

MISS PRISCILLA SWIFT

A former resident of Forest Range in South Australia from 1914 – 1957

Priscilla Swift was a sewing teacher from McLaren Flat who moved to Forest Range to live a solitary life. For many people where she came from, and why, was a mystery. Some stories said that one day she simply 'walked in with her cattle and stayed'.

In 1914, at the age of 48, Priscilla purchased 56 acres of section 95. This land was previously owned by Gotthilf Wilhem Muller of Lobethal and had been sold to James Eustace Hamlyn in 1910. This land is on the road now known as Collins Hill Road.

She lived there for more than 40 years.



Figure 1 Priscilla Swift, Aunt Prissy – from Leanne Hyett

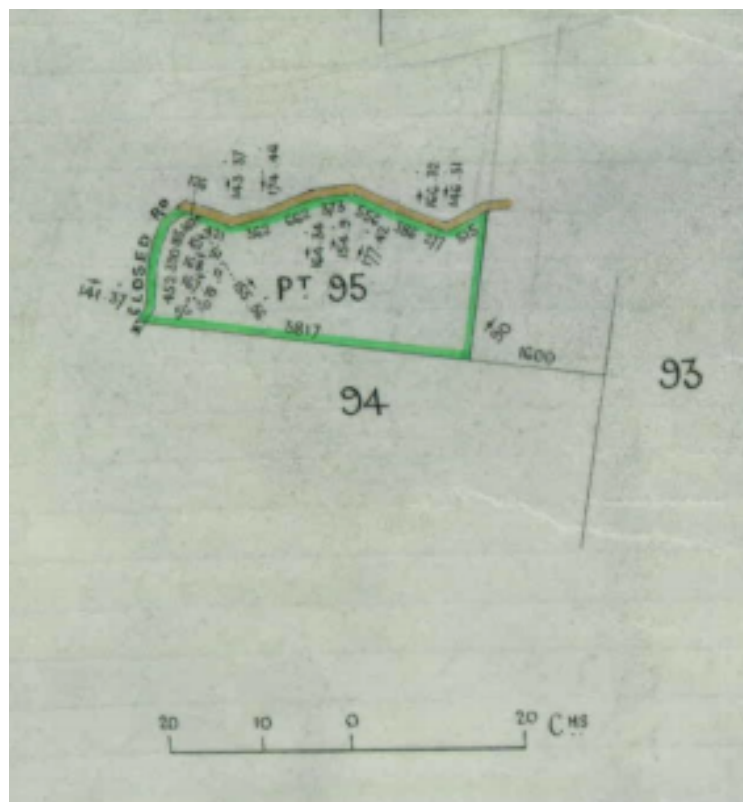


Figure 2 Map from original certificate of title. Vol 722. Folio 81.

