

Frederick August Louis SOMMER & Mary Ann WATT or WHIFIELD

Notes from Susan Nicholls - as at 14 Oct 2016

- Great great uncle of Susan Nicholls
- Uncle of Helene Radbone née Willemer
- birth 1844 Zellerfeld, Hanover, Germany
- parents father Georg Christian Sommer mother Henrietta Auguste (maiden name unknown) (my great great great grandparents)
- arrival in Australia 1846
- residences childhood and marriage Callington; later life Yatina, Broken Hill and Adelaide.
- marriage 18 April 1866 to Mary Ann Whitfield at her father's home Oakbank (nowadays 20 minutes from Callington)
- children nine, 4 males and 5 females, all bar 1 born in or near Callington
- occupation farmer, carpenter, miner, labourer, publican
- death 24 December 1920 ,Adelaide, buried in West Terrace Cemetery with his son Albert James
- descendants six of Fred's children were to have children and I believe from all six branches there are descendants currently living.
- significance Frederick was the only sibling of my great great grandmother. This meant he was also the only uncle (on her mother's side) for Helene. Tragically both Helene's parents died leaving a family of nine children with Helene as the head. I believe "Uncle Fred" would have been some support for her.

Frederick Sommer came to Australia as a child of about two years of age. He came in 1846 on the ship Pauline with only a small family, his parents, Christian and Henriette and his elder sister, August Juliane Sophie Sommer, known as Sophie, my great great grandmother.

1846 was the beginnings of Adelaide and also the beginning of the immigration of many Germans to Adelaide. Around the 1860s 10% of the SA colony was of German descent. One group of Germans settled in the area around Hahndorf and created this town in 1839. The other major area of German settlement was the Barossa. Frederick, with his parents and sister ended up in Callington near Hahndorf. Callington was a mining town set up in about 1850, its heyday was in the 1860s. Callington is an hours drive from Adelaide, now just off the Adelaide Melbourne highway. Unfortunately the mining had various highs and lows and it is now a very small town. Many people left Callington to go to other mining centres such as Broken Hill and Ballarat, which is indeed exactly what my **Willemer** relatives did, but not till after a significant time in Callington.

It would be interesting to view the school records to see when Frederick and family did arrive in Callington and how long Fred attended the school. School records can be very helpful in identifying exactly when families are in certain areas and they also give addresses and parents' occupations. Unfortunately the Callington school records are now unavailable/mislaidd. In 1989 when Marjorie Moore née Radbone (my mother) was in Callington and visited the school she was fortunate enough to view them and photocopy Grandpa Radbone's enrolment and attendance record. These records were still available in the early 2000's for the 150th Callington primary school anniversary. However they have now disappeared. After several requests of mine to view the records, one lady on the staff, who herself was interested to find these records, invited me to come up to Callington and help her go through the school shed. Unfortunately this was to no avail, we could not find these elusive records.

Christian and Henrietta and their son and daughter did stay in Callington many years. (Frederick's whole childhood and youth and the first 20 years of his marriage were spent in/near Callington.) I know little of the details of their life in Callington particularly in their first 10 years. It is possible Christian farmed some land. In 1856 his younger brother Heinrich Adolf Sommer came from Germany with his family and was to take up land near his elder brother. Unlike his elder brother, Heinrich was to have further children born to him in Callington. (Heinrich and his wife spent the rest of their lives in Callington and were buried there. I've also followed this family to some depth.)

In 1851 Frederick's father, Christian Sommer applied for naturalisation and was granted it. The application says that he was "of Bremer in the province of South Australia", he was 40 years old, his occupation was a miner and he had been in Australia for five years. It also said that he was a native of Hanover Germany. I do not have any details in the 1850s for the Sommers except for the arrival of his brother and family in 1856. Sadly, on the 9 September 1862 Christian Sommer, Frederick's father, died of dysentery at the age of 51, in Callington, 15 years after arriving in South Australia. Frederick was 22 years old. (Frederick's mother died 10 years later, at the age of 73, on 8 Jan 1872 in Callington. This implies that Henrietta was at least 10 years older than her husband.)

The next family event, after his father's death, was Fred's sister's marriage. This was on 6 August 1866 to Robert Johann **Willemer** known as Robert.

