

Tracey Letters

Tony Martin

Richard Nicholas Dowling Tracey, the eldest child of Catherine Dowling and Martin Tracey was born circa 1842. John O'Shannassy (Premier of Victoria) was godfather to Richard. Richard, like the rest of his family was well educated, in Lille Belgium, and then studied at Dublin University in his younger days. Richard was forty when he married on the 27th September 1882 Madeleine Amelia Walton aged 20, (born on 1st August 1861 at Geelong) the daughter of George Walton and Margaret Chalmers Orr. The Waltons resided at 'Fairfield Hall' in Great Myer Street, Geelong. George Walton originally arrived in Melbourne aboard the vessel *Ben Nevis* in January 1853.

Madeleine was a lady of handsome appearance and commanding presence. She was said to be an imperious person who cultivated influential and prominent people as well as intellectual leaders of the arts. She entertained with a gracious flair, and was said to be a woman well ahead of her time who was extremely ambitious and became heavily involved with politics.

Madeleine was reputedly requested by the Honorable Alfred Deakin, Prime Minister of Australia to draft the first Tariff Bills for Australia. She was an official guest at the opening of the Transcontinental Railway and numbers of other important events. Her professional services were sought by both Federal and State parliamentarians. Whilst Madeleine was thoroughly involved with the thrust and parry of politics, Richard maintained a neutral stance regarding politics. She was photographed with Sir George Reid, to whom she was an advisor, in 1906 at the signing of Australia's first Customs Tariff Act.

Richard Tracey was the Assistant Government Statist of Victoria. He died on the 1st October 1910 at the age of 68 near the steps of Parliament House in Spring Street, East Melbourne where he had slipped and hit his head; an inquest followed.

His wife lived for a further twenty two years and died on the 1st June 1932 at Cheltenham, aged 70. She was buried at the Necropolis, Springvale. The spelling of the Tracey surname was changed for future generations of this line. In a sworn affidavit at the inquest, (No 1001) held on the 15th October 1910, Richard's brother Patrick stated that Richard always signed his name as "Tracey", but the name change to "Tracey" was instigated by his wife Madeleine!

Madeleine and Richard had three children, the eldest being Richard Eustace Sarsfield Tracey (born 15 Jul 1883, died 2 Nov 1973); the middle

child was Madeleine Mary Stephanie Tracey (born 21 Sep 1884, died 2 Aug 1933) and the youngest Beatrix (Trixie) Dagmar Tracey (born 29 Aug 1888, died 12 Jun 1929).

The two daughters were notable in terms of their social activities with the arts. Trixie was an actor for a short time and wrote articles for the 'Lone Hand' and later the 'Bulletin' when she married Howard Carr. Madeleine had three husbands the first being Thomas Louis Buvelot Esson (Playwright) who wrote several short stories, poetry and plays with a distinctive Australian flavour; some considered him the 'father of Australian drama'. Her last husband was John Nereus Cosgrove, also a man of the stage. The Cosgrove family history has been published and more information can be found in this work titled *The Flying Cosgroves* by Jenny Rudd O'Neill.

Of some interest is the interaction between mother Madeleine and her namesake daughter who was for a time employed in the Catholic Library. A letter from the mother is an absolute gem in terms of its language and conveys the very essence of authority. It is rebuked by the younger fiery daughter in a gem of a response. One finds it difficult to see any such letters being written today with the advent of mobiles and text messaging. These letters are a treat to savour from another era.



Image courtesy Tony Martin

▲ Trixie standing, Madeleine seated, c1920.



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