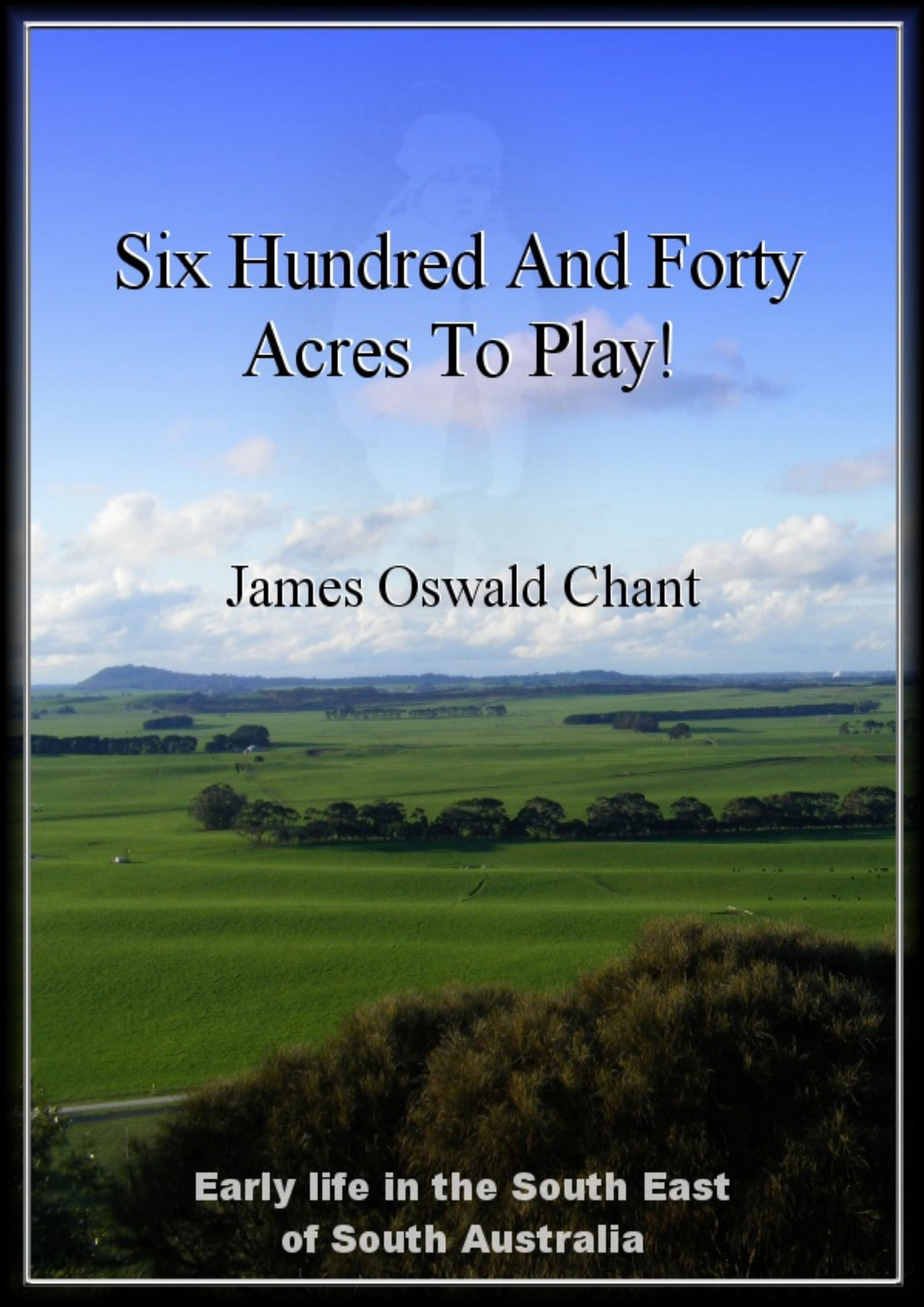




Six Hundred And Forty Acres To Play!

James Oswald Chant

**Early life in the South East
of South Australia**

= CHAPTERS =

[Preface](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1 - My Lucky Life](#)

[Chapter 2 - Our Family](#)

[Chapter 3 - More About The Old Place](#)

[Chapter 4 - Athelney - The New Place](#)

[Chapter 5 - More About Athelney](#)

[Chapter 6 - Beachport Fun](#)

[Chapter 7 - Animal Stories](#)

[Chapter 8 - Schooldays](#)

[Chapter 9 - Clay Wells](#)

[Chapter 10 - A Leisurely Age](#)

[Chapter 11 - Favourites](#)

[Chapter 12 - Farm Life](#)

[Chapter 13 - German Creek](#)

[Chapter 14 - The Present Day](#)

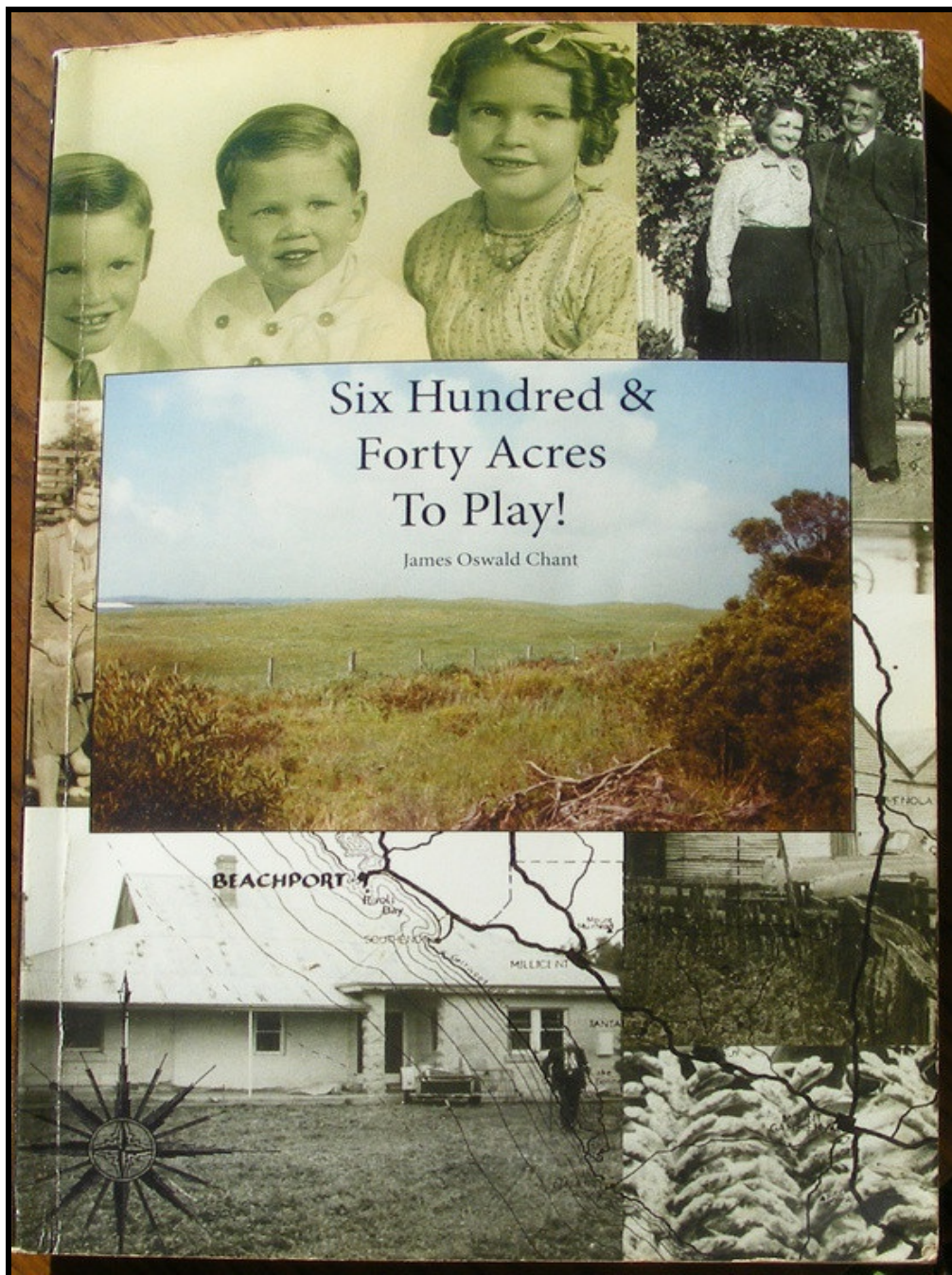
[Chapter 15 - Dreams](#)

[Appendix 1 - Properties](#)

[Appendix 2 - Family](#)

[Eulogy](#)

[End Frames](#)



Original cover of the 2008 Book
(Pictures of the author, his children
and places near Mt Gambier - South Australia)
The hard copy book was donated to the
historical section of the Mt Gambier library in 2018

*** START ORIGINAL BOOK ***

Six Hundred and Forty Acres To Play!

by

James Oswald Chant

Collated and edited by members of his family

First Edition 2008 - Soft Cover Book

This eBook created 2018 by Jamie W. Ryan.
(*Son of Coralie - Grandson of the Author.*)

Original source manuscript provided by Ken and Alison Chant.

The text is unedited...identical to the original book.
Many minor typographical errors were corrected however.
The first (missing) subheading of each chapter was reinstated.
I also added some relevant photographs for additional interest.

Front cover photo and design by JWR 2018
(*The photo looks towards Mt Gambier from Mt Schank.*)

© Copyright 2008-2019
All rights reserved

Version 1.3 PDF
Converted from validated EPUB
(Some minor formatting changes)

CONTENTS

SUBHEADINGS

PREFACE

Six hundred and forty acres to play...

INTRODUCTION

A portrait of the author by his grand-daughter Rebekah, written for his eightieth birthday.

CHAPTER ONE

MY LUCKY LIFE

A Wailing Baby, The Beautiful Lakes, My First Home, My First Brush with Death, Water Bubbles, Once Again I am Rescued, Dad's Pony, Great Fun with the Horses, Poliomyelitis Strikes, Danger in the Dark, Motor Bike Peril, Train Terror, Motor Bike Accident, Many Travels, A Further Stumble, Eighty-five Years.

CHAPTER TWO

OUR FAMILY

Our Forebears, Our Grandfather, Blocks Purchased by Grandfather, Our Father, Our Mother, Our Parents, The Old Place, Natural Inhabitants of the Old Place, Snakes and Lizards, Father's Stories, Flora and Fauna, How Uncle Arthur Lost His Hand, Boxthorns, Sneed's Island, The Haunted Hut, Adam Lindsay Gordon, A Mystery.

CHAPTER THREE

MORE ABOUT THE OLD PLACE

Memories of Family Life, New Babies, Twelve Brothers and Sisters, Beach Picnics, A Dead Whale, Local Cemetery, Sub Artesian Water, Picking up Chips, The Trees Go Crack, Earliest Memories, The Darling Pea, Tree Marks, My Sister 'Rene Lost (c.1909).

CHAPTER FOUR

ATHELNEY – THE NEW PLACE

Cooking Outdoors, Playing with Matches, Winter Time, Baby Brother Tommy Dies, Humble Homes, Bees at Athelney, Robin's Jam Burn, Swaggies or Sundowners, Drain M, The Bridge, The Drain Families.

CHAPTER FIVE

MORE ABOUT ATHELNEY

The Hawker, The Tinsmith, A Frightening Event, Church Services, Strange Biscuit Shapes, Shells, Athelney's Trees, Shrubs, Small Creatures, Birds of Many Breeds, Snakes, Six Hundred and Forty Acres to Play.

CHAPTER SIX

BEACHPORT FUN

Christmas Holidays, Beachport Fun (1917-18), The Harbour Master, A Great Haul of Fish, A Rare Occurrence.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ANIMAL STORIES

Horse Disease – Strangles, Sheep Disasters, Rabbit Plague, An Observation Made by my Grandfather, Bluey the Fast Trotter, Prince- the Stallion, Fish Galore, Emu Feathers, Wombats(1912-25), Robin Strikes Again, Trained-Untrained Horses, Adventure and Discipline, Clever Foxes.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SCHOOLDAYS

Walking Ability, The Influence of Older Sisters, A School Memory, Teachers at Beachport School (1914-21), A Near Tragedy for the Larwoods (c.1920), Childish Squabbles, Soldiers Leaving for Overseas, Soldier's Honour Roll.

CHAPTER NINE

CLAY WELLS

Clay Wells, Clay Wells Holidays, Henry's Accident, A Foolish Experiment, Struck by Lightning, Once Upon a Time, Delicious Apples, A Load of Chaff, Termites, Our Orchard at Clay Wells, My Encounter with Tiny Wildlife, Eating Dangerously.

CHAPTER TEN

A LEISURELY AGE

Droving, Careful Preparations, Oh, for the Gift!, Wet Blankets, Leisure Periods, Flowers and Birds, Dave Kallock.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

FAVOURITES

Old Toby, our Lovable Clown Dog, Sandy a Clever Sheep Dog, Bluey, a Dog of Many Talents, Kalu, a More Recent Beloved Companion, Games of Childhood, Housekeeping, Tops and Marbles, Collecting, Old Fashioned Medicine, A Few Notes, A Native Berry, Observations of Wildlife.

CHAPTER TWELVE

FARM LIFE

Shearing Time, The Boy, Shearing Time Risks, The Destination of Our Wool (c.1924), Farming Chores, More About Fencing, A smack in the Face, Bullock Teams, Drought, Sheep Sale at Millicent, Memories of Long Ago, Notes on Smoking.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

GERMAN CREEK

Living at German Creek (1922-40), Tragedy – Our Sister Grace Accidentally Killed, Rabbits Finally Overcome, Snakes Alive, Modern Shearing Methods, White Smoke.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE PRESENT DAY

Chosen to Have an Education, More About High School and University, My Wife Vera and Our Children, The End of the Chant Chronicles, The Telephone, Maughan Church Memorial.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

DREAMS

Have dreams any real substance?

APPENDIX

Property Sales and Acquisitions, Old Identities of Beachport, Our Family Scattered, The Year 2000, Note from the Editors 2005, Final Eulogy.

PREFACE

“Six hundred and forty acres to play!” This was one of James Oswald Chant’s favourite reminiscences during his declining years when he lived again in memory his idyllic childhood. In this book James reveals a gift of almost total recall of that eventful time of his life on the six hundred and forty acres of “Athelney”. Certainly his memories are lovingly pictured and make a marvelous collage of what must have been a free and untrammelled boyhood.

This history is being published posthumously as a tribute to this remarkable old gentleman. The tales he has told of rural life in the early twentieth century in our land of Australia remain a fascination for his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. His stories encompass excitement, humour and pathos, and through his eyes we catch a glimpse of what it must have been like to grow up in the days when Australia and its people were rising from their pioneer origins into the nation the land is today.

His bout with polio at the age of six years affected his life to an enormous degree. He was afflicted severely by this disease which left him weak in his muscles, but he never asked to be treated differently from others. Because of it his life was a long series of set backs and falls by the dozen, resulting in arm fractures, toe fractures, rib fractures, knee-cap fractures, and leg fractures! Even so he averred his life was good, interesting, rewarding and, by the forgiving grace of God, reasonably comfortable and successful.

From the following introduction, written by his granddaughter Rebekah, you will gain some insight into his retirement years. It was during this time that his son Barry encouraged him to write this book.

His great grandchildren lovingly called him Grandpa Chocolate, as he always had a jar of chocolates and tea with condensed milk, to reward them for their company.

The poetry throughout unless otherwise indicated is by James who had a life time love of poetry and spent many happy hours endeavouring to write some of his own.

*** * * * ***

INTRODUCTION

A portrait of the author by his grand-daughter Rebekah, written for his eightieth birthday...

Dear Grandpa,

I was thinking about what I would like to do for you on your birthday, and I began to recall some wonderful childhood memories of you and your home at Leslie Street. So I thought that I would share them with you.

My most early memory is probably the day that I broke my collar bone on the equipment that my Mum and Dad had hired for my birthday when we were living with you. I remember many little things from that day, like sitting in the lounge room on the old couch and Aunt Coralie giving me some slippers for my birthday. I think that I enjoyed being a celebrity for the day.

One thing that always sticks in my memory is sitting in your lounge room on the floor, in front of you with your legs squeezing me. Michael and I used to see if we could get out of the hold you had on us. I remember that room most exactly. I can still see all the things on the fireplace, the photos on the wall, the slide projector and your big dresser full of interesting things. In my mind I can still see all the things on your table, the jar of crown mints, the cross-words from the newspapers, your diaries and anything else that you needed to be close by.

I used to love visiting you because we could watch television, for we still didn't have one then. The only thing that annoyed me was that because you had a remote control, you could turn off the sound during the adverts. They were always the best bits of television for us!

We liked it when you occasionally forgot to turn down the sound.

Your garden features very clearly in my mind. I remember treading on all the squashed plums on the ground, eating fantastic mandarins, getting all the almonds off the trees, trying to stop the birds eating the grapes from the grape vine, and never being able to see the back fence for all the fruit and flowers growing. It was so big in my mind when I was a child. It seems much smaller in my adult memories!

When you bought the Combi-van we began to have some wonderful adventures. I can still see all the garnets lying on the ground somewhere near Broken Hill. I remember the wonder of a thunder egg when you were able to cut them in half, and how every holiday after that included some gem hunting. The holiday we spent with you in the "Combi" brings back memories of wonderful night-time skies. The weather must have been very good for all the stars shone so brightly. Later I was to learn to drive in the "Combi".

We loved going into your stone cutting shed. It was so amazing that such beauty could come from such ordinary looking rocks. I especially liked it when you cut

slices from the agates. They were so beautiful. We often boasted of our very clever Grandpa to our friends.

Another place that I always liked to go in was the sleep-out. There were so many interesting things hidden away in that room. I still have some of your old teaching books that you gave me when I was a child. I have used some of the poetry books when teaching my classes. We always came away with some little treasure if you had to go in that room while we were visiting. Dad often told us of the time he was so sunburnt that he could not even bear a sheet on top of him, as he tried to sleep in the bed out there.

I don't remember many family gatherings. It was probably hard with Uncle Ken and Aunt Alison always interstate, but I do remember one Christmas at Aunt Coralie's; I remember swimming in their above ground pool and having a great day. We didn't see a lot of Aunt Coralie and her children and I regret that.

One of my most often remembered memories is of eating meals at your place. We must have eaten with you a lot. Michael and I always wanted to have our own electric knives after watching you cut meat and bread and even cake with yours.

I can remember when you got a new stove and how exciting that was. I also remember when you got rid of the old bath and put a door through the wall to the toilet. We were very happy about that, as we didn't like going outside, especially at night time. I can still remember the old washing machine and your poking stick for lifting the clothes. We were fascinated by it!

I remember you teaching us how to make key-ring tags with the plastic tubing. My children have now learnt how to do that! I think that I still have some of the old reels of tubing in our shed. I can remember going into John Martins at Arndale to buy my own tubing so that I could make them at home as well as at your house.

After I married Steve, I really enjoyed living close to you. It was nice to be able to pop in and visit you. Steve often talks about climbing onto your roof for you, or up a tree, or any other awkward place. He has enjoyed his relationship with you also.

I wish that I had known your "Vera". I am sure that I would have loved my Grandmother. It is strange to think that I am now almost the same age she was when she died. Sharon and I were talking about her just the other day. Reading the letters that she wrote to you was one of the most meaningful things for me. By reading them she became a real person, not someone of whom I had just heard. Her concerns were very similar to mine as a mother of young children. Thank you for letting me read them.

You were a wonderful Grandpa to us, and although you never said it I always knew that you loved me. I am so honoured to have had you as my Grandfather . My only regret is that my children have not had the honour of knowing you as I did.

I love you Grandpa,

From "Becky".

* * * * *

CHAPTER ONE

MY LUCKY LIFE

A preliminary but apt quotation in association with the heading to this autobiography is as follows. Sir Francis Drake when writing to Walsingham and describing his “singeing the King of Spain’s beard” at Cadiz (c 1506) said:

“There must be a beginning to every great matter but the continuing unto the end until it be thoroughly finished yields the true glory”

A Wailing Baby

The year was 1907; not that I have any remembrance of that warm December, nor of the street and town and house where Mother was confined awaiting my birth, with what expectations I do not know. But I have been told that for months after my birth Mother suffered the loud wailings of an infant that could not be consoled. I saw the light of day in the nursing home of a Mrs Wibber who resided in Wheel St South in the town of Mt Gambier in the state of South Australia, and I’m sure she was more than happy when Mother departed for home - a train journey of just over 80 kilometres, carrying me, a wailing disaster.

My beginning of a conscious life took place early Christmas Day morning. Information related to me, maybe ten years hence, indicated that heavy rain (accompanied by reverberating thunder and bright lightning flashes) was lashing the town. Soon an eagerness to know and do, along with persistent effort, enabled me to master skills in crawling and walking, after which I wandered far afield.

My first year was a mystery except for hearsay. My Mother told of my constant wailing, and the failure of all attempts at pacification until the magic day I found I could crawl and explore using leg and arm muscles for motivation. I was no longer inhibited from outside explorations; I sampled many strange objects and I allowed my mouth to be the final arbiter. Something I found, what I know not, was the marvellous catalyst my body had been seeking for twelve long months. I stopped wailing like a lost soul and peace descended like an invisible morphine screen into Mum’s world, a heavenly peace twenty four hours a day. Her reaction, I’m told, was, *“Blessed be the name of the Lord!”* My activities increased, and like all keen explorers, I searched every newly found exciting place of mystery.

