Finding God at Work in our Family Roots

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Recommended Citation
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Finding God at work in our Family Roots

Keith Clouten
2018
The Cloutens Migrate to Australia

English tradition says that people stop where they started. They die in the village where they were born, buried with their ancestors. Nothing changes—or if it does, the tortoise gets there first. Now and then, however, someone breaks with tradition and plunges into a new future.

The Clout family occupied the village of Hunton, Kent, for multiple centuries and generations. Then, in 1790, William Clout was born. While still a teenager, William flew the coup, headed to the seaport of Dover, found a girl he liked, discarded his family name, married at 19 as William “Clouten”, and moved with his sweetheart to the nearby seaside town of Folkestone. One of their six children, George, born in 1816, inherited his father’s get-up-and-go, married, and in 1847 sailed from Plymouth with his wife and two children for distant New South Wales, just when the colony was casting off its role as a convict settlement. Their ship for the three-month voyage was the Tory. This vessel was already distinguished for its role in bringing a party of men to the South Pacific in 1839, with the express purpose of preparing the way for settlement in the country of New Zealand.

This painting depicts arrival of the Tory in Wellington Harbor, New Zealand, 1839.

Above: St. Mary’s Church. Hunton, Kent, where I’m certain some of my ancestors are buried. Below: Ngaire with cousins, Robert and Beverley Symonds.
George and Elizabeth Clouten had four children, but lost two girls to an early death, so they landed in Sydney in 1848 with a twelve-year-old daughter and a ten-year-old son, William. Intent on making their home in a new land that was bursting with opportunities, George soon moved with his family northwards to Maitland, a town up the river from Newcastle, and later, about 1870, to Belmont on the eastern shores of beautiful Lake Macquarie. There, with past experience as a sawyer, George built first, a small house, then a boat for fishing on the lake. He soon established the first commercial “fish run” from the lake to the expanding markets of Newcastle, 15 miles away.\(^2\)

While the family was living in the Maitland area, young William met Naomi Gill, a daughter of Reverend Silas Gill, one of the colony’s pioneering Methodist missionaries.\(^3\) Were the Cloutens early converts to Methodism? We do not know. William was just 18, and Naomi 17, when in 1858 they were married in the parsonage at Maitland. The couple wasted no time in starting their own family of twelve children – six boys and six girls – their firstborn in 1859 being my grandfather, William John (“Bill”) Clouten.

William and Naomi’s first home after their marriage was at Sugarloaf, near Mount Vincent, in the shadow of the Watagan mountains, inland from Lake Macquarie. By 1870, though, they had moved to Belmont, where William’s father, George, was already getting established in the fishing business.

William identified himself as a carpenter when he signed a petition for the opening of a school at Belmont. Unfortunately, the school came too late for Billy, who thus missed out on a formal education. This boy’s future lay in boat building and fishing, like his grandfather, George. Bill also seems to have shared his parents’ ambition to populate the country. In 1883, he married a diminutive 17-year-old, Jane Cowell, whose father qualified as a dwarf. Bill and Jane produced twelve children between 1884 and 1911, the last of their offspring being Herbert, my father. I remember Jane Clouten as my “Little Grandma”.

Early land plan (1877) of Belmont, Lake Macquarie: George Clouten 52 acres

Above: George Clouten (1816-1892)
Below: William Clouten (1839-1919)
Lakeside Developments

As settlement opened up new areas in northern New South Wales, the need for a northern railroad from Sydney to Newcastle and beyond to Brisbane became a priority. The completion of the line on the western (inland) side of Lake Macquarie in 1887 brought some interesting developments to the region.

The Excelsior land development company in Sydney acquired a large piece of land at the northern end of Lake Macquarie and advertised a new township with hundreds of desirable lakeshore building sites. They named it Toronto, honoring a champion Canadian sculler, Ned Hanlan, who demonstrated his rowing prowess on Sydney Harbor in 1884. William and Naomi Clouten moved to Toronto from Belmont in or about 1896. Toronto grew rapidly and was a prosperous town by the time I was born at nearby Stoney Creek in 1938.

The story was very different for a lumber-cutting village inland from the western shores of the lake. Cooranbong was settled by sawyers who discovered vast stands of rain-forest hardwoods in the deep, well-watered valleys of the nearby Watagan mountains. Since Dora Creek was a navigable waterway for several miles upstream from Lake Macquarie, Cooranbong became a shipping place for lumber. Small steamers plied the waters of Dora Creek, the lake, and its channel to the sea.

