

Royal Western Australian Historical Society's  
Annual Pioneers Memorial Service  
on Sunday, 12 June 1994 at St Bartholomews Chapel, East Perth Cemeteries,

Commemorating MARY CHARLOTTE BLYTHE (nee COPPIN)

Citation by Thelma Jones

Mary Charlotte's parents, James and Charlotte (nee Collington) Coppin, were married in St John's Parish Church, in Croydon, Surrey, on 18 April 1831.

In December, 1841, they boarded the barque, Diadem, bound for the Australind Settlement in Western Australia, with three children, Eliza (7), Sarah (5) and Christopher (2). They arrived, after a voyage of four months, on 10 April 1842 (an anniversary of which Coppin descendants proudly celebrate each year by a picnic in King's Park).

In August of 1842, Charlotte was delivered of a boy (Henry), and, in about 1843, the family moved from Australind to the Vasse, where James worked as a sawyer, and established a farm on a property sometimes known as "Salisbury" and sometimes as "Millstream Farm", along what is now Queen Elizabeth Avenue in modern Busselton.

At least three more children were born Walter John (1847), Mary Charlotte (1850) and Alice Elizabeth (1854) Mary Charlotte's birthplace, on 10 October 1850, is given as Millstream Farm, and she was probably baptised in St Mary's Anglican Church, where she was confirmed, by Bishop Hale, on 27 November 1864. By that time, she had sadly lost her mother, in 1860, and was probably her father's housekeeper, as her two older sisters had married and moved away.

(What was happening in Western Australia when Mary Charlotte was born, in 1850? The population of W.A. was 5,886; the first convicts had arrived on 1 June 1850; more convicts arrived on 25 October; Queen Victoria was on the throne of England).

Mary Charlotte Coppin married Joseph Blythe at the Blackwood Bridge Police Station on 17 June 1870 (he aged 20, she aged 19). It is possible that the Blythe and Coppin families were well acquainted, as Joseph's mother, then a teen-aged Comfort Stanton, had shared the long voyage on Diadem, with her father, two younger sisters - and James and Charlotte Coppin. Indeed, she named her first daughter, Charlotte.

Comfort's husband, James Blythe, speaks in his Diary, of taking over "Coping's house, which is now mine", when the Coppin family left Australind. Both Mary's brother, Christopher, and Joseph's brother, Roland were farming in the Blackwood Bridge (Nannup) area.

The young couple established a home in a little cottage on a farm at Jalbarragup, about 20kms from Nannup. In that little cottage, on the bank of the Blackwood River, were born, between 1871 and 1884, seven sons and one daughter, Louisa Mary, my grandmother.

(What else was happening in W.A. during that period? The population grew from 25,135 in 1870 to 33,546 in 1884; John Forrest led an expedition from Perth to Adelaide; Perth Town Hall was officially opened; and, in 1879, Alexander Forrest explored the Kimberley's and named the King Leopold Range).

In 1885, in September, I think, the adventurous Joseph took his wife and eight children (all under the age of fifteen, remember) aboard the new vessel, Natal, to the newly settled town of Derby, in the Kimberley's. Aboard Natal were the materials to build the first inn in Derby, from the proceeds of which, Joseph was to purchase cattle stations, such as Mount House, Glenroy and Fairfield. Soon after arrival, in November, Mary Charlotte was delivered of her second daughter, who, sadly, died, in January 1886, without being named.

The story of Mary Charlotte is a little hazy from then on. An Obituary, which appeared in the South-West paper, on her death, in Perth, on 4 November 1894, Mentions some travelling:

We, of the Vasse, were very sorry indeed to hear of the death of Mrs Joseph Blythe at Perth. The deceased was the third daughter of the late Mr James Coppin of the Vasse, and sister of Mrs G. Rose of the Broadwater Farm. She was born in the Vasse, and after she married she resided with her husband at the Lower Blackwood until some years ago they went to reside at Derby. Owing to ill health she returned to Vasse a few years ago, and resided here for a short time, when she again went back to the north, but shortly afterwards returned to Perth on account of her health, where she died. She had a large family of sons, but only one daughter, who is married. She was very much respected

Mary Charlotte was probably in Derby for the marriage of her only daughter, Louisa Mary, at the age of nearly seventeen, to her first husband, Archibald Thomson, in September 1892 but not for the birth of her first grandchild, in February 1894. She was possibly there when the body of her third son, Lindsay James, was brought back to Derby having perished in the bush, at the age of fifteen, in 1893.

But she missed the tensions and anxieties of the period, from 1894-7 when the Aboriginal outlaw, Pigeon (Sandamarra) terrorised the Kimberley's, and her husband, riding as a Special Constable, had his hand shattered by a bullet, and her firstborn, Charles Christopher, nearly lost his life in a similar skirmish. She probably never visited the station properties but remained at home, in Derby, to worry about the riders out there in the Kimberley's, over the Leopold Range.

Mary Charlotte's death, by the way, was recorded in the Diary of her brother-in-law, Edward Henry Withers - a brief statement in the margin of Monday, 5 November 1894: "Joe's Mary died in Perth". (He had also recorded, on Tuesday 8 September 1885: "Joe and Mary went away").

(What was happening in W.A. in 1894, when Mary Charlotte died? The population was 81,579; Gold production was 207,131 ounces; rabbits were seen west of the border for the first time; Perth Railway Station was completed; and Dr J.S.Battye took up the post of Head of the Public Library).

Mary Charlotte Blythe left us many legacies- She was a woman of Junoesque stature (reputedly six feet tall, as were all her sons). Some of her thirty-three grandchildren, eighty-six great-grandchildren and many later descendants, have been pastoralists, farmers, nurses, teachers, musicians, historians, pioneers in the social field (the concept of Air Beef, for example) and sheer good and worthy citizens of our State. I like to think we have inherited her loyalty to husband and family that made her follow the pioneering spirit, in spite of pregnancy and ill health, and die at the early age of forty-four.