We lived near Beachport, a town about eighty kilometres north-west of Mt. Gambier. My Dad was a sheep farmer and owned land at Clay Wells and more near Kongorong which is situated about twenty-five kilometres west of Mt Gambier.

The Beautiful Lakes

Mt Gambier, a fine prosperous town, is over-shadowed by the lofty summit of Mt Gambier, itself the remnant of an exploding volcano which left behind a series of four lakes that occupy the deep hollows from which great quantities of earthy material had been ejected. One lake, the famous Blue Lake, is the largest covering

an area of 165 acres, and holding a depth of water of about one hundred and five metres. Its vertical sides stretch a further one hundred and five metres skywards. The land around is fertile, but much of the best earth has been built on by the expanding town.

My First Home

How different were the surroundings visible from the doorstep of my very first home. Long, sand ridges paralleling the sea-coast, were sparsely covered by she-oak trees and flag-rushes, boobialla and blue ti-tree. Away in the distance the low Woakwine Hills were clearly visible, hills of consolidated sea-sand, an ancient sea-shore. Behind our home a sand ridge sheltered our residence from the gusty sea-breezes which blustered in from the west. A railway line leading to Beachport passed by on its western side. Certain native animals, such as wombats, an odd kangaroo, snakes and lizards, magpies and crows were familiar to my older brothers and sisters, but I was too young to appreciate their existence even when at the age of four years we all moved to a new home at Athelney, the year then being around 1911.

Our land at "The Old Place", where we first lived, was not at all fertile except in the shallow gullies, where water lay about one metre below the surface. Here wombats scratched special "watering" burrows, their own private water supplies, and farmers excavated water-holes with one sloping side in the most likely-looking wet places. Sheep, cattle and horses used the sloping side to reach the water.

My First Brush with Death!

Dad owned many sheep, thousands of them. One day he was working through the hundred or so he had yarded. The baa-ing of the sheep, the barking of the dogs and the shouting attracted my attention. I directed my two-year-old footsteps toward the exciting sounds. Somehow I entered the yards, and, unnoticed, took up a stance in the middle of a gateway. Suddenly, a racing sheep, eager to be free of men and dogs, galloped headlong into me tumbling me unceremoniously into the dust. A frightened and desperate bawl burst from my mouth.

"*How did he get there?*" my startled parents cried, and hastened to my rescue. Miraculously I was uninjured, but the experience has remained with me like a bad dream for over eighty years. The mental picture is as clear, almost, as on the day the incident occurred. That was the first of my lucky escapes from serious harm. I could have been killed!

Happily I enjoyed many pleasant days, over one thousand of them at the Old Place. We children had our own special sand pit on the summit of a sand hill. From that vantage point, when the weather allowed, we watched for the daily train that puffed and rattled along the nearby railway from Mt. Gambier.

Every week Mother used to visit the settlement closest to us which meant a drive of about four kilometres. Weekly supplies were purchased and on odd occasions a pleasant hour or two of rest and enjoyment and companionship with a friend was spent on the beach. During a wet winter, water covered the road for about one and a half kilometres, and careful guiding of the pony was very necessary. Lake George was the source of the water, for it filled to overflowing.

Water Bubbles - Once Again I am Rescued.

On one of those picnics on the beach when I had reached the age of three years, I fell when walking in the water and lay on my back, the bubbles streaming out of my mouth. I watched as they floated upwards somehow quite unconcerned, and making no effort to stand up. I could have drowned, but for my older sister hastening to my rescue when she realised I had disappeared beneath the saline flow. She heaved me clear of the water and I rested quietly on the warm sand until I had completely regained my usual tolerance of human presence.

There was one other occasion when danger threatened and I slipped over on the fishermen's landing jetty and almost rolled into fairly deep water. I was by myself and had I entered the water, being a non-swimmer, I would probably have drowned. I know I realised my escape was auspicious for I was trembling uncontrollably, and I realised luck was with me.

Dad's Pony

Early one morning when I was about five years old, I saddled a pony Dad owned, climbed aboard, and trotted my steed up a gentle rise. Horrible to remember, the saddle slipped under the pony's stomach, my foot got caught in a stirrup, and I was dragged along on my face! I should have been killed but a miracle occurred: the stirrup leather broke! I was freed from disaster, the pony frightened out of his wits, his legs painfully buffeted by the swinging saddle, had galloped blindly away for some twenty chains or more. I was lucky. I regained my feet and soon walked inside. I still remember Mother's first words, "*What happened to you?*" when she noticed lost patches of skin on my nose, cheeks, chin and forehead. I explained!

Great Fun with the Horses.

One corner of Dad's many paddocks was rather long and narrow. Into that corner my brothers and I would drive our working horses, knowing we could easily scramble on the backs of the ponies. Having done so, without bridles and saddles, ("bare-back" is the term used), we would manoeuvre our horses behind the rest, yelling like maddened devils, and gallop behind the racing mob, legs swinging, arms waving like windmills, the ponies with eyes flashing, and horses in front kicking up their heels; all present enjoying immensely the fun of the morning gallop. I often wonder how the riders would have fared if one or more of the ponies had tripped, put a foot in a hole, or just stumbled. The result could have been disastrous to the unlucky rider! But "all's well that ends well!" and the half kilometre walk, followed by the half kilometre gallop was really a thrill and an excellent start to another busy day. A marvellous way to build up an appetite for a hearty breakfast, and a cup of tea, brewed in the time honoured way.

Poliomyelitis Strikes.

One rather unlucky day for me my sister requested my company on a walk to the Woakwine Homestead. I enthusiastically expressed my eagerness to do so and away we went. Upon arrival back home I refused my dinner, complained of a headache, and retired to my bed. Next morning when I arose I reached for the floor but I collapsed in a heap. My legs refused to carry my weight!

I cried out, "*Mum, I cannot stand up!*"

"*Don't be silly!*" she replied, "*Of course you can.*"

But I could **NOT** stand. I had been afflicted by Infantile Paralysis, and I was confined to my bed for several months. The ravages of that disease have been my cross for all the years that have passed since, and I am now close to eighty-five years old. Gradually I recovered the use of my legs, but I was over seven years old when I was first enrolled at the Beachport School, the year being 1915 - the year of the start in earnest of the First World War! For seven years my primary scholastic career continued, and I topped the qualifying exam in my last year. In the meantime I had learned much about sheep-farming, but never mastered the art of shearing - my legs were not strong enough! However I could build new fences and repair old ones, assist at shearing times, press the wool into bales, saw out blocks of stone, trap rabbits, assist at dipping the sheep and marking the lambs, and generally be available at times when hay was to be carted and stacked, or posts to be obtained from a distant forest.

"Poliomyelitis"

*Have you ever had polio?
It isn't very jolly-o!
One cannot play old leap-frog
Your knees can't bear the strain
You cannot play cricket
Nor the hard rough games of youth
To bend one's knees becomes a chore
And a full bend something much, much more
To straighten the knees, requires two hands
And wishes deep for a magic wand
To run, to hop, to skip or jump,
Sure means a very awkward flop!
And careering cows and fractious bulls
And goats on flight and racing sheep
Pose difficulties and dangers,
Not faced by other folk
Now fences not so high are obstacles to fear
For weakened legs devoid of strength
Just cannot scale those spiky wires.*

*Racing and chasing and climbing tall trees
And boxing with peers and handling round balls
Or lifting big loadings of everyday things
Were exercises beyond skinny weaklings like me!
The thrill of making fine home runs, of hitting jolly "sixers"
Of winning hard fought contests, perhaps by half a whisker
Or speeding past the winning line, by half a head or less
Were never the goal of the "polio", he knew when he was best!*

*Raining or shining, blowing or hailing he stands
Thinking of his life span, pondering on what might have been!*

*So you see my hearties, but one course remained
To bear his misfortunes, disabilities grim
And fine good sense retain, a will deep ingrained
To truly live his life, forget his weakened limbs.
And remember the old song
"As life you travel through,
You'll get heaps o' lickings for the things you never do!"*

Danger in the Dark!

Sometimes danger raises its ugly head at the most unexpected times and in the most unexpected places, like meeting suddenly a hissing, menacing snake, or other danger, as witness one of my terrifying experiences as a teenager. On a Sunday away back in the middle twenties, on a dark night and on a lonely road, I was heading town-ward. In those days I rode a fixed wheel bicycle of ancient make, without brakes, but in good repair, on my week-end trips to my family's home which was situated on a farm about twenty-seven kilometres from Mount Gambier. The highway followed was being rebuilt and the finished sections were as smooth as modern bitumen roads. I entered a section where the road traversed two low ridges close together, easy of ascent, up a long, gentle slope, and I took advantage of the following smooth steep descent, not over-long, but smooth going. It was very dark, remember, and on the second hill I increased my speed, and I raced down little dreaming of the terrible surprise that awaited me, for like a ghostly spectre, my gleaming acetylene headlight alone gave an indication of my presence. My light probably saved my life! Suddenly, a line of large boulders, all being about thirty centimetres high, was caught in the bright beams: "What have they done to the road?" screamed a frantic thought. To stop was impossible; to slow down an insurmountable task in the time a decision had to be made; but what a decision! Slam forward and trust to luck? My bright light saved me from the certain wrecking of my not so sturdy bicycle, one that had traversed many, many kilometres, on the big stones which would probably end my own life. Suddenly on the right side I spied a narrow gap, and like a homing scared creature, I charged toward it - a gap only fifteen centimetres wide, or a little more, between two stones; the only gap visible, and maybe my salvation. I realised as I did so that my fixed wheel pedals could easily contact one of the large stones, and hurl me like an avenging missile into the air, a flying body soon to crash to the grassy sward, or the hard surface of the stony road. I prayed my luck would see me safely past the great danger. Would I successfully negotiate the one narrow gap of safety? Miraculously I did, my heart thumping, my feet again pumping the pedals smoothly after I cleared the death trap. For a short while a kind of intoxication consumed my mind and I found the thoughts to comprehend fully my lucky escape! Soon the apprehensions that had been aroused in my innermost senses, like a willing fire, subsided in me and I completed the journey to my destination, another five kilometres away where I prepared for a sound sleep. After all the years in between then and now, horror still takes over my mind when I dwell on what might have been if I had not had angels watching over me during that terribly horrifying experience. My lucky night!

Motor Bike Peril

Many years later I had been transferred to Naracoorte, a fine town situated about ninety-six kilometres from Mt. Gambier and a well-known South Australian town, famed for its wonderful series of limestone caves, sculptured into a long ridge of marine limestone probably millions of years ago. Marine fossils abound in the more ancient layers of sedimentary rocks. By this time I was a teacher! Although my wages were small I had accumulated enough money to purchase a motorcycle, a rather basic model minus all the latest refinements. But owning it did make me feel like a gladiator, or ministering knight of old ready to battle for the right of way. On my way back from my parents' land holdings near Kongorong where I had gone to spend the week-end, a certain kind of accident then common to basic motorcycles occurred. My machine struck an unusual formation in the road surface, a curved ridge about ten centimetres high, and as a steering damper had not been affixed to the bicycle, (a steering damper when screwed down inhibited movement on the fork) a vital inequality in steering had been transferred to the front wheels and a frightening speed-wobble was set in motion. It is a terrifying experience indeed as the uncontrollable wobble carries the machine in ever-expanding rhythmic swings from side to side until the full width of the road is covered and at that point - like a very weary, intoxicated inebriated toper, stunned by the ground rising up and hitting him, the machine is lying over so far that it loses its equilibrium entirely and slithers along the road. The centre of gravity can no longer keep within the range of safety; the power in the swings is terrific and has the same momentum as that created and held by a gyroscope. Your helplessness is profoundly scary, and an apprehensive shiver passes through me as I remember that perilous adventure. I admit that I never wanted to have the same experience ever repeated. Little imagination is needed to realise the dire consequences to the unlucky rider had other, larger vehicles been passing either way when the dangerous wobble commenced. (The motor-cycle and rider are forced to act as a whole). I could have been killed, or at the least, seriously maimed. Actually I had the road to myself, and, except for a ruined shoe, a lost toenail (very sore) and sundry minor abrasions, I was unharmed, and free of bruises. One can be lucky, and I do give great credit to my lucky stars for broken bones could easily have been suffered in such a slither on a hard road.

Train Terror

The years passed by and now I was on a train travelling to Adelaide, and nearing the town of Bordertown. I had received an appointment to a city school which I had accepted. As our train with its expectant passengers was about to move into the town precincts (afternoon tea was expected at Bordertown), the engine suddenly lost power, luckily this was after the driver had reduced speed to less than half the normal, and the puzzled crewmen were able to brake and slow the train to a halt. An inspection of the engine by the engineers disclosed that a heavy steel bracket which held in place a weighty arrangement of moving parts joined to the wheels, the driving mechanism set in motion by the steam in the hot-box, had broken off at the right angle (the weak spot in the whole arrangement) and allowed the crank-shaft that turned the wheels to collapse downwards. The fourth piston rod was bent and I believe that had the train been travelling at top speed when the break occurred, the thrashing shaft could have struck the sleepers and over-turned the engine with disastrous results to the passengers. Frightening to contemplate! All the continuing passengers had to wait for a replacement engine from nearby Serviceton before their train could continue its journey. We enjoyed afternoon

snacks and walked up and down the platform during the long wait.

Fantastic coincidences do occur. My uncle Jim Tenby was driving a train towards Victor Harbour when suddenly a break occurred in the near-side driving mechanism and the loose end murderously thrust up through the steel floor of the cabin missing my uncle by less than fifteen centimetres as it thrashed up and down with great force, enlarging the hole it had made. Uncle closed the steam valve and slowed the train to a halt. Luck was with Uncle Jim on that day for had the hefty bar struck him he would have been killed instantly, and had it struck earthward, the force of the thrust could have overturned the engine (a steel bar powered by high pressure steam moves with great force). One has a horrible nauseating feeling just thinking about what might have been!

Motor Bike Accident

While in Adelaide I retained my motor cycle as my principal means of transport, and my experiences in its use in a big city proved somewhat more hazardous than was normal in country towns.

In the year 1931 I was riding my motor-cycle along the South Road, Hindmarsh section, when my equilibrium was disturbed by an onrushing motor-car which catapulted itself into my back wheel. The motor-cycle crashed and my head collided violently with the bitumen road. I was knocked out and both my bike and myself finished up in the gutter! The driver of the car took me to a nearby doctor who advised hospitalization because bleeding at the nose indicated concussion.

For the next twenty-seven days I rested in the Adelaide hospital: I was not allowed to sit up and strong Epsom salts were given about six times a day for the prevention of headache. I was allowed no excitement. Vera, my wife to be, visited me often and she was absolutely marvellous. The care I received proved most efficacious for I did not suffer from any headaches!

Many Travels

Travelling and visiting new and distant places has always been one of the great expectations and delights of my life, and I have allowed that urge to colour my existence. To roam, to climb over the hills, and cross the oceans has been satisfied by many overseas trips, mostly after I retired. In between foreign excursions I have also had the great pleasure of many visits to all Australian states and to New Zealand. I am also familiar with most of South Australia itself. On a memorable occasion I visited the northern Flinders Ranges and the Arkaroola Private Resort there.

A Further Stumble

One of my special trips was a visit to the Mt. Painter uranium mine where, I believe, uranium was mined for use in the development of the first Atomic bombs. While passing between a large boulder and the edge of a thirty metre deep pit, our guide offered me assistance, which I politely refused; I thereby learned an infallible truth. "It is kinder to accept than to refuse"! Almost immediately afterwards my walking-stick slipped in some loose earth and I nearly lost my footing. I could have fallen and crashed to my death on the rocks in the depths of the old mine thirty metres below. My heart thumped with the thought of what could easily have been the end of my existence. That taught me a profound lesson. When help is offered, take the

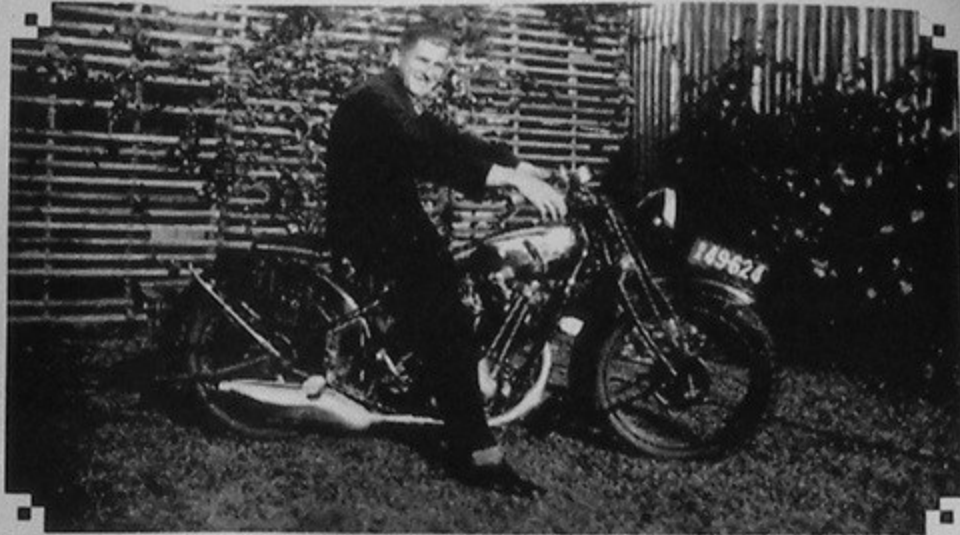
friendly hand with a smile and a word of thanks. You will both benefit. God is great! A venturesome bent takes one into activities that can be awkwardly dangerous. I recall three climbs I made at various times that should have been beyond the ability of my weakened "polio" legs to accomplish.

Eighty Five Years

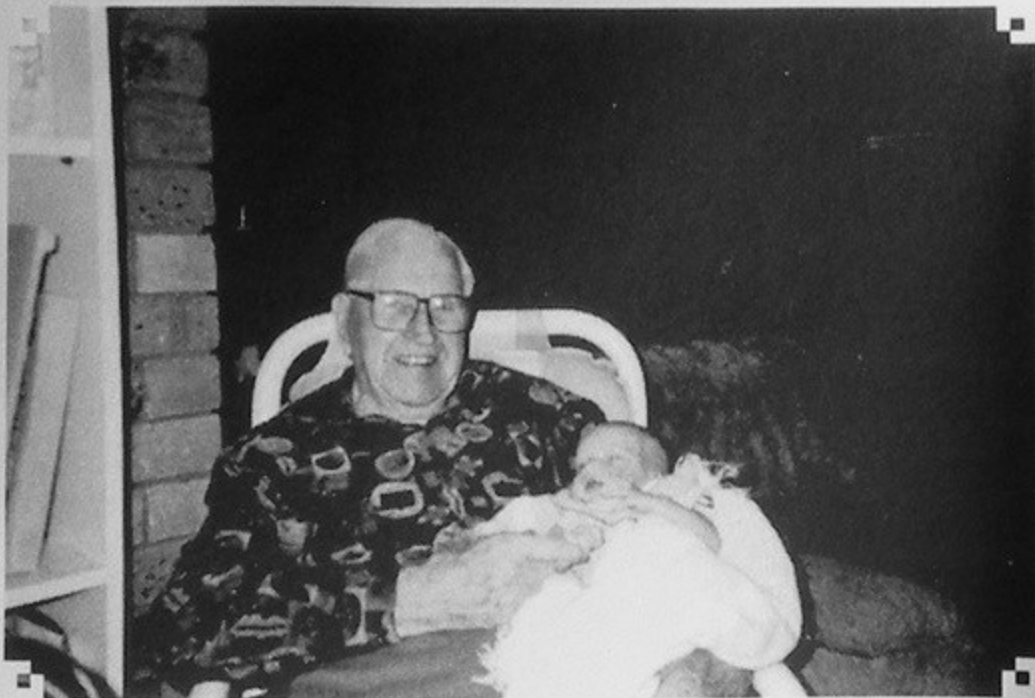
So many times over the years my life could have been cut short, but here I am at 85 years of age, still safe and well after a life time of adventure. During those years I married Vera, and we produced three lively children of our own, Kenneth, Coralie and Barry. Now I am writing these memoirs for them and for their children and for their children's children, that they might know what it was like to live on a farm in the early days of the twentieth century.

I must digress no longer but begin at the beginning!

* * * * *



James Oswald on his third motorbike



James Oswald in his eighties with one of his numerous great grandchildren

CHAPTER TWO

OUR FAMILY

Our Forebears

Our family forebears, the Chants of Somerset, England, had their origins, we believe, in ancient France and originally they may have been named Chaute, or Chaunte, or even Chante. No one knows for sure, but I believe that Catholic persecution of the French Protestants, or Huguenots, during the fifteenth century induced many of France's ablest middle-class families to flee that unhappy land and settle in England. The Chants settled in Somerset where they remained for nearly three hundred years, living in contentment and comparative comfort; good solid citizens performing their daily tasks but never really prospering.

Our Grandfather

At the age of twenty-one years, our Grandfather, James Chant availed himself of the privilege of an assisted passage to South Australia, where he arrived in May 1865, on the ship Burlington; his fare being four pounds. Two years later he married a Miss Hawke of Kapunda and the following year the young couple left Kapunda for Mt Gambier. Soon after arriving, around the year 1868, James obtained employment on Coola Station. where he remained until a disagreement induced him to seek work elsewhere. He carted goods to and from Port McDonnell, but he had ambitions of being a farmer and when land became available he selected a block quite close to Tantanoola, and as the years went by he prospered greatly and added to his holdings by purchasing blocks of land as they came on the market. Simultaneously he raised a family, two sons and two daughters. Sadly five other babies had died soon after birth and one was killed by a pet lamb, a cruel death for the beautiful and trusting little girl, and a tragedy for the sorrowing parents. The four children who reached adulthood married and raised families of their own and at the same time achieved a degree of prosperity which was a credit to them.

