

## An Intriguing Record

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Time spent researching Family History is time well spent, in my opinion. I think perhaps I should have been a detective instead of a teacher! Not only do I spend years tracing all my various family lines, but I also enjoy solving puzzles for fellow researchers whenever I can.

Recently there was a request on the AUS-NSW mailing list on the Internet for a look-up in the NSW Birth, Death and Marriage records. I decided to answer the call and used some of my time at the local Library as a volunteer Genealogical Research Assistant to look up the records on the computer. I confirmed for the inquirer from New Zealand that indeed, the references were for a mother and child, both named Sarah DEAN. The child had died a week after the mother, who obviously died in childbirth.

The inquirer warmly received this information since it settled the question of what had happened to her forebear, Sarah DEAN. My newly found friend then stated that she was having great difficulty in tracing this particular family. Her knowledge consisted of the following, which I quote:

*“Samuel DEAN married Sarah WILLIAMS in England in 1846. Prior to this they had a baby girl, Mary Ann DEAN, born in 1844 in England and then Emily DEAN born in 1847 in Lambeth, England.*

*Together they came to Australia on board the General Hewett in 1848 to settle in NSW, where they had a son, William Charles, and then a daughter, Sarah. William Charles DEAN grew up and married Elizabeth BALZER from Grafton; they settled in Samoa where they had a large family and owned a store.*

*Emily DEAN had two children, Alice and Arthur, before marrying John KEENAN in New Zealand. We know nothing about Mary Ann DEAN but have found two references to marriages in Australia and wonder if one of them is our Mary Ann?*

1. *Mary Ann Dean to James BRENNAN in Orange 1871*
2. *Mary Ann Dean to William KERNS in Orange 1874*

*I have also found two birth references for William Charles DEAN, both in 1851 – V1851747 45C/1851 and V18511233 51/1851. I wonder if they are both the same person and maybe one is a birth and one is a christening?”*

I looked at the films and found the exercise very interesting. The first entry (Reel 5016) was obviously an interim one and the second a “tidy” version in the “proper” book. The entries were virtually the same, except that the latter gave some occupations. Evidently Samuel and Sarah were on a trip to San Francisco!

NSW BDM V18511233 51/1851 (Reel 5018)  
Entry #446 St Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Sydney  
William Charles “Born at Sea” 25/06/1851 at San Francisco, California  
Father, Samuel DEAN, Merchant  
Mother, Sarah WILLIAMS  
Baptised 09/08/1852

My eyes were drawn to the neighbouring entries, since they were all Marine births:

Entry #445 was for William James  
Father, John BOYD, Shipwright  
Mother, Anne DEAN  
Born at Sea, Long 166.57 West, Lat 6.30 North 07/05/1852  
Baptised 05/08/1852

Entry #447 was for William  
Father, Alexander WILKIE

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Mother, Sarah BRADFIELD  
Born San Francisco 31/05/1851  
Baptised 09/08/1852

Entry #448 was for a Male Child  
Father, Aaron LOVERIDGE  
Mother, Catherine WILLIAMS  
Born San Francisco  
Baptised 11/08/1852  
Living Woolloomooloo, Sydney

It appeared to be a family group (excluding the WILKIEs perhaps) with Samuel and Sarah travelling with his sister, Anne, and her sister, Catherine, plus their respective husbands. It is a surprising coincidence that all the women were pregnant. Did they just wish to have their babies in San Francisco? Obviously the husbands were on a business trip to purchase (maritime?) supplies.

The ship was apparently just offshore of San Francisco on 31 May for the WILKIE baby's birth and 25 June for both William DEAN's and the WILLIAMS' baby's arrival. The #445 record suggests that they were all at sea again a year later when the BOYD baby arrived. Eventually, the babies were all baptised within a few days of each other in the same month in the same church back in Australia.

Of course, the family researcher had no idea that William Charles DEAN was born on this trip. Her reading of the NSW BDM index entry only suggested that he was born – as she expected – in NSW. Now she has an extended family and an interesting research task ahead of her to find the shipping records to see whether the other children accompanied their parents and to discover why they all went to San Francisco.

I'll look for Mary Ann DEAN's marriage during my next free time at the Library and see what else turns up in this intriguing family history. My correspondent has indicated she would like to repay me "in kind". Just possibly my "random act of kindness" as people often describe such help given to fellow researchers may be reciprocated one day. I have told her of the missing 22 years spent in New Zealand by one of my husband's antecedents. She may come across him one day and I'll be more than repaid!