

LATHER

The Lather family originated from Germany, indeed they were amongst the very first German immigrants to arrive in Brisbane. John (Johann) Conrad Lather was born on 18 February 1823 in Lohra, a small settlement near Marburg. He married his wife Margaretha Gretchen Heil, from nearby Hessen, on 9 November 1848 and their first son, John Conrad was born the next year¹.



John and Margaretha Lather

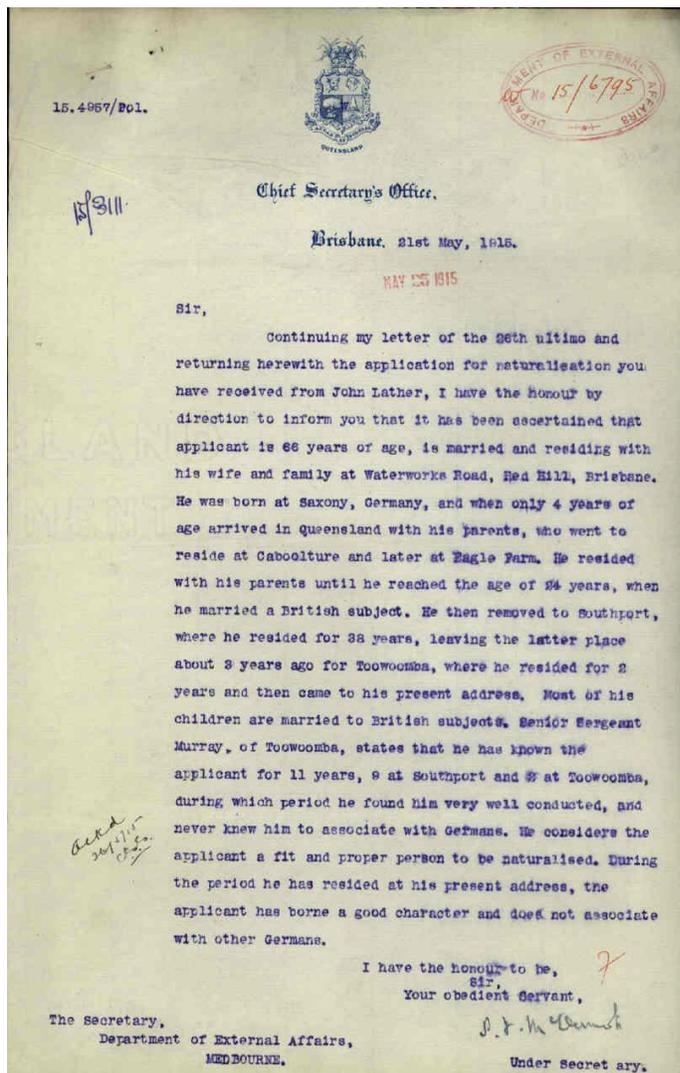
John was a vine dresser and in 1854, he decided to make the move to Australia, presumably to further his trade of viticulture. The family left Hamburg on 20 October 1854 aboard the *Aurora*, a tiny 132 ton barque with 236 immigrants including John, Margaretha, the young John and a daughter Margaretha, aged 3². Their journey ended in near disaster: having 'arrived' in Moreton Bay on 14 March 1855, the vessel promptly ran aground off Moreton Island. The slightly larger barque *Merbz*, which had also sailed from Hamburg, managed to negotiate the northern channel and arrive safely despite losing 47 of the 270 immigrants to fever, cholera and measles.³ However, the captain of the *Aurora* 'mistook the entrance (to Moreton Bay) and coming in by the South Passage went ashore on the sea side of Moreton Island'. The vessel stood 'quite upright'⁴, and was 'accessible at half ebb, being dry at her bows'. The females and children on board were removed to Cleveland, and the crew and immigrants (were) in good health and condition. They had been on the island for 11 days and the rescue to

Cleveland was effected by a cutter of the same name.⁵ Many years later, Margaretha, then married as Margaret Napper, had 'a very vivid recollection of the passengers and crew of the *Aurora* being landed on the sands of Moreton Bay by means of basket and ropes'. 'Things had got in such sore straits' when they reached Australian waters, that 'tucker was down to hard tack ... and not too much water'⁶.

