

# The first Australian William Colenso (1861-1939)

Gunner, Shearer, Drover, Unionist, Hotelkeeper & Businessman



Shearing the Rams by Tom Roberts, 1890

Ann Collins  
July 16, 2018

# The first Australian William Colenso (1861-1939)

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William Colenso (1811-1899) was a prominent NZ pioneer, a polymath with a broad range of interests. His nephew, William (1842-1945), in Penzance, was also involved in the arts and sciences as well as a participant in local politics, serving on the Penzance Council with a term as Mayor. William's youngest brother, Edwin, migrated to Australia and raised a large family who lived active lives in their communities – one was named William.

## Edwin Colenso's Family in Geelong

Edwin Colenso was born in January 1827 in Italy.<sup>1</sup> His father Samuel May Colenso was a saddler in Penzance. He had withdrawn his eldest son William from school in September 1826 and indentured him as an apprentice printer. Samuel and his wife then travelled to Italy, possibly in preparation for establishing an ironmonger shop in London. Their eldest daughter Jane Emily was already living, in 1826, with her uncle William and his wife Frances in Marazion.<sup>2</sup> The other children may have been distributed amongst their relatives.



After being raised in Penzance, Edwin immigrated to Geelong, Victoria, arriving on the *Berkshire* in October 1848. He was a carpenter, aged 21, and started work as a cabinet maker and undertaker. In January 1850 he married Eliza Borrill Cook. They had four sons, with only two surviving infancy – Samuel Robert (1853-1890) and John (1853-1933). One of the other sons was called William and lived just over a year. Eliza died in 1858. During this time Edwin had joined the gold rush at Ballarat.

Edwin Colenso

Edwin married his second wife, Martha Austin, in February 1859. They had eleven children, nine living to adulthood, seven sons and two daughters.

- Edwin Austin Colenso (1859-1898) who became a grocer in Melbourne.
- William Colenso (1861-1939), the subject of this paper.
- Emily Caroline Colenso (1865-1950), married Alfred Allan Winstanley.
- Richard Alfred Colenso (1867-1923) who was a business man, amateur actor, local politician and cycling handicapper.
- Thomas Henry Colenso (1870-1950) a painter and decorator who started a paint manufacturing business.
- Amelia Virginia Colenso (1872-1898), married Robert Courtney Feltham.
- Joseph Austin Colenso (1874-1939) who served in the Boer War, emigrated to NZ, established a painter and decorator business and was involved in amateur swimming competitions.
- Alfred George Colenso (1877-1950) became manager of a Woollen Mill and was a competitive rower.
- Albert Ernest Colenso (1880-1954) who served in the Boer War and settled in South Africa.

Most, if not all, of the sons were active Freemasons, like the family back in Penzance.

In Edwin's obituary, published in the Geelong Advertiser in July 1897, his early years in Victoria are described as follows.

*Mr Colenso arrived in the [Corio] bay in October 1848, and was among the first undertakers who opened business in this town. He joined the mad rush to the diggings early in the fifties, and participated in the Ballarat riots, taking sides with the late Hon. Peter Lalor at the famous*

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*Eureka Stockade. He had the rather sensational experience when returning to Geelong, having been "stuck-up" by bushrangers, robbed of his hard earned gold, and was left in a perfectly nude state, by them, lashed to a tree. He was discovered by a settler shortly after, and was released.<sup>3</sup>*

One of the consequences of bushranger activity and the Eureka rebellion was the establishment of a volunteer corps in 1854, not exceeding 2000 members, with the officers appointed by the Victorian Governor. Several rifle units were first, quickly followed by artillery and cavalry. By 1860, the provision had been expanded to allow up to 10,000.<sup>4</sup> A meeting concerning the Artillery Brigade in Geelong was held in February 1864 and the reports mentions Mr Colenso moving a motion to elect the sergeants.<sup>5</sup>



Victorian Volunteer Rifles 1854 Drill hall, Skene St Geelong. Rear of Gold Diggers Hotel

## William Colenso and the Victorian Permanent Artillery

In 1870, the war between France and Germany, and the possibility that England might be drawn into it, caused considerable anxiety in the public mind and steps were taken to establish a corps of permanent artillery in Victoria. This corps consisted of seventy men including all the drill instructors who were classed as artillerymen. For many years the corps under the command of Captain Stubbs, a retired officer of the British Army, held pride of place among the land forces of the colony. They rejoiced in the sobriquet of "Stubbs' Bulldogs", which, far from insinuating any bullying, combined their tenacity and the name of their esteemed leader. But among the eyes focused on the corps were those of the Chief Commissioner of Police. After each man had given full proof of his efficiency as a soldier his services were claimed to complete the establishment of the Victorian Police Force. "Stubbs' Bulldogs" were condemned by the Victorian Treasury as a serious waste of public money as they appeared to exist simply for training policemen at great expense. In a severe retrenchment, much to the regret of the military authorities, the Government ordered their disbandment in December 1880. One officer and twelve men were retained for military works.

When the public again became concerned about a possible war involving Great Britain in Egypt and the Sudan the Victorian government resurrected the permanent force.

An advertisement was published in the Victorian newspapers in July 1882. *Persons desirous of being employed in the Victorian Artillery Corps have to present themselves at the barracks. The recruits were sworn in under the Discipline Act for five years. They have to be not less than 19 nor more than 30 years of age, and a minimum height of 5ft. 8in. with a chest measurement of not less than 35in. Their characters must be good, they must be able to read and write fairly, and they have to pass a medical examination. The pay for gunners is to be 4s. per day, made as follows – Daily pay, 2s. 6d, messing allowance, 1s., deferred pay, 6d.<sup>6</sup>*

William enlisted as a gunner on July 27, 1882. He was then 21 and described as 5ft. 8¼in. high, with fresh complexion, brown hair and eyes, Victorian, driver or drover.<sup>7</sup>



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In 1883 a young man named Colenso was arrested at Benalla, charged with deserting from the Permanent artillery about a week previously. He then escaped on June 4, while in the guard-room under arrest.<sup>8</sup> Two years later on June 12, 1885, mounted constable Beckwith, who was stationed in the Camperdown district, arrested a young man named Colenso on a charge, on warrant, of being a deserter from the Victorian Artillery Corps at Melbourne from May 29, 1885. He was arrested while driving a traveller's trap.<sup>9</sup>

Whether these incidences were temporary absences or an attempt to permanently leave the force is not known. However in 1928 William was the president of the Old Comrades' Association which consisted of former members of the Victorian Artillery (Permanent).<sup>10</sup> He also unveiled a Roll of Honour at the Albert Park Artillery Drill Hall in 1930.<sup>11</sup>

William's brothers continued to serve in the artillery. This photograph may include Albert Ernest, who was a gunner before shipping out to South Africa to fight in the Boer War.



