

The Life Story of George W. Stacey

On the Eleventh of July, 1860, in a cottage at the One Mile, West Ipswich, a brown-eyed baby son was born to Mr. and Mrs. Robert Stacey, British migrants of four years' standing. The little son was christened George William - he being their third child.

When George was one year old, it was Shearing time again and George's father was going shearing upon the Darling Downs. This time, George's mother refused to stay by herself again, so Robert bought a bullock dray and bullocks to draw it. He put a hood on top of the dray for the accommodation of the family. They travelled over the Little Liverpool Range, and up the Toll Bar (Toowoomba), to Drayton, where they lived for a year in their dray home.

When little George was two years old, his parents returned to Brisbane, and boarded a ship going to Newcastle, where they visited relatives.¹

During the next few years, the family lived on a farm, The farm did not prove a success owing to floods, etc., so Robert again decided to go up country looking for employment. This time, instead of a bullock dray, he bought a horse and dray and made comfortable accommodation for the family. The dray was their home for several years. They travelled from Maitland through all the towns to Tamworth, thence to Armidale. The towns in those days were very small places, consisting mostly of bark shanties - even the Station Homesteads had earth floors in those days.

George was five years old when they arrived in Inverell. Then they travelled on some twenty miles or so from Inverell to a small place called Graman. Here, Robert obtained employment which was going to last some time. So the first thing to be done, was to find a suitable place to camp. They found a nice spot under the shady gum trees on Graman Creek, which had a running stream of good fresh water - a very important thing for the bush folk. The campsite was chosen and a shelter built for cooking in.

Mrs. Ranes was the Proprietress of the Hotel at Graman, and she reared a lot of turkeys - they wandered about the bush up to half a mile away from the house. The highlight of the children's day was to go looking for turkeys' nests. Mrs. Ranes used to pay them for finding the eggs.

When the work was finished at Graman, the family moved to Gullengutter, where Robert had another Contract. When that was finished they moved to Reedy Creek, where George's sister (Sarah) was born. When Sarah was old enough to travel, they returned to Maitland for a holiday.

When the holiday was over, Robert started a little business venture which was successful. He sold out to advantage and returned up country. It was on this trip that George first met Thunderbolt. The family was having breakfast when Thunderbolt rode up on a beautiful chestnut horse. George's father offered him a pint of tea, which he accepted. He asked Father if he knew who he (Thunderbolt) was, and Father said "No", but it did not matter, as he would give a cup of tea to anyone. Thunderbolt thanked Father and told him that the Police would be along shortly and to tell them he was going towards Bundarra. Father said "No, he wouldn't tell which way", but Thunderbolt said, "I want you to tell them". So he did. When Police arrived a few minutes later, they galloped after Thunderbolt. About half an hour later, Thunderbolt returned, then rode on to Bendemere where he held up the Bank. There wasn't a Policeman in town - they were all galloping to Bundarra, chasing Thunderbolt, as they thought.

Robert and family again went to Inverell and he got employment at Bannoch Station. It was here that George and

his sisters spent the next few years. George got his first pony - a Little white mare, of which he was fond and proud, and he could, and did everything with her. The little girls of his acquaintance used to watch him showing off on his pony and they thought he was wonderfully clever. He used to ride the pony to bring up the cows. One day he had some difficulty in finding the cows. They had wandered further than usual, resulting in his being late coming home. The family thought he was lost, and everybody turned out to look for him. They were firing guns and calling out, but he didn't take any notice of them - he didn't know they were looking for him. He knew he wasn't lost. He was riding along the track bringing the cows home.

At the age of eight, George first met the little girl he was later to marry². The Head Shepherd of Byron Station told George that he was bringing his wife and four little stepdaughters to the Station, and that he (George) could have his pick. It was the little five-year-old Louie whom George chose.

