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HISTORICAL FEATURE

The Abdo Family of Queanbeyan and the Manning Valley

In our research on pioneer Lebanese families in the southeastern area of New South Wales, I had the good fortune to speak to Andrew Blundell, the Local Studies Librarian at Queanbeyan City Library. Andrew sent ALHS material on the story of Abdo family who had settled at first in Queanbeyan and later in Wingham in New South Wales.

Anthony Abdo was born in Lebanon in 1850 and arrived in Australia in 1891. He was naturalized on 18th March 1902. Anthony's wife Barbara and two sons Joseph and Henry arrived in Australia between 1892 and 1900.

His descendants say that on arrival in Australia he settled Queanbeyan and established himself as a hawker and a storekeeper. Anthony with other Lebanese men lead by Joseph Ferris and with the assistance of a bullock team worked on constructing the Snowy Mountains Road. As a result of this work they were then given a contract to work on the Comboyne Mountain Road located in the Manning River District of New South Wales. Although the Abdo family had bought a property at Killabakh in the Manning region of New South Wales around 1900, they had reason to return Queanbeyan regularly till about 1926.



Anthony Abdo

The *Roll of Electors for the Municipality of Queanbeyan for 1902* lists an Abdo family living in MacQuoid Street, East Queanbeyan.

Local history research from Queanbeyan notes that Joseph Anthony Abdo, born 4th August 1888, died 7th June 1915 was the son of Anthony. He was said to have been a Maronite Lebanese buried in Section 3 of the Catholic Portion of the Riverside Cemetery at Queanbeyan whose monument bears Arabic script.

The circumstances of Joseph Abdo's death were quite tragic. In 1915 Joseph Abdo was working at a camp at Tuggranong Plains near the Murrumbidgee River as part of a rabbit extermination team on lands occupied by a Mr. J. J. Dulhunty and under the supervision of a Mr John Gibbs. When the camp dispersed on the Saturday for the following non-work days of Sunday and a public holiday on the Monday, Joseph Abdo said he intended to spend his time fishing. When another of the

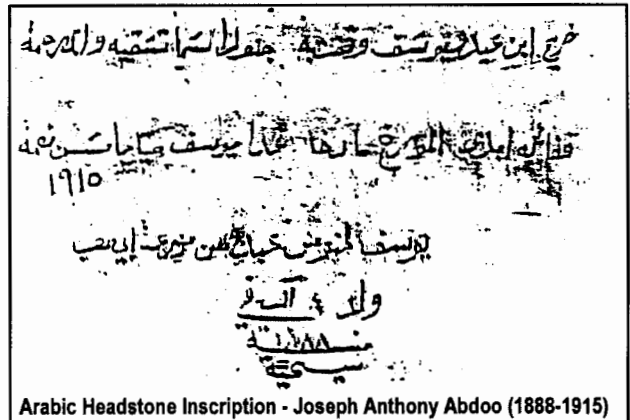
workers, Albert McNulty returned to the camp on the Monday afternoon, there was no sign of Abdo and it appeared no one had been since the Saturday. After searching the river without finding Abdo, he reported him missing in the evening. After a search by fellow workers and the police his body was found in a chasm surrounding a deep creek on the Wednesday morning. His fishing gear was found about mile up river.

The inquest into his death was told that he had joined the camp on 28th April 1915 and earned two pounds 14 shillings per week. He was said to have been a peaceable man of sober habits and on good terms with all in the camp. He was described as being of good physique and 6 feet tall and 12 stone in weight. He was a native of Syria who parents resided at Wingham in the Manning Valley.

The coroner found that his death was likely the result of a fall from the steep riverbank and that he probably died on the Saturday afternoon of 7th June.

When the Riverside Cemetery monuments were being transcribed and published, the authors had a Mrs Mary Garrity of Riverview College translate the Arabic inscription on Joseph Anthony's tombstone, which reads in English:

*I stood by the tomb of Abdo Youssef's son:
May the soldiers of Heaven water him with
showers of mercy.
The historian, in praise, revealed his virtues.
Youssef died in the fullness of Grace
Youssef Taneus Abdo from Mazrat Abisaad.
Born on 4th August in 1888 A.C.*



When I consulted the research Mounira Saad showcased for the Manning Valley Lebanese Reunion of April 2001, a fuller picture of the family emerges. Anthony Abdoo came to Australia in 1891 from Mazraat Aassaf in Lebanon. His wife Sarah came in 1899 with two children. Two daughters were born in Australia. The family came to Wingham around 1908 where they had a general store and hawking business as well as a property at Killabakh. The Abdoo's were still the largest Lebanese family in the Manning Valley. Manning Valley records show that Anthony's wife's name was Sarah, not Barbara.

When Anthony died after a short illness on 9th September 1939 at age 89 he was described as residing at Killabakh Creek and an old and respected resident of the district. He was buried in the Catholic section of Wingham cemetery. He was survived by his wife Sarah who died on 11th June 1945 aged 85 – therefore she was born in about 1860. (However, her newspaper obituary says she was 92 when she died which would mean she was born in 1853), His surviving son Henry (Harry) Abdoo who died on 19th April 1956 aged 63.

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Abdoo's Store Wingham: Newspaper c.1930

His surviving daughter Mary Catherine Abdoo (c.1902 to 11th May 1955) was married to Michael Dominic Abdoo. It is recorded that there were other families with the Abdoo name in the district, so perhaps Mary Catherine's husband Michael was one of these. For instance, Mary Fouz Abdoo arrived in the Manning Valley in 1923 and died in the region on 7th January 1950 aged 104.

As we know, Anthony was predeceased by his son Joseph Anthony as well as by another daughter, name not known.

Freda Backes

References

Correspondence between ALHS & Queanbeyan City Library 19th July 2005.

Queanbeyan Age, 11th June 1915

The Northern Champion (Taree) – 'Mrs Sarah Abdoo', June 1945

The Northern Champion (Taree) – 'Obituary Mr. Anthony Abdoo', September 1939.