

## ROBERT KALESKI (1877-1961): 1

Who was Robert Kaleski?

Let's start with his father, John Stanislaus Kaleski. John Kaleski was an assayer.<sup>1,2</sup> At odds with local politics, he left his native Poland and moved to Germany where he held academic appointments at the universities of Heidelberg and Bonn.<sup>3</sup> With no hope of returning to Poland, he emigrated to New South Wales.

In 1871 John Kaleski married Isobel Falder, a daughter of Dr Robert Falder of Grenfell.<sup>4</sup> Grenfell, in the 1860s was one of the richest gold fields in New South Wales. John Kaleski may have found employment on the gold fields during the 1860s but, by the 1870s, gold production from Grenfell was declining. At the time of his marriage, John gave his address as Sydney, and John and Isobel were living in Burwood (Sydney suburb) when their first child was born, in 1872.<sup>5</sup>

John Kaleski put his property up for auction in 1874, advertising "his Residence near the Railway Station, Burwood [and] the whole of his furniture and effects, in consequence of his removal to the interior".<sup>6</sup> His plans, to move elsewhere, seem to have been abandoned because the John Kaleskis were still in Burwood when Robert Lucian Stanislaus Kaleski was born in 1877.<sup>7</sup>



Illustration accompanying Kaleski's story, "White Spot - the Tiger Cat".

When he was 11½ Robert Kaleski, so he tells us in his "Schoolday Reminiscences", went to a school in Croydon (Sydney suburb, close to Burwood) "kept, run, or otherwise managed by the Rev. Joseph Newton".<sup>8</sup> School life was much to his liking until 1888 when the "Presbyterian Young Ladies' College", now P. L. C. Sydney, opened its doors opposite Newton's school. The young ladies, it seems, had a demoralising effect on many of Kaleski's school mates. Kaleski later left Newton's for the Sydney High School where he stayed until c. 1893. The Australian Dictionary of Biography suggests that Kaleski began law studies and abandoned them.<sup>9</sup> He did, however, attend Sydney Technical College<sup>10, 11</sup> and successfully completed a course in agriculture in 1898.<sup>12</sup>

The ADB adds, with no sources cited:

*"For health reasons, aged 9 to 12 and for other long periods, he lived with a relation at Holsworthy where he dodged school and gained much knowledge of the bush. With access to a good library and making up his education in Sydney, he began legal studies but at 21 went in for droving and general bush work. After working for a year on a station at Grenfell, two years timber-getting on the Dorrigo plateau and a year house building at Mosman, he took up a small selection at Holsworthy in 1904. Henry Lord, an agriculturalist at Sydney Technical College, was an early and valued educational influence."<sup>13</sup>*

Kaleski's inventive genius ranged from his Settler's Knife to a tip-wagon.<sup>14, 15</sup> The settler's knife (early 1900s) foreshadowed the Swiss Army Knife and Leatherman Tool, and his tip-wagon (1919) made an important contribution to bulk wheat handling. *The Sydney Stock and Station Journal* and *Country Life Stock and Station*

*Journal* published his articles regularly and he ran an information service from the offices of both journals. “All questions on agriculture ... will be answered in these columns.”<sup>16, 17</sup>

Kaleski was passionate about native wild life. Readers of *Smiths Weekly* and *The Sun* enjoyed sensitive and beautifully written stories such as “White Spot: the Tiger Cat”, “Darkie: the Black Bream”, and, “Bronze-Wing: the Scrub Pigeon”<sup>18, 19, 20</sup>. His commitment to the environment was acknowledged when he was appointed an Honorary Ranger under the Wild Flowers and Native Plants Protection Act.<sup>21</sup> He was also published in *The Bookfellow* and *The Bulletin* where he would have met prominent literary figures such as Dame Mary Gilmore.

And, of course, his writings on dogs.

First and foremost, Robert Kaleski was a writer.

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### References and notes

1. Peter Kaleski, pers. comm. 2003. The late Peter Kaleski was a grand nephew of Robert Kaleski. Peter’s father used to tell of holidays spent on “Uncle Bob’s farm” near Liverpool. John Kaleski was therefore Peter’s great-grandfather.
2. In metallurgy, an assayer is one who analyses an ore, alloy, etc., in order to determine the quantity of gold, silver, or other metal in it.
3. Peter Kaleski, pers. comm. 2003.
4. *The Sydney Morning Herald* Saturday 15 April 1871 p 1. Trove, accessed online 5 July 2019.
5. *The Sydney Morning Herald* Saturday 24 August 1872 p 1. Trove, accessed online 5 July 2019.
6. *The Sydney Morning Herald* Saturday 31 January 1874 p 11. Trove, accessed online 5 July 2019.
7. *The Sydney Morning Herald* Tuesday 30 January 1877 p 1. Trove, accessed online 5 July 2019.
8. *Sydney Mail* Wednesday 16 March 1921 p 26. Trove, accessed online 5 July 2019.
9. G. P. Walsh, 'Kaleski, Robert Lucian (1877–1961)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/kaleski-robert-lucian-6894/text11953>, published first in hard copy 1983, accessed online 5 July 2019.
10. *Sydney Mail* Wednesday 16 March 1921 p 26. Trove, accessed online 5 July 2019.
11. Peter Kaleski pers. comm. 2003.
12. *The Daily Telegraph* Saturday 14 January 1899 p. 5. Trove, accessed online 5 July 2019.
13. G. P. Walsh, 'Kaleski, Robert Lucian (1877–1961)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/kaleski-robert-lucian-6894/text11953>, published first in hard copy 1983, accessed online 5 July 2019.
14. *The Farmer and Settler* Friday 11 September 1908 p. 8. Trove, accessed online 5 July 2019.
15. *The Sydney Stock and Station Journal* Friday 26 July 1918 p. 16. Trove, accessed online 5 July 2019.
16. *The Sydney Stock and Station Journal* Friday 14 September 1923 p. 5.
17. *Country Life Stock and Station Journal* Friday 21 March 1924 p. 3.
18. *Smith's Weekly* Saturday 10 May 1924 p. 25. Trove, accessed online 5 July 2019.
19. *The Sun* Sunday 11 November 1934 p. 19. Trove, accessed online 5 July 2019.
20. *The Sun* Sunday 25 November 1934 p. 21. Trove, accessed online 5 July 2019.
21. Government Gazette of the State of New South Wales Friday 22 March 1929 [Issue No.40] p. 1358. Trove, accessed online 5 July 2019.