

Robert Hamilton Ross by May Koellner

In our March 2004 Journal we asked for information about Robert Ross, the author of a nostalgic poem about Moruya published on page 3 of that issue. May Koellner is one of our oldest members. She is a member of the Emmott family - her great grandfather built our museum. She was a valued contributor to early editions of our Journal.

Here she provides the answer to our question.



The poem was very well known to me as a homesick Moruya girl living in Sydney for my education. I cut it out of the *Moruya Examiner* which my mother sent to me each week and it really described the Moruya I knew so well - tall gums, Myrtle Gully and the small creek that flowed through it and over the 'cataract' as we called it. The bush birds' song, the river, the corn and cattle of the dozens of farms in those days; the cold white spray of the sea and the hillsides all around - I knew the poem by heart, then one day years ago I realised that it had been lost in one of our moves. Thank you then to the Journal for the opportunity to see the poem in print again.

Robert Hamilton Ross was the younger son of John Leslie Ross, who was born in 1862 in Cromarty, Scotland. (I have to thank the *Pioneer Directory* for the dates.) John Ross was the town's carpenter, joiner and undertaker, and for many years he was the secretary to the Moruya Hospital. I remember him in my childhood as a kind

and jolly man, a friend of my family. He and his wife lived in a house I thought was beautiful in Campbell Street in about its lowest part, opposite what has been called 'The Swamp'. Their family had all left home by then.

Robert was born on the 24th May, 1897 in Moruya, so that is why he loved Moruya, and it was a wonderful place to be young in those times.

A younger sister, Marjorie died age nine.

Robert's brother, Lieutenant J.S. Leslie Ross, A.F.C. was a World War 1 ace who, having survived the war, was accidentally killed when the plane in which he was navigator, wireless operator and assistant pilot, crashed shortly after take off from Hounslow Aerodrome in England on the first flight to Australia. I remember the shock and sorrow of the people of Moruya at the tragic news. That was on 13th November, 1919. The tablet to his memory, may be found on the eastern wall in the Moruya Uniting Church,

which was then the Methodist Church. It was unveiled at a special ceremony in memory of our servicemen, which was described in the *Moruya Examiner* of 15th January, 1921.

His mother and father suffered intense grief at the death of their elder son and it undermined their health. Mr John Ross died in February, 1924 and Mrs Ross in October, 1930.

At the time of Mrs Ross's illness, Robert was living at Ganmain, a long way from the place he loved so much, but he and his sister Jean, a schoolteacher, with whom his mother had lived since the death of her husband were in attendance all through her last illness.

Jean, who lived at Kensington came to Moruya from time to time and visited my parents, Mr and Mrs A. F. Emmott, and I met her on one occasion, about 1950 - a most likeable and pleasant lady.

I never really knew Robert himself, but I feel sure he was like the rest of his family. I only know the verses as a poem, but it does have a song like lilt to it. Perhaps some musical Moruya person could compose a tune to it?



This studio photograph in the Museum's collection is marked "Ross" and is almost certainly the Ross children:

Robert Hamilton Ross, born 24 May 1897.

Isabella Jane Ross, known as Jean, born 8 July 1893.

James Stewart Leslie Ross, born 20 October 1895.