

AN HISTORY OF MY GENEALOGICAL RESEARCHES

By Craig James Smee

It all began in the year 1971 when I was researching my family tree. Unfortunately I came up against a brick wall – I could not find the ship of arrival of my ancestor Catherine Neale. One record said she arrived per Earl Cornwallis in 1801 but I knew that this could not be correct as she had married William Shaw in 1796 and had a daughter Catherine in 1799. So in my youthful enthusiasm (and naivety) I said “Right I shall start from the beginning and trace everyone until I find her” so I commenced collecting all arrivals from year one (1788). As it turned out she arrived per Marquis Cornwallis in 1796, which should have been obvious but I was very inexperienced at the time. But I remember thinking to myself “I wonder if someone else has already done this research” and what a waste of time and effort to keep working over the same material.

That’s when I had my FIRST big idea. Why not create a central repository where family historians could deposit their research and where others could see what has already been done and concentrate on what was still unknown rather than repeat what was already known? By this time I was a member of the “1788 1820 Association” (a society now sadly defunct) and fellow members were very enthusiastic about my idea. People liked the idea of seeing the efforts of their research in print. Thus the Pioneer Register project was born.

I created a standard schema for the layout of the family trees (most would fit nicely on one A4 sheet of paper) and started accumulating submissions and in no time I had enough to publish the first volume in 1978. Each first edition volume was a soft cover version containing of one hundred families and to my delight I discovered that publication could be a research tool. In the early days I was receiving up to two or three letters per day from people adding information or making corrections to material that had been published and more importantly submitting their own families for publication (I think I made a fortune for Australia Post on postage expenditure at the time!) Over the decades there would be forty first editions published. Because the first edition volumes were often so greatly updated and revised I started to publish an hard cover second edition version containing five hundred families. There would be eight second edition volumes published over time.

There were several spin offs over the years, collections of First, Second, Third and Fourth Fleet Families were published as well as “Convict Families That Made Australia” for pioneers who arrived in the colony after the year 1820.

As the family trees continued to be updated and revised (my schema sought to collect thirty three separate pieces of information which up to the present time not one family has achieved – from memory I believe the family of John Macarthur comes closest – the maiden name of the pioneer’s mother is the killer) it was always my intention to produce a third edition of “The Pioneer Register”, an amalgamated, integrated, updated work covering all eight volumes of the second edition, when they in turn had already covered the forty volumes of the first edition. However the project has

become a victim of its own success so to speak, such a tome would be over five thousand pages in length, the spine would be over one foot in width and prohibitively expensive to print. In the absence of such a third edition the problem still remains of finding information dispersed and spread over so many volumes and editions. After all one of the reasons for creating the Register in the first place was precisely to make finding information on our earliest pioneers simpler and more accessible.

The solution to this problem was a compromise to publish "A Comprehensive Index" whereby all pioneers, spouses and sons & daughters-in-law were alphabetically indexed and referenced back to the relevant volume and edition. This last volume was published in 2014 and all the many thousands of letters received over the decades were donated to the Society of Genealogists in Sydney as a wonderful resource for future family historians.

By then the number of families published in the Register was 4,000. When one adds the spouses to these 4,000 Pioneers, plus their 14,000 children and over 47,000 grandchildren, plus 5,000 sons & daughters-in-law, one arrives at a total of over 73,000 names, making the Pioneer Register project one of the largest genealogical works ever published in this country.

In passing it is intriguing to note the huge advance in technology during the mere thirty six years of publication of the Register. When I commenced the project in the 1970's I typed the manuscript on my mother's Royal 240 portable typewriter. The first five volumes of the first edition were produced on this typewriter, in fact I taught myself to type on this machine as no doubt my many 'typos' will attest. Then in 1980 I acquired the very latest in technology in the form of an IBM Electric Selectric typewriter with the wonder of the age - lift off correction tape! At least now my 'typos' could be seamlessly corrected. The Spouse Supplement to the first five volumes was produced on this machine.

The next advance was the arrival of personal computers. I acquired a Sanyo MBC-550 in 1984. Younger readers may not believe this machine had no hard drive but rather two floppy disc drives of the 5" variety. The operating system (MS-DOS) was loaded into the right hand side and the data disc into the left. The word processing programme was Wordstar and to this day I still create my initial drafts using this word processor, Wordstar is brilliant for list manipulation. The printer attached to the computer was a Brother HR-15 daisywheel. This allowed me to use **bolding** to highlight all the names in the text and was in use right up until 2012 when I had to abandon it due to the impossibility of buying anymore ink ribbons. Volume XXI of the first edition was the first book prepared under this *nouveau regime*.

Of course the inevitable happened and I was eventually forced to move to the dreaded Microsoft Windows operating system and the Word word processor (and a desk top computer with an hard drive). This did however now allow me to use *italics* to differentiate the names of ships.

Beginning in 2007 with volume XXXI of the first edition all my final manuscripts have all been prepared on a Canon LBP-660 laser printer. But to my aesthetic taste the type face is not quite as pleasing to the eye as that of my old daisywheel. As a gesture to nostalgia I prepared the final volume of the first edition on my beloved daisywheel printer.

