out workings. He introduced himself as Kerry Nicholls<sup>494</sup> and told us he was there

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<sup>489</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 7.

<sup>490</sup> Nicholl, 1921.

<sup>491</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 16-17.

<sup>492</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 8.

<sup>493</sup> Nicholl, 1901.

<sup>494</sup> For photograph of James Henry Kerry Nicholls, see title page of his *The King Country; or, Explorations in New Zealand. A narrative of 600 miles of travel through Maoriland* (London, 1884).

to try to get an option over the claim and asked if we would be willing to allow him two months to find the money to build a battery and float a company of £15,000 in £1 shares for a third interest in the mine.<sup>495</sup>

In August, the prospectors recalled that this first meeting with James Henry Kerry Nicholls on the Martha claim had taken place in May.<sup>496</sup> Kerry Nicholls, who had worked as a geologist in Australia before elected a Fellow of the Geological Society in 1876, professed to be greatly impressed with the prospects.<sup>497</sup> Although the party signed an agreement with him on 3 June,<sup>498</sup> the first announcement of this was not published until ten days later, when the *Thames Advertiser* was 'pleased to learn that a battery at Waihi' would 'soon be an established fact'. Kerry Nicholls, correctly described as 'a Ballarat speculator',<sup>499</sup> with 'one or two others whose names have not transpired', had purchased the Karangahake battery which Darrow and Fraser had intended to move to Waihi, and tenders for its removal and re-erection would 'be called for forthwith'. Having 'tested large quantities of the dirt' during the past month, he was 'satisfied with the prospects'.<sup>500</sup>

Kerry Nicholls' testing indicates that he was the man who, according to Majurey's statement to Fraser, had offered better terms.<sup>501</sup> When they were negotiating with Kerry Nicholls to form a company, the splendid result from the trial crushing was yet to be obtained. In fact, between May and July Nicholl and party negotiated with three groups of speculators, during most of that time having discussions with two of these groups simultaneously. Nicholl's 1927 memoirs described how the arrangement to form a second company was made:

We started to break out the crushing and had six or seven tons of ore broken out when a man by the name of J.H. Kerry Nicholls

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<sup>495</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 7.

<sup>496</sup> Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 August 1881, p. 3.

<sup>497</sup> Letters from J.H. Nicholls, 'A Fellow of the Geological Society', and J.H. Nicholls, *New Zealand Herald*, 23 October 1881, p. 3, 25 October 1881, p. 3, 26 October 1881, p. 6.

<sup>498</sup> Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 August 1881, p. 3.

<sup>499</sup> See *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1881, p. 3, for confirmation that Kerry Nicholls had speculated in Ballarat mining.

<sup>500</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 13 June 1881, p. 3.

<sup>501</sup> Letter from E.B. Fraser, *Thames Advertiser*, 2 June 1881, p. 3.

came on the scene and proposed to take an option to build a battery for [a] third interest in the mine. I asked him what he was prepared to put down for the right of option. He said he had no money to put down but that he was certain he could have it floated in a fortnight, but he wanted two months to be certain of doing it and that if, we gave him a chance, we wouldn't regret it. Majury thought it would be better to give him a chance. I consented, but I wasn't too sweet on the business.<sup>502</sup>

Later, Nicholl wrote that Kerry Nicholls 'was certain he could do it. As my mate was showing the funk I thought it was better to let him have it'.<sup>503</sup> This remark presumably was a jibe at Majurey, and, like his not being 'too sweet on the business', reflected Nicholl's fear of being cheated. The agreement with Kerry Nicholls required the latter to provide £1,500 to erect a battery in return for a one-third interest in the property.<sup>504</sup> Nicholl explained in 1927 why this partnership was unsuccessful:

We drew up an agreement and had it stamped, and we all signed it, and he went to Auckland. He was away five weeks before we had any word from him, then I received a letter from him telling me that he was getting on well with the flotation of the company, and in a few days they would be ready to make a start to [the] work.

I heard no more from him till his agreement had expired, then he wrote me a letter asking me for an extension of time. I wrote him that I had no more time to give, that his agreement was at an end and that I had to start and work the mine at once.

I heard no more from him, but a few days later I received a letter from F.A. White, asking me to come to Auckland on business connected with the mine. I went to Auckland the next day and saw Mr F.A. White, and he told me that he was prepared to enter into an agreement to build a battery and float a company to work the mine. I agreed that he could come down and see the claim, and, if he was satisfied to start right away to work, I would consent. He agreed and started in the boat for Paeroa and in two days after he reached Waihi and tried the dirt for himself and was satisfied with the show, and in less than a fortnight the company was floated and the surveyors surveying the water race and the battery site. In a month a contract was let to Mr H.H. Adams to erect the battery; I thought all my trouble was over.<sup>505</sup>

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<sup>502</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 17-18.

<sup>503</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 12.

<sup>504</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 16 August 1881, p. 3.

<sup>505</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 18-19.

(Francis Angus White<sup>506</sup> was a prominent legal manager, meaning secretary, of many mining companies.<sup>507</sup> Henry Hopper Adams was then a leading figure in Te Aroha mining, later becoming one of the most important mine owners in Hauraki.<sup>508</sup>)

Later Nicholl repeated that the agreement specified that Kerry Nicholls had two months to raise the capital, and added that ‘when his time was up, I sent him a letter telling him that his time was up and that we were going to have nothing more to do with him’.<sup>509</sup> His third account, given to his son, recorded that Kerry Nicholls

went to Auckland but his agreement expired. He had done nothing, and I hadn’t heard of him since he left, so I decided to go to Auckland and hunt him up. When I found him, he wanted an extension of time, but I objected and told him the business was off. I went to F.A. White to talk matters over with him and C.J. Stone. They agreed to erect a battery of 15 stampers on similar terms to the others after White had visited the claim. If he approved of the prospect [then] I could consider the bargain closed.<sup>510</sup>

(Captain - his unusual Christian name - James Stone was a prominent Auckland mining investor.<sup>511</sup>)

Far from not hearing from Kerry Nicholls for five weeks and then having no more news from him until the option had expired, at the end of the one-month option the prospectus of the Martha (No. 1) Gold-Mining and Quartz Crushing Company was published. The chairman of directors was Kerry Nicholls, and the other directors were the Nicholl brothers, Majury, and Nathaniel Gordon Lennox. (The latter was an Auckland bookseller and stationer whose other mining investments have not been traced: in 1886 he had shares in mines and in a Turkish bath valued at only £40.<sup>512</sup>) The

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<sup>506</sup> For his involvement in the Te Aroha rush, see *New Zealand Gazette*, 30 December 1880, p. 1786, 20 January 1881, p. 110, 24 February 1881, p. 258.

<sup>507</sup> See *Waikato Times*, 22 July 1893, p. 2; *Auckland Weekly News*, 7 December 1895, p. 7.

<sup>508</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>509</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 12.

<sup>510</sup> Nicholl, ‘The Discovery’, p. 7.

<sup>511</sup> See *Auckland Weekly News*, 18 April 1885, p. 24; *Observer*, 18 April 1885, p. 11.

<sup>512</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 16 April 1886, p. 3; *Mercantile and Bankruptcy Gazette of New Zealand*, 24 April 1886, p. 128, 19 June 1886, p. 191.

nominal capital was to be £18,000 in £1 shares, of which 3,000 were on offer to the public. The company was to erect a battery with 16 head of stampers, which had 'already been purchased on favourable terms'. Considerable detail was given of the geology, the workings, and the prospects of cheap and profitable mining; as soon as £1500 had been raised the battery would be built.<sup>513</sup>

### THE THIRD, SUCCESSFUL, ATTEMPT TO FORM A COMPANY

On 22 June, before this prospectus was published, the *Thames Star* briefly noted that White was visiting Waihi and it was 'understood' that immediate steps would be taken to erect a battery.<sup>514</sup> Two days later, it reported that Nicholl had accompanied White to Auckland, as 'some Auckland capitalists' were 'in treaty for a portion of the mine'.<sup>515</sup> Its Waihi correspondent in the same issue announced that the prospectors had completed arrangements for erecting a battery: 'shareholders very sanguine'.<sup>516</sup> Next day, the *Thames Advertiser* reported that White,

the popular legal manager of Auckland, has been visiting Waihi during the past few days, and returned to Auckland yesterday, highly pleased with the prospects of the district. He took with him an excellent specimen of gold-bearing stone, said to have been taken out of the Prospectors' ground at their low level.<sup>517</sup>

Clearly Nicholl's visit to Auckland to see White and (in the version given to his son) Stone took place over a week before the option given to Kerry Nicholls expired. In this account, White 'came to Waihi three days' after Nicholl had visited him in Auckland, 'prospected the workings himself, and was well satisfied, so we clinched the bargain'.<sup>518</sup>

Yet more speculators were interested in the mine. The day after the prospectus of the Martha (No. 1) Company was published, it was reported that another 'gentleman from Victoria offered yesterday to a miner intimately connected with Waihi £3000 to be expended on a battery. If the

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<sup>513</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 4 July 1881, p. 2.

<sup>514</sup> *Thames Star*, 22 June 1881, p. 2.

<sup>515</sup> *Thames Star*, 24 June 1881, p. 2.

<sup>516</sup> Waihi Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 24 June 1881, p. 2.

<sup>517</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 25 June 1881, p. 2.

<sup>518</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 8.

Martha project should fall through the offer will be accepted'.<sup>519</sup> Therefore Nicholl's party could choose between three possible backers. As soon as the one-month option expired, they abandoned their arrangement with Kerry Nicholls because, the *Thames Advertiser* announced, Nicholl and Marjurey had 'withdrawn from it'.

Mr Nicholls has not carried out the promises made at the time the arrangement was entered into, and they have therefore refused to transfer their interest in the leases to that gentleman. The fact that the agreement having been cancelled will not, we are informed, prevent the Martha from possessing battery accommodation, Mr F.A. White ... having arranged with several capitalists to erect a sixteen stamper mill without delay.<sup>520</sup>

According to Nicholl's memoirs, the directors of the new Martha Gold Mining Company were himself, Marjurey, Stone, Joseph Liston Wilson, of Wilson and Horton, proprietors of the *New Zealand Herald*,<sup>521</sup> John Bycroft, an Onehunga miller,<sup>522</sup> Josiah Clifton Firth, merchant and landowner,<sup>523</sup> and Porter.<sup>524</sup> In fact they comprised the Nicholl brothers, Majurey, Stone, Wilson, and Edward Wayte, an Auckland estate agent.<sup>525</sup> The company had a capital of £15,000.<sup>526</sup> A call of one shilling a share was made to start the mine, according to Nicholl,<sup>527</sup> which must have meant to start the erection of the battery, the mine being well started.

The local correspondent for the *Thames Advertiser* visited the mine after the announcement of the formation of this latest company:

The Prospectors intend getting protection for their ground for two months, during which time it is expected their battery will be erected. The large quantity of quartz on hand has also

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<sup>519</sup> *Thames Star*, 5 July 1881, p. 2.

<sup>520</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 8 July 1881, p. 2.

<sup>521</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 269.

<sup>522</sup> See *City of Auckland, East, Electoral Roll, 1880*, p. 3; *Auckland Star*, 9 May 1892, p. 3, 19 May 1892, p. 6.

<sup>523</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 103-104.

<sup>524</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 8.

<sup>525</sup> See *Auckland North Electoral Roll, 1882*, p. 24; advertisements, *Observer*, 13 November 1880, p. 76, 28 April 1894, p. 3.

<sup>526</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 14 July 1881, p. 3.

<sup>527</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 8.

necessitated this step, for with the easy facility with which they will be able to send their quartz to the battery when erected, and the immense size of the reef, no difficulty will be experienced in keeping the stampers in full swing. Mr Nicholl in the meantime will turn his attention to further prospecting between Waihi Plains, Waitekauri, and the Thames.

As gold was ‘showing freely in the face’, all the adits were barred to prevent visitors stealing samples.<sup>528</sup> At the end of that month, Nicholl revealed the likely site for the battery. Daniel Henry Bayldon, the leading mining surveyor at Thames,<sup>529</sup> was expected to arrive the following day to ‘select the most suitable site for the battery as well as to take the necessary levels of the water race and ground for the horse-grade tramway’ to connect the mine and battery.<sup>530</sup> Nicholl later wrote that Bayldon ‘was appointed to decide the battery site and water race. He laid out the battery site where the mine manager’s house later stood. The gum tree growing in Mr Gilmour’s garden was planted at the back door of the old battery’.<sup>531</sup>

Three days after this company was formed, according to Nicholl’s 1920s memoirs and those he gave to his son,<sup>532</sup> or according to his 1935 version ‘a few days’ after he had written to Kerry Nicholls abandoning their agreement,<sup>533</sup> they were ‘starting to open up the reef where I got the best prospects on its cap’<sup>534</sup> when he saw either one policeman (one version) or two policemen (two other versions)<sup>535</sup>

coming up and thought “what the hell-d a policeman want there.” I knew that I had done nothing to fetch him, so I asked Majury what he had been doing to fetch a cove like that here. When he got up to us, he did not keep us waiting long, he pulled two summonses out of his pocket and read them to us and handed me mine and Majury his. They were to appear at the Magistrate’s

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<sup>528</sup> Waihi Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 16 July 1881, p. 3.

<sup>529</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 7 (Wellington, 1898), pp. 36, 49; *Observer*, 24 January 1903, p. 4, 23 December 1905, p. 4.

<sup>530</sup> Waihi Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 30 July 1881, p. 3.

<sup>531</sup> Nicholl, ‘The Discovery’, p. 8.

<sup>532</sup> Nicholl, 1921; Nicholl, 1927, p. 19; Nicholl, ‘The Discovery’, p. 8.

<sup>533</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 12.

<sup>534</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 12.

<sup>535</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 19; Nicholl, ‘The Discovery’, p. 8; Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 12.

Court at Thames on a charge of £5000 damages for breach of contract.<sup>536</sup>

‘I said “what-oh!” to Marjury’.<sup>537</sup> When the case was heard, Kerry Nicholls ‘had three of the best lawyers in Auckland on his side and [we] only had Alf Whitaker and Miller<sup>538</sup> to represent us’.<sup>539</sup> (Alfred Edward Whitaker was a prominent Auckland solicitor,<sup>540</sup> and James Armstrong Miller was a leading Thames one.)<sup>541</sup> ‘Majury was put in the box first. They tried to get him to speak, but all that he would do was waltz round the witness box, and they didn’t call me to the box’.<sup>542</sup> This unkind account of Majurey’s performance may reflect a cooling of their friendship: Nicholl was not a witness at Majurey’s wedding in December 1883,<sup>543</sup> and made no further mention of him in his memoirs.

(Majurey, once married, settled down to his trade of mechanic and blacksmith, fathered ten children, and died in Thames in 1902 aged only 52.<sup>544</sup> By 1886 he was living at Karangahake.<sup>545</sup> Nicholl may have kept in touch with him, for in 1901, when writing to the press about the discovery of the Martha reef, he stated that Majurey also deserved credit and mentioned that he was then working as a blacksmith in the Crown mine at Karangahake.<sup>546</sup>)

Contemporary accounts gave a different picture of Majurey responding to a plaint so lengthy that copying it down had ‘exercised for several hours

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<sup>536</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 20.

<sup>537</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 12.

<sup>538</sup> Name recorded as Meldrum.

<sup>539</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 12.

<sup>540</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 281.

<sup>541</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 876.

<sup>542</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, pp. 12-13.

<sup>543</sup> Marriage Certificate of Robert Majurey, 27 April 1883, 1883/2837, BDM.

<sup>544</sup> Death Certificate of Robert Majurey, 29 June 1902, 1902/4570, BDM [recorded as Majury].

<sup>545</sup> ‘Addresses Presented to Sir George Grey on his 74th Birthday, 14 April 1886, by European and Maori Residents of Auckland Province’, p. 201, Grey New Zealand MS 275, Auckland Public Library.

<sup>546</sup> Nicholl, 1901.

the nimble fingers of the clerk of the court'.<sup>547</sup> Kerry Nicholls' counsel explained that his client

had agreed to provide £1500 for the erection of a battery for the Martha claim. On June 3rd an agreement was signed by the owners of the claim expressing their willingness to convey to him one-third of the interest in the claim on completion of the terms of the contract within a month. Defendants being influenced in the meantime gave plaintiff to understand by their actions that the terms of the agreement would not be rigidly adhered to, but that an extension of time would be allowed.<sup>548</sup>

The *Thames Star* gave a different version of the latter statement: 'the defendants had on several occasions said time was no object'.<sup>549</sup> As Nicholl and Majurey had, on 4 July, given notice that they considered the agreement at an end, the action was brought for £5,000 or 'specific performance of the contract'.<sup>550</sup>

For some unknown reason, Nicholl was not called to give evidence. Majurey explained that, after the agreement was signed, he had told Kerry Nicholls 'that the Karangahake battery was for sale, at about £200, and then it was arranged that it should be purchased, complainant finding the capital'. When asked 'whether at the time of signing the agreement any mention was made of an extension of the time for its performance', according to the *Thames Advertiser* he could not answer because the lawyers interrupted.<sup>551</sup> According to the *Thames Star*, he explained that, after the contract was made, 'there was some talk about the battery, but no mention was made about an extension of time'.<sup>552</sup> Both reports agreed that the remainder of the hearing was taken up with legal debate over the Statute of Frauds and whether variations of contracts should be in writing. At the conclusion of these arguments, the warden said: 'It was plain that the plaintiff agreed to raise by a certain date £1500, and to receive an interest in the mine, which he failed to do'.

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<sup>547</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 11 August 1881, p. 3.

<sup>548</sup> Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 August 1881, p. 3.

<sup>549</sup> Warden's Court, *Thames Star*, 25 August 1881, p. 2.

<sup>550</sup> Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 August 1881, p. 3.

<sup>551</sup> Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 August 1881, p. 3.

<sup>552</sup> Warden's Court, *Thames Star*, 25 August 1881, p. 2.

Any extension of the time must be shown to have been made in writing, signed by defendants; that evidence of the defendants' conduct showing a waiver of performance within the time limited, or if stopped by defendants, was not admissable. The case would be non-suited with costs.

Kerry Nicholls' counsel gave immediate notice of an appeal to the Supreme Court, and the injunction placed on the mine was extended for ten days to enable this to be lodged.<sup>553</sup> Nicholl's final comments on this dispute were that 'J.H. Kerry Nicholls had no case; he applied to the Supreme Court but that was the last I heard of it'.<sup>554</sup> He also noted that 'Alf Whitaker brought their case under the Statutes of Frauds and said that any further agreement would have to be in writing'.<sup>555</sup>

In early September, the *Thames Advertiser* sent its 'Special Mining Reporter' to Waihi. At the Martha claim, or Prospectors' Spur as he called it,

on account of the injunction pending, I was prohibited from seeking or handling anything having reference to this claim. But I saw sufficient to convince me that the promise was good for carrying gold and feel satisfied that the parties who originally proposed to erect a battery had made a great mistake in not carrying out their first intentions.<sup>556</sup>

In late September it was reported that Nicholl and Majurey were 'at work in the neighbourhood, whilst awaiting the settlement of the injunction question, and it is said they have another good thing in hand somewhere between Waitekauri and Waihi'.<sup>557</sup> This 'good thing' did not lead to any discovery of note. At the beginning of October, they announced their intention of working their claim, despite the injunction, 'alleging that the injunction is on the company and not on the claim. They object to be deprived of their rights for so long a term, when they have done nothing to

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<sup>553</sup> Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 August 1881, p. 3.

<sup>554</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 20.

<sup>555</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 13.

<sup>556</sup> Special Mining Reporter, 'A Visit to Waihi', *Thames Advertiser*, 10 September 1881, p. 3.

<sup>557</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 26 September 1881, p. 3.

merit such a hardship'.<sup>558</sup> Despite their stated intention, in mid-October the mine was still 'closed up'.<sup>559</sup>

On 18 October it was reported that the injunction had lapsed, Kerry Nicholls' appeal 'not being brought forward at the appointed time – during the civil sittings of the Supreme Court'. Immediately after these sittings closed, Miller 'registered a deed assigning the claim to the Martha Gold Mining Company, which course of action may effectually put a stop to any litigation'.<sup>560</sup> At a meeting of directors of the company on 26 October, litigation was 'finally arranged', with Kerry Nicholl elected a director in place of Nicholl, 'who resigned in his favour'. As part of this arrangement, Kerry Nicholls gave the company his Karangahake battery. The directors immediately called tenders for a low level to cut the reef 250 feet from the surface.<sup>561</sup>

In July 1882, the share list for the Martha Gold Mining Company included Nicholl with 3,918 of the 15,000 shares, his brother with 348, Majurey with 2,250, and Kerry Nicholls with 232.<sup>562</sup> The latter chaired the luncheon at the opening of the Martha battery in 1882 and proposed the toast to the miners of Waihi, 'eulogizing miners as a class'.<sup>563</sup> This ended his involvement with mining apart from becoming, in the following year, a director of the stillborn Thames Winding Company.<sup>564</sup> He had explored much of the Pacific as well as visiting New Guinea in the early 1870s, and in October 1882 started making arrangements to explore the King Country, which he did in early 1883, returning to England in 1884 to publish an account of his journey.<sup>565</sup> Nicholl in later years may have felt embarrassed by his dealings with Kerry Nicholls, for all mention of the latter and of the

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<sup>558</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 5 October 1881, p. 2.

<sup>559</sup> Own Reporter, 'Owharoa, Waihi, and Waitekauri Districts', *New Zealand Herald*, 18 October 1881, p. 6.

<sup>560</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 18 October 1881, p. 3.

<sup>561</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1881, p. 3.

<sup>562</sup> Martha Gold Mining Company, Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 35 no. 214, ANZ-A.

<sup>563</sup> *Auckland Star*, 26 October 1881, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 26 May 1882, p. 3.

<sup>564</sup> Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 44 no. 283, ANZ-A.

<sup>565</sup> J.H. Nicholls (sometimes J.H. Kerry Nicholls) to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 15 May 1879, and to Sir George Grey, 31 October 1882, 20 May 1883, 14 June 1883, 3 July 1884, Grey New Zealand Letters, vol. 20, pp. 90-91, 97, 105, 111-113, 132, Auckland Public Library; J.H. Kerry Nicholls, *The King Country; or, Explorations in New Zealand. A narrative of 600 miles of travel through Maoriland* (London, 1884).

controversies over floating a company was omitted from the version of his memoirs published in the *Auckland Star*.<sup>566</sup> However it is equally likely that an editorial decision was made that these details were of no interest to its readers.

#### WAIHI IN LATE 1881

Nicholl did not acquire any shares in the Rosemont and Young Colonial companies formed in late 1881 to work these claims.<sup>567</sup> Adams' tender of £2,740 to build the Martha Company's battery was accepted in late September,<sup>568</sup> and in Nicholl's words he 'started his contract and pushed it through as fast as it was possible to do it. In the meantime, a contract was let to drive a tunnel four hundred feet to cut the reef at a hundred feet below the place where I found the gold on the surface'.<sup>569</sup> When the lode was hit, they would 'rise 90 feet to the surface.... It was intended to work the reef with an open cut from wall to wall, feed the battery with the best of it, and dump the rubbish over the tip'.<sup>570</sup> The directors agreed to drive this new low level in late October.<sup>571</sup> Nicholl expected the tunnel and rise to open up the mine sufficiently 'to keep the battery working for a few years'.<sup>572</sup>

Adams also had the contract to build a water race for this company and both a water race and a tramway for the Waihi Company.<sup>573</sup> These developments led to conflict with local Maori, as Nicholl explained in 1935, somewhat incoherently:

We had no trouble with the Maoris till then. I went down to wash a dish of dirt and when I got back to Majury there were thirteen young Maoris and Majury as white as a sheet, and one of them dollying some quartz in my dolly.<sup>574</sup> I asked Majury was it them

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<sup>566</sup> *Auckland Star*, 15 September 1928, Magazine Section, p. 1.

<sup>567</sup> *New Zealand Gazette*, 3 November 1881, pp. 1442-1443, 24 November 1881, p. 1589.

<sup>568</sup> *Thames Star*, 22 September 1881, p. 2.

<sup>569</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 20.

<sup>570</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 8.

<sup>571</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1881, p. 3.

<sup>572</sup> Nicholl, 1921.

<sup>573</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1881, p. 3, 7 April 1882, p. 3.

<sup>574</sup> Clearly a type of dish or mortar, but an unusual use of the word: see McAra, p. 318, for the normal meaning.

that had been into the drive, and he said it was them that did it, and I wrenched the pestle of the mortar from the fellow that was using it, and told them to get quick and lively.

They took my advice and left me, and they took the picks and shovels from the men Adams had cutting the road to where he was erecting the sawmill, and Adams reported it to the police, and they came up and arrested thirteen of them and some of them got two months in gaol for their trouble.<sup>575</sup>

His memory had failed him. Because of conflict over ownership of the land containing kauri trees to be used for the water races and batteries, 15 Ngati Hako had indeed, on 20 October, prevented Adams from felling these trees by threatening his men with violence. After the intervention of the native agent and a request by the magistrate that Adams be permitted to cut the trees while the Native Lands Court adjudicated on the question of who owned the land, Ngati Hako took no further steps to interfere.<sup>576</sup> They would be fined the purely nominal amount of one shilling plus costs.<sup>577</sup>

Nicholl recorded that ‘Things started [to] move a bit faster, and the Thames County Council had let a contract to cut a road from the Waitekauri road into Waihi. A start had been made to build a hotel’ by Thomas Corbett, and John Phillips. Jr., of Paeroa,<sup>578</sup> ‘was erecting a store’.<sup>579</sup> (Corbett’s hotel was the Criterion, Nicholl recalled;<sup>580</sup> while he was correct that Corbett erected the first hotel, it was called the Waihi Hotel.<sup>581</sup>) Phillips appointed Dan Campbell, one of the earliest settlers in the district,

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<sup>575</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, pp. 13-14.

<sup>576</sup> G.T. Wilkinson, diary, entry for 24 October 1881, University of Waikato Library; *Thames Advertiser*, 21 October 1881, p. 3; *New Zealand Herald*, 24 October 1881, p. 5.

<sup>577</sup> Paeroa Magistrate’s Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 3 November 1881, p. 3, 1 December 1881, p. 3.

<sup>578</sup> A shopkeeper during the Te Aroha rush and then at Waihi: see Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Applications 1880-1882, folios 15-16, no. 41, BBAV 11505/3a, ANZ-A; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 853.

<sup>579</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 20.

<sup>580</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 16.

<sup>581</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, Ohinemuri Correspondent, 13 February 1881, p. 3, 10 October 1881, p. 3, 13 February 1882, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 7 September 1904, p. 2.

and from 1882 a storekeeper there,<sup>582</sup> to manage his store, Nicholl correctly recalled, and Campbell took it over from Phillips in 1886.<sup>583</sup>

Manukau Jones had taken up a claim on the southern end of the spur and had started to work with six men and had let a contract to erect a battery of 20 head of stampers. About twenty claims had been staked out by this [time] and some of them had started to work. Mr Fred Hollis and Jim Smith<sup>584</sup> had started a tunnel to cut the reef, while Messrs Nicks, Patton, and Potter were working their claim and things were starting to move a little faster. Hollis and Smith had struck the reef and were paddocking pay dirt [payable ore]. John McCombie<sup>585</sup> and Andy Wilson<sup>586</sup> had struck gold in the Silverton, and the natural beauty of the plains was doomed to lose its beauty with the dawn of civilisation.<sup>587</sup>

In his last account, Nicholl described the driving of the new low tunnel, as usual emphasising his extreme physical exertions:

Adams lost no time to get the work under way, and Mr Bayldon, surveyor, Thames, was engaged to lay off the battery site and a water race and a tunnel four hundred feet to cut the reef one hundred feet under the surface. I took the contract to drive it for ten shillings a foot and timber if required. I then went to the bush and felled a kauri tree that would be sufficient to timber three hundred feet of the tunnel, and had it carted on to the ground, and put up trucks to hold all the muck that came out of the tunnel, and we put two men on the night shift, and me and

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<sup>582</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 927.

<sup>583</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 16; *Hauraki Tribune*, 23 September 1887, p. 3.

<sup>584</sup> Correctly Smyth.

<sup>585</sup> For his mining at Waihi in 1881, see Thames Warden's Court, Register of Claims 1880-1882, claim 966, BACL 14397/13a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1875-1882, folios 138, 147, BACL 14397/10a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, Warden's Court, 6 May 1881, p. 3, 28 June 1881, p. 2, 'Waihi', 16 July 1881, p. 3, Special Mining Reporter, 'A Visit to Waihi', 10 September 1881, p. 3, Waihi Correspondent, 26 September 1881, p. 3.

<sup>586</sup> Andrew Wilson had been at the Te Aroha rush before turning his attention to Waihi. For Te Aroha, see Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 177, 197, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 15 November 1880, p. 3. For Waihi, see Thames Warden's Court, Register of Claims 1880-1882, claim 966, BACL 14397/13a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1875-1882, folio 147, BACL 14397/10a, ANZ-A.

<sup>587</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 20-21.

Majury did the other two shifts by working the sixteen hours each day till the tunnel was completed.

We made a start at the tunnel and me and Majury slept six hours and used the other two hours to cook our food. Majury never saw the face of the tunnel, he did the trucking only, and I broke out the ground and I filled the truck for him to run out, and, when we were not timbering, we used to clean out ready for the timber. [We did] fifteen feet in our two shifts, and the other shift only could drive six feet in their eight hours.

When we were timbering, we used to dress six sets and stand them up ready for slabbing, and we soon had the tunnel completed and the reef cut through. It was only about two feet wide and as hungry as a hound's tooth.

We got Bayldon from the Thames, and he passed it and clapped me on the back and said that the tunnel was a credit to us. I then got paid up for the tunnel, and I put a rise up to the surface to start to work on the reef with an open cut from wall [to wall] and pick the stuff that was rich enough to run through the battery.<sup>588</sup>

In late December 1881, a correspondent described progress in this tunnel:

In the Martha good headway is being made with the main tunnel, which is completed for a distance of nearly 200 feet, and it is anticipated that the reef will be intersected within about 100 feet from the present heading. Should it prove to be auriferous at this point, the run of gold in this claim will be determined for a depth of 220 feet below the surface. The country is all that could be desired, and the driving is being got through at the rate of 10 feet per day.<sup>589</sup>

This compared with Nicholl's claim that 21 feet were driven each day, 15 of them by himself.<sup>590</sup>

A hearing of the warden's court in October revealed that Nicholl had also speculated in the Hatter claim at Waihi. When the mining inspector sought to make him forfeit it, the lawyer for one group of claimants alleged 'that actual collusion between certain parties would be proved'. Evidence to this effect was not forthcoming, for the inspector

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<sup>588</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, pp. 14-15.

<sup>589</sup> Waihi Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 22 December 1881, p. 3.

<sup>590</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 15.

said that Nicholl had that morning abandoned the claim.- The Court deprecated the practice of abandoning claims during the time that proceedings were pending, as it opened the way for sharp practice.- As defendant did not appear the case was adjourned for a week.

Nicholl then appeared in court, and the case proceeded. In response to the charge of not having worked his claim during the past month, he stated that he had pegged it out on 10 February 'and left it about May with the intention of abandoning'. The warden thereupon ruled that the claim was open for others to occupy and charged the costs to Nicholl.<sup>591</sup>

### THE MARTHA BATTERY AND MINE IN 1882

At the beginning of February 1882, a special reporter wrote that

the Martha and Waihi Companies' batteries are being rapidly proceeded with, and until they are ready the place will make no further progress. The men are almost at a standstill for want of crushing power, and a large amount of stone is in the paddock, and ready to be taken out, as soon as crushing power is available.<sup>592</sup>

A week later another correspondent wrote that the mines were 'very quiet at present; very little work is going on underground'. The two water races were well advanced, and heavy machinery was being carted from Paeroa.<sup>593</sup> When the battery was completed, the Martha claim would 'keep it going for some time', according to another reporter, in late March.<sup>594</sup> There were 'great expectations' about the wealth to be produced.<sup>595</sup> To Nicholl, 'both batteries and tramways soon made the Waihi look like the dawn of civilisation had struck it'.<sup>596</sup>

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<sup>591</sup> Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 15 October 1881, p. 3.

<sup>592</sup> Special Reporter, 'The Waitekauri District', *Thames Advertiser*, 6 February 1882, p. 3.

<sup>593</sup> A Correspondent, 'Ohinemuri Goldfield', *Thames Advertiser*, 13 February 1882, p. 3.

<sup>594</sup> Our Correspondent, 'From Te Aroha to Paeroa', *Thames Advertiser*, 29 March 1882, p. 3.

<sup>595</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 12 May 1882, p. 3.

<sup>596</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 16.

From March onwards, the Martha was managed by James Gribble,<sup>597</sup> an experienced manager.<sup>598</sup> By May, he was putting up rises upon the footwall from the low level to the surface, and had started to drive on the reef in several places. In the lower drive it was 20 feet thick, ‘an immense body’ of mostly payable ore: ‘a tremendous output of quartz’ was ‘at command’.<sup>599</sup> As Nicholl recalled,

things started to hum after Mr Adams was at work for six months. The tramways and water races and batteries were completed. The Martha battery was completed first and a spread was given at the opening. There was a good attendance from the surrounding districts and a few from Thames and Auckland.<sup>600</sup>

The battery was situated 200 yards from the mouth of the low-level tunnel at the base of the eastern slope of the hill. Although there had been grumbling over the long time Adams had taken to build both battery and water race, there was also much praise for the machinery he had invented.<sup>601</sup>

The battery is situated in the centre of the Juno claim, on the eastern side of the Young Colonial and Little Tommy claims. The water for the turbine is brought in from Walmsley’s Creek, a distance of two and a half miles, on a substantially constructed race, giving a fall of 70 feet, and is connected with the turbine by nine-inch iron pipes. The turbine is on a different principle to the ordinary ones, being an idea of Mr H. Adams, the contractor, and appears to work in a very satisfactory manner, the pressure being about 35lb to the inch. The battery building itself is of heart of kauri and is exceedingly well fitted up. Only 15 head of stampers have been erected at present, but the bed-log is laid for 15 more head, which will be fitted up as soon as required. Upwards of 100

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<sup>597</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 24 March 1882, p. 8.

<sup>598</sup> For his career at Thames, see *Thames Advertiser*, 17 October 1873, p. 2, 9 December 1873, p. 2; for his participation in the Te Aroha rush, see Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 156, 210, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Star*, 10 November 1880, p. 2, 13 November 1880, p. 2, 26 November 1880, p. 2, 27 November 1880, p. 2; for his career at Waihi, see *Thames Advertiser*, 27 May 1882, p. 3; for his life in general, see *Waikato Times*, 4 September 1886, p. 2.

<sup>599</sup> Special Reporter, ‘The Upper Country’, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 May 1882, p. 3.

<sup>600</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 21.

<sup>601</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 26 May 1882, p. 3.

persons were present at the opening, and after the battery had worked for a few minutes, the guests sat down to a sumptuous luncheon.<sup>602</sup>

In his 1901 account of the official opening of the battery in late May, Nicholl recorded that 'a gigantic spread was given' for the visitors from Thames, Paeroa, and Auckland, and that 'the battery was christened by Miss Mary Jane Compston, of Waihi'.<sup>603</sup> She 'broke the conventional champagne bottle on the fly-wheel, and amid the cheers of the multitude christened it "The Martha Battery"'.<sup>604</sup> A daughter of the farmer on whose land Nicholl had camped on his first visit to the Waihi plains, presumably she was selected by Nicholl to do the christening, for in three years' time they would be married.

Nicholl wrote that the opening was honoured with 'a lot of speeches given with a lot of kidding and the water was turned on' and the stampers 'started bumping; after running a few minutes the water was shut off and the keys handed over to me. They all started devouring the Turkey and the good things on the table and all seemed to be happy'.<sup>605</sup> 'Two huge turkeys with about three inches of fat on their ribs, specially fed by Mr Adams' Negro cook' were provided for the banquet, which 'all the people in the district' seemed to have attended.<sup>606</sup> 'Everyone enjoyed themselves, what with varioys speeches and a lot of kid and drinking of toasts. Mr Adams had the balance of the turkeys carted to the cookhouse, they being only prospected in a few places', meaning eaten, 'while at the battery. I do not know what became of them, but I think the darkie fed his boarders on the lean and rendered the blubber down to run the battery on'.<sup>607</sup>

One newspaper recorded the 'recherche luncheon' being followed by toasts and speeches: not till nearly the end were 'Messrs Nicholl and Majurey, the original prospectors', toasted. Their responses were not recorded, nor were they mentioned in the summaries of the other speeches.<sup>608</sup> A correspondent noted that 'the absence of Thames and

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<sup>602</sup> Waihi Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 27 May 1882, p. 5.

<sup>603</sup> Nicholl, 1901; her name was printed as Compton.

<sup>604</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 26 May 1882, p. 3.

<sup>605</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 21.

<sup>606</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 8.

<sup>607</sup> Nicholl, 1921.

<sup>608</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 26 May 1882, p. 3.

Auckland gentlemen interested in the district was very much commented upon'; were they losing their faith in the prospects? A local correspondent expected 'far more than a payable return'.<sup>609</sup>

In 1935, Nicholl wrote that at the opening Adams started the battery going 'for a few turns and it went splendidly, but he did not let it run long before he stopped it'.<sup>610</sup> In the account given to his son, he recalled that after five minutes of the stampers working he 'was satisfied the contract had been completed satisfactorily and took it over' from Adams.<sup>611</sup> In 1921 he wrote that after the opening Gribble was appointed the first mine and battery manager. 'I handed him the keys, and a start was made to crush. He ran the battery for five weeks, and cleaned up with 111oz of gold, valued at £3 6/ per oz'.<sup>612</sup> Six years later, confusing the date when Gribble came to Waihi, he wrote that 'in a few days' after the opening Gribble arrived in Waihi 'and took charge and started the battery crushing. He ran the battery for four weeks and cleaned up with 111oz of gold'. But the battery was 'almost useless', as 'it had no power to drive the stamps at a speed to crush the ore'.<sup>613</sup> One month after the opening, it was apparent that there was something 'radically wrong' with the turbine.<sup>614</sup> Nicholl's 1901 explanation was that 'all the speed that could be obtained from it was forty bumps a minute, which was almost useless for the treatment of the ore'. Gribble's

first month's return was 111oz of gold, the expenditure being £1400 to obtain this amount, which resulted in three calls being made alternatively of three shillings each. After the return became known, the shares went flat on the market. This resulted in an extraordinary general meeting being called, after which I resigned my seat on the Board, and was appointed mine and battery manager.<sup>615</sup>

If Nicholl did indeed step down from the board of directors at this time, he must have been re-elected previously, for he had stepped down in favour

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<sup>609</sup> Waihi Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 27 May 1882, p. 5.

<sup>610</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 16.

<sup>611</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 8.

<sup>612</sup> Nicholl, 1921.

<sup>613</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 21.

<sup>614</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 26 June 1882, p. 2.

<sup>615</sup> Nicholl, 1901.

of Kerry Nicholls in the previous October.<sup>616</sup> Neither his re-election nor his second resignation was recorded in the press, and it seems that he had muddled the sequence of events. In 1927, he simply wrote that ‘Mr Gribble resigned, and I was made manager’.<sup>617</sup> His appointment as manager of both mine and battery was made in early August.<sup>618</sup>

It was just at the latter end of the wet season, and the water dried up after I ran the battery for three weeks. I was compelled to shut the battery down, and retort the amalgam obtained, which resulted in 130oz of melted gold, valued at £3 6s 9d per oz, which gave a profit for the three weeks’ run of £300 over working expenses, or equal to a dividend of nearly 6d per share.<sup>619</sup>

In his last memoirs, he gave more details of the battery and correctly noted that Gribble was at the opening ceremony:

Adams handed me the keys of the battery and I gave them to Mr Gribble<sup>620</sup>.... When he started it, it went at eighty blows a minute, and after running it a minute came down to 45 belts a minute, and at this speed little dirt could be put through the battery. The turbine was an invention of Adams’, and if it had the Ohinemuri River running through it it wouldn’t make the battery go at a speed to run enough ore through it to be of any use to the company, and Gribble was running all sorts of muck through it, and he had only one hundred and eleven ounces for his month’s run. And the company had made three calls of a shilling a share and I thought it was time for me to act, or the mine would be ruined with bad management.

