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UROLOGY

HAMILTON HOUSE  
64 PALMER PLACE  
NORTH ADELAIDE 5006

7th May, 1971.

Mr. Robert Hamilton,  
Hamilton's Ewell Wineries Pty. Ltd.,  
165 Oaklands Road,  
WARRADALE. S.A. 5046.

Dear Robert,

Referring to your letter of 23rd March, 1971, in which you appear anxious to obtain some information about the old house at Ewell. Following is about the best that I could get for you.

Richard Hamilton arrived in South Australia in 1837. Henry was left in England but arrived here a couple of years later. Henry was born in 1826 and died in 1907. About the 1840's his father, Richard, gave him Section 176, upon which the winery, as I understand it, is built. Henry moved to Ewell in 1842 or 1843 and built an adobe or wattle and daub house of three rooms with a verandah all around it and I believe, a separate kitchen with an underground water tank. The purpose of the underground water tank was two-fold, firstly they had to have water for drinking purposes, and secondly, it was put under part of the house so that if the aborigines attacked them, they would still have a supply of water. The two front bedrooms of the present house were built about twenty to thirty years later. There was a pantry off the present southern door of the dining room. It is said that up to eighteen men were regularly fed in the old dining room and they were employed in clearing the land, which was heavily forested with huge gum trees. All of them had to be grubbed out and then cut up into fencing posts, fire wood etc.

In 1916, the wattle and daub rooms on the southern side of the house were taken down and the present building of blue stone, comprising a drawing room in front and bedroom just behind it, then a bathroom and another small bedroom at the back was built to replace the old adobe structure. The present passages running east and west, along the new blue stone building and the long one running north and through to connect it to the rest of the house and to the northern door, were there before the blue stone building was put up. Prior to the building of the blue stone portion, there was no bathroom inside the house and the method of having a bath was to heat the water on the stove or when we were children on the open fire place in the dining room, and then tip it into a tub in which the baths were taken. The first bathroom with running water was built outside the house about 1914 and had a chip heater. The drainage from it was into a well.

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The lavatory was about 100 yards from the back of the house, outside, over by some sheds, at an angle of about 45° running north west from the back of the house. It was a brick structure, with a wooden seat over a big pit. There was an opening at the back of it through which the pit was cleaned out, about once a year and ashes were always dropped into the lavatory after it was used. Newspaper was used for people wiping themselves. Being some distance from the house, there never appeared to be any smell coming from it but flies were always bad. In about 1916, the deep pit was abolished and a septic tank was connected to the old lavatory. This lavatory was pulled down after, the winery was connected to deep drainage, as far as I remember in the early 1930's and the present lavatory at the back of the old house was built. The floor of the long passage running north and south and the floor of the dining room were lowered by about a foot, as the old dining room had a very low ceiling and our ideas had become more sophisticated and we did not like the low ceiling.

At that time, the whole family was still living there, having moved into the house after Henry Hamilton died in 1907. Our father, Frank Hamilton, died 13th June, 1913, having been ill for a week with influenzal pneumonia. He developed an empyaema, for which he was operated upon on Friday, June 13th, by Dr. Poulton, Adelaide's leading surgeon of the day. The operation for drainage of his chest was carried out in the front bedroom of the house, i.e. the room on the north east corner but he died soon after he came out of the anaesthetic on that same day. Before he died, your father promised him that he would look after the family. He knew he was near death.

The room exactly opposite to that at the front of the house, at that time, was the drawing room and the children all lived in the old adobe rooms on the southern side of the house. In 1916, when the re-building was done, we all lived at a rented house at Glenelg on the seafront. The only member of the family who was not there was your father, who, at that time, was in France, with the Australian Army.

Henry Hamilton had three wives, the last being Mary Duff, who was a widow and a very regal type of woman. I believe that her first husband was Captain Duff, who came out in the early days. They were well-educated people and brought a number of strange plants from India with them, one of which is still in the old garden and that is the lily with the large leaves which comes up every year. They had a property in the Marion over near where the late Harold Laffer's property is. I cannot remember who his other wives were but one of them died of tuberculosis, two children, a daughter and a son, Ted, also died of tuberculosis, the girl in her early adult years, and the man when he was probably in his forties. Henry's third wife had no children, as they were too old by the time they were married.

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Your grandfather, Frank Hamilton, also had two wives, the first one was a cousin, a Hamilton, and died of tuberculosis and there were no children from that marriage. The second wife, i.e. my mother was the daughter of William Ayliffe. Her name was Violet Elsie Mabel. To go into the history of the Ayliffe side would take many foolscap pages and quite a book could be written about them.

When we were young, we lived in the old house on Oaklands Road, which was recently demolished, i.e. before we moved to Ewell. My father had about thirty acres of land there and it is said that he planted it with vines by moonlight, as he was working for his father and had no other opportunity to do it apart from this sort of timing as in these days, people worked from daylight to dusk practically, in the winter, certainly about twelve hours a day and six days a week. Probably they were expected to look after the horses or something like that on Sundays. At that time, Henry Hamilton's financial position was very insecure. He did not work himself, in his later days, and just enjoyed living and it was only through the efforts of my father, that the Estate was saved and had he not been there, I have little doubt that the Hamiltons would have lost it. That was the reason why his father, Henry, left him the old house and the winery when he died. I believe that the other brothers were not too pleased about it and to his disgust, after the estate was finalised, although he had saved it from bankruptcy, the only token of appreciation that they gave him was a photograph of themselves, which, I believe, my mother put in the fire, as we never saw it again.

With my kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,

*Jan Hamilton*

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