Above: Map of Lake Macquarie and the Tuggerah Lakes. Places associated with family history include Toronto, Stoney Creek, Belmont, Dora Creek, Cooranbong, Avondale, Martinsville, and Tacoma on Tuggerah Lakes.

Below: Two early drawings of the lumber industry at Cooranbong, including loading a paddle-wheel steamer on Dora Creek.
Two things threatened the future of Cooranbong. The new railway in 1887 bypassed the town when it crossed Dora Creek a few miles downstream and created a new place, Morisset, as a rail shipping point for forest products. Worse still was the arrival of a major economic depression that slapped the Australian colonies during the 1890s. The lumber market collapsed, leaving dozens of families around Cooranbong without employment and income.

That was the situation in May of 1894, when a small party of Seventh-day Adventists alighted from the train at the small Dora Creek platform. One of them was Ellen White. The group rented a small creek-side cabin and a couple of boats which they rowed up the creek about three miles to inspect a 1500-acre bush property near Cooranbong that was for sale at a remarkably low price. “The boat ride was very enjoyable,” wrote Ellen, “though the rowers had to change hands to rest each other.”5 The small Adventist membership in Australia was seeking a place to build a school, but funds were scarce. “We are planning to buy a tract of land, and we can scarcely get enough money to go and see it,” wrote Willie White, Ellen’s son.5

The group inspected the Cooranbong property, but were undecided until the following morning, when they met together for worship in the small Dora Creek cabin. During prayer, one of their number experienced miraculous recovery from an illness. The land was purchased, and soon a team of young men were clearing the forest for a school site and preparing lumber at a small sawmill they set up near the creek. They also cut a roadway to the school site. By the spring of 1895, Ellen White had selected and purchased 40 acres on the Avondale Road, and by year’s end she and her staff were ready to move from Sydney to her new home, “Sunnyside.”8

We left my grandparents, Bill and Jane Clouten, with their growing family, as newcomers to Dora Creek. The Newcastle Almanac of 1883 described Dora Creek as an agricultural village with a scattered population employed in farming and timber-getting. That was before construction of the northern railway in 1887. By the early 1890s, the village was populated by fishermen who were using the railroad to get their fish to the Sydney and Newcastle markets. Before ice became available, the fishermen probably followed a common practice of storing their catches in sawdust pits in front of their houses. They would then pack the fish with bracken ferns between each layer and someone would take them by spring cart to the train.9
The Cloutens at Dora Creek

The Cloutens were among the residents at Dora Creek in 1894 when the Adventist land-seekers made their row-boat journey up the stream to Cooranbong, and soon afterwards opened the Avondale School.

It is apparent, from Ellen White’s Sunnyside diary and letters, that Bill Clouten was an early convert to the Adventist faith. His parents were practicing Christians of the Methodist faith. In July 1897, Ellen referred to Bill in her diary as “Brother Clouten.” It is likely that the Cloutens were among some Dora Creek families who attended Sabbath School meetings in an old, disused schoolhouse. Ellen visited the site and described it as “an old schoolhouse enclosed—no finishing within, only hard benches without backs. The location was good... Brother Herbert Lacey spoke several times in this place, leaving an excellent impression.

In spite of the uninviting, rude place all seemed to listen with deepest interest.” One of Ellen’s workers, Minnie Hawkins, helped with the Sabbath School, and Ellen’s son, W.C. White, “either speaks to the people himself, or provides someone to take charge of the services. We feel deeply the wants of these people. Several have embraced the Sabbath, and have discarded tobacco, tea, and meat.”

On at least one occasion, Ellen herself spoke at the old schoolhouse: “There were forty-two present and they listened with most earnest attention. I had much freedom speaking to them from Matthew 6: ‘Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth.’ We hope the little company of believers—who were mostly fishermen—and unbelievers, were hearing and receiving the seeds of truth. I was much pleased to see that the children manifested interest in hearing the words spoken... The students are appointed to go out into the surrounding neighborhoods to have little gatherings in the

Top: Ellen White (this photo believed to be from the time she was in Australia).
Below: Dora Creek Public School, 1896, Peter Gardiner, teacher. Among the children pictured are likely four young Cloutens: George (12), Margaret (9), Alfred (8), and Edith (6).
homes of those who know not the truth, and encourage them to come to the chapel.”

It is possible that one of the homes visited by the Avondale students was the Clouten home at Dora Creek.

