

MATHIAS JEREMIAH TUOHILL

By Jeanette Lee

Sometimes when researching for the Ships Project I come across a pensioner whom I find of more interest than usual, one such man was Mathias Tuohill who through most of his military career was known as John Davis although the alias was acknowledged by the military at the time. From the time he arrived in Australia he used the name Mathias Tuohill.

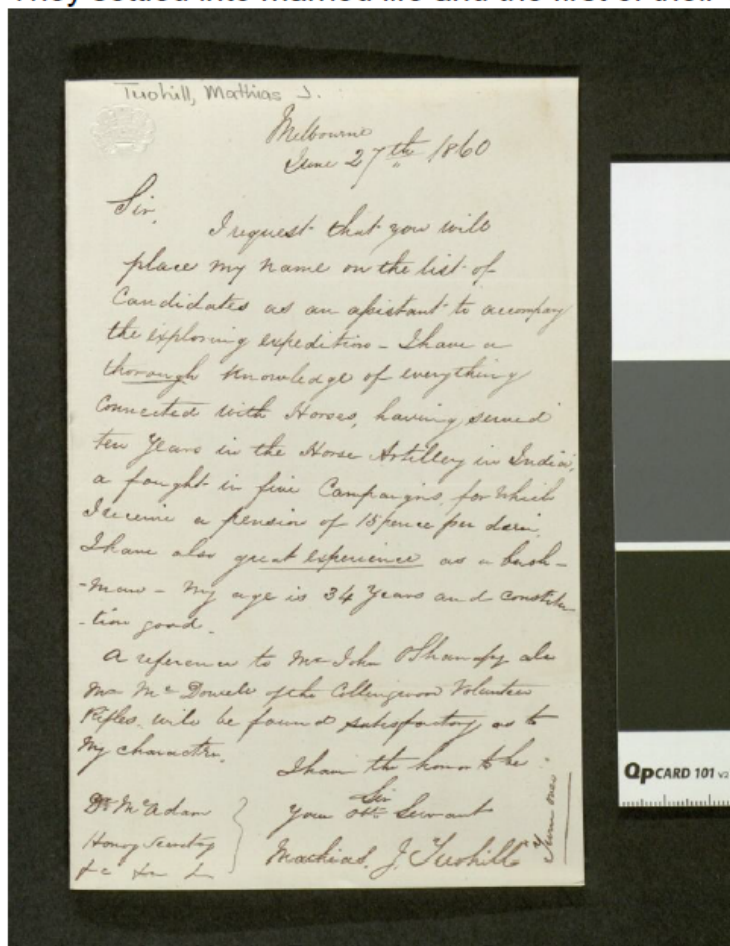
Mathias Tuohill was born at Barnwell, Lower Canada in 1822; he more than likely was a child of a soldier as British regiments were stationed there at this time. 'Lower Canada was a British Colony on the lower Saint Lawrence River and the shore of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence (1791-1841). It covered the southern part of the Current-day Province of Quebec, Canada, and the Labrador region of the modern-day Province of New Found Land and Labrador (until the region was transferred to Newfoundland in 1809).'

Prior to 1842 he returned to England and was employed as a clerk until in 1842 at the age of twenty he enlisted at Liverpool in the East India Company as a soldier and was attached to the Bengal Artillery 2nd brigade as a gunner. While serving at Soodlapore in the Punjab in 1850 he was wounded in action by roundshot to his shoulders that rendered him unfit for further service and he was discharged from the service on 12 June 1850 with a permanent pension of one shilling and 3 pence. Mathias physical description on leaving the service was five feet nine and a half inches in height, swarthy complexion, hazel eyes and brown hair.

Between 1850 and 1854 Mathias lived at Tralee, County Kerry, Ireland until transferring to Plymouth in 1854 prior to joining the convict ship *Stag* as a member of the guard arriving at Fremantle Western Australia on 23rd May 1855.

On 23rd August 1855 barely 3 months after arriving at Fremantle Mathias married Mary Keane and in 1856 the couple journeyed to Geographe Bay where they boarded the brig *Lochinvar* bound for Adelaide South Australia.

