



## THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

PAPER NO. 142

PREPARED BY: J. Crethary

DATE: 22 January 2007.

### **Bro. ROBERT MUIR (1815-1851)**

Pioneer New England Cattleman and Grazier

Robert Muir was born on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1815 into the Glasgow, Scotland, family of merchant John Muir who had married Elizabeth Sibbald. The family contained 16 children. His story begins with the arrival in Australia of the Lang family of Largs, Scotland.

The Lang family consisted of William Lang, his wife Mary Dunmore and their children John Dunmore b.1799, George Dunmore b.1802, Andrew b.1804, Isabella Ninian b.1806.

George was studying to be a doctor, which apparently he didn't like and quickly abandoned when a friend offered him a position on a sugar plantation in the West Indies. However, before he left to go to his new job the plantation owner was killed in a driving accident and George was left without a job. Because of a connection in New South Wales George decided to come here which he did in 1821.

On arrival, he received a grant of 1000 acres from Governor Macquarie, in the Hunter region. i.e. near the present township of Largs, N S W.

George had been working for the Commissariat at Parramatta and Windsor and in 1824 resigned with the intention of moving to his Hunter grant of land. On the way, in Sydney he was overtaken by inflammatory fever and died in 1825 aged 22 years, unmarried.

In 1823 his father and mother, William and Mary, and siblings Andrew and Isabella came to N S W.

In 1824 father William and brother Andrew had contracted to build the first Scots Church, in Sydney, near the present York and Margaret Streets junction. When the Sydney Harbour Bridge opened in 1927, York Street was widened and the Church had to be demolished.

When George died in 1825, Andrew with his father William and mother and sister Isabella, moved onto George's property to work the land and build a home.

In 1830 his father William, was making a trip to Sydney by boat overnight. A storm blew up and the boat, a small one, was wrecked and William drowned at sea.

In 1849 Andrew married Emily Caswell a daughter of a retired military officer, from nearby "Balikera". They had one child who died in infancy.

While George worked in Sydney he wrote home that there was potential here for a Presbyterian Minister, which Governor Brisbane had indicated he would support.

John Dunmore Lang, who in 1811 at the age of twelve had enrolled at the University of Glasgow, was licensed to preach by the Church of Scotland at the age of 21, and was persuaded by this and arrived here in 1823.

In 1831 John Dunmore returned from one of his numerous trips to England bringing with him his future bride, Wilhelmina Mackie, a daughter of the sister of William Lang.

John Dunmore Lang became the well known Patriot and Statesman Rev Dr John Dunmore Lang, who displayed great missionary fervor, gained much prominence, and proved to be a much loved, and much disliked figure in Church and politics for 55 years.

John Dunmore's habit of public denunciation of people, their actions or morals, often brought the expected response in some way or other.

A well known man in Sydney who was married, enjoyed the pleasures of an extra paramour. After some years of this association, his wife divorced him. He then married his lady friend.

Lang was shocked by this and sent off a letter to a newspaper condemning the man, his actions and the Church, which remarried him.

A few days later Lang was walking in a city street when a man who asked him if he was Dr Lang confronted him. He acknowledged he was and was taken to with a horsewhip and thrashed.

Lang had not seen the man before and asked him who he was. He identified himself as the man Lang had libelled in his letter to the newspaper.

Lang charged the attacker with assault and the defendant was fined five pounds.

Rev Dr John Dunmore Lang experienced prison life more than once. He was in Parramatta Gaol, 1851, serving a four month sentence for libel, when his ninth child Wilhelmina was born.

He was however, a hero to many people and achieved much for the good of the country he served.

Isabella married Robert Muir, a pioneer pastorist and grazier who had property on the Liverpool Plains and further north.

Robert Muir had kept a detailed journal between 1838 and 1846, which includes details of his entire interesting voyage to Australia from Scotland and his experiences during his first six years in this country. The Mitchell Library in Sydney holds the original.

