

*Charles Towsey of Henley upon Thames in the County of Oxford's Gentleman*

*Mary Harriet Sparks*

*H. B. Moorhouse*

# TOWSEY TALES

**NAME:** Mary Josephine Cooper (née O'Connor)

**BIRTH DETAILS:** 1853 Tralee, Kerry, Ireland

**DEATH DETAILS:** 21 October 1929 12 City Rd. Auckland

**CHART REF:** Towsey Chart B3

**MARRIAGE DETAILS:** 21 September 1880 Auckland

**SPOUSE:** Charles Augustus Cooper

Mary Josephine O'Connor had been born in Tralee, Ireland in 1853 and was one of a dozen children of Daniel O'Connor and his wife, Mary Behane. (Don't laugh at Mary; I think she looks very pleasant).

You may also have noticed Daniel's ears: That is a gene that is not going to just go away without a fight! (Although the 'ear gene' did calm down a bit, you can see it fight its way back to prominence in his great grandson, Pat Towsey, born in 1918)

Being from County Kerry, which is saturated with O'Connors, all of whom share just a few first names, means that it is very difficult to sort out just who was who back there at Castleisland. You will best see by looking at the genealogical chart for the O'Connors, just how all of the Daniels, Maurices and others fit together.



**Daniel O'Connor circa 1880**



**Mary O'Connor (nee Behane)  
circa 1880**

Although the story might be a bit confused, with all of the Daniels and Maurices, it seems that our ancestor and his brother, jointly took over the family farm at Kilcusanan.

At some point there was a dispute about the use of the barn, which ended up with the brothers dividing everything down the middle, including the barn, and the house. All a bit strange, but perhaps a bit of light is shed on this behaviour by the comment of an Irish friend who was also from County Kerry. When I told him that I had ancestors from Kerry, he laughed and said that that was something I might like to keep to myself, as amongst the Irish, Kerry folk are generally regarded as a bit thick.

Apart from the twelve children which Mary Behane produced, of which Mary Josephine was the second or third, they also brought up a William O'Connor, whom Daniel had fathered with the maid. I think the fact that his wife seems to have just gathered the bastard in with the rest, shows what a good soul she was.

If you think that Mary Behane was large, just wait until you hear about the super hero boys that she produced!

Daniel and Mary O'Connor brought their family to New Zealand in 1868.



**Pat O'Connor circa 1870s**

The six exceedingly stalwart sons of Erin shown in the photo below represent the six surviving male members of the O'Connor clan. The family is strong numerically as well as physically, for in addition to "the big six" there are also five of their sisters still living, while one other brother is dead, so that the family originally consisted of a round dozen. Probably, the two best known to the present generation of Aucklanders are Maurice, who relinquishes the occupancy of the Waverley Hotel on March 10, on which date he will have been proprietor of that popular hostelry for exactly 10 years, and Timothy B., better known as "Tim," will reign in his stead.

After leaving Home, Maurice spent a couple of years in the United States, after which he came to this colony and joined the Armed Constabulary in 1873. Six years later he was drafted to the detective force, in which he rose rapidly until he couldn't rise any higher. In other words, he was appointed chief detective in Christchurch, holding that position until 1895, in which year he was transferred to Dunedin to act in a similar capacity. He remained in Otago till 1897, when virulent attacks of insomnia forced him to resign, and he went to Australia to recruit his health. On his return to Auckland some ten years ago, he took over the Waverley from "Joe" McRae, the former proprietor, and has run it with conspicuous success ever since. Maurice is a pretty considerable landed proprietor, and, only a few months ago, purchased a block of buildings in Queen-street for the tidy sum of £20,000. He leaves shortly for a trip to the Old Country, and bears with him the good wishes of all who know him.

"Tim" has been actively identified with athletic sports ever since he has been in Auckland. In 1893 he was a member of the New Zealand athletic team that went to Australia, and he personally won the shot putting and hammer throwing events. As a footballer, Tim was long a tower of strength to New Zealand in general and Auckland in particular. He was a member of the first N.Z. team that toured Australia in 1884, was captain of the Auckland team that beat Stoddart's English combination in 1888, besides playing in other matches innumerable. He has also been prominent in rowing circles, and is still a member of the Waitemata Rowing Club. In business, Tim was for many years contractor to the Auckland Harbour Board. In addition to doing a lot of dredging work, he did the first section of reclamation at what is now Victoria Park. Subsequently, he took over the Victoria Hotel about 1897, remaining there for some 10 years. A keen sport and one of the best of good fellows, Tim is bound to be popular in his new role as host of the Waverley.