Once Ellen White was settled in her “Sunnyside” home, she quickly became aware of the great needs of many people in the surrounding communities. Extreme poverty and the total lack of medical facilities took its toll on the population. The nearest doctor was 35 miles away and rarely called because his visits were unaffordable. However, Ellen White was accompanied throughout her nine years in Australia by a trained American nurse, Sara McEnterfer, whose services were quickly discovered and utilized, especially because there was never any charge for her visits to individuals in the surrounding communities.

Reports of Sara’s caring visits spread quickly by “bush telegraph.” It led to the following story, which Ellen White penned in her daily diary in July 1897. All the details that follow come from her diary:

“I awoke at three o’clock and prepared myself to write. . . . While I was busily writing upon important matters, Sara came interrupting me, saying Brother Clouten had just come running from Dora Creek, so out of breath he could scarcely speak, stating, ‘There is at Dora Creek a man very sick with inflammation of the lungs, and he will and must die unless he has help.’”

The sick man lived near the Cloutens. In response to grandfather’s urgent message, Sara McEnterfer and May white, Ellen’s daughter-in-law, went the three miles to Dora Creek that Friday morning as soon as they could gather up articles and harness the horse and buggy. They found the poor man delirious, eyes glazed, in a tightly closed room and surrounded by his family. Sara took charge at once, asked family members to leave the room, opened the window, conscripted Bill Clouten to assist in giving the man an enema, and left him soundly sleeping for the first time in five days.

Soon after Sara left that Friday morning, a doctor, who’d been sent for five days earlier, arrived by train from Newcastle. Finding the man rational and looking better, the doctor suggested he be given “a drop or two of liquor” if he had sinking spells. Soon afterwards. Bill Clouten came over, and finding a blazing fire and every window closed, “he went to work at once and threw the wood out of doors, put out the fire, bathed his face and head, and opened the window and let in air. The sick man said, ‘You are a good fellow, Billy Clouten. You know what to do for a fellow. I feel better.’”

Bill remained with him until past ten that night. “He saw the brothers and father were drinking rum and they proposed giving the sick man some, but Clouten said, ‘Do not give him one drop. If you do, it will kill him, and I will not remain.’ They said they would not give him any.

“Early next morning, Clouten went to the house, and learned the patient was dead. Then said Clouten, ‘You gave him liquor.’ They said they did. Mrs. Swan, a neighbor, who had been with Sara while she was giving him treatment, came in early to see the patient and found he had died. Said she to the mother, ‘They have given him liquor.’ ‘Yes,’ said the mother, ‘all they could possibly stuff down him.’ ‘Well,’ said Mrs. Swan, ‘they have killed him.’ She charged it all upon the doctor who advised that a little liquor be given him, but the men, drinking themselves, were in no condition to stop with a drop or two. The man was doing well, remarkably well. They are a very affectionate family, but liquor had beclouded their senses.”
Cloutens move to Martinsville

Writing about my grandfather in her diary dated February 25, 1899, Ellen White said: “The father of one family, now converted to the truth, was a fisherman, smoking and drinking. He has good natural abilities, but uneducated. The fishing business is now very poor and uncertain, and few can sustain their families. This brother went out into the bush, after selling his boat, and commenced to clear land. He was a boat builder and yet he could not support his family. He is at work and has raised vegetables enough to keep them. He has raised melons and other things. Things in the bread line he has to buy, also clothing, but they are doing as well as could be expected. He is trying to win souls to the truth.”

The place “in the bush” where Bill and his family chose to live was the scattered village of Martinsville, several miles upstream from Cooranbong. Here the heavily forested valleys of the Watagan Mountains were accessible only by rough dray tracks. The area was popularly referred to as “The Brush”. There were probably a couple of reasons why grandfather chose to move there from Dora Creek in 1898. One of them had to do with an over-supply of fish for the depressed economy of Sydney and Newcastle.

In 1993, several years before he passed away, my father Herbert wrote the story of his life. There he recalls hearing his dad tell about their years at Martinsville, including their contacts with Ellen White and the Adventist community. He described how his father, Bill Clouten, had to clear their property, using a team of horses, harnessed to a dragline, to bring felled logs to the foot of the mountain, where they were loaded on a bullock wagon to be taken to a sawmill at Dora Creek.

One day, about fifty years ago, when Cooranbong was my home, we drove through Martinsville to the end of Wilkinson’s Road along Deep Creek, and found the site (lot no. 111) of the old Clouten farm selection. We found most of the property covered with new forest growth, and no trace of the Cloutens’ bush cabin.