Victorian Garrison Artillery 1900 Drill Hall McKillop St Geelong.  
Just prior to movement to Myers St Depot (Current location)

A Mr Colenso moved a vote of confidence in Captain Edward

Morley who was the Nationalist member for Barwon in the Victorian Legislative Assembly, at a meeting in 1921, stating that he had known Captain Morley since boyhood – since they had been together in the artillery at Queenscliff.<sup>12</sup> This Mr Colenso was described as a native of Chilwell and may have been John Colenso, rather than his brother William.

### William Colenso the shearer and unionist

In 1900, the *Worker* described William Colenso “as one of the earliest and best Unionists in Victoria... though no longer shearing, still retains his AWU membership in the Creswick Branch and is one of the most active spirits in the Eight-Hour Demonstration movement.”<sup>13</sup> When the Geelong Trades Hall Council presented him with an illuminated address in 1911 to “recognise that he had been a trojan worker for Labour” William included in his reply “that he was proud to see that his 25 years work for Labor was appreciated and pleased to be a unionist.”<sup>14</sup>

In 1886 a group of pastoralists informed the shearers, via a newspaper advertisement, that they would be reducing the rate from 20s per hundred sheep to 17s per hundred. David Temple, a 24 year old shearer was indignant. He started to organise the Australasian Shearers Union. From the above comments William Colenso was one of the early members.

The Australasian Shearers' Union was founded by William Guthrie Spence, brothers Charles and Alexander Poynton and David Temple after a meeting in Ballarat in 1886. This branch became the Creswick Branch. This union joined with shearers' unions in Bourke and Wagga to form the Amalgamated Shearers Union (ASU) of Australia in 1887. Similar organisations were forming in Victoria and NSW and Temple had the objective of amalgamating them into one union. Spence had been

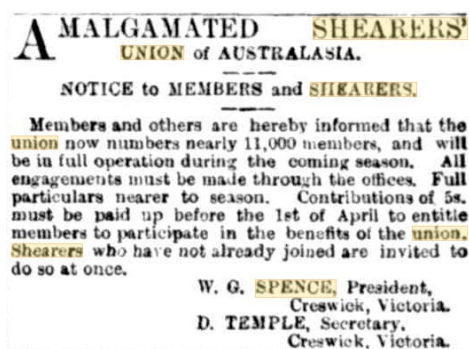
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instrumental in forming the Miner's Union, together with John Sampson (Robert Gordon Menzies' maternal grandfather), also a native of West Cornwall.

Membership was built by touring organisers. Newspaper advertisements were taken out for shearers. Branches were located in pastoral areas, and in the town, agents collected subscriptions and intelligence. The most potent organising was to be in the sheds. Temple, joined by other organisers, divided NSW, Victoria and South Australia between them and travelled from shed to shed. What the union represented was a shift in the power arrangement in the sheds. ASU rules shifted the responsibility for hiring and firing, work organisation and the quality of the shearing from the pastoralist to the union and elected shed representatives. The union took the responsibility for the engagement of shearers through a union office system rather than the pastoralist's preferred system of having shearers pay a deposit to reserve a stand in the shed.

In November 1888, Colenso was reported to be the drover in charge of 5,000 ewes being moved from the Avoca Station (NSW), owned by the Cudmore brothers, to South Australia for sale.<sup>15</sup>



At the beginning of the 1890s wool was one of Australia's largest industries, and as it grew so did the number and influence of the shearers. At the annual conference of the Union in 1890 it was agreed that union members would not work with non-union members. Soon after, shearers at the Jondaryan Station on the Darling Downs went on strike over this issue. When the shearers asked for help the Rockhampton wharfies refused to touch the Jordaryan wool. As a consequence the squatters formed the Pastoralists' Federal Council to counter the strength of the unions.

The ASU held a meeting in Melbourne in April 1891 to elect the chairman and secretary of a newly formed Vigilance committee. The role of committee was *"to preclude men from working as non-unionists, or otherwise act antagonistically to the ASU or the Queensland Union during the present struggle."*<sup>16</sup> The elected chairman was Charles Poynton and secretary William Colenso.

A week later another meeting was held where the *"Eight Hours Demonstration"* and the *"Queensland Difficulty"* were discussed. The meeting concluded with a motion moved by A. Tremaine to pledge to *"do all in its power to – and urge all shearers in the colony – to support the shearers of Queensland, not only by contributing to their assistance, but by using their influence to prevent labour going to the Northern colonies."*<sup>17</sup> William Colenso seconded this motion, which was carried amidst loud cheering.

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In May of the same year a meeting was held at the Geelong Trades Hall to hear a delegate, Mr Burgess, from the Queensland Shearers Union state *“that before the unions started the shearers were the victims of tyranny and oppression at the hands of the pastoralists. The action of the squatters, backed up by those in Victoria, was to crush unionism among shearers and all branches of trades.”*<sup>18</sup> The meeting concluded with a motion of support for the Queenslanders, seconded by Mr J Colenso – William’s brother John.

In 1894 the ASU amalgamated with the General Labourers Union to form the Australian Workers’ Union (AWU). At this time William was the Union’s agent in Melbourne as indicated by this advertisement.<sup>19</sup>

**S**HEARERS wanted, Victorian sheds, current prices; fares paid. Labor Exchange, 347 Little Bourke-st., upstairs.  
**S**HEARERS, two, wanted, unionists, £1 per 100, near Melb., at once. Koppelen, 256 Queen-st.  
**S**HEARERS, consult your agent before engaging with P.U. 95 King-st., near Collins-st. Colenso, agent.  
**S**HEARERS' Union Office Opened at 95 King-st., near Collins-st. Colenso, agent.  
**S**HEARERS. — The Pastoralists' Association has VACANCIES in good Victorian Sheds for a few first class Shearers, both hand and machine. Fares paid from Melbourne to station. Make immediate personal application to the PASTORALISTS' ASSOCIATION, "The Oldfield," 475 Collins-street. Only first class men need apply.

