

My Favourite Genealogy Record and How I Found It

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My favourite genealogy record is the archival file¹ for the selection Carbean, a grazing farm in central western Queensland, which has added so much to my understanding of my grandparents' lives. While not knowing my grandmother, Bessie COOPER (née PACE), my childhood memories of Leopold Maxwell Skuthorp COOPER (Leo) are limited to the kindly grey haired man with whom I, as a four year old, spent only a few holiday weeks. As an adult I was keen to know more about him and this record has added details which enhance what was passed on orally. The path that led me to this record has been a long and winding one with several detours along the way, all the time providing wonderful glimpses of other people in his life as well as the places that surrounded him.

The path began with the oral family history I learnt growing up on Carbean. I knew from an early age that Carbean was resumed from the consolidated grazing run called Mexico and that my grandfather was related to the family who had first leased the land. Many years later, my genealogical research revealed this relationship. Birth, death and marriage indexes from New South Wales² led me to Leopold Maxwell Skuthorp COOPER's parents as James COOPER (1836-1878) and Mary Ann SKUTHORPE (1841-1936), who had married in North Richmond, New South Wales on 29 July 1864. Leo, their only son, was born in North Richmond on 3 December 1868³. He lost his father soon after turning nine so it is likely that his mother Mary Ann continued to live close to her family and that he grew up with his many SKUTHORP[E] cousins.

So how did the boy from the Hawkesbury district of New South Wales become the landholder in central western Queensland? Serendipity played a part in this stage of my journey – my interest in local history led me to a range of resources – local newspapers and Queensland Government Gazettes. While using them to research local government issues, I came across the distinctive name SKUTHORP[E] in connection with land and droving stock. The incidental information I collected at this stage revealed a pattern of movement of the men of the family northward from the Hawkesbury.

I turned to land records from both New South Wales and Queensland to find information which may answer my questions. It became apparent that Leo COOPER's grandfather, Richard SKUTHORP[E] (1817-1880) and his uncles, moved north and took up land along the Culgoa and Balonne Rivers before Queensland became a separate colony in 1859. Just north of the border with New South Wales, Richard first licensed a block called Courawah⁴. Five of Richard's eight sons spent some time in this part of Southern Queensland, some remaining there until about 1877⁵.

One of these sons, John Richard SKUTHORP (1849-1914) moved further north and licensed (with a partner, James Vincent NEVILL), in July 1875, a block of land on Jordan Creek that they called Mexico⁶. In 1877 it was transferred to John's brother Richard Tertius SKUTHORP (1843-1920). Richard used 'Tertius' as the third man to carry the name in Australia and it often helps to distinguish him from his father in their dealings. Richard Tertius SKUTHORP extended his holdings along Jordan Creek to 605.5 square miles by 1881⁷. While the blocks first leased were not surveyed, the area as estimated by the landholder is recorded and reflected in the assessment of rent at 5 shillings per square mile.

Three series of records enable the genealogist to find where their Queensland ancestors held pastoral land in the 'unsettled districts'. A survey of landholders and their holdings from 1867 to 1914 is provided in the 'Lists of Runs – showing Rent and Assessment' contained in the *Queensland Government Gazette*⁸. Arranged alphabetically by lessee within each Land District, these records provide a widely available source. Secondly, registers reveal much more detail about licence fees, rent and survey fees paid by landholders each year. They

¹ Item ID 70850, Dead farm file, Barcaldine Land Agents District, Queensland State Archives

² BDM NSW – Pioneer Index 1788-1888 (CD-ROM), Marriage 1864/1038

³ Certificate, NSW Birth 16361 – personal collection

⁴ Accepted Tenders for Runs, *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 9 June 1856, p1256

⁵ *Queensland Electoral Rolls 1860-1869* (CD-ROM), Toowoomba & Darling Downs FHS 2002; *Queensland Electoral Rolls 1870-1879* (CD-ROM), Toowoomba & Darling Downs FHS 2002

⁶ Item ID 75705, Register of runs, Mitchell 1873-1875, Queensland State Archives

⁷ List of Runs – showing Rent and Assessment, *Queensland Government Gazette*, Volumes 17-28, 1875-81

⁸ Lists of Runs – showing Rent and Assessment, *Queensland Government Gazette*, Volumes 8-103, 1867-1914

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also list transfers, forfeitures and other details⁹. The third source, land files, is the most valuable of all for the genealogist.

