

The Tragic Tale of Henry Lomman and the Adelaide Asylum

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I saw it in a newspaper on Trove many years ago and had an inkling that it was an ancestor, but I wasn't ready for researching it – it was an article on ancestor Henry Lomman who went to court for attempted murder in 1860. He was my great-great-great grandfather, a pioneer settler in South Australia. His wife Martha Strong was strong in both name and nature as she, along with Henry, experienced a great deal of trauma throughout her life.

Henry Lomman married Martha Strong on 13th August, 1839 in the Church of England in the Parish of North Petherton in the County of Somerset, south-west of England. He was a 27 year old Labourer and she was a 23 year old Servant - the marriage certificate said they were both 'full age.' Henry was literate and signed his name, but Martha left an 'X' mark on the marriage certificate, indicating she was illiterate. Her father was a Carpenter, whilst his was a Labourer.

Two days after they were married, Henry and Martha applied for assisted passage to South Australia. Henry and Martha departed Gravesend, London, England on the 12/9/139 and arrived in Port Adelaide, South Australia nearly five months later on 5/2/1840, travelling via the barque, 'John'. The following year, the 'John' was reported lost at sea. A whale boat arriving in port reported that the John had foundered 700 miles to the west of Swan River, Western Australia. The crew had embarked from the ship in four boats, only one of which were rescued after being ten days at sea.

Henry, John, Eliza and Thomas were four of the six children of John Lomman and Ann Lenthall from Pitminster, Somerset, who travelled to South Australia. Both of these surnames (Lomman and Lenthall) appear to have Jewish origins – in the first half of the 19th century there was a strong push to convert Jews to Christianity in England. John Lomman, Henry's father, was listed as a 'Pauper-Agricultural Labour' in the 1851 census, when he was 69 years old. Like many others, the Lomman siblings were heading to South Australia in search of a better life.

Martha was 7 months pregnant on the voyage to Australia, and had her first child, James Strong Lomman, on the 8th April 1840. They next had twins Anna Maria and Eliza Ann on the 15th May 1841. At the time, Henry was a Labourer at Beaumont Grange, a farm at Paradise. They then had Hannah (either born in Halifax St, Adelaide, or section 336, Paradise) on the 18th June 1843. They next had Joseph in 1845 and William in 1846. At this time, Henry worked at Richmond Hill Farm (now Wadmore Park, Athelstone). Thomas (1847), Thomas Henry (1849), Martha Ann (1851), Louisa (1853), William (1855) and Harry (1858) were their other children (born at Shepley, Paradise).

At their deaths, it is reported that Henry and Martha had three surviving sons and four daughters. In total, they had 12 children that were born from 1840 to 1858, two died in their infancy and two died as young adults. In 1847 and 1848, two infant sons died, William (1st) in 1847 and Thomas in 1848. These tragic events may help to explain why in 1848, when he was 36 years old, Henry had his first 'attack' of mental illness and went to the Adelaide Asylum. He was released after a short period.

In 1849 Henry purchased 84 acres of land for 84 pounds and 1 shilling, section '816'. In 1850 he purchased 100 acres at 'Fifth Creek' for 201 pounds, section '817' (these parcels of land are at Athelstone, section 817 being right on the Torrens River). In 1854 he bought another 103 acres 'Near Black Hill, Hundred of Adelaide' (near Athelstone). In 1859 he was granted a timber license by the East Torrens council, likely obtained to clear land. Henry also donated half an acre of land to the Athelstone Gorge Primitive Methodist Church to build the church on the site (foundation stone laid 1861), and his eldest son James was one of the trustees of the church.

