

**Reconstructing a Rural Community: The Use of Civil Registration Data; Glenda Strachan;
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Abstract¹

This paper outlines the major source of data used in a reconstruction of a rural community in Australia which emphasises the role of women and children or family units in rural settlement. There has been little research about the settlement and community structures on the more fertile coastal plain of eastern Australia, an area which Frost² terms ‘the wet frontier’, and this ‘micro-history’ undertakes a detailed evaluation of the community activity in a small geographical area.³ Centuries of data are not available for Australia so that population reconstitution along the lines of Wrigley and Schofield is not possible but the technique of using the individual registration of demographic events to establish details of the life of a community can be used. Sources used for research on the community in the Upper Williams Valley are the records of civil registration, the baptismal, marriage and burial records of the Church of England Parish of Dungog as well as census data, agricultural records, and local newspaper reports. While census records have been destroyed in Australia, civil registration records provide great detail about family events. The paper presents examples of the information that can be gained using the details of civil registration in Australia. These include insights into the patterns of birth and marriage in this rural community.

The Settlement of the Australian Colonies

European settlement of Australia occurred when the British Government established a penal colony in 1788. Mass migration from Europe (overwhelmingly Britain and Ireland) in the nineteenth century created the twentieth century nation of Australia, with one and a half million immigrants arriving

¹ This research is supported by an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant. I would like to thank Research Assistants Anne Dunne, S.D. Owen and Lindy Henderson.

² Warwick Frost, ‘Farmers, Government, and the Environment: The Settlement of Australia’s “Wet Frontier”, 1870-1920’, *Australian Economic History Review*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1997, p. 19.

³ Barry Reay, *Microhistories*, Cambridge University, Cambridge, 1997, ch. 1.

between 1821 and 1900. The colony of New South Wales (oldest of the Australian colonies) received a quarter of a million immigrants, thirty per cent of this number arriving in the 1850s.⁴ The overriding principle of land settlement in nineteenth century Australia was that land grants were given to immigrants with capital to be worked by a landless labour force imported from Britain.⁵

The indigenous population practised a hunter gatherer economy⁶ and the Aboriginal people were judged to have no prior claim on the land.⁷ A doctrine of *terra nullius* was maintained legally until 1992, and no treaties were made. The indigenous inhabitants were characterised ‘as people too low in the scale of social organisation to be acknowledged as possessing rights and interests in the land’.⁸

In the first half of the nineteenth century economic development in the Australian colonies was dominated by the pastoral and agricultural industries which employed predominantly single male labour. The manufacturing and service sectors were insignificant until later in the century and there was a low value placed on female employment, except as domestic servants.⁹ Yet colonial authorities believed that the employment of greater numbers of married men had benefits as wives (and daughters) provided their domestic needs and married men’s work habits were judged to be more stable than single men, a major problem given the periodic severe shortages of labour. The immigration of single women and families was encouraged from the 1840s not only to redress the sex imbalance and improve the tone of the colonies but to counter the bias towards the employment of single men. Labour shortages and greater security of land tenure in the 1840s induced more families

⁴ R. Haines and R. Shlomowitz, ‘Immigration from the United Kingdom to Colonial Australia: A Statistical Analysis’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, 34, 1992, pp. 43-52.

⁵ Jan Kociumbas, *The Oxford History of Australia: Volume 2: 1770-1860: Possessions*, Oxford University, Melbourne, 1992, p. 135.

⁶ Tony Dingle, *Aboriginal Economy*, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1988.

⁷ Kociumbas, *Oxford History of Australia: Volume 2*, p. 135.

⁸ Noel Pearson, ‘204 Years of invisible Title’ in M. A. Stephenson and Suri Ratnapala (eds) *Mabo: A Judicial Revolution*, University of Queensland, Brisbane, 1993, p. 77.

