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**BOUND TO RISE: THE MARCUS CLARK
CONNECTION.**

THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF AN ENTREPRENEUR



Henry Marcus Clark circa 1890

(Photo courtesy of Hornsby Shire Library)

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Henry Marcus Clark was born in Lancashire, England, in 1859. He migrated to Australia in 1880. He lived briefly with his uncle in Melbourne but travelled overland to NSW combining droving with visits to the goldfields at Parkes and Hill End en route. Around 1882 he arrived in Sydney and took up employment in John Kingsbury's drapery store in Newtown. Legend has it that the penniless Clark initially slept under the counter in Kingsbury's shop. How Clark came to link up with Kingsbury is not clear, but one source curiously suggests it was on the basis of a similar religious conviction.

John Kingsbury was the son of Joseph Kingsbury one of the founding fathers of Churches of Christ in NSW¹. Working in John Kingsbury's store, Clark met Martha Anne Day (known by the nickname "Mattie", later "Pattie"). Pattie was the vivacious daughter of George Day² a pioneer evangelist at Newtown/Enmore Church of Christ.³ They were married in the old Christian Chapel in King Street Newtown by the enigmatic John Strang in February 1883.



Martha Anne ("Pattie") Clark nee Day circa 1890

Henry (or "Harry" as he was known to his family) and Pattie combined their resources and acquired John Kingsbury's business. Under the impetus of Henry's entrepreneurship and Pattie's business acumen, the firm expanded and flourished. The range of merchandise was widened and branch stores were opened at Marrickville and Bondi Junction. The new business was registered under the name of "Marcus Clark", a source of endless confusion with the famous contemporary writer Marcus Clarke (author of *For the Term of His Natural Life*) whom Clark seemed to have admired. The Clarks had five children

In 1890, the family moved from Newtown to a house they built at Dulwich Hill, some 3/4 kilometres away. The house was called "Sefton" after the village in England where Henry grew up. With its spacious grounds, swimming pool, gardens and high surrounding walls it was an ideal place for their large family. There the Clarks entertained business acquaintances and members of their extended family from Enmore Church of Christ. Signifying his religious commitment, Henry erected a coat

of arms above the entry portal which bore the words *In Te Domine Sper[avi]* (Latin = "In thee O Lord I have put my trust").⁴

Clark remained active in the Newtown area where his principal business was located. He stood for the NSW Legislative Assembly in 1891 as a Free Trader. Interestingly, one of his Labor opponents was John Hindle, merchant, also a member of Enmore Church of Christ.⁵ Clark was not elected. In 1893 he became an alderman of Newtown Council following in the steps of Enmore members Joseph Kingsbury (alderman 1869 – 1871, Mayor 1870) and Charles Whately (alderman 1877 – 1894, Mayor in 1881 & 1886).⁶

Tragedy struck in 1892 when Pattie suddenly got sick and died (aged 32) leaving Henry with responsibility for a large household as well as the business. In 1893, he married Pattie's younger sister Georgina May Day ("May"). The marriage was performed in the home of George Day by Jesse Colbourne, minister of the Elizabeth Street, Sydney Church of Christ. The union reinforced connections with the Church of Christ community. Friends at Enmore included the Kingsburys, Hunters, Vercos, Andrews, Goles, Bardsleys⁷ and Whatelys. Many of these families were related by marriage. Their descendants are still active in Churches of Christ.

May Day was more retiring than Pattie but stepped into the role of mothering her nephews and nieces well. She herself went on to have two children with Henry, the last being born after Henry's death. The tradition of hospitality at "Sefton" was maintained and the grounds of the property were opened to fund raising events for the Marrickville Cottage Hospital. For such occasions the property was gaily decorated with Chinese lanterns.

Tragedy struck again in 1899 while the family was staying at their holiday home, "Drachenfelds", at Mt. York (near Mount Victoria.). Their youngest son Byron slipped from a balcony into the ravine below. He was conscious when found, but died before he could be brought to the top. It is said that the family never returned to "Drachenfelds" after the tragedy. "Drachenfelds" was later destroyed in a bushfire. A huge white cross was erected near the site of the accident and remained in place until about 1983. The name of their son Byron (after Lord Byron) reflects some literary interest on Henry's part. He had earlier demonstrated some poetic ability. By now, however, Henry was too busy to write poetry.

