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# Downs Folk

## Lives and times of folk of Toowoomba & the Downs

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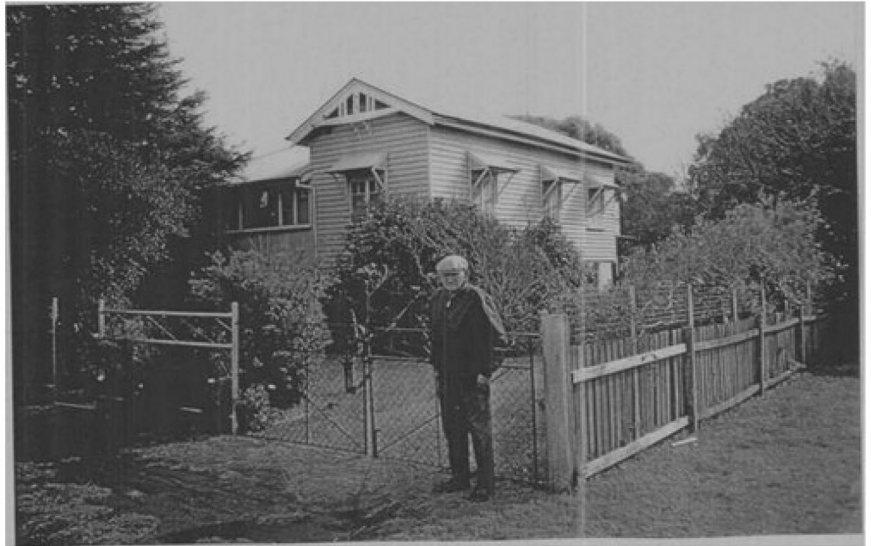
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## Francis J Pobar



Francis Joseph Pobar

My name is Francis Joseph Pobar and I was born in Toowoomba 88 years ago. My grandfather, Feliece Pobar, was an Austrian seaman who jumped ship in India. He came to the Victorian goldfields. Whilst at Ballarat he joined

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the diggers at the Eureka Stockade and was shot in the leg by the troopers. He had a hole in his leg for the rest of his life. Feliece met Emma Archer on the Bendigo goldfield and married her - I think she was only 15 years old at the time. Her brother, Fred Archer, was a champion jockey who remained in Coventry, England. Feliece was a strict Catholic who had a brother who was Archbishop in New Zealand. I was named after him.

The family, which included another few Archers, heard about the land in the Darling Downs and decided to move here. They came by dray from Melbourne to Grandchester and got jobs on the railway which was only then being built. After a time they finished work on the railways and built a house on 11 acres in Tor Street on what is now known as the Wine Estate. At that time there were vineyards all round the area was called the vinegar estate. My grandparents had 7 children altogether and he started the boys off in the Gowrie Street butchery which opened in 1896. The location was good because many railwaymen lived in the area and bought meat as well as the men from other areas who were just passing through Toowoomba. The Pobars were great horsemen. Most of the cattle for killing were bought in Crows Nest. They were then driven to Toowoomba and slaughtered on the 40 acres the family had bought across the way from the other 11 acres.

When working for the butcher, one of my jobs was to deliver meat on horseback. My father, John, was born in 1875. He later built a house on the 40 acres at Tor Street. Gowrie Street at one stage housed 3 different families of Pobars! My father married Catherine O'Keefe in 1893 in St Patricks Church in Toowoomba. The couple had 11 children and I was 8th in the family. My mother's father was a coach builder in Toowoomba who worked for people like Ferguson. My grandfather was a heavy drinker. My mother's brother was a top boxer - a lightweight who was Toowoomba born but went to Melbourne. I went to school at Wilsonton from 1915-22. My Dad was on the original School Committee. I then went to Christian Brothers College for 12 months and sat for the Scholarship exam. 95 of us sat and 94 passed!.

I went to work as a butcher on 10 March 1924 and worked for my relatives for 2 years before joining the railways as a coachbuilder in 1926. During the Depression, in 1931, we apprentices were all sacked by the Queensland government - the first time this had ever happened. For 12 months I was unable to find work and we used to play tennis every day. I had been interested in sport before and had played junior rugby league for Queensland. The Gowrie Street butcher's shop had closed in the meantime but in 1922 it started again as F. Pobar and Son.

In 1933 I went back to butchering again in Gowrie Street for five years. The Pobars had many shops - one in Ruthven Street near Bell Street, one near the present Royal Hotel in Ruthven Street, one at Harlaxton, and another in Margaret Street where the PF Chicken Bar now stands.

I was married on 2 February 1933 to Evelyn Haig, of Scottish descent. Because she was not Catholic we were not able to marry at St Patrick's but found a priest at Holy Name willing to conduct the ceremony. Haig Street was named after Evelyn's grandmother who had lived in the street all her life. We had four children: Francis Joseph (John), Noreen Francis, Kevin Ronald, and Barry Douglas who died when 6 years old. John played rugby league for Queensland whilst Kevin was also an excellent player. We lived at 5 Charles Street for 22 years and 13 Vera Street for the last 35 years. My wife died on 29 August 1986.