⁹ Katrina Alford, *Production or Reproduction? An economic history of women in Australia, 1788-1850*, Oxford University, Melbourne, 1984, pp. 160-161, 174-176.

to settle in rural areas.¹⁰ The most common pattern of rural employment of women in the first half of the nineteenth century was as part of a family economic unit. The wives and daughters of settlers with capital undertook domestic work only when servants were unavailable.¹¹ From the 1860s many settlers had little capital and toiled with very little assistance from outside the family unit while some lived in dire poverty. Indeed 'the absence of settled communities and a wider kinship network meant that many families lived and toiled in relative isolation, and that women and older children constituted a vital economic component of the family'.¹²

Most general histories of Australia have privileged the white male experience, an obvious outcome when many histories concentrated on government policies and activities in the public sphere. One of the difficulties in this project, of course, is revealing the story of groups such as women who operated primarily in the private sphere and left fewer records and documents. Many of the sources relied on in *Creating a Nation*, a history which privileges women's experiences, are anecdotal diaries and memoirs of educated women.¹³ The evidence of emigrants' guides, travel diaries and other personal memoirs written by women in the nineteenth century led Grimshaw to conclude that 'a good, useful wife would not only be no expense - she would often earn nearly as much as her husband' and children were valuable assistants on farms, creating 'a reversion to a common family pattern reminiscent eighteenth century society'.¹⁴ What can registration sources contribute to the history of Australia's settlement and especially the experiences and contributions of immigrant women?

¹⁰ Alford, *Production or Reproduction?* pp. 160-161; Michael Quinlan, ' "Pre-arbitral" labour legislation in Australia and its implications for the introduction of compulsory arbitration' in Stuart Macintyre and Richard Mitchell (eds) *Foundations of Arbitration*, Oxford University, Melbourne, 1989, pp. 25-49.

¹¹ Alford, *Production or Reproduction?* p. 175.

¹² Alford, *Production or Reproduction?* p. 189.

¹³ Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marian Quartly, *Creating a Nation*, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1994, p. 1.

¹⁴ Patricia Grimshaw, 'Women and the Family in Australian History' in Elizabeth Windschuttle (ed.) *Women, Class and History*, Fontana, Melbourne, 1980, pp.41-42.

The Region

The Upper Williams Valley, an agricultural area in the Hunter Region north of Sydney, is hemmed in on three sides by mountain ranges and the Williams River (a tributary of the Hunter River) and its tributaries flow through the valley. The steepest slopes are heavily wooded and unsuitable for agriculture, the less steep slopes are used for cattle grazing while agriculture and dairying are carried out on the river flats. In the latter half of the nineteenth century the Upper Williams Valley was a place of small agricultural settlements and short lived gold mining villages with Dungog as the only town. Cedar-getters or stockmen were probably the first Europeans in the district and the first land grant was made in 1824. In the 1830s grants of 500 to 2000 acres were provided to settlers with capital. A number of the initial large landowners expanded their holdings and these families occupied the most prominent positions in the local community. By the end of the 1860s a division of labour emerged as large owners ran cattle extensively on the slopes and small tenant farmers and small owners were involved in intensive production of a range of subsistence and market produce. Dungog is the principal town and sits at the entrance to the valley. It was established as a village in 1834, principally to provide a centre for the civil administration of the vast mountainous region stretching north of Newcastle into the Williams Valley. Census figures show the increase in the population of the census district increased from 1757 in 1871 to 4564 in 1901 and the town of Dungog from 286 in 1851 to 1013 residents in 1891, a number that remained constant in 1901.

Structure of the database

This study of the Upper Williams Valley relies principally on a social reconstruction of Dungog and its surrounding agricultural area. Social reconstruction is an expansion of the methodology of population reconstitution and in England population estimates, fertility and mortality trends were established using parish registers.¹⁵ For this research the information on individuals is being entered into a computer database using Access. The philosophy of the Dungog community database is to

¹⁵ E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981; E. A. Wrigley, R. S. Davies, J. E. Oeppen and R. S. Schofield, *English Population History from Family Reconstitution 1580-1837*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

keep as much richness of the data in the original source as possible so that the researcher is not restricted to answering a limited number of pre-defined questions. This contrasts with another style of database, for example Quinlan and Gardner's study of trade unions, which uses a wide range of newspaper sources to collect a narrow range of information and ask a narrow range of questions.¹⁶

The database consists of two main tables which are 'Events' and 'Persons' and a collection of other smaller tables. All tables are linked to the unique Event ID. An Event may be any happening from a Death certificate to a newspaper article to a petition. The 'Events' table is a table of properties that are common to all events, that is date, place or location, a reason, a subject, the source or reference, etc. Each Event is given a unique identity number. It is not necessary for each event to have all the properties listed, however date, place and source are mandatory. To aid in searching, all events have been given a type such as Birth Certificate, Education, Tender, Accident etc.

