

Matthias and Elizabeth Koina

Mat Koina was the son of a German farmer living at the 'Dog Trap; near Inverell N.S.W. His name was Christie Koina. He had three sons, Mat, Martin and Christie and one daughter, Mary, who never married. Mat married Elizabeth Stamm about the early Seventies¹. About that time land was made available on 'Gunyaerwarildi' for closer settlement and Mat took up a selection there and he and his wife moved from the Inverell district to his new property which he named 'Brunstadt'. Their first home was built of round timber, post split slab walls and bark roof with earth floor.

Elizabeth helped her husband to build the house and also the fences. they both worked very hard. Elizabeth also had to do all her cooking on an open fire and bake her bread in a camp oven. At night she did her sewing which she did by hand, all her baby clothes were beautifully made. It was impossible to buy ready-made clothing at that period, everything had to be hand made.

They lived in that first home for many years, all the older members of the family were born there, mostly a neighbour in attendance at the birth of each child.

Then Mat was able to build a very home with a large attic which was used as a school room. There were able to keep a Governess to teach the children there being no school in the district.

Unfortunately Elizabeth did not live many years in her new home. When her ninth child was born something went wrong and both she and the baby died.

The children's names were as follows: Mary, Fred, Isabella, Alec, Elizabeth, Minnie, Alice and Tom.

Isabella died when she was about seventeen, she was a very nice girl. She died before her mother. Mat was a very quiet man and never had much to say, very strict with the family, never discussed the running of the property with the young people but they had to do as they were told and did all the work about the property. The girls helped with the stock at busy times of the year.

The girls did all their own dressmaking, did all kinds of fancy work and did it beautifully, took many prizes at local shows and were really hood cooks. Mat had to take charge of the home and family after her mother's death and made a very good job of it. She was always her mother's help. Mat later married again, a teacher at Ross Hill Public School, Inverell². He was passing the school in his way to 'Brunstadt' and called at the school and asked for a drink of water and that is the way the friendship started. She was a very nice person and settled in with the family very well. She let Mary carry in as before and she took charge of the children's education.

She had two little daughters of her own, Nellie and Jessie. Nellie was very like her mother and Jessie like the Koinas. Fred when a young man was out attending to his work as usual, was riding alone when the horse put its foot in a hole and fell and threw Fred over its head. Fred fell heavily and fractured his neck but was able to get home. He was home several days but his neck got worse so he was taken to the doctor but it was too late and he died from the injuries.

Aleck was the one to leave home. He married a pretty little blue-eyed girl named Millie Chaffey. They went to live at the old Geisler property now known as 'Millgalah' as manager for the new owners. They lived there for some years and had a son and two daughters.

Some years later Mrs Koina died leaving her husband and two schoolgirl daughters. Mary cared for them and they grew up.

After his wife's death Mat was now getting on in years and decided to retire. He bought land at Inverell facing the Warialda Road. He built a lovely home there. He and the girls lived there and Tom and his wife Maud lived at and managed 'Brunstadt' until his father's death when the property was sold and each member of the family received their share.

Tom and his wife came to Queensland and took up or bought a property and went in for sheep. They had a son and three daughters, the youngest one died when just a school girl.

After settling into their new home 'Altenham', Mat met a very nice lady and married again. He didn't tell his new wife that he had a family, she thought he was alone so she got a dreadful shock when she arrived home and found three grown up daughters in the house and when she found Mat was well cared for she finally decided she would return to her home as she was very well off herself and did not want anything from them. The girls said she was very nice. They were all good friends and kept in touch. She came to Mat's funeral when she died.

Mat went to Sydney, perhaps to see his two daughters who were living with their mother's people and also Aleck who had married and was living in Sydney. While in Sydney Mat bought a new car, railed it to Glen Innes and decided to drive it to Inverell. He was not a very good driver and on the way down the car got out of control and he had an accident and was badly injured and died from the result of his injuries.

The girls continued to live at 'Altenham' until they married. Minnie was the first to marry. She and her husband went dairy-farming at Moss Vale.

Then Elizabeth married James McIlveen and lived at Inverell. Mr. McIlveen had a grown-up family. Mary, the last to marry, her husband was a storekeeper in Inverell, a widower with a young daughter. Mary was happy she had someone who needed her and loved them both.

After the girls got married 'Altenham' was sold and each got their share.

'Altenham; looks as lovely as it did when I saw it over fifty years ago. I saw it when I was in Inverell in March 1973.

Tom Koina lived the last of his life at Cleveland. His wife predeceased him by a few years. In his 89th year he had to go into an aged people's home where he was well cared for. He passed away just after his 90th birthday in October 1972 and was buried beside his wife in the Victoria Point Garden of Rest.

Written by Frances O'Sullivan (née Stacey)

¹ The marriage was on 1st May 1872 at Inverell

² His second wife was Elizabeth T Richardson