


# #52 Ancestors # Week 10 - Bachelor Uncle

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## #52 Ancestors # Week 10 - Bachelor Uncle

My mother had two bachelor uncles, two of the 13 children born to her grandparents, Anthony and Charlotte Whitten.

The family lived on their property about 13 miles from the nearest town - a long way in the horse and buggy days, particularly was there were several creek crossings which made the trip impossible after heavy rain.

These two uncles spent all their lives in the bush - first on their parents' farm and then on their own neighbouring holdings. They were educated in the bush school that their father had built for his family and taught by a series of (largely inept) itinerant teachers.

One member of the family told this story about their schooling:

"the pupils were liable to be thrashed by "Jackpot" Ward, the untrained travelling teacher, who was an Irish tosspot, prone to vent his spleen on the young Whittens. Older brother, "H", on one occasion intervened on Albert's behalf, and when a poetry exercise was demanded for homework they brought along an extract from the "Temperance Reader". The schoolmaster showed he was not without some humour, his response being, "A stands for Anthony. silent and grim, Come all ye who drink, and listen to him!"\*

The family outing of the week was to church in the nearby town, and then afterwards there was always a large lunch with the extended family, which lingered into the afternoon. Then they all went to the evening service before travelling home.

Church was probably one of very few opportunities to meet girls, but there never seems to have been one in "H"'s life. My mother remembered him as quiet and shy, fond of his dogs and horses. He seems to have been more outgoing with his nephews, who often visited. I was very amused to hear that he used to assign them to different parts of the farm under the "three boy rule", which states that, "one boy is worth one boy, two boys are worth half a boy, and three boys are no good at all." As a grandmother of three boys, I think I get it.

Uncle "E" was perhaps more interesting to the children because he had a good telescope and a passion for astronomy. It was said that from the hill up behind the homestead he could read the time on the Post Office clock in Tamworth, a distance of some 40 ks.

In this photograph of him, other instruments on the verandah table include a barometer, sun clock, protractor, magnet and tape



measure. All the nieces and nephews were fascinated - it may well have been a factor in two of those nephews becoming scientists (although not astronomers).

Sadly there was a dark side to Uncle "E". When my mother was very old, she told me that he had "put his hand in her bloomers" while on a family outing one day when she was 9 or 10 years old. She was speechless with shock. She never told anyone until years later when she related the story to one of her cousins who had also been a frequent visitor to the farm. Her cousin replied with a similar story of inappropriate touching, and declared that she had been careful never to be too close to him ever again.

We will never know any more than this.

# This is a reference to the children's father, Anthony, who was a strict teetotaler.