I went to Auckland and called the shareholders of the company together and told them that if the mine was worked properly that it would pay big dividends instead of making calls. They asked me if I would guarantee them dividends if mine manager, and I told them I would, and they told me to go down and take charge and gave me Gribble’s discharge.

The battery was hung up for want of power to drive it. I managed to get it to run through seventy tons of ore and I had to hang it up

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<sup>616</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 27 October 1881, p. 3.

<sup>617</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 21.

<sup>618</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 12 August 1882, p. 3.

<sup>619</sup> Nicholl, 1901.

<sup>620</sup> Confirmed in Nicholl, ‘The Discovery’, p. 8.

for want of water to drive it, and out of the seventy tons it yielded 153 ounces, worth three pounds six shillings an ounce.<sup>621</sup>

In 1921 he wrote that, when he took over the battery,

unfortunately the water was getting less, a dry spell having set in, and the battery would now only beat thirty-nine blows a minute. I only managed to put 206 half-ton trucks through for a three weeks' run, and on cleaning up yielded 151oz of retorted gold. I took it to the Bank of New Zealand, Thames, where it lost 14oz in the melting, its value was £3.6.9 per oz.<sup>622</sup>

Six years later he explained its high value:

I kept the battery going at its slow pace for three weeks till I had to hang it up for the want of water to drive it. I cleaned up for 150 ounces of retorted gold. The gold when sold to the Bank fetched £3-6-9 per ounce. I acknowledge I picked the dirt; it wasn't a general average of what the whole reef was worth. I only sent the dirt to the battery that I knew would pay to run through, and with a battery of 15 head of stampers that would crush as a battery should, I would be doing the same today and paying dividends.

I took a sample of the tailings that had been through the battery and burnt them and rubbed them round in the mortar with the pestle and panned it off, and found I could get as good a prospect at the tail of the battery as I could in the ore before I ran it through. The battery was useless, for the water dried up in the creek and came down the race halfway only.<sup>623</sup>

Later, he explained that by this time there was so little water that 'it would only beat 39 blows a minute'.<sup>624</sup> 'If the battery had worked for me, I would have been able to produce over a thousand ounces a month by working it in an open cut from wall to wall and picking the best of it to start with'.<sup>625</sup>

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<sup>621</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, pp. 16-18.

<sup>622</sup> Nicholl, 1921.

<sup>623</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 21-22.

<sup>624</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 9.

<sup>625</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 18.

The press was almost entirely silent on developments after the first two batteries started, this silence reflecting the lack of success of the field. On 12 August, Nicholl's report to his directors was published:

Since taking charge of your mine, I have been doing some dead work yet, which was absolutely necessary for the future economical working of the mine. I have lifted and relaid the bottom level tramway, which was very much required, and have made and fixed a good iron door at the bottom of the main rise or pass at the bottom level. These works will greatly facilitate the transit of quartz from the upper workings to the mill. I have also taken the bend out of the rise, aking it straight, so that the quartz has now a clear tun from the intermediate to the bottom level The lead has been broken up for twenty feet back from the present face at the intermediate level, but has come together again, forming a compact body of quartz, giving fair dish prospects. I have started stoping in this level to do with less truckers. It will take me some time, perhaps two weeks, before I have the mine in proper working order. At present I have only one man working on the Sovereign run of gold, as the dirt costs too much to deliever to the battery from there on account of it's having to be handled three times. I intend next week starting a drive from the battery level towards the Dulcibel, as I consider that the mine can be worked much cheaper from this level.<sup>626</sup>

On 26 August there was brief mention of the Martha in terms indicating that Nicholl had not admitted selecting the ore for treatment. 'Mr William Nicholl, the new manager of this mine, who will be remembered as one of the pioneers of that goldfield, banked yesterday 130oz melted gold, the result of 180 tons of general stuff. The average in this instance is about 14 1/2dwt to the ton, as against 8 1/2 at last cleaning up'.<sup>627</sup> In the 'Mining News of the Month', this result was described as 'a material improvement as compared with previous crushings' and 'with economical working and good crushing appliances, should pay handsomely'. The 'great drawbacks on the field' were 'the defective batteries'; the motive power' of both was 'not satisfactory', and possibly a new turbine would be imported.<sup>628</sup> These criticisms were confirmed by the mining inspector:

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<sup>626</sup> W. Nicholl, mine manager's report, printed in *New Zealand Herald*, 12 August 1882, p. 5.

<sup>627</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 26 August 1882, p. 3.

<sup>628</sup> 'Mining News of the Month', *Thames Advertiser*, 9 September 1882, p. 3.

This district has been most unfortunate, and has come to a complete stop, through the batteries not working properly, some mistake having been made either in the turbines or in the calculation of waterpower. After running for some time, it was found that not as much quartz could be passed through the stampers in one week as ought to go through in a day.<sup>629</sup>

Nicholl's 1921 account continued:

The drought continued for six months; no parsons appeared to pray for rain, and to get steam power to drive the battery would be useless as no water could be got to the battery to supply the plates. The drought was getting hard on my nerves; what I would have given right then for a wowser to pop in and bring rain. A scheme was suggested to amalgamate all the claims and remove the battery to the Silverton site, where there would be sufficient water to drive it. I thought it was a mad business, as the other claims were worthless to us, but, in the end, I chucked in the sponge, seeing the amount of money that had been spent by the shareholders and no return coming in. I thought it wouldn't be just of me to stand in the way if they thought they could better themselves by amalgamating.<sup>630</sup>

That decision was made at the beginning of December, when it was announced that 'the three principal companies owning ground at Waihi', the Martha, Waihi and Young Colonial, had 'agreed upon amalgamation'. As the new turbines ordered from America had not arrived, the field was 'almost at a standstill'.<sup>631</sup> Nicholl noted that 'the Dulcie shareholders held out, thinking the number of shares offered to them ridiculous'.<sup>632</sup> The shareholders of the three companies met later in the month to confirm this decision.<sup>633</sup> On 12 February 1883, White applied to register the Martha Extended Gold Mining Company.<sup>634</sup>

The new turbines were for Manukau Jones' battery, as Nicholl explained. 'The dry spell kept up for some time, and [yet] there was plenty

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<sup>629</sup> J.M. McLaren to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 30 April 1883, *AJHR*, 1883, H-5, Appendix, p. 23.

<sup>630</sup> Nicholl, 1921.

<sup>631</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 2 December 1882, p. 3.

<sup>632</sup> Nicholl, 1921.

<sup>633</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 15 December 1882, p. 2.

<sup>634</sup> *New Zealand Gazette*, 22 February 1883, pp. 268-269.

of water to drive Manukau Jones' battery. He had been running his battery of 20 head of stampers for six weeks and cleaned up with 80 ounces of gold, [but] had duffered their claim out', meaning that he had exhausted all the good ore.

A scheme was proposed to amalgamate all the claims on the hill and remove the Martha battery down to Jones' site and make one battery of it, as there was sufficient room in Jones' building to add the Martha's 15 head to his battery. We all agreed, and a tramway was built to bring the quartz from the Martha mine to the battery. Mr J. H. Moore was appointed manager of the new company and crushed from a rib of the reef on the footwall of the reef for three years and then let the mine on tribute. This is my connection with the old Martha company.<sup>635</sup>

John Hoey Moore was a leading mine manager;<sup>636</sup> for instance, he had managed the Prospectors' Claim at Te Aroha for six months until it proved to be unpayable.<sup>637</sup> In 1884, after being shown over the workings by Moore, McCombie congratulated the company on appointing him:

Prior to taking the management of their mine, he had had seven years' quartz-mining experience on this field, where the reef system is somewhat peculiar, requiring special treatment. He is not afflicted with "mining fads" of any description but believes an inch of practice to be worth an acre of geological or mining experts' theory.<sup>638</sup>

(Moore became Nicholl's brother-in-law in 1888 when he married Mary Ann Nicks, widowed when her first husband died two years previously.<sup>639</sup> She was again widowed when Moore died in an accident in 1893;<sup>640</sup> three

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<sup>635</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 22-23.

<sup>636</sup> See *Thames Advertiser*, 3 October 1887, p. 2, 19 October 1887, p. 2; *Auckland Weekly News*, 3 June 1893, p. 10.

<sup>637</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 6 December 1880, p. 3, 9 April 1881, p. 3, 1 June 1881, p. 3; *Waikato Times*, 30 June 1881, p. 3.

<sup>638</sup> Own Correspondent [John McCombie], 'Ohinemuri Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 16 September 1884, p. 2.

<sup>639</sup> Death Certificate of John Nicks, 17 July 1886, 1886/3670; Marriage Certificate of John Hoey Moore, 7 May 1888, 1888/1128, BDM; *Thames Advertiser*, 1 June 1893, p. 2.

<sup>640</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 1 June 1893, p. 2.

years later she was married, for the third and last time, to Henry Christian Wick.<sup>641</sup> She died in 1918.<sup>642</sup>)

Nicholl wrote that 'I took the contract to build the tramway to connect the Martha mine with the new battery. The tramway came along the side of the hill under where the number five shaft is and connected with the other tramways where the courthouse is now'.<sup>643</sup> When Moore was appointed manager of the amalgamated company, 'I lost it by one vote. C.J. Stone tried to keep me there, as I showed a big profit when I had charge of the mine, but I lost it by one vote'.<sup>644</sup> This narrow defeat cannot be confirmed from contemporary press reports.

In concluding one account of his experiences at Waihi, Nicholl wrote that 'Moore worked on the footwall of the reef in the Martha claim for three years and threw all the other claims open to avoid paying rent on them as he could not man them legally'.<sup>645</sup> 'Work was started on the Smithy level and kept the battery going on a rib of the reef on the footwall.... Having worked the reef to the surface the mine was let on tribute to the Hollis brothers'.<sup>646</sup> Nicholl also recorded that the owners of the Dulcibel claim, Nicks, Patton, and Potter, had refused to merge it with the new company, 'thinking the number of shares offered to them ridiculous'. They

stuck to their claim till they were dead beat. They crushed 200 tons of quartz, and it barely paid for the crushing. I felt sorry for those three men - the bravest I have ever met on the goldfields. The game is never worth a candle to the Prospector - Such is the history of my connection with old Waihi.<sup>647</sup>

Nicholl's various memoirs do not reveal why he ceased to be a leading figure in Waihi mining: presumably his competence was viewed as less than that of Moore and the other men who managed the mines in the future. Like most miners, he had had no formal training, but, unlike many other 'practical men', he was never asked to be a mine manager again. What is certain is that his discovery of the Martha mine, one of the great gold

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<sup>641</sup> Marriage Certificate of Henry Christian Wick, 17 March 1896, 1896/4106, BDM.

<sup>642</sup> Death Certificate of Mary Ann Wick, 18 January 1918, 1918/434, BDM.

<sup>643</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 18.

<sup>644</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 18.

<sup>645</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, pp. 18-19.

<sup>646</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 9.

<sup>647</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 9.

producers of the world once cyanide was used in treating the ore, brought him no lasting financial rewards. In 1884 he estimated that he had lost £370 through his involvement in the Martha Company; in 1921 he said he came out of the Martha 'in debt'.<sup>648</sup>

#### FROM KARANGAHAKE TO FIJI

In March 1882, a journalist encountered Nicholl about to accompany James Smyth to Karangahake 'to test the prospect and to secure the ground' at another of McCombie's discoveries.<sup>649</sup> Nicholl was not recorded as having made any new finds, and he did not acquire interests in any claims there. He was shown where the MacWilliams brothers had been prospecting, and was later to support their claim to have discovered the Talisman reef.<sup>650</sup> His memoirs are silent on the years 1882 to 1885, perhaps because for most of that time he had abandoned mining to be a timber merchant, which led to his filing as a bankrupt in June 1884.<sup>651</sup> When he underwent his public examination in the District Court in August, his assets were set down at £619 and liabilities at £626:

Wm. Nicholl, sworn, stated he was a timber miller at Waihi, and had been a miner. Had been a contractor for the supply of sleepers. His property at that time was worth £150. Was making about £3 per week at the Matatoke portion of his contact but lost over it at Tapu. Purchased a mill at Waihi; he was then worth £70. He gave £30 in cash for it, and bills for £207. A quantity of timber was still at the mill, which a creditor had seized, and he filed to prevent a sacrifice of the stock. Taking the full value of the timber, his assets would cover his liabilities. He had lost £370 in the Martha Company, at Waihi.

To the Deputy Assignee: Had not included certain sleepers at Waihi in his schedule, as Mr Darrow had partly paid for them; the payment was made on the day his filed. Of the sum of £45 received from Mr Darrow, he had spent £15 in travelling expenses. Paid M[atthew] Vaughan [a publican]<sup>652</sup> £30 - £20 for

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<sup>648</sup> District Court, *Thames Star*, 6 August 1884, p. 2; Nicholl, 1921.

<sup>649</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 23 March 1882, p. 3.

<sup>650</sup> *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 27 October 1931, p. 2.

<sup>651</sup> Advertisement, *Thames Advertiser*, 18 June 1884, p. 2.

<sup>652</sup> For his involvement in the Te Aroha rush, see Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 153, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; for his involvement in

money borrowed, and £10 for refreshments, &c. To a creditor: Might have told someone that he had paid £240 on the mill. Had kept no account of the sum of £100 which he had when he went to the mill. Had paid £30 on the mill but was not sure as to how he had expended the balance....

The deputy assignee asked that the payment of £30 to Vaughan should be declared void, and the Court so decided.

The Court then made the usual order that the examination was closed.<sup>653</sup>

He would not be discharged until July 1896, because only then did he pay some wages owing.<sup>654</sup> His statement revealed features typical of other bankrupts: attempting to operate a business when under-capitalized, with no apparent security, and with most of the funds raised by taking out promissory notes, usually at a high rate of interest. His vagueness on some points of detail was also typical, as was the failure to keep account books. As was usual, publican Matthew Vaughan was not paid for his 'refreshments'.

At the time of his bankruptcy hearing, he was prospecting the Old Nut at Owharoa with James Stevenson; a correspondent considered they deserved 'to get gold for their trouble'.<sup>655</sup> (Stevenson mined at Owharoa for several years before abandoning the district in mid-1886.<sup>656</sup>) One month later, Stevenson was working this ground single-handedly.<sup>657</sup>

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mining at Waiorongomai, see Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 3, 4, 6, 8, 14, 22, 25, 39, 156, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

<sup>653</sup> District Court, *Thames Star*, 6 August 1884, p. 2.

<sup>654</sup> Supreme Court, Bankruptcy Register 1884-1827, folio 157, BAEA 11029/1a, ANZ-A; Supreme Court, *New Zealand Herald*, 14 July 1896, p. 3.

<sup>655</sup> Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 14 August 1884, p. 2.

<sup>656</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Register of Claims 1882-1884, nos. 1031, 1069, 1078, 1096, 1119, BACL 14397/14a; Register of Claims 1884-1886, nos. 1240, 1366, 1402, BACL 14397/15a, ANZ-A; *Thames Star*, 8 December 1882, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 27 July 1885, p. 3, 11 May 1886, p. 2, 10 March 1887, p. 2, 31 January 1889, p. 2; Ohinemuri Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 20 February 1886, p. 2; *Auckland Weekly News*, 19 September 1885, p. 21, 21 November 1885, p. 13, 12 June 1886, p. 22.

<sup>657</sup> Own Correspondent [John McCombie], 'Ohinemuri Goldfield', *Thames Star*, 16 September 1884, p. 2.

The following year was a better one for Nicholl. On 7 January he married Mary Jane Compston,<sup>658</sup> and

in the latter part of 1885 I joined the Hollis brothers in taking the Waitekauri mine and battery on tribute for a term of two years. Everything about the mine and battery was in a rotten state of repair. We had to overhaul the whole business and put it in repair before we could make a start to break out and crush. There were eight of us in the tribute all told, and after we had run 30 head of stampers and cleaned [up] after a month's run, we found that our venture was highly payable. We kept the mine and battery working for the two years and produced 2,800 ounces of gold.<sup>659</sup>

'We made it pay well for two years'.<sup>660</sup> (William Hollis, who married Nicholl's sister-in-law Sarah Margaret Compston in 1882,<sup>661</sup> had been a successful tributer at Waitekauri in the 1870s, and had pegged out the Young Colonial claim next to the Martha immediately after Nicholl's discovery.<sup>662</sup> In June that year, he asked the county council 'for assistance in constructing a suspension bridge over the Ohinemuri River at Waihi'.<sup>663</sup>)

A member of this tributing party later sought gold further afield, possibly interesting Nicholl in prospecting overseas. Traces of gold had been found in the Tavua Basin area of the island of Viti Levu in Fiji as far back as 1872,<sup>664</sup> and at the end of 1886 quartz from Fiji was tested in Auckland. It was 'so satisfactory' that the following January the Fijian Prospecting Association, a syndicate of Auckland and Fijian investors, selected Thomas Hollis to prospect the find.<sup>665</sup> Hollis returned in May, convinced there was no payable ore,<sup>666</sup> but the syndicate remained sufficiently optimistic to send

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<sup>658</sup> Marriage Certificate of William Sharman Crawford Nicholl, 7 January 1885, 1885/191, BDM.

<sup>659</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 23.

<sup>660</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 19.

<sup>661</sup> Marriage Certificate of William Hollis, jr., 1882/1750, BDM.

<sup>662</sup> *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 508.

<sup>663</sup> County Council, *Thames Star*, 4 June 1885, p. 2.

<sup>664</sup> Arvi Parbo, *Down Under: Mineral heritage in Australasia: An illustrated history of mining and metallurgy in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea* (Melbourne, 1992), p. 286.

<sup>665</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 5 January 1887, p. 2; *Auckland Star*, 22 January 1889, p. 5.

<sup>666</sup> *Waikato Times*, 24 May 1887, p. 2.

Nicholl to Fiji in September to prospect for gold and other minerals.<sup>667</sup> He was instructed to investigate the rumours of gold having been found and 'to make a thorough exploration of the district in which this find has been made'.<sup>668</sup> In announcing his departure, the *New Zealand Herald* described him as 'well known at Coromandel and at Waihi', where he had been 'chiefly instrumental in proving the value of the ground since known at the Martha, from which a large amount of gold has been won'. James Alexander Pond, chemist and Colonial Analyst as well as mining investor,<sup>669</sup> had been given the task of selecting the prospector; the newspaper was pleased that 'our Thames miners' were 'recognised in so many parts of the colonies for their skill in prospecting'.<sup>670</sup>

Nicholl was not the only one prospecting in Fiji at that time, for speculators funded other parties.<sup>671</sup> Two days after he arrived on 26 September, the *Fiji Times* quoted from the *New Zealand Herald's* report on his selection and stated that he had 'the best wishes of the community for his success'.<sup>672</sup> By the end of the month he had started prospecting,<sup>673</sup> aided by 'Mr Smith the boat builder', described by the *Fiji Times* as 'an old digger and likewise a cute [cunning person],<sup>674</sup> who knoweth the gold when he seeth it and is convinced that it exists in Fiji'.<sup>675</sup> (He has not been identified.<sup>676</sup>) At the end of October, the two men reported tracing gold in black sand for one and a half miles without finding a reef.<sup>677</sup> Nicholl's most detailed account of his first explorations was written in 1927:<sup>678</sup>

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<sup>667</sup> *Waikato Times*, 17 September 1887, p. 2.

<sup>668</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 19 September 1887, p. 5.

<sup>669</sup> See paper on his life.

<sup>670</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 19 September 1887, p. 5.

<sup>671</sup> *Fiji Times*, 17 March 1888, p. 2.

<sup>672</sup> *Fiji Times*, 28 September 1887, p. 2.

<sup>673</sup> For map of the Fijian Islands showing where Nicholl prospected, see Infomap 242-5, 2 ed. (1988), Land Information New Zealand.

<sup>674</sup> Partridge, p. 284.

<sup>675</sup> *Fiji Times*, 1 October 1887, p. 2.

<sup>676</sup> For James Cobham Smith, see R.A. Derrick, *A History of Fiji*, vol. 1, rev. ed., (Suva, 1950), p. 203; for J.V. Terry Smith, see *Cyclopedia of Fiji* (Sydney, 1907), p. 229.

<sup>677</sup> *Fiji Times*, 5 November 1887, p. 2.

<sup>678</sup> Only an abbreviated account was published in *Auckland Star*, 15 September 1928, Magazine Section, p. 1.

I started to work on the southern side of the Viti Levu, as it was the biggest island, and only found gold in the Sigatoka after trying the coast from Suva to there. I followed the gold up the river for 30 miles to try to locate its source, and before I had time to locate it I got a letter from Suva telling me to pack my outfit and bring it to Suva. I had a mate with me [presumably 'Mr Smith the boat builder'] but he was useless, he was thoroughly tropical soddened and as lazy as they make them. When I got to Suva I saw the boss of the syndicate. He told me that they had a meeting and that they decided to send me to prospect the island of Vanua Levu. I told them I was tracing a trace of gold up the Sigatoka River when I got their letter and would have liked to be left 'till I located it. Old Bulldog Smith [not identified, but apparently not 'Mr Smith the boat builder']<sup>679</sup> was the boss of the syndicate and Mayor of Suva at that time and what he said was law. He said that he knew that Vanua Levu was teeming with gold, and that all it wanted [was] shoveling up.<sup>680</sup>

When his prospecting of Fiji ended, Nicholl reported that he had explored the banks of the Sigatoka River 'for forty miles, but the results obtained were not payable. He also examined the coast from Nadi to Raki Raki, and found colours in a creek at Koro Levu, but not in sufficient quantities to warrant any expenditure of capital or labour'.<sup>681</sup> In his memoirs, Nicholl described the remainder of his time prospecting on Fiji's second largest island:

They packed me off to Vanua Levu next morning in a cutter. We landed at the mouth of the Yanawai River two days later. There was a store there then, kept by a German named Volmar. I got a supply of goods from him and started inland, as there was no chance of trying the river near the coast, it being tidal a few miles up from the mouth. After travelling three miles up the river, I struck a white man's camp; his name was Dr Grabourne. He had a wife and a growing-up family of girls. He was looking after the interests of the natives on behalf of the Government. He gave me an empty bure [Fijian house] to camp in.

I made a start in [the] morning to explore the ranges and try the creeks I met with. The first day out I found a few specks of gold in one of the branches of the Yanawai. I tried all its other branches and could not find a trace in any of them, so I decided to try the coastline right round before locating the gold I had found, in

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<sup>679</sup> For members of the Suva Town Board, see *Cyclopedia of Fiji*, p. 214.

<sup>680</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 23-24.

<sup>681</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 23 January 1889, p. 5.

hopes of finding something better. I prospected the island right round and could only find a slight trace of gold in the black sand at the mouth of the Wailevu River. I crossed the range at the head of the Labasa River into the watershed of the Wailevu and prospected its headwaters and could find no trace, so I made my way back to the Yanawai to follow the gold I had found there.<sup>682</sup>

In 1889, he had briefly stated that he had explored the district of Wailevu and the coast around Natewa Bay, as well as the valley of the Labasa River, 'with similar unsatisfactory results'.<sup>683</sup> According to his 1927 account, he was given a permit signed by the Governor of Fiji, Sir John Bates Thornton.<sup>684</sup>

I had to produce it to the chief of the district I wanted to prospect, and he would find me with what labour I wanted. When I produced it, they always [had] a great corroboree over it. I found them very friendly, even the mountaineers that had not seen a white man before me.

When I got back to the Yanawai, I engaged fifteen men to help me sluice the creek and get some of the gold together to take to Suva when I went there. I started off for the Yanawai and got three boards and made a sluice box and got the natives to carry it to where I wanted to sluice and started them to fetch up the tail race. We sluiced for a week and cleaned up with three ounces of gold. There were four different samples of gold in the creek ['a branch of the Yanawai River'],<sup>685</sup> but not enough to pay for working. The finer sample was lower priced gold than the coarse samples. I followed the fine sample four miles and located it on the top of a dividing spur. I took two bags of dirt out of it and the gold ran out. I panned off two hundred-weight of the dirt for four pennyweights of gold. I cut it in three places where it was shedding gold but there was nothing continuous in it. It was lying flat on the top of the spur and six feet under the surface and covered about one chain square, and not worth wasting time on.<sup>686</sup>

Later, he gave a higher value to the ore he had found 'in a six-inch flat leader on the top of a range. I broke out four bags of it and the gold cut out.

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<sup>682</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 24-25.

<sup>683</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 23 January 1889, p. 5.

<sup>684</sup> See *British Australasian and New Zealand Mail*, 11 February 1897, p. 292.

<sup>685</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 19.

<sup>686</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 25-26.

The four bags of it were worth about five ounces to the ton. They did not give me time to locate the source of coarse gold or to try the river lower down to see if it was payable'.<sup>687</sup>

The *Fiji Times* largely ignored his explorations. In February 1888 it briefly reported that 'the person employed by the syndicate had found a rich gold-bearing reef, promising to yield innumerably ounces to the ton. This rather appears to lack confirmation'.<sup>688</sup> Its next report was not published until early December:

News has been received from the Fiji Mining Company's prospector at Vanua Levu. He reports that he is still tracing gold along the Yana Wai; but, up to the time of his writing, had not found the reef. The prospects found so far are good, but there is nothing to warrant a rush or any extensive party working the river. Other residents in the neighbourhood have also written to friends in Suva verifying the prospector's report. This is good news; but the company anticipates that, before long, better will arrive.<sup>689</sup>

His 1927 account summarised the last stage of his prospecting tour:

I started to run up the other samples and before I had time to locate them, I got a letter telling me to go to Suva. I went down to Graybourn's and awaited a boat for Suva. I had been sixteen months roughing it in the ranges and was getting a bit run down and in want of a change. When I got to Suva, I met Bulldog, and he told me that the syndicate was not prepared to go any further with the prospecting. I handed him the thirty-four dwt of gold and told him that I thought they were wise and that there was no hope of finding an extensive goldfield on the island, but that there was a hope of finding a payable mine if the gold I had found was traced to its source. I left Suva by the next boat for Auckland.<sup>690</sup>

He had slightly exaggerated his time in the ranges, as he had been away from New Zealand for 15 months; he later reduced the time spent in Fiji to only 200 days.<sup>691</sup> 'I took my three ounces of gold to Suva and told them that I couldn't tell them ... whether it was worth their spending any

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<sup>687</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 19.

<sup>688</sup> *Fiji Times*, 8 February 1888, p. 2.

<sup>689</sup> *Fiji Times*, 8 December 1888, p. 2.

<sup>690</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 26-27.

<sup>691</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 19.

more on it; that I would not advise them one way or the other, that no man knew where gold was 'till he found it'.<sup>692</sup>

When he had finished prospecting Vanua Levu, Nicholl gave a detailed account to his employers:

The coastline was ... followed round from the mouth of the Wai Levu to Bua, and then crossing the island to the Dreketi River, Mr Nicholl thoroughly prospecting the various rivers, creeks, and likely looking places met with *en route*. Nothing, however, was found on this trip, except on the Yanawai River, where three ounces of gold were obtained from three weeks' work on the bed rock of the river, with three Fijians assisting him. With this prospect he again returned to Suva, and having exhibited the result of his labours to the members of the Association they resolved on again despatching him to endeavour to discover the matrix or lead where the prospect obtained must originally have come from. This quest Mr Nicholl continued for another three months, prospecting both banks of the river for eight miles above the spot where the three ounces were obtained. The cap of a gold bearing leader some six inches wide was cut into during this search, but this had not the appearance of continuing for any distance, judging from the lay of the country, and the running dip of the leader itself. This leader was on top of a range 3000 feet high.

Mr Nicholl expresses an opinion that a large amount of the lead had been conveyed to the river by successive land slips, which have had a great deal to do in supplying the river with the gold which can now be obtained from its bed. The result of his further explorations only amounted to the discovery of about 3dwts of fine gold, which he pounded out of the reef.

During the fifteen months which his tour has extended over, Mr Nicholl has travelled a long distance, and thoroughly tested a large tract of country on both Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. He thinks that the only likely spot he has seen which it is possible will ultimately prove to be payable auriferous, is in the neighbourhood of the Yanawai and Sigatoka Rivers, as the indications on these spots are by far the most favourable to further discoveries.<sup>693</sup>

Whereas in 1927 he wrote that 'I discovered the gold in the Yanawai, and I believe they are poking at it today. Whether they got payable gold or

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<sup>692</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, pp. 19-20.

<sup>693</sup> *Auckland Star*, 22 January 1889, p. 5.

not I don't know',<sup>694</sup> later he claimed that he had 'proved the two biggest islands auriferous, but as I never was a prophet I couldn't tell them whether the gold I found would have paid them to work it or not. There was not enough of it for me to cause a rush of men to it'.<sup>695</sup>

On 15 January 1889, the *Fiji Times* published his report to the Fiji Mining Company, which concluded that although he had

prospected some considerable distance along the Yana Wai and found traces of gold all through but no defined gold-bearing reef was discovered. He gave it as his opinion that the gold in the riverbed would pay well to work with native labor. As Mr Nicholl was anxious to return to New Zealand the meeting passed a vote of thanks for the work done by him on behalf of the Company and directed that he be paid up to date for his services.<sup>696</sup>

His 'being anxious' to return to New Zealand must be assumed to indicate not only frustration at not finding good ore but also a desire to be re-united with his family, which had grown in his absence. A recent study on modern mining in Fiji notes that other prospectors in the late nineteenth century also found traces of gold in the Yanawai district of Vanua Levu. Nicholl was correct in forecasting a worthwhile discovery, for in 1929 and 1932 good gold was found at Mt Kasi in this area as well as near Tavua on Viti Levu.<sup>697</sup>

Nicholl's last words on his Fijian experience implied that he had had difficulties. 'I got paid and sailed back to New Zealand with a whole hide. The Fijians, take them as a whole, they are a good lot, but like ourselves there are good and bad amongst them'.<sup>698</sup> There was no hint of any problems, not even with the climate, when he spoke to a journalist upon his return in January 1889: 'He does not complain of the climate and has not suffered in any respect'.<sup>699</sup>

## WAIHI ONCE AGAIN

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<sup>694</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 27.

<sup>695</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 19.

<sup>696</sup> *Fiji Times*, 19 January 1889, p. 2.

<sup>697</sup> Aru Emberson-Bain, *Labour and Gold in Fiji* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 17-19.

<sup>698</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 20.

<sup>699</sup> *Tbames Advertiser*, 24 January 1889, p. 2.

While Nicholl had been in Fiji, Thomas Russell had floated the Waihi Gold Mining Company on the London market, and his son Thomas Henry Russell had started to revitalise Waihi mining.<sup>700</sup> According to Nicholl, when the latter took over the mine he ‘put men on to cut through the reef in the Smithy level, and three shots unearthed rich ore which carried through to the hanging wall’.<sup>701</sup>

When I arrived back in Waihi, I found things starting to boom. Mr T.H. Russell had bought Martha mine and all the ground surrounding it and was building a battery at the Union mine and all hands seemed to be busy and plenty of work for all newcomers, but no money to pay them, until the gold was broken from the mine. It was easy then to get work in Waihi, but hard to get money.

He started first with pan amalgamation with McKay pans, but whether the amalgamation was [not] conducted properly, or the fault was in the pans not doing their work right, he did not make a success of them and had them all smashed for scrap iron. Then he let contracts for kilns to burn the ore, and had the battery converted into a dry crushing plant.<sup>702</sup> Then the Cassel process of treatment [using cyanide] was adopted, and proved to be the best way of treatment, the gold being so fine that it was quickly manipulated by the cyanide solution. He worked a good time dry crushing, and filled the graveyard with a lot of the old hands before the change was made to the wet crushing.<sup>703</sup>

Later, Nicholl wrote that ‘when I got back to Waihi I found that J.H. Moore had let the Martha on tribute to Hollis, and that Russell had offered 300 for it’, a mistake, for the amount was £3,000.<sup>704</sup> ‘It was too late for me to save the old company by putting Moore onto the gold in the hanging wall side of the reef’,<sup>705</sup> a statement implying that he had kept the location of the best gold secret. Was this because Moore and not he had been selected as manager of the Martha Extended Company? He does not appear to have

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<sup>700</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 10 December 1887, p. 3; see Russell Stone, *Makers of Fortune: A colonial business community and its fall* (Auckland, 1973), p. 190.

<sup>701</sup> Nicholl, ‘The Discovery’, p. 9.

<sup>702</sup> For a summary of Russell taking over the mine and making changes to the treatment of the ore in the early 1890s, see McAra, pp. 48-49, 63-64, 75-76, 85-86.

<sup>703</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 27-28.

<sup>704</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 20; McAra, p. 49.

<sup>705</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 20.

been a spiteful person, and, according to family tradition, was on good terms with Moore, who had become his brother-in-law in the previous year.<sup>706</sup>

In his final account of his life, Nicholl wrote that, immediately upon returning to Waihi,

I went to contract for Russell, and I found that he had no respect for his word or his writing, and that he would walk through any agreement he made with you, and he was a brain sucker.

When I came back from Fiji, he came down to my place the next weekend after I had arrived to make enquiries as to how much water was in Walmsley's Creek in the summertime, and he asked me to come up and meet him at his office at ten o'clock next day. I went up at this time and knocked on the door and got no answer. I asked whether he was in the office, and they told me where he was. After I was waiting about half an hour for him, I made a start for home and he came out of the office and called me back and we went to the site that Aitken had surveyed out for the dam, and he said that a tunnel had been laid off to carry the water to the battery that he had started to erect.

I told him that he would have trouble in trying to hold the tunnel up under the swampy country which it had to pass through and that it would be better for him to raise his dam another ten feet and run an open ditch around to his battery and gain the extra fall for his water. He asked me if I thought it could be done, and I said that it was the proper way to do it, and he said that if he decided to do it that he would let me the contract to do it.

I thought it was all right. The next morning, I heard Long Drive Walker calling to me from the other side of the river, and [he] told me that Russell had decided to let the contract to another man.<sup>707</sup>

On 20 February 1889, Nicholl took out a miner's right for the Waihi district.<sup>708</sup> As the wage books for the early years of the Waihi Company have not survived, it is not possible to know whether he worked for this company as a wages man, but it was more likely that he worked in several mines, probably as a contractor. The water race contract he hoped to obtain probably was not let such a short time after his return from Fiji. According to the work diary of Thomas Gilmour, who became mine manager in January 1891, the contractors started on the water race at the beginning of

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<sup>706</sup> Information provided by J.H. Moore, Whangamata, 11 November 1996; Marriage Certificate of John Hoey Moore, 7 May 1888, 1888/1128, BDM.

<sup>707</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, pp. 20-22.

<sup>708</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Index of Ohinemuri Miners' Rights 1876-1892, Miner's Right no. 23979, issued 20 February 1889, BACL 14441/2a, ANZ-A.

March, and Walmsley Creek was ‘turned into the new race and pipes’ in mid-July.<sup>709</sup> In August, Nicholl obtained a contract to dig a shaft in the Waitete claim,<sup>710</sup> and there must have been other contracts that were not recorded in the press, for there was work available for experienced miners such as Nicholl. Contemporary accounts referred to more machinery being erected, more ore being uncovered, and praised Russell’s ‘judicious’ management that had made the revival possible.<sup>711</sup> Nicholl agreed, writing in 1901 that to Russell ‘all honour is due for the success of the Waihi goldfield, and to him alone’.<sup>712</sup>

There were no indications in his memoirs or in the press of his doing any prospecting. With a wife and two small boys to support it was inappropriate for him to be away on long prospecting trips, and instead he tried other ways of earning money. In 1890, he was, briefly, in partnership with John McLennon of Waitekauri, who was for a time a bushman and contractor who dabbled in mining at Waitekauri and Komata before becoming a carter and contractor with John Somerville Hope before becoming a publican in Tauranga in 1900.<sup>713</sup>

In March 1890, it was reported that Nicholl and McLennan had a obtained a contract to supply the Waihi battery with 10,000 tons of firewood ‘at a good price’. They were ‘energetically constructing a tramway from a neighbouring bush’ and had obtained ‘favourable terms’ for supplying firewood to the Waitekauri battery.<sup>714</sup> In the following month, Nicholl advertised for firewood cutters.<sup>715</sup> But this arrangement quickly turned sour. In mid-June, a Waihi correspondent reported that the contract to supply this amount of firewood over a two-year period for 6s a ton required ‘of course the construction of the necessary tram’ by Nicholl, who was also to construct a tramway to convey quartz from the mine to the battery. ‘When

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<sup>709</sup> Thomas Gilmour, work diary, entries for 2 March 1891, 18 July 1891, in McAra, p. 68.

<sup>710</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 12 August 1891, p. 3.

<sup>711</sup> For example, *Thames Advertiser*, 28 January 1890, p. 3.

<sup>712</sup> Nicholl, 1901.

<sup>713</sup> *Bay of Plenty Times*, 4 November 1887, p. 4; *Te Aroha Electoral Roll, 1890*, p. 22; Paeroa Warden’s Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1887-1896, folios 38, 40-42, 47-50, 55, 57, ZAAP 13293/1a, ANZ-A; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 17 June 1896, p. 2, 4 July 1896, p. 4, 25 September 1897, p. 5, 20 May 1899, p. 3, 4 April 1900, p. 3, 19 May 1900, p. 2; *Ohinemuri Electoral Roll, 1900*, p. 63; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 852.

<sup>714</sup> Waihi Correspondent, *Bay of Plenty Times*, 20 March 1890, p. 1, 19 June 1890, p. 7.

<sup>715</sup> Advertisement, *Bay of Plenty Times*, 17 April 1890, p. 3.

half completed, the manager wished to reduce the price of the firewood 25 per cent', which 'caused a cessation in both trams for the space of 24 hours. Next morning when the fogs cleared the company had arranged to finish the quartz tramway themselves'.<sup>716</sup>

In response to a disagreement over 'what constituted fair firewood', Nicholl sued the company for 'over £1,000'. Russell, whom he considered had been 'too exacting in his demands', had taken possession of his tramway and plant and terminated the contract. A local correspondent reported that 'very much sympathy is felt for Mr Nicholl in thus losing the results of a prodigious amount of labour expended during the wretched winter months, and just as remuneration therefor was resulting'.<sup>717</sup> But in the following March he was forced to abandon his suit after 'an Order-in-Court compelled him to find securities for the probable expenses of the Company's defence'. As Nicholl was still an undischarged bankrupt, 'not caring to accept the risk he abandoned the action'. A local correspondent disapproved of how the law enabled 'the wealthy and influential' to take advantage of 'their poorer neighbour'.<sup>718</sup>

Nicholl's memoirs detailed what went wrong:

The [Waihi] company was employing all the drays and waggon teams that could be had to cart firewood and timber to keep the works going, and [with] the bad state of the roads it looked like that the battery would be stopped for the want of wood to keep steam up to drive it. I saw that there would be no difficulty in running a tramway from the mine to Walmsley's Bush,<sup>719</sup> as there was a good grade all the way from the battery to the bush and the ground suitable to lay the tram without navvying.

I saw Mr Russell and told him that, if he gave me the contract for 10,000 tons of firewood at 6/- [6s] a ton and supply me with the rails to build the tram with and I to find labour and sleepers, that I would guarantee to keep him fully supplied with wood in three weeks from the time the contract was signed. He agreed and at once got the rails carted to the tram site. I went to work, and in a fortnight's time was supplying the mine with wood and a week later the whole supply that was required was brought along the

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<sup>716</sup> Waihi Correspondent, *Bay of Plenty Times*, 19 June 1890, p. 7.

<sup>717</sup> Waihi Correspondent, *Bay of Plenty Times*, 12 November 1890, p. 2.

<sup>718</sup> Waihi Correspondent, *Bay of Plenty Times*, 20 March 1891, p. 4.

<sup>719</sup> The Walmsley brothers sold timber to the Waihi Company for several years: for example, see Thomas Gilmour, work diary, entry for 2 June 1894, in McAra, p. 74.

tram and the drays and waggons were put on the road to cart timber and machinery from Paeroa and the Waitekauri forest.