An Event may or may not include people. In most cases it does, if for no other than that they appear as an observer to the event. Each Event may include any number of persons. 'Persons' is a sub-table (although much larger) of events and linked again by the Event ID. This table contains information common to all people, that is name, sex, age, address, occupation, religion, etc. Additionally, the table contains any relationship to others in the event (for example mother, neighbour, landlord) and their capacity in the event (for example witness, victim, accused, nurse). An attempt to record literacy is also made by recording if the person is able to write (signing one's name is taken as able to write). It is not necessary for any included person to possess all the properties listed.

By this means it is possible to place information from diverse sources into the same database without abandoning any information but at the same time keeping the database relatively compact. The database can be searched by any property of 'Persons' (for example name, occupation, capacity) to give events that involve those persons. Or the database can be searched by any property of 'Event' (for example type of event, reason, date) to give persons involved with such events. This gives the database the ability to reconstruct cliques, informal groups etc. Since the

¹⁶Michael Quinlan and Margaret Gardner, 'Researching Industrial Relations History: The Development of a Database on Australian Trade Unions 1825-1900', *Labour History*, 66, 1994, pp. 90-113.

database also includes Post Office savings, school attendance, school fees paid, land holders and tenders to government it will be possible to gain a good indication about the wealth of individuals and other social information. A unique ID is given to all individuals to assist searching and identification. Information can thus be connected to individuals from a variety of sources.

To date the records number 12,159 Events and 62,294 persons. The following sources are included in the database:

- Civil Registration Certificates of Birth, Death and Marriage, 1856 to 1910
- Anglican Parish Register of Baptism, Burial and Marriage, 1854 to 1894
- Infectious Disease register for Dungog in the late 1890s
- Land and stock holders around Dungog, 1886 (the only year this was compiled)
- Education files for Schools of the area from 1850s.

Census Data

Census data provide an outline of the population changes that occurred. Unfortunately, despite decennial censuses from 1851, the original forms and collection reports have been destroyed. For the censuses of 1861, 1871 and 1881 we have access to the aggregated data only. However, a fire in 1882 destroyed many of the 1881 census returns and this is not useable for comparative purposes as is the 1851 census as its unit of aggregation is larger than the subsequent census districts. Census collectors' notebooks are available for the 1891 and 1901 censuses only and these allow the population of the district to be disaggregated to the villages but only provide the number and sex of the individuals in each household. Thus the research on population growth and movement, household size and occupation that relies on detailed census records and has been completed by historians in other parts of the world is not available to Australian historians. On the other hand, civil registration records which begin in 1856 in the colony of New South Wales provide valuable data.

Civil Registration

Civil Registration in the colony of NSW evolved out of attempts to codify and consolidate all the existing marriage laws and acts relating to the registration of baptisms, burials and marriages. The first provision for compulsory civil registration was embodied in 'An Act to amend and consolidate the Laws affecting the Solemnization of Marriage' (the Marriage Act) assented to on 30 November 1855 and in 'An Act for registering Births Deaths and Marriages' (the Registration Act), assented to

on 3 December 1855.¹⁷ Prior to the implementation of civil registration in NSW, a total of nine Acts of Parliament were passed between 1825 and 1855 in an attempt to regulate and improve upon the church system of registration.

Christopher Rolleston, Registrar General, aimed to have 'one uniform plan, a scheme of Statistical Registration of Births, Deaths, and Marriages; as complete as the experience and wisdom of British statisticians could devise for the use of the Mother Colony.'¹⁸ He sought guidance for the establishment of civil registration from England and the Committee of the Statistical Society in London and the general registry offices of the other Australian colonies that had already introduced civil registration. He believed that the system of registration in the colony of Victoria, devised by William Henry Archer, was the best option. Archer's system and schedules were based on those devised for a Registration Act for Scotland¹⁹ and Rolleston claimed that this system with slight modifications was the same as that adopted by NSW.

