

Day 3- Fact Sheet 6

Tales of the Todd- Read all about it!

Charles Todd

Source: Flinders Ranges



Charles Todd, son of a grocer and tea merchant, was born on 7 July 1826 at Islington, London. From an early age he became interested in the latest form of communications, sending messages by electricity. He worked at the Royal Observatory at Greenwich for nearly seven years and in 1848 gained the job of Assistant Astronomer at Cambridge University Observatory. It was here that he first came into contact with telegraphy and with twelve year old Alice Bell, born 7 August 1836, who promised to marry him.

At the age of twenty-eight, Todd was appointed, on the recommendation of the Astronomer Royal, Sir George Airy, Observer and Superintendent of Telegraphs in South Australia in February 1855. After having consulted a certain young lady he accepted the position. On his wedding day, 5 April 1855, he expressed the hope to his now seventeen year old wife Alice, to bring England and Australia into telegraphic communication.


Charles and Alice Todd left England on the *Irene* in June and arrived at Glenelg on 4 November 1855 and found that James McGeorge had just completed a telegraph line between Adelaide and Port Adelaide that very day. It was a commercial success and later bought by the government to improve its own revenue. The young Todds, who originally had stayed with friends at Woodville moved to Angas Street and later North Adelaide where their first child Charlotte Elizabeth was born on 12 March 1856 followed by Charles Edward on 7 April 1858.

In South Australia Charles Todd was responsible for the equipping of the new Adelaide Observatory at West Terrace. His small family moved into these new premises in 1860 and their third child, Hedley Lawrence was born there on 27 June 1860. They eventually had four daughters and two sons. Although life must have been hard for Alice, she was able to return to England on the *Irene* again on 19 December 1861 taking Elizabeth with her.

Charles Todd soon became responsible for setting up and supervising a network of meteorological stations. According to his plan of 1856 his observation stations were connected by telegraph and were able to report their findings daily to the Adelaide Observatory. This system made it possible to produce weather maps and was later adopted in the other colonies and New Zealand. He was also the first to make the connection between droughts in Australia and India due to a phenomenon known today as El Nino.

On top of all these responsibilities there was still another one, the design and construction of a number of major telegraph lines. His first line had been completed between Adelaide and the Port in March 1856, followed by another line to Gawler. Within ten years many large country towns were connected to Adelaide such as Kapunda Kadina, Koorunga, Wellington, Port Augusta, Wallaroo, Victor Harbor, Mount Barker, Mount Gambier, Goolwa, Strathalbyn, Clare, Port MacDonnell and many others. By August 1858 Adelaide was connected to Melbourne and a direct line between Adelaide and Sydney was opened in 1867. His best known and most famous line was the Overland Telegraph. The idea for a line through the

Drawing of
"Todd River"
By: Anthony
Age: 8



centre of Australia was first proposed by him to Governor MacDonnell in 1859 and mooted publicly when reading a paper before the Philosophical Society of Adelaide in 1863.

After the successful crossing of the continent by John McDouall Stuart in 1862, South Australia gained control of the Northern Territory on 6 July 1863. For a number of years the colonies had talked about a connection with Europe via a submarine cable which could be landed at Perth, Darwin or somewhere on the Queensland coast. Finally on 11 October 1870 the South Australian Parliament passed a bill to construct the Overland Line. Thanks have to go to F. S. Dutton, Agent General in London, and Charles Todd for securing the line for South Australia. All that remained now was to build it. It was completed on 22 August 1872 and the first messages between London and Adelaide were exchanged on 22 October 1872.

According to the Advertiser Charles Todd had 'made his mark upon history which will never be obliterated'. With the return of Charles Todd to Adelaide and that of the officers and men on 10 November it was on 15 November 1872 that Adelaide really celebrated. As a result of the Overland Telegraph, Western Australia, which had been the first colony to receive news from England, became now the last. Construction of a 2532 km. line between Perth and Adelaide was started in 1875 and completed on 8 December 1877.

It was not just a telegraph line and telegraphy which he brought to South Australia. As an Astronomer he rendered important services to science by observing the transit of Venus in 1874 and again in 1882. His skills made it possible to fix the proper boundary between South Australia and New South Wales. In October 1881, Todd successfully demonstrated the use of electric light on the streets of Adelaide. By the end of that decade electric light had been used at several venues, including the Jubilee International Exhibition of 1887 and at sport meetings on the Adelaide Oval.

Charles Todd was one of the founders of the Brougham Place Congregational Church in North Adelaide and of the Stow Memorial Congregational Church in Adelaide. During all these years Charles Todd continued also in his position of Postmaster-General. He attended international conferences and in 1886, while in England, was made an honorary M.A. of Cambridge University. Charles Todd was appointed CMG in 1872 and KCMG in 1893. He also received numerous other honours, including election as a Fellow of the Royal Society, Royal Astronomical Society, Royal Meteorological Society and the Society of Electrical Engineers.

Charles Todd became a member of the Councils of the University of Adelaide, Art Gallery, Museum and the Public Library. In December 1891 an attempt was made to form a small Society or Club 'for the purposes of meeting together occasionally and discussing astronomical matters'. The first meeting, held in the Observatory, was chaired by Charles Todd and gave rise to the Astronomical Society of South Australia. In 1907 Charles Todd attended his last meeting but continued to be elected president until his death.

His wife Alice died in 1898 but Charles Todd kept on working although well past his retiring age. After Federation of the Australian colonies his title of Postmaster-General was changed to Deputy-Postmaster-General, the only one to be allowed this title. After passing legislation to make it compulsory for South Australian public servants to retire at seventy, the Government withdrew the Bill for as long as Todd wished to remain in office. He finally retired in 1905 at the age of seventy-eight. He had been a public servant for sixty-three years, fifty of them in the service of South Australia. He died at the Esplanade, Semaphore on 29 January 1910 and is buried beside his wife at the North Road Cemetery.

*The School of Electrical and Information Engineering of the University of South Australia,
Mount Todd, the Mount Todd Gold Mining Company,
Todd Mall, Todd Street, Charles River and the Todd River are all named after him.
Alice Springs and Alice Lodge are named after his wife.*

*Charles Todd was fond of puns.
One of his favourite sayings, when accepting an offer of tea would be
"Oh yes, without T, I would be odd."*

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