

23. Great Southern Land

The Crewman

It was sometime between his father's wedding to Lokheea on 16 March 1878 and the birth of their first child Jahangeerbee (Ruth) on 31 July 1880, that Grampa decided it was time to move on. We know from our Mauritian family that he was still in Mauritius at the time of his father's wedding, and then left because of that marriage.

The Safe Landing

Grampa left Mauritius and arrived in Tasmania, Australia, where he was listed in the Tasmanian Education Department archives as having applied for a teaching job on 23 August 1879, nine days before his 20th birthday.

The Application Form

Grampa's application form was completed at Franklin (possibly the Education Department region) and contains some valuable information as to his life and experience prior to leaving Mauritius and once in Tasmania.

He completed the form in the name of Thomas S. James which tells us that he had already changed his name for his new life in Australia. He noted that he had been in the 'colony' for nine months, and that he had previously worked as an assistant teacher at a government school in Mauritius for three years, and also worked as a "telegraph clerk X post master". He therefore must have started work at around seventeen years of age.

This new evidence now provides a ballpark date of arrival in Australia for Grampa. Assuming he went straight to Tasmania from Mauritius, he would have arrived in November 1878. Travel from Mauritius to Australia in those days took approximately three to four weeks. This suggests that Grampa would have left Mauritius in approximately May 1878; that is, eight weeks after his father's marriage to Lokheea. This makes sense.

Family had previously suggested that he was sixteen or seventeen years old when he left Mauritius, however this new evidence tells us that he was probably nineteen years of age.

Grampa's employment references listed on his teaching application were Reverend J.M. Bayley and Charles Crosby Esquire, and he was noted as boarding with Mr Wright at Upper Huon. This is an area south of Hobart around the Franklin River area, which is a thick and lush forested region.

The Assessment

Following the lodgement of his application for teaching Grampa was examined on 2 December 1879 and found to be:

Sufficiently educated for the charge of a small country school, though not conversant with the English treatment of arithmetic and other branches to justify his being classified at the moment. He appears to have fair power as a teacher and his attainments on a whole are better than can generally be secured for an out of the way bush district.

Objection to his classification would not apply to the candidate's employment as teacher of a provisional school with the usual gratuity of thirty pound a year, which he is willing to accept.

The final assessment of Grampa's application took place on 18 December 1879. We have been unable to confirm how long Grampa worked at the Upper Huon School if at all, however, we next hear of Grampa on 3 January 1881 when he met the Maloga mob at Brighton Beach. This was only 17 months after he lodged his application.

We have always understood that Grampa enrolled in medicine at Melbourne University – I have been consistently told this by family over the past 73 years, and I still believe it to be the case. However, as previously mentioned, I have been unable to obtain his student file, as these records are incomplete due to a fire some years ago. I tried to locate them in the 1990s and again in 2012, but to no avail.

Charles Crosby Esquire

Charles Crosby Esquire was Grampa's referee for his teaching position in Tasmania. Who was this man?

Charles Crosby's father William Crosby was born in England and worked for the Fenwick and Co shipping company in England in the late 1840s. He then moved to Hobart where he established William Crosby and Co with the backing of Fenwick and Co in England. William Crosby and Co went on to become one of the largest shipping, importing, exporting and mercantile companies in Tasmania. They owned or had interests in a fleet of ships including the *Australien* of the Messageries Maritime Co.

Robynne: We mentioned this ship back in Chapter 11. Grampa had wanted to travel home to Mauritius on 30 December 1891 and he named this ship specifically. Now we see why!

The Fenwick and Co ships travelled back and forth from England, Mauritius, Sydney and China. The William Crosby and Co offices were based at Salamanca Place at the new wharf in Hobart Town. After his father's retirement, in 1879 Charles took charge of the Melbourne branch carrying on a large mercantile business. Charles died in 1932 at the age of 92 and was noted for, among other things, his: 'deep interest in religious work and particularly in missionary work in other lands. Missionaries from all parts of the world had enjoyed the hospitality of his home in Hobart'.

