

INTRODUCTION

This is an attempt at the history of a family from which my wife (and children) is descended, through her mother.

Having made some fascinating discoveries about the family, and through them learnt more about the history of this State, I am very conscious of how little I still know, largely because of the scarcity of family records. Consequently most of what follows is background only, or inference from official records.

Reliance on official records means however, that there is a wealth of information about the early years of the family, because James Reed came to N.S.W. as a soldier. Fortunately his regiment at this period is well recorded, and I have drawn on the Regimental diary and the official histories of the Regiment, the memoirs of two officers, a description of the voyage of the ship in which the Reeds travelled, and a recent study drawing on other records relating to life in the Regiment while it was stationed in N.S.W.

The subsequent stages of the life of the family are less well documented. The years in Sydney are virtually unrecorded, the move to Bourke not fully explained, and only scraps of information about subsequent activities and events are available. The twentieth century records are not fully explored yet, and so far reveal only that, the family settled down to become more-or-less typical of the residents of a western town. Many branches of the family today are still unlocated, but undoubtedly scattered throughout N.S.W., Queensland and elsewhere. Just a few hints of their eventual whereabouts are found in some of the records.

What follows is therefore more a synopsis for a family history than a proper history, trust it is of some interest, nevertheless.

JAMES AND FRANCES REED

(1) In the Western Herald and Darling River Advocate of Wednesday, February, 2nd, 1898 appears an obituary notice announcing the death of "one of Bourke's oldest residents", Mr. James Reed, of North Bourke, "at the ripe old age of 88 years". He died on Sunday, 30/1/1898, and had been predeceased by his wife Frances on April, 5th, 1895.

The obituary gives several biographical details, some of which were inaccurate. The Reeds were thought to have emigrated in 1833, three years after their marriage. In fact the year was 1836, James was still a serving soldier in the 80th Regiment, and came as a guard on the convict ship, Earl Grey, accompanied by his wife and two sons.

His early career is traceable through the official military records. A letter from the Regimental Secretary of the Staffordshire Regiment (successor to the 80th) states:-

(2) "No. 665 James REED enlisted in the 80th Regiment 11th June, 1827 at the age of 17. The record shows he was a brickmaker and had been born at Trentham in the Parish of Stone, Staffordshire. (in 1810). He was discharged on 31st December, 1843."

The death certificates of James and Frances provide additional information.

James was the son of Thomas Reed, a shoemaker. He married Frances Heazel at Sunderland, England when 20 years of age (i.e. 1830). Frances was the daughter of Sergeant Major Benjamin Heazel and his wife Elizabeth, and was born at Canterbury in 1812.

(3) Until 1836 James served in England and Ireland. The duties of the Regiment were described in the records as to "assist the civil authorities". The official historian explains that in the 1830's "the country....was in a very unsettled condition, owing to the rejection of the Reform Bill, rioting and incendiary fires were prevalent in the industrial towns". They spent a good deal of time in the north of England, in the Liverpool and Manchester region.

(4) As well, the Regiment spent some time in Ireland (1832-1834). The official diary records that "while at Belfast many parties were sent out at different periods for the purpose of assisting the Civil Power in collecting tithes as also in aiding the Revenue Officers which duty was often harassing from long marches and inclement weather."

It was at Belfast (1832) that the eldest son of James and Frances was born, and named John Benjamin. Their second son, James, was born about 1835.

Late that year the Regiment learned of their forthcoming transfer to N.S.W. The news was not received with much pleasure. For various reasons the Army dreaded a period of service in the colony. It involved guarding convicts in small detachments, and the effects of this over a period were considered detrimental to discipline.

THE VOYAGE TO NEW SOUTH WALES

- (5) The 80th Regiment was stationed in the Liverpool area from May, 1835. In September, the Diary records, "the Regiment received orders to proceed to Chatham for embarkation in Convict Guards for New South Wales."

