

STRIKE UP THE (FAMILY) BAND

Sergeant THOMAS BRYAN, arrived in Western Australia as an Enrolled Pensioner Guard on the "Clyde" in 1863 as a guard for the convicts. He was accompanied by his wife Deborah and children.

Prior to enrolling in the Enrolled Pensioner Guards, Sergeant Bryan had served in the 96th Regiment of the British Army, serving in Tasmania, India and Gibraltar.

Most British Army Units had in their ranks a drummer boy and/or young recruits who took up the Fife as their instrument, and these lads would play as the troops marched, or on ceremonial occasions. Thomas Bryan was 16 years of age when he enlisted and it is more than likely he showed some musical talent at that time.

Early settlers in Western Australia had made various attempts to encourage participation in music – concerts, recitals and the like and as the Enrolled Pensioner Guards had been in Western Australia since 1850, it is recorded that the Pensioners Band was formed soon after that and performed on a regular basis on Fremantle Gaol Hill, as well as providing music at Balls and amateur theatricals.

The Royal Engineers who were instrumental in supervising the construction of many of the early buildings in the young Colony also contributed to the musical entertainment with their own Royal Engineers Band in those early years and they were missed when they were recalled to England.

By 1858 the original Pensioners Band had become redundant and the instruments were sold to a Mr. S. Mitchell who intended to hold musical classes. Unfortunately that venture appears to have petered out after a couple of years.

During the next decade, another Band was formed which performed for many musically enjoyable years in Perth and Fremantle. The Metropolitan Rifle Volunteer Band was made up of members from both previous Volunteer Rifle Bands, which consisted mainly of citizens of Perth and surrounding districts.

Sergeant Thomas Bryan had always been interested in anything musical and it was Sgt. Bryan who was instrumental in forming the new Metropolitan Rifle Volunteer Band. Sgt. Bryan had earlier started music classes for children and he became the first Bandmaster and leader of musical direction of the newly formed senior Band.

At the official laying of the foundation stone for the Perth Town Hall in May 1867, Bandmaster Sgt. Thomas Bryan composed a special lively piece "The Metropolitan Volunteer" especially for the occasion. In spite of torrential rain, the ceremony went ahead.

(It is interesting to note that the actual foundation stone was laid under the direction of Williams Buggins, builder, who was the maternal grandfather of Cyril Bryan, son of Sgt. Thomas Bryan's son, John (Tom)).

At a concert the following year in 1868, held in the Public Garden under the direction of Bandmaster Sgt. Thomas Bryan, the players in the Band gave of their time 'gratuitously', except for light refreshment provided at the conclusion of the performance.

The Band also received accolades for other performances including a New Years Ball held at Government House. That concert was also lauded for the appearance of a visiting performing Troupe from Melbourne.

In 1873 the local newspaper "Gazette" contained an article that was aimed at readers in England – "the small capital of West Australia can muster a larger amount of musical talent in proportion to its population, than is to be found even in world-renowned classic lands."

Sgt. Thomas Bryan continued his involvement in the musical culture of Western Australia and the same must be said of his son –

John Joseph Bryan (known as 'Tom') was born in India in 1852 and inherited his father's love of music. Tom was in fact recorded as being a Bandsboy on his arrival with his parents in 1863. Tom's love of music kept him involved in the music scene in Perth, and on the retirement of his father, Tom Bryan was appointed Bandmaster of the Metropolitan Volunteer Rifles Band. Tom was married to Anne Louise Buggins and was a printer by trade involved in the early commercial printing industry. Tom is believed to have operated a business in Howick Street (now Hay Street) and then in Murray Street, Perth.

Tom Bryan served more than 20 years as Bandmaster with the Band and was selected to accompany that Band to Melbourne for a Military Review to celebrate Federation in 1901. Family records indicate John Joseph (Tom) Bryan collapsed and died on parade on 10 May 1901 at Melbourne and his body was brought back to Perth for burial with full military honours at East Perth Cemetery.

Michael Bryan, second son of Sgt. Thomas Bryan, was born in India in 1854 and married Ellen McDonald in 1877 in Perth. Michael worked at various times as a warehouseman, a boat builder and in Government Stores. Michael Bryan inherited musical talent from his father and played the bass drum in the Metropolitan Volunteer Rifles Band.

To carry on the family tradition, Sgt. Thomas Bryan's third son, Thomas William (known as Willie), born in Kildare, Ireland about 1861 also had musical talent. Willie Bryan played the kettledrum in the Metropolitan Volunteer Rifles Band.

Little is known about George Bryan, fourth son of Thomas and Deborah Bryan except his birth was in Perth in 1865 and his death in Melbourne in 1938. From a photograph of George Bryan in the possession of the family, which shows George in his Band uniform, it can be assumed he too had the Bryan musical talent.

Alfred Bryan, fifth son of Sgt. Thomas Bryan, born in 1866 is believed to have been the small boy pictured as having played the triangle in the Band in a

picture taken prior to 1879. Alfred eventually worked in the Goldfields before moving to New Zealand where he worked as a tinsmith. Alfred died in New Zealand in 1939.

However, we do know a little more about Patrick Francis Bryan, sixth son of Sgt. Thomas Bryan, late of the 96 Regiment. Patrick Bryan was born in Perth in 1868 but spent most of his life in Tasmania. His musical talents were evident as a Trombone player in the Launceston City Band.

It is of interest to record the fact that at least one of Sgt. Thomas Bryan's daughters was also a musician.

Caroline (Carrie) Bryan was born in Perth in 1873 and her second husband, William Byron, was a Theatre Manager at the Grand Opera House and Caroline herself was a talented pianist.

AND THE BAND PLAYED ON – 'WALTZING MATILDA'?

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