

The
Nicholson
Family Tree



1690 - 1986



ARMS

Barry of six Erminois and Gules, on a chief Azure, a cross patee Argent, between two suns in splendour Or.

CREST

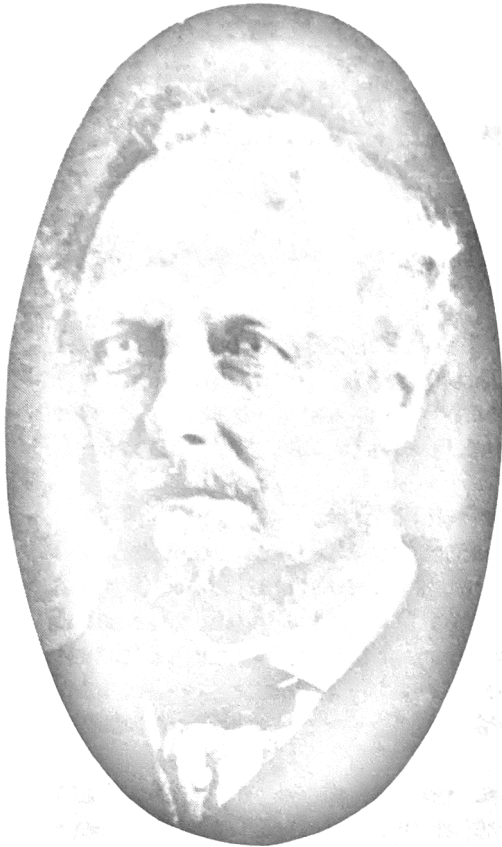
On a branch of a tree fessways Proper, a lion's head erased Or, and charged with a cross patee Gules.

MOTTO

"PROVIDENTIA DEI"
(By the providence of God)



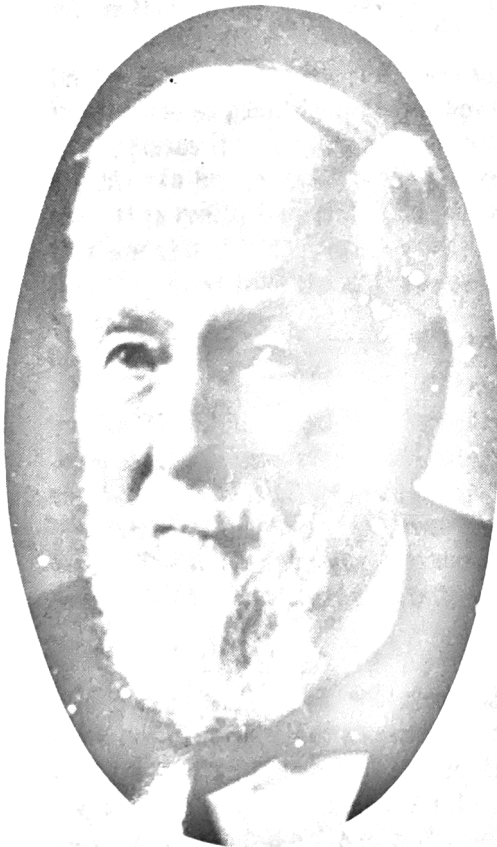
Craven Nicholson 1750 - 1828
Head of this family tree
Great Great Great Great Grandfather of the author



John Duggleby



Harriet



William



Fanny

John Dubbleby & William were sons of Elijah Nicholson (a8) - son of Craven

HISTORY OF THE NICHOLSON FAMILY OF UNDERBERG

By J M (Skonk) Nicholson (1986)

The brothers John Duggleby and William Nicholson were descended from the Nicholsons of Watton Grange in Yorkshire. Despairing of making a living through farming during the sad economic conditions which prevailed in England in the 1840's they became interested in the Byrne settlement scheme in Natal South Africa.

John Duggleby was married to Harriet (nee Harrow) of Hampshire and William was married to her sister Fanny. The two families (including John and Harriet's two young sons Willie and Edward) sailed from London in the ship "Sandwich". This sailing ship of 149 tons was the smallest of the ships chartered by J. C. Byrne. There were only 12 passengers on board. Harriet in her journal refers to the final farewell at London docks on April 20th 1850 as follows: "I shall not enter into a description of the agonised parting we had with those who accompanied us on board, sufficient to say that sleep did not visit our eyelids."

They were all, as can be expected, upset at leaving England. Harriet writes "We shed many tears over the White Cliffs of Dover as they fell astern." The ship rolled dreadfully in rough seas and Harriet did not flourish during the long voyage. She remarks: "I will here remark that I have not been so thin for years." She was often sea-sick and the roughness of the voyage at times is indicated by an entry in her journal for the 4th of July, 1850: "A terrific night, we were nearly rocked out of our beds. Just before tea I had a dreadful fall from one side of the vessel to the other - knocking my head against the bulwarks and cutting it open. I was quite insensible so that dear Willie thought that I was dead."

