

Chapter 1 Sea change – 200 Years Ago.

My Da sailed into Sydney Town more than sixty-five years before the colonies federated to form our Commonwealth of Australia. Around 1835 Patrick Quinn arrived, a year or so, or so it seems, before Selina Lought, his bride to be. They apparently headed north from Sydney Town on a coastal packet to Lake Macquarie where they married at Five Islands in 1840. Evidently, for the birth of their first child, they returned to Sydney Town where Dad worked around the village of Burwood, maybe as a bell man, or as a sawyer in the forest around Duck Creek, then being cleared for orchards.¹

I am Hugh Quinn, first born of Patrick and Selina, and the first of my Quinn clan to be born here in the antipodes. That was back in 1842 just up-river from Sydney Town towards Parramatta. For over twenty years Burwood had been a staging post for the waggon² to Parramatta. Five years after my birth, brother James was born (1847) and in '52 by the time I was ten years old my second brother, another Paddy joined our family. Rosanna our sister, then just two years old, had joined our mob in 1850, and we were living at Skeleton Creek about 10 miles NE of Glen Innes. Yes, by 1852 our Quinn family numbered four kids and Mum and Dad.

During the forties and fifties, we moved to be living on the New England Tablelands North West of Newcastle and the Hunter River Valley. Timber cutting, down on the coast, probably provided employment for my Dad. It was not till about twenty years later in the 1870's that mining took off in the tableland, an area that also provided possibly the richest pastoral and agricultural region yet developed in the colony. Regular rainfall and deep, fertile soils produced rich rewards for those pioneers who trundled their way west and north over the Liverpool Range of the Great Divide via low point gateways such as Nowland's Gap³ and, further to the West, Pandora's Gap.

Squatters to be, in flagrant violation of the law, colonised the rich Liverpool Plains beyond the limits of location as defined by Governor Darling's 1829 proclamation of nineteen counties.⁴ Free selection beyond the Black Stump Run, claimed to lie along the Nineteen's northern boundary,⁵ was illegal, and



x = Five Islands

dangerous placing the colonists beyond the limits and protection of the law. Within the limits of location crown land was available for sale and activities could be policed providing some security for the settlers, a prudent goal of setting limits to legal occupation. Beyond the limits of the law, settlers simply selected a run, settling on land of their choosing. By 1836, the Government had a change of heart imposed on it by the sheer numbers of these illegals who were given grazing rights by Governor Bourke.⁶ Squatters were then able to obtain annual licenses to legitimise their squatting activities although they still agitated for ownership of their selections.⁷ Beyond the law and often with the active support of troopers the destruction of our black Nations was increasingly more actively pursued.⁸

Towards the coast the Manning River formed the northern limit of location but by the 1840's even along the MacLeay further north, there was 'a great number of squatting stations, belonging mostly to retired officers. These are the words of one of those early squatters.

'The country they occupy as cattle runs is abundantly watered, independently of the river, by a vast number of permanent chains of small ponds, and water-courses; the grass is good, but the country available for grazing extends but a very few miles back from the river, especially on the north side, as the ranges soon become lofty and serrated, rising one beyond the other in endless succession, universally covered with dense brushy forest, and intersected by innumerable ravines and gullies worn by torrents.'⁹

The MacLeay is a few rivers further north than the Manning and well outside the limit of location. Between these two rivers runs the Hastings to Port Macquarie. In 1821 this port became a prison within a prison, replacing Newcastle as a penal settlement for convicts who committed secondary crimes in the original penal colony. Hastings region was first opened to settlers in 1830 and later in the decade the penal settlement closed, replaced by a new place of punishment way to the north at Moreton Bay. 'Settlers quickly took advantage of the areas good pastoral land, timber resources, and fisheries.'¹⁰