Daughter Hannah Maria Lomman spoke about seeing, when growing up (in the 1840s), 500 Aboriginals from the Kaurna plains holding a corroboree on the banks of the Torrens River, known as

Karrawirra Pari to the Kurna people. The corroboree was held where the Paradise bridge (also known as the MacDonnell Bridge) was later built in 1857. She also spoke about 'wild dogs' (dingoes) causing issues for farming, and the family travelling to Glenelg in bullock drays for holidays. In 1844 in a letter to the Register, a European settler reported on words supposedly translated from a song sung at a corroboree:

*Adelaide no more good since the white men came – now the road has tired me – throughout
Yeona there is a continuous road – what a fine road this is for me winding between the hills...*

South Australian Register, Saturday 16 March 1844, page 3

Colonisation had a devastating impact upon the Kurna people and their culture. Food sources were depleted through the purchase of land and farming practices. In 1847, an Act was introduced which also restricted the movement of the tribes, the 1847 Vagrancy Act. Diseases brought from Europe brought untimely death. The South Australian German settlers established missions in an attempt to convert Indigenous tribes to Christianity.

Gold fever struck South Australia in the 1850s, leaving the colony in jeopardy as people fled for Victoria. In 1852 Henry Lomman contributed to the Tolmer Testimonial Fund, which involved a group of businessmen fundraising for payment of Police Commissioner Tolmer and a group of South Australian mounted police troopers in a police escort. This police escort was protecting gold being transported from the diggings in Mount Alexander, Forest Creek and Bendigo, Victoria back to South Australia. This was partly to ensure the return of the diggers and their gold back to South Australia, to ensure the ongoing economic operations of the fledgling colony. The escorts of the gold (18 in total) would save the colony from bankruptcy and ensure the livelihood and welfare of its European residents.

In 1856, Henry Lomman placed an advertisement in the Melbourne Argus newspaper every day for two weeks, searching for James Fort, formerly a dairyman of Adelaide (from Government Farm, Coromandel Valley), who has likely gone to the gold diggings in Victoria (James Fort had not had a lot of luck in SA, losing a mare in 1853 and then being robbed in 1854, he left SA in 1855). At that time Henry is living in Paradise.

From 1853 to 1856, England was involved in the Crimean War, and collections were being taken in South Australia for the War Relief Fund.

In 1860 things start to unravel for Henry. He was admitted to the Adelaide Asylum on the 25th March 1860 and discharged on the 2nd May 1860, after 39 days. He was later remanded in custody in the Old Adelaide Gaol for attempting to shoot his son James on the 13th December, 1860. He had abused his son and threatened to kill the whole family whilst drunk (and likely during a mental illness episode), then came outside with a shotgun whilst James fled towards the house. Henry shot at the door of the house and left a hole the side of a hand.¹

After this incident, Henry went to the Supreme Court but was released from custody in 1861 with a £100 bond, and although Henry pleaded guilty, Judge Boothby stated he would not pass sentence. It was said that he committed the offence when 'under the excitement of drink.' It was stated that he entered into the bond with the understanding that if he made such an attempt again, he would be brought to the court and receive a very severe sentence. There was also commentary about him 'not appearing to be in his right senses' when the case was first heard.

In 1862 Henry applied to list land under the 'Real Property Act' with his brother in law John Loller (his sister Eliza's husband), and in 1865 this land was listed as allotments, in the Village of Thorndon

¹ (At this time their surname in the newspapers seemed to change from 'Lomman' to 'Loman'. In the UK, the surname had also been 'Lowman'.)

Park. The same year Henry and Martha's eldest son John Strong Lomman died, aged 22 years, from measles. This was only 5 weeks after John had married Susan Skinner at Ferryville (part of Largs Bay).

Whilst Henry was a faithful husband with a devout wife in Martha, the same could not be said for his siblings. His brother Thomas bolted for California in 1850, just five weeks after he was married, leading to another court case where his wife Louise nee Brachel ('a respectable looking girl') sued. In 1864, Henry's brother John's wife (Johanne Matilda Nitschke) left him and he advertises that he will not be responsible for any of her debts and that her leaving has been done 'without just cause.' However John appeared to have a violent and volatile nature, and a problem with drink. In 1851, he was taken to court as he was accused of assault by a nurse who was taking care of his pregnant wife. In 1866, John and his son Samuel went to Police Court as they were charged with assaulting their son/brother Thomas, and both were fined.

