

MEMORIES JOHANNA MARIA CAROLINE BISLEY formerly KARSTEN
The St Pauli Voyage, Moutere, Nelson Settlement and the KARSTEN family
(Weblink SP Appendix V7)

Nelson Provincial Museum Isle Part Stoke Nelson - Reference Bisley JMK 1836-1917
Memoirs [J.M.C. Karsten]

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[Memories about why the KARSTEN family left Germany]

-She had been obliged to leave France for some reason and was a refugee in Germany her property had been confiscated but she hoped some day to go back to France well when she came home in the evening, (Hamburg & Altonia are quite close together only gates & a drawbridge between) She bought with her some papers and books about New Zealand, what a wonderful country it was. She was quite excited about it.

Father had been to Hamburg too and he also came home full of it and brought a friend to look into the books and papers with a view to going out they sat down and went into the whole matter and I have heard my dear mother saying after we came here that they were like so many Maori perfectly mad about coming out and the old French lady was in great trouble because she could not leave her property and her beloved France and was too old to take the journey but she strongly persuaded my father and his friend who was also a Master Cabinet Maker (BECKMAN) and had property of his own to sell everything they had and go to Nelson or New Zealand.

So in less than six weeks my father had discharged all his men (but one whose name was IZEMAN [sic] (EISEMANN) and he came out with us. When we arrived here father had to pay his passage to Adelaide to get rid of him) for there was nothing to do but work on the roads making ditches and he had not been used to that kind of work. Sold off everything and we were in lodgings waiting for the ship to be made ready to have all our friends and everything worth living for to come to this wild country. The worst thing our father ever did us as far as human judgement goes and his friend Mr BECKMAN did was when we all came together.

But before we left home my grandfather came in his ship, he was a captain and used to come to Hamburg sometimes and father used to take me on board to see him but this time we all went to wish him goodbye. I was only a child but I remember my grandfather was with father and how my poor mother cried. Mr Grandfather wanted mother and us children to go with him to his home in Prussia and let father come out alone and see what kind of a place it was and then if he did not like it, he could come back in the same ship as he went out in but mother would not consent to stay, many things might happen she said in a year and it was a wife's duty to go when her husband went as much as she disliked the thought of it all she must go with father, then I remember my grandfather putting his hand on my head and saying this poor child will be only no mouthful for those black fellows (meaning the Maoris) you must take your own way but do not expect me ever to do anything more for you, for you are causing me more sorrow than I can tell you.

My Fathers mother died when he was a baby and my Grandfather had married again and had got a second family. A few days after he left port and my father never saw him again. Some years after Mr BECKMAN went home to Germany about some property and when he returned he brought a letter from my Uncle MARTIN and a little money but it was not much. I do not think my Grandfather ever forgave my father for leaving home in such state. We have not heard from any of our relatives for over fifty years. (End of chapter one)

August 7th 1899 - *[memories about the St Pauli voyage]*

On the twenty fourth day of December Eighteen hundred and forty two December 24/1842 we embarked in the good ship Saint Pauli's and sailed on X-mas Day for New Zealand. I do not know how long we had been on the sea when one day my father took me in his arms and showed me the White Cliff of England. It looked like a white rock to me but it was a long way off and that is all I have ever seen of England.

Some time after this we were in a severe storm there were one hundred emigrants on board beside the crew and the Beat family, some passengers and three missionary's Mr Wohlers and (MR HEINE who I believe is still alive at the Moutere) and the Captains wife and little son. While the storm lasted everyone thought we should be lost, no one could go on beck for three days and nights we were very ill and no food could be cooked either for us or the emigrants. I remember father bringing some boiled rice when the worst of the storm was past and trying to give me some but I could not even sit on his knee I was so weak and ill.

When the storm was over it was found it was necessary to call at some port for repairs and we went into Bahia, there we lay for three weeks it was lovely people use to come every morning with boats full of fruit and very large hats for it was very hot there, we ere nearly staying there instead of coming on to Nelson but father was afraid of the heat for Mother. Two of the passengers did stay, they were single gentlemen. I wish I had been older to remember more about the place. Well after everything was ready we made another start. I do not remember any more storms.

