

# Moondyne Joe



In the 1850s Joseph Bolitho Johns became infamous in Western Australia as a convict, an escapee and hero of the average man from the bush. Not quite a bushranger but worse than just a horse thief, here began the legend of Moondyne Joe.

## Toodyay Visitor Centre

7 Piesse Street, Toodyay

(08) 9574 9380

[www.toodyay.com](http://www.toodyay.com)

[visitorscentre@toodyay.wa.gov.au](mailto:visitorscentre@toodyay.wa.gov.au)

 @visittoodyay 



**February 1853**

Johns arrives in Australia aboard the convict ship Pyrenees, having been sentenced to 10 years transportation in 1849.

He had been arrested in Wales and found guilty of stealing several cheeses, 3 loaves of bread 2 pieces of bacon, part of a shoulder of mutton and a piece of suet.

Johns' good behaviour meant he is offered his ticket-of-leave upon arrival in Fremantle.

Johns works in Fremantle until the end of 1854 before receiving his conditional pardon. Sometime prior to 1860 he moves to the Avon Valley district.

**1861**

Johns is arrested in Newcastle for illegally branding a brumby and jailed in the Newcastle Convict Hiring Depot. The building was old and dilapidated and he easily escaped taking the brumby and the Resident Magistrate's saddle and bridle.

He is re-captured days later, and sentenced to "three years penal servitude", to be served at the forbidding Convict Establishment (now known as Fremantle Prison).

**1864**

Johns is pardoned and released.

The name "Moondyne" is thought have originated from Joe's hiding spot in the Moondyne Hills near Toodyay. Many of the settlers who knew him from this area regarded him as something of a hero for his ability to continuously evade the authorities. It is thought that people like this helped hide and feed him whilst he was on the run.

**1865**

Johns is arrested again for "killing an ox with felonious intent" and sentenced to ten years imprisonment back at Fremantle Prison.

He escaped three times in four months, on the last attempt breaking into Everett's Store in "Old Toodyay" to obtain supplies for a trip to South Australia. He is recaptured only 300kms from Perth.

**1866**

The name Moondyne Joe appeared in the press for the first time on 8 August in relation to this escape, cementing Johns into WA history and folklore. On his return to Fremantle Prison, Johns was subjected to one of Governor Hampton's "escape proof" cells. Governor Hampton is reputed to have said to Johns on inspection "If you get out again, I'll forgive you."

In this tiny cell Johns began to suffer physically and was assigned to "exercise"; breaking stones in the main parade ground of the prison.

**1867**

By early March the guards have foolishly relaxed in overseeing this work and didn't realise, until it was too late, that Johns had chipped his way through the wall, escaping once again. This time, "Moondyne Joe" is on the run for nearly two years



Moondyne Joe's walking stick

**25 February 1869**

It was bad timing that saw him caught again when he broke into the Houghton's Winery in the Swan Valley for supplies.

Unbeknown to Johns the police had been investigating a drowning nearby and literally walked into him as he ran out of the winery.

Upon his re-imprisonment he petitioned the new Governor, Frederick Weld, to uphold his predecessor's promise of release after his successful escape from Fremantle Prison.

**1871**

Weld agrees that further punishment would be unfair. Johns' is granted a Ticket of Leave.

**27 June 1873**

Johns is pardoned after a period of good behaviour.

He went on to marry Louisa Hearn in Fremantle and together they travelled around the state searching for work. His final imprisonment was at Fremantle Lunatic Asylum where he died of "senile dementia" on 13 August 1900, aged 71.

**The Ballad of Moondyne Joe by Bryan Lynch**

In the Darling Ranges, many years ago,  
There lived a daring outlaw, by the name of 'Moondyne Joe'.  
He stole the squatter's horses, and a sheep or two or three,  
He loved to roam the countryside, and swore he would be free.  
The troopers said we'll catch him, but we know it's all in vain,  
Every time we lock him up he breaks right out again.  
'Cause in he goes, and out he goes, and off again he'll go,  
There's not a gaol in W.A. can keep in 'Moondyne Joe'

**Anonymous**

It were Moondyne of course That took Ferguson's horse. He'd hidden the same  
In the hills of that name. When he found it had gone Ferguson searched all the Swan, and offered a pound  
For when it was found. But Joe has it hid  
And he pockets the quid. In a month to the day  
Again the horse goes astray. But Ferguson's no fool  
Goes along to Moondyne Pool. To see if it's true  
The police comes too. When his sentence is gone Joe is done with the Swan. They call me bushranger— I'll feel quite a stranger;  
So by the Mass I'll try the Vasse. At Ellensbrook The silly old rook Gets a job  
At Fifteen Bob.  
No more I don't know  
That's the story of Moondyne Joe.

# Moondyne Joe

Learn more about Moondyne Joe and other stories about Toodyay's past at the Newcastle Gaol.

Located on Clinton Street, Toodyay

Open weekdays 10.00am - 3.00pm

Open weekends 10.00am - 3.30pm

Closed Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Years Day and Good Friday

Admission fees apply



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