Henry and Martha's daughter Hannah Lomman married John Austin on the 4th April 1866 at the Trinity Church. Shortly after this, on 15th June 1866, Martha Lomman 'charged' her husband Henry with being of unsound mind at the Police Court of South Australia, and he was removed for medical examination. He was sent by the authority of Samuel Beddome, Police Magistrate at the Police Court. Henry re-entered the Adelaide Asylum on the 15th June 1866, the medical certificate was signed by George Mayo on 14th June 1866. The patient file said that he had his current attack for 10 days. He would spend the remainder of his days at the Adelaide and Parkside Lunatic Asylums. His 'diagnoses' included 'mania' and 'dementia.' At the time, there were only three main diagnoses: mania, dementia and melancholia², and schizophrenia was known as 'dementia praecox.'

In 1868, there was a report on the building of the 'New Lunatic Asylum' (Parkside, now known as Glenside). It was reported that '25 or 30' inmates would be moved from the grounds of the Adelaide Lunatic Asylum to Parkside, to trench and plant the ground, so that in 2-3 years when all 'inmates' were there, there would be flower and fruit trees. Initial apartments were built at Parkside to accommodate the first patients.

In 1869 there was a Parliamentary Inquiry into the Lunatic Asylum, whereby a Select Committee examined a number of allegations including the drunkenness of the attendants and cruel treatment of so-called 'inmates' by Resident Medical Officer Dr Alex Patterson and attendants. Eight of the attendants were seen drinking a bottle of brandy by members of the Gas Commission. At the time there was a 'Board of Visitors' who provided information to the inquiry, in particular Mr Fuller. Two discharged attendants and two current attendants who were denied promotion (according to the *Adelaide Observer*) also provided evidence 'for the prosecution.' Evidence included patients being physically assaulted or denied water, and there were allegations that Dr Patterson received food and beer from the store. Dr Patterson's statement about the allegations were printed in full in *The Express and Telegraph Newspaper*, and it makes for extraordinary reading. In response to accusations of misappropriating supplies, Patterson argues that it was the 'ordinary custom of an asylum' to take vegetables for himself and his family, and for his washing to be done at the asylum. He did, however, take 15 pounds of pork, a major focus of the inquiry. He also claims that the 50 chickens on the site were his own, which he bought from his predecessor. He was accused of giving away plants from the asylum, but claims that they were his personal property, having been given 300 to 400 plants by his friends. He claims he gave them away to prevent them from being destroyed. He also broke in two colts on the asylum grounds – but says that these horses had always been available for public purposes, saving government expense. He argues that he broke the horses in there for his own

² This journal article says that around this time in Cornwall, there were only 3 diagnoses, mania, dementia and melancholia: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC539549/>

entertainment, and not economy, and that ‘the excitement of riding a young horse is a relaxation from the monotony of constant intercourse with diseased minds.’

As he was criticised for allowing patients outside of the asylum, Patterson’s statement mentions that asylum residents were allowed excursions out of the asylum, as part of testing their fitness for discharge. Dr Patterson describes giving leave to a resident so that he could work at his brother in law’s boot shop in Rundle Street, so that he could give the proceeds to his wife and young children, who were in a ‘starving state.’ He also makes reference to waiting for the ‘new building’ to open (at Parkside), and that he was managing both the new asylum and the existing one, without any additional remuneration. He was also accused of unfairly dismissing staff. In the report, he refers to one attendant being responsible for 130 residents across six corridors. He responds to concerns about the escape of a patient, and referred to the asylum not being a prison, but states that attendants slept with ‘master keys’ under their pillows. He also answers to the ‘illegal incarceration’ of a patient. He refers to asylums in Victoria having 2 medical superintendents for 250 people, but complains he is on his own with 257 patients (daily average) – so it is a wonder that he broke in the horses on the hospital grounds and planted trees! Another article states that there are 270 patients, and 33 attendants, in addition to the medical doctor. Dr Patterson boasts a higher recovery rate and lower death rate than any of the English asylums, stating statistics from four English asylums. Regarding the quality of the attendants, he states

It is worse that useless to erect too high a standard by which to judge of the attendants in a Lunatic Asylum; the real will inevitably fall far short of the ideal. The model attendant can be easily sketched. He should possess courage, presence of mind, self-reliance, a quiet, but firm and gentle manner, the greatest forbearance and patience, sobriety, a good preliminary education, a stout muscular frame, and, above all, a fair share of that moral force which gives man power over his fellows. To secure a combination of these qualities in any one man or woman is difficult, or rather I should say, impossible; their possession would command a prominent place in the race of life, and the fortunate owner, especially at the present rate of remuneration, is not likely to apply his energies to the care of lunatics.