One of the Missionary's Mr --- took a great liking to me. I must have been a funny little girl for I made friends with everyone in the ship from the Captain downwards. I wore a dressing gown and bloomers lined with wadding, very warm. Mother had gowns made for all of us, there were three the youngest was quite a baby, but I being the older had trousers also, the gentlemen used to tease me and call me a boy, for I was a great romp full of life.

Once I remember I fell down the stairs among the Emigrants and was nearly killed and when we were leaving Bahia I fell on some planks and ran a piece of wood into my chin and it remained in for two years the Drs that were here were not very cleaver for they did not know what to do. At last my father cut it with his penknife and out came a large splinter. I have got a scar to this day and shall have it until I die. It was cut so often by the Drs.

Mr RIEMENSCHNEIDER was very kind to me and he began to teach me the English Alphabet and when I could say it off he taught me to read little words. He took a great deal of trouble for was a restless child but could learn quickly. So when we arrived I knew a little English.

At last after a long voyage of nearly six months we arrived in Nelson on the 16 of June 1843 the day before the Wairau massacre (but the awful news did not reach Nelson tile about 10 days after). We have only lost one child by death on board. We had smallpox but none died. Three people had them two men and a women but all survived.

When we were out in the Bay everyone wanted to know where the town of Nelson was, there was nothing to be seen but Bush, Hills and Scrub a few tents and some Maoris. No buildings, no place to land, no churches, no roads in fact it was a complete wildness. There were a few buildings of wood on the Church Hill and a depot was being built at the back of where the institute now stands but it was not finished. The most of the people had only tents or whares with blankets and fern & toitoi but timber was being prepared for wooden houses called Salt Water ridge so we could get into the town and a strange place it was Father got a

room in the new depot and there we stayed for a few days and a little while after the Saint Pauli sailed away home again and we were left here and to end this 2 chapter

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“The next move we made was to the Moutere. Father was going to be a farmer. He had brought out seeds. A whaleboat took us and our things to the landing place and there we remained until morning under some trees. We slept on dry fern and a tent made of *****

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“We slept on dry fern and a tent made of blankets and the next day went on to where we were going to make a home in the wilderness. Eight families and the three missionaries. They were going to the Maoris’ but they were going to learn the language first.

The first thing was to build some sort of place to live and father and his men built a large place. It had no walls but was like a Maori whare a door each end, one end was the bedroom and the other end of the kitchen. It was thatched with rushes and stood on a little rise. The House of the Lord was got ready and the seeds put in the ground for it was spring by this time. The children were taught by the missionaries and church was held in our whare on Sundays as it was the largest.

There were several floods in spring. They did not do much damage, but in February 1844 a big flood came and washed everything away except our whare. Being built on a rise saved it, and father kept the trees that came down from knocking it over with a long pole.

Our neighbour had taken the tops off four large pine trees and built a sort of house on them, and when it rained he took his family, wife and two children and a goat up and pulled the ladder up and was safe. His name was **Manssen**. He was a gardner.

When the flood was over my father was tired of farming and he had had enough of New Zealand. As for my poor mother, being so sickly she felt the hardships very much. We had been there seven months and all the labour and expense was gone, washed away by the flood, so father walked to Nelson and left mother and us children with very little food. There were a few fowls left and mother killed one and cooked it for us.

It took father nearly a week to go to Nelson and back for there were no roads, only tracks. It was on a Sunday night mother expected him back, and she took us a little way through the bush to meet him. It got dark and he did not come so we had to turn back. We had not had much to eat that day and he was going to bring some bread and other things that he could carry. We were very disappointed and cried a good deal. We had not been in bed long before he came and we got up and had bread and butter. It was lovely, I remember it now how nice it was. We did not expect the butter for it was five shillings a pound in those days.

Father had bought a house for fourteen shilling, and we were going to Nelson to live. One morning before daylight we were taken out of bed and dressed to

walk some miles to the beach where a boat was going to be ready to take us back to Nelson.”

The life of Johanna Maria Caroline BISLEY formerly KARSTEN An historical article written by Helen WHELAN

Lina or Carrie, as she was called by her husband, was born in Altoner near Hamburg in Germany, December 3 1836. She was the third of six girls, the two older having died in infancy and the sixth being born after the family arrived in Nelson. Lina wrote her memoirs when she was sixty-three, over fifty years after leaving this first home, but her memories are of a large house with pretty garden. There were a number of journeymen and apprentices in her father's business, which was that of master maker. It was apparently a comfortable life, with a servant to help her mother, and a French governess for herself.