Pictures from Top: Fishing Boats at Dora Creek, 1910; Clearing the Watagan Brush; The Road to Martinsville, 1925; Healy’s Sawmill at Dora Creek, 1910.
Ellen White wrote at length about the Clouten family’s Adventist experience.\textsuperscript{13}

“\textit{Sister Sara McEnterfer in company with Brother James, my farmer, has just gone to visit Brother Clouten, who lives six miles from here in the bush. This brother has embraced the truth since we came to Cooranbong. He was a fisherman, uneducated, yet possessing considerable natural ability. Before accepting the truth, he smoked night and day; but the truth took hold of his heart. He received it and gave up his pipe, and the Lord blessed him in this. Then came another battle on the question of drinking tea. He went to the Lord for strength, and He helped him to renounce his habit. Leaving off the eating of flesh of dead animals was a severe trial for the poor fisherman, but he passed through step by step, and obtained a bright experience. Brother Clouten is showing by his life that he has a living connection with God. His testimony is always full of rich experience.}

“\textit{Brother Clouten has been soundly converted and his fellow fishermen think it the most wonderful case on record. He has attended no school but the school of the great Teacher, and he is a new man in Christ. His case has been, as every case should be, a recommendation to the truth we are advocating. He seems to be led and taught by God, and he is teaching others. He and his eldest children, eight, ten, and twelve years old, walk six miles to Sabbath School and meeting when the weather will permit.}

“\textit{Brother Clouten is a fisherman, but he could not support his family by fishing, and so moved away into the bush, to a place a mile from where carriages can go. He took up a bit of land and is cultivating it. He is living mostly upon what he produces. He is a boatmaker, and sold his boat to purchase this land. His father, mother, and brother live near him, and we expect them all to receive the truth.”}

Unfortunately, Ellen’s last expectation did not happen. William and Naomi Clouten had been living for the past few years at Toronto, where William was lay-preacher at the United Free Methodist Church. Bill’s choice to move into the Martinsville bush in 1897 must have influenced his parents to leave Toronto and join the younger Cloutens on their bush property. Two of their sons, George and Ernest—Bill’s younger brothers—came with them. This family were faithful Methodist Christians. At Martinsville, Bill’s father was soon invited to share the pulpit of the Martinsville Union Church whenever it was the Methodists’ turn to worship there; and Bill’s brother, George, assisted his father as a Sunday-School superintendent for several years.\textsuperscript{14}
When they lived at Dora Creek, Bill Clouten had sought Sara McEnterfer’s help in attempting to save the life of a dying man. Now, at Martinsville, it was Sara’s turn to support Bill during his bout with a threatening illness. Ellen White tells the story:  

“Now news has come to us that our beloved brother has come down with typhoid fever. Mr. Pringle is the only man in the village who knows anything about giving treatment without drugs; but six weeks ago he was called upon to attend Mr. Barnes, who was also down with typhoid. He has stayed with him night and day, and has now returned to his home, worn out with the strain. So he cannot be depended on to nurse Brother Clouten.

“Sara and Brother James have gone to see what the situation is. If Brother Clouten can be moved, he must be brought within our reach, even if he has to be carried on a litter. We cannot let him lie there and die, to leave his wife and children to the mercy of whoever will have mercy on them.”

Writing again a few days later, Ellen said: “Sara has just returned with the good news that Brother Clouten is much better. Brother Clouten is a health reformer, and when his case was given vigorous treatment, the fever was mastered. He is weak, but is up and dressed, and is cheerful and happy in the Lord. Sara says that the corn he is growing will help largely to sustain his family. They have a hand mill, and grind this corn over and over until it is fine. From this they make their bread, for they have not money to purchase fine flour. We shall send them some flour. Brother Clouten has that in him that will not allow him, if he has health, to depend on any one. But the man who purchased his boat has paid him nothing, for he could not.”

“W.C. White saw Brother Clouten’s necessity, and borrowed eight pounds from our blacksmith and loaned it to him, that he might make a beginning. And all are glad and more than astonished to see the beginning he has made. About twelve acres have been cleared and planted with sweet corn and field corn. The sweet corn they will eat, and the field corn they will sell. The vegetables that have been grown help a great deal in supporting the family. The little lads are working with their father like little farmers. They are so earnest and full of zeal that it is amusing to look at them and see how happy they are in their work. They have not much society besides their own family connections, but they are in the very best school they could be in.”
In 1900, Ellen White as well as her son, W.C. White and family, moved back to America. They were missed for their loving care to the community, but their evangelistic efforts were not always appreciated. Ellen noted more than once that many of the Martinsville community were bitterly opposed to their zealous soul-seeking, and refused Adventists the use of their “union” church for meetings. “There are two little churches in this place, very small and rough. But the people are so afraid that we shall convert some of their number that they will not give us the use of them.” 

