

## Chapter 6 Pony Express Mail to the Tableland

Robust community spirit flourished beside pioneering poverty along the creek where we lived<sup>1</sup>. There was little room for racial or religious discrimination among people who were struggling together to eke out a living. For those with little, bonds of friendship developed easily, particularly among the young. Would it not be possible that a classless society could naturally arise without the interplay of wealth and property! We took pride in the simplicity of our life in tune with nature, a life shared by both original peoples and pioneers from Europe and Asia. Our simple belongings at the time would hardly inspire the covetous desire for possessions that characterise the landed and the wealthy. Mum had made it plain to us that all God's children were welcome in her life.

The Irish people, over centuries, had borne the brunt of severe discrimination, almost to the point of extinction, Desolating news from Ireland of a black rot that caused the potato famine only reinforced Mum's view of history.<sup>2</sup> She brought us up to understand that racism underpinned the 'strangers' attempts at colonisation right down to the privations of the 'year of the slaughter' during the Great Frost of a century before.<sup>3</sup> Since then the bulk of the Irish were reduced to a starving rural population, tied as tenant farmers to an absentee aristocracy, concerned chiefly with commercial gain that deprived the tenants of the abundant produce of their labour. She rejected wholeheartedly exactly that which many colonisers saw as an essential prerequisite to successful settlement.



The radical pursuit of racist ethnic cleansing was epitomised in the Myall Creek massacre<sup>4</sup> of June 10, 1838. It provoked the pioneers promotion of almost the best-kept secret along Australia's frontier. The uproar caused by the December hanging of seven of the perpetrators ensured that future extermination events were covered up by a pact of silence, thus preventing sufficient evidence ever coming to the light of justice.

Slaughterhouse Creek<sup>5</sup> near Moree involved mounted police in a massacre in January of the same year. Police reports to the July inquiry provided insufficient evidence for any convictions. After the troopers had returned to Sydney, many of the local squatters and stockmen carried on with the 'drive' against Aborigines. The perpetrators of the Myall Creek massacre inspired others to continue that relentless slaughter on up into Queensland. Only years later did Dad let on about similar grim episodes down in the deep dark jungle of the coast. Terror in the settlers spawned terror as their tool of defence.

Such inhumanity repulsed Mum, who had been appalled by whispers of atrocities. In

conversation with local tribal women, she gained even deeper insight into the depravity of those perpetrating such injustice. I remember when she recounted with hushed breath some of the detail she had gleaned from her aboriginal friends. Terror turned into terror as a tool to justify the unjustifiable.

One of her friends confided in Mum, 'My mother would sit and cry and tell me this; they buried our babies in the ground with only their heads above the ground.

All in a row they were. Then they had tests to see who could kick the babies' head off the furthest.

One man clubbed a baby's head off from horseback.<sup>16</sup>

'Tis enough to drive a person to drink!', was Mum's response. It was all too much for her. The brutality of some aspects of pioneer life absolutely took their toll on Mum. She had too much of what is good in human beings for her own good.

But for all her goodness she could do little but offer friendship to these people now outcast in their own land. Their plight reminded her of what rural tenant farmers had suffered back in Ireland. Here they were cast out from pioneer society like flotsam on the froth of the pioneering wave that flowed inexorably as a tidal bore across this Great South Land. Wherever they could find a haven they pitched their humpies using dross discarded by we invaders. And yet some did survive, for non-judgemental forgiveness in the face of overwhelming terror was one way they found to preserve their existence.



Clarence River Blacks by J W Lindt 1872

From out my gloom and depression that followed my mother's death, new life returned as I tuned into the grandeur of great nature. Freedom and solitude of my life on the trail, the bush with only horses for company, revived in me the joys of living. Leaving Clarence Head where the faster ships docked near the open sea, I would trail my horses, saddlebags and packhorse loaded with mail, up into the tableland and on to the Armidale Post Office established there since 1844. Dangers associated with mail delivery in those pioneering days could not be overstated or fully forestalled. However, my pony express delivery route avoided flooding threats that often caused delay associated with the overland delivery route along inland northern roads. For any deluge affected a whole string of rivers cutting across the inland route. Moreover, trailing directly to the coast combined with the ocean leg that cut at least a week off delivery time, provided a faster and more reliable service. Slowly, working where I loved to be, I grew and healed. New life sprang out of the emptiness and grief left by my first taste of death and loved ones dying. It was a growing I feel I was fortunate to grow through.