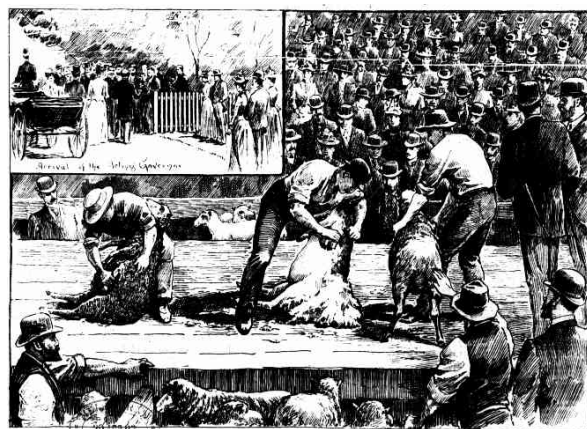
In October 1894, at an entertainment given by the shearers and shed hands at Kerribree Station, fifty miles north west of Bourke, William Colenso donated 5s to the Prisoners’ Defence Fund.<sup>20</sup>

### Eight Hour Demonstration Movement

Action taken by stonemasons on April 21, 1856 led to the establishment of the Eight Hour Day, with the government agreeing that workers employed on public works should enjoy an eight hour day with no loss of pay. It was a world first and became emblematic of the rights of labour. In recognition of the significance of this achievement, April 21 was made a public holiday in 1879 and commemorative marches were held each year from 1879 until 1951. The Eight Hour Day holiday was renamed Labour Day in 1934. In 1955 the Labour Day march and celebrations were replaced by Moomba celebrations.

As a result of the support and encouragement the shearers had received in previous marches, the ASU decided to make more *“pretentious preparations”* for 1893. William Colenso was elected the secretary of the organising committee.

*The shearers were a success—what there was of them; but the majority must have been keeping their wrists limp and laying the turkey-stone on for the shearing championship on the grounds. One or two of the mounted men were shearers to the manner born, with strapped riding pants and gray Mexican hats with black bands and a pink necktie—the glorified being one meets on the long road north of Swan Hill after the shearing, calling for whisky instead of for tar. In others there was an odd mixture of the Upper Barcoo and the Lower Yarra. Still, if everyone had done as well as the shearers, the show would have been much more interesting.*<sup>21</sup>



The Shearing Contest (Leader, April 29 1893, p32)

From two letters to the editor of *The Worker* from William Colenso and David Temple published in May 1895 and September 1895 respectively, it appears that some branches voted against providing funds to participate in the Eight Hour Demonstration of that year. It also seems that William was acting

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as an agent for the shearers living in Melbourne, using the office set up in King Street. This was closed down by Temple, and William Hurrell, an official of the Millers Operatives, conducted some business for the union.<sup>22</sup>

These letters, to a paper funded by the AWU, are indicative of Temple's alienation from the union he founded. He had had a disagreement with a reporter from the *Worker* at the 1894 conference. The conference had supported the journalist and Temple walked out.

For the 1897 Eight Hour Anniversary William was one of the marshals managing the parade. The same year he was appointed by the 8 Hours Anniversary Committee as a life governor of the Eye and Ear Hospital. The appointment is included on a board in the foyer of the new section of the Victorian Trades Hall. In 1899 William was elected a trustee on the 8 Hours Anniversary Committee for 1899-1900.



On April 19, 1900 the newly appointed Secretary of the Creswick Branch of the AWU, Ted Grayndler, was introduced to a meeting of AWU members held at the Trades Hall, Melbourne.<sup>23</sup> The purpose of the meeting was to take part in the Eight-Hours Demonstration and to consider the following two resolutions:

- (1.) That this meeting recommends the Executive to take a plebiscite vote as to which is the most suitable place for the offices in Victoria; and further that this meeting is favourable to Melbourne being the site. Carried.
- (2.) That Mr. W. Colenso be agent for the AWU in Melbourne. Mr. Colenso was elected unopposed.

The article goes on to describe the 1900 Demonstration as follows:

Labor of all kind showed her toil-stained hand without shams – indeed, flaunted it in the face of the public with pride. The tableaux of the AWU was the admiration of the vast crowds assembled along the line of route taken by the procession. As one writer put it: “The Clancy of the Overflow came along shearing sheep. On a large lorry tastefully decorated they showed the old style of ringer in the good old days out back, and the new with the Wolseley machine.”

In May his contact details were advertised.<sup>24</sup>

Mr W. Colenso, the AWU agent for the Creswick Branch in Melbourne is now residing at 50 Barkly-street, South Brunswick. He can be seen there, or letters to that address will find him.



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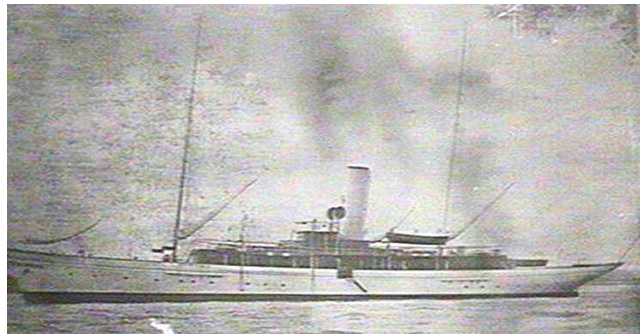
William was the victim of a pickpocket at the Carlton v Collingwood match at Princes' Park Oval in June 1901. He reported that he felt hands against his vest, *"On looking down he saw his watch chain and medal in the hands of the accused."* He caught the thief by the collar, while the articles were being thrown to someone else in the crowd. An altercation ensued with assistance from the members of the crowd. The medal was described as a 15-carat gold medal - *"8 Hours Anniversary Committee 888, 1897"* with William's name inscribed.