On Sunday afternoon I filled an appointment at Martinsville, and spoke to the people in the open air. Our meeting was held in a paddock which had no entrance. I had either to crawl under the fence or climb over. I chose to crawl under.”

The Sunday-keeping Methodists, which of course included the senior William and Naomi Clouten, strongly opposed the influence of the “Saturday keepers”. It was largely under these circumstances that my grandparents abandoned their newfound Adventist faith, and grandfather Bill was soon smoking his pipe again.

About 1905, Bill and Jane said goodbye to their bush selection at Martinsville. It was time to do so. Their oldest children were no longer teenagers, they were living in a social backwater, and Bill’s aging parents were planning to move to Sydney. Furthermore, I think my grandfather missed his world of boats and fishing, so the family moved a few miles south to the small fishing community of Tacoma on Wyong Creek, near its outlet into the Tuggerah Lakes. It was there, in 1911, that their twelfth and last child, Herbert, was born. By that time their eldest, George, was married with two small children, and operating his own fishing enterprise. There was no Adventist presence in the Wyong district, so the flickering faith of my grandparents died.
A couple of years after my father was born, Bill moved his family again, first to Toronto, where he operated a small boats-for-hire business on the waterfront. An undated photograph depicts his boat shed, with “Boats for Hire” painted on the front. By about this time, though, Bill suffered increasingly from an old leg injury, which limited his ability to manage his boat work. He needed the help of a younger man. Four older sons were now married with families of their own, busy with their fishing operations on the Tuggerah Lakes. The fifth son, Leslie, now in his late teens, remained as grandfather’s “right-hand-man”.

Then war broke out in Europe, and Leslie responded to the call for young men to serve their country. At 20 years of age, he enlisted in the Australian Army, joining the 35th Battalion formed in Newcastle, New South Wales, in December 1915. Three years later, during a heavy battle at Villers-Bretonneux, northern France, Leslie was severely wounded, and died the following day. I still have a postcard letter that Leslie wrote to his little brother, Herbert, from the firing line in Belgium, just before Christmas in 1917.

Sad and discouraged with the news from the war front, and struggling to carry on his work, Bill Clouten closed his boat shed at Toronto. My father recounts how the family made several short-term moves after the War—to the mining town of Weston, where Bill operated a small school store; to a suburb of Newcastle with a small fish shop; and then to Kempsey, 300 miles north, where he caught river fish and sold them in town. None of those ventures were successful, so Bill finally invested in a horse and buggy for the long trek south, back to Tacoma on Wyong Creek.

My father began his schooling at Toronto, and continued it at Tacoma: “I attended a small bush school, one teacher, grades 1-6, and about 25 children. You may wonder why I called it a bush school. The reason is that it was built about one quarter of a mile from the village, on a clearing in the middle of a paperbark Ti Tree scrub.” Dad did not mention that the school was on the south side of the creek, which meant that he and his sister, Frances, had to join other kids on the school boat each day.

At twelve years, Herbert finished school and began working full-time with his father in boat building and repairing. By the time he turned 18, Herbert had his own fishing boat. He was now a commercial fisherman.
My father continues the story:  

“The years passed, times were hard, fish were scarce, and not much work in the boat-building industry. We decided to move to Lake Macquarie, a large lake just north of Tuggerah lake, where we were living. We little knew what a change this move would make in our lives.”

It wasn’t the first time Bill and Jane had lived at Toronto, operating a boats-for-hire business on the lake front, but that was only for a short time. Now, with retirement a necessity, Bill in 1929 bought a small section of land at Stoney Creek, Toronto. There he built a small cottage that was big enough for Jane and himself, as well as 18-year-old Herbert. All the other chicks had flown.

A short time after they moved, a gentleman named William Prees stopped at their house with a copy of *Signs of the Times*. Bill was happy to receive and read the magazine. When Mr. Prees invited Bill to come to his home on Saturdays and join a few other folk for Sabbath School, Bill readily accepted the invitation. Herbert did not join them. “I had not heard of Adventists, and thought it ridiculous to observe Saturday as Sabbath, especially since Saturdays were days of much activity.”