Robynne: Charles Crosby's history now raises a question or two: Was it the captain of a Crosby ship that Grampa befriended in Mauritius to find his way to Tasmania? Was it Charles Crosby himself?

Charles Crosby's interest in religious and missionary work certainly suggests a shared interest that may have bonded the two men from the beginning. A significant connection of some kind had obviously taken place for Charles Crosby to act as Grampa's referee when he applied for teaching jobs soon after his arrival in Tasmania. Had they become friends? Or was Grampa working for him at some stage?

Charles Crosby moved to Victoria to take over management of the Melbourne branch of the family business some time in 1879. Did Grampa travel with him? Or follow soon after? We must consider the possibility that Grampa travelled to Melbourne with Charles and his wife, which would mean that he did not take up a teaching position in Tasmania, or that he only taught for a short period before moving to Melbourne. We know that he waited over three months for his teaching assessment and letter of offer. Given this delay, it is entirely possible that he decided to move to Melbourne with Charles Crosby. To date, we have found no evidence of Grampa working as a teacher in Tasmania, other than his application. But we do have in our possession, a Riverine Herald article dated August 1946 *Cumerogunga Mission - Story of Its Early Days, Tribute to Teacher* in which Daniel Matthews' son JK Matthews states that it is Mr Crosby who brought Grampa into contact with Daniel Matthews at Brighton Beach hence confirming that Grampa and Charles Crosby were in Melbourne together. See Appendix Two.

The Stable Hand

Over the years I heard from a number of family members the story that Grampa had lived with a wealthy man in Melbourne and worked as his stable hand, and that this man had supported Grampa to start his medical studies.

I had come to believe that this man was G.J. Coles as told to me by my father's sister, Auntie Iris Atkinson, many years ago. However, as mentioned earlier, after talking to G.J. Coles's daughter, this seemed unlikely.

Now, given the information outlined above, I am now certain that the man was Charles Crosby. Having someone like Charles Crosby as a referee would certainly have provided Grampa with a foot in the door at Melbourne University. Not that he would have needed it! I have no doubt that through vigorous testing he would have proven himself worthy to gain entry into the medicine course.

Medical Studies

Melbourne University

Grampa often spoke to his children and other family members about his medical studies and the need to give them up due to his contracting typhoid which left him with the shakes. We have come across a number of letters in which Grampa's medical skills or knowledge was noted by Chief Inspectors, the Education Department or Grampa himself, in his days on Maloga and Cummeragunga. During 1895 and 1896 Grampa had written to Chief Inspector Bridges seeking promotion and therefore outlining his years of experience, including his medical studies which he had to leave due to typhoid illness. I therefore still believe that Grampa commenced the study of medicine sometime between August 1879 (when he put in his teaching application in Tasmania) and January 1881 (when he met Daniel Matthews and our people at Brighton Beach and then returned to Maloga Mission with them).

