

"TO LIVE AND HAVE LAND: CAROLINE CHISHOLM IN ILLAWARRA

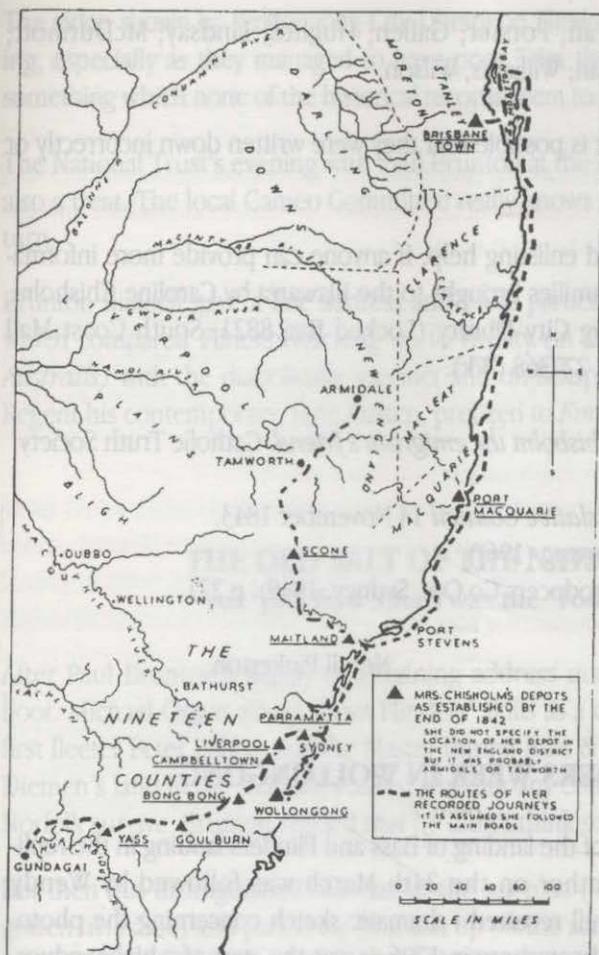
Much has been written about Caroline Chisholm's work with the homeless and helpless female emigrants in Sydney. She rescued many a poor creature from the brink of destruction [1] and established the Female Emigrant's Home in Sydney. It is less well known that she also established a registry office for farm labourers and she undertook long journeys into the bush in order to settle emigrants on the land, to provide wives for existing settlers and to personally supervise the conditions into which the newly arrived emigrants were launched.

In 1840, NSW was passing into a depression. Sydney was experiencing high rates of unemployment. Rural labour was needed but the government had no plans for dispersing the throngs of assisted immigrants who remained in Sydney without employment. Caroline Chisholm sent circulars to leading country men seeking information and enlisting help. In November 1843 she spoke to the Select Committee on Distressed Labourers, telling them that most immigrants emigrate to "live and have land" and she outlined a scheme for settling families on the land with long leases. The government, however, was slow to take up the challenge and unwilling to invest in her schemes. Undaunted, she began the arrangements to settle 23 families on land provided by Robert Towns at Shellharbour



Towns had offered 4,000 acres of land - part of the Peterborough Estate. He also provided rations for the families for the first five months. Chisholm engaged a schoolmaster to open a school and employed three bushmen to show settlers how to clear and crop the land [2]. The Sydney Morning Herald of 7 December 1843 reported the departure of Chisholm and the 23 families, 240 people altogether.

As clearing lease tenants, the families were given the land rent free for 6 years in exchange for clearing the land. Clearing a lease was a slow, physically demanding occupation. The leases in the Illawarra were heavily-timbered and cabbage-palm predominated in the thick scrub. Cabbage palm would not burn but was cut into lengths and rolled to the nearest stream and pushed in. The pigs ate the chips from the inside of the palm. the tender tops were used as a vegetable and the fronds were used to produce cabbage-



tree hats. [3]

During the tenancy period, a family could also establish a small farm, grow basic crops and raise a few animals. At the end of the lease, tenants could pay rent or purchase the land as it became available. The tenants needed to be tough and hardworking to survive the harsh conditions. Chisholm later reported that the project was successful so it can be assumed that many of the 23 families remained and became self-supporting. Cousins [4] claims that the tenants shipped their goods from Shellharbour and it soon became a prosperous port.

Who were these tough and hardworking people? Genealogists have been asking me this question for many years and it seems that there exists no convenient list of names to

refer to so I am now trying to discover which families came to Shellharbour with Caroline Chisholm. There is a map of Shellharbour leases onto which surnames have been hand written. The writing is difficult to decipher and in some cases the spelling is uncertain. The map is undated but the most tantalising coincidence is that there are 23 names listed. I hope that these might be the 23 families I am searching for - I am told that one of them (Dorrough/Darah) definitely came with Caroline Chisholm. The names are:

Aitkin; Atkinson; Barber; Blaney; Campbell; Carter; Claymore; Cochrane; Cockerill;

Collins; Conway; Dorrough/Darah; Forster; Gallen; Hughes; Lindsay; McDurmott; Matthews; Murray; Rankin; Shipman; Williams, Wilson.

As the names were handwritten, it is possible that they were written down incorrectly or misspelled.

I am now seeking information and enlisting help. If anyone can provide more information about these families or any families brought to the Illawarra by Caroline Chisholm, please contact me at Wollongong City Library (Locked Bag 8821, South Coast Mail Centre NSW 2521) or phone (042) 277368 (Wk).

- 1) ANSTRUTHER. G.E. *Caroline Chisholm the emigrant's friend*. Catholic Truth Society. London, 1916. p.6
- 2) *Votes & Proceedings of the Legislative Council* 14 November 1843.
- 3) JERVIS. J. *The History of Wollongong* (196?).
- 4) COUSINS. A. *Garden of NSW*(Producers Co.Op.. Sydney. 1948). p.221.