James was an honest hard working and kindly man. He had an independent spirit and because he always kept his word he expected others to do the same and became very resentful if they did not! He was a friendly man and he loved children. He was gruff spoken, but that was a characteristic he inherited from his "Cousin Jack" forebears. He would speak confidentially to me when I was only about twelve years old. I saw him last just before I started attending Mt Gambier high school, when I was just little more than fourteen years old. He had attained the age of seventy-eight years, a venerable gentleman near the end of a successful life time employed in the building up of extensive pastoral interests.

Blocks Purchased by Grandfather

The first block of land that Grandfather, James Chant senior, bought was one quite near "The Snuggery" a tiny railway siding. The block was of one hundred and twenty acres and it was bought at the government price. Soon afterwards another block of eighty acres near the local cheese factory came on the market and that was purchased as well. When Gall's farm came on the market (Gall had gone to Ballarat gold-diggings) James eagerly bought it and another block next to it, one hundred and four acres and one hundred and thirty acres respectively. The last purchases he named New Stoke and he lived there until he died in 1922. The soil was rich and grew excellent crops of grass, barley and oats. I myself have seen crops of "white oats" exceeding two metres in height growing in one of the paddocks and the much heavier yielding Algerian type of oats invariably proved a valuable crop. For a number of years leading up to the Second World War star thistle proved a persistent and annoying pest to the arable farmers, but somehow the problem was overcome. The last time I visited New Stoke not one thistle was to be seen, where once there was a thick green carpet of them. Each star thistle produced a massive bush one metre high and up to one to one and a half metres across and the spined stars were equipped with quite long, vicious spines that were sharply penetrating.

Our Father

Our Father's name was James Henry and he was a man of courage, fortitude, intelligence and ambition. I know little of his early life but I do know he attended the German Flat primary school (now closed) where he completed his formal education at the age of fourteen. His scholastic achievements were equal to most and after leaving school he worked on his Father's properties attending to the sheep and cattle, building and repairing fences, shearing the sheep, ploughing, seeding, and harvesting.

He was very sound in character and in morals, and never knowingly did harm to any man, woman or child. He was careful of his language, he was a teetotaler, never smoked and worked hard. He had undoubted business ability and used his talents to become a comparatively wealthy man. He was just in his handling of his family and though cash was usually short we always had plenty to eat. Generally he was an excellent Father and certainly set us a good example of a clean, honest, temperate and hard working man. It was rare indeed for an expletive to pass his lips!

Our Mother

Mary Louisa (nee Gates), our Mother, was born and lived in Mt Gambier before taking service with our Grandfather who lived near Tantanoola. She had an excellent training from various employers and was a clever seamstress, an experienced cook, and good at making preserves. She had had some secondary education. Her Mother died when she was but eight years old and she was strictly disciplined by a stepmother.

Our Parents

At the age of twenty-one she married my Father who was twenty-eight years old. At first they resided in Tantanoola, where James Henry was the proprietor of a mixed

business. After three years James sold his business and purchased land owned by a Mr. Hanel, about five kilometers from Beachport, and pastoral interests remained his chief vocation in life until his death at the age of seventy-five years. Mother was strict in the running of the house and we children always knew what was expected of us and acted accordingly. She expected us to be truthful, honest, considerate and clean mouthed (she hated swearing) and in the main we were all of that. We were taught to respect all Bible teachings and taking the Lord's name in vain was frowned upon, and we mostly adopted her principles and I'm certain we have much to thank our parents for in the building up of our characters. We also inherited material advantages which have enriched our lives, physically and mentally. They were a fine couple and I'm sure God's judgment will be, "*Well done, thou good and faithful servants.*"

The Old Place

The Old Place was she-oak country, consisting mostly of sand ridges, covered by sparse grass, white tussock grass and flag rushes, a very coarse kind of dry land reed, attaining a maximum height of about one metre. She-oak wood is very hard but burns fiercely, giving off great heat, and it was an ideal fuel for providing warmth during the long cold wintry nights. As the land was coastly, that is it lacked certain essential minerals, Dad found it necessary to acquire healthy land situated about nineteen kilometres inland at Clay Wells, formerly named Landazer. The three blocks purchased were owned by his Father and improvements included an established fruit garden, a hut of two rooms, a shearing shed, and all necessary fencing, windmills, wells, and gates. Most of the land had been cleared of trees and some had even been cultivated. Notwithstanding the clearings, much land was totally obscured by masses of fallen trees that had been ring barked many years before. I remember well accompanying my brothers Jack and Bob on many a wild ride along a well marked track of "hurdles" as we galloped our ponies across one particular paddock, heedless of the result should our ponies falter and crash over the large log jumps. A kindly providence must have been watching over us! Now-a-days not only have the fallen trees all disappeared, but the fruit garden, the old shearing shed, the two huts and the few living trees also.

Natural Inhabitants of the Old Place.

During our walks up and down and along the ridges and gullies and across the low-lying swampy areas small wild creatures, tiny furtive bodies, and some not so tiny, stimulated wonder and interest in our minds and we would pause and speculate. There were trees, such as the wide-spreading yellow-flowering acacia, which produced many seeds and was a pest. Blue ti-tree, which preferred low-lying wet ground and produced white flowers in season. Then last the taller, sighing, sometimes-graceful, cone-bearing, whispering she-oaks which had needles instead of leaves. Sheep loved the tasty needles, which to them were apparently delicious. Using she-oak stocks and branches we sometimes attempted the construction of temporary playhouses, but our rudimentary attempts at architecture invariably collapsed when nearing completion.

Wild creatures, rabbits, wombats and, rarely, a wallaby would hastily seek a haven of safety when they became aware of our presence, and we watched with some speculation and excitement as the wild creatures fled from sight, scurrying down burrows or charging into thick blue ti-tree scrub. Tall tussock grass, short white

tussock grass, flag rushes with sharp pointed leaves, and in swampy areas certain indigenous heath shrubs housed many a tiny creature such as bush spiders, beetles, pretty red wasps, lizards and various kinds of ants.

Snakes and Lizards

Invariably we kept a close lookout for snakes, for various venomous reptiles such as brown, black, copperhead, whip and tiger snakes were indigenous to the area. One night Dad showed us a specimen of the snake-like lizard, pointing out its two vestigial legs – once complete legs!

Small wary lizards hid themselves from our presence, but larger skinks such as the blue-tongued sleepy and pointed tail lizards would cause us to pause in our walk. A stock placed in the mouth of the “sleepy” would be seized quickly, and the clamped jaws enabled us to lift up the scared animal and examine its anatomy more closely.

At last, tired and hungry and probably each wearing a garland of Darling Pea flowers, we would return home. We were more than ready for an appetising meal and an early night. Perchance to dream of whistling birds fluttering in the trees, and of wild-eyed scared native creatures, and of snakes, those horrible creatures to be feared. To dream also of many fearsome repulsive spiders, busy ants, and other creepy creepers, and wide-mouthed lizards, with blue tongue exposed to view, which raised a defiant posture.

We were always more than a little frightened of the frill necked lizard, I think because of their fearsome look and their rare turn of speed. Moreover, they would not think twice about climbing to the top of your head if threatened by a dog! On the other hand the skink or stumpy tailed “sleepy” lizard, thickly protected by tough scales and slow and cumbersome in movement posed no threat and we instinctively understood that this was so and our existence and safety were not threatened in any way. Our knowledge of natural history was somewhat meagre and we knew little about the real characteristics of the reptilian creatures that inhabited our bushland. Certainly we had not learned that all Australian lizards are non-venomous, and that they should be protected by us, not killed as enemies. One tiny lizard fascinatingly shed its tail if in danger and the tail left behind hoodwinked the enemy by continuing to wriggle and twist. A predator of small lizards must have been astonished when it held in its mouth a short length of wriggling tail instead of a tender, appetising whole lizard. The energy stored in the severed tail which kept it wriggling was really unbelievable and would seem to be impossible.

But I have digressed too far!

Father's Stories

During the time our Father, James Henry, worked at home he led a busy life. He told us about the hours each day he spent chasing away the myriad of hungry native companions. One was a large crane like bird that relished the young cereal plants just showing through the rich black earth. It was a tedious job, constant and tiring. He told us of the many occasions that he and his brother Lewis had driven a wagon into the forest nineteen kilometres distant, where they felled large trees, sawed the logs into lengths, split hundreds of posts and carted them back to the home farm.

He told us of the times he traveled to the mid-north of South Australia where he obtained employment as a shearer, using the old fashioned blade shears to

separate the wool from the sheep. You may have heard the song: "*Click go the shears, Boys, Click, Click, Click!*" and the old blades did go click, click, the whole day long. I also learned to shear a sheep using blade shears and I learned they were to all intents and purposes over-sized scissors. The click referred to was really a knocking sound because two small pieces of leather were carefully fastened to the clicking points to deaden the monotonous sounds, those metallic clicks that jarred on the nerves. The knockers had to be covered with leather.

He also told his eager listeners all about the Tantanoola Tiger (a huge Siberian wolf) and of a different kind of "tiger": the man who slaughtered hundreds of sheep stolen from his Father.

Flora and Fauna

A matter of great interest discussed was the richness of the native flora and fauna, but more especially the bird life and the kangaroos, wallabies, native cats, paddy melons (a very small marsupial), and possums that populated the lower part of South Australia when he was a boy. The Toolach, a beautiful creature about the size of a wallaby that took two quite long hops followed by a really prodigious one, inhabited a small area near Clay Wells. This ability could easily carry them out of the reach of a pursuing predator, such as a hound, a dingo, or a man on horseback. Their speed was remarkable. I know, for they easily outdistanced my pony when I used to chase them, hoping for a closer look. Their dodging of obstacles was superb and it is reasonable to suppose that they had no difficulty in leaping over fences. Mr Sam Fletcher of Robe did his best to protect and preserve the Toolach kangaroo by allowing them to live and roam undisturbed on his own land near Clay Wells. Apparently the handsome creatures preferred to live where yaccas (ancient grass trees) and other healthy plants grew, with odd patches of trees to provide shelter. I remember well galloping after the Toolach wallabies on several occasions for short distances. But I and my brothers were careful not to extend them too much for we had no wish to harm them in any way.

About forty years ago, in the 1940's a very clumsy attempt was made to capture this last few of a once wide spread type of kangaroo, with the object of transporting them to a safe haven at Flinder's Chase or Kangaroo Island. Something was achieved by the clumsy attempt, for the conservationists managed to exhaust several of the poor creatures to the point of death, and a proportion of them failed to recover. The net result was their final annihilation. It was a sad chapter in the long story of our gradual destruction of our wild life, for if the locals had used methods whereby the animals became accustomed to entering special yards, for example, I am sure they would have succeeded. Galloping horses merely terrified the uninitiated animals, and terrified the Toolachs were, fatally so! They vanished forever around 1940.

Often when the rain rattled on the iron roof, we gathered around Dad's knees and enjoyed the warmth of a blazing wood fire while he told us tales of ghosts, shipwrecks, Chinese migrants on their way to the Victoria gold fields, of our own aborigine and of the depredations of the imported fox on our native fauna, and of how they, the native fauna, were being replaced by the foxes, rabbits, feral cats, and of course the myriad sparrows and starlings, blackbirds and doves that have replaced the decimated native birds. Dad saw the changes as they happened and he experienced the sudden drop in prosperity because of the phenomenal spread of the destructive rabbit.

How Uncle Arthur Lost his Hand

Sometimes while in pensive mood, one ponders on how easily accidents occur, and how often the victims suffer dire and sometimes fatal injuries. The story of how our uncle Arthur lost his right hand at the early age of twelve was told in the following manner. He climbed to the back of an empty spring cart and his weight caused the vehicle to tip up; that is the shafts flew upwards, and the back, or tail shot downwards, taking Arthur with it. Tragically, as Arthur thumped to the ground, his arm fell athwart the upturned blade of a large hoe, and his hand was severed at the wrist. But uncle was not one to remain helpless. He had manufactured a special attachment into which he could screw a knife, a fork, a spoon or a ring and that enabled him to perform most activities including using an axe. The apparatus was in the shape of a sheath that fitted over the stump of his forearm, and a suitable harness attached to it kept the sheath firmly in place.

Boxthorns

Another pest, the African box thorn, introduced from South Africa, caused us many an agonizing moment when we were unlucky enough to step on its penetrating and toxic thorns, and that was exactly what we often did! One day a schoolmate, Harold Vorwerk, bravely holding back the tears, held up his foot to show us his problem. Six thorns had penetrated well below the skin! A rapid tug by one of the boys, Jack Peters by name, freed the thorns from the agonized foot but I'm afraid the pain remained to worry poor Harold for some time. Because of the extra freedom of movement, nearly all the pupils who attended the Beachport school were barefooted, and thus the incidence of spiked feet was rather frequent, especially because of the many boxthorn bushes near the school. Now bulldozers have made the destruction of the bushes comparatively easy, and very few of them now remain in South Australia.

Sneed's Island

One morning, just at day-break, Henry and I were at Sneed's Island, near Clay Wells. In those days, some sixty-two years ago, a row of rather tall African boxthorns grew along a fence, and an isolated bush grew about forty metres away. While Henry waited, gun in hand, in a strategic position, I systematically frightened thousands of starlings from their roosts in the main hedge. A large portion of them settled on the isolated bush and at the right moment Henry fired a charge of shot into the boxthorn. We picked up twenty-five birds but many more were caught in among the prickly thorns. The birds flatly refused to settle in the bush again, no matter how much we disturbed them.

On another occasion when Henry and I were on Sneed's Island the rabbits were running around in such numbers that our dogs stood still, heads and eyes bobbing around, quite unable to decide which one to chase! Never again did I see so many rabbits in one place. It was phenomenal! Another day on Sneed's Island, I ran across in front of a rabbit being chased by a grey hound. The dog, his eyes on the rabbit, crashed into me injuring my right knee.

The land around Clay Wells is very flat and becomes extremely water logged during the wet season. That is why rabbits collected in their thousands on Sneed's Island, they were flooded out of their burrows on the flat lands.

The Haunted Hut

Near German Creek the walls of an old stone hut ("The Haunted Hut") reminds us of the isolated life led by the early shepherds. One day a shepherd left his wife alone in the hut while he made the long trip to Mt Gambier, where he purchased supplies and collected the mail. Next day while on the return trip he met his wife. Astonished, he asked why she had left the hut. She answered, *"During the night I heard ghostly voices, but of the people there was no sign. I flatly refuse to spend another night in that hut."* So the story goes!

Adam Lindsay Gordon

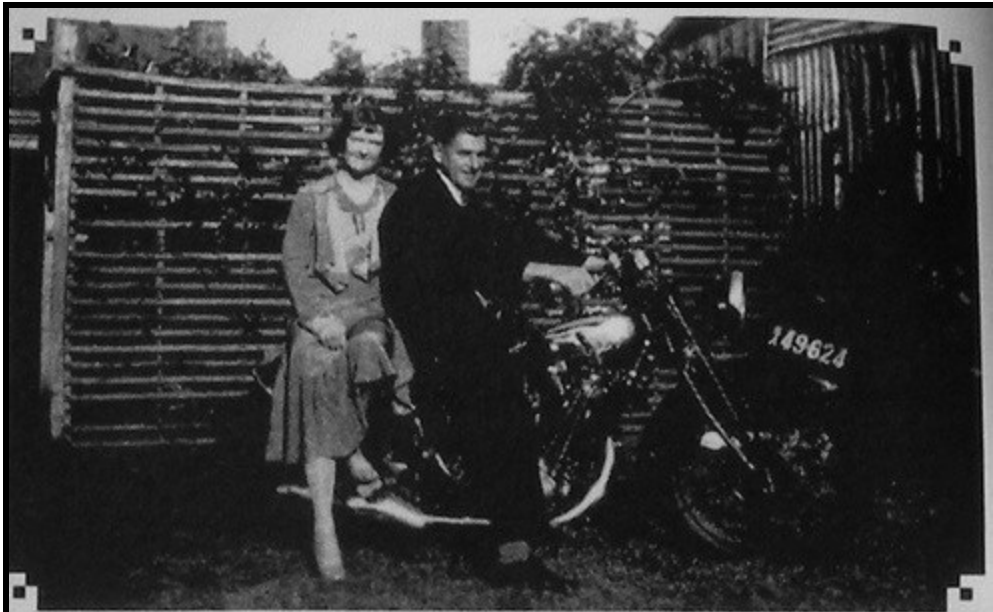
Adam Lindsay Gordon's descriptive poem, "The Ride From the Wreck!" describes landmarks such as the Sugar Loaf, a rounded hill, and the wombat holes, and the creek. Most are easily distinguishable and are in close proximity to the German Creek Homestead, where we lived for many years. Furthermore, traces of the route followed by the Chinese migrants illegally landed at Robe and on their way to the Victoria gold fields are said to exist even to this day, but I must admit I have not seen any of the said traces. Surprisingly, however, odd very old coins have been found in unexpected places, and they may have been lost by those early alien invaders. My brother, Bob Chant, found two quite old "cartwheels", copper coins worth four pence each, large and heavy, hence their nickname, in the vicinity of German Creek. The route from Robe to the Ballarat fields traversed a distance of nearly two hundred and ninety kilometres, and harrowing tales have been told of the way the so-called guides abandoned their Chinese charges in wild, uninhabited country except for warlike aboriginals, and many must have perished before reaching their destination. The guides would return to Robe, pick up another group of heathen and repeat the deception.

A Mystery

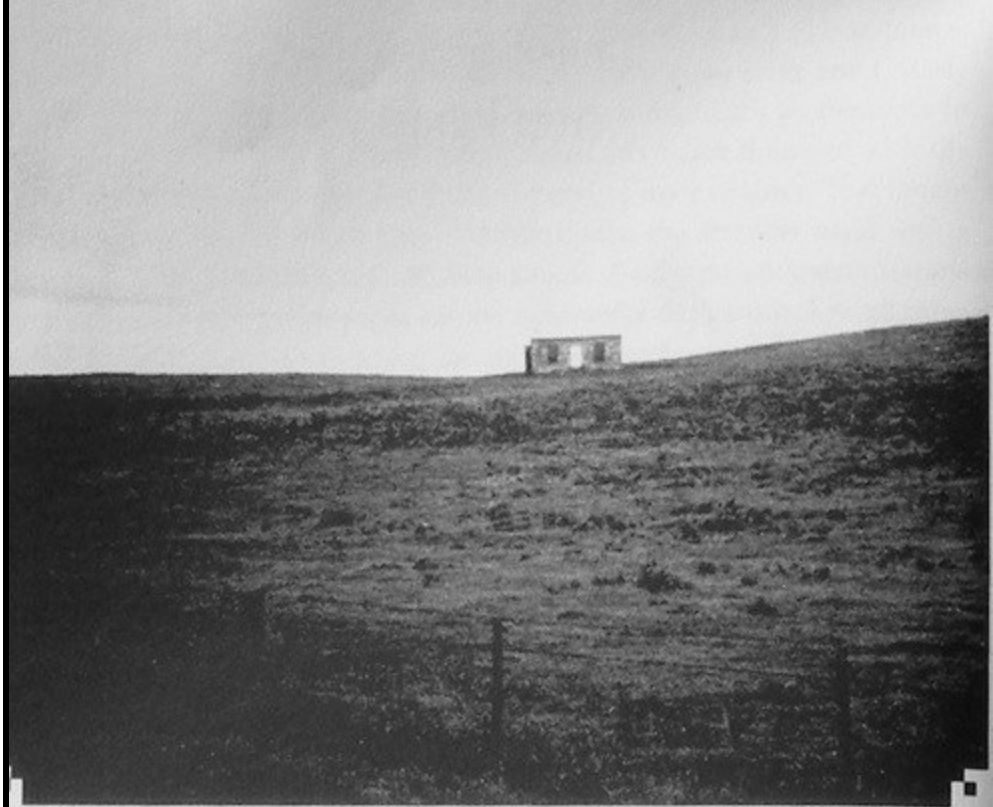
Whether spirits, ghosts, apparitions or spectres actually exist I do not know, but I do know that I have not had the thrilling experience of meeting one in its see-through, ghostly, floating body. Now, many years ago, a series of brands in the shape of a (C.I.) and a (T) mysteriously appeared on the chaff room door at Athelney. Who or what put them there I do not know and I never did discover the identity of the ghostly decorator.

Sometime later the door was carefully painted dark blue, in an endeavour to hide the carefully arranged brands. *"Success!"* everyone thought. But no, the spectral characters soon shone through the covering paint, but with a whitish tinge, far removed from the original dark blue. What do you think?

* * * * *



James and Vera on the motorbike



The haunted Hut near the 'Sugar Loaf' at German Creek

CHAPTER THREE

MORE ABOUT THE OLD PLACE

Memories of Family Life

Memories crowd my mind when I recall the life I knew at the Old Place, for this was my first childhood home, and the one where the pattern of family living was first experienced.

My memories include the first time I was knocked down, sent sprawling by a charging sheep as I childishly stood in a gateway, for a toddler had no knowledge of the perils that awaited little fellows who dared to enter a yard where excited sheep careered blindly hither and thither. I remember where the cow bail was and Mum milking the cow, "Strawberry" by name. There was a machinery shed, and the "dunnikin" now more politely spoken of as the toilet which was behind the shed. I remember the gum-tree which gave us shade, and the vegetable garden, and the "swaggies" who sometimes paid us unwelcome visits, and the older children going off to school and returning in the evening. During the summer months fires sometimes approached quite close to our home and I clearly remember standing at the window watching the approach of one such fire. Somehow, as anxiety filled our breasts, mostly they miraculously burned themselves out, usually just before reaching our house yard.