A report in Tocsin, July 19, 1900 indicates that William continued to be the honourable secretary of the AWU attached to the Trades Hall.<sup>25</sup> In a later report in the same journal, dated January 24, 1901, William was now called the Agent-General. He also reported on attending the meeting of the Victoria Branch, held in St Arnaud.<sup>26</sup> However, on July 16, 1901 William resigned as agent on account of the pressure of business. At the same meeting he was elected President of the AWU Melbourne District Committee as well as to the committee of management.<sup>27</sup>



In the following month, William was elected by the Eight-Hour Anniversary Committee to represent them on Eight-Hour Day in Sydney.<sup>28</sup> This was held on October 7 and widely reported. It was estimated that between 14,000 and 15,000 unionists took part in the procession. William was named as one of the visitors who participated in the procession.<sup>29</sup>



He sailed in the Political Labour League harbour excursion on October 5. This was a cruise on the government yacht Victoria and the invitation indicated it was arranged *"to celebrate Labour's victory in the Federal and State elections."*<sup>30</sup>

Despite the drought, the Melbourne Eight-Hour Procession of March 1902 featured the AWU:

Banner; tableaux; men with bikes; men marching – a large number walked. The AWU tableau was one of the features of the procession and gained first prize in its group. The day was one of Victoria's brightest. Much credit is due to President Bill Colenso for the energetic manner in which he carried out the duties allotted to him and also the committee who worked under him. We are also indebted to Messrs Dangar, Geyde and Co. who lent us their bike and shearing machine – a great acquisition to our show.<sup>31</sup>



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## William Colenso's Family in Sydney

In Sydney on September 14, 1887 a child named William Edward Colenso was born to Helena Colenso. The birth registration has not been found. Helena continued to live under the name Colenso until she died in 1913. When giving testimony in a Sydney Summons court, after summoning a constable for assaulting her, she stated that *"she had been married seven years and was married in the Sydney Bethel. She was married before [1883]. Her previous name was Hand, and she would be surprised to hear [William] Hand was alive. She did not want to know where he was."* She was living at 54 Brisbane Street at this time. No mention was made of her current husband and the case was dismissed.<sup>32</sup>

There were two men called William Colenso living in Sydney in the 1880s.

William John Colenso was living with his wife Eliza White in Five Dock, running a bakery. The couple had immigrated to Sydney on the *Samuel Plimsoll* in 1876. He was born in St Erth, where his parents, Edward Colenso and Jane Hosking were still living. In August 1887, William John was insolvent. His major creditor was his sister-in-law Miss White. He discharged his debts after closing down his business and the family moved to Melbourne and then on to Perth by 1906. William John Colenso died in Western Australia in 1921.<sup>33</sup> William John's brother Thomas Henry and wife Sarah Penelope joined him in Sydney in 1885 but had returned to Cornwall in time to be recorded in the 1891 (April 5) census.

The other William had no recorded occupation in the Sands Directory and was no longer included after 1900. It is probable that William was working as a shearer and/or drover between 1886 and 1896, travelling between Victoria and NSW. Lena Colenso was listed under her own name from 1904 - recognition that William was no longer in her life.

William Edward Colenso, son of William Colenso and Helena O'Brien married Winifred Mary Maloney on February 4, 1911 in the Roman Catholic church of St Peter's in Surrey Hills. William Edward was working as a printer at this time. His father's occupation was listed as a grain expert – an occupation the Victorian William practised from around 1902.

On April 28, 1913, Helena Colenso died of a cerebral thrombosis at 11a Brumby Street, Sydney. The informant was her son William, also of that address. He was listed as the child of her second marriage to William Colenso in 1886.

William Edward and Winifred were to have eight children with five sons and two daughters reaching adulthood. William joined the AIF in WW1 and four of his sons were serving with the 8<sup>th</sup> Division in Malaya in WW2. Two died at the fall of Singapore and the other two survived being POWs of the Japanese.

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Colenso Entries in the Sydney Sands Directory & Electoral Rolls			
<b>W J Colenso</b>	1883	136 Darling Street	Baker
<b>Mrs Eliza Colenso</b>	1889	Birkenhead Road, Birkenhead	Baker
	1890	Birkenhead Road, Birkenhead	
<b>Thomas H Colenso</b>	1889	Birkenhead Road, Birkenhead	Baker
	1890	Birkenhead Road, Birkenhead	
	1891	Birkenhead Road, Birkenhead	
<b>William Colenso</b>	1889	9 Morehead Street, Waterloo	
	1893	59 Brisbane Street	
	1894	59 Brisbane Street	
	1895	172 Elizabeth Street	
	1896	172 Elizabeth Street	
	1897	172 Elizabeth Street	
	1898	172 Elizabeth Street	
	1899	172 Elizabeth Street	
	1900	172 Elizabeth Street	
<b>Mrs L Colenso</b>	1904	110 Goulburn Street	
	1906	1 Macquarie Street South	
	1909	16 Commonwealth Street	
<b>Edward S Colenso</b> <b>(m Margaret Scott 1902 in NSW)</b>	1898	Douglas Street, Waterloo	Boot
	1904	Botany Road, Botany	machinist
	1906	Botany Road, Botany	
	1909	8 Lawson Street, Alexandria	
<b>George Colenso</b> <b>(m Mary A Wilson 1893 in NSW)</b>	1898	68 Bucknell Street, Newtown	Seaman
	1904	8 Lighthouse Street N, Sydney	

### William Colenso's Family in Victoria

On June 17, 1902 William Colenso, a grain sampler, married Margaret Jackson in Queen Street, Melbourne. Margaret was 27 and had been born in Dunedin NZ, the daughter of Hugh Jackson, a bootmaker, and Ann Downes. At the time William was living in Barkly Street, Brunswick. However William and Margaret already had three children and were to have their fourth in the following month:

- Margaret Doris born January 6, 1898 in Fitzroy (William's occupation cooper)
- Alfred Harold born and died 1899 in Brunswick
- William Edwin Baden born May 6, 1900 in Brunswick
- Richard Harold William born August 2, 1902 in Brunswick
- Clarence Roy born 1905 in Brunswick
- Reginald Keith born 1910 in Geelong
- Lindsay Gordon born February 6, 1914 in Lara

On Margaret Doris's birth certificate her parents' marriage details are given as January 1, 1896 in Geelong. The same information is given when registering Richard. On Lindsay's certificate the same date is given with the location Melbourne.

