

Queensland's Pioneer Families (By "Historian")

Gallant Soldiers and Sturdy Settlers

The Leith-Hays of Rannes and Banana

READERS who have been interested in the Stories of Queensland's Pioneer Families published from time to time in the Steering Wheel & Society & Home, will have been struck by the number of young men of good ancestry who came to this country in the early forties of last century to seek their fortune, their interest having been awakened by the published reports of the early explorers.

In Thomas Hall's book, *The Early History of Warwick*, it is stated that in the late thirties, when people in Scotland were keenly interested in Allan Cunningham's discovery of the Darling Downs, Ernest Elphinstone Dalrymple, a smart young officer on furlough from a Highland regiment stationed in India, paid a visit to his ancestral home, Logie Elphinstone, in Aberdeenshire. His father, Sir Robert Elphinstone Dalrymple, invited the tenantry to meet his son, who proved himself to be a brilliant speaker. After describing his travels in Ceylon, India and North America, he touched upon the slave conditions in the latter country and foretold the Civil War. The young officer then went on to speak of Allan Cunningham's explorations, and to the surprise of his father he declared his intention to gather a party of young Aberdonians to seek their fortunes in Australia.

Ten Brave Adventurers

THOMAS HALL'S father was present and he related that "Disney," as young Dalrymple was known, had no difficulty in making up a party numbering ten, with himself. They included Patrick and George Leslie, George and John Gammie, George M'Adam and James Fletcher. There is reason to suppose that the number was made up by James Leith-Hay and his brothers Charles and Norman, three of the five sons of Colonel Sir Alexander Leith-Hay of Rannes

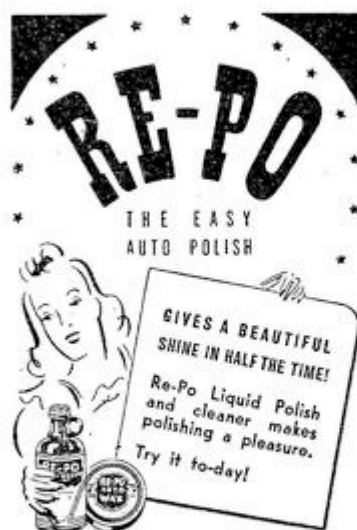
and Leith Hall. Mrs. A. B. Gibson, a daughter of James Leith-Hay and relict of the late Mr. A. B. Gibson (for a number of years P.M. at Blackall), is confident that this was so. Much has been written from time to time of the part which the Leslies and others of that party of 10 played in the pioneering days, but no connected story has hitherto been told of the adventurous part played by the Leith-Hays. When it is mentioned that the brothers took up and named Rannes Station two years before the Archers discovered the Fitzroy River, and that one of them, Norman Leith-Hay, was killed by the blacks, it will be realised that the material is there.

Gallant Soldiers

REPRESENTATIVES of the Leith family long ago held large possessions in Scotland, including the barony of Restalrig and lands in the shires of Midlothian and Leith, whence the name would appear to have originated. William Leith of Barnis lived in the time of David Bruce. He was Provost of Aberdeen in 1350 and proprietor of the lands of Caprinton. He married a daughter of Donald, the twelfth Earl of Mar, and had two sons—Lawrence, his heir, and John, who became ambassador to the Court of England in 1412.

Coming to more recent times: a member of the family was the ancestor of the Leiths of Klenkennie and Freefield, whilst Sir James Leith was a Lieutenant-General in the army, Governor of Barbadoes and commander of the forces in the Winward and Leeward Islands. John Leith of Leith Hall died without issue in 1778, and the estates went to his brother, General Alexander Leith, 73rd Regiment, who, having succeeded Andrew Hay of Rannes, changed his name to Leith-Hay of Rannes and Leith Hall.

General Leith-Hay was succeeded by his eldest son, Colonel Sir Andrew Leith-Hay, M.P. for the Elgin district of Burghs, 1833-38 and 1841-47. He was for a time Governor of Bermuda, and served in the Peninsular War, of which he wrote a history. He was a Knight of the Hanoverian Guelphic Order and was distinguished in scientific circles. His eldest son, Colonel Alexander Sebastian Leith-Hay, C.B., served with distinction in the 93rd Sutherland Highlanders through the Canadian Rebellion of 1857-9, the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny. He was also a Knight of the Legion of Honour and of the Order of Medjidie. During the Indian Mutiny he succeeded to the command of the 93rd when the Hon. Adrian Hope was killed in the assault on Rhodanow in Oude. Of all the engagements in which Colonel Leith-Hay proved himself a dashing leader, the capture of Sikandarbagh was perhaps the most conspicuous. Of the seven and a half companies engaged, the 93rd had 76 officers and men killed or wounded. The assault on Shah Majat was another exploit in which



Saved by Loyal Blackfellow . . .