On one occasion Dad's planned visit to Clay Wells was suddenly and painfully interrupted by a fall as he descended from his cart at a gateway. He injured his back, fortunately not too seriously. He was forced to return home and being in much pain he left the cart out in the open. Mother and I pushed it into the shed. "*Why didn't Daddy put the cart away?*" I asked. Even at the age of four I had an enquiring mind and demanded to know the reason for everything. Mum quietly explained.

Near the summit of a part of a long sand ridge by the house we children had a delightful hole in which we spent many happy hours at play. The hole had another advantage too, for from its summit we often watched the daily train pass by on its way to and from Beachport. Our uncle Jim Tenby was the engine driver and sometimes he would throw us a parcel and great was the excitement as the merry chase began to retrieve the parcel and carry it importantly in to Mum.

New Babies

When a new baby was about to arrive Mother would go to a Mt Gambier Nursing Home and on two occasions I was chosen as the one to accompany her, I'm not sure why but I did not raise any objections. On the first occasion I was about five years old, and for a time we were the guests of Aunt Hilda Tenby. When Mother entered the Nursing Home, I continued to live with Aunt Hilda and Uncle Jim. Aunt and Uncle owned a horse which they stabled in their back yard and which pulled

their sulky when they went driving as they often did. One had to cross the stable yard when visiting the toilet, and thereby hangs a tale. Usually the horse kept to the far end of the yard, and I had no reason to suspect that he disliked children. On a certain day, he was near the toilet and as I walked near him he lashed out with his hoof and kicked me on my right hip. After that I was terrified of him and would only scamper across his yard when he was well out of the way. One day a neighbour sent in some plates of scones and later I was asked to return the plates which were wrapped in a tea towel. On the way I placed the plates on the ground, probably too heavily as I discovered one plate was broken. No one was at home, therefore I hid the broken plate in the hedge near the back door and placed the good plate plus tea towel on the doorstep.

Yes the broken plate was found, and I had some explaining to do! Mother's new baby was born shortly afterwards, we returned to Athelney, and my adventures in Claraville, Mt Gambier came to an end.

Twelve Brothers and Sisters

Altogether my parents had twelve children, two of whom, **Thomas and Alma Grace**, died in infancy. The ten remaining in order of birth were:

Eva Emily Louisa (b.1901)

Arthur William Henry (b. 1903)

Irene Florence (b. 1904)

Mary Jane (b.1906)

James Oswald (b. 1907)

John Wilfred (b. 1910)

Robert Melville (b. 1911)

Hilda Muriel (b. 1916)

Leslie (b. 1918)

Edwin Stanley (b. 1923)

A brother or sister came along at regular intervals and when our brother Bob was born Dad's sister, our aunt Maria looked after us. She brought several of her own children with her, hence she had quite a family to look after. Our aunt was a kindly woman who understood children and as I recall, her presence in our home was much appreciated. The year was 1911, Bob was Mother's seventh child!

Beach Picnics

During the hot summer Mother sometimes gave us a special treat. Having packed a generous lunch and distributed the loads of "goodies" among those best able to carry them Mother would take us hiking to the nearest beach – about two kilometres away. Much splashing of racing feet in the shallow water followed and the older children indulged in swimming efforts, but not very successfully. A frantic cry of "*Shark!*" and the bathers scrambled from the sea to safety turning fearful eyes seaward where the threatening triangular dorsal fins of the marine monsters slowly passed by, gradually disappearing into the murky sea-misty distance. Then we either searched for sea shells and other treasure troves or played in the deep sand that covered the seashore. Meanwhile Mother sat on the beach and read or crotcheted while she kept watch over our activities. I also remember how much further the home-ward hike over the many sandy ridges, seemed to our tired young legs as we wearily trudged up hill and down dale. After dinner we needed no urging to retire for the night.

A Dead Whale

Once, a specimen of the world's largest mammal, a dead whale, was pushed ashore during a violent storm. Its body was about 2 metres thick and decay was well advanced.

The smell from the rotting flesh was so awful that we could not approach too closely to the smelly monster. However, we did note its great length and size which was probably equal to two elephants!

Local Cemetery

Near where we lived was the local cemetery in which grew many she-oak trees. The sighing of the wind through their needles, which were long and thin, was like a continuous sighing of sad bereaved folk moaning for their departed loved ones. I was deeply impressed and other cemeteries lose much by comparison, and I can still feel the eerie shivers that passed up and down my spine as strange feelings and emotions were aroused by the ghostly whisperings, feelings that I little understood at the time. Winters of those days gave the impression of being colder and wetter than those of late years, but I do remember on shopping excursions to Beachport that Mum drove our sulky through a fairly long stretch of water up to almost a metre deep when Lake George, a big lake near Beachport, overflowed low-lying sections of the roadway. For the younger members of the family the source of so much water, which suddenly appeared, was a real mystery. The flooding ceased when an outlet to the sea was excavated and the surplus water entered Rivoli Bay. This outlet had side effects not anticipated. New sandbanks and bars changed both the configuration of the sea floor, and the flow of sea currents. Serious beach erosion was the result. Groynes have done much to restore what were once excellent beaches, but their width and extent cannot be wholly restored.

The gate at the entrance to the Old Place paddocks, which covered an area of about four hundred and fifty acres, was placed on a low lying swampy area. I did not learn the reason for its position until some years after we had changed our place of residence. Apparently an unfenced road had practically bisected the property. That was why motor cars, much to the astonishment of the small children, occasionally passed our home on their way southwards. Because of the primitive, and sometimes sandy tracks, the cars soon returned, and no doubt endeavoured to find a better track to lead them to their destination. When I had reached the mature age of about sixteen years Henry and I partly completed a new fence on the west side of the Old Place paddock. Dad by arrangement with the Rivoli Bay Council exchanged the road that bisected the paddock for an equal area on the western boundary and that meant a total realignment of the fence. Further, the old gateway could now be closed and a more suitable site was selected several chains further along the northern fence.

Today the Old Place forms part of Burke Island cattle and sheep station, a prosperous and wealthy estate.

Foxes became somewhat of a pest at the Old Place and the thieving creatures played havoc with our small flock of geese until the very last one was but a patch of feathers in a remote spot among the tussocks.

I feel that childhood memories, are rather more vividly impressed on one's mind than one would think possible; perhaps because of their association with pain or hurt feelings. The memory of being bowled over by a charging sheep is startlingly

clear in my mind and memory and at the time I doubt whether I was taller than the galloping animal.

Details of the sheep yards, gate, cow bail, dogs, Dad, the type of sheep, and my sister are so clear as if it happened but yesterday. The only part I do not remember is the hurt! The cry of Mother, *"Look out for Oswald!"* is also distinctly recalled to mind.

Sub Artesian Water

Each winter our vegetable garden was partly under water, flooded by the sub-artesian water that was always near the surface in every low-lying part of the Old Place. My sister Irene has told me that I thoroughly enjoyed testing the depth even though I had only just mastered the skill of walking.

A wind-sculptured gum tree quite near the house provided us with a shady resting place when the days were hot, and also material for long hours of creation. The flower stalks, when dry, could easily be threaded onto cotton or thin string, and a necklace, or bangle, or head band of dubious aesthetic appeal resulted. Further I suppose the handling of the long tubular flower stalks did, to a certain extent educate our fingers for better occupations. The garland necklaces made during play periods under the tree needed no string or cotton if permanence was not desired, because, when pushed tightly into each other, a quite serviceable necklace resulted.

Our house at the Old Place was built in the shape of a large "L". Each arm of the "L" though joined to the other was an isolated entity for there was no inside connecting door! Hence to reach our bedrooms it was necessary to brace the weather and the darkness, and on cold wet blustery winter nights that was quite an ordeal. On one occasion I had just returned from a visit to Clay Wells with my Dad and upon being asked how I liked visiting Clay Wells, I replied, *"I like it better than home because you don't have to go outside to go to bed!"*

I was very puzzled when ribald laughter greeted my statement of fact! Years later, when sleeping quarters were built for shearers at Clay Wells, retiring for the night required a walk of two or three chains to reach the new hut, and now it was necessary to "go outside" to go to bed, even at Clay Wells. The Old Place consisted of six rooms, three in each wing. There was a store room, a kitchen, a sitting, or dining-room and three bedrooms. I think the kitchen was most used, for it was the warmest room and that was of prime consideration during the long winter. A large wood stove well built in with thick stone slabs provided the warmth, and the heat for the baking of the tasty loaves of home-made bread, cakes and biscuits.

Picking up Chips

When I was about four years old I was ordered to go to the wood heap and fetch in a bucket full of chips. Reluctantly I obeyed for I was definitely not fond of picking up chips. Seeing a spade nearby, I hastily grabbed it and shoveled chips and dirt into that empty bucket. Good thinking for a four year old, but the chips were definitely below the quality Mum expected! I recall that Mum criticized the quality of my chips and suggested I return to the woodheap, empty the bucket and select many more good chips and certainly much less dirt! I suppose I did so, but have no clear memory of it!

The Trees Go Crack

When I was about five Dad allowed me to accompany him when he visited Grandpa's scrub block on the Reedy Creek, which lay about twenty-eight kilometres from the Old Place and in an inland direction beyond the Woakwine Ranges. Dad proposed to cut down some trees that would supply logs that could be cut into lengths and split into posts ready to put into some new fencing that he had planned. Being conscious of the need to keep me well away from the falling trees Dad supplied me with a tomahawk and suggested I try my hand at chopping down a sapling several chain away. Relishing the idea of being an axe man, just like Dad, I swung my tiny axe rather lustily, flexing my puny muscles, spitting on my hands to prevent blisters just like Dad, and moving around the tree in a truly professional manner.

Later after Dad and I had returned home to the Old Place, someone asked how I had enjoyed my outing in the scrub.

"All right", I muttered in my childish voice, "but my trees wouldn't crack like Dad's did!"

General laughter followed my innocent remark, but for the life of me I definitely could not see anything to laugh at. Upon reflection I think my success as an axe man was inhibited by two negative attributes. Firstly my tomahawk was too light and too blunt to penetrate the hard eucalyptus heart wood, and secondly my muscles were too weak to force my miniature axe into the wood!

About 1912 Dad purchased another block about five kilometres distant from the Old Place. Personal residence was a condition of purchase, hence a change of residence was forced upon us. Hazy memories of accompanying Dad to the new block remain with me. The block had to be fenced, and that was a long job. One day I was asked to walk and fill the billy with water. I set out bravely, an intrepid five year old, but several bullocks near the well proved too much for my immature courage, and I hastily returned minus the water. Dad was fencing near the six and a half kilometre post on the Furner Rd. Another day we were near the same place when Mr Ted Atiwell came along just as we were about to partake of lunch. Mr Atiwell was the district council clerk and he probably knew everyone in the district council area of Beachport.

We had boiled two billies, one for Dad's tea and one for my coffee. Dad offered Ted a drink and he promptly drank all my coffee and I was left lamenting and thirsty to boot! I have no recollection of how we overcame the problem but I do think I complained somewhat crossly.

It is strange, I think, that I remember visiting the new block (Athelney) with Dad but I have no memory of actually moving to the new, temporary home Dad had built while waiting for the permanent residence to be constructed.

Earliest Memories

I had attained the ripe old age of roughly four years when my parents changed their place of residence from the Old Place to Athelney which was a 5-acre block about five kilometres east. Consequently I have many memories of the Old Place, although some of them are a little vague.

Hazily I recall sitting atop a fairly high load as we approached Athelney, and I now realise that that must have been moving day and the first day of our occupancy of

the temporary home prepared for us.

Chronologically I cannot be sure which memory can be said to be absolutely the earliest of all. For example, I have a memory of losing my woolly hat, and of Dad jokingly stating that perhaps a passing drover might find it and use it to boil his billy! Also I recall standing in the kitchen doorway and teasing a greyhound with my bare foot. It was soon pinched between the teeth of the angry dog!

The Darling Pea

Walking was an exercise I thoroughly enjoyed. I have excellent recollections of wandering about the homestead land accompanied by my older sisters Mary and Irene. We would search for bush flowers such as the darling pea, which bore either blue or white flowers with long, soft juicy stems that could be threaded into pretty garlands. They were fragile but pleasing.

Certain characteristics of the pea-plant are worth mentioning. It always grew among bracken ferns or low-growing shrubs and creepers. It had small leaves but seldom exceeded two thirds of a metre in height. It attained a bushy appearance and its foliage contained a habit-forming drug, especially injurious to horses.

Occasionally I accompanied my older bother Henry when he was setting rabbit traps at burrow entrances. He would set them among the tall rushes and tussocks of white grass and she-oaks that lined the long sandy ridges. These ridges resembled the waves of a mighty frozen sea stretching away into the distance. The gullies between the ridges were neither wide nor deep. Wide-spreading boobialla trees, shrublike in appearance, and a specie of wattle, clothed patches of further sandy areas.

I can recall a picnic outing at Beachport. Mother and Aunt Hilda were present. Aunt presented me with several fairly large biscuits shaped like children and Mother snatched a couple from my hands and ran away in a teasing manner. I chased her around our sulky but Mother just kept out-pacing me until we both got tired and my biscuits were returned to me. I'm afraid I must confess to grizzling somewhat instead of laughing and enjoying the chase.

On another well-remembered day while we were still residing at the Old Place, Mother and all my brothers and sisters and I ambled across the sand ridges until we reached the seaside. There a long, sandy beach beckoned to us. We had all helped carry the lunch baskets filled with "goodies".

After lunch we all walked south along the beach to where there was a large stranded whale, very dead, and very smelly! It was a seven-day wonder to us for it was the very first one we had seen in the flesh (c.1910).

Some years later a stranded sperm whale provided those interested with thick slabs of blubber. Dad visited the whale and obtained several oily lumps, which he brought home and rendered down for the oil – a good preservative for leather harness, but rather a fishy smell!

Generally speaking, we all enjoyed a happy childhood, and we certainly thrived on our freedom of movement, and the healthy, active life we lived. Seldom were we incapacitated for any length of time through illness, but we did contract all the usual childhood illnesses. The symptoms soon departed from our strong, healthy, well-fed bodies.

Just as well, too, for there was always a job of work waiting to be done. I must confess voluntary efforts on my part were rarely performed, tasks such as carrying

stones to fill deep ruts in the track that our vehicles followed from the main road to our home. The stones were broken into small pieces thus facilitating the fitting together to make a smooth surface.

Gardening projects on an individual basis were also a part of our maturation processes, albeit not always very successful.

Several well worn and frequently used tracks crossed our land at Athelney before Dad fenced it in. Why? Because the tracks provided a short cut from the Robe road to the road to Furner and places beyond. In a few places the traffic had worn the track down to a depth of one metre. Moreover, about half way along the shortcut a sheep yard built of boughs and logs cut from the nearby ti-trees, was a popular overnight stop for drovers. Dad fenced the yard properly, and included extra land, thereby creating an excellent enclosure for the growing of Cape Barley, which we cut green and fed to our pony.

Tree Marks

Landmarks are always familiar to all country folk, and I fancy many city folk too, but what about “tree marks?” I have several!

Number one is the old wind blown eucalyptus tree we small tots played under, busily making garlands of flower stalks when the scorching winds made it too hot to stay inside. Number two was one we used as a slippery dip, a weather-worn dry land ti-tree. Number three was an old mulberry tree growing just off the road near the ten-mile post of the Furner road. Number four, a venerable old cypress tree my Father planted over one hundred years ago. Number five was our “killing tree”, at Clay Wells where the sheep were butchered; and number six, at German Creek, another tree we used to hang up the butchered carcasses of sheep, and on rare occasions a bullock. There are others that remind me of life as I have lived it: trees such as certain fruit trees that have a particular association such as the one near Argyle, not far from Millicent.

My Sister Rene Lost (c1909)

‘Rene, (Irene Florence) was a determined five-year-old who, with her sister Mary Jane, accompanied our Dad some distance from the house to where he was erecting a new fence. The girls sojourned near the water hole playing childish games.

Mary, who wanted to see her Dad working, walked over a bank full of rushes and disappeared from sight. Not long afterwards, tiring of playing alone, Irene decided to follow her! Strangely, for a country girl, she meandered away in the opposite direction until she came to the railway. This she followed southward instead of northward.

The guard on a passing train guessing her predicament signalled by hand and voice that she should retrace her steps. Not believing him, she continued on in the wrong direction. When the train was on its return journey the guard again saw the intrepid wee one and again advised her with appropriate gestures and calling out to turn and walk in the opposite direction.

Later, when her Dad and sister returned home, Mother queried, “*Where’s ‘Rene?’*” Dad answered, “*Didn’t she come home?*” Thence a great and anxious search began to find the missing wanderer. Mr Fred Benson, an employee, along with many others on horseback, joined Father in a diligent search, loudly calling her

name.

Meanwhile, darkness had crept over the land and the scared little girl, desperately afraid of foxes, sought a resting-place in a huge sandpit where she curled up under a bank and soon fell asleep. She was abruptly awakened by cries of, "Coo-ee".

Racing toward the sound she replied with her high girlish treble, "*Here I am! Here I am!*"

Thankfully, her Dad, who was the one to find her, lifted her up and placed her on the front of his saddle.

"Wait until I get home! I'll tell Mum I had a ride on a horse. It's good!" prattled the wee lost one, quite unconcerned about the anxiety she had caused her parents.

On the way home her Dad was able to recall the other searchers.

All's well that ends well.

* * * * *



*Drain "M" on the Lake George end looking back toward the
Woakwine Hills*



The Pool of Siloam – seven times saltier than the sea

CHAPTER FOUR

ATHELNEY – THE NEW PLACE (c 1913)

**Athelney our home, a wonderful place
Had everything to please a young boy's taste
Friendly trees ancient, gnarled and strong
All easy to climb, using limbs so long
And splendid lookouts for make believe sailors
And rabbits to catch and foxes to hunt
And wombats and snakes and porcupines of awe
And bird's nests to rob and emus to chase
Wild cats to release, vicious hate on each face
And skins to collect for the "hawker" to purchase
And ponies to gallop through narrow tree gaps
While shouting with glee and wielding a strap
And games to play and work to be done
And a great many pleasures and oceans of fun
And leeches to avoid in the shallow swamp ponds
And bull ants to fear, for their stings were so strong
And hopping ants too, for they attacked in throngs
And a sting from one ached dreadfully long
Always regarded as a painful pest
On sandy ridges they built their nests
Creatures large and creatures small
All united to form a familiar band
And helped us to appreciate the value of land.**

(Extract from the poem "Claywells")

Cooking Outdoors

Athelney differed somewhat from the Old Place. It was further from Beachport, and it had main roads on two sides. Much of the land was covered with thick ti-tree scrub. Trees almost surrounded the residence, but it was visible from one of the main roads and a group of ti-trees near the rear of the house provided welcome shade on hot days. It was a compact house too, and we appreciated that. I don't remember thinking much about the trees, but the contrast between Athelney, with its hundreds of trees, and the Old Place with its sparse she-oak population was most marked. For the first few months we lived in temporary living quarters, and Mother had to do all of the cooking on an outside fire using camp ovens, and saucepans to do the cooking. How she managed I do not know, but we were fed well enough, and there never seemed to be any shortages.

I remember trying to retrieve a board from the open fire and falling forward and placing my hand on some very hot coals. With little effort I can still feel the burning sensation and picture the half dozen blisters that quickly appeared. My sister Mary

applied some lemon juice and that eased the pain somewhat.

When we lived at Athelney Dad did very little in the way of clearing the land. Hence, when we departed, the homestead block was almost in its natural state.

Occasionally ewes and their lambs wandered over the open spaces and along well-worn pathways through the ti-tree scrub. Their bleating gave a significant touch of farm life atmosphere in a peaceful, tranquil setting. We younger children loved to watch the lambs at play. They held their wriggly tails, so soon to be lost, high – visual evidence of their pleasure in their immature activities, and in the tucker provided by their woolly mums.

Playing with Matches

A gusty westerly blew strongly across the reedy swamplands of our homestead block of Athelney, and itinerant clouds cast a gloomy shadow over all. Two boys idly wandering among the reeds and bushes looking for something to occupy their minds and energy suddenly came to a decision. They would set a match to an isolated patch of reeds. The older of the two boys extracted a box of matches from his pants pocket, gathered a handful of dry, soft grass (excellent tinder), and set a match to it!

Calculations had indicated that the isolated bunch would burn only, but the strong, gusty wind proved otherwise and should the fire spread, as seemed likely, their home would be directly in its path! Consternation reigned!

“What shall we do?” was the cry.

A hasty inspection of the flood water in the vicinity of the embryo blaze located a small ti-tree growing nearby, which gave promise of providing the means to beat out the eager flames. There followed a sudden rush over to the flood water and back and then a vicious, urgent thrashing of the burning reeds by frantically wielded boughs. The danger was thwarted.

Lesson learned: *“Always check wind direction before igniting inflammable material in the open – especially in open paddocks covered with vegetation.”*

About fifteen metres west of the bunch of rushes lay a main road and beyond that was a swampy area covered by rushes, tussocks and a type of ti-tree that preferred swampy areas but seldom exceeded four and a half metres in height. Beyond that again lay Lake George. About three chain south of that Drain M was located with its retaining banks. Eastward stretching some thirty metres across some low parallel ridges lined by dry-land ti-trees and wattles with an occasional she-oak and patches of flag rushes, was a six-roomed house of timber and iron which was our home.

A large vehicle shed and a chaff-room provided abundant material for greedy flames. It takes little imagination to realise how terrified those two boys were and how desperate was their desire to extinguish the “devil” they had released!