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William was living in the Fitzroy-Brunswick area of Melbourne from around 1896. He was working as a cooper (cask or barrel maker), packer and labourer when not shearing. At that time his brother Richard and his sister Emily (married to Alfred Allan Winstanley) were also established in Brunswick. William, Richard and Alfred Winstanley were partners in the Brunswick Fodder Company, and this may coincide with William working as a grain sampler from around 1902.

William withdrew from the partnership in July 1905.<sup>34</sup> By 1907 he had the means to acquire a victualler's license.

Richard withdrew from the company in November 1906 and established R.A. Colenso, a shipping provedore, based in Flinders Street, Melbourne. It later moved to 12 King Street, as shown in the following photograph.





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William Colenso's Addresses in Victoria				
1896	William Colenso	Lewisham Road, Prahran	baker	Rate Books
1897	William Colenso	Palmer Street, Fitzroy	cooper	Rate Books
1898	William Colenso	Atherton Street, Fitzroy	labourer	Rate Books
1899	William Colenso	56 Atherton Street, Fitzroy		Directory
1899	William Colenso	32 Gold Street, Brunswick	packer	Federation
1900	William Colenso	32 Gold Street, Brunswick		Directory
1901	William Colenso	56 Barkly Street East, Brunswick		Directory
1902	William Colenso	Barkly Street, Brunswick	grain sampler	Marriage Certificate
1903	William & Margaret Colenso	132 Barkly Street, West Brunswick	grain sampler	AEC
1904	William Colenso	56 Barkly Street West, Brunswick		Directory
1905	William Colenso	56 Barkly Street West, Brunswick		Directory
1906	William Colenso	125 Brunswick Road East, Brunswick		Directory
1906	William & Margaret Colenso	7 Barkly Street East, Brunswick		AEC
1907	William Colenso	7 Barkly Street East, Brunswick		Directory
1909	William & Margaret Colenso	Malop Street, Geelong	publican	AEC
1912	William & Margaret Colenso	Lara	independent means	AEC
1913	William Colenso	Lara	hotelkeeper	Directory
1914	William & Margaret Colenso	Lara	hotelkeeper	AEC
1915	William & Margaret Colenso	Lara	hotelkeeper	AEC
1916	William & Margaret Colenso	Lara	hotelkeeper	AEC
1919	William & Margaret Colenso	Lara	hotelkeeper	AEC
1921	William & Margaret Colenso	Lara	hotelkeeper	AEC
1922	William Colenso Margaret Colenso	241 Spring Street, Preston	grain expert wine licensee	AEC
1924	William Colenso Margaret Colenso	241 Spring Street, Preston	grain expert wine licensee	AEC
1926	William Colenso Margaret Colenso	241 Spring Street, Preston	grain expert wine licensee	AEC
1928	William Colenso Margaret Colenso	241 Spring Street, Preston	grain expert wine licensee	AEC
1931	William Colenso Margaret Colenso	51 Northcote Road, Armadale 35 Wilgah Street, Caulfield West	shipping providor home duties	AEC
1934	William Colenso	51 Northcote Road, Armadale	shipping providor	AEC
1934	Margaret Colenso	74 Hotham Street, East Melbourne	home duties	Death Certificate
1936	William Colenso	51 Northcote Road, Armadale	shipping providor	AEC
1939	William Colenso	Wilgah Street, East St Kilda	produce merchant	Death Notice

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## Publican in Geelong

On July 18, 1907 the license of the Eureka Hotel, in Malop Street Geelong, was transferred to William Colenso.<sup>35</sup> The hotel was advertised as having first class accommodation for boarders with 1/- meals available.<sup>36</sup>

Brunswick football team visited East Geelong for a practice match in September 1907.

The team and supporters, to the number of 37, stopped at the Eureka Hotel, of which the well known Brunswick sport, Will Colenso, is licensee. Needless to say one and all were treated right royally....The return trip home was made per S.S. Edina on Sunday afternoon. As the vessel left the Geelong Wharf, rousing cheers were given by each team, with a tiger for "Eureka Bill."<sup>37</sup>

In the following year a similar event occurred between the Brunswick Cricket Club and Geelong.

The Brunswick Cricket Club at an invitation from the combined Junior Team of Geelong, journeyed there on Friday week by train, and were met at the station by the officers of the Geelong Clubs and driven to an old friend's – Will Colenso's, who now has the Eureka Hotel, where great preparations had been made for them. On Saturday the team played South Geelong, and defeated them, and on Easter Monday played and defeated a picked team of Geelong (including three seniors)....Our host and his wife could not have treated visitors better and the Geelong boys proved the best of good fellows....The Club tenders its best thanks to Mr and Mrs Colenso and the Geelong Cricket Club.<sup>38</sup>

William was now an active member of the United Licensed Victuallers Association of Victoria and he was associated several motions during their first annual conference that was held in Geelong in June 1908.<sup>39</sup>

That licensed premises remaining open in the vicinity of those closed should not be required to make up the amount of the license fees thereby lost. (Moved by W Colenso)

That in each electorate a branch of the United Licensed Victuallers Association be formed. That all interested in the trade be invited to join for mutual protection, and locally organising the public vote by the following means:- (a) The careful watching of rolls, and placing thereon, the names of those friendly disposed towards the trade; (b) the distribution of literature supplied by the United Licensed Victuallers Association; (c) the watching and conserving the trade's best interest at all times; (d) the holding of monthly meeting of branches. (Seconded by W Colenso)

There was, now, a rapid development of Trade Unionism in Geelong coinciding with increasing prosperity and the steady growth of local industry. This followed the decline during the depression between 1894 and 1900. Sufficient rejuvenation had occurred for a Trades and Labour Council to be formed. One of the affiliated unions was the AWU.