However, Herbert’s mother was also interested in what the Adventists were doing. “She told me the story of how they had been members of the Adventist Church many years before my time. She told me how happy the home had been, when they were Seventh-day Adventists. Already I could see a transformation taking place in my father’s life. One day he told us he was going to quit smoking. This made us very happy. He put his pipe on the mantel shelf, and I think a few days later it finished up in the fire.”

Photographs from top: (1) Toronto waterfront, showing Bill Clouten’s “Boats for Hire” shed; (2) Early photo of Toronto Public School, Herbert’s first school. (3) Wedding of Margaret Clouten at Toronto, 1910 (From left: George Clouten (26) holding Frances (2), Alf (22), George Bendeich, Margaret Clouten (23), Edith (20), Abe (16), Abraham Cowell (Jane Clouten’s father), Nathaniel (12), Jane Clouten, Bill Clouten. In front, Mabel and Ethel.
“Not long after this I went to the letter box to get the mail, and there was an invitation to attend a Mission Outreach conducted by lay members from Avondale College. It was to be held Sunday nights in a small hall about a mile across the lake from where we lived. It caused some problems, as Dad wasn’t able to manage the boat, and start the motor. Another problem was that Monday morning was one of my best times for selling my supply of fish. But anyhow, we decided to attend the meetings. I would have my fishing net and gear in the boat all ready, and after the meeting, when I had taken my parents home, I would go fishing as usual. Although it was late when I’d get to the fishing grounds, the Lord always supplied me with a good catch of fish.

“The final meeting came all too soon. The call was made to accept Christ and the Three Angels Message. The three of us accepted the call. That night I went fishing as usual. My heart was overflowing with peace and happiness. I stopped the motor out in the middle of the lake, knelt down and surrendered my life to Christ.”

Shortly after this, all three (Bill and Jane Clouten, and Herbert) were baptized in the outdoor font at Avondale College. It was a re-baptism for Bill Clouten. A church was organized across the lake in Fennell Bay as a result of the Mission Outreach. Soon afterwards, a church was organized in Toronto, and the three became charter members.

The first official meeting of the Toronto Seventh-day Adventist Church was held in 1932 in the old Blackalls Bakehouse. It was used for meetings until 1941, when a church building was erected in another location.
Another Family Migrates to Australia

My mother, Pearl Clouten, was born in England in 1909. She was a little girl when her family moved to Australia shortly before the Great War broke out in Europe. As a small boy, I had clear memories of my mother preparing food parcels which she mailed periodically to three of her cousins in the “home country” during and soon after World War II – Aunt Rosie in Dover, Aunt Hetty in Cornwall, and a third living at Ashford, Kent. My mother’s maiden name was Hawkins, but my young mind never figured out why she had an older brother, my Uncle Bert, whose last name was Griggs. Mum never talked about her relationship to her brother, but it puzzled me.

Let’s go back a couple of centuries, and find ourselves at Mersham, a small village in the County of Kent, England. Among the Mersham farmers were Stephen and Mary Wilson. In 1830, they produced twins, John and Mary. When John Wilson grew up, he married Susan-na Ashman. John worked as a shepherd for a local farmer. The couple had nine children – six boys and three girls – most of them born while they lived near Mersham. One son, Charles, and his wife Eliza, had several children, among them my mother’s aunts Rosie and Hetty. Another of John and Mary’s sons was Ernest Wilson, born on the farm in 1872.  

Church and graveyard in the small village of Mersham, Kent. The Griggs family is still represented in this area.

This painting in the British Maritime Museum at Greenwich near London depicts the June 1893 tragedy in the Mediterranean when the troop ship Camperdown (right) collided with H.M.S. Victoria (left). Ernest Wilson was on board the Camperdown at the time.
John Wilson worked for a farmer who employed Ernie and other boys each summer to scare birds off the fruit and corn on his farm. The boys went to school in the winter.

By the time he turned 18, Ernie was working full-time for the farmer, and asked for a man’s wage. His request was refused, so soon afterwards, Ernie left the farm and joined the British Navy. So it happened that in June 1893, he was on board the ship Camperdown, one of a squadron of vessels sailing along the coast of Tripoli in the Mediterranean. On June 22nd, the Camperdown was involved in a difficult maneuver when it collided with H.M.S. Victoria, causing the Victoria to capsize and sink. This maritime disaster resulted in the loss of 370 officers and crew.  