Later I saw a real and terrible bushfire and the memory has stayed with me.

“Bushfires”

***As the morning progressed the heat built up
For a fiery sun and a scorching north wind
Seared the earth with a blistering heat
And waves of heat merged with the mirage behind
A misty haze and the shimmering pine trees***

***All objects appeared as amorphous shapes
And anxious eyes the horizon searched
For wispy smoke trails of an embryonic bush fire
A lightning flash that has struck the earth
And a ghastly fire instantly given birth
To devastate the land and bring terror in its wake***

***A grand forest of tall pines, mature and strong
Awaited the loggers with their saws and thongs
But a match so careless tossed deep in the needles
And those fiery imps with merciless glee
Raced up those trees to their feathery tops
And waved and cracked, screamed a poem of bliss
And in close embrace whirled a deadly kiss***

***The green tops shivered in agony so clear
And anon their blackened stark skeletons so drear
Pointed skywards to show the loss so dear
Careless man and his smokes leave little to cheer***

***Out of the forest with a fiendish roar
The flames roasted over the grass and ferns
And the oven hot gasses carried those flames
To kindle new fires ahead forty chains
And the speed of those flames most frightful to see
Swallowed houses, animals and crops like an angry sea!***

***Haystacks and fences and machinery too
And vehicles and birds and slithering reptiles
Succumbed to the greed of those avaricious hot flames
And charred and baked they left their remains
Mute evidence indeed of man's inability to cope
With nature's calamities, catastrophes that leave no hope***

***But man's will is indomitable, and the farmers so brave
Accepted the help from more fortunate folk
And set to with a will and courage sublime
Determined to repair nature's rapine in good time!
They surely succeeded, and benevolent rains
Caused a great rebirth of waving grass so prolific
And a smiling land paid back so terrific
The courage and persistence of those farmers humane.***

Winter Time

The southeast of South Australia is not exactly noted for mild winters. Especially is that so when cold, stormy winds rage in from the west bringing rain squalls, biting cold and an inclemency that has to be experienced to be believed.

Because of the changeable nature of the weather we children often had the misfortune to be thoroughly drenched when kilometres from shelter. Often our clothes could not be discarded and chills and even colds descended upon us. I remember severe colds when distressful coughing racked my chest and a painful soreness resulted, and a severe lassitude made the expenditure of energy for working or walking almost impossible.

Warm air alleviated the symptoms, therefore, as I remember, I endeavoured to occupy the warm spots near the kitchen fireplace. Fortunately the healthy life we led with plenty of exercise and good, plain, fresh food enabled us to throw off the infections with comparative ease.

Of course, we were regularly visited by all the usual childhood infections. I alone became infected by a really serious disease, when I contracted the infantile paralysis (poliomyelitis) which left me handicapped for the rest of my life. As the years pass by I feel the weakening effects of my withered muscles increasingly as the weaknesses caused by my illness become more pronounced.

Baby Brother Tommy Dies

It was early in 1914 our brother Tommy was born. He was always ailing, never robust, and he soon fell victim to a rather mysterious infantile complaint that caused the deaths of many babies during that fateful year of drought and war.

Mostly, unless otherwise ordered, we stayed inside on those inclement winter days when icy winds from the distant frozen southwest penetrated bitingly our warmest clothing, numbing fingers and causing our teeth to chatter. We would cluster around the cosy wood fire, which was always well stoked, and burning brightly in the kitchen or sitting hearth. We would wallow in the warmth and comfort listening to the rain pelting on the iron roof, and the wind persistently swishing through the leafy ti-trees.

During the long winter, much of the land was flooded. Waterbirds flocked to the myriad tadpoles, which rapidly made their appearance. We gathered samples of egg-spawn and marvelled as the eggs changed to miniature tadpoles and were equally fascinated to see the gradual transformation to adult frogs.

Humble Homes

Our homes were always rather humble. There was nothing elegant in the way of fittings, furniture or knick-knacks. But warmth and good cheer were always there in abundance.

Dad was a good provider and we were invariably a healthy, well-fed family, enjoying a varied diet procured mainly from home-grown meats, vegetables and fruit. Mum was a good cook and excelled in soups, biscuits, preserves, homemade bread, pasties and pies. Her sheep's head soup and Cornish pasties were a gourmet's delight. My tastebuds simply drool when I recall how much I enjoyed her potato cakes, quince jelly, suet puddings, roast dinners and chutneys!

Had we, as a family, continued to live at Athelney, I planned to bring one of my

dreams to fruition. This was a double row of Norfolk Island pines leading from the Drain M Bridge to the entrance to our house yard. I had in mind the planting of other trees too, perhaps exotic ones, and shrubs.

The profession of poultry farmer had long appealed to me. I had visions of dozens of yards filled with white leghorns each busily going about her duty and providing an egg each day. However, all my plans for the future were obfuscated when Dad decided I should attend high school, receive a reasonable education and perhaps pursue a commercial career. These were sometimes offered by the stock, land and commercial agencies. Man often proposes, but fate disposes of his ideas and decrees otherwise. Thus, my life's work finally lay in other directions.

Bees at Athelney

One problem, a rather constant one, was the presence of bees between the outer cladding of the house at Athelney, and the inner lining. Usually several hives were present at the same time, and Mother tried to dislodge them by squirting kerosene and other substances into the recesses where the honeycomb had been built and filled by the busy bees. Nothing worked and even robbing them had little effect for supplies of honey were easily replenished. We also suffered odd stings and seldom did a summer's day go by without numerous bees finding their way inside, and later spending hours climbing up and down the windows. A mixture of flowers provided the nectar, which when changed to honey, they gave the honey a queer taste.

One day our adventurous pet magpie sat at the entrance to a hive of bees which were living in a large box. A fast and furious snapping of his bill protected him somewhat but soon he was glad to vacate his dangerous resting place. Whether the bees were able to penetrate his feathers with their stings I do not recall, but he did seem to swallow some of the bees he had caught in his bill!

Dry-land ti-trees covered much of our land at Athelney, and as they flowered profusely during spring and summer, honey collected by those pesky bees consisted of ti-tree honey, which had a very strong taste, and it also candied quickly and set hard. We never really acquired a taste for it.

If we had had boxes full of frames for the bees to live in we probably would not have been bothered by hives taking possession of our home – or at least parts of it!

Robin's Jam Burn

I also remember old Robin, a large horse which learned it was not wise to be too curious about what was cooking on the fire, especially in an open camp oven. He placed his nose down into the camp oven where a large jam tart was sizzling and steaming and his lips actually touched the bubbling jam. He jerked backwards, whirled suddenly, and raced to the drinking trough. He plunged his blistering nose into the cooled water again and again proving he was capable of a kind of constructive thinking. I can still see the shocked look on his face as the boiling jam adhered to his searching lips and the agony of the intense burning sensation began to build up.

Memories of Athelney also crowd my mind, but curiously I have no recollection of moving from our temporary living quarters to our new home. However, I do recall taking a keen interest in the construction of the chimneys and asking the mason questions about the mixing of the mortar, and why it was used. As our new home was visible from the main road, sundowners, requesting a handout were frequent

visitors, mostly unwelcome visitors for not all of them were trustworthy citizens, and few had any desire to earn a meal, or a supply of rations to see them through. As times were hard Dad could ill afford to provide rations for strangers.

Swaggies or Sundowners

Athelney having two main highways on two sections of its boundaries, was an easy target for itinerant workers moving around South Australia looking for work. Hard times had come along for many! These men, who arrived at any time of the day, were widely known as “swaggies” because of the bundles they carried on their backs. Inside each bundle would be a minimum selection of things needed – maybe a change of under-wear, a towel, a knife and fork, toilet articles, some food perhaps, and a rug to wrap around the necessities for a long walk. A “billy” to boil water, in which tea, sugar and maybe condensed milk were carried, was a valued item. Most of the wanderers were good, honest men truly seeking employment but very few ever found it. I believe word would be passed to members of the fraternity where a meal or supplies were handed to the needy! And then more would make time to call at the best time, maybe near mid-day.

A stranger called one day and requested a handout. *“If you are prepared to work for it you will be welcome. There’s a woodheap you may have noticed on the way in. I’m short of cut and split wood. Use the axe and cut a couple of arms full and I’ll see what I can do.”*

“I don’t know the length and size!” was the sullen reply and he looked down and shuffled his feet.

Mother indicated the suitable length and thickness by hand movements, and some explanation.

“My experience using an axe is very limited,” he grumbled, in exasperation at being asked to work for a meal.

“Please yourself,” said Mother, *“We are not drones here. Do as I ask or go hungry!”*

That is all I remember, but the wayfarer must have decided to do the work as required for I do remember him enjoying a meal that Mother had provided.

Another “swaggie” was clean shaven, presentable but just a tiny bit dusty, in his late twenties, or early thirties, and he spoke in an educated manner. His hair was brown, he had fair skin, and I’m almost certain he had not been walking the roads for very long. His approach to us was somewhat shy and diffident as if begging was a very, very new experience indeed.

On another occasion both our parents were absent when a visiting “swaggie” requested something to eat and drink. Without preamble my sister Mary provided for the poor fellow and before leaving he said, *“Thank you very much for the help you have given me! May I make a further request? Would you be so kind as to provide me with some bread, a pot of jam, a pot of butter, maybe a slice of meat, and perhaps a slice of cake or a bun?”*

Mary, being the kind hearted girl she was, soon had a parcel of food ready and our visitor smiled as he waved goodbye: it was his lucky day. Athelney’s reputation as a good place for the wandering fraternity to make a request for help must have soared to the heights.

“Sundowners” posed a different problem in that they invariably arrived, as the name suggests, just as the sun disappeared below the horizon, and the itinerant work-seeker would be thinking of a place to rest and sleep. We did have suitable

accommodation in a large room attached to a shed which was about three chains north of our home, but except for drovers we knew, I cannot remember any sundowner actually using the room.

One “swaggie” presented me with a mouth organ, much used, but Mum, who had some set ideas about hygiene, saw that it had disappeared by next morning. Tiny tots had to be cared for and protected.

Drain M

With the onset of winter the lower south-east of South Australia is converted into a vast water-logged area extending from Kingston to Port MacDonnell – with only the ranges and ridges being above water level. As early as 1863 much of the low-lying area inland from Rendlesham was criss-crossed with drains and thousands of acres began producing crops of chicory and certain grain crops. The almost level plains of the Millicent and Tantanoola wetlands was similarly drained soon after, and wool, dairy products and great quantities of barley and oats were exported from the area, much passing through the newly opened port of Beachport.

The South Eastern Drainage Scheme which had come into existence as early as 1863, further extended its activities by having Drain M authorized by the South Australian government and in 1913 the first explosion to start the project was detonated at the surveyed route of the Drain at the Woakwine Range Cutting just over eight kilometres from Beachport.

*Suddenly to skywards, a mass of rocks is sped,
And a mighty crackling sound signaled loud and clear,
That the cutting of the Woakwine, for the draining of the land
Had surely been started, by an eager toiling band.*

The survey for the complete Drain cut off about one hundred and fifty acres from the rest of the six hundred and forty acre block we had named Athelney.

Though rarely, even during a long dry summer did sheep, cattle or horses cross over the drain, which during the dry shrank to a shallow, slow flowing stream. When I first saw the Woakwine Cutting only a few chains had been excavated and the soils removed but as the year progressed we saw Drain M extended another sixteen or more kilometres inland – but its total length finally reached nearer forty-eight kilometres, capturing Reedy creek on its way. Only the last section, a length of about five kilometres, really concerned Dad, for about one and a half kilometres of those five had been excavated in Athelney. Great excitement filled our hearts when the very first winter flood raced headlong for the sea, and we eager beavers, raced like scared rabbits to stand on the bridge and watch with fascinated attention the swirling muddy waters speeding beneath our feet. One felt mesmerized by the sight and reluctant to turn one’s back on the phenomenon of such unbridled ever changing flood.

One section of the drain’s five kilometres was shaped and confined by men using planks to wheel the barrows along, and picks, spades and shovels. All dirt dug within the very, very shallow drain (about twenty-three centimetres deep) and much more from Dad’s grazing land, was used to raise retaining banks, squared and strong, to contain the winter floods. To see all the men with barrows, working away, moving, digging, filling the barrows was like watching the busy scenes on the early goldfields. The scene on the next section, the sand-ridges, was very different for

there men and horse drawn scoops excavated the drain to the required depth quickly and comparatively easily. Moreover, noisy sounds increased: the tramping and scraping, the commands to the many teams hauling the scoops, and the constant movements, made a picture that depicted a massive involvement of very busy men and horses. The picture very clearly remains in my memory.

The Bridge

After the diggers had moved on another team, the bridge-builders, moved in. A pile of squared piles, a pile of sleepers, a pile of railings and posts, a donkey engine (steam) a steel monkey (to ram the piles) road metal, wood for the fire in the engine, steel cable, bolts and nuts, and other paraphernalia needed were dumped on site, including the timber to be used for the “monkey” derrick. Fascinating indeed!

Preparation took several days and then the real work began – the driving of the first pile. Bridge building is a job for experts: they fixed the engine securely, arranged in place a movable towering wooden frame to hold the pile in place, used the engine to hoist the “monkey”, pulled the “trip” and allowed the monkey to free fall and thump the pile into the earth. This action was repeated over and over until the pile was at the required depth for a level bridge. How long it took to drive a pile I never learned, but the work of building continued until piles, decking, tie beams, railing, cross-beams to hold the piles upright, metal for the road, and the approaches were completed and we could use our new bridge – a sturdy structure indeed! Even the safety rails had been painted an eye catching white. I remember how fascinated I was when the monkey was pulled upwards like a massive climbing beetle, and how the thump of its hitting the pile could be heard even from our house, and the hissing of the steam also as the engine did its work. In my mind’s eye, like a vision, I can picture the scene as if it had happened but yesterday. And this scene of building a bridge was repeated at least a dozen times before Drain M was completely dug and bridges, weirs, a ford and retaining banks were completed. An outlet to the sea was also cut about two thirds of a kilometre from Beachport’s centre.

Much sand was carried into Rivoli Bay, and this built banks which altered the flow of currents within the bay and extensive erosion set in so that much of the beach, beloved by holiday makers and the towns folk, was lost, some thought forever! Luckily the building of groynes caught and retained the sand and at least some of the beach, but not all, was re-deposited by the busy waves.

The Drain Families

We children were fascinated by Drain M, first by the clearing operations, secondly by the horse- drawn scoops which were used to excavate the drain across the sandy ridges, and thirdly, by the donkey engine, a smoking, hissing new comer, which lifted the “monkey” (a ton block of steel attached to a steel wire rope), which was used to drive the long piles deep into the ground. These piles supported the bridge that was built for us.

Of course we became rather friendly with several of the families who had Fathers working on the drain – the Simpsons, the Aldens, the McLeans, and others whose names I forget. I remember calling at one camp on a number of occasions (before I got polio) and being regaled with a sumptuous repast of bread and fat and sugar! Surprising really, how it appeased the pangs of childish hunger!

Sometimes the language used by the shouting teamsters (usually when harnessing up in the morning) was not exactly that used by more polite society, but the distant singing of the women and girls as they performed their daily chores was more in keeping with the general spirit that pervaded the workings. While the drainage workers were living close by, Mother provided meals for several of the single workers, and the income from them supplemented our family's resources.

After the drain had been completed we noticed the strange early morning silence! No longer did the whistle summon the teams to work, no longer did we hear the shouts of the men as they harnessed the teams, nor did we hear the commands shouted as work began. Peace had returned to our tranquil world.

However we children found the drain and its numerous deep holes a place for fun and games, especially during the hot summers. Once, much to our horror we discovered a rather large snake was disporting itself in the same pool. We did not argue, or dispute who should retain possession!

Every winter thereafter great quantities of water violently rushed down that drain in a wild rampage, a somewhat awe inspiring sight we never tired of viewing. The rushing water, swirling and boiling beneath the bridge fascinated me immensely, and I stood mesmerized, watching the changing patterns on the surface of the water. A sudden call from my elders would break the spell!

When the sea at high tide reversed the flow the surging water was equally enthralling.

It was about this time that I, then aged six years, had the misfortune to suffer the onset of the poliomyelitis which incapacitated me so much that heavy work was mostly beyond my somewhat wasted muscles.

* * * * *



The back of the old chaff room, we lived in this while our new home was being built at Athelney



The front view of the chaff room 73 years after it was our temporary home



WOAKWINE CUTTING

Illustrates how important the drains were...and the arduous work involved.

Work commenced on this cutting in 1957.

DRAIN M is near here...closer to Beachport.

(Photos by JWR 2011 - Added to the book 2018)

WOAKWINE CUTTING INFORMATION

WOAKWINE CUTTING WAS CONSTRUCTED BY MR. M.B. Mc COURT IN ORDER TO DRAIN A LARGE SWAMP ON HIS PROPERTY. THE WORK WAS UNDERTAKEN BY 2 MEN, MR Mc COURT & MR Mc INTYRE & WAS COMPLETED IN UNDER 3 YEARS WITH THE AID OF A CATERPILLAR D7 TRACTOR A 7 TON DRAIN RIPPER, LETOURNEAU 8 - 11 YARD SCRAPER & EXPLOSIVES. THE CUTTING IS 1KM IN LENGTH, 28 - 34 MTS AT ITS DEEPEST POINT & ENTAILED THE REMOVAL OF 276,000 CUBIC METRES OF MATERIAL THE PROPERTY THAT WAS DRAINED CAN BE VIEWED FROM ANOTHER VANTAGE POINT 300 MTS NORTH.

CHAPTER FIVE

MORE ABOUT ATHELNEY

The Hawker

An Assyrian Hawker, Tony Michael, regularly called upon us, usually late in the afternoon, and a tinsmith, who made kitchen articles out of scrap tin plate, also came our way regularly, as did a traveling salesman for Griffith's tea. Usually we welcomed such visitors for they broke the monotony of our daily existence. Tony played the accordion very well, and the music he coaxed from his chosen instrument was much appreciated, for in that day and age a musical evening was a rare treat and had to be savoured to the full. But Tony always ate his dinner with a remarkable opening of the mouth and a great smacking of his generous lips. We children were fascinated by his great display of teeth and tongue, and we always protested loudly when sent to bed before the accordion concert ended for the night. Tony bought our rabbit skins and proudly showed Mum and all of us the remarkable collection of clothes, and nick-nacks he carried for sale. He could also mend clocks and watches, and we used his skill on several occasions.

The Tinsmith

An itinerant tinsmith knocked at our door once only and explained that for a small charge he would make kitchen utensils out of empty petrol tins. He was really expert at this and had a good set of tools.

This visitor who worked so skillfully to perfect his "tin dishes" owned a bicycle and would visit several places each day. A bag attached to the long horizontal member of the frame carried his tools and eating utensils – a plate, knife, fork and spoon – and his swag was safely strapped to his back. He probably enjoyed his wandering life as long as he found regular customers and the weather remained the best. Freezing cold and heavy rains would be a severe handicap to this entrepreneur!

While we watched he cut the tins open, inscribed circles on the shiny side of the requisite size and using "curling" tongs, evenly and neatly bent up the correct portion of the circle to form excellent and serviceable dishes suitable for baking jam tarts. The dishes varied in size. When he moved on we discovered Mother had purchased a collection of his handiwork, and she used them in her culinary preparations for a number of years. Each dish was, to our eyes, perfect and we boys were fascinated as his deft educated hands quickly completed each dish.

A Frightening Event

I have already mentioned old Robin. He was a remarkable horse in that he could be teased from a distance. One day while sitting at a window in our kitchen I waved my fingers at him and made a hissing noise, in order to attract his attention. Without

warning he laid back his ears, rushed forward, and poking his nose through a pane of glass, attempted somewhat viciously, to bite my hand. For some reason he also hated old men, but why we never found out. He had an old Syrian Hawker, named Michael, thoroughly scared, but had Michael known it all he had to do was seize a big stick and adopt an aggressive stance. Robin was easily scared.

One day Mother, having donned an old coat and a hat belonging to Dad, unthinkingly went walking near to where Robin was browsing on some green grass. Thinking she was an old man Robin attacked her fiercely, forcing her to the ground and biting her hands when she tried to protect herself. Lacerations were made to her face and arms, and she was severely bruised about the body. Her frantic screams for help were heard by my oldest sister, Eva, who rushed to her aid. The scene that greeted my sister was starkly terrifying. Mother lay on the ground and old Robin was kneeling on all fours, with Mother between his front legs, savagely attacking her. Quickly sizing up the situation Eva seized a stout cudgel which she wielded so lustily onto the maddened horse that he smartly heaved himself to his feet and galloped fearfully away. When Mother was helped to her feet she was a pitiable sight. Blood flowed freely from teeth wounds on her face, arms and hands. She was in a dreadfully disheveled and overwrought state. We younger children gaped and stared and wondered what had happened. We soon learned! Mother was hospitalized for some time but as the years passed all traces of her terrifying ordeal disappeared. My sister 'Rene was nearby at the time of the attack and she is of the opinion that old Robin may have realized his mistake just as Eva began to belabour him with her waddy. Maybe!

Robin was a somewhat heavy cart horse, as tall as a Clydesdale, but not as hefty or strong, particularly in the legs. However he was a fast trotter and a very useful farm horse, hence Dad's reason for keeping him on our farm. After the incident the authorities insisted that old Robin be moved from Athelney, and he was taken to a paddock near Kongorong, eighty kilometres away. It was there he died from the effects of eating darling pea, which contains a drug as habit forming and as dangerous as heroin is to humans. I have clear pictures in my mind of our local policeman assisting in the removal of Robin from our homestead block. The policeman was Mr. Archie Mclean, a mounted constable. He was on horseback, and having forgotten to bring a whip he raised his fists threateningly and shouted loudly as he guided the horse towards the bridge over Drain M and the exit gate from the farm.

