

Marcia Rutter's Story

(a transcript)

I was born Marcia Blackhall in 1944 at Coolah. My parents owned a wheat and sheep property, and I attended a one-teacher school at Hannah's Bridge about mid-way between Coolah and Dunedoo. When I was in 5th Class my parents sold the farm and bought another smaller one near Muswellbrook, where I finished my schooling, before coming to Sydney to work and live.

My paternal grandfather died when I was a baby and grandma died when I was still too young to appreciate family stories. Growing up there was only occasional contact with cousins and extended family, and unfortunately my own father died of cancer at age 54, before I commenced family history research. However I do not think he knew about his Aboriginal great-grandmother.

John Blackhall was a ships deserter who married Elizabeth Rayner, Diana's second child with Robert Rayner, an ex-convict, at Piambong near Mudgee. After Robert's death in 1874 John and Elizabeth moved to Spicer's Creek where they raised a large family. John, a farmer, was prominent in the community being postmaster for a short time, and one of several people who lobbied for the establishment of a public school in 1878.

As the children married most seem to have moved away and not kept close contact. My grand-father William (Bill) Blackhall did stay at Spicer's Creek and married a local girl. Their children, including my father, who was the youngest in the family, attended the Spicer's Creek school. The family were friendly with the school teacher who wrote a poem about his friend "Ol' Bill". The poem has a chorus describing Bill as "a white man".

Apparently it was local knowledge about the Aboriginal connection but not always well regarded. I feel very fortunate that we have been able to find lots of information about Diana from official records, but would always like to find more, particularly a photograph if one exists anywhere.

Throughout my research I have made contact with Descendants of Diana's children, except Mary Ann and Emma Phillips. We have a network of descendants of Sarah Knight, Elizabeth, Jane, Shadrack and Harriet Rayner. I would particularly like to acknowledge the help and support, over many years, of Faye Heany, whose husband, Brian, is a descendant of Diana's daughter Jane.