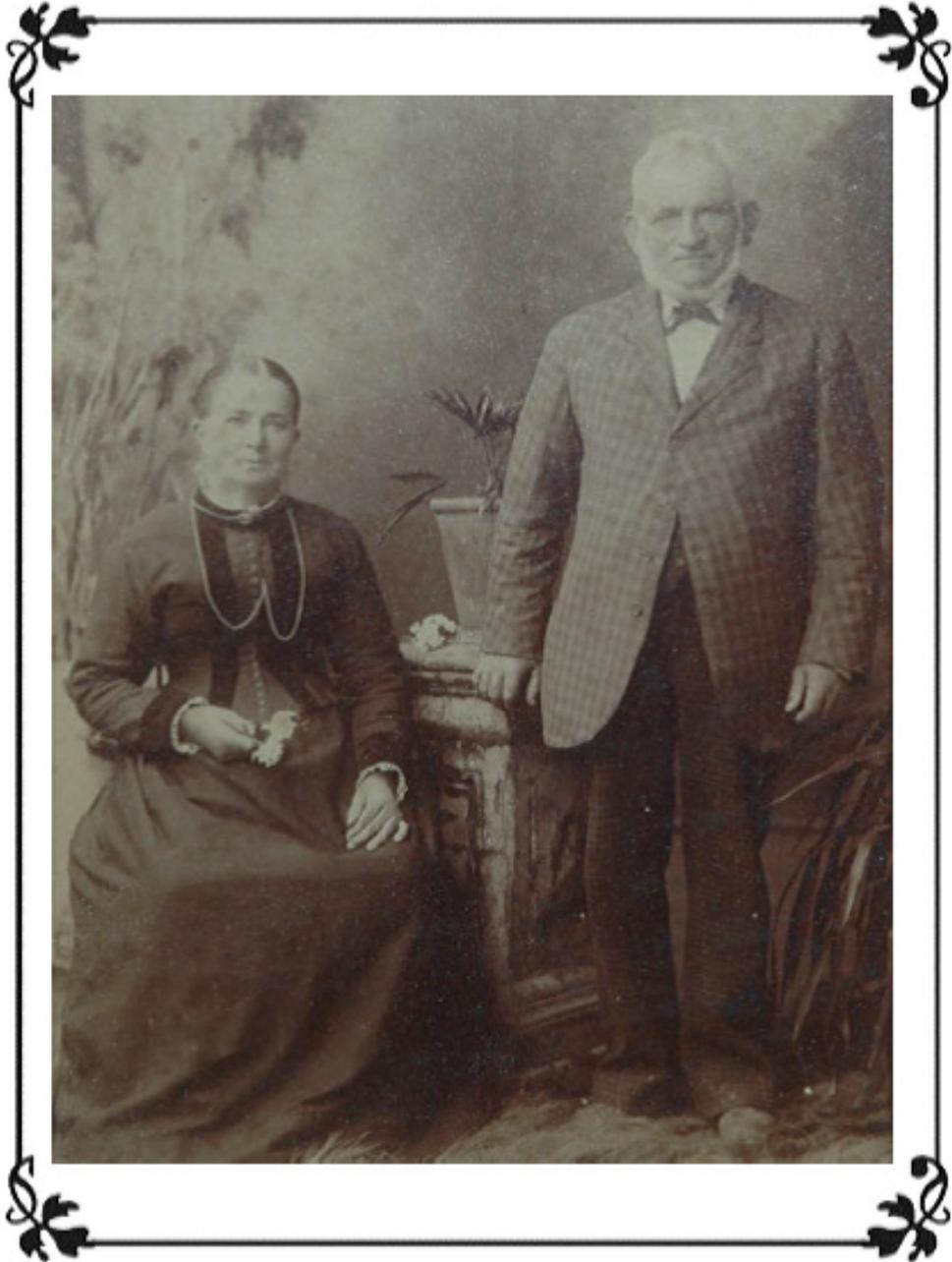


George and Diana Stevens



An unusual photo for the era with Diana seated and George standing.

A Special Photograph

The only known photo of Diana and George was that of a professional photographer. It could have been taken in a studio, although some damage to the upper right side of the back drape suggests that it might have been taken by a travelling photographer. However, the important thing is we know what they looked like and we know that they were thinking of us, their descendants.

George could be fifty or slightly more. His face, with a large nose and fly-away ears, is framed with a fringe beard which is well trimmed and meant to convey dignity, respectability and masculinity, although it is some years out of fashion. Only the top two buttons of his jacket are done up which was also an outdated fashion. He appears to be quite short as most people were in those days. He is remembered as a stern father who was handy with the strap, a behaviour not inherited by his four sons. Sons George, John and James were involved in local politics and may have been influenced by their father. Grandson Lin, carried on the interest as a councillor for Tullaroo from 1950-1974, with two terms, 1953 and 1965 as President.