That was the last time I saw Robin alive, but later I did see a skeleton of his remains draped over a fence surrounding an old haystack, roughly five and a half kilometres from Kongorong.

Church Services

I have pleasant memories of accompanying Mother to church services held in a shelter shed a short distance from the Woakwine Cutting. The Methodist minister arrived on a motor cycle, somewhat dusty, but nevertheless most welcome for all that, and was greeted by the surprisingly large congregation waiting for him. I can still hear the enthusiastic singing of "Shall We Gather at the River". After the service Mother and I visited a Mr. and Mrs. Alden with whom we were very friendly. Mr. Alden was a qualified steam engineer and was in charge of one of the big steam shovels. Near their tent were other tents, and primitive fences made of Yacca sticks enclosed embryo gardens around some of them, a pitiful attempt to add a touch of home to their rather drab and cramped quarters. Very little shelter was available

and the icy winds of the Southern Ocean, only six kilometres away, must have made conditions very unpleasant during the bitter winters often experienced in that region.

Because the land level varies, being several metres high on the inland side, water seeped under the ranges and formed small mound springs on the seaward side, and several of these springs provided permanent sources of excellent drinking water.

Strange Biscuit Shapes

Another phenomenon, thousands of big, round limestone biscuit shapes that covered large areas of swampy ground, puzzled us as to their origin. I still do not know what nucleus is necessary to initiate the process of their growth for they varied in size from very small and thin to quite large twenty centimetre biscuits nearly three centimetres thick. We skimmed the smaller ones across whatever water surface happened to be handy. We developed a special throwing technique, and competed to see who could produce the most hops. Great fun, until the good right arm tired!

One of nature's mysteries, the biscuit shapes increased in size over the thousands of years since Athelney was raised above sea level. Many thousands were loaded on a heavy dray, carted to where road repairs were needed and became road metal. They had been sold to the District Council of Beachport. Whether any remain in sites I do not know for sixty-five years have gone by since I last walked those ancient swampy flats. How old were the largest biscuits? I do not know. But, like a farmer guessing the weight of a pig, I too can only guess, but the second youngest geological age, the Pleistocene, started probably about one million years ago so the biscuits could be, I believe, at least 100,000 years old.

Shells

Ancient sea shells, probably older even than the biscuits, are found in all the sand ridge areas of Athelney. They vary in size and shape but they are so old that the distinguishing colours faded many thousands of years ago. Generally the size varies from the tiniest twelve millimetre long shells in their untold thousands to fairly large ones, much rarer, about five centimetres long and equally fat. I think it would be fair to place them in the Miocene era, or even more ancient than that. Some oil bores near Kongorong penetrated beds of limestone in excess of three hundred metres, and it was of the coralline variety, probably full of shell grit. In the gullies between the ridges the shells were almost on the surface. The larger shells had an occupant that manufactured a hard, shiny compact disc from limestone it extracted from sea water. It then used it as a sealed safety door that excluded all predators. As the trap door spider does even today in South Australia.

We named the twelve millimetre across discs, "counters" for that was the only use we found for them. Boyhood days are full of practical interests and we had little interest in shells of a bygone age, hence we neither collected a representative sample, nor made any endeavour to learn of their age. I suppose much history of ancient times still lies buried beneath those sand covered relics. As in the ancient burial grounds of man, where archeologists search persistently and hopefully for artifacts which have a story to tell.

Athelney's Trees

Seldom did an Athelney tree find the needful fertility to exceed a height of eight to nine metres, hence commercial timber did not exist, but many trees were of a size suitable for fencing purposes and ti-trees were especially prized for the posts gave many years of sturdy strength when placed in a line of fencing. However she-oaks, wattles and boxwood were generally judged to be useless for such purposes. However she-oak when used for constructions necessarily placed in sea-water did last for many years. As a boy I remember seeing about twenty she-oak posts doing their job outlining a safe place to swim, and that could be the reason for the scarcity of good solid straight she-oaks near the port.

Ti-trees grow very slowly and the oldest and largest could be anything up to a thousand years old.

Shrubs

Many shrub-like plants, dwarf ti-tree, dwarf acacia, native heath graced our surroundings. Most had a tendency to produce an annual display of flowers, and this complemented the lovely display of the massed flowers on the wattle, ti-tree and blackwood trees. Swarms of bees each in search of a new home, were frequent visitors, and on odd occasions a swarm would adopt a strange place to set up a home.

Dad used a specialised machine (or cart) that would excavate a furrow, lay baits in the furrow each of the right size and each about fourteen centimetres distant from the last laid, as a horse, directed by Dad, pulled the cart along.

The bait material, bran, pollard, phosphorous, and an oil that attracted rabbits all mixed together, was carried in a special container as part of its mechanics, and especially constituted to trick the swarming rabbits was fractionally successful only. One swarm of bees actually occupied the upright container that was used to hold the poisoned mixture of bran, pollard, and phosphorous. Strangely they were unharmed, even though some of the very dry mixture still stuck to the sides.

Small Creatures

Bull ants and hopping ants are the stingers. Bull ants, about two centimetres long were black and red in colour. They would sting if cornered but seldom bothered us. They are known as "inchmen" in Western Australia, and they are scavengers that prefer to live in sandy areas.

Hopping ants are aggressive and they look for trouble! They will quickly spread out by a hopping movement seeking "enemies" near their nest. They will climb anything that moves and viciously sting if impeded in any way. Very often itchy and painful swelling is the result.

Fat red ants never hurt anyone, and sugar ants were well named as they carried a pouch of sweetness much loved by the aborigine.

The thin red ant lived in big colonies and apparently liked devouring fat grubs, bits of meat, flying insects and such like. They are known to enter houses, but rarely do. They do not bite using their mandibles, or sting, and we thought of them as "meat" ants. Full of energy they raced backwards and forwards, as busy as could be.

The black ants were about three millimeters long. These ants are found most anywhere but in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia they are fast being

driven out by a similar variety from foreign parts, the Argentine ant! This ant is a persistent intruder into homes, but can be distinguished from the native Australians by rubbing it between your fingers. You will quickly realize it has no acid smell! Then attack the intruders vigorously until your persistence teaches them to avoid your kitchen.

The last is a very tiny brown ant which is usually present in large numbers but does not ever become a household pest.

We loved the pretty lady birds that preyed on the aphids or greenfly, and we caught the tiny creatures and watched them spread their wings and fly freely away. We were careful not to harm them. Dragon flies too, long slender wings fluttering in their erratic movements through the air searched flowers for nectar to satisfy hunger and thirst.

Other tiny creatures present include fascinating brightly coloured wasps and beetles, most of them night fliers attracted by the light, and a variety of moths, also night fliers and pale in colour, similar to most flowers that open at night. One big brown moth sometimes paid us a visit but he was rather rare.

One evening a square black beetle, wings buzzing and sounding like an aeroplane, or noisy car engine, flopped on to our table and crawled towards the light. I held it in my closed fist and felt the ticklish sensation as the beetle used its unusual strength to escape from its incarceration in such a small space.

Another, when placed on its back used a kind of contortion trick to release a "spring" like quick flash in the air, and it always landed on its feet, the whole six of them.

Certain brown beetles about two centimetres long, hunted for carrion and if the body was of their usual diet, and the earth on which it lay was of a kind easily removed by vigorous digging, by daylight next morning even a creature the size of a rabbit would be completely covered, by excavating a hole beneath the rabbit and covering it with soil. Such a stupendous exercise depended upon the number of beetles drawn in by the smell of the dead carcase.

Carrion so buried became the home and nursery of the hard working beetles until the larder was entirely consumed.

Weevils that destroyed skins, hides and pelts were always with us and we regularly sorted our store of hides and destroyed the weevils if we found a few. Another beetle often found its way into the tanks that stood beside our windmills. It was the water beetle, that also inhabited our wells. It was of a blackish colouring and was a great swimmer.

Birds of Many Breeds

As Athelney was the home of many trees and various nesting sites were readily available, bird life flourished, and, as could be expected feral cats, that prey on birds, were also present: vicious angry hating creatures that posed a problem when caught by one of our rabbit traps.

Swallows, by building mud nests, raised families under our bridge: magpies, Murray magpies, (peewees) and Willy Wagtails often nested in the same tree. The three were coloured black and white, and I often wondered whether the colouring had anything to do with the co-habitation. Starlings liked to nest in hollow trees, sparrows built nests in any suitable tree, as did silver eyes, pigeons (native bronze wings).

The hawks, a small sparrow hawk, medium sized swamp hawk and the lordly and much maligned eagle were constant visitors during my youth – but I'm not so sure if they are not like the Boandik tribe, which owned territory from Kingston to the Victorian border, and have vanished forever!

Laughing Jacks entertained occasionally, and most water-loving birds, ducks of most breeds, blue crane, spoonbills, swans, muss-duck, divers, shags, and swans all found Drain M and nearby water storages ideal feeding grounds for hungry birds. Water hens, with size and colouring similar to Bantam hens, frequented patches of salt water ti-trees that grew near water, but again, like so many of our small fry, I sadly believe they have all but disappeared forever. Sad, sad, is the day!

The straw-necked ibis, a most useful bird, mentioned in ancient writings and, like their ancient forebears, great survivors, also frequented Athelney's broad acres. I have never known of any person who deliberately shot these friends of the land-owning class, for they were great hunters of pasture grubs that destroyed the roots of grasses, thus causing much loss of pasture. Usually these birds worked in flocks of fifty to one hundred and they had a long curved beak especially adapted for grub hunting

The native companion, though not actually on Athelney acres could clearly be heard in the distance. Others were parrots, interstate visitors which rarely visited us, black cockatoos, raucous screechers with red underwings, that were great nut eaters, and the long fliers, Jack snipes, and swifts that spent part of each year in southern Australia, including Athelney. These returned to Siberia for the northern summer.

Snakes

Australia, and specifically the very swampy areas of Athelney, where frogs teemed, providing great food for snakes, were not forgotten when snakes were distributed throughout the world and allowed to roam freely. Venomous varieties predominated. They included dangerous species such as tiger, black, brown, and copperhead. The whip snake, around a third of a meter long was a non-venomous variety, known as a "carpet" snake because of its patterned skin. I think this snake is also known as a "grass" snake. Only the "carpet" snake would venture inside, searching for food. Another inhabitant, which certainly had all the characteristics and appearance of being a snake was a non-venomous lizard which had vestiges of two legs on its underside. This developed like a snake for its own protection. Cunning, but of course it paid a terrible penalty when "man" came along and killed all snake-like creatures.

Other lizards claiming a home in Athelney included the slow, armoured, sleepy lizard (a skink), the frill necked lizard, a fast runner, the blue tongue which had a long tail, and a tiny skink that shed its tail if attacked plus several other small lizards without names.

Contrary to widespread belief none of these lizards are venomous being entirely without fangs, hence unable to produce and use poisons. If treated gently they are easily handled and are not vicious in any way.

Six Hundred and Forty Acres to Play

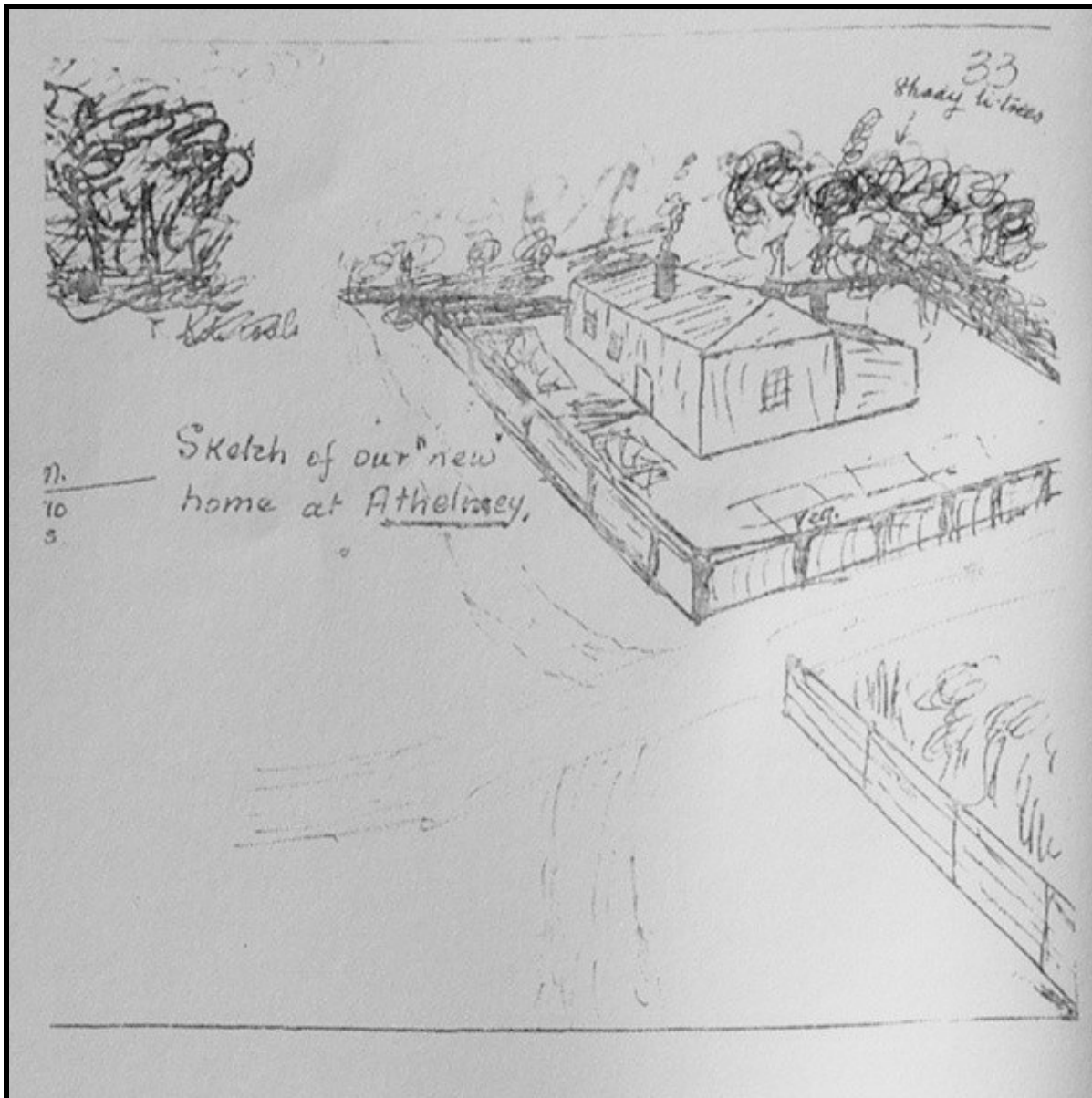
Was living at Athelney ever boring? No! I cannot recall even once when I could not find some occupation that would please me! Our playground covered six hundred and forty acres and our activities included childish games with my older sisters, bird nesting for eggs, bird watching, playing Cowboys and Indians, paddling and bathing in Drain M, making toy windmills, toy propellers, bows and arrows, native throwing sticks (wommeras), and toy whistles. We also set traps, hoping to catch a few rabbits and we were always on the look out for native animals for observation purposes.

Always, as alternative activities, were the usual household chores, such as preparing dinner for our pigs – cooked dried rabbits and potatoes – and watering flowers and vegetables in hot weather. Then there were away from home trips to attend to sheep in distant paddocks, where sometimes windmills ceased to function, and animals, like humans, could not survive long without the water these windmills provided.

Schooling often entailed long walks. This occurred when a vehicle was unroadworthy, or a horse was needed elsewhere. The distance walked each day would be equal to ten miles so that soon after the evening meal the younger children were ready for bed!

Generally we lived a full life, as healthy children usually do.

* * * * *



CHAPTER SIX

BEACHPORT FUN

Christmas Holidays

Boxing day, the twenty-sixth of December, always raised a feeling of coming excitement, for on that day trainloads of happy and expectant picnickers arrived in Beachport and we always joined the happy throngs, carrying our picnic baskets and anticipating a tasty repast. Sometimes picnic races were held but always the many hours at the beach were enjoyed by the splashing and frolicking holiday makers. The more adventurous folk took long walks to the Back, Ocean Beach, or to the Pool of Siloam, a salt water swimming lake about seven times saltier than the sea. But I think a more exciting day was enjoyed by those who visited Beachport on New Year's Day, for then an added attraction was the Annual Regatta of swimming, diving, boating, and riding the greasy pole, among other delights.. We found the antics of the contestants, trying to retain their balance, on the well greased pole, a difficult and almost impossible task. It was all rather hilarious, and we expressed our amusement by many a loud laugh. Each contestant was armed with a pillow-like weapon with which he manfully buffeted his opponent, endeavouring to force him into the water below. And each battler rapidly accumulated a generous coating of the best axle grease, thus making the task of remaining "aboard" extremely difficult. To conquer the pole was felt a mammoth task indeed, but occasionally odd ones managed to do so.

The usual train loads of picnickers arrived, and again we had our picnic baskets with us as we joined the happy excursionists headed for the recreation areas. Sometimes a brass band was hired by the town and from most parts of the town their musical efforts were clearly audible. Usually they stationed themselves in a strategic position in front of the Harbour Master's residence. When the opportunity offered I positioned myself close by and watched and listened. One friendly musician when questioned about the difficulties that might be encountered in the reading of the music sheets said, "*No, it is quite easy! See, those notes are A,B, and C.*" And he pointed to a group of three on the staff or stave. We were extremely interested but certainly no wiser.

Beachport Fun (1917-18)

On special days different amusements were provided for the entertainment of children. One such amusement cost three pence per head. A gentleman living in the town of Beachport owned one of the four cars in the town. The hood had been lost, the gears ground horribly, it leaked water, it smoked, its seats were hard and its maximum speed was in the vicinity of thirty-two kilometres an hour. But it was a fascinating vehicle and every kid in the town gloried in being a passenger in it, even though the trip covered a distance of about six kilometres only. All its strange sounds made it doubly attractive and we sat up proudly and pitied those who were

not able to partake of such a glorious ride. I know for I had several such thrilling and satisfying rides in that monstrously exciting and noisy vehicle. Who was its owner? I do not know – for I have long since forgotten!

Sometimes, on other than special days, we were able to hitch a ride in passing cars, but the sensation was never the same as those other smoky, noisy, bumpy, and exhilarating rides that I remember so well. We missed the grinding gears, the noisy differential, the smoky exhaust, the backfiring, and the bumpy nature of the ride. Such a ride was an experience, an adventure, a risk taken, not just a ride in any car that might come along. And did we revel in that wonderful experience!

At the end of the day, although very weary indeed, and ready for home, I think all the visitors would agree that a holiday in Beachport was well worth the effort. We were always up early and sometimes walked toward the town hoping that a friendly motorist would offer us a ride. Exciting times, but alas, gone forever. The railway has long since disappeared and the railway station, with its warning bell is now the club house of the local lawn bowling club.

Beachport's unique swimming venue, the Pool of Siloam, the small salt lake mentioned earlier, is probably seven times saltier than the sea, in which it is impossible to sink. Many a time our teacher, a Mr. P. Hart, led us to the lake where swimming lessons were conducted. The evidence implies that I was a poor learner for I actually learned to swim a few years later (1920) in the Valley Lake, Mt. Gambier, when I unknowingly stepped into very deep water and consequently was forced to sink or swim. I swam!

During the period of the year when the harbour at Beachport was a comparatively safe anchorage, and ships could be safely moored to the jetty, Beachport was often a busy port. Train loads of barley from Tantanoola and Millicent soon filled all storage space, and I have seen as many as five ships in the limited anchorage waiting their turn to be loaded down to the plimsoll line. Every able-bodied man who was willing was co-opted into the lumping gangs and soon a busy little steam engine was hard at work hauling lines of loaded trucks down the jetty to the waiting ship. Sometimes horses were used to haul the trucks; probably because the little engine had broken down or the driver was ill. Sometimes too, horses panicked and I know of one that fell off the jetty and was drowned. Three ships, frequent visitors that I remember, were the Kintore, the Corio (lost finally near Cape Banks), and the Eumerella. Rather infrequently a collier would arrive from Newcastle, New South Wales, and I recall that on one occasion Dad volunteered to assist in the unloading of the coal. Labour was in very short supply at the time. He used to arrive home covered with very black coal dust, for no washing facilities were made available either by the ship or its owners or by the town. Another visiting ship was the Governor Musgrave, a lighthouse tender, which carried supplies for the local lighthouse that had been built on Penguin Island. The lighthouse mechanism was probably serviced at the same time. Locally owned fishing boats also used the harbour and jetty. A low part of the jetty, the fisherman's landing, was used by them.

The Harbour Master

A Mr. Captain Scully was the harbour master, a short stout man who had a rather commanding personality. I remember that he acted as a judge in a mock court at a school fete, and a severe and realistic judge he was too. About ten metres in front of the harbour master's residence a substantial flag pole was erected. Whether

ships entered the harbour by means of the flags I do not know, but flags often fluttered in the breeze.

On very rare occasions an old fashioned sailing ship of the ketch type honoured the town with a visit. I remember one being beached by a fierce gale within the harbour. A tug from Adelaide hauled her afloat, and away she sailed.

A vessel sailing from Tasmania to Port Adelaide was caught in a fierce gale and was driven back from near Kangaroo Island to the rocky coast near South End and wrecked on that most inhospitable coast. Her load of blackwood planks littered the shore for kilometres.

