

## HARRIETT SLEE (NEE TAITE)

A brief history by Ken Slee (a gg-grandson)

Harriett Blackshaw Taite was born at Southwark, London, on April 9 1802. There were likely six older siblings (one of whom had died soon after his birth) and three younger siblings including Henry Pettit Taite the baby of the family.

Harriett's parents were Joseph Taite and Elizabeth Blackshaw Wall. Joseph Taite was a leather tanner and dealer in Southwark, London. He was also a developer of new industrial leather processing methods and a warden of the Leathersellers Guild in London. Harriett's paternal grandfather, also Joseph, was a publican and landowner who was instrumental in the development of the town of Boston Spa in West Yorkshire.

Nothing is known of Harriett Taite's early life in London, but on May 18 1820 she married Josiah Slee, also a tanner and leather seller, in Southwark. Josiah had been born in Southwark on January 20 1791 to Noah and Elizabeth Slee (nee Lynch). Noah Slee was originally from Sampford Peverell in Devon and had become wealthy through his business activities in London.

Josiah and Harriett Slee had six children in London, Josiah, Harriett, Emma, Frederick Taite, Edgar and Agnes. Frederick Taite Slee died aged one year in London.

In July 1831 Josiah raised £300 by mortgaging his share of the houses inherited from his father and the family embarked on September 26 1831 on the ship *John Woodall* as steerage passengers bound for Hobart Town in Van Diemen's Land, now the Australian state of Tasmania. On board were Josiah (40 years) and Harriett Slee (29), their five surviving children aged from five months to ten years, Harriett's brother Henry Pettit Taite (aged 18) and Harriett's sister Ann's in-laws from Boston Spa, John and Hannah Burnley and their eight children. Why these family members made the decision to emigrate is unknown but it was possibly to become landowners and farmers. The *John Woodall* arrived in Hobart on February 17 1832.

After the Sles arrived in Hobart Town another child, Charles Slee, was born in 1834. Unfortunately, Josiah Slee then died at New Norfolk in January 1838.

Having six children aged from three to 16 years old and with minimal assets, Harriett Slee was forced to take employment following her husband's early death and in June 1838 she obtained the role of Superintendent of the Nursery at the Female Factory in Hobart Town, a role that she filled over the next twelve years. Presumably, her superintendence of the nursery and its convict mothers and babies would have been a very difficult and demanding job and in 1850 she was forced to retire due to ill health.

After the discovery of gold in Victoria in 1851 Harriett Slee and her by then adult family moved to the Central Goldfields area in that state.

Harriett died at Carisbrook near Maryborough in December 1854 aged 52 years of "general decay" and was buried in the Bald Hills Cemetery to the east of Carisbrook. No headstone marks the grave although the Carisbrook Historical Society has recently erected a monument to those buried at the site that lists Harriett's name on a bronze plaque.

While Harriett's move to Australia with her family did not pan out well for her and her extended family, her children all found success and prosperity in coming years and contributed greatly to the building of prosperous communities, particularly in Victoria.

A history of the family with the title *My Slee Family in England, Van Diemen's Land and Victoria* was published in 2019 (ISBN 978-0-646-80145-2) and it elaborates on Harriett Slee's antecedents and some of her descendants in Australia.