

Grandma Hollow's Family.

The Leitch Family

Margaret's parents were Neil Leitch and Mary Perrett who were married at Williamstown on 1/1/1861 when Neil was 29 and Mary 24.

Mary Perrett had come to Australia as an assisted immigrant in 1857 and was to work as a dressmaker for Mr. J.H.O. Rose of Brow St. Williamstown. The Ship was the "Hornet" and its register describes her as aged 20, a general servant from Lanark, near Glasgow, and a Presbyterian literate. Her parents were Robert Perrett, a butcher, and Mary Rogers Freebarn, she was born at Glasgow.

The marriage certificate lists Neil's parents as Walter Leitch, a master mariner, and Catherine McKay. His birthplace was Port Bannatyne near Rothsay on the Isle of Bute, Scotland.

The marriage of Neil and Mary was held at Rennie St. Williamstown where both of them lived. The marriage celebrant was William Charles Robinson a Congregationalist minister.

When Neil Leitch arrived in Australia is not clear. A Neil Leitch arrived on the ship "Flora McDonald" in 1852 from Bute Scotland. However the Leitch's listed on the Flora McDonald are:- Neil (aged 39, Presbyterian), Janet, James, Neil, Mary A. This group was a family, listed in the 1851 census and their son Neil would have been four years old at the time of the voyage. Neither of these Neil Leitchs are the right age to be the Neil Leitch who married Elizabeth Perrett in 1861. Our Neil was listed on the Scottish Census with his family and was fifteen years old in 1851. I have been unable to find a shipping record for our Neil Leitch coming to Victoria. He may have arrived at another port.

Neil and a brother Walter were together in Walhalla and possibly came to Australia together. Walter was to die in Walhalla in 1876 aged 47 years; he was four years older than Neil.

When Neil Leitch was married his occupation was a baker, but then he must have moved to try his luck at the goldfields. Neil and Mary Lived in Sandridge (Port Melbourne) when their first child was born but then followed the lure of gold. Their second child was born in Scarsdale (15km SW of Ballarat) and then they moved to Walhalla where they finally settled and had four more children. Neil's occupation is recorded as a miner on Margaret's birth certificate.

Although people always referred to grandma's name as Margaret on her birth certificate it is actually recorded as Marguerite. Later she added Anne to her name as she was known as Margaret Anne.

Neil it seems was not satisfied to remain a miner and began moves to buy farmland in 1877; on 10/9/1877 he made an application for a license for land at Moondarra under the Land Act of 1869. This act established a system under which land was held by license for three years before it could be purchased. Then if conditions regarding improvements were met, selectors could purchase the land. If they did not wish to purchase it immediately they could obtain a seven-year lease during which the balance was to be paid.

Neil and Mary Leitch had seven children, the details are as follows: -

Walter LEITCH b 30/10/1861, Sandridge

Robert LEITCH b 20/06/1864, Scarsdale

Neil William LEITCH b 28/07/1867, Walhalla

Isabella Mary LEITCH b 30/04/1870, Walhalla

Marguerite LEITCH b 17/07/1872, Walhalla

Julia Hannah LEITCH b 03/09/1874, Walhalla

Violet Catherine LEITCH b 26/03 1877, Walhalla

The Leitch Family

In the land records an official form dated 29/2/1878 and headed Application of Neil Leitch, describes the land as... " *Very rangy country, heavily timbered and densely scrubby.*" The land involved was in two blocks and totaled 151 acres in area. Neil's application was recommended for approval on 3/6/1878.

Neil must have started working on the land almost immediately if not before as a record of 5/3/1879 lists the following improvements to the land.

Dwelling 28' x 14', weatherboard and shingles, 3 rooms, Well 30 ' deep.

Other improvements - ringing timber and cutting scrub, felling trees.

The property was not enclosed yet, there was still burning off and clearing occurring. Neil was still working as a miner in Walhalla although his family lived on the selection. In correspondence Neil gives his reason for the lack of progress as... " *not being able to get in crop and having to work to support family.*"

At this stage, 1879, his family consisted of Walter (17), Robert (15), Neil (12), Isabella (9), Margaret (7), Julia (5) and Violet (2).

The book, "Mountain Gold, A History of the Baw Baw and Walhalla country of the Narracan Shire" reports that Neil Leitch settled in Moondarra in 1879 and grew a variety of crops particularly chaff, for the Walhalla market, and he milked seven or eight cows to make butter also for Walhalla. The book describes his land as being near the Lower Moondarra School. Moondarra was not really established until the late 1770's so the Leitch family could justly be described as one of Moondarra's pioneer families.