In the year Mum died, I came across, in the Armidale Express of June 13, a letter pointing out in no uncertain terms problems with the post of the day. My experience of the direct trail to the east provided me with first-hand knowledge as well as practical solutions to the problems this letter to the editor outlined. '...the well-known and long established fact that our (Armidale's) postal arrangements between Maitland and Armidale are manifestly

bad .... ' And the author went on to detail the nature and extent of mail delays before launching into his suggestion to eliminate these delays.

'The principle (I might say almost the sole) cause of the detention of the mails ... would appear to arise from the occasional flooded state of some of the rivers and creeks crossing the great northern line of road ... rendering them impassable for days together'. Astutely shrewd and with overflowing perspicacity, he went on to postulate his solution to the problem.

## The Armidale Express.

SATURDAY, JUNE 13, 1857.

### Acrostics.

#### ORIGINAL.

A TRIP by the Railway to Armadale town—  
Rushing furiously up the hills, carefully down!  
Most enchanting to think of, to Armadale fair:  
All Sydney is panting to have a trip there!  
Respond not, ye croakers, to see soon laid down,  
A Railway from Maitland!, right up to your town!  
Let not the dull ears of the Government rest,  
Except that they grant you your "railing" request!  
Ægeus.

TUESDAY, JUNE 2.

Before the Police Magistrate, Gilbert Elliott, and  
Alfred M. Girard, Esqrs., J P.'s

**DRUNKENNESS.**—John Corcoran, Gregory  
Brady, Patrick Quinn, and William Long-  
worth appeared on bail to answer this  
charge, and were convicted and fined in  
the sum of 20s. each, with the usual alter-  
native.

His first proposition was for boats (14 footers) to be used by police to ferry mail across several Rivers, the Hunter, the Peel and at Bendemeer, the McDonald. He then posited the necessity to require the contractor to drive or swim his horses across, and if unwilling to do so he declared, 'it shall be compulsory upon him to have a set of mail horses on both sides of each river.'

This nincompoop correspondent, who will remain anonymous, obviously never breasted a raging river in full flood.<sup>7</sup> But he had hit the nail on the head as far as the difficulties inherent in the land route north. It was plain to me that my route for the mail was preferable. I travelled East-West along streams made mighty by their perennial floods that cascaded eastward to the ocean. When crossing these rivers, I forded upstream in the tablelands where the rivers rose and presented no life-threatening difficulty. To boot, mail transported rapidly

north from Sydney Town by speedy coastal packet to Big River arrived regularly and on time. Clarence Mouth Post Office provided a regular pick-up point for mail from where I began my brief inland journey to the highlands. All up, three days from Sydney to Armidale. The trail I rode was shorter even, than the bullock track to Grafton and became known twenty years later as 'Quinn's Route' for a railway to the coast. In 1875<sup>8</sup> at a public meeting in Glen Innes Court House I presented details to NSW Railway engineers, that could save half a million pounds on plans to construct a rail link from Armidale to Grafton.

Dad somehow arranged for friends to look after his young family so he and I were free to get back to work, he to his work as a sawyer and me to the mail run. I heard that my grieving father travelled via Armidale to tie up some loose ends associated with the hospitalisation and funerals of both his wife and daughter. To me he was non-committal, and he never admitted to any trouble there with police. But rumours may have resulted from reports in that same edition of The Armidale Express dated June 13 and July 4, 1857. They spoke of a Patrick Quinn fined for drunkenness. Whoever it was, he was fined 20 shillings for the first offence and 40s for the second. I also saw the reports in the paper but Dad never owned up to being the Patrick Quinn in question.

Coastal cutters carried mail rapidly, even overnight direct from Sydney Town. On arriving outside Clarence Mouth, if the weather was calm they might, with great care, safely manoeuvre their own way over the ever changing sands of the bar. Once inside, the river was navigable, even far beyond the timber wharf at Rocky Mouth where the Clarence emerges from its meander around Woodford Island. Downstream from there, as Big River emptied into the Pacific, it regularly deposited seasonal sand in great quantities amid

ragged rocks, forming the most notorious river mouth on the Eastern seaboard. One stormy day when a ship stood off the bar, not daring to enter, I watched the local pilot in action. Francis Freeburn, a Canadian, who had been engaged since 1854 to assist shipping, would normally row down over the bar in his whaleboat to dock alongside each incoming ship. Once aboard he would pilot shipping safely through the potentially treacherous waters as the Clarence tumbled over the ever-shifting sands of the bar at its mouth.