¹⁷ 'An Act to amend and consolidate the Laws affecting the Solemnization of Marriage', in Alexander Olwen, *A collection of the Statutes of Practical Utility, Colonial and Imperial in Force in New South Wales*, Vol. III, Thomas Richards, Sydney, 1879, pp. 1405-1409; 'An Act for Registering Births, Deaths and Marriages', *The Public General Statutes of New South Wales, (1852-1862)*, Thomas Richards, Sydney, 1862, pp.3006-3014.

¹⁸ Report from Registrar General, 4 Jun. 1856, *NSW Legislative Council Votes and Proceedings, 1856*, vol. II.

¹⁹ 'Report from Registrar General', 4 Jun. 1856; Evidence of William Henry Archer, Assistant Registrar General of Victoria, 'Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on the Registration and Preservation of Records, 4 Jun. 1858', *NSW Legislative Council Votes and Proceedings 1858*, vol. II.

Birth Registration

It was the responsibility of a parent to notify the district registrar within sixty days of the birth of a child. There was no provision for the registration of still births.²⁰ The information recorded in the birth register was as follows:²¹

- Child's date of birth
- Child's place of birth
- Child's first name/s and whether present at the registration
- Child's sex
- Father's name
- Father's rank or profession
- Father's age
- Father's birthplace
- Date of parent's marriage
- Place of parent's marriage
- Names of previous children living and deceased
- Mother's name and maiden name
- Mother's age
- Mother's birthplace
- Informant's name, description and residence
- Witnesses – accoucheur, nurse, others
- Signature of registrar
- Date and place of registration
- Child's name if added after registration

Death Registration

The principal occupant of the building in which the deceased died had the responsibility for informing the district registrar of the death within thirty days. If a dead body was found, the local coroner or

²⁰ 'An Act for Registering Births, Deaths and Marriages', *The Public General Statutes of New South Wales, (1852-1862)*, Thomas Richards, Sydney, 1862, pp.3006-3014.

²¹ 'Report from Registrar General', 4 Jun. 1856, Appendix C.

justice of the peace notified the registrar.²² The Death Certificates are the most carefully entered and it is rare to find unintentional omission of information. The information recorded in the death register was as follows:²³

- Date and place of death
- Deceased's name, rank or profession
- Deceased's sex and age
- Cause of death
- Duration of last illness
- Medical attendant's name and when he last saw deceased
- Name and surname of deceased's father and mother
- Rank or profession of deceased's father and mother
- Informant's signature, description and residence
- Registrar's signature and date and place of registration
- Place and date of burial
- Name of undertaker
- Name and religion of minister
- Burial witnesses' names
- Deceased's place of birth
- Deceased's duration of time spent in Australian colonies
- Place and age at time of marriage
- Name of spouse (all marriages recorded)
- Names and ages of all children in descending order

²² Registrar General's Office, 'Instructions to District Registrars appointed under the Acts of the Governor and Legislative Council, 19 Victoria, Nos. 30 and 34, for Registering Births, Marriages, and Deaths, in the Colony of New South Wales', in 'Report from Registrar General', 4 Jun. 1856, Appendix G; 'An Act for Registering Births, Deaths and Marriages'.

²³ 'Report from Registrar General', 4 Jun. 1856, Appendix D; 'Report from Registrar General: Second Annual Report, 16 August, 1858', *NSW Legislative Council Votes and Proceedings, 1858*, vol. II.

