

## MICHAEL JOHN CURTAIN

### *By Michael F. Curtin (Great Grandson of Michael John Curtin)*

On 13 May 1855, the Nashwauk, which was sailing from Liverpool to Adelaide, was wrecked at 3.00 a.m. near the mouth of the Onkaparinga River. One of the 300 emigrants was Margaret Curtain, who was five months pregnant at the time. With the assistance of her husband, she fought to save her unborn child.

On 8 August 1855, in a tent in Kensington, Michael John Curtain was born.

Michael's parents John Curtain and Margaret (nee Maloney) had migrated from Tullygarvan, on the west coast of County Clare. John's parents were Austin Curtain and Ellen Howard.

In 1856, the family travelled by dray, following the route of the Old Adelaide Road which the Chinese miners took, as they had landed in Adelaide to avoid the bounty imposed by the Colony of Victoria.

They settled briefly in Axedale and then later moved to Myers Flat.

Michael went to school at St Kilian's in Bendigo. At the age of 15 he left school to work in the mines for the next twelve years. During this time, Michael took the opportunity to invest in various mining stocks and later in hotels.

In 1884 he became the proprietor of the Exchange Hotel in High Street, Eaglehawk. According to the Cyclopaedia of Victoria —

*"The Exchange is a popular house in the district and by means of direct telephone communication, Mr Curtain keeps the residents posted up in the latest stock and share quotations, which are chronicled under the verandah of his hostelry."*

He then went on to hold the position of Vice President of the Eaglehawk Stock Exchange

Later on, he became the proprietor of the City Club Hotel, in the centre of Bendigo, opposite the fountain.

He also had a strong interest in various sporting activities: -

- He was Secretary of the Old Sydney Flat Cricket Club and as a player he also topped the batting averages for a couple of seasons.
- He was a promoter of the Eaglehawk Rifle Club and became a crack shot in the Colony, so much so that he shot in the Queen's Prize at Williamstown and not only received Queens badges, but he also won against all comers The Sir Frederick Sargood Cup shooting over a distance of 800 yards. In the middle range competition of 600 yards, he beat all the crack shots in Australia and consequently was selected for the winning Australian Team in 1890 to beat the United Kingdom.
- In November 1888, it was reported in the Hawkes Bay Herald (New Zealand) that in the Centennial Rifle Association, Michael won in the matches over 500 and 600 yards.

- Michael had a strong interest in greyhounds winning the Elmore Cup in 1893 and was twice runner-up in the Echuca Cup. In 1895 he was elected as a patron of the Echuca Coursing Club and was also a judge and member of the Bendigo Jockey Club.
- He was also a Judge and referee and promoter of the Eaglehawk Athletic Club and was a promoter and officeholder of the Eaglehawk Football Club.

In 1893, he was elected to the Eaglehawk Council and in 1898 he held the position of Mayor and Chief Magistrate

In 1891 he was gazetted as a Lieutenant of the Victorian Military Force and was promoted to Captain in 1897.

In 1884, he married Susanna Crawford, daughter of William Hunter Crawford and they went on to have eight daughters (Elizabeth, Susanna, Mary, Margaret, Eileen, Norah, Jane and Ellen), and five sons (John, William Hunter, Michael, Arthur, Augustine, and George).

William Hunter Curtain is my grandfather and his third son, was Michael, who is my Father.

Michael John passed away in 1918 at the age of 63. His wife Susanna lived on until 1944.

I am not aware of where the name Michael originally came into the family, but we can see how it has been maintained through the generations and this has continued with one of our daughters having Michelle as a middle name and Michael is also the middle name of one of our grandsons.

I cannot let this moment pass without acknowledging the following people, who have helped preserve this Illuminated Address to Michael John and the other Councillors.

Margaret Curtain who, with her mother Molly, stored the address for many decades.

Cousin Sally Holmes who, after helping Margaret transfer to a retirement home, brought the address to my attention.

The incredible interest and work undertaken by Ayleen Kirkwood (nee Crawford) and Bev Hanson who took it upon themselves to have the restoration completed.