As part of the active organising policy of the AWU, James Scullin, their political organiser, was travelling the rural areas of Victoria to galvanise the local branches of the Political Labour Council (PLC), the state branch of the ALP, into political activity. In July 1908 William was elected one of two

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vice-presidents of the Geelong Branch of the PLC.<sup>40</sup> The Eight Hours Birthday Procession was resumed in Geelong in 1908.

In May 1909 an enjoyable social was held at W. Colenso's Eureka Hotel by the South Geelong Cricket Club. The tables were tastefully laid out. Mr Colenso occupied the chair. Miss Doris Colenso was included in the programme of songs and recitations.<sup>41</sup>

In June 1909 William reported to have made reference, at the Geelong Town Hall, to the small amount of evidence tendered locally to support the proposed Geelong to Willaura railway. Present at the meeting was Mr William Plain MLA, the Labour member for Geelong.<sup>42</sup> In the same month he was part of a delegation that discussed the "unemployed problem" with the Geelong Harbour Trust. Other members of the delegation were William Plain, William Skillern, Reverend Pressly and Councillor Brownbill.<sup>43</sup> The same delegation also approached the Geelong West Borough and Newtown and Chilwell Councils to urge that relief work be provided for the unemployed.<sup>44</sup>

In August 1909, William unsuccessfully ran for an elected seat on the Geelong Hospital Committee. One of the reforms he wanted to see occur in the institution was that patients would not be questioned as to religion, means etc., before treatment was provided.<sup>45</sup>

The hotelkeepers of Geelong attended a meeting at the Victoria Hotel in January 1910. The object of the meeting was to encourage them to join the Hotelkeeper's Union being formed because of dissatisfaction with the United Licensed Victuallers' Association. They were feeling threatened by temperance advocates, such as the Victorian Alliance and the Social Reform Bureau, who were out to exterminate the drink traffic. William Colenso proposed at the meeting that they form a working committee to recruit the Geelong Hotelkeepers to join the Union. He was appointed chairman of the Geelong section.<sup>46</sup>

In January 1910, William was again elected as one of the two vice-presidents of the Geelong Branch of the PLC. The selected candidate for Corio, Alfred Thomas Ozanne, urged the members of unions not to neglect the political side of the Labour movement. *"Without sympathetic administration backed up by good Labour strength in the House, the unions would be powerless, and it was to their advantage to strengthen the ranks of the Labor members in Parliament."*<sup>47</sup>

In April 1910, the Federal Election was a victory for Andrew Fisher and the Labour Party. They won 42 of the 75 House of Representatives seats and held 22 of the 36 Senate seats. Two contests were of family significance.

In the Corio electorate A T Ozanne [1877-1961], the Labour candidate, was 1500 ahead of the Fusionist Crouch when the final numbers were up, and the young Laborite deserves congratulations for having pulled off this seat, which was by no means an easy one to win. Mrs Catherine Nicholson did excellent organising work in the populous parts of the electorate, whilst W Plain, the State member for Geelong, always lent a willing hand. As of old, W Colenso was there to render all aid in his power.<sup>48</sup>

Once more has McDougall topped the score. At the last election he beat Arthur Robinson by 1000 votes, and now Winter-Coole, backed by property and sooted on by the squatters and the land monopolists of the Western District, is beaten out of place by over 2000 votes.<sup>49</sup> This election was a great personnel triumph for John Keith McDougall and the political principles



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he so unswervingly advocates. The land monopoly gang hawked Deakin through the constituency in the hope of getting his hired eloquence to collar votes. What a mockery! Deakin, who orates about settling people on the land, talking in that fertile, locked-up country on behalf of squatterdom! As a living picture the spectacle of Deakin in the midst of his new-found political friends would make something worth throwing on the screen.<sup>50</sup>

In May 1910, William was again an agent for the AWU, now for the Geelong branch. He reported to the Geelong members on the outcome of the recent conference between the pastoralists and the AWU.<sup>51</sup>

Margaret reported the theft from her bedroom at the Eureka Hotel, on March 3, 1911, of a lady's gold ring, set with 5 opals, a gold star pendant with a large opal, several gold brooches, one with "Maggie" and a gold lady's hunting watch.<sup>52</sup>

In the same month William was making arrangements for the AWU display in the Eight Hours' procession. He reported that the *"union hopes to eclipse its mechanical display of last year with something quite novel to Geelong."*<sup>53</sup> In a description of the April 25 procession this was reported to be a practical exhibition of shearing. It was awarded equal second prize with the Oriental Timber Mills, behind the Woollen Mill Operatives Union.

At the May 1911 meeting of the Geelong Trades Hall Council the approaching departure of an old unionist, Mr W Colenso was referred to. He was described as one *"who had proved himself a good organiser and had always helped labor. He had been a good friend of the council and was worthy of their recognition."*<sup>54</sup>

The license of the Eureka Hotel was transferred from William Colenso to Thomas Dorgan in June 1911.<sup>55</sup>



From Geelong Heritage Centre Collection

William intended to settle in the Lara district. The Trades Hall Council held a smoke social to say farewell and presented him *"with an illuminated address to recognise that he had been a trojan worker for Labour."* In his reply, William said that he *"was proud to see that his 25 years work for Labor was appreciated and pleased to be a unionist."*<sup>56</sup>

William resigned his position of president of the Hotelkeepers' Union in the following month, as he

had ceased to be a licensed victualler. When accepting his resignation the members made complimentary reference to the manner in which he had safeguarded the interests of the trade.<sup>57</sup>

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## Hotelkeeper in Lara

The family relocated to Lara, a settlement 18 km north east of Geelong. William was running an establishment called Mr. Colenso's Coffee Palace, which also provided accommodation for travellers. A Coffee Palace was a temperance hotel and was often multi-purpose or mixed use buildings which included a large number of rooms for accommodation as well as ballrooms and other function and leisure facilities. But it did not take long for an application to be made for a victuallers license for the premises.

On December 15, 1911 James Henderson Blair, a farmer and resident of Lara, was granted a victuallers license for a premises which he proposed to establish near the Lara Railway Station. The previous year he had been refused a license for a house, close to the Presbyterian Church, on the other side of the railway.<sup>58</sup> Lara had a population of about 1000, within a small radius of the proposed site. The Avalon Estate has just been subdivided and about 60 settlers have taken up land there, and the Lara Estate has just been opened for settlement with another 30 new settlers to come. The closest hotel is over 6 miles away. James Blair proposed to have William Colenso and his wife manage the business. The building to be relocated was at that point occupied the Colenso family.