Colonel Leith-Hay distinguished himself. He won fresh laurels at the Battle of Cawnpore. At the capture of Begom Kothe he was congratulated by Sir Colin Campbell for the coolness and skill with which he handled his men.

Bushrangers at Toolburra

THE Leith-Hays who came to Australia with Dalrymple's party were younger brothers of Alexander Sebastian Leith-Hay. It was in 1840 that Patrick Leslie accompanied by his assigned servant, Peter Murphy, followed in Cunningham's steps to the Darling Downs and made his first headquarters on what he named Toolburra. He would appear to have been joined soon after by the Leith-Hays, for Henry Stuart Russell in his book, *The Genesis of Queensland*, tells of the presence of all three of them at Toolburra when the station was stuck up by a gang of bushrangers in 1846.

Thomas Hall in his previously mentioned history, tells of an occurrence at Canning Downs, then the Leslies head station, when one of the brothers was saved by a loyal black named Tommy from being murdered by Chinese shepherds. These men had become enraged at learning that they were receiving less pay than the white shepherds. Obtaining possession of some of the old-fashioned hand-shears then used for shearing sheep, they broke them in halves, and, armed with these deadly daggers, five of the Chinese approached the butcher's shop, where Leith-Hay was busy salting beef. Realising their purpose, the loyal blackfellow dashed among them and laid about them with his nulla nulla, and he is said to have knocked the whole five of them senseless. Their weapons were taken from them, and when they recovered consciousness, Leith-Hay gave them a taste of the stockwhip, whilst Tommy administered the flat of his boomerang to their "sit upon." Mr. Hall does not say which of the Leith-Hay brothers was concerned in this narrow escape, but it was probably James, who was for some years superintendent at Canning Downs.

Turning for a moment from the Leith-Hays to the young man who had organised the party of Aberdonians, of which they formed part, it is on record that Goomburra, an outstation of Canning Downs, passed to Ernest Elphinstone Dalrymple, who sold it to the Aberdeen Co., and the creek on which the township of Allora stands was named after him. A tablet



Mr. James Leith-Hay

to his memory, which can be seen in St. John's Cathedral, records that he died on November 4, 1844, at the age of 24 years. His brother, George Elphinstone Dalrymple, became a member of the Queensland Parliament, was Colonial Secretary in the short-lived Herbert Ministry of 1866, did much valuable exploring work in North Queensland, and was afterwards Police Magistrate at Somerset.

Moving Inland

IN the late forties the Leith-Hays purchased Toolburra from the Leslies, and, in conjunction with Mr. Fairholme, they also purchased another property named Yoolburra. These properties were resold later to the Leslies, and in 1852 the brothers turned their attention to the Wide Bay district, where they took up two properties, Ger Ger (Running Creek) and Marodum (Karrie). They appear to have soon realised that their sheep would

do better further inland, for we next hear of them in March, 1853, travelling through Coonambulla, on the Burnett, then owned by the Archers. They had with them a flock of 28,000 sheep, with which they took up and occupied country about 130 miles from Eidsvold. They named it Rannes, after their birthplace in Scotland. They also named the Don and the Dee Rivers after two streams which flow to the sea near Aberdeen.

Some time prior to this James Leith-Hay had married Maria Catherine, youngest daughter of Colonel Charles George Gray, Police Magistrate at Ipswich, where the ceremony was performed by the Rev. H. O. Irwin, of Brisbane. Colonel Gray had gone from Edinburgh to India with the 75th Regiment when he was 17 years of age. After service there he went through the Peninsular War, was at the siege and capture of Badajos, was twice wounded and later went through the campaign in Flanders culminating with the Battle of Waterloo. He came to Australia shortly after and settled on the Hastings River before his appointment as P.M. at Ipswich. His son, Mr. Robert John Gray, was for some time Commissioner for Queensland Railways.

