

## **“The Chester Family of Queensland”– By Daniel Pianto.**

In the Village of Wednesfield, Staffordshire, England, William Chester was born in 1826. He married Elenora ( Ellen ) Lovely, who was also born in Wednesfield, Staffordshire, England in 1836. One of their sons was named Thomas Chester who was born around 1861 in Staffordshire. Thomas Chester was to marry Caroline Willis, born around 1866. Caroline Willis was the daughter of Herbert Willis and Caroline Earley.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1883, Thomas and Caroline Chester, sailed from London, England, aboard the Ship, “Jerusalem”, bound for Australia. Thomas was aged 21 and his wife Caroline was only 17. The ship arrived in Brisbane, Queensland on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 1883.

Thomas Chester shortly after his arrival in Queensland, commenced farming and about two years later became one of the Pioneering Dairy farmers of the Mount Gravatt district. He was a well known and respected member of the Congregational Church and was a very accomplished Organist.

He later resided at Haig Street, Coorparoo, Queensland. He was the father of five sons and one daughter. He was the grand father to eleven grand children and a great grandfather to five grand children. Thomas Chester lived to the grand age of eighty seven and died in 1948.

In the Queensland heatwave of 1925, Mrs Chester, (Caroline ), was to fall victim of the intensity of the hot weather conditions, and the many bush fires in the area, which claimed the lives of five people during this the hottest day experienced in Brisbane for twenty years. It was tragically about noon on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> of February 1925, that when Mrs Chester, returned home from Voting, she prepared the dinner and then complained of being unwell. At around 3pm that day she died. She had lived with her husband on the Broadwater Road, Mt Gravatt, and she died at the age of 61. Taken tragically much too young.

The five children of Thomas Chester and his wife Caroline Willis – Chester were as follows:

- William Herbert Chester – 1884 – 1953 – Married - Pearl Sommer in 1918;
- Thomas Chester – 1886 – 1960 – Married - Annie Christina Zohn in 1906.
- Benjamin Chester – 1888 – 1953 – Married – Jane Watson Carlin in 1912.
- Edward ( Ted ) Chester – 1891 – 1971 – Married – Lucy Whittaker Bird in 1912
- Ellen Caroline Chester – 1905 – 1891. Never Married.

A beautiful picture is in existence of the Chester Family, and I wish to acknowledge the Queensland State Library to reproduce it, the copyright has expired but I am grateful to them that they have preserved such an historical gem.

It shows the picture of the Chester Home, of which I can identify the Chester's in it, in regards to their ages. Left to Right are pictured – Benjamin Chester, George Chester, William Chester, Edward (TED), Their Mother ( Mrs Caroline Chester ) Thomas Chester Jnr. and their Father (Thomas Chester Snr.). This picture was taken at their home in Mount Gravatt – Queensland, taken prior to the birth of their youngest sister in 1905.

One of the children of Thomas and Caroline Chester was Edward Chester, also known as, (“Ted”), was born in 1891. Ted Chester married Lucy Bird, born in 1891, the step daughter of Henry Gibson Bird and her real mothers name Jessie Whittaker, who married Henry Bird in 1902. Jessie was the daughter of Thomas Whittaker and Ellen O'Leary. Jessie Bird died in 1954.

Mr Ted Chester, became famous throughout his native Queensland and beyond, for his magnificent long distance performances, that took the fancy by storm. His name became a household name and was so synonymous with the pride of his lofts, through purchasing in 1922, the famous imported, "Uncle Sam", from the Bushell Bros. of Haberfield Lofts, Sydney.

Ted Chester was interviewed by the local pigeon columnist, in the Sunday Mail Brisbane, on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> of December 1927, page 33, under the title of, "HOMING PIGEONS – FAIRFIELD LOFTS" by the author known as, "RING". I have reproduced it as it appears in full. This information can be taken as genuinely the most accurate so far in many articles written about him by others, given that it was Ted Chester himself, being reported about directly. It reads;

*Mr E Chester, the owner of the Fairfield Lofts, completed a hat trick in the Queensland Homing Pigeon Association Competition, when he won the two longest distance races of the the season. They were Charleville, air line distance of 426 miles and Quilpie, 546 miles air line. Mr Chester's lofts are situated in an excellent position on a slight rise, facing East and commanding a fine view, consequently an easy landmark for the pigeon returning from the race point. A large separate loft is kept for stock birds and breeding purposes, and a short distance is a loft of similar size fitted with a patent trap at the top, into which the birds trap on race days.*

