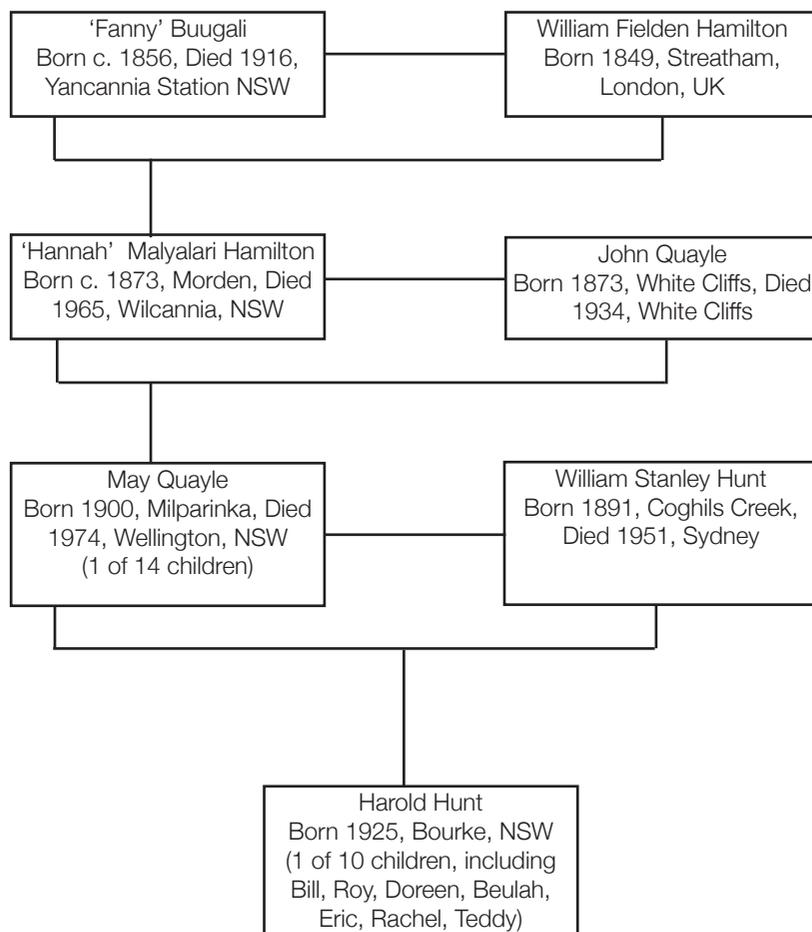


## Harold Hunt Family Tree



## Chapter 1

### The Quayles

I AM THE THIRD ELDEST OF TEN, ONLY EIGHT HAVING SURVIVED INFANCY. I am a son of an Aboriginal woman and an Australian-born Irishman. I never knew my Dad's people. He sometimes spoke of his family but they never kept in contact. He told me they ran a small pig farm near the little town of Coghills Creek, a rich farming area in the goldfields of Victoria. He had one brother, Tom, a schoolteacher. Years later I heard they had a bakery in Broken Hill, but I never knew of that before. Maybe they didn't know about us.

We grew up with my mother's family, with my grandparents, Jack and Hannah Quayle. Hannah - Gran, as we knew her - talked about family a lot.

Gran's own mother was a traditional Maliangaapa tribal woman. I can't recall her tribal name, but she is commemorated as Fanny Williams on the White Cliffs Cemetery register, having died at nearby Yancannia Station in 1916.

My gran was born of her mother's union with a newly arrived Scottish grazier, William Feildon Hamilton. William, or Bill, as he came to be known, came from an elite Scottish background. At the age of seventeen, he was sent to Australia to 'toughen up'. That he did.

He partnered with a man named Gayer, managing a pastoral lease on Morden Station in the far western country of New South Wales. The story goes that they refused a generous offer of purchase before the big drought and rabbit plague in the 1880s. Many landholders in Outback

New South Wales and Queensland were affected. Their pleas to supporters in England for publicity and financial assistance fell on deaf ears. Bill walked away penniless from Morden around 1884 and returned to his family in England. Apparently, though, his taste for pioneering adventure was not sated. A short time later he sailed for another new colony, New Zealand, and made his mark there. But that's another story.

