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LOOKING BACKWARD.

Nightmare Trip to Australia.

Mrs. M. M. Hirschberg's Vivid Recollections.

When Armidale Was in Swaddling Clothes.

A glimpse into the past—days when men and women ware pioneering tins great New England tableland, days when baby bonuses, wage taxes and endowment taxes and the like were still undreamt of as a possible aid to the attainment of political power—was afforded a representative of the "Ex press' yesterday by Mrs-. M. M. Hirschberg, of Faulkner-street, Armidale, who confidently " expects to celebrate the 88th anniversary of her birth in March next.

This old pioneer's mental power is wonderful. She can conjure up a vivid picture of her homeland as she saw it, as a child, in the late forties, the ancient "windjammer" in which she and her family set sail for Australia, the dreadful ordeal of the six months' voyage, and her earliest experiences in the Parramatta and Ryde and,

later, in the Armidale district.

Mrs. Hirschberg is one of the earliest pioneers of this district now surviving. Though she has been an invalid for some time, her mental vigour is as great as ever was, and she takes the keenest interest in the. events of the day.

Her maiden name was Zartmann, and she came of an agricultural family of the province of Wurtemberg, South-west Germany. Like so many other people in Great Britain and elsewhere, her father's interest was aroused by tales of marvellous gold finds in the newly discovered continent in the south. One could pick the precious metal up in the streets, he was told. There was gold everywhere—a veritable El Dorado. And so, after selling; up his home and his property, Zartmann booked a passage for himself and his family on a typical old-time sailing ship, the Pero.

Mrs. Hirschberg was at that time a child of ten or eleven, but her memory is so good that she can remember not only the name of the ship, but the towering masts, the positions of the berths, and other details which most people would have forgotten years ago.

The Pero started out from Hamburg, that great , German maritime city, but, before reaching the open sea, was compelled to shelter for six weeks, owing to the fierce storms which were raging. Two ships had foundered, while one was returned smashed and broken and barely afloat. It was while the vessel was sheltering that Mrs. Hirschberg's mother lost her youngest child, a tiny baby, through illness. Then the voyage proper commenced—a voyage lasting six months without once touching land. There were fearful storms and heart-breaking calms, when little or no progress was made for days at a time; hut most terrible of all was the shortage of food.

Deaths at Sea.

During the voyage to Australia, 48 of the three or four hundred souls on board perished from lack of proper nourishment. When the ship finally sailed in through Sydney Heads the only food left on board consisted almost wholly of a few ship's biscuits. The ordeal had been too much for Mrs. Hirschberg's mother, and she passed away almost immediately after arrival.

'The family settled in the Parramatta district and, soon afterwards, Mr. Zartmann married a second time. Mrs. Hirschberg, then in her teens; was given the opportunity of coming to Armidale and at once grasped the chance of seeing the true rural Australia.

After residing here for a few years she became the wife of Mr. Hirschberg, a cabinet-maker and timber merchant, and there were ten children by the marriage. Mr. Hirschberg died in 1910 and five of. the children to-day survive, namely, Mrs. Bruyn (Wollomombi). Mrs. Perry (S. Coast). Miss E Hirschberg (Armidale), and Messrs. W. A. and Joseph Hirsch

There is little that Mrs. Hirschberg does not know about Armidale. She has seen it grow little by little, and she knows the intimate history of all the old families—their good fortune and bad fortune, their births and deaths, their adventures in the sphere of romance! She has seen humble families rise to positions of wealth and affluence, and others follow the reverse process. A book of her reminiscences would give both pleasure and pain to many now living in this city.

Merely a Village.

Mrs. Hirschberg recalls the time 71 or 72 years ago—when Armidale was not much more than a village.

"When I first came here," she said, 'There were more shops in Dumaresq street than in Beardy-street. Can you believe it?" And she laughed a little to herself, recalling the things she had seen which no one else in Armidale had ever seen.

"There were four hotels, she went on. "The names—no, I can't remember them very well. There was Barney Norton's, there was Mr. Scholes, there was Mrs. Molloy's-yes. I can remember them clearly, just as though it was yesterday.

"That terrible, fire in Beardy-street—have you heard about-that? I cannot remember just when it was, but we were living in the building where Mr. Simpson, the dentist, now is. I know that fire was started on purpose. I know who did it. You had better not say who it was—that would not be fair now, would it?

"Yes—the fire started early one morning, about' two o'clock. There had been several other attempts, but this one was a success—yes, a great success. It burnt from next to our place right along the street. About five or six little shops went up in smoke that night.

"I hear that there are houses still being built up on the gaol hill. Well, there was hardly one when I first came to this town. There was not even the gaol—that came later. I saw it built and I saw the last of it. Mr. Caldwell was the chief gaoler—I can remember him well.

Opening of the Railway.

"The opening of the railway was something I will never forget. I was with my sister at Uralla when the first train arrived there. Of course, that was some months before it came to Armidale. There were great celebrations—some of the funniest sights you ever saw. But of course that was only fifty years ago—it seems like yesterday.

"Did I tell you that my father and brother lived near Ryde? Before the railway came to Armidale, I went down to see them, by coach and carriage. It took two or three days to get as far as Newcastle and then we had to get into a little boat for the rest of the journey. The second time I went we were rowed across the Hawkesbury to where the train was waiting on the other side.

"Oh, it was a terrible trip in the coach. We hardly ever stopped for a minute. New horses would be put on and off we would go again. The road in parts was terrible. We often had to walk—we'd have had our necks broken if we hadn't! Of course, in those days all our goods came up from Sydney by bullock dray, usually taking about three months. My husband made all our furniture, mostly from cedar from near the Grafton road. Later there were several flour mills, and a Mr. Moses had a big boot factory and tannery at West End, employing about 50 men. But most things we wanted we had to get from Sydney. It was very hard to get oil for the lamps, and we usually used candles.

"When I first came here there were only a few good buildings; most of them were slab houses and bark huts. There was not a house that I can remember on the North Hill and none east beyond Taylor-street, except the Catholic Church, which stood where the College now stands. Father Mc Carthy was the priest at the time. The church in Dangar-street came a good bit later and then they pulled that down and built St. Mary's Cathedral.

"Yes, I remember hearing all about Thunderbolt. Everyone was talking about him, but, of course, I never saw him. I remember the shooting of Constable King. I knew his wife well. She afterwards had a dress-making place near what, is now the court house."

Hillgrove's Rise and Fall.

Mrs. Hirschberg said she paid several visits to Hillgrove. The first time she went there was not a house there. It was many years after her arrival in Armidale that the mining boom came and she recalled going out to see her sister, who had moved there from Uralla, and was conducting a refreshment stall at the bottom of the gorge.

"I went right, down to the bottom," said Mrs. Hirschberg—"down a long, winding path, on which two people could not pass, except at little landings here and there. My sister later started a place up on the top and built a house there."

Referring to the old landmarks, Mrs. Hirschberg explained that the lock up and post office were run jointly and the site was that of the present massive Post Office structure. The court was often held in a, wooden structure behind where the present imposing building stands.

Mrs. Hirschberg recalls that the 'Express’ made its appearance some years after her arrival in Amidale. When the "Chronicle" later made its appearance, it was printed in a building at the back of the premises in Faulkner-street in which Mrs. Hirschberg now resides, but later moved in quarters in Beardy-street,

Mrs. Hirschberg told the "Express" representative that she would not now be alive if it weren't for one golden rule, which she always followed and which, she considered, was the only road to health and vigour in old age.

"And what is that?" she was asked. "Hard work," replied the old lady.