I continued to lay the tramway till it was one and a half miles into the forest. By this time the tram was three miles in length. I had fifteen men in the bush cutting the wood and three men sleighing it to the tram with three horses, and three men and three horses trucking the wood to the mine.

By this time, I had two thousand tons of wood delivered to the mine and had not received a penny for it and had paid all the money I had to keep the business running. I went to Russell and told him that I was stumped and would have to shut down if he wouldn't pay up. He paid me a little money and I shared it among the wood choppers as far as it would go.

Then he started complaining about the wood that it would not roast the quartz. McDermott was packing the kilns with quartz and wood, and he was a mate of McLennan's, and between the two they wanted to beat me for the contract and would not put the right amount of wood in the kilns with the quartz to burn it. Neither me nor Russell knew this, and we were always at loggerheads. He was at [me] every day to improve the class of wood. I told him that it wasn't in the bush to do it.<sup>720</sup>

(James McDermott, a mariner living in Waihi, would be one of four partners in the Komata Licensed Holding with McLennan in March 1892.<sup>721</sup> The version of Nicholl's memoirs published by the *Auckland Star* turned McDermott into 'some man', and McLennan became 'his mate',<sup>722</sup> presumably to protect the guilty.)

Nicholl explained how his relations with Russell ended:

He came to me again and was complaining. I wasn't in a sweet temper at the time. I told him to take his damned contract, that I was out of it. He called me back, he said to talk the matter over, but I had enough of it and was determined to have no more to do with him.

The fact was that he hadn't the money to pay me, nor could he get it till the mine produced it. So I was on the rocks again with a wife and two children and £36.- in debt to my storekeeper.<sup>723</sup>

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<sup>720</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 28-29.

<sup>721</sup> *Te Aroha Electoral Roll, 1890*, p. 21; Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1887-1896, folio 40, ZAAP 13293/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>722</sup> *Auckland Star*, 22 September 1928, Magazine Section, p. 1.

<sup>723</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 29-30.

Later he wrote that he worked for Russell ‘on contracts for two years after’ returning, ‘and I was in debt to my storekeeper thirty pounds, and had spent all the money I had earned in Fiji at risk of my life, and I was dead broke with a wife and two boys’.<sup>724</sup> The dates of these endeavours to make a living by being an independent contractor (and when he was still an undischarged bankrupt) are uncertain. Presumably his timber contract was signed in 1891, when Gilmour recorded that he had ‘engaged with McLennon to bring the cribbing down from [James Edward] Slevin’s Bush’,<sup>725</sup> another source of timber. In March 1892, he obtained a contract from Russell to build a tramway between the latter’s Komata New Find mine and his Waitekauri battery.<sup>726</sup> This required constructing inclines on both sides of the range, with a horse whim assisting to haul trucks to the summit.<sup>727</sup> The following month, he had about 50 men at work and he was hoping to have the three-mile tramway either finished or nearly so within a month.<sup>728</sup> Two weeks later, when about 30 men were working, it was reported that ‘their operations so far have not gone much beyond the work of preparing the necessary road-way; but the navying is now pretty nearly finished, and the work of laying the rails is well in hand’.<sup>729</sup> By the end of May, a correspondent reported that Nicholl had ‘found the job a bigger one than he had anticipated, and fresh arrangements had to be made for its completion’, two new contractors taking over the task.<sup>730</sup> They may not have made a financial success of their contracts either: in mid-June a Waitekauri correspondent wrote that ‘this has been a long and laborious work, and will cost considerably more than was first estimated’.<sup>731</sup>

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<sup>724</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 22.

<sup>725</sup> Thomas Gilmour, work diary, entry for 6 August 1891, in McAra, p. 69. For Slevin, a prominent resident of early Waihi, see *Thames Advertiser*, Warden’s Court, 8 July 1892, p. 3, 31 August 1899, p. 2; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 30 March 1898, p. 2, 1 May 1903, p. 2, Waihi Correspondent, 24 May 1907, p. 2; National Bank, Waihi Branch, Inspector’s Report, 19 June 1901, National Bank Archives, Wellington.

<sup>726</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 21 March 1892, p. 2, 27 April 1892, p. 2.

<sup>727</sup> For a description of the completed tramway, with a map of the area, see S. Cochrane Macky, ‘A Visit to Waitekauri’, *New Zealand Herald*, 11 November 1893, Supplement, p. 1.

<sup>728</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 19 April 1892, p. 2.

<sup>729</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 3 May 1892, p. 2.

<sup>730</sup> Own Correspondent, ‘Upper Thames Mining’, *Thames Star*, 30 May 1892, p. 4.

<sup>731</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 16 June 1892, p. 2.

Nicholl followed the example of many miners by having a small farm. He had first applied for an agricultural lease of 50 acres in 1883, but this was not granted.<sup>732</sup> In 1891 he applied for a larger area, using, as was common, the names of his family members as dummy owners. The first application was made in January, when his wife, describing herself as married to a farmer, applied for 50 acres bordered on the south by the road to Tauranga and on the north and west by the Ohinemuri River. It was granted.<sup>733</sup> Nicholl applied in late February for 50 acres of 'pastoral & agricultural land' bordered on the north by the river; the sketch map he enclosed showed this land as being on both sides of it, with the western boundary being Waitete Creek.<sup>734</sup> It was two miles 'below' Waihi.<sup>735</sup> On 26 March, William Nicholl, junior, miner, of Waihi, son of William Nicholl, miner, applied for another 50 acres, also on the edge of the Ohinemuri river and adjoining Mary Jane Nicholl's occupation license.<sup>736</sup> This applicant can only have been Nicholl's youngest son, aged three. This license was not granted, but his father's was, in August.<sup>737</sup> Another application for an occupation license was unsuccessful.<sup>738</sup>

Because Nicholl was normally away from home working as a contractor or miner, sometimes on the other side of the range, his wife must have looked after the farm for most of the time. This was illustrated in November 1895, when the Waihi Company informed her, not Nicholl, that

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<sup>732</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Numerical Register of Applications 1890-1896, folios 25, 55, BACL 14354/2a; Register of Applications for Agricultural Leases and Licensed Holdings 1878-1886, folio 16, 5 March 1883, BACL 14452/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>733</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Numerical Register of Applications 1890-1896, folio 34, BACL 14354/2a; Waihi Occupation Licenses 1891, folio 5, AAAE 15183/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>734</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Waihi Occupation Licenses 1891, folio 83 (with map), AAAE 15183/1a, ANZ-A; for a 1901 survey of this land, Section 23 Block XV Ohinemuri Survey District, see SO 12007, and Lands and Survey Department, Register Books, vol. 108, folio 220, LINZ, Hamilton; advertisement, *Thames Advertiser*, 9 March 1891, p. 3.

<sup>735</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Waihi Occupation Licenses 1891, folio 83, AAAE 15183/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Advertiser*, 2 March 1891, p. 3, advertisement, 9 March 1891, p. 3.

<sup>736</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Numerical Register of Applications 1890-1896, folio 37, BACL 14354/2a; Waihi Occupation Licenses 1891, folio 109, AAAE 15183/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>737</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Ohinemuri Agricultural Leases 1875-1893, folio 155, ZAAP 13784/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>738</sup> Warden's Court, *Thames Star*, 19 March 1891, p. 2, 28 May 1891, p. 2, 23 July 1891, p. 2.

there would be compensation for a portion of the farm taken for its water race.<sup>739</sup> In the following April, Thomas Lockhead, a prominent farmer of the Tauranga district,<sup>740</sup> went to Waihi to inspect the farm, but was informed that it had been let to someone else.<sup>741</sup> Four days later, he 'got telegram from Nicholl Waihi about farm', and returned.<sup>742</sup> After breakfast on 5 May, he 'went and saw Nicholl and wrote out agreement about lease' and posted this to his solicitor.<sup>743</sup> From that date onwards, Lochhead regularly transferred milch cows between this lease and his farm at Te Puna, and sold milk, cheese, and eggs in Waihi.<sup>744</sup> Local men and boys ran the Waihi farm during Lochhead's absence.<sup>745</sup> He had regular contact with Nicholl, on occasions borrowing the latter's horse to ride between the two farms and running some of Nicholl's heifers on his Te Puna farm.<sup>746</sup> Whenever Nicholl went to Tauranga he stayed for a night with Lochhead.<sup>747</sup> There were some unrecorded issues over the lease that required discussions with their respective solicitors in 1897, leading to a new one being drawn up.<sup>748</sup>

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<sup>739</sup> Jackson and Russell to Mary Jane Nicholl, 8 November 1895, Jackson and Russell Letterbooks, no. 60, p. 459, MS 360, Auckland Institute and Museum Library.

<sup>740</sup> Thomas Lochhead, diaries 1893-1941, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

<sup>741</sup> Thomas Lochhead, diary, entry for 28 April 1896, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

<sup>742</sup> Thomas Lochhead, diary, entry for 2 May 1896, 4 May 1896, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library; here, as in most of the other entries, Nicholl's name was written as Nicholls.

<sup>743</sup> Thomas Lochhead, diary, entry for 5 May 1896, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

<sup>744</sup> For example, Thomas Lochhead, diary, entries for 11 May 1896, 12 May 1896, 13 May 1896, 26 May 1896, 14 June 1896, 3 September 1896, 28 October 1896, 29 June 1897, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

<sup>745</sup> For example, Thomas Lochhead, diary, entries for 18 May 1896, 14 July 1896, 16 July 1896, 17 July 1896, 5 September 1896, 9 September 1896, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

<sup>746</sup> For example, Thomas Lochhead, diary, entries for 17 July 1896, 25 October 1896, 10 March 1897, 12 April 1897, 15 July 1897, 22 August 1897, 7 September 1897, 16 September 1897, 7 January 1899, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

<sup>747</sup> Thomas Lochhead, diary, entries for 10 October 1896, 11 October 1896, 17 May 1897, 18 May 1897, 26 June 1897, 28 June 1897, 30 June 1897, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

<sup>748</sup> Thomas Lochhead, diary, entries for 10 March 1897, 13 May 1897, 4 August 1897, 6 August 1897, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

In addition to this land, on 8 December 1896 his wife was granted business site no. 9 in Waihi.<sup>749</sup> This was let to a butcher, whom he sued in July 1897 for unpaid rent amounting to £6 8s.<sup>750</sup> Part of this site was granted to George Crosby's coaching company in December 1898, with Nicholl (in whose name the site was held by then) retaining the remainder until the end of 1904.<sup>751</sup>

## MARATOTO

Nicholl's principal mining venture during the 1890s was at Maratoto, across the range from Waitekauri, where the Maratoto Company had ceased operations in 1891 after exhausting the bulk of the richest ore in its upper workings.<sup>752</sup> As the Inspecting Engineer for the Mines Department noted in July 1892, these mines had 'not turned out according to expectation. Indeed, they have been very disappointing'.<sup>753</sup> Possibly his interest in this district had been sparked by his brother-in-law, John Hoey Moore, who joined the 1887 Maratoto rush after ceasing to be a mine manager in Waihi.<sup>754</sup>

On 7 January 1891, Nicholl took out a miner's right for that district,<sup>755</sup> and later that month sought the forfeiture of the Quayle. Its owner, Thomas McDonough,<sup>756</sup> a miner who was allegedly an inveterate claim-jumper,<sup>757</sup>

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<sup>749</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Mining Applications 1895-1897, folio 21, BAFV 13692/2a; Register of Residence Sites and Business Sites 1896-1912, folio 298, application 1856/1896, BAFV 13835/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>750</sup> Paeroa Magistrate's Court, Plaintiff Book 1896-1901, folio 31, no. 345, BACL 13745/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>751</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Residence Sites and Business Sites 1896-1912, folio 298, application 1856/1896, BAFV 13835/2a, ANZ-A; for George Crosby and his Ohinemuri Coaching Company, see *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 853.

<sup>752</sup> *Auckland Star*, 15 November 1898, p. 2; Fraser and Bell, p. 13.

<sup>753</sup> H.A. Gordon to Minister of Mines, 28 July 1892, *AJHR*, 1892, C-3, p. 44.

<sup>754</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 29 March 1887, p. 3, 19 October 1887, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 8 October 1887, p. 2; *New Zealand Herald*, 8 November 1887, p. 6; *Auckland Weekly News*, 7 April 1888, p. 30, 26 May 1888, p. 3, 9 June 1888, p. 36.

<sup>755</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Index of Ohinemuri Miners' Rights 1876-1892, no. 46215, BACL 14441/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>756</sup> For his involvement at Te Aroha and Waiorongomai, see Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folio 213, BBAV 11567/1a; Plaintiff Book 1880-1898, 19/1882, 29/1882, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A.

admitted not working it but said, for some unexplained but presumably personal reason, that it should not go to Nicholl.<sup>758</sup> The following month, Nicholl applied for a claim he called the Jane Nicholl, using his wife's second name.<sup>759</sup>

According to Nicholl's 1927 memoirs, after the failure of his contract to supply firewood to Russell's battery 'I heard just then that the Maratoto Mining Company had been wound up and that they had sold the mine and battery by public auction and that Mr [Charles] Judd, foundryman of Thames, had bought it for £210.-.-'.<sup>760</sup> (Judd had founded his Thames Iron Works, a foundry and tailings plant, in 1869.<sup>761</sup>) He bought the property for £70, not £210, in April 1892, acquiring a 30-acre licensed holding, a water race, and a small battery comprising two McKay pans, one settler, one Pelton wheel, dishes, retorts, sundries such as mining tools and piping, and an office and a hut.<sup>762</sup> According to the warden, this small plant was 'only capable of treating the loose rubble that was found in the prospectors' reef'.<sup>763</sup> In October, he was granted the New Maratoto Licensed Holding.<sup>764</sup> This ground was close to the bottom of the range where the first discovery had been made between Maratoto Stream and its western tributary, McBrinn's Creek.<sup>765</sup> At an unknown date Nicholl 'went to the Thames and offered to take the mine and battery on tribute at ten per cent'.<sup>766</sup> In his last memoirs, he explained that first 'I went over to it and prospected the mine,

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<sup>757</sup> See *Thames Advertiser*, letter from 'Old Miner', 25 May 1893, p. 3, Warden's Court, 26 April 1895, p. 3.

<sup>758</sup> Warden's Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 23 January 1891, p. 3.

<sup>759</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Numerical Register of Applications 1890-1896, folio 26, BACL 14354/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>760</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 30.

<sup>761</sup> See J.H.M. Salmon, *A History of Goldmining in New Zealand* (Wellington, 1963), pp. 195, 224, 253.

<sup>762</sup> *Thames Star*, 13 April 1892, p. 2.

<sup>763</sup> Warden to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 19 May 1893, *AJHR*, 1893, C-3, p. iv.

<sup>764</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1887-1896, folio 67, ZAAP 13293/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>765</sup> S. Cochrane Macky, 'A Visit to Waitekauri', *New Zealand Herald*, 11 November 1893, Supplement, p. 1; Fraser and Bell, p. 100; for maps of the area in which this claim was located, see map facing p. 104, where it is part of Walker's Maratoto SQC, and Downey, p. 230.

<sup>766</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 30.

and I found a small block of ground that would pay me to work on tribute'.<sup>767</sup> In 1927, he wrote that Judd 'told me that he knew nothing about mining and couldn't do it, but that he was prepared to sell it for £210-.-, what he gave for it. He told me that he had bought it without seeing it', meaning the battery,

and that he was afraid it would take more to fetch it from where it was than it would be to buy a new one. I told him that I had no money to buy it, but that if he would trust me, I could pay him in two months time. He gave me the keys of the battery and told [me] to go ahead and that he would draw up the transfer when I brought the money.<sup>768</sup>

Later, he wrote that Judd 'told me that he would trust me'.<sup>769</sup> Nicholl then turned to Russell for assistance:

Mr Russell seemed [to] regret the way he treated me. I had no spite against him. I knew that if I asked him for the [quick]silver I wanted to charge the battery with, he would trust me till I could pay him. I called on him next morning and told him what I had done and that I wanted seven bottles of quicksilver to charge the pans and settler. He told me to go to [John Sommerville] Hope the battery manager at Waitekauri<sup>770</sup> and get them. I went and told him that Russell told me to get seven bottles of silver. He told me that he couldn't do it without an order from Russell.

I went to Waihi and told Mr Russell what Hope had said; he was writing at the time. He waited until he was finished writing. When he had done writing he got up and went to the door and called a man and told him to go to Campbell's stable and fetch his horse and one for Nicholl. He went into the office and sat down and started writing again, without saying a word to me. When the man brought the horses, he stopped writing and went out and got on his horse and told me to mount mine. This is all the words that had passed between us till we reached Waitekauri.<sup>771</sup>

(Daniel Campbell, the storekeeper already known to Nicholl,<sup>772</sup> also owned a coaching business at Waihi at that time.<sup>773</sup>) Nicholl's later account

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<sup>767</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 21.

<sup>768</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 30.

<sup>769</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 22.

<sup>770</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 915-916.

<sup>771</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 30-31.

<sup>772</sup> Nicholl, c.1935, p.16.

stated that Russell ‘told me to go to Dan Campbell and tell him to harness up the buggy and wait for him there till he came. He wasn’t long in coming and he told Dan to drive us to Waitekauri’.<sup>774</sup>

When we got there, he went straight to Hope and said, “Give Nicholl the silver he asked you for,” and turned to me and said, “Nicholl, anything you want to make a success of your venture don’t be afraid to ask me, and if it is in my power I will do it.” I thanked him and he took the bridle off my horse and led him out to his stable at Waihi. And strange to say, me, Dan Campbell, and Smifie Lynch<sup>775</sup> were the only men he would bid the time of day to and ask how we were getting on.<sup>776</sup>

Later, he quoted Russell as telling Hope ‘To give me what he sent me for and anything I asked him for in future’.<sup>777</sup>

Nicholl’s memoirs emphasized the extremes of physical punishment he regularly gave his body, which were especially severe when he carried bottles of mercury over the range. As he could not use his horse because the coach road from Waitekauri to Maratoto via the Golden Cross saddle had not been constructed,<sup>778</sup> he had to walk, as described in his last memoir:

The trail was up to the Komata from the Waitekauri battery and along the range to Sheep Hill. I used to leave my house on the Plains at five o’clock in the morning, a distance of four miles from Waitekauri, and take my crib [food]<sup>779</sup> with me and do two miles from the battery. The battery at Maratoto was seven miles distant from the Waitekauri battery, and I did two trips a day with ninety pounds on my shoulders.<sup>780</sup>

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<sup>773</sup> *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 927; W.C. Kennedy, ‘Waitawheta Recollections’, *Ohinemuri Regional History Journal*, no. 1 (1964), p. 26.

<sup>774</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 23.

<sup>775</sup> The first name must be a nickname (correctly Smithie?); was he the same Lynch who had the contract to erect a crushing plant for the Golden Cross mine, at the head of the Waitekauri valley, in 1894?: see *AJHR*, 1894, C-3, p. 43.

<sup>776</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 31-32.

<sup>777</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 23.

<sup>778</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 33; *AJHR*, 1896, C-3, p. 269.

<sup>779</sup> Partridge, p. 269.

<sup>780</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 23.

Sheep Hill was 2,227 feet above sea level, and from the top of the range he could follow a ridge directly to his destination.<sup>781</sup> The graded roadway he used can still be traced from the former township via site of the Durbar mine and battery up to and along the ridge between the Komata and Grace Darling mining areas.<sup>782</sup> Nicholl gave considerable details about how his body suffered under this extreme exertion:

It is seven miles from Waitekauri to Maratoto, and the first four miles of it all up hill. To the top of Sheep Hill is 1800ft above the Waitekauri battery and it is downhill from there to the Maratoto battery.

A bottle of quicksilver weighs 90lb. When I picked up the first bottle, I thought it would only be a cakewalk carrying seven bottles over the range, so I went at it and by the time I had the first bottle on top of Sheep Hill my shoulders were skinned. The bottle not [being] quite full, the silver in the bottle was continually on the move while getting carried.<sup>783</sup>

This emphasis on exertion and pain was repeated in his later version:

With the working of the silver in the bottle it soon had my shoulders raw flesh. When I put the bottle on my shoulders at Waitekauri I never rested with it till I dumped it down at Sheep Hill halfway to Maratoto, and 2,000 feet above the Waitekauri Battery.

When I carried it through to Maratoto I boiled the billy, and I had crib and had a smoke and off again for the next bottle. When I got the seven bottles over, my God, what shoulders I had. There wasn't a bit of skin on them to halfway down to my waist.<sup>784</sup>

The 1927 memoirs, after giving a less dramatic version of carrying the last bottles, described how he started treating the ore:

I filled two bottles next day so that the silver couldn't move, although I never found them much easier to carry. I made two trips next day, and the day after I brought my swag and grub in for the week and charged the settler with two bottles of silver and the other bottle I kept to charge the pans with, and started the

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<sup>781</sup> For the route taken, see 'Topographical Map of Ohinemuri and Waihi North Survey Districts', in pocket of Fraser and Bell.

<sup>782</sup> Personally explored on Forest and Bird walks.

<sup>783</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 32.

<sup>784</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, pp. 23-24.

battery going on a heap of stuff that the company had left untreated and went to the mine to prospect it.

I found a block left giving payable prospects 53 [feet] x 32, so I started to beat it out first, and by the time the battery had the heap through I had another ready for it. Every four hours I had to charge the pans, but the last charge at night I let it run for eight hours and made it a double charge. I worked the sixteen hours and used the eight hours to rest, get wood, and sleep. I cleaned up after running the battery for a fortnight and retorted and had £103.- for my fortnight's run.<sup>785</sup>

Later he gave a somewhat different account:

I made a truck to hold about a ton of ore instead of sacking it to the battery as the company did, and got a boy to drive it, and I got a week's supply of grub packed over the hill, and went in to the mine and started the battery going and in nine days I had my first clean up, and was astonished at the bucket of amalgam that I got for the time the battery was running, and then I knew that I was on the pig's back, and that I could [repay] Mr Judd in the time I promised to do it. My first return I paid my storekeeper and the next I paid Mr Judd.<sup>786</sup>

His 1927 version described how he paid 'my storekeeper Dan Campbell':<sup>787</sup>

When I handed out the money Dan looked pleased and when the bill was receipted, me and him went over to the pub and had two long beers together and shook hands and I went home. I started out next morning with a horse and a boy with a month's grub. The boy was to cart the quartz to the battery from the mine. I ran the battery for another three weeks and had enough bullion to pay Mr Judd his £210.<sup>788</sup>

When paying Judd, Nicholl 'thanked him for trusting me'.<sup>789</sup> In April 1893, Judd transferred all his interest in his New Maratoto Licensed Holding to Nicholl's wife, and in the following year she was first granted a

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<sup>785</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 32-33.

<sup>786</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 24.

<sup>787</sup> For a photo, taken before 1890, of Dan Campbell's general store and post office at Waihi, see *Diamond Jubilee of the Ohinemuri County*, p. 71.

<sup>788</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 33.

<sup>789</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 23.

claim of one man's ground and then, in June, another four men's ground, under this name.<sup>790</sup> This claim covered just over five acres and included the levels opened up by the original Maratoto Company.<sup>791</sup> In December 1895, she was granted the New Maratoto Extended Special Claim, of 30 acres.<sup>792</sup> She was also granted two water races.<sup>793</sup>

Two men assisted Nicholl in working his mine and battery.<sup>794</sup> In his last memoir, he wrote that 'I kept the battery going for three years and it never stopped all this time. I used to get up at twelve o'clock at night and give it a charge to last it to morning, so the battery was running night and day for three years without a stop'.<sup>795</sup> A visitor noted, in November 1893, that Nicholl was obtaining 'payable results'.<sup>796</sup> Nicholl claimed to have 'turned out £1300.- a year for three years',<sup>797</sup> but other reports gave different estimates. In May 1894, the mining inspector reported that 'much of the ore that was then rejected has been found since to pay handsomely', although as the bullion mostly contained silver it was worth only 6s 6d an ounce. By that date, the 200 tons treated had produced 2,349oz 5dwt of bullion.<sup>798</sup> By the following May, he had extracted a further 508 tons, which

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<sup>790</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Mining Applications 1892-1895, folios 144, 160, 162, 163, 168, ZAAP 13692/3a; Register of Licensed Holdings 1887-1896, folios 67, 98, ZAAP 13293/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>791</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1887-1896, folio 96, ZAAP 13293/1a, ANZ-A; George Wilson to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 7 May 1894, *AJHR*, 1894, C-3A, p. 11.

<sup>792</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1896-1898, folio 2, ZAAP 13293/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>793</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Mining Register 1881-1895, pp. 85-86, ZAAP 13296/1a; Mining Register 1895-1896, pp. 349-350, ZAAP 13296/2a; Mining Maps, YCAB A1711/46a, 46c, ANZ-A.

<sup>794</sup> George Wilson to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 7 May 1894, *AJHR*, 1894, C-3A, p. 11; George Wilson to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 21 May 1895, *AJHR*, 1895, C-3A, p. 11.

<sup>795</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 25.

<sup>796</sup> S. Cochrane Macky, 'A Visit to Waitekauri', *New Zealand Herald*, 11 November 1893, Supplement, p. 1.

<sup>797</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 34.

<sup>798</sup> George Wilson to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 7 May 1894, *AJHR*, 1894, C-3A, p. 11.

produced 1,142 ounces of bullion valued at £376 15s 9d.<sup>799</sup> In August, a newspaper stated that Nicholl had been ‘working some lodes in this claim for about 18 months’ and stated ‘that during that time he obtained £1600 worth of gold’.<sup>800</sup>

In February 1896, his wife was granted permission to work the New Maratoto Licensed Holding with one man for four months;<sup>801</sup> Nicholl was the man? Six month’s protection was granted in late March for the New Maratoto Extended.<sup>802</sup> In May, his party was working the Maratoto Special Claim, of 70 acres.<sup>803</sup> Before their New Maratoto Licensed Holding was sold shortly afterwards, they received ‘a fair return from quartz taken from the prospector’s reef, 37 tons yielding 122oz of bullion, valued at £62’.<sup>804</sup> An 1898 article stated that Nicholl ‘ran the pan plant for about 18 months’, and estimated that he had obtained between £1600 and £1800 worth of bullion.<sup>805</sup> A later history of Hauraki mining, based on official sources, deduced that from 1892 to 1895 Nicholl and his fellow tributers obtained 4,596 ounces of bullion, worth £800, from 978 tons.<sup>806</sup> It is clear that Nicholl exaggerated both the output and its value.

Nicholl did not confine his mining to Maratoto, for at the same time he prospected in other parts of Ohinemuri.<sup>807</sup> Between 1895 and 1898, he was relatively financially secure, with modest credit balances in his account with the Bank of New Zealand. At the end of the half-year to 30 September 1895, his account (in his wife’s name) showed a credit balance of £41 15s 2s; on 30 September 1896 he had one of £53 13s 3d; on 31 March 1897 it was £24 11s 2d; on 30 September 1897, £318 9s 6d; and on 31 March 1898, after

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<sup>799</sup> George Wilson to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 21 May 1895, *AJHR*, 1895, C-3A, p. 11.

<sup>800</sup> *Auckland Weekly News*, 3 August 1895, p. 10.

<sup>801</sup> Warden’s Court, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 8 February 1896, p. 7.

<sup>802</sup> Paeroa Warden’s Court, Register of Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1896-1898, folio 2, ZAAP 13293/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>803</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 2 May 1896, p. 2.

<sup>804</sup> H.A. Gordon to Minister of Mines, 17 June 1896, *AJHR*, 1896, C-3, p. 72.

<sup>805</sup> *Auckland Evening Star*, 15 November 1898, p. 2.

<sup>806</sup> Downey, p. 227.

<sup>807</sup> For example, Thames Warden’s Court, Register of Applications for Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1887-1896, folio 241, application of 1 April 1896 for the Bank of New Zealand Special Claim at Whangamata (granted on 1 October), BACL 14376/1a, ANZ-A.

he had used up most of his money by going to Klondike, £28 12s 3d.<sup>808</sup> Presumably most of his profits had been eaten up paying wages or purchasing mining requisites and meeting family and household expenses.

### FAMILY CRISIS

When Nicholl had made his first £103 from Maratoto, he ‘took the gold to the bank and sold it and opened an account in my wife’s name as I could not keep money. Anyone asking me for it could get it out of me, and I knew that they would have a contract [‘a hard task’]<sup>809</sup> to get it out of her’.<sup>810</sup> The earliest surviving records of the Ohinemuri branch of the Bank of New Zealand reveal that on 30 September 1895 the account, containing £41 15s 2d, was indeed in Mary Jane Nicholl’s name.<sup>811</sup> He wrote that, after his first crushing at Maratoto,

I did not take time to go into the bank with the bullion. I had made all I had over to my wife as I thought it would be easier for her if anything happened [to] me in the mine.... I could trust my life with her. She was in high spirits when I would come home at the end of two months with my back load of bullion.<sup>812</sup>

When he went to Judd’s office to pay for the Maratoto property,

I handed him the money and told him to make the transfer out in my wife’s name, that I thought it would be better for her if anything would happen to me in the mine. He drew up the transfer and it was signed and I recorded it and got back to the mine as quick as I could and started the battery going and kept it going for three years.<sup>813</sup>

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<sup>808</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Ohinemuri Branch, Half Yearly Balance Books, Balances as at 30 September 1895, 30 September 1896, 31 March 1897, 30 September 1897, 31 March 1898, Current Accounts, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

<sup>809</sup> Partridge, p. 250.

<sup>810</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 33.

<sup>811</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Ohinemuri Branch, Half Yearly Balance Book, Balances as at 30 September 1895, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

<sup>812</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, pp. 24-25.

<sup>813</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 33-34.

It was in June 1894 that the New Maratoto Licensed Holding was granted in her name.<sup>814</sup> In December 1895 she was granted the New Maratoto Extended Special Claim.<sup>815</sup> In 1894, a business license at Waihi was granted in her name, two more were granted to her in the following year (possibly renewals of the original one), in 1896 two new ones were granted for Waihi and one for Maratoto, and in 1897 one (probably a renewal) was granted at Waihi.<sup>816</sup> This practice of having money and property in a wife's name was quite common, and could be a way of avoiding losing property in the event of bankruptcy, an ever-present possibility that he had already experienced. As well there was the practical and legal complication that, until July 1896, he was an undischarged bankrupt,<sup>817</sup> which may have been the real reason rather than his later explanation that money slipped through his fingers. That it was understood that properties in Mary Jane's name were really his was illustrated by a suit for forfeiture of a Waihi business site in late 1896.<sup>818</sup> A weekly rental of 12s 6d had been paid until 'the license was allowed to lapse through a misunderstanding as to who should pay'. After stating that he was 'not in favour of forfeiture except when he was absolutely obliged to do so', the warden noted that the defendant, meaning Nicholl even though his wife was being sued, 'was away from the colony, and in the condition of affairs he was not surprised that a mistake had been made'. Accordingly, he imposed a fine as 'sufficient punishment' and did not forfeit the site.<sup>819</sup>

Nicholl's memoirs continued the story:

The wife was all honey when I brought the bullion in every month and I was happy to see her pleased, for I thought no man had a wife like mine.... She was taking the bullion and selling it and banking it in her name.

By this [time] the boom had started, and I got a letter from Long Drive Walker to come to Waihi and see him if I wanted to sell the

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<sup>814</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1887-1896, folio 98, ZAAP 13293/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>815</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1896-1898, folio 2, ZAAP 13293/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>816</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Alphabetical Register of Business Licenses 1893-1900, 3885/1894, 6, 3918/1895, 48, 141, 3090/1896, 3111/1897, ZAAP 17395/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>817</sup> Supreme Court, Bankruptcy Register 1884-1927, folio 157, BAEA 11029/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>818</sup> Warden's Court, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 28 November 1896, p. 6.

<sup>819</sup> Warden's Court, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 12 December 1896, p. 3.

mine and let him know what I would take for it. I went to Waihi and told the wife what I was over for and I told her that I wanted £2500.- for it. I went to Walker, and he was prepared to give £2000 and no more. After a bit of barney, I consented. I went and told my wife that I had sold it for £2000.-.<sup>820</sup>

Nicholl's compressing events that happened over a year or more into days or weeks has confused the chronology, for the negotiations took far longer than he indicated. A press report for August 1895, at the height of the Hauraki mining boom, stated that Nicholl had placed 'the old Maratoto mine' in the hands of Walker to be sold in London.<sup>821</sup> Not till the end of the following April was it announced that Walker and another prominent mine manager, Charles McLean,<sup>822</sup> had bought the Maratoto Special Claim and battery from 'Nicholl and party' for £2,000 and were about to float it in London.<sup>823</sup> It was believed Nicholl sold his ground 'at a price nearly 10 times larger than that for which he had bought it'.<sup>824</sup> Not till mid-August 1896 did Mary Jane Nicholl transfer all her interest in the New Maratoto Licensed Holding and New Maratoto Extended Special Claim to Walker.<sup>825</sup> She was granted a mile-long water race in May, but because the titles for this and other water rights and machine sites (all held in her name) had not been completed, not till the following February were they transferred to Walker.<sup>826</sup>

According to Nicholl's 1927 account, after he sold this property his wife

was in great glee about it and, in her excitement, she gave me a kiss. Walker had told me to send her to Miller's, the lawyer's office, and the money would be paid over and she could sign the transfer. I told her this and she kissed me and the two boys and went to Miller's office, and I got the two boys ready for school and I went over to Maratoto to fetch my belongings for home. When I

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<sup>820</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 34.

<sup>821</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 1 August 1895, p. 6.

<sup>822</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 502.

<sup>823</sup> *Auckland Star*, 30 April 1896, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 2 May 1896, p. 2; see also H.A.

Gordon to Minister of Mines, 17 June 1896, *AJHR*, 1896, C-3, p. 72.

<sup>824</sup> Salmon, p. 250.

<sup>825</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1887-1896, folio 98, ZAAP 13293/1a; Register of Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1896-1898, folio 2, ZAAP 13293/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>826</sup> Warden's Court, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 25 May 1896, p. 2, 24 February 1897, p. 3.

got home again, I was surprised to find that my wife was not at home. I saw a note on the table, I picked it up and read, this is what it said, "You brute, I only married you for spite: you will never see my face again." I could not help saying "My God, what does this mean?" We never had an angry word for over twelve years of married life, and I thought her the only woman in the world and could not believe it was real.

The two boys came home from school, the elder was nine years and the other six years. I did not say anything to them about it, I got them their dinner ready, and they asked me where Ma was. I told them that she had gone to the Thames and that she would be back soon. I went to her sister to see if she knew anything about her. They were as surprised as I was and reckoned she must have gone mad.

I waited for three days before I made a move to hunt for her, and, in the meantime, I get a letter from Walker telling me that there was £1000 at Miller's office, if I would call down I could get it. I went down and I found out that, but for Walker refusing to buy the claim unless I got half the money, I would have been left penniless.<sup>827</sup>

Later he wrote that, when Walker offered him £2,000 for the mine,

I agreed to let him have it. Before it was sold, she had left her home and her two sons and tried to stop my credit in Waihi. I went to Walker and tried to stop the sale of the mine, and he told me that he had already paid the 2,000 pounds into my wife's lawyer, Mr Miller of Thames, and he said that she wanted the lot of it, and he refused to put the money down if I didn't get half of it. So I only got a thousand pounds out of the lot I made out of the Maratoto.<sup>828</sup>

According to his 1927 memoir, he 'decided not to chase her and let her have her fling. She would turn up some time, so I settled down to bring up my children and make them as happy as I could. Her body was her own and she could do what she liked with it'.<sup>829</sup> All mention of his wife deserting him and the children was literally blue-pencilled by the *Auckland Star* in 1928. After a shortened account of his selling the ground to Walker and of his wife signing the transfer, the following sentence, not found in any other version,

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<sup>827</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 34-35.

<sup>828</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, pp. 25-26.

<sup>829</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 35-36.

was printed: 'She got £1000 of the money and left with it - I never saw her again'.<sup>830</sup>

Later, he wrote that it cost him £150 'to get my house and farm back into my name'.<sup>831</sup> This cannot be confirmed: although records for the Waihi Magistrate's Court do not start until 1899, those for Paeroa reveal that he did not take his wife to court to obtain control over his property.<sup>832</sup> The fact that the business site in Waihi was transferred into his name on 8 March 1897, having been obtained in his wife's name on the previous 8 December,<sup>833</sup> indicates that the marriage breakdown occurred either at the very end of 1896 or early in 1897. His statement that the children were aged nine and six when deserted by their mother<sup>834</sup> cannot be correct, for that would have made the year 1894. Their bank account was in her name in September 1895, was not listed in March the following year, and then was in his name in September,<sup>835</sup> again proving that the date given in his memoirs was incorrect.

There was no indication in the 1927 memoir of any domestic problems. However, later he wrote that, when he was working at Maratoto,

I found a great change in my wife's manner to me towards the end of that time. Up to then, for five years we had lived in the greatest of happiness, and towards the end of that time I could not do anything right, and she was always complaining of an empty-headed idiot, and she made my life miserable.<sup>836</sup>

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<sup>830</sup> *Auckland Star*, 29 September 1928, Magazine Section, p. 1.

<sup>831</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 26.

<sup>832</sup> Paeroa Magistrate's Court, Minute Book 1894-1902, BACL 13744/1a; Plaintiff Book 1896-1901, BACL 13745/2a; Paeroa Warden's Court, Mining Registrations 1896-1898, BAFV 14017/1b; Index of Miscellaneous Applications 1896-1922, ZAAP 13770/1b, ANZ-A.

<sup>833</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Residence Site and Business Site Licenses 1896-1915, folio 298, BAFV 13835/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>834</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 35.

<sup>835</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Ohinemuri Branch, Half Yearly Balance Books, Balances as at 30 September 1895, 31 March 1896, 30 September 1896, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

<sup>836</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 25.

This suggested five years of married bliss, not 12 as he wrote in 1927,<sup>837</sup> and may explain why he spent most of his time over the range at Maratoto, and why being kissed by his wife was worthy of special note.

A picture of their married life cannot be obtained from his memoirs, which did not mention it until after the marriage ended. There was a difference of age between them, hardly uncommon: his marriage certificate made him seven years older than his 22-year-old bride, but his death certificate made him 11 years older, which was probably correct.<sup>838</sup> His wife was American, born in St Louis, Missouri, but it is hard to see how this could be relevant. Nine months after the wedding, their first son, George Grey was born; for some unknown reason his birth was not registered for two and a half months.<sup>839</sup> The boy's name presumably indicated that Nicholl favoured the Liberal Party: his wife's political preferences are unknown. When he went to Fiji, he left his wife two months pregnant; in mid-April 1888 she gave birth to a boy she named, possibly on her own initiative, William Sharman Crawford, which does not suggest any ill-feeling on her part towards her husband.<sup>840</sup> Nicholl did not return home to see his new baby until January 1889, a long absence that may not have helped the marriage. During the eight years they were together after his return, they had no more children, possibly suggesting marital disharmony. However, he was working at Maratoto for much of that time, normally only visiting his family at two-monthly intervals,<sup>841</sup> which limited the possibility of more pregnancies.

Whilst this lack of regular contact may explain why his wife left him, it does not explain why she deserted her children, which was most unusual. The reason, as will be shown, was that she had left New Zealand with another man, who cannot have wanted her children to accompany them.

Nicholl did not expect a long separation. A few months after she left him, he joined the Klondike rush, not just to make his fortune but also, he later claimed, because 'I thought if she had had any love for the boys' she

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<sup>837</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 35.

<sup>838</sup> Marriage Certificate of William Sharman Crawford Nicholl, 7 January 1885, 1885/191; Death Certificate of William Sharman Crawford Nicholl, 6 August 1937, 1937/18390, BDM.

<sup>839</sup> Birth Certificate of George Grey Nicholl, 22 October 1885, 1886/1418, BDM.

<sup>840</sup> Birth Certificate of William Sharman Crawford Nicholl, 18 April 1888, 1888/13339, BDM.