He recorded his disappointment in that he had been expecting his father to give him a substantial sum but was not now being as generous as he had expected.

He wrote on August 9 1838: *"Father is getting distrustful of my success in N.S.W. – says 500 pounds is all he will give me including passage money & outfit. My understanding was to land there with 500 pounds in my pocket."*

The ship Robert traveled in, the "Alfred", was a Barque of 716 tons which left Plymouth on September 17 1838. It arrived at Port Jackson, Sydney, on January 16 1839, after a voyage of 121 days. It carried 280 emigrants and a load of merchandise.

During the voyage to Australia several passengers passed away. He recorded:

October 17<sup>th</sup> Wed. (1838). " ... - another child died to-day."

October 19<sup>th</sup> Frid. (1838). " This morning a woman died."

October 21<sup>st</sup> Sun. (1838): "Last night was a fearful one, ... poor Clark died. (from typhus)"

October 28<sup>th</sup> Sun (1838): " ... a child died at 8."

October 29<sup>th</sup> Mon (1838): " Another child died this morning both funerals took place at once in the afternoon

November 1<sup>st</sup> (1838): " ... Another child died and was buried in the afternoon."

November 5<sup>th</sup> (1838): entry for this day is a detailed record of the visit by Neptune and the ceremony that followed. The end of the entry reads: "During the night a child died."

November 13<sup>th</sup> Tues.(1838) "Freak S.E. trade all day. A child which was born 4 days ago died & was buried – there was another birth 3 days ago."

November 15<sup>th</sup> Thurs (1838). "The other child which was born on board died & was buried."

November 16<sup>th</sup> Friday: (1838) " – a woman died & was buried this morning"

November 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday (1838), "Service as usual – another child died".

November 28<sup>th</sup> Wednesday (1838): " ... A boy of 10 years buried this morning, died of consumption so little are deaths noticed that it is often the tolling of the bell for the funeral which lets it be known that some one's dead – There are still several fever cases on of the intermediates, a female has been delirious for two days."

December 11<sup>th</sup> Tuesday (1838): " ... - Mrs Grant died today she gave birth to a child some time ago who died soon after."

December 20<sup>th</sup> Thursday (1838) "Early this morning a man died suddenly – he was buried before breakfast - ...".

December 29<sup>th</sup> Saturday (1838). " ... about 250 miles from land – another child died this morning."

However, special occasions were acknowledged and suitably celebrated. Christmas was recognised and New Year saw a fine celebration. Crossing the line occasioned a visit from Neptune with due ceremony.

Arriving in Sydney, on Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> January 1839, Robert landed after breakfast and recorded " – Sydney disagreeable place – George Street two miles long – "

On Thursday he looked at some horses and bought a Chestnut mare for 45 pounds. On Friday he had breakfast with Dr Lang and met his brother Andrew. On Sunday he went to Dr Lang's church.

After attending to necessary details, on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> January, Robert sailed from Sydney per the *Tamar* at 7 pm. He arrived at Green Hills (Morpeth) at 2 pm on Friday 25<sup>th</sup>. He rode into West Maitland where he spent four days arranging more equipment and left there on Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> for Glenmore, in the New England.

Some place names used in those early days are familiar with us to-day e.g.: Patrick's Plains, Muswellbrook, Kayuga, Aberdeen, Pages River, Karabubla (Currabubula), Gunny gunoo (Goonoo Goonoo), Peel River, McDonald's River (*one of the tributaries of the Namoy*) (Namoi River), Bannockburn Station, Bondora (probably Bundarra), Murrumurundie (Murrurundi),

Robert's journal continues with interesting details of his pioneering activities including activities with aboriginals, some of whom were helpful and others not so much. He records that blacks killed one of his neighbor's workers.

