Cultural Advice

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this website contains names, images, and voices of deceased persons.

In addition, some articles contain terms or views that were acceptable within mainstream Australian culture in the period in which they were written, but may no longer be considered appropriate.

These articles do not necessarily reflect the views of The Australian National University.

Older articles are being reviewed with a view to bringing them into line with contemporary values but the original text will remain available for historical context.

Hide message

Paddy Swift (1848–1922)

by Philippa Scarlett

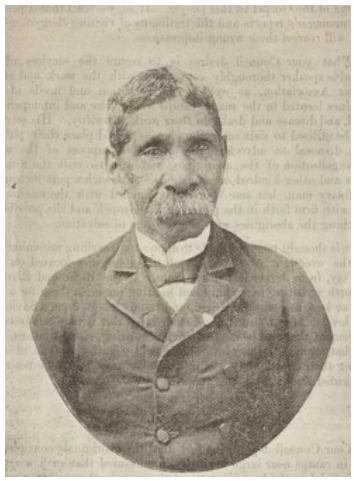
This article was published:

- **in the *Indigenous Australian Dictionary of Biography***
- **online in 2020**

View Previous Version

This is a shared entry with Jenny Swift

Paddy Swift (c. 1848–1922), stockman, horse-breaker and trainer, and missionary, and Jenny Swift (c. 1858–1894), missionary and dormitory matron, were husband and wife. Paddy was born in 1848 at The Hermitage, a station on the Ovens River, Victoria; his parents' names are not known. In later life he said he was a member of the Nanga (Pangarang/Pangerang) people of Oxley, Victoria, which suggests that he may have descended from what is now mainly known as the Jabulajabula language group. Separated from his people at the age of six, he began working as a stockman when he was fifteen, developing skills as a horse-breaker and trainer.



***Paddy Swift**, 1893*

Annual Report of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Association for 1893

In 1882 Swift visited Maloga Mission on the Murray River, New South Wales. After a month he decided to stay, converting to Christianity and embracing the missionary endeavours of Daniel Matthews and his wife Janet. Matthews, the mission's founder, was devoted to converting Aboriginal people to his evangelical Christian faith. On 17 June 1884, at Maloga Mission, Swift married Violet Barnes; she died later that year. Their son Charley had been born at Maloga in 1882. On 17 February 1886 he married Darug woman Jenny Johnston/Johnstone, née Lock, at Maloga. His daughter, Daisy, was born there the following year; her mother is unknown.

Jenny Lock was born in 1858 at Blacktown, New South Wales, daughter of Darug parents William Lock and Lucy Merry Merry. Maria Lock, her paternal grandmother, was the daughter of Yarramundi, leader of the Boorooberongal clan. Jenny's early life was spent at the Female School of Industry, Sydney, where she learned reading, writing, and domestic skills. At age twelve she was sent as a servant to the Balmain home of Captain Schulbert. This unhappy experience was followed by a second placement with the wife of a Sydney publican. Jenny left this position and lived in the Sydney region with other Aboriginal people before marrying James Johnston/Johnstone, an African American ship's steward, in 1874. They had two children: a stillborn son and a daughter, Florence (b. 1874). The relationship was violent and, by 1880, the couple had separated. In 1881 Jenny was one of twenty-three Aboriginal people from the Sydney area induced by Matthews to travel with him to Maloga.

Paddy and Jenny became keen members of the Maloga Missionary Band, which travelled throughout Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland, singing and proclaiming for Christ. Paddy's role was to sing and tell stories about his pre-conversion life: 'I have been a great sinner, in drinking and gambling … But [now I am] a saved man' (*Argus* 1887, 13). An eloquent speaker, he used the opportunity created by his performances to advocate for his people, regularly condemning the evils of alcohol and the theft of Aboriginal land, and praising the essential humanity of Aboriginal people: 'Although we are black in the face, our hearts are whiter than some of your faces' (*Argus* 1887, 13). Jenny gave solo renditions of well-known and affecting hymns in a voice praised for its sweetness. She was thin and prematurely aged through illness; however, it was noted that when she spoke a 'strange light [gleamed] in her great hollow eyes' (*Argus* 1887, 13) enhancing the effect of her words, which grew in strength and assurance as she emphasised her people's capacity for civilisation and their cruel treatment by white men.

Matthews had been instrumental in the establishment of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Association (APA) in 1880. In 1883, after an adverse government report on Maloga and Warangesda missions, the APA took over the administration of both, with financial support from the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board. Five years later the increasing estrangement of Matthews from the APA culminated in the removal of the Maloga buildings to a new APA-run Aboriginal station, Cummeragunja, three miles (5 km) upstream from Maloga. The majority of the Maloga population moved to Cummeragunja, but Paddy and Jenny, showing their loyalty to Matthews, remained.

In May 1889 Matthews and Janet travelled to England to publicise the injustices perpetrated on Aboriginal people and seek donations for Maloga, taking Paddy and Jenny to assist them. At meetings in and around London the Swifts spoke passionately on behalf of their people. While they did not speak about their culture (possibly because they were not encouraged to), Paddy seized the chance to talk about Aboriginal weaponry when directed to by Matthews. However, he became 'rather garrulous on the subject' (*London Daily News* 1889, 3) and was instructed to confine his remarks to the mission. At large meetings at Exeter Hall and Mildmay Hall the couple were dressed in possum cloaks 'lined with red cloth … and both also had a number of coloured feathers stuck vertically into a red and black band encircling the head' (*Table Talk* 1889, 1). A photograph of the Swifts in this attire suggests that they were not comfortable with being portrayed as specimens of a curious race to pander to the preconceptions of the audience. Such incidents produced increasing tension between the Swifts and the Matthews and, on their return to Australia, the Aboriginal couple moved to Cummeragunja.