It was about this time that the first land was opened for selection on Bannochburn. George's father was the first man to take up land of what is now known as "Oakwood". George and Jane helped their father to put up the fence. They dug the post-holes. Father had a small crow-bar made for George's use. He dug the soil and Jane shovelled it out, then their father put in the post and bored the holes while the children dug the next hole - thus the fence was built.

When George was ten years old, he got his first job, that of Tar-boy, at the Shearing Shed at Byron Station. The work consisted of having a pot of tar and a stick with a wad of wool or rag bound on the end of it, which was dipped into the tar, then dabbed on any cut spot on the sheep to stop any danger of infection from flies, etc.

George then worked for a man named Ned Skinner, who was a hawker. He had three horses and a dray and used to load up with men's clothing, boots, cotton materials, needles, cottons, and buttons, etc. His regular boy had broken his leg, so, George was taken on until the boy's leg was all right again. They travelled down through the flat country to Moree, Boggabilla and other places. George learned a little bit about salesmanship.

George next tried Stock Drowsing with Jim Greenwood who was going down the big river to meet a mob of cattle that were being taken down to Grafton to the boiling-down works. (There was no sale for cattle - it was drought time, so they used to boil them down and send the tallow to England). On the way down, there was a shortage of water. They were told there was a tank at the Nine Mile. They camped there and George went to get a billy of water and found that someone had left the lid off the tank and it was full of dead possums. He pushed them aside, dipped a billy of water, put his handkerchief over the billy and had a drink through it, then used it to strain the water for tea.

The next night they camped at the Sand holes. When George went for water, he found that the water-hole was full of dead cattle. He walked out on a dead cow and dipped his billy of water. They then met the mob of cattle and travelled with them as far as the Red Rock Crossing, and then returned home.

The next job George had was with Glennie and Philip - Storekeepers - at Graman. They used to send a man out with two drays, (one three and one two horses), with merchandise. The man, Ham Winter, in charge, drove one dray and George drove the other. George's experience with Skinner was a help here, as he knew the roads, etc. George made a big sale one

day at Boggabilla. They had a lot of red and black plaid shirts, which were not selling. They camped not far from an Abbo Camp. The Gins came along to see what they could buy and saw the shirts. George sold out of them in a few minutes. (The shirts became dresses). The Boss was very pleased (he was away at the time of the sales). Another day George sold two pairs of size twelve boots to a shepherd - his feet were so large they had to soap his heels to get the boots on. It was at Boggabilla that George saw his first Black Corroboree and he was scared stiff.

George next worked for a Butcher at Tent Hill. He learned there to cut up a beast, and how to make small goods. He was there about twelve months.

In 1872, of the age of twelve, George took on a Contract to cut ten acres of burr for a pound. He worked very hard for that pound - a small boy with a big heart.

After that, George worked for Mr. Sinclair on Byron Station. This consisted of doing odd jobs such as cleaning his boots, getting his horse and saddling it, riding with him, going messages, and getting the mail from the Station house- It did not matter how quick he was getting the mail, the Boss would always tease him about talking to the little Nurse-maid, his little friend, Louie, whom he seldom saw.

During the year he was with Mr. Sinclair, one of his jobs was to go to Stonehenge with a letter. He left early in the morning, delivered the letter, got a reply, and returned to Byron by late afternoon. When he arrived, the Boss said, "I thought I sent you to Stonehenge, George", "So you did, here is your reply, Boss", George said. "What horse did you ride, George?" asked Mr. Sinclair. "My own", George replied. He had ridden 114 miles in the day - fortunately for the horse, George was a light weight. The horse, ("Johnny"), lived to be thirty years old. George's children used to ride him.

On another occasion, he was sent out with a load of Rock Salt for the sheep. He got along fine until he came to a gully. The horse went down all right but wouldn't pull out. George couldn't get him to move, and then he laid down and wouldn't get-up, George tried every way he knew to get the horse up, but to no avail, Finally, he gathered some dry leaves and placed them near the horse's hind legs and tail and set fire to the leaves. When the horse felt the fire begin to burn, he got up quickly and pulled the dray out of the gully. After that, if he began to jib, all that had to be done was to rattle some dry leaves.