<sup>841</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 25.

would 'come back to them, hearing I was out of the country'.<sup>842</sup> As he had to continue working, his sister Mary Ann suggested a solution to his child-minding problem. She

was sending one of her boys to a High School in Tauranga kept by someone of the name of Murphy. She thought that it would be better for me to send them there, that they would be better looked after than I could do. I went to Tauranga and saw Mr Murphy, and he took the boys on, so I left them there.<sup>843</sup>

This school, Queen's College, had at least 26 pupils in 1898, many of them of pre-high school age, as shown in a contemporary photograph.<sup>844</sup> It was run for almost 20 years by Jeremiah Murphy, who was, according to his obituary, 'a man of pleasant and genial temperament'.<sup>845</sup> In September 1889, he advertised that he was a Master of Arts and 'Prize and Honor-man' of Trinity College, Dublin, and that his school offered 'superior advantages to Boarders as well as Day Pupils'. Subjects taught covered 'every branch required for Matriculation, Junior and Senior Civil Service, E and D Certificates, and Preliminary Law Exam'.<sup>846</sup> Two years later, the local newspaper, commenting on the annual prize giving, stated that the examination papers indicated 'solid grounding and steady progress' during the previous six months, which reflected 'great credit' on Murphy.<sup>847</sup> When he announced in January 1895 that the school was to reopen in new premises, the newspaper stated that he had 'proved himself to be a capable and most successful teacher'.<sup>848</sup> Being a private school, its roll has not been deposited in the government archives, and consequently the precise dates when George and Willie attended cannot now be ascertained. Thomas Lochhead's diary reveals that Nicholl took his two boys from Waihi to Tauranga in his buggy in September 1896 and collected them one month

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<sup>842</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 69.

<sup>843</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 36.

<sup>844</sup> Betty Coubrough, 'Education', in *Tauranga 1882-1982: The centennial of gazetting Tauranga as a borough*, ed. A.C. Bellamy (Tauranga, 1982), p. 134; Nicholl's children may be in the photo, but have not been identified.

<sup>845</sup> Coubrough, 'Education', pp. 134-135.

<sup>846</sup> Advertisement, *Bay of Plenty Times*, 5 September 1889, p. 3.

<sup>847</sup> *Bay of Plenty Times*, 21 December 1891, p. 2.

<sup>848</sup> *Bay of Plenty Times*, 28 January 1895, p. 2.

later:<sup>849</sup> perhaps they first attended Murphy's school then because his wife had left him in that month. If so, they did not stay at this school for long, for the elder boy was present when the inspector visited the Waihi school on 3 December.<sup>850</sup> As neither boy attended this school in 1897 or 1898,<sup>851</sup> they must have spent these years at Tauranga. At the end of June 1897, George 'came in a coach' to Lochhead's farm, bringing a horse from Tauranga and a chain which Nicholl had sent from Waihi.<sup>852</sup> Both boys seem to have been working on Lochhead's farm for a time in the middle of that year, for at the end of July Lochhead received a letter from Nicholl 'wanting his boys up again'.<sup>853</sup> George returned to Tauranga early in September.<sup>854</sup> Both boys returned to the Waihi school in 1899,<sup>855</sup> after Nicholl's return from Klondike.

At the age of 16, when rounding up a horse on the farm, George 'received a nasty kick in the head, inflicting a deep gash within an ace of the temple'. A doctor said he 'had a very narrow escape of being killed instantaneously'.<sup>856</sup>

#### TO THE KLONDIKE

Having placed his boys with Murphy, Nicholl returned to Waihi, where 'just then the newspapers were teeming with news of the rich discoveries made on the Klondike'.<sup>857</sup> 'Just then' was late in July 1897,<sup>858</sup> six months after his boys had settled into Murphy's school.

Everyone seemed to be Klondike mad with excitement, and the newspapers were looked for eagerly to get the latest news from

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<sup>849</sup> Thomas Lochhead, diary, entries for 11 September 1896, 10 October 1896, 11 October 1896, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

<sup>850</sup> Class Lists for Waihi School, 1896, YCAF 4135/46a, ANZ-A.

<sup>851</sup> Class Lists for Waihi School, 1897-1898, YCAF 4135/47a, 4135/49a, ANZ-A.

<sup>852</sup> Thomas Lochhead, diary, entry for 30 June 1897, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

<sup>853</sup> Thomas Lochhead, diary, entry for 28 July 1897, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

<sup>854</sup> Thomas Lochhead, diary, entry for 8 September 1897, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

<sup>855</sup> Class Lists for Waihi School, 1899, YCAF 4135/52a, ANZ-A.

<sup>856</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 5 September 1901, p. 4.

<sup>857</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 36.

<sup>858</sup> For the first reports of Klondike published in Auckland, see *New Zealand Herald*, 22 July 1897, p. 5, 24 July 1897, p. 5, 26 July 1897, pp. 4, 5.

the field and the number of tons of gold already produced and the number of boats that had been sent down the Yukon from Dawson City laden with gold and also to hear of the latest gulches found and the number of tons of gold taken from the Discovery Claim. I amongst the rest was getting a bit excited, and it only wanted a few more good reports to start me going. The excitement [was] just about up to fever heat. Then we read in the paper of the big finds that had been made on the Indian River, Dominion Creek, Sulphur and Australian gulches, and the number of pack animals engaged in packing gold to Dawson City and the number of claims staked out and that it was impossible to get within seventy miles of Dawson City without walking over stakes [mining claims]. This was in November, and people said that it was time enough to leave New Zealand in March to strike the breaking up of the ice on the Yukon.

Things had started to move in Waihi. It was the birth of the big boom, the mine had started to pay dividends and was opening up well. It was just on the balance whether I would go to Klondike or stay in Waihi and buy property in the main street in the township. The shares in the mine had jumped from 2/6 to £5.- in a fortnight and things were moving in Waihi and other districts adjoining it.

Then another flourishing report came from the Klondike, and I could stand it no longer. I went to Auckland and took boat to Wellington to catch the Vancouver boat and booked my passage to Vancouver, figuring on getting my outfit over the Chilkoot and get down to Lake Bennett and build my boat and be ready to float off with the breaking up of the ice. I had to stay in Wellington a week to await a boat to Vancouver and I thought it the longest week I had ever spent. I was Klondike mad sure enough.<sup>859</sup>

He had confused the month of his departure; it was in fact at the beginning of October, and he was booked on the San Francisco steamer, not the Vancouver one.<sup>860</sup> When this ship arrived,

there were no passengers aboard her returning from the Klondike and there were only eleven of us went aboard her that were bound for the Klondike. There were eight boys from Western Australia's goldfields and three New Zealanders. We all chummed in together and were mates till we got to Klondike.<sup>861</sup>

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<sup>859</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 36-38.

<sup>860</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 2 October 1897, p. 4.

<sup>861</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 38.

Acquiring mates was essential to survive the conditions that faced them. As one historian explained, 'one of the immediate advantages of partnership was that the weight of baggage was lessened. The amount of food remained the same, but it was not necessary to carry duplicate sets of tools and utensils'.<sup>862</sup>

When we arrived at Vancouver, we found that there was not so much talk of the Klondike there as there was in New Zealand. We had to wait in Victoria, B.C. [British Columbia, Canada], for five days to await a boat to take us to Dyea, the nearest port to the Chilkoot Pass. All hands decided on taking that route.

While we were waiting Swiftwater Bill arrived out from the Klondike and the morning papers were full up with him and the amount of gold he had brought out with him. He was supposed to have sixty thousand dollars with him. I saw him: he had a nugget chain across his vest with a big nugget hanging in the centre for a pendant. He was bound for Seattle. When he got to Seattle, the papers reported that it was six hundred thousand he had brought out with him. We learnt after that he was fitted up with sleigh and dog team and three thousand dollars and sent out to advertise the field to get people on the move.<sup>863</sup>

(According to a Tasmanian who prospected at Klondike alongside some New Zealanders, 'Swiftwater Bill' acquired his nickname by shooting the White Horse Rapids when travelling downriver to Dawson City in the previous summer.<sup>864</sup> According to an historian, William F. Gates acquired it because he had operated a river ferry in Idaho during earlier gold rushes. He was one of the first to become rich at Klondike and was flamboyant and always well dressed.<sup>865</sup> He was renowned for his exploits and the extravagant spending of his great wealth.<sup>866</sup>)

'The boat arrived, and we got our outfits on board. We had about a ton and a half of an outfit per man with tent, Yukon stove and sleigh'.<sup>867</sup> Newspapers provided advice about the contents of outfits: one published in

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<sup>862</sup> Robert Wallace, *The Miners* (New York, 1976), p. 210.

<sup>863</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 38-40.

<sup>864</sup> Letter from Louis Breheney, 1 May 1898, printed in *Thames Star*, 16 July 1898, p. 4.

<sup>865</sup> Douglas Fetherling, *The Gold Crusades: A social history of gold rushes, 1849-1929*, rev. ed. (Toronto, 1997), p. 133.

<sup>866</sup> See Pierre Berton, *Klondike: The last great gold rush, 1896-1899*, rev. ed. (Toronto, 1986), especially pp. 81-82, 360-361.

<sup>867</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 40.

Chicago listed goods weighing 1,492 pounds and costing \$264 that would last a man for one year.<sup>868</sup> Henry Garland, a New Zealander who joined the rush, warned that ‘no man should attempt to start with less than £200’.<sup>869</sup> An historian listed the contents of ‘a typical outfit’:

500 pounds of flour, 200 of bacon, 100 each of sugar, beans, dried fruit and dehydrated potatoes, plus another 500 pounds of assorted foodstuffs. Most men also carried the equipment required to build a boat and a cabin and operate a mine - gold pans, brace and bits, chisels, caulking irons, plane, pitch, oakum, rope and duplicate handles for all tools. Beyond that, there were cooking utensils, stove, heavy clothing, tent, gun and ammunition, soap, candles, fishing tackle, lantern, blankets or sleeping bag, medicines, tobacco, whiskey and a book or two.<sup>870</sup>

Another historian gave a more detailed list of the 26 varieties of food and condiments needed, adding several additional requirements including a compass, a whipsaw, and mosquito netting, and noted the appropriate clothing required:

Three suits of heavy underwear, a mackinaw coat, two pairs of mackinaw trousers, a heavy rubber-lined coat, a dozen pairs of wool socks, half a dozen pairs of mittens, two over-shirts, two pairs of snag-proof rubber boots, two pairs of shoes ... two pairs of overalls, [and] a suit of oilskin clothing.<sup>871</sup>

All of this, in addition to the fare to Canada, used up much of the profit Nicholl had made from selling his Maratoto mine and battery. As well, he had to pay for his children to be boarded and educated at Tauranga. On 30 March 1898 there was £28 12s 3d in his New Zealand bank account, but six months only 1s 10d remained.<sup>872</sup> Although some men hired porters, mostly

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<sup>868</sup> ‘Outfits for the Klondike: Articles Necessary in an Outfit for One Man One Year in the Diggings’, *Chicago Daily Tribune – Tribune Extra Klondike Edition*, 1898, reprinted in *Sourdough Sagas: The journals, memoirs, tales and recollections of the earliest Alaskan gold miners, 1883-1923*, ed. Herbert L. Heller (Cleveland, 1967), pp. 127-128.

<sup>869</sup> Henry V. Garland, ‘The Yukon Goldfields’ [letter dated 17 November 1897], *New Zealand Graphic*, p. 249.

<sup>870</sup> Wallace, p. 207.

<sup>871</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, pp. 245-246.

<sup>872</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Ohinemuri Branch, Half-Yearly Balance Books, Balances as at 30 March 1898, 30 September 1898, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

'Indians',<sup>873</sup> like many stampeder Nicholl carried his outfit to avoid having to pay 40 cents per pound, a total cost of \$400, to have it portered across the pass.<sup>874</sup>

His memoirs continued with an account of his arrival on the shores of Alaska in January 1898:

We threaded our way [through] the Alaska islands, calling in at Juneau. This city is supported principally by the Treadwall mine on Douglas Island just across the water from it. I never struck a town with so many cripples. Nearly every man you met in the streets either was walking on crutches or had their arms or head tied up.

We made another start for Dyea,<sup>875</sup> and were surprised to be held up for customs duty and our outfits all overhauled and heavily taxed, being Canadian goods, the duty on my outfit coming to 68 dollars and it had to be paid in gold coin. We all had our money in sovereigns. I think it's very little of that money went to the Government, the customs officer looked quite pleased when we were handing him the golden sovereigns.<sup>876</sup>

This was, he noted, '25 per cent duty'.<sup>877</sup> Other accounts confirmed that some customs officials were corrupt. Whereas Nicholl implied that Americans were the offenders, one historian only mentioned members of the Canadian Mounted Police.<sup>878</sup>

Nicholl intended to get to Dawson City by scaling the Chilkoot Pass, the shortest and best route, but with a steep climb up to the pass.<sup>879</sup> 'From Dyea to Lake Lindemann was less than 30 miles, and the section before the foot of the Chilkoot began smoothly enough through a pleasant country

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<sup>873</sup> *The Last Great Gold Rush: A Klondike Reader*, ed. Graham Wilson (Whitehorse, 2002), pp. 16-17, 24-28, 38, 53-55, 63, 175.

<sup>874</sup> Melanie J. Mayer, *Klondike Women: True tales of the 1897-98 Gold Rush* (Ohio University Press, 1989), p. 76.

<sup>875</sup> For photographs of Dyea and Dyea Beach, see Pierre Berton, *The Klondike Quest: A photographic essay, 1897-1899* (Boston, 1983), pp. 28-30, and Don McCune, *Trail to the Klondike* (Washington, 1997), pp. 11, 17, 18.

<sup>876</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 40-41.

<sup>877</sup> W.S.C. Nicholl, letter to Edwin Edwards, n.d., printed in *Te Aroha News*, 8 March 1898, p. 2.

<sup>878</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, p. 249.

<sup>879</sup> For profile map showing the elevation from Dyea to Lake Bennett, see Mayer, p. 70.

criss-crossed by a river'.<sup>880</sup> 'We had our outfits brought up to Canyon City with a waggon'.<sup>881</sup> The waggon road beside the Dyea River only reached Finnegan's Point, some distance before Canyon City. This settlement was at entrance to the Dyea River canyon, 'a slender crevice two miles long and fifty feet wide, cluttered with boulders, torn-up trees, and masses of tangled roots'. At the far end was a settlement 'called Pleasant Camp because it came as such a relief after the gloom of the gorge'.<sup>882</sup> Nicholl did not describe the journey, but an earlier explorer wrote that the trail to the base of the pass crossed the river seven times:<sup>883</sup>

It is a glacier stream, and the water is about three or four feet deep at the riffles where the shallowest water is to be found and where we made our crossings. The icy water chilled us through at each crossing, but we warmed ourselves by jumping around as we did not want to take time to build a fire each time. One member of the party attempted to make the first crossing just below a riffle. The water was so deep that he lost his footing, but he managed to reach shore safely. We then decided that the best way to cross was to take a long pole and have each one hold onto it. Then we headed across in a diagonal line with the tallest man in the lead. In this way, the force of the current was broken for those at the lower end of the pole.<sup>884</sup>

Nicholl wrote that 'we cached our outfits in the snow and took our sledges and our camp outfits and some grub and made up the canyon trail to Sheep Camp'.<sup>885</sup> Sheep Camp was at the base of the range, and the last place where wood could be cut. It had been the base for hunters of mountain sheep, hence its name.<sup>886</sup> Horses had to be left at this 'town of sorts,

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<sup>880</sup> Robin May, *The Gold Rushes* (Melbourne, 1977), p. 114.

<sup>881</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 41; for photographs of route from Dyea to the base of the pass, see Berton, *Klondike Quest*, pp. 65-69; for photographs of Canyon City, see McCune, pp. 29, 31.

<sup>882</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, p. 240.

<sup>883</sup> For maps of route from Dyea to Chilkoot Pass and beyond it to Lake Bennett, see Berton, pp. 240-241, and 'Seattle Post-Intelligencer's Map of the Dyea and Skaguay Trails' (1897), in Stan Cohen, *The Streets Were Paved with Gold: A pictorial history of the Klondike gold rush 1896-1899* (rev. ed., Missoula, Montana, 1987), p. 18 .

<sup>884</sup> Frank Buteau, 'My Experiences in the World', in *Sourdough Sagas*, p. 109.

<sup>885</sup> For photographs of Sheep Camp, see Berton, *Klondike Quest*, p. 72, and McCune, p. 35.

<sup>886</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, p. 240.

consisting of a shack for professional packers and a few other tents, sheds, and “hotels” ’.<sup>887</sup> The camp was

in a deep basin which seemed to have been scooped by a giant paw out of the encircling mountains.... On most days the peaks were shrouded in a gloomy fog, but when the sun was out and the sky clear, the pale light glinted on the evil masses of glaciers which hung from the rim of the mountain wall. The summit was only four miles distant, but it was a long way up – thirty-five hundred feet above the town of Dyea.<sup>888</sup>

Nicholl briefly described the hardship of reaching this point:

It was a hard pull up the canyon, the temperature was ten below zero and the lower the temperature the harder the sleigh is to pull. We camped about half a mile above Sheep Camp on the site where 200 diggers lost their lives three months later, getting buried with an avalanche sweeping off the mountains,<sup>889</sup> sweeping down the gulch and burying everything in its road.<sup>890</sup>

This avalanche had occurred on 3 April; Nicholl had exaggerated the death toll, which was between 60 and 70.<sup>891</sup>

We pitched our tents on the snow and fitted up our Yukon stoves and cut the foliage of the spruce trees and threw it on the snow for feathers to sleep on. When the fire got going in the stove and the stove and stove pipe got red hot it made things look like home inside the tent and looked quite different outside the tent.

We started next morning to bring up our outfits, we brought two sleigh loads. I found two hundredweight was as much as I cared about hauling up the canyon.<sup>892</sup> One of the party bought two dogs but he found them a failure. They would have had his outfit eaten before he finished dragging it.

We got two loads up the canyon and that night a blizzard set in. It blew and snowed for three days. The first night of the blizzard I

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<sup>887</sup> May, p. 114.

<sup>888</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, p. 240; for photograph of prospectors camped there in 1897, see Bateau, p. 110.

<sup>889</sup> For photographs of this avalanche, see Berton, *Klondike Quest*, pp. 74-75, and McCune, pp. 61, 63.

<sup>890</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 41-42.

<sup>891</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, p. 258; Wallace, p. 204.

<sup>892</sup> For journey past Sheep Camp, see McCune, p. 43.

was awakened by pressure on my sleeping bag. I had quite a contract to get out of my sleeping bag and squeeze my way to the door of the tent. When I opened it I found I was snowed in three feet deep. I had to shovel the snow off the tent: it was buried, only three feet of it above the snow. This had to be repeated for three days and when the blizzard ended my tent was down a hole eight feet below the surface of the snow. The other boys had a similar experience; they all had their own camps. I cached the two sleigh loads of my outfit a few hundred yards higher up the trail than my tent and never found it. It was buried six feet with snow. I should have stood a pole up in the snow to mark it, but I was green and didn't know what a blizzard was till I actually experienced one.<sup>893</sup>

We had to get to work and break a trail in the soft snow for a distance of five miles to our Canyon City cache. The snow hadn't fallen too heavily in the canyon, so we soon had the trail broken and got the balance of the outfit up without any further mishap. From our camp we had to pack our outfits to the Scales, a distance of three miles, it being too steep to use the sleigh. What with blizzards and breaking trails it took me five weeks getting my outfit to the Scales.<sup>894</sup>

I stuck a pole up at my cache, it was fourteen feet out of the snow when I dumped my first pack alongside of it and when I finished caching my outfit there was only two feet of the top of the pole out of the snow. I had to dig down twelve feet for my first pack.

Now we had to pack our packs up the steep cliff to the top of the pass. There was a rope all the way up the cliff to haul yourself up with.<sup>895</sup> The getting up was a tough proposition, but the coming down was easy: you sit down in a snow chute, and you are at the Scales in a few seconds.<sup>896</sup>

A letter he sent to New Zealand in January 1898 described the Chilkoot Pass as 'one continual climb from the time you leave Stone House, and a very hard one, too, the last of the climb having a grade of 45 degrees'.<sup>897</sup> The 'house' was, apart from the Scales, the only point on the climb where there was a place to rest.<sup>898</sup> It was 'a large flat rock extending out of the ground at an angle of 45 degrees to a height of about ten feet,

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<sup>893</sup> For photograph of caches with poles indicating their location, see McCune, p. 65.

<sup>894</sup> For photograph of the Scales, see McCune, p. 47.

<sup>895</sup> For photographs of the climb to the summit of the Chilkoot Pass, see Berton, *Klondike Quest*, pp. 77-83, and McCune, pp. 45, 49, 51, 55, 64.

<sup>896</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 42-46.

<sup>897</sup> Letter from W.S.C. Nicholl, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 5 March 1898, p. 4.

<sup>898</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, p. 243.

affording shelter to travellers in case of storm'.<sup>899</sup> (Nicholl had exaggerated the angle of the climb by about ten degrees.<sup>900</sup>)

The gradient was 30 degrees for the four miles from the flatter country to the Scales, a large flat ledge where all baggage was re-weighed. It was estimated that for city-bred men the average load for the six-hour climb to the Scales was 50 pounds, meaning that up to 40 trips might be needed and the whole outfit could not be carried there in under three months.<sup>901</sup> Nicholl's claim that it took only five weeks must not be discounted, for, as he had proved on several earlier occasions, he was very fit. Whereas 'the average stamper' carried from 50 to 75 pounds, 'professional packers averaged close to a hundred',<sup>902</sup> and it must be assumed that Nicholl carried a heavier load than most.

From the Scales to the summit of the pass, 3,400 feet above sea level,<sup>903</sup> the steepness of the climb was 35 degrees or greater.<sup>904</sup> Climbing upwards was known as 'the Chilkoot Lock-Step' as they moved ever upward', as 22,000 did over that winter.<sup>905</sup> 'The last 150 feet were the worst, and steps had been hacked out with axes by enterprising climbers who then charged others for the privilege of using them'.<sup>906</sup> The total number of steps for the climb was 1,200.

Klondikers would have the opportunity to count them many times over, a vicious and intermindable treadmill which halted only at night and continued until each man had deposited the necessary tonnage at the top. Following one behind the other, it took from three to six hours to make the climb, the pace being set by the slowest.<sup>907</sup>

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<sup>899</sup> Buteau, p. 109.

<sup>900</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, p. 242.

<sup>901</sup> Wallace, pp. 210-211.

<sup>902</sup> McCune, p. 56.

<sup>903</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, p. 240.

<sup>904</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, p. 242.

<sup>905</sup> For photograph of endless line of men doing the 'lock-step', see May, pp. 102-103; other photographs of climbing the pass in Cohen, pp. 78-84.

<sup>906</sup> May, p.114.

<sup>907</sup> McCune, p. 48.

A crude aerial tramway to carry baggage had been installed in December 1897,<sup>908</sup> but Nicholl, either being true to his super-masculine self-image or for financial reasons, did not use it. At the summit a camp covered many acres, each outfit marked with a pole with an identifying rag.<sup>909</sup> Nicholl correctly described the method of descending to the Scales: Berton recorded that ‘the stampeders simply tucked their boots beneath them and tobogganned down the slope on their rumps, gouging deep chutes in the snow, and hitting the bottom in a matter of minutes’,<sup>910</sup> not seconds, as Nicholl recalled. From the normally windswept and foggy summit, the climbers returned by using ‘The Grease Trail’, so-called because it had been ‘worn down to a shoulder-high depth by thousands of sliding bodies’.<sup>911</sup> ‘Only the rarest, strongest men could make more than one round trip’ in a day.<sup>912</sup> If Nicholl was one of these rare men, which the time taken implies, he did not record making more than one ascent per day nor how many trips he made; presumably he must have carried a heavier load than was normal.

His memoirs continued with another memorable event:

While we were packing our outfits to the summit of the pass there was a tribe of Alaskan Indians got caught in a blizzard at the Scales, and a woman and her two children lost the trail in the blinding blizzard. It was reported in Sheep Camp and all hands turned out to look for her. She was found with her two kiddies lying in the shelter of a boulder, frozen to death with all her clothes torn off and wrapped around her kiddies. The youngest had the most clothes and it was alive, but the other was just dead. They were all brought to Sheep Camp, all hands turned out to her burial.

When we dumped all our outfits on the Chilkoot<sup>913</sup> we shifted our camp to Lake Lindemann<sup>914</sup> and made one trip a day to the pass.<sup>915</sup>

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<sup>908</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, p. 247.

<sup>909</sup> Wallace, p. 213; for photographs of caches at the summit, see Cohen, pp. 86-87.

<sup>910</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, p. 247.

<sup>911</sup> McCune, p. 56.

<sup>912</sup> Wallace, p. 213.

<sup>913</sup> For photographs of the summit, see Berton, *Klondike Quest*, pp. 84-87, 90-91, and McCune, pp. 57, 59.

<sup>914</sup> For photograph of canvas settlement on shores of Lake Lindermann, see McCune, p. 82.

<sup>915</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 46-47.

Garland described going down, 'coasting part way, 14 miles to Lake Lindemann'.<sup>916</sup> The Chilkoot Trail bypassed Crater, Long, and Deep Lakes on the far side of the pass, followed a river valley down to Lake Lindemann, which was 1,200 feet below the top of the pass.<sup>917</sup> 'Descending was almost as difficult as the climb had been. Rough-locked sleds skidded down a slope corrugated by blizzards and polished by traffic into belts of glossy ice'.<sup>918</sup>

Nicholl did not describe this part of his journey in detail.

The temperature was lower at this side of the range, often going down as low as twenty-five below zero, and when it was down to that your sledge runners would freeze to the trail as you were pulling it along. We had all our outfits dumped on Lake Bennett before the Canadian police arrived.<sup>919</sup>

Garland wrote that Lake Lindemann was five miles long, and that in winter 'you will sled it on the lake, and take the mile of rapids' at the lower end 'in a portage to Lake Bennett, which is a 28 mile tramp'.<sup>920</sup> 'Lake Bennett's tent city was the biggest in the world and surrounded the entire lake'.<sup>921</sup> Nicholl next wrote that 'We made a start to whipsaw our lumber to build our boats with'.<sup>922</sup> 'It took approximately 800 board feet to build a boat capable of carrying a ton of supplies'.<sup>923</sup> At the time his party constructed their boat, 'Lake Bennett boasted the largest tent city and greatest boat-building centre in the world'.<sup>924</sup>

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<sup>916</sup> Garland, p. 249 [the name of this lake was also recorded as Linderman and Lindeman].

<sup>917</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, pp. 248, 262; Buteau, p. 93; see map in Wallace, p. 203; for photographs of the journey from the summit to Crater Lake, see McCune, pp. 69-73; for photograph of Lake Lindemann and Lindeman City in 1898, see Cohen, p. 91; for sleds using sails on the lake, see Berton, *Klondike Quest*, pp. 94-95, and McCune, p. 75.

<sup>918</sup> McCune, p. 68.

<sup>919</sup> For photographs of the tent city on the shores of Lake Bennett, see Berton, *Klondike Quest*, pp. 100-103, and McCune, p. 85.

<sup>920</sup> Garland, p. 249; for photographs of rapids between Lakes Bennett and Lindemann, see Cohen, p. 93.

<sup>921</sup> May, p. 115; see photograph on p. 105 of part of this 'city' while stampeders were waiting for the ice to break on the lake.

<sup>922</sup> For a description of this difficult process, see Berton, *Klondike*, p. 264; for photographs, see Berton, *Klondike Quest*, pp. 104-109, McCune, pp. 87, 89, 91, and Cohen, pp. 96-97.

<sup>923</sup> McCune, p. 88.

<sup>924</sup> McCune, p. 92.

We had our boats built long before the breaking up of the ice and didn't know what to do with ourselves while we were waiting. I used to take long trips in the ranges on my snow shoes but I couldn't get any of the boys to keep me company. I didn't strike any good country, or bears, as my mates said I would meet with in some of my wanderings.

I took a run over to Dyea to get some stores I was short of and to post a letter back to New Zealand. When I got to the pass, I found the police camped near the summit, and collecting customs from the diggers as they passed over the pass.<sup>925</sup> There was a great stir all along the trail, and stacks of goods for miles along the trail. I got back with my pack to the pass and was held up for duty. The receipt I got for the duty I paid on my pack was written on a piece of newspaper and worded this way: Pass W. Nicholl pack and Canadian goods.<sup>926</sup>

As expected, he had to pay customs duty to both Americans and Canadians.<sup>927</sup> The letter he mentioned was written on 17 January, when he was about to cross back over the Chilkoot Pass, and was sent to Edwin Edwards of Paeroa, previously owner of the *Ohinemuri Gazette*.<sup>928</sup> Because of the widespread interest in Klondike, it was printed in several newspapers, one of which referred to Nicholl as 'the well-known prospector'.<sup>929</sup> He began by describing the climb up the pass:

You have to hang on to a rope to keep yourself from falling back; and the icicles hanging to your beard nearly down to your waist. I have felt the cold worse in New Zealand than I have felt it here; in fact, I have had no occasion to put on any more clothing than I wore in New Zealand.

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<sup>925</sup> For photographs of Canadian Mounted Police camp at the summit, see Berton, *Klondike Quest*, p. 92, and McCune, p. 67.

<sup>926</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 47-49; his account of crossing the pass was omitted in the version published in *Auckland Star*, 29 September 1928, Magazine Section, p. 1.

<sup>927</sup> Letter from W.S.C. Nicholl, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 5 March 1898, p. 2.

<sup>928</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 28 February 1898, p. 2.

<sup>929</sup> *Te Aroha News*, 8 March 1898, p. 2; this letter was published in *Thames Star*, 4 March 1898, p. 2, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 5 March 1898, p. 4, *Te Aroha News*, 8 March 1898, p. 2, *Coromandel County News*, 14 March 1898, p. 3.

As all his prospecting had been in the Hauraki district, this seems most unlikely; if he really wore no more clothes than in its temperate climate, then he was being very foolhardy, as one historian explained:

Howling gales were almost a daily occurrence. No matter how much a man bundled up, the wind reached in somewhere, tearing at fur and leather and penetrating sweaty bodies with an icy grip. When a climber was working, hauling, pushing, or packing, it was easy to perspire. And if he didn't change into dry clothing, his wet skin would freeze. Frostbite was common, leaving painful blisters and deep sores.<sup>930</sup>

Nicholl seems to have avoided these problems. If he had provided the details of how to survive the cold provided to goldseekers by the North American Transportation and Trading Company, he would have discouraged others from following his example.<sup>931</sup>

Don't let the cold frighten any one from coming to Alaska - that is not the worst: it is the other end, from what I hear from the old timers who are returning every day. They report things are in a very bad state on the field, and the amount of gold greatly exaggerated. The Bonanza and Eldorado creeks will all be cleaned and worked out in the coming Spring, and there is nothing new-found as yet to warrant the rush that is likely to take place.

He warned of how the field was being boomed in Victoria and Seattle, quoting the example of Swiftwater Bill; though in this account the number of dollars he had brought out had diminished from 60,000 to 50,000. 'You can place no dependence on what you hear here', he warned those dreaming of easy wealth:

Any man intending [on] coming here must not think that he can get to Klondike on a few pounds. There are any amount of men here already who have left the colonies with a £100 and are stuck here. There is no work, and the trams you have heard about as being completed are only frauds. There is little being done on any of them, and when they are finished, they will only be tin-pot things. Old Yukoners say that the field will be in a worse state for

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<sup>930</sup> McCune, p. 52.

<sup>931</sup> North American Transportation and Trading Company, *Alaska and the Gold Fields of the Yukon, Koyukuk, Tanana-Klondike and their Tributaries* (1898), reprinted in *Sourdough Sagas*, pp. 11-13.

food this year than ever it has been, and that there is no use of any man going there unless he has enough to keep him going at least two years. There is no work on the field, and nothing for it but to prospect. There has been a strike on the field, wages having been cut to a dollar an hour, and men can only work five hours a day. The thing is not worth the candle, and men who are in New Zealand had better stay there and put their money to some other use than spending it on a mad trip like this.

After these discouraging remarks, he added that the climate was 'bracing and much healthier than in New Zealand'. He would 'not be able to get down the river any lower than the Lake before the open season, as the ice on the river is rough and but little a man can draw on his sleigh'.<sup>932</sup>

His memoirs made no mention of this contemporary view that it was 'a mad trip', nor of the fact that, whilst trying to discourage others, he had carried on with what he described as a futile expedition. Instead, he wrote that 'when I got back to camp, the ice on the lake was getting a bit thin and sloppy, and in a few days we could start for the Golden City. We got our outfits aboard our boats. There were four in the boat I was in, and we hoisted our sails and drifted away with great expectations'.<sup>933</sup> They had 500 miles to go to reach Dawson City, but it would all be by water.<sup>934</sup>

His boat, recorded by the North West Mounted Police as number 779, had been checked by them on 21 May as being ready to enter the Yukon River.<sup>935</sup> The police required all boats to have serial numbers; these, with the names of the prospectors, and the addresses of next of kin were sent to police posts along the river. If a boat did not check in at each post within a reasonable time, the police would search for it.<sup>936</sup>

The first cracks in the ice on Lake Bennett appeared on 29 May, and two days later the lake was empty of its 7,124 boats.<sup>937</sup> Although Nicholl recalled that there were four men in his boat, the police recorded only two: Nicholl himself, and Frank Louis, from California.<sup>938</sup> The next number was

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<sup>932</sup> Letter from W.S.C. Nicholl, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 5 March 1898, p. 4.

<sup>933</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 49.

<sup>934</sup> May, p. 115.

<sup>935</sup> Filson's Pan for Gold Database, <http://www.gold-rush.org/ghost-07.htm>.

<sup>936</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, p. 267.

<sup>937</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, p. 269; for photographs of the launching of the boats, see Berton, *Klondike Quest*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>938</sup> Filson's Pan for Gold Database, <http://www.gold-rush.org/ghost-07.htm>.

given to a scow and tender, which contained two New Zealanders, W.N. Rullidge and W.N. Bowling, and four Australians: J. Hurley, J. Dean, A. Anslow, and a man named McCarthy (these names may not have been accurately recorded).<sup>939</sup> These were, presumably, the other prospectors he had met on the boat from Wellington. The boats recorded before and after these two were occupied by Californians;<sup>940</sup> it appears that the boats bearing Australasians went together in a convoy.<sup>941</sup> Boats crossing Lake Bennett covered 30 miles.<sup>942</sup>

On the lakes we had to depend on the wind, so we rigged up blankets and anything we could get to rig up to hurry us along.<sup>943</sup> There were police camps at the mouths of all the rivers where you were demanded to haul in to get your outfit overhauled. Lake Laberge was a beautiful sight with the moving mass of boats. People thought it would be impossible for them to pass through Miles Canyon and the White Horse Rapids without jamming together.<sup>944</sup>

As Lake Laberge was not reached until passing through Miles Canyon, he meant either Lake Bennett or the next one, Marsh Lake, 24 miles in length.<sup>945</sup> Miles Canyon 50 miles from Lake Bennett, was a 'terrible gauntlet' to run, '100 feet wide and 50 feet deep, through which the Lewes River roared. In the canyon was a whirlpool followed by rapids. In the first days of the river rush, 150 craft were destroyed in the canyon and ten men

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<sup>939</sup> Scow and Tinder 780, in Filson's Pan for Gold Database, <http://www.gold-rush.org/ghost-07.htm>.

<sup>940</sup> Boats 777, 778, 781, in Filson's Pan for Gold Database, <http://www.gold-rush.org/ghost-07.htm>.

<sup>941</sup> For another New Zealander's experience of travelling from Lake Linderman to the Yukon River, in this convoy, see *A Kiwi in the Klondike: Memories from the diaries of Francis William Hiscock*, ed. S.M. Hull (Waiuku, c. 1993), pp. 19-26.

<sup>942</sup> Emma Kelly, 'A Woman Pioneer in the Klondike and Alaska', in *Last Great Gold Rush*, p. 30.

<sup>943</sup> For photographs of boats sailing across Lake Bennett, see Berton, *Klondike Quest*, pp. 112-117, and McCune, p. 93.

<sup>944</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 49-50.

<sup>945</sup> Garland, p. 149; see map in Berton, *Klondike*, p. 270, and photographs at Tagish, on Marsh Lake, in Cohen, pp. 103, 105.

drowned, so thousands of other boats held back, their crews frightened and demoralized'.<sup>946</sup> Garland described the canyon's horrors:

Thirty miles down the Lynx River you come suddenly upon the Miles Canyon, which is considered the worst place on the trip. No man ought to shoot the rapids there without taking a look at them from the shore. The miners have put up a sign on a rock, to the left just before you get to it, so you have warning and can get ashore and walk along the edge of the side. It is sixty feet wide and seven-eighths of a mile long, and the water humps up in the middle it goes so fast. A capsizing here is certain death.<sup>947</sup>

It was five miles in length. After the first boats were wrecked, the police checked each craft and the skills of its helmsman before permitting further attempts; few drowned after this was done.<sup>948</sup> Nicholl and his party braved the canyon, after checking it first:

We drifted over the lakes with the wind behind us all the way. We hung up our boat at Miles Canyon to have a look at it before shooting it. It looked a pretty swift proposition to get wrecked in.<sup>949</sup> We let go the painter and started with a long sweep fore and aft. [We] were flying down the canyon at lightning speed. When we were about halfway through, we bumped the side of the Canyon. It made our boat leak badly, but we got through safely. There was one of our party [who] reckoned that he was a bit of an expert at guiding a boat through swift water, but when he came near any swift [water] he wouldn't stay in the boat. He would always have something wrong with his head and complained of a giddy feeling and thought the walk would do him good and we could haul in for him lower down. We hauled in after we cleared the canyon and patched up our boat where it was leaking, and passed on down to the White Horse Rapids.<sup>950</sup>

Garland wrote that these rapids were at the end of the 'three miles of bad river' that succeeded the canyon, and were 'rocky and swift, with

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<sup>946</sup> May, pp. 115-116; for map of the canyon and later photographs, see Cohen, pp. 107-108.

<sup>947</sup> Garland, p. 250.

<sup>948</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, pp. 272-273.

<sup>949</sup> For photographs of Miles Canyon and the rapids, see Berton, *Klondike Quest*, pp. 118-120.

<sup>950</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 50-51.

falls'.<sup>951</sup> When the first stampeder arrived there, 150 boats were wrecked within a few days and give men drowned; the police therefore forbade any boats going through unless they had sufficient freeboard and a competent steerer.<sup>952</sup> Another goldseeker and his mate avoided the White Horse Rapids<sup>953</sup> because they had 'promised our girls before leaving home that we would walk around, so we had our outfit packed around on the beach and turned the boat loose to run the rapids. We caught it below but saw many boats capsize and several men drown as well as horses and mules'.<sup>954</sup> Most stampeder sent their boats through empty and took several days portering their goods around the one and a quarter mile of rapids.<sup>955</sup> Nicholl was sensibly cautious:

We tied up before shooting them to have a look at them. The only danger in shooting the White Horse was a boulder just before entering the rapids, and half a dozen plugs of gelignite would blow the whole business out of existence and make the rapids as safe as a mill pond. While we were looking at the rapids a boat struck the boulder and capsized. There were four in the boat, three of them were drowned. A woman that was aboard of it put her arm out of the water and was lassoed by a cowboy on the bank and she was pulled ashore safe.

We got into the boat to take the rapids, but Mack's head was a lot worse, and he reckoned he would walk. We got through without any mishap and picked up Mack and made up our minds not to let him out of the boat when we were going to shoot the Rink and Five Finger. When we came to the Rink, Mack wanted us to pull ashore, but we kept on going on and Mack got red first and then blue and white, and remained that colour till a while after passing through the Five Finger.<sup>956</sup>

(Who was 'Mack'? The only person listed as travelling with them on scow and tender 780 was an Australian named McCarthy, whose first name was not recorded.<sup>957</sup>)

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<sup>951</sup> Garland, p. 250.

<sup>952</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, pp. 272-273.

<sup>953</sup> For photograph of Whitehorse Rapids, see Cohen, p. 111.

<sup>954</sup> Lynn Smith, 'Sourdough Life', in *Sourdough Sagas*, p. 134.

<sup>955</sup> Kelly, pp. 32-34; William B. Haskell, 'A Dangerous Voyage', in *Last Great Gold Rush*, p. 109.

<sup>956</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 51-53.

<sup>957</sup> Filson's Pan for Gold Database, <http://www.gold-rush.org/ghost-07.htm>.