On the 23rd of May Harriet comments: "As the heat is really dreadful we are obliged to go as lightly clad as possible. I cannot describe how painful the heat is to us. John sleeps on the boards which makes it much hotter. The poor children eaten up with bugs, killed 22." A few weeks later an entry in her journal reads: "Found nearly 100 bugs in the gathers of a bolster we have not in use. It is really frightful." To add to their misery rats made a hole in their berth. Fortunately this was closed in due time. What with rough seas, bugs, rats and sea-sickness there is no doubt that they must have thought constantly of the comfortable home that they had left behind them in Yorkshire.

On the 27th July 1850 the "Sandwich" arrived off Durban but as the sea was very rough after several days of gale force winds could not cast anchor and so had to beat up and down shore much to the discomfort of the Nicholsons. They could see a wreck of a vessel off the Bluff. Harriet reports: "We soon hear the vessel wrecked was the Minerva and when we reflected how nearly we had settled to be amongst its passengers, we felt overcome with gratitude, for although all were saved, still the amount of property lost was very great - that night we scarcely closed our eyes."

On the 29th of July the Nicholsons landed at Durban. Harriet writes in her journal: "The tides were too low to admit of a vessel entering the harbour and so we were landed in surf boats. I will add here that the "Sandwich" crossed the bar about a week later. The scenery entering the harbour was most splendid. I cannot describe what we felt on landing, it seemed so delicious to step on land once more. We had a cup of coffee with bread and butter and rode from the shore to Durban in a wagon drawn by bullocks."

In Durban the Nicholsons lived in a tent in the vicinity of what is now the site of the City Hall. What a start to their life in a new country. Supplies were not always easy to come by. The new comers were not impressed with Durban. Harriet writes: "I cannot say much for Durban

for although the scenery there is beyond magnificent, the place is so sandy that it is unbearable. The sand burns your feet and when there is the least wind you can scarcely see. Still it is a very flourishing place and the storekeepers are getting rich by posing on the poor immigrants who are compelled to live there whilst they wait for their lands."

Most of the Byrne settlers had difficulty in getting their land but John Nicholson told Mr Moreland (the Byrne settlers' agent) that he had to see the people sent from Beaulieu and he thought that while he was about this he might as well look at some land. Accordingly two days after they had landed, John accompanied by Edgar Knight (a settler on the Sandwich) set off for Illovo, (now Richmond) and liking the situation returned to Durban and got authority to have their allotments next to each other on the Illovo River.

John, Harriet and their two young sons left first for Illovo. William and Fanny stayed behind at the port to arrange financial matters and to collect the Nicholson's baggage from the Sandwich. Harriet writes: "We were in Durban only ten days and then left for here (Illovo). We of course travelled in a wagon and the roads are not of a first class quality. We were nicely shaken and the hills were terrific."

Fanny and William followed a few days later. The wagon trips were a great experience for the Nicholsons as they had never before travelled in such conveyances - a strange contrast to the quiet, peaceful rural life in England. Preparing meals under trek conditions was a novel experience and awakening each morning under the wagon tent made them wonder if they were dreaming. Flooded rivers, enforced outspans in various perils of the road eventually ended when the Nicholson's arrived on the stretch of bare veld (now the farm Beaulieu) selected by them.

William and Fanny were allocated forty acres and John and Harriet were allocated fifty acres; the extra ten being allowed because they had two children. Harriet reported to relatives in England; "We like our situation very much indeed, our land is close to a large river called the Illovo and not far from the town which is already laid out in streets and is to be called Beaulieu (now Richmond). We of course have a town allotment and we hope it may become of value as there are many families settling there."

The Nicholson's experienced many hardships in those early days. A tent sufficed as a dwelling house for a considerable time, tilling of the soil being for the moment more important than buildings. Fortunately the forty and fifty acre allotments mentioned above adjoined each other and so the two brothers worked them as one unit.

John and William assisted by their wives worked with a great deal of determination to establish themselves. It was not easy because transport was a real problem and it is not surprising to read in Harriet's journal that "John and William are thinking of getting a wagon as the generality of them answer remarkably well" The Nicholson farming activities prospered so much that more land became necessary and so this in time led to John Duggleby and William deciding to farm separately. William and Fanny remained on the farm Beaulieu which had developed on and around the original two allotments while John and Harriet moved to the farm Illovo Mills (now Riverlea) on the other side of Richmond. Here John built a large mill powered by a water wheel, drawing its water via a canal from the Illovo river.