At the age of fifteen, George learned to shear sheep at Mr. Ned White's shed. They would shear two days, then put in a day washing the sheep, enough for two days' shearing. Whenever Mr. White had time, he would shear a sheep and put it on George's tally to help him along, because he was a learner.

At that time, Byron Station was sold to Mr. Cruikshanks. He wanted a lad who knew the country, to show him round, so he engaged George. Later, he took over the coachman's job.

Somewhere about 1876, the Public School opened at Oakwood. The Teacher had night-classes for some of the older boys and girls. George, (at the age of seventeen), went with his sister (Jane) to night-school for three months, and learned to read and write and a little arithmetic. That was all the schooling he had, but he was able to advance himself until he could read aloud very well, and also he could do all his own correspondence.

During the remainder of his teenage years, George was a Stockman on a Station, did shearing, fencing, or any other work that came along.

When George was twenty-one, his father gave him a big party, a day's racing, and a dance at night.

About this time, George again met Louie who was then a pretty girl of eighteen. She, her sister, and brother, had ridden up from their step-father's property to the Inverell Show. It was then that they fell in love. A year later in December, 1882 they were married. They had to ride twenty-five miles on a very hot day - get married - and ride home again.

During that year, George had taken up a Selection and built a home out of timber which he cut out of the bush. He cut round timber and squared the posts with an adz, and split slabs and smoothed them by adzing. Bark was used for roofing which was later replaced by galvanised iron. The earth floor was later covered with kangaroo skins, which were treated and joined together. The main rooms were ceiled with calico after Louis came. She was a real home-maker, papering ---³ and all the things a woman can do to make a house into a home.

It was this house in its most primitive state that George took his bride to, the day they were married. George has said that after he paid the Parson, he had a wife, two horses, and two and sixpence in his pocket.

Unfortunately, George was unable to stock the place, so he had to do outside work to keep his wife and pay the rent. Work in those days, was very poorly paid - 15/- per week. George did quite a lot of Contract work, and used to nearly kill himself to earn a few pounds.

On the 29th October, 1883, their daughter (Frances) was born, and two years later, a son (George) was born. During those years, George worked very hard.

Occasionally, he let the property on agistment. He borrowed money to buy sheep, but the 1888 drought came and he had to find water. He used the money to sink a well, got water, but it was salty and no good. Later, he found water in a gully just below the house. He sank a hole - six feet deep - and got a wonderful flow of beautiful soft water. That spring is still flowing. The property today is worth thousands.

In June, 1888, a second daughter (Jane) was born. George was fencing on Coolatai, and when he wasn't doing Contract work, he put in his time kangaroo shooting to keep the home-front going.

In 1889, he sold out, and later took up another Selection on Coolatai, near the Wallangra boundary. He built a better house than the one on the first Selection. He was able to stock up with sheep and started with two cows. He did his first shearing in a tent and built his own wool-press. His wife did the wool rolling and Frances was tar-boy. The wool-shed was built the next year.

In 1890 a third daughter (Adelene) was born.

During the following year, things become a little more prosperous. To help along, George used to shear at Coolatai and Wallangra Station.

It was during the Nineties that he took up cricket. Wallangra had a very good team, and they used to visit the various centres. Mostly, George took the family with him. It meant a day out and a picnic for them, Most families came to the Cricket Matches. George was always interested in Sport and as a very young man was very good at running and jumping.

On the 5th March, 1893, the fourth daughter (Lucy) was born, and the fifth daughter (Vera) was born on the 7th October, 1895. Two years later, another daughter (Sylvia) was born, and when she was only a few months old George sold the property and took up a lease near Ashford.