A senior Officer wrote later, "It was reported that the Regiment was to embark for New South Wales, but no one would believe it. We considered ourselves a crack regiment... so fine a corps could not possibly be sent on such a service".

- (6) Officers could make arrangements to leave the Regiment. Private James Reed had no choice.

- (7) Detachments sailed over a period of more than a year - from 23rd May, 1836 to 5th August, 1837, the last draft arriving in Sydney on 23rd December that year. James Reed and his family embarked on the Earl Grey on 25th July, 1836. The military party consisted of 5 officers, a sergeant and 29 rank and file, 3 officers' wives, five women and seven children. There were 45 in the crew.

According to Surgeon Evans, the ship was new, and very damp, so several of the guard suffered 'catarrhal affliction'. To dry out the ship, fires were burnt between decks, and the barracks and prison 'dry holy stoned with hot sand and lime' - this during the voyage from Deptford to Kingstown, Ireland, to embark the convicts.

- (9) During the passage to Ireland little John Reed took sick with croup. The Sick book records his age as 6, but in fact he was only 4 years of age. The little boy was bled and given aperient powders to make him vomit, to the extent that his countenance became pale and sunk and 'symptoms of sinking of the powers of life manifest - the powders were discontinued....' - all on the first day! It took him two weeks to recover from this treatment.

- (10) The convicts were embarked in two groups - 91 at Kingstown and 192 at Cork, plus 'five free boys (the sons of convicts in the Colony'. So the ship sailed on 27th August with 384 persons on board.

- (11) The voyage took 126 days from Cork to Sydney. The surgeon's account indicates that generally it was without incident. The complains of the heat, and expresses concern for the health of the convicts in his charge. At his insistence the vessel called at Capetown in November to take on 'fresh beef, mutton and vegetables for the Guard and convicts'. Scurvy was affecting a number of the convicts by this time, but it cleared up very quickly afterwards. In all, three convicts died on the voyage.

- (12) Little is recorded by the surgeon about the military personnel, with the notable exception of Lieut. Macdonald of the 80th Regiment. His problem was overindulgence in eating and drinking, and if space permitted the surgeon's notes would be worth quoting. A fellow officer describes the Lieutenant as a man weighing from seventeen to eighteen stone with a wife to match, and not in general remarkable for his acuteness. Such was the man responsible for the supervision of Private Reed and his fellow-soldiers.

- (13) Ensign Best, who sailed a year later, describes in his Journal the daily routine imposed on the guard. Sentry duty was carried out around the clock, and the men on guard were regularly inspected by the officer in charge. Soldiers could be reported and punished for such offences as insolence, quarrelling, dirty weapons, sitting down while on guard, sleeping on guard, or talking to the prisoners. The principal concern of the officers was to prevent disturbances among the convicts, and they were anxious to avoid punishing the soldiers too severely in front of the convicts - the preferred punishment was 'stopping the allowance of grog'.

The soldiers life was therefore a round of boring and repetitive duties. His wife and children also suffered the boredom and discomfort imposed by the voyage and the weather conditions, and the close company of often incompetent fellow passengers.

- (14) The ship arrived in Sydney on 31st December, 1836. 'The weather proved remarkably fine and unusually dry' wrote the surgeon. The next day the convicts were marched to the Barracks to be inspected by the Governor (Sir Richard Bourke). The safe arrival of ship and its assorted company was briefly reported in the Sydney Gazette. The officers and their wives are mentioned by name. James Reed, his wife and children are not mentioned. - just '29 rank and file of the 28th, 50th and 80th Regiments, 5 women and 7 children'.

Until July, 1837 the Regiment was based at Sydney Barracks. It then moved its headquarters to Windsor. It supplied detachments to a variety of locations to act as guards for convict work gangs. The Regimental Muster Rolls record James Reeds movements, quarter by quarter, but until they can be examined, it will suffice to record those locations which are recorded elsewhere over the next few years.

