

CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2022

2229 A Legacy of Resilience and Love: Annie May

by Lynette Weir

A Legacy of Resilience and Love - Annie May

It's easy to dismiss less glamorous 'ordinary' lives, but oftentimes when you scratch the surface you find a rich legacy in the essence of their character. My grandfather, Herbert George Perkins, mother was Annie Elizabeth May Schaumann and his father was 'Walter Arthur Perkins,' who enlisted in WWI and never returned. When visiting the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, my father requested I place a poppy on the wall of remembrance for his grandfather. We found there was no Walter Arthur Perkins who died in WWI. There was one who enlisted, whose record did not appear to be our Walter Arthur,ⁱ but in untangling the complex storylines of Annie May's life, I found he was. Then I discovered Walter Arthur 'Wally' Perkins was not my great grandfather.

Annie Elizabeth May Schaumann called 'May' by family but often recorded as 'Annie May', was born 5th May 1881 at Yamba.ⁱⁱ The granddaughter of Canadian Master Mariner, Captain Francis Freeburn, the first Pilot at Yamba, and his English born wife Elizabeth McEvoy. Annie May was the eldest child of Frances and Elizabeth Freeburn's daughter, Jane,ⁱⁱⁱ who married a seaman named Johann Friedrich Schaumann from Elmshorn, Germany,^{iv} who settled in Yamba in 1879.^v Annie May grew up in Yamba, an isolated river town, attending the little local school,^{vi} then working as a maid for a tailor in nearby Maclean.^{vii}

No birth record has been found for Walter Arthur 'Wally' Perkins, only a death certificate.^{viii} Goal and marriage records report he was born 1881,^{ix} the fourth child of Sarah Ann Bishop and 'Arthur Elton' James Perkins known as 'Daziane' a well known 'wire walker' and traveling performer.

On 11 July 1902 Annie Elizabeth May Schaumann married Walter Arthur Perkins at the Church of St James in Maclean, NSW.^x Annie May's father was a witness, perhaps an incentive for the groom to 'do the right thing'.

Annie May and Wally Perkins' only child, Daphne Pearl, was born in Yamba on 23 December 1902. Wally Perkins deserted them by the end of 1903. He never returned. In a missing person report filed in 1911, Annie May confirmed that Walter had '*left his home eight years ago*'.^{xi}

Annie May's second daughter Myrtle Faith was born 26 November 1904^{xii} at the maternity hospital and Home of Hope for Fallen and Friendless Women in Newtown. My grandfather Herbert 'George' was born on 22 October 1907^{xiii} in the Lady Bowen Hospital in Brisbane. Neither child's father was recorded. Daphne was raised in Yamba with her grandfather as her guardian.^{xiv} Annie May went to Queensland recording her address as Dugandan on George's birth record but also Yamba on electoral rolls until 1909.

Against all the odds at that time, Annie May kept Myrtle and George with her. There is just one record found between 1909 to 1914, the missing person report filed by Annie May in Boonah in 1911 looking for Wally Perkins.

Both Myrtle's and George's births were registered as Schaumann, but they used 'Perkins' listing Walter Arthur Perkins as their father on school records. These records from five Brisbane schools, show Annie May became a 'widow' with numerous addresses, working as a 'Charwoman', 'Laundress', 'Cafe Hand' from 1914 to 1919 to support her children.^{xv}

In 1919 Annie May moved in with returned Serviceman Herbert Henry Russell.^{xvi} Despite no divorce records, they married 5 December 1924 at the Joyful News Mission Hall, Valley, Brisbane.^{xvii} May and Herb Russell returned to Yamba in 1930,^{xviii} they cared for Annie May's elderly mother until her death and were active community contributors.

Tracing Wally Perkins was an adventure. He went to gaol, then on to have two more children with Mary Jane Bean nee Johnson, who was already married with seven children. She left them to have two children with Wally, leaving him with two children to return to her first family after her husband died.^{xix} Walter Arthur 'James' Perkins adapted his name marrying Hilda May Whiteley in 1927,^{xx} they had four sons. Hilda raised all six children. These families never knew of his first marriage and daughter Daphne, but Wally made one mistake in covering his tracks providing a link to Annie May. On 27 April 1919, Walter Arthur James Perkins was born in Goulburn, Wally was the informant for the birth certificate where he records '*Date of marriage: 13 March 1902 Place: 'Maclean NSW'*'.^{xxi} There's enough truth in case caught, but not quite. He was married in 1902 at Maclean, but to Annie Elizabeth May Schaumann on the 11 July, not to Mary Jane Johnson, the mother of his new son.

