

Johnston Family History

Notes from Rona O'Donnell

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Johnstone in Scotland

The Johnston family came originally from Scotland. According to Claude A. Johnston, his great grandfather lived “across the river from Edinburgh”.¹ At some point, he left to Australia, arriving eventually in Melbourne. Whether he married in Scotland, and took his wife with him, or met her in Melbourne, is not known. The family name in Scotland had been “Johnstone”, but in Australia it was changed to Johnston, possibly because someone wrote it down wrongly, and they went with the change.

Archibald Johnston

This Johnstone had a son, Archibald Johnston², Rona's great grandfather. Archibald himself may have been born in Scotland, coming out with his parents, arriving Melbourne. Or he might have been born in Melbourne after they arrived. In any case, he was probably born around 1840.³

Archibald met and married Elizabeth Henderson.⁴ Elizabeth was the youngest child of a Scottish family, with 6 older brothers. The parents died when Elizabeth was young, and she was raised by her brothers, most of whom were born in Scotland. Rona believes she was born in Ballarat. Although not born in Scotland, she still spoke with a Scottish accent, picked up from her brothers.

They lived in or near Melbourne. According to Rona, they had 6 sons and 3 daughters, most of which died young, except for two sons.

Archibald died before Rona was born, but Elizabeth lived until around 1932. She was then known as “Little Grandma”, so must have been a tiny woman.

Claude Henry Johnston

Claude Henry Johnston, Rona's grandfather, was born in Melbourne, to Archibald and Elizabeth, probably around 1865.⁵

One of his younger brothers got TB. He didn't live in the house, because there were children there. He had a tent in the yard. In those days, they believed fresh air was important for curing TB. He however died at some point before Rona was born.

Claude Henry was in the printing trade, working for a printer.

¹ From notes from Claude A. Johnston collected by Rona.

² The name ‘Archibald’ is from the death certificate of the son, Claude H.

³ Assuming he was 25 when he had his son.

⁴ The name Elizabeth taken from death certificate of son, Claude H. The surname Henderson from notes Rona collected from Claude A.

⁵ Rona remembers Claude H. to be born in Melbourne. The first names of his father and mother were obtained from his BDM death certificate. His mother's surname was from notes Rona obtained from her father, Claude A. The date is estimated, as he was aged 80 when he died in 1945. Rona thinks he was baptized by Cannon Begbie.

At some point he met Amy Jane⁶ Roddick and married her. She was from a well off family, living in the suburb of Toorak in Melbourne. The Roddicks didn't approve of this wedding, as they thought Claude H. was beneath Amy in station, being just a printer.

They lived in Melbourne, and owned a house. They had two daughters there, Nell and Ethel. Nell later married Jack (John). Ethel married Jo (Joseph) Bonford, and was mother of Ray Bonford, a cousin of Rona. Ethyl and Jo apparently had a grocery shop. Jo died when Ray was 3.

Claude H. and Amy lost this house during the 1890s depression, which was particularly severe in Australia, due to the bad drought. Claude and Amy moved to Sydney, living in a rented house in Camperdown. Claude H. got another printing job here (Rona thinks they printed the Australian Woman's Weekly).

In 1897, they had a son, Claude A. Johnston (Rona's father). Claude A. remembered, at 3 (perhaps 1901), being carried downstairs by his father (must have been a 2 story house) to see the soldiers walking past, going to the Boer War. (the house must have been near Parramatta rd.)

Later, Claude Henry and Amy bought a house at Campsie, built by the Colonial Building Society (who built houses everywhere). Rona says the roads were still dirt when she was little, and when it rained, mud.

When Claude A. was 14, Claude H. and Amy had a 4th child, Stan (around 1911).

Rona remembers that Claude H. was very good to everyone. One of his brothers was an accountant in a bank, or at least somewhere where he had opportunity to get at money, and he then embezzled it. He came to Claude H. and said "I've got to get out of the country". So Claude H. went with him to the bank, and withdrew all the money he had, and saw him onto a ship to San Francisco. He was never heard of again. This was just before the earthquake in San Francisco, so whether he died there, or chose to disappear, no one knows.

Claude H. was very much into community service, especially through the church. He was Choir Master at the local St. Stephen's church (Campsie, Church of England). He was also the Sunday School superintendent for many years. There is a memorial plaque to him in the church still. He was an organiser of the Boys Brigade (a precursor to the scouts). He liked to help others, but, according to Rona, Estelle had problems with him because he was always pushing religion.

