

# **CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2022**

**2215 I Am Australian**

**by Barbara Reen**

## I Am Australian

I come from Sydney, Australia — not from a line stretching back tens of thousands of years, but from a line that began to call Australia home with the arrival of my great-great grandparents, Maria Young (nee Warren) (1829-1908) and Edwin Young (carpenter/joiner) (1828-1880), as unassisted immigrants, in Sydney, Australia, from England, aboard the *Meteor* in 1853<sup>1</sup> I come from a line of strong women that extends from Maria to her daughter and my great grandmother, Emma Maria Hanson (nee Young nee Johnson) (1854-1922), and then to her daughter and my grandmother Olivia Margaret Connolly (nee Hanson) (1891-1970).<sup>2</sup> In this age of female empowerment it is instructive and humbling to look back at the lives of these women who preceded me in my family, to acknowledge the debt that I owe them as exemplars of strength and courage in the face of adversity, to hope that I have inherited some of their grit and determination and to acknowledge that they laid the foundations for the strong family culture and traditions that I have inherited, and for the benefits that I enjoy as an Aussie in Australia today.

This is the story of my great grandmother, Emma Maria Hanson, the first Australian-born member of my family .Her parents were surely hoping for a more prosperous life in Australia when they arrived with their 12 month old daughter Maria Sarah (1852-1853).<sup>3</sup> The Great Exhibition in 1851 had portrayed Australia as having a booming economy and the official discovery of gold in Australia in 1851 prompted a surge in immigration to Australia.<sup>4</sup>

However, prosperity eluded them and tragedy struck with the death by drowning of their daughter, Maria Sarah just one month after their arrival.<sup>5</sup> Emma Maria was born the

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<sup>1</sup> Baptism of Maria Warren, 04 August 1833', *England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538-1975*, <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com.au>, accessed 18 May 2022; Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages NSW, 'Death Certificates of Maria Young, 19 September 1908, 8366/1908 and Edwin Young, 30 July 1880, 1329/1880; Baptism of Edwin Young, 28 December 1828', *Twynford Baptisms 1626 - 1837 Revised 7 July 2008.xls*, <http://grke.net/family/images/tbaptisms.pdf>, accessed 18 April 2022; List of Immigrants per Ship Meteor as Inspected by the Immigration Board on 6th July 1853, Index to Bounty Passengers, Reel 2465.

<sup>2</sup> Anglican Parish Registers, Sydney, Australia, 1814-2011, Baptism of Emma Maria Young 09 July 1854; Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages NSW, Birth Certificate of Olivia Margaret Hanson, 01 December 1890 3531/1890), Death Certificates of Emma Maria Hanson, 02 November 1922, 17086/1922 and Olivia Margaret Connolly, 05 July 1970, 30943/1970.

<sup>3</sup> Church of England Births and Baptisms, London England, 1813-1920, All Saints, Islington, 1839-1855, Baptism of Maria Sarah Young, 1 August 1852, *London, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1920*, <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com.au>, accessed 18 April 2022; Anglican Parish Registers, Sydney, Australia, 1814-2011, St Stephen, Newtown burial, 08 February 1849-31 December 1853, Death of Maria Sarah Young, 27 August 1853, p. 136, 2714), <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com.au> accessed 22 May 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Louise Douglas, Representing Colonial Australia at British, American and European International Exhibitions, *ReCollections*, Volume3, No. 1 [https://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol\\_3\\_no\\_1/papers/representing\\_colonial\\_australia](https://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol_3_no_1/papers/representing_colonial_australia); Defining Moments: Gold Rushes, <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/gold-rushes>.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*.

following year, on 09 June 1854, in Cumberland Street, in the Rocks area of Sydney.<sup>6</sup> Between 1857 and 1872, Maria and Edwin had another seven children, five of whom died in infancy or early childhood. When Emma Maria was eight years old in 1862, she experienced the death of her 5 year old sister Elizabeth Sophia from typhus. The following year, 1863, saw the deaths of her one year old sister Sarah Anne from ‘mesenterio disease and exhaustion’ and her four year old sister, Maria from diphtheria. When she was fourteen, in 1868, her brother Alfred died at the age of two from a brain tumour and when she was eighteen years old, in 1873, her sister Louisa Kate died, aged eleven months, from bronchitis. During this time, the family moved to the Ryde district, then to Waverley and finally back to the Rocks area where Edwin and Maria resided until their deaths, Edwin in 1880 and Maria in 1908.<sup>7</sup>