Between the tableland escarpment and the Eastern coastline, mountainous terrain was covered with almost impenetrable jungle. Dense forest restricted development of pastoral leases to land along the lower reaches of some of the southerly rivers cascading from the tablelands to the Pacific Ocean. Unrestricted, timber cutters penetrated these forests and led the wave of colonial development north along the coast, extracting their booty and clashing with the indigenous peoples. A Government Survey in the early 1840's reported that 'As the cedar on the MacLeay river is now quite exhausted, the cedar sawyers have lately migrated to the brushes at the Nambucca.' The report continues: 'They were at first exposed to murderous attacks from the native tribes on its banks, who killed and wounded several sawyers; and as retaliatory expeditions were undertaken, in consequence, against the natives, (on which occasion the sawyers mustered together, armed

with their guns, and swords, roughly manufactured from their pit-saws), a great number of blacks were killed in the skirmishes which took place, and they gradually became more peaceably inclined.'¹¹

Rumours about just such a hostile wilderness in the mostly unexplored north coast would have filtered south, even around Five Islands in Lake Macquarie. Little wonder then that Paddy and Selina had returned to Sydney Town for my birth in 1842. Maybe Paddy tried his hand as a sawyer in this area in the year following his 1840 marriage. Much Cedar had already been culled from the area, but there may still have been some cutting and sawing around Five Islands on the northern shore of the Lake. Workmates in the area may have included timber workers returned from the leading edge of colonial expansion to the north with tales as tall as the timbers they felled, tales of war waged and wealth won, rumours of fabulous wealth to be gained in gathering Red Gold. After my birth the Quinn family, Patrick, Selina and I newly born journeyed north past the jungle forests of the New South Wales North Coast, to commence our pioneering life in the growing colony.¹²

The following report in the 1839 Sydney Gazette on Tuesday, June 4 may have inspired our family to journey northward. Maybe it was Mum who saw it as marriage plans were under way. The prospect of harvesting or even planting Cedars for the future may have held out a lot of promise for this young couple in their early twenties. The rather lengthy report read as follows:

'No person who has resided for some time in the interior of this Colony can fail to have noticed the improvident habits of the generality of our settlers. The single study seems to be to make money and to make it rapidly. It matters not how certain may be the result of investing capital in any particular branch of agriculture, if the profits be not moderate or not susceptible of being immediately realized, it will infallibly be neglected. If, on the contrary, any branch of agriculture gives an extraordinary return one year, the next year the market seldom fails to be overstocked, the large profits of the preceding year tempting all to turn their attention to the production of the same article of consumption'.



The report gives this example: 'At Hunter's River, for instance, in the years 1830 and 1831, tobacco was cultivated on a very limited scale, the profit to the grower was consequently enormous. In 1833 and 1834, almost every agriculturist on the Hunter directed his attention to the culture of tobacco, and the market was in consequence glutted to such an extent that sales could scarcely be effected at any price'.

The Gazette moves towards the main point of the article: 'We have been induced to make these remarks from observing the gradual disappearance of Cedar, the most valuable of all the indigenous trees of the Colony, from our forests. Some twenty years ago, the Cedar grew in abundance on the banks of the Hunter and its tributary streams, the William, and the Patterson. At Illawarra also, and in various other districts adjacent to Sydney Cedar was procurable. Now the cabinet-makers have to depend for their supply on the bands of pioneers sent out to explore the terra incognita lying to the northward of Port Macquarie. At the McLeay and the Manning, whence Sydney has

been principally supplied for some years, comparatively little Cedar is now to be found within a practicable distance of the river, and it is obvious that ere long the whole of what remains will be cut down and carried away. As Cedar becomes scarce, it will necessarily rise in price, and with the rise in the price of the timber, there must follow a corresponding rise in the price of every article of household furniture.'

In conclusion, the article finally makes its point: 'It would obviously be a wise policy were such of our settlers as possess good Cedar lands, to obtain a quantity of young Cedar plants and turn their attention to the culture of this valuable tree. The outlay required would be but small, and as the Cedar grows rapidly, the returns would eventually be ample. A father could scarcely leave a more valuable legacy to his children than a forest of young Cedar trees.'¹³

The way forward was opening up to the north for Paddy and Sel as they took on the challenge of their new homeland. Clement Hodgkinson submitted the first Government Survey of the area in mid-1842. He tried hard to finish all his outstanding survey duties, but his final letter to the Surveyor General dated 2nd May 1842, makes harrowing reading:

'Sir, Having been in town some days I beg to apologise to you for not calling on you before this. The reason of this delay is the alarming illness of my wife whose life has been pronounced to be in the most imminent danger and being away from her friends I am obliged to be constantly in attendance on her.'