Claude Henry died in 1945 of pneumonia (he was still living in Campsie⁷ at the time). His daughter Ethyl nursed him in his last days, as Amy was herself somewhat an invalid. Amy Johnson lived until 1957, dying at the age of 92.

Stanley Howard Johnston

Stanley Howard was born around 1911⁸. He married JESSIE LAVINIA BOOTHROYD in 1937, when he was 26, in the Ryde District⁹. Two years later, aged 28, 1939 in Ryde

⁶ She is usually referred to as Amy J. but in the death record of Stanley Johnston (1939), she is named as Amy Jane. Rona provided the surname. A note from Claude A. records her as 92 at her death in 1957, making her born in 1865, the same year as her husband.

⁷ His death record shows Canterbury as the place of death.

⁸ STANLEY HOWARD from his death record, 1939.

district, he died from blood poisoning (the year after, antibiotics became available which could have saved him). They had had no children yet.

Claude Alfred Johnston

Claude A. Johnston, Rona's father, was born in Camperdown, Sydney in October 1897.¹⁰ Rona remembers that he was baptised by a Reverend or Cannon Begbie. One of his earliest memories was of watching soldiers marching along the road, on their way to the Boer war (probably along Parramatta Road). When he was around 4 or 5, his parents bought a house in nearby Campsie, and they moved there.

He went to nearby Canterbury primary school. He didn't go to high school, which was quite common in those days. At school, he was a very bad boy. Once, he threw an inkwell full of ink at the teacher, then dived out the window, and ran home. His father made him go back and tried to smooth things out.

After primary school, his father started him working in his printing firm, where he worked for about a year, but he hated it (he hated being indoors). So his father got him an apprenticeship as a carpenter instead, which was to become his trade.

When he was 20 or so, he went to New Zealand for 2 years, and worked as a carpenter there, for a builder. He was in a boarding house in Dunedin. He had a girlfriend, who was the daughter of the landlady of his boarding house. Mick remembers that he said he eventually left because the girlfriend wanted him to marry her.

He returned to Campsie, where his parents still lived. Soon after, he met his future wife, Martha Hannah K Barrett. He said that when he returned from NZ, she was the girlfriend of one of his friends, but that he took a liking to her. One day, they were walking along the street together, and he asked her if she liked him, and she said she did. So he stole her from his mate.

Marth-Hannah (as she was called) was the daughter of John W. Barrett and Maria Elizabeth Lilliebridge (later called "Dolly"). She was born in 1898. They lived a few blocks away from the Johnstons, in neighboring Canterbury. However, according to Rona, they had never met before Claude returned from NZ.

They married in January 1922, in the Canterbury district.¹¹ Claude called his wife Marie, which became her name.

Possibly short of work in the city, Claude A. accepted a job building a silo, probably in Temora, NSW. Marth-Hannah accompanied him, and they were living in a tent for the duration. Marth-Hannah used to cook not only for Claude, but also for some of the single men, to make some extra money.

After this job, they returned to Campsie, Marth-Hannah now pregnant. 10 months after marrying (20 November 1922), they had their first daughter, Estelle.

Soon after, they moved to Moss Vale. They lived in rented rooms while Claude was building a house for the family, called Myee ("My home" in aboriginal). Their second daughter, Rona, was born there on 5th September 1924.

⁹ From NSW BDM.

¹⁰ BDM certif: 33784/1897, registered Newtown.

¹¹ From NSW BDM.

During the Great Depression, Claude originally was working for a builder, and then building on contract. As the depression deepened, less people were building, so he took whatever work he could get, fixing drains, and odd jobs. He also kept a vegetable garden going for extra food. Marth-Hannah also worked as a dress maker, and this money kept the children clothed.

During their time in Moss Vale, Claude H., Claude's father, would come up and visit often, especially on long weekends. Rona remembers that her and Estelle's job was to take him out to see Claude's latest house. On the way back, they would stop at a sweet shop, and Claude H. would give them a penny to spend on sweets.

Claude H.s' wife, Amy rarely came up to Moss Vale. Rona thinks she probably had a prolapsed uterus while birthing Stanley, and in those days, they couldn't fix this. She rarely left home, eventually even stopping going to church. Despite this, she lived to 92.

Amy's two brothers, who still lived in Melbourne, would drive up to Sydney occasionally to visit Amy. They would stop off in Moss Vale on the way up, to visit their nephew, Claude A. Rona remembers that they would always bring Estelle and her a tin of lollies each.