Immediately after this maritime tragedy, Ernest Wilson “jumped ship”, fled the Navy, changed his name to “Henry Hawkins”, and went to Canada. For the next few years he worked his way across that country, eventually arriving at Vancouver, British Columbia. By 1903, however, he was back in England, probably at his home village of Mersham.

Mersham and its surrounding hamlets was also a generational home of the Griggs family. Less than four miles from Mersham is another small village, Sellindge. In 1870, James and Fanny Griggs were living there when they gave birth to a daughter, Mary Ann, baptized October 30, 1870, at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin in Sellindge. As a single young lady, Mary Ann found employment as a domestic servant on a farm at nearby Monks Horton. It was there, at 22 years of age, that she became pregnant, giving birth to a son who was baptized as Herbert Griggs. Mary was very likely living with her parents and caring for her son when, about ten years later, she met Ernest Wilson, alias Henry Hawkins. In 1903 the two were married in a registry office at Dover. Henry took a job at a nursery garden near Sandwich, Kent, where in 1909 the couple had a baby daughter, Pearl. Shortly before the outbreak of the War in 1914, Henry and Mary Ann, with Pearl and her half-brother, Herbert, migrated to Australia.
It is interesting that Henry Hawkins never shared his story with my mother. She knew virtually nothing about the early lives of her parents in England. When, in retirement, my parents took a trip to England, my mother was shocked and bewildered to discover that she came from the Wilson clan.

It was soon after the Hawkins arrival in Sydney that Herbert enlisted with the Australian Army, joining the 19th Battalion which left for Egypt in June 1914. Soon afterwards the Battalion joined other Australian and New Zealand forces in Turkey. Bert survived the horrendous battle at ANZAC Cove, Gallipoli, and went on to join major offensives in France. He was wounded on two occasions during the European War, but returned to Australia in February 1919 where he was awarded several medals including the Gallipoli Medal. 23

Meanwhile, the Hawkins couple, with Pearl, resided temporarily in a couple of different localities in New South Wales before choosing to settle at Martinsville in 1918. Why they chose a remote village in the district of Lake Macquarie, I do not know. Henry purchased a house and sixteen acres of land on which he developed a citrus orchard and poultry farm. Pearl attended the small, one-teacher, Martinsville public school. 24

Not long after their arrival at Martinsville, they were visited by a neighbor Seventh-day Adventist, who invited them to some Sunday night house meetings conducted by students from Avondale College. Pearl’s father was given a copy of Great Controversy, which he read each night using a kerosene lamp. There were more Bible studies before Henry and Mary Hawkins were baptized in Dora Creek at a site that had become known as the “Dry Log”. Back in 1894, a small group of young men who lived in tents alongside the old Healey Hotel in Cooranbong, discovered a short-cut through the bush to their work at the future Avondale school.
They crossed Dora Creek over the trunk of a fallen tree, which soon became known as “the Dry Log.” During the 1920s, several baptisms were conducted at the Dry Log, and on occasion the place was used for open-air Sabbath services.

A short piece in the church paper of March 1926, reported on the baptism of the Hawkins couple and several others at the Dry Log. “On this occasion a husband and wife from Martinsville went into the watery grave together. After many years of noting the work of the Lord and viewing the lives of God’s children, these two dear souls have decided to cast in their lot with the people of God.”

When I was a small boy, soon after we moved from Toronto to Cooranbong, Mum took me along the old bush trail to the Dry Log, to show me where her parents were baptized.

In 1930 their daughter, Pearl, was baptized in the newly built outdoor font at Avondale College, where she spent one year as a resident student. At about the same time, Herbert Griggs married May Conley, a Seventh-day Adventist, and they had a son, Bruce. When Neville and I were young, we occasionally visited the Griggs family on their small farm near Ourimbah, a few miles south of Cooranbong.
How It All Came Together

The story is best told in my father’s own words: 12

“I was now 17 years old. A new family had come to live in Toronto. They were new Adventists, Mr. & Mrs. Hawkins, and their daughter. They had previously lived at Martinsville. Mr. Hawkins opened a fruit and vegetable shop. He also started a fruit and vegetable run, going from door to door. One day when he called, I was playing the mandolin. He asked my father who was playing the music. Dad told him it was his son. I heard them talking, and went to the door. He said that his daughter played the mandolin, but it had a couple of broken strings. I told him that I would call in sometime and put the strings on and tune it for her. We invited them to go over to the church with us, which they gladly accepted. Mrs. Hawkins was not able to attend regularly, as she suffered with a chest problem. That meant we had two passengers in the boat each Sabbath.
“The church appointed me as a Deacon, and also Young People’s Leader. I had never attended a young peoples’ meeting. Miss Hawkins had spent one year at Avondale College, and she offered to help me with the programs. She became my assistant, and after this was known as Pearl to me for the rest of our lives. I called at their home one day, and put the strings on the mandolin, and tuned it for her, which made her very happy. They invited me to come again, and the next time I went, I took my instrument with me, and we started to play duets together.

