

Croker Prize for Biography

Entry 1514

**Rebecca Tipping -
a Life on the Move**

REBECCA TIPPING – a life on the move.

Many of us begin and end our lives in the same place. The lives of others begin in one part of the world and end half a world away. Rebecca Tipping was one such individual. Born in India, raised in industrial England, married in Wilcannia NSW, she ended her days in Sydney.

Rebecca was born 9 December, 1860, and baptised 25 February, 1861 at Poonamallee, India. Her parents were Richard and Ellen Tipping, her father a Private in H.M. 68th Regiment stationed in Madras. ⁱ He left the army shortly afterwards.

The 1871 UK Census for Wolverhampton shows the Tipping family at 143 Lower Stafford St. with Richard a general labourer, aged 45, born Wales, and all the children born in Wolverhampton with the exception of Rebecca, born India.

In 1881 the information is much the same, except that Rebecca is missing. She had emigrated to South Australia in 1879.

Rebecca Tipping, aged 18, arrived in South Australia, 12 May 1879, on *Star of India* as one of many domestic servants. ⁱⁱ They could be hired from ‘the Servants’ Home.’

A newspaper report, with an illustration of the commotion around the home when a boatload of domestic servants arrived, explains how the new arrivals were besieged with prospective employers, offering every benefit and condition imaginable, as the colony was desperately short of both male and female labour. ⁱⁱⁱ

One story of her arrival is that she came to join her brother who was in the horsebreaking business. He met her in Adelaide when she arrived and went back upcountry for more horses. He was accidentally killed and his partner, Timothy Roy, went to Adelaide to tell her what had happened. She fell in love with Timothy and he took her to Milparinka, travelling by coach to Echuca, then riverboat up the Darling to Wilcannia and then by wagon to Mt Browne. ^{iv}

Timothy, born in 1857, near Dungog, came from family with Scottish ancestry. ^v Family stories tell of him catching wild horses for a living out on the Darling River, and taking them to South Australia to be sold to the army in India. He had left home as soon as he could because of his father’s drinking, and monetary demands on his children.

Timothy Roy married Rebecca Tipping at Wilcannia, 6 September, 1881. Both bride and groom gave their usual place of residence as ‘Mount Browne’, Milparinka, over 100 miles from Wilcannia, in far western NSW. ^{vi}

‘Mt Browne’ is a sheep station which had been grazed before the goldrushes of the 1880’s. The Albert Goldfield was proclaimed there in February 1881, and it would seem that Timothy was a gold miner involved in the rushes around Easter 1881. He gave his occupation as ‘miner’ on his marriage certificate.

In 1882, Rebecca and Timothy had the first of their fourteen registered children.

Baby Charles was born 13 April, 1882, at Warratta Creek, Albert Goldfield, Milparinka.^{vii} He died 3 ½ weeks later of ‘general debility since birth’. There was a severe drought at the time and I can’t imagine what it was like for poor Rebecca being pregnant through the heat of a Milparinka summer, and then to have the baby die.^{viii}

“Not only was lack of water a problem, food was difficult to obtain. Scurvy and typhoid outbreaks occurred frequently. The diggers’ fate depended on finding goldbearing dirt and then having enough water to wash out the gold.”^{ix}

Rebecca spent the first 19 years of her married life almost continually pregnant. She had 14 children registered, including twins, in 19 years, the last one born in 1900. Seven sons and three daughters survived infancy. The first seven were born in the Milparinka area, where Timothy worked as a miner and drover on long cattle drives.

By 1886 favourable seasons had returned and Milparinka was a permanent town with 3 hotels, 4 stores, boarding houses, a newspaper, photographer, blacksmith, saddler and 2 butchers.

In 1891, Rebecca is at Warratta Creek, the head of the household. Her husband is away again.^x

By September 1892, the family was in Taree. Charles William’s birth is recorded there. Family lore tells us that Timothy was ill and he and Timothy Junior, aged nine, came to Sydney from Tibooburra on horseback, then by train, while Rebecca followed with the rest of the family by dray.

What a journey it must have been! It is hard to imagine a woman alone with five small children, aged from one to seven years, making such a journey. The logistics seem almost impossible.

The family moved to Sydney. The next 6 children were registered at Erskineville, St Peters and Leichhardt. Those children who were at school went to Annandale Public School. Timothy was working and his illness improved slightly.

In December 1895, the newspapers reported a blasting accident where men working on the western Suburbs Sewerage system were injured in an accident at Stanmore. Timothy Roy was one of the workmen but he was not injured.^{xi}

Timothy’s illness became worse and he was in Bathurst in December 1901, staying at the manse, presumably for the climate. This we know from a letter he wrote to ‘Dear Beccy,’ who had returned to Sydney. It is a simple letter of great fondness. He wanted to come home.

