

How I traced my earliest Australian ancestor

Johann Michael HOLZBERGER

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So who was my earliest Australian ancestor? Until my eldest son went to high school several decades ago, I would have had no idea. But he had to prepare an ancestral family tree back to his great-grandparents. Of course, he could enter details about my wife and me. Most of his grandparents were still living, so that was not a problem either. Both my wife and I knew who our grandparents were, but didn't know much about their lives or their ancestors. This lack of knowledge started my journey down that never-ending track of genealogy and family history.

It became evident quite early that my paternal grandparents were recent arrivals as they had migrated from Scotland in 1913 aboard the *Osterley*.¹ My maternal grandparents were both born in Australia and it was their parents who left their homelands to settle in Queensland.

I can remember asking my mother for her memories of parents and grandparents. Some of the information confused me at the time until we visited the Sherwood Anglican Cemetery in Brisbane and saw the details on the gravestone.² This showed Michael HOLZBERGER who died 16 July 1931 aged 89. But the first inscription was for his wife, Emilie, who died in October 1897 aged 48. There were also inscriptions for their children, Barbara and Edward, with their ages as 7 days and 16 months respectively. In addition there was Elizabeth Henrietta HOLZBERGER who died on 8 June 1907 aged 55 years.

With this information I travelled to the State Archives and was lucky enough to find the will of Michael HOLZBERGER.³ Included in these papers was a copy of his death certificate⁴ which showed he had been married twice. His first marriage was to Emilie DAHLKE⁵ when he was aged 26 and the second to Elizabeth then SPENCER formerly CROZIER when he was 59. His place of birth was Kembach, Baden, Germany and he had been in the country for 80 years.⁶

That solved the initial confusion I had felt. For my grandfather Albert Michael HOLZBERGER⁷ had married Eveline Mabel SPENCER⁸, the daughter of Arthur Lambert SPENCER and Elizabeth Henrietta CROZIER⁹. After Arthur SPENCER died¹⁰, Elizabeth married Michael HOLZBERGER. So Albert Michael HOLZBERGER's mother-in-law also became his step-mother.

Elizabeth's death certificate showed she had been 37 years in the colony when she died, so she would have arrived about 1870. Michael HOLZBERGER would have arrived about 1854. Here was the clue to my earliest ancestor to arrive in Australia.

When did Michael HOLZBERGER arrive? Here my mother was able to provide the necessary link with a copy of his Obituary notice which included the information that he had arrived with his parents and siblings on the *Caesar* in Sydney in 1855. There was also another newspaper article about Michael and his siblings under the heading of 'Long-Lived Family'. The accompanying photograph was captioned 'Nearly 400 Years of Age'¹¹. This article revealed the family had left the *Caesar* in Sydney and transhipped to Brisbane. There was also the notation that Michael's brother Jacob first saw the light of day aboard a schooner in Sydney Harbour.

¹ Passenger list of *RMS Osterley* arrived Brisbane 5 July 1913

² Australian Cemetery Index: Sherwood Anglican Cemetery [online]; plus personal visit

³ Will of Michael HOLZBERGER number 646 of 1934, Queensland State Archives

⁴ Copy of Death Certificate, Michael HOLZBERGER number 24737 in Queensland register

⁵ Arrived with parents and siblings September 1865 *Susanne Godeffroy* IMM/113 page 62

⁶ Ibid footnote 4

⁷ Birth Certificate copy; Queensland Birth Index 1881/C5349; son of Michael HOLZBERGER and Amelia DALKE [sic]

⁸ Birth Certificate copy; Queensland Birth Index 1880/C6664

⁹ Arrived Brisbane *Young Australia* 25 Aug 1870; IMM/114 page 21[Arthur] and IMM/114 page 27 [Elizabeth]. Both single.

¹⁰ Died 6 November 1902, copy of Death Certificate

¹¹ From original newspaper articles cut from newspaper of the day [about 1931 and 1934] and given to me by my mother. Many family members had these articles as well as a copy of the photograph of the 5 siblings.

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That knowledge then raised the question of who is my earliest Australian ancestor? Well, the earliest ancestor born on Australian soil would be my great-uncle, Jacob HOLZBERGER. But the earliest ancestor to come to Australia would be my great-great-grandfather, Michael HOLZBERGER the father of my great-grandfather who died in 1934. I will treat my great-great-grandfather as my earliest ancestor, with some further notes about my great grand-uncle.