“At this time there was a spare section of land next to our home, and my parents suggested to me one day that I should buy it. I thought about it, thinking it would be handy, and that I would be able to make a bigger vegetable garden, so I went ahead and bought it.

“The friendship between Pearl and I had developed over the years, and although we had never discussed it, we both realized that there was more than friendship between us. We loved each other. We were always so happy to be together. Pearl would walk down to our home at Stoney Creek a couple of times a week, and I would go to her home and visit. They were happy occasions for both of us.”

The rest is history. Herbert went to work building a house on the lot next to his folks. His father died of lung cancer in August 1934. Three months later, on November 1, 1934, the wedding took place. I put in an appearance In January 1938, then Neville in February 1940. Although grandfather Bill died four years before I was born, my “Little Grandma” lived next door to us for several more years. On my mother’s side, Grandpa Henry died before I turned four, but “Big Grandma” Hawkins lived with us until she passed to her rest in 1950. By that time our family had moved from Toronto to Cooranbong, where Dad secured employment in the Weetbix factory, and Neville and I attended church school.

From left: Henry Hawkins, Herbert Griggs, Mary and Ken Bendeich, Herbert and Pearl, Doris Bendeich, Margaret and George Bendeich, Pastor R.A. Salton. Front: May Conley, Bruce Griggs, Mary Hawkins, Gordon Bendeich, Jane Clouten, Ethel Dennis Clouten.

Top: Pearl Hawkins at age 21; Above: Herbert and Pearl at their wedding, 1934.
Exploring one’s family roots is fun. Sometimes it uncovers fascinating and important information. I recall Marcus Garvey’s words: “A people without the knowledge of their past history is like a tree without roots.” Digging around in my family’s roots, I’ve come across some unique characters: individuals who discarded tradition, changed their names, migrated to the ends of the earth, sacrificed for their families and for their country, cared for their neighbors, and grabbed at new opportunities. I have wondered if I inherited any of that wild, caring, adventurous spirit.

Some of my family roots became intertwined in amazing ways. I believe some miracles happened. I see evidence that God brought some of the rootstock together in ways that no nurseryman could ever have accomplished; and I think it all happened according to a long-term plan in which I am somehow involved. The Apostle Paul said it well: “We are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.”

I am wonderfully inspired when I think about my grandfather’s story, about the caring and commitment of Ellen White, her family, and her nurse, to the desperate needs of their surrounding community. It was a time when there were no motor vehicles, no telephones, and roads, when they existed, were little more than rutted and bumpy trails, dusty in the dry, and muddy in the wet. Yet these women went way beyond the call of duty in meeting the needs of sick, injured, or hungry people. I see how Ellen White practiced in her daily life what she encouraged all of us to do when she wrote these words in Ministry of Healing, published in 1905: “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’”

21
1  Cloutlines: newsletter of the Clout Descendants Society, no. 26, June 1996.
2  Sydney Morning Herald, 23 June, 1874.
5  Ellen White: Letter 82, 1894.
6  W.C. White to C.H. Jones, 16 May 1894.
7  White: Letter 114, 1898.
10 Ellen White: Manuscript 174 [diary] dated July 23 and July 24. (Her diary gives the name of “Cloutsen” which must have been a transcription error.
11 White: Manuscript 183 [diary], 1899..
13 White: Manuscript 183 [diary], 1899.
15 White: Letter 62, 1899
16 White: Letter 74, 1899
18 Notes prepared by Neville Clouten during a visit to the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, about 2009.
20 “Recollectons of Mr. Herbert Clouten”, July 1975.
21 My information about Ernest Wilson comes from letters written to me by Robert Symonds, whose mother, my “Aunt Hetty”, was a niece of Ernest Wilson.
22 S.T. Abrahamson, “The Victoria and Camperdown Disaster.”
23 Information collected by Neville Clouten from Australian government war service records. Neville also has a typescript of Herbert Griggs’ war diary and two of his war medals.
24 “Mrs. H. Clouten” [recollections], July 1975.
26 Ephesians 2: 10, NLT.