

'REAGHILL' – The Human story

22 FEB 2005

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The Davies Family:

HUSBAND: Seymour George Pilkington DAVIES 271
 Born: 6 Jul 1860 Ballinsloe GAL
 Chr: 20 Jul 1860 St Johns, Ballinsloe, GAL
 Marr: 12 May 1896 St Stephens CE, Elsternwick, VIC[1] 81
 Died: 9 Oct 1935 60 Avoca St, South Yarra, VIC[2]
 Prob: 2 Nov 1935 VIC[3]
 Immigr: 1863 Adelaide, SA
 Occ: Banker
 Father: Thomas Pilkington DAVIES 270
 Mother: Agnes Mangan HARRISON 273

WIFE: Dora Staniforth HALL 231
 Born: 25 Mar 1877 "Glendora", Elsternwick, VIC[4]
 Died: 19 Feb 1945 60 Avoca St, South Yarra, VIC[5]
 Father: John HALL 44
 Mother: Dora MOORE 157

CHILDREN

1| Name: Dora Seymour DAVIES 274
 F| Born: 26 Apr 1897 Burwood Rd, Hawthorn, VIC[6]
 | Marr: 12 Aug 1939 Roxton, BDF, ENG 85
 | To: Victor Charles JAMES 280
 | Died: 11 Aug 1985 Bedford, BDF, ENG
 | Occ: Physician

2| Name: Geoffrey Francis Seymour DAVIES 278
 M| Born: 20 Aug 1900 Burwood Rd, Hawthorn VIC[7]
 | Died: 27 Dec 1986 Burwood, VIC
 | Occ: Physician

3| Name: John Seymour DAVIES 279
 M| Born: 8 Jul 1902 Burwood Rd, Hawthorn VIC[8]
 | Marr: 28 Oct 1933 St Thomas CE, Moonee Ponds, VIC 87
 | To: Bessie Flora AMIES 287
 | Died: 3 Jul 1976 Camberwell, VIC[9]
 | Occ: Physician

REFERENCES

- [1]cert 1827 1896, J Hall fam Bible; Rev P Bailhaiche.
 [2]cert 9094 1935 age 75.
 [3]prob index 276 154.
 [4]J Hall family Bible @ 9.05 am.
 [5]cert 1623 1945 age 67.
 [6]cert 11595 1897.
 [7]cert 19493 1900.
 [8]cert 18869 1902.
 [9]cert 15646 1976 age 73.

NOTES:

Seymour Davies was born in Galway, Ireland and came to South Australia as a three-year-old child in 1863. He joined the English, Scottish and Australia Bank in their Adelaide office as a ledger keeper in February 1878. Among other positions he spent fifteen months from September 1888 as acting manager of the Palmerstone (Darwin) branch. He moved to Melbourne as an accountant in February 1891. His parents had left South Australia to come to Melbourne a year or so earlier.

In May 1896, at a well attended society wedding, he married Dora Staniforth Hall, the youngest daughter of John Hall a senior official with the Colonial Treasury. Between 1897 and 1902 a daughter and two sons were born to them. They were then living in an elegant bank-owned residence at 253 Burwood Road, Hawthorn. It was located on the north side about 150 metres west of Glenferrie Road. The building still exists, very little different in 2005 to its appearance in the early 1900s. In January 1907 they left Melbourne on a six-month visit to England and Ireland leaving their children in the care of a nurse. We presume that their journey included visits to relations at Ballymore, Loughrea and Tuam in County Galway. The former may have been the origin of the name 'Reaghill' although John Cone notes that "Reag" means "royal" in the Irish language, hence logically "Royal Hill". Following his return from overseas Seymour contributed two long articles on the history of the Davies family, which were published in the *Tuam Herald*. During this period he and Dora were seeking a country retreat and in 1909 bought a small house and land in rural Ringwood. They named this "Reaghill". Seven years after their return from the UK Seymour, at the age of 53, was forced to retire from the Bank due to ill health. This meant leaving the bank-owned building so they moved into 'Reaghill' for the duration of World War 1. About 1918 they bought a house at 60 Avoca Street, South Yarra.

Seymour and Dora's family were born at Hawthorn and the children all began their education at Tintern, which was then located nearby in Glenferrie Road. Both Geoffrey and John often joked about being "old boys" of Tintern! The boys continued their education at Trinity Grammar, a boy's school in Kew. All three qualified at Melbourne University as medical practitioners. Geoffrey's degree was conferred on 12 April 1924, John's on 2 May 1925 and Dora's on 23 December 1926. Dora had deferred subjects on several occasions due to ill-health.