There, he built a nice home. All the family had to work to get things going, making a garden, etc. The children were able to go to school from there; previously, there wasn't a school within distance for them to attend. George was able to stock the place with sheep, cattle, and horses. He also built a wool-scour and did very well for a few years, then a flood washed away the dam which was never repaired. Another son (Robert) was born on the 24th October, 1899.

Whilst at Ashford, George was made a J.P. and he used to sit on the local bench, to try minor cases. He also became a member of the Independent Order of Good Templars, and was sent as representative of the local Lodge, to the Grand Lodge Annual Meeting in Sydney, on several occasions. The family was always thrilled about it, as they never knew what he would bring home for them.

The seventh daughter (Kathie) was born in 1902, and at the age of ten months she died - the first break in the family.

About 1903, tobacco growing was introduced in the Ashford district. George was interested and grew tobacco for some time. Whilst living in the district, George took a keen interest in all local affairs. He was a leader in organising benefits for worthy causes and was well respected and highly regarded by the people, and when the family left the district in 1906, they gave him a wonderful send-off and presentation.

Another son (Eric) was born in 1905.

In 1906 George again got itchy feet and decided to go to Queensland, so the family packed their goods and chattles and travelled to Queensland in a van and buggies, taking also some spare horses. People thought it was a Circus. The roads were rough and a storm didn't improve matters. Finally, they reached Peak Crossing, where George bought a sawmill, which he ran for a number of years. The family lived at the sawmill for four years.

The Doctor advised George to take his wife away as the dust and noise were too much for her. So he leased a dairy and pineapple farm and moved the family to North Pine. They stayed there two years. George was no farmer and didn't like cows. Whilst there, the first wedding of the family took place. On Boxing Day, the 26th December, 1911, their daughter (Jane) was married to William Finimore.

Early in 1912, the family moved to a house in Zillmere. George did a bit of speck building, getting his timber from the sawmill.

Then he bought land and built a home at Graceville. The family moved in at the end of 1912. During the years he lived at Graceville, he did a bit of land dealing and speck building, drawing the timber from the sawmill, which was managed by his eldest son.

On Christmas Day, the 25th December, 1913, Lucy was married to Edward T. White, and on the 26th April, 1915, their little daughter (Lucy) was born and her Mother passed away. A very sad loss to everyone. She was a very popular girl.

During the war years (1914-1918) George took a keen interest in Patriotic affairs, and helped to organise workers and build cottages for War Widows at Sherwood and Graceville. He also was very interested in Shire Council Elections and Local Government, and any scheme for the improvement of the district, had his full support.

In 1920 George again moved. He sold some of his property and went to Sydney, where he bought and sold property and was doing very well until the depression years, when he, with thousands of others, lost almost everything. He fortunately managed to save a small property he had at Wynnum, Queensland, where he and his wife returned in 1930.

During those years, three of their daughters (Vera, Sylvia, and Frances) married, and also son (Robert).

When George returned to Queensland, he built a house for his son (George) at Thornlands, before settling in his own house at Brisbane Rood, Wynnum, where he did a bit of vegetable growing and poultry farming.

In 1930, Eric was married and two years later George married.

At eighty-six, George bought a piece of land from his daughter (Frances) where he built his present home at Chestnut Street, Wynnum. Two years after that, his dear wife, at the age of eighty-five, passed away, leaving him a very lonely man, after sixty-six years' companionship.

He bravely took up life again, and become interested in taking Pioneer Tours and attending Card Luncheons, which has helped him to live a full life. On the 20th July, 1951 the third break in the family occurred when Adelene passed away.

George has made many friends and every morning, he takes a walk down the street, meets his pals, has a yarn, and returns home with the "Courier Mail". Thus, his days pass

peacefully, and on the 11th July 1960, he celebrates his One Hundredth birthday.

George had ten children, and now has sixteen grandchildren and sixteen great-grandchildren.

Footnotes:

¹ Possibly Frances' half-sister Emily and her husband George Solly

² Probably George was ten as the Head Shepherd did not marry until 1870