Despite the domestic tragedies and the economic downturn of the 1890s, the business grew. It was converted from a family (sole trader) business to a limited liability company with Henry Clark as managing director. In 1896 Clark opened up Bon Marché, in George Street (Broadway) an early type of discount shop inspired by a store in Liverpool England and named after one in Paris. By the early 1900s, fierce competition was developing among the department stores in that part of the city. Not far from Bon Marché, Grace Brothers had opened up a huge emporium in Broadway. In the other direction, Anthony Horderns was expanding on its George Street site (Brickfield Hill), eventually becoming the largest store under one roof in the southern hemisphere.

Not to be outdone, Marcus Clark opened a nine storey building at the convergence of George and Pitt Streets Sydney near Railway Square. This building was known as the Flatiron building because of its angular shape. It marked the gateway to Sydney and was for a while its tallest building. The location of the store close to the railways parcels office facilitated a move into mail order business and helped expand the store into country areas. The building seemed to exemplify the company motto "Bound to Rise". The Newtown store was now downgraded to The Cash Store.



The Flatiron building – in its day the tallest building in Sydney

Tragedy struck the family yet again in 1906. Edna Kingsbury (aged 9) and Dorothy Gole (aged 10) were playing in the grounds of "Sefton" and drowned in the swimming pool. Edna was the youngest daughter of John and Harriet Kingsbury (nee Whately) from whom the Clarks purchased the original drapery shop. The poignant inscription on Edna Kingsbury's gravestone at Rookwood cemetery is "Jesus wants me for a sunbeam". This points to a Sunday School association.

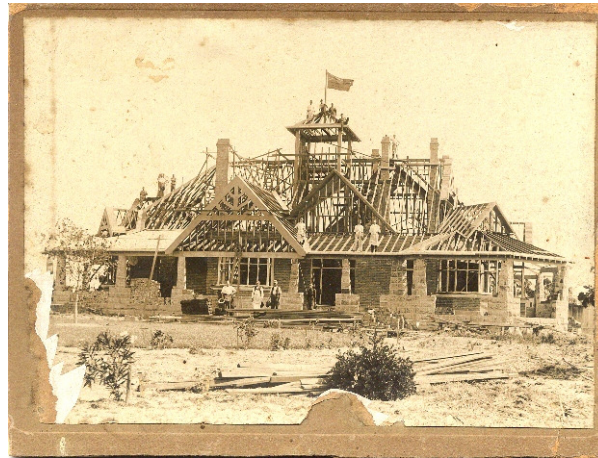
In 1908, Clark's brother Theodore (aged 42), a director of the company slipped down a lift shaft in the Flatiron building and was killed. Theodore had migrated from England to help his brother with the business and the brothers were regarded as close. The funeral service was conducted by G.T.Walden at Enmore church which Theodore attended.

Perhaps because of the past associations, the Clarks decided to move from Dulwich Hill. A large parcel of land was acquired for a family home at Mt. Wilga – then a rural area to the north of Hornsby. An existing house on extensive grounds was also purchased at Mt. Wilson in the Blue Mountains.

The Mt. Wilga property was intended to be the family's winter home. Between 1907 and 1908 an additional 100 acres of land were acquired and a large suspension bridge erected over a gully to improve pedestrian access to Hornsby village and the railway. The building was not complete when the Clarks hosted a visit by interstate delegates to the Centennial Conference of 1909. The story in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (22/4/09) reads

The interstate visitors of the Associated Churches of Christ, to the number of 100 were yesterday entertained by Marcus Clark at his country residence, Mt. Wilga, Hornsby, at lunch. The toast to Mr. and Mrs. Clark was spoken to by Messrs. Burford (SA), W.J. Way (Tas), C.W. Gordon (Vic), L.A. Hoskins (Q), D.M. Wilson (WA) and Thos Hagger (NSW)

The Centennial Conference celebrated the 100th Anniversary of Thomas Campbell's *Declaration and Address*.⁸



The Queen Anne type federation house under construction at Mt. Wilga around 1909
(Photo courtesy of Hornsby Shire Library)