Marriage Registration

In instances where parties conscientiously objected to being married by a minister of religion or no such minister was accessible, the Marriage Act authorised a district registrar to celebrate a marriage provided the bride was a resident of the district and a declaration was made by both parties. Where the marriage was performed by a religious minister it was his responsibility to forward the original certificate to the district registrar for entry into the register book.²⁴

It appears that administrative blunders in the establishment of both the Marriage and Registration Acts of 1855 accounted for the lack of information reported in the civil marriage registers. The original Registration Act omitted to prescribe the proposed form for the registration of marriage and the officer who drew up the Act incorrectly listed Marine schedules instead of the proposed birth and death schedules. These oversights also went unrecognised by those who passed the Bill!²⁵ Unfortunately, Rolleston did not have the legal power to enforce the collection of data for his preferred choice of marriage registration form. Information included in the original proposed marriage registration included:²⁶

- Date of marriage
- Place of marriage
- Names of bride and groom
- Condition of the parties: that is, whether bachelor, spinster, widower or widow, including date of death of former spouse and number of children living and dead of former marriage. (The inclusion of children by a former marriage is not asked for after 1859.)
- Birth place of both parties
- Rank or profession of both parties
- Ages of both parties
- Present and usual residence of both parties

²⁴ 'An Act to amend and consolidate the Laws affecting the Solemnization of Marriage', in Alexander Olwen, *A collection of the Statutes of Practical Utility, Colonial and Imperial in Force in New South Wales*, Vol. III, Thomas Richards, Sydney, 1879, pp. 1405-1409.

²⁵ 'Report from Registrar General', 4 Jun. 1856; 'Report from Registrar General: Second Annual Report, 16 August, 1858', *NSW Legislative Council Votes and Proceedings, 1858*, vol. II.

²⁶ 'Report from Registrar General', 4 Jun. 1856, Appendix F.

- Father's and mother's names including mother's maiden name for both parties
- Father's rank or profession for both parties
- Declaration by both parties of religious membership
- Signature of both parties
- Name of witnesses
- Name of officiating minister or district registrar

This registration form was indeed the one set out in the register books compiled by the district registrars but much of the information went unrecorded because the majority of marriages were performed by religious ministers and the only information they were legally required to transmit to the district registrars was that recorded on the certificate of marriage in accordance with 'Schedule E' as set out in the Marriage Act. Ironically, the church marriage registers held much of the information that Rolleston desired for his own registers but under the Acts, the clergy were not obliged to submit this information.²⁷

The only information required on the marriage certificate and hence recorded in the civil registers was as follows:²⁸

- Full name of officiating minister or registrar
- Designation of person officiating ceremony
- Place of marriage
- Husband's full name, designation, residence
- Wife's full name, designation, residence
- Date
- Signature of minister or registrar
- Signatures of parties to the marriage
- Signatures of witnesses

²⁷ Evidence of Christopher Rolleston, 'Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on the Registration and Preservation of Records', 16 Jun. 1858, *NSW Legislative Council Votes and Proceedings 1858*, vol. II.

²⁸ 'An Act to amend and consolidate the Laws affecting the Solemnization of Marriage', Schedule E, p.1409.

Despite the attempts by Rolleston and successive registrar generals to have the Acts amended, the limited form of the marriage certificate as laid down in the 1855 Marriage Act was continued until 1895.

Insights from Civil Registration

Marriage

For most women, marriage and family life was the centre of existence in Dungog. Marrying in her early twenties (see table 1), a woman's life was thereafter devoted to raising children, keeping house and creating a comfortable and civilised world for her husband and one in which her children could grow and learn the appropriate social graces. Due to the lack of information on civil registration certificates, the Anglican Church records provide more detailed information and cover approximately fifty per cent of the population.

Table 1: Average Age at Marriage by birth cohort

Year of Birth	No. of Brides	Average Age of Brides	No. of Grooms	Average Age of Grooms
1820-25	2	36.5	5	38.3
1825-29	3	24.0	21	31.8
1830-34	15	28.4	18	28.9
1835-39	27	21.7	50	25.2
1840-44	60	21.3	79	26.4
1845-49	74	20.7	71	26.8
1850-54	66	22.0	81	26.4
1855-59	70	21.0	81	27.3
1860-65	98	22.0	92	27.0
1865-69	87	22.5	101	26.6
1870-72	88	22.2	97	25.8
1875-79	104	21.4	74	23.1
1880-84	67	19.4	15	20.6

Source: Civil registration of birth of first child. This has been used as marriage registration enters exact age only if over 21 years.