*Adjoining the lofts is a short flight out-house, with an earthen floor, into this the birds go at their leisure, and on hot days it is greatly appreciated by the feathered flock.*

*Mr Chester is a keen flyer and raced his pigeons from 1909 until 1919, he then retired for several years, but the call of the, "fancy" was too strong and he began again in 1922. Mrs Chester, like her husband, also became a member and registered her first win on April 4<sup>th</sup> of that year with, "Fairfield Lady".*

*The lofts contain about 130, the most important is a Blue Chequer Cock, which was imported by the owner from America, and for which the sum of 25 pound was paid. **NOTE: We know that this minor detail is not entirely correct, being imported by the Bushell Bros of Sydney, NSW in 1919)***

*Mr Chester is loud in his praises of, "Uncle Sam", who has proved an excellent stock bird and his young ones have stood the test, and added generally in the prize lists. Uncle Sam is of the swallow type and was bred in America. He flew 1,000 miles on three occasions, was first in the 200 miles, first in the 500 miles and first in 1,000 miles, in the second 1,000 mile race flown. Uncle Sam was the only bird that homed.*

*Mr Chester is also the proud possessor of an American Hen, named, "Lady Liberty", a dainty white flight and blue chequer hen bred by Dr Schillington ( Schilling ). These birds have been mated and crossed with the owners own special breed of, "Pioneers", with most pleasing results.*

*Uncle Sam is the Sire of, "Young Uncle", who flew all stages from Charleville, and was one of the only three birds who homed on the day of the liberation.. The birds competing numbered 228. Two weeks later, Young Uncle flew from Quilpie, air line – 545 miles and three weeks later flew from Longreach when only 9 birds returned out of 92 liberated. This was a most disastrous race, and will long be remembered as many valuable birds were lost, and never recovered.*

*Young Uncle, flew all stages on the northern route, 3<sup>rd</sup> in Maryborough 380 miles, 6<sup>th</sup> Mackay 500 miles, and 3<sup>rd</sup> in Bowen 600 miles. Only three birds timed in, in the last mentioned race, which was open for fourteen days. Young Uncle also homed on the day of liberation from St Lawrence.*

*“Speed King”, a natty Blue Chequer Cock won Quilpie in 1923 in 9 hours and 49 minutes. “Black Tracker”, a full brother to Speed King, a fine Black Chequer Cock also won Quilpie, three months later than Speed King. “The Hawk”, belongs to the same family, while, “Battle Queen”, a sister to these excellent cock birds was the only bird home in the Longreach race, two birds from the same loft arriving a week later. The parents of these birds were, “Pioneer” and “Liberty Lady”.*

*“Willy's Knight”, the best individual performer of the Brisbane Homing Club, 1924, is from, “Speed King” and, “Little Wonder”, a daughter of, “Uncle Sam”, the imported U.S bird.*

*Due to the Brisbane Homing Club forming a Boundary Line, Mr Chester, being outside the Boundary was forced to resign and became a member of the Queensland Homing Pigeon Association, in which he has flown with success, particularly in the long distance races.*

*Mr Chester intends to further improve his stock and has arranged for several improvements to be made for the birds entire comfort in their lofts.*

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Ted Chester remained flying and being associated in the sport and kept pigeons, longer than most people have originally thought. The earliest date of Mr Chester's involvement as mentioned was 1909 and there are results of him still actively competing and quite successful in 1954, from printed racing results, against such legendary flyers as Herb Knoblauch. After 1954, there is no publicly available newspaper access to my knowledge that I am able to draw information from.

Mr George Chester, the brother of Ted Chester, also flew pigeons but he did not remain in the sport as long as his brother, due to business activities. He was very successful in his brief time.

He appears, with his brother Ted, in a photograph taken of the Officials and Committee, of the Brisbane Homing Pigeon Club in 1924.

The following persons appear in the 1924 photograph, Standing left to right are, K. Gillespie – Hon Auditor, A E Barnacle – Press Correspondent, G Chester – Clock Reader, A. Scott – Hon Auditor as well. Seated – E. Chester ( Ted ) Ringer of Birds, C. Knoblauch - Treasurer - ( Herb Knoblauch's Father ), F. Krome – President, S. Johnstone – Ring Checker.

In regards to the two Pigeon Flying Brothers, they made such a valuable contribution to their area, in creating employment in the fields of Building, Agriculture and Horticulture.

