

# 11. His Mission Life

## Mr Maloga

As you now know, I have really been searching for Grampa's story since I was a seven-year-old boy. But it's been over the past 30 years (since the 1970s) that I have been undertaking more serious research, seeking out answers to my many questions about Grampa Thomas Shadrach James, his life here and his life in his homeland wherever that might be. I would ask anyone who would listen what they could tell me about Grampa, and as I have mentioned earlier in this story, it was surprising to me how different his children's stories were about him. I just couldn't seem to pin down with confidence the real story. The only really consistent story I was hearing was that he had been studying medicine at Melbourne University, contracted typhoid fever which left him with the shakes, and had to leave the course because he could no longer go on to be a surgeon as was his dream.

So it was a real blessing when my son George gave me a gift in the 1970s – a copy of Nancy Cato's book *Mr Maloga*. What a find this book was! I was hungry for more information about Grampa and this compilation of Daniel Matthews' diary notes from his days on Maloga Mission was priceless to me. I couldn't put it down. I read it and re-read it and read it again. I gleaned bits and pieces about Grampa's life on Maloga Mission written through the eyes of Daniel Matthews. This chapter relies heavily on this book.

Nancy Cato states in *Mr Maloga* that during the period 1866 to 1872 Daniel Matthews had been planning the establishment of Maloga Mission. Sometime during that period (date unknown) he wrote an article in the *Riverine Herald* in Echuca titled 'Plea for Aborigines – Situation Deplorable':

The deplorable conditions of the Aboriginal tribes around Echuca should excite deep concern and call forth the sympathies of those who possess the smallest part of fellow feeling ... Do the simplest teachings of humanity suggest a remedy? Cannot sufficient amount of moral sensibility and benevolence be found among the people of a professedly Christian community to ameliorate the condition of those degraded beings who have never even been enemies to us? We possess their land, we march unmolested through the length and breadth of their territory, we dwell in peace and security upon the soil which they inherited from their ancestors, we derive amusement and realize profit from what was formerly their only means of subsistence – hunting and fishing.

And our liberal minded government, as compensation for these natural gifts, that have been so unwittingly yielded up by their sable possessors have doled out to them in most parsimonious manner, an occasional blanket and a few paltry stores that are anything but timely and adequate to their wants.

I ask you sir – in the name of humanity – is it fair? Is it honest?

Daniel and Janet Matthews eventually opened Maloga Mission in June 1874.

## The Revival Camp

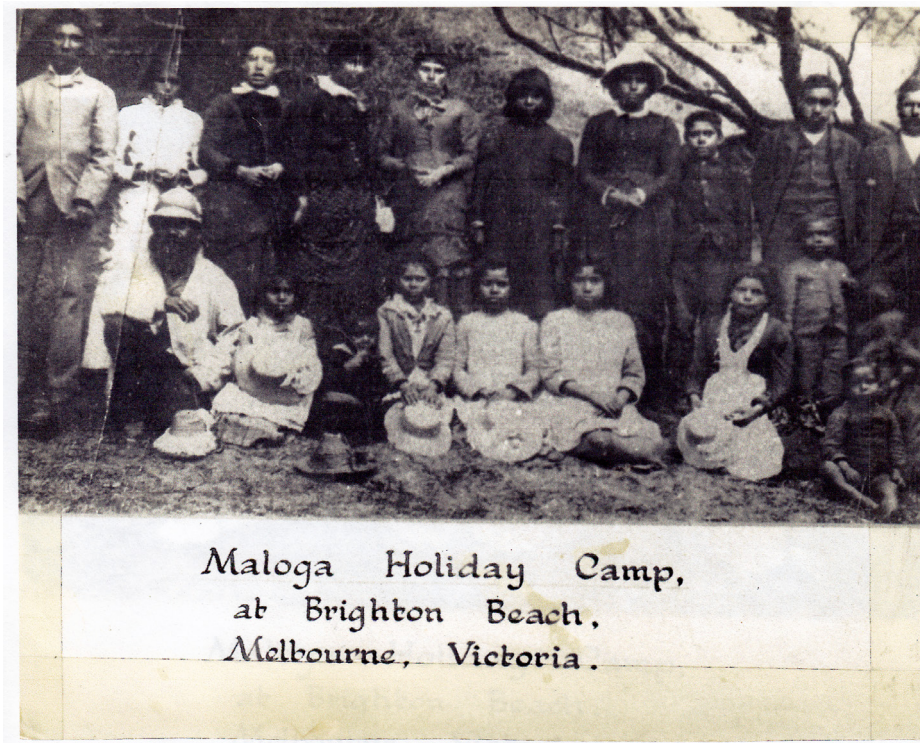
On 3 January 1881, 41 Maloga residents, including my wife Brenda's grandfather, Bagot Morgan, travelled with Daniel Matthews, a Cornish missionary, to Brighton Beach to hold a Revival Camp. Daniel Matthews was speaking publicly in an effort to encourage other Aboriginal people to return to Maloga with them for a better life. Bagot Morgan was one of those Aboriginal men pivotal in the establishment of Maloga Mission. They were responsible for encouraging our people to come to live on the mission for their own protection and wellbeing.



**My wife Brenda's grandfather – Bagot Morgan.**

Source: GBRN Collection.

Grampa James happened to come across the Maloga group at Brighton Beach, heard Daniel Matthews speaking, was immediately inspired and offered to return to Maloga and provide assistance.



**The Maloga Revival Group that Grampa met at Brighton Beach in 1881.**

Source: GBRN Collection.

So it's possible then that this fits well with the story about Grampa studying medicine at Melbourne University and having to withdraw due to illness. Could he have been feeling lost and forlorn after having to leave the course? He may have been walking along the beach one day wondering what he should do with his life. It seems that that day – the day he met the Maloga mob – fate stepped in and opened a door for Grampa, leading him to a group of people who would heal him of his illness; to a group of people who would welcome him in as one of their own; to a group of people whose lives he would forever touch and be a part of. Nanny Pris said that her father told her 'the Lord had spoken to me that day', leading him to this group of people and a new life. Grampa really believed he had found where he was meant to go. It was a 'calling'.

The Maloga group did in fact heal Grampa of the typhoid fever with special bush medicines and he became fascinated by the power of such plants.

Then, according to *Our Aim: Journal of the Aborigines Inland Mission* (1913), Grampa returned to Brighton Beach on 14 December 1888 with a group of 60 Cummeragunga residents. There was another outbreak of typhoid fever during

which Grampa was struck down. The epidemic continued on Cummeragunga on their return and there were many deaths including Uncle William Cooper's wife Annie and her infant son Bartlett who died in January 1889.