The Lather family was taken in by German missionaries on Zion Hill station, Queensland's first Christian mission which opened in 1838 on 650 acres near present-day Nundah⁷. After serving their time, John was engaged by one of the staff, Leonard Zillman, a blacksmith, to construct cattle yards at Caboolture, an area where Zillman had pioneered settlement. After six years, John and Margaretha purchased land in Eagle Farm to build "Inglesbatch", a substantial house, and leased 640 acres of land for dairy farming. It seems that John also pursued his viticultural interests as *The Queenslander* reported that 'two acres of land (were) planted as a vineyard'⁸. In 1877, the Lather family moved to Southport and purchased a saw mill at Nerang Heads on the bank of the Nerang River between the site of Gardiner's Creek and today's The Southport School. The family became 'closely identified with Southport ... and intimately associated with its interests'.⁹

John and Margaretha went on to have nine more children, making 11 in all. John died in Southport on 15 December 1886. The eldest son, John, chose to become naturalized in 1915 after the outbreak of World War I. His letter of recommendation noted that he was 'very well conducted' and considered 'a fit and proper person to

be naturalized'. Most importantly, he 'did not associate with other Germans'¹⁰. One can only wonder at this statement as John would surely have made friends with other German immigrants at Zion Hill.



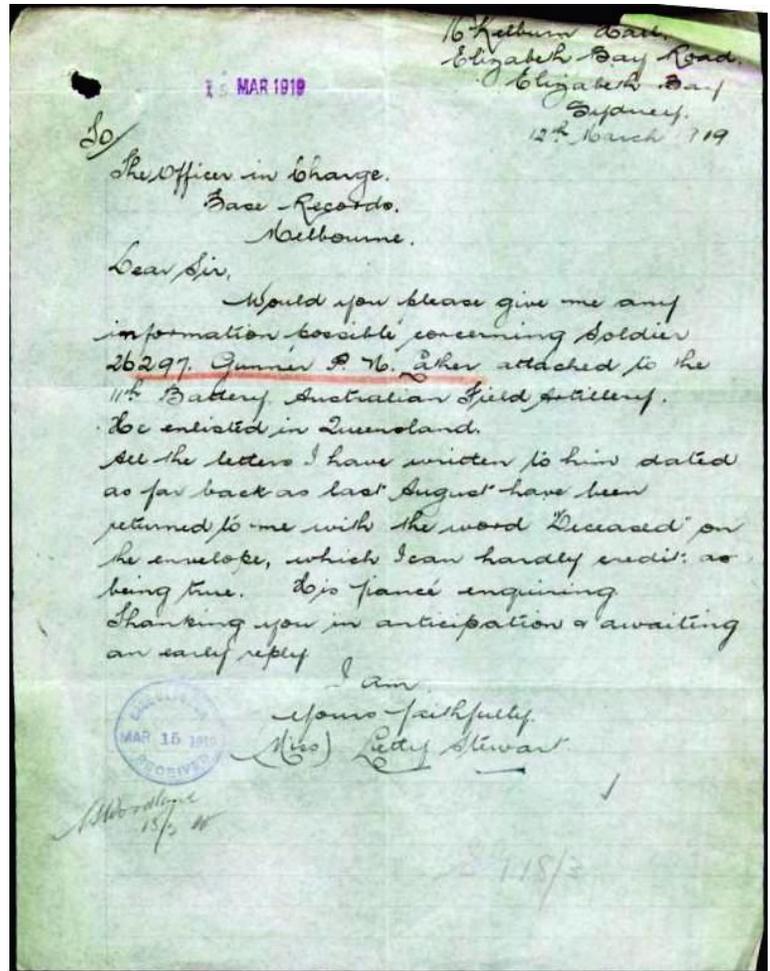
Moreton Bay corps. Six of the Lather children are shown: Thomas and Charles Lather standing, George and William seated, and Alfred on the floor, ca. 1880.

John Lather became a proficient rifle shot and at one time, four of his sons, Thomas, Charles, Alf and William all shot for the Southport Rifle Club scoring an emphatic victory over the Darling Downs Rifle Club in 1893.¹¹

A number of Johann and Margaretha Lather's children and grandchildren went on to play prominent roles in public service. William, the second son, attained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Defence Force and was Second-in-

Command of the 9th Battalion, The Moreton Regiment.¹² This was an all-volunteer regiment raised for the First Australian Imperial Force for service in The Great War. He was Clerk to Southport Council for 35 years, one of the longest terms of service in Queensland. Sadly, his life was touched by one of the tragic ironies of World War I. In 1917, his son Percy, a gunner in the artillery, went missing having been gassed at least six times. He died on 29 September 1918 but information did not reach his family for some six months. His military records include a poignant letter from his fiancée in which she inquired after his well-being. She wrote 'All the letters I have written to him dated as far back as last August have been returned to me with the word 'Deceased' on the envelope, which I can hardly credit as being true'. Percy, the son of a former German national, had died fighting for Australia against Germany.¹³