I left the butchering with Pobars to take up a position as an instructor under the veterinarians at Gatton College. Later I worked at the Toowoomba abattoirs for 20 years, from 1955 - 1975. I became a foreman and later assistant work manager.

I remember the Empire College fire. It lit up the whole sky.

My great-grandparents, the Archers, took up about 60 acres in the 1800's at East Greenmount. They had some involvement in the Gatton murders. The prime suspect, a fellow named Burgess, was camped on their property on the night of the murder so could not have been where the murders were committed. The Archers gave this evidence and Burgess was not charged.

The Archers sold the property much later to Tom Allen, a noted cricketer who played for Queensland.

I remember the end of the First World War. Bells were all ringing at midnight in Toowoomba and woke everyone up. We had an air raid shelter in the back yard at Charles Street during World War 2.

As kids, we were constantly entertained by an Irish policeman. On one occasion we saw a horse drop dead near the Commonwealth bank in Ruthven Street. The policeman came to make his report and asked us to move the horse to Bell Street because he was unable to spell Ruthven Street!

Mr Pobar interviewed by John Clements on 30 April 1998.

Additional Information supplied by Mr Pobar on 5th May 1998

The railway workshops and locomotive housing used to be in Bellevue Street. In about 1927 the whole lot was moved to Willowbum. Willowbum had about 27 high spotlights there then on about 20 towers. The twenty apprentices climbed every one of them. I am now the only apprentice still living. I am also the only one living of the 1927 Christian Brothers Rugby league team. The team later became the All Whites and I lost interest.

At Willowbum, Baillie Henderson used to have 9 foot high fences but now they have been pulled down. There used to be 1400 patients but now there are only 300 to 400. Baillie always had beautiful gardens.

My brother 'Swagman Jack' was 14 years older than me. He was 86 when he died. He used to write to Banjo Patterson and Henry Lawson. He used to call Banjo 'Barty'. He had many letters from Banjo which he kept in his room at Brodribb Home. I went to his room at Brodribb just after he had died but they had disappeared. He also had 2 books of his poems which also disappeared. The poems had been published in the Chronicle by Sart Mamey.

'Swagman Jack' worked for KR Darling Downs for many years until the 1946 strike and later the Bulimba Brewery for a long time. He was called 'Swagman Jack' because he always carried a swag and walked beside the bullock team in the Carnival of Flowers (early 1950's). He also marched proudly in the Labour Day procession.

During WW2 there was a Javanese camp on the western side of Willowbum workshops. The property was owned by Forde who later built a big house at Highfields. The Javanese worked as labourers on the Council. They made beautiful box kites and as many as 100 at a time could be seen flying near Mort Street - they were all different sizes and shapes. They all went back to Java after the war.

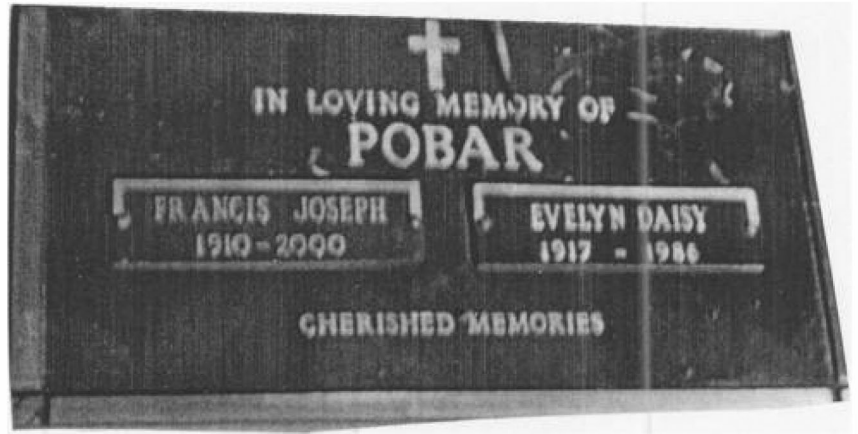
There were camps everywhere in Toowoomba during the war. The butchers (especially Searles) and bakers made a fortune. There were camps at Clifford Park, Newtown Park, etc.

In early Toowoomba there were red roads everywhere - the fellows on relief used to spread the gravel from the quarries. When storms came there were big clouds of red dust everywhere. Doug Annand was mainly responsible for the red road development.

We used to swim in Watsons quarry where the Wheat Research Institute is now located. We used bullock's bladders as floaters. We found bamboo sticks to blow them up through the teats. I used to ride my pony to the pictures at

the Strand. I loved the sound of the pony galloping over the cobblestones of Ruthven Street late at night after the pictures.

There were Chinese gardens all along Black Gully in the early days. Black Gully was named after the black wattle, which grew along the gully. We made hockey sticks from the trunk and root of the wattle. At the bottom of Gladstone Street was a bacon factory. My father went to North State school as did Littleton Groom, the two Horns, Alec and David, and Dr Roberts from 'Finchley'.



— Material prepared in July 2006 and proof read by Mrs Nola Robinson.

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