MILITARY SERVICE IN NEW SOUTH WALES 1837 - 1843

- (16) The Regiment was dispersed to more than a dozen locations during the time of its service in N.S.W. It seems that soldiers were transferred quite frequently from place to place, as James Reed's movements show.

- The Reeds' third son, Alexander, was born at 17 Mile Hollow on 10th July, 1837. So we can imagine the small body of soldiers marching off into the wilds, with presumably some kind of transport bringing at least one long-suffering and pregnant, soldier's wife and her two small children along. The lot of a soldier's family must have been hard, because life was not easy for the soldier himself. The trails of the men on guard detachments are vividly expressed in the words of one of their officers - 'Oh! the sufferings of my men'. Command was weakened by the isolation and the ineffective leadership of junior officers and NCO's. The constant association with the convicts tended to have a bad effect on the soldiers. 'Close association with the convicts corrupted the troops....damaged the soldiers' self-esteem...they became dissatisfied with army life'.

- (18) Soldiers and convicts 'belonged to the same working class culture, and so, had much in common'. There was therefore a tendency to fraternise, discipline became slack, and crime frequently followed. 'All that kept many soldiers from crime and transportation before enlistment had been a chance meeting with a recruiting sergeant'.
- (19) Some reverted to crime in these circumstances or just became bad soldiers.

- Marriage and family life should have been a steadying influence on James. During the seven years he served with the 80th Regiment in N.S.W., he continued to enjoy the company of his wife and family. After Alexander a daughter, Sarah, was born at Sydney Barracks in November, 1839 and Eliza at Wollongong in October, 1841. When Sarah died in May, 1843, they were again in Sydney. And there, exactly seven years after their arrival, on 31st December, 1843, Private James Reed left the military service, with nothing more to show for 16½ years of service than a gratuity of three months pay (£4.11.3).

- (20) This suggests that the sort of experiences referred to above had tired him of military life, and he was glad to take the opportunity to leave. Within a year, in August, 1844, the Regiment was to be reunited for the first time since 1836 as a single body and sailed off to India, where they experienced some real soldiering (and heavy casualties) in the Sikh Wars. But that is no longer part of the Reed story.

SYDNEY 1844 - 1862

Practically all the information we have about the years 1844 - 1862 comes from baptismal records and postal directories. The picture is of a growing family and declining economic circumstances.

Low's 1844 Directory for the City of Sydney records James Reed, grocer, Barrack Lane. When Sarah Ann Reed (born 21st March) was baptised on 26th May, 1844, the address was shown as York Street, so it appears that James Reed had set himself up in a shop on the corner just across the way from the Barracks which he had just left. Clearly, if the military life no longer held any appeal, the company of his old colleagues was still attractive (as also their custom).

Next comes another baptismal record - Prudence, August, 1846 (born July). The grocer has become a constable in Kent Street. Previously the babies were baptised in St. James or St. Philip's church, the two nearest the Barracks. Prudence was baptised at St. Andrews which suggests that James was stationed at the watch immediately behind the still incomplete cathedral.

This return to uniform was short-lived. In July, 1848, when the next child, Frances, was born her father was a labourer, residing in Clarence Street. Occupation and residence remained unchanged until at least June, 1856, when their last child Jane, was born. Then on the official registration form, the address appears at 17 Clarence Street, (the street numbering has since been changed). Meanwhile, two other children appeared - in 1850 George Charles and 1852 Mary Ann.

Few other family details have come to light for the remainder of the Sydney period. The eldest son, John, married in October, 1857. A son, William, was born, in 1858 and a daughter, Frances in 1860.

Sarah Ann married Michael Brennan in January, 1863. A search of the records should eventually turn up other marriages and the births of grand-children, but at this stage, I can note only the most significant in the direct line of my wife's own family.

