

# James Robson

## THE ROBSON FAMILY

The Robson family were originally from Scotland, from a market town called Turriff near the city of Aberdeen. The family consisted of the parents, John? and Sarah Robson, four sons - Joseph, James, Alexander and David and two girls (names possibly Sarah and Polly). The four boys migrated to Australia in 1876-77. They established themselves in the Cairns and hinterland district and after a few years arranged for their mother and sisters to emigrate to the Tablelands. By this time their father had died. Some cousins, the Patterson and Cairns families, also emigrated at this time.

Some information is known about the boys of the family, especially James. Unfortunately, nothing seems to be recorded about the girls nor about Sarah Robson, who is buried next to her son. We can only imagine the life they had. Clearly good health, stamina, positive attitude and an ability to accept challenges must have been some of the attributes of Sarah Robson to have lived to the age of 90 years in a foreign and harsh land.

Joseph (Joe) Robson settled in Herberton and set up a business as the first baker from where other stores in the district were supplied with breads, pastries and confectionery. He met his wife, Elizabeth, a school teacher in Herberton. He was the only one of the Robson's boys to marry. Joe's family were involved in the push to get services for the town - railway line, telegraph and telephone services, as well as the building of churches, Masonic temple and other enterprises.

Alexander (Sandy) Robson joined Joe in Herberton and then set up the first bakery shop in Irvinebank.

David (Dave) Robson spent his life mining and prospecting. He spent most of his time with John Atherton at the time when tin was discovered at Tinaroo. He mined and prospected in the Mareeba, Emerald Creek, Mt Molloy, Petford, Emuford and Chillagoe areas. He erected a flying fox spanning the Barron River which had a hauling rope of 900 feet, which was used to haul goods across the river close to Tolga.

JAMES ROBSON made the most impact of the brothers, and so we have more detailed information of his life in this area. James settled south of what is now Cairns in the area now known as Bayview Heights. His plan was to engage in dairying to supply the growing ports of the area and the developing mineral fields in the hinterland. His house, called "Bayview" overlooked Trinity Bay. He decided that there was greater opportunity on the Tablelands and was granted a lease at the intersection of the Barron River and what was later know as Robson's Creek. His mother and sisters settled with him at this site at Tinaroo (or Danbulla) and the remains of some of the stumps of the house he built are still on the flat above the graves, near the car turning circle at the northern end of "Scout Point" Barrabadeen.

The establishment of ROBSONS TRACK, which allowed a much easier route along which to transport minerals from the Tablelands to Cairns, is the feat for which James Robson is mainly remembered. The blazing of this track enabled the establishment of Cairns as the major port of the area, rather than Port Douglas. The route that James Robson cut through the dense rainforest follows what we now call the Gillies Highway.

On January 1st 1884, a large party from Cairns, Riverstone and other areas assembled at Redbank (Cairns) to honour James Robson with a gold watch and chain and an address bearing 48 names in appreciation for extending Robson's Track.

JAMES ROBSON died in March 1903, as we know from his grave. He was escorting a very pregnant neighbour to Atherton to have her baby under medical care. The trip to Atherton was uneventful, but on the way back, it is believed he called in at Martintown (Tolga) to see some friends after which he drove his sulky out through Kairi and down to the crossing of the Barron River (where Danbulla Drive now crosses the river below the dam wall.) The Barron River was in high flood by this time. He got into his boat just before dark, to row across the flooded river to the northern bank and to his house. The boat was caught in debris, upset and swamped and carried away downstream. James and the boat finished up against a large she-oak growing in the river channel. (The tree was still growing a hundred metres or so below the bridge on the Danbulla Road in 1974.)

When the flood receded, his body was recovered from the tree. His mother, Sarah Robson, arranged for James to be buried just below the house on the slope facing the Barron. It is 2.5 metres above the crest level of Tinaroo Dam which was completed in 1959! Sarah died three years later, at 90 years of age. She was buried next to her son.

## **THE GRAVES AT SCOUTS POINT**

These graves mark the last resting place of two pioneers of this region. They are JAMES ROBSON and his mother, SARAH ROBSON. You can see that James Robson died on 13th March, 1903, aged 58 years and that his mother died three years later on 26th September, 1906. She was 90 when she died.

The headstones are very rough, but have weathered well for nearly a century. They were made from raw cement still in the kegs. The cement would have been imported from Scotland, as was usual in the late 1800's and early 1900's.