

CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2020

2030 An Acadian Downunder

by Elizabeth Crock

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The Royal Mail Ship *The Earl of Sefton*¹ sailed from Liverpool on November 21st, 1855. Along with the usual mails, it carried ‘one of the most valuable cargoes which ever left the Mersey in one vessel [...], being composed almost entirely of fine goods’². It arrived in Melbourne in record time on April 6th, 1856³. Along with its fine cargo, it carried my most elusive ancestor, a young man named Henry Crock.

Henry was listed as 23 years old, British and a ‘mechanic’⁴. We knew he spoke French and had sailed directly from Saint John, New Brunswick to Liverpool on the *Themis*⁵ in November 1855. He travelled to the Antipodes with other young adventurers⁶.

Henry went to Beechworth – a journey of eight days⁷, we assume for the Gold Rush⁸. There he married Charlotte Grimshaw in 1858⁹, and the couple had eight children¹⁰, one stillborn¹¹.

Henry spent 30 years in Wangaratta, working as a farmer, sawyer, carpenter, inn-keeper, and a bridge-builder.^{12, 13} He was frequently in debt, bankrupt twice¹⁴.

The family moved to Western Australia in 1879 where Henry managed the Jarrahdale sawmill¹⁵. Henry also constructed the first bird-proof vineyard in Western Australia¹⁶.

The mystery was: who were Henry’s parents? Why did he sail alone to Australia, never to see his family again?

One year, serendipitously, I went to Louisiana. I read about the ‘Cajuns’, descendants of ‘Acadians’, who had settled in North America in the 1600s. I noticed they came from New Brunswick. I wondered if Henry was Acadian, a community of whom I knew nothing.

A Y-DNA test of a direct descendent proved Cyr was the original, and indeed, Acadian surname. Henry descended from the Cyr branch that used Crock as a ‘dit’ name, a nickname. A captivating, tragic story emerged as I pursued my most elusive ancestor.

Acadia spanned from Nova Scotia to Maine, its boundaries disputed. Acadians were Catholic French settlers who refused to swear allegiance to the Crown after Britain took possession. From 1755-1764, the British expelled more than 11,000 Acadians to the colonies and Europe in an event known as *La Grande Derangement* – The Great Upheaval¹⁷. Thousands died *en route*. Many eventually returned to North America, settling in Louisiana (the ‘Cajuns’) and other colonies¹⁸.

Acadian Cyrs descend from Pierre Cyr^{19, 20}. In 1750, Pierre’s grandson Jean-Baptiste helped defend Fort Beauséjour against the English²¹. He was nicknamed ‘croc’ - he said he would ‘croquer ses adversaires’ (crunch his enemies)²².

Jean-Baptiste Cyr and family were established along the Saint John River when Loyalists came, the sixth time the family sought refuge²³. As he farewelled their land, Jean-Baptiste said ‘My God, is it true that there will never be a place on earth for the Cayens (Acadians)?’²⁴.

Jean-Baptiste had eleven children, who in turn had many children²⁵. It was daunting trying to identify Henry’s grandparents, then parents.

The only record of Henry’s parents’ names was on his marriage certificate: ‘Henry Synge Crock’ and ‘Mary, maiden name unknown’²⁶.

I travelled to New Brunswick, consulted archivists, met DNA ‘cousins’²⁷ and Cyr family members with a passion for finding every lost Acadian²⁸. At a Cyr reunion, people flocked to help. I returned home with many leads, yet no answer: the search continued.

Henry's birth year varied by ten years in Australian sources - seven indicating 1833-1836²⁹, two indicating 1826-27³⁰. Most documents recorded he was from New Brunswick ³¹³²

Researchers identified Honoré Cyr born in 1827 in Carleton, Baie des Chaleurs, son of Bonaventure Cyr dit Crock³³ and Vénérande Jeanson³⁴. Honoré was anglicised to Henry. Honoré disappears from Canadian records after 1846³⁵.

Finally, I unearthed two striking clues.