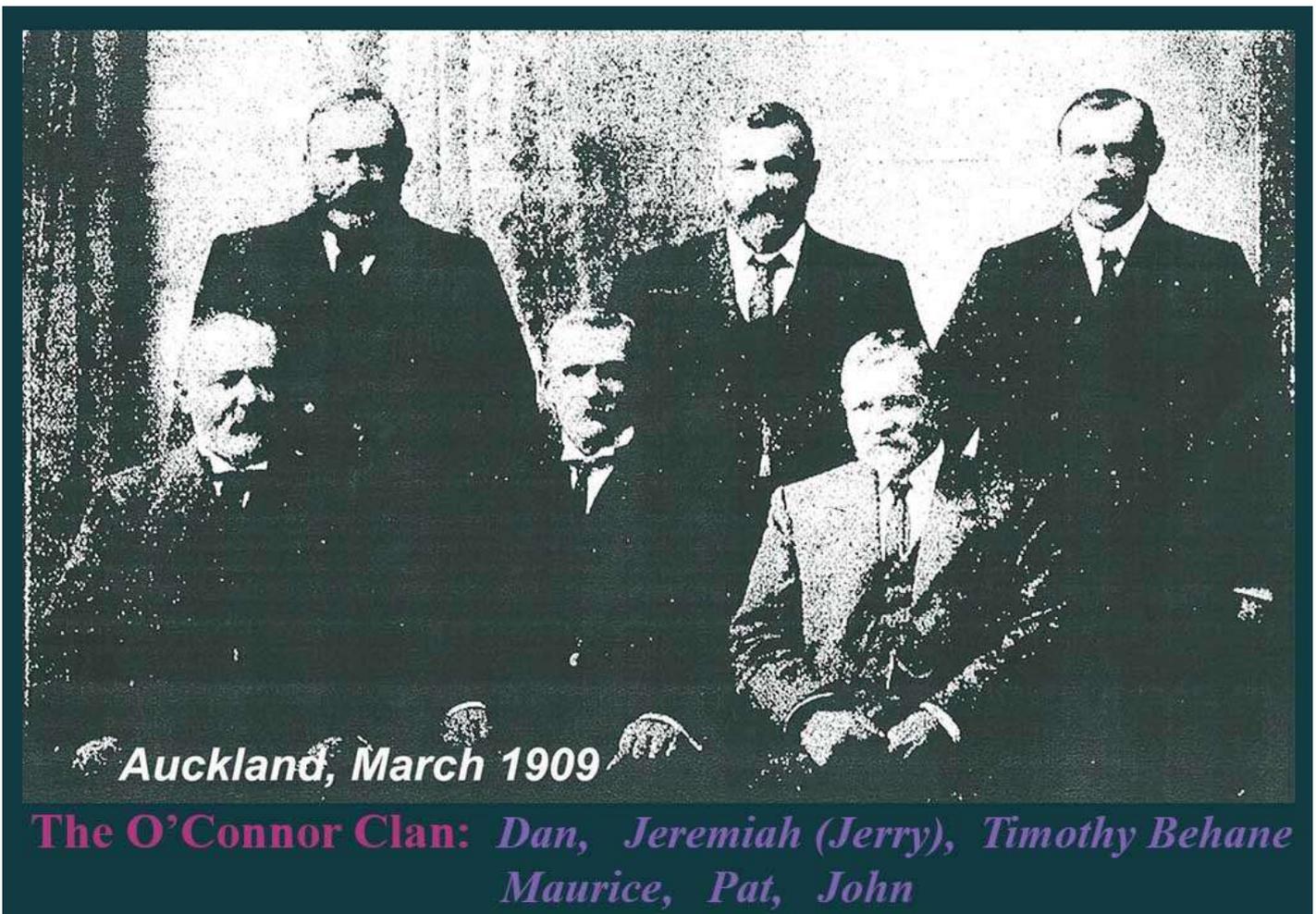
Dan O'Connor was for a great many years an official in the railway service, first at Christchurch, and later at Auckland. Some eight years ago he left the Government service and took over the Shakespeare Hotel, of which he acted as host for three or four years. City life palling on him, he went on the land, and is now the happy possessor of a highly delectable farm at Clevedon in the Waikato.

"Pat" and "Jack" O'Connor have always been together, and are known in the Waikato (where, like Dan, they are now farming) as the O'Connor Bros. Some 40 years ago, they followed up goldmining pursuits on the West Coast, after which they went to Australia and took up contracting work in the Darling Downs district. Subsequently returning to New Zealand, they purchased the property at Te Awamutu where they now reside. In the early days, Pat was well known on the West Coast as an invincible wrestler, and, judging from his appearance, he would be a formidable gentleman to tackle even now.

Jeremiah O'Connor, better known as "Jerry," was also a mighty wrestler, and a terrific combat which he had with Sam Carlisle at Coromandel about 20 years ago is still remembered. Jerry began his business career as a contractor in Queensland. At the time of the boom, he came to New Zealand and and the Golconda Hotel at Coromandel from which he retired to take up farming some six years ago. Truly it may be said that the O'Connor family's business career has been one of brilliant success.

