

## The Dowdell Forebears

This name is variously spelt in the records as Dowdell, Dowdal, Dowdale, Doudell and Dowdle. The eldest surviving male in each generation was named Charles. I have maintained the spelling variations as they appear in the various resources.

In 1793 the *Sugar Cane* arrived in Port Jackson from Cork, Ireland. She carried one-hundred-and-ten male and fifty female convicts and a freight of beef, pork, flour, limestone, clothing and necessities for the young colony. On board were Charles Dowdle and Rose Leonard, both sentenced in Dublin to seven years penal servitude (Charles in April 1791 and Rose in January 1792).

We do not know Charles's misdemeanour, but it is recorded in the 'Public Register or the Freeman's Journal' of January 12th 1792 published in Dublin, that Rose Leonard was sentenced at the Tholsel Quarter Sessions for "stealing a double-cased silver watch, value 1 pound, the property of James Harley". At the same Sessions one John McDonogh received the same sentence of seven years transportation for stealing a pair of shoes.

Charles and Rose were more fortunate than most in their transport. After the brutality and heavy death roll of the Second Fleet, the Home Office decreed that convict ships should carry a surgeon charged with supervision of the passengers and their treatment. There was only one death on the 'Sugar Cane' - a man executed for mutiny. He was accused of planning to seize the ship and was found out of his shackles. It was an exceptionally fast run from Rio - sixty-three days. But the Colony was in dire straits from drought and shortage of food and from the maladministration of Major Grose who had succeeded Governor Philip. A benign and just regime gave way to military power and corruption.

At Port Jackson on April 4th 1796 a son, named Charles, was born to Charles Dowdal and Rose Leonard. They are both recorded in the 1801 muster and again in 1805 when Rose is noted as living with Charles Dowdal and he is working as a labourer for Simeon Lord, a major landholder who had himself arrived in 1791 with a seven-year sentence. In 1814 Rose is recorded as the wife to Charles.

In 1810 Charles Dowdall received a land grant (no 138) of thirty acres at Botany Bay, at an annual rental of one shilling. He quit this grant on January 1st 1815 but continued to work as a fisherman until his death on 22nd November 1817, at the age of forty-eight. Although there is no evidence he ever lived in Van Dieman's Land his death is noted in the *Hobart Town Gazette* of 24th January 1818 - "Charles Dowdle, fisherman and old inhabitant of Port Jackson - while in the act of drawing a seine - Botany Bay 22nd November". The seine was a long net used to trap fish.

He was buried from St Philip's Anglican Church on November 24th 1817. Rose (with an up-market name-change to Rosannah) lived until the age of fifty and was buried also from St Philip's on 4th June 1821. According to Joseph Cordell's letter of 1865, Charles Dowdel bequeathed to his son Charles two allotments, one in George Street and one in Pitt Street, Sydney.

The 1814 muster records Charles Dowdell as a fisherman - this could have been the father or the son, then aged eighteen years. Our next clear record of the son comes in the Colonial Secretary's papers of February 1st 1820, where it appears that Charles Dowdell, seaman, was employed in the *Princess Charlotte*, "conveying Commissioner Bigg to Newcastle. To be paid from Police Fund".

According to Cordell's letter, in 1821 Charles sailed from Hobart Town to Sydney and back again in the brig *Jupiter*. Cordell was the mate and a close friend of

Charles. The purpose of the visit was to sell the George Street block to a Mr Robert Cooper, distiller, for the sum of one hundred and fifty pounds. Cordell avers that the Pitt Street property “was never disposed of”.

Charles married the next year 1822 - his wife was Susanna Jillett. They were married in St David’s Church Hobart and had four children, two girls, a boy who did not survive, and a fourth child Charles Derwent Dowdell, born 25th April 1828 and baptised May 28th at St David’s. The baptismal certificate gives the father’s profession as ‘whaler’.

In 1826 Charles had petitioned the Lieutenant-Governor for a grant of land “he being possessed of 60 head of horned cattle, 150 sheep, cart and instruments of husbandry . He has never received a grant. He has had great loss of a schooner, also cargo (£150) scuttled by bush-rangers near to White Rock”.

The request was not granted, nor was he permitted to erect a stall for the sale of poultry in the new market place in December 1827. It appears he continued his whaling career until he was lost at sea. To quote Cordell - “Your father leaving the colony on a whaling voyage the ship was never heard of, or any of the crew that sailed with her”.

The letter from Joseph Cordell was written in Hobart Town on 6th March 1865, addressed to Mr Charles Dowdel Jnr, Merchant. He was clearly concerned about the fate of the Sydney property . He had remained as mate of the brig *Jupiter* until 1824 and left her to become a pilot in Launceston where he lived until 1851. In 1825 he married Elizabeth Pitcher, they had one son who died at birth, a daughter who survived to marry in 1850, and a second son found dead in his bed at the age of sixteen. When he wrote the letter in 1865 he must have been near enough to seventy , but he appears a sound and reliable, if ill-fated, witness.

Charles Derwent Dowdell grew up to be a substantial merchant and citizen in Hobart Town, a member of the Executive Committee of the Hobart Regatta and a Churchwarden and member of the Parish Council at St David’s Cathedral. In 1853 at the age of twenty-five he married Martha Marshall from Sorell, who was only seventeen. They had eleven children, of whom Jessie Isobel, born in 1865, was the seventh child and the fifth girl.

In his later years he moved to Melbourne, to a house in Hawthorn, and conducted the business of a marine surveyor up until the time of his death. In 1891 he was appointed one of the skilled members of the Court of Marine Enquiry, and was also elected to the Committee of Management of the Melbourne Hospital, then a keenly contested privilege. He died on February 15th 1892 at the age of sixty-four. Martha survived him by thirty years and is still recalled by some of her great- grandchildren as a very old lady in a black bonnet and mittens.

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