- On Henry's first child's Australian birth certificate³⁶: Father's birthplace: *Beachlow*, Lower Canada.
- On the births of the next children, Father's birthplace: *Saint Johns*, or British North America³⁷. Then came then another odd entry: *Pachels*, North America³⁸.

I consulted with my Canadian collaborators. *Beachlow* and *Pachels* were evidently written based on what Henry pronounced. He had obviously said 'Baie des Chaleurs'. Further, 'Lower Canada' means Québec.

Only two Cyr dit Crock sons settled in Québec, Antoine and Bonaventure. To the Acadian researchers, this is sufficient evidence that our Henry Crock was indeed Honoré Cyr, son of Bonaventure Cyr and Vénérande Jeanson.

Of course, some questions remain:

- Where was Honoré Cyr from 1846-1855?

Henry Crock is reported as building the first bridge over the Ovens River in 1855, months before his documented arrival³⁹. This begs the question - did he come twice to Australia, like some compatriots⁴⁰? Christopher Dockendorff came on the brig *Australia*⁴¹, and again in 1860 on the *Oriental*⁴². He sailed to Western Australia with Henry in 1879^{43,44}. Incidentally, Dockendorff employed Ned Kelly, as mentioned in the *Jerilderie* letter⁴⁵. In family lore, Henry is said to have worked with Ned.

- Why did he say his father's name was Henry, not Bonaventure? What of the 'Synge Crock' on Henry's marriage certificate?

Acadian researchers said Acadians commonly disguised their French names when dealing with the English. The 'Synge Crock' on the marriage certificate meant 'Cyr dit Crock'.

- Why did his age vary widely?

Perhaps he didn't know his age. Henry was 31 when he married, his wife 17. He may have tried to minimise the difference.

On his last child's birth certificate, and on his own death certificate, his age corresponds with that of Honoré Cyr dit Crock from Carleton, Québec.

I haven't quite got to the bottom of Henry's story. I have learned of the tragic saga of the Acadian expulsion whose ripples reached Australia's shores with Henry's arrival. I have experienced the richness of the surviving Acadian culture and people. These ancestral memories had been lost to Henry's descendants.

I am grateful to my elusive ancestor's determination to seek a better life Downunder. Henry found his own place on earth, his own 'Acadie' in glorious Western Australia.

¹ Lloyd's Register of Shipping for 1856 lists The Earl of Sefton as built under Special Survey at Saint John (New Brunswick) in 1854. Built of Tamarac Pine and sheathed with Yellow Metal and part Felt, it was a vessel of 1082 tons. It was owned by Moore and Co and its home port was registered as Liverpool. Its Master was Captain John Noble.

² *The Express* (London) Friday Evening, 21 December 1855, p. 4

³ *London Standard*, 21 December 1855

⁴ Public Record Office of Victoria. Index to Inward Passenger Lists, Victoria, Fiche 107, page 003. Earl of Sefton Passenger List.

⁵ *New Brunswick Courier* January 26 1856 Saint John Letter from passengers on the Themis. Daniel F. Johnson Newspaper Archives. Volume 15 Number 3021. Provincial Archives of New Brunswick.

⁶ *The Daily Sun*, July 29 1890 Saint John New Brunswick, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick. Daniel F. Johnson Newspaper Archives. Vol 78: Number 103.

⁷ Duyker, E (ed). 1995. *A Woman on the Goldfields: recollections of Emily Skinner 1854-1878*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

⁸ McMahon, HD and Wild, CG (2008) *American fever, Australian gold* [electronic resource] : American & Canadian involvement in Australia's gold rush. CD ROM. Middle Park, Queensland, Australia.

