

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, December 21, 1891, with transcript

Alexander Graham Bell to Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell. December 21, 1891. Journal for the information of my little wifie. AGB

Dec. 21, 1891. Monday. Worked upon opening address to the A.A.P.T.S.D. — giving the history of the Association — till dinner time 1 p. m. After dinner Mrs. Dunlap called thus delaying my afternoon trip to mountain. She has paid altogether upon mortgages we hold — about \$800. Some of this amount represents interest and some of it a return of principal — so that our security has increased. Hotel is doing well and the collection of interest etc., has always been paid promptly. She called to tell me of a mortgage upon the Telegraph House made by her husband 22 years ago for \$600. For 22 years they have paid \$50 every year as interest — but as no provision was made for gradual re-payment of capital — they still owe the full amount \$600 — although they have paid \$1100 by way of interest. The owner of the mortgage — an old man — is very ill — and Mrs. Dunlap fears that, in the event of his death, the executors may foreclose the mortgage and she does not know how to raise the necessary amount. The next payment of interest will be next March and she wants to know whether we will not advance the money required to pay off the mortgage (\$600) — and take a new mortgage in place of it — providing for the gradual re-payment of the capital as we did before.

I told her that we could not do so at the present time — but that we might perhaps be able to do so next year. I could not make any promises however until after our return from Europe. I told her to let us know if the old gentleman died — and the executors should press her for a settlement. In that case I said we would see what we could do to help her. I hardly think that we will hear more of it — for the heirs would hardly foreclose a mortgage which yields 8 # per cent interest — and which has been paid regularly for 22 years —

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and will probably continue to be paid. When we return from Europe we can look into the matter. The Dunlaps seem to be honorable people — the hotel business is prosperous — and they give us no trouble in the collection of interest etc. We may decide to relieve them of that mortgage.

Half-past three — trudged up the mountain. Good news. “Pet” has come in. The six-nippled Ewe already O. K. The young ram 34 of 91 “The hope of the family” has not disappointed me. He turns out to be a magnificent fellow — quite capable of all I want of him this winter. 77 of 91 the biggest-nippled of all the young rams has also turned out well; but 19 of 91 is only a baby. His flock has been turned over to the Merino Ram “Lord Stanley.” When I came here I feared that the sheep had been neglected too long — and that I might not have the lambs I expected next year. Now however I feel more encouraged. Not a day passes without good progress on the top of the mountain — and my experiment will have a fair trial.

I am afraid however that the Merinoes will not succeed in perpetuating themselves here. I do not think we will have more than four lambs next year from them. Have just made a discovery of importance concerning them. A few of them have extra nipples. I have been examining the past births in their relation to nipples. My 3 attention was directed to this by noticing that the only Merinoes which give promise of lambs for next year have extra nipples — and that none of the two-nippled Merinoes give any hope. Now looking back over the two years experience we have had — I find that the two-nippled Merinoes — as a rule — have been sterile — whereas all of the extra-nippled Ewes (excepting one) have had lambs. Merinoes, I know are not remarkable for fertility — and the presence of extra nipples seems to be a sign of increased fertility. Four-nippled Merinoes are more liable to have lambs than the two-nippled Ewes. In native sheep — which are usually fertile — the extra nipples again indicate an increased tendency to have lambs. Four-nippled Ewes are more liable to have twins than the others. We are all speculating regarding the offspring of the six-nippled Ewe. What I would like would be a six-nippled Ram. Johnny says — “Four-

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nippled twins." Mr. McCurdy pokes fun at us — and says "A single lamb — two nipples"! What will the offspring be.

Went to laboratory at 5 p. m. Worked at my sheep cards making tables of results of last year's breeding. Mr. Ellis has been at work upon graphophone printing. Have given him a job to make 50 plaster casts from small tapering ozokerite cylinders — so that I may make a series of experiments to determine best way of obtaining an ozokerite print from a plaster mould. He is not ready for me yet. Has only 23 moulds finished. Work interrupted today in order to finish one of my non-freezable water barrels for the Merino sheep. Windmill has arrived. If we have fine weather hope to set it going 4 in Sheepville pumping water from the mountain spring into a tank in the barn. Been very cold and stormy here — everything wrapped in snow and ice. Milder today. Mr. McCurdy's photographs of the sheep have turned out well. Mr. McInnis is now arranging a fixed stand on the mountain for photographing sheep — and we hope to take about 50 photographs of the ancestors of the new breed that is to be!

A and B are two upright posts to which two of the legs of a sheep will be strapped. The posts will not show in the photograph. In this way every sheep will stand in exactly the same place. The camera will also be in a fixed position. We will try to get the sheep to look at a fixed place — perhaps a hand full of oats at C. These photos — if successful — may perhaps be capable of yielding interesting results — by composite photography. Perhaps a composite of the ancestors of a lamb — may resemble the lamb himself etc., etc. Some dark stuff has been purchased to cover the exposed side of the sheep-barn — and on it will be pinned a large card — with the name of the sheep — for example: 34 of 91 — The card will be photographed with the sheep — so that we can identify every picture in our gallery. Mr. McCurdy yesterday photographed the nipples of the six-nippled sheep. Not developed yet — it has been sent to Watson the photographer. Distance 4 feet.

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After supper — one game of chess — beaten by a flush — and then A.A.P.T.S.D. address until Mr. McCurdy went to bed at 12:30. 5 Then I started on this journal. Hope to write something every night to send to Italy.

Mr. McCurdy all right now — looking strong and well. The daily double walk up mountain has done him good.

Mr. Ellis is suffering from headache and the blues — produced I think by the discovery that the main features of his Fire-escape Portable Ladder — have been anticipated by others. Think he may be able to get a patent however — though I fear — not one of much value.

Noted at Beinn Bhreagh — Dec. 21st, 1891.

AGB