Nicholl had recalled the falls in reverse order; the Five Finger was before the Rink, and both were downriver from Lake Laberge.<sup>958</sup> Neither of these rapids were as dangerous as those already conquered. One historian made no mention of the former and wrote that the Five Finger rapids 'looked formidable, but few found them really troublesome'.<sup>959</sup> They 'received their name for the fact that the channel split up into five separate channels at this point'.<sup>960</sup> Horatio Walmsley, who later passed through them, described them as 'very harmless bogeys. By keeping the right channel, although the current is swift and rather rough, there is no danger, and no difficulty in passing through. High rocks stand up on either side, upon which many river gulls were perched'.<sup>961</sup> Another account shows that some found them a formidable challenge:

The run was clear until we reached Five Fingers Rapids. We landed, walked down a way and looked her over. While we were watching, there were several boats went through without a mishap, although when they took the jump off, they were out of sight but bobbed up again.

We got underway and went right in the middle of the channel. I was in the back end of our boat which was tied about two-thirds behind the big boat, and we went faster all the time gaining speed. All at once I saw the two big rocks and saw Doc's boat take the high dive. I was still up in the air in our boat. Then his boat came up and I took the header and "pop" something snapped and up I came. Here is where I turned white, going about twenty-five miles an hour with a lap full of water and my boat loose from the other one. Gradually turning sidewise, expecting to upset any minute, I glaced up and saw a man in the water climbing out onto a rock as I went by. Just when I was ready to give up and get ready for the water and my watery grave, a boat hook on a long pole reached out and caught the bow of my boat and steadied it. Both boats were bobbing up, going like the mill race of Hell; Praise the Lord, Old Jasper had kept his head and saved our grub and myself. For six miles, we went in this fashion before we could land, beach the boats and put the grub on shore to dry out. About one day was lost here before we could start again. This was a relief, for we all had nervous "prostitution" all day, and we had

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<sup>958</sup> See map in Berton, *Klondike*, p. 270.

<sup>959</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, p. 276.

<sup>960</sup> Buteau, p. 111; for photograph of the rapids, see Cohen, p. 115.

<sup>961</sup> Letter from Horatio Walmsley, *Waihi Miner*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Advertiser*, 1 October 1898, p. 4.

plenty of company along the riverbank, for others had the same experience.<sup>962</sup>

Nicholl described the remainder of the journey very briefly:

There was nothing more to be afraid of, all that we had to do was to sit down and float down with the current. I decided to cache my outfit at the mouth of Indian River and strike out from there after having a look over Eldorado and Bonanza and Skookum's Gulches.<sup>963</sup> When we got down to the Indian, we hauled in and my mates helped me to cache my outfit, and I floated down to Dawson with them. We hauled in at Lousetown.<sup>964</sup>

This was officially named Klondike City, on the opposite bank of the Klondike River from Dawson City,<sup>965</sup> which was on the junction of the Klondike and Yukon Rivers.<sup>966</sup> They had travelled 500 miles from Lake Bennett, and probably arrived on 16 June, eight days after the first boats in the flotilla reached 'Lousetown'.<sup>967</sup>

We found a big crowd already there and looking very much disappointed and a number of them wanting to dispose of their outfits to get down the river in the boat.

We crossed the Klondike in a boat to Dawson City.<sup>968</sup> There was no evidence there of the flourishing goldfield that we had been given to understand through our papers. There were only a few log shanties in the City and a stockade for the Canadian police, and a bit of a pier for the steamers coming up the river to tie up to.<sup>969</sup>

The 'Yukoner', one of the larger steamboats on the river,<sup>970</sup>

was lying at the pier and was just about to start down the river. They did not look like successful diggers, they looked just the

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<sup>962</sup> Smith, pp. 134-136.

<sup>963</sup> For map showing these creeks and the main discoveries, see Berton, *Klondike*, p. 36.

<sup>964</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 53.

<sup>965</sup> See photographs in Berton, *Klondike Quest*, p. 127, Cohen, p. 145, and McCune, p. xii.

<sup>966</sup> See map in Berton, *Klondike*, p. 270.

<sup>967</sup> Wallace, p. 215; Berton, *Klondike*, p. 283.

<sup>968</sup> For photographs of this settlement, see Berton, *Klondike Quest*, pp. 128-136, 142-147.

<sup>969</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 53-54.

<sup>970</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, p. 270.

opposite.<sup>971</sup> After having a look over the City, we called into the record office and took out our miners' rights. We took the number of each miner's right and put them down on the back of all our rights so that if any one of us struck a good show we could stake claims for the rest.<sup>972</sup>

His Free Miner's Certificate, the Canadian version of a miner's right, was number 16952, issued on 16 June. On the back can still be seen the numbers of the rights of three or four members of his party, whose names, apart from that of Edward Morrison, are now unreadable.<sup>973</sup> Morrison was not listed as a member of Nicholl's boat or of other boats that came down the river at the same time; neither the route he used to reach Dawson City nor his nationality are known. 'We found both men and women auctioning claims in places we struck, but you didn't want to have much sense to see the sales were a fake'. In one issue of a local newspaper,

they published the correct amount of gold mined from the Klondike and challenged the authorities to deny its truth and slating them for fooling people into such a hole as Dawson City. I tried to get a copy of the paper, but there were only a few of them got about, they were all called in. I offered a Yankee five dollars for one, but he wouldn't part.<sup>974</sup>

(This newspaper was probably the *Klondike Nugget*, an American-owned newspaper constantly critical of Canadian officialdom.<sup>975</sup>)

We all had a run up Eldorado and Bonanza Creeks to see where the supposed tons of gold were got.<sup>976</sup> There was a bit of work done in Skookum's Gulch but not a great lot done in the two creeks. There was a party washing down their box just as we arrived. There was a crowd standing round the box, we went over to see what was going on. They washed down and panned off and they had about forty ounces in the dish. It was the finishing up of

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<sup>971</sup> For photographs of departing men selling their outfits, see Berton, *Klondike Quest*, pp. 137-139.

<sup>972</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 54-55.

<sup>973</sup> Included in display on Nicholl's life, Waihi Museum, 1996 onwards.

<sup>974</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 55.

<sup>975</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, p. 312.

<sup>976</sup> For photographs of workings in Eldorado Creek, see Berton, *Klondike Quest*, pp. 157-163; for those in Bonanza Valley, see pp. 164-165.

his dump and the chances are that the forty ounces was all they got out of their dump. The claim was offered for sale.

I bid my mates goodbye and crossed the divide over into the Indian River. On my way over, on the flank of the divide on the Indian side, I stopped to pick up a stone to have a look at it when I heard a terrible crash as if a huge cannon ball had passed me. I looked up and was too late to see what it was. I heard the scrub breaking right down to the Indian River. It was either a moose or a bear. I must have been almost touching it before I stooped down. When a prospector is travelling new country, he is on the look out for gold and not for wild animals.

I got over to my cache and had a sleep for three or four hours. When I awoke, I had a snack and had a look round for a spruce tree big enough to make a dugout. I struck one two feet in diameter; it was the biggest tree I could find, in fact it was the biggest I saw in the Yukon. I got to work and made a dugout out of it twenty-four feet long. I got to work at it with the axe and sharpened the nose of the log and flattened one side of it, and what with axe, adze and fire I soon had it ready to float.

I put two fifty-pound bags of flour in it and a sack of beans and a side of bacon and a lot of other stores and my tools. I donned my gumboots and started to line the canoe up the Indian River and prospected it on my way up. I managed to work my way upstream fifteen miles the first day. I found gumboots a failure: when they got full of water it was hard to move your legs. I found I had to be in the river most of the time guiding the dugout clear of the boulders.

I struck two good catches for gold, had there been any in the river. I cleaned two crevices that were lying against the stream and panned them off for two fine colours of gold. I worked sixteen hours a day at lining the dugout up the river and trying the most likely places all the way up the river, sleeping in the middle of the day and working at night. It being all daylight, the night was the coolest to get along with my work.

I managed to line it up to the mouth of Dominion Creek. I could not get the dugout any further, so I made a cache of my goods. Now all the way from the mouth of Indian River to the junction of Dominion Creek, where we read in the papers that tons of gold were being produced, the river never had a pick put in it and I feel assured it never will. I would be surprised to get an ounce of gold to an acre of it.

I had a run up Dominion Creek and Sulphur Creek. I found them staked out but no men there. There were two or three holes down on each creek but nothing doing.<sup>977</sup>

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<sup>977</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 55-60.

(Clearly he did not know that a rush to Dominion Creek from June 1897 onwards had caused so many legal disputes over claim boundaries in this rich area that the creek was closed at this time, with no re-pegging being permitted until 11 July.<sup>978</sup>) He moved on to the Porcupine River, 250 miles due north of Dawson City; Berton, the leading historian of the rush, makes no mention of any gold ever being found there.<sup>979</sup>

I came back along the hills to see if I could find any sign of reef outcrop. There were none to be found. I got back to my cache and made up a pack of rice, beans and bacon, tea and sugar enough to last me a month, and made my way up Australian Gulch. I left my gun behind, thinking it too heavy to carry. I had my pick, dish and shovel to carry; with the grub it was a tidy pack with my mosquito curtain. There is no other place that the mosquito stings so badly as on the Indian River and the sandfly's bite is like a red-hot needle stuck in your flesh. They are that small that you can hardly see them, but you have no trouble in feeling them when they are up your legs.

I started up the gulch intending to get as far away from Dawson as I could while my grub lasted. I found the gulch staked from end to end and no man on it or work done on it to show that any returns had been taken from it. I kept on going and struck another gulch in the Porcupine River watershed and found it to be staked also. After this I kept to the high country in search of reefs.

After going for three days and not striking any, I made my way down to a creek running into the Porcupine River. This creek had no stakes in it or signs of anyone ever being there. I prospected the creek for a mile and could get no trace of gold. I could see that this creek forked lower down, so I struck across to strike its left branch. I had to go through some spruce and cottonwood scrub. When I got to the edge of the scrub, I saw a huge moose eating the green moss that grows at the bottom of the pool. His back was to me, and I was to [the] leeward of him. I stood and watched him for ten minutes. He would lift his head and look and listen and go on eating again. I would have had a rap at him [to kill him]<sup>980</sup> if I had had my gun. I let [out] a loud yell: it hit him like a bullet, he staggered and bounded off at a terrific pace.

I made my way to the creek and travelled up it some distance before I had a chance of trying it. The rim rock came in from the right-hand side of it. I struck some crevices in it and cleaned them and panned out three specks of gold that would weigh about a

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<sup>978</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, pp. 316-317.

<sup>979</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, p. 189.

<sup>980</sup> Partridge, p. 959.

grain. I followed up the creek for about two miles till the rim rocks on the sides came closer to the creek. I got better prospects here but not enough to pay for burning it out [frozen soil was heated to extract the gold].

I did a bit of blind stabbing in different places. I touched bottom in one place and could get about five grains to the pan. I found stone showing gold in this creek and had a hunt around to see if I could find the reef that shed it but failed. I did not stake out any claims on the creek.

I got up on the high country and kept on going in hopes of striking reefing country. The quartz I found in the creek gave me a bit of encouragement. The country rock that I had been going over was nearly [all] of it composed of mica-schist.

I struck down to a creek twenty miles east of the last creek I tried. It was running into the Porcupine River. It had about eight or ten sluiceways of water in it where I struck it. I started to prospect up the creek and obtained a good show of gold any place I tested it. I struck a bend in the creek where the rim rock tongued out into the stream a little below water. I spotted a nugget of gold in a crevice about two feet below water and put my arm down and picked it out of the crevice; it weighed one ounce sixteen pennyweights. I lowered the water on the rock by bringing up a tail race and found seven ounces of gold on the tongue: the washdirt dipped down all round the tongue. I blind stabbed down till I was up to my middle in water, but I could not touch the main bottom.

I had nearly finished my beans and bacon and I had only rice left. It would take me a week getting back to my cache, so I decided to stake out my discovery claim and stake one each for the other boys. I did this and left my tools on the bank of the creek and struck out for a week's tramp on rice till I struck my cache on the Indian River.

On my road back when I struck high hills where I could see over the beautiful valley of the Yukon, I thought it a pity that such a land with its fertile soil wasn't in the same position under the sun as New Zealand. It would be the garden of the earth and something to be proud of being born in such a land.

I battled back to the Indian. It was pretty hard going in places where the moss was deep. I finished the last of my rice the day before I reached my cache. I started a fire and boiled a billy of beans and made some leather jackets ['a rough and ready pancake']<sup>981</sup> to do me on my way down the river.

I had a paddle, and I could sit in the stern of the dugout and make it fly down the river. The worst difficulty was to guide it through the boulders. I got along splendidly and was about a mile and a half from my cache at the mouth of the river. The river took

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<sup>981</sup> Partridge, p. 672.

a sharp bend here and [my dugout was]<sup>982</sup> swept into the bank. I was flung down in my dugout and in a second was swept against the bank. I tried to push the dugout off with the paddle; in so doing the dugout turned upside down and landed me and my outfit in the water. I was swept under water and held there with a tangle of willow roots. I managed to kick myself clear after I had swallowed a few mouthfuls of water.

When I got my head above water, I couldn't see the dugout or any of my outfit. They had rounded the bend of the river. I struck out downstream and when I got to the bend, I could see her ladyship making her way to the Yukon, bottom up, as fast as the current would take her and a fifty [pound bag] of flour following her. This is all of my outfit that I found. The only things that I regretted losing were my gun and ammunition.

I righted her, the paddle was floating alongside of her and when I got the water out of her, I paddled her down to the cache and was in the act of boiling the billy when I saw a boat enter the mouth of the river and pulling up to me. He was close to me before I recognised him. It was one of my warmest friends while in Waihi, dear old Horatio Walmsley. We had a warm shake [of our] hands. He told me that since he got to Dawson he had been on the hunt after me, and that the day before he had met one of my mates and he told him that I had cached at the mouth of the Indian River, and he made straight for me. I told him that if he had come a day sooner, I would not have been there.<sup>983</sup>

Walmsley had crossed the Chilkoot Pass on 8 June and come down river in a two-man scow, boat 12948, with a prospector from Western Australia.<sup>984</sup> He later wrote to the *Thames Advertiser* about his experiences but without mentioning his meeting with Nicholl.<sup>985</sup> Walmsley then

told me that the wife had not returned to the boys but that he had seen my sister, and she told him that the boys were alright. This was a shock for me, I thought if she had had any love for the boys, she would have come back to them hearing I was out of the country. When I heard that she wasn't back my spirits went down to bedrock and I couldn't help dropping a tear for my two boys. I

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<sup>982</sup> These three words inserted in version in *Auckland Star*, 13 October 1928, Magazine Section, p. 1.

<sup>983</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 60-68.

<sup>984</sup> See Filson's Pan for Gold Database, <http://www.gold-rush.org/ghost-07.htm>, where he is listed as H.A. Wormsley from Waihi, New Zealand.

<sup>985</sup> Letters from Horatio Walmsley, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 October 1898, p. 4, 20 November 1898, p. 2.

would never have left New Zealand had I thought she wouldn't return to them to give them a mother's care.<sup>986</sup>

I boiled the billy, and we had a feed of biscuits and tinned dog, and I told him of the creek I had found and showed him the gold I had found in it. I told him that he could come in with me, that I had staked claims for my mates and had come down to record the claims I had staked out. He agreed.

We made our way in Walmsley's boat down the river to Dawson City to record the claims and to replenish our outfits for the winter. When in the city I met with three of my trail mates. They hadn't been out of the city. They had built a cache and were going to take a lay [a share] on a claim on Eldorado Creek. One of them was in hospital with typhoid fever. I told them I had been out prospecting and had staked a claim in a creek 200 [miles] east for them, and that I had come in to record.<sup>987</sup>

Because of over-worked and inexperienced staff attempting to cope with the flood of applications, there were long queues at the mining recorder's office,<sup>988</sup> as Nicholl discovered:

We went to the record office, and it was full up. We had to wait a while before we could get a hearing.<sup>989</sup> I made a sketch of the country and marked the number of creeks on it that I had found on my tour. I handed this to the record officer with the creek marked on the plan and the position of the claims I had staked out on the creek. He took my sketch into the office and returned with it half an hour later with two sketch plans, the one I gave him and one similar, the only difference that the creek was staked end to end. He showed me his sketch and told me that the whole creek was already recorded. I tried to explain to him that there were no marks of men having been in the creek before me and that there were no stakes in it before mine, and I accused him of his sketch being a fake.<sup>990</sup>

One of Walmsley's letters gave several examples of corruption in this office and claimed that it was 'rampant' from 'the highest official to the

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<sup>986</sup> All these details about his wife and sons were omitted from version published in *Auckland Star*, 13 October 1928, Magazine Section, p. 1.

<sup>987</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 68-70.

<sup>988</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, p. 313.

<sup>989</sup> For photograph of men queueing to obtain licenses, see Berton, *Klondike Quest*, p. 150.

<sup>990</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 70-71.

meanest constable'.<sup>991</sup> Two months previously, a Maori prospector had reported his experience:

Government officials are one of the problems here. If you strike pay-dirt you go to the Department to record the claim, and the official will tell you, if he knows it'll pay well – in that case he'll say the record is closed. Or else he'll tell you to come back to the Department in two or three days. During this time, he'll send some men off to look at the claim, and if it pays well, what he'll tell you is, "the record is closed." So you can't get anywhere.<sup>992</sup>

Berton confirmed that 'bribery, inefficiency, and small corruptions were the order of the day'. Recorders used their inside knowledge to give valuable ground to their friends or to assist them to jump claims, and sometimes even changed the names of claimowners.<sup>993</sup> Another historian agreed that complaints about 'the incompetency and dishonesty of the Canadian administration' were justified.<sup>994</sup> 'The ledgers were a shambles of inaccurate, altered, or even forged data. Not only was a small bribe necessary to have a claim recorded, but it was enough to have a prior claim misplaced or invalidated'.<sup>995</sup>

After Nicholl accused the official of dishonesty,

he ordered me out of the office. Three police that were standing a few paces from me caught me by the arms and hustled me out of the door. I was thrown on my face and cut badly. I had nothing to protect myself with, only my fists, and my arms being caught I couldn't use them.

I was dazed for awhile and my mates were bringing me to. My eyes were blackened and the skin off my face. They took me to the hospital and got my face plastered up. My mates wanted me to stay and go into the lay with them, but I was full up of it. I was satisfied that there were no laws or protection [to prevent claim being 'jumped'] in that country, so the sooner I was out of it the better. Walmsley agreed that it was best to get out of it, so we sold what of our outfit we didn't want for the journey. We decided

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<sup>991</sup> Letter from H.A. Walmsley, *Thames Advertiser*, 29 November 1898, p. 2.

<sup>992</sup> Robert Hector Manihera to Rangi, 30 September 1898, printed in *He Reta Ki Te Maunga: Letters to the mountain: Maori letters to the editor 1898-1905*, comp. Margaret Orbell (Auckland, 2002), pp. 43-44.

<sup>993</sup> Berton, *Klondike*, p. 311.

<sup>994</sup> Fetherling, p. 157.

<sup>995</sup> Fetherling, p. 158.

to line our boat up the river as far as Fort Selkirk [an old Indian trading post and mission station],<sup>996</sup> a distance of two hundred miles, and take [a] boat.<sup>997</sup>

They joined a steamer for the trip up-river with some trigger-happy fellow passengers:

All hands had rifles, and they were continually firing at the flocks of cranes and geese as they were flying past migrating south. I never saw one come down. The second day out they saw a bear going up the steep bank of the river. All guns were on him. He walked up the bank as if there was nothing wrong. He was nearly up to the top, and at that time six hundred yards away, when old Ellis asked his son for the rifle. The old fellow dropped him the first shot, to the surprise of all on board.

We hauled the steamer through the Five Finger and Rink rapids with the steam winch. When we got to the White Horse me and Walmsley decided to walk the twenty-four miles to Lake Marsh [at the outlet of Lake Bennett].<sup>998</sup> We had only four pounds of flour and some tea and sugar left: they told us that we could buy what we wanted at the White Horse. We hunted round and after a lot of battling we managed to get ten pounds of flour as a favour for fifty dollars and started off. We only had a blanket each and the nights were getting cold and long. Walmsley had a revolver, and I carried a sword bayonet which I used for a scrub knife.

When we got up the river a few miles, I went down to the river to get some water to make some tea and surprised a black bear eating a dead horse that had been washed up on the low bank of the river. There was a high rock behind him and me in front of him. He let out a horrid yell and came for me. I dodged him and hit him on the back with the bayonet. He saw Walmsley above him, and he turned and made a spring for the rock. I got him on the hind leg with the sword bayonet, he came down and as quick as lightning he was round and knocked the bayonet out of my hand and started to claw me. He made a bounce to hug me, and just as I felt the pressure of his legs Walmsley's revolver went off and drove a bullet through his spine. He managed to damage my left hand a bit and cut me on the right arm with his claws. We cut one of his hams off and his claws and took them with us; the ham was a bit rank but was just all right.<sup>999</sup>

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<sup>996</sup> Kelly, p. 35.

<sup>997</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 71-72.

<sup>998</sup> See map in Berton, *Klondike*, p. 270.

<sup>999</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 73-76.

(Nicholl brought one claw back to New Zealand and had it made into an ornament with a gold filagree.<sup>1000</sup>)

When we arrived at the lake, we saw what we took for a camp about a mile to the left. The tents looked small, we thought it might be caches and that someone would be there looking after them. We went to see, and when we got to it we found it to be a bit of calico stretched over a pole and covering a box that was lying on a table made out of sticks and about four feet high. We could not think what it was. Walmsley was determined to find out, he took my bayonet and prised a board off one of the boxes and found a red blanket with something wrapped up neatly in it. He went to work and unwrapped it and unearthed a human skeleton, the bones bleached white and polished. He put the board on the box, and it did not take us long getting back to the mouth of the river. It was an Indian burial ground.

We made a raft and poled it to the west side of the lake and made our way to the police camp at the head of the lake. We had to walk on a network of dead trees lying ten to fifteen feet deep in a confused mass, with young green trees growing up thick together. We got half-way up and found a bit of clean ground and we lit a fire and cooked a feed of our bear ham.

When we had it cooked, two Indian women sat down in front of us. It seemed to us that they had dropped from the clouds. We didn't see them till they were right on us. We could not make them understand our language. We offered them some bear ham, and they offered us an animal like a squirrel but much bigger. We didn't want it, as we had plenty of meat. They roasted two of these animals, and they were very fat. They were only half cooked when they started to eat them. The fat escaped and ran down from the corners of their lips, but they did not let it waste. They kept one hand under their chins to catch the drips and licked the oil out of the palm of their hands.

It struck me that they might have found out that we had been tampering with their graveyard and tracked us until they found us. We could not learn anything from them. They finished their feast and started off.

We reached the police camp just at dark. It was on the opposite side of the river. We hailed them and they had quite a lot of talk before they would agree to bring us across. They came with a boat after a lot of wrangling and took us across. We were a ragged-looking pair. We thought we could buy grub there, but they wouldn't sell any. They let us sleep in an empty bell tent and gave us a mug of coffee in the morning.

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<sup>1000</sup> On display in the Waihi Museum.

After we [had] finished, we saw the boat steaming up the lake. When she arrived, we got aboard of her and landed at the head of Lake Bennett and walked over the White Pass to Skagway. The trail for miles was strewn with dead horses and pigs; in many places there were heaps of them lying dead. When we got to Skagway we took boat to Vancouver. I parted with Walmsley here and took boat for New Zealand poorer than I left it. Walmsley went to British East Africa.<sup>1001</sup>

Upon Nicholl's return to New Zealand in November 1898, he gave the press 'a deplorable account' of the Klondike, only a fraction of which was published. He said that only 'a very few of the thousands of men who went there in the Spring have found anything to do. He states the Waihi mine is producing more bullion itself than he has seen in the Klondyke altogether'.<sup>1002</sup> His account of hardship and failure was confirmed by other New Zealanders whose letters were published during that year;<sup>1003</sup> some abandoned their venture before even reaching Klondike.<sup>1004</sup>

#### FAMILY MATTERS

Nicholl's 1927 memoirs had only three sentences dealing with his life from 1898 until then: 'When I returned to Waihi I found a great change. The township had trebled its population and the shares in the mine had reached £10-.-. The company had started to erect a battery of 200 head of stampers and mining in the surrounding districts was panning out well'.<sup>1005</sup> His memoirs then dealt with family matters:<sup>1006</sup>

I went straight to the boys as soon as I got home. I couldn't hear anything of their mother. I found they didn't do as well at school as they were doing before I left them, and they told me they would be much happier at home with me, so I fetched them home

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<sup>1001</sup> Nicholl, 1927, pp. 76-80.

<sup>1002</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 18 November 1898, p. 1.

<sup>1003</sup> For example, *Thames Star*, 6 May 1898, p. 2, 26 May 1898, p. 2, 11 June 1898, p. 2, 16 July 1898, p. 4, 5 August 1898, p. 3; *Bay of Plenty Times*, 4 July 1898, p. 2. For another account of the hardships, see *A Kiwi in the Klondike: Memories from the diaries of Francis William Hiscock*, ed. Stella M. Hull (Waiuku, 1993).

<sup>1004</sup> For example, *Thames Star*, 13 May 1898, p. 4.

<sup>1005</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 81.

<sup>1006</sup> The *Auckland Star* once again omitted all these details of his personal life.

and stayed with them till they were able to battle for themselves. I couldn't leave them to go prospecting, so I had to go to work in the mine to make a living for them and myself.

I could hear nothing more of their mother till after her death. I heard that she soon got through her money and had to take on cooking for a living and that she was cooking in a hotel in Hamilton. My elder boy was married at the time, he was manager of a butcher's shop on the opposite side of the street to the hotel, she used every spare minute to be with him and used to cook nice little dishes for him. The Great War had finished at the time and her younger son was to return to Melbourne from the war and she decided to go over to meet him. She stayed with the older boy three weeks before she left for Melbourne, and he told me that she broke up terrible when she was leaving him. She was only in Melbourne a week when he got a letter that his mother had died with a broken heart, three weeks before the younger boy landed in Melbourne.<sup>1007</sup>

The last paragraph of his final autobiographical writings gave a different version of his wife's death:

I never knew where she was for twenty years after, when she fell down a flight of stairs in Melbourne and was picked up dead and penniless. She had a family in Tasmania, and she lies now in an unmarked grave in a Melbourne cemetery. People said that she was mad, and I think there was some truth in it, or she would never have married a prospector. All that I know [is] that she cured me from having any more to do with women.<sup>1008</sup>

These are puzzling accounts. After deserting her children, why did she come back to them 20 years later? If she had so willingly left them when they were young, why should she become such an enthusiastic mother to her elder son after he had married, and then die of a 'broken heart' when briefly separated from him? And if she had another family in Tasmania, why should she come back to New Zealand? There is no evidence that she ever returned to New Zealand: her name is not listed in any electoral rolls or street directories for Hamilton for the years after 1911. Although the *Waikato Electoral Roll* for 1919 listed George Grey Nicholl, butcher, as living in Firth Street, Hamilton, his wife was not included on it.<sup>1009</sup> George

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<sup>1007</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 81.

<sup>1008</sup> Nicholl, c. 1935, p. 26.

<sup>1009</sup> *Waikato Electoral Roll, 1919*, p. 108.

had been married in 1914,<sup>1010</sup> and it is possible that he and his first wife had separated early in their marriage, which could explain why, had his mother indeed returned to New Zealand, she provided meals for him. But this interpretation is fanciful.

Nicholl's last account was partly correct, but whether he knew the full story is unknown. He had believed that by going to Klondike his wife would return to his sons,<sup>1011</sup> not knowing that she had already left New Zealand. For, as he later discovered, she had indeed settled in Tasmania, where she bore two sons, Robert James on 26 March 1898 and Richard James on 18 November 1899. Their father was Robert Nicholl, his elder brother, then mining at Zeehan, on Tasmania's west coast.<sup>1012</sup> Nicholl must have realized, in time, that his brother had left New Zealand at around the same time his wife had disappeared, but whether he knew that he was the father of her sons is not known. That his memoirs made only the briefest mention of Robert implies either that the brothers were not close friends or that he had been told of Robert's betrayal.

The birth certificates of these two boys recorded that Robert and Mary Jane were married in New Zealand on 5 January 1885; the date was correct, but the bridegroom had been William, not Robert. Perhaps her parting note to Nicholl, 'I only married you for spite',<sup>1013</sup> indicated that she had been in love with Robert, that their relationship had been a stormy one, and that to spite Robert she had married William, later regretting her choice of brothers. Robert mined at Waihi throughout the 1880s, apart from an unexplained absence in 1887, and was living there once more from at least 1890 to 1893. In the 1894 and 1896 electoral rolls, the only Nicholl listed at Waihi was Mary Jane,<sup>1014</sup> and Robert has not been traced. As Robert had sought an agricultural lease near Waihi alongside his younger nephew and

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<sup>1010</sup> Marriage of George Grey Nicholl, 1914/1570, BDM.

<sup>1011</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 69.

<sup>1012</sup> Birth Certificate of Robert James Nicholl, 26 March 1898, 33/1898/3834; Birth Certificate of Richard James Nicholl, 18 November 1899, 33/1899/3256, Tasmanian BDM.

<sup>1013</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 35.

<sup>1014</sup> *Tauranga Electoral Rolls, 1881*, p. 16; *1885*, p. 20; *1887*, p. 18; *Te Aroha Electoral Roll, 1890*, p. 25; *Bay of Plenty Electoral Rolls, 1893*, p. 39; *1894*, p. 38; *Thames Electoral Roll, 1896*, p. 55; *Ohinemuri Electoral Roll, 1896*, p. 42.

close to that selected by his brother and his wife in 1891,<sup>1015</sup> he was then in contact, perhaps intimate contact, with his sister-in-law. That Robert had not married prior to leaving for Tasmania supports the argument that he had been in love with his brother's wife for years.

Mary Jane Nicholl's life after 1900, when her elder child by her second relationship died at Zeehan,<sup>1016</sup> has not been traced. She still lived in Zeehan in 1905 but had left the district by 1907.<sup>1017</sup> If indeed she returned to New Zealand at any stage, she then moved to Melbourne. Robert continued mining at Zeehan,<sup>1018</sup> dying there in January 1925 aged 73. He was recorded on his death certificate as being a single man,<sup>1019</sup> not a widower, suggesting that they had parted in anger and had lost contact with each other soon after 1905.

Mary Jane's death certificate listed her son from her second relationship as James, not Richard James, and his age was not known to the police constable who filled in the form.<sup>1020</sup> Clearly, she had abandoned this son as well and lost touch with him. As he was aged 17 when she died in 1917, it was likely that he was still living with his father. By January 1924, when Robert made his will, Richard James lived in Auckland and was the sole beneficiary.<sup>1021</sup>

Her younger son by Billy Nicholl had moved to Victoria, and probably to Melbourne, in 1907, remaining there until his death in 1953.<sup>1022</sup> Had she been there for the decade before her death she may indeed have contacted him and possibly even mothered him, as Nicholl believed she did one of his

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<sup>1015</sup> Thames Warden's Court, Numerical Register of Applications 1890-1896, folios 25, 55, 34, 37, BACL 14354/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1016</sup> Death Certificate of Robert James Nicholl, 961/1900, Tasmanian BDM.

<sup>1017</sup> *Australia, Commonwealth Electoral Rolls, State of Tasmania, Electorate of Darwin, Subdivision of Zeehan, 1903*, p. 13, *1905*, p. 13, *1906*, p. 14; *Tasmanian Post Office Directory, 1904* (Hobart, 1904), p. 291.

<sup>1018</sup> *Australia, Commonwealth Electoral Rolls, State of Tasmania, Electorate of Darwin, Subdivision of Zeehan, 1909*, p. 47; *1910*, p. 48; *1912*, p. 40; *1913*, p. 43; *1914*, p. 37; *1915*, p. 27; *1916*, p. 23; *1917*, p. 24; *1921*, p. 19; *1922*, p. 17; *1925*, p. 16.

<sup>1019</sup> Death Certificate of Robert Nicholl, 8 January 1925, 1438/1925, Tasmanian BDM.

<sup>1020</sup> Death Certificate of Mary Jane Nicholl, 11 May 1917, 4382/1917, Victorian BDM.

<sup>1021</sup> Probate of Robert Nicholl, Probates, no. 15143, 1925, Tasmanian State Archives.

<sup>1022</sup> Death Certificate of William Sharman Crawford Nicholl, 31 August 1953, 6429/1953, Victorian BDM.

sons, because he did not marry until 1922.<sup>1023</sup> However, any contact must have taken place in Melbourne, not Hamilton, although she cannot be traced as living in Melbourne before 1917.<sup>1024</sup> As well, it must have taken place early in the First World War, for he spent most of the war in Europe. Nicholl wrongly recalled that she had gone to Melbourne to meet this son on his return from the war, for he was captured in mid-1917 when fighting in France with the Australian army and was not released from captivity until after the war had ended, when he returned to Melbourne once more.<sup>1025</sup>

By then Mary Jane had died, on 11 May 1917. At the time of her death, she was a cook at the Cafe Victoria in Bridge Road in the suburb of Richmond. Possibly Nicholl, by muddling together her being a cook and in contact with his sons, had concluded that she had been in touch with his elder son, when in fact it was the younger one, and in Melbourne, not in Hamilton. When she died, she was aged 55; the cause of death was recorded as 'Diseases of the Heart and Kidneys'. Her death must have been sudden, as Nicholl wrote, because the coroner was contacted, but after a post-mortem he ruled that an inquest was unnecessary. Whether she literally fell down the stairs is not known; there was no report of her death in local newspapers, which might have reported such a spectacular death. That she had lost contact with her children was indicated by the fact that no information was recorded on her death certificate about whom she had married, and the ages of her three sons (whose names were incompletely given as George, William, and James) were not known.<sup>1026</sup> That she did not leave a will suggests that Nicholl accurately recorded that she died penniless.<sup>1027</sup>

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<sup>1023</sup> Marriage Certificate of William Sharman Crawford Nicholl, 8978/1922, Victorian BDM.

<sup>1024</sup> The Mary J. Nichol who was a nurse at Fitzroy from at least 1900 to 1916 was another person: see *Sands and McDougall's Melbourne, Suburban, and Country Directory, 1900*, p. 1079; *1904*, p. 1242; *1907*, p. 1428; *1909*, p. 1525; *Victoria Post Office Directory, 1916*, p. 1800.

<sup>1025</sup> Letters of J.H. Moore to [Martha] Dulcie Brodie, 17 July 1917, to Mrs M.A. Wick, 14 January 1918, to W.S.C. Nicholl, 16 November 1918, and to [Martha] Dulcie Brodie, 4 March 1919, reprinted in *Anzac Jack*, ed. J.H. Moore (typescript, Whangamata, 1994), pp. 59, 67, 74, 81-82.

<sup>1026</sup> Death Certificate of Mary Jane Nicholl, 11 May 1917, 6429/1917, Victorian BDM.

<sup>1027</sup> Nicholl, 1937, p. 26.

On the four occasions that Nicholl was admitted into the Waihi Hospital in 1905, 1907, 1908, and 1912, he recorded his status as ‘married’, and in 1908 gave ‘Mrs Nicholl’ as his nearest relative,<sup>1028</sup> This should not be interpreted to mean that they had renewed contact: indeed, he was possibly referring to his mother, who was still alive if not mentally well. His younger son was working at nearby Waikino as a labourer in 1906, when aged 18,<sup>1029</sup> but the following year he went to Victoria.<sup>1030</sup> As his elder son George had left the district by the time he was 21 and would die in Auckland in 1965,<sup>1031</sup> from 1907 onwards Nicholl lived alone.

### FARMING AND PROSPECTING UNTIL 1920

In 1900, Nicholl’s residence was given in the electoral roll as ‘Nicholl’s Flat, Waihi’, and his occupation as settler.<sup>1032</sup> Presumably he was living on his small farm. On 22 January 1901, he obtained a new lease of the same land, now surveyed precisely as 49 acres three roods and 28 perches, the map showing it being bisected by the Waihi Company’s water race.<sup>1033</sup> In January 1903, he applied for a ‘timber warrant’ and sought permission to cut 30 rimu and one kauri tree at Waimata Creek, between Waihi and Athenree.<sup>1034</sup> Two months later, when he reported the theft of a silver watch and gold chain from his house at Waihi, he gave his occupation as that of a farmer.<sup>1035</sup> In October 1904, giving his address as ‘Waitete, Waihi’, he

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<sup>1028</sup> Waihi Hospital, Register of Patients, 1903-1910, folios 20, 33, 55, ZABW 4935/1a; Register of Patients, 1911-1914, folio 37, ZABW 4935/1b, ANZ-A. That the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* in 1902 referred to Nicholl’s wife as still residing ‘in the district’ indicates how out of date this entry was: *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 927.

<sup>1029</sup> Waihi Hospital, Register of Patients, 1910-1910, folio 28, ZABW 4934/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1030</sup> Death Certificate of William Sharman Crawford Nicholl, 31 August 1953, 9859/1953, Victorian BDM.

<sup>1031</sup> George Grey Nicholl was not listed in the electoral rolls for the Waihi district from 1907 onwards; Death Certificate of George Grey Nicholl, 3 September 1965, 1965/39852, BDM.

<sup>1032</sup> *Ohinemuri Electoral Roll, 1900*, p. 71.

<sup>1033</sup> Occupation Lease no. 109, Section 23 Block XV Ohinemuri Survey District, Register Books, vol. 108, folio 220, with map, LINZ, Hamilton.

<sup>1034</sup> Paeroa Warden’s Court, Register of Mining Applications 1892-1895, folio 11, ZAAP 13692/3a; Waihi Warden’s Court, Hearings 1902-1906, BAFV 13696/3a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1035</sup> *New Zealand Police Gazette*, 25 March 1903, p. 74.

advertised having for sale ‘Eight choice Heifers and Cows at profit, and a number of Steers; also, a number of Heifers not in calf’.<sup>1036</sup> Six weeks later, another brief advertisement was published: ‘Wanted, Graziers. Good grass’.<sup>1037</sup> In the following May, the Waihi Company called for tenders to cut a water race deviation ‘near Nicholl’s farm, Waitete’.<sup>1038</sup>

The farming of his land was supervised by Thomas Lochhead and carried out by his employee, William Dean.<sup>1039</sup> While Nicholl was at the Klondike rush, in June 1898 Lochhead was sued for rent amounting to £26.<sup>1040</sup> He must have paid this debt, for he continued to lease the farm, and in May 1899, immediately after Nicholl returned, ‘saw Nicholl’ about obtaining a whare for it.<sup>1041</sup> Lochhead drove cattle and brought eggs and other farm produce to the Waihi farm normally at monthly intervals, and sold this produce and milk in Waihi.<sup>1042</sup> Nicholl ran cows both on his Waihi land and on Lochhead’s Te Puna farm. In January 1900, for instance, amongst the cows that Lochhead drove to Waihi were ‘Yel Nicholl’ and ‘Nicholl Beauty’, and in September the following year he ‘started for Waihi with three for Dean 9 for Nicholl and T.M. Thomson’s bull for Walmsley’.<sup>1043</sup>

Nicholl had little contact with his tenant, the only time that Lochhead recorded meeting him in 1900 was when he ‘had a look at fence with Mr Nicholl’.<sup>1044</sup> In mid-July the following year, Lochhead went to discuss the lease with his lawyer at Paeroa and then ‘went over to see Nicholl when I

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<sup>1036</sup> Advertisements, *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 15 October 1904, p. 3, 17 October 1904, p. 3, 18 October 1904, p. 3.

<sup>1037</sup> Advertisements, *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 29 November 1904, p. 3, 3 December 1904, p. 3.

<sup>1038</sup> Advertisement, *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 18 May 1905, p. 3.

<sup>1039</sup> For Dean, see *Ohinemuri Electoral Roll, 1900*, p. 23.