A Great Haul of Fish

About the year 1916 a group of Beachport fishermen were dragnet fishing along the beach within the vicinity of the town. After a moderate haul they placed the net in position again hoping for a richer reward for their efforts. And richer it was, too! Amazingly so!

To the astonishment of all, the bulging net was so heavy that extra help was needed to drag the net to the shore. What a sight for their wondering eyes!

Thousands of fish, a mountainous heap, soon adorned that sandy beach. Cartloads were taken to distant towns and farmhouses and every home in Beachport had its store of fish, and yet hundreds of them were left on the beach waiting to be claimed.

The morning after, when we arrived at school, Mr Larwood, the head teacher, told us about the fish. As we were a large family, he knew that the fish would be a welcome addition to our food supply. Two of the older children were provided with buckets and leave was granted so that they might collect some fish before they became stale. The four-gallon buckets were soon filled to capacity, and then began the long four-mile trudge homeward, with the buckets of fish swinging on a long pole between the two children.

Hours later after many, many rest periods, they arrived home. An immensely surprised Mother found herself confronted by a load of fish that surpassed even her experience. A proportion was consumed that same evening and some the next morning. The remainder was salted and dried for future use.

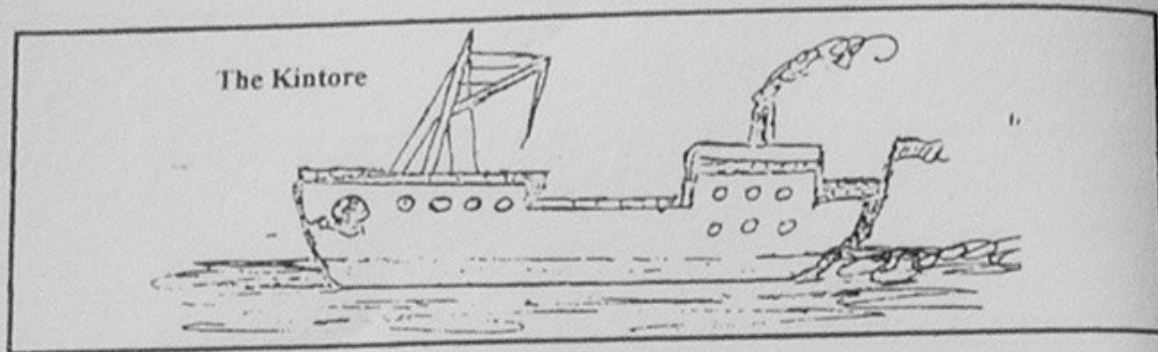
As Mother was due to enter a nursing home almost immediately (a new baby was imminent) the fish helped with the food supply while she was absent.

The fish were a variety of mackerel seldom seen in South Australian waters, and maybe the "school" was fleeing from sharks when they invaded the shallow waters of Rivoli Bay.

A Rare Occurrence

The summer of 1921 saw the appearance (and subsequent death) of a large tropical turtle on the ocean beach near Beachport. When I observed the mortal remains of the large creature, decay was much in evidence. On the lee side the effluvia was positively overpowering. To view the poor visitor it was necessary to walk several kilometres up-wind to a point well beyond the site of the tragedy.

* * * * *



Mr Burchell gave us a ride in his battered old car. We sat up in the back seat, straight and proud. We just adored riding in a car, any old car!

CHAPTER SEVEN

ANIMAL STORIES

The purchase of animals, unless certified in perfect health, always meant that some risk is involved. One day in Mt Gambier I drew Dad's attention to a horse that was for sale. Dad purchased the horse, which to all appearances was in good health. However, a week later it was dead, apparently from some internal complaint, such as cancer in the stomach.

Another time I was crossing the cattle paddock at Clay Wells and I came upon the skeleton of a dead horse. Quite by accident I disturbed some of the dry stomach contents, and there I found a short four inch rasp. Somehow the animal must have swallowed it, and by doing so caused its own death.

Horse Disease - Strangles

For this horse disease the name strangles is particularly appropriate for it actually "strangles" its victims in a peculiar and horrible way. It is an infectious equine disease which in its later stages produces a terrible ulcer in the victim's throat, and both drinking and eating is inhibited and death invariably follows. One of our ponies became infected and Dad tried for weeks to save the valuable animal, but the disease won. One day I saw a horse, similarly infected, standing in water up to his knees. Now the terrible and cruel nature of "strangles" was palpably manifest, for the poor stricken creature trying desperately to alleviate its dreadful thirst found that the water poured out of its nostrils and not one drop passed the obstruction in its throat. I was appalled, and the horror of that poor dumb creature's predicament lives in my mind to this day, sixty years later!

What became of the poor creature, or more appropriately where it died, I do not know, for by the next day it had apparently moved out of the district.

Sheep Disasters

Disasters just had to be faced and then overcome! About the year 1910 a terrible bushfire swept through sections of the Clay Wells property and caused the death of about eleven hundred of Dad's sheep. It was a loss that Dad could ill afford and it set him back financially a number of years. At the time he was struggling to pay off land mortgages incurred when he began life as a sheep farmer.

On another occasion, in the late twenties, Dad bought a flock of fine looking northern sheep apparently in excellent condition but soon after purchase they perished by the hundred from a hidden disease which could not be detected by external examination. Another severe trial was the havoc caused among farm stock by the disastrous 1914 drought when lack of feed caused the demise, by starvation, of many cattle and sheep.

Rabbit Plague

I wish I had photographs of the hundreds of pairs of rabbits draped over a fence, and all caught in one night. Such pictures would give a clear indication of the teeming rabbit population during the first half of the twentieth century. Happily such nightmarish days are passed.

The explosion of the rabbit plague was a disaster of gigantic proportions, which caused mammoth losses and forced the farming community to fight back by employing trappers, spreading poisonous baits using a special vehicle and by placing wire netting on all fences. All these methods were more or less expensive, and although the skins and the carcasses could be sold, the money so obtained could not compensate for the loss of the carrying capacity of the land and the costs of the battle against the teeming pest. It was not until the rabbit disease, myxomatosis that the rabbit plague was for a time conquered. After forty years of freedom from the pests there are signs that rabbits may be on the increase again. Eternal vigilance will be needed to keep the pest in check.

An Observation Made by my Grandfather

"When in England I was fined for poaching and killing rabbits. Now, I have received notice from the local council that I'll be fined if I don't kill rabbits. How circumstances alter cases!" (c. 1920)

Bluey, the Fast Trotter

Bluey was a fine upstanding grey horse, medium heavy in weight, but a fast trotter. He was a good cart horse. About the year 1917, a particularly wet year, Dad and I spent a number of days at Clay Wells and I was given the task of driving the sixteen kilometres home to deliver fourteen pairs of rabbits and a side of mutton, and to bring back necessary supplies. Either of two routes could be negotiated, but one was much more difficult than the other, especially in the depths of winter when much of the land was a quagmire of mud and water and the unmade roads almost impassible. This day, perversely, I chose the more difficult route, and after negotiating three kilometres of comparatively dry land Bluey hesitated then sat down while hauling the cart across a stretch of shallow water that lay athwart the lane. Because I was unable to persuade him even to make the attempt to regain his feet I unfastened all the harness and removed it and left him sitting there in his lonely, very wet and cold posture. I walked about three kilometres back to Clay Wells where I caught a draught horse, a Drysdale, and rode him away in search of Dad. When I explained the position Dad shepherded the sheep back three kilometres to a safe lane where he left them and then hurried to our farm, Clay Wells. Here he harnessed two horses (collars, hames, chains, swingle, and drag chain) and proceeded to where I had left Bluey calmly sitting in the water, soaking his drowned posterior. Much to my astonishment he was sitting exactly where I had left him, in the cold watery seat that had lasted at least three to four. hours, but I think closer to four. Dad fastened the drag chain around Bluey's front legs and the team soon hauled him to firm ground. Immediately the old reprobate regained his feet and calmly began nibbling the luscious green herbage. After a four hour "sit" in such conditions I imagined he would be too cold and stiff to move, but I opine he was a tough old boy.

The puzzle! Why did the cunning old horse sit down and stay there for so long? The answer! I think some experience, perhaps when he was a foal, connected with water made Bluey extremely scared of sinking into mud.

Prince, the Stallion

Prince was a stallion, strong and powerful, and ever ready and willing to show his determination, and his sense of humour. One day my task was to drive into Beachport and bring home a load of bagged chaff. The fun began when we reached a tee junction, or intersection, where the Fumer Road joined the Beachport Road Highway. Here, close together, stood two sign posts, one indicating direction and the other advertising the Pool of Siloam.

Prince, and I'm sure he had a wicked gleam in his eyes, clamped his teeth on the bit and refused to take the corner. Showing superb judgment and generating a furious trot, he pulled the cart exactly between the two sign posts with but centimetres to spare on each side. As bad luck would have it the offside body of the cart caught the corner of the larger sign advertising the "Pool" and tore it down. It lay in moot protest on the grassy turf.

Not wishing to try conclusions with a strong fence directly to the fore Prince veered to the left, bounced the cart, with me in it, rather violently over about six chains of cutting grass tussocks, and foot high bumps, which was very uncomfortable for the driver, and then veered back onto the road because a rather deep drain lay ahead. He lowered his head submissively, negotiated a bridge and then trotted calmly onwards as though nothing had happened. He had broken the monotony of the drive and subjected me to some bruising at the same time. I know he must have chuckled inwardly at my discomfort.

A few days later I listened very quietly while the local district clerk, Mr. E. Attiwell, complained bitterly to Dad of irresponsible citizens that destroyed public property by dislodging notice boards. I, much, much later told of how the sign board had been damaged but by then we had moved to another district, Kongorong, and I was attending the high school in Mt Gambier.

Should you ever be about six kilometres from Beachport you'll see the road junction I have mentioned, and the notice board advertising the Pool of Siloam. However, I think it unlikely the very same notice board is still there, after a lapse of about sixty years.

Fish Galore

Previously I mentioned some effects the outlet had on the beach, but there was another of some importance as well. High tides, higher than usual, sometimes reversed the flow of water and when this happened sea creatures as well as seawater entered Lake George. Several years passed before an accidental discovery disclosed that sea fish had acclimatized themselves to the fresh lake water and had flourished exceedingly. Lake fishing became quite popular and the size of the fish astounded the locals. Jack Salmon caught in Lake George were often half a metre in length. Attempts were made to get the sole rights to fish the lake as certain folk recognized the richness of the potential catch. However, common sense prevailed.

The fish entered Lake George via Drain M and thereby hangs a tale. One day

Henry and I decided on a change of diet. The time was several years after Dad had shifted his place of residence to Kongorong, about seventy kilometres away, and we had been fencing off the new lane, mentioned elsewhere, while we lived in the deserted house at Athelney. This is how we changed our diet. Having stretched a length of netting across Drain M, and having fastened it securely to the bridge piles, we dragged a somewhat longer piece along the drain at right angles to its flow. We did this over a considerable distance, each holding an end, and being careful to keep the netting in an upright position, thus trapping many fish between the two lengths of netting. Gradually the yard was decreasing in size until it covered about three square yards, we entered the yard and using our bare hands, which received numerous small cuts by contacting the sharp fins, we dexterously snared and tossed about forty fish onto the back of the drain. Each was roughly about a foot long, plump and succulent, and quite good eating too. We attempted to smoke cure some of them but we were only partially successful.

Emu Feathers

On rare occasions we, or our dogs, captured an emu. Attention to war news established the fact in our minds (Jack, Bob, and I) that our light horse soldiers wore a bunch of such feathers on their hats. Somehow our subsequent penchant for feather adornment annoyed our brother Henry and I believe his dislike of our action made us more determined to indulge in our fancy to wear the feathers.

Emu feathers, unlike all others I have seen, are all grey, very fine, very much alike and usually pointed downwards. Of course we had seen several "light horse-men" whose hats were adorned by the feathers, because men from Beachport had joined the Light Horse regiments in the first Australian Imperial Forces.

Wombats (c. 1912-25)

In certain special places a land buildup takes place and the sea retreats, leaving behind ridges of consolidated sand dunes. This phenomenon happened where the Old Place was situated, and the long ridges provided ideal burrowing ground for hundreds of wombats that competed with the sheep, cattle and rabbits for the available herbage. For the wombats water was no problem, for they burrowed deep into the gullies in selected spots, where the presence of water near the surface was somehow known to them. Generally the whole block covered an underground aquifer that provided an unfailing water supply. However I suspect the water table has lowered significantly during the last thirty years.

Sadly the wombats, including yellow examples, have all disappeared, victims of a poisoning campaign to make the carrying capacity of the land economically more viable. The wombats were very clever and efficient burrowers, and in the sandy soil could dig at an astonishing rate, especially if they considered themselves cornered or in danger. What a relief it is to know the conservationists have, by their efforts, ensured that certain colonies of wombats, somewhat lovable creatures, have been preserved for posterity.

Robin Strikes Again

Sir Reginald Ansett's interests were wide and one of his special interests concerned race horses of which he owned several. Now, an interesting fact is that Les Chant, our brother, worked in that august gentleman's racing stables for a short

period.

One day a gentleman by name of Tony Crow, visited Athelney – for what reason I do not remember, but he was chased by “old Robin”, a horse mentioned in these memoirs in several places.

Robin was a handsome, up-standing, strong and staunch horse and preferred, I believe, to be in close association with folk he knew and trusted. Consequently he seldom wandered far from our homestead, and his big, bay body could usually be seen if one cared to look about the farm, but as I’ve observed before, he hated strangers and especially old men.

Evidently Robin noticed Tony was rather old, and a stranger as well! Robin attacked and, coat tails flying and legs and arms moving in unison, Tony developed a rare turn of speed, and ever and anon his wild, wide open, frightened eyes glanced behind hoping to find he was outdistancing the pursuing ferocious looking horse!

Just as all seemed lost, Tony reached safety and roared, *“Keep that crazy horse away from me!”*

To the watchers, who knew how to handle Robin, the episode was one for loud laughter, but for the object of Robin’s anger, who knows! We knew Robin disliked being thrashed, even mildly, and all Tony needed to do was to pick up the handiest heavy waddy (stick) and threaten the horse with as much anger and vigour as possible. Robin would have turned tail immediately and galloped away.

Trained – Untrained Horses

One day, during the time I was away at high school, Dad asked two of the boys, Jack and Bob, both younger than I, to muster the unbroken horses and to yard them. This was done but only after some difficulty for patches of thick scrub and elongated masses of trees made it easy for the “wild horses” to dodge and twist and turn and cunningly make use of every advantage.

Having been yarded the animals showed remarkable quiescence and the buyer examining the horses, which were mostly ponies, said, *“These are the quietest unbroken ponies I have ever seen! Remarkable!”* Dad mumbled something about how he couldn’t believe his own eyes. And thereby hangs a tale.

Jack and Bob, assisted by Bob Wilson and his brother and friends and neighbours had taken the ponies into Wilson’s paddock where there was a very acute angled corner. Here the ponies had been caught one by one and ridden by each of the boys in turn. I believe the same procedure had been adopted on several occasions and the ponies naturally had become somewhat familiar with the proceedings when handled by humans.

One can easily imagine the vociferous yells, the encouragement for good riding and the derisive jeers should one of the boys lose his seat and find himself on the ground.

Necessarily, I must add, that the truth of the matter was never carried to Dad’s ears and as a puzzled owner he remained a little proud of his ability to breed such unusually quiet ponies.

Adventure and Discipline

Other adventurous pursuits included fox-hunting (using grey hounds) kangaroo hunts, rounding up partly wild cattle, and wild gallops on excited horses!

It was a free and easy life with some minor hardships, but in general we led a healthy existence. Dad never said much or did much in the way of discipline, but we knew instinctively that to go contrary to his wishes was just asking for trouble. Here corporal punishment was a rare thing indeed and laughter rather than tears was the general rule. Once only do I remember a specific chastisement, and that was for a deliberate disobedience on my part, and well deserved, and the strap about my legs a couple of times taught me once again that when the strong command obedience is best, especially when the commander is your own Father, and a man you know to be scrupulously fair.

Clever Foxes

Sometimes foxes become heavily infested with fleas and I have been led to believe they use an ingenious method to rid themselves of the pests. Various objects, such as thorns and barbed wire fences, have a tendency to pull small tufts of wool from passing sheep and a fox will gather these tufts and fashion a rough ball from them. Holding this ball in its mouth it hurries to the nearest water hole and backs very slowly in until only the tip of its nose is showing. The fleas all gather on the ball of wool and the clever fox flips the wool into the water, thus ridding itself, for a time at least, of all its body vermin!

* * * * *



These rabbits were shot in only a few hours when rabbits were in plague proportions

CHAPTER EIGHT

SCHOOL DAYS

“Fun, Fun, Fun”

*Running and jumping and singing a song
For living is fun and the days not too long
And acting and working and thinking and planning
And swimming and learning and reading and scanning
And loving and sewing, collecting and worrying
And gathering a family, and learning life's secrets
And knowing and believing and worshipping sincerely
For God's in his heaven, we know his promises clearly.*

Walking Ability

If practice makes perfect and experts agree it should, we ought to have developed remarkable walking ability, for the Chant children sure spent many, many hours traipsing at least fourteen kilometres a day in an endeavour to obtain an elementary education.

However, it was not all a monotonous tramp, tramp, tramp along the king's highway, for on rare occasions we hitched a ride with passing motorists. Moreover, during the summer months a variation of routes was open to us. The first was a direct crossing of the dry southern section of Lake George, and the good, flat, hard packed sands, ideal for hikers, were much appreciated. A sleepy, cunning old fox almost collided with Jack, Bob, and I one morning and his surprise was so great that he careered away in a desperate gallop until he reached the security of the distant scrubby shoreline. But the lake crossing had one disadvantage: shelter was totally absent. One morning Jack, Bob and I were caught in a very heavy rain storm and we were thoroughly drenched. Upon arrival at school our teacher, Mr. Larwood, suggested we find somewhere to dry off. We did! A glorious day of adventure, of idle periods, of aimless wandering and fun and games followed. We made good use of our marvellous day of freedom and our activities soon dried our clothes, for a warm day had followed the morning showers. Late in the afternoon we arrived home, having hitched a ride with the local drainage engineer, a Mr. Burchell. We were hungry and tired and ready for an early night. Mum was flabbergasted and asked how we spent all those hours on the road home! We of course had no idea!

The second alternative included a walk along the beach for about a kilometer and a half. We searched for cowrie shells, paddling in the water and throwing stones back into the sea was fun indeed. Sometimes we followed the railway which paralleled the beach. We divided into pairs, clasped left and right hands, and each pair tried to outdo the other in the distance they were able to stay on the rails. It took intense concentration for the rails were rather narrow.

One morning when on the beach I attempted a kind of kangaroo leap over one of the exposed groynes (built to prevent erosion). Unfortunately the inside of my right knee contacted a protruding bolt with agonizing results. By late afternoon I could hardly walk. I called upon a Mr. Turner, a railway employee who had some reputation as a first aid man, and he massaged a copious amount of eucalyptus oil into my swollen joint. It certainly helped to ease the soreness. I'm not sure but I believe it was on that occasion I borrowed a bicycle to facilitate my return home. Somehow I had learned to ride a bicycle but I cannot recall how or when.

Winter posed its own problems to the intrepid scholars' hike to school. Flooding of short cuts meant more lagging steps and to arrive at school on time meant leaving home before, or just after, sunrise. We were capable boys, and each morning we prepared our own breakfasts and lunches. First we had to light the fire, then boil the kettle and cook some oatmeal porridge. Always we made sure Mum had a "cuppa" before we resolutely hurried off to school.

We often walked bare foot, and on mornings when frost covered the ground our feet really got chilled, but I think the rain bothered us more than the icy ground.

When I was a year or two younger and my older sisters were attending school as well we used a pony and sulky to get to school. Dad had purchased a town acre across the road from the school and there we left the pony and sulky. One pony had a disturbing and awkward habit. He leaped forward when being released from the vehicle, any vehicle. One morning I was one of the two allotted the task of unhitching the traces, which had to be done in a flash! Speed of action was not one of my virtues. I missed and the sulky wheel passed over my shoulders! Luckily my only hurt was a skinned cheek, but had I fallen face upwards my injuries could have been fatal.

Later the same pony had his shoulder injured and a pronounced limp developed. He stumbled easily, and when he did so with me on his back I shot over his head! Nothing remarkable about that, you might say. Quite so. But when he placed his hoof on my chest as he was regaining his feet he immediately changed weight to the other hoof and saved me from a possible crushed chest. I cannot forget that, and I wonder at his perspicacity in realizing that I was the one in danger. After years of faithful service he lived his old age in retirement, and died a venerable and well loved friend.

The Influence of Older Sisters

Driving to school by gig and pony was always somewhat of an adventure. My older sisters loved to demonstrate how mature they were as compared to us callow youngsters of seven years or more. They just adored wearing flimsy veils attached to their hats and sheltering their faces, that is, while the delicate fabric lasted. We young stars thought them rather silly but they gloried in their grown-up appearance and sniffed in disdain. Funny, but I haven't seen a veil in fifty years! How fashions come and go!

Our brother Henry was lucky! He only had one sister older than himself, and able to exert a modicum of her authority over him. We much younger boys had three sisters older than us who loved exerting their seniority and authority, brow-beating, bullying, ordering, teasing, chastising and, on rare occasions, I hopefully believe, actually loving us.

But the constant awareness of a sisterly chastisement, sometimes administered without warning, made certain unlooked for changes in my subconscious mind

which left a legacy of never being really at ease with, or trusting woman-kind, or of being able to build a lasting, close relationship. Love became hard to develop or sustain, my feelings always being inhibited by a shallowness of perception. Psychologically speaking, I am of the opinion that fate is kindest when she decrees that the boys shall all be older than the girls in any one family.

