



Chapter 23 – Catherine and Family

(1838 - 1857)

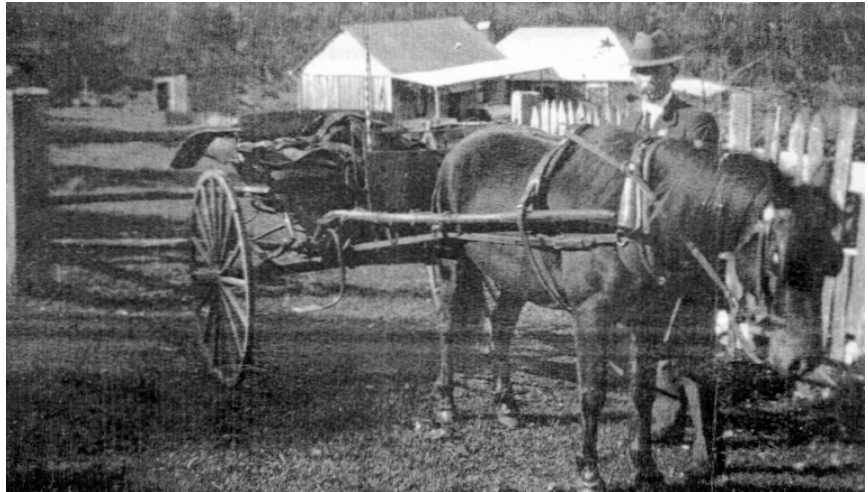
The contact between the Humphries' Watson's Bay and Brisbane Water elements of their family remained direct and strong, thanks to their having convenient access to water transport. A second generation of native born Humphries was growing up less aware of the Brown connection and more interested in events at 'the Bay' and Brisbane Water.

A meeting was held at Brisbane Water, chaired by Rev. John McEnroe on 4 July 1838. Its purpose was to take steps to erect a church for members of the Roman Catholic faith. It was to be the first Catholic Church in the Brisbane Water district. In response, Catherine's son, Thomas, gave 3 acres of the original Mount Humphreys grant to the Church. Thomas was appointed Trustee for the building of the Church. Thomas is known to have taken a deep personal interest in the 'Holy Cross' church. When it was finally constructed, he was one of the first pew holders, and also gave money and labour to help with the building of the Holy Cross Church on the land.⁷⁴⁶

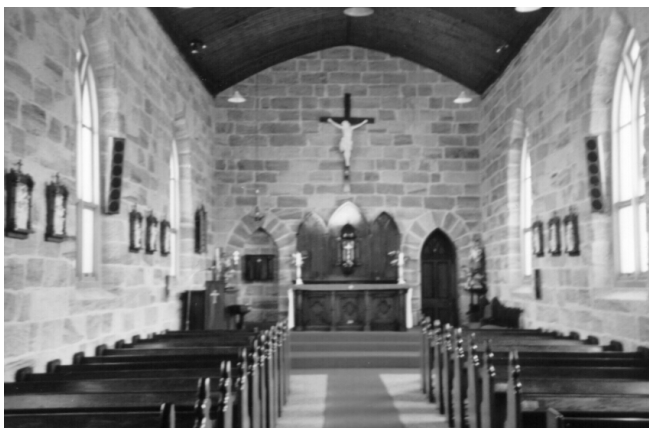
Brisbane Water in those days was rich in cedar. Thomas homestead was constructed almost entirely from cedar. Thomas also supplied the cedar for, and if not made, would have taken a keen interest in the making of the furnishings for the Holy Cross Church.

Thomas bought the South Kincumber property from his father not long after the title was confirmed in 1841.

The 1841 Census shows only eight people living at Watson's Bay.



The homestead Thomas Humphries built at South Kincumber is the background for this photo of his grandson, Thomas (son of Francis), tending to his horse and buggy. c1900.



Inside view of 'Holy Cross'

During the year of 1842, Catherine's youngest son, David, at the age of 27, married Jane Mary Daley at St Matthew's, Catholic Church at Windsor.⁷⁴⁷

Thomas Humphries was one the Councillors appointed to the "District Council of Brisbane Water" when it was constituted in 1843. He prospered and progressively acquired other properties in the region.

⁷⁴⁶Pioneer Families Brisbane Waters. Charles Humphreys..

⁷⁴⁷ BDM V 1842 1642 92 0.



Catherine was widowed for the second time when Patrick, known as ‘Patt’, died on 26 August 1846.⁷⁴⁸ He was buried on 28 August 1846 at Kincumber/ Brisbane Waters, Parish of East Gosford.

The parish record states: Patrick’s age as ‘92’, though his baptism date suggests he was closer to 81 years old. The name of the ship he came on “could not be ascertained”, he was a “Farmer” by profession, and his abode was “The Heads” near Sydney, i.e. Watson’s Bay.

Catherine had four sons and two daughters by Patrick:

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|------|-----------------------|-----|---------------------|
| i. | Michael, 1803-1860; | iv. | George, 1810-1863; |
| ii. | Thomas, 1805-1881; | v. | Ann, 1812-1890; and |
| iii. | Catherine, 1807-1838; | vi. | David 1815-1885. |

In the 1840s the present Signals Station sandstone tower was part built (Mortimer Lewis, architect) and not completed until the 1890s. The Station remained a government instrumentality until March 1992.

Also during the 1840s, there was a school in operation for the children of the sparsely populated settlement of Watson’s Bay. Hannibal Macarthur, nephew to John Macarthur, was known to have had a ‘very well built cottage with out buildings’ that included a coach house. Late in the 1840s, a visiting clergymen, conducted divine service in the schoolhouse every fortnight.’ In 1847, John Macarthur’s widow, Elizabeth, took her holidays there. She and her party travelled to Hannibal’s house in a hired steamer, from Parramatta as the most practical way of doing so. Elizabeth recalled in later years that she and her sons were the first persons to ascend the New South Head Road in a carriage. They had to alight and travel on foot in deep sand for a mile or more because that part of the road had not been metalled. The ‘old South Head Road is neglected since the new road was finished, and a number of habitations have arisen where beautiful flowering shrubs formerly were in great profusion.’⁷⁴⁹



A view of Sydney Harbour, to the West from Watson’s Bay. Sketch by FC Terry 1853. Wicklow, the Humphries home, at centre foreground, almost obscured by a large tree. Vaucluse Point can be seen jutting into the harbour view directly beyond.

⁷⁴⁸ Date on Tombstone.

⁷⁴⁹ Philip Geeves” Sydney. P130.



South Head Roads Trust was set up by an Act of the colonial government of the day in May, 1848 controlling Old South Head Road, New South Head Road and Point Piper Road (now Jersey Road/Ocean Street) totalling 15 miles (24 km.). Turnpike gates were set up to extract tolls from users. However, the maintenance of these roads remained very poor and after many deputations, the Trust was disbanded in 1904.⁷⁵⁰

In June of 1848, Catherine's first grandchild, Thomas, died; and was buried at Jerry's Plains.

Contact between the Brisbane Water and Watson's Bay branches of the Humphries families was maintained during the remainder of that century. Thomas' daughter, Theresa, recalled frequent visits to her grandmother during the late 1840s and 1850s.

In 1854, Watson's Bay became markedly less remote from Sydney. South Head Road was extended from the Signal Station to Watson's Bay by the present route to replace the rough track down the hillside formed in 1811 by soldiers of the 73rd Regiment..

Having lived most of her life in the colony at the peaceful but isolated settlement of Watson's Bay, Catherine died there on Wednesday, 30 April 1857.

For the last ten years of her life, Catherine had been blind. She is said to have endured this with great fortitude and said 'patiently and cheerfully' of her situation that she was "waiting for the light." An obituary of the time said of Catherine: "an unkind word or reminiscence never was used by the dear lady's gentle cooing voice - the voice particularly belonging to the blind, which perhaps makes them so tenderly regarded."

Restored historic 'Holy Cross' Church, South Kincumber, where Catherine and many of her family are buried. Thomas and his father, Patrick's graves are in foreground side by side. It is likely that Catherine is buried to the right of Patrick.



⁷⁵⁰ Woolahara Council Website.



An Uncertain Age

Catherine's age on the death certificate is stated to be "101". She was buried at the same cemetery as her second husband Patrick, at Brisbane Waters on 4 May 1857. The undertaker was her son, Michael, and her other son, Thomas, was one of the witnesses. No doubt, Michael's trade as boat-builder had put him in good stead for making coffins. In fact, coffin making can often be found in advertisements of the early 19th century as a service provided by carpenters.

Catherine's stated age on the death certificate of "101" – was a much rarer event then, than it is these days. If true, it means that she would have been born in 1756, and therefore 43 years old at the birth of her second child, Elizabeth; 46 years old when Patrick married her; and not quite 60 years old at the birth of her youngest son, David. It is worthwhile remembering this in the light of her having grown up in the grinding poverty of Ireland. A situation not conducive to youthful preservation, good health, or longevity - Where forty would have been old.



Watson's Bay, Port Jackson NSW viewed north to South Head, c1856-64, Watercolour, Dixon Galleries. Painted by Samuel Thomas Gill (1818-1880). The Humphrey's house would have been lower right hand side, just out of sight of this view.

The age Catherine gave for the 1828 census was '40' years, which would put her at twelve years old when she arrived in the colony in 1800, clearly a very unlikely situation. Much more believable if she had stated '50'. Humphries legend as recorded by Jack Woodward says that Catherine was in early twenties when she was widowed in 1801. This suggests her year of birth as c1778.

It was not an unusual practice during the 19th century for people to be flexible with their age. Catherine was one of many who did so. Her son-in-law, David Brown jnr, is another notable example. They did so for a variety of reasons.

Catherine had impressed those about her (e.g. her family) in her latter years, that she had achieved a very rare milestone - some 20 years older than she really was. Story telling encompassing the family history was an Irish tradition that was very much part of the Humphries culture. It is unlikely that Mooneys or McMahons were any different. Facts of a given event would have been less important than the telling of a good story. It is worth considering this in the light of information given by Catherine and Patrick and in the 1806 and 1811 census.⁷⁵¹

⁷⁵¹ Catherine Humphries' death certificate NSW reg No 1957- 01757 shows her first husband's name as Francis McMahon instead of Terence McMahon. Their eldest child's name was Frank (Francis). The passing of time and the long absence of both men had led to the confusion.