Although I had visible evidence of the HOLZBERGER family's arrival through the newspaper articles mentioned above, I needed to get official confirmation. At the time of my research it was still possible to write to the Archives and get shipping information. I wrote to the New South Wales State Archives on 20 June 1981 and obtained details of my ancestors who arrived on the *Caesar* on 29 March 1855.¹² They were shown as Michael HOLZBERGER aged 47, vinedresser; Barbara HOLZBERGER aged 32; Michael HOLZBERGER aged 10; Catherine HOLZBERGER aged 8; Andrew HOLZBERGER aged 5; and John HOLZBERGER aged 2. All were Protestant, born at Kembach and in good health. Michael and Barbara, the parents, could read and write. Their children, Michael and Catherine, could read.

It was all very well to have such facts, but who were these ancestors? I needed to get more information from Germany, but I could not speak or write German. Furthermore my handwriting was not very legible, so I decided to print my requests in a letter to the pastor of the Evangelical Church at Kembach. On 13 March 1984 I received a letter from Reinhard HAUSMANN¹³. Thankfully he was able to read and write in English. He had sent extracts from the church books at Kembach and I subsequently sent a bank draft to him for his services. These extracts showed that Johann Michael HOLZBERGER married Barbara HORNER on 15 February 1844¹⁴. A further entry was for Johann Michael's birth on 28 September 1808 to Georg Leonhard HOLZBERGER and Anna Dorothea TAG¹⁵. A similar record revealed that the son of Johann Michael HOLZBERGER and Barbara HORNER was born on 29 November 1844 and named Johann Michael HOLZBERGER¹⁶. Barbara HORNER was the daughter of Andreas HORNER and Elisabetha Barbara ROOS, and born on 11 October 1822¹⁷. It was a common practice in the area to name male children as Johann followed by the name they were generally known by.

Some time later in 1984, a cousin-in-law of mine also wrote to Reinhard HAUSMANN and obtained further extracted copies of records. We shared both sets of records and extended our knowledge of German ancestors.

By this time my sister had married and her husband had been born in Germany. They lived in Canada, but we corresponded regularly and I passed on information as I received it. It was very exciting to receive a letter from her in April 1992 describing a visit to Kembach and enclosing some photographs. The village was built on hills and dominating the landscape was the Kirche on one side of the village with vineyards on the other. She and her husband were able to speak to some of the residents and found many had emigrated to America and Australia about the time our HOLZBERGER family came here. The main cause was lack of work¹⁸. This helped to explain why Johann Michael HOLZBERGER was described as a vinedresser on the immigrant list.

I have seen numerous references to the voyage of the *Caesar* which left Hamburg in November 1854 under the command of Captain STURGE. Not all accounts agree completely, but it was interesting to read an account by the son of Simon GOTZ who recalled that cholera broke out on the voyage and many died as a result¹⁹. Unfortunately, those deaths included the sister-in-law and niece of Johann Michael HOLZBERGER and Barbara HORNER²⁰. They were Regina [nee DEIFEL, age 43] and Maria [age 2]²¹. The ship first stopped at Twofold

¹² Board's Immigrant List for *Caesar* arrived from Hamburg on 29 March 1855 AONSW. reference 4/4945 Reel 64

¹³ Pfarrer [a priest]

¹⁴ Kembach church book 1844-1874 S.303, Nr.1 Year 1844. Auszug aus dem Trauregister Reg Nr 1 Seite 303

¹⁵ Kembach church book 1785-1814 S.136 Nr.5 Year 1808

¹⁶ Kembach church book 1844-1874 S.13 Nr.78 Year 1844

¹⁷ Auszug aus dem Taufregister Reg Nr12 Seite 72

¹⁸ Details from letter written by Shirley Britsch. April 1992

¹⁹ From 8th Edition, Volume 1 'Die Zeitung' newsletter of German Research Group, Genealogical Society of Queensland

²⁰ Board's Immigrant List for *Caesar* arrived from Hamburg 29 March 1855 AONSW reference 4/4945 Reel 64

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Bay where some passengers disembarked before continuing to Sydney to complete its voyage. The family then had to tranship to Brisbane.