A newspaper notice takes this sad and probably all too frequent sorry colonial experience to its tragic conclusion:

'Died at Sydney, May 11th, six days after giving birth to a daughter, Matilda Mary, the beloved wife of Clement Hodgkinson Esq. and second daughter of W. H. Chapman. Her long and painful illness was born with the most exemplary piety and Christian fortitude; her last moments affording her afflicted friends the consolation that her soul was at peace with her God.'

Her baby daughter died soon after and was buried at Yarrabandinni (Clements cattle station on the north side of the MacLeay river basin). The headstone read:

'Sacred
To the Memory of
Emily Ann Hodgkinson
Died 11 June 1842
Aged 6 weeks
Surviving Her Mother 1 Month.'¹⁴

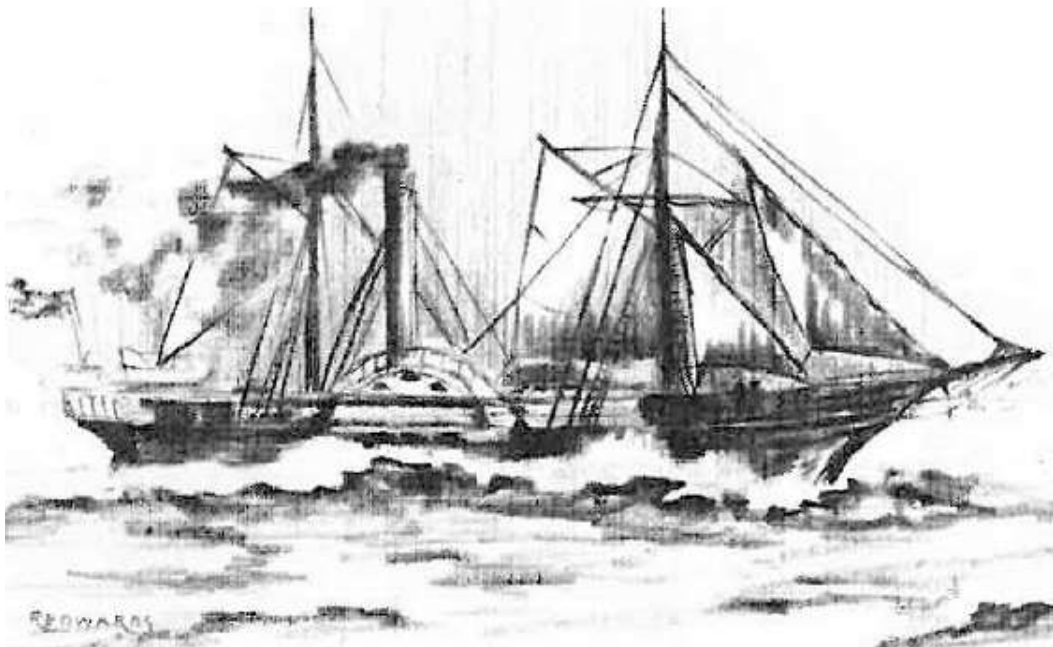
'Died without issue'¹⁵ euphemistically refers to a double tragedy, the death of both mother and her firstborn. A shadow may have crossed the heart of Selina Quinn if she read the death notice in the Sydney Herald of July 20, 1842¹⁶. Still confined and expecting her first born or else released and suckling me, she would have been reinforced in the decision to return to Sydney Town for my birth. Selina's future was already determined as wife and mother. The alluring promise of fabulous fortune built on a foundation of solid work, such was the promise of a bright future for the family of Paddy Quinn as a sawyer in search of Red Gold.

