

# **CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2022**

## **2212 I Am an Australian**

**by Joan Lewis**

## **I AM AN AUSTRALIAN.**

My great grand-father, Antonio George Patrech, was a Pontic Greek<sup>1</sup> and a descendant of the Greek colony that settled on the shores of the Black Sea c800 BC.<sup>2</sup> He was born on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 1857<sup>3</sup> to George Papadopoulas and Clothe Cleanthe in the village of Kerasundi (now Giresun) when the Ottoman Empire was in power. The Pontic Greeks and the Armenians had co-existed for many centuries with the Greeks keeping their own language and religion, whilst their music, dances and food were influenced by their Middle Eastern environment.<sup>4</sup> George and his eldest son were priests of the Greek Orthodox Church and they both died during a cholera epidemic, possibly an expected result of working amongst the sick and dying.

Antonio had also been expected to become a priest. He had a permit, written in “old” Russian which stated that he was 19 years old, had black hair, dark brown eyes and a “medium” nose with numerous moles on his face and a scar on his right hand. His religion was Orthodox and occupation Seaman. The permit allowed him to travel within the Empire of Russia, called him a Turkish citizen and named him as Anton Georgiu. (I have been told that Georgiu means “son of George”). It was witnessed by the Russian Consul at Kerasundi on 26<sup>th</sup> of March 1876 and finalized by the Mayor of Kerch on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1876; it also stated that he had to produce this permit and a police certificate of no objection, to leave the country.<sup>5</sup>

The two dates on the passport indicate that the family had left Kerasundi by April 1876. Family story tells us that the Russians, fearing Christians were in danger, had advised them to move to the Sea of Azov. They would have gone by boat across the grey green waters of the Black Sea, the graveyard of many wooden ships still preserved after 2000 years,<sup>6</sup> and settled in Kerch, which had been ceded to Russia by the Turks in 1774.<sup>7</sup>

Antonio had earned his title of Seaman by working on a merchant vessel owned by an uncle. He was said to have been in Australia twice, the second time deserting ship and staying, leaving behind his mother and three sisters. We know he sent money home as there was a letter saying “thank you son for the two pounds you sent me;” today this amount would be valued at \$432.<sup>8</sup>

He was living in Moruya NSW before his marriage to Sarah Annie Bettini 15<sup>th</sup> May 1887 in St. Paul’s Anglican Church at Batemans Bay.<sup>9</sup> He purchased 4 acres, 3 roods and 8 poles (almost 5 acres) of land and built a family home on Beach Road overlooking the Clyde River.<sup>10</sup> They went on to have 11 children, 2 of whom died in infancy.<sup>11</sup> Cleanthe, my grandmother was the eldest daughter and was born 27<sup>th</sup> February 1888<sup>12</sup> and had a talent for painting which encouraged her father to arrange art lessons for her. At the time of his death in 1929, a painting of his mother was buried with him. Who painted that and was it someone back in Kerasundi such as one of his sisters? This is of particular interest as some of his descendants are artistic.

He had several occupations; fisherman, oyster farmer, mail contractor and cattle farmer.<sup>13</sup> He carried mail by motor boat up the Clyde River to outlying families. The family then moved to Townsville in Queensland where they lived on Ross Island and had oyster leases. A son Alfred George was born on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1892 and we know they were back in NSW in 1894 as a daughter Lucy was born in that year at Moruya.<sup>14</sup>

Alfred George was the father of my family story-teller Marie Bateup. As a child she had known Antonio and told me of his standing before the open fireplace, bushy moustached and with the family twinkle in his eye he informed her he “was warming the whole of his body.” She had asked, “Where are you really from?” His answer was “I am an Australian.”

Antonio George Patrech became an Australian citizen on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of December 1898.<sup>15</sup> It states on his Certificate of Naturalization that he arrived in the Colony of NSW on the ship “Alexandria” in the year 1881. Was that his Uncle’s ship or did he go to England and ship out from there? No amount of searching has found the “Alexandria”.

The family members that he left behind were destined for a cruel fate. His mother and sisters were probably safe but the many extended family members were to suffer dreadfully at the hands of the Turks. Some were sent to Greece, but millions of Armenians and Greeks perished during the Genocide carried out by Ataturk.<sup>16</sup>

At the time of the Genocide, (1914-1923) some of our people were forced to convert to the Muslim faith in order to survive and maybe some had intermarried. Whatever the case there is evidence of my DNA across Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.<sup>17</sup>

Back in Australia a curious thing had happened; sometime prior to 1914 Antonio George received word that a lawyer was coming to see him about a land inheritance. This news apparently sent him and Sarah Annie into a mad scramble to burn records and costumes from his old life in Kerch. Did he leave illegally? He was a white Russian; a supporter of the Tzar and he could have been subjected to severe punishment upon his return.<sup>18</sup> (The Tzarist regime was overcome and the Royal family executed in 1917.<sup>19</sup>) World War 1 was beginning and they needn’t have worried as the boat carrying the lawyer was torpedoed and the poor fellow didn’t get here.