In Queensland, the land files created as a result of the Land Act of 1884¹⁰ reveal a great deal about early settlers on runs. They are easily located at Queensland State Archives because they are listed under the names given to the consolidated holdings. After the passing of this Act, the conterminous blocks Richard Tertius SKUTHORP had leased were consolidated as Mexico.

The Mexico file¹¹ includes a revealing surveyor's tracing which shows the location of natural water sources and indicates those considered permanent. It also shows the Government Tank (artificially built earth depression) constructed by 1887 to provide more water for stock travelling through Mexico. The 24 waterholes considered to last more than 6 months, together with some springs, were a significant factor in enabling the SKUTHORP[E] brothers to remain on this run for 30 years. The accompanying Commissioner's report provides the earliest detailed description of the landscape, in particular the timber, grasses and herbage on different parts of the station. It also shows that the brothers built a weatherboard cottage with a separate kitchen valued at £150, several bachelor's huts and fenced several yards and small paddocks. The total value of these improvements was £740. While Richard Tertius SKUTHORP was the leaseholder, his younger brothers Charles (1853-1896) and Henry (1855-1937) managed the property for him. The file contains the letter by which Richard authorised Henry to sign all the documents in connection with the 1884 Land Act.

While this Mexico file revealed so much about my SKUTHORP[E] ancestors, it did not include mention of my grandfather. I needed to take a detour to another local record – the newspaper *The Western Champion*. There I discovered an account of Leo playing cricket with his cousin Oswald SKUTHORPE (1872-1935) in April and June 1894¹². Oswald, a son of Richard Tertius SKUTHORP, was four years younger than his cousin Leo and it is possible that they joined their uncles on Mexico as young men in their twenties. Another detour into the electoral rolls showed that while Oswald applied for admission to the Queensland electoral roll in 1895, Leo did not¹³.

A second component of the Crown Land Act of 1884 was the provision for resumption of a percentage of the consolidated run for closer settlement. Under this provision, almost 30% of consolidated Mexico was resumed. This portion was first opened in 1893 as nine Grazing Farms, ranging in size from 6,500 to 20,000 acres¹⁴. Only two of the blocks were selected but after the remaining area was re-opened in 1898¹⁵, my grandmother, Bessie PACE, selected one of the blocks along Jordan Creek, a small block of about 9,016 acres. Maps included in the Mexico run file provided a vital key to continuing my search as they listed the first selectors on resumed land as well as the numbers allocated to their selections. Grandmother Bessie PACE's selection was described on the map as GF545¹⁶ in the Blackall Land Agents District.

At last I had located the file which was to reveal so much about my grandfather. On her application of 26 February 1900, Bessie had indicated that she was a spinster working as a governess on a property located near Isisford, about 130 miles away. Her application was approved on the receipt of the first year's rent of £29/2/6 (¾d per acre) plus £8/4/- as one-fifth of the survey fee and she was granted her licence on 21 August. The provisions of the Crown Lands Act of 1884 required the lessee, or her agent, to reside on the block and to enclose the selection with a substantial fence. The selection file reveals how Bessie, as a female lessee, managed these requirements. In February 1901, she applied for exemption from residence for six months or

⁹ For example, Series ID 14063, Register of Runs, Mitchell District, Item IDs 75704-75707, 1869 to 1888, Queensland State Archives

¹⁰ Crown Lands Act 1884, *Queensland Government Gazette*, 29 December 1884, pp2123-2178

¹¹ Item ID 27249, Lease – pastoral, Run 1160 – Mexico (1885-1930), Queensland State Archives

¹² *The Western Champion* 3 April 1894 and 5 June 1894

¹³ Queensland Electoral Rolls, District of Barcoo, 1894-1900, Queensland State Archives

¹⁴ *Queensland Government Gazette*, 21 January 1893, p174

¹⁵ *ibid*, 2 March 1898, p723

¹⁶ The boundaries of the Land Agents Districts changed to place this selection in the Barcaldine Land Agents District with the number GF156. Item ID 70850, Dead farm file, Barcaldine Land Agents District, Queensland State Archives

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until sufficient rain fell. This was granted to her. When in the following month an application was made for an extension to pay rent on account of drought, it was signed by her attorney, Leonard S COOPER. He was in residence on Carbean, as the selection had been named, from 20 February 1901.

