



Dr William Haig (1823-1893) Justice of the Peace. M.D. Maryland U.S 1848.

Dr William Haig was a respected doctor of Emerald Hill South Melbourne. He lived in the area over thirty years as a practising Doctor and Medical Officer of Health, a Government appointed Magistrate and a Justice of the Peace. Many doctors of the day served in the civilian military, the Victorian Artillery, and William did serve as a Surgeon-Major. His hospital association was with the Alfred Hospital, initially as an Outpatient Physician then as a Consultant Physician from 1871 to 1884.

His early life was somewhat complicated and there is now a paucity of information of why the family left England to live in USA. The family settled in Baltimore, Maryland. He attended the Medical School at the University of Maryland, graduating in 1848 as a Doctor of Medicine. The Medical School at the University of Maryland was the first public medical school in the USA, founded in 1807.

After graduation, for two years he worked in New York at the Penitentiary and Smallpox Hospital and the Alms House on Blackwell's Island, now known as Roosevelt Island. Many of the old buildings on the island are still standing but now in ruins. The Penitentiary Hospital of New York was later known as City Hospital and then Charity Hospital. In 1858 a fire destroyed the building, and it was rebuilt by the prisoners and became known as City Hospital serving prisoners and the city's poor. Terrible stories of conditions and care exist in American medical archives. One would never question his decision to migrate.

The discovery of Gold lured many men and women to travel to Australia. It was not only wealth they were seeking but for adventure and a "buzz" of the unknown. It was probably all of these that encouraged William Haig to travel to Melbourne. Our early doctors were mainly from British and European homelands, some from elsewhere. William was one of them. He obtained registration in Victoria in 1862.

He travelled from New York to Melbourne on *Oneco of Duxbury* in January 1853. The people coming to Australia were from around the world, of almost all professions and skills including doctors, to seek their fortune. Multiculturalism was a feature of early colonial Australian history.



His wife to-be Louisa Jane Baker, born in 1838, was described as an orphan when she travelled on the *Anglesey* from England in 1856 at the age of 19. Her parents, Sarah Carey and Thomas Baker both died separately before she was fifteen years old. She and her sisters spent time in the Eltham Asylum for Girls.

There is evidence that she belonged through her mother to a notable medical family, the Barlow's, who lived and worked in London. English Medical Directories include references to them as well qualified and members of the British Medical Association.

How William and Louisa met is unknown. They married in 1860 and had seven children. Louisa was not without skills of her own and today, online, she is more easily searched than her husband!

Louisa Jane Haig (Baker) was a notable botanical collector with connections to Baron Von Mueller. Both Louisa, their youngest son, John Sibly, and William were often mentioned the Baron's recordings and letters.

The medical connection of the Melbourne Medical Community and the Baron was, indeed, significant. Their link gave kudos and status to each of them within the scientific world. It is noted that Baron Von Mueller recognised and awarded women in the world of science and discovery at a time when women were not readily accepted.

Frederick Von Mueller was not a medical doctor. He obtained qualifications in Pharmacy and then proceeded to gain a doctorate in Botany from the University of Kiel.

His parents had died when he was young. It is thought they died of Tuberculosis. In 1847 his sister was in poor health, and he and two sisters travelled to South Australia in search of “warm climes”.

He saw more opportunities in Melbourne and moved there in 1853 where he was appointed the Government Botanist by Lieutenant Governor Charles Joseph La Trobe. This position he held for 43 years until he died in 1896. He was naturalised in 1849 and was described from then as an “Australian”. He was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of London in 1861.

Medical men accepted Von Mueller as an Honorary Member of the Medical Society of Victoria about 1871. The privilege of Membership to non-medical persons was only afforded to few.

Medical Historian and Paediatrician, Dr John Pearn in 2001 wrote about William Haig in his book “A Doctor in the Garden”- “he was a pleasant, good-natured man, one who enjoyed very much the company of fellow doctors and scientists, and one who “was always ready to take part in any movement having the common good of the profession”.