All this changed, in the space of six weeks, when Lina was six. Her father studied books about New Zealand and determined to emigrate with his family. His wife was not enthusiastic, but believed it her duty to accompany him. His father tried to persuade him to go alone, until he was sure New Zealand was suitable for the family. Having failed to make him change his mind, the grandfather apparently broke off contact.

The Karsten family left Hamburg at Christmas 1842, on the St Pauli and arrived in Nelson June 14 1843. Their first view of Nelson was that of a complete wilderness. Lina says:

“When we were out in the Bay everyone wanted to know where Nelson was. There was nothing to be seen but bush, hills and scrub, a few tents and some Maoris. No buildings, no place to land, no churches, no roads. There were a few buildings of wood on the Church Hill, and a depot was being built at the back of where the Institute now stands. Most of the people had only tents or whares, with blankets, fern and toitoi, but timber was being prepared for wooden houses. In a few days we landed, and we stayed in a room in the depot.”

After a few days in the town, they left with eight other families for the Moutere, where Mr Karsten planned to take up farming. They travelled by whale boat to the Moutere and spent their first night under the trees. Lina describes life in the Moutere as follows:

“We slept on dry fern and a tent made of blankets and the next day went on to where we were going to make a home in the wilderness. Eight families and the three missionaries. They were going to the Maoris' but they were going to learn the language first. The first thing was to build some sort of place to live and father and his men built a large place. It had no walls but was like a Maori whare a door each end, one end was the bedroom and the other end of the kitchen. It was thatched with rushes and stood on a little rise. The House of the Lord was got ready and the seeds put in the ground for it was spring by this time. The children were taught by the missionaries and church was held in our whare on Sundays, as it was the largest. There were several floods in spring. They did not do much damage, but in February 1844 a big flood came and washed everything away except our whare. Being built on a rise saved it, and father kept the trees that came down from knocking it over with a long pole. Our neighbour had taken the tops off four large pine trees and built a sort of house on them, and when it rained he took his family, wife and two children and a goat up and pulled the ladder up and was safe. His name was Manssen. He was a Gardner. When the flood

was over my father was tired of farming and he had had enough of New Zealand. As for my poor mother, being so sickly she felt the hardships very much.

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The town seemed more attractive this time. Lina continues:

“Nelson had improved, there were a good many wooden houses built and there was a shop Mr Campbell had opened. Mr Bird had a butcher shop where the old jam factory now stands and things were beginning to look better for the eight months we had been away. We were glad to get back. So when we landed our things were taken on a Bullock cart to the shanty father had bought. It was one room, walls mud, roof thatched, floor bricks, one small window and a chimney, quite a Palace after the Hut at the Moutere. The only trouble was the floor was full of fleas. We could not sleep for them so mother boiled kettles of water and poured on the bricks and so made the place clean.

“We lived in that place for a good many years. There were four houses built all in a row and father bought them all as the people who owned them left. One family went to Motueka and some of their children are there now. A number of the settlers left and went to Adelaide. Father wanted to go but mother would not go. She said she had come to the end of the world and she thought that was enough. Soon after this father got work at shipbuilding. Mr Strong, a Quaker had some small boats built to trade to Tasmania and gave a good many men work. He did not pay them money, but opened a store and they had to take their earning out, all but a few shillings a week.

“That was about the happiest time in my life. I went to school, for in April (18) 44 the Nelson School Society opened the old Brick School, both for religious and secular education. All the children in Nelson in those days went to the school and learned to read and write. One Sunday school was just over when a man came into town and brought word that a number of Maoris were coming to kill us all. The Church Hill had been made secure so all the mothers and children were ordered to go up there, and the men who had been drilled were to go and meet the natives. The report proven not to be true. The Maoris were going fishing so the men came back about three in the morning and we all went home to bed. I remember that some of our mothers shed a great many tears that night.”

The family suffered much illness. The mother was never strong and she died, after a few days' illness, when Lina was nine. She had three younger sisters. Wilhelmina died of the quinsy while small, and another sister died some time later, leaving just Lina and Dorah, whose full name was Johanna Dorothea Friederike.

Life became very difficult for Lina after her mother's death. She described herself as mischievous. A tomboy, who frequently argued with her father. She would not stay at school when sent there.