Family insecurity, poverty and tragedy therefore, marked Emma Maria’s childhood. It seems probable that the family lived in some of the “wretched dwellings” that were “worse than those even of the crowded cities in Europe”, as a Report of a Select Committee into the living conditions of the working classes in Sydney in 1860 found. The Report also found “a great amount of distress from want of employment, in addition to that caused by intemperance”. Thus it is also probable that Emma Maria’s father, Edwin, experienced unemployment, as carpenters were high on the list of the unemployed.<sup>8</sup> As to intemperance, Edwin was imprisoned in Darlinghurst Gaol in 1868 for drunkenness.<sup>9</sup>

On 06 November 1875, at the age of twenty-one, Emma Maria married John Johnson, a Swedish seaman.<sup>10</sup> They had five children over the next twelve years.<sup>11</sup> This would have been challenging enough, but on 13 April of 1888, John Johnson was killed at the Government Printing Office on the corner of Phillip and Bent Streets, Sydney. He was in charge of transporting goods from the yard to the basement of the building by means of a

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages NSW, ‘Birth Certificates of Elizabeth Sophia Young, 04 January 1857’ (9430/1857) Maria Young, 27 January 1859, 12259/1859, Sarah Anne Young, 17 July 1863, 13267/1862, Edwin Henry Young, 18 May 1864, 3741/1864, Alfred Young, 1866, 1678/1866, Emily Anne Young, 1869, 844/1869, and Louisa Kate Young, 21 July 1872, 2087/1872, <https://familyhistory.bdm.nsw.gov.au>, accessed 23 May 2022; Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages NSW, Death Certificates of Elizabeth Sophia Young, 10 January 1862, 9430/1857, Maria Young, 28 October 1863, 2336/1863, Sarah Anne Young, 17 July 1863, 2325/1863, Edwin Henry Young, 08 February 1868, 3717/1831, Alfred Young, 23 February 1868 247/1868, Emily Anne Young, 09 July 1930, 14477/1930, and Louisa Kate Young, 21 July 1873, 976/1873, <https://familyhistory.bdm.nsw.gov.au>, accessed 23 May 2022.

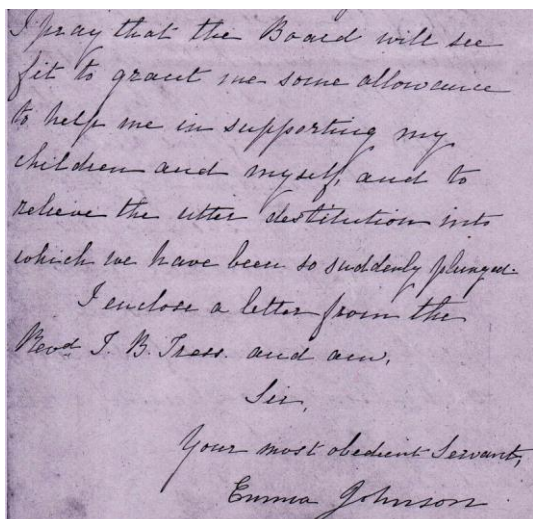
<sup>8</sup> State of the Working Classes in Sydney, *Illawarra Mercury, 1856 - 1950*, Wollongong, NSW, 27 April 1860, <https://trove.nla.gov.au>, accessed 04 May 2022.

<sup>9</sup> *Entrance Book Darlinghurst 1867-1868, New South Wales, Australia, Gaol Description and Entrance Books, 1818-1930 for Edwin Young, 1868*, <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com.au>, accessed 26 May 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages NSW, Marriage Certificate of John Johnson and Emma Maria Young, 06 November 1875 1025/1875, accessed 27 May 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages NSW, Birth Certificates of Maria Johnson 206/1877, Lillian Johnson, 1086/1879, Frederick Johnson, 3710/1882, Oscar Henry Johnson 2343/1885 and George Johnson, 746/1888, accessed 27 May 2019.

lift when his head was crushed between the floor of the building and the lift.<sup>12</sup> Emma Maria successfully petitioned the Civil Service Board for compensation, pleading for relief from "the utter devastation into which we have been so suddenly plunged". She was awarded the maximum gratuity of £199.11.3.



