

My family's 170 year association with Canberra

In early December 2012 I was eating fish and chips with my grandchildren at Stirling Park looking across Lake Burley Griffin to the National Museum of Australia on Acton Peninsula, where my grandmother on my mother's side of the family was born in 1893. Behind me on the ridge towards Parliament House is where my grandfather on my father's side of the family lived in the Tradesman's Camp in the early 1920s. My father was only seventeen months old when my grandfather brought his family to House No. 16 Westlake in March 1924. They were the first family to move into the 'new' suburb of Westlake. The whole family have been 'Southsiders' ever since.



Left to right: Helen, Frank, Paul, Edith, Felix and Tom (in front) Clowry. This photo was probably taken when the family arrived at Westlake in March 1924.

My grandchildren, Indiana and Declan, are seventh generation Canberrans on my father's side of the family and sixth generation Canberrans on my mother's side of the family. The first generation was John and Julia Kilmartin, who were living near Hall when their daughter, Ellen, was born in 1848. She was my father's grandmother. My mother's grandparents, Bartholomew and Mary Carroll, met in Canberra in the 1880s while they were working for Arthur Brassey at Acton Station. Their daughter, Maggie, my grandmother, was born there in 1893.

My father's family in Canberra

John and Julia Kilmartin, migrated from County Tipperary, Ireland in 1841 and were living at Bedellick, near Hall, in 1848 when their daughter, Ellen, was born. Ellen married John Clowry (who was born at Glenrock, near Goulburn, in 1846) in Braidwood in 1869. Ellen and John were my great grandparents.



John Clowry born Goulburn 1846 and his wife Ellen (nee Kilmartin) born near Hall in 1848 with their daughter Katie, circa 1874.

John's father, Thomas, came to Australia in 1819 from County Carlow, Ireland as a convict. Thomas married Catherine Lamond (who emigrated from County Limerick, Ireland in 1841) in Goulburn in 1845. They moved from Goulburn to Braidwood in 1854 and had ten children, five born in Goulburn and five born in Braidwood. One of their sons, Terence, regularly featured in the Queanbeyan Age as a member of Queanbeyan's Amateur Star Minstrels entertainment troupe during the 1880s and 1890s.

John Clowry was a police constable and escorted gold shipments between Braidwood and Goulburn. A dangerous occupation at the time due to the activities of bushrangers. The notorious Clarke brothers roamed the area at the time that John joined the constabulary. They were accused of the worst crime against police in Australian history – the murder of four special constables who were sent to the area to apprehend them. The Clarke brothers were captured and hung in 1867.

John and Ellen's three children were born in the area between 1872 and 1876. My grandfather Frank Clowry's birth certificate states that he was born on 28 February 1876 at Wallace St Braidwood. Sadly for the family Ellen died of consumption in 1878 when my grandfather was only two years old. He and his two older siblings, Katie and Phil, were then raised by their grandparents, John and Julia Kilmartin, who had moved from the Hall area to the Majors Creek goldfields near Braidwood in the 1850s.

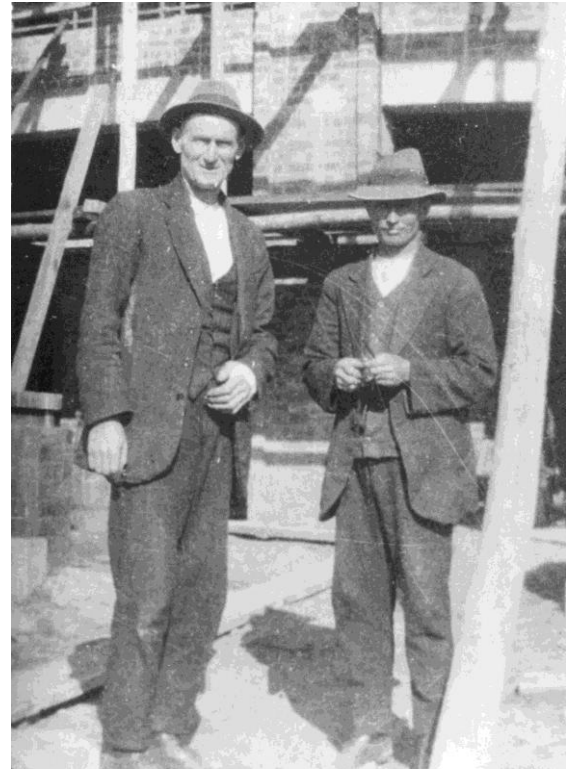
Frank and Phil Clowry did carpentry apprenticeships at Majors Creek and Captains Flat.