Her own health was not good and she writes:

"Soon after this I had a very severe illness. I was about 13 years old when one day I was very warm and the river was just behind the house so I had a bath, hot as I was. A day or two after I was full of pain and the Dr was sent for. He said I had got rheumatic fever very badly. I suffered dreadful pain. The neighbours were very kind to me. Nursing me and sitting up with me for some time as my life was despaired of. When I began to get a little better one Sunday some of the girls in my class in the Sunday school came. They got me up and put me in father's chair before a large fire and I fainted. They were very much scared and went for a neighbour Mrs Mathur. She put me back to bed and sent for the doctor and I suppose I had a relapse fore I was ill for a long time after. When I did get up I had to have crutches to walk with for my left leg was useless. It was six months before I could get about again, and what I had suffered had quieted me down. For years after that illness, indeed all my life, I have suffered more or less through it. But it did me good and while I lay weak and helpless I thought of many things in my past life and was sorry for my wild ways. After a while I got the use of my leg but I was never as strong as I was before."

On her recovery, Mrs C Elliott asked her to become her servant. She lived with Mrs Elliott for four months. She was a much-needed friend to her and taught her to be a good housekeeper and to sew. Another illness brought this to an end and Lina returned home with a bad cough.

Her father took up work at Happy Valley. He built a house in Waimea Road, where the girls lived. He came home at weekends and paid the bills. From time to time, there was a housekeeper and, at other times, they looked after themselves. When her father announced his intention to remarry, Lina said she could not live with a stepmother and she took a position with Mr Jenkins. She lived in and did the sewing.

Another bout of illness followed: "There were some very severe earthquakes in Nelson (16-24 October 1848) and prayer meetings were being held in all churches for everyone was very frightened. The earth was very seldom still for more than a fortnight and some of the shakes were very severe. I attended the meetings the first week and took the measles from a young girl by whom I sat. When they were out on my arms a heavy earthquake came, and I got out of bed and ran and took cold and was very ill. Mr father was sent for and when I was better he took me home. [There was also an earthquake in 1855]

"While I was ill he had come back to town to live, the partnership having come to an unlucky end and all his money gone. I was scarcely well when father and one of my sisters, Dorah, and my stepmother's little girl and myself were taken very ill with dysentery. For eleven weeks I was at death's door. Father was over five weeks ill and the little girl died. My sister did not have it so bad but I got a relapse and was very ill. My father would not let any of the Christians who had become my friend's see me. He told me all this trouble had come upon us because of me, although people were dying all around us of the same complaint and the Lord in mercy had permitted us to survive, all but the little children."

Mr Jenkins had taken her to church with him and she had made some new friends there. She experienced a conversion and became much happier. Her father was not so pleased, because it meant she was turning her back on the Lutheran Church, to become a Baptist. They had been part of the early Lutheran community in the Moutere and had travelled out on

the St Pauli with the Lutheran missionaries, and briefly had been housed in a building, which was to be used as the Lutheran church in Nelson.

With the help of a friend, who spoke on her behalf, Lina eventually received her father's consent to this change. She described it as a very important event in her life, but she did not always remain a Baptists. In turn she joined Methodist, Open Brethren and Methodists again.

Lina started to receive offers of marriage when she was fifteen, but she did not marry until she was twenty-eight. She married by a Wesleyan minister to Joseph Herbert Bisley, a baker, of Waimea Road on July 27 1864. The couple adopted her husband's niece and bought her up. Joseph Bisley died, after nine years of marriage, from typhoid fever. Lina's father J.C.M. Karsten had died at his home in Collingwood Street in 1870.

Lina had money troubles at the time of her husband's death. She took a job, as housekeeper to Mr Charles Harley, a brewer. She worked for him for fifteen years. When Mr Harley died, he left her a cottage to live in and an income of \$40 per year. She was very grateful to Mr Harley for this, as she was now in her fifties. The cottage was probably in Collingwood Street.

Lina wrote her memoirs in 1889 and added a further note in 1911, by which time she was seventy-four. She died on May 13 1917. Her story illustrates many of the difficulties experienced by women who came to Nelson in the nineteenth century, from the other side of the world.

PS There is a photograph of Mrs JMC Bisley in the Tyree photographic Collection at the Nelson Provincial Museum.