Another of Johann and Margaretha Lather's children, Charles, their fifth son, was born on 20 July 1866 at Eagle Farm and was destined to form the link between the Lather family and Moggill. Charles married Minnie Gillingwater in 1900 and worked a pineapple farm in Woombye north of Brisbane. In August 1919, Charles and Minnie, and their children Rita (Marguerite) and Edward sold their pineapple farm at Woombye and purchased a dairy farm at Moggill. The family were staunch members of the Methodist Church and Red Cross at Woombye. At a leaving party, Mr Schultz, the Sunday School circuit steward, spoke 'in eulogistic terms' of Minnie's work. She was given a plated toast rack and autograph album with members' names as 'a slight token of their appreciation'.¹⁴ The Moggill property was situated between Pullen Creek and the Brisbane River and is described as Sub 1, Portion 6, Parish of Moggill, County of Stanley.



Letty Stewart's letter to Army Records dated 12 March 1919.

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For years, Charles Lather served as a Member of the Church property board and his son Edward was secretary of the same board. Rita Lather was Church organist and Minnie Lather was secretary of the Ladies Guild. Edward Lather was employed as a Cadet Engineer in the Postmaster General's Department.



The opening of Rockhampton Automatic (Telephone) Exchange Building, 30 November 1940. Edward Lather is second on the left in the second row. He was divisional engineer in charge of country installations. At the left hand end of the second row is the Mayor of Rockhampton, Mr R W Evans

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To get to work, he crossed the river in a small boat, then rode on a bicycle three miles to Darra railway station and on to the City of Brisbane by train. He did this for several years, then purchased a Dodge 4 car and travelled to the city by car in relative luxury. Perhaps as a result of this tortuous journey, he became a staunch advocate of a bridge being built across the Brisbane River between Moggill and Riverview. As Hon. Secretary of the Moggill Bridge League, he advocated the best position as spanning between the Salvation Army farm and the main Moggill Ferry Road at the Moggill coal mine¹⁵. From 1942-45, Edward served as a Lieutenant in the Signals division of the Australian Army. After the War, he was promoted to higher positions in the Engineering Division and finally retired as Director PMG Department for Queensland¹⁶.

The Lather family established a good garden in Moggill with fruit trees etc and so fruit and vegetables were plentiful. Two tennis courts were eventually built, one at Lather's farm (Kareellaa or Kareela) and the second at the church, so sporting activities of the young people were well catered for. Charles Lather died on 29 June 1934 at Kareela Farm and is buried in the south west section of Moggill Cemetery.

Neville Marsh

¹ Lather Family Tree. <http://trees.ancestry.co.uk/tree/50839839/person/13140738395> Viewed 1 March 2014

² New South Wales Government. *Persons on bounty ships to Sydney, Newcastle and Moreton Bay (Board's Immigrant Lists)*, Series 5317, reel 2468. State Records Authority of New South Wales, Kingswood, NSW 2747

³ *The Moreton Bay Courier*, Saturday 24 March 1855

⁴ *Moreton Bay Free Press* 20 March 1855

⁵ *The Brisbane Courier* 21 Jul 1924

⁶ *South Coast Bulletin*, 4 December 1931

⁷ Griffith University: *German Missionaries in Queensland: Catherine Langbridge, Robert Sloan and Regina Ganter*. <http://missionaries.griffith.edu.au/gld-mission/zion-hill-mission-1838-1848> Viewed 2 March 2014

⁸ *The Queenslander* Thursday 17 November 1932

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Correspondence files, annual single number series (series A1: 1915/6795) for John Lather – Naturalization; National Archives of Australia, Queen Victoria Terrace, Parkes, ACT 2600

¹¹ *The Brisbane Courier* 6 June 1893

¹² *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane) 18 June 1933

¹³ First Australian Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers, 1914-1920 (series B2455) for Lather, Percy Norman; National Archives of Australia, Queen Victoria Terrace, Parkes, ACT 2600

¹⁴ *Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, Friday 22 August 1919

¹⁵ *Queensland Times*, Tuesday 11 October 1927

¹⁶ Sugars, Bruce; 16 January 1997 after Ted Lather.

<http://www.chapelhill.homeip.net/FamilyHistory/Photos/Moggill-cemetery-Brisbane/bruce/mogg.html> Viewed 1 February 2014

Note: Photographs of John and Margaretha Lather and the Moreton Bay Corps from the Napper Family Tree: <http://trees.ancestry.co.uk/tree/21610453/person/1115213255> and [1111701765](http://trees.ancestry.co.uk/tree/21610453/person/1111701765). Viewed 14 June 2014
