

The Davis Family

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The Davis family story begins in the late 1880s when William Davis (b.1857) and Mary Hannah Clemson (b.1867), of the Agnes Banks - Castlereagh area, married in Penrith and travelled to Dalmorton, near Grafton. It is not certain what work William undertook but it is known that he held several gold mining leases, so it is probable that he was prospecting at times.

It was at Dalmorton that their first seven children were born, with two of the boys dying in their infancy - George b.1896, d.1896, and William b.1897, d.1898. The five surviving children were Elvy Eliza b.1894, Edward (Ted) b.1899, Henry (Harry) b.1902, Archibald Cecil (Archie) b.1904, Robert (Bob) b.1907. Around 1908 William and Mary left Dalmorton with their family and moved to Gundy, near Scone, where William got a job on the Rocky Crossing contract.

It was at Gundy where their youngest child Eva Flora was born, on the 8th September 1909. Just six weeks after Eva's birth, William developed pneumonia and died on the 18th October 1909, leaving Mary destitute with six young children to raise. With no relatives in the area to assist, the townspeople of Scone rallied to the aid of the family with various fund-raising events. In March 1998 the Scone District Historical Society published the following article in their Newsletter –

The Davis story is one of tragedy and a sympathetic district that rallied to help. William Davis and his family had only been in the district about 18 months when he sadly died from pneumonia on the 18th October, 1909, leaving a wife and six young children aged from six weeks to fourteen years old. They had no relatives in the locality so the people of the area started a relief fund for the unfortunate family.

Many people from all parts of the shire donated money and held fund - raising events such as socials, sports days, and band recitals. Collections were taken up in several of the shearing sheds of the district where shearing was in full swing at the time. People of all walks of life donated money or helped the plight of the grieving family in some other way.

A person was designated to take up collections in each area of the district for the cause. The money was deposited in the savings bank and a suitable allowance was made weekly to the family. Hundreds of pounds were donated. The family was living at Gundy where Mr Davis had been working on the just completed 'Rocky Crossing' contract. The widow and children continued to live at Gundy but eventually left and it is not known where they went.

Also with the above article, is a story of a sales docket from the Victoria Hotel, Moonan Flat, issued to Mrs M. Davis who purchased three pairs of trousers for ten shillings and sixpence, a packet of bobby pins for a penny, and traded in three possum skins for one shilling and three pence.

Greg Davis (a great grandson) who provided the Scone Historical Society with the sales docket, also has in his possession family records that show the community of Scone raised a total of 162 pounds (\$324). This was a huge amount of money for those days, especially when one considers a house built 13 years later for the Davis family in Park Street Riverstone cost 110 pounds (\$220).

Because employment opportunities for the boys were better at the meat works, Mary decided to move the family to Riverstone in c1911. Post cards in the family's possession indicate the first house they rented was in Crown Road, with electoral records showing the family living in No. 8 Oxford Street from 1912 until they moved into their new home at 41 Park Street in 1923.

Besides caring for her family during the 1914 - 1918 War, Mary gave much of her time to helping the soldiers who enlisted from the district. At the end of the War, in 1919, the returned soldiers of the district presented Mary with a beautiful framed collage of themselves, inscribed with the words "Presented to Mrs. Mary Davis by the Returned Soldiers of Riverstone and District in appreciation of her voluntary services rendered during and on their return from the Great War 1914 - 1918".

However, tragedy was again to strike the family when Mary died on the 16th October, 1921 at the age of 53. Mary was buried in the cemetery at Richmond. At 26 years of age, Elvy became the family 'mother', and at 21 years Ted became the family breadwinner, along with younger brother Harry. The family bought several acres of land bounded by Piccadilly, Market and Park Streets and built their new home at 41 Park Street in 1923 at a cost of 110 pounds (\$220). Later they bought a paddock bounded by Piccadilly, Wood, and Elizabeth Streets.

No. 41 Park Street was to be the family home for the remainder of their lives, along with their orchard, poultry pens, a ploughed paddock for their crops, and a paddock for their horse and the milking cow. The four boys were held in high regard by the community for their hard working ethics, be it at home or at their workplace. Of the six children only Archie and Bob were to marry and leave that home. Elvy continued to care for the family until her death on the 13th June 1957.

Ted, Harry and Bob all spent most of their lifetime working on the mutton board at the meat works. Ted was a butcher, who for many years also worked week- ends doing the emergency slaughter of injured animals after they were unloaded from the stock trains.

