

VACY HALL'S CONNECTION TO NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

Vacy Hall, Toowoomba's grand and stately colonial mansion has an interesting connection to the French Emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte.

Gilbert Gostwyck Cory lived at Vacy Hall for 50 years from 1873 to 1924, along with his wife Ann Sophie Cory (nee Taylor) and they were the beneficiaries of the home which was gifted to them by her father, Hon James Taylor.

Gilbert Cory's maternal grandmother, Maire Brigette Joseph (who was known as "Josephine") COYMANS (B1789) married Edouard Desire Constant RENS (B1787) in Tournai, Belgium in May 1811 where he was the Administrator of Monies and Public Records.

Prior to her marriage to RENS in 1811, Josephine Coymans was supposedly a lady in waiting to *Her Imperial Highness* Empress Joséphine. However this was a difficult time for the Empress Joséphine as she agreed to divorce Napoleon early in 1810 to give the Emperor the chance of an heir.

After leaving Her Imperial Highness to marry Edouard in Belgium, Josephine RENS had a son Edward and a daughter Jeannette Georgianna who was born in 1815 in Tournai Belgium but her father had died before she was born.

Some time later, Madame Rens, now widowed left Belgium and migrated to Australia by way of Batavia (Indonesia) and arrived in Sydney in January 1827 on the ship "Phillip Dundas" with her 11 year old daughter.

In the 1828 NSW Census Madame Rens described herself as "Coymanos Vidonia Rens" and said her occupation was a milliner (or hatmaker). In her application for naturalisation in 1831, she stated that she had brought with her property amounting to 6000 Pounds Sterling an enormous sum in those days.

By 10 June 1827 Madame Rens had bought an allotment on the corner of George and what is now Bridge Street, Sydney. The site of her home and business is very close to the AAPT Tower at 249 George St Sydney seen to the right.

On 16 April 1833, Madame Rens and her 18 year old daughter set sail for London on the ship "Edward Lombe".

They returned in 1835 accompanied by her son, Edward, travelling from England on the barque "Enchantress" from London for Hobart Town and



Sydney. The ship hit rocks and sank off the south-west coast of Bruny Island in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel , Tasmania on Friday, 17 July 1835.

Sixteen of the crew and one steerage passenger were lost. Madame, Mr and Miss Rens were listed among the passengers saved. They arrived back in Sydney on the ship "Medway" in September 1835.

On 24 January 1838 (two days before the 50th anniversary of the settlement on Australia) her daughter Jeannette Georgianna RENS married Gilbert CORY (senior) of Vacy in the Hunter Valley at St James in Sydney. Over the next 16 years she produced 10 children before dying at the age of 39 in 1854 from complications associated with child birth.

Her mother, Madame RENS lived until she was 84 in 1873 eventually residing in Charles St Newtown and she is buried in the Petersham Cemetery in Sydney.

At about the time of her death James Taylor was building the first Vacy Hall for his daughter as a wedding present for her marriage to Gilbert Cory.



The Barque "Medway