Morden, and the neighbouring Wonnaminta and Yancannia stations, had a good relationship with the Maliangaapa people and other tribes who continued to live on their own land, even when active dislocation of Aboriginals was being enforced by government policy. In 1883 the government had established the Aboriginal Protection Board to control the Indigenous people. Their policy assumed that children would more easily be 'socialized as Whites' and that 'Aboriginal blood could be bred out', with them gradually being biologically assimilated into European society.

This could only be achieved by separating full-bloods from half-castes, so children of mixed descent were being forcibly removed from their families.

Gran's mother Fanny stayed behind when Bill Hamilton left Australia. He, I am told, wanted to take her and their child Hannah with him, and rode the district for over two weeks searching for them. But Fanny had gone back to her tribe and the elders told him to leave her. She returned to 'Cobham' Tommy Williams, a full-blood Aboriginal, and they had two sons, Gilbert and George Williams.

My gran was a half-caste. Having grown up at Morden, she had learnt the ways of the white man's domestic duties and was fairly at ease in both camps. In this time of significant social change for Aborigines, a shy young Hannah met a brash young stockman named Jack

Quayle, who was working on the district properties. Like Hannah, his father was English, from the Isle of Man, and his mother a full-blood from the Corner Country. But Jack's mother had returned to her tribal clan so he and his two brothers were raised by their white father. The three sons were reared in the manners of the English working-class by their father and built an honest reputation as hard workers. Their only education was in the form of tank sinking, fencing and whatever horse work came their way. With the boys barely out of their teens, Jack Quayle senior passed away. He had willed his tank-sinking plant, horses, harness, ploughs, scoops and all camping equipment to his three sons to carry on the business he had built up for them. However, on the station the Quayle boys were working on at the time of their father's death, the owner falsely claimed there was a debt owing to the station. He therefore withheld what was rightfully the property of the young unschooled Aboriginals who could broker no argument, by law, against a white station owner. The three learnt an invaluable lesson. Without the protection of their father, who was schooled in the white system and of good reputation, they had little standing to argue.

Jack, the eldest, decided he must move on and he determined to make a life for himself and earn a living as a horse-breaker. There was a big demand for that type of work and he liked working with horses anyway. From his earnings in horse-breaking he was able to re-establish himself in his father's trade - earthmoving, the work he'd been raised to do. By his early twenties, he was a self-made man. Jack Quayle and Hannah Hamilton married in the Roman Catholic Church at the nearby opal mining town of White Cliffs in 1895. By then, 'Big Jack' Quayle was a successfully established contractor in the Paroo River region with experience in tank sinking, fencing, horse-breaking, shearing and whatever else bush work

was required. He became a man of great independence. He taught me that a person's lot in life depended on what he was prepared to put into life. Having always lived on the land away from conveniences, he was an innovator. He thrived on the challenges of breaking new ground by modifying equipment and trialling various techniques, necessity in a harsh land being the added spur to invention.



John "Jack" Quayle c. 1884.

women and children had been forcibly moved from their homes onto designated reserves, away from their homelands, without notice. Families and clans were dispersed and various tribes were thrown together by government decree. It was a further disintegration of their customs and dialects.

## Dad

Billy Hunt travelled alone.

He worked in a livery stable in the mining city of Broken Hill for a time. He must have had at least some schooling, for he was quite literate and very precise as

to how he signed his name, even on the smallest and seemingly most insignificant of documents. He was a drifter in a sense; he had that itinerant, instinctive nature so often characteristic of a person with no strong family ties. He was a good worker who always insisted on paying his way. His word was his bond and he expected the same from everyone else.

Somehow he found himself employed by my grandfather, Jack Quayle, who recognized qualities he admired in this young white man. Billy was a little older than Jack's teenage children but he readily settled into their camp lifestyle, participating in boxing and athletics with the boys after work. In no time Billy was accepted as a family member. They were energetic sports-loving young men, with much more than their fair share of competition from their sisters. There was another attraction about the Quayle mob for Billy - the second eldest girl, May. Just after her twenty-first birthday, May and Billy were married in the Roman Catholic Church at White Cliffs.

Billy Hunt remained in the employ of his father-in-law until he accepted a position on Willangee Station some sixty miles from Broken Hill. It seemed a good opportunity for independence to settle down in a steady regular job, and to raise and support a family in his job as a handyman, maintenance worker and camel driver. There was a camel team on the station that was used to transport wool to the railhead at Tarrawingee, some fifteen miles away, and bring supplies back on the return journey.