George Chester was a very prominent figure of community importance. He was one of Brisbane's first scale sub-divider and home builder, shortly after the conclusion of World War Two. The surplus timber that came from his Sawmill, located in Pimpana, was sourced to make many new homes in the Mount Gravatt area, in the vicinity at one stage of over 100 new homes.

It was known that the Tram services, stopped at Holland Park, but as Mr Chester developed, the Tram line followed his estates all the way to Mount Gravatt. A very wealthy man, George Chester became known as the, “Banana Case Baron”, and was the largest producer of Bananas in the area and he claimed that he was the largest Banana producer in Commonwealth. He was, like his family, one of the Pioneers of the new Suburb of Mount Gravatt located in Brisbane. That is quite a remarkable achievement when one ponders his endeavours.

Mr Edward ( Ted ) Chester, was by no means any less talented in his undertakings, in comparison to his younger brother George. It was mentioned in other articles and by the people who can remember him, that Ted was illiterate and could not read or write, thus his pigeon records were non-existent, at least in the context that Ted could not record them.

What has been told by other authors and pigeon fanciers of the time, has been mostly contributed by their own personal recollections and no doubt all recorded in good faith. The details through Ted's lack of ability to record ring numbers and breeding details, is such a great loss as there appear large gaps over the years of any vital continuance of information. It is most unfortunate, that there has been over time, many discrepancies with some facts, but we simply do not know the answers.

There has been many conflicting stories told and unfortunately over time a lot of this information gets lost in transit and the original stories perhaps, become just that, however they form their own story. I would like to point out, it is not my intention to discredit any information written prior as all of this information, gives us an overall account as to how highly the Pigeons of the late Ted Chester were held, in such high esteem, and from the original purchase of, "Uncle Sam" in 1922. If it was not for the oral stories and publications by others, the story would have been lost.

The original Uncle Sam and his descendants, have always remained shrouded in secrecy and myth, and perhaps always will, however there is no doubt this bird and his owner added much to the bloodlines of our racing pigeons, especially in the Brisbane area, if all information is correct. It was also learned in the earlier newspaper interview, that Ted possessed his own family of, "Pioneers". It is such a great shame the reporter didn't report what this, Pioneer family actually was.

All I can say, in this, my personal admiration of a man, I have heard so much about, yet through a generational gap, never met. I felt a need to produce this article about him and I also understand that he certainly contributed to the development of the Long Distance Racing Pigeon of Queensland, more than people actually realise. THIS IS FACT!!!

There is enough literature already available in print about "Uncle Sam", but for the reader who is not aware of the Uncle Sam story, I will briefly include some information about it.

"Uncle Sam", was a beautiful looking pigeon of the finest quality. He was a Blue Chq Cock – E4398 bred in 1916 by Mr G Lenz, who flew with the Fort Wayne Homing Society. This Club has been in existence since around 1887 and several members were noted for their World record performances and were undoubted masters of racing pigeons each year up to 1,300 miles.

"Uncle Sam's performances were;

1916 – As a 'youngster he flew 100,200,300 and 500 miles. Winning the 300 and 500 mile races, respectively.

1917 – As a yearling, he flew 100, 200, 300, 500 and 1,011 miles, breaking the world's 1,000 mile yearling record.

1918 – 100, 300, 500, and 1,011 miles ( TWICE ) in the one season. He had only returned from the previous long race three days, when he was shipped again and returned. He was noted as having the finest flights and wing ever seen on a racing pigeon. He was a very long caste bird as well.

Designed over many generations through extreme long distance flying, there can be no doubt.

Uncle Sam was bred from – Sire - Not listed. Dam – Sighilde – BCH - B2421 – 1912. She was an excellent stock hen who produced many fine 1,011 mile birds. Her noted sire was, Hagen who flew the 1,000 mile races 5 times. This is incredible when one ponders what an achievement this is, considering he flew 5,055 miles, let alone other races and training tosses.

It should be noted that Ten American 1,000 Mile Strain pigeons were imported in total by the Bushell Bros, from Dr. Schilling, and I find it hard to believe that only the birds of Ted Chester's remained known about, that being Uncle Sam and his mother, Sighilde.

Where did these other American birds go after the 1922 Clearance Sale of Messrs Bushell?