Frank married Edith Ffrench at Ballalaba, near Major's Creek in 1910. Edith was a member of the large Ffrench family who have lived in the Braidwood/Canberra

area since 1842 when her grandparents Peter and Charlotte Ffrench migrated from County Wexford, Ireland. Peter and Charlotte bought land at Ballalaba and raised a large family of eleven children. A twelfth child, Laurence, their first born, died on the journey to Australia in 1842.

Edith's parents were Thomas Ffrench, born Araluen in 1845, and Johanna Hickey, born in Sydney in 1847. Johanna's parents, John and Mary Hickey (nee Ryan) migrated from County Tipperary, Ireland in 1839. Edith was the youngest of Thomas and Johanna's nine children.

Frank and Edith Clowry were living in Sydney when their first four children were born. To escape the Spanish flu epidemic after World War I they moved back to the Majors Creek area. Edith ran the Post Office and the party line exchange at Reidsdale until the family moved to Canberra in 1924.



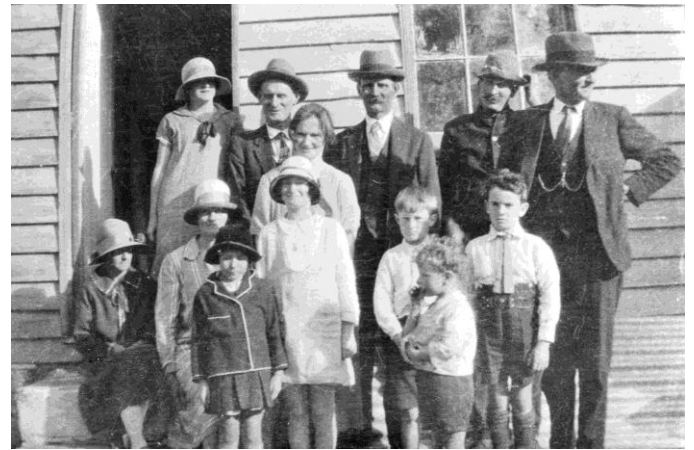
Frank Clowry, on the left, at the Parliament House construction site circa 1925.

Frank was a foreman carpenter on the Parliament House building and, although I do not have a record of it, I am sure the family would have attended the opening of Parliament House in May 1927. The photo with the family may have been taken on the day of the official opening. My father was four and a half years old in May 1927; he is the child with the curly hair at the front of the group in the photo and he looks about four and a half years old.

The caricature of Frank Clowry appeared in the Canberra Community News in 1926 and it shows him with his spirit level under his arm and wearing his characteristic three piece suit. I still use this spirit level.



The photo on the previous page shows Frank, in his suit, at the Parliament House site. The other man in the photo is unidentified.



Frank and Edith Clowry, 2nd and 3rd back row, with members of the Clowry and French families. Paul Clowry at front, aged about four. Circa 1927.