He had experiences with bushrangers too. On May 1<sup>st</sup> he recorded: *"About 12 noon I was in the hut when the dogs set up a barking – I went out to see who was coming there were four horsemen & a black gin dressed as a boy on horseback. Three of them had packhorses – I thought they were people looking for a station. The first who came up saluted me with a good morning – good morning I answered & seeing a rifle slung across him & pistols in his belt added, your appearance is formidable enough to frighten the ———. Oh said he we won't harm you, or any new settler. There are plenty down the river who can stand it. This shewed me at once that they were bushrangers who are at present so much dreaded. They dismounted & let their horses feed, while they came into the hut and took dinner. They showed us one of the pistols they took from Elliot having lost the other, also his watch and ring, saddle & bridle – I never saw men so well armed – they could fire 50 shots without requiring to load a second time. Three of them were young men. They talked quite freely of their forays & told us from whom this horse and that pistol was taken from & from whom the ——— was taken & told us about the country towards the sea coast & c & c. They stayed about an hour & were civil as men could be asking for the loan of a needle and thread to sew some straps & thanked us for their dinner when going away - John Cameron arrived while they were here but they would not meddle with his horses – it is only those who have characters for severity & hardness that they despoil."*

One day one of Robert's neighbours came to him with a long face. Bushrangers had cleaned him out of all the tea, sugar & tobacco he had. They had also taken clothes, blankets, shoes etc. They poured out three bags of commel for their horses & took from him his black bay horse and a filly.

Fences weren't in use at these times and to control stock: cows, horses and sheep, shepherds were used. They would stay with the stock at all times, particularly at night, to see they did not stray and become lost. However, in cases where shepherds were not employed stock did become lost and many times were difficult to find afterwards. Sometimes they were not located and were lost forever. Robert experienced this inconvenience.

One entry in his diary reads that he *"had a bad cold in the head, the nights were cold and they had ice ½ inch thick – The bloody cows have strayed again."*

The entries for the next few months are about daily doings such as, visiting neighbours to borrow, or return items which have been borrowed, such as flour, salt, tobacco, grinding stone, plough etc. and being visited by men journeying through.

In late December (1839) Robert started with a load of wool to Maitland where it was arranged it would be shipped to Sydney. On the way he *"Got a capsiz between the two Moonboys."* (The "two Moonboys" are two hills which are the access to the New England Range, north of Tamworth. It was explained some years ago the name originated in the early days when bullocks, in hot weather would be spelled at the foot of the range until nightfall and the moon rose and was used for light to guide teams through the bush and up the approach to the range. When the moon rose someone would call out "There is the moon boys". And so the locality was known as "Moon Boys" later to be known as "Moonbies".)

When he arrived at Maitland Robert shaved for the first time in twelve months. He went to Green Hills (Morpeth) and there bribed a man with 7/- to get his wool on board the "Tamar".

With this done he started again for his New England property. He records on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> January 1840, "*Hunter flooded, rising fast.*" He arrived at Black Creek but this was impassable. The floods further delayed him on his journey.

On 9<sup>th</sup> June Tues.(1840) he started on another trip to Sydney. At Maitland on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup>. he went to "Dunmore", the home of the Langs including their daughter Isabella, who he later married. He traveled to Sydney with Mr Lang on Sat June 27<sup>th</sup> and a round of activity was had, meeting people, attending church on Sunday,

In August Robert moved to Brezo (Breeza) where he was heavily involved in caring for his sheep and cattle - branding animals, killing cattle for meat, making yards for stock, riding around searching for cattle and horses which had wandered off at night, attending to sheep when they lambed.

In March 1841 Robert "*Hired a shepherd at 12/- a week & rations.*" - the rations included beef, flour, tea, sugar and tobacco. He also visited Maitland and stayed with Langs at "Dunmore".

On 22<sup>nd</sup> March Mon. (1841) - he recorded: "*Went into Maitland - dined with Clarke - was at the Masonic Lodge.*"

In Maitland Lodge of Unity's original presence book 1840 - 1855, included in the signatures of 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1841 is "**Rob Muir St Mungos**". It is the only time his signature could be located.