## Teaching

It is clear from reading Daniel Matthews' diary that Daniel and Janet Matthews set the stage for education at Maloga and Cummeragunga. In the early days of Maloga the teaching of Aboriginal children was inconsistent as the children would initially tend to come and go. Mr and Mrs Matthews fought to establish the school at Maloga with many challenges from those around them who did not agree with their continued efforts to help Aboriginal people. Both provided a good introduction to education, but our people were understandably often suspicious of white men in those days. They would come to the mission and then, having fear put into them by the actions of unscrupulous white people, they would leave in the dark of night with their children. This routine changed as the community settled into Maloga and their trust in Daniel Matthews began to grow.

Daniel Matthews wrote in his diary entry for 26 July 1874: 'This morning we welcomed the arrival of our first Aboriginal Scholars. They were two girls both aged around fourteen years old.' On 31 August 1874 it is noted by Daniel Matthews that: 'Today the children had their first arithmetic lesson on slates. Kitty [Granny Ada's mother] came in with the children for a reading lesson and learned four letters of the alphabet'. Things went along okay for a few weeks until: 'Kitty rolled her blankets once more and decamped, taking her younger children and then the two older girls ran away to Barmah'. This type of to-ing and fro-ing went on for Daniel Matthews for many years, with him struggling to get stability on the mission and in the school.

Then, finally, in December 1876, it is noted by Daniel Matthews that:

There is no doubt the missionaries loved their work and were convinced that physical cleanliness, education and holiness went hand in hand. To some of the (Aboriginal) people, however, their ways remained incomprehensible with some saying:

"Too much praying wear-im out trouser;" &

"Me married enough already!" &

"Too much all-a-time worry 'bout nothing!"

How true! According to Mr Matthews our Aboriginal people were happy that someone was taking an interest in them and their children: 'They were no longer outcasts; there was one place where they were welcome'.





**The Maloga Community – see Grampa in front of second house from the right with black hat on.**

Source: GBRN Collection.

## The Teacher

In 1881, when Grampa Thomas Shadrach James returned to Maloga with the Brighton Beach Revival Camp members and took up his teaching assistant post, things started to change. It would seem that from that point in time Grampa took education to another level. He was able to maintain some consistency of students in the classroom and was able to negotiate with parents to send their children to school.

He became a permanent assistant to Daniel Matthews following the school receiving its recognition as a State School on 1 August 1881. Mr Matthews states that his teaching assistant was: 'an educated Indian from Mauritius. He spoke fluent Tamil as well as French and English. As Mauritius was a European-dominated island, he was particularly well suited to understanding the problems of his new pupils'.

## The Scholars Hut

And then there was the 'Scholars Hut'. I note that Mr Matthews always seemed to refer to his students as 'Scholars' right from the very beginning of Maloga Mission. On 10 April 1885 he refers to how well Grampa is 'getting on with his adult class, the Scholars Class at night in the men's hut; and Miss Affleck was teaching the older women'.

Nancy Cato explains that in August 1883 'Daniel Matthews stepped down as school teacher and the gentle Indian school teacher Thomas James, who was much liked by his pupils, was duly appointed at a salary of 168 pounds a year and 44 pounds board'.



**Cummeragunga, 1889, soon after the move from Maloga Mission. See Grampa in the dark suit, aged 29.**

Source: Jackomos Collection, AIATSIS.

On 28 August 1891, Grampa wrote to Thomas Pearson Esq, Inspector of Schools, seeking a promotion. He stated that: 'I took charge of the school on 1 October 1883 but previous to my appointment I had already served two years in it, nominally as an assistant, but virtually doing the whole of the work and being paid by Mr Matthews at the rate of £20 per annum.'

Under the direction of the new Cummeragunga Mission Manager Mr Bellenger, our people were moved from Maloga Mission to Cummeragunga with Grampa taking possession of the new school on 2 November 1888.

When the community was moved to Cummeragunga, Grampa continued on as teacher there and became a steady and reliable focus for generations of school children. But he was not only important for the young children. He was passionate about the importance of life-long learning and as soon as he arrived he set up the 'Scholars Hut' just as it was at Maloga.

The NSW Government report of 1892–93 stated that: 'At Cummeroogunga there was always a qualified teacher; at this time Mr James. The teacher is popular and esteemed. Also he acts as a medical adviser in part; his influence is very beneficial'.

While Grampa was not, initially, a qualified teacher, his daughter Nanny Pris told me that he travelled to the Education Department in Hay (New South Wales) to complete examinations which resulted in him receiving his qualification as a School Teacher.

Many students were able to continue their education after leaving school, with boys and men attending night Scholars classes in the men's hut with Grampa; and many girls and women attending classes with Miss Affleck. This was a place separate from the school, where older children and adults could come to learn literacy and numeracy and even more importantly, leadership skills, world politics and how to write formal letters.

## Growing the School

From about 1905 onwards, once schools were established and school attendance for Aboriginal children was becoming more consistent, the authorities started to put restrictions on the level of education the Aboriginal children could have. This meant that they were only permitted to advance to grade four before they were forced out of education to work around the mission or over at local stations, Moira Station and Madowla Park. Boys such as Brenda's father Ronald Morgan were riding boundary at Moira Station checking fences and stock. As time went by and World War One began, girls were ordered to knit and sew for soldiers at war, or put out as domestic labour under the ever-changing government legislation relating to Aboriginal children.

During his first 20 years of teaching at Cummeragunga, Grampa grew the school to the point that, in 1910, there were approximately 90 students. This was an enormous achievement for Grampa given that his classroom was so small, and was filled with both Aboriginal and white children learning and growing together.

## The Husband and Father

### The Wedding

On 10 April 1885 Mr Matthews noted in his diary that Grampa James came to him and advised him that he wanted to marry Ada Cooper (Granny Kitty Cooper's daughter) and that he had insured his life for 500 pounds. He clearly thought he was now well equipped to take on a wife. He was 26 years old and she was 18. Daniel Matthews gave his permission.