<sup>1040</sup> Paeroa Magistrate’s Court, *Plaint Book 1896-1901*, folio 70, no. 319, BACL 13745/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1041</sup> Thomas Lochhead, *Diary*, entry for 3 May 1899, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

<sup>1042</sup> For example, 1900: Thomas Lochhead, *diaries*, entries for 16-18 January 1900, 8-10 February 1900, 19-21 February 1900, 26-28 March 1900, 10-11 April 1900, 7-9 May 1900, 26-27 June 1900, 25 July 1900, 12-14 August 1900, 17-18 September 1900, 8 November 1900, 12-14 December 1900, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

<sup>1043</sup> Thomas Lochhead, *diaries*, entries for 23 January 1900, 10 September 1901, 11 September 1901, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

<sup>1044</sup> Thomas Lochhead, *diaries*, entry for 19 September 1900, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

came back'.<sup>1045</sup> Just over a week later, Nicholl and his elder son spent a night with Lochhead at Te Puna. The following morning, Lochhead 'got in all the cows and picked out Nicholl's cattle, he gave Mrs Lochhead Strawberry, he agreed to leave them for another month, he and George left after dinner'.<sup>1046</sup> Six weeks later, all Nicholl's cattle were taken by Lochhead to Waihi, presumably for Nicholl to run on his second farm, as his lease on the first had expired on 19 August.<sup>1047</sup> In September 1908 the second one was transferred to a Waihi butcher.<sup>1048</sup>

From 1902 until 1919, Nicholl was recorded in the electoral rolls as living at Waihi. In December 1903 he transferred his business site there, Section 9B, part of the section earlier held in his wife's name, to R. and L. Green; earlier that year he had nearly forfeited it for non-payment of rent.<sup>1049</sup> Henry Roy Green and Herbert Weldon Lyell Green were plumbers.<sup>1050</sup> He was granted a residence site at Waitekauri in June 1909, on the corner of Main Road and Jubilee Road, where he lived until his final move, to Auckland in 1935, when the title was transferred to his elder son.<sup>1051</sup> Except for 1902, when he was still a 'settler', his occupation as given in the electoral rolls was 'miner'.<sup>1052</sup> It seems that during these years he had

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<sup>1045</sup> Thomas Lochhead, diaries, entry for 17 July 1901, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

<sup>1046</sup> Thomas Lochhead, diaries, entries for 28-29 July 1901, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

<sup>1047</sup> Thomas Lochhead, diaries, entries for 10-11 September 1901, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library; Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Ohinemuri Agricultural Leases 1875-1893, folio 155, ZAAP 13784/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1048</sup> Transfer no. 47642, 24 September 1908, noted on Occupation Lease no. 109, Section 23 Block XV Ohinemuri Survey District, Register Books, vol. 109 folio 220, LINZ, Hamilton.

<sup>1049</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Mining Applications 1892-1895, folio 26, ZAAP 13692/3a; Waihi Warden's Court, Plaintiff Book 1902-1913, 8/1903, BAFV 13682/1a; Record Book 1902-1904, 8/1903, BAFV 13683/1a; Nominal Index of Registrations 1903-1905, nos. 861, 904, BAFV 13668/1b; Hearings 1902-1906, folio 26, BAFV 13696/3a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1050</sup> *Bay of Plenty Electoral Roll, 1905*, p. 44.

<sup>1051</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Numerical Index of Registrations 1908-1909, no. 6944, ZAAP 13292/2d; Register of Licensed Holdings 1905-1909, folio 278, ZAAP 13294/6a; Mining Applications 1935, no. 10093 (with plan of site), BAFV 13695/10a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1052</sup> *Bay of Plenty Electoral Roll, 1902*, p. 56; *Ohinemuri Supplementary Electoral Roll, 1908*, p. 32; *Ohinemuri Electoral Roll, 1911*, p. 98; *Ohinemuri Electoral Roll, 1914*, p. 14; *Ohinemuri Electoral Roll, 1919*, p. 85.

a degree of financial security, for in 1900 he had a credit balance of £67 18s 7d in March, £73 in September, and £26 10s 1d in March 1901.<sup>1053</sup> The account was transferred to the Waihi branch of the Bank of New Zealand in January 1902,<sup>1054</sup> for which no records of this nature have survived.

From 1903 onwards, Nicholl concentrated on prospecting, and started acquiring some claims.<sup>1055</sup> In January 1905 he obtained a prospecting license over 50 acres near Tairua.<sup>1056</sup> Most of that year was spent prospecting near Whangamata,<sup>1057</sup> and in 1906 he prospected 25 acres on the south branch of the Tairua River, near the track from Hikutaia to Whangamata.<sup>1058</sup> In 1907, when prospecting this claim with only ‘moderate’ success, he had a ‘unique and trying experience’, according to a press report:

One evening, after a hard day’s work, he had a bath, when he put his clothes on, he found them wet with perspiration. Having no change at his whare, he made the best of it. Unfortunately, a serious chill accompanied with rheumatic pains attacked him, the result being that, with his other ailments, he went blind. He was in this state for two days, without anything to eat. On the evening of the second day, fortunately, an Austrian [meaning a ‘Dalmation’] gumdigger visited him in his whare and discovered his precarious state. Hot water, with hot water bandages, and a liberal use of kerosene, were applied by the Austrian under Mr Nicholl’s instructions, until the sufferer recovered his sight, and his strength was partially restored. During the treatment Mr Nicholl swallowed two teaspoonfulls of kerosene in one dose and used kerosene freely for the massage of his body and legs, and his massage was applied until the skin was too sore to continue the

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<sup>1053</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Ohinemuri Branch, Half-Yearly Balance Books, Balances as at 31 March 1900, 30 September 1900, 31 March 1901, Current Accounts, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

<sup>1054</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Ohinemuri Branch, Half-Yearly Balance Books, Balances as at 31 March 1902, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

<sup>1055</sup> For example, Paeroa Warden’s Court, *New Zealand Herald*, 3 December 1903, p. 6.

<sup>1056</sup> Paeroa Warden’s Court, Register of Mining Applications 1892-1895, folio 72, ZAAP 13692/3a; Waihi Warden’s Court, Hearings 1902-1906, folio 72, BAFV 13696/3a, ANZ-A; Warden’s Court, *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 22 February 1905, p. 3.

<sup>1057</sup> Waihi Warden’s Court, Nominal Index of Registrations 1903-1905, 1948/1905, BAFV 13668/1b, ANZ-A; Inquest on Roderick McCorquodale, Justice Department, J 46, 1905/1021, ANZ-W.

<sup>1058</sup> Thames Warden’s Court, Applications 1906, 398/1906 (with map), AAAE 14350/53a, ANZ-A.

treatment. However his strength was sufficiently restored to enable him to mount his horse, which the kind Austrian had procured and saddled for him. He then rode straight to the Waihi Hospital, where he received the best and most attentive treatment and is now in a fair way of recovery.<sup>1059</sup>

After this self-medication, Nicholl spent five weeks in the hospital recovering from this attack of rheumatism.<sup>1060</sup>

In 1909, he owned an interest in the Scotia Gold Mining Company.<sup>1061</sup> Two years later, he was granted the Last Chance Special Quartz Claim of just under 25 acres, situated just outside the Waitekauri settlement.<sup>1062</sup> Also in 1911, he applied for a sluicing claim at Jubilee Creek and was granted the King George extended river claim at Waitekauri.<sup>1063</sup> In 1912, when working the Last Chance with the assistance of William Henry Skeen, another miner,<sup>1064</sup> found valuable ore. In March 1912, therefore, for the first time in his life he applied for a government subsidy, £50, to enable them to drive 200 feet.<sup>1065</sup> Asked for his advice, the mining inspector, Matthew Paul, reported on the claim:

For some considerable time Mr Nicholl has been engaged sluicing what is known as Diamond Gully, endeavouring to trace the source of the gold found there, and is now satisfied that it must

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<sup>1059</sup> *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 12 March 1907, p. 2; reprinted in *Thames Star*, 13 March 1907, p. 2.

<sup>1060</sup> Waihi Hospital, Register of Patients, 1903-1910, folio 33, no. 208, ZABW 4935/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1061</sup> Scotia Gold Mining Company, Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 245 no. 1441, ANZ-A.

<sup>1062</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Numerical Index of Registrations 1910-1912, 7584/1911, ZAAP 13292/3b, ANZ-A; Warden's Court, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 10 February 1911, p. 3; Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 7 May 1912, Mines Department, MD 1, 1912/875, ANZ-W.

<sup>1063</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Numerical Index of Registrations 1910-1912, 7760/1911, ZAAP 13292/3b, ANZ-A; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, Ohinemuri County Council, 18 August 1911, p. 2, Warden's Court, 22 September 1911, p. 2.

<sup>1064</sup> *Ohinemuri Electoral Roll, 1911*, p. 122.

<sup>1065</sup> Thames School of Mines, Assay Book, 1907-1919, entry for 10 March 1912, School of Mines, Thames; W.S.C. Nicholl, per H.M.C., to Chairman, Ohinemuri County Council, 30 March 1912, Mines Department, MD 1, 1912/875, ANZ-W; Ohinemuri County Council, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 3 May 1912, p. 2.

come from the hill at the head of the Gully. But on account of there being so much overburden, the lode or lodes which shed their gold are not exposed on the surface. It is now proposed to cut at right angles to the known run of the lodes of this district. In order to test this locality Mr Nicholl showed me some of the gold valued at £15:13:4 obtained by sluicing and from my knowledge of this locality consider that he has a fair chance of finding the lode.<sup>1066</sup>

The Mines Department contributed 5s per foot, up to a total expenditure of £50, and the council provided 2s 6d per foot.<sup>1067</sup> The tunnel was duly driven, and the subsidy paid in two instalments, in October 1912 and June 1913, once Paul confirmed that the work had been satisfactorily done; as 'nothing of value' was found, in December 1912 the Last Chance and King George Extended claims.<sup>1068</sup>

In 1913 he was granted another prospecting license,<sup>1069</sup> and in May applied for a subsidy to drive 350 feet in his Reward.<sup>1070</sup> The Mines Department granted £125 to assist Nicholl and another miner to drive a low level 500 feet 'to prove the Scotia and May Queen claims', the former owned by Nicholl. The department considered 'this locality is worthy of a trial, but considers that one low level tunnel should be sufficient to prove' both claims, and granted the subsidy 'on the understanding that a suitable site is chosen and agreed upon by both the claim holders'. The county chairman offered to consult with the mining inspector 'about the site of the tunnel'.<sup>1071</sup> As the two miners could not agree on where to site the tunnel, they applied for separate subsidies,<sup>1072</sup> but neither reported any success.

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<sup>1066</sup> Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 7 May 1912, Mines Department, MD 1, 1912/875, ANZ-W.

<sup>1067</sup> Ohinemuri County Council, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 7 June 1912, p. 3.

<sup>1068</sup> Certificates by Inspector of Mines authorising payments, October 1912, June 1913, Mines Department, MD 1, 1912/875, ANZ-W; Inspector of Mines, Waihi, 'Prospecting Subsidies Granted', n.d. [1923], Inspector of Mines, BBDO 10046, A902, MM 174, ANZ-A; Warden's Court, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 13 December 1912, p. 3.

<sup>1069</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Index of Miscellaneous Applications 1898-1922, 29/1913, ZAAP 13770/1b, ANZ-A.

<sup>1070</sup> Ohinemuri County Council, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 9 May 1913, p. 3.

<sup>1071</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 8 August 1913, p. 3.

<sup>1072</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 5 September 1913, p. 2.

Two years later Nicholl sought assistance to drive a low level 500 feet in the Scotia Special Claim, the ground earlier held by the company in which he had been a shareholder.<sup>1073</sup> When Paul visited the site, he found Nicholl 'engaged sluicing in the creek adjoining the Old Waitekauri Battery site. He informed me that he had disposed of the Scotia Claim', and therefore this subsidy was not granted.<sup>1074</sup>

In July 1917, Nicholl paid £65 to purchase the Waitekauri Special Quartz Claim along with licenses originally issued to the Waitekauri Company in 1900 for two machine sites, one special site for stacking firewood and for kilns, three dam sites, a water race, and a tramway.<sup>1075</sup> At the same time, he was granted the Reward Extended Quartz Claim, on the southern boundary of the New Waitekauri Special Quartz Claim. As this was farmland, he agreed to fill in any prospecting holes and make them safe for cattle.<sup>1076</sup> In later years he used one machine site for a one-stamper battery and three berdans, abandoning the other licenses.<sup>1077</sup>

In December 1917, he once again sought assistance, this time to drive 200 feet in the New Waitekauri claim.<sup>1078</sup> When asked to provide an opinion, Paul gave a detailed account of Nicholl's work during the previous three years:

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<sup>1073</sup> W.S.C. Nicholl to Chairman, Ohinemuri County Council, 26 April 1915, Mines Department, MD 1, 1918/63, ANZ-W; Ohinemuri County Council, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 7 May 1915, p. 3, 4 June 1915, p. 3; Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 245 no. 1441, ANZ-A.

<sup>1074</sup> Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 18 May 1915, Mines Department, MD 1, 1918/63, ANZ-W.

<sup>1075</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1917, 8634/1917, BAFV 11933/2a; Register of Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1899-1900, folios 104-106, 223, ZAAP 13294/2a; Register of Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1900, folios 239, 245, 248, ZAAP 13294/3a; Register of Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1905-1909, folio 148, ZAAP 13294/6a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1076</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1917, 35/1917, BAFV 11933/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1077</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1918, 8710/1918, BAFV 11933/2a; Mining Applications 1919, 8791/1919, BAFV 11933/10a; Mining Applications 1920, 8927/1920, BAFV 11933/3a; Mining Applications 1921, 86, 9057/1921, BAFV 11933/3a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1078</sup> W.S.C. Nicholl to Chairman, Ohinemuri County Council, 1 December 1917, Mines Department, MD 1, 1918/63, ANZ-W.

Applicant is one of the oldest prospectors in the Hauraki Mining District, still enjoys splendid health, and capable of doing a good day's work. For the past three years he has been prospecting the Waitekauri District, and last year purchased two stamps and four berdans, a portion of the Old Waitekauri Battery, repaired water race, put in a small pelton wheel, and crushed 50 tons of ore, obtained from different leaders in his claim, known at the Waitekauri, for gold valued at £136.

In the Jubilee section of his claim, a leader known as Christies, produced some very rich ore in the early days of this goldfield. Mr Nicholl has collected and crushed loose boulders of quartz found on the surface, north of the old working, some of which proved to be highly payable. He has taken a mate and started a crosscut with the object of intersecting this lode, about 100 feet north of old workings.<sup>1079</sup>

Granted £50 in March 1918 to drive 200 feet at the usual subsidised rate of 5s per foot, by June he and his mate (whose name was unrecorded) 'cut a small lode, in which gold has been freely seen'.<sup>1080</sup> Five years later, Paul recommended that, as the results had 'proved disappointing', the balance of the subsidy, £12, be cancelled.<sup>1081</sup>

In September 1918, Nicholl was granted the Waitekauri Extended Quartz Claim, of 3 acres 2 roods and 29 perches, bounded on one side by Battery Creek.<sup>1082</sup> Three years later, he surrendered it.<sup>1083</sup> In April 1919, he was granted the Republic Extended Quartz Claim of five acres, near the top of the valley and with the Golden Cross Stream crossing it.<sup>1084</sup> In the first half of 1920 he worked in his Waitekauri Cross claim with A.C.

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<sup>1079</sup> Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 9 February 1918, Mines Department, MD 1, 1918/63, ANZ-W.

<sup>1080</sup> Ohinemuri County Council, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 8 March 1918, p. 2; Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 29 June 1918, Mines Department, MD 1, 1918/63, ANZ-W.

<sup>1081</sup> Inspector of Mines, Waihi, 'Commitments to Prospecting, as at 1 April 1923', and 'Prospecting Subsidies Granted', n.d. [1923], Inspector of Mines, BBDO 10046, A902, MM174, ANZ-A.

<sup>1082</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1918, 43/1918 (with plan), BAFV 11933/2a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1083</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1918, 71/1918, BAFV 11933/2a; Mining Applications 1921, 86/1921, BAFV 11933/3a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1084</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1921, 19/1921, BAFV 11933/3a, ANZ-A.

Williams,<sup>1085</sup> probably Albert Charles Williams, a returned soldier living at Paeroa.<sup>1086</sup> During that year he was granted permission to cut down four rimu trees on the Marlow Track at Waitekauri to use in his Republic Extended.<sup>1087</sup> Later in the year he applied for a kauri tree blown down on the Grace Darling Spur, which he estimated would provide 4,000 feet of timber for it.<sup>1088</sup> However, in April the following year, when the engineer of the Ohinemuri County Council finally went to measure the tree to determine the royalty to be paid, it was not found 'and had apparently been unlawfully removed by some other party'. Nicholl tried to discover the identity of the offender, unsuccessfully.<sup>1089</sup> As he had surrendered this claim two months previously,<sup>1090</sup> he no longer needed the timber.

The extent of Nicholl's success during the second decade of the twentieth century can be ascertained by checking the amount and value of gold that he sold to the Bank of New Zealand at Thames. In late 1916 he sold 13oz 2 dwt of gold valued at £2 per ounce taken from 'Hume's Battery Site' for a return of £26 4s.<sup>1091</sup> Three lots from his New Waitekauri mine and treated in his own battery were sold in 1917. In April the gold was valued at £2 6s and his 9oz 10dwt returned £21 17s, two months later it was valued at £2 11s 6d and 14oz 14dwt returned £37 17s, and another four months later 8oz 10dwt valued at £2 11s returned £21 13s 6d.<sup>1092</sup> In March 1919, 13oz 9dwt valued at £1 10s 6d taken from his Waitekauri Cross mine

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<sup>1085</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Thames Branch, Gold Dealer's Book 1913-1932, 59/48, 59/49, 59/51, 59/53 of 1920, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

<sup>1086</sup> *Ohinemuri Supplementary Electoral Roll, 1919*, p. 36.

<sup>1087</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1920, 25/1920, BAFV 11933/3a, ANZ-A; Warden's Court, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 20 August 1920, p. 2.

<sup>1088</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1920, 52/1920, BAFV 11933/3a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1089</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1921, 16/1921, BAFV 11933/3a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1090</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1921, 19/1921, BAFV 11933/3a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1091</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Thames Branch, Gold Purchase Register 1899-1932, entry for 27 October 1916; Statement of Daily Gold Purchases at Thames 1916-1954, entry for 14 November 1916, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

<sup>1092</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Thames Branch, Gold Purchase Register 1899-1932, entries for 13 April 1917, 5 June 1917, 16 October 1917; Statement of Daily Gold Purchases at Thames 1916-1954, entries for 20 April 1917, 16 June 1917, 20 October 1917, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

and treated in his own battery returned £26 11s 3d.<sup>1093</sup> This gave a total of £134 2s 9d. In May 1920, Nicholl treated two batches from his Waitekauri Cross mine for a total of 6oz 6dwt melted gold, value £12 2s 6d, and in June had two cleanups of his battery, obtaining 71oz 6dwt melted gold, sold for £34 6s 9d.<sup>1094</sup> Any gold extracted in later years was not sold in Thames but presumably to the Waihi branch, whose records of gold purchases have been lost.

#### PROSPECTING AT WAITEKAURI DURING THE 1920s

Nicholl surrendered his tranway in November 1920.<sup>1095</sup> A year later, all the special sites, water races, and dams he had purchased in 1917 were surrendered.<sup>1096</sup> Late the following March, he applied for 100 acres as Nicholl's Reward Special Quartz Claim, bounded by the New Waitekauri, May Bell, and Gordon's Freehold claims.<sup>1097</sup> A Paeroa newspaper announced that he had found what promised to be 'a very valuable reef, 40 feet wide: 'great excitement prevails'.<sup>1098</sup> More detail was given in the Waihi newspaper:

It was reported in Waihi last evening that an important find of a large reef at Waitekauri was made by Mr W. Nicholl, the well-known prospector. The width of the lode is said to be 40 feet, and it is stated that as far as can be ascertained it carries fair values. It appears that the lode was struck by means of a hand boring

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<sup>1093</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Thames Branch, Gold Purchase Register 1899-1932, entry for 6 March 1919; Statement of Daily Gold Purchases at Thames 1916-1954, entry for 15 March 1919, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

<sup>1094</sup> Bank of New Zealand, Thames Branch, Gold Dealer's Book 1913-1932, 59/48, 59/49, 59/51, 59/53 (entries for 17 May 1920, 25 May 1920, 8 June 1920, 26 June 1920), Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

<sup>1095</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1905-1909, folio 158, ZAAP 13294/6a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1096</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1899-1900, folios 104-106, 223, ZAAP 13294/2a; Register of Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1900, ZAAP 13294/3a, folios 239, 245, 248, ANZ-A.

<sup>1097</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1922, 19/1922, BAFV 11933/3a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1098</sup> *Hauraki Plains Gazette*, 31 March 1922, press cutting in Mines Department, MD 1A, 12/99, ANZ-W.

machine, and is said to have been traced for a quarter of a mile.<sup>1099</sup>

The *Observer* wrote that ‘Willie Nicholl finds gold at Waitekauri, and with a self-invented drill’, and praised him for being able to show the way for the present-day miner.<sup>1100</sup> Paul reported that, ‘some years ago’, Nicholl had obtained,

by sluicing in a small creek about half a mile from the township, 17 ounces of gold, and as the value proved higher, and therefore did not correspond with value of gold, generally found at Waitekauri, he formed the opinion that this gold was shed from an undiscovered lode; open trenching and surface drives were tried, with no results; eventually he procured boring rods, and now claims to have traced a lode for fully 100 feet.

He had obtained good prospects from drilling on a 40-foot reef, finding an outcrop in a small creek. Paul was shown what Nicholl ‘claimed to be the outcrop, but as there was only a trench cut into it, exposing boulders of quartz and rubble’, it was ‘difficult to express any definite opinion’ as to its value until more work was done, because he might have ‘bored on a line of quartz boulders, buried in a large slip’.<sup>1101</sup> Nicholl applied for a two-mile water race to the old Australia battery site, which would take 12 months to construct and cost £2,000, but nearly two weeks later withdrew his application for this and the enlarged claim.<sup>1102</sup> Three months later, Paul reported that, since finding the outcrop, Nicholl had ‘done a considerable amount of work, consisting of open cutting and trenching, without discovering the lode which shed the gold obtained by sluicing’.<sup>1103</sup> Nicholl never did find a lode, despite extensive drilling: in 1928 he stated that with his hand-boring plant he had drilled to a depth of 80 feet and bored through

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<sup>1099</sup> *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 29 March 1922, p. 2.

<sup>1100</sup> *Observer*, 8 April 1922, p. 22.

<sup>1101</sup> Matthew Paul to Warden, 4 April 1922, Paeroa Warden’s Court, Mining Applications 1922, 19/1922, BAFV 11933/4a, ANZ-A; Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 5 April 1922, Mines Department, MD 1A, 12/99, ANZ-W.

<sup>1102</sup> E.W. Porritt to Mining Registrar, 11 April 1922, Paeroa Warden’s Court, Mining Applications 1922, 19, 20/1922, BAFV 11933/4a 2, ANZ-A.

<sup>1103</sup> Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 31 July 1922, MD 1A, 12/99, ANZ-W.

five feet of solid quartz.<sup>1104</sup> Also in that year, he told the Mines Department that he had taken 'several' tons from the Scotia, treating the ore in his small mill for an average return of £4 per ton.<sup>1105</sup> That one reef he found was regarded by others as promising was reflected in an 1935 application for Nicholl's Reef Special Quartz Claim, between Waitekauri Road and Jubilee Road, this the Scotia low level drive on its northeastern boundary.<sup>1106</sup>

In January 1924, Nicholl was granted a prospecting license for 66 acres on the Golden Cross Creek.<sup>1107</sup> For £10, in November 1925 he acquired both the May Bell Extended Quartz Claim and the Success Special Quartz Claim of just over 28 acres, but two years later surrendered them;<sup>1108</sup> they had not produced anything worthwhile.

The total value of the gold he extracted during the 1920s was never recorded, but his obituary in the Waihi newspaper indicated that he never lost his faith in the Waitekauri district and also explained why his main discovery there had proved to be disappointing:

He had been a resident of Waitekauri for many years and always maintained that a major fissure lode exists there and will some day be discovered. In this connection he carried out boring operations along the estimated line of the ore-body without success though he was satisfied there were indications of its existence, and on one occasion was confident that he had struck the lode, but subsequent investigation showed that he had met with a deposit of quartz which was lying flat and was apparently not connected with any definite ore-body. The boring apparatus was one of his own contrivance and he manipulated it himself. Like most prospectors, he was a great optimist, and the lure of gold kept him tied to the prospecting dish even after attaining an advanced age.<sup>1109</sup>

## HIS LAST PROSPECTING EXPEDITION IN OHINEMURI

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<sup>1104</sup> Memorandum by Inspector of Mines, 3 August 1928, MD 1A, 12/99, ANZ-W.

<sup>1105</sup> Memorandum of 1928, Mines Department, MD 1A, 8/52, Part 1, ANZ-W.

<sup>1106</sup> Map of Section 50 Block XIV, Waitekauri, applied for by H.L. Morgan, 2 April 1935, YCBW 1711/480, ANZ-A.

<sup>1107</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1923, 75/1923, BAFV 11933/4a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1108</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Mining Applications 1925, 64, 9450/1925, BAFV 11933/5a; Mining Applications 1927, 52/1927, BAFV 11933/6a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1109</sup> *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 10 August 1937, p. 2.

In 1927, Nicholl concluded his memoirs with an account of his last major prospecting expedition, undertaken at the age of 75. 'In the month of February 1927, I started out to prospect the eastern flank of the range from Whangamata along to Waihi. One of the Robinson boys'<sup>1110</sup> (probably Basil, a son of a Waitekauri farmer<sup>1111</sup>) 'volunteered to help me to carry my outfit to the place where I intended to camp. We started off to cross the range and follow a leading spur down into the Waiharakeke Stream, halfway between the top of the range and the coast'.<sup>1112</sup> The Waiharakeke River ran from the eastern side of the range to the Otahu Inlet at Whangamata. There was a benched track along the top of the range from the head of the Waitekauri Valley to Wharekiraupunga, a former mining area near Whangamata, and on to the sea.<sup>1113</sup> This was not a geologically encouraging area. In 1912, Fraser and Bell wrote that although 'extensive sinter-beds' on the southern side of this stream 'of various colours and textures' often contained pyrite, their gold and silver content was 'negligible'.<sup>1114</sup>

After eight hours solid going we reached the place where I was intending to camp. I was intending to pitch my camp and return next morning and bring in a month's supply of grub, so I only brought two small loaves of bread and two pounds of bacon and one of butter. When I opened up my pack, I found one of the loaves all in crumbs, so I had only one two-pound loaf left and the crust of the other to live on till I got out again. I boiled the billy and made some tea and gave the boy a slice of the loaf and some tea, and he started off back home and I started to rig a camp.

I started out next morning to prospect the headwater of the main branch of the Waiharakeke Stream. I raked the creeks and gullies for five days without finding a trace of gold. By this time, I had only one thin slice of bread and I was 20 miles from where I could get any, so I had to be satisfied with a drink of black tea and a smoke for supper and save the slice of bread for breakfast and

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<sup>1110</sup> Written as 'Robson'; there was no Robson family at Waitekauri at that time, although there were Robinsons, the spelling used later in his memoir; see *Thames Electoral Roll, 1928*, p. 155.

<sup>1111</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 89.

<sup>1112</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 82.

<sup>1113</sup> For map of the river and the tracks Nicholl used, see 'Topographical and Geological Maps of Ohinemuri and Waihi North Survey Districts', in pocket of Fraser and Bell; this track, although overgrown, can still be traced (personally explored for a short distance).

<sup>1114</sup> Fraser and Bell, p. 98.

lunch. After boiling the billy and roasting two rashers of bacon, I ate a fourth part of my slice of bread and one of the rashers and saved the balance for lunch.

I started to strike out for Waihi and to find the Wharekiraupunga - Waihi track. I was told that the farmers of Waihi drove their cattle along the track, and I thought it would only be a cakewalk [an obstacle 'easily overcome']<sup>1115</sup> going round by Waihi compared with crossing the range. I started at daylight in the morning. I hunted around for the track for half an hour before I found it. It had a thick jungle of scrub growing over it, and I had to burst my way through it as best I could.

After battling along for two miles, I came to an open space in the forest of about 50 acres, with two big outcrops of quartzite running parallel to each other, striking two points east of north. The biggest one measured about 150 feet in width and the smaller one 30 feet. They can be traced along for about twenty chains. The smaller one carries about 15 feet of mineral on its eastern wall, so I thought that it was likely that it might carry values and decided to give it a go and sample it when I got back.

I continued to burst my way through the jungle until one o'clock before I struck a bit of good travelling, and my legs were getting down to bedrock with weakness and pains. I only got along the clear trail about ten chains when a big beast's footprint [appeared] on the trail. It was going ahead of me and the marks were freshly made. I was getting played out by this, so I had a rest for about half an hour and a smoke. While thinking what was best to do, turn back or face the bull, I saw him rounding a bank of the trail as I was lighting my pipe. Luckily for me the wind was blowing from him, or the fight would have been short.

I gave him half an hour to get well ahead of me, thinking he would go off the track and leave it clear for me to go on. When I started and got round the bend, I came face to face with his lordship. He no sooner saw me than he lowered his head and cocked his tail and came straight for me. I let him come close before I stepped aside. I made a lunge at him with my [Turkish] sword bayonet [a souvenir from Gallipoli given to him by his nephew Jack Moore to use as a slasher]<sup>1116</sup> and missed him. Luckily, he hit a small tree with his forelegs, and he tripped and the speed he was going landed him over on his back, and before he righted himself, I got up on the fallen tree. He no sooner got on his feet again than he came straight for me and started horning the tree under my feet. I tried to pith him with the bayonet [to

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<sup>1115</sup> Partridge, p. 295.

<sup>1116</sup> Nicholl, p. 91; unsourced newspaper cutting, n.d. [1932 or later], H. Rodenwald, Scrapbooks, vol. 3 [no pagination], MS 98/92, Library of the Auckland Institute and Museum; Jack Moore to Philip Hart, 30 April 1909, email.

sever the spinal cord], but the point was too blunt to enter his hide. I managed to get a good blow on the tip of his horn, and it seemed to start him thinking for a few seconds, and he turned and went away from me about fifteen yards, and came straight for me and jumped the tree, but I managed to sidestep him before he hit me. He repeated this three times before he saw it was no use, then he reared up on his hind legs and tried to horn me, resting his forelegs on the tree. While he was cutting this caper, I put in quick on his horns with the sword bayonet, and I managed to get the point of the bayonet into one of his eyes and a hard blow on his knee, which lamed him before he cried "A go." He fell from the log and got away at a limping run.

I bid him good afternoon and continued on my journey. I thought the track would be clear for the rest of the way and that I would be able to get out of the bush before dark, but after I got along it for about five chains the tangle of jungle was the worst I had met with on my journey. I struggled along it for two hours, over slips and fallen trees, and then I came in sight of a clearing and thought I was safe, but when I got to it I found it was a crop of blackberries fifteen feet high and growing as thick through the bush as they were in the open, so I was hung up with them. I had nothing left to do but to get back to camp as best I could. I knew that I could not reach camp before dark in my weak state, so I managed to struggle back to where I [had] crossed over a tree that had fallen on the track and broken its branches up small enough to keep a fire going for the night.

I managed to reach it before dark and got a fire going and pulled off my britches and shirt and boots and socks and hung them up to dry and took two bites out of my crib and put the rest away for the morrow. When my shirt and britches were dry, I took my flannel and drawers off and hung them to dry and put my shirt and trousers on. The night was very warm and cloudy, and I was expecting it to rain heavy any minute, but luckily it kept up till daylight before it burst.

Just as I was about to start back to camp, after taking two more bites out of my crib, the rain came down in torrents, and I had the worst battle to save my life that I ever had during my 60 years' experience as a digger. I battled on for 8 hours, and then I lost the track. A tree had fallen on the track at this place and covered it. I hunted round to find it till my legs refused to go further, then I thought I had company with me urging me on and telling me not be a coward or the pigs would eat my corpse if I died there. There was pig rooting all about there, and the thought of them tearing my corpse to pieces and the contract I would have to collect it on the Judgment Day gave me fresh courage.

I got up and started up hill. After I had gone a chain, I struck the track. The rain and mist were so thick that I had a hard task to find it. After I had struggled along for about half a mile, I came to

the clearing where I found the quartzite outcrops, and this gave me courage. I knew I could make the camp in about half an hour. When I reached it, I found a parcel tied to the ridgepole of my tent; it was a loaf of bread and a pound of sausages. To find the greatest gold mine on earth couldn't put me in better spirits than this loaf of bread and pound of sausages did. Mr Ronald Robinson<sup>1117</sup> had sent one of his brothers in to see if I was all right, and he brought the bread and meat in with him. He got to the camp six hours after I left it on my Waihi journey and found the ashes in my fireplace warm, so he knew that I was still alive. I wasn't long in getting my dry clothes on and the billy boiled, and two rashers of bacon toasted on the coals, and with a mug of tea and a slice of bread I made a good meal and thought myself a lucky prospector.

I had a good sound sleep that night and awoke next morning none the worse for my experience and started out to prospect the two outcrops I found on the track to Waihi. I sampled and burnt the mineral and pounded and washed it for three days along the line of reef without raising a trace of gold or silver.

My bread was about done and I had to get a fresh supply of food to prospect the country further down the stream towards the coast, so I started next morning across the range for home, arriving home in Waitekauri before dark next day. I ordered a month's grub to start out with. I had a day's rest and got Basil Robinson to help me to carry my pack to the top of the range. When we got there, we had a smoke, and I took the swag and started for camp and the boy for home.

On my way down the flank of the range, I took a spur to the right in mistake for the one that took me to the creek within two miles of my camp. I followed it down till I thought it time to turn down into the creek. The sidling was very steep to the creek and covered with a thick growth of supplejack and keikei,<sup>1118</sup> and I had to cut my way through them. A little lower down there was a clear space, but very steep, and about 100 feet in length. There was nothing to hold on to to steady myself to walk down it, so I thought I would give it a go and slide down it, so I sat down and let my swag rest on the ground, and I started going. I thought I would be able to break my speed with my hands, but no, I no sooner started than I was there, hung up by both feet and stretched at full length with the swag rope around my neck, and the swag swinging on it. My left hand was free, so I pulled the

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<sup>1117</sup> Ronald Charles Robinson and Arthur Clarence Robinson were farmers at Waitekauri: *Thames Electoral Roll, 1928*, p. 155.

<sup>1118</sup> Written as gigi, another name for keikei: see P.R. May, *The West Coast Gold Rushes*, rev. ed. (Christchurch, 1967), p. 277, and Johannes C. Andersen, 'Popular Names of New Zealand Plants', *Transactions of the New Zealand Institute*, vol. 56, p. 691.

bayonet out of the sheath and cut the rope in time to save myself from strangling. I managed to right myself and get down to my swag and reach camp before dark and get things snug for the night.

After spending a month in raking the creeks and gullies and getting no trail to follow, I decided to start in from Waihi and prospect the country from there to where I knocked off, so I struck camp at daylight in the morning and started for home in Waitekauri. I had about twenty miles to reach home through dense bush. I had started about half an hour when the rain came down in torrents and before I got two miles along, I was soaked to the skin and my boots full of water. After I had been going for about four hours, I struck the top of the range and made along it towards the Wharekiraupunga track. The rain and mist were that dense that I could not see where I was going, and I got off the top of the range into some deep gullies and I was getting dead beat with the weight of my wet clothes and my heavy swag. I [was] going to lie down and let the ranges take their toll of my life, but I thought better of it and struggled to the top of the spur and found some tawa branches that had been broken down with the wind.

It was blowing and raining hard, and I had a hard job to pitch my tent. I had matches and a bit of candle and paper in a tin in the breast of my shirt and they [had] kept dry, so I managed to get a fire going and I cut enough to keep it going all night with the aid of my bush knife, which was a Turk's sword bayonet with a saw at the back capable of cutting through a six inch log. When I got enough wood cut for the night and the fire going good I put up a rack at each side of the fire and wrung the water out of my wet clothes and hung them to dry, and put my wet coat on my bare pelt till my flannel and shirt got dry. The fire was just inside the door of the tent, and, oh God, the smoke that I suffered that night, I have no wish to want to go through again.

When the fire had burned out, my overcoat and clothes were dry, so I folded up my tent fly and put it on the wet ground and put them on and went to sleep for about four hours, and when I awoke, I could see the sun like a dim red coal of fire. I could only keep my eyes open for a second at a time. I knew then that I was nearly blind, and for the first time in all my life did my spirits go down to bedrock with fear of losing my eyesight and being no further use to the world.

I sat down and thought what was the best thing to do. I could see a tree trunk at three yards away, but the small scrub I could not see. I had [had] no food since I struck my camp the morning before, so after a few minutes' thought I decided to put down my tent and make up hill the best way I could. After I had groped my way along for about ten chains, I struck the track. I dumped my swag down on the track [and] started along it towards Waitekauri. I had 8 miles to go to reach home and four miles to

reach the nearest squatter's house. The track was badly grown over with blackberries and scrub. I had a rough time getting along it, but I managed to get to Mr Hodges' in about six hours, and Mrs Hodges was not long in getting me something to eat.<sup>1119</sup> After I rested for half an hour, I started for home at a good pace. I could see the road dimly, and the thought of home and getting a good sleep livened me up. I kept up the pace for two miles and started to knock up, and I could not have reached home only for getting some tea and cake from Mrs Gordon.<sup>1120</sup> When I got home my eyes were still aching and I felt as if they were full of gravel. I turned into [my] bunk and didn't want any rocking to send me to sleep.

I slept till 10 o'clock next day, and seemed to be recovered, only for the blindness and the pain of my eyes. It took three days before my sight got back to normal, then feeling fit I [set] off from my house and brought my swag home. Next morning I started off for the head of the Golden Cross Creek to find an old tunnel that the Waitekauri Company had driven some years ago. I got onto a trail of gold and trailed it up the creek for a mile and it ended at the dump of the tunnel, and I thought if I could get into the tunnel [then] I could locate its source. I found the tunnel, but unfortunately it had fallen in for about 300 feet, and beyond my strength to pick it up. It must have been broken out of this tunnel, as there is no gold shed from either side of the creek or higher up the creek above the tunnel. The thing that has been cut through has been rich in gold, but whether it would continue – that's the rub.

When I got home I had tea and went to bed quite fresh, and I thought I was over my bush trip all right, but that night I decided to get a horse and ride out to Mataura [the Mataura Stream runs from the range to cross the road to Whangamata northeast of Waihi]<sup>1121</sup> and find a place to camp to start to prospect the eastern flank of the range from Waihi to where I had knocked off in the Waiharakeke Stream. I borrowed a horse next morning and started off for Mataura. I located a place to camp and started for home and ordered the goods to start out with next morning. That night, after I went to bed, I was awakened with violent pains all through my body, head and legs. I was suffering all night and up to four o'clock next day before I could get anyone to send for the doctor. When the doctor came, he told me that I would have to take six months' rest, but I have a big trip planned for next

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<sup>1119</sup> Either Edwin Austin Hodges or Hector Macfarlane Hodges, farmers at Waitekauri: Mrs Hodges was either Frances Margaret or Lily: *Thames Electoral Roll, 1928*, p. 82.

<sup>1120</sup> Either Harriet or Mary Elizabeth Morgan: *Thames Electoral Roll, 1928*, p. 127.

<sup>1121</sup> See 'Topographical and Geological Maps of Ohinemuri and Waihi North Survey Districts', in pocket of Fraser and Bell.

summer, but whether I can see it through, that remains to be seen.

The end.<sup>1122</sup>

That story concluded the memoirs he wrote in 1927. At the age of 75, he had yet again pushed his body almost beyond its limits of endurance on a minimal amount of food. There is no record of his ever again prospecting in such rugged country, but he did continue to search for gold in easier areas and to give advice to other prospectors.

### HIS FINAL PROSPECTING

Nicholl also explored a completely different area in the last years of his life. A photograph in the Waihi Museum, dated 1928, shows him setting out with a dinghy from his nephew Jack Moore's farm to prospect upstream of Arapuni dam before the power station there was commissioned in the following year and the valley was flooded.<sup>1123</sup> This was probably the 'big trip planned for next summer' he had referred to in 1927.<sup>1124</sup> One of his great-nephews recalled, in 1994, that 'he stayed with my family in Putaruru on a number of occasions from 1930 during which time he prospected for gold on the beaches of the newly formed Arapuni hydro lake. This, when he was nearly 80'.<sup>1125</sup> Yet again, this expedition failed to find anything of value.