The house was relocated in three pieces, from Waverley Road to Hick's Street. At a special sitting of the Licensing Court on June 1, 1912, the license was granted to William Colenso, for the premises erected on the east side of the Lara Railway Station.<sup>59</sup>



Geelong Advertiser, December 10, 2004

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At the 1913 AWU Conference there was a resolution moved to prevent hotelkeepers from being agents for the AWU. Many delegates spoke against the resolution, one was Mr McIntosh, who said he knew of some excellent agents in Victoria-Riverina Branch who were hotelkeepers. He continued with *“where, for instance, could they get a stauncher unionist than Mr W Colenso, now of Lara, but formerly of Geelong, where he had been actively identified with the district committee of the AWU?”* The resolution was defeated.<sup>60</sup>

In May 1915, William represented the Western district at the annual meeting of the Licensed Victuallers' Association of Victoria.<sup>61</sup>

On November 29, 1915, Reginald Keith Colenso, aged five years, fell from a dray under a wheel, which fractured his neck. He died instantaneously. He was the son of the licensee of the Lara Hotel. The funeral was held in Lara and a procession of the hearse and 45 vehicles passed through the town, stopping briefly at the school, where the flag was at half-mast and the children were standing to salute the cortege, and then continued to Geelong to the Eastern Cemetery.<sup>62</sup>

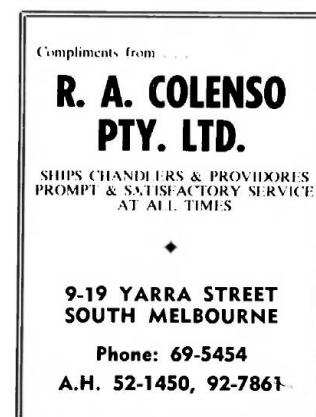
On April 7, 1916 Harold Colenso, sixteen years of age, was in a bicycle collision on his way to the Avalon State School to attend a picture show. His light had blown and he did not see another cyclist coming towards him. He was unconscious for several hours and required several stitches for a wound on his forehead.<sup>63</sup>

The license for the Lara Hotel was transferred to Josephine Fowler in July 1921.<sup>64</sup>

### Shipping Provedore in Melbourne

Around 1914, then aged 47, William's brother, Richard, was diagnosed with diabetes. He continued to live a busy life, including serving as the councillor for Carrum (1914-1920) in the shire of Dandenong, with a stint as President of the Shire. However, in 1921 his doctor advised him to take a long sea voyage for the sake of his health. This coincided with his brother leaving Lara and moving to Preston. In the electoral roll William's occupation is given as grain expert, with Margaret described as a wine licensee. It is possible that William was invited by his brother, who had no sons, to look after the business.

Richard died in August 1923 and William took over the business. At his death Richard also had a share in Coloro, his brother Thomas' paint manufacturing business. In 1922 the Colenso-Buchan Cup was established as well as the Coloro Cup for rowing events associated with the Preston Rowing Club.





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In June 1933 R A Colenso Pty. Ltd., shipping stevedores and produce merchants, was listed as a new company. The capital was £2000 and the subscribers were William Colenso and his son Clarence Roy Colenso.<sup>65</sup>

The business was relocated to Flinders Street before 1939, to premises under the railway track, between Elizabeth and Spencer. It later moved to South Melbourne. The business was deregistered in 2003, but was then no longer owned by the Colenso family.

On August 14, 1934 Margaret Colenso died of a cerebral haemorrhage, aged 61. Her usual address was given as 74 Hotham Street, East Melbourne. On December 26, 1939 William died.

The funeral of the late Mr. William Colenso of Wilgah-street, East St Kilda, principal of R A Colenso Pty Ltd produce merchants, Flinders-street, city, who died in a private hospital on Boxing Day, took place at the Springvale Crematorium December 27, 1939. The late Mr Colenso was aged 78 years. Prior to entering business in Melbourne he conducted a business at Lara, near Geelong. A prominent Freemason he was a member of the Corio Lodge Geelong. Four sons and a daughter survive him. Rev L J Harwood of St Bartholomew's Church Burnley conducted the funeral service. A Masonic service was also held. Arrangements were made by Herbert King and Sons.<sup>66</sup>

His obituary is interesting for several reasons. There is no mention of his more than twenty five years as an active unionist, no details of his businesses before being a produce merchant or his military service and membership of the Old Comrades Association. The only lodge mentioned is Geelong based and he had been living in Melbourne for nearly twenty years. The activities in his life where he was involved in events that continue to impact on Australia had been omitted.