One of John's sons, Robert, lived with his parents at Illovo Mills until he married Kate Findlay. Thereafter he farmed at Theddon before moving to Beaconsfield (now known as Poldhu). In 1897 they returned to the farm Illovo Mills. Prior to this in 1886 Robert became interested in obtaining a farm in the Underberg District.

Up to this time Underberg was known as no-man's land as it was an uninhabited area. The first Europeans to set eyes on this lovely district were Portuguese. On the 21st of January 1593 the sailing ship Santo Alberto was wrecked near the Umtata River mouth and the survivors took an inland route in their attempt to reach Lourenco Marques (now Maputo). They passed through the district in May. ~~1593~~. The district came into the news again when it was visited by the Voortrekkers Commissie Trek in 1834. In the following year Captain Allen Francis Gardiner travelled through the district with his two wagons in an attempt to find a route over the Drakensberg to the Cape. He was accompanied by Dick King, Henry Ogle, G. Cyrus and Jan Wynngaart. He named the area (below what is now Hodgson's Peaks) the Giant's Cup and also named a prominent mountain which reminded him of Edinburgh Castle. This he called Giants Castle (now Garden Castle).

In 1862 a group of men pursued some Bushmen who had stolen cattle in the Dargle - Nottingham Road area. Unfortunately one of them, Thomas Hodgson, was accidentally shot in the thigh. He died within twenty four hours and was buried under the cairn of stones near the peaks which now bear his name. Later in the year J.S. Dobie returning from Queenstown where he had gone to buy sheep, made a sketch of the mountains now known as Bamboo Mountain and Garden Castle. He called them the Cathedral and the Castle. J.S. Dobie had been accompanied on his trip to Queenstown by two Australian brothers Henry and Fred Bucknall. On their return to the Nottingham Road district they discussed with their brother Edgar, the country they had passed through.

A few years later in 1865 Edgar Bucknall and his cousin Frank Bucknall decided to squat on land beyond the Umzimkulu on the Amanzimnyama lands on what is now the Nicholson farm Highlands. There, assisted by Robert Gold they set about building a small sod house. Running short of supplies Edgar set off down the Umzimkulu River with two horses hoping to trade with the natives in the Makuzeni location but he was murdered somewhere near the junction of the Polela and Umzimkulu rivers. A low mound marks the site of their simple home on Highlands. Today we honour Edgar and Frank Bucknall - the first Europeans to attempt to settle in the Underberg District. Frank left the district after his brother's murder.

Towards the end of the same year (1865) the Surveyor General of Natal, Dr Sutherland, accompanied by Willie Nicholson, of Richmond (a son of John Duggleby and Harriet) fixed the southern boundary of Natal in this area. A mountain to the south of the Ngwangwana River was named Mount Sutherland. The early settlers in the district called it Sutherland's Folly because they felt that he should have fixed the boundary much further south thereby including the whole of East Griqualand. Sutherland changed the name of Giant's Castle to Garden Castle, after his (Dr Sutherlands) mothers maiden name. A prominent peak further north was called Giant's Castle. From an historical point of view the change of names was a pity.

During the Langalibalele incident in 1873 the Richmond Rangers rode right through what is now the district of Underberg as it was thought that Langalibalele might have escaped into no-mans land (Underberg and East Griqualand). Finding this was not the case the Richmond Rangers, after scaling the Black Pass (now Sani Pass) took part in an epic chase of Langalibalele across Basutoland (now Lesotho). James Hackland of Richmond, father of Clarice Nicholson served in the Richmond Rangers.

All the comings and goings brought the district to the notice of some of the pioneer settlers. In 1885 R W Cockerell got permission from the Surveyor General of Natal, Dr Sutherland, to settle where he liked in the district. He selected the land now known as Fondeling Farm near Garden Castle. Soon afterwards Robert Christianson followed and settled on the farm Scotston. Cockerell was friendly with the Nicholsons of Richmond and he persuaded them to visit the district. As a result Robert Nicholson, accompanied by his wife, Kate and young son Jack (J B Nicholson), then seven years of age, travelled by ox wagon to the district in late 1886.

On the way up, near Fondeling, they outspanned in misty conditions on a site on what was to be the Nicholson farm of Highlands. The next day while at breakfast the mist cleared and there above them was a high hill which they promptly named Breakfast Hill. While staying at Fondeling the Nicholsons lived in their tented wagon. Walter Nicholson also came up from Richmond. He and Robert looked around the land available near Fondeling and as a result of their efforts Robert selected the farms of Highlands and Lowlands. Walter chose Selbourne while Stoney Hall went to Thomas Nicholson and X L to Henry Nicholson. It is interesting to note that Walter Nicholson erected a mill powered by water on the farm Selbourne, near the Ngwangwana River. The ruins of this mill are still clearly visible today.