For Claude's building work in Moss Vale, he had to get timber sent up from Sydney, as there was no local timber supply center. He decided to set up his own, and used his shed, with part for timber, and also a section for selling tools. However, a couple of brothers in the town had the same idea, and set up a similar center, with more resources behind them. So Claude had to shut down that business.

While in Moss Vale, Claude did a job for a builder in Bowral. The builder liked his work, so asked him to build a house (possibly a farm-house) in Coolah, with the promise of more work in Sydney after. Since there was little work in Moss Vale, Claude accepted the offer, and in sold the Moss Vale house (in 1934), and while he went to Coolah, Marth-Hannah and the two daughters went back to Sydney, where they stayed in a rented room in Moss St., West Ryde.

When Claude finished the house in Coolah, he returned to Sydney, so they moved to another place, Hermitage Rd, West Ryde, this one with two rooms. He kept working for the same builder, who was based in Eastwood.

The landlady of this house had one son. Her husband had been an AMP insurance agent, but he got into financial difficulties, and jumped off the Harbor Bridge, recently completed. His wife thus needed to rent rooms to survive.

They then rented a whole house, an old fibro house in Gaza Rd., West Ryde. This was an uncomfortable house however, so they soon rented a more comfortable house in Adelaide St.

About this time, Claude stopped working for the Eastwood builder, and started building houses on spec (speculation - buying land, building a house, then selling). He did the carpentry, but got in bricklayers, plumbers, etc. He heard rumors of a railway station being built at Denistone, so he bought three blocks of land there, build a house on one, and sold that and the two blocks when the station was announced, or possibly started. After this, he built another house on spec at Rhodes, a waterfront block (on the Parramatta river).

They stayed in rented houses, as his plan was that if they couldn't sell one of these spec houses, they would move into it, and this happened with his next house, in Trelawney St, Eastwood. This was to be the family home from 1937 until about 1956.

During WW II, Claude worked for the Civil Construction Corps, a non-military organisation, although with government connections. The CCC originally consisted of men drafted from the Main Roads Department to carry out War Works, although other people were taken in too. They built structures for the military, such as barracks. He worked mainly in Canberra and then Brisbane. Rona remembers going to visit him in Brisbane. He had just got a new set of false teeth. On a bus trip somewhere, he opened his mouth to say something, and they just popped out, onto the floor. He was embarrassed, but Rona had a laugh.

[PHOTO OF BADGE].

In 1956, they sold the Eastwood house,¹² and moved into a flat (part house) in Pymble, while Claude was building a house in Shaftsbury Rd, Epping, which they lived in for a few years. He then built a house in Turramurra (possibly Warrigal Rd), where they also lived for several years.

Their last house, which Claude build himself, was in West Pymble, around 1963. The block was bush when they bought it, and they left the bush intact at the back of the house.

Claude kept on working, building houses, until he was 80. The last house he built was for his daughter Rona and her family, in Castlecrag. This he found too much for him, so he gave up house building. He was however still doing odd carpentry jobs for people in Pymble until his late 80s.

Marie died in 198?, aged 86. Claude himself lived to the ripe old age of 92, dying in September 1989.

¹² Rona remembers staying in the Eastwood house upon returning from New Guinea, with her new husband, Peter. She also remembers coming up from Albury with sons John and Paul to stay there.



Figure 1: Claude A. (back center)

Postscript

With the possible exception of the brother who fled to San Francisco, the name Johnston in this branch died out. Claude H. and this brother were the only surviving sons of Archibald and Elizabeth (possibly other brothers survived, but if they did, they had only daughters). Claude H. and Amy had two sons, but Stanley died without issue. Their other son, Claude A., had only daughters. Possibly the black sheep has started a family in San Francisco, we don't know.

MERGE

The Civil Construction Corps (CCC) had a large camp near Ellison Road at Chermside in Brisbane during WW2. Their nightly two-up game was highly popular with the soldiers from the neighboring camps. The game often ran all night with much money won and lost.

The Civil Construction Corps consisted of men drafted from the Main Roads Department to carry out War Works. Men of the Allied Works Council and the Civil Construction Corps were apparently camped in the area between Murphy Rd, Ellison Rd, Newman Rd and Hamilton Rd, Chermside in Brisbane. (UBD Map 120).

There was also a Civil Construction Corps Camp located somewhere in the Colmslie area in Brisbane. There may have also been another CCC camp located in the Bulimba area of Brisbane. (from <http://home.st.net.au/~dunn/ozatwar/ccc.htm>)

? Anderson (Claude's grandmother) came to Australia & married Henderson (born in Balarat, Victoria), in Melbourne. She died 1934.