

# A Passenger on the *Parmelia* by Lyn Coy (a descendant)

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Charlotte Davis, aged 2, is claimed to be the first white female to set foot on the Swan River Colony in Western Australia. Charlotte was carried ashore by a sailor and set afoot on the uninviting land on 1 June 1829.

My ancestors, the Davis family, sailed with Captain James Stirling on the ship *Parmelia* for the new colony of Swan River, Western Australia from Plymouth in England.

On 1 June 1829, Foundation Day, fate was unkind and the *Parmelia* struck a sandbank. Orders were quickly given to lighten the load so twenty eight women and children, families of the artificers, were loaded onto Carnac Island with the heavy stores. Amongst the twenty eight off-loaded onto Carnac Island was two year old Charlotte Davis. A sailor carried her ashore and set her down making her the first of her sex to touch the uninviting land.

The next five days brought incessant rain and gale to the twenty six castaways, leaving them to survive the elements. They had no shelter, no beds, no food apart from salt beef and biscuits, were soaked to the skin and had one knife and one mug to share among nearly thirty people. As reported by Commissioner Morgan, the solitary man in charge of the stores, the party all survived in good health and good discipline.

Thomas Davis was the Government Blacksmith and her mother was Catherine Davis who died in 1836 after only seven years in the colony at Mt Eliza. Catherine Davis was buried in East Perth Cemetery.

Charlotte Davis married at eighteen years of age in 1845 at Wesleyan Chapel, Perth to John Herbert who had arrived in 1839 on the ship *Westmoreland*. John Herbert took over the licensee of the Royal Oak Inn Toodyay from his brother William after he left the district. With Charlotte's good management the family built up an excellent hotel trade and were able to purchase several lots of land in the Toodyay district.

Charlotte and John Herbert had four children, Esther, John Thomas, Martha and Charlotte.

Charlotte's son John Thomas Herbert made quite a name for himself in the district when in 1883 he decided there was no adventure left in Western Australia and at the age of thirty five set out for South Australia 'on foot'. He arrived there safely without any real hardship. He married an Irish girl named Elizabeth Conroy but when his mother became ill he decided to return to Western Australia, again on foot, but this time with a companion. On the trek back John and his companion nearly died of thirst and were saved only by the fortuitous arrival of a telegraph linesman, however he arrived back in time to see his mother Charlotte on her deathbed.

Charlotte Herbert died at Toodyay on 31 March 1885 aged 58 years and is buried at Toodyay Cemetery.

There is a memorial in Newcastle Park, Toodyay Western Australia erected by her descendants commemorating the Davis family. The memorial is a granite rock formed in the shape of Western Australia and was found by one of Charlotte Davis' descendants on their property in the Toodyay district.

A fitting tribute to a true Western Australian pioneer.

**Written by Lyn Coy – Great Great Great Great Granddaughter of Charlotte Davis (edited by Celebrate WA).**