On 14 May 1885 Grampa and Granny Ada were married in a double wedding with Annabella and Edward Rivers (Joachim). As noted in *Mr Maloga*, Matthews reported that:

Weather bright and lovely, cold and rather frosty ..... Mrs Matthews and the women were busy preparing for the wedding feast – we had a Grand dinner spread in the (old) schoolhouse – Rev J.C. Johnstone and wife arrived at 1.30 ... at 3 the ceremony began ..... Ada looked well – rich dress and hat – Annabella dress and pretty hat – warm and loving congratulations – kisses – sumptuous spread – real brides' cakes – proper tea meeting ... with fruit tarts etc ..... Mr Johnston spoke of the marked improvement in our people – clean, healthy, intelligent appearance – Ada's advancement – improvement in position. Amusing games for all to conclude – fireworks – had to repress dancing men.

It was further noted that Granny Ada 'was now very different from the wild little thing who came down from the Moira Station Black's camp in Daniel Matthews buggy in 1874'.

In fact, on 1 November 1874, Matthews refers to four canoes coming down from O'Shanassy's station, with Maria (pronounced Mariah), her daughter Kitty and Kitty's children Ada aged five and Jacky aged seven. Great-Great-Granny Kitty was 45 years old then, so Great-Great-Great-Grandmother Maria must have been a good age. Kitty's other children coming and going between Moira Station and Maloga at that time were Billy (Uncle William Cooper), Bobby, and Lizzie.

*Robynne: This record of Granny Ada's age suggests that when they married in 1885, Grampa was 26 years old and Granny Ada was 16 years old – a ten year difference.*

On 17 May 1885, three days after the wedding, Daniel Matthews made note that: 'Mr. James appears very happy in his married life ... very kind to quite a group of children, & feeds them'.



## Raising a Family

### The James' Children

Granny Ada and Grampa went on to have eight children as previously noted, with the oldest being Miriam Esther (born 1886) and the youngest being Thomas Carey (born 4 July 1908).

*Robynne: Uncle Carey James senior's birth certificate notes that Granny Ada is only four years younger than Grampa. I am more inclined to take the word of the birth certificate, details from which would have more likely come directly from Grampa and Granny, as the informants.*

Uncle Carey's birth certificate also notes the ages of the older children: Miriam was 22, Priscilla 'Pris' 20, Shadrach 'Shady' 18, Rebecca 'Becky' 14, Louisa 'Louie' 12, Garfield 'Garchy' eight, and Ivy was six years old.

### Lost Children

However Uncle Carey's birth certificate also mentions another child born after Aunt Ivy as: 'Deceased male 1, named Gamaliel'. N.B: Remember this name Gamaliel as it may be useful later in this story. Gamaliel was one year old when he died.

There was another child born to Granny Ada and Grampa; a 'stillborn' male baby. According to Granny Ada's sick leave request and medical certificate, this birth took place on 8 April 1913. The following day Granny Ada applied for: 'usual leave for accouchement'.

As previously mentioned, Grampa and Granny faced further tragedy when their son Garfield 'Garchi' was killed after falling from a horse. I understand, from the stories I have heard over my lifetime, that he was approximately 17 years old at the time, so I estimate this occurred in 1917.

## The Farm Blocks

### Allocating Farm Blocks

In 1888, after petitions and letters from Maloga people over the previous two years, the newly formed Aborigines Protection Board (APB) allocated farming blocks from the Cummeragunga Mission land for individual families. These farm

blocks were understood to be in response to letters written by Uncle William Cooper and my Great-Grandfather John Atkinson in 1887, which explained that Aboriginal people desperately wanted to farm land on their own country.

Grandfather John's letter said:

I want a grant of land I can call my own that I can leave at my death to my wife and children ... Having for several years tried to save enough to pay for a selection I find it an utter impossibility ... We know that grants of land have been made to the Aborigines in other parts of New South Wales ... be good enough to give our tribe a trial.

William Cooper's letter was similar and he added that he called on the government to secure: 'this small portion of a vast territory which is ours by Divine Right'.

The original block holders, including Brenda's Grandfather Bagot Morgan, were told that this land was to be theirs forever. My father-in-law Ronald Morgan describes the Cummeragunga land:

At its origin, this place comprised a large area of land, some thousands of acres of virgin soil, being made up, as it is of rich high country, with sand hills that pass through a portion. It is topped off by having the Murray flowing from one of its boundary's end to the other. The timber that grows there is of a mixed variety. There is the black and grey box, the yellow jack, Murray pine and, along the river flats, the old red gums. As I draw a mental picture of how I can first remember it I often think of what it was. To look today one would never imagine that it ever existed. But there was wealth in it. If only this land could be cleared and cultivated one would not find a better property in the Riverina. (Morgan 1952)

## Smart Farming

These farm blocks were always too small to support a family but, as Heather Goodall notes, Aboriginal people 'used them in the most sensible and economic ways possible', given bad seasons and undercapitalisation. Cummera families farmed the land when the seasons were good and leased them for income from agistment when the seasons were bad. The annual crop figures proved that Cummeragunga farmers were able to bring in harvests which equalled or bettered the local average yields, as Diane Barwick explained in her article 'Coranderrk and Cumeroogunga: Pioneers and Policy'.

## The Letters and Documents

For Grampa and the Cummeragunga residents life was fairly settled in the years from 1888 to around 1908 even though there was a terrible depression and drought in the 1890s.

Over the years that Grampa was the teacher at the schools on Maloga and Cummeragunga, he wrote many letters, reports and complaints to various people and authorities including the NSW Education Department and APB. And there were many letters and reports written by others relating to Grampa and Maloga or Cummeragunga. These tell us a great deal about what life was like on both missions, the challenges in the schools, what problems Grampa and the community were facing and how he tried to achieve justice for the community.

Grampa's letters are beautifully written in polite and refined English in copper plate calligraphy. I write about these – not in chronological order, but in a topical order as you will see from the following sub headings.

### Reporting to Chief Inspectors

Grampa was expected to report to the Chief Inspectors regularly on all matters relating to the management of Maloga and Cummeragunga schools. These reports included attendance records, advice of widespread sickness in the school (for example scarlatina – scarlet fever), and other important school matters.

### Fighting for Children's Rights

This reporting process provided Grampa with an avenue for firmly voicing the needs of our Aboriginal children in the Maloga and Cummeragunga schools, through the power of his pen. Grampa's penmanship is second to none with him able to so eloquently outline the issues, needs and concerns as he saw them. In fact the majority of Grampa's letters refer to the many occasions when the children did not have the appropriate standard of equipment, books, paper to write on, pencils, school buildings, furniture, or comfort that children in other schools in the district did.

Grampa often had to literally beg for better conditions for our children, including funds to build extensions onto the school, to buy school books, or to even start a vegie garden for the children to maintain as part of their learning.