By the 1860's the circumstances of the family appear to have become unsettled again. The 1861 Lands' directory shows James Reed at 37 Cambridge Street, and John Reed next door at No.39. But this John is a 'waterman', when our John at his marriage (22) was described as a blacksmith. Unfortunately there were a number of Reeds (and Reids) in Sydney at this time, several names James, and it is easy to confuse them. The name of this family is several times misspelled 'Reid' (and 'Read') in the records, but fortunately the same Frances is less common, and is a helpful identifier when other details are unclear. Both a daughter and more than one grand-daughter were given the name.

THE BOURKE YEARS' 1862 to 1898

James' and Frances' obituaries in the "Western Herald" are quite specific that the family moved to Bourke in 1862 (but note the date of Sarah Ann's marriage). Perhaps some followed after their parents moved. This would have been an event vivid in the memories of practically the whole family - the youngest child would have turned six in 1862. The year is also significant because it marks the beginning of land selection under the provisions of the Robertson land acts. For several years there had been severe unemployment in Sydney, and agitation for land reform, that is, to allow small selectors to move in on the great holdings of the squatters, was vigorous. Provision was made for Crown lands to be selected 'at a price of £1 per acre, with an initial payment of 25 per cent and the remainder within three years'. Blocks of 40 acres or multiples thereof (23) were rapidly taken up as soon as land was offered for sale.

Perhaps the several Reed Families resolved to make a mass migration into the unknown, like Abraham taking his family from Ur of the Chaldus to the Promised Land. James was 52 years of age, his wife 50, their eldest son about 30 with a wife and at least two children, their own youngest just six. Whether they moved, on masse, or within a few years of each other, between 1863 and 1867 (24) various members of the family had bought town blocks in Bourke itself, and selections were taken later up in the district.

Old James' last major venture was to take up 80 acres near Mt. Oxley, on the main road (as it then was) to Dubbo, via Gongolgon. There he established the (25) Mountain House Hotel in February, 1870, in his 60th year. It should have been a successful venture, because travellers tales of the day refer to the frequency and popularity of the wayside inns. The standing of the publicans was not necessarily as high as it might have been. A traveller on this road in 1880, commenting on the hotels along the way, said:-

"It is not what the customer eats, but what he drinks and pays for, or pays for and does not drink, that gets the publican his living. My private opinion is that keeping a bush public house is not the (26) road to Heaven.

Of course, I don't suggest that these comments are true of James Reed!

There is little more to tell of James and Francis. In their later years they lived with their daughter Sarah Ann and her husband Michael Brennan in North Bourke. The Brennans' fourth daughter Isabella was said to be the first white child born at North Bourke, in 1869. Frances died in April, 1895 and James in January, 1898, (27) aged 88, and leaving it was reported, nine surviving children, 'held in high esteem'. (28) 86 grand children and over 40 great grand children.

GEORGE REED'S FAMILY

George Charles Reed was born in Sydney on 23rd September, 1850, and baptised at St. James' Church by the Rev. Chas. Priddle on 13th October. Of his education and early employment we know nothing. He was 11 or 12 years of age when the family set off to Bourke.

From 1860 it was possible to travel as far as Penrith by train, by Cobb & Co. coach to Dubbo, then by whatever transport was available (frequently horseback) for 400 miles to Bourke. It is likely that the Reeds had to organise their own transport to carry household goods and the women and children.

Probably George worked for his father on his selection, and in due course in the Mountain House Hotel, from 1870. In November, 1867 two allotments in Anson Street, Bourke were purchased in his name, and in September, 1873 he was granted the licence of the Bourke Hotel, Darling Street.

In 1875 George took over the licence of the Overland Hotel, North Bourke, and was there when he married ~~Mary Ann Peters~~ on 1st January, 1877.

Mary was the daughter of William and Sophia Peters, and was born at Windsor in 1859. Her father was a sailor, and was said to have drowned in the Hawkesbury River, after which mother and daughter made their way to Bourke.

Another reference to George's Hotel interests is dated 11/2/1878, and relates to the licence of the Shakespeare Hotel, Mitchell and Glen

unfinished.....
no further information