In 1928, Nicholl encouraged others to investigation Waitekauri, forecasting that it would become an important mining centre.<sup>1126</sup> At unrecorded dates he prospected along the line of the Edward and Martha lodes in the direction of Te Aroha.<sup>1127</sup> In 1930 he was 'still actively engaged

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<sup>1122</sup> Nicholls, 1927, pp. 82-94.

<sup>1123</sup> Photograph of Billy Nicholl, his nephew Jack Moore, and Jack's wife Elsie and sons Jack and Alex, near Arapuni, c. 1928; Jack Moore Collection, displayed in Waihi Museum.

<sup>1124</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p. 94.

<sup>1125</sup> J.H. Moore to Chairman, Waihi Museum Committee, 26 September 1994, 93/38, 1249, Waihi Museum; printed in Jack Moore, 'Billy Nicholl', *Ohinemuri Regional History Journal*, no. 40 (September 1996), p. 37.

<sup>1126</sup> Memorandum of 1928, Mines Department, MD 1A, 8/52, Part 1, ANZ-W.

<sup>1127</sup> *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 3 February 1934, p. 15.

in his search for the precious metal', and was 'looking wonderfully well'.<sup>1128</sup> The following year he made a suggestion to a Waihi correspondent

to help the effort to determine and exploit the mineral resources of the Dominion. His experience has taught him that the nature of the country must first be determined, and that a reliable geological survey with this end in view can only be carried out by means of systematic boring in the areas between the known gold localities. "We may be sitting on millions" was the graphic phrase which Mr Nicholl used to emphasise the position. A scheme of this nature if adopted by the Mines Department should go far towards the development of future mining areas. Mr Nicholl, despite his 80 years, is still engaged in boring operations. He is at present working on a dacite formation carrying quartz at a depth of 40 feet and is confident there is a large lode yet to be disclosed in the Waitekauri district. Mr Nicholl thinks highly of the prospects of the Owcharoa field, and of the Tokatea district at Coromandel.<sup>1129</sup>

In early 1932 he was still 'conducting boring operations'.<sup>1130</sup> The then mayor of Waihi, William Wallnutt, frequently visited him in his 'small cottage close to the Waitekauri road just before you entered the township' to discuss the mining outlooks of Waitekauri and Owcharoa. 'Like others of the old-time mining men, he was of the opinion that a large lode existed in the Waitekauri district and would someday be brought to light'.<sup>1131</sup> A resident of Waitekauri recalled that 'near where he lived, he got £80 worth of gold out of a drain when [it was] worth £4 an oz. He used a hand-boring machine around Waitekauri, and one time struck a large specimen stone'.<sup>1132</sup> He was one of the few people still living there: in 1930, only 23 males were listed, almost all farmers apart from two miners and one prospector, Nicholl.<sup>1133</sup> A woman who had grown up at Waitekauri remembered him living on her

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<sup>1128</sup> Waihi Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 26 July 1930, p. 4.

<sup>1129</sup> Waihi Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 8 December 1931, p. 9.

<sup>1130</sup> *Auckland Star*, 2 April 1932, p. 4.

<sup>1131</sup> W.M. Wallnutt, 'Random History Around Waihi', *Ohinemuri Regional History Journal*, no. 30 (September 1986), p. 38.

<sup>1132</sup> Interview by unnamed Waitekauri resident with Alistair Isdale, 11 July 1962, appended to Isdale's typescript copy of Nicholl's 1927 memoirs, p. 27.

<sup>1133</sup> *Leighton's Auckland Provincial Directory, 1930* (Auckland, 1930), pp. 767-768.

father's farm, working 'at the tipheads' of the old mines.<sup>1134</sup> A schoolgirl recalled him as being 'convinced that there could be gold in a little creek that ran through our farm.... My dad could not see much hope in the spot, but Billy Nicholl spent many happy hours prospecting there'.<sup>1135</sup> A son of a miner wrote in 1987 that he knew 'of quite a few of "old Billy's" working spots in Waitekauri and often as a young teen-ager I used to watch him at his workings'.<sup>1136</sup>

Nicholl continued to record his occupation as 'prospector' until his death.<sup>1137</sup>

### FINAL YEARS

In October 1931, Nicholl was the principal guest at the inaugural reunion of the Waihi Old Boys' Association, sitting on the right hand of the chairman. In reply to a toast to the pioneers, he gave a speech and recited his poem about finding the Martha lode.<sup>1138</sup> When the Governor-General visited Waihi 'he was presented by the Mayor as the "Grand Old Man of Mining" and received a very enthusiastic ovation'.<sup>1139</sup> When aged over 80, and still living in his 'two-roomed whare at Waitekauri', he reminisced over the past with visitors, especially about how he had failed to make money from discovering the Martha lode:

Had Mr Nicholl<sup>1140</sup> retained his interest in the lode a little longer, he would have been a much richer man to-day, but one who saw him recently says that it would take a lot more than that to embitter one of his sterling nature. He is still able to do two hours' work a day boring for gold. One of Mr Nicholl's most treasured possessions is an old Turkish bayonet, which he used as

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<sup>1134</sup> Recollection of Isabella Chester, in 'Pumphouse on Parade', *Waihi Leader* Special Publication, 12 December 2006, p. 16.

<sup>1135</sup> Jane Brocket, 'Memories of Billie Nicholls', *Ohinemuri Regional History Journal*, no. 52 (September 2008), p. 9.

<sup>1136</sup> Cyril Gwilliam to Elsie Graydon, 24 July 1987, Elsie Graydon Papers, MS Papers 90-184-1, Alexander Turnbull Library.

<sup>1137</sup> *Thames Electoral Rolls, 1931*, p. 135, *1935*, p. 130.

<sup>1138</sup> *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 27 October 1931, p. 2, 29 October 1931, p. 2, 10 August 1937, p. 2; *Auckland Star*, 31 October 1931, p. 8.

<sup>1139</sup> *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 10 August 1937, p. 2.

<sup>1140</sup> Journalists could still not get his name right: in this report he was Nicoll.

a slasher in the bush, and for a variety of purposes for which it was never intended. Probably the only approach to its legitimate use by him was on an occasion when he escaped from a wild bull by blinding it with this weapon. He looks after himself and is still more blithely independent than many younger men.<sup>1141</sup>

As he transferred his residence site license at Waitekauri to his elder son on 4 February 1935,<sup>1142</sup> this probably was about the time when he moved to live with his half-sister, Martha Matilda McQuoid, in Auckland. As he was recorded in the electoral roll for that year, which closed on 29 July, as still living at Waitekauri,<sup>1143</sup> and was not included in any Auckland rolls, he may have moved later in that year. His elder sister had died in 1918 and his younger in 1932,<sup>1144</sup> and presumably his health did not permit him to live alone. On 6 August 1937 he died at Auckland Hospital, aged 85. He had suffered from chronic nephritis, a kidney disease, for an unspecified number of years, and in the last months of his life had developed stomach cancer as well. The death certificate did not provide the name of his wife. Only his elder son was still alive, whose age was unknown to his half-sister, who presumably had had little contact with his family.<sup>1145</sup> He was buried in an unmarked grave in Waikumete Cemetery, Glen Eden, Auckland.<sup>1146</sup>

### NICHOLL'S PERSONALITY

What of Nicholl's personality? That he could be combative in his younger days was illustrated in 1885, when the Thames County Clerk,

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<sup>1141</sup> Unsources newspaper cutting, n.d. [1932 or later], H. Rodenwald, Scrapbooks, vol. 3 [no pagination], MS 98/92, Library of the Auckland Institute and Museum.

<sup>1142</sup> Paeroa Warden's Court, Mining Registrations 1935, no. 10093, BAFV 13695/10a; Waihi Warden's Court, Index of Residence Site Holders and Agricultural Leases, n.d., no. 6944, BAFV 13743/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1143</sup> *Thames Electoral Roll, 1935*, p. 130.

<sup>1144</sup> Death Certificates of Mary Ann Wick, 18 January 1918, 1918/434; Sarah Elizabeth Jane MacLean, 11 September 1932, 1932/7312, BDM.

<sup>1145</sup> Death Certificate of William Sharman Crawford Nicholl, 6 August 1937, 1937/18390, BDM. His elder son provided Nicholl's account of early Waihi mining for publication in 1962, three years before his own death: editorial note to Nicholl, 'The Discovery', p. 5.

<sup>1146</sup> Plot 62, Section 5, Lot G, Old Anglican Area, Waikumete Cemetery, Glen Eden: Pamela Gilbert to Philip Hart, 22 July 1997.

Edwin Wise Hollis,<sup>1147</sup> responded to a letter from ‘Cyclops’ in a Paeroa newspaper.<sup>1148</sup> After inspecting the county records, ‘Cyclops’ had first of all claimed that two councillors had received £8 8s each per month for attending council meetings and then that this amount had ‘nothing to do with travelling expences’. The clerk was blunt:

The County books show nothing of the sort, and these statements are untrue. These gentlemen receive £2 2s each for attending the monthly meetings of committees and Council, and as it takes them two days to come and go, and two days attending their public duties, it allows them 10s 6d a day for payment of their expenses, and nothing more. It is much to be regretted the Press should be made the instrument for promulgating such reckless statements, as they only tend to engender feelings of anger and resentment and cannot possibly serve any just or worthy purpose.<sup>1149</sup>

Nicholl responded:

Allow me to state that the information which appeared in *Hauraki Tribune* emanated from me. I visited the County office, accompanied by Mr J. Ritchie, and asked Mr Hollis for the accurate amount that each of the Councillors who represent the Ohinemuri Riding of the Thames County received per month, as I required the information for publication, when he replied, “that it takes four days of the said Councillor’s time at every monthly sitting of the Council, and that two guineas was the allowance made two each Councillor per day, thus making a total to each of eight guineas per month.”<sup>1150</sup>

(John Ritchie was a fellow miner.<sup>1151</sup>) A man who had been present when Nicholl asked his question then wrote that ‘in justice to Mr Hollis I beg to state his answer was “two guineas each.” He further stated: “It takes them four days – two for attending Committees and Council meetings, and two days to come and go.” The sum of eight guineas was not mentioned’.<sup>1152</sup>

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<sup>1147</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 867.

<sup>1148</sup> As most copies of the *Hauraki Tribune* no longer exist, this letter has been lost.

<sup>1149</sup> Letter from E.W. Hollis (County Clerk), *Thames Advertiser*, 3 September 1885, p. 3.

<sup>1150</sup> Letter from W. Nicholl, *Thames Advertiser*, 7 September 1885, p. 3.

<sup>1151</sup> *Thames Advertiser*, 6 December 1880, p. 3; *New Zealand Gazette*, 14 June 1883, p. 798, 10 December 1885, p. 1436; *Auckland Weekly News*, 21 September 1911, p. 49.

<sup>1152</sup> Letter from D. Edwards, *Thames Advertiser*, 8 September 1885, p. 3.

Nicholl did not respond to this rebuttal; it is not known whether he or Ritchie had a grudge against one or other of the councillors.

Nicholl's great-nephew, Jack Moore, recalled meeting him when aged seven:

I can recall him as a grand old gentleman who reminded me of Santa Claus, not only because of his snow-white beard and benevolent smile, but also because of his generous nature. I can remember him buying my young sister a teddy bear, all of two feet tall, for her birthday. However, my mother's sensible advice prevailed, and my sister was presented instead with a smaller version.... Samples of gold in small glass tubes with rubber stoppers were given to the children by Uncle Bill and were wonderful presents.<sup>1153</sup>

Herbert John (Jack) Morgan, born into a prominent Waitekauri family in 1905, over 90 years later still had vivid memories of meeting Nicholl when aged about ten. Morgan would slip away from school at lunchtime to listen to Nicholl's fascinating stories about prospecting. When the Waitekauri battery was demolished, Nicholl had bought the assay house to use for his one-stamper battery. Morgan watched him retorting the gold and had the treatment of ore explained to him and was shown his latest discoveries. Morgan particularly recalled that, unlike other miners, he never used any bad language: he was 'a real gentleman and very kindly to others'.<sup>1154</sup> Another boy who watched him at work recalled him as 'a fine old, quiet gentleman'.<sup>1155</sup> Jane Mann, then a schoolgirl, had some vivid recollections:

On our walk home from the Waikino School, my younger brother, Gordon, and I would stop at Billy Nicholl's cottage, if he was at home.

He used to potter in his garden but the only thing I remember him growing was tobacco. He had the big flat leaves hanging in his little one room cottage. At one stage the walls were completely hidden by the bundles hanging up to dry. Whenever he got on to

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<sup>1153</sup> J.H. Moore to Chairman, Waihi Museum Committee, 26 September 1994, 93/38, 1249, Waihi Museum; printed in Jack Moore, 'Billy Nicholl', *Ohinemuri Regional History Journal*, n. 40 (September 1996), p. 37.

<sup>1154</sup> Interview with Herbert John Morgan, in Hamilton, 29 November 1998.

<sup>1155</sup> Cyril Gwilliam to Elsie Graydon, 24 July 1987, Elsie Graydon Papers, MS Papers, 90-184-1, Alexander Turnbull Library.

the project he would pursue it with gusto. But I do not think his friends were very keen on sampling the finished product as this one.

Her brother 'spent as much time ... as he could manage' watching Nicholl prospecting in a creek crossing the family farm.

One memory that stands out was the day our aunt, Mrs Campbell, from Waikino, was being driven up in her lovely old car (with dickey seats) by her son Alex. They stopped on the way to greet Mr Nicholl and found him in trouble. He had been cutting firewood at his house and the axe missed the wood and cut his shin. It was a deep wound and bleeding badly.

They brought him in the car to our place. Our mother was so concerned she tore up a perfectly good sheet to make bandages, without turning a hair. My hair stood on end, but I learnt a lesson that people are more important than possessions. He was taken to the doctor in Waihi and stitched up. He was back at work as good as new in a week or so.

He had a lively mind, was very hospitable and loved to talk. On one of our visits, he told us about the poetry that he wrote. He showed me his book and I copied out the one that captured my fancy. It did not have a name, but I called it Old Martha Hill.<sup>1156</sup>

William Wallnutt, the mayor of Waihi, who knew him in the early 1930s, recalled him as 'a wonderful old chap' who 'possessed a great sense of humour'.<sup>1157</sup> This, along with a kindly nature, can be detected in his memoirs, and was referred to in other sources. In 1905, the Thames correspondent of the Auckland *Observer* wrote that

"Willie" Nicholl, the discoverer of the famous Martha lode, was at the Thames t'other day.... There is an entire absence of side about the old prospector. Mr Nicholl, some years back, when Waitekauri was booming, favoured Harry [Henry Pierce] Hornibrook [prospector and mine manager],<sup>1158</sup> Nat [Nathaniel] Rowe [a Thames miner],<sup>1159</sup> and others with an original poem, "The

<sup>1156</sup> Brocket, p. 9; the poem is printed below.

<sup>1157</sup> Wallnutt, 'Random History Around Waihi', p. 38.

<sup>1158</sup> See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 489-490; *Observer*, 24 February 1912, p. 17; for his work at Waiorongomai, see *Te Aroha News*, 5 April 1884, p. 2, 8 November 1884, p. 2, 6 December 1884, p. 2, 8 August 1885, p. 2.

<sup>1159</sup> See *Thames Electoral Roll*, 1890, p. 32; *Thames Star*, 11 May 1901, p. 3, 13 September 1901, p. 2.

Discovery of the Martha Lode.” The metre was somewhat wobbly, but the verses were decidedly interesting. Time has made little change in the veteran. Shoulders bent a little more, maybe, but the same old kindly light in the eye and the same old hearty grip on the hand.<sup>1160</sup>

Nicholl was so proud of this poem that in 1896 he attempted to have it printed in an Auckland paper. It was rejected on the grounds that the verses had already been published in a local newspaper and were ‘not of sufficient importance’.<sup>1161</sup> This issue of the Waihi newspaper has not survived, and it was not reprinted in the Paeroa or Thames newspapers at that time; however, a copy circulated in the Waihi district and was reprinted in 1931, and is printed at the conclusion of this paper.

Nicholl had, as his great nephew noted, ‘a great many friends but very few enemies’.<sup>1162</sup> An example of friendship was given in his memoir when Horatio Walmsley sought him out in Klondike to give him news of his sons. Again, in January 1881, his old mining mate Thomas Scanlan went to Waihi and arranged with Nicholl to peg out a claim for him.<sup>1163</sup> He enjoyed company, and had a sense of humour, but on one occasion his idea of reckless fun caused the death of a close friend. On 8 November 1905, Roderick McCorquodale, aged 45, postmaster and shipping agent at Whangamata, was admitted to Waihi Hospital suffering from burns; he died six days later.<sup>1164</sup> Nicholl was admitted for the same reason, but after 105 days was discharged after a very slow and painful recovery.<sup>1165</sup> At the inquest into McCorquodale’s death, his widow, Minnie, deposed that on the day of the accident Nicholl, a friend of her husband who had been living at Whangamata for the past nine months, was at their house:

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<sup>1160</sup> ‘Thames Jottings’, *Observer*, 22 April 1905, p. 18.

<sup>1161</sup> ‘To Correspondents’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 April 1896, p. 17.

<sup>1162</sup> Jack Moore to Philip Hart, n.d. [February 2003].

<sup>1163</sup> Warden’s Court, *Thames Star*, 26 August 1881, p. 2; Warden’s Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 27 August 1881, p. 3.

<sup>1164</sup> Waihi Hospital, Register of Patients, 1903-1910, folio 20, no. 149, ZABW 4935/1a, ANZ-A.

<sup>1165</sup> Waihi Hospital, Register of Patients, 1903-1910, folio 20, no. 150, ZABW 4925/1a, ANZ-A; see also *Thames Advertiser*, 17 November 1905, p. 2, Waihi Correspondent, 6 December 1905, p. 2.

While at tea Mr Nicholl proposed to throw two tins of benzine, each containing four gallons, from [his] yacht into the water, in the bay - He had spoken of doing this on Guy Fawkes day, for some time previously - I advised him not to throw it away - I was always afraid on Steamer nights because my husband was then in the habit of getting drink from the steamer - The steamer was in the bay on that day.... I saw my husband and Mr Nicholl have two drinks of whiskey each, this was about half an hour before the accident.... Both appeared to be sober when they left the house, although I do not think they would have gone out if it had not been for the liquor they had drunk - When they left me, I felt satisfied that they would not set fire to the benzine that night.... Half an hour later, my daughter called my attention to a fire on the water. I saw a terrible fire, the flames must have been fully twenty feet high - This must have been about 9 o'clock. About a quarter of an hour after that my husband came to the door, he was covered with burns - He said am I not a terrible sight, this is the result of setting fire to benzine. He sat down and I dressed the wounds, and he went to the Waihi Hospital the next day. Mr Nicholl came to the house later, he was badly burned. I dressed his wounds too.... Mr Nicholl and my husband were very friendly, they were like brothers, I am satisfied that the burns were the result of a pure accident.

When Nicholl gave evidence, he was so weak that he had to sign his statement with a cross. He stated that he had known the deceased for six months:

We were on the best of terms and were nearly always together.... We threw two tins of benzine over the stern of the yacht, the tide was then going out, I then threw some lighted matches on the water, but the benzine did not burn. We both got into the little dinghy and rowed after the benzine, the deceased rowed, and I threw matches, when the benzine took fire, I sang out to deceased to pull - he pulled but at first stroke one of the oars came out of the rollock. The fire was all round us - We got the oar in place again and we pulled the dinghy through the flames - I saw that the deceased's clothes were on fire - I pulled to my yacht and two boys came in another boat and took deceased ashore - I did not think things were so bad - I remained on the yacht for some time, I left the yacht later and went to deceased's house. I then saw that deceased was badly burned. I was also badly burned. Neighbours with Mrs McCorquodale applied remedies. We rode into Waihi the next day and came to the Hospital - I used to use benzine in my yacht, which until recently had an oil engine - The benzine was useless and I wished to give the children a bonfire it being about Guy Fawkes Day - I had about three glasses of

whiskey that evening before the accident. I am not in the habit of drinking whiskey. Deceased had the same number of drinks as I had. When deceased and I left the house to set fire to the benzine we were perfectly sober. We had no liquor in the boat with us.... That was the first time that I had purchased liquor off a boat in the Whangamata port.... I bought the whiskey for the benefit of my mate, because he was generally sick after steamer day, and I wanted to have a reviver ready for him.... It was dark when we went out in the boat, and we could not see the benzine on the water - I had often ignited benzine on the water before but never had an accident through doing so.<sup>1166</sup>

### SIMILARITIES WITH OTHER PROSPECTORS

Although setting fire to the sea was not typical of how prospectors entertained children, several other aspects of his life were typical. The hardships of working in rugged country were common to all those exploring the Coromandel Peninsula, and his memoirs are valuable in giving examples of these experiences. He had a resilient physique, able to cope with long tramps carrying a heavy swag over rough country and working for weeks at a time on a very poor diet. At Waitekauri, he was remembered by one man for 'his feats of strength, and skill with the lasso. He tried to dodge Bill at 80 with the lasso but was unable. The belligerent never picked a quarrel with Bill - he was too well known. Bill was with a circus for a time'.<sup>1167</sup> The last statement is most unlikely: his memoirs would surely have included mention of working in a circus. His skill with a lasso was not recorded elsewhere either, but that does not mean this recollection is wrong. His hard life did take its toll, as on other prospectors: when in his fifties he was hospitalized three times because of rheumatism, an ulcer of the leg, and arthritis.<sup>1168</sup> At the end of his life he had very poor eyesight.<sup>1169</sup> Many miners had dangerous experiences underground, and Nicholl had at least one:

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<sup>1166</sup> Inquest on Roderick McCorquodale, Justice Department, J 46, 1905/1021, ANZ-W.

<sup>1167</sup> Interview by unnamed Waitekauri resident with Alistair Isdale at Waitekauri, 11 July 1962, appended to Isdale's typescript copy of Nicholl's memoirs, p. 27.

<sup>1168</sup> Waihi Hospital, Register of Patients, 1910-1910, folios 33, 55, ZABW 4935/1a; Register of Patients, 1911-1914, folio 37, ZABW 4935/1b, ANZ-A.

<sup>1169</sup> W.S.C. Nicholl to J.P. Wilson, n.d. [1937], held with 'Autobiography', MS 1713, Alexander Turnbull Library.

One day he was working in a 100-foot shaft near Waihi with a horse whim<sup>1170</sup> and a boy at the top to pull up the bucket, which came up pushing the trapdoor and then sat on it. This time it came up spinning and broke its chain and crashed to the bottom. Nicholl had been working hard with his head down. He had just straightened up when - whoosh! - it tore the front off his shirt, but he was unharmed.

He went up the ladder and found the boy had gone, so he went to the pub and found they were all about to sally forth to collect his remains.<sup>1171</sup>

Like all persistent prospectors, Nicholl was forever searching for new finds, in his case even overseas and when in his eighties. He shared the 'sanguine' attitude often mentioned as being typical of the lifelong gold-seeker. He was recalled as a 'typical prospector', namely a man who was only interested in finding gold, not in working his discoveries. 'When he found something, he wanted to move on'.<sup>1172</sup> (Which was not correct, for although keen to explore new areas, he spent years at Waihi, Maratoto and Waitekauri trying to develop increasingly small mines.) One Waitekauri resident of the 1930s recalled that 'He liked to be working - when unable he soon declined and died - became cantankerous, he who was so much the other way'.<sup>1173</sup> But whereas many who spent much of their lives prospecting were single men, he was married, and it was probable that his long absences from home were an element in the collapse of his marriage.

Like others of his occupation, he does not seem to have minded the loneliness of his solitary prospecting, making up for it when he returned to a nearby town for provisions. He enjoyed the conviviality of drinking alcohol,<sup>1174</sup> and once described clergymen as 'wowsers',<sup>1175</sup> but usually seems

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<sup>1170</sup> A hoisting device operated by a horse. 'A large drum with the winding-rope on it was mounted vertically and equipped with a long arm to which the horse was attached. By walking in a circle the horse pulled up the bucket by rotating the drum': McAra, p. 337.

<sup>1171</sup> Interview by unnamed Waitekauri resident with Alistair Isdale at Waitekauri, 11 July 1962, appended to Isdale's typescript copy of Nicholl's memoirs, p. 28.

<sup>1172</sup> Interview with Herbert John Morgan, Hamilton, 29 November 1998.

<sup>1173</sup> Interview by unnamed Waitekauri resident with Alistair Isdale at Waitekauri, 11 July 1962, appended to Isdale's typescript copy of Nicholl's memoirs, p. 27.

<sup>1174</sup> Nicholl, 'The Discovery'. p. 7; Nicholl, 1927, p. 33; Evidence of Minnie McCorquodale and Nicholl to inquest on Roderick McCorquodale, Justice Department, J 46, 1905/1021, ANZ-W; District Court, *Thames Star*, 6 August 1884, p. 2.

<sup>1175</sup> Nicholl, 1921.

to have been a moderate drinker. In May 1897, Thomas Lochhead wrote that he had met Nicholl in Tauranga and ‘waited on him’ to come to stay on his Te Puna farm ‘but at last he decided to stay as he was a bit boozed’.<sup>1176</sup> Nicholl cannot have been too ‘boozed’, for he arrived at the farm later on and left for Waihi the next morning.<sup>1177</sup>

Like other successful prospectors, he was famous for making his one good find. He was also a competent underground miner, successfully managing both the early Martha mine and a small-scale mine and battery at Maratoto. Unlike others with his years of experience, he was never appointed to manage larger mines; he was more of a prospector than a mine manager. He was given credit for inventing (in fact, probably modifying) a hand drill,<sup>1178</sup> and that again was typical of the capabilities of many practical miners. His work required a variety of skills, and apart from those needed for mining and prospecting he could also cut down large trees, make a dugout canoe out of a large tree, and do small-scale pastoral farming.

And like so many prospectors, he did not make any lasting financial gains from his discoveries. He spent money freely (or, he claimed, let others spend it for him<sup>1179</sup>), and became bankrupt when he tried to become an independent small businessman, a relatively common occurrence. Many miners went bankrupt: for instance, his early Thames and Coromandel mates Scanlan and Quinton both became bankrupt in 1889. Scanlan had liabilities of £181 11s 1d and no assets, while Quinton had liabilities of £113 11s 1d and notional assets of £170.<sup>1180</sup> Nicholl’s attempt to improve his financial state by trying other occupations without adequate capital was a common feature of miners, as was the combination of mining, contracting, and running cattle on a small farm. In his words, ‘The game is not worth a candle to the prospector, as he generally comes out in debt, as I did in the Martha, and the correct name for a prospector is a born madman’.<sup>1181</sup> The proof of this comment was in his estate. Three years before he died, he drew up a will leaving all his money to the three children of his nephew, John Hoey Moore, and his granddaughter Dulcie Edna Nicholl. They would share

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<sup>1176</sup> Thomas Lochhead, diary, entry for 17 May 1897, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

<sup>1177</sup> Thomas Lochhead, diary, entry for 18 May 1897, MS 63, Tauranga Public Library.

<sup>1178</sup> *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 29 March 1922, p. 2, 10 August 1933, p. 2; *Observer*, 8 April 1922, p. 22.

<sup>1179</sup> Nicholl, 1927, p.12.

<sup>1180</sup> *Mercantile and Bankruptcy Gazette*, 13 July 1889, p. 214, 16 November 1889, p. 356.

<sup>1181</sup> Nicholl, 1921; see also Nicholl, ‘The Discovery’, p. 9.

an estate of £11 17s 6d; of this 18s 9d was held in his Post Office Savings Bank account, the remaining £10 18s 9d being the value of shares, probably a very notional value.<sup>1182</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In its general outline, Nicholl's life was typical of other Hauraki prospectors, but he was one of the rare ones who found good gold. His main achievement was summarized in the caption to a photograph published in 1929 showing him with some of the tools of his trade: 'A pioneer prospector, who made the first discovery of payable gold in the Waihi district'.<sup>1183</sup> He was typical in not profiting from his discovery and for spending the rest of his life still searching, with little success, but never becoming discouraged. A man who made very many friends and very few enemies, unfortunately the most notable example of the latter was his own wife.

Nicholl liked to talk about his adventurous life to anyone interested, and wrote several accounts of it, even recording more details at the very end of his life. His memoirs, despite imprecision over dates and a tendency to run events together and to vary in some of the details, are irreplaceable for providing insights into a lost way of life.

By way of conclusion, his poem 'The Discovery of the Martha Lode', written 'some years after the discovery'.<sup>1184</sup> It was, like some parts of his memoirs, a little shaky on factual detail. For instance, he most certainly was not 'a boy' when he found the Martha lode, and he certainly heard the Compston girls and their dog. And he still could not spell his wife's surname accurately. His poem reflects his pride in his achievements:

When but a boy some years gone by,  
 Fortune-hunting I thought to try.  
 I pitched my camp in a lonely spot,  
 Just at the foot of Compston's<sup>1185</sup> lot.

For days and days, I wandered round,  
 But saw no man nor heard<sup>1186</sup> no sound;

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<sup>1182</sup> Probate of William Nicholl, Probates, AAOM 6029, 913/62170, ANZ-W.

<sup>1183</sup> *Auckland Star*, 27 July 1929, p. 11.

<sup>1184</sup> *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 29 October 1931, p. 2.

<sup>1185</sup> Jane Mann recorded this as Gampson: Brocket, p. 9.

<sup>1186</sup> 'Saw' in original as recorded by Jane Mann; Brocket, p. 9.

I looked across the dreary plain,  
And thought no reef was there to gain.

When travelling onward with a will,  
I spied ahead a lonely hill,  
Standing apart above the plain,  
Which took me quite a time to gain.

When nearing to its rugged top,  
I found a reef from it did crop.  
I now approached it with a will,  
And with the stone my dish did fill.

Then to my side the dish I took,  
And travelled to a trickling brook;  
I panned it off with greatest care,  
And saw the treasure gleaming there.

And when I found that gold it bore,  
I fossicked on in search of more;  
I trenched and tunnelled with a will,  
Upon thy flanks - old Martha Hill.<sup>1187</sup>

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<sup>1187</sup> *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 29 October 1931, p. 2; reprinted with slight variation in Gwentyth Mary Gilbert, 'Waihi Gold' (typescript, Waihi, 1938), p. ix, MS 0831, Alexander Turnbull Library; Brocket, p. 9

*Appendix*

*Figure 1:* Martha Nicholl, n.d., Jack Moore Collection; used with permission.

*Figure 2:* Robert Majurey, n.d., Jack Moore Collection; used with permission.

*Figure 3:* Martha Dulcibel Nicks, the niece after whom he named the Martha lode, n.d., Jack Moore Collection; used with permission.

*Figure 4:* Martha Compston with her daughters Mary Jane, wife of Billy Nicholl, and Sarah, wife of William Hollis, n.d., Jack Moore Collection; used with permission.

*Figure 5:* George Compson with his daughter Mary Jane Nicholl and his two grandsons, George and William Nicholl, n.d., Jack Moore Collection; used with permission.

*Figure 6:* Nicholl with his son George, c. 1925, Jack Moore Collection; used with permission.

*Figure 7:* 'Billy Nicholl with his nephew Jack Moore, Jack's wife, Elsie, holding Alex, with Jack on horse. Uncle Billy was setting out from the Moore farm near Arapuni to prospect for minerals on the Waikato River prior to its flooding, circa 1928', Jack Moore Collection; used with permission.

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*Figure 10:* Nicholl with his prospecting tools, outside his Waitekauri cottage, c. 1935, Jack Moore Collection; used with permission.

*Figure 11:* The last photo of Nicholl outside his Waitekauri cottage, c. 1935, Jack Moore Collection; used with permission.

*Figure 12:* ‘Sketch plan of William Nicholl Application for Occupation License’, attached to application for license, 1891, Thames Warden’s Court, Occupation Licenses 1891, AAAE 15183/1a, ANZ-A [Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Auckland Regional Office]; used with permission.

*Figure 13:* ‘Section 23 Block XV Ohinemuri Selected by W.S.C. Nicholl’, 1901, SO 12007, University of Waikato Map Library.

*Figure 14:* Plan of St Andrew Special Claim, Block XV, Ohinemuri Survey District, 1899, showing freehold held by Mary Jane Nicholl on opposite side of Ohinemuri River from Nicholl’s land, SO 8512, University of Waikato Map Library.

*Figure 15:* Portion of map showing location of Ohinemuri and Waihi mining, James Mackintosh Bell and Colin Fraser, *Waihi-Tairoa Subdivision, Hauraki Division, Auckland Land District: Geological Survey Bulletin, new series, no. 15* (Wellington, 1912), in portfolio inside rear cover; showing the route followed when Nicholl carried bottles of mercury etc from Waitekauri, via Sheep Hill, to his claim in McBrinn Creek, at Maratoto, and where he explored in the Waiharakeke River valley and adjacent areas in the 1920s.

*Figure 16:* Portion of Maratoto Mining Area, Bell and Fraser, showing Walker’s Maratoto, formerly owned by Nicholl.

*Figure 17:* *The Call* (San Francisco), 23 July 1897, p. 1, showing ‘Overland to the Klondyke’ route; California Digital Newspaper Collection, online.

*Figure 18:* Portion of ‘Overland to the Klondyke’ route showing Juneau to White Horse Rapids section.

*Figure 19:* Portion of ‘Overland to the Klondyke’ route showing White Horse Rapids to Dawson City section.

*Figure 20:* Map of the Klondike rush, showing the rivers and first discoveries, 1897, wikimedia.org.

*Figure 21:* H.L. Morgan, 'Sketch Plan of Nicholl's Reef Special Quartz Claim', 2 April 1935, Warden's Court Mining Maps of Waikato Area, YCBW 24626, A1711/48u, ANZ-A [Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga, Auckland Regional Office]; used with permission.

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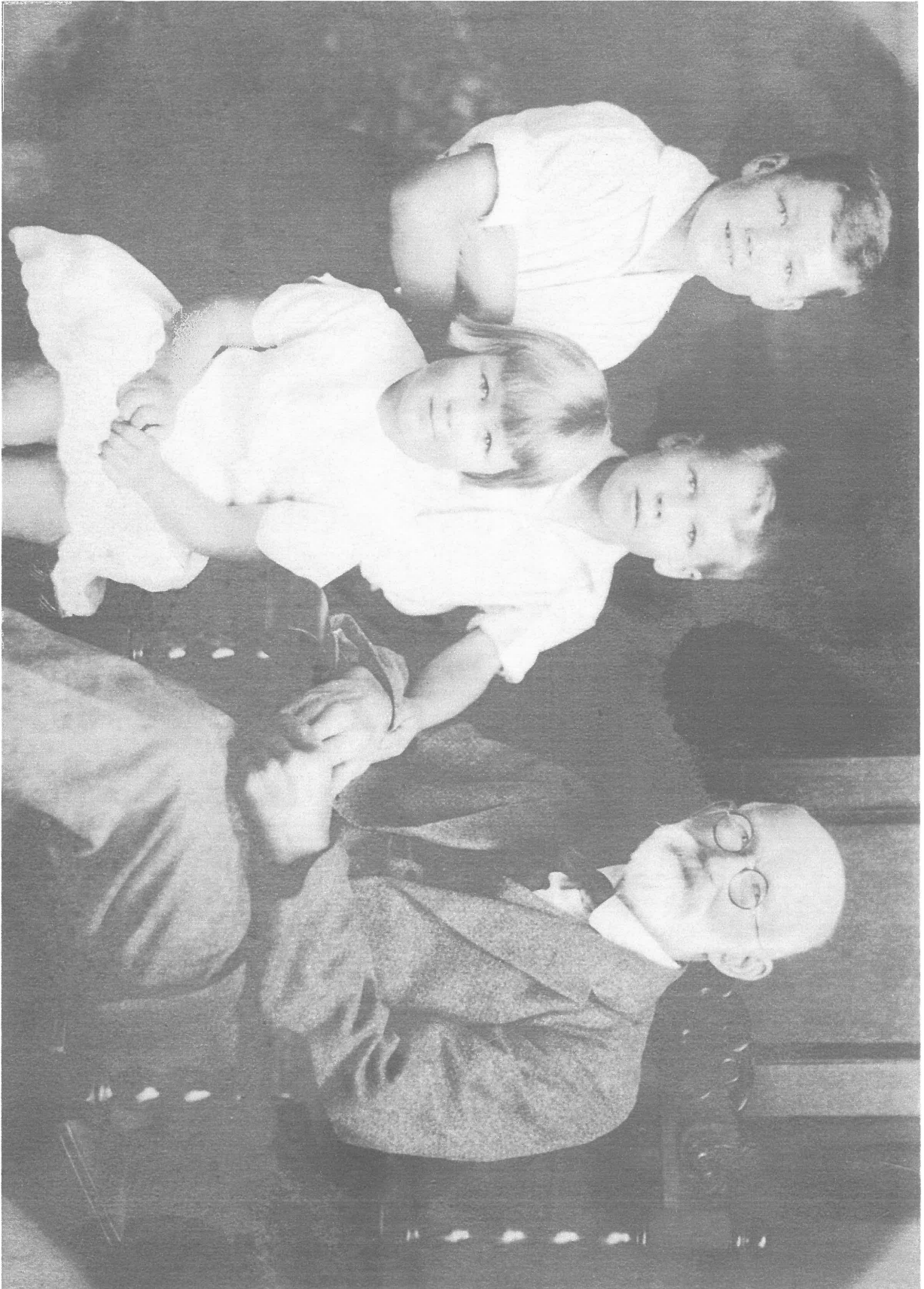


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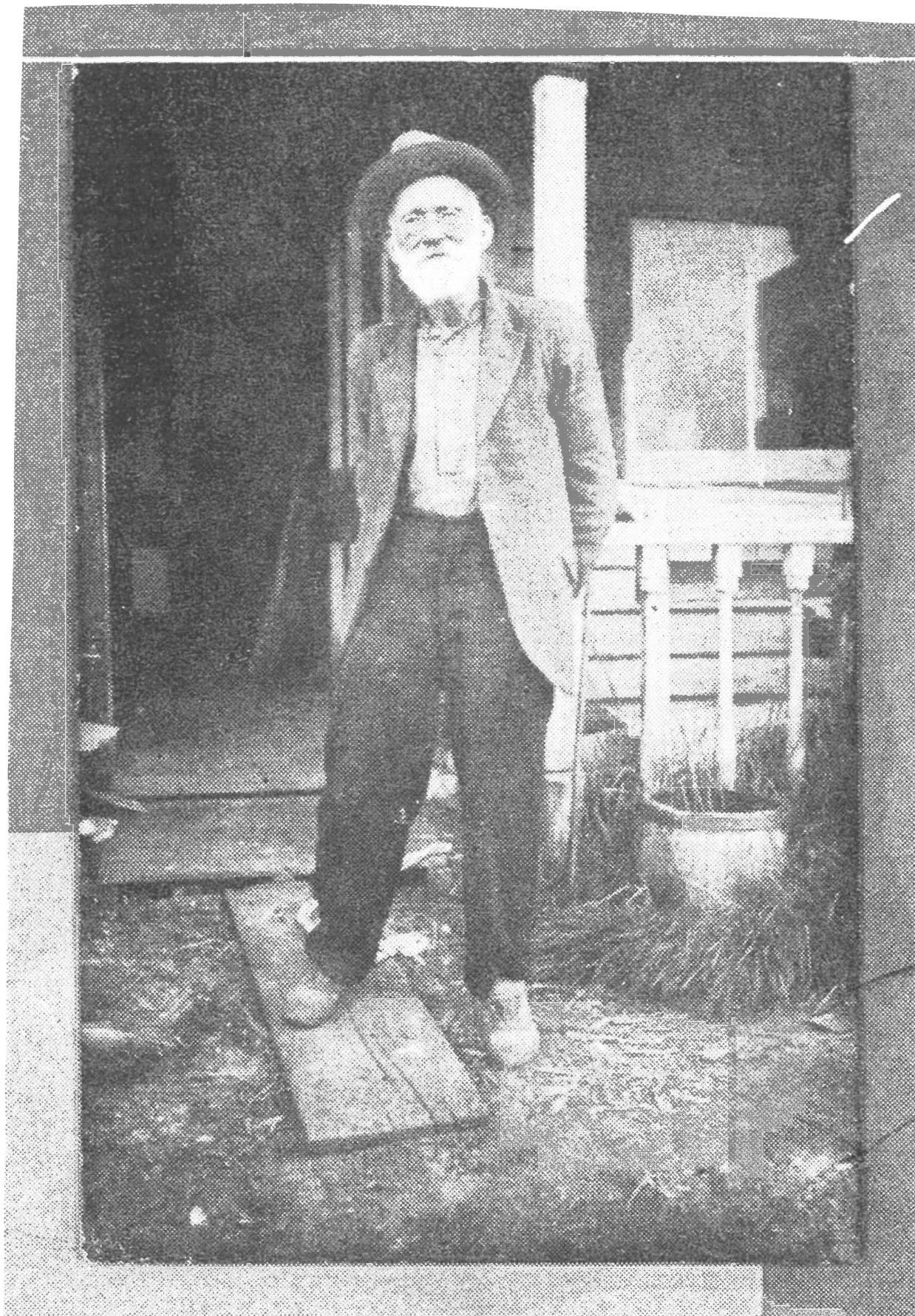


