



# THE PICK OF THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

## Pick Volume 3.12

### McFarland is Buried Here

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Many travellers along the Old Northern Road at Maroota have looked at the grave beside the road edge and wondered who was buried there. The grave has a typical 1920s headstone and surround and a very simple head stone that reads McFarland is buried here 19/1/1871. The Hawkesbury on the Net Cemetery Register states:

It is alleged that McFarland died of thirst, not realising how close he actually was to water. The grave is maintained by the RTA as it is on a Main Road. The RTA Historical Section advised that “they believed the man was a surveyor who died of thirst whilst out on a job”. “Tour of the Old Northern Road from Castle Hill to Wisemans Ferry” by the Hills District Historical Society states that local stories suggest McFarland was a “wayfarer”.

Although the date of death and the style of headstone did not match, it seemed with a name and date of death it would be a simple matter to find out a little more about this person.

A search of the death registration for 1871 showed there was one McFarland death registered in 1871. A copy of this death certificate proved he was not the McFarland buried beside the Old Northern Road. Who was buried in the grave?

After a search of all the McFarland and McFarlane and unknown death registrations it appears the probable occupation is an unknown male of unknown age whose body was found on the Northern Road at Maroota on 29 December 1880 and who was buried on the 30th December with the coroner registering the death on 3 January 1881.

In 1880/1 the surrounding land was crown land, and there were only two families who gave their address as Maroota. Why would a stranger be walking this way. It is possible he was looking for work, or heading home to Sydney from the Hunter Valley. With no newspaper report of the coroner’s inquiry there is no information to even guess which way he was traveling or how long he had been lying beside the road or what had caused his death.

I believe the occupant of this grave is the person who died at Maroota on the Old Northern Road in December 1880 despite his death certificate saying he is buried at Rivervale the property of Henry Wilson, one of the witnesses to his burial. In the middle of summer, in the days before refrigeration



when most transport was by foot, horse or boat and there was a general cemetery at Wisemans Ferry, why would a witness take the probably, by then, putrid body of an unknown male to his property for burial. At a time when there were virtually no residents in Maroota it was much more likely they would bury the unknown male near where they found him, on the edge of the road. Grave sites in general cemeteries had to be purchased. Although there were three other unknown deaths in the Wisemans Ferry area between 1860 and 1930, I believe the body in the grave marked McFarland is this man.

The next unanswered question then is why the headstone and that inscription. It appears the grave was marked in some way. Carol Sweeny of Eastbend said one of the local stories was that it was an unknown Scotsman i.e. "Mac from a far land". It is not difficult to imagine that the burial party wired together a rough cross, planted it at the head of the grave and hung the mans hat on it. Later, as the area became settled and the school established a few hundred yards away, it is likely the first cross was replaced with one with a painted message that may have read something like:-

Man  
From a  
Far land  
Buried here  
January 1881

Effected by weathering this was then translated as McFarland, buried here 19/1/1871 when the Public Works surveyors who were re-surveying the road found the grave in 1928 and had a head stone and grave surround installed.

Although not mentioned in the very brief inquest registration, the body may have born indications that the man was not Australian born, foreign made clothing, tattoos, scars etc that lead to grave marker been inscribed Man or Mac Far Land which with time and weather was translated as McFarland, with the original living on in memory. As there is no report of the inquest in one local paper and the other paper does not exist for 1881, so no details are known.

In 1880/1 there are approximately one unknown death registered in NSW each week. The local coroner would look at the body to determine as best he could what the deceased had not met his death by foul play, then authorise burial. Very scant details are recorded in the registers. The local press appears to have only carried reports of the inquest on unknown persons when the person was known in the local area, surname unknown, i.e. Jock the Cook, or old Bill, or old Jack, or the finding was harrowing or poignant, i.e. unknown family of three perished together.

Why do the RTA believe it was a surveyor who died while working? It would appear when analysed that this story is just that, a story possibly to justify the headstone. Surveyors did not work alone, they worked in parties and if one had died from misadventure or illness it is likely his body would have been returned to his family or taken to a cemetery not buried by the roadside. The area was surveyed when the road was initially built, again in the mid to late 1880s when the land was subdivided for conditional purchase and in 1927 when the road was slightly realigned and there was no McFarland or McFarlane who was listed as dying as Maroota or whose death was registered locally.



Although neither the name or date appear to be correct this grave can be considered representative of the numerous other unmarked and unknown graves of the men who died building the road and of numerous other unknown wayfarers buried where they were found across NSW.



#### References

*The Australian, Windsor, Richmond and Hawkesbury Advertiser* December January 1880/1881 missing years other unknown males died Wisemans Ferry.

*Cumberland Argus* December 1880; missing for 1881 missing years other unknown males died Wisemans Ferry.

Death Certificates; McFarland 1871; Unknown 1881

Coroners Inquest index and register. 1880 – 1882 SR reels 2926 and 2924

BDM indexes.

Discussions with Carol Sweeny, Eastbend Rural communication and Maroota Local community information

Information re Harry Wilson of *Rivervale* from Michelle Nicholls and Cathy McHardy, Librarians Windsor Library