Hesselmed 19 Queen Street

Newtown 26 th February 1933

For the information of my descendants only [EXTRACT FOR GENERAL CIRCULATION]

As I have now arrived at age of 90, an age to which I have never dreamt of obtaining, it seems to me a good time to write down a few facts of events which have occurred in my not uneventful life but before doing I propose to write a few words about my family.

I arrived in London in 1862 and commenced the worst year of life & without money I had to take whatever there was to get and went on a full rigged ship as ordinary seaman going first to Canada, but before arriving there we met the worst gale of wind the Captain had ever seen and after 3 or 4 weeks something broke in the steering gear and we lay drifting for over two weeks with shortage of food in snow & ice, with pumping water day & night and no dry clothing to wear. The crew was a bad lot, 2 Wales, 1 Irish 2 boys and a German cook about 45 who one day after we had been about 2 weeks out I was warming myself near the galley when he came out with a big carving knife shouting I will settle you Danish dog, I ran towards the cabin and he threw the knife within a foot of my head. By good luck the Captain was coming up the step and told him he would be put in irons, and the only excuse he gave was that I had called him a lot of bad names in German and after that I had no trouble with him. After drifting as before stated we were noted by a larger vessel and managed to reach St Johns Newfoundland, and after staying there some time for repairs proceeded upon our return to London with better weather. The Captain was a Wales man by name of Evans and not a bad sort, when I was discharged in London he gave me a certificate as AB(able seaman) entitling me to double wages and by this time I was able to converse pretty well in English having procured in a second hand bookshop in London a small dictionary, a grammar and a book of mathematical problems in navigation.

From London I went by train to Liverpool trying to get on a ship to Australia where I had been told gold could be picked up anywhere with a small amount of trying, but no ship going there was to be had, and after a few weeks going to Belfast & other towns I obtained one to America with a very decent crew as well as officers and as I now was quite able to hold my own in any work required of me in this or any other ship I hardly met with any circumstances worth recording or remembered by me until I arrived in Melbourne in January 1864 in a sailing vessel from Montevideo South America where a war was in progress against Peruvia.

After staying in boarding house a few days and leaving my chest there containing the most of my clothing books etc. I commenced a tramp up the country with a mate I had met on the ship, seeking for gold in several old diggings but without much success, and at last arrived at Bunniyong a mining town 7 miles from Ballarat where my mate left me to return and I went to a boarding house kept by a widow by name of Forward who had a brother a member of Legislative Assembly and while I was there married one of the boarders an Engineer by the name of Milligan.

I there procured employment at a deep mine called (Garibaldy) and after about 6 months went by coach to Melbourne but found that the chest with all my things had been claimed by a stranger and all gone. While residing in this place some time and occasionally visiting Ballarat for a little mild speculation in mining shares without any luck, a kind of gambling which I think was inherited from my father who I had been told always trusted to luck but never found it.

During this time I caught the typhoid fever, went to the hospital, was reduced to a weight of 105 lb, was given up by consultation of 3 doctors but recovered and unable to work during 6 months. In the latter part of 1869 I shifted my residence to Ballarat working as a miner sometimes under the ground and sometimes on top at the engine after working 12 hours alternately night and day. During the next few years I was receiving constant letters from my Mother advising me to try getting something better to do. There is no doubt I tried but without success although I managed to get up a speed in shorthand of 150 words and was offered a position as a clerk by a German firm at 2.00 pounds per week which I could not accept paying 25/- for my board but in 1874 a School of Mines was started in Ballarat under the Master Mr John Phillips and in which I was accepted as one of the first pupils. However the School did not seem to become so popular as expected and after about 6 months Mr Phillips said it might close down & that he was going to New South Wales as a Surveyor and as he was very satisfied with my drawing and mathematical ability he offered me a place as his Assistant which I accepted and occupied in the Tamworth & Orange districts during the about 12 months the latter part of which was situated in Parkes where Mr Phillips bought a piece of land laid out in the form of a large garden, and erected a house upon it where we resided with his daughter as housekeeper and an old policeman and his wife the former as gardener and the latter as cook.

Mr Phillips was a well known scientific man and looked upon surveying as a mere drudgery, devoting the most of his time to his hobby – the garden, the whole of the field work being left to me, and seeing in the paper that an examination for licenced surveyors was to be held in Sydney in February 1876 I decided to have a try and left for Sydney about a week before it was to commence, was accepted as a candidate and passed third out of fifteen, a position far better than had been expected by me.

What became of Phillips I do not know for certain but was told that he had been appointed Govmt Geologist in Queensland.

After my pass I was appointed as draughtsman in the Lands Department and about one month later was offered my choice of 3 districts as Licenced Surveyor by the Surveyor General Mr Adams, and as it happened on looking for a place to board I chose one in the Glebe Road by an ad in the window for one boarder, was well satisfied and remained there till I left Sydney for my district in Maitland and how this came about was rather strange. It appears that the next door in the terrace was occupied by a widow who also kept one or 2 lodgers, and it happened that one morning one of these a young man came out and both of us entered an omnibus (no trams then) going to the Lands Office and that is how I first met Geo. Bush, who was occupied there as junior draughtsman, was introduced by him to some of his friends connected with the Dept and when the choice of district was offered advised me to accept the one in Maitland in which he was quite at home and where I could obtain his brother John as pupil and Assistant for two years. Before proceeding to Maitland I had to get money to start with and the Surveyor General Mr Adams was kind enough to recommend an advance of 150 pounds for an outfit from the Dept. without any security, and with this I procured Instruments, a spring cart, 5 horses, tents and packs for 2 horses etc. and with my Assistant, 2 men and a cook all under 20 years of age, I kept at constant work in the Mountains for nearly 2 years with only a few holidays, the first of which was to my Assistants home in Gresford, where I was made very welcome

H F Madsen

NOTE.

On 8/5/2018 Anne Beggs of the Buninyong Historical Society advised that she had found Hans Madsen as one of the first enrolments in the BSM & that the record is at the Blainey Library, Mount Helen Campus of the Federation University. (1871 is earlier than the 1874 date HFM mentions).

HFM was a surveyor with the NSW Lands Dept from 1876 to 1913 (his 70 th birthday) working in both country area of NSW (The Mountains, Braidwood & Young) as well as in Sydney where he lived in Newtown.

He became well known in Sydney for his work with telescopes in making large 18 inch specula lenses & built a reflector telescope which was used in 1896 to observe the moons of Mars.

His eldest son, Sir John Percival Vissing Madsen was a very distinguished Scientist, Engineer & Mathematician at Sydney & Adelaide Universities. There is a great deal of information about him on the internet & at two Sydney University websites, “Beyond 1914” & “EIE History Sydney University.”

Both HFM & JPVM are regarded as pioneers in the work that they did.



