

Thomas and William McCreery

Thomas McCreery, the son of a man of the same name, was born in 1829 at Enniskillen in County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland. By the time he was 17, young Thomas was working as a weaver at Dundee in Scotland. On May 21 of that year, he enlisted in the 6th Regiment of Foot. About three years later a medical board proposed his discharge because of a disability – he was suffering from impaired vision because of ophthalmia. Thomas left the army on the last day of 1849 and was eventually admitted as an Out-Pensioner of the Chelsea hospital on May 20, 1851 (1).

Thomas settled and married in Scotland and by 1856 he was in good enough shape to be accepted into the Enrolled Pensioner Force. He and his family arrived at Fremantle on the 'Runnymede', September 10, 1856. Pensioner McCreery did rather well in the colony of Western Australia, although sadly he was widowed twice and was married for the third and last time in 1882. His service with the Enrolled Pensioner Force probably ended when it was disbanded on November 10, 1880 (2). Thomas was active as an EPF man in Fremantle and acquired property at North Fremantle and in Perth. He survived to attend the 1897 Diamond Jubilee celebration dinner held in honour of Queen Victoria at St Georges Hall and died at Northam in the home of his son William John McCreery on June 21, 1908 (3).

Thomas McCreery left six children, but the aforementioned William McCreery of Northam is the person of interest for present purposes. He was born at

Dundee in 1851 and was apprenticed at the age of 13 to William Leach, a boot maker of Fremantle. Many years later William McCreery was a respected and prosperous boot maker at Northam and was interviewed by the local newspaper about his early life in colonial WA. William noted that the workers in the Leach firm were all ticket-of leave men, except for the apprentices. He had interesting memories of the visit of the Duke of Edinburgh to WA in February 1869: "he was rowed from his ship to the small jetty. On the jetty six military pensioners dressed as hussars were drawn up as an escort. The few volunteers acted as guard of honour...The Duke didn't even stay in Fremantle. He came straight through to Perth." (4)

It was not easy at the time to make a living in the trade so William McCreery joined the WA Police Force on August 9, 1871 on the recommendation of Captain Charles Finnerty, a senior Staff Officer of the Enrolled Pensioner Force (5). McCreery served at Perth, Northam, York, Youndegin, Beverley, Kojonup and Guildford in turn and was promoted to Lance Corporal on January 1, 1876. Newspaper readers would have been amazed by some of his reminiscences, which showed how tough, demanding and isolated the working lives of police officers were in the rural districts of the colony during Victorian times: "my lock-up [at Youndegin] was a gum tree with a bolt through it, a ring on one end of the bolt and a large nut on the other end...during five years and three months my wife saw only two white women pass the station." (6)

William McCreery resigned from the police on March 31, 1884 and worked at a boot factory in Swan Street, North Fremantle for some time before moving to Northam in October 1884 and establishing his own highly successful firm there. He had married Marion Hope Murray and the couple raised several children, some of whom continued to manage a family business after William the patriarch died on May 17, 1935 (7). Descendants have continued the tradition.

- (1) Cook, J.R., 'Thomas McCreery 1829-1908 – Soldier and Pensioner Guard' (unpublished paper, 1988), pp1-2
- (2) *Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians*, Vol. 3, K-Q, p1950; Broomhall, F.H. *The Veterans* (Hesperian Press, 1989), B182; Cook, pp5, 7-8
- (3) Cook, pp4-7; Broomhall, B182
- (4) *Northam Advertiser*, November 3, 1933
- (5) WA Police: Record of Service of William McCreery; Cook, p5
- (6) Record of Service of William McCreery; Police General Duties Book, January 1, 1876; *Northam Advertiser*, November 3, 1933
- (7) Cook, p8; Record of Service of William McCreery; *Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians*, Vol.3, K-Q, p1951.

My thanks to Jean McDonald for drawing my attention to the Cook paper, likewise to Mr Ken Ross for additional insights on the life of William McCreery.

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[Ed Note. My 101 year old mother (granddaughter of EPG Richard Henderson) still talks of having to go to Mr McCreery to have her boots made when she was a young girl in Northam.]