### **Cummeragunga School – Grampa with his students.**

Source: GBRN Collection. High Resolution copy provided by AIATSIS, Jackomos Collection.

There were times when he wrote about the unforgiving heat in the summer, cold dampness in the winter and the impact on the children in the small classrooms.

His many requests fell on deaf ears and so he would have to purchase the materials himself from his private funds, to ensure that the children did not go without. In one particular letter to Thomas Pearson, the Chief Inspector of Schools on 28 August 1891, Grampa states that: 'The parents being too poor to supply the children with writing copy books ... I have borne this expense from my own purse for many years'.

Grampa had both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in his school and he fought for the rights of all, equally. This is obvious when he writes to Lynch, the Chief Inspector of Schools on 25 July 1910 asking about the level of power Mr Harris, the Cummeragunga Manager, has to stop 'white children' attending Cummeragunga School. There were plans by Mr Harris and some farmers to establish another school for white children on the sandhill at Mr Bremner's farm highlighting the danger for the kids having to cross the Murray River every day, twice a day. This school would be completely separate from the Aboriginal school and Grampa was against this.



Remember it's during the period 1909–10 that the laws are changing in relation to Aboriginal people and the APB is given full control over any child of an Aboriginal, among other changes that are significantly impacting on the rights of Aboriginal people.

Life is changing rapidly on the mission and Grampa is trying to stay one step ahead by writing many letters day after day fighting for our rights and seeking further information about the changes taking place; this would have been very time consuming for a man whose time was already taken up with his many responsibilities on Cummera. I can just see Grampa in the darkness of night sitting by candlelight in his hut, surrounded by his wife and children, writing letter after letter, very carefully laying out the issues, putting down the facts, backing it up with his explanations and laying out how this might return some positive outcome to the authorities that they might enjoy. For example, better educational outcomes or improved school attendance.

## Leading and Writing

It has been stated by many over the years that Grampa was a great teacher to our children and adults on Maloga and Cummeragunga, both in his classroom and in the Scholars Hut. In fact many of his students went on to great things in the Australian political scene. How did Aboriginal students from Cummeragunga take such an enormous leap? We suggest that it was no accident at all, but a clever, calculated and systematic approach taken by Grampa to empower Aboriginal people to become great *leaders and writers*. And that's exactly what many became! Our opinion comes from a letter we have found, which was written by Grampa on 28 August 1891, to Thomas Pearson Esq, the then Inspector of Schools. He advised that he was seeking a promotion and provides in his own words the reasons why he is deserving of this promotion.

Grampa states firmly in his letter that:

I have most persistently endeavoured to promote the importance of education in every possible way, not only amongst the pupils in the school, but among the parents on the mission. And if I have not succeeded in making them fine Scholars, I have at least taught them to realise the importance of *Leading and Writing* ... Although a native of Mauritius, I am an Asiatic Indian by birth and feeling specially adapted for the work among the Aboriginal children. It is my wish to remain here with the sanction of the Minister.

This letter highlights that Grampa worked hard to instil the importance of *leading and writing*. Please see a small portion of this letter in Chapter 24 ( Image 106 ). We know this is true as we look today at the wide range of powerful leaders who came out of his school room and Scholars Hut. It's a who's who of Aboriginal politics in Australia in the early 1900s. Aboriginal men and

women whose writing and leadership skills were second to none, had stepped directly out of his Scholars Hut on the Mission and onto the Australian political stage. And they weren't alone. There were so many others who led quietly on a local community level, still showing great leadership in their families and communities. They may not have been the public faces of the community, but they were there working quietly behind the scenes using their writing skills to seek justice for our people in their letters to politicians and newspapers.

## Reasoning

If the children didn't attend school, then Grampa would visit the parents and reason with them to get their kids to attend. Grampa himself writes in a report to Thomas Pearson, Inspector of Schools on 28 August 1891 that:

Certain results such as good attendance and punctuality are attainable and these I have maintained for many years as a result of constantly visiting and reasoning with parents ... speaking to the Scholars themselves and seeking at all times to make their work in school a pleasure rather than a task.

It seems that this approach led to 'good will' all round, rather than forcing children to attend.

## The Teacher's Rights

Grampa's efforts to ensure justice for all didn't stop at our people. He did the same for all around him, including his non-Aboriginal teacher's assistants. If he heard that an equivalent assistant at another school was receiving better pay or a living away allowance, he would soon be writing to the authorities to request the same for his assistants and himself.

In July 1900 he got wind of other teachers in the region being paid a living allowance that he and his assistant Miss Falconer were not. He therefore made application on behalf of both of them and was successful. He then applied to have this back dated to 1 July 1899 and again was successful. This was a prime example of how well Grampa could negotiate terms on behalf of himself and his staff.

There were times when Grampa even had to request, if not plead, that he be allowed to stay at Cummeragunga. He always hoped to see out his career there. But even after 20 to 30 years, he still lived with the fear of being moved on to another area at any moment, if a station manager or chief inspector wasn't happy with him.

*Robynne: Even with all he was doing for our people, he was facing his own personal challenges, including racism, illness, the fear of being moved at any moment,*

*harassment of him and his family, and the pressure of answering to the APB, NSW Education Department, station managers and chief inspectors. He was really carrying an enormous load.*

## The Sick Children

There are numerous occasions outlined in Grampa's letters when the majority of his students were away from school due to the serious outbreak of one medical condition or another, including: a measles outbreak in October 1893 lasting over one month and leaving only four students in the school; scarlatina (scarlet fever) epidemic in March 1897; influenza outbreak in November 1899; and the influenza and whooping cough outbreak in August 1902. In the outbreak of 1899, Grampa, Miss Falconer and 30 'Scholars' were all ill. He therefore sought and received permission to close the school during this period. In the outbreak of August 1902 Grampa wrote an urgent letter to Mr Drummond Esq, Inspector of Schools, titled 'Prevalence of Communicable Diseases' stating that 'influenza, croup and whooping cough have broken out here, every house, including my own being affected' and requesting permission to close the school. This outbreak led to 50 of his then 86 students being kept home due to the illness. Those who weren't sick were kept home out of fear of them coming down with the medical condition at the school. It wasn't until the epidemic had also reached the inspector's own household that he allowed Grampa to close the school doors.

It seemed ridiculous to read that Grampa would have to beg to close the school at a time when most students were away sick with a highly contagious disease. At one stage the school remained open even with no students in attendance. The delays in receiving definitive responses from the Education Department caused additional strain on Grampa's ability to take appropriate steps to safeguard his students, family and community. In the case of the 1902 communicable diseases epidemic, he received a reply to his urgent telegram two weeks later, but still no approval for school closure was given; instead he received more questions from the APB and NSW Education Department delaying the outcome he sought.