## The O'Connor Clan

*'The Observer'*  
6th March, 1909



Although Daniel had been a farmer back in Kerry, he was at least at some time, a publican in New Zealand. This also seems to have been the main occupation of several of their sons, though many of them also went back to a quieter life on the land.

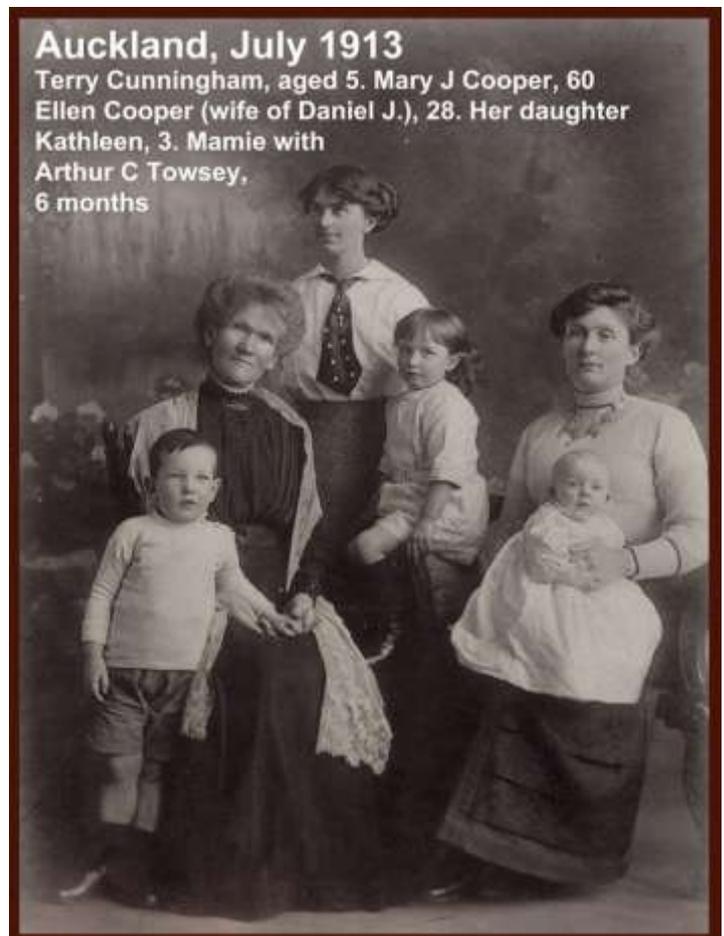
By 1887, Maurice, was a Christchurch police detective. He went on to be head of the detectives.

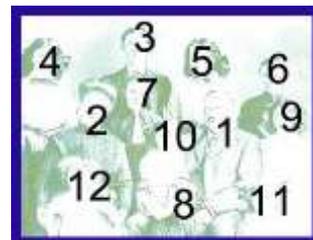
It is possible that the parents, Daniel and Mary, were also in the area.

Patrick O'Connor was one of Mary Imelda's six large uncles. He and his brother John (Jack), who lived their whole lives together, went to the New Zealand West Coast gold fields, upon arrival in the colony, where they spent four years. They then went to New South Wales for various gold rushes there, before spending 15 years gold mining in Queensland.

Pat was famous throughout the camps for his wrestling prowess and competence in other 'manly' sports.

When they returned to NZ, they spent four years in Auckland before buying a farm at Te Awamutu, which is in the middle of the North Island, south of Hamilton. By the late 1890s, Pat and Jack had settled there with their parents, before their father, Daniel O'Connor died in 1898 at 84 years of age.





- 1 T B O'Connor 1860-1936
- 2 Helena Martin (nee Martin) 1865-1952
- 3 Daniel 1894-1975
- 4 Patricia Agatha 1895-1979
- 5 Pauline Casserly B:1897
- 6 Henry Martin (Buster) 1898-1966
- 7 Timothy Behane (Ted) 1900-1975
- 8 Maurice Stanislaus (Chook) 1901-1969
- 9 Helen (Lovie) 1903-1969
- 10 Anne (Nancy) 1905-1996
- 11 Kathleen (Kay) 1906-1976
- 12 Margaret 1908-1963

When I first saw the photo of Mary Josephine Cooper (nee O'Connor), taken in 1913, I commented that with all of those great big bullish brothers, that she must have been pretty tough herself. Apparently though, she was about the sweetest, gentlest person you could meet. So I guess with all those brothers to defend her interests, she could afford to be. She would, with that background, also have been able to take her husband's gregariousness in her stride.

Mary was staying with her daughter, Mamie Towsey, when she died in 1929. Her husband, Charles Cooper, died seven years later.