

Euphemia Lawson; Three generations of convict and orphans

By Andrew Cocker, 28th October 2018

Most, if not all, family trees have brick walls that stubbornly remain intact, despite our best efforts. My most frustrating brick wall was that of Emma Agnes Jones, my great grandmother who married Joseph Cocker in Longford in 1876. Early in the search, two baptism records had been found referring to Emma Agnes Jones as Emma Lawson and so the net had been widened to search all Emmas whether they be Jones or Lawson. I had been searching for a birth record or any evidence of her parents for many years when, in 2015, a register of *Baptisms Solemnised in the Female House of Correction, Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* was digitised. It was a curious entry on 17 October 1849 for Euphemia Lawson because under ship it said free.

Curious indeed, because the column named ship was used to list the name of the ship in which the child's convict mother had arrived. A baptism within the Female Factory usually occurred due to a convict arriving pregnant or becoming pregnant, while assigned. The mother was allowed to feed and care for her baby for six months before being punished and then re-assigned. The babies were also punished, by being taken from their mothers, compulsorily weaned and sent to the nursery where they had a significant risk of dying. In the 18 pages from April 1843 to July 1854 there is just this entry where the mother is noted as free.

This was the record that enabled me to reconstruct Emma Agnes' life and two convoluted generations of convicts, Female Factory and Orphan School inmates. I quickly confirmed that the mother, Sarah Lawson, was not a convict, but there was a Euphemia Lawson incarcerated in the Female Factory at that time and she arrived with a daughter Sarah. The most likely explanation seems to be that Sarah named her baby after her mother and had her baptised within the Female Factory so that her mother could attend. Using the Orphan School web site database and the FCRC database I was able to tease out the full story that my Great Grandmother had changed her name to hide from.

The story of Euphemia Lawson senior is told in Chapter 3 of *Convict Lives Volume 2* and, to summarise, Euphemia was tried in Scotland and sentenced to death, commuted to transportation for life. When Euphemia arrived on the *Borneo* in 1828 she was accompanied by her two children who were placed in the Orphan Schools, William aged about four and Sarah aged about two. Euphemia married ex-convict Edward Griffith who arrived on the *London* in 1832 and had a third child, Ann, in 1837.

Euphemia's first assignment was to Government House, but it was short-lived: she was returned to the Female Factory cells for being intoxicated. Thus began a fifty year cycle of drunkenness, petty offences and rebellion. She was returned to the Female Factory at least 28 times – a cumulative total of more than ten years.

Euphemia's daughter, Sarah, had a difficult time in the Orphan School. Like her mother, Sarah was strong willed, and she was the only child to speak out in 1841 when the Orphan School's headmaster and chaplain of St Johns Church, the Reverend Thomas James Ewing, was investigated for sexual misconduct with one of the senior girls.

After prolonged gossip within the Orphans Schools, the Colonial Secretary instigated an investigation which simply found Ewing guilty of imprudence but, not of criminal conduct, and it was over two years before he was finally removed as headmaster. Sarah was punished by Ewing for refusing to retract her story and, within a matter of just a few weeks she had been apprenticed and discharged from the Orphan School. Sadly, Sarah trod a path not dissimilar to that of her mother. Just four years after she was apprenticed, she was before the court with two other girls for disturbing the peace in the "classical neighbourhood of Bathurst Street".

In 1847 she gave birth to a daughter, Sarah Elizabeth, probably in the Brickfields lying-in hospital. No further record of this child has been found. In 1849 Sarah gave birth to a child fathered by a married convict, George Jones, in all probability as a result of her being 'on the town'.

She formed a relationship with convict Jacob Standring and had three children, Jacob, Daniel and Richmoth. However, Standring abandoned them and went to Sydney around the time of Richmoth's birth in November 1859.

In 1861 a constable giving evidence in court described Sarah as “a terror to the neighbourhood ... she had three or four children and she was in the habit of leaving them all day while she went out drinking”.

In 1862, she was accused in court of using language ‘of the most disgusting description. The fact was that when the woman became drunk she was perfectly mad.’ Just four months later Sarah was cooking soup for her children in a house in Melville Street over an open fire when her clothes caught alight and she was severely burned. She died a lingering and painful death over many weeks in hospital, leaving behind four orphaned children.