Furthest North

MRS. JAMES LEITH-HAY joined her husband at Rannes shortly after it was taken up, for, in the record of their journal which ended in the discovery of the Fitzroy River and their settlement at Grace mere, the brothers David and William Archer state that they spent several days at Rannes, leaving there on May 1, 1853. They add that Mr. and Mrs. Leith-Hay were well established at Rannes, Mrs. Leith-Hay having made her home further north than any white woman, which distinction she enjoyed for a number of years. A true Australian born, she was the right type to face the hardships of pioneering, which began in a rude hut, well loopholed for gunfire against any marauding bands of aborigines.

The blacks for many miles around were regarded as fierce and treacherous, and it became neces-

sary at times to secure the protection of the Native Police. One night when Lieutenant H. Walker was visiting the homestead at Rannes, his camp—which had been pitched on the opposite bank of the creek—was attacked by the myalls, who killed one of the troopers and wounded several others.

On Christmas Day of the same year (1855) the savages attacked the homestead of Mr. William Young at Mt. Larcum during the absence of the owner and murdered the head shepherd, his wife and three station hands. Then there was the tragedy at Kinnoul Station, where James McLaren and one of his Chinese shepherds were murdered, the massacre of 11 souls at Hornet Bank on October 27, 1857, and the killing of 19 people at Cullin-la-ringo on October 17, 1861.

Killed by Blacks

WHEN the Leith-Hays first took up Rannes, their wool had to be conveyed by bullock team to Maryborough, via Gayndah, for shipment. Mr. W. H. Wiseman, Crown Lands Commissioner, later received instructions from the New South Wales Government to select a site for a township on the south bank of the Fitzroy River, and, as a result, the present site of Rockhampton was selected. Thereafter the Rannes wool was shipped from the new port, which brings us to another tragic story.

In 1857 the schooner *Sea Belle* loaded one of the first shipments of wool from the Rannes and Gracemere Stations. When she took her departure she had on board as passengers Mr. Norman Leith-Hay and an officer of police. The captain was accompanied by his wife and two young daughters. Nothing more was heard of the ship or those on board for about a year, when it was ascertained that the *Sea Belle* had been wrecked on Great Keppel Island, opposite what is now the favourite beach resort of Emu Park. Mainland blacks reported that the whole of the ship's company had managed to get ashore, but they were surrounded by natives, and, after a fierce fight, the white men were all

killed. One, who, from their description, was evidently Norman Leith-Hay, fought the savages with his bare fists until he was clubbed to death. The captain's wife and two girls were kept captive by the tribe. From time to time parties searched the islands and the adjacent mainland in the hope of rescuing the three unfortunates, but without

Charles Leith-Hay returned to Scotland when Rannes Station was sold to the firm of Towns & Stewart, about 1860. In 1861 Mr. James Leith-Hay was appointed Police Magistrate and Sub-Commissioner of Gold Fields and Crown Lands at Rockhampton, and later at Bowen, where he was the first P.M. His wife died at Ipswich on June 7, 1875, and the following year Mr. James Leith-Hay died whilst on a visit to France. One of his daughters married Lord Henry Phipps (son of the Marquis of Normanby, Governor of Queensland, 1871-4) who made his home at Glen Eagle on the Upper Logan River and died from a heart attack in the Brisbane Botanic Gardens.

His son, Mr. C. E. N. Leith-Hay, went to Scotland in 1881, and was for some time private secretary to Lord Balfour of Burleigh. He then took over the management of the estate of his uncle, Colonel A. S. Leith-Hay, C.B., and when the latter died childless in 1885, he succeeded to the property. He married the Hon. Louisa H. V. O'Neill, a daughter of Baron Ed. O'Neill and a descendant of the second Earl of Donegal. He died at Leith Hall last year. His only son joined up for war service and was tragically killed in September, 1939, at the age of 21 years. He was the last to bear the honoured name of Leith-Hay.



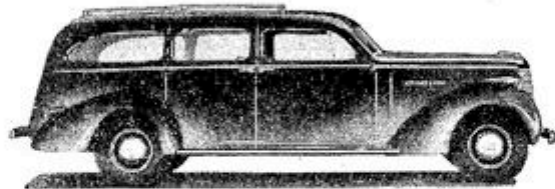
Mrs. James Leith-Hay

success, though reports of their presence among the nomads were several times brought in by other blacks.

In addition to Rannes, the Leith-Hays also took up adjoining country, which they named Banana.

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