Marriage was generally a local affair in Dungog and most women and three-quarters of the men marrying in the Anglican Church in the Parish of Dungog from 1880 to 1894 were born in Dungog or the surrounding district. Most unmarried women were primarily committed to the family enterprise. Of the 127 women who married in the Anglican Church in these years, 86 per cent had their occupation recorded as 'living with parents'. As many of their parents were farmers this meant that they were not living a life of leisure but rather they provided the essential labour of another adult on the farm or in the home. Of the other nineteen, seventeen were domestic servants, one was a teacher, and one was described simply as a spinster. An examination of male occupations across two generations can be undertaken using the information on the Anglican Parish Registers. Of course, it has been noted that occupation given on marriage certificates is frequently raised in status.²⁹ Forty-eight per cent of the men marrying in the Anglican Church recorded exactly the same occupation as their father and many more had a closely allied occupation. The occupation of the bride's father, even if he was deceased, was given on the marriage certificate. (A mother's occupation is only given once, that of washerwoman, when her nineteen year old daughter, living with her mother, married a thirty year old labourer.) Of the 104 brides for whom this information exists, 28 per cent married a man with exactly the same occupation as their father. Many more, however, married men of similar status. For example, daughters of farmers married blacksmiths, a brickmaker, carpenter, carrier and tailor. It is clear that the educated of the town married daughters of educated men.³⁰

Birth

Civil registration records show that following marriage, most women could expect to give birth to a child within twelve months. Women gave birth to their first child in their early twenties and this age declines a little over the decades. There is no difference in age of mother related to her birthplace

²⁹ R.J.Morris, 'Qualitative to Quantitative by Way of Coding and Nominal Record Linkage: The Search for the British Middle Class', *History and Computing*, 11, 1&2, 1999, pp. 10-12.

³⁰ Anglican Register of Marriages, Parish of Dungog.

(NSW, Victoria, England, Ireland and Germany). Given the nature of the immigration to the locality, over time more children were born to parents of Australian birth (see table 2).

Table 2: Parents' Birthplace, Dungog Registration District

	1858	1860	1865	1870	1875	1880	1885	1890
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
2 parents born overseas	80	73	56	39	21	16	16	4
No parent born overseas	1	5	18	28	39	60	65	72

Source: Civil registration of birth.

The most popular spacing between first and second child was approximately 18 months and this is fairly constant across the decades. The space between the second and third child is similar. The greatest length of time between births was recorded as twenty years to a woman who had one daughter aged 20. I suspect that, in this instance and several others, an illegitimate birth was accepted as her own by a mother or aunt.

It is difficult at this stage of the project to estimate completed family size. The collective civil registration records for the Dungog district provide only births registered in the district and it is known from other documents that women did leave the district to have their children and stayed with relatives in nearby towns. It is intended to cross link other material to ascertain that the individual is still in the area and the likelihood of ceasing to bear children. While each woman only has one death certificate, she can appear as a mother many times. If she was widowed, or had a child out of wedlock, she may not always have the same surname (family name). There are additional problems as her maiden (unmarried) name may be recorded as the same as that of her deceased husband and her first name may be recorded variously using a diminution of the name or her second name. Four prime attributes from the birth certificates are used to assign a unique identity number: first name; surname; maiden name; marriage date. This process allows identification of ninety per cent of individual mothers. However, it was frequent practice of brothers to wed sisters from the same family. On occasions sisters in law would share the same first name and surname. In some instances

they wed on the same day and therefore the linkage has to be done by hand. This is also necessary when data is incomplete or names misspelled.

In order to estimate reliably the completed family size at this stage of the project the prime source has been the death certificate as it is the only document that is unambiguous as to the birth of the final child. However, even the death certificate has problems. Civil registration begins in 1856 and death certificates have been made available until 1910. These record 301 female deaths over the age of 18. Of these women, 191 survived to over the age of forty. Therefore younger women who have completed their families by 1900 but who have not died by 1910 are not recorded. From information on the certificate the age of beginning a family and spacing of children can be calculated. The number of non-surviving children can be calculated by comparing the number of surviving children and total number of children. An educated guess can be made as to where these deceased children would have fitted in the sequence, but it is only a guess. Stillborn and other failed pregnancies are not recorded. In the case of some women, particularly with those born in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, less is known about them, as frequently there were families left in Europe.