May and Billy moved out to the station and set up camp - a small tent pitched in the shade of the tall leafy ghost gum trees encircling the a small stock-watering dam. Such dams were usually nothing more than some hundred waterholes ranging in depth up to fifteen feet depending on how often they were de-silted. The catchment areas of the dams were drains constructed for

several hundred yards across the sloping terrain. In times of quick downpours the water would be channelled into a smaller catchment area known as a silt tank. This is where most of the topsoil, being washed along the drains, would settle, before the water level reached a height when it would then overflow through a galvanized corrugated iron tube into the main dam.

A galley was then rigged. It consisted of two posts across which a rail was suspended from which to hang buckets of water. It was May's role to fuel the fire under them, and so provide the heating for all other domestic purposes.

The tall gum trees provided some shade most of the day. Those on the eastern side provided early morning shade as did the trees on the western side in the late afternoon, but during the hottest time of the day there were gaps of sunlight and shade alternating as the sun passed over those trees on the northern side of the tent. The position of the tent also had to be carefully decided upon to get the most shade. Also, for safety measure, the tent had to be erected away from the tall eucalypts because their limbs often snapped and fell without warning.

Country people knew how to fulfil these requirements of comfort and safety. 'Born to the bush', it is sometimes called. Most bush folk found it hard to understand when city and town folk didn't take such important matters into consideration when setting up camp.

Water was carried from the dam in buckets hooked to a wooden yolk carried across the shoulders. Whilst the dam water was shallow and muddy, it could be cleared by boiling, then adding some ashes from the campfire, and being left to settle. The water was filtered by the ash, and sediments sank to the bottom. Billy would fill the buckets before going to work each day, but on wash days when more water was required, it was up to May to carry

whatever extra she might need.

Fuel stoves and refrigerators were unheard of in camp life in those days. Fresh mutton obtained from the station homestead had to be cooked on the day, and then kept in a hessian-covered cooler called a Coolgardie Safe. The Coolgardie had a wooden base hung by wires from a shallow, water-filled, open-topped container. Curtains of hessian acted as siphons and allowed the water to gradually seep over and down the sides, thereby cooling the safe with any breeze that might rise and drift across the arid plains. The safe was hung from the ridgepole at the front of the tent. Here it would not only catch the breezes but also be shaded by the giant gum trees.



Left: The Hunt's camp at Willangee. Right: Pulling down a newly broken camel for harness.

Billy Hunt adjusted to bush life, Aboriginal cooking and the eating habits of his new family. He and May often supplemented their food supply by going hunting, cooking and eating bush tucker with its endless menu of kangaroo, emu, goanna, witchetty grubs, and the various types of fruit - quandongs, moley apples, wild spinach, pig weed, yams, cullukas. It made for a different and enjoyable change from the usual spuds, onions, cabbage, carrots and the like, which seemed to be the staple diet of Europeans.

The young couple's work and camp life was not interrupted by May's first pregnancy in 1920. Most

women in the bush carried on with their normal duties throughout their pregnancies. When the birth was due, all was taken care of by an experienced mid-wife, not necessarily medically trained, but a woman who had children of her own and had attended many births in the company of older women. That's the way so many people entered the world in that part of the country back in those days. To this young couple, the joyous expectation of their first born, plus a permanent job, made the whole world seem theirs. All was just the way it was meant to be. The availability of a hospital a mere sixty miles away at Broken Hill with modern medicine and maternity facilities gave the young couple the false hope that nothing could go wrong. However, tragedy struck. The little boy survived only a few weeks. He died with the name of his Dad - he was named simply, Bill.

Whilst my parents were living and working on Willangee, two more children were born in Broken Hill, this time in hospital. Roy entered the world eighteen months after the loss of little Bill. Just prior to the birth of each child, May would travel into Broken Hill and stay with friends, often the Zada family. The head of that family was a prominent Afghan, Khan Zada. He followed the Halal bleeding process at the local abattoirs, a religious requirement for the large Muslim community of Broken Hill in those days. Khan Zada, like many of his kin, married an Aboriginal woman. These marriages bonded the Aboriginal and Afghan communities.

Camels were the only means of reliable transport throughout those arid parts of Australia. With the importation of camels came Afghan men, but no women. It was inevitable that Afghan and Aboriginal people married, for both groups were seen as lower class.

About a year later, shortly before the birth of Doreen,

May's elder sister Ruby passed away, leaving her three little girls orphaned. Ada and Mary went to live with Granny Quayle, and the eldest, Myrtle, became a member of the Hunt family.

