

Red Hill

Dear Sir or Ma'am,

My father has said I am to start at Red Hill School soon, so I write to introduce myself. My name is Alice and I have just turned 11. I come from Bristol, England, but we have been living in Ballarat for a year now. My older brother John has just left school to start work in the Wheelwrights so father says he has enough spare coins that I can go back to school.

Father works as a Carriage Builder. He tells John all the time that opportunities abound here in the Colonies for hardworking folk. All those fortune seekers will want shiny new carriages when they strike it rich, he says. Mother was working as a cook when we first arrived, but once father got a good position she was able to come back home. This was lucky, because baby Lucy was born a few months later.

Baby Lucy has been a blessing for mother. She lost baby Matthew on the voyage over and was stuck in her sadness for a long time. It was a terrible three months on the ship. We weren't the only family to lose a loved one. It still makes me cry to think of little Matthew's body floating away, on his own in the boundless sea.

The journey from Melbourne to Ballarat was hot and dusty and the carriage we took jolted awfully. Father spent the whole time complaining about the mechanics or some such. I swear he cursed us because halfway through the voyage the whole carriage broke apart in a dreadful marshy bog. We had to walk the rest of the way as we had no more money.

We lived in a lovely little cottage on the edge of Bristol. I still miss the beautiful old oak by the village green. The trees here are so strange and it smells so different from the woodlands back home. At the moment we are living in a little hut near to father's work. He and John hope to start working on a cottage for us soon. I look forward to the day when we have a sitting room and maybe even a piano, but I fear I'll be long married before that day comes.

Mother has been teaching me all the household arts and I will still do all the washing, mending and ironing when I start school. But she hopes that a proper education will help make me more refined and find a better husband.

Yours Sincerely,

Alice Easton

St Peter's



Dear Sir or Ma'am,

My father has enrolled me in St Peter's Denominational School and so I write to introduce myself. My name is Jack and I am 11 years old. My father is a Merchant who is often away travelling. My mother keeps house and also works on occasion mending clothes. I have an elder sister who is working as a maid for the McKenzie's and three younger siblings.

We arrived in Ballarat only one month ago after a dreadful four month voyage aboard the clipper from Liverpool. Father secured Cabin Class tickets, but even so, the conditions were dreadful.

Neither the stench nor the rats stayed in the lower decks. A number of our pickled vegetable barrels were lost to rot and so we had little to eat beyond salted meat and stale bread. Many passengers were showing signs of scurvy by the time we arrived in Melbourne.

We recovered in Melbourne for some weeks and waited for father to join us. The coach to Ballarat was much better than the ship and only took us one day. We passed many fortune seekers struggling on foot.

One of father's clients let us to stay in the room behind his shop while our cottage was finished. We have just now moved in. It is a simple home of two rooms, but mother hopes that soon we will have enough money to build a proper kitchen. I am just glad to be up the hill and away from the rabble down at the creek. My little sister is helping mother sew curtains as I write.

It is so much hotter here than back home in England. Everything is so brown and dusty. Mother is not very happy here, but father assures her that we will do well. He says he can sell his goods at a much higher price here and hopes that within another five years he will be able to build us a brick house.

Father expects that in a few years, after I finish school, I will join him in his business. He says I have a good head for numbers. I do all the shopping for Mother so I can practice my arithmetic with the shillings and pence. I hope I can carry on his good name.

Yours faithfully,
Jack Smith