Antonio George may have been covering his tracks when he changed his name to Patrech and then deserted ship. He died a free Australian 29<sup>th</sup> March 1929<sup>20</sup> and I am left with a glow of awe and pride to see where I came from.

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1 [https://www.ancestry.com.au/dna/origins/E56BB229-CD9B-493A-8954-1E6B45F365F9/details?olid=90600&sch=Web\\_Property&ethnicity=2021\\_017](https://www.ancestry.com.au/dna/origins/E56BB229-CD9B-493A-8954-1E6B45F365F9/details?olid=90600&sch=Web_Property&ethnicity=2021_017) viewed 30<sup>th</sup> April 2022

2 [greekreporter.com/2021/05/19/greek-genocide-pontus-asia-minor/](http://greekreporter.com/2021/05/19/greek-genocide-pontus-asia-minor/) viewed 13<sup>th</sup> May 2022

3 Russian permit N237 issued 13<sup>th</sup> April 1876 at Kerch, Ukraine, witnessed by Russian Consul at Kerasundi, Turkey 26<sup>th</sup> March 1876.

4 [greekreporter.com/2021/05/19/greek-genocide-pontus-asia-minor/](http://greekreporter.com/2021/05/19/greek-genocide-pontus-asia-minor/), [greekreporter.com/2021/05/19/ernest-hemingway-and-his-connection-with-greece-and-its-culture](http://greekreporter.com/2021/05/19/ernest-hemingway-and-his-connection-with-greece-and-its-culture) viewed 13<sup>th</sup> May 2022

5 Russian permit N237, translation by J Guggenheimer, Canberra 1984.

6 <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/oceanic-histories/black-sea/3BED782610F53D0F89ED0BDC1C99F442> viewed 12<sup>th</sup> April 2022

7 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kerch> viewed 12<sup>th</sup> April 2022

- 8 Cash.thornblake.com.au/secondary/hisdata/calculate.php
- 9 NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, no. 4723.
- 10 Parish map, Surveyor General's Department NSW, Bathurst NSW. Parish of Bateman, County of St Vincent.
- 11 Death Certificate Antonio George Patrech D32687, NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, issued 5<sup>th</sup> July 1929.
- 12 NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, birth certificate no. 21132.
- 13 NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, Marriage Certificate no. 4723, Death Certificate no. D32687; NSW Australia, Government Gazettes, 1853-1899 for A Patrech, 3 oyster leases no. 501,821 and 1708. Ancestry.com ; <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/> 10<sup>th</sup> February 1921-Acceptance of Tenders for Conveyance of Mails, NSW –Trove. 4<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2022. Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> February 1919-NSW-Trove-Commonwealth of Australia Gazette (National: 1901-1973.) Page 283 NSW Acceptance of Tenders for Conveyance of Mails; Cattle brand, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1918-Stock Act 1901-Trove, Antonio Patrech, Batemans Bay, No. of application 129935
- 14 Patrech/Bettini family bible; Australia Birth Index, 1788-1922- Ancestry.com.au, birth certificates 011641 and 21824.
- 15 Naturalization Certificate: No. 148 NSW Certificate of Naturalization 6<sup>th</sup> December 1898, Archives of NSW (Globe St. Sydney 1984)
- 16 greek- genocide.net/index.php/overview, greekreporter.com/2021/05/19/greek-genocide-pontus-asia-minor/
- 17 [https://www.ancestry.com.au/dna/origins/E56BB229-CD9B-493A-8954-1E6B45F365F9/details?o\\_lid=90600&o\\_lid=90600&o\\_sch=WebProperty&ethnicity=2021\\_017,](https://www.ancestry.com.au/dna/origins/E56BB229-CD9B-493A-8954-1E6B45F365F9/details?o_lid=90600&o_lid=90600&o_sch=WebProperty&ethnicity=2021_017) <https://greekreporter.com/2021/05/19/greek-genocide-pontus-asia-minor/> viewed 13<sup>th</sup> May 2022
- 18 As per Author's conversation with John Patrech Shephard (dec.) c1952
- 19 <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nicholas-II-tsar-of-Russia>, viewed 19<sup>th</sup> April 2022
- 20 NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, death certificate no. D32687