The average completed family size for Australia as a whole is shown in table 3. Table 4 shows the average size of family for the Dungog civil registration district using information on death certificates. It is possible to compare the two sets of data for women born in the 1830s and this shows a larger completed family size of 8 in the Upper Williams Valley compared to the national average of 7. Birth registration data shows a smaller completed family size of between one and 5 for women born in the 1830s. Using this data for mothers born up to the 1860s (after this date the women are less than forty years of age as access to birth data ceases in 1905) completed family size for the whole period is less than the national average. The fact that the average number of children is higher on death certificates indicates that we are missing births to women in the district when we only use birth registration.

Table 3: Average issue of married women in Australia by generation

Generation	Average number of live births to a married woman surviving to 1911 census (children born to all marriages)
1831-1836	6.98
1836-1841	7.02
1841-1846	7.03
1846-1851	6.75
1851-1856	6.44
1856-1861	5.92
1861-1866	5.25

Source: Lado T. Ruzicka and John C. Caldwell, *The End of Demographic Transition in Australia*, Australian Family formation Project Monograph 5, Australian National University, Canberra, 1977, p. 153.

Table 4: Size of completed family in Upper Williams Valley

Mother's birthdate	Age at marriage	Age at arrival in colony	Number of children
1773-1799	19 to 38 years average 27	31 to 62 years average 47	1 to 9 average 4
1801-1810	16 to 30 years average 24	19 to 49 years average 36	1 to 17 average 7
1811-1820	17 to 36 years average 21	1 to 54 years average 25	0 to 18 average 9
1821-1830	15 to 34 years average 22	1 to 37 years average 23	1 to 14 average 10
1831-1840	13 to 32 years average 20	1 to 44 years average 17	2 to 14 average 8

Source: Civil registration of deaths. Only women who married before the age of 40 are included.

Pre-nuptial pregnancy

These are closely related to illegitimate births as there may only be a fine line in time between the two. Eighteen per cent of first births occurred within six months of marriage. The practice of

anticipating one's marriage became more popular in the 1880s and the most popular time for marrying within this group was at about three months pregnant.

Illegitimacy

A child was deemed illegitimate if its parents were unmarried, whatever the circumstances, and individuals would go to some length to be married before the birth. The data on time between marriage and birth of first child shows several instances of marriages only days prior to the birth and on one occasion on the day itself. A few married soon after the birth, and if marriage occurred between the birth of the child and the registration of birth then the child appeared as legitimate. These events are recorded correctly as the Registrar annotated them.

It was a common practice to anticipate marriage and many of those with an illegitimate child or children married at a later date, sometimes after several years had passed. Fathers' names are not usually recorded unless the couple was co-habiting. However, there was one case where the registrar must have known the father's name and it was entered carefully then crossed out in a way that did not affect the legibility of the entry.

The term illegitimate covered many different parental circumstances, a fact that has been noted in other studies on illegitimacy,³¹ and included

a) single women. This is the most usual case accounting for 96 of the 129 illegitimate births. Mothers' ages range from 15 to 38 years although 18 to 25 are the most common. A few individuals had more than one illegitimate child. For instance, one woman had four children out of wedlock and each time she was described as a spinster.

b) children born in a longstanding relationship but the parents were not married. This accounts for 15 cases. For example, one woman had five illegitimate births by the same father whose name is entered in the birth records. In this case, the mother is aged from 32 to 37 and went by another name at an earlier time so one of the parties may have been married already, thus making another marriage impossible.

³¹ For instance, Shurlee Swain and Renate Howe, *Single Mothers and Their Children: Disposal, Punishment and Survival in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, ch. 2.

c) widows. There are eight cases of widows bearing illegitimate children. They are aged from 24 to 42, although half are over 39 years old. Since most are older widows it would suggest that younger widows could remarry more easily. The older widows did not have this option so readily available.

Over the time period the number of marriages doubled yet the number of illegitimate births does not show anything like this increase, although there are peaks in 1895 and 1901. The most common ages were from 17 to 24, with the largest number being 18 years old. Approximately half of the older mothers were unmarried but in stable relationships. Given the social mores of the time it is unlikely that they simply decided to remain unwed so it is probable that one or other of the partners was already married. The other half (save one) of the older mothers are widows.

