

Billy Blue.
The Black Larrikin Series by Wilfred Roach

As to why Billy Blue qualifies as a **Black Larrikin** is admirably set out in the definition of a *Larrikin* by the historian Manning Clarke,

“Almost archly self-conscious- too smart for his own good, witty rather than humourous, exceeding limits, bending rules, avoiding rather than evading responsibility, playing to an audience, mocking pomposity and smugness, taking the piss out of people, cutting down tall poppies, larger than life, suffering fools badly, and above all, defiant”

Billy was born around 1767 (approximately). Being a spinner of yarns he claimed to be born in America and of freed slaves and suggested he fought in the American War of Independence.

In 1796, he was convicted and jailed for 7 years for stealing sugar in Deptford, London where he worked as a Chocolatier. After 4 years on a prison hulk ship in southern England he was transported to Sydney in 1801 to serve the remainder and completing his sentence in 1803.

His Convict records state: *“that he was a Jamaican negro sailor aged approximately 29 years old”*.

He lived From 1805 he lived at the Rocks and married English Convict Elizabeth Williams two months after her arrival in the colony. They had six children and a long and happy marriage.

Billy worked as a waterman collecting and selling oysters.

In 1808 his name was included in a list of citizens who supported the arrest of Governor Bligh.

He found favour with government officials including Governor Macquarie. Billy was appointed harbour watchman and Constable by Governor Macquarie in 1811. These titles enabled him to acquire a new home overlooking Sydney Harbour, which became a local landmark known as Billy Blue`s Cottage.

Governor Macquarie subsequently, awarded him a licence to run a water boat service between the North Shore and where Circular Quay now stands. He became a familiar and popular figure in Sydney. He would dress in a frock coat and top hat, with the nickname Commodore due to Governor Macquarie`s fondness for awarding Billy a medal each time he launched a new boat!

Despite his status, he engaged in rum smuggling and was goaled again. He managed to retain his water licence and grant of land after an intercession by Governor Brisbane, despite lobbying from his opponents who were also Billy`s neighbours`. He was also caught hiding a convict woman in his home after his wife Elizabeth died.

Billy died in 1834 but his name lives on in places such as Blues Point, Blues Point Road.

There are also paintings of him held in NSW State Library.

A true Larrikin worthy of the title!