The **Willemers** were a German family who had settled in Hahndorf. Robert's father also Robert Johann Willemer, known as Johann, was a carpenter and spent his Australian life in Hahndorf. This family had travelled from a different part of Germany, actually called Prussia, from a town called Posen. Posen is actually now in Poland. This is a story in itself, currently living in this town are people new to the village since World War one??. This is because all the Posen citizens, because they were of German culture, at the time of the war moved to Germany. This is one of the many examples of a large displacement of people. Johann and the Willemer family were from Frankfurt originally. We believe Johann went to Posen as a part of his carpentry apprenticeship. He married his wife in Posen. Johann's wife (Robert's mother) died soon after the family's arrival in Australia. Robert had two sisters one died at the age of 18 and the other married into the Rodert family and lived in Hahndorf. Johann WILLEMER lived his life in Hahndorf and died there in 27 April 1894 at the age of 80.

Sophie and Robert lived in Callington the whole of their married life and unfortunately both of them also died there. They had nine children and it appears Robert worked as a labourer and at some stage for the railways.

The significance of this is that Frederick and Sophie, his sister not only spent most of their childhood in Callington but also spent part/all of their married lives in Callington. The births all of their children were in/near Callington. One suspects that these children, as first cousins, in a small town like Callington would have spent much time together and have attended the same school. Again the elusive school records would have been useful.

My great grandmother, Helene August Sophie, the firstborn of Sophie and Roberts children is the most significant child of these families to me. The study of Fred's life has been undertaken because of its significance to Helene and my interest in the early Adelaide and South Australian history.

On 18 April 1866 Frederick married Mary Ann WATT/WHITFIELD. (Note on many records, particularly baptismal records of the children, her surname varies dramatically and is sometimes given as Watts). Frederick and Maryann's first child, a daughter, was born in 1867 and (four years after the birth of Helene Willemer) but unfortunately died 9 months later. She was not the first baby of my ancestors to be buried in Callington Cemetery. {The **Radbone** family had four infants already buried in the cemetery. The **Radbone** family, who also come to Callington, were the third of my ancestral family to reside in Callington. In actual fact three sets of my great grandparents lived in Callington and stayed till their deaths and were all buried in Callington (except one because of his death in the Adelaide Hospital, he was buried in a city Cemetery).}

Maryann and Frederick were to have another eight babies between 1868 and 1884. All these children survived infancy. In 2012 Alison, my daughter, and I investigated these children's lives and where they resided in South Australia and Adelaide. This helped put a picture together of some South Australia history and helped explain aspects of my descendants' lives. I have now written a detailed document on these children and their families and descendants. (One reason was so my information can be left at the South Australian Genealogical Society for the benefit of future families researching this family.) It required a great deal of research to follow through to current descendants. I was hoping that some of them may have some original family documents from the 1850s. I was extremely lucky to contact a current SOMMER descendant. In the white pages there were only a dozen SOMMERS listed, one of them, a Glenn sommer, was a descendant of Fred but he did not realise his ancestors were in Australia in the 1840s and of their life in Callington. The day after I contacted him he rang me explaining that he had a small family bible. In this bible was a list of all Frederick and Maryann's children and their birth dates and some of their deaths. This was wonderful to confirm some of what I had discovered. I was also able to explain to Glenn who this bible originally belonged to and how it came to be returned to his family.

I am not sure of Frederick's occupation during the time of the birth of the children. NEWSFLASH In August 2016 I spent a couple of days at the genealogy Society looking through microfiche the birth certificates of Fred's children. For the birth of the first child, 1867, Fred is referred to as farmer of Callington. At the time of the second child, 1868, he was a farmer and they lived near Woodside. At the time of the third and fourth birth 1869 and 1871 he was a labourer, their residence was near Oakbank. The next one says labourer but the residence is now Callington. At the sixth birth, 1875 we have a major change, the family is now residing in Adelaide and Fred is a carpenter at Pirie Street. But there is a return to the country in July 1879, the seventh child is born at Callington and Fred is now the publican of Callington. On the certificate Fred is a "licensed victualler". This is also the case for the eighth child born in 1881. For the birth of their last child in 1884 the microfiche was missing but the index gave her birth as at Callington. Unfortunately read comes across difficulties and becomes insolvent. On 23 Jan 1883 his debts 493 and his assets only 42 pounds.