Ted appears a highly intelligent and very talented person in other ways and was a very good business manager, despite his lack of literacy ability. We know that he was a brilliant spokesperson and was a great worker. On Ted's property of Sunnybank, he was one of the largest Poultry Farmers in the State of Queensland, and had at one stage a flock of over 8,000 laying hens. They recorded some months an average of upwards of 6,000 eggs per day and the daily average throughout the year was estimated at around 2,000. Ted was a committee member of the Egg Producer's Deputation and was also competed in Egg Laying competitions of which he was highly successful.

For many years, Ted was responsible for providing the people of Brisbane with around 750,000 eggs annually. Some times he employed the services of up to six men to assist him and it costs many thousands of pounds to feed them, estimated at around 5 pounds per day. Mr Chester among the other Poultry farmers at the time was often at loggerheads with the Queensland Egg Board, due to their demands on pricing etc., with like most Farmers, being out of pocket. His quote can some up how he felt at the time,(1937) “ **The Egg Board are getting all the Currants out of the Cake**”

In relation to the Pigeons, I have managed to locate some of Ted's recorded 1<sup>st</sup> Federation wins with the QRPA, and are as listed. Taken from Newspaper articles on, “Trove”.

- 1923 – Dalby, Plardo, Quilpie, Charleville, Longreach.
- 1924 – Jondaryn.
- 1928 – Rockhampton,
- 1937 – Dulacca, Goondiwindi, Roma, Inglewood,
- 1938 – Roma, Chinchilla, Charleville, Dulacca.
- 1939 – Dirranbandi, Mitchell, Roma, Goondiwindi, Cunnamulla,
- 1940 – Quilpie, Grafton, Kempsey, Gloucester, Kampaer, Thallon.
- 1941 – Roma.
- 1946 – Gladstone.
- 1948 – Quilpie.

The last year I am able to research is 1954 and it is recorded that in the 1954 race from St. Lawrence, I have Ted listed in 5<sup>th</sup> place, along side some greats, J. McKenna, A. Watton, R. Brown, R. Scott, E. Chester, W. Haylock, R. Allison and H. Knoblauch..

Several Pigeons that Ted Chester had much success with, were named and there photograph appeared in the local newspaper. Some of these birds I will list below, including one which belonged to George Chester.

- {BLACK ARROW} Black CC – Bred by G. Chester. He held the Charleville record for 436 miles.
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- These birds all were bred by Ted Chester:
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- {BATTLE QUEEN} Bred by E. Chester. The Longreach Winner, only bird timed in. She had flown over 2,000 miles and was only 8 months old.
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- {SPEED KING} BCC - Bred by E. Chester . Winner of the 1923 Quilpie Race of 543 miles. Speed King lowered the previous record of 20 hours and 23 minutes, 5 seconds – To record a win of 19 hours, 49 minutes. Flying at the average speed of 55 and 1/3 miles per hour.
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- (PLARDO PRINCE – BCC - Bred by E. Chester. He won the Plardo race 208 miles and was the loft favourite, entered into the Longreach race of 1923.
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- {WILD ROSE ) RCH – Bred by E. Chester. She won the Dalby race of 111 miles out of 200 entries.
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- {HAWK} BCC – Bred by E. Chester. Winner of the Charleville race of 426 miles in 13 hours and 24 minutes. The birds flew all day against a strong head wind and of the 226 competitors, only 5 birds were timed home, three of these being Mr Chester's.

Sadly in 1971, at the age of 80, Mr Edward ( Ted ) Chester had passed away. His generous nature was to be extended, after his death through his Will, proposing amounts of money to various Charitable .Institutions, including the improvement and breeding of Racing Pigeons alike. His wealth had other admirers, and his next of kin, challenged his request in the High Court.

**The Canberra Times – Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> of July 1974, “ GIFT FOR PIGEONS INVALID” -**

SYDNEY – Tuesday - The Full High Court ruled today that a Queensland poultry farmer's bequest of about \$100,000 to improve the breeding and racing of homing pigeons was invalid.

The farmer, Mr Edward Chester, of Coorparoo, died in October 1971, leaving an estate of \$196,816. He made bequests of \$30,000 dollars each to the RSPCA, the Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade and the Salvation Army and left the residue to the Royal National Agricultural and Industrial Association, to improve the breeding and racing of homing pigeons.

The validity of the bequest was successfully challenged by Mr Chester's next of kin in the Queensland High Court and the association made an appeal to the High Court which was dismissed by Mr Justice Mc Tiernan, Mr Justice Menzies and Mr Justice Mason. In their joint judgement handed down today the judges said,

“It is common ground that the gift fails for perpetuity unless it is for a charitable purpose in the legal sense”.

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