<p>In the case of Patrick Lunn charged with being drunk</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">384 Police Office Armidale 1 July 1857</p> <p>Before A. O. Murray Esq. M.A.</p> <p>Person pleads guilty</p> <p>Fined 40/- or 48 hours cells</p> <p>A. O. Murray Esq.</p>
---	--

However one particular day, as I awaited an arriving mail packet, the wind was well and truly up. Conditions were so severe that no mere boat, not even his whaleboat could be put to sea to brave the bar. Undeterred, pilot Freeburn signalled for the ship standing off the southern headland, to lower its boat and bring a line to a rocky point south of the treacherous Clarence mouth. With the rope fastened at his waist, Freeburn plunged into the wild waves to be towed to the ship. Once on board he ably piloted the ship to safety through wild water that would have swamped any mere boat.<sup>9</sup> The town that developed was named Yamba in 1861 and its post office officially opened in 1862. As a centre for mail, it was still called Clarence Head Post Office until 1881. By that time, I had moved into mining and made the first commercial find in the Kingsgate area<sup>10</sup> East of Glen Innes. My love for horses continued in my later life through my involvement with racing events held at Bald Nob.<sup>11</sup> But more of that anon. I was being saved by the mail on the trail and hardly was aware of it at the time.

Sunshine and splendour, such was this springtime of my life. Deep within my inner attitude flushed with positivity as the juice of life ignited my soul, my very self. Spiritual sap seemed to surge in the very fibre of my being and life was sweet.

'Ah Yee, I think I know what heaven is like!' I confidently confided with my celestial friend as we sunned ourselves on the banks of Vegetable Creek. I was between mail runs and home briefly in the summer of '58. The water in which we splashed naked was chilled still with spring melt and we soaked up the warmth of returning summer sunshine on a grassy bank beside a pond below his father's garden patch.

'Mum and my sister ... I reckon they are in heaven. ... And the priest said, happy forever and ever!'

Softly Ah Yee replied. He always spoke in silken tones that warmed my heart. I knew even then we would always be friends. 'Golden Glow of Buddha fills fragrant air above lotus pond. All play like children in warmth of glow'. Yes, that was what I was feeling in my life, heaven on earth.

'Mum is sharing her happiness with me!' I realised the truth of what I spoke even as I shared thoughts with my friend.

'Honourable Father told me same story of happiness for honourable ancestors. ... Did priest mention big brick wall in heaven? ... Sign on wall telling all to be quiet.'

A wall! In Heaven? This was news to me and I mumbled as I rolled onto my side to eyeball him. 'True?' I asked him to his face.

His golden hooded eyes met mine as he smiled and told my why the wall, why the sign. 'Whites on other side of wall. Think they only ones allowed.'

Lounging languidly in the lazy morn had dulled my mind. It was a while before the twinkle in his eye allowed me to consider his words. Then his truth hit me fair and square and I rolled back and roared with laughter. Wisdom seemed to waft around my friend like scented gums in spring. None else I knew, knew how to share so deeply.



Early Tin mining, Vegetable Creek

Years later we would labour together at Graveyard Creek just a mile or so west of what would come to be known as Emmaville. By then we worked some diggings together sluicing placer ore deposits along the creek. The treasure we sought would be alluvial tin, concentrated in ancient stream gravels buried under accumulated overlying soils.

My Da needed to know what Ah Yee had shared with me. His life of living in competition with Blacks as well as Chinese had left him, maybe understandably, with a sometimes meaner view of other races. From his point of view, when you're pretty low yourself you feel a need to sometimes put another down, even lower, to build your own self-esteem. I had to share with him what Ah Yee had shared with me, the joy of escaping prejudice.