In the event, it fell to May Clark to complete the construction of this large, attractive house. She did this according to Henry's plans (apparently based on the design of the earlier "Drachenfelds"). She continued to live there until 1919. The land linked to the property was later subdivided but the core property was preserved and eventually became a rehabilitation centre. It operates today as part of a private hospital and has a heritage listing.⁹

From about 1910, Henry Clark who had some recurring health problems began to think about retiring. He put effort into the development of the property at Mt. Wilson. Clark named his new country seat "Sefton Hall" after his former home at Dulwich Hill. In 1913, he became seriously ill and specialist physicians were sent up to Mt. Wilson from Sydney to advise on his condition. A decision was made to operate immediately – using the dining room table as an operating platform. Clark, did not however, survive the operation. The cause of death was given as pancreatitis and cholelithiasis. He was aged only 53.

The funeral was held at Enmore. Business interests, overseas trips and residential relocations prevented the Clarks in the latter years from regularly meeting with the "brethren and sisters" there, but the affiliation remained firm. The *Sydney Daily Telegraph* (March 31, 1913) reported an attendance of about 1200 people, "including the deceased's relatives and 400 employees" at the funeral service. As implied earlier, there was a not inconsiderable overlap between Clark's relatives, friends, church associates and employees.

The service was conducted by A.E. Illingworth, Enmore minister, and G.T. Walden. Walden, whose grand portrait stares out of the pages of the *Jubilee History*¹⁰ had been the dynamic minister at Enmore during its glory years around 1900-1906. In his association with the Clarks, Walden seemed to acquire the role of family chaplain. He officiated at family related weddings and funerals long after his time as minister

at Enmore. Walden's comments at the funeral include mention of a letter received from Henry just a few days before his death inviting him to visit.

Walden's eloquent eulogy described Henry Clark as a "benefactor to hundreds, and a friend to all" (*The Australian Christian* of April 17, 1913). Walden went on to say "His shareholders and employees were to him members of a great family. When he died they knew they had lost a real friend as well as a successful general". Walden supported that statement by reading numerous extracts from letters of bereavement sent by grieving employees. The high level of attendance by company employees at the funeral service (possibly around 50%) bears testimony to the regard with which they held him.

Concerning Clark's generosity, Walden said:

He gave prodigally to needy ones. One of Sydney's leading doctors wrote 'I have come across innumerable instances of his quiet generosity and goodness to others'. He gave liberally to organised charities but the greater part of his giving was direct to the needy ones, mostly anonymously, as he disliked being thanked for anything he did.

Walden concluded:

Mr. Clark was a deeply religious man; though he seldom spoke his thoughts, he loved and worshipped God.....All of Mr. Clark's children, except the youngest boy are members of the Church of Christ, Enmore....He was an entirely honest merchant and his memory is to all who keep it, dear and helpful. His sons and daughters whom he loved to the uttermost say this of him.

At the time of Henry's death, Marcus Clarks had expanded into a chain of about 15 stores with 700 employees. It was one of the first of the department stores to realise the benefits of regionalisation. A year or two later, now an official army Chaplain, Walden departed for the Great War.¹¹ The world was about to change - and so was retailing.

Henry Clark was succeeded by his eldest son Reginald Marcus who learned the trade while managing the Newtown store. Reginald got off to a bad start. While attending his father's funeral, his home in Stanmore was ransacked by thieves. Under his leadership the chain store reached its apogee. In 1926 - 1928 a new store was erected in Railway Square facing Central Railway - apparently to replace the Flatiron building nearby.

Reginald was married in 1909 in the Enmore Tabernacle (by G.T. Walden, of course) but the Churches of Christ connection did not long survive after the death of his father. Reginald began to move in other circles and dabbled in the arts. A beautiful chapel was built at Mt. Wilson as a memorial to Henry in 1915, but it was consecrated as an Anglican church (St. George's) in 1916. This chapel is still in use. Reginald was knighted, taking the name of Sir Marcus, thus adding to the confusion over the Marcus name. His portrait, painted by William Dargie, won the Archibald prize in 1947. He died in 1953.

The business did not long survive his death. All the department stores in that end of town began to suffer the effects of population change and decline, increasing commercialization of the area, and the affect of increased traffic flows. The Churches

of Christ at Enmore and Surry Hills (City Temple) were being squeezed by the same factors. Retailing began moving up town towards Market Street where David Jones and Myers (previously Grace Bros., before that Farmers) now stand. The huge Westfield Tower shopping mall recently opened in the same area.