On 29 January 1903, Timothy Roy died aged 45. The cause of death was given as ‘Phthisis’. He was buried at Rookwood.^{xii}

Phthisis was a term used for various illnesses. It could indicate a wasting disease, perhaps with respiratory symptoms, but not necessarily TB.^{xiii}

In the history of the Tibooburra area, it is of interest to note that the only successful mining company closed down in 1891, about the same time as the Roy family left the area. The rock drill had been used there, as well as the mining method of dry blowing, something we know today as a sure recipe for lung disease.

The First World War began and four of Rebecca's seven sons enlisted. She opened her home to other young soldiers. We know about two of them - Ben Kuscov and Fred Pickering, whom she regarded as her foster sons.

We have three of Rebecca's scrapbooks, full of photos of the family, news cuttings and greeting cards. She also noted in them when she put eggs under a clucky chook!

The photos date from around 1900 to the Second World War. There are pictures of her children, their friends and activities. There are many wedding groups and lots of people in fancy costumes, as if for plays or concerts, in traditional Scottish kilts, and military uniforms.

The cards scattered through tell of Christmases, birthdays and Mothers' Days, written by adoring adults and children to 'Mother' or 'Grandma'.

The newscuttings provide a wealth of information about the family. There is one about the four sons who enlisted for the First World War – Charles who was killed in action and Lesley who gained the Military Medal for conspicuous bravery during the fighting at Menin Road September 20, 1917, during which he suffered damage to one eye. Bob was at the evacuation of Gallipoli, and at The Somme, where he was wounded and contracted shell shock, in June 1917. Stan was barely 18 when he enlisted, but he did not embark due to the signing of the Armistice.

There is a report of the funeral of Charles William Roy (b 1892), in Rouen, telling the circumstances of his death. Charlie died from a gun shot wound to the neck at Bullecourt. His death deeply affected the whole family and seemed to subsume Rebecca's life until her death. Both Les and Bob were discharged as medically unfit.^{xiv}

The older Roy sons went to Lithgow as coal miners. Campbell became Mayor and was a representative on the Joint Coal Board during WW 2. There are many clippings which mention Campbell or his brother Sam. They were foundation members of one of the Miners' Lodges and were involved with local football teams and other sporting activities. There are pictures of them with the Oakey Park Colliery Tug of War Team.

The collection included several reports of multiple births such as quads, quins and Siamese twins, and photos of Dame Sybil Thorndyke, and her performance as Joan of Arc, the Maid of Rouen. Perhaps because it was about Rouen, where Charlie was buried, made Rebecca keep it.

Between 1918 and 1940 Rebecca and Bob moved around - Leichhardt 1918, Haberfield in 1920 where she lived with Bob, Fred Pickering and her daughter and son in law, Ethel and Sydney Crane, Lithgow in 1935. By 1940 Rebecca and Bob had moved to Granville and then to Guildford.^{xv}

Rebecca died at her modest home at Guildford, 10 October, 1949 and is buried at Rookwood. Her son Charles is commemorated on her headstone.^{xvi}

Rebecca did not achieve any academic or social status. She left no large estate, but left a legacy of compassion and patriotism, a large closeknit family and many stories still to be told.

ⁱ Baptismal Certificate Rebecca Tipping Vol N/2/42 Folio 63 India Office Library, 197 Blackfriars Rd, London.

ⁱⁱ Microfiche Index of S.A. Arrivals No 313 SAG.

ⁱⁱⁱ Fearson's Weekly 22Mar 1879 p42.

^{iv} Myrtle Mackay, grand daughter of Rebecca, 25 Jan 1992 at Lithgow Reunion of Roy Family.

^v NSW Birth Timothy Charles Roy 1857 #6424

^{vi} NSW Marriage certificate Timothy Roy and Rebecca Tipping 1881 # 6129.

^{vii} NSW BDM Birth 1882 # 28059.

^{viii} NSW BDM Death Charles Roy 1882 # 12461.

^{ix} NSW National Parks and Wildlife Leaflet "Historic Milparinka".

^x 1891 census for NSW Tibooburra via Ancestry.com.au.

^{xi} SMH 11 Dec 1895 page 7.

^{xii} Independent section grave 5c/560.

^{xiii} Guidelines in the Interpretations of Certified Causes of Death. Brian Gandevia, published in Journal of the Society of Australian Genealogists "Descent" Sept 1990.

^{xiv} Military record – Robert McMillan Roy, Lesley Angus Roy and Charles William Roy. Australian Archives.

^{xv} NSW Electoral Rolls

^{xvi} Independent Section Grave 5c/560.