Diana, with her hair drawn back from her face appears a refined and delicate woman. She could be aged from mid-forties to around fifty. She has, what phrenologists at the time, would have described a high intelligent forehead. She is very attractive, has a very pretty nose and excellent skin.

She is wearing a dark gown with a fitted bodice which has lots of small buttons down the front. The neck line and cuffs are trimmed with lace. She is holding two white flowers which could be carnations. Her fingers are long, slim, and very white and belie the hardship of her life. (The family believe that Diana's aunt left her a considerable inheritance which she never received. What a difference it would have made to her life!)

Diana's persona is one of femininity and gentleness. There is a deep stillness

about her. A quality that emerged perhaps, with the death of baby Mary, who would have been taken from her arms and “buried at sea”. Burials occurred at midnight when few people were about.

We great grand-daughters have discussed this tragedy in Diana’s young life. We wonder how she survived the ordeal as we wonder how we ourselves would have endured it. Our hearts go out to her and we are as one with her in her suffering. If we could we would tell her how we cherish all that she risked and sacrificed for us, her descendants.

It is easy to imagine Diana hanging lacy curtains at her window of her first home and picking wildflowers in the spring to pretty the rooms. Our great-grandmother was, in fact, an integral member of the civilising gender of the settler nation.

Beneath Diana’s personable exterior resided a woman of courage and confidence. Courage to face the turbulent seas and confident enough to start a new life in a primitive pioneering society. That life would have involved hardships she could not have imagined back home in Somerset. The first months of her arrival would have been hot and most unpleasant, as clad in cumbersome gowns, she travelled long distances by horse drawn vehicle, first to Brighton and later to Central Victoria where they settled.

In Maryborough Diana and George lived in a small cottage where they contributed to the town streetscape with the planting of several Elm trees. After the purchase of land at Betley the couple moved there to live. Diana’s home, was “L” shaped, made of brick and quite substantial. (See Joyce’s description, via her father Lin, of Diana’s home).

Diana, being some distance from Maryborough, would have been quite isolated, and very busy. She would have bolstered the family budget and filled the cellar with the poultry she raised for meat, soups and eggs. She would

have kept a kitchen garden, had fruit trees and a docile house cow, which, until the children could do it for her, she would have milked morning and night seven days a week.

She would have baked scones in the baker's oven that never went out then spread them with jam she had made herself and added a dollop of cream for extra happiness. She would have made her own bread, pickles and chutney for the Sunday roast, the leftovers of which would be served cold the following tea time. Nothing would have been wasted. Water was a priceless commodity and the cutting of wood backbreaking. There were few luxuries. Her children would have been well dressed with garments she sewed and knitted by dimly lit kerosene light late into the night.

She would have baked for social functions and helped raise funds for the Betley School and church. She would have been a welcome member of the Betley community, except, that is in the political sphere which was banned to women until 1901.

My sisters and some of my cousins know this of Diana for it is the life our own mother's lived as rural Australian women; and we ourselves experienced to a fair extent growing up in the 1940s and 50s. (Note the admiration family felt for Elizabeth and Vivian who followed in Diana's footsteps on the farm throughout the following pages).

George and Diana had two daughters and four sons. The girls were Mary who didn't survive the voyage, and Matilda (Tilly-1867). The boys were George Louis (1865), John Thomas (1869), Edward Samuel (1871) and James Henry (1873).

In 1890 Matilda married local lad George Patterson, had seven children and settled in West Footscray, not far from brother James.

George married Adelaide Wragg and lived at Betley.

Edward married Elizabeth Walker in 1899 and took over the Betley farm.

John (Jack) married Selina Walker who died of TB, then Mary Scantlebury. He fathered six children and lived at Havelock.

James was born at Bet Bet in 1873 and died at Royal Park at age 74. He was awarded a Bachelor of Arts, trained as a minister in America, wrote verse, and a memory training book and also ran classes on the subject.

In 1909 he married Agnes Cockerell and fathered four sons, Garfield, Horace, Douglas and John. In 1907 he purchased land in St Albans which became the Stevensville Estate. He was a councillor with the Shire of Keilor for 15 years. James is remembered as a patient man who never raised his voice. In compensation to his wife for not having the daughter she wanted, in 1924, he bought her a brand new TF Ford.

Youngest son John as a student at Williamstown High school caught pleurisy and bronchitis and the doctor advised his mother that:

The best thing you could do is to get him away to a hot climate ... so I went up there and I wrote to mum that I milked eight cows day and night, I'm having a great time here. I got a letter back about two days later saying, come home. We'll get a milking cow ... I started to love cows through being up there ... I loved to have a few cows and poddy calves.

Diana passed away in 1900. A very sad start for the family at the dawn of a new century. As her death approached she would have had many memories and considerable satisfaction. She had a devoted husband, a family to be proud of and she had her Elm trees. The trees she planted upon settling at Betley, after which she named their property, Elm Grove, and which by 1900, would have been a very impressive sight.