## The Sick Teacher

There are quite a number of instances where Grampa himself became seriously ill and the doctor ordered him to take time out. At one stage he had been so ill for so long that the doctor ordered him to take leave and go away for some well-earned rest. At other times Grampa had requested time away, however, the Chief Inspector tended to take so long to respond that by the time a response was received it was too late. He had forcibly worked through the illness and soldiered on.

Grampa required significant time off when he was ill with fever in March 1890, with influenza in 1899, and with fever and renal colic in 1908.

An influenza epidemic in November 1901 led to Grampa being so ill (as were some of his family) that his doctor ordered him to get away to the seaside for a break. He intended to do so by horse and buggy and sought permission to close the school because Miss Falconer would not be able to cope with so many students alone. Permission was granted.

It seems that working in the school meant Grampa was susceptible to all the illnesses children got. As time went on, Grampa was becoming more and more susceptible to lung and kidney related medical conditions and was sick more often than most may have realised.

His work conditions, dealing with the authorities, the blatant racial issues against both him and the Aboriginal community, the demands on his time, losses within his family, poor housing conditions, poor school conditions, the continued fight for Aboriginal rights, complaints against Grampa, the manager's vendettas against him and his family, enormous strain and stress, inequality of pay and other allowances, continued denial of promotion to appropriate rates, the strain of the loss of the farm blocks for our people in 1908 and even the vulnerability of his teaching position with his every day fear that he may be moved on to a teaching position elsewhere due to his strong advocacy role for our community, all inevitably built up to cause significant strain on his ongoing health and wellbeing.

At times Grampa's illnesses aligned with some disturbing event taking place around him, suggesting that he likely internalised the problems, feeling powerless in his advocacy role; powerless to help; and literally worried himself sick.

*Robynne: It's important to note that in February 1908 a joint complaint was written about Grampa and his family by a group of men led by George Harris, the mission manager. This led to months of uncertainty, unnecessary strain and the need to fight the complaint. Any wonder that Grampa was so ill during 1908. As will be explained in the next chapter, the farm blocks were starting to be taken away from the Aboriginal men on Cummeragunga in 1907, so by 1908 the aftermath was devastating for our people, with Grampa in the middle of it. I have no doubt that Grampa continued to try and 'keep the peace' and advocate on our behalf, but he must have felt so churned up and powerless over it all. What became clear is that with Grampa and our people copping the wrath of George Harris and friends during 1908, this would be the beginning of the end of Cummeragunga.*

It has also been noted in letters written by Chief Inspectors about Grampa that he had at least two bouts of typhoid fever in his life. One of those was when studying medicine; another was in 1888 when he took a group of Cummera residents back to Brighton Beach.



On many occasions he worked on, regardless of his illnesses; on other occasions he was so weak and ill that his leave request would state: 'I am so very weak that I can scarcely ask for less time off'. At such times, the letters are in someone else's handwriting, most likely one of his children.

## The Dirty School Books

There came a time in October 1889, following a report by Inspector Long, that Grampa was ordered to answer why the children's school books were 'dirty'. Grampa wrote a lengthy response explaining that he examined the children twice a day, including their hands, and that their hands were washed. He could not explain how the books got dirty except to suggest it might be from the children's clothing which would inevitably get dirty just from the normal 'play' that children do.

## The Clergymen

Then, on 20 December 1890, Grampa had a visit from two Clergymen from Sunbury and Moama. While visiting they inspected and found the conditions of the school highly unsanitary and air flow in the school insufficient for the number of children in the building. Grampa reported their findings back to Pearson, the Inspector of Schools, and also stated that three quarters of the children were suffering from phthisis, a disease relating to the wasting away or atrophy of the body or body parts, usually related to tuberculosis.

## Chanter's Report

J.A. Chanter MLA made a visit to Cummeragunga in January 1899 to inspect the school and teacher's residence and reported that:

The school building is altogether inadequate for the healthful requirements of so many children and in a warm climate such as this must be very deleterious to the health of the children and teacher ... The teacher's residence I venture to say, is the worst provided for any teacher in the colony. One's head almost touches the tin roof. And although unsuitable in the colder portions of the year, in the summer months it's a marvel to me that the teacher and his family have not been stricken down by a serious illness.

*Robynne: Grampa writes time and again in his letters about the conditions of the school in that it was too small, contained, hot, cold, and therefore a good*

*environment for health conditions to spread like fire. This is why the school was constantly inundated with widespread sickness amongst the kids and teachers. If one got it, then most did! It seems Chanter also agrees.*

## Going Home, 1892

As kids we never heard much about Grampa being in touch with his mysterious family and homeland overseas. But his letters show that he not only kept in touch with family in Mauritius and Sri Lanka, but actually went home on a couple of occasions to Mauritius.

One of these trips was in 1892 when Grampa went home to see his father. He wrote to the Chief Inspector of Schools in November 1891 seeking four months leave to return to Mauritius, explaining that he hadn't seen his father in 15 years and now wished to visit him.

He mentions in this letter that he wished to depart on 30 December via the 'Australien of the Messageries Maritime Co'. His request also stated: 'I further beg that you will be good enough to permit my wife and family to stay in the teacher's residence'.

He was obviously worried that his family would be moved out of their home while he was on holiday. He also asked that Granny Ada receive his six weeks pay during his absence but this was declined. Grampa left Australia for Mauritius on the date he suggested he would. However, once he got to Mauritius he received a letter from the Under Secretary approving his leave from a date one week later than Grampa had sought.

Grampa wrote back from Mauritius to the Chief Inspector outlining the error and seeking correction. He went on to say that:

I am very much distressed about my return passage to Australia. I have a return ticket, but the agent, owing to smallpox raging on the island, will neither send me back, nor refund the money. I will seize the first opportunity of returning by a sailing vessel.

*Robynne: Grampa himself has stated he is very much distressed and you can feel the sense of urgency with which he has written this letter. He had planned on spending approximately four months in Mauritius, but had arrived to a smallpox outbreak and was desperate to leave and return home. Due to the agent's restrictions he mentions, he had some fear that he may not get home to his wife and family.*

Grampa's replacement while he was in Mauritius was one Mr Cavan, who, upon arriving at Cummeragunga, was horrified to discover he was at an Aboriginal mission. He immediately wrote to the Chief Inspector Maynard on 13 January 1892 stating:

I protest against my placement at this school as I was not aware when I received the appointment that the place was an Aboriginal mission station and the children attending the school are blacks. Had I known, I would have declined to accept the appointment and considering the way a single teacher has to live here, it would require a man with a very much stronger constitution than I possess to endure it.