There are many published references to Frank Clowry in the early days of Canberra's development as the national capital. He was a quiet man but very highly regarded for his work in the community, especially for the Catholic Church. The following are some of the references that mention Frank:

1. Monsignor A. J. McGilvray's book 'The Hallowed High Adventure' (published in 1973) states that Frank Clowry was mentioned in almost every issue of the local Catholic magazine 'The Angelus'. Some of the references to Frank Clowry in Monsignor McGilvray's book allude to the type of humble, quiet and community minded man that Frank Clowry was:

- Page 80. "The list of Printers' Quarters men is as long as a litany: ... Tom Clowry (son of the patriarch, "St Joseph" Frank) ...";
- Page 84 refers to a document dated 15 July 1926 dealing with the Canberra Altar society. "... Our thanks are due to Mr Frank Clowry who built our new altar as well as a solid Tabernacle ...";
- Page 104. "In a recent interview, an old gentleman who had lived at the Bachelors' Quarters in the late 'twenties, put his impressions in a

nutshell: "In those days dear friend the Catholic Church was the Corkhills and the Clowrys - and Father Haydon.";

- Page 112 refers to an editorial in the December 1928 edition of the Angelus. "What is Canberra going to do when "the old gang" disappears? They were at the recent bazaar in all their glory ... Frank Clowry was there with his hammer and his nails - and his vow of perpetual silence, ...".

2. There are a number of published references to Frank Clowry's trips home to visit his family in Reidsdale (near Braidwood) before the family moved to Westlake in March 1924. He used to ride his bicycle about 60 miles (100 kilometres) each way every second weekend (some say it was every weekend). The following three references again illustrate the type of man that he was:

2 (a). The following reference is taken from Ann Gugler's internet information (<http://canberracamps.webs.com/aspectsoflife.htm>) about the early development of Canberra. Frank Clowry is mentioned on page six of chapter 1 - Aspects of Life 1909-1929 in the FCT (Federal Capital Territory):

"Families were left behind in other states as many men came to the FCT to work. Many of these remained in single camps for years because of the lack of accommodation for married couples. One infamous case was that of Frank Clowry, a carpenter foreman at Parliament House. He used to ride his bicycle home to Reidsdale, near Braidwood, every second weekend. On one of his trips home, a man in a T-model Ford stopped to offer a lift. Frank thanked the man in his usual gentle manner, and declined the invitation because he, himself, was in a bit of a hurry! Frank Clowry was also known as *St. Joseph*, because of his carpentry work for St. Christopher's Church.

The Angelus, July 1928, had the following to say about Frank:

"Frank Clowry, expert wielder of the carpenter's hammer, must be thanked for the predella on which the beautiful Altar rests at St. Christopher's Church, Canberra. It was the work of many hours duration, but a genuine labour of love to the most undemonstrative man "on the Federal". Digoneses of old, stumbling along with his lanthorn, questioning in vain for an honest man, would have howled with glee had he happened upon Westlake's tall and bashful carpenter."

2 (b). The following is taken from an article in the Canberra Times of Monday 25 March 1946. The article titled 'CANBERRA VETERANS TELL OF OTHER DAYS AT REUNION' quoted a number of Canberra residents, interviewed at a function at the Canberra Services Club, who were involved in Canberra's early development:

"Riding from Canberra to Reidsdale and return every week-end on a bicycle, a distance of 63 miles, was in the ordinary course of events for Mr. Frank Clowry, of Griffith.

"I used to leave Reidsdale about 9 p.m. on a Sunday and often arrived too early for work, so used to rest under a tree at Acton," said Mr. Clowry."

Frank Clowry died in Canberra in 1965 at the age of 89.

My Mother's family in Canberra

My great grandfather, Bartholomew Carroll, arrived in Canberra in 1880 when he migrated from County Waterford, Ireland. He had two siblings and a cousin who had migrated earlier and were already living at Majura. His brother Patrick migrated in 1877 and his sister

Margaret and cousin, Ellen Hennessy, migrated in 1879.

Patrick Carroll married Mary Darmody in Queanbeyan in 1879 and Ellen Hennessy married James Darmody (Mary's uncle) also in 1879. Margaret Carroll married twice. Her first marriage was to Patrick Buckley in Queanbeyan in 1883 and her second marriage was to Charles Burn in Queanbeyan in 1889. One of Margaret and Charles' sons, Jack, married Rose Blundell, daughter of Isaac Blundell. Another son, Charles, was killed in 1917 in France in WWI.

My great grandmother, Mary Ann Hartigan, migrated from County Limerick, Ireland in 1888. She arrived with her brother Thomas and two friends, Bridgie and Eileen Baker. They worked for Arthur Brassey at Acton.



