

Henry Lawler's first voyage to Australia

My Gg grandfather Henry Augustus Lawler was born in Portsea/Portsmouth UK in 1798. He disappeared for me from his birth until 1819, where I found him on a voyage as a 23 year old sailor (Able Seaman) on the *HMS Dromedary*, taking convicts to Australia.

The *Dromedary* was a large Storeship in His Majesty's fleet and carried 40 guns. Previously in 1809 she made a trip to Australia, carrying Lachlan and Elizabeth Macquarie, their young son and a servant, Black Tom.

Now she was fitted out as a convict transport vessel. The voyage began on 11th September, with Captain Richard Skinner in control, and took 130 days.

On 19th September 1819 they took on 200 convicts from the Sheerness hulks and a further 169 were taken on board at Spithead. Those 369 male convicts, plus passengers, crew and a Guard consisting of 1 Ensign and 57 soldiers of the 69th and 84th (foot) Regiments, commanded by Capt. Richard Alexander Cruise. Fortunately, he kept a great diary of the trip. The Regiment boarded on 9th August 1819, and they eventually departed England.

On 9th January 1820 they made the South Cape of Van Diemen's land and proceeded to Port Dalrymple, then Hobart.

On Friday 21st January 1820, 347 prisoners were landed. The convicts were mostly assigned to settlers and when inspected, were found to be healthy, clean and orderly. It sailed from Hobart on 22nd January 1820 for Sydney.

The *Dromedary* arrived in Port Jackson on 28th January 1820 during a period of hot, dry weather. The remaining 22 prisoners were landed. There were 11 deaths on the voyage, plus the husband of one of the passengers had died in Hobart after falling from a horse, and another husband died several days after reaching Port Jackson.

The crew were able to be refreshed while the ship was refitted as a timber transporter, the major task of the trip. They were bound for New Zealand to obtain spars of Kauri trees, as suggested by Captain Cook as the best in the world, for use as masts and return with them to England. The biggest and best for the Royal Naval Fleet, specified to be 21 – 23" diameter and 64 – 84' long.

They sailed on 15th February, escorted by the Colonial Schooner, *Prince Regent*, as directed by Governor Macquarie. On board was the Reverend Samuel Marsden and 9 Maori chiefs and highborn men, who had been living in Paramatta with him. They were in full native regalia and slept on deck, not trusting this big 'wocka.'

On board were 12 bullocks, 2 timber carriages, used to cradle out the logs from the forest plus Marsden boarded 16 head of cattle, 3 horses and stores.

They anchored at the Bay of Islands where they were to procure the spars. Not an easy task. First, a road needed to be built into the steep and swampy gullies. This was done by the soldiers and crew and is recorded as the first road in New Zealand. It was known for many decades as The Soldier's Road. It was a backbreaking job but 98 Kauri spars were hauled out, using the carriage on the road.

In this area they came in contact with whalers, sealers, American Merchant seamen and missionaries. All of these would have an impact on Henry's future.

The *Dromedary* returned to Sydney on 20th December 1820, slung about with the spars and departed for England on 14th February 1821. On arrival they were in want of water, after a passage of 140 days. Several new people had joined the ship, including two stowaways. *Dromedary* unloaded her timber at Chatham, on the Medway in Kent, in June 1821.

In the 1830s Henry returned to the South Sea Island as a Merchant Captain and adventurer, often working for the English Missionaries stationed there. On at least one of these trips, he went to Sydney.

Gg grandfather Henry migrated to Sydney in 1838 with his pregnant wife and a son. His second son was born not long after arrival. He worked as a Pilot in Sydney Harbour, and captained many ships on the coastal trade to Tasmania and then Port Phillip.

He oversaw the building of the Steamer *Aphrasia* which was tested against Sydney steamers on the harbour, successfully beating them every time. The family travelled to Port Phillip Bay in the *Aphrasia* in 1840, where they lived in Aphrasia Cottage in Newtown. The vessel was then put into ferry service between Geelong and Melbourne. They remained in Victoria, apart from a trip when he captained a ship and took his wife and son to England, yes, the cargo was timber.

He worked mainly on the water and around boats, doing very adventurous things. He was an early Pilot at Queenscliff, a publican of an hotel, then they moved to Williamstown. He was obviously too old for the harsh life of the sea. One of his last occupations was as a Powder Master, the explosives being stored on a hulk in Hobson's Bay.

Their house in Williamstown is still standing. He is buried in Williamstown Cemetery.

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