⁹ Marriage Registration, Beechworth Victoria, No. 1252/1858

¹⁰ Births in the district of Wangaratta in the colony of Victoria Schedule A 9 Feb 1859 Mary Anne Crock. Cert no. 159. Births in the district of Wangaratta in the colony of Victoria Schedule A 25 April 1861 Louisa Crock. Cert no 2951861. Births in the district of Wangaratta in the colony of Victoria Schedule A 22 October 1879 Cert no 109 George Edward Crock Cert no 155. Births in the district of Wangaratta in the colony of Victoria Schedule A 12 Feb 1873 Hester Newton Crock. Births in the district of Wangaratta in the colony of Victoria Schedule A Sep 13 1865 Henry Crock junior 1865 cert no. 711. Births in the district of Wangaratta in the colony of Victoria Schedule A 26 July 1863 Ellen Crock Cert No 499. William Crock no birth cert and one child still born 1874. Birth certificate 25 April 1861 Schedule A Births in the City of Wangaratta. Louisa Crock.

¹¹ Public Record Office of Victoria. Proceedings of Inquest held upon the body of a male child at Killawarra, 21st December 1874, number 1137.

¹² Ovens and Murray Advertiser, 1860. Publicans' Licences. August 22nd.

¹³ Country cities and towns: their rise and development. No. 24. History of Wangaratta. *The Weekly Times* (Melbourne) Sat 9 March 1929.

¹⁴ *The Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 10 February 1860. New insolvents. *The Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 24 October 1874, New insolvents.

¹⁵ W.A. Almanac, 1884, District Directory, p. xxxviii.

¹⁶ 'Some settlers from the Eastern states and their work'. *Western Mail*, 3rd June 1905 page 39

¹⁷ *The Acadians*. Dictionary of Canadian Biography. http://www.biographi.ca/en/theme_essays.html?p=27

¹⁸ Mahaffie, C.D Junior. 1995. *A land of discord always : Acadia from its beginnings to the expulsion of its people, 1604-1755*. Camden, Maine: Down East Books

¹⁹ Cochrane, D Pierre Cyr and His Family, Part 1. Nova Scotia Genealogical Society Vol XXV11/1, pp. 13-18.

²⁰ Tremblay, J, Couturier, R-M, Vincent, M, Couturier, R, Bérubé, B, Tremblay, N. 2019. *From Sirre to Cyr : Early generations of an Acadian Family*. Cyr Family Reunion publication, Memramcook.

²¹ Cochrane, D Pierre Cyr and His Family, Part 1. Nova Scotia Genealogical Society Vol XXV11/1, pp. 13-18.

²² LaPointe, Jacques F. 1989. *Grand-Rivière: une page d'histoire acadienne*. Monographie de la ville de Saint-Léonard, N.-B. 1789-1989. Moncton :éditions d'acadie., page 25

²³ Tremblay, J, Couturier, R-M, Vincent, M, Couturier, R, Bérubé, B, Tremblay, N. 2019. *From Sirre to Cyr : Early generations of an Acadian Family*. Cyr Family Reunion publication, Memramcook.

²⁴ LaPointe, Jacques F. 1989. *Grand-Rivière: une page d'histoire acadienne*. Monographie de la ville de Saint-Léonard, N.-B. 1789-1989. Moncton :éditions d'acadie., page 25

²⁵ Tremblay, J, Couturier, R-M, Vincent, M, Couturier, R, Bérubé, B, Tremblay, N. 2019. *From Sirre to Cyr : Early generations of an Acadian Family*. Cyr Family Reunion publication, Memramcook.

²⁶ Henry Crock and Charlotte Grimshaw. Marriage Registration, Beechworth Victoria, No. 1252/1858

²⁷ Mandine Le Blanc, Gilles Essiambre, Rose-Marie and Rita Couturier, Marguerite Cyr.

²⁸ Professor Emeritus Dr Stephen White, University of Moncton; Mr Robert Gilmore, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, Fredericton. Professor Emeritus Dr. Jean-Guy Poitras, Université de Moncton, campus d'Edmundston, Michel Lussier, Allen Doiron, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick. Roger Guitard, Fidèle Thériault.