Because Inspector Maynard could not find a replacement for Mr Cavan in a hurry, Mr Cavan was ordered to remain given that it was only a temporary appointment.

On 25 January 1892, Inspector Maynard made the following notation on Mr Cavan's letter: 'Mr James, his (Mr Cavan's) predecessor, a native of Mauritius, has contracted typhoid fever twice; a man of strong constitution and peculiarly fitted to the school ... I have no one willing to be sent', hence the need for Mr Cavan to remain as relief teacher until Grampa returned.

This wasn't good enough for Mr Cavan who immediately took extended sick leave, which likely took him through to Grampa's return. These were the desperate lengths he went to, to avoid mixing with Aboriginal people.

## Going Home, 1913

I also understand from family stories that Grampa took six months leave to return home again, probably in 1913–14. According to a *Riverine Herald* news article dated 15 December 1913: 'Mr James was about to leave on a well-earned holiday extending for six, perhaps for nine months'. Significantly, this article is titled: 'Social at Cummeragunga: T. S. James Honoured – A Happy Gathering'.

My cousin Rhonda Dean tells me that Grampa had begged Granny Ada to go with him on his travels back to his homeland, but she would not go. So he travelled alone. Rhonda also recalls her father, Uncle Carey Snr saying that Grampa never wanted to return home to Mauritius for good. He told Uncle Carey that his life was here now. He just liked to visit his family whenever he could.

As you can see from the article below, Grampa was well loved and respected by the community around him, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal in the district. This 'Happy Gathering' was a chance for people to give praise for him and the work he had tirelessly done for the people in the district.

Riverine Herald (Echuca, Vic. : Moama, NSW : 1869 - 1954), Monday 15 December 1913, page 2

## Social at Cummeragunja.

MR. T. S. JAMES HONORED.

### A HAPPY GATHERING.

A casual visitor to the prosperous mission station at Cummeragunja on Friday afternoon would have at once realised that there was something in the air. Everywhere there was bustle and preparation, and the residents hurrying hither and thither had an eager spirit of vivacity and expectation that spoke of great doings. The centre of this activity was at the Public school, where for the past 33 years Mr. T. S. James, in the old building and in the new, has conducted the educational affairs of the mission. And after this long life of devotion to the welfare of the mission Mr. James was about to leave on a well-earned holiday, extending for six, perhaps for nine, months. The Cummeragunja people, and, indeed, all those in the district, on the Victorian as well as the New South Wales side of the river, had determined to make the event a red letter one in the history of the mission. Not that they were glad that he was going, but that they were pleased that his services to them had been recognised, as they had long known them, and that he was to be sent out on a long holiday from which he would return stronger and better fitted to carry on the many offices which he fills on the mission. They had determined, therefore, to make the event a day of days. When a "Herald" representative arrived at the mission on Friday afternoon he, first of all, found his way to the school, where it had been arranged to give Mr. James a splendid send-off. He found the place alive with chattering children, eager women, and alert men, all busily engaged in transforming the staid building into a place of beauty. Flowers and festoons hung on the walls, over the door a "welcome" greeted the visitor, and inside that sentiment was repeated here and there in various forms. Even the old school room had not been neglected, and its walls were made bright with garlands of bush flowers, to which Mr. R. Fullarton, the well known travelling photographer, had added quite a picture gallery of photographs of the inhabitants, relieved here and there with cards of the local celebrities.

By 8 o'clock all was in readiness for the great event, and very soon after the doors had been opened the new school

the great event, and very soon after the doors had been opened the new school was well filled by an enthusiastic mirror audience. Every man, woman, child and baby in the settlement seemed to be present, and there were still more to come. By buggy from the outskirts, motor cars from greater distances, and by punt over the river the friends and admirers of Mr. James poured in. The final arrivals were a boat load of visitors from Barmah. Mr. Evans had kindly placed his steamer Edwards at their disposal, and when they reached the school the place was filled to overflowing. Many who came only heard what was going on through the open door and windows.

Only a few of the names of those present can be mentioned. The local committee of the mission was represented by Mr. A. E. Barlett (chairman), Mr. A. J. Counts, Mr. E. Berryman, and Senior-Constable Constantino. Messrs. J. Sanville and I. Martin sent apologies. Dr. Stoney, Miss Stoney, and Mrs. Hicks came from Echuca, and the "other side of the river" was represented by Mr. R. J. Evans, Mr. W. T. Maloney, Mr. G. Vowland, Mrs. Carr (Lower Moira), and a host of others.

Mr. B. Ferguson, manager of the mission, presided and welcomed the guests, and thereafter a long and entertaining programme of musical and other items was performed. At an interval the chairman introduced the chief purpose of the gathering, which he said had assembled to do honor to Mr. James, who was about to take a well-earned and well-deserved holiday. He spoke feelingly of the great services which Mr. James had rendered to the community over a long number of years, not only with regard to their physical, but to their moral and spiritual well-being.

Mr. Vowland spoke of the great good as an educationist the guest of the evening had accomplished, not only on the mission, but on the other side of the river, and how he had always been the friend and helper of the people generally in their times of need.

Mr. Barlett, on behalf of the committee, offered their congratulations, and spoke eloquently of the thoroughness of Mr. James' work as a teacher.

Mr. W. T. Maloney added his quota of grateful thanks, and expressed the wish that Mr. James might return from his holiday with a renewed strength and vigor that would enable him to work among them for many long years to come.

Dr. Stoney paid an eloquent tribute to Mr. James' assistance to him in attending



Mr. James' assistance to him in attending to the physical wants of the mission. Their guest had been nurse and friend to his patients, and he (Dr. Storer) could at any time leave in Mr. James' hands the treatment of any patient, with the assurance that when he returned everything that should be done would have been attended to.

Miss Ferguson, on behalf of the teachers of the Cummeragunja school, spoke of the kindly interest which Mr. James had at all times taken in pupils and teachers alike.

Mr. W. Matthews and Mr. Alf. Hill also spoke.

Mr. Ferguson, on behalf of the mission, presented Mr. James with a purse of sovereigns, and a handsome silver cup which the cricketers had won in 1888-1889. The latter, he said, would remind him of old friends who had passed away and of the esteem of many who remained. "We," continued Mr. Ferguson, "congratulate you on a long service of peace, and we hope that you may return renewed in health and vigor to continue a harmonious fellowship for many years."

