

CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2020

2001 Elizabeth Donaldson

by John Stanhope

ELIZABETH DONALDSON

My elusive ancestor was my father's maternal grandmother. Mysteries about Elizabeth Donaldson were (1) what happened to her after the birth of her seventh child? (2) what happened to her sixth and seventh children? (3) when and where did she die? My current knowledge of her was completed only recently by searching for her husband on Ancestry at SAG.

She was born on 12 January 1847 at Wappan Station near Mansfield, Victoriaⁱ. She was the sixth of seven children of Scots David Donaldson and Elizabeth Anderson. She was baptised by Free Presbyterian rites on 5 April 1847.

Her siblings were Christina 1836-1898, Alexander 1838-1889, David born and died in infancy in Scotland, Joan/Johanna born 1841 at sea, Robert born 1844 at Mount Battery Station, died in 1930, and Janet 1850-1928.

She married Otto Emil Ringk (1833-1909) on 17 April 1865ⁱⁱ. As she was under age, she had her parents' consent. Her residence and the place of marriage was 'Wattle Grove', probably on or near her father's farm near Merton. Then she lived Otto's farm at Glen Creek.

They had seven children (1) Mary Amelia, born 1866ⁱⁱⁱ on 22 February 1884 at Hay NSW^{iv}, died 1 November 1943 at Marrickville (2) Charles David, born 1867^v, married Annie Hallett in Bathurst NSW on 31 May 1902^{vi}, took up farming near Blayney^{vii} where he died on 24 July 1926^{viii}, (3) David Emil, born 1870^{ix}, died unmarried on 2 October 1907 in Hay NSW^x, (4) Elizabeth Janet/Jennet, born 1872^{xi}, married John Peter Johnston on 11 August 1890 in Hay NSW^{xii}. After his death on 11 June 1907^{xiii} she married Richard Edward Thorne at Darlington Point on 8 February 1911^{xiv}. She died on 5 September 1924 at Darlington Point^{xv}. (5) Emily Christina, born 18 August 1874^{xvi}, married George Grant Stanhope on 18 July 1894 at Narrandera, divorce absolute on 20 April 1815, married Arthur David Ashcroft on 6 September 1920 at Wesley Chapel, Sydney, died on 14 August 1867 at Newcastle NSW.

Until recently nothing was known of her from 1880 till Otto and the Narrandera police stated in his naturalisation papers in 1900 that he was a widower. With access to Ancestry at SAG, I recently entered his name hoping to get his baptism details from Lieberose, Prussia. What came up were confirmation of the births of the missing children and their surname change. They were (6) Alexander Henry, born 1877 in Victoria, raised with the surname O'Connell by Matthew O'Connell (7) Jessie Agnes, born 21 July 1880 in Victoria, raised with the surname O'Connell by Matthew O'Connell.

Some time between 1880 and 1884 she left her husband and cohabited with Matthew O'Connell. They had two sons born in Lismore (1) Daniel John O'Connell born in 1884 (2) James O'Connell born in 1887.

Her death is not indexed in any state under 'Ringk', 'Donaldson', 'O'Connell' or any likely variant, including coroner's cases. Mr Joe Sartain (grandson of her brother Alexander) had never heard of her, although he knew about all her adult siblings and their families when I interviewed him in April 1993 in



This 'photo is believed to be Elizabeth with possibly baby Charles David born 1867

Mansfield. But I found in a journal at SAG a comment which led me to a significant article^{xvii} by Mrs Muriel Smith. She is a great granddaughter of Elizabeth's sister Christina. She sent me copies of photographs of Elizabeth and Otto.

Elizabeth was alive in 1887 and deceased by 22 October 1900. A grave in the name 'Mrs Ringk' is in the Methodist (formerly Wesleyan) section of Narrandera Cemetery. A municipal official told me that this meant she was the first person buried in the plot. Narrandera had a Wesleyan congregation from 1879^{xviii}. The church was formally constituted in 1884^{xix}, but no records survive from before 1889. The Wesleyan graveyard was commenced before the appointment in September 1889 of Rev John James Boyd, the first resident minister and record keeper^{xx}.

Family graves are A26 (Dorothy Stanhope 1899-1900 my aunt) and A28 ('Mrs Ringk' and Otto Emil Ringk 1833-1909). Memorials of Dorothy and Otto appeared in local newspapers, but not Elizabeth. Elizabeth was probably buried during 1887-1889. Why was she not in Lismore? Perhaps she wanted to meet her married daughters all living in the Riverina. Otto may have arranged for her burial, as he lived near Narrandera. Emily never discussed her mother with her children, including my father who was aged seven when Otto died.

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iv NSW Marriage 1884.3742.
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vii The Canowindra Star 24 March 1922 page 8.
viii Tombstone inscriptions observed by JMS in relevant cemeteries; also Riverina Cemetery Index in SAG collection.
ix Victoria Birth 1870.3422.
x NSW Death 1907.13933; also The Riverine Grazier death and bereavement notices, 4 October 1907, p.2.
xi Victoria Birth 1872.10084.
xii NSW Marriage 1890.4082.
xiii NSW Death 1907.5124.
xiv NSW Marriage 1911.1727.
xv NSW Death 1924.14778.
xvi Victoria Birth 1874.23873.
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xviii Wade, Raymond E. The Methodists of Wagga Wagga and district. WW Parish Council, Uniting Church in Australia, WW, 1980 pp.34, 61.
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xx Wright D & Clancy EG. The Methodists: a history of Methodism in NSW. Allen & Unwin, St Leonards NSW, 1993, p.47.