In September 1862 an application was made for the admission of Sarah’s three youngest children to the Queens Orphan School. The application stated “The supposed father of these children has been away from the colony about two years and a half. The mother was for some years a prostitute so that it is impossible to identify the father of the children”

The sub-Inspector of Police reported he knew Sarah as a prostitute in Hobart Town. After their mother’s death, the children were cared for by a woman but she was sent to the Female Factory. The children were then in the care of Thomas Wood, who lived alone in a brothel behind the Golden Gate Inn (on the corner of Harrington and Collins Streets). He was accused of paying the children’s Benevolent Society support into his own account.

The three children were admitted on 22 September 1862.

Jacob, the oldest child, was awarded an Orphan School prize in 1866 and the following year, aged nearly 14, he was apprenticed to farmer George Chaffey of Green Hills, Little Swanport. He had been there for nearly three years when he absconded. The Police Gazette described him as 15 and a half years old, 5 feet high, sallow complexion, cross-eyed, low forehead and idiotic appearance.”

Jacob worked for many years for the Quaker, Cotton family at Kelvedon, Swansea. In 1897 he was awarded a certificate of merit for rescuing a drowning man. I can find no record of marriage or offspring for Jacob and he died in Hobart, aged 81, in 1934.

Jacob's brother Daniel spent just over eight years in the Boys Orphan School until 1870 when he was apprenticed to Mrs Bromley of Macquarie House, the first three story brick house in Hobart and then operating as a hotel. Fourteen months later he absconded and escaped to Melbourne onboard the *Derwent* from Launceston. The Police Gazette described him as 16 years of age, 5 feet, two inches high, light brown hair, stout build, ruddy complexion. He then disappears from the records.

Richmoth was awarded an Infant prize in 1864 and spent 11 years in the Orphan School until apprenticed at the age 13 years and 10 months. She married Thomas Holloway in 1864 and they lived most of their life at Police Point. They had just one son, Reginald, who died aged 4. Richmoth was buried with Reggie in 1923 when she died, aged 66.

In 1874 the Superintendent and Headmaster of the Boys Orphan School, J. M. Graham, wrote a long and rambling defence when he was dismissed for applying 24 strokes of the cane to 11-year-old Alexander Carrick's bare buttocks and then having the boy placed in a cold bath, and salt rubbed into his wounds. The boy's crime was climbing over the orphan school boundary wall to retrieve a ball. In his defence Graham stated that a previous matron had been more violent and that Richmoth Lawson had been apprenticed out black and blue from a beating from the matron.

But what of Euphemia Lawson, later known as Emma Agnes Jones, who, as the oldest, had undoubtedly spent much of her life caring for her three siblings? At just over 13 years, she was too old for the Orphan School and she suddenly found herself alone and responsible for her own welfare. She may have found work at the *Horse and Jockey* inn, later known as Cooleys Hotel in Moonah, just a short walk from the Orphan Schools. At some stage she became friends with Frances Jones who married Charles Morris Cooley, son of Thomas Todd Cooley the proprietor. She moved to Perth to work for Frances' parents, Frederick and Amelia Jones and to live with them in, what many of us know today as, the Robur Tea House café, currently an antique shop, in Main Road, Perth. Fred was a free settler; his convict brother Britton Jones was the original owner of the National Trust building, Franklin House in Launceston.

As Emma Lawson, Euphemia gave birth in 1872 to a child, Emma Louisa Jones, fathered by George Jones of Breadalbane, son of convicts Thomas Jones and Sarah Venables. In 1876, now known as Emma Agnes Jones, Euphemia married Joseph Cocker. They raised a family of nine, including Emma Louisa.

There were three significant Jones men in Euphemia Lawson's life. George Jones fathered her and she bore an illegitimate child to another George Jones. Both had pregnant wives at the time of conception. Euphemia known as Emma, was taken in by Frederick Jones and his family and I believe that is the reason she took the Jones name. The three Jones men were not related.

