

A Bunbury Enrolled Pensioner Force man and his sons

As F.H.Broomhall shows, the small detachment of Pensioners who volunteered to go south and relieve the handful of 99th Regiment men at the Bunbury post were in an anomalous situation. They were not on the EPF pay list and “were releasing regular troops for duty elsewhere at no cost to the government, apart from the trifling cost of superintendence...and the maintenance of their arms and equipment”.¹

The Pensioners at Bunbury were allowed to use the barracks in the district until they made better provision for themselves. They received a land grant of one acre each, upon which they were expected to build a cottage. As Captain John Bruce, Officer in Command of the EPF, noted in 1852, the experiment was a success – garrison needs had been met and the men were mostly employed as “useful labourers”.²

The non-commissioned officer in charge, Lance Sergeant William White, formerly of the 99th Regiment of Foot, mustered the men for parade on Sunday and sent in a fortnightly official report. The small settler community will have been happy with the arrangement, for a convict depot was established there (also in 1851) and security problems became an issue as early as 1853.³

For the Pensioners who took up Bunbury offer, it proved to be a very good decision. Farming and timber milling operations around Bunbury were in a promising state and in 1840 even whalers had appeared off the coast, although that had no industry outcome. An interesting element in Bunbury life was the presence of a few ‘colonial gentry’ families such as the Cliftons, Scotts and Forrests – plus a Government Resident who kept a close

eye on everyone after convicts arrived.⁴

Of the original seven Pensioners at Bunbury, at least five made new lives for themselves in the district and died there – the remaining two may also have done so.⁵ One of them was Private James Connors, who had formerly served in an East India Company regiment and arrived in Western Australia on the ‘Hashemy’ in October 1850. It should be noted that version of the name – ‘Connors’ – became ‘Connor’ among his descendants. Father Salvado listed the family as being members of the Roman Catholic faith when he visited Bunbury in May 1854. In 1858 Private Connor(s) was granted an additional lot at Bunbury for his military service with the EPF. He was married to Bridget Cullen; perhaps six children of the couple reached adulthood.⁶

The retired soldier died on December 13, 1886 at the age of 76; his widow Bridget passed away in 1900.⁷ As was common with scores of EPF men we have on file in regard to links between pensioners and the expanding Police Force of the colony, a son decided to don a blue uniform in 1873. Service in the colonial law enforcement establishment was a good option for the sons of veterans.

A disciplined working life will have been familiar to them, besides offering more mobility and a means of eluding the daily routines of farming or labouring life – providing one wanted such a change. An added incentive was ‘preference’: we have hard evidence that many sons of soldiers were enlisted as constables on the simple say-so of EPF officers such as John Bruce, Charles Finnerty and Robert Crampton. More will emerge as our research continues.

The unusual thing in this case is that three of the old soldier’s sons joined the Police Force: John (born in Ireland before

1851) in 1873; James (born Bunbury, 1856) in 1878 and William (born Bunbury, 1862) in 1888.⁸

John Connor had a reasonably successful career – he reached the rank of sergeant, worked for about five years as a Perth detective and served from 1892 until his resignation in January 1894 as Officer in Charge of the South-Western District. The district capital was Bunbury, so he ended his career as an important public official in his home town.⁹ His brother William, sad to say, misused alcohol more than once while he was on duty – and lost his position as a constable because of it.

James Connor, the middle brother had a wonderfully successful public career. He began work as a coach driver and was recruited by the Police Force as part of its effort to maintain reliable eastern and southern mail runs. James provided very fine service and eventually moved into general duties policing.

His career was something of triumph: he reached the rank of inspector (a very senior rank in that age) and commanded three huge police districts in turn. The last was the Plantagenet District based on Albany. Triumph turned into tragedy during a swimming excursion at Albany on December 22, 1906. Inspector James Connor lost his life during a successful attempt to save his nephew from drowning.¹⁰

Notes

(1) Broomhall, F.H. *The Veterans* (Hesperian Press, 1989), p102

(2) *Ibid.*, p103

(3) Bentley, M. *Grandfather was a Policeman* (Hesperian Press, 1993), pp36-37

(4) Sanders, T. *Bunbury: some early history* (Roebuck Society Publication No.16, Canberra, 1975), chaps.4-6 *passim*

(5) Broomhall (1989) on William White, B295; on John Baskerville, B19; on Patrick Lee, B166; on John Costello, B62; on James Connors, B58

(6) Erickson. R. *Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians*, (University of Western

Australia Press, 1987), Vol.1, A-C, p624; Broomhall (1989), B58

(7) WA Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Death Certificate 2283 of 1900

(8) *Bicentennial Dictionary*, Vol.1, A-C, entries on James, John and William Connor, pp625 and 627; Western Australia (WA) Police Records of Service of those just named

(9) WA Police Record of Service of John Connor

(10) WA Police Record of Service of James Connor; *The West Australian*, December 29, 1906

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