There was a lot of fencing to be done at Willangee, so Billy decided to do it on contract as a means of financial improvement. They were doing well, and shortly thereafter, the Hunts bought themselves a Model T Ford utility. When it arrived at the station, Billy looked it over and said, "That's not for me. I'll stick to the camels. My wife will be the better one to handle that machine."

May, being the person she was, saw it as a new challenge. She took the vehicle for a short run under the guidance of the salesman who had brought it out from Broken Hill. She then offered to drive him back to Tarrowangee, the nearest town, so he could get the train home. Beside her instructor, with Billy and the kids in the back, May took the controls and completed the round trip to the Tarrowangee railway station and back home without any problems.

Billy was very pleased. May, having been brought up as equal to her brothers, had proved to be up to his expectations in so many ways, and this gladly relieved him of the need to learn to drive. He did eventually learn to reverse the car, but that was as far as he was prepared to go. Of course, May enjoyed it all. It was an extra skill under her belt and she would drive the car out with her husband on the fencing jobs where she would help by running the wire.

That meant setting the one hundredweight coils of wire onto a spinning jenny. She would pull the wire out by hand and thread it through the bored holes in the posts. This was a heavy task, especially for a pregnant woman. Each strain, as they were called, was two hundred yards long, and she was pulling that weight in steel wire. It was

especially heavy going if some of the holes in the posts were not exactly in line with the rest of the fence. For each wire strain this action was repeated, depending on whether the fences were of five or six strains in each of the posts.

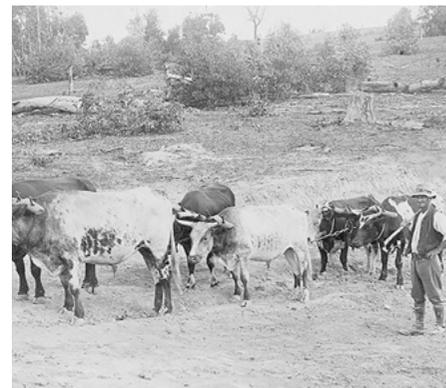
The going was tough in those days. Living in tents meant there was not the dusting and polishing chores of a proper house, but there were many chores of a different kind. It wasn't just a matter of washing the dishes, the clothes, and making the beds. May had to sweep the ground clean around the camp to show up the track of snakes or other creatures that might decide to sneak into the quiet camp, hoping to find a small treat at their disposal.

Most women accompanied their husbands, assisting wherever they could in his daily toil whilst looking after the children. May handled it well. With two of her own children and an orphaned niece, she looked after their camp and helped Bill with his work.

With another pregnancy, they decided to join the Quayle family camp again. There was always work with Grandfather Quayle, and Gran would enjoy taking care of her little grandchildren – for a time anyway. Billy took time off work from Willangee and moved to Wilara Station on the Paroo River 160 miles west of Bourke, where he once again worked with his father-in-law on a fencing job.

## Camp Life On The Paroo

The birth of a child does not always come at the most convenient time. May was due in the middle of summer. In this part of New South Wales, the 'Corner Country', it is exceptionally hot, with temperatures as high as 120° F (50° C), and an annual rainfall of only eight to ten inches. Dry hot westerly winds blow in off the Simpson Desert



Left: Bill Hunt (foreground) with bullock whip, Bill Gilbey with scoop, sinking a dam for Grandfather Quayle. Right: May and Monica Quayle on camel.

bringing sweltering nights. The climate suits only swarms of flies during the daylight and mosquitoes at night.

People out there had no choice; they had to cope with the conditions and make the necessary adjustments. They worked usually from dawn till dusk, and then there was food to be prepared, served and saved. When fresh meat was available it was mostly grilled on coals beside the open fires, baked or boiled in buckets or, for the "well-to-do", baked in camp ovens, heavy cast iron pots with lids. They would be placed on a bed of live coals in a shallow hole in the ground with more coals placed on the lid. Heat would build up quickly within and the lid did not allow any ash or coals to spoil the ingredients.

What could not be eaten was cooked, wrapped in paper and hessian, kept well covered in a shady area during the day and hung out under trees at night.

The Coolgardie safes were topped up each day with smaller quantities of food for daily use. Other larger amounts of fresh meat would be salted and kept. This was done by rubbing raw coarse salt into the meat, then wrapping and hanging it wherever it would catch the slightest breeze during the day, and unwrapped at night.