Mr. Vrowland, on behalf of the Barmah residents, handed to Mr. James a purse of sovereigns, wishing him "in God's name" that all that was brightest and best should attend him in his walk of life.

Mr. James, who was received with three cheers, and long continued cheering, addressing those present as "friends," said he would not attempt words to express his thoughts, and would only appeal to their sympathy. The gift of sovereigns would vanish—he intended, and they intended, that they should vanish—but the gift of friendship, kindness, and goodwill would remain an unfading thing through all the days of his life. He had had his days of blackness and of sorrow, but this was for him and his a day of joy and exaltation.

The programme was continued until well after midnight, the entertainment being a most enjoyable one. The items given were the following:—Chorus, "Over the Sea," Cummeragunja Choral Society; song, "Killarney," Mr. J. Cooper; song, "Idle Words," Mrs. Briggs; recitation, "Man from Snowy River," Mr. G. Vrowland; song, "Recess," Mrs. Nicholls; comic

Mr. R. J. Evans; duet, "Life's Dream is O'er," Mr. J. Cooper and Miss James; chorus, "Beloved Friend," Cummeragunja Choral Society; recitation, "How Rubenstein played the Piano," Mr. Barryman; pianoforte solo, "Alpiner's Farewell," Miss M. Ferguson; song, "Sweet Adeline," Mr. Archer; song, "River of Tears," Miss Ferguson; duet, "Larkboard Watch," Mr. J. Cooper and Miss James; song, "A Token," Mrs. Carr; song, Tosti's "Good-bye," Miss Matthews; chorus, "Good-bye," Cummeragunja Choral Society; "Good Save the King," the company.

song, "The Grocer," Mr. A. Cooper; song, "What is the World without You," Mrs. G. Nelson; song, "The Bashful Man," Mr. R. J. Evans; duet, "Life's Dream is

'Social at Cummeragunja: T. S. James Honoured', Riverine Herald, 15 December 1913.

Source: GBRN Collection and improved copy provided by Echuca Historical Society.

## In his Footsteps

Letters between the NSW Education Department, Public Service Board, and various Inspectors from 1904 onwards, show that some of Grampa's own children chose to follow him into teaching at the Cummera School. Aunty Miriam, Aunty Becky, Nanny Pris, and Uncle Shady, all took up the role of his assistants under his guidance. Nanny Pris told me that Uncle Garfield 'Garchi' travelled to Hay to sit his examination, also wanting to become an assistant teacher to his father. However, as previously mentioned, he was killed in a horse riding accident; if he started teaching, it wasn't for long.

Grampa's eldest daughter Aunty Miriam was employed as a temporary assistant teacher to Grampa from March 1904 until February 1910, when she decided to step down. Nanny Pris saw her opportunity and wrote a terrific application dated 25 February 1910, seeking to step into this role. She gave a solid explanation as to why she would be most suited for the role, including her intention to take a:

systematic course in preparation for the new Kindergarten Scheme that was soon to be carried out in the school – [I] have carefully considered the responsibilities which cluster around such a position and the qualifications it demands and I am confident that with my father's (Head teacher) counsel, help and supervision, I shall be able to respond to them satisfactorily and worthily.

She was duly appointed and loved working as a teacher's assistant beside her father. However it was only nine months later that she resigned due to ill health on 28 November 1910. Inspector Lynch noted on her letter that her resignation was due to illness, Dr Askins of Echuca believing that she was 'threatened with phthisis' which usually relates to the body wasting away due to tuberculosis.

Her sister Becky then became Grampa's teaching assistant, however she was forced to resign from her post on 16 June 1912 after barracking at the local footy and walking arm in arm with one of the other girls from the mission, a good friend of hers. Yes, something as simple as this would lead to the authorities insisting that she must resign her position. She was given no other option than to follow the orders presented to her. This must have been really heartbreaking for dear Aunty Becky. But as you will soon see, this took place during a time of great pressure on Grampa and his family with manager George Harris and friends targeting him, and when they couldn't get him they targeted his family directly.

## The Electoral Officer

It seems that amongst his many roles and responsibilities, Grampa was also the Electoral Officer for the area. At one stage in 1912, he had written a letter to G. Dart, the Inspector of Schools, requesting to continue on with this role, and this was permitted due to his honest reputation and standing with the community of Barmah, Cummera and surrounding areas.

## The Witness

There were even times when Grampa was called upon to give evidence at Deniliquin court for various people who found themselves in trouble with the law. Both Aboriginal people and Indian people who were living in the district had come to know and trust Grampa, therefore calling on him to provide witness statements in court. Grampa had outlined such situations in his leave requests to Inspectors, whenever he was required to attend Deniliquin court.

## The Anthropologist

The 1890s were a time when early anthropologists like the surveyor R.H. Mathews were trying to make a record of Aboriginal languages and customs across the south-east of Australia. When R.H. Mathews wrote to the Protection Board in September 1897, to find out about languages and customs at Cummeragunga, the Board passed the letters on to Grampa.

Grampa was asked to complete a 'census' of the names and numbers of different tribes that were present on Cummeragunga. On 27 September 1897 Grampa wrote a letter to R.H. Mathews in which he listed: 'Yorta Yorta – Pure', underneath describing what appears to be the clan groups of Yorta Yorta. He then lists 'Surrounding Tribes' and writes 'marked on the map of NSW'. Unfortunately we do not have a copy of the actual map drawn by Grampa as part of this letter, although many of us have previously seen the map and know of its existence.

The letter itself is a rich source of information from that time and because Grampa was such a huge part of our families and community, I have no doubt our people would have been very open with him about this information. What is very interesting about this list is not only the diversity in tribal and clan names that he claimed were living on Cummeragunga; but those names that were not mentioned. Please see appendices for a full copy of this letter, (Image 73).

R.H. Mathews wrote again to Grampa asking him to explain the Aboriginal 'class' system showing how Aboriginal people organised themselves in marriage patterns. In Grampa's reply he tried to explain our Aboriginal system as being similar to that in India. (He does not explain, however, which Indian society

he was referring to). Grampa shared what he had learnt from a particular Aboriginal Elder as follows: 'One chief would pride himself as belonging to the Emu class ... another to the white cockatoo; and so on with the lowest class being the crow'.

In December 1897 Grampa again wrote to R.H. Mathews following up on the last letter again providing information about the class (or marriage) systems, ceremonies and healing methods. In this letter he wrote:

I can gather that the Yorta Yorta belongs to the Kangaroo class.