But with us there was much fun too. My oldest sister Eva, who was a student at the Adelaide Girls High School, came home for the Christmas holidays. Hidden away among her personal belongings which filled a large luggage case was a present for me, a bowler hat, and very proud I was to wear it. I wore it everywhere, even into the nearby town when I was commissioned to undertake a shopping excursion. Being but 10 years old, I was the envy of my schoolmates of similar age, and I sure treasured that hat; but what became of it I do not remember, for my recollections recall mind pictures of me wearing it, but nothing else. I have no memory of what my other brothers received, but I do remember that Eva brought home some plants called "Pinks" which multiplied rapidly and formed very pretty borders along the garden beds.

Often we played exciting make-believe games as a family of boys and girls and those times of excitement are part of my very nostalgic memories of the long ago. Life was never dull, for we always found exciting things to do in between certain chores such as chopping wood, gardening, trapping rabbits, chasing stray dogs and helping Dad in the everyday running of a farm. Some of the chores are mentioned in a later chapter.

A School Memory

One day at school, native birds and their calls to one another came up for discussion. This was probably due to a preliminary Morning Talk. Because of our close association with bird life and their colonies, I knew bird calls and when the Blue Crane was being described a request for someone to demonstrate its raucous call was made. All hesitated. One's peers can be very sarcastic and cruel. However, plucking up courage I raised a tentative hand and uttered the raucous, penetrating cry of the blue crane. I was laughed to scorn! Strangely, my peers opted for the cooing sound made by Mr. Larwood, our teacher. It was a quite uncharacteristic sound.

I knew I was right for wasn't I the expert? Ignorance has a tendency to side with ignorance. I was disgusted and consequently refrained from taking part in any further discussion on the subject.

Seventy years ago, birds were still plentiful in number and specie. Sadly the years have witnessed a great decrease in many native birds.

"Birds"

*Birds a chirping, cheeping and eating
Birds a-hopping, running and leaping
Birds a-fluttering, winging and singing
Birds a-diving, zooming and looping
Birds a-crawling, pecking and feeding
Birds doing most things birds usually do
Birds that lay, birds of prey
Farm birds, water birds, flightless birds*

*Large birds, small birds, swans and grey emus
 Tiny hummers, pretty birds, parrots exquisite
 Willy-wags, magpies and chattering cheeky jays
 Birds that are pests, blackbirds so wily
 Birds that eat insects, work hard so ably
 Scratching birds, hunting birds, butcher birds
 Bellbirds notes a-ringing, songbirds singing
 Birds known to you and me, friends you'll agree
 Protected birds, good birds, native to our land
 Table birds, quacking birds, birds so savoury
 Caged birds, friendly birds and birds from overseas
 Mournful birds, raucous birds and crows with voice surprising
 Mitchells so pretty, galahs so dullish grey
 Parrots hued, hawks with strength imbued
 Silver eyes so perky, among the leaves so murky
 Gobbling up the juicy fruit, voracious little cuties
 With many hungry fluffy mates assisting in the rape
 Of the poor suburban gardener's crop of sweetly luscious grapes!
 Small birds, fat birds, birds with longish tails
 Long wings, glide wings, wings that give great speed
 Flapping, fluttering, winging, dodging
 Eager eyes, snapping beaks, a-gathering of their food
 Penguins, gannets, skuas, albatrosses too
 Some a-walking, some a-swimming, some a-diving sure
 All about their business of filling crops with food
 Chickens small, chickens big, beaks a-gaping wide
 Talking, gobbling tasty food, to miss out woe betide!
 To survive - eat they must, for nature shows the way
 To ensure that birds so clever will always with us stay!*

Apart from rabbits, which had increased to plague proportions, animals (other than the domesticated ones) were rare indeed. I remember seeing wombats occasionally, kangaroos more rarely. Feral cats, savage and fierce, were in evidence, for they sometimes were caught in our rabbit traps. Foxes we knew were present, for they left their scent behind. In season we observed many holes dug by them when they were searching for rabbit kittens. They would listen for the sound made by the kittens and scratch down to their nesting place. Clever!

An occasional ringtail possum visited our farm. Nuts were plentiful and the waddling porcupine became a focal point of interest. Dingoes no longer roamed the south eastern plains and woods having been eliminated from that area as early as the late 1800's.

My first sight of a dingo was actually in a zoo. My first ringtail possum I spotted near the King William Road Bridge over the River Torrens in Adelaide! The early settlers sure hastened the destruction of our small native fauna when they introduced the fox and the cat to our bushland. I wonder was it all a part of God's plan for Australia. I hardly think so, but the ways of the Father are very, very mysterious!

Fortunately, in the late 1900's, lovers of our unique fauna in this twentieth century are diligently working toward preserving as many as possible of these lovable creatures in danger of extinction. One such breeding sanctuary is very near to the village of Myloo [2018 Edit typo: probably Mylor?] in our Adelaide Hills. Away in the

Snowy Mountains of New South Wales concerned people have constructed a tunnel under the main connecting highway. Now tiny mammals (the males living downhill from the females) can, during the mating season, move toward the waiting females, without fear of being killed or mangled by passing cars. The males soon discovered the easy and safe pathway and nature preserved the species for another year! In the world of native animals, tiny furry beasts can still ramble in safety.

Teachers at Beachport School (1914-1921)

My first teacher was a Mr. Arthur Philip Hart. I was a pupil in his school for several years. At the end of his period of service a Mr Ernest E. Anthony was appointed to the Beachport School. I think he had cowardly instincts, for he favoured the older children and dealt severely with the younger ones on occasion, or perhaps I should say, on special occasions.

One day a much older boy accused me of having used a forbidden word, a dirty epithet. He reported me to Anthony who said to my accuser, Bertie by name, *"Are there any witnesses?"*

"Yes," replied Bertie, whose nickname was "Shirtie". (Now you may have guessed what he accused me of saying!)

"Are you able to produce them?" asked Anthony. Bertie nodded and muttered, *"Yes, I can!"*

Soon he swaggered in with a bunch of his special cronies. They confirmed his lying words. I spoke up and cried out, *"There are at least twenty children out in the play area who can prove I didn't swear!"*

Anthony glared at me and admonished, *"You shut up, and not another word from you!"*

Remember, I was a Grade 1V pupil accused by a Grade VIII pupil, and afflicted by poliomyelitis. I believe Anthony naturally hated children who were handicapped and practised his natural ferocity upon them. Anthony was an Englishman by birth and education, but the so-called British justice was not one of Anthony's virtues.

I was somewhat severely punished – caned – for a misdemeanour I had not committed.

What a contrast this was from Mr. Hart who always acted with the strictest fairness.

Afterwards Anthony became a respected member of the Legislative Council, but I am afraid I always harboured a most disrespectful opinion of that not-so-honourable Englishman!

Other teachers of my primary schooldays include a Mr. Devonshire, a tough man, but strict and fair. Also remembered is Mr. Lindsay Larwood, our head teacher, a fine teacher and generally very just in all his dealings with his pupils.

Many years later I was appointed as acting head of the Bordertown Primary School, and while perusing old school registers I discovered that Mr. Larwood had been headmaster of the same school. Mr Hart graduated to President of the Teachers' Institute, and was, for some time, an Inspector of Schools. I write this in 1985 and all these men have long since departed from their earthly life.

Further information gleaned from the Advertiser some time during the year 1985 confirmed that Mr Larwood died in his 98th year, thus, he lived from 1887 - 1985.

A Near Tragedy for the Larwoods (c 1920)

As well as being one of our teachers Mr Larwood was a family man with a very adventurous small daughter who loved taking her “doggie” for a walk. This particular day, a fine, warm day, ideal for hiking, she disappeared early in the morning and when the alarm was raised by the anxious parents, who had already searched for an hour or two, a concerted effort by children and adults was organised. One young lady, Alice Alden by name, who owned a pony, spent so many hours searching for the tiny wanderer that her posterior became very saddle sore. She couldn't comfortably seat herself for nearly a week afterwards.

In ever widening circles the search continued until it was generally believed the distance from the school was beyond the little one's capacity to walk. Over stony hills and sandy dunes, beyond the pool of Siloam, and even along the ocean beach, anxious searchers called and listened. Suddenly, above the roar of the breakers which crashed continuously on that lonely beach, a searcher cried, *“Listen, I'm sure I heard a dog barking!”* Alice Alden had found the child!

A short distance away on the top of a cliff, the faithful little dog, beloved of his tiny mistress, was keeping watch over her. Hearing voices he had advertised his presence in the only way he knew how. Below, on a small ledge, lay the wee missing wanderer unharmed. She was soon rescued and before long restored to the arms of her delighted parents.

Needless to say, there was no school on the day of the search!

How one so very young was trapped on that narrow ledge a metre below the lip of that frowning precipice is a mystery that was never satisfactorily solved. Generally, those most able to express an opinion, presumed that her predicament was purely the result of ignorance of danger and thus accidental. But surely the loving care of our Father in Heaven was with her on that momentous day.

Childish Squabbles

On odd occasions while we were driving home from school (we lived seven kilometres from Beachport) certain incidents, which I'll not mention, occurred, mostly our own fault, but some forced upon us.

Somehow Mother learned of these incidents soon after they occurred, and we were extremely puzzled about this, and remained so for some years.

There is a sequel! A certain Mr. Davis developed the habit of taking afternoon walks, sometimes well in excess of one and a half kilometres, along the dusty road that we necessarily drove along. He was a familiar figure to us and often gave us a friendly wave.

Quite a number of years later after I had left the school, and the district, I learned that he was the culprit that sneakily and nastily poked his proboscis into our business, and tittle-tattled to our parents about what he had heard and observed on his evening walks.

Disgusting conduct from a somewhat respected citizen, I thought, but I guess he had little else to occupy his spare time.

Sadly, tragedy struck the family when Mr. Davis gashed his foot while chopping some firewood. Shortly after that his only son Rex, was drowned in the sea whilst swimming in the bay. I know that my sympathy would have been somewhat less had I known he had been spying on us!

Soldiers Leaving for Overseas

Small country schools, whenever possible endeavoured to farewell their brave soldiers with love and enthusiasm. Our school, Beachport, always paraded at the railway station to add a touch of officialdom to the leave-taking of a soldier home on his final leave. Leave-taking, more particularly in wartime, is always somewhat heart-rending, and on odd occasions a departing soldier attempted to kiss every girl in sight! Most accepted the impertinence as special and rarely objected. Only once do I remember one or two girls displaying aversion to such liberties.

A more memorable occasion, however, was when a soldier, who had an excellent singing voice, stood on the carriage steps and sang a melodious farewell as the train slowly pulled away from the station. The man was, I have been reminded, "Molar" Crow, and we all stood quietly and listened as his voice gradually faded into the distance.

I wonder what thoughts filled the minds of the older people who knew and understood some of the dangers of the terrors and the loneliness of war! They knew he would face most dangers in a distant, foreign land.

During the First World War years we children who were able to compose a letter were asked to write to any Beachport soldier we fancied who was serving in the armed forces fighting the Germans in France. Sometimes we received replies and excitement was great when the letters were opened and eagerly digested.

Fortunately for us we were not permitted to look into the future at that time, a future in which there would be a Second World War in which my four brothers would take part!

Soldier's Honour Roll

I wonder whether the old Honour Roll is still in existence (1914-1918). It occupied a space in our long schoolroom next to a frame containing and displaying:

"Tom Price's Last Message to the Boys and Girls of South Australia", a message from the Hon. Thomas Price, Premier and Minister of Education July 1905-December 1909 asking them to adopt the finest principles of citizenship, and I quote:

"Character is the Best of All"

"Boys, grow up to be manly men. Develop a backbone; don't be blown about like men of straw, from one side to the other. Get clear opinions on things and stick to them – fight for them if need be. Above all, try to grow up morally pure.

"Girls, your mission in life is to be modest, to be pure, and to make the boys and men better because they have known you. Learn to be good housewives and take a pride in your home.

"Often I used to wish that some of my own children would turn out to be geniuses – in music or in science but all such thoughts were changed by my visit to the Old Country. Now my only wish is that they may become good, upright, conscientious men and women. Character is best after all."

(From Children's Hour, Classes IV & V, July 1909 pp. 145)

* * * * *



The school we attended at Beachport, James Chant in the foreground. The building is no longer used as a school (1983)

CHAPTER NINE

CLAY WELLS

***We loved the autumn with its abundance of fruit
And its glamorous warm days, azure skies so bright
When working or idling was a joy indeed
Alive and learning and loving the joy
And making the most of just being a boy***

(Extract from the poem "Claywells")

Clay Wells

About seventeen kilometres distant inland from Athelney lay Dad's land at Clay Wells. Some "firsts" for me occurred there. They included exciting gallops after Toolach kangaroos. The chase included emus, foxes and even wallabies. I saw my first large possums – savage grey ones, real fighters, vicious biters and extremely agile. I learned the correct way to shear a sheep. I pressed the wool into bales for the first time. I also learned the rudimentary principles of using a shotgun through means of an ancient Greener muzzle-loader. I first attempted to develop some skill in the hand milking of cows. At this chore I proved hopelessly inadequate! I just could not make the milk flow! My technique never progressed beyond the juvenile stage! I wonder why? But I could (and did) make the poor cows kick in protest! I was pretty hopeless in the performance of most farm activities, perhaps because polio had robbed me of muscles which had completely vanished and would never return.

Clay Wells Holidays

During our youthful days, usually school vacations, we spent a week at Clay Wells where Dad had four blocks of land and Grandfather Chant owned five thousand acres on the Reedy Creek. This huge block was mostly scrub land distant about four kilometres from Clay Wells. We enjoyed the freedom of the life, possibly because our activities there were different from those at Athelney in certain respects. Four shearers' sleeping quarters had been added to the facilities and the extra accommodation was appreciated by we boys. We manufactured our own, "rush lights" using a velvety stick out of a male banks flower, some earth to hold the stick, a generous supply of fat, and a tin to hold the ingredients. It was a primitive light but effective enough for our purpose. Trips to the scrub block on Reedy Creek, to split posts, to gather wild honey, to depasture sheep, or just to spend a day in the scrub, were always enjoyed. Sometimes we had the extra bonus of a wild gallop after an emu, or a kangaroo, or fox. Whatever it was our wild, ferocious yells were nearly enough to frighten the poor creature to death. One day, when Jack and I were still youngsters we made long lines of sedge fluff in the bed of the dry Reedy Creek. We would light one end and then endeavour to outdistance the flame before

it reached the other end. We always lost but we enjoyed the game, I suppose because it was so much like racing a real burning powder train, and just as difficult, and the flat dry bed of the creek was an ideal race track.

Ploughing, cultivating, seeding and harvesting were seasonal occupations, but cultivation of crops was not excessive as less than a hundred and fifty acres had been cleared for ploughing. Thistles grew profusely and a task disliked intensely was the cutting down of these prickly pests, which, if left would impede the effectiveness of the harvester which we used to gather the grain. Thistles were pushed over by a forked stick and the stems severed by a sickle. It was not hard work, but the large numbers of thistles made it tedious.

Henry's Accident

What could have resulted in a disastrous injury to Henry occurred during a hay carting session. Just prior to the incident I am about to relate, Henry, who was driving, raced the horse and dray away from a gate which I had opened and closed, leaving me behind. I raced after the dray, catching up with it with some difficulty, and climbed aboard over the tailboard. Next time through the gate I was the driver and I retaliated! Henry, however, after catching up grabbed the framework, braced his foot on the wheel hub, and endeavoured to climb on board. Then a frightening thing happened. His foot slipped and his leg shot between the spokes of the turning wheel! His toe caught a protruding wooden member of the dray's frame. Fortunately the dray was old and the protruding piece gave way before Henry's leg was broken! The nearest doctor was forty-eight kilometres away, and our only mode of transport was a horse and cart. The thought of what might have happened still gives me butterflies in the stomach. Henry's leg was strained and very sore for weeks afterward.

Other occupations included the hauling together of fallen trees ready for burning, and the shepherding of sheep on the wide lanes near our camp. One day, while so occupied, sleep overcame me and I "lost" over half my flock. A much worried Dad hurried away in search of the missing "woolies". He found them camped and busy chewing the cud at a closed gateway beyond my ken.

A Foolish Experiment

Youthful days are days of experiment for most boys and I was no exception. Sometimes common sense gave way to a kind of madness, and foolishness, not indulged in at other times, takes over. It did with me on a certain day, when I was at Clay Wells.

We killed and butchered sheep, our meat supply, and under a certain eucalyptus tree, over near the old wool shed, was where the butchering took place. A strong rope, with a gambol tied to its end had been thrown over a horizontal limb which was about four metres above the ground. Speculation filled my brain as I measured the height of the limb and glanced at the rope and gambol. My thoughts were these; *"I think I can pull myself up from the ground if I stand on the gambol!"*

I determined to try. Standing on the gambol I hauled away at the rope, and I managed to raise myself some way up. Then in making a tremendous heave I allowed my feet to rise above my centre of gravity, and naturally my feet shot skywards, my body slumped downwards and I hit the ground with a decided thump! I was completely winded and I crawled round trying desperately to draw air into my

deflated lungs, mouth wide, nostrils flaring and a stifled gasp in my mouth.

Presently I was able to stand, but I was shaking like a leaf. That was my first experience at self-lifting and most definitely my last. The gambol had shot upwards too, and had coiled itself around the strong branch. I believe my brother Henry was the one who climbed the tree and freed it ready for the next time it would be needed.

Struck by Lightning

On odd occasions Clay Wells provided surprises which were not the usual tasks waiting to be tackled. A large eucalyptus tree which grew about half a mile from the hut, and in the corner of a paddock, provided one surprise. One day as we neared that very same corner we noticed something different about it. Yes, the tree had disappeared. It had been struck by lightning and literally shattered into a hundred pieces, or was it a thousand! Many years later I actually saw lightning strike a tall, dead stump. Within seconds it glowed a deep cherry red from top to bottom, and no doubt it would have burst into flames had not a heavy shower of rain fallen immediately afterwards. This was lucky because a long dry summer had left the country side tinder dry, and a large pine plantation was nearby with a myriad of dead bracken ferns among the pines. These burn readily and give off intense heat, good fuel indeed to foster a mighty conflagration.

Once Upon a Time

Good stories usually begin with the words "Once upon a time" well:

Once upon a time, about 1912, Mum and Dad and the children visited Clay Wells.

"*Who has the keys?*" asked Dad, who looked expectantly at Mum, but each one shook his or her head amid a chorus of, "*I haven't!*" Further questions elicited the fact that the key had been left at home!

Now the problem was how to enter the hut without damaging it. Mum and Dad held a conference and soon came to a decision: "*Henry will have to be lowered down the chimney!*" Dad stated. The idea was not too pleasing to Henry, who was probably no more than ten years old. However, intrepidly, Henry divested himself of most of his clothes, climbed to the top of the chimney, attached a rope to his body, and disappeared from view while Dad carefully paid out the hempen strand. Sundry groans and, "*Oh's*" issued forth as the "chimney sweep" negotiated the narrow section, but soon the rope slackened and that told those waiting outside that a successful descent had been made. I can't remember how Henry opened the door, perhaps he opened a window through which Dad climbed before using a screw driver to open the door. I do not know, but I do remember that Henry was almost black from head to toe – and those of you who remember the story of "Tom the Chimney Sweep" will be able to visualize what Henry looked like when he walked out into the sunlight. Although very young at the time I can still see him, blackened arms, face, hands and feet, and a torso that had suffered some scratches and abrasions, and had collected vast amounts of soot.

On another day I was the one who was not too clean. Accidentally I had stumbled into the stagnant and dirty sheep dip and I was thoroughly drenched in a solution of Cooper's Special Sheep Dip mixed with plenty of manure, wool fat, and other muck. It must have been quite a task to make me smell like a human being again.

Delicious Apples

All who knew Clay Wells will agree, I firmly believe, that the happiest time to be there was during the late summer merging into autumn when over a dozen varieties of ripening apples filled the air with the scent of their maturity and the delicious fruit was there for the picking. Pearmain, russets, and huge five crown pippins are three varieties that I remember especially for I really enjoyed all of them. Yum, yum! But there was one particularly delicious apple which tasted like an extra special red delicious, but it had an elusive flavour that a “delicious” apple hasn’t quite got. Sadly I do not know its name, but when yellowing slightly to full ripeness it was a gourmet’s delight. I have no idea of its name and as the tree has long since disappeared I have no way of finding out. But it may have been an ancestor of the variety known as “delicious”. Sometimes, but rarely, my mind dwells on the Clay Wells garden when I am asleep and subconsciously I wander happily and with intense expectations among the trees bearing ripening fruit, and I invariably turn towards the trees that bore the fruit I liked so much! Strange how the subconscious easily revives memories of what happened over sixty years ago. We truly are wonderfully and fearfully made.

A Load of Chaff

Dad was busy at Clay Wells preparing arable land on which he proposed to grow a crop of wheat or oats. His team of horses needed hard feed, oaten hay chaff, and I was given the task of carting a load from the railway station at Beachport to Clay Wells, a distance of about twenty-two kilometres, about half the distance being along bush tracks. I collected the load a day before and I made sure my horse had a good feed that evening, and I refilled his feed box before retiring for the night. Next morning, after he had had a feed, I harnessed Bluey, an upstanding grey horse, and placed him between the shafts of the cart, fastened all the buckles, climbed aboard and soon Bluey was hauling the cart with its load out onto the highway, seventy-two kilometres from Beachport, where Athelney our homestead was situated. A variety of terrain had