²⁹ Public Record Office of Victoria. Index to Inward Passenger Lists, Victoria, Fiche 107, page 003. Earl of Sefton Henry Crock is listed as aged 23, therefore would have been born in 23 1833. Henry Crock and Charlotte Grimshaw. Marriage Registration, Beechworth Victoria, No. 1252/1858. Henry is noted as being 22 years of age, therefore born in 1836. Births in the district of Wangaratta in the colony of Victoria Schedule A 9 Feb 1859 Mary Anne Crock. Cert no. 159. Henry noted as age 23 therefore born in 1836. Births in the district of Wangaratta in the colony of Victoria Schedule A 25 April 1861 Louisa Crock. Cert no 2951861 Henry is noted as 26 years so born in 1835 ; Births in the district of Wangaratta in the colony of Victoria Schedule A 22 October 1879 Cert no 109 George Edward Henry noted as 36 years so born 1834; Cert no 155 12 Feb 1873 Hester Newton , Henry noted as 45 years so born in 1828; Births in the district of Wangaratta in the colony of Victoria Schedule A Sep 13 1865 Henry Crock junior 1865 cert no. 711, Henry noted as age 30 so born 1835; 26 July 1863 Ellen Crock Cert No 499 Henry noted as 28 so born 1835; William Crock no birth cert and one child still born 1874. Western Australia Death certificate Henry Crock 28 May 1910. Registration number 3400006V/1910 Henry is noted as 84 therefore born in 1826.

³⁰ Death cert 1910 aged 84 so born in 1826; Western Australia Death certificate Henry Crock 28 May 1910. Registration number 3400006V/1910.

³¹ Public Record Office of Victoria. Index to Inward Passenger Lists, Victoria, Fiche 107, page 003. Earl of Sefton Passenger List.

³² Births in the district of Wangaratta in the colony of Victoria Schedule A 25 April 1861 Louisa Crock. Cert no 2951861. 12 Feb 1873 Hester Newton Cert no. 155. Sep 13 1865 Henry Crock junior 1865 Cert no. 711.

³³ Son of Jean Baptiste Cyr dit Crock 11 born 1747, died 1822, son of Jean Baptiste Cyr dit Crock 1 born 1710, died 1785.

³⁴ Guitard, R and Thériault, F 2019. Who was the Canadian Henry Crock who settled in Australia in 1856? Who were his Canadian parents? A genealogical report. Unpublished report, October.

³⁵ Honoré Cyr was present as godfather at the baptism of his half-brother Aimé Cyr. Baptism Aimé Cyr 1846, Van Buren Saint Bruno Parish Register, Madawaska, U.S.A.

³⁶ Births in the district of Wangaratta in the colony of Schedule A Victoria 9 Feb 1859 Mary Anne Crock Cert no. 159 – Henry is listed as being born in Beachlow, Lower Canada.

³⁷ Births in the district of Wangaratta in the colony of Victoria Schedule A 25 April 1861 Louisa Crock. Cert no 2951861. 12 Feb 1873 Hester Newton Cert no. 155. Sep 13 1865 Henry Crock junior 1865 Cert no. 711.

³⁸ Births in the district of Wangaratta in the colony of Victoria Schedule A 22 October 1879 Cert no 109 George Edward Crock.

³⁹ Country cities and towns: their rise and development. No. 24. History of Wangaratta. The Weekly Times (Melbourne) Sat 9 March 1929. Henry Crock is listed along with Christopher Dockendorff and others as building the first bridge over the Ovens River at Wangaratta which was completed in 1855. I have not found the original list of contractors yet.

⁴⁰ The Daily Sun, July 29 1890 Saint John New Brunswick, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick. Daniel F. Johnson Newspaper Archives. Vol 78: Number 103.

⁴¹ Public Record Office of Victoria, Unassisted passenger List. Brig Australia, 1852.

⁴² Public Record Office of Victoria, Australia. Unassisted passenger lists. The Oriental New York 12th January 1860.

⁴³ Shipping. Cleared out. November 29 1879. The Weekly Times (Melbourne) Sat 6 December, page 21.

⁴⁴ By Electric Telegraph. Albany, Dec 6 1879. The West Australian. Tuesday 9 December, page 2.

⁴⁵ National Museum of Australia. Ned Kelly's Jerilderie letter. <https://www.nma.gov.au/explore/features/ned-kelly-jerilderie-letter/transcription>