In 1966 the Marcus Clark chain was sold off to the Waltons chain which itself soon disappeared. The iconic store, minus the revolving globe on its tower, still stands in Railway Square as a reminder of another era. The building has been converted into offices and facilities for the NSW Department of Technical and Further Education.



Marcus Clark Department Store, Railway Square, Sydney

Reflection

The company motto “Bound to Rise” had a glorious ambiguity. At the commercial level it refers to a confidence in the destiny of the firm – rather like the motto of Anthony Horderns – “While I live I Grow”. The motto could also describe the resilience of the Clark family in rebounding in the face of tragedy. But the motto also carries strong gospel/resurrection symbolism. That symbolism may not have been lost on Henry Clark. Perhaps, after all, there is something to be said for *In Te Domine Speravi*.

Such speculations aside, the Marcus Clark story throws considerable light sociologically on the role of connected families within Churches of Christ. When the early members referred to each other as “brothers” and “sisters” it was because they were – or almost. The story also shows something of the influence of local church members in helping to build and develop the wider community – through prominent preachers, merchants, aldermen and politicians. The contribution is all the more remarkable considering that the Newtown/Enmore church had only been

established some 30 or 40 years. Finally, the Enmore/Newtown church included some extraordinarily entrepreneurial people who were institution builders and managers. They laid down the institutional foundations of Churches of Christ in N.S.W.

¹ The role of Joseph Kingsbury in the development of CoC in NSW is related in the Historical Society Monograph *Whatever Happened to Albert*, 2010. See Society website

² George Day's portrait appears on 306 of *Jubilee History*. A son, Arthur Day, attended the CoB Kentucky, and later served as a missionary in Japan. (see *JH* p313). Another son, W.E.Day joined the staff of Marcus Clark later became a director. At the time of his death in 1920 he was a member of the Cof C Preachers' Provident Fund and Chapel Extension Committee.

³ The new chapel at Enmore was opened October 1886. With later additions (1904) it became known as Enmore Tabernacle.

⁴ Based on Psalm 31:1 (Vulgate). The Latin phrase is found in the *Te Deum*.

⁵ Like Henry Clark, Hindle came from Lancashire where his family had a strong connection with the British Churches of Christ. Hindle was a member of the first Conference Executive in NSW. Like Clark he was a merchant. He had a managing interest in John Bardsley & Co, wholesale grocers. Photos of John and Mrs. Bardsley appear on p. 311 of *JH*

⁶ The first Sunday School of Newtown Church of Christ met in the Whateley carriage works (garage). Harriet Whateley married John Kingsbury. A grandson of Charles, Robert K Whately became minister of Enmore in the early 1920s. He later moved to Victoria and entered Parliament.

⁷ See photos of John and Mrs. Bardsley in *JH* p, 311

⁸ Details of this extraordinary Conference are described in Churches of Christ Historical Society Digest No 163 in May, 2009 *A History of Celebration*.

⁹ By coincidence, the writer's father was one of the first patients at the hospital – during its transition from a rehabilitation centre in 1988. The complex has been extended and upgraded. A \$5m upgrading of the property was commenced in 2011

¹⁰ Page 304, also p.242 and Enmore group photo on p.307

¹¹ Among those who gave speeches at the farewell were John Hindle and T.E.Rofe

References

Clark, Marcia A.M 1985 *Bound to rise: the story of Henry Marcus Clark and Sefton Hall*, Personal Publishing, Milson Point. [Marcia Clark was the younger daughter Henry and May. She was born in the year of her father's death. The name "Marcia" is the feminine form of the Latin "Marcus".]

Maston A.B.(ed) 1903 *Jubilee History of Churches of Christ in Australia*, Austral

NSW Government Heritage Branch Website www.heritage.nsw.gov for details on Mt. Wilga Biographies of Henry Marcus Clark and Mayor Charles Whateley from www.sydneyarchives.info – the Newtown Project

Historic House Trust for overview of the development of the Marcus Clark Department store www.hht.net.au/discover

Some journal references are embodied in the text