In the late 1940s Ted did not take too kindly to the State Government Housing Commission wanting to resume his land in Wood Street, compensating him only a fraction of its real value. Ted discovered he was powerless to prevent the resumption. In the 1950s the Housing Commission wanted to resume the family's other land surrounding their home in Park Street, again at a very low price. Ted resisted all their offers until 1962 when the family finally accepted the Housing Commissions offer.

However, it was to be poetic justice that in 1954 Ted won first prize of 6,000 pounds in the State Govt. lottery. Ted passed away on the 7th July 1961 and was buried in the Riverstone cemetery.

Harry was the most outgoing member of the family, involving himself with many of the towns organisations and sporting clubs. He played tennis and cricket, coached several of the ladies Vigoro teams when that sport was popular during the 1930s, and had a lifetime involvement with the Riverstone football club as a trainer and masseur.

Riverstone Rugby League Club in 1930 had such respect for Harry that they presented him with a Gold Medallion for his services to the club. This medallion is still often worn today by Greg's wife.

In 1956 the club presented Harry with a blazer with pockets showing all the competitions Riverstone won from the 1930s through to the 1960s. The blazer is in immaculate condition and, having been donated by the Davis family to the Historical Society, is now on display at the local museum.

Harry was an active member of the Buffalo Lodge and also on display at the museum is his Initiation certificate. Many residents may not realise it but they have probably sat on Harry's knee at some time in their lives, as he was the town's Father Christmas for many years. Harry passed away on the 30th October 1964 and was buried in the Riverstone cemetery.

The third son Archie left school to work at the meat works for a short period before he decided to change his career. He left the meat works and began training to become a motor mechanic with Dalgetys, importers of the Essex motor cars. He later worked at Waddingtons, (later known as Commonwealth Engineering), and then at the Clyde Engineering factory.

He also worked for several years at Lopez Engineering in Sydney as a mechanic, and after completing his St. Johns Ambulance Certificate also as the company's First Aid Officer. Another not so well known side to Archie was that at times he liked to write poetry.

Archie became recognised as one of the best mechanics in the district and started repairing cars in an old shed at the side of his home in Railway Terrace. Soon demand for his services became such that he left his job at Lopez and began working in this shed full time. Archie bought an Indian Scout motor bike in 1927 and was a familiar sight riding it around the streets of Riverstone.

Archie married Vera Gwendoline Woods from Pitt Town on the 21st March 1925 in Sydney. They eventually bought a house at 16 Railway Terrace, Riverstone and it was here they raised their four children May, Horrie b.16/6/1927, d.31/1/1967, Betty b.10/6/1934, and Fay b.8/2/1937. Archie died on the 4th March 1970 and was cremated at Pinegrove, Rooty Hill.

Bob was the third member of the family to work on the mutton board, and like Harry and Ted, worked most of his life there. During the slack season on the mutton board, Bob, to help the family budget, would work on the farms at Windsor picking such crops as corn, potatoes, beans, etc.

Bob married Enice Ida Watton on the 26th December 1931 and they lived in Castlereagh Street where they raised their son Alwyn. In 1950, Bob and Enice purchased land on the corner of Piccadilly Street and Park Street opposite the old family home, and built their new home.

Unfortunately Bob was never to live in their new home as he died on the 2nd October 1951, aged 44, and was buried in the Riverstone cemetery. Enice and her son Alwyn moved into the new home in January 1952 and Enice continued to live there until she passed away in 1990.

Following Elvys' death in 1957, Eva continued to care for Ted and Harry in their Park Street home. After their deaths Eva lived alone, continuing her social activities and outings with the Senior Citizens Centre, though in later years she became housebound with arthritis. When she died on the 24th May 1987, she was buried in the Riverstone cemetery and, being the last member of that generation of the Davis family, the house was later sold, after 65 years of continual ownership.

The Davis family was a family that saved everything - postcards, newspaper clippings, charity day buttons and badges, trophies, medals, certificates, all sorts of trivia and memorabilia. There are show ribbons from the Riverstone shows held during the 1930s, cigarette card collections, birthday cards, a birds egg collection in a glass case that today adorns a wall in the home of Greg Davis.

Compiled by Clarrie Neal September 2000, from information and photos provided by Alwyn and Greg Davis, and Fay Graham (n. Davis).