The next tragedy on 6 June 1884 is the death of his brother-in-law, his sister's husband, Robert Willemer. Robert was injured in an explosion accident while working for the railways. He was badly injured with a rock blast and taken to Adelaide Hospital where he died aged only 42. He left behind nine children for his wife, Sophie to look after. Three months later was the occasion of the marriage of Frederick and Maryann's eldest child, Elizabeth, known as Bessie. In September 1884, she married Patrick O'Neill, who was from a farming family in the Callington area. Bessie was only 16 years of age and Patrick 24. Their first child, Frederick's first grandchild was born in August 1887 in Monarto South which is just near Callington.

But the next death was another tragedy that of his only sister Sophie are only five months after the death of her husband. She died of cancer of the stomach. This left her eldest daughter Helena in charge of the family of nine, at this stage Helene was 20 years old. The problem was the family did not have finances. There were interesting articles about two concerts, held locally to support the destitute WILLEMER family. Given the fact that Frederick was insolvent he would have not been able to support them.

Frederick and Maryann and a few of the children leave the Callington area sometime after this. I was first made aware of this when finding the marriage of their second child at Yatina in Sept 1890. Yatina is about three hours drive north of Adelaide. I was able to confirm their residence in Yatina in another way. In 2012, when I was aware that Fred was the publican in Callington, I was referred to a book which showed the historical licensees of many of the pubs in South Australia. In this it showed that Frederick (in actual fact Maryann) had the license for Yatina pub in 1890. I assume Maryann had the license because of Fred's insolvency.

Again a further piece of research discovered the availability of the Yatina school records at the SA genealogical Society, Unley. Parts of the records were available and I was able to confirm that some of Maryann and Frederick's children enrolled in December 1887 at Yatina primary School and that they left Yatina in November 1890.

When the family actually left Callington after 1884 and the birth of their ninth child, I do not know. They may have moved to Adelaide or gone directly to Yatina and I do not know why the family moved to this district. It may have been because this was the time of the mineral discoveries leading to the development of Broken Hill and the subsequent building of the railway line. This would have ensured the need to build settlements to house the many people building and maintaining the railway line.

Fred's second daughter, Sophie, is married to Robert Tannahill McLean who comes from Strathalbyn which is near Callington, so I am assuming that they met in the Callington days. Sophie and Robert were to move to Broken Hill. I discovered this as a result of the birth of their first and second children in Broken Hill. I believe they were there for approximately 10 years. It is of interest to note whether Frederick went to Broken Hill first and they followed or vice versa.

Who was left behind in Callington? Though I have established that Frederick and Maryann were in Yatina, I cannot confirm how many of the children went with them, apart from those on the school records. A tragic event confirms that their eldest son, William, was unlikely to be living with them. On 27 February 1889, while Fred and his family were residing in Yatina, William was involved in a fatal horsing accident in Callington. (*Note this is the son who was the original owner of the Bible that Glenn Sommer has in his possession and it was given to William by his teacher.) It appears William's occupation was an ostler, someone who works with horses. Unfortunately the death of their eldest son was not the only son to predecease Frederick and Maryann. In fact all four of their sons predeceased them. (The tragedy of the next three sons was that they were married with very young children. Two of them died of TB and one of pneumonia)

Whether other family members, daughters or sons also stayed in Callington I do not know. It is possible that Sophie was living in Callington and when she and Robert decided to marry they travelled to Yatina on their way to Broken Hill. They could have resided with Helene and the WILLEMER family their cousins.

In 2012 I had no idea how long Frederick and Maryann resided in Yatina. I knew they were in Adelaide for some years because of the information in a few post office directories. In April 2016 I came across an application for naturalisation by Frederick Sommer presented in Broken Hill 1904, and was actually not continued with at this time. In his application it confirmed his name, that he was from Hanover and it stated that he had been working in Broken Hill for 14 years! This information added a further twist to my lack of knowledge about the time period between 1890 and 1910.

