

Eric BYRD

His travels and other data extracted, based on correspondence with Hugh Tracey, from the archives of ILAM, Rhodes University, Grahamstown

Letter dated 19th September, 1965

Eric Byrd's contact address then:
1039 Closse Street
Montreal 25

*N.B.: Hugh Tracey's address is given as:
The Fortune Theatre, Russell St., London WC2*

Selected contents:

Eric had just received manuscripts of Hugh Tracey's book. Eric's brother was living in Montreal 29.

The "Ballets Africains" (West Coast dancers) were appearing in Montreal, and he was amused to see the entirely un-African faces appearing in drawings for articles on the company – white or rather European faces with a change of colour only. He hoped publishers would have someone who knows Africans, should they not use his drawings.

Eric had just had a letter from Zululand to say that his "Stations of the Cross" for a church there are "magnificent" (he himself was not so sure) – Hugh Tracey had helped him in posting the "Stations".

Letter dated 23rd October, 1965

Eric Byrd's contact address then:
1039 Closse Street
Montreal 25

Eric was waiting for Hugh Tracey's answer as he did not know where to send the rest of the illustrations. He hoped the publishers liked the sample illustrations.

Eric's brother was an authority on English.

Eric had been back from holidays already since 6 weeks.

Edgard Brooke and his wife Heidi had come to tea on 21st October, 1965. Brooke used to be Head of Adams Mission in Natal and also represented the Coloured people in Parliament. He had last seen him in March, writing a history of Natal; Brooke was one of the most brilliant people Eric knew and one of the wittiest. They had come from Kinston, Ontario, where Brooke had been invited to lecture.

Letter dated 7th July, 1966

Eric Byrd's contact address then:

c/o Mr Keith Adams

409 Currie Road,

Durban

Selected contents:

End of June, 1966, Eric had been travelling to London (2 weeks), Montreal and Johannesburg (2 days), Krugersdorp (2 weeks), then Durban, to be followed by a trip to Zululand to paint and visit the game reserves. End of August/early September he was going to be in Johannesburg and 2 weeks in the Cape.

In London, he could have gone to see Colin Franklin, but did not; Eric's cousins were ill.

He hoped Hugh Tracey's African stories were a big hit.

Letter dated 27th August, 1966

Eric Byrd's contact address then:

c/o Mr A.G. Byrd

18 Haraldene Road,

Durban

Selected contents:

Eric had a sudden run of portraits and other commissions in Zululand and he had now recovered all his outlay in travelling expenses.

He had not gone to the Cape as intended and could not stay in the Transvaal as he was flying off from Durban on 30th August to Johannesburg to take a connecting BOAC plane to London where he was to be until 10th September, intending to visit Hugh Tracey's publishers as suggested, and enjoying the delights of London.

In London, he was going to stay with Mr E.L. Hutchings, 59 Hogarth Gardens, Heston Hounslow, Middlesex UK, thereafter at his normal Montreal address.

Eric had just had a letter offering him classes to teach in place of those he had dropped in 1965 at Sir George Williams University. So he would not after all be destitute on his return. He hoped to confine his classes to Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings which would give him the days for painting and some really long week-ends.

Letter dated 26th May, 1967

Eric Byrd's contact address then:

c/o Mr K Law

11 Worsley Rd.,

Hampstead

London NW3

Selected contents:

Eric was leaving Hampstead on 26th May, 1967, en route for Denmark, then South Africa. He would not be able to greet Andrew and Paul (Tracey).

Eric mentioned that Kenneth was his brother, whose son was Christopher, also an actor, who would love to meet Andrew and Paul whose show he had seen with Eric in London.

Letter dated 21st May, 1970

Eric Byrd's contact address then:
1039 Closse Street
Montreal 108

Selected contents:

Eric had received the Mbira photographs from Hugh. He had heard nothing for a long time from New York. On 30th May, 1970, he was leaving Montreal for London en route to Rhodesia and later South Africa.

He would be until 11th June c/o Ken Law, 54 Pilgrims Way, London NW3, after that c/o Ray Clark, P.O. Box H.G. 94, Salisbury, until 18th June and finally c/o Dr Harry Barlin, P.O. Box 74, Klerksdorp.

He was looking forward to see Hugh Tracey soon.

Letter dated 16th July, 1970

Eric Byrd's contact address then:
c/o Glen van Rooyen
Box 16
Mtubatuba, Zululand

Selected contents:

Eric had been in hospital in Klerksdorp after an examination by his doctor friend there, with whom he was staying. After a week's stay in hospital, Eric's friend's wife brought him down to Durban. He was going to be taken by friends to Mtubatuba where he had to do some portraits. He had then to return to Klerksdorp for further examinations as various things were wrong with him.

He wrote he had been honoured with the attention of 8 different doctors in hospital, most of them friends. This was his first thorough check-up in 65 years.

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