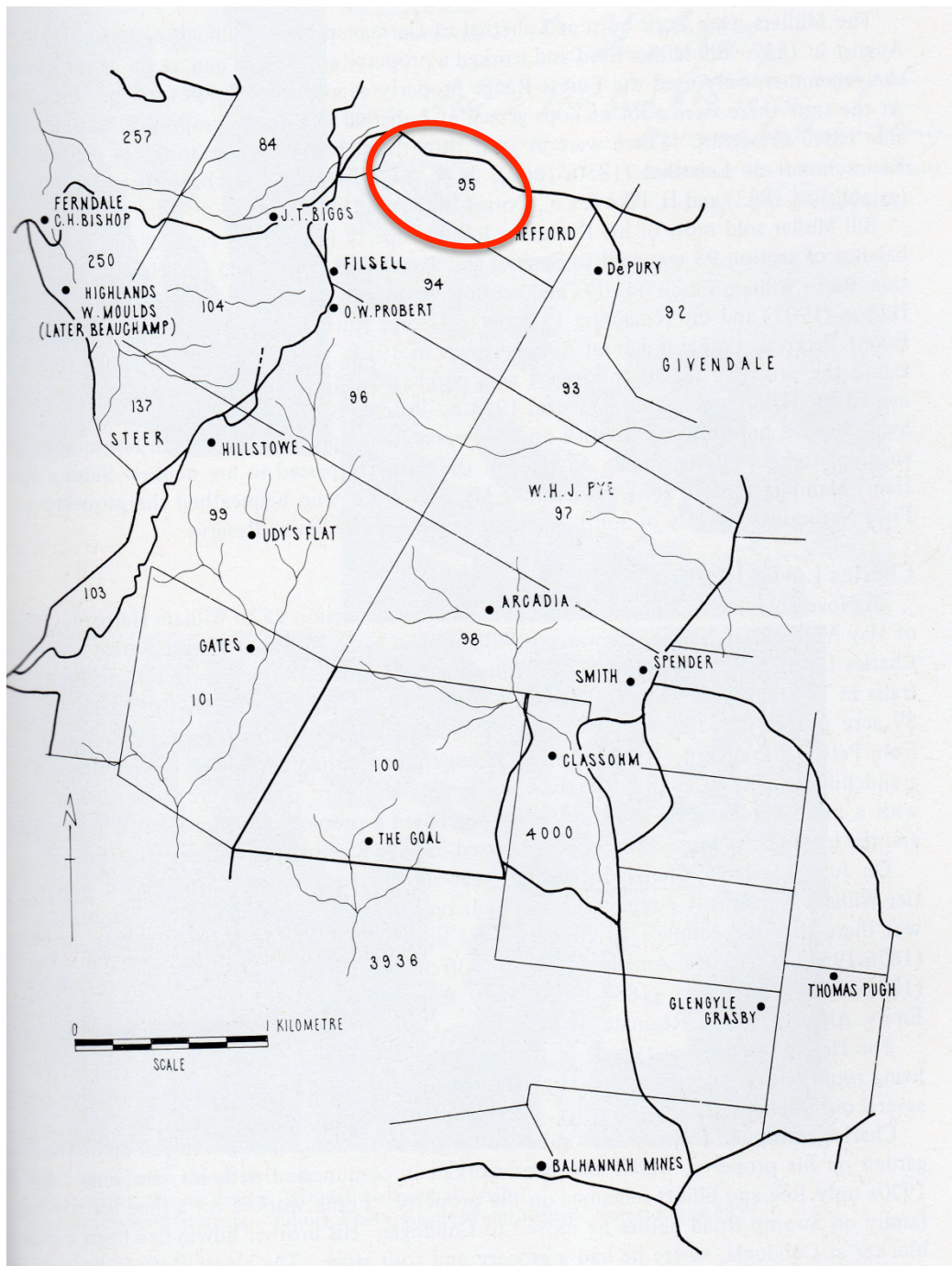


Figure 3 Deviation Road and Swamp Road (Balhannah end) from Bishop, 1984 p 163

Priscilla was the youngest child of Jeremiah and Cecelia Swift. She was born 12 September 1865 and died 18 June 1958.

Her father, Jeremiah, was born in 1805 and was sent to Van Diemen's Land as a convict. While in Tasmania Jeremiah married his first wife Eliza Moore with whom he had two children. A daughter Mary Ann died in infancy and a son William. It is not known what happened to William.

Once he earned his freedom Jeremiah travelled to South Australia on the John Pirie in 1837. He was a plasterer and bricklayer by trade and at that time there was a need for those skills in early South Australia. He was responsible for the erection of most of the homes in Beltunga, just a few kilometres from McLaren Flat.



Figure 4 Granny Swift (Cecelia Swift), Thomas Hardy, Stan Chapman and Alice the cow. Taken in front of the Swift house on, McLaren Flat. Collection of Leanne Hyett.

Cecelia Hooper arrived in South Australia on the Abourkir in 1847. She was one of a few women who arrived as single woman and was put up in newly appointed accommodation for single women. Jeremiah and Cecelia were married in 1848. Cecelia was born in 1820 at Ruan Minor, in Cornwall to Grace Bolitho. Priscilla was their youngest daughter.

1. Mary Hannah was born on Sturt Street Adelaide on 9 March 1849. Mary married Thomas Townsend and they had three children William Louis, Bertha and Evelyn. Evelyn married William Sigston. Mary died in 1918 and is buried at McLaren Flat.
2. Frances Emma was born 22 June 1851 at North Adelaide. Frances married Zechariah Ward and had two children. Frances died in 1883 and is buried at McLaren Flat.
3. Joseph was born 30 July 1853 at North Adelaide. He tragically died at the age of 12 after a fall from a visitor's horse near the house along Pearn's Lane. He died in 1866 and is buried at McLaren Flat.
4. Jonathon was born 13 February 1859 at McLaren Vale. He died in 1899 and is also buried at McLaren Flat.
5. Elizabeth Jane born 6 October 1861 at McLaren Vale. Elizabeth married Edward Manning and had three children, none of whom married. Sidney was one of her children. Elizabeth died in 1936 at McLaren Flat.
6. Matilda was born 12 July 1864 and died a few days later on 30 July 1864.
7. Priscilla was the youngest, born 12 December 1865.