My backup storage has moved from 5" floppy discs (which I can no longer buy) to 3" discs (which also I can no longer buy) to USB keys and who knows what is going to replace them. Thank goodness I still have the ultimate backup in the form of ink on paper!

The bedrock of genealogical research is the baptismal, burial and marriage records stored on parish registers. For the early colonial period these are held on micro-film and micro-fiche which are not always easy to access and are certainly often hard to read due to poor photo-copying and difficult to decipher handwriting.

That's when I had my SECOND big idea. "Why not publish the early records to make them more accessible to all?" But more than that, with my now huge store of family history information, why not value add! The early registers recorded little more than a date and a name, what if I could identify all those names by including; ages and the ship and status upon arrival in the colony or the names of parents for the colonial born (especially including the maiden name of the mother)? But that is not all, why not include the births, deaths and de facto relationships of those couples who were not married, which did not appear in any of the parish registers?

Thus was born my "Births & Baptisms, Marriages & De Facto Relationships, Deaths & Burials in the Colony of New South Wales" project. This series of books combines information in the parish registers with my Pioneer Register project database plus data from the shipping indents, the early colonial musters of 1802, 1806, 1811, 1814, 1822, 1825, 1837 and the "1828 Census of New South Wales". I split the work into decade blocks (the first "decade" had three extra years but only two parishes) and the first volume was published in 2015 to be followed by three more bringing the coverage of the project to the end of 1830.

Unfortunately as the decades progressed the numbers grew exponentially. In the first 'decade' there were 1,800 births but 1,820 deaths with 7,378 convict arrivals (6,023 males and 1,355 females). In the second decade the corresponding figures were 3,142 births against 1,414 deaths with 4,296 convict arrivals (3,310 males and 986 females). In the third decade there were 6,081 births against 2,820 deaths with 17,344 convict arrivals (males 15,414 and females 1,930). In the fourth decade there were 8,502 births against 5,325 deaths with 22,337 convict arrivals (males 19,480 and females 2,857). In the fifth decade there were over 24,000 births against 13,170 deaths with 30,807 convict arrivals (males 25,927 and females 4,880). The number of free arrivals in the first four decades

was perhaps a few thousands at most but their numbers exploded in the fifth decade, they are much less well documented than the convict arrivals making identification much more difficult. Even so by the end of transportation to New South Wales in 1840 a reasonable estimate of the population of the colony would have been in excess of 70, 000.

I was obviously a little naive to think I could achieve one more decade for this project. The eight thousand odd marriages were barely manageable, the thirteen thousand odd burials were something more of a challenge but the twenty four thousand odd baptisms were simply impossible to record and research on my own, even in my retirement. Regrettably as a result I have only been able complete the transcription of the baptisms of 53 of the 157 parishes in existence in the colony by the end of 1840.

The numbers were just getting too large to cover the cost of a traditional paper print. The option of dividing the work into three separate volumes; for births, death and marriages was considered but again costs of three separate publications made this option unaffordable. The solution for the fifth decade was to create a digital version.

To be honest moving to digital also has the advantage of making the inevitable updates and revisions simpler and faster. This is why I decided to convert all four previous volumes to a digital platform as well.

My hope and dream was to have the database installed on the internet as “my gift to the nation” so to speak after all those decades of research and work. However to my great dismay and disappointment the Society of Australian Genealogist, the National Library and all the State Libraries have declined to upload it. Only the Fellowship of First Fleeters has supported me.

Ideally it would have been nice to extent the project for another decade and a half to the commencement of civil registration of births, death and marriages (1856) but one only lives for so long! Perhaps local family history societies might like to take up the challenge and transcribe the parishes in their local areas at least, as has happened for instance with Christ Church Newcastle, St Matthews Windsor and a few other Hawkesbury parishes.

I am not sure what my **THIRD** big idea is going to be!

Addendum: The thirty three pieces of information collected for the Pioneer Register entries:

1. Christian Name(s) of Pioneer
2. Surname of Pioneer
3. Exact Date of Birth of Pioneer
4. Place of Birth of Pioneer
5. Christian Name(s) of Father

6. Christian Name(s) of Mother
7. Maiden Name of Mother
8. Exact Date of Arrival
9. Ship of Arrival
10. Civil Status upon Arrival
11. Exact Date of Death
12. Place of Death
13. Church/Place of Burial
14. Exact Date of Marriage
15. Church/Place of Marriage
16. Christian Name(s) of Spouse
17. Surname of Spouse
18. Civil Status of Spouse
19. Total Number of Children
20. Christian Name(s) of Each Child
21. Exact Date of Birth of Each Child
22. Place of Birth of Each Child
23. Exact Date of Death of Each Child
24. Place of Death of Each Child
25. Exact Date of Marriage of Each Child
26. Church/Place of Marriage of Each Child
27. Christian Name(s) of Spouse of Each Child
28. Surname of Spouse of Each Child
29. Civil Status of Spouse of Each Child
30. Total Number of Children of Each Child
31. Christian Name(s) of Each Grandchild
32. Exact Date of Birth of Each Grandchild
33. Place of Birth of Each Grandchild