They settled into married life and the first of their children Elizabeth was born on 20th



June 1857 at Adelaide followed by Mary Ann in 1859. Mathias obtained employment as a policeman possibly with the mounted police until he was charged with “stealing £2 5s., the money of Robert Strong, publican, Wright street, on the 6th of December”. The case was dismissed as the Court found insufficient evidence to convict.ⁱⁱ Whether he continued in the employ of the Police department is unclear but in 1860 Mathias and family moved to Melbourne where on 27th June 1860 he applied to join the Burke and Wills expedition quoting his service with the Bengal Artillery and participation in five major campaigns in India fortunately without success.ⁱⁱⁱ

State Library of Victoria
File 1004-451-001. Tif

Application from Mathias Tuohill to join the Burke and Wills expedition dated 27 June 1860

Their next two children Sarah and Lucy were born in Melbourne 1861 and 1863, however within the family things were not going well due to Mary’s intemperate habits and in 1862 Mary Tuohill (sic) “a woman of confirmed habits of drunkenness” had gained entry into the Immigration Home by declaring that her husband had deserted her when she had spent the money he gave her on drink. She was charged with vagrancy and gaoled for 3 months.^{iv}

In 1863 recruitment agents of the Government of New Zealand visited the major capitals in eastern Australia calling for volunteers to fight the Maoris in what is referred to as the Maori Wars. The terms they were offering were very generous, rates of pay for a private was two shillings and six pence a day, free passage for the wives and families of the volunteers and a grant of land of 50 acres after three years active service. Mathias enlisted 19 January 1864 in the 3rd Waikato regiment and the family set sail for New Zealand. The New Zealand years seemed to be ones of relative prosperity for the Tuohill family. On the Electoral rolls for 1869-1870 Mathias Jeremiah Twohill (sic) lived at Napier Street, Waipa and was the owner of Lots 112 and 116 totaling 60 acres at Hamilton, presumably the land granted for his military service. Another daughter Fanny was born at Auckland in 1867.

By this time the cracks in the marriage were ever widening due in part to Mary's excessive drinking, a factor that Mathias blamed for their daughter Fanny being born unable to speak.

In 1868 the family moved to Sydney where Mathias had a job as a bailiff but the damage was done and the couple separated. The three older daughters were put into the Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children while Fanny remained under her mother's care.^v On 3rd October 1871 Fanny died as a result of burns received when her clothing caught fire, she was admitted to hospital but died soon afterwards.^{vi}

Following the Inquiry Mary charged Mathias with desertion and as a result Matthias Twohill (sic) was brought before the Court by warrant, charged with wife desertion, and was ordered to pay the sum of five shillings per week for twelve months, this was in addition to what he had to pay for the girls' board in the institution.

Mathias returned to live in Melbourne and it was there on 10 August 1876 he died in the Melbourne Hospital aged only fifty four of hemorrhage of the stomach the result of excessive drinking. At the time he was working as a County Court Bailiff and lived in Bouverie Street, Carlton.^{vii}

Where and when Mary Tuohill died is unknown but a little more is known of several of the daughters.

Elizabeth married Carl Mischke at Newtown Sydney in 1883. She died 4th October 1895.

Lucy was a legally apprenticed for six years by the Randwick Asylum to a Doctor Louis Duerot who lived at Haydonton. In 1878 neighbours bought a court action against the Doctor for having failed to provide Lucy with necessary food, clothing and lodging but Lucy refused to testify saying she was treated with kindness and the case was dismissed.^{viii} Lucy married George J Balfour at Sydney in 1886 and died at Randwick in 1940.

Nothing further is known about Mary Ann although she was unmarried at the time of her sister Elizabeth's death in 1895. Her sister Sarah Samuel is also mentioned at the time of the death which suggests she married a man called Samuel.

Sources:

ⁱ Wikipedia

ⁱⁱ Adelaide Times (SA 1848-1858) Thursday 8 January 1857 page 3

ⁱⁱⁱ State Library of Victoria File 1004-451-001

^{iv} The Argus (Melbourne Vic: 1848-1857) Tuesday 4 November 1862 page 6

^v NRS 13362[2]Reel 1866 page 210 Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children

^{vi} The Sydney Mail and NSW Advertiser Saturday 14 October 1871

^{vii} The Argus Monday 10 August 1876 page 6

^{viii} Singleton Argus and Upper Hunter Advocate Wednesday 3 July 1878 page 6