John Pearn also wrote that Baron Von Mueller described William Haig

I redeem my promise dear Dr Haig, to dedicate to you as a permanent mark of respect a new plant. It came from the western part of the great bight. The specimen of this new everlasting is a poor one, but the species is pretty and well worthy of your honoured name.

It was called Helipterum haigii – HIG’S everlasting.

One of Louisa and William’s sons, Thomas Baker Haig, was born in 1871. He left Melbourne as a young man to travel to England to study Medicine, graduating LRCP et LRCS Edin 1900 LSA London 1900 MD Brussels 1901. He was a member of the British Medical Association. His hospital experience was at the Royal Eye Hospital, North East Hospital for Children, and Medical Officer East London Hospital for Children and Dispensary for Women at Shadwell. (this hospital being highlighted by Charles Dickens in two articles he wrote to raise funds for the hospital rebuilding after a fire.)

In London, Thomas lived in Hackney NE London, the home of his cousin Dr Thomas Carey Barlow. After Dr Thomas Barlow died in 1913, Thomas Baker Haig married Thomas Barlow’s widow. Two of Dr Barlow’s sons studied Medicine.

Louisa and William’s daughter, Angelina Margaret, married Franklin Ethelbert Fay. Their son Frank William attended Scotch College Melbourne and graduated in medicine from University of Melbourne in 1915. He served in World War 1 winning the Military Cross for his gallantry at Polygon Wood. His medical practice was principally in Hobart Tasmania.

The newspaper reported in 1884:

We are pleased to see that Dr Haig, JP, one of the oldest resident medical men in South Melbourne, has been unanimously elected President of the Medical Society of Victoria.

William Haig's time as President had little change from previous Presidential terms. The business of the Medical Society of Victoria at the time related to the risks of infectious diseases in the community and the need for providing specific hospital facilities for these patients. Problems with members of the community described as alcoholics and drunkards in the community was also raised by the Society, remembering, at the time there were institutions for "Inebriates". The two representative groups of doctors in Victoria, the Medical Society of Victoria and the British Medical Association Victoria, were undertaking discussions of amalgamation.

William and Louisa both added to medical and botanical history in Victoria. Their progeny continued the medical profession tradition in Tasmania.



flower: Rhodanthe haegi flowers Jacinth Sep 2016

There was a botanical name reclassification to Rhodanthe Haegi

*HAIG, William, 1823-93, medical practitioner. Born in Britain. Went to Melbourne in 1853. Practised medicine at Emerald Hill (South Melbourne); surgeon at Alfred Hospital, Melbourne. President, Medical Society of Victoria, 1885 [Gibbney & Smith (1987)]. *Helipterum haigii*.*

HAIG, LOUISA JANE NÉE BAKER, c.1838–1919, coll. NSW. Born in England, the youngest daughter of a solicitor, Thomas Baker. In 1860, Louisa married a physician in Melbourne, William Haig (1823–1893). They had seven children. Louisa collected MEL specimens at the Blue Mountains, 1888. Her husband, and son, John Sibly Haig (1873–1949), also collected MEL specimens. Louisa died in Kew in 1919 aged 81. MELISR: 11 specimens. Mrs W. Haig/ Mrs Dr Haig. References: ABC ('Haig J. [S.]', 'Haig, William R.'); *Indexes to Victorian BDM records, State Library of Victoria; Argus (15 February 1860: 4, marriage). Mueller Project letters: L77.09.22 to W. Haig. Map: Appendix 3.*

By Jean Douglas 2025: References.

A Doctor in the Garden. – Nomen Medici in Botanicis Australian Flora and the World of Medicine.
John Hemsley Pearn. Amplion Press

Medicine in Maryland 1752-1920 mdhistoryonline.net.

National Park Service New York City, Trove, Find a Grave, British Medical Journal,

Scotch College <https://portal.scotch.vic.edu.au> › honour › fayFW.

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