Husband

Jeremiah Swift
 B: 1805 in England
 D: 26 MAY 1883 in McLaren Flat, South Australia, Australia

Wife

Cecelia Hooper
 B: OCT 1820 in Ruan Minor, Cornwall, England
 D: 27 NOV 1907 in McLaren Flat, South Australia, Australia

Relationship Events

Marriage
 1848 in Adelaide, South Australia, Australia

Children

Name	Birth	Death	Hints
Mary Hannah Swift Daughter	09 MAR 1849 in Sturt Street, Adelaide SA Australia	10 SEP 1918 in McLaren Vale, South Australia, Australia	
Frances Emma Swift Daughter	22 JUN 1851 in North Adelaide, South Australia, Australia	15 JAN 1883 in McLaren Vale, South Australia, Australia	
Joseph Swift Son	30 JUL 1853 in North Adelaide, South Australia, Australia	19 MAR 1866 in McLaren Flat, South Australia, Australia	
Jonathon Swift Son	13 FEB 1859 in McLaren Vale, South Australia, Australia	20 JUN 1899 in McLaren Vale, South Australia, Australia	
Elizabeth Jane Swift Daughter	06 OCT 1861 in McLaren Vale, South Australia, Australia	30 SEP 1936 in McLaren Flat, South Australia, Australia	
Matilda Swift Daughter	12 JUN 1864 in McLaren Vale, South Australia, Australia	30 JUL 1864 in McLaren Vale, South Australia, Australia	
Priscilla Swift Daughter	12 SEP 1865 in McLaren Vale, South Australia, Australia	18 JUN 1958 in Lower Mitcham/Magill, South Australia, Australia	

Figure 5 Family of Jeremiah and Cecelia Swift. Leanne Hyett, Ancestry.com.au.

Priscilla was a Sunday School teacher at McLaren Flat Bible Christian/Methodist Church. She also taught sewing at McLaren Flat Primary School and was appointed as teacher on 4 August 1893. It is possible that this was just one year as she only appears as a teacher in 1893 on the UniSA teachers list. (Condon) Miss Swift was "a colourful figure in the Flat for many years. She lived in the cottage down the lane next to the Lows and was an eccentric dresser! Sometimes wearing up to three hats at time." (Walling, 1980)

Priscilla was well known for wearing a number of dresses and hats when she visited McLaren Flat from Forest Range. Her family recall, with affection, her squeaky voice. Priscilla, along with her cousin Gerald Ward, inherited her parent's property after the death of her mother. The property, on Pearns Lane, has never left the family since the time Jeremiah purchased it in 1847. Phillip Stigston, a family member who is producing wine under the label StigstonSwift Wines, now owns it. It is not known why Priscilla moved to Forest Range.

In 1914 (the year of the drought) Priscilla moved to her 56 acres at Forest Range with 2 or 3 cows and a bull. At one point Priscilla sold off a ten-acre block of her property. Farming was hard and that land and surrounding land was heavily wooded. In March 1929 she lost 20 acres of wattle land due to a bushfire but fortunately her home was not damaged.

FOREST RANGE AND OAKBANK SWEPT. ORCHARDISTS SUFFER SEVERELY.

A fire on the property of Mr. C. L. Hefford at Forest Range restarted about 10.30 a.m. on Tuesday, and after burning several acres of scrub spread to a holding of 160 acres owned by Messrs. Clark and Alan Filsell, which was completely swept, only three acres being untouched by the flames, which reached a height of 100 feet at times.

About 1,000 cases of apples were rendered unsaleable, and about 60 acres of wattles, valued at £1 an acre, were reduced to charred stumps and ashes. The property was not insured, and Mr. C. Filsell estimates his loss at more than £1,500. A few days previously he had sold the crop on the fruit trees to his brother, a buyer in Ade-

laide, for delivery next month, but the fruit was ruined, and a large number of the trees were burned. Only the work of helpers prevented sheds containing a large motor lorry, cars, and trollies, and an electric light plant, worth in all £2,000, from catching alight.

Other orchardists in the district also suffered severely. A quantity of fruit on the trees almost ready for picking, the property of Messrs. M. and P. Frost, was badly burned, in addition to several acres of wattles. The home of Mr. D. Brockhoff, whose property adjoins that of Mr. Filsell, was endangered, but the work of 50 men who were summoned when the out-

break occurred saved the building, although much of his land was swept. The houses of Mr. J. Trevennen and Miss P. Swift were also endangered for a time.

Messrs. Trevennen, J. East, O. Probert, and Miss Swift each lost about 20 acres of wattle-covered country.