A few particulars regarding marriage and the medicine man might be interesting to you ... early betrothment as is practiced in India was universally observed among the Aborigines ... the symbol of contract being a string around the wrist worn til the consummation of marriage. The nuptial ceremony simply consisted of the chief taking the bride by the hand and handing her to the bridegroom ... the custom of bestowing gifts was also observed.

Intermarriages were strictly forbidden – a man of the kangaroo class/tribe could not choose a wife in the same tribe but must seek a wife in the Emu or native companion tribe. Polygamy was practised by chiefs only and bigamy was tolerated with the approval of the chief. Such concessions being granted to expert hunters – men capable of supporting two wives.

Rape and incest were punishable by death according to the code of Biامي<sup>1</sup>.

Next to the chief the medicine man was held in high esteem ... we cannot help but admitting that he exhibited a fair amount of skill in medicine and surgery and many of his treatments were not totally devoid of scientific principles.

After careful investigation, I find that he used the juices of various herbs as cathartic tonic ... He also used vapour baths in cases of rheumatic pleurisy, fever, colds etc. It was done in this way:

"The ground where on the bath is to be given having been thoroughly heated by kindling a fire on it, was next swept and sprinkled with water and covered with green gum leaves. On this the patient would lie, the result being a copious flow of perspiration.

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1 Biامي – our creator.



Massage treatment was also used. The goanna and emu oil being freely used for the purpose."

Among his surgical operation the following may be mentioned: The ligature treatment for snake bites as taught in our schools was also known amongst the Aborigines.

Grampa uses some interesting medical and herbal medicine terms such as those below, in some of his letters, which demonstrates that he was actively involved in thinking about and learning about healing whether that was through the use of white man's medicine, his medical studies at Melbourne University, or herbal and bush medicine from our local Aboriginal community, or his own Mauritian Indian heritage.

*Cathartic*: accelerates defecation (use of the bowels).

*Phlebotomy*: an incision into the blood vein e.g. venupunctures or collecting venous blood.

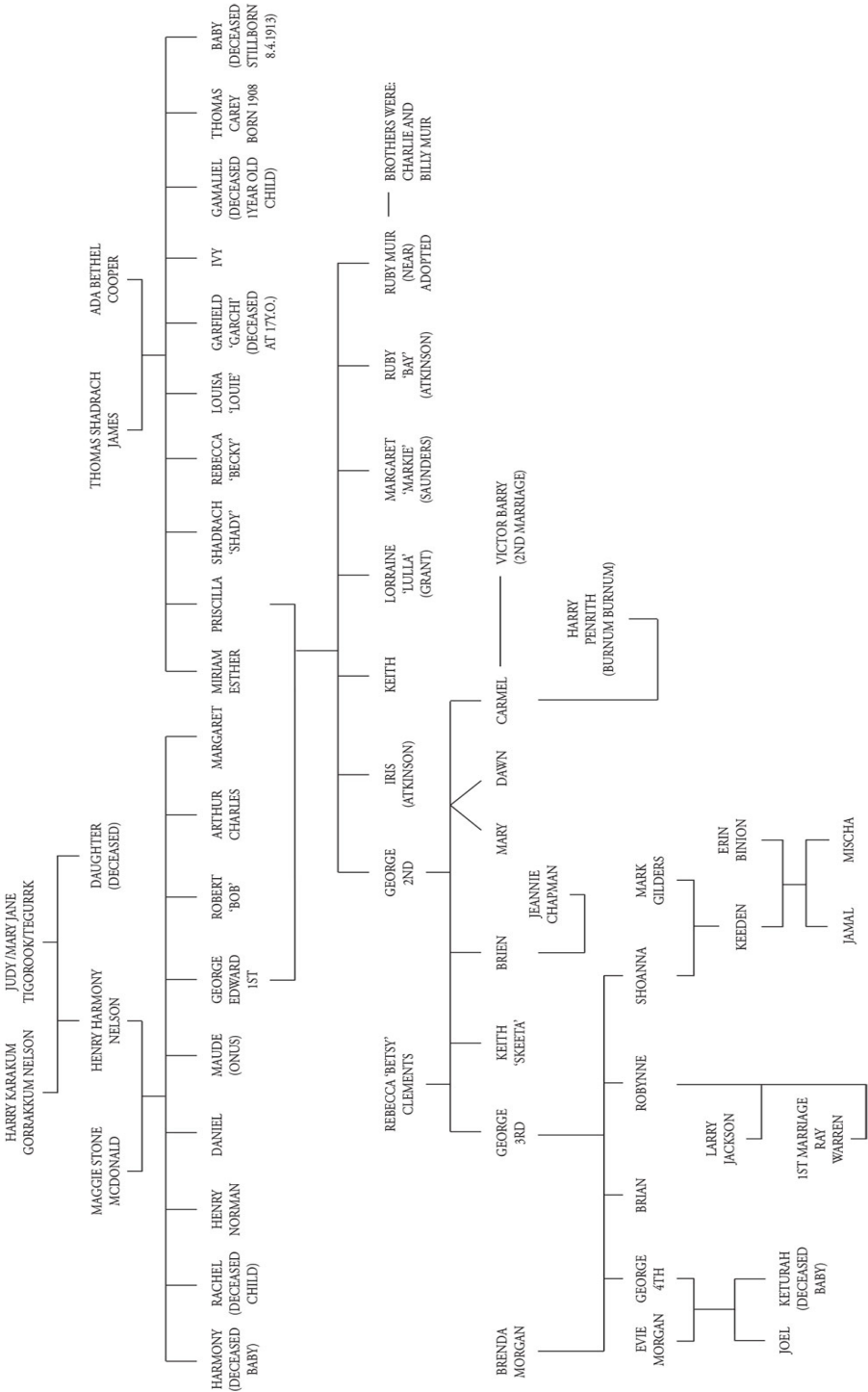
*Febrifuge*: which is directly associated with herbal medicines, means an antidote to fever.

The term used for plants which are antipyretics (bring temperature down) is Febrifuge.

*Stiptic*: (or in Greek terminology it is spelt 'styptic') meaning a substance used to stop bleeding.

Grampa's use of these terms is important because it shows that he was very aware of medical processes and in particular that he was aware of the way specialists in herbal medicines explained their healing treatments.

FAMILY TREE: NELSON/JAMES



Nelson/James family tree.

Source: GBRN Collection. Illustrator: Ian Faulkner.