**Figure 1: Extract from letter from Emma Johnson to the Civil Service Board dated 11 May 1888**<sup>13</sup>

Two years later, on 12 April 1890, Emma Maria married Oliver Hanson (1852-1924), my great grandfather, also a Swedish sailor.<sup>14</sup> Another four children were born, the first born being my grandmother Olivia Margaret, on 01 December 1890.<sup>15</sup> Two of Emma Maria's sons fought for Australia in World War I: Albert Edwin Hanson was discharged as medically unfit after having been gassed in France, and tragically, George Johnson, was killed in action at Gallipoli.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Anon., Inquests. Killed in a Lift, *The Daily Telegraph*, Sydney, 17 April 1888, p. 3, accessed 01 June 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Emma Maria Johnson, Petition to the Civil Service Board for Compensation Following Husband's Death, 26 April 1888, State Archives and Records NSW.

<sup>14</sup> Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages NSW, Marriage Certificate of Oliver Hanson and Emma Maria Johnson, 12 April, 1890, 513/1890; Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages NSW, Death Certificate of Oliver Hansen, 10 February 1924, 3814/1924, <https://familyhistory.bdm.nsw.gov.au>, accessed 27 May 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages NSW, Birth Certificate of Olivia Margaret Hanson, 01 December 1890, 3531/1890, William James Hanson, 1338/1893, Albert Edwin Hanson, 19214/1895 and Annie May Hanson, 18004/1898, <https://familyhistory.bdm.nsw.gov.au>, accessed 27 May 2019.

<sup>16</sup> National Archives of Australia, Hanson, A. E., <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au>, accessed 25 May 2022; Australian War Memorial, Private George Johnson, 20th Battalion, 2019, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P10247153>, accessed 25 May 2022.

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**Figure 2: Emma Maria Hanson pictured seated at left with her daughter Olivia Margaret Connolly (nee Hanson), her first two grandchildren Oscar and Albert Connolly (my uncles), her son William Hanson, her sister Emily Anne Young, and an unknown girl seated in front. Standing behind are Lilian Johnson, Oscar Connolly, Anne Hanson and George Johnson.<sup>17</sup>**

Emma Maria Hanson died on 02 November 1922, aged 68 years. In the photograph above, surrounded by members of her family, she epitomises that indomitable spirit that allowed her to transcend the traumas of her childhood and the challenges and hardships of her married life. She nurtured all her children to adulthood and established a flourishing family. The photograph also shows my grandmother, Olivia Margaret Connolly with the two eldest of her six sons, Oscar and Albert.<sup>18</sup> She was the only child of Emma Maria to have established a family that, to my knowledge, continues to this day. She and my grandfather, John Oscar Connolly (known as Oscar) (shown standing behind her in the photograph) established the Connolly family, now numbering in the hundreds, to which I proudly belong. We are a typical Aussie family: cricket and football mad, fond of practical jokes, with a dry sense of humour, easy going but hard working, egalitarian and all for giving everyone a fair go. My life as an Aussie in Australia today, with its comforts and opportunities for education, travel, entertainment and leisure, owes so much to the struggles of people like my great grandmother, Emma Maria Hanson, who had none of these things.

<sup>17</sup> Anon., *Emma Maria Hanson with Members of Her Family*, photograph, n.d., original held by Connolly Family.

<sup>18</sup> Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages NSW, 'Birth Certificates of Oscar James Connolly 6612/1910, Albert Francis Connolly 46835/1912, Leslie Edmund Connolly, 43387/1911, George Connolly, 28676/1915 John Oliver Connolly, 18213/1918 (my father), <https://familyhistory.bdm.nsw.gov.au>, accessed 25 May 2022; Birth of Frank Kevin Connolly 25 November 1925, in Frank Kevin Connolly, *My Olden Days* unpublished, p.1, 2001.

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