Dr Patterson, The Lunatic Asylum Inquiry, 1869

Dr Patterson mentions the risk of physical assault that attendants are subject to and claims that ‘modern treatment of insanity forbids the use of all restraint or coercion.’ The *Adelaide Observer* declared their public support for the Resident Medical Officer (who did not appear to be, in fact, resident but did daily visits) and ridicules the Lunatic Asylum Committee and the central question of ‘who appropriated the pork?’ It questioned how the Select Committee was ever able to be established in the first place. At the time the newspaper was owned by a group of wealthy shop-keepers and merchants, likely in support of the government.

Henry Lomman was one of the first male patients to move from the Adelaide Asylum to Parkside and arrived at Parkside on the 18th May, 1870. The final buildings at Parkside were intended to accommodate 800 residents. He would have missed the 1871 ‘Old Colonists Dinner’ attended by his brother John (John features in a picture of South Australian Pioneers, with the spelling then Lowman).

Despite Henry’s location in the asylum at Parkside, whenever his children were married their marriage notice in the newspaper refers to their father as ‘Henry Lomman from Athelstone.’ Henry and Martha’s daughter Martha Ann Lomman (1851-1924) (my forebear) married John Heading (1846-1935) in 1868, and they had a long marriage with 16 children (including my great grandmother Ada Heading). The Headings were market gardeners from Campbelltown.



Martha Ann Lomman (1851-1824) John Heading (1846-1935)

In 1876, Martha and Henry's youngest daughter Louisa Lomman married Gordon Bilney, at the time both were living at Athelstone. Two of the sons married sisters (maiden name Semmens) from McLaren Vale (Harry in 1881 to J Semmens).

In 1877, Henry and Martha's son William (2nd) was fatally shot at Caltowie, aged 22 years. There was an inquest into his death, held at Ingram's Hotel, Caltowie. He was with his brother Harry and other friends at the time shooting kangaroos and rabbits, and it appears as though he accidentally shot himself in the left groin. He walked with a crutch under his right arm and was carrying a gun powder flask around his neck with a string, and it was believed he was holding the gun by the barrel. He died in his brother Harry's arms. That was the fourth child that Martha had to bury, likely alone as her husband was institutionalised.

In 1882, Martha and her son Thomas Henry Lomman applied to take over Henry Lomman's affairs under the Glenside Lunacy Act (Lunacy petition 48A/1882). At the time, a piece of land on section 335 was exchanged with Mary Ann Wright and Emma Wright for a plot on section 336 with right of way to 336 from Alders (or Allen) Street. The petition mentions that Henry had been suffering dementia and unsound mind for 16 years. His estate papers give his address as Parkside (the location of the Parkside Lunatic Asylum).

The women's suffrage petition of 1894 was signed by Harry (Henry and Martha's youngest son) and Jane Lomman of Gawler South, and T.H. (Henry and Martha's 7th child) and his wife M. Loman/Lomman of Walkerville. It was great to see these male ancestors on the suffrage petition, probably influenced by the experience of their mother in battling with the government to manage land after her husband went to the asylum. They were also probably influenced by the temperance movement as they were devout Methodists and there appeared to be problems with alcohol in their father's generation.

Martha Lomman (nee Strong) died in 1897, at the time she lived at Campbelltown (likely with her daughter Martha). There were two death notices, which stated she was a 'colonist of 58 years' and that 'another pioneer passed away.' It mentions 3 sons and 4 daughters, 36 grandchildren and 9 grandchildren at that time.

Henry Lomman died at the Adelaide Asylum in 1900 (he had been transferred there in August 1900), aged 87 years. His death notice mentions that he was a colonist of 61 years and states ‘sweet rest at last.’ He had spent his last 34 years in the Adelaide and Parkside Asylums.

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