



Putting a Price on history

After more than 150 years, the Price family story is still

being told, **Simone Dalton** reports

What do you get when you start wandering into the past and scaling the family tree?

For one family in southwest Victoria the climb has been priceless with tales of money made, limbs lost, successful sawmills, Methodists, midwifery and even murder.

The seed for all these amazing stories was the landing of Oxfordshire immigrants Richard and Jane Price and their eight children at Portland Bay in 1855.

More than 300 of Richard and Jane's descendants will meet this Saturday at Portland for a giant family reunion, where they will relive these stories.

Melbourne man Peter Price has been one descendant who has enjoyed piecing together his family's history and will be at the reunion.

Peter says the thing he finds most amazing about his family history is Richard and Jane's courageous move to actually emigrate to the other side of the world.

"I think that is the thing that struck me with all this, the trip and the decision to leave England," Peter says.

Lynne Price from Hamilton says the family has tracked down thousands of descendants and was finding more "on a daily basis".

"It is amazing just from one couple and their children, all those thousands of descendants," she says.

"They were a tough breed, they didn't sit back and wait for it to happen, I am very proud of what they did achieve."

At the time of the Prices' immigration, the colony of Victoria was only a few years old and in the midst of a gold boom.

According to historical accounts unearthed by their descendants, rather than be struck down with gold fever, the Prices turned their hand to farming for eight years before moving to the thick bush between Heywood and Condah.

Historical records show that it was here Richard Price set up his first saw mill in 1863 and while there were plans to call the timber settlement Pricetown, it ended up being Milltown.

By 1881 Richard had two mills, 76 workers and 13 teams of bullock to cart the logs in a sawmilling business that would stay in the family until the 1915.

Workers of the 1880s started at 6am and could well have put in 10-hour days six days a week.

One reporter visited the mill at night in 1881 to find 40 men out in the bush felling trees in the dark so they could get their cricket ground cleared and set up for the upcoming season.

It is hard to tell when they actually got to play cricket because Richard was a stickler for church on Sundays and would travel around collecting parishioners for their weekly service.

"I be the Lord's sheepdog, I be go round nippin' at the heels, nippin' at the heels to gather the sheep," Richard was quoted as saying in a Salvation Army newsletter.

Jane looked after her 13 children and helped deliver countless others.

Family stories describe a priceless image of Jane, with her own baby strapped to her back, galloping through the forest to help a neighbour in labour.

The Price children grew up just as tough.

Son Charles, who was the first Price born in Australia, lost his arm to blood poisoning but still managed to drive a bullock team and raise 10 children.

Charles' children all worked at the Milltown for nothing until they turned 21 when they would be given a team

of bullocks for their birthday.

These days Heywood man Jack Price, who lived near the family's Milltown mill as a toddler, remembers his uncle Smokey Joe Price whose forehead received a major cut after an emery wheel flew apart while he was sharpening his saw.

In his 80s, Joe loved to shock people by trimming his thumb nails on a spinning circular saw.

"He was a hobbly old bloke, he would lean on the centre of the saw to get his balance," Jack says.

Lynne Price says her grandfather Frank smashed his leg under a cart and it was about to be amputated when Frank's mother stepped in.

"The bones were poking through and she set it herself and put sandbags at the end for weights," Lynne says.

"It healed up but forever after that his nickname was Hoppy Price."

Peter Price also uncovered the story of his great uncle Charlie Price, an Omeo goat farmer who he believed was murdered in 1912.

It appears Charlie became friends with a neighbouring woman who was in an unhappy marriage.

He helped her leave her husband and briefly get a job in the Western District but the pair was seen together by another Omeo man.

After Charlie returned to Omeo he was found shot in the bush.

Peter says no one was convicted of murder but there are real doubts that Charlie took his own life.

Checklist

The Price family will meet at Portland this Saturday from 11am at the Pioneer Immigration Wall, opposite Portland hospital.

For inquiries phone Lynne Price (03) 5572 5089 or Peter Price (03) 9848 6507 or go to www.portland1855.id.au



Family tree: the Price family store which was built in Milltown to sell timber. Jack Price (right) is one of the hundreds of descendents who will attend the family reunion on Saturday.