Robert Nicholson did not settle permanently in Underberg but continued with his farming in Richmond. He did however make many visits to his two farms, often spending weeks at the simple home which was erected on the farm Highlands. He appointed Harry Cockerell to manage the farm for him. Robert assisted by Harry set about building the simple home even before the final survey of the two farms was completed. As most of the money available was set aside for paying for the farms the house which was eventually built would by today's standards be classified as primitive. While the house was being built Robert and Harry lived in their tented wagon. In the first instance two rooms were built. As the dolerite boulders used for this purpose had to be shaped progress was of necessity slow. One room, the living room and dining room included a large fire place and here meals were cooked. The other room served as a bedroom. A high corrugated iron hip-roof was placed over these two rooms.

As Kate Nicholson expressed a wish to visit the Underberg farms two further rooms were added: one to be used as a kitchen and the other as a second bedroom. The walls of these rooms were built of clay bricks made from local deposits of the material available nearby. These sun dried bricks were sprayed with black tar to protect them against adverse weather conditions. A few years later when Robert Nicholson decided to breed horses a stable in the form of a lean to was added at the back of the house. Times were very hard in those early days of farming in the district and the stable out of sheer necessity had to be adjoined to the house.

In 1896 John Bertram Nicholson (known as Jack) came to Underberg to farm at Highlands. He was 16 years old and he was joined by his brother Robert Edward in 1899. This began a partnership between the two brothers which was to last for many years, finally to be broken by the death of Jack in 1957. Edward Nicholson was engaged to Annie Malcolm and it was intended that on their marriage they should live on the section of the farm known as Lowlands. Their future home was actually in the course of construction on sloping land overlooking the Ngwangwana flood plain when Annie died as a result of meningitis in 1913. Edward remained at Highlands until his death in 1959 forming a very successful partnership with his brother under the name of Nicholson Brothers.

On the engagement of Jack Nicholson to Clarice Hackland of Ivy House, Richmond, it was decided that the original dwelling house could not serve as a family home and so a favourable site, about 200 metres from the original dwelling, was chosen. The outbreak of the Bambata Rebellion saw Jack Nicholson once again going on active service with the Natal Carbineers just as he had done during the South African war when he was in the campaign from start to finish. The 1906 rebellion delayed the building of the new house on Highlands. The delay had one great advantage in that the railway between Pietermaritzburg and East Griqualand reached Donnybrook in 1906 and supplies were fetched from the station instead of from Pietermaritzburg - a much longer haul.

The new house was built by Sam Downs of Richmond and he made use of an outcrop of sandstone on Breakfast Hill for the outer walls of the building. It is interesting to note that one consignment of yellowwood for flooring and parts of the doors cost £9.00 for 1200 feet. F M Saunders from Bulwer undertook the carpentry work. Three additional rooms and two side verandahs were added in the early 1920s by two itinerant tramps known as Mr Dickens and Mr Chamberlain.

One of the sheds built near the original homestead (now known as the old house) was built by a Mr William Pitt. Thus, men with famous British names who had fallen upon hard times after the Great War played their part in extending the buildings on Highlands.

Clarice Ellen Nicholson and her daughter Kate Irene did much to help the farm weather the depression of the 1920s and early 1930s running as they did a paying guest establishment. Clarice, a very keen gardener, established a name for herself far and wide for her magnificent tulip and daffodil bulbs.

Three of Jack Nicholson's sons took up farming. Robert Desmond the eldest starting in 1930, Godfrey Charles the youngest in 1937 and Paul Bertram after service in the army during world war two. Desmond after his marriage to Olive Pike in 1940 took up the running of "X L" Farm which had been purchased from Henry Nicholson in 1923.

Paul and Godfrey remained on Highlands and after the deaths of Jack and Edward Nicholson ran the farms Highlands and Lowlands in partnership. Godfrey died in 1979 and Paul continues to farm the two farms with the able assistance of his second son Derek Edward Bertram. His first son Anthony Peter who died tragically at the early age of 25, was also due to take up farming on the adjoining farm Rokeby.

"X L" Farm is now farmed by John Duggleby Edwin Nicholson but he would be the first to admit that things are made easier for him by the invaluable assistance given him by his father Desmond.

I was the odd one out and went teaching.

Skonk Nicholson





PENNY NICHOLSON

Watton Grange Homestead, Yorkshire
Home of the Nicholsons