'All God's children gonna get their wings someday' was how I broached the subject with Dad. 'These Chinks aren't all fiendish devils' I maintained against his somewhat racist pigeon-holing. Our families lived and worked together all our lives and when death finally claimed my Da in the winter of '89 I could see he too had somewhat changed his thinking. He loved to overhear Ah Yee talk with me of life, and of death, of birth and growth, of things celestial. His oriental wisdom grew on us and enriched our lives.

Burst into bloom in spring. Begin to brilliantly shine like the sun in summer. Grow thick and then bear fruit. After fruition come what may, it is winter. Seek a mission in the spiritual world. You will become a much larger tree in your next life. In the human world, the season of withering is winter. My mother died so drastically mid summer! Da was sitting in the sunshine on our front verandah at home as Ah Yee and I sat on a log along the road below. Ah Yee drew in the sand. 'Winter is this picture, meaning blow away and disappear, but fruit does not decay. It prepares to sprout ready for rebirth'<sup>12</sup>. There are many blind with seeing eyes, who see only what their eyes behold. 'There are none so blind as those who will not see'. Mum's words echoed in my mind.

Patrick Quinn was to die at home in Grey Street Glen Innes of natural causes on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1889.<sup>13</sup> He was 74 years of age having lived 54 years in the colony. Reminiscing with him on the day before his departure, about the world we shared together he wondered what his afterlife would bring. 'Will the ancestor's wave a welcome flag and

provide a guide to see me through?' For fifty days each soul can tour the world<sup>14</sup> was Ah Yee's consoling comment. So when Da passed over I feel sure he met my Mum again. Selina shared her spring with him and together they bore fruit. Her winter came so early, so severe. Catherine too for sure was waiting for him there. What mission in his future fits the future life of these pioneers?

# The Land of "The Beardies"

BEING  
The History of the Glen Innes District.

Prepared by direction of the  
to mark the occasion of the  
(June 17, 1872) and issued at



Jubilee Celebrations Committee  
Jubilee of the Municipality  
the deferred celebrations

NOVEMBER 1 - 5, 1922.

W. C. BLESSING, Mayor.



A. A. VENESS, Town Clerk.

Under instructions from the Committee, this Booklet was written and arranged by E. C. Sommerlad,  
Proprietor of the Glen Innes "Examiner."

A. A. VENESS, J.P., Rev. A. P. CAMERON, B.A., B. G. LAWRENCE, M.A., P. F. CANE, B.A., B.Ec.,  
Booklet Revision Committee.

Story Copyright © T Quinn<sup>15</sup>

- 
- 1 Hugh Quinn Obituary GIE Aug 8 1915 could have been near Armidale, then Oban and later Vegetable Creek.
  - 2 Wikipedia, Irish Potato Famine [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great\\_Famine\\_\(Ireland\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Famine_(Ireland))
  - 3 Wikipedia, Irish Famine (1740–41) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish\\_Famine\\_\(1740%E2%80%9341\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Famine_(1740%E2%80%9341))
  - 4 Wikipedia, Myall Creek massacre [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myall\\_Creek\\_massacre#Massacre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myall_Creek_massacre#Massacre)
  - 5 Wikipedia, Slaughterhouse Creek massacre [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waterloo\\_Creek\\_massacre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waterloo_Creek_massacre)
  - 6 Creative Spirits web site <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history/myall-creek-massacre-1838#toc0>  
Footnote (4) 'Massacres to Mining: The Colonisation of Aboriginal Australia', Jan Roberts, 1981, p.19
  - 7 Armadale Express, June 13 1857. Communication from Dr P Ward UNE & Region Archives.
  - 8 Railway meeting Glen Innes Examiner, May 5 1875
  - 9 Reader's Digest Illustrated Guide to Australian Places p159 Based broadly on the report on Yamba
  - 10 Quinn's Kingsgate Find, Glen Innes Examiner, October 28 1879
  - 11 Bald Nob Race Program, Glen Innes Examiner, January 6 1875 and November 24 1875
  - 12 Okada, Yoshikazu, -1974. Holy words = Goseigen p 100 2nd Eng.ed. 2002 <http://lcn.loc.gov/2001126790>
  - 13 Death of Patrick Quinn 26/06/1889 NSW BDM Ref#1889/9830
  - 14 A possible step in a Oriental Dharma Cycle
  - 15 Story Copyright © T Quinn. All rights reserved.