Too young was I to remember details of our journey north. The Great Northern Road over the Liverpool Range via Nowland's Gap had been completed by 1834. Over 3,000 convicts had laboured for eight years in constructing this first road out of the Hunter Region. But there was little work for a sawyer in the hardwood timber of the tableland: too heavy to haul; too hard to work. Maybe they choose to sail along the coast by ship from Sydney to Port Macquarie. A steamer such as William the Fourth would start such a journey as an overnight trip to Newcastle, there to take on coal. Then putting out from Nobby's Head at the mouth of the Hunter about midday it would round Tacking Point and

birth in the Hastings River about mid-morning of the following day. A schooner such as the Lady Nelson could make it sooner, bypassing the Hunter and sailing directly to the Hastings.

Our Quinn family may have looked forward to the prospect of living for a while in the forest and beaches along the coast to be near the cutters camps. Alternatively, by 1843, the newly built convict road up the Hastings overland to New England was opening up access to the tableland. Along the coast 'From Port Macquarie, northerly, there was no beaten track at the time, and the country may have presented some obstructions to the formation of a road', such as numerous coastal rivers flowing between beaches of glorious golden sand. Travelling was, however, not difficult on foot, following the blacks along the coast, via a succession of sandy beaches, extending from Port Macquarie to Point Plomer, from thence to Crescent Head'.¹⁷

Joining one of the timber teams working their way up the coast would have ensured shipping support from the timber traders. In 1843 Cedar dealers first crossed the bar at the mouth of the Bellinger River to open up luxurious Cedar forests containing 'the finest cedar and rosewood ... the trunks of these trees were often six foot in diameter, and ninety feet high, before they threw out a single branch.'¹⁸ My parents route north towards a ruddy El Dorado is uncertain, and unsure I am whether they travelled direct to the table land or via the Port and the coast. Within a decade, we had reached the New England fields around Furracabad. They were to be our home where we lived and grew.



William the Fourth - Coastal Steamer¹⁹

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- 1 Wikipedia, Early Orchards http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Croydon,_New_South_Wales
 - 2 Wikipedia, Burwood Staging Post http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burwood,_New_South_Wales
 - 3 Wikipedia Gateway north, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Nowland
 - 4 Wikipedia Limits of Location http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nineteen_Counties#cite_note-1
 - 5 Wikipedia Black Stump Run http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Stump
 - 6 Wikipedia 1836 Bourke reform http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Bourke
 - 7 Wiki; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Squatting_\(pastoral\)#Darling_and_the_.E2.80.98Limits_of_Location.E2.80.99](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Squatting_(pastoral)#Darling_and_the_.E2.80.98Limits_of_Location.E2.80.99)
 - 8 Wikipedia Australian War - History Wars http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_wars
 - 9 Hodgkinson, Clement. (1845). Australia from Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay :London :T. and W. Boone :p 17
 - 10 Wikipedia Port Macquarie http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port_Macquarie#History
 - 11 Op. cit. Hodgkinson, Clement. (1845). p 24 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn740742>
 - 12 Authors note: No facts support which trail the Quinn Family journeyed on to arrive at Glen Innes.
 - 13 The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser June 4 1839, P 2 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page693565>
 - 14 OP. cit Hodgkinson, Clement. & Pegum, Sheila. & Hodgkinson, Clement. (2008). Two expeditions to the Bellinger 1841 & 1842 : an extract from Australia from Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay. Urunga, N.S.W : Pilot House Books p.xxiii <http://nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn4502785>
 - 15 H. W. Nunn, 'Hodgkinson, Clement (1818–1893)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, A N U, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hodgkinson-clement-3774/text5959>,
 - 16 Sydney Herald July 20 1842 p3 <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/12876256>
 - 17 James, Raymond,. (1966). The N S W calendar & G P O directory, 1832. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn2181891>
 - 18 Op. cit. Hodgkinson, Clement. (1845). p 70 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn740742>
 - 19 Rogers, F. Edwards, R. Hastings DHS (1982). Pt Macquarie : a history to 1850. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.cat-vn105039>
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