In September 1883 the Licensee, Neil Leitch, made application for Lease or Crown grant and there is another description of the selection.

House - 6 rooms, 30 feet x 24 feet, weatherboard and shingles. Dairy - 10ft x 12ft. weatherboard and shingles,

Barn – 30 ft x 15 ft, slab and bark, Stable – 20 ft x 14 ft, slab and bark, Orchard - half an acre, paling fence, two wells,

150 chains of log and chock fence.

The number of acres ploughed and cultivated: - First year, 2 acres, crop potatoes, yield 4 tons

Second year, a further 8 acres, crops potatoes (4tons), oats (3 tons), hay

Third year, a further 10 acres (total now 20 acres), crops potatoes (4 tons), barley (30 bushels).

In the previous year, 1882, another block adjoining Neil's land was taken over from another Walhalla miner, Joseph Day. This block was about 68 acres and had been taken up by Day about the same time as Neil Leitch's block in 1879. However Day was having problems; in June 1881 he requested time to "*pull myself together*" and later in the same month requested more time to pay and was given until the first of September to pay the arrears.

The arrears were apparently paid and on the 10/10/1882 there are letters from Day and Leitch, Day wanting to relinquish his license and Leitch wanting to take up the selection.

This was approved on the proviso that the land was not required for a racecourse. Presumably this was not the case as the certificate of registration is dated 4/12/1882.

The Leitch Family

The land was still not enclosed, however by 1883 a bailiff's report stated that the land was now enclosed with:- 266 chains of fence, mostly log (200 chains), slab or picket (8 Cha.), post and three rails (8 cha.) and log and chock (50 cha.). At this time 16 acres were ploughed.

The break up was: wheat, 2 acres, yield 30 bushels, potatoes, 8 acres, yield 4.5 tons, oats, 3 acres, yield 35 bushels, peas, 3 acres, yield 20 bushels. 141 acres had been rung i.e. ringbarked.

At about this time Neil was asked to furnish a declaration setting out the period for which he personally resided on his selection. A statutory declaration of the 18/2/1884 states:-

"My family has resided on the land held by me at Moondarra for the last five years up to date. I have also lived on the same land two days a week both before and since the license was granted for the last five years having a large family to support I have had to work as a miner at Walhalla to obtain funds for working the land."

Asked to state how far he resided from the land a letter of 4/3/1884 states "10 miles" (~17km).

On the 17/3/1884 the lease was approved for fourteen years.

In February 1888 Neil Leitch requested time to pay (2 months) due to his own illness and a death in the family. Mary and Neil's son Neil had died in the September of 1887 aged 19 years. Neil was allowed until the 2nd of March to pay.

In 1890 Neil applied for a renewed lease for fourteen years, apparently his ownership of three acres in Coppermine Road was included which was under lease for lime burning purposes. The report says that the "150 acres has 80 acres sown down in English grasses, the land has been cleared, ploughed and cropped."

Neil now resided on the property with his family. The parish plans show the date of Crown Grant on the original land was 16/8/1897. There were two blocks, one comprised 87 acres, 2 roods, 1 perch and the other 63 acres, 2 roods, 17 perches. [4 roods = 1 acre, 20 perches = 1 rood]

In 1898 the Lower Moondarra school was burnt down in a bushfire and the Leitch farm, if not burnt, must have been threatened as the farm was very close to the school. The school was rebuilt and opened again on the 21/7/1898.

The total price paid for the land was £153/12/4, £1/12/4 of that being costs. The third block was 68 acres, 2 perches, the date of Crown Grant was 20/7/1903 and the grantee was M. Leitch Ex. of Neil Leitch. Neil Leitch had died on the 9/9/1899 and the land was passed to Mary his wife in February 1901. At that stage the land was valued at 357 pounds and his personal estate was valued at £138/10/0. The land was made up of three separate blocks totaling 219 acres, 20 perches (88.67 hectares). Mary's address at the time she took over the land was 99 McCracken St., Kensington so presumably her family continued to work the land.

In 1903 she fell into arrears with the payments and owed £6/12/5 but the fact that the Crown Grant was made in 1903s shows that all the arrears were paid eventually.

From the records it is clear that Neil and Mary Leitch and no doubt their children also were industrious, hard working pioneers.