

#52 Ancestors Week 31 - Brother

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The story of Ireland in the 19th century is the story of emigration. Of the 12 children of Edward and Martha Whitten of Roscrea, the youngest five were to emigrate to Australia. Russell Bell, in his history of the family, suggested that they came as a result of a tuberculosis scare in their home country, but we don't know. We do know that the story of Irish emigration is partly that the relatively small holdings could not support the large number of children generally born to them and Edward's eldest son Robert had inherited the house on his father's death.

The Whittens had occupied the property known as "Fancroft", a few miles from Roscrea, in County Offaly (formerly King's County) since about 1795, when Edward, son of William Whitten and Prudence (nee Clery) was born. There were two older sons, Anthony and Robert but I assume both died young, as it was Edward and his wife Martha (Lucas) who inherited on William's death.

Of Edward and Martha's children, the four youngest boys, Edward (Ned), Anthony, Henry and Joseph came to Australia. (Their newly widowed sister Ann Elliott came too, with her son, but that's a story for another time). It seems that Henry and Anthony came first – via America. There is an entry in Alfred Whitten's travel diary (written in 1912) which says, "we visited a John McBride, who went to America with Father (Anthony) in about 1860. Father worked in St Charles, a town on the Missouri, in the USA, for William McBride, for two years"

On their arrival in Australia, Anthony and Henry lived in the Singleton area, where they got to know the Mason family who came from Ballingarry in Tipperary, not far from Roscrea. They sponsored their youngest brother Joseph, who arrived on the ship "Sir John Moore" in 1863 and settled nearby at Chain of Ponds. Ned came last, in about 1865.

Within a few years Anthony and Henry married two of the Mason sisters, Charlotte and Eliza and both couples took up 40 acre blocks near Wallabadah. Anthony and Charlotte travelled there on horseback on their "honeymoon" with 17 head of cattle, two horses and a dog. The distance is about 100 miles, over a mountain range, so Charlotte (aged 23) had an early introduction to the rigors of life as a farmer's wife.

Henry, who married Eliza in 1867, also began with a 40 acre block, but then moved about 4 miles north to Gowrie and acquired another 100 acres. Between

them, Anthony and Henry eventually owned about 2500 acres of this country.

Ned settled at Sugarloaf, on the other side of the hill from his brothers, and at the age of 46 married Elizabeth Freestone. They had 7 children in 12 years, the last born after Ned's early death at the age of 58. He is buried at Wallabadah, near the graves of Anthony and Charlotte.

These three brothers maintained close relationships throughout their lives. They all had large families (Anthony had 13 children, Henry had 9) and many of their sons also became graziers and farmers in the area. There is a story that when Ned was dying, Anthony rode over the mountains to Quirindi for medicine, but the bottle broke on the way back. Anthony was heartbroken when Ned died shortly afterwards.

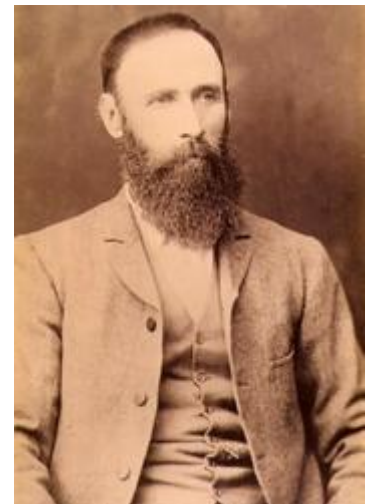
Joseph is the brother that the family knows least about, as he became estranged from the others. As good Methodists, the Whittens were teetotallers, but Joseph established himself as the licensee of an inn and wine saloon which was an important halfway house for coaches on the main northern road. (The inn was still there in the early 1990s but as it is on land owned by the Electricity Commission and occupied by the Liddell Power Station it was unoccupied and neglected. It was rapidly falling into disrepair when I saw it then and had been vandalised so that all the fine timber joinery, including the staircase, had gone).

Because Joseph dealt with alcohol, it seems that the other brothers never saw him again.

Joseph's history lends some credence to the aforementioned tuberculosis story, as nearly all of his children died young. He married 16 year old Joanna Devitt at Chain of Ponds in 1867, when he was 26, and they had 11 children but only four of them lived past the age of 30 and many of them left young families when they died. Joseph is buried in Singleton with two of his children, Matilda (known as Barney) who died at 17, and Percival, who was only 7.



Anthony Whitten



Henry Whitten



Edward "Ned" Whitten



Joseph Whitten