When, in 1890, Paddy and Jenny sought to start their own mission and school at Lake Moodemere, Victoria, their venture was undermined by negative publicity following an incident at a Wahgunyah hotel, in which Paddy was served alcohol. This led to claims that he and Jenny had been drunk and the publican was later fined. In 1892 the Swifts tried to establish a mission at Comerong Island, New South Wales, but this application was also unsuccessful. These attempts, which showed initiative and confidence, attracted censure from Matthews who criticised the Swifts' independent attitude, predicted their downfall, and insinuated that London had made them vain, unmanageable, and rebellious. The APA did not agree, in 1893 appointing Paddy the first Aboriginal overseer (assistant manager) at Warangesda Mission, and Jenny the dormitory matron. At Warangesda Paddy combined his skills as a stockman with preaching in the church and at open-air religious meetings. He also travelled with George Ardill, the APA's general secretary, to preach and lecture throughout New South Wales. Meanwhile, Jenny, whose health was declining, had the difficult task of looking after a disparate group of girls in a substandard dormitory where they succumbed to a succession of diseases. She became involved in incidents with the girls and the manager, George H. Harris, who criticised her care of her charges, culminating in her describing him and all whites as hypocrites. Her failing health overtook her plan to leave the mission and she died of tuberculosis at Warangesda on 6 October 1894. She was buried at the mission.

In June 1896 Paddy moved to Sydney and, on 9 November, at the Refuge, Sussex Street, he married an Aboriginal woman, Emily Manager, née Arden, from Walgett. Ardill was his best man. The APA subsequently selected Paddy as their preferred candidate for the position of missionary at La Perouse but the appointment did not eventuate. Retta Dixon, a nineteen-year-old white woman, was appointed in September 1897. What made Paddy 'unsuitable' (Telfer 1939, 27) for the post was not disclosed; however, it is likely that his independence had become an irritant to the authorities. His criticism of white men and missionary activity in his publicly reported speeches had sharpened over the years. For example, in an address to the APA in July 1896, he decried sending missionary aid to other countries to the neglect of Aboriginal people, the country's 'rightful owners,' and suggested that it was time for Aboriginal people to 'collect the rent' (*Daily Telegraph* 1896, 6). With no means of support, Paddy left Sydney and returned to Warangesda with his wife and infant son John (b. 1897).

Sometime in late 1897 Paddy left both Warangesda and his new family and seemingly turned his back on the missionary world. At Ournie station, Tumbarumba, in the high country of New South Wales, he returned to his old occupation of horse-breaker and trainer and appears to have kept silent about his relationships and past life as a missionary. He died of heart disease at Tumbarumba on 17 June 1922; his condition at the time of death was complicated by gangrene, the result of being trodden on the foot by a horse. In a symbolic break with the evangelical non-conformist Christianity he had embraced and tried to use for the betterment of his people, he was buried with Catholic rites in an unmarked grave at Walwa. His surviving children, John and Daisy, lived most of their lives at Warangesda and, later, on the adjacent Darlington Point police paddock. Neither have any known descendants.

Jenny's daughter, Florence, had been sent to Warangesda in 1882, a circumstance that allowed Jenny to keep in contact, facilitated by the close connections between Maloga and Warangesda people and their administrators. In 1891 Jenny was a witness to her daughter's marriage to Thomas Methven. The marriage produced six children, many of whose descendants live on the New South Wales south coast. Jenny Swift's achievements and personal resilience have latterly assumed significance for her family and for other Aboriginal people.

Philippa Scarlett is of Scottish, English, and Irish descent. She was born on Gadigal land and was living on Ngunnawal land when she wrote this entry.
Research edited by Rani Kerin

Select Bibliography

- *Argus* (Melbourne). 'Random Papers.' 15 January 1887, 13
- Cato, N. *Mister Maloga*. St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1976
- *Cumberland Mercury* (Parramatta, NSW). 'Characteristic Address by an Aboriginal.' 12 April 1893, 2
- *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney). 'A Service in the Centenary Hall.' 20 July 1896, 6
- *London Daily News*. 'Mission to the Aborigines of Australia.' 4 October 1889, 3
- Matthews, Janet. 'Paddy and Jinny,' *Our Aim* (Aborigines Inland Mission), 18 April 1939, 12
- National Library of Australia. MS 1791, Diary [Warangesda Mission Manager's Diary, 1887–97]
- National Library of Australia. MS 2195, Diaries and Papers of Daniel Matthews, 1866–1909
- New South Wales Aborigines Protection Association (NSW). *Annual Report*. Sydney: F. S. Dyer & Co., 1894
- *Table Talk* (Melbourne). 15 November 1889, 1
- Telfer, E. J. *Amongst Australian Aborigines: Forty Years of Missionary Work*. Melbourne: Fraser, 1939

Additional Resources

- Trove search
- description of Paddy's missionary work, Argus (Melbourne) 15 January 1887, p 13
- description of a speech by Paddy, Cumberland Mercury (Parramatta, NSW), 12 April 1893, p 2
- address to the Aborigines' Protection Association by Paddy, Australian Town and Country Journal, 11 July 1896, p 35

- Paddy's marriage to Emily Manager, Macleay Argus (NSW), 14 November 1896, p 9

Related Entries in NCB Sites

view family tree

- Swift, Jenny (wife)
- Matthews, Daniel (acquaintance)
- Ardill, George Edward (acquaintance)
- Simms, Joseph (related entry)

Citation details

Philippa Scarlett, 'Swift, Paddy (1848–1922)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/swift-paddy-29708/text36780, published online 2020, accessed online 4 December 2023.

© Copyright Australian Dictionary of Biography, 2006-2023