Giving Birth

The form for registering births contained a column for witnesses listing three types of people: 1. accoucheur, 2. nurse and 3. witness with the numbering implying a hierarchy of importance. The clarity of entries depended on the nature of the Deputy Registrar who filled in the forms. In the case of the Dungog District, Theos. Fook took over this position in March 1858 and he was precise in his designations. The 'rules' established at this time remain the same until the end of the century. An accoucheur could only be a doctor or surgeon. The first named female was categorised as nurse and subsequent females designated as witness. There could be more than one witness. Males who were not doctors were never called nurse even if they were the only person in attendance and on this rare occasion were designated witness. In fact this occurred on only two occasions to the same couple and the male witness was the husband.

There were 3,797 births registered from 1856 to December 1896, with an average of 85 births per year to 1879, rising to an average of 102 per year for the period 1880 to 1896. Doctors were recorded on the registration of birth as being present at 1,019 births, 27 per cent of all births. Which cases were attended by the doctor? The proportion of doctors attending births varies across the four decades. Between 1856 and 1868, 30 per cent of all births were attended by a doctor. From 1869 to 1883 this falls to 13 per cent. From 1884 to 1896 this rises to 39 per cent. While there is some variation, the pattern of three distinct periods emerges. Primarily geographical factors determine this change, and this can be seen in the places of residence of parents. In the 1870s the far-reaching parts of the valley were being settled yet the doctors were based in Dungog. A journey on horseback of over ten miles was required, roads were bad and no bridges crossed the streams. In

addition, the land became less productive as you proceeded up the valley, and families lived in poor circumstances or poverty. What factors could have influenced the change in the 1880s? The answer probably lies once again in geography - better roads, some bridges and the failure or decline in some of the further settlements. Dairy farming became more popular and a number of farmers reported their address as Dungog. There may also have been some influence from the ideas about the necessity of having trained attendants at birth.

As an agricultural community, half the births (52 per cent) were children of farmers, although this is higher (61 per cent) in the period to 1880. However, only 15 per cent of the births attended by doctors were children of farmers (this proportion was higher in the period to 1879, 33 per cent). Location is given for 389 of the doctor assisted births and, primarily, these occurred in Dungog or very close to it. The individuals who used a doctor most frequently were in town or if they resided a few miles from town they were wealthy graziers. Townspeople with a trade or in commerce were likely to have a higher and more stable income than many of the farmers in the district who were tenants on their land and poor, so income could also be a factor. Choice of a doctor relates to location and wealth but these are not the only determinants. Some wealthy families did not have a doctor present while some labourers who resided in Dungog had a doctor in attendance.

There are 524 different women listed as either accoucheur or nurse. Eight women who attended more than 100 cases each accounted for 29 per cent of the deliveries. Thirty-seven per cent of births occurred where the nurse attended fewer than twenty births across her lifetime. There is no discernible pattern in the women who attended a birth when there is a doctor present and both experienced and inexperienced women acted in this capacity. In 17.5 per cent of cases the nurse had the same surname as either the mother's married or maiden name and this percentage remains constant over the four decades. Thus many women offered their services in familial or neighbourly acts at the time of childbirth.³²

Conclusion

The civil registration certificates in NSW provide a wealth of information about the demographic events of a local

³² See Glenda Strachan, 'Present at the Birth: Midwives, "Handywomen" and Neighbours in Rural New South Wales, 1850-1900', *Labour History*, no. 81, Nov. 2001, pp. 13-28.

community and offer a window into community practices as these certificates contain detailed information. The legacy of this complex system of registration is that issues of birth, family formation and death plus migration can be explored to varying depths and some examples relating to family life are contained in this paper. These insights show that marriage was generally a local affair and that the birth of the first child followed closely after marriage. Attendants at the birth were dependent on the location of the mother, the family's wealth and the health of the mother. Completed family size is similar to the national average. Illegitimacy occurred but these children could be born to effectively single women or into a stable family unit. These insights show an immigrant society settling the land as part of the nineteenth century European colonisation of foreign lands.