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## Notes & Sources

- <sup>1</sup> As indicated on all the birth certificates of his children.
- <sup>2</sup> "Ghost Story." eColenso Supplement, August 2016, 8
- <sup>3</sup> "The Late Mr Edwin Colenso," *Geelong Advertiser*, July 5, 1897, 4.
- <sup>4</sup> "A Brief History of Artillery in Victoria" available [http://artilleryvic.org.au/History\\_of\\_Artillery\\_in\\_Vic\\_Pt1.pdf](http://artilleryvic.org.au/History_of_Artillery_in_Vic_Pt1.pdf)
- <sup>5</sup> "The Artillery Brigade." *Geelong Advertiser*, February 23, 1864, 2.
- <sup>6</sup> Untitled. *Portland Guardian*, July 18, 1882, 2.
- <sup>7</sup> "Extracts from Victorian Police Gazette." *South Australian Police Gazette*, September 16, 1885.
- <sup>8</sup> "Extracts from Victorian Police Gazette." *South Australian Police Gazette*, June 13, 1883.
- <sup>9</sup> "Extracts from Victorian Police Gazette." *South Australian Police Gazette*, September 16, 1885.
- <sup>10</sup> "Old Comrades' Association." *Argus*, May 25, 1928, 17.
- <sup>11</sup> "Old Comrades' Association." *Age*, December 19, 1930, 12.
- <sup>12</sup> "Capt Morley Scores Again." *Geelong Advertiser*, August 30, 1921, 8.
- <sup>13</sup> "Notes from the Bush." *Worker*, April 28, 1900, 8.
- <sup>14</sup> "Good-Bye to Mr W Colenso." *Geelong Advertiser*, June 19, 1911, 3.
- <sup>15</sup> "Wentworth." *Argus*, November 6, 1888, 7.
- <sup>16</sup> "Meeting of the Amalgamated Shearers Union." *Argus*, April 11, 1891, 10.
- <sup>17</sup> "Meeting of the Australian Shearers Union." *Age*, April 18, 1891, 10.
- <sup>18</sup> "Meeting at Geelong." *Argus*, May 20, 1891, 5.
- <sup>19</sup> Advertising. *Age*, October 26, 1894, 8.
- <sup>20</sup> "Subscription Lists." *Worker*, October 20, 1894, 3
- <sup>21</sup> "The Eight Hours Demonstration – A Fine Display." *The Australasian*, April 22, 1893, 24.
- <sup>22</sup> "Appointment of Mr Hurrell Melbourne Agent of the AWU." *Worker*, May 18, 1895, 3.  
"Eight Hours' Demonstration." *Worker*, September 14, 1895, 3.
- <sup>23</sup> "The AWU in Melbourne." *Worker*, April 28, 1900, 8.
- <sup>24</sup> "Notes from the Bush." *Worker*, May 19, 1900, 8.
- <sup>25</sup> Untitled. *Tocsin*, July 19, 1900, 1.
- <sup>26</sup> Untitled. *Tocsin*, January 24, 1901, 5.
- <sup>27</sup> "Australian Workers' Union." *Worker*, July 27, 1901, 8.
- <sup>28</sup> Untitled. *Worker*, August 17, 1901, 8.
- <sup>29</sup> "Eight-Hour Day in Sydney." *Sydney Mail & NSW Advertiser*, October 12, 1901, 916.
- <sup>30</sup> "A Harbour Excursion." *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 7, 1901, 5.
- <sup>31</sup> "A Growl from Gurlly." *Worker*, May 3, 1902, page 7.
- <sup>32</sup> "A Constable's Powers, may enter and arrest." *Evening News*, January 6, 1894, 3. The Bethel was the Bethel Union Society which moved to the Rocks in 1856 and built a church in 1859. Closely associated with the Mission for Seamen.
- <sup>33</sup> "The Late Mr. William John Colenso." *Daily News*, July 16, 1921, 5.
- <sup>34</sup> Coburg Leader, September 2, 1905.
- <sup>35</sup> "Licensing Transfer." *Geelong Advertiser*, July 19, 1907, 2.
- <sup>36</sup> Untitled. *Geelong Advertiser*, July 23, 1907, 2.
- <sup>37</sup> "Bruswick v East Geelong." *Coburg Leader*, September 21, 1907, 2.
- <sup>38</sup> "News and Notes." *Coburg Leader*, April 25, 1908, 4.
- <sup>39</sup> "Licensed Victuallers, Annual Conference." *Age*, June 4, 1908, 6.
- <sup>40</sup> Untitled. *Worker*, July 16, 1908, 18.
- <sup>41</sup> "Cricket." *Geelong Advertiser*, May 28, 1909, 6.
- <sup>42</sup> "Geelong to Willaura Railway." *Geelong Advertiser*, June 25, 1909, 2.
- <sup>43</sup> "The Unemployed Problem." *Geelong Advertiser*, June 29, 1909, 5.
- <sup>44</sup> "The Unemployed Problem." *Geelong Advertiser*, July 1, 1909, 3.
- <sup>45</sup> "Hospital Elections." *Geelong Advertiser*, August 7, 1909, 2.
- <sup>46</sup> "Hotelkeepers' Union." *Geelong Advertiser*, January 13, 1910, 4.
- <sup>47</sup> "Political Labor Council." *Geelong Advertiser*, January 13, 1910, 2.
- <sup>48</sup> "Victoria Repudiates the Fusion, Polling Booths Strewn with Political Wreckage." *Worker*, April 21, 1910, 9.

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<sup>49</sup> Sool is a verb meaning to attack. It can also be used in the context of encouraging or inciting someone or something to attack. Macquarie Dictionary.

<sup>50</sup> J K McDougall was the first cousin of William's brother Thomas' wife, Elizabeth Gilchrist Bain.

<sup>51</sup> "Labor News." *Argus*, August 10, 1910, 9.

<sup>52</sup> "Housebreaking and Stealing from Dwelling Houses." *Victoria Police Gazette*, March 16, 1911, 1.

<sup>53</sup> "Australian Workers' Union." *Geelong Advertiser*, March 24, 1911, 2.

<sup>54</sup> "Trades' Hall Business." *Geelong Advertiser*, May 31, 1911, 4.

<sup>55</sup> "Geelong and District." *Argus*, June 28, 1911, 11.

<sup>56</sup> "Good-bye to Mr W Colenso." *Geelong Advertiser*, June 19, 1911, 3.

<sup>57</sup> "Hotelkeepers' Union." *Geelong Advertiser*, August 3, 1911, 2.

<sup>58</sup> "Lara Gets its License." *Geelong Advertiser*, December 16, 1911, 7.

<sup>59</sup> "Geelong." *Age*, June 3, 1912, 8.

<sup>60</sup> "AWU Annual Conference." *Worker*, February 19, 1913, 1.

<sup>61</sup> "Licensed Victuallers. Government's Compact. No Interference till 1917." *Argus*, May 7, 1915, 5.

<sup>62</sup> "Master Reginald Keith Colenso." *Geelong Advertiser*, December 3, 1915, 4.

<sup>63</sup> "Lara." *Geelong Advertiser*, April 11, 1916.

<sup>64</sup> "Licence Transferred." *Geelong Advertiser*, July 12, 1921, 5.

<sup>65</sup> "New Companies, Victoria." *Daily Commercial News and Shipping List*, June 8, 1933, 4.

<sup>66</sup> "Mr W. Colenso." *Age*, December 28, 1939, 8.