Bible College

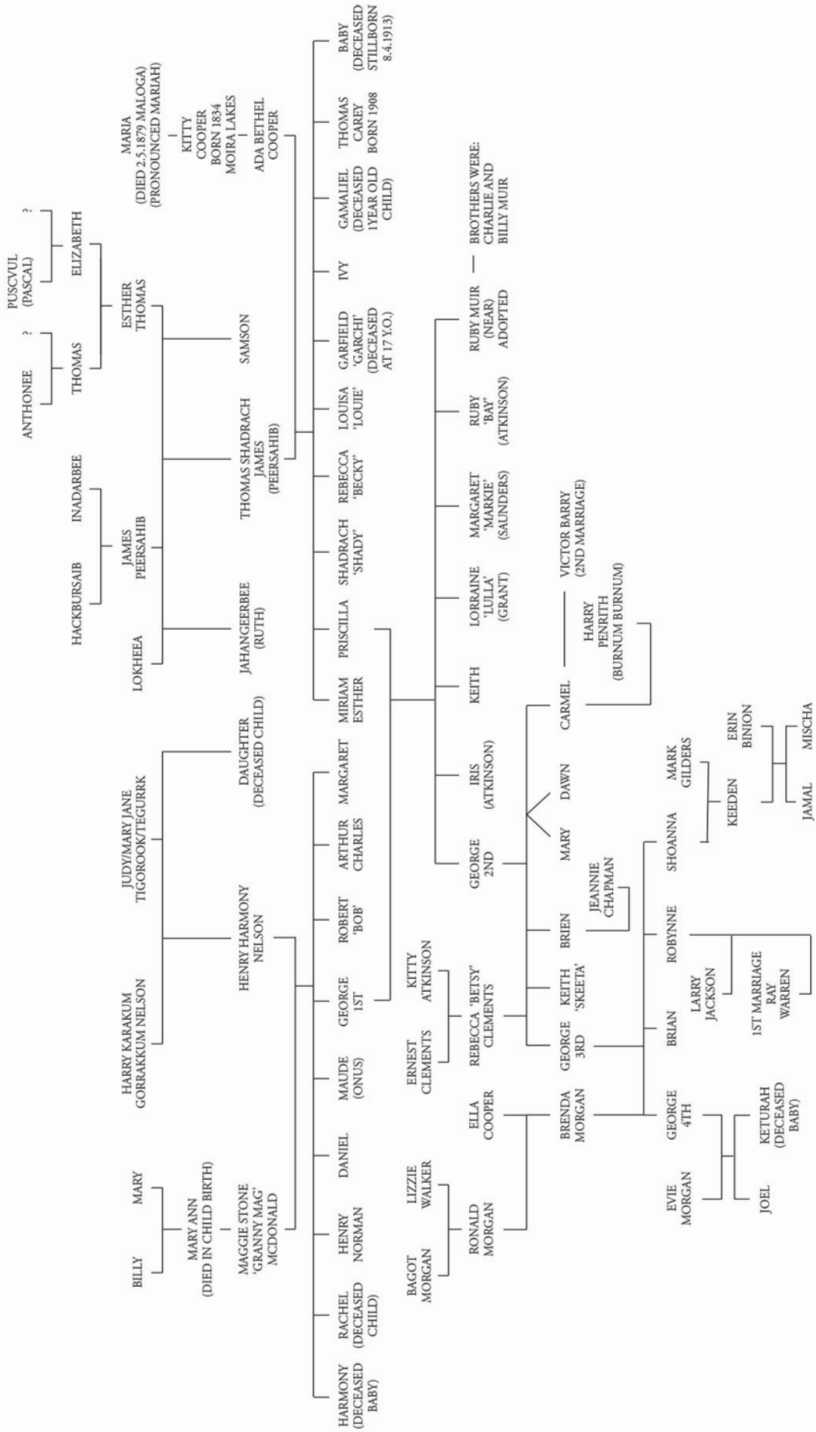
Singleton Bible College

It has also been suggested within our family here in Shepparton that Grampa had attended the Singleton Bible College in New South Wales in order to qualify as a Church Minister before coming to Maloga Mission. As a result of our extensive research, working through facts and dates, and ongoing deliberation, we do not

believe that Grampa had enough time to do this. Don't get me wrong; we are not certain about this, but the dates and other facts do not support his studying there. Moreover, when you consider his father's background as catechist to the Bishop of Mauritius; his father's establishment of a Christian Indian school; Grampa's own work (as highlighted on his Tasmanian Education Department application form), as a teaching assistant in Mauritius – possibly in his father's school; his uncles and cousins' positions as church deacons and missionaries; the deeper Islamic background in his father's family; and the strong Tamil/Christian missionary presence in his mother's family – it would seem that he didn't 'need' to go to Bible College. He already had an incredible educative and religious basis with which to start teaching in both Tasmania and Maloga Mission. He would no doubt have understood the life of a missionary, teacher, minister and advocate. He grew up amongst it.

Grampa arrived at Maloga in early 1881. He started as assistant teacher to Mr Matthews, and took charge of the school in October 1883. He spent the next four decades committing his life to our people at both Maloga and Cummeragunga. He married into our community and became one of us, leaving an enormous impact on the the lives of our people and the future of Aboriginal Australia.

FAMILY TREE: COMBINED



Combined family tree © George and Robynne Nelson.

Source: GBRN Collection. Illustrator: Ian Faulkner.