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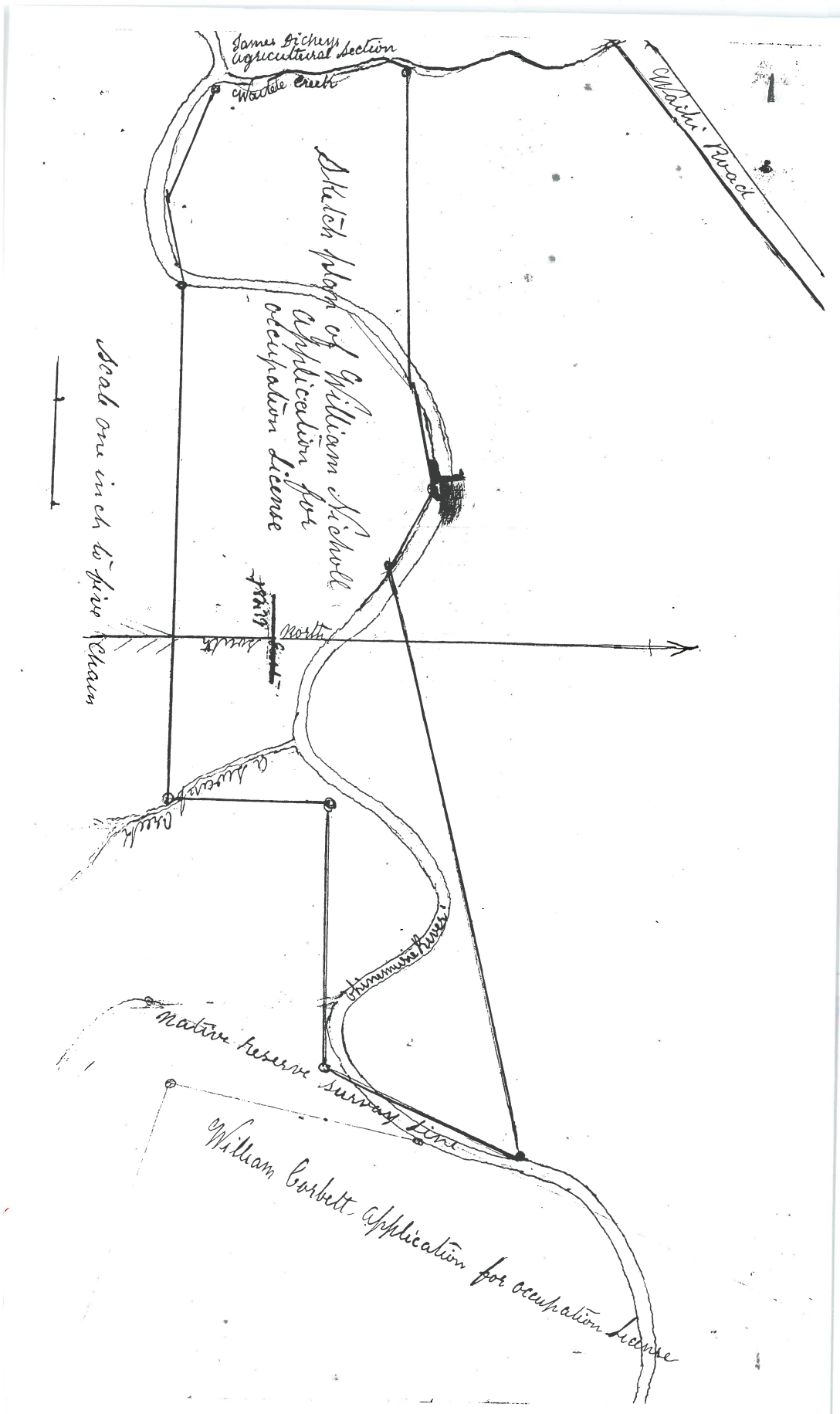


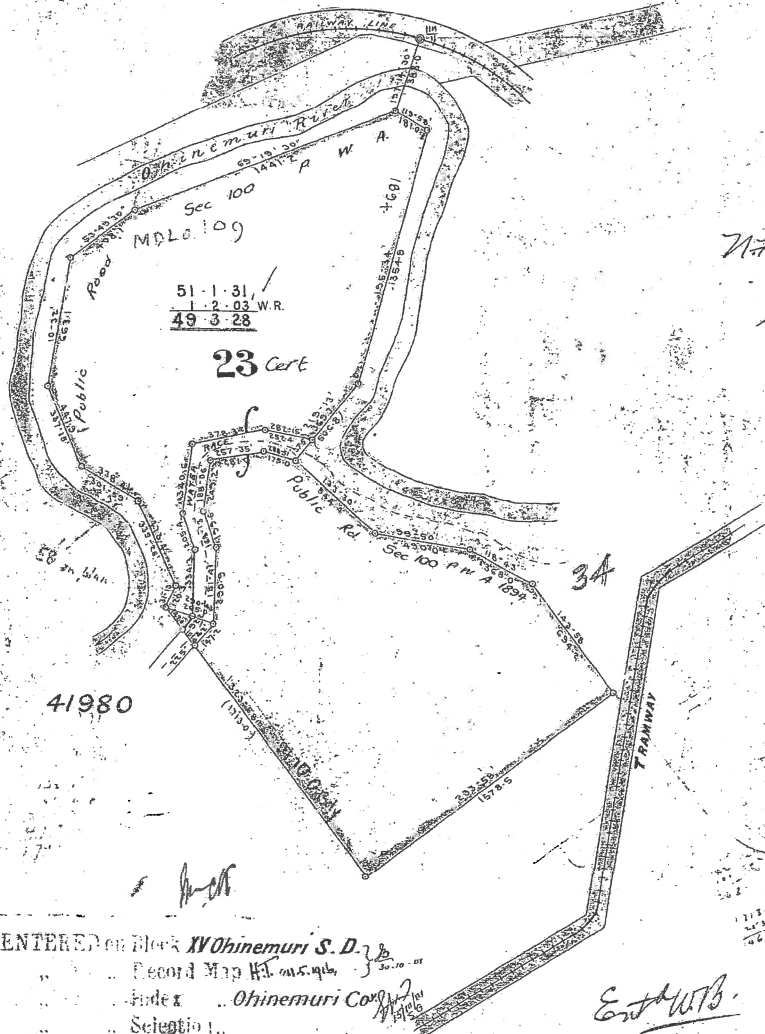
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# SECTION 23 BLOCK XV OHINEMURI

Selected by W.S.C. Nicholl. John Sayf

Scale 5 Chains

*Mining District Land occupation Act. 1894.*



*W. F. Hazard  
Licensed Surveyor  
D. W. M. M. M.  
Licensed Surveyor*

Authority L&S 4719 954

*John Mc Kellar  
M.O.H.  
9.9.01.*

FIELD BOOK	BP-56	ADW
REV. NOTES		
	4.9.01	
	9.9.01	

ENTERED on Block XV Ohinemuri S. D. 31  
 Record Map H.L. 1895. 1901  
 Index Ohinemuri Comptrol  
 Selection 1...

12007

*Ent. W.F.B.*

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Figure 14: Plan of St Andrew Special Claim, Block XV, Ohinemuri Survey District, 1899, showing freehold held by Mary Jane Nicholl on opposite side of Ohinemuri River from Nicholl's land, SO 851, University of Waikato Map Library.

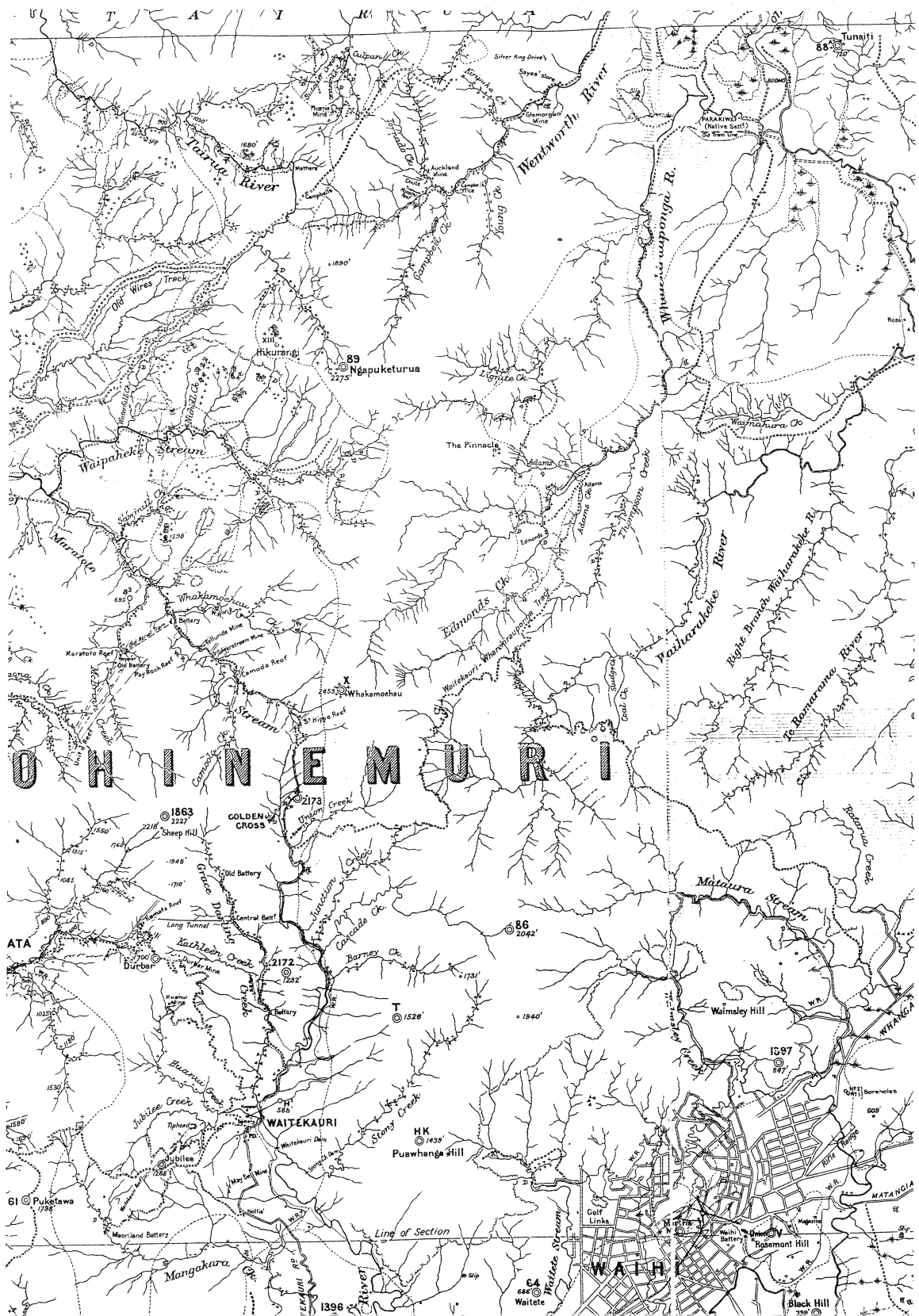


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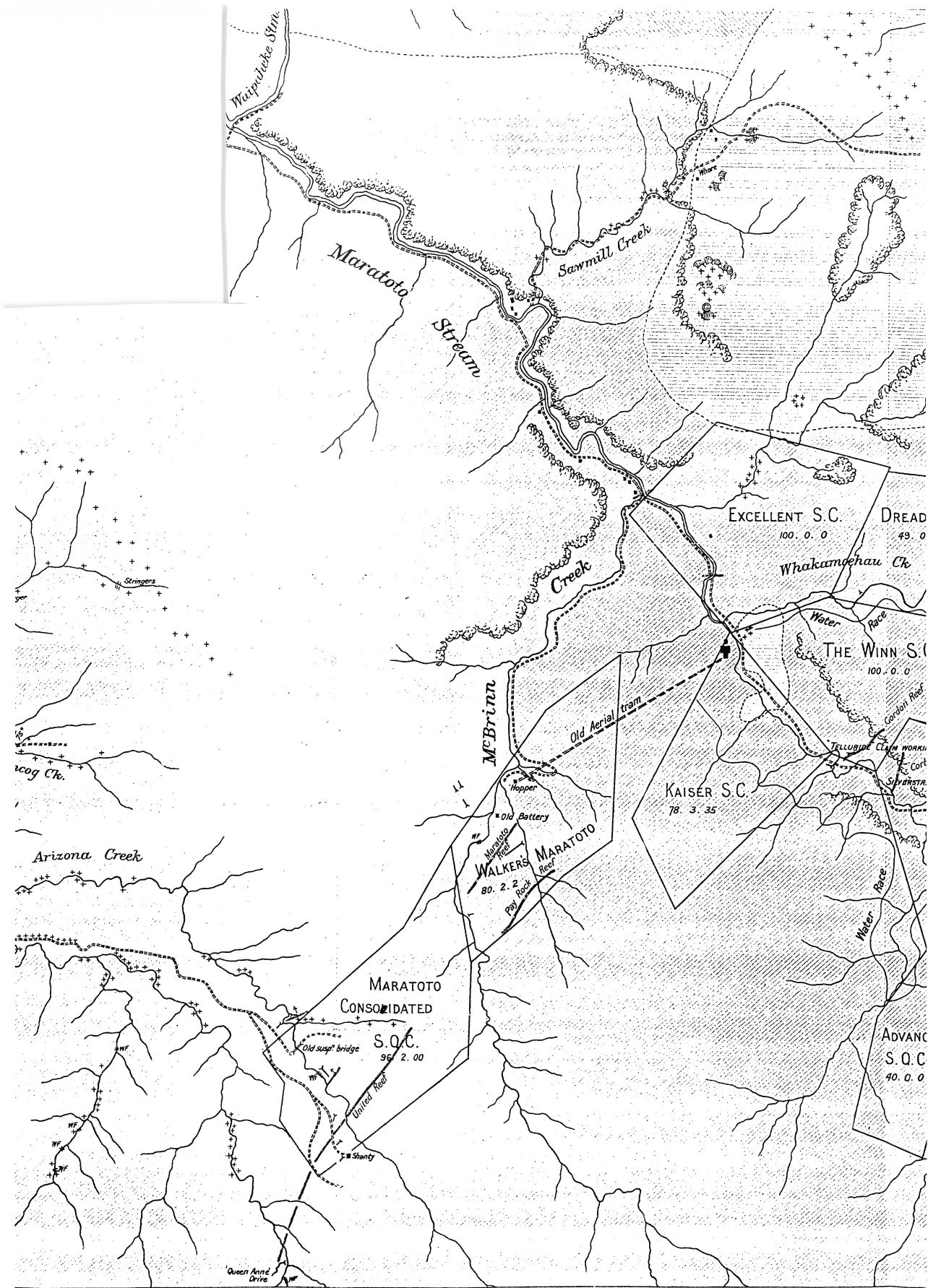


Figure 16: Portion of Maratoto Mining Area, Bell and Fraser, showing Walker's Maratoto, formerly owned by Nicholl.

# GOING TO SCOOP UP THE GOLD.

## Departure of the Portland With Passengers for the Far North.

### WOMEN AMONG THOSE BOUND FOR THE KLONDIKE.

### No Abatement in the Excitement Caused by the Wonderful Discoveries on the Yukon—There May Be a Clash Over Customs.

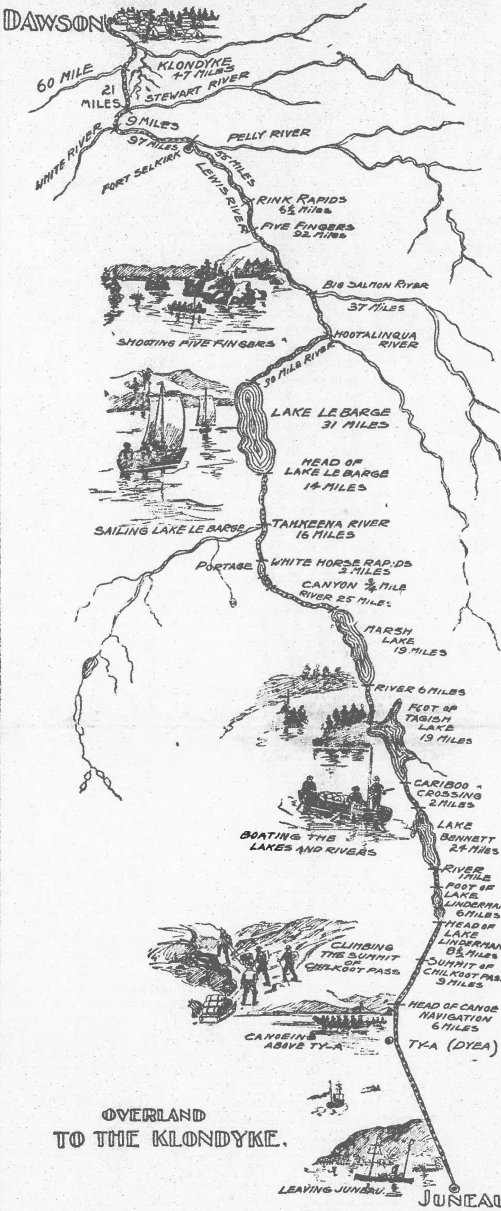
SEATTLE, July 22.—There were 100 persons down at Aniakchik dock today to see the steamer Portland bound for the Klondike. The women among the passengers are bound for the gold fields of the Yukon. The steamer is bound for the Klondike and every body is anxious to get on board. The women among the passengers are bound for the gold fields of the Yukon. The steamer is bound for the Klondike and every body is anxious to get on board.

The Portland was scheduled to sail at 10 o'clock, but it was 45 minutes late. The women among the passengers are bound for the gold fields of the Yukon. The steamer is bound for the Klondike and every body is anxious to get on board.

All the passengers look happy and content. The women among the passengers are bound for the gold fields of the Yukon. The steamer is bound for the Klondike and every body is anxious to get on board.

A departure from the usual routine of the Portland is that it will carry a number of women. The women among the passengers are bound for the gold fields of the Yukon. The steamer is bound for the Klondike and every body is anxious to get on board.

It is remembered that the British Columbia authorities have within the last few years been very strict in their requirements for the Klondike. The women among the passengers are bound for the gold fields of the Yukon. The steamer is bound for the Klondike and every body is anxious to get on board.



### OVERLAND TO THE KLONDIKE.

of clothing and provisions each. They have three horses and a boat thirty feet long, built on the lines of a Canadian canoe, which is all ready to be put together as soon as the trail is reached. The party carries over the Klondike trail. The women among the passengers are bound for the gold fields of the Yukon. The steamer is bound for the Klondike and every body is anxious to get on board.

# NUGGETS AND THE SHADE OF FAMINE.

## More Lucky Ones Bring Sacks and Stories of Gold.

### ALL REPEAT A WARNING TO RUSHING FOOLS.

### There Is a Taunting Fear That the Growing Rush of Fortune-Seekers Will Proportion Misery to the Gold.

More Klondikers have come to the Commercial Hotel yesterday morning with pockets full of nuggets and stories of gold. The women among the passengers are bound for the gold fields of the Yukon. The steamer is bound for the Klondike and every body is anxious to get on board.

One of them is out over with romance. He brought for nine years in the Yukon a nugget worth \$25,000. The women among the passengers are bound for the gold fields of the Yukon. The steamer is bound for the Klondike and every body is anxious to get on board.

There is a N. Mercer, who brought down \$2000 and will not allow to which he will return. The women among the passengers are bound for the gold fields of the Yukon. The steamer is bound for the Klondike and every body is anxious to get on board.

Mr. Fenton is intelligent, good-looking and well dressed. He has a small party with him. The women among the passengers are bound for the gold fields of the Yukon. The steamer is bound for the Klondike and every body is anxious to get on board.

There were just as many suggestions as there were warnings. The women among the passengers are bound for the gold fields of the Yukon. The steamer is bound for the Klondike and every body is anxious to get on board.

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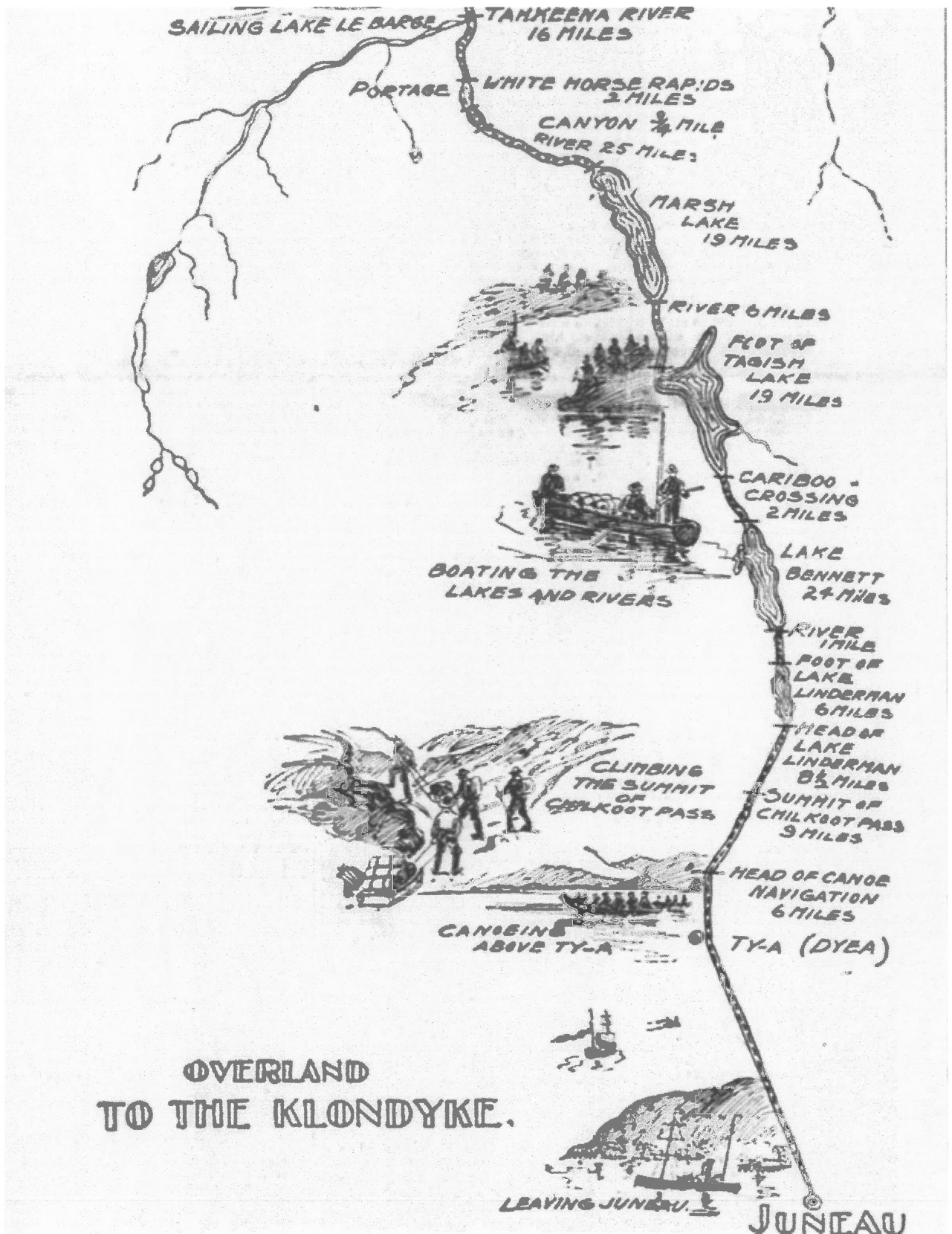


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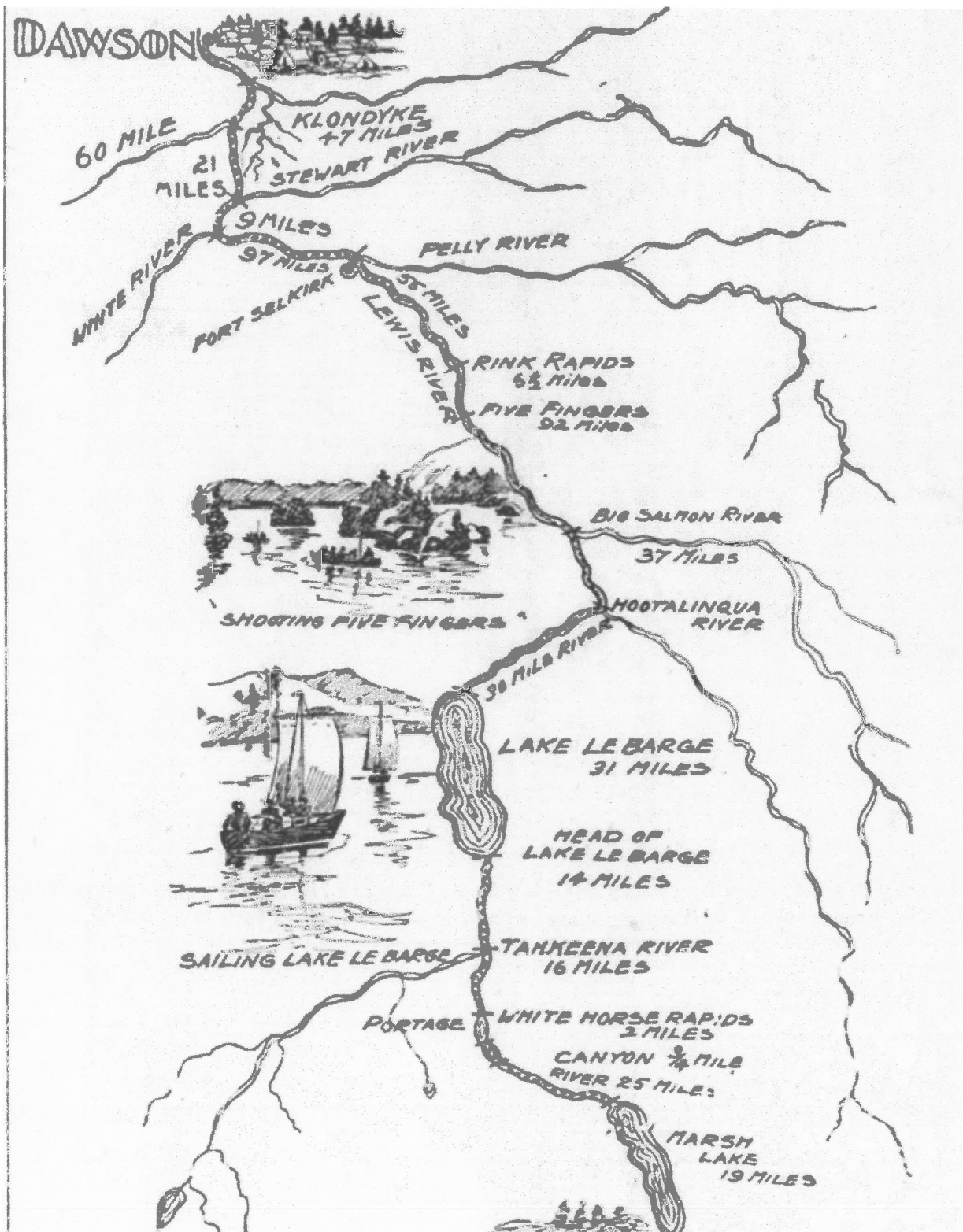


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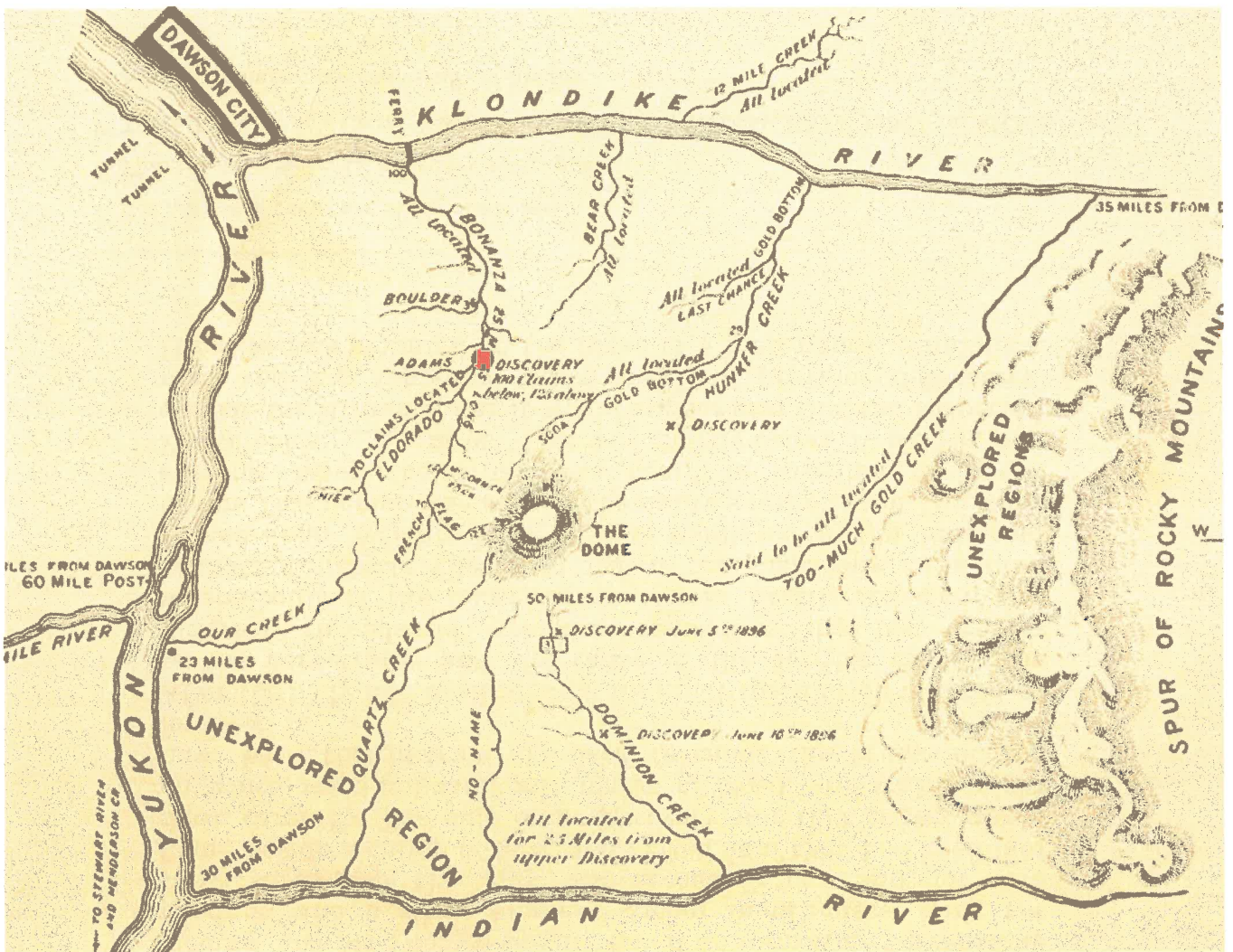


Figure 20: Map of the Klondike rush, showing the rivers and first discoveries, 1897, wikimedia.org.

Sketch Plan of Nicholl's Reef Special Quartz Claim

LOCK XIV

1077 50

Application:—  
H.L. Morgan,  
2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1935

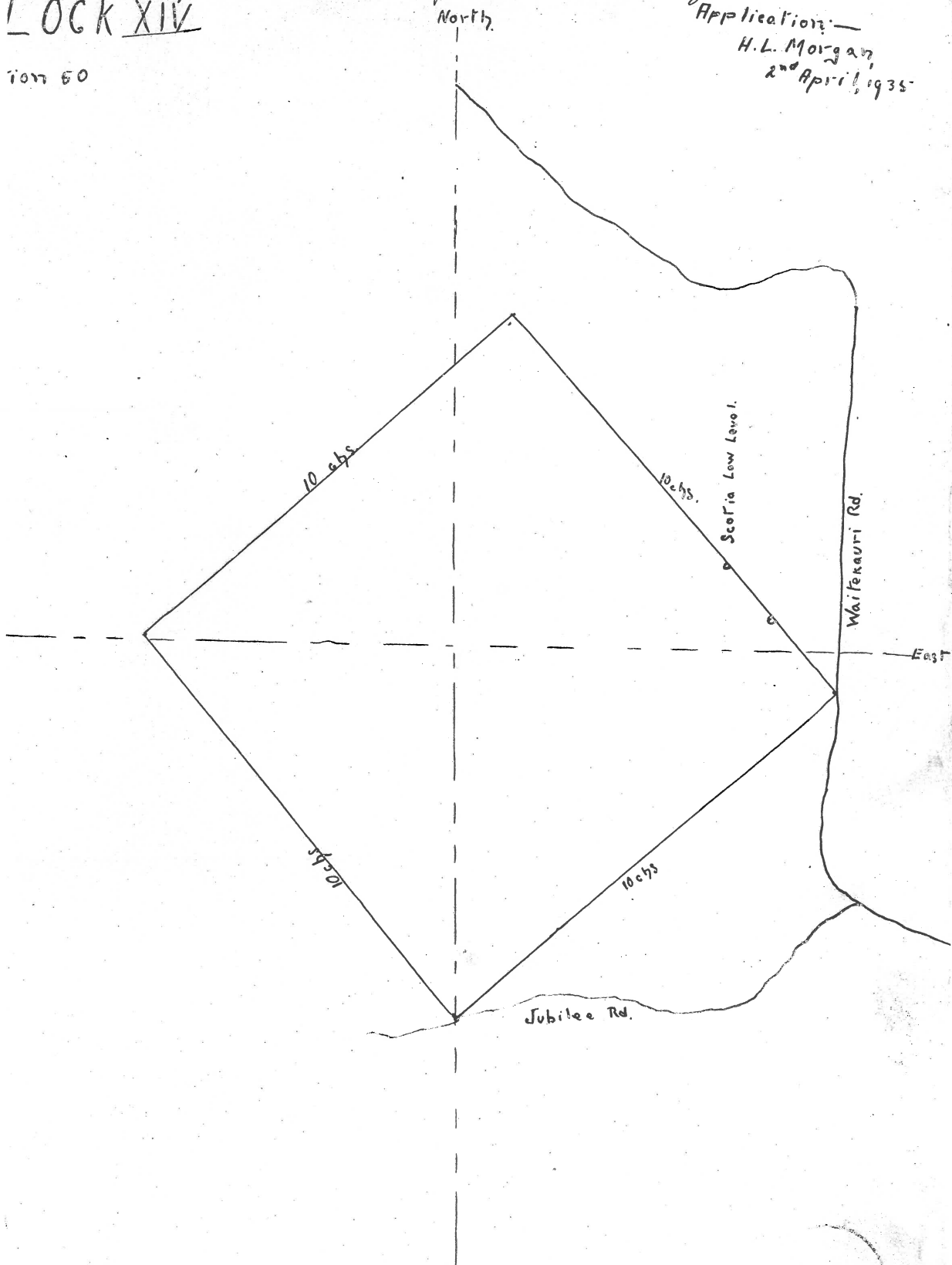


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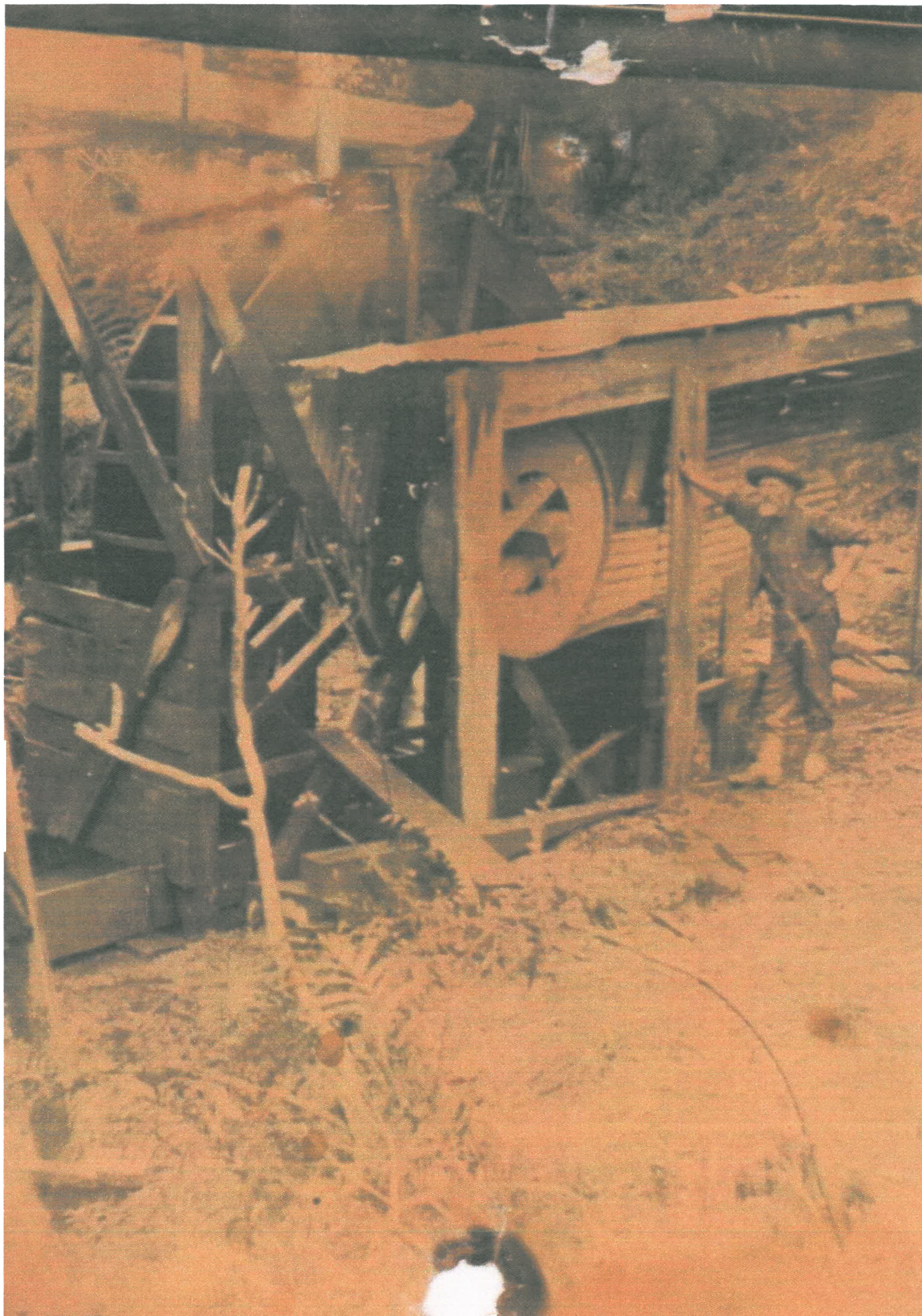


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