Leo's letters, written on behalf of Bessie PACE over several years, to the Minister of Lands and the Under Secretary for Crown Lands reveal the difficulties he faced and his determination to continue on this selection. His first task was to complete the conditions of selection. In the first year, Leo enclosed the selection with a 3-wire fence. The 17½ miles cost £350. Severe drought had taken hold so the selection was not stocked for several years and Leo earned wages elsewhere in an attempt to meet the rent. He also attempted, unsuccessfully, to gain an advance on the lease. While some rent payments were made during these difficult years, the accumulated arrears continued to mount until, in April 1905, they had reached £109/13/4. Although threatened with forfeiture by the local Land Commissioner, J V S DESGRAND, additional time to pay was granted as the debts were fully paid by February 1907 when the lease was transferred to Leopold M S COOPER for 10/-.

Seasonal conditions gradually improved from 1905 and the couple (Bessie PACE and Leopold M S COOPER had married in St Paul's Cathedral Church, Rockhampton on 16 February 1904¹⁷) first tried dairying. This provided them with only a meagre living, and soon they purchased sheep. By 1908 they were shearing 1,000 in the newly built woolshed. This was a significant development as the more favourable seasons and the growing demand for grazing selections in the district doubled the annual rent payable from 1 July 1907.

The reports written each seven years by the Land Rangers in conjunction with the re-appraisal of rent and included in the selection files provide a comprehensive picture of the development of each selection¹⁸. So by comparing the reports of 1908, 1914 and 1922, I learnt that across that period the value of improvements on Carbean increased from £700 to £1,486 and then to £1,670. An overshot dam on Jordan Creek was improved, a bore sunk and windmill, tank and troughing purchased, all to improve water supply for stock. J V S DESGRAND, in his 1908 Report, describes Leo as a 'divining rod expert'. On inspection day, Leo demonstrated for the Land Commissioner – 'the rod worked in the verandah of the house, indicating, he said, the presence of water at a moderate depth'¹⁹. The house was close to the creek and did not require a bore, so the first bore was sunk towards the western boundary. Many, many years later Grandfather was proved right when a successful bore was sunk near where he divined water would be found!

Other developments in this period included the improvement and extension of fencing and additions to the house and outbuildings. The 1923 report shows that cattle had replaced sheep – the increasing number of dingoes had necessitated this change²⁰. Profits from grazing were sufficient for Leo to extend his landholding by selecting a Grazing Homestead in 1913²¹. It was about 27 miles distant, and Leo had to perform the residence conditions as he had previously on Carbean, a decade earlier. At the beginning of 1916, Carbean was transferred back to Bessie COOPER and the selections were worked in conjunction.

From the Carbean selection file, my favourite genealogy record, I have learned that my grandfather was hard working, skilled and determined to make a living from the land. It has also led me to the files that cover successive leases held by my family on this land, and to those held in central western Queensland by other family members. On the path to its discovery, I have learned the value to genealogy of many kinds of records.

¹⁷ Certificate, Queensland Marriage A89605 – personal collection

¹⁸ Parts of the Reports for Assessment were transferred to the file for the succeeding lease and must be read in conjunction with the file for the first lease. The succeeding lease file for Carbean is GF3440, Item ID 178405, Dead farm file, Barcaldine Land Agents District, Queensland State Archives

¹⁹ Item ID 178405, Dead farm file, Barcaldine Land Agents District, Queensland State Archives

²⁰ Stock returns accompanying the report show that 550 sheep and no cattle were run in 1916; 150 cattle and no sheep were run in 1922

²¹ Item ID 74935, Dead farm file, GH1949, Springsure Land Agents District, Queensland State Archives