Maggie Carroll. Born at Acton in 1893.

Bartholomew Carroll was also working for Brassey when he met Mary. They were married in Sydney in 1890 and their first five children were born in Canberra between 1891 and 1898. My grandmother, Maggie Carroll, was the second child of the marriage and she was born in Canberra in 1893. Their first child John, aged just 2 years, drowned in the Molonglo River in 1893 when he attempted to follow his father to work one day.

Bartholomew and Mary Carroll left the Canberra district in 1900 to take up farming in the Warri district (in the Riverina) and purchased a farm at Ardlethan when it was established a few years later (1908). Their sixth child John, aka Jack, was born in Narranderra in July 1900. In the mid 1970's Jack wrote a short history of his parents and in it explained that his parents were great friends of Mr and Mrs Bob Corkhill and that they were a source of great consolation to them following the drowning of their son. He explained that the two women remained good friends until their deaths in the 1940s.

The Corkhills and the Carrolls would have been friends across the Molonglo River. The Corkhills lived in a slab hut near where the National Library is now located while the Carrolls would have lived near where the National Museum is now located. In 1913 the Corkhills were moved to one of the Campbell houses at Yarralumla and this became the Corkhill dairy.

Ironically, my father was friends with a subsequent generation of Corkhills and after my parents were married in 1950 my father grew potatoes on a portion of the Corkhill's dairy farm near where the Water Police premises is now located. My parents lived nearby in Banks Street Yarralumla.



Bartholomew and Mary Carroll. Residents of Canberra in the 1880s and 1890s. This photo was taken in 1918.

My mother, Monica McInerney, granddaughter of Bartholomew and Mary Carroll, moved to Canberra in the 1940s and married my father, Paul Clowry, in 1950.

Frank and Edith Clowry's children

My father was Frank and Edith Clowry's fifth child. He attended St Christopher's school for all his schooling, from kindergarten to the leaving certificate. Two of his older siblings, Felix and Helen were enrolled at St Christopher's School on the first day of the new school in 1928. They had previously attended Telopea Park School. Tom, the eldest went to St Pat's at Goulburn to finish his schooling.

Tom and Felix were involved in the Canberra Aero Club in the early 1930s.

They probably developed their passion for flying after the visit to Canberra of Bert Hinkler in March 1928 – I am sure that they would have been in the crowd of 5000 that witnessed Hinkler's landing in the capital. The brothers joined the air force in WWII; Tom was shot down over Italy and spent three years as a POW (Prisoner of War) in Italy and Germany, while Felix was shot down and killed over Libya in 1941.



Frank and Edith Clowry with four of their children and their daughter-in-law, left to right, Felix, Patricia, Paul, Dorothy (nee Woodward) and Thomas. This photo was taken in the front yard of their home in Canberra in 1940. Their daughter Helen was not in the photo because she had already joined the convent.

Helen Clowry was a teacher for a short time in Canberra in the 1930s before joining the Sisters of the Little Company of Mary in 1940. She was in the inaugural group of nuns who established the Calvary Hospital in Canberra in the 1980s. 'The Clowry Ward' at the hospital is named in recognition of her contribution.

The youngest child in the family was Patricia, born in Queanbeyan in 1926. She also attended St Christopher's School for

her entire schooling. She married Frank Boyle in 1950 and was a well-known, much loved and highly respected member of the Canberra community throughout her long life. She died in 2011 at the age of 85. A large number of Pat and Frank Boyle's seven children, twenty two grandchildren and growing number of great grandchildren continue her legacy in Canberra.

Conclusion

I am proud of my family's involvement in the development of Canberra from the earliest farming days along the Molonglo River, their involvement in the construction of national buildings like the first Parliament House and now the large extended family that continue to contribute through their involvement in various trades, professions, farming, public service, private business, academia and numerous sports. I look forward to my grandchildren and the other descendants of the family's Canberra pioneers continuing to contribute to the development of this vibrant city.

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