Now is the time to digress to my great grand uncle Jacob. He was born on 19 April 1855 and baptised on 14 May 1855. His baptism was in the Queensland district of Ipswich²². In fact he was baptised as George Jacob HOLZBERGER and the location of his baptism bears out the information that he was born on a schooner in Sydney Harbour. The vessel which brought the family to Queensland is not known, though it may have been the *Waratah*, *Boomerang* or *Raven* among other possibilities. Jacob, as he was known, married Mary Ann LAW on 7 August 1877 in the Wesleyan Methodist Church at Boggo, Queensland²³. Mary had been born in Lancashire and was the daughter of Richard LAW and Margaret WADE. The marriage certificate also confirmed that Jacob had been born in Sydney, New South Wales. Jacob and Mary had two daughters, Barbara Margaret who died as a young child, and Lillian May. Lillian married Johann Conrad LATHER who was killed in a railway accident on 13 July 1904²⁴. Their only child was a daughter, Irene Gladys LATHER born on 11 February 1904. Irene did not marry so this line came to an end when she died.

The HOLZBERGER family of my second great-grandfather went to the Burnett district. They travelled 240 miles in a bullock dray to reach their destination of Cartugar Station²⁵. That journey took eight weeks and they lived there for about three and a half years. When they left the family moved to a farm at Bulimba for a few years before settling in the Oxley district in 1862²⁶.

I am in possession of newspaper articles which were kept by my mother. These were the obituary for Michael HOLZBERGER [the younger] and the article about a long lived family. The dates of the newspapers are unknown but the one about the long lived family would have been about 1931 as Michael, the son, was 87. Part of that article said *They can tell some interesting stories of hard battling in the early days, and Michael had a merry little twinkle in his eye when he said that for three and a half years in the Burnett district they never tasted butter or potatoes and boiled pig-weed was regarded as a choice dish.* In the accompanying photograph there were 5 siblings. Michael and Catherine were born in Germany. Jacob, Harry and Charlotte were all born in Australia. Not a great deal is known about Michael and Barbara except that they were obviously hard working and determined to make Queensland their new home. They arrived at the time when it was still New South Wales, but they would have become Queensland residents on that auspicious occasion when Queensland was proclaimed in December 1859. It is fair to say that the descendants of this HOLZBERGER family are forever linked to original Queensland colonists, and it seems appropriate to be writing this in the 150th anniversary year of Queensland.

Barbara (HORNER) HOLZBERGER died at Rocklea on 24 March 1899²⁷ and was buried in Grenier's Cemetery near Archerfield aerodrome²⁸. She was 76. Her obituary was under the heading 'A Queensland Pioneer Dead – Leaves 56 Grandchildren'. She and her husband had helped nurse the sick on the voyage from Germany in 1855. The concluding sentence was '*Mrs HOLZBERGER was one of the oldest and most respected residents of the Rocklea district*'²⁹

Grenier's Cemetery was a private cemetery established by the Grenier family after the accidental death of a son. Mrs Sarah GRENIER promised free burial plots to many an old resident and that promise was kept even when control passed to shire or council authorities.³⁰ The cemetery was known by many names, such as God's

²¹ Ibid

²² Baptism Certificate

²³ Certified copy of entry in Register at Queensland State Archives

²⁴ Queensland Death Index B004782. Copy of inquest held on 20 July 1904 at South Brisbane

²⁵ Despite research by the Queensland State Library, a station of this name was not found. It may have been Cadarga

²⁶ From obituary of Barbara HOLZBERGER [née HORNER] *A Queensland Pioneer Dead - Leaves 56 Grandchildren*

²⁷ Death Certificate copy

²⁸ Booklet *God's Acre, Grenier Cemetery, 1859-1980, Archerfield*, page 37

²⁹ From obituary of Barbara HOLZBERGER [nee HORNER] *A Queensland Pioneer Dead - Leaves 56 Grandchildren*

³⁰ Booklet *God's Acre, Grenier Cemetery, 1859-1980, Archerfield*, page 6

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Acre, over the years and there are many unidentified persons buried there. It is very likely that Johann Michael HOLZBERGER was buried there too. I am waiting on a copy of his death certificate which may resolve this issue but I have found that the requested copy has gone astray in the post and another is to be sent. However, verbal advice is that he was laid to rest in Oxley Cemetery, which is one of the many names by which Grenier's Cemetery was known.

Johann Michael HOLZBERGER, my great-great-grandfather, died on 31 July 1881, aged 72. He was truly my oldest ancestor to arrive in Australia, but I think that Jacob has a claim as my earliest Australian ancestor. Perhaps both deserve to be looked at as the earliest with an arrival in March and a birth in April.