

# INDUSTRY & PERSEVERANCE

## PREFACE

This account of David Brown (1750-1836) and his descendants and their connections, gives an insight into the expansion of free European settlement of Australia. David junior (c1783-1857) and his wife, Elizabeth McMahan (1799-1837), and their descendants, feature prominently in this history. Elizabeth's mother, Catherine Mooney (c1778-1857) and the children that she raised from her marriages with Terence McMahan (c1767- 1801) and Patrick Humphries (1767- 1846), are an integral part of this history. Likewise, David senior's son-in-law, James Chisholm (1772-1837), and his family, form a significant part of the Brown story.

I have tried to show the state of the Colony of New South Wales in c1800 as they found it, and developments and conditions in the colony as it affected the 'Brown' family in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This work grew out of 'Perspectives', which I last produced in 2001. In 'Perspectives' each character was dealt with separately, and there was considerable overlap of information. 'Industry & Perseverance' attempts to weave together the individual stories of the various characters presented in Perspectives. I have included a great amount of new information relevant to the Brown's story that I have come by since 2001.

Industry & Perseverance is a mosaic of available evidence. It is largely presented as a chronology. Wherever possible, appropriate contemporary comments from letters, newspapers, and journals have been used. There is little in the way of historical argument. Here and there, there is some deliberation about how the facts may be interpreted.

Most of what has been compiled so far has been based on BDM registration, land transactions, census, occasional newspaper items, archival records, various academic and family histories, and family legend. The Brown family legend as recorded by Blanche Jenkins in 1946 has generally proven to be a good pointer to what happened but is often wrong in detail. Unfortunately, there is little in the way of personal correspondence and diaries encountered so far, which might add to current understanding of these people. However, the evidence gathered suggests the Browns, and those connected to them, were busy and energetic people who made the most of their connections and entitlements in the colony.

The origins of David Brown are a mystery. Family legend has proved to be a tantalising challenge to all those who have attempted to research David and his family. Finding anything of substance that corroborate or disprove the hints of Jacobite connections and lost lands in Scotland has proved elusive.

The history of the family is very much a history of major events in the development of settlement from Sydney to the Hawkesbury River, and then to the Hunter River, and beyond. The Browns are particularly associated with the Cattai region and Jerry's Plains. Jerry's Plains, during the period 1841 – 1850, fortunately had an active correspondent to the Maitland Mercury and its predecessor the Hunter River Gazette<sup>1</sup>, who provided a useful contemporary insight into the concerns of a small rural

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<sup>1</sup> The Maitland Mercury, the newspaper's correspondent was also its agent for subscriptions and orders for advertising and printing. The agent for the newspaper was often the postmaster. The agent and correspondent for The Hunter River District News was Joseph J. Harper, brother to Charles Harper (1813-1868). Charles is described in 'National Library of Australia News', July 2003, as Australia's first poet and philosopher, Joseph J. Harper who had 'removed from Jerry's Plains' by 20 March 1850 was the papers agent for most if not all of ten years prior.

community - Quotes from that correspondent are usually self-sufficient. Unfortunately, during the 1850s, Jerry's Plains ceased to be well represented in the Maitland Mercury, and so I have drawn more on relevant material from the correspondent of nearby Singleton.

The significance of the development of the colony up to the Hunter, and then the push to the northwest and north from there, has been very much under appreciated. This appears to be due to the fact that most of this was achieved (under difficult circumstances) through the efforts of ordinary folk, rather than 'establishment' people.

The tendency towards having large families of the nineteenth century meant that there were a lot of birth events to recount. The chronological inclusion of such detail in some instances disrupted or confused the telling of other events. To minimise that effect, for the most part, births are indented in italics as an aside, and preceded by a "#", unless they are linked with additional information. Births are also summarised with the deaths of their parents.

In doing this project I have often tried to visualise the people and their circumstances. I have become increasingly aware of the poor dental health of the white population in Australia in the nineteenth century. Medical science as we experience it, still had a long way to go, there was no such thing as a quick fix with antibiotics. Dentistry was little more than pulling teeth. Excavation of a pioneer graveyard by the University of Adelaide at St Mary's, South Australia in 2002, provided a significant pointer to this state of affairs. It is apparent that a very high proportion of people had lost most of their teeth by their early forties. Laughter and open mouth smiles of adults were likely to have revealed sparsely scattered, broken, and blackened teeth. One can understand why soups, stews, and porridge might have been popular fare with nineteenth century folk. This image, and the debilitating effect on general health of a tooth abscess, the foul odour of that particular situation, and general poor dental maintenance, all add another dimension to a picture of what were, in any event, difficult and challenging times.

Notable are some of the women of this history, such as Ann Shepherd, Elizabeth McMahon, and Catherine Mooney - They stand out as strong independent characters.

Also significant is, how much was achieved in such a short time. The extent to which people got around with a very slow and limited transportation and communications system is remarkable.

Readers are welcome to notify me of any information, sources and corrections that might add to, or improve, the understanding of the lives and times dealt with in this work.

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