

52 Ancestors 2023 - Week 1 - I'd Like to Meet

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Frederick

Whitten

I met all but one of my grandparents when I was a child, and both of my grandmothers were still alive when I was a young adult, but I never met my maternal grandfather, who died two years before I was born.

Frederick (Fred) Whitten was born in 1871 at the family property, Lowestoft, near Quirindi, NSW. He was the fourth child and third son of Anthony and Charlotte Whitten (nee Mason) who had settled on their property at the time of their marriage in 1865. There would be 9 more children including twin boys who died as babies.



Fred and his siblings were educated at the little school built by their father on the property, but like most children of the time his formal education ended around the age of 12 and he began to work on the farm.

Lowes

Creek School -Fred 4th from left

We know little about his early years but can assume that it was a life of hard work tempered by time with his large extended family and the activities of their church. He was known as a good stockman and a good shearer (in the days of blade shearing). Their mother, Charlotte, was particularly religious and in the early years attended her nearest church (10miles away at Wallabadah) on horseback or by cart. All the children would have accompanied her.



In 1902 Fred married Annie Florence Newcombe in Tamworth, NSW. He was 31 years old and she was just 21. Sadly, within a year Annie had died in childbirth, leaving baby Gladys and her devastated young husband. Her headstone in the cemetery in Tamworth is testament to his grief.

It reads:

My dearest Annie has left me,

And gone to realms above;

My heart seems torn within me.

Yet I know that God is love.

She left me in the bloom of youth

When her course seemed just begun,

In grief and pain, I try to say

My God, Thy Will be Done



Fred and Gladys were fortunate that he had a large extended family around them. Gladys was adored by her grandparents and bachelor uncles who all rallied to help.

Eight years later, Fred met Josephine Morgan at a picnic at Duri, not far from his home at Gaspard. My mother said that 'when he saw her step down from her cart, dressed in yellow, he was instantly smitten.' They were married in the Methodist Church in Tamworth on 9 August 1911.



Josie was a Catholic, and a city girl but she willingly became part of his Methodist Church and threw herself into rural life. She became a life long member of the CWA (Country Women's Association) and lived the rest of her life in the Quirindi community.



The first of Fred and Josie's seven children arrived in 1912 – my uncle Keith Wesley Whitten. He was followed by Jackie (1913), Ruth (1915), Connie (1919) Royce (1921) Gwynne (my mother, 1924) and Joan (1928.)

The growing family lived at Woodstock, Fred's property next door to Lowestoft until 1924. Jackie died accidentally (in 1920) and in 1924, while she was pregnant with Mum, Josie was thrown from the sulky as it was being driven to town. Her hip was broken, and because of her pregnancy (and probably also because of limited medical treatment available to her) it was never set properly. Although Mum was delivered safely at full term, her mother walked with a limp for the rest of her life.

In response to this accident, my grandfather bought a house in town and henceforth he commuted to the farm, spending weekends with the family at "The Meadows" in Fitzroy St, Quirindi.

My mother described it thus: 'Dad would arrive in time for lunch on Saturday, having already been into town and placed his order for supplies for the coming week with one of the three grocers in town (he would patronise all of them in turn). After lunch he would have a nap and then at night we would all be together at home. Occasionally he and Mum would go out to the pictures or, if they were in town, to Sorlie's (travelling show).

On Sunday mornings we would all go to church, then come home for a big lunch, often with other members of Dad's extended family. Afterwards there would be a big afternoon tea, then church again at night.

On Monday morning Dad would go back to Woodstock for another week's work."

In about 1941, Fred suffered a stroke. I don't know the details, but he spent some time in Sydney and then came home to be nursed by Josie for the rest of his life. Keith and Royce were already working on the property (although Keith enlisted and was absent during the war years). Ruth and Connie were both married and Joan still at school. Dad apparently told Fred around this time that he shouldn't worry about Mum, because he was going to marry her (she was only 17 at the time).

He died in October 1947. His obituaries in *The Quirindi Advocate* and *The Methodist* both describe a man of great integrity and kindness, dearly loved by his family and friends and regarded highly by his community.

I have two treasured mementoes of my grandfather Fred, both given to me by his youngest daughter Joan. They are a little leather coin purse which he always carried in his fob pocket, and a silver spoon from Woodstock.

I wish I had met him.