There was a modest weatherboard house almost on the highest point of 'Reaghill'. It had been built by a Mr Wallace Bruce, a speculative builder in 1908-09. At the time of its construction there was some difficulty in getting plasterers so the house was lined with tongue and grooved timber lining boards. The Davies family frequently spent their weekends at 'Reaghill'. To get there they took the train to Box Hill where they hired a horse and trap to complete the journey, reversing the procedure to get back to their home. Their grand daughter, Heather Davies remembers visiting the house, as a child, with her parents. Among other things she particularly recalls the many intriguing little paths through the bush. In 1926-27 they added a useful sunroom to the eastern side of the house. For many years Stan (Stanley Francis) Blood was caretaker/manager of the land for the Davies family. In a codicil to her will, prepared in 1942, Dora Davies left him a substantial legacy as a reward for his long and loyal service in that role. Stan and his wife, Amy, lived in Bedford Road near the corner of Howard Avenue. Stan died there on 23 December 1957 and Amy in 1968 at Sale.

One of the assets in the inventory attached to Dora Davies' probate documents was a growing crop of pears and apples. There is still a pear tree at the northern end of Homebush Court.

The early 1940s were uneasy times, by mid 1941 the war in Europe had raged for 18 months meanwhile the Japanese had occupied the whole of Indochina and were considered a threat to Thailand and Malaya. In July 1941 Geoffrey enlisted in the AIF and on 30 August embarked on the *SS Wanganella* on the strength of the 2nd 13th Australian General Hospital. He disembarked in Singapore on 15 September. The hospital had taken over St Patrick's School, Singapore during the emergency, it was later to become the headquarters of the Japanese army. On 7 December Japan attacked Pearl Harbour and the same day landed its forces in northern Malaya. They were opposed by British and Australian troops during the short, ill-fated campaign to defend that country from the Japanese onslaught. With the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942 he was interned by the Japanese, first at Changi and later at prison camps further north, on the Burma/Siam railway. He used his skills to alleviate the suffering of his fellow POWs making use of locally available herbal remedies to cope with dietary deficiencies and tropical diseases. With other surviving prisoners he was recovered from the Japanese in Thailand on 4 October 1945. He returned to Australia on the *Morton Bay* on 30 October and was discharged from the Army in January 1946. He resumed work at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital at the Sydney suburb of Camperdown which he had left in 1941. The history of the nearby

suburb of Homebush impressed him, this was the origin of the name of the new court created when the land was later sub-divided. As has been stated elsewhere he had been left 'Reaghill' under his mother's will and early in 1947 returned to reside there. Prior to his retirement he worked part time at the Repatriation General Hospital (Heidelberg Military Hospital) as a pathologist.

Following its sub-division in 1955, during his residence there, he retained, not only Lot 11 but also Lot 14, the latter to give him access to Bedford Road. He was a member of the Melbourne Savage Club, taking part in many of its social activities. He also accumulated a unique library on a wide variety of subjects. His friends and relations remember him for his kindly nature, he always remembered birthdays. Many recall receiving a well-chosen book from the bookshop of Margaretta Webber. He also joined in several garden discovery tours in Europe. We also remember his regular walk across to have Sunday lunch with his friend and contemporary, Dr W L Colquhoun, in Aringa Court, across the other side of Canterbury Road. The latter had also served with the Army for a period but did not go overseas.

In the land transactions it will be noted that the legal firm Meares, Duigan and Hall and its partner P StJ Hall appears from time to time. He was the elder brother of Dora Staniforth Hall and a founding partner in the legal firm Meares, Duigan and Hall. In due course his son Hugh (Hugh P Hall) became a senior partner in the same firm. His name occurs in several of the documents in the closing years of the Davies family's association with 'Reaghill'.

Until about 1948 part of the area between Bedford Road and Canterbury had been used as an orchard run by Hermann Gerlach. Gerlach's later house appears in photos of the area and remained there until about 1990. He died there on 28 March 1953. After the 1939-45 war the property was sub-divided and a number of families built homes, initially along Bedford Road. Among them were Jack and Lila McRae, Osmund and Marie Wickham and Fred Motteram. The Beattie family bought and moved into the Gerlach's house. Lila recalls Jack Wood and his wife, Mary, who lived in an old cottage in the grounds of 'Reaghill' opposite. The building was a sort of gatehouse as it stood at the entrance to the driveway to 'Reaghill' which wound from there around and up the hill to the house at the top. It was called the "apple shed" The Woods were older than their new neighbours but were very welcoming. Cash was short in those days but whenever a task needed some extra labour the Woods would be over to help. In return Jack milked the Wood's cow and looked after their chooks when they had a few days away. A row of up to twenty large, old pine trees lined the northern side of Bedford Road. They were on the 'Reaghill' land, and were felled when it was sub-divided. It was sad to see them go but the sun was no longer hidden during the winter! Frank Walker, from the adjoining 'Wombolano' often took his horse and trap to pick up Dr Hewitt, from Ringwood, and bring him back to the Walker's home for dinner. Walker's house was a lovely old place set in a pleasant garden complete with a fountain. On the flat ground behind the house was small waterhole or dam, the home of many frogs in those days.

The McKellars bought Lot 12, one of the larger blocks, in 1958. Jack (John Whittaker) Wood still lived in the old cottage now on lot 21 or 22. Prior to the sub-division Jack had grown tomatoes on the flat land close to Bedford Road. He died in 1972. The Bloods had a market garden on the larger area behind. There was then also a large clearing, extending east from lot 12 into Wombolano Park, which Geoff Davies said had been used by the Bloods as a strawberry growing area, possibly before the Davies' had bought the land. Elsewhere perhaps a dozen lemon trees were almost hidden in huge clumps of blackberries. There were also some cherry and a few apple trees. A mature forest, mainly of gums, covered the eastern slope. Some pines were growing up among them. Several were removed but others remain, one of these cut down a few years ago had been growing since about 1940. The remnants of Dora's walking tracks could still be seen in the forest. Bedford Road was then a strip of bitumen with grassy verges. In winter these became very soft. They recall Mr Lyon, the Heathmont newsagent, getting his car hopelessly bogged there one morning. In the post-war period the demand for services outstripped their availability, new electricity lines had to be erected, no telephones were available for some time and water was obtained by a private line from Bedford Road. Even so on the balmy summer evenings water supply pressure was low, often failing completely until after dusk when citizens stopped watering their gardens and retreated inside to escape marauding mosquitoes.

John Cone, a purchaser of one of the 'Reaghill' blocks in 1955 has the following reminiscences based on frequent contact with Geoffrey Davies from 1952 to 1986, especially 1952 to 1964. He never met Dora except through Geoffrey's thoughts.

The top of the hill contained a small quarry or open cut antimony mine which pre-dated the Davies ownership and buildings. The same site was subsequently used for an "apple house". He believes that the

land was planted with apple trees and the "apple house" was used to store the fruit. In recent years the excavation has been filled and its site now has a tennis court on it.

Geoffrey's mother, Dora, was an artisan and craftswoman who made carved boxes and textiles of stringybark in liaison with Frank (Stringybark) Walker. She also laid out the hilltop paths, especially the "Grand circle" afternoon tea walk with its stops for taking in the views. Very refreshing – you could do the whole circle or just a half circle. This path also had a luminescent fringe for night walking. Dora was indeed the spirit of 'Reaghill'.

The Spanish oak now on lot 6 near the corner of lots 11, 12 and 13 was planted by Dora in 1909 when they bought 'Reaghill' and is therefore almost 100 years old. The earlier additions to 'Reaghill' and other aspects were the inspiration of Dora and were maintained meticulously by Geoffrey. What a strong lady she was.

Sources: personal memories – Ian & Margaret McKellar, Heather Crow, Geoff and Dorothy Healey, Lila McRae, Margaret & John Cone.

A photograph album, belonging to the Davies family, recording the history of 'Reaghill' is being copied for our Archives. The service records of Major G F S Davies, NX 76351, are in the National Archive - File B883, No 4621917.

DAVIES, Seymour George Pilkington

Extracts from records in the ANZ Bank Archives (*with additions*)

6 July 1860 *Born in County Galway, Ireland*
1863 *Arrived in South Australia*
English, Scottish and Australian Bank
Feb. 1878 Appointed Ledger Keeper, Adelaide Office
Sep. 1888 Acting Manager Palmerston (Darwin)
Presented with Chinese vases by widow of Judge T K Pater on behalf of Darwin's Chinese citizens
Dec. 1889 Accountant, Adelaide Office and Sub-branch Inspector
July 1890 Acting Accountant, Melbourne Office
Feb. 1891 Accountant Melbourne Office
Jan 1893 Acting Manager, Melbourne Office
Sep 1894 Manager, Melbourne Office
May 1894 *married Dora Staniforth Hall in Elsternwick*
Jan 1907 Granted six month's leave of absence and invited by the Board to visit England and Ireland.
28 Feb. 1914 Retired. (See cutting Australasian and Insurance and Banking Record 21 Mar. 1914 p. 199)

Granted £600 equivalent to six months salary.

Sources: EK1, EK2, EK3 .

21 Jan 1914 . Board Minute

"The retirement of Mr Seymour Davies, Manager at Melbourne on account of ill-health on 28th Proximo was announced and accepted with regret. In recognition of his long and valuable service it was resolved to supplement the pension payable under the rules of the Provident Fund, so as to bring it up to £500 per annum."

Source EA202

9 Oct 1935 Died in SouthYarra
(see JGM to Sec London EAB 23 p125)

OBITUARY

JAMES (nee Davies), Dora Seymour

We were sorry to learn of the death of Dr. Dora Seymour James (nee Davies) on 11 August 1985 in Bedford, England. As Dora Davies, she attended Tintern from 1903 to 1915 and was Head Prefect (the School's third) from 1913 to 1915.

As Tintern did not offer the subjects she required for her medical course, she had private coaching and in 1916 passed the Junior Public Examination gaining 11 passes at that level. In 1917, she attended the School of Medicine at Melbourne University and gained her MB & BS in December 1926. She was a resident at the Queen Victoria Hospital from 1927 to 1933.

Early in 1934 she sailed to England and did post-graduate work which helped her to win the Diploma of the College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology - a high honour.

Dora was appointed resident medical officer to Luton Maternity Hospital, Bedfordshire, England in 1939. In August of that year she married Victor Charles JAMES in England. She had lived near or at Bedford ever since.

(Source: Tintern Old Girls Association Newsletter)

Some details of the Walker family

Frank Leslie Walker was born in South Yarra in 1874, the youngest and 8th child of Theodore Walker and Ann Marshall.

Frank married Henrietta Celeste McGowan in 1912, she died in 1937, there are no known children of the marriage.

His eldest brother, Arthur, was born in 1863, he married Elizabeth Georgina Gordon in 1899, Theodore Gordon Walker, the nephew of Frank Walker, who was given the property in 1955 was their eldest son.

(Source: Indexes of Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages)

Some details of the Gerlach Family:

Hermann GERLACH married Annie BLOOD in 1898 [5327 1898]

Annie Gerlach died at Ringwood in 1928 aged 53 (b 1875) [12364 1928]

Hermann Gerlach died at Ringwood on 28 March 1953 aged 84 b 1869 he left his weatherboard house to Hilda

Issue 3 daughters:

Myrtle Emma Gerlach b 1899 [21785 1899 Ringwood]

She died Melbourne in 1973 aged 73 [8090 1973]

She married Arthur William Franklin (a plumber) in 1924

Alvena Elma Gerlach b 1900 [21872 1900 Ringwood] (also known as Elvina)

She married Albert George Kerr in 1928 [709 1928]

He died in Ringwood aged 69 [21705 1956] b 1887

(perhaps Alvena Avenue was named after her)

Hilda Annie Dorothea Gerlach b 1909 [6065 1909 Ringwood]

She married Arthur Leslie Schultz in 1937

He died in 1975 at Coldstream

Mrs John Blood – see photograph of Bedford Road from outside her house.

John Blood was the son of Robert Blood and Jamima Rowstone born about 1850. He married Elizabeth Bonsor on 20 July 1885 – his second marriage - and they had five children John, Florence Emily, Mabel, Edward John and Roy Thomas. He died in his home in Bedford Road on 11 February 1915 after an illness lasting “16 years and seven days” and is buried at Box Hill. The four room weatherboard house was on four acres, one rood and 35 perches being Crown allotments 16,17,18 31, 49 and 50 of section C of the Township in the Parish of Ringwood. This was probably the one opposite the Bedford Road shops. His widow, Elizabeth, was left the house but must have given it to her daughter Florence, then Mrs John Knox some time before her death there on 8 June 1927.