On 28th January 1933 at the Methodist Church in Grafton,^{xxii} my grandfather George 'Perkins' married my grandmother Marie Jane Gray. They had three children, Lorna Marie, Colin George and Beryl Emma, and the family myth of Walter Arthur Perkins, son of a circus performer and father of George, was entrenched.

Annie Elizabeth May Russell died on 14 May 1963 at Grafton Base Hospital aged 82 years,^{xxiii} taking many of her secrets with her. She died just eight weeks before I was born.

We know the clear family lines of Annie May, but we now know of her strength and fortitude in the face of adversity. Final pieces and circumstances of George and Myrtle's father/s remains elusive. We may never know.

Annie May's life is one experienced by many women. It included much hardship and hard work, but she was very much loved by my grandfather and all her family. She is remembered as a lovely and kind soul, someone who helped her friends, family and community. She was strong and resilient, going against the tide by keeping and raising her children. Hers is just one of the stories of a woman's love and resilience in my family, but it is less about who or where, and more about this legacy of love, caring for others and resilience from Annie May which is the real essence and guide for where I came from.

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- ⁱ National Archives of Australia - PERKINS Walter Arthur : Service Number - Depot : Place of Birth - Windsor NSW : Place of Enlistment - Liverpool NSW : Next of Kin - (N/A) JOHNSON Mary Jane - NAA: B2455, PERKINS WALTER ARTHUR
- ⁱⁱ NSW Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages - Birth Reg Number: 13421/1881
- ⁱⁱⁱ NSW Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages - Marriage Reg Number: 7737/1859
- ^{iv} Evangelische Kirche Elmshorn (Kr. Pinneberg): Verein für Familienkunde Elmshorn Film Number: 1337520 - Baptismal Record for Johann Friedrich Schaumann Birth Date: 17 Mrz 1839 (17 Mar 1839) Baptism Date: 24 Mrz 1839 (24 Mar 1839) Baptist Place: Elmshorn, Schleswig-Holstein, Deutschland (Germany)
- ^v National Archives of Australia - John Friedrich SCHAUMANN Naturalization NAA: A1, 1911/3607
- ^{vi} Port of Yamba Historical Society - Yamba Public School records
- ^{vii} Home of Hope for Friendless and Fallen Women (South Sydney Women's Hospital) Admissions Register (1903 - 1905) Nursing History Research Unit, University of Sydney - Verbal notes from archivist. Records currently under review to be transferred to NSW State Library
- ^{viii} NSW Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages - Death Reg Number: 3360/1959
- ^{ix} NSW State Archives - NX-84-8093 - PERKINS Walter Gaol Inmates/Prisoners Photos Index 1870-1930 Item No: [3/6071] | Digital ID: IE42459 | Series: NRS2138 | Page No: 93 | Photo No: 10016
- ^x SW Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages Birth - Marriage Reg Number: 7010/1902
- ^{xi} Queensland State Archives – Queensland Police Gazette page 64 Missing Friends Report Walter Arthur Perkins 3 February 1911
- ^{xii} NSW Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages - Birth Reg Number: 35122/1904
- ^{xiii} Queensland Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages Reg Number: 1907/B/15697
- ^{xiv} Port of Yamba Historical Society - Yamba Public School Admission records
- ^{xv} Queensland State Archives - School records for Myrtle and George Perkins at Dunellan, Coorparoo, East Brisbane, Petrie and Windsor State School student records
- ^{xvi} Queensland Electoral Roll 1919
- ^{xvii} Queensland Births Deaths and Marriages – Marriage – Herbert Henry Russell & Annie Elizabeth May Perkins – Registration details: 1924/B/36086
- ^{xviii} NSW Electoral Roll 1930
- ^{xix} Victoria Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages - Death Reg Number: 12412 / 1961
- ^{xx} NSW Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages - Marriage Reg Number: 3679/1927
- ^{xxi} NSW Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages - Birth Reg Number: 19035/1919
- ^{xxii} NSW Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages - Marriage Reg Number: 3068/1933
- ^{xxiii} NSW Registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages - Death Reg Number: 16303/1963