As well as her children William and Sarah, Euphemia Lawson Senior had another child, Ann, admitted to the Orphan School, first in 1844 when Euphemia was serving a two-month sentence in the Female Factory. Ann was released to her mother the following year but was re-admitted 18 months later, when her mother was sentenced to five years imprisonment for intent to commit grievous bodily harm during a drunken outburst. This time she was admitted as Ann Griffiths.

Ann, aged 14, was apprenticed in 1851 to Archie McDowell of Bothwell. When she was 17, she had the first of three children to Huon sawyer John Wignall. Ann's life was also marred by alcohol abuse and she was periodically in trouble for drunk and disorderly offences. She died in Deloraine in 1884. Only her first child, Jessie Maude, survived.

Conditions in the Orphan Schools were grim and the 1848 Bradbury report was very critical, noting that children were shorter and more listless than their equivalents outside the institution. Dr Edward Swarbreck Hall was an outspoken and constant critic of conditions and he highlighted the substantially higher death rate of children within the schools. His campaigns led to improvements, particularly in regard to nutrition. But I recently read an article claiming children were often sexually abused and, apart from the Ewing incident, I have found nothing to substantiate that claim.

The conditions in our Orphan Schools must be evaluated in the context of conditions elsewhere and we do know that children were bullied and beaten at all levels of society. A wonderful avenue for future research would be a comparison of conditions experienced in similar institutions in Parramatta, England, Scotland and Ireland and

indeed in free society. Whatever the outcome of such research, I am confident in asserting that without the care provided by the Orphan Schools to my ancestors it is very unlikely that I would exist to stand before you today.

My great great great grandmother Euphemia Lawson arrived in 1828 bringing her two children with her, William and Sarah, both of whom were admitted to the Orphan School on arrival. A third child, Ann, born in the colony, was also admitted, twice. Euphemia's daughter Sarah, my great-great-grandmother, had four children, three of whom were admitted to the Orphan School after her death, when their oldest sister, only 13, could no longer care for them.

Ten years ago at an FCRC seminar I told the story of how Lady Jane Franklin had taken Sarah Elizabeth Briggs under her wing and had her admitted to the Orphan School.

Coincidentally, Sarah Lawson was in the Orphan School at the same time as Sarah Elizabeth Briggs. Some 25 years later, their children married, to become my great-grandparents, Joseph Cocker and Emma Agnes Jones.

*Baptisms solemnized at the Female House of Correction
Newark Jersey New Zealand Land
1849-1850*

No.	When Born	When Baptized	Child's Christian Name	Parents Name	Ship	By whom Baptized
	Oct. 13 th 1849	Oct. 15 th 1849	Charles Emily	Lilly	Cadet (1)	D. Gates
	April 26 th 1849	Oct. 17 th 1849	Euphemia Sarah	Lawson	(Free)	D. Gates
	Oct. 23 rd 1849	Oct. 26 th 1849	Ann Ann	Towers	Galathea (1)	D. Gates
	Nov. 4 th 1849	Nov. 5 th 1849	Henry Thomas	Ann Padgug	Asia	D. Gates
	Nov. 1 st 1849	Nov. 5 th 1849	Thomas Mary	Manly	Cadet (1)	D. Gates
	Nov. 1 st 1849	Nov. 5 th 1849	Robert Henry	Robert & Ruth Turner	Novarino	D. Gates
	Sept. 29 th 1849	Nov. 10 th 1849	William Thomas	William & Sarah Stappins	(Lord)	D. Gates
	Nov. 22 nd 1849	Nov. 23 rd 1849	Martin Patrick & Ellen	Hans	(Finnian 2)	D. Gates
	Nov. 25 th 1849	Nov. 25 th 1849	Sarah Louisa	Frances Norman	Eliza & Henry	D. Gates
	Dec. 4 th 1849	Dec. 10 th 1849	Letitia May Ann	Johnson	Woodbridge	D. Gates
	Dec. 4 th 1849	Dec. 10 th 1849	Priscilla Mary	Webber	L. Eugene (2)	D. Gates
	Dec. 7 th 1849	Dec. 10 th 1849	William Margaret	Keedy	L. & Henry (2)	D. Gates