At Maitland one of Robert's neighbours, named Eales, advised he intended to claim all the Mooki (including Breezo) and stock it with sheep from "top to bottom". Eales intended to send 6000 sheep to the area. Robert took action through the Commissioner and obtained an interdict for the sheep.

On returning from a trip to Maitland he found Eales' 5000 sheep on the station. He obtained orders for the sheep to be removed and served it on Mr Alger, Eales' employee but the response was a refusal to remove the sheep. Eales had an order for him not to remove the sheep.

On Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> April (1845): Robert obtained an order to impound the sheep and the last entry re this episode says: "*Took Alger's sheep one flock 2718.*"

On Friday 25<sup>th</sup> April. with his own, and the flocks of two others', he left home with 9018 sheep and droved them to Murrurundi where he camped.

Here the diary ends abruptly and does not reveal what happened to the sheep or his properties. Robert had spent considerable time at Dunmore and apparently conducted business with Andrew Lang including at Breezia.

On 8<sup>th</sup> July 1845 Robert and Isabella Lang married. This union was the only one to preserve the bloodline of the Lang family of "Dunmore", although under a different name.

Of the three Lang sons George Lang died unmarried, Andrew Lang married and had a son who died in infancy, and Rev Dr John Dunmore Lang married and produced ten children but no grandchild. The one daughter, Isabella Ninian, married Robert Muir and produced one son who married and

produced a son and daughter who preserved the bloodline which has grown to a considerable size now spread over much of Eastern Australia, extending to Western Australia.

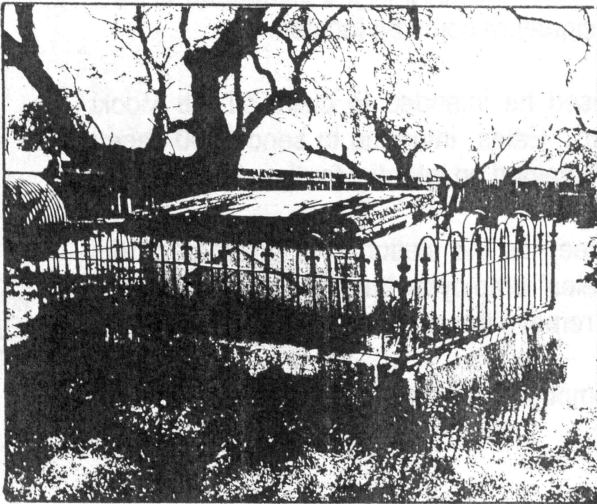
Isabella died in 1847. Robert died in 1851. They are buried in a tomb near the Lang home "Dunmore House", Largs, N S W. The tomb contains the remains of Mrs Mary Dunmore Lang and the infant unnamed child of Andrew and his wife Emily

Most of this information has been provided by Ronald Sibbald Muir, of Leonora, Western Australia, who is a Great Great Grandson of Robert and Isabella Muir, formerly of Scotland.

Brother Robert Muir was initiated in Lodge St Mungos (Glasgow, Scotland) 6<sup>th</sup> October 1837. There could not be found any record of him being Passed or Raised.

The only record found, of him attending a lodge was on March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1841, when he signed as a visitor to Maitland Lodge of Unity.

Acknowledgements: "Preacher, Politician, Patriot, John Dunmore Lang" by DWA Baker.  
Robert Muir's Journal kindly loaned by his Great, Great, Grand Son  
Ronald Sibbald Muir, Leonora, WA.



SACRED to the MEMORY of  
MARY DUNMORE LANG  
ISABELLA NINIAN MUIR  
(Sic)  
ROBERT MUIR  
and  
INFANT CHILD OF  
EMILY & ANDREW LANG

(The above is clearly engraved on the tomb. No dates are included but records show that Mary died in 1844. Isabella died in 1847, her husband Robert died in 1851, and Emily and Andrew's child died in 1851.)



ROBERT MUIR 1815 - 1851  
PASTORALIST AND GRAZIER