A Brewery in Danger.

The blaze spread from Forest Range in the direction of Balhannah and Oakbank, and about 200 men combined to save the brewery of Messrs. J. and A. G. Johnston. A corner of the property of the Onkaparinga Racing Club was swept.

The fire was first noticed heading in the direction of Oakbank about lunch time. It travelled over the property of Mr. T. Edwards, about half a mile from the township, on the Adelaide-

Figure 6 FOREST RANGE AND OAKBANK SWEPT. (1929, March 16). Chronicle (Adelaide, SA : 1895 - 1954), p. 52.

Ross Pollard of Forest Range grew up across the road from Miss Swift. He recalls that Priscilla was a very interesting and lovely old lady. She had no teeth, long and unkempt hair. She wore long dark dresses.

Priscilla lived in a two-room iron shepherd's hut. In later years another room was added but he remembers that she did not use it. She had very humble possessions with a couch in the kitchen and her table was a wooden chest. Priscilla did not own an axe and she would collect old wattle trees, drag them home, placing one end in the fire and as it burned she would stoke in the remainder.

There was no window in the main room, only a door. Priscilla had a cast iron pot for cooking and there was a small tank by the humpy from where water was collected in a small general-purpose bowl. A sewing basket was in the drawing room, as she called it, and we believe she slept on the sofa in the main room as the window was broken and sealed with iron in the second room.

Priscilla was very contented with her lifestyle. She attached a piece of tea tree to a stick and swept her path through her small orchard to the road and kept it spotlessly clean. Ross played marbles there as the ground was so smooth. The road to her place was originally a bush track that later became East Hill Road and is now Collins Hill Road.

She did not flash money around and was self-sufficient. Ross recalls Priscilla catching Graeber's bus to go down to Coles in Adelaide to purchase a saw to cut the bottom of her door due to sediment from the rain. The grocer from Summertown or Lobethal used to call if she required anything

Church of Christ Sunday School socials were held at the old Forest Range Hotel at least twice a year but Priscilla would only go if asked. Due to her appearance some locals were frightened of her and called her the witch, but Ross recalls that she had a beautiful smile. When Priscilla was ill and taken away she was always determined to return to her humble cottage and often walked between Forest Range and McLaren Flat.

The Filsell and Pollard family were very good to Priscilla encouraging her in community things. Dr Jungfer used to ride his horse to Lindstrom's shop about once a month for consultation. Ross Pollard's mother asked Dr Jungfer to visit Priscilla as she recognised her frailty. Ross reinforced that Priscilla was a good influence on him and she was very friendly. As a lad he recalls her gouging apples with her thumbnail.

Lois Leming (nee Filsell) also fondly recalls Miss Swift. Lois recalls that Priscilla walked in a very prim and proper manner, being very stately and erect. She was very tall. On Monday afternoons Lois's mother would invite Priscilla for afternoon tea and Lois's brother Alec would always join them if Miss Swift was there. When Priscilla was not well a meal was often taken around to her. When her cattle strayed the Filsell family remember Miss Swift asking 'Has anyone seen my male?' referring to her bull. No one can recall visitors to Miss Swift at Forest Range but the nephews from McLaren Flat were often mentioned.

Lois was a nurse and when Priscilla was in Sunset Lodge on Unley Road (now Belair Road) Lois would visit her. She recalls that it was lovely to see Miss Swift in a white nightie and white sheets. Priscilla died on 18 June 1958 and is buried at McLaren Flat in an unmarked grave. 46 acres of her property passed to her nephew Sidney Barton Henri Manning, who bequeathed the property to the Field Naturalists' Society of South Australia as a Flora and Fauna Reserve.



Figure 7 Photo from Collins Hill Road looking at where the hut of Priscilla Swift used to stand – M Fry



Figure 8 Ross Pollard stands by the remains of the chimney of Miss Swift's home – M Fry



Figure 9 Field Naturalists Society sign on the land formerly owned by Miss Swift – M Fry

Phil Sigston is a great-great-great-grandson Jeremiah Swift, Priscilla's father. He says 'My father and I have established SigstonSwift Wines so that we may continue the legacy of our ancestors, and so the wine produced by this land can continue to be enjoyed by all.'

SigstonSwift winery has named one of their wines 'Aunt Prissy Tempranillo' after Priscilla Swift. Visit the SigstonSwift website <http://sigstonswift.com/bottles/aunt-prissy-tempranillo/>.



Figure 10 Aunt Prissy Tempranillo - M Fry

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