Owing to a family member later living in Norwood I also checked the Norwood primary school records and surprise surprise I found some of the children enrolled in November 1890. This meant the family had moved directly from Yatina to Norwood. The children were under two different listings, girls and boys. The boys' data had included both pages of the documents and hence I can confirm that one of the sons was at school for 4 years and left April 1894. Unfortunately the girls' records only had the first page of each enrolment form which does not allow you to see the length of their attendance at school. Since then, from marriages of their children and post office directories I have been able to confirm that the family moved from Yatina and spent the rest of their lives in Adelaide. However it appears that Frederick worked in Adelaide as a carpenter or a labourer and when work was scarce travelled to Broken Hill and worked as a miner. (Frederick's occupation as carpenter and miner were listed in two of his children's enrolments. In the post office directories he was listed in some as a labourer and others as a carpenter!) The Broken Hill train line was completed in 1890 and the train journey was only a day. I suspect that Frederick spent time in Broken Hill and then returned to Adelaide when he could. This is not as extreme as it sounds, in the early 1900s many men travelled from South Australia or Victoria to Kalgoorlie and the goldmining in the area, leaving their families behind for months at a time and sending back some of their wages.

One month after Sophie's marriage, her eldest sister, Bessie gave birth to her second child a daughter in Yongala, which is a town just near Yatina. The question is, had Bessie and her husband moved with Fred and Maryann or did Bessie just go to her mother's for the birth of her second baby. As there are several Patrick O'Neills in South Australia at this time it is hard to trace Bessie and her husband Patrick. I have been unable to confirm where the O'Neills lived between 1890 and 1910. From their first child's birth certificate I know that Patrick was a labourer and was residing in Monarto South near Callington in Aug 1887. Their daughter was born in 1890, Patrick was a miner and was living at Callington. It is possible that Patrick worked on his father, Thomas's farm in Callington or helped in other farms in the area. The O'Neills eventually went to reside in Adelaide city perhaps in approx 1916.

In November 1890 Fred and Maryann and the children left Yatina to live in Norwood and Adelaide. Details of the next 10 years are hard to establish. In 1902 their third son Harry married. Harry was working in Port Adelaide in a boot manufacturer and one post office directories suggests he was a manager. Harry was to marry Edith Neck and they had two children, the first in Port Adelaide and the second in Adelaide so it appears that they have moved to Adelaide city. In the 1890s Helene WILLEMER's brothers and sisters, in other words Frederick Sommer's nieces and nephews, gradually moved from Callington. One sister went to live in Adelaide where she had three children, unfortunately she died at the birth of the third child. Another sister and brother went to Ballarat. One of her brothers, Frederick **Willemer**, went to Broken Hill where he married and his descendants have resided for at least 100 years. Now that I know Frederick **Sommer** and some of his children were in Broken Hill I believe that is the reason nephew Frederick **Willemer** went to Broken Hill. (Two years ago I was in touch with one of the grandchildren and he is now residing in Adelaide.) Her youngest sister married and began her married life in Adelaide before she too went to Melbourne. Helene herself, I believe went to Ballarat at the end of 1897 because this is when grandpa Radbone appears to leave the Callington school. Helene's closest sibling, the eldest boy in the family, William, stayed in Callington his whole life until just before his death. He died, at the age of 40, in the destitute asylum in Adelaide. This is where you went if you had no one to care for you when you were ill.

The marriage of Frederick's and Maryann's other children occurred subsequently in 1906, 1908 and 1909. Some of these marriages and some of the grandchildren's marriages were at the Methodist Manse Morphett Street. One wonders if this was the church the family attended.

In the middle of these marriages as I mentioned earlier tragedy was to strike. On 19 Aug 1907 Harry died, the first of the three married sons to predecease his parents. He was aged only 30 and had 2 infant children. In the next five years

there followed the births of more grandchildren. In 1912 Fred and Maryann became great grandparents after the marriage of their first child, Bessie's two children and two subsequent births. Then in 1816 two more of their married sons died within one month of each other. Studying this family and their births, marriages and deaths was an interesting history lesson but the tragedies were not unique to our family.

On 24 December 1920 Frederick Sommer was to die at his residence 18 David Street in the city of Adelaide aged 74. He was buried with his son Albert James in the West Terrace Cemetery. Maryann survived him by nearly 8 years. She lived with her daughter Agnes Wilkinson in Hume Street. She died on 23 July 1928 and was buried in West Terrace Cemetery. Subsequently Agnes and her husband were buried with her.

I have produced a detailed document about the lives of each of Fred and Maryann's nine children.

..ooOOoo..