

# Our Grandmother, Catherine

CATHERINE MARY MORKART was born c. 1828 (date or month not known) in Frankfurt, Germany. Her father was a shoe maker, all shoes were made by hand at that time as there were no machines.

They were not very well off but she went to school. She was only a small girl and her brother used to carry her on his back to school so she wouldn't have to walk in the snow in the winter time. She learnt to read and write in German but couldn't write in English but could read and speak English very well<sup>1</sup>. She never spoke German after coming to Australia. She said as she was living in an English country she would only speak in English, if anyone spoke to her in German she would always answer in English. She had to go to work when she was old enough.

Catherine, at about the age of twenty married a Mr Stamm. I never heard his name, it could have been Alexander which was his son's name. He was a man who understood the care and management of sheep.

When their first child, a little daughter, was about a year old Mr Stamm was employed by the owner of Tenterfield Station as a sheep overseer, they sailed to Australia about 1849 or 50<sup>2</sup>.

It took them six months to come out<sup>3</sup>. I believe there was a very mixed bunch aboard ship<sup>4</sup>. They had a very uncomfortable trip. On the way out their little daughter died and was buried at sea. It was very hard on the small children being cooped up with so many people on a small ship<sup>5</sup>.

On arrival in Australia they travelled to Tenterfield where they rented a cottage in Tenterfield township where they lived for a number of years. Four children were born, Isabella, Elizabeth, Alexander and in 1860 Amelia was born. Mr Stamm died, that is all I know about him (except that Uncle Aleck said that his father was a Protestant).

Catherine was left a widow with four young children. There was no Government help for widows in those days. There was nothing a widow could do but marry which Catherine did by marrying her landlord who apparently had been very good to her. His name was Francis Sharpenberg. He was a businessman and farmer. Three daughters were born to them, Louise, Catherine (Kate) and Maria. They still lived in the same cottage, the older children were going to school.

When Francis Sharpenberg decided to move the family to Yetman where he had a produce business, he used to go to Tenterfield and buy produce from the farmers (Tenterfield was a

farming area and still is) and bring it to Yetman by horses and dray. One day on the return trip they ran into a very bad storm. The horses were frightened by lightning and bolted. Francis was killed. My informant was too young to remember very much about it. Again Catherine was a widow with seven children, the oldest being Isabella who was a girl of 16 years. She met and married a young shearer named James Parker. She had a floral muslin wedding dress.

My mother, a little girl of 5 years, remembered seeing her sister walking away with her husband to a hooded dray which was all the home they had. Catherine bravely cared for her family. I believe she had certain assets which kept her head above water but again at a later date she married her landlord, his name was George Geisler, a German. He was a sheep overseer at the Wattles, an out-station of Byron Station near Inverell N.S.W. The owners were Fraser and Anderson.

George Geisler went to Yetman and brought Catherine and family to Bannockburn Station where Catherine stayed with Mr. and Mrs. Robert Stacey until the wedding. Mrs Stacey made the bride's dress and acted as bridesmaid and her husband, Robert, was best man. Both ladies wore dresses made with fitting bodices and very full gathered skirts and bonnets and lovely silk shawls which Catherine had brought from Germany. After the wedding George took his bride and her family to live at the Wattles where they lived for some years.

George Geisler arranged for a flock of sheep each for Elizabeth and Aleck to shepherd, the other children were too young to work.

Time passed, Elizabeth grew up, met and married Mat Koina, son of a German farmer living near Inverell. When Louisa was old enough she became junior nurse to Dr Fraser's family at Byron Station where she stayed until the Station was sold and the family moved to Sydney. Louisa would not go with them, she went home.

In the meantime land had been opened up for closer settlement. George Geisler took up a selection on Gunyerwaraldi Station, built a house on it and moved the family to their new home where Catherine lived for the rest of her life.

George planted an orchard and vineyard and a nice garden in front of the house. It was a very nice property, there were also sheep, cattle and horses. There being no fences, the girls had to shepherd the sheep. Amelia and Kate (Catherine) had one flock and Louisa had the other.

It was very difficult to get hats for country

men so George used to make cabbage tree hats which he sold at a good price. He used to buy the cabbage tree palm fronds in bundles or hands as they were called. He had an instrument he used for splitting the cabbage tree to the desired width which he gave to the girls to plait. He had taught them how to plait. As the girls were taking out the sheep they were each handed a bundle of straw which they were expected to have plaited ready for making the hats by the time they brought the sheep home in the evening.

The day Louisa was 18 she put her flock in the yard and informed her step-father George that she wasn't going to take them out any more and she didn't. She stayed home and helped her mother.

That year, 1881, she and her brother Aleck rode up to the Inverell Show. They met young George Stacey, son of Robert and Frances Stacey who had been bridesmaid and best man at her mother's marriage to George Geisler. They fell in love with each other, they hadn't met since they were quite young. They married on 18th December 1882. Two days later Amelia was married to Tom Irwin, a young widower with one

little daughter. He was a teamster carrying goods, wool and produce, to and from Tamworth for the settlers. After the wedding the parents gave a party for the two couples at the weekend. Two years later Kate married a young man who had been working on the property for her step-father. He was the son of a German farmer of Frankston, Victoria. Her step-father built a cottage for them and he continued to work on the property. His name was Jacob Ernst.

Two years later Maria was married to a man named Fred Skipworth. After the wedding the couple left the district. Aleck married a Miss Minnie Hussey early in 1883. He also became a settler on Gunyerwaraldi with George Stacey next door. Tom Irwin took up a selection adjoining Aleck Stamm. The two old people were then alone. They had a nice home and were comfortably well off. Catherine died at the age of 68 after having lived a useful life and rearing a very nice family and should be remembered as one of the good old pioneers. Her husband died some years later after retiring to Warialda.

Written by Frances O'Sullivan (née Stacey) of Wynnum, Queensland

<sup>1</sup> At both Australian marriages Catherine 'made her mark' rather than signing or writing her name

<sup>2</sup> Arrived at Sydney on 12th January 1853

<sup>3</sup> They left Hamburg in September 1852 and took less than four months for the voyage

<sup>4</sup> As well as the crew there were seven passengers and 203 emigrants (although alternate source says 263 emigrants)

<sup>5</sup> The ship was the Johan Cæsar from Hamburg