Also, the various donors who have assisted with funding. I am certain there is more to be donated in this regard.

And finally, to Ayleen and Bev and the Bendigo Council in arranging today's celebration.

### WRECK OF THE NASHWAUK.

The Nashwauk, a fine ship built 18 months ago, as the captain informs us, of between 700 and 800 tons, sailed from Liverpool for Adelaide on the 13th February, under the command of Captain McIntyre. She had on board nearly 300 emigrants, chiefly Irish, among whom there were 130 single girls, and a general cargo. She made a quick and favourable passage, but on Sunday morning (the 89th day) unfortunately went ashore in the Gulf. The accident happened exactly opposite Mr. Harriott's house, about two miles below the mouth of the Onkaparinga, and notice reached Noarlunga by daybreak. Mr. Birrell, the postmaster, sent instantly to the wreck, urging the captain to land the mail and to put the passengers ashore, as there was at that time every prospect of rough weather. At 1 o'clock the landing of the passengers commenced, and the whole came to Noarlunga in the course of the afternoon and evening. The surgeon-superintendent also came to the township, and afterwards Captain McIntyre and the ship's crew, the mates remaining on the beach to watch the wreck. By the exertions of several inhabitants the passengers were lodged in the mill cottages and other empty houses; and a quantity of bread was baked, 8 or 10 sheep were killed, and tea was prepared by bucketsful. In short, every thing was done that the kindest hospitality could suggest, but the conduct of the emigrants has led to much remark. Many of the girls behaved in a most discreditable manner, showing plainly that they were either unfit to have been sent as emigrants, or that they had been sadly corrupted on the voyage. On this painful subject we need not enlarge, as there can be no doubt a very searching enquiry will be instituted by the proper authorities, not only into the circumstances attending the loss of the ship, but into the conduct of all concerned during the passage, and after the catastrophe.

In the course of the night Captain Douglas, the Harbour-Master, arrived from Port Adelaide with the Melbourne steamer and the Government schooner Yatala, both which anchored off the wreck, and on Monday morning the emigrants, after breakfasting at Noarlunga, were ordered back to the beach.

Meanwhile the Nashwauk was lying in two

Meanwhile the Nashwauk was lying in two fathoms water, close under the high cliffs of clay and limestone, about a quarter of a mile below the reef on which the Tigress was lost. The Nashwauk's bottom was much damaged, she had had twelve feet of water in her hold, and it was clear that no hope remained of saving her.

The sea was rather rough, and there was a heavy rolling swell outside the breakers, which induced Captain Douglas to abandon his first intention of putting the emigrants on board the steamer where she then lay, and they were directed to walk along the beach on the tops of the cliffs to the mouth of the Onkaparinga. About half of them obeyed orders, and assembled in front of Mr. Gray's store, but the remainder dared not tempt again the element from which they had so narrowly escaped, and went back across the country, saying they would get to town as they best could. A few accepted situations in the country.

Those who remained, consisting chiefly of females, were taken across the Onkaparinga in boats, and again mustered near the jetty at Port Noarlunga, opposite which the Melbourne was then lying. There the sea outside the breakers was tolerably calm; and at about 3 o'clock the first boat-load was safely taken on board. The embarkation was proceeding when our reporter left, and Captain Douglas intended sending the steamer away in the course of the evening with all who were willing to go; but several more deserted and made their way back to Noarlunga. The emigrants' luggage was for the most part brought round in drays, by which, or by the Yatala, it was to be sent forward.

The Nashwauk brought no regular mail, but a small bag of letters was sent in on Monday. Our reporter made every effort to obtain papers, but was assured by the captain that there were none on board. He also enquired for the manifest, but was told it had been sent ashore with the captain's boxes. On examining them in the evening at Noarlunga, the captain ascertained that the box containing the manifest had been left on board.

He stated that the cargo was all on board. He also stated that the captain had ordered the ship to be taken to the beach, and that she must inevitably go to the bottom.

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