

The life of John Steavenson.

John Carpenter Steavenson (John's father) married Elizabeth Fenwick in Tynemouth, Northumberland on 30th September 1826. John Carpenter was from a long established family from Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland. His father had been Lord Mayor of Berwick a record 7 times. Elizabeth's father was a very successful ship owner from Tynemouth who made his fortune in the Australian Wool Trade.

After a honeymoon in Paris, now trendy after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, John Carpenter took his new wife back to Fortrose, near Inverness in Rosshire, Scotland. John Carpenter owned 4 Sloops, had the main Hardware Store in Fortrose, and also rented the Fishing Rights (salmon) off the local Laird – Hugh Ross.

Elizabeth produced 2 sons whilst they were living in Fortrose – John (born 19th August 1827) and Hugh Ross (27th April 1835). She produced 2 more sons later when they were living in Walton, nr Liverpool – Joseph (20th July 1842) and David Fenwick (10th September 1844).

About 1856 John came out to Melbourne as a Roads Surveyor. He obviously flourished and became Assistant Commissioner and then Commissioner of the Department of Roads and Bridges. Finally on 26th April 1871 he became Secretary of the Railways Department (which included the Department of Roads and Bridges). He writes and complains that he is grossly overworked – the workload has doubled (with the combining of the Departments), but his Staff have been halved, and he has had to take a compulsory 1/3 reduction in Salary. (In 2005 we call it Government cut-backs !). He also says that sometimes he does not get paid for up to 3 months, and has to borrow money to finance his living costs.

John marries Mary Murphy on 30th September 1862 at St John's Church, Toorak.

John sends ½ his salary home – to pay for his Mother's upkeep as his father is now destitute, and to pay for Joseph and Fenwick to go to King William's College, Isle of Man, and then Trinity College, Cambridge where they both graduate with BA. He then sends further funds to both brothers when they are struggling Junior Lawyers. His younger brother Hugh Ross lives with him for 6 years, and his father lives with him for quite a time. John has to fund both of these as they have no money at all!

At the end of 1876 he suddenly cannot stand it any more, and leaves for England on Compassionate Leave. He arrives home at Whickham near Gateshead in January 1877. From what I can make out Mary followed him home, with I think her parents. But the marriage was over. John says that he had put up with 15 years of her bad temper and mood swings. (It must be a family trait as he says that another sister has kicked her husband out of the house and that he is drifting around the world destitute.) Mary (presumably with her parents) went on an extended holiday through France before returning home to Melbourne.

John spent several years trying to get a high paid job in the City of London, and also trying to claim a Pension off the Government of Victoria, both to no avail. He asks Fenwick, who is now on course to be a highly successful Barrister, for a loan until he gets his inheritance when his mother dies. He reminds Fenwick he paid for his schooling and to go to Cambridge. Fenwick tells him to get lost and won't help him at all. (Joseph has married a very expensive wife in Madras and is strapped for cash also !)

John finally makes peace with Fenwick. Fenwick agrees to give him a pension of £49 per year (Aus\$110) on the sole provision that he sails for Labrador (Canada) as soon as the ice on the River Thames melts, never to return to England again (Fenwick's words, underlined !)

Authors Note

I have spent the past 3 months searching everywhere to find out what happened to John. Only on Sunday night, in a scrappy old envelope, I found the Birth and Death dates for the Steavenson family, starting with John's Grandfather and going through to the 4 sons of John Carpenter. It states that John Steavenson died in Labrador, about 1890, seal hunting. I am now trying to find his Tomb Stone in Labrador to get the actual date.

So what happened to the rest of the family?

John's father died 5th November 1867 leaving virtually nothing

Elizabeth Steavenson (nee Fenwick) died 25th July 1887 always complaining of a lack of money.

Hugh Ross Steavenson, having been kicked out of Melbourne by John, went to New Zealand and married Eleanor whose parents also came from Northumberland. They had 3 children in New Zealand (one of whom died). Eventually, after a string of failures they land up in Caldwell, Idaho, USA where Hugh dies 12th September 1894 and is buried next to his wife.

Joseph became a High Court Judge in Madras (now Chennai) India. He married a very pretty girl from Northern Ireland, and had a girl and then a boy. I am descended from the girl.

Fenwick married his childhood sweetheart from the Isle of Man – also Eleanor. (I think he also had a mistress in London). Eleanor was a sickly woman, produced 2 girls, then died. Fenwick was by now a very wealthy Barrister, and became a well known High Court Judge in Northern Britain. He married the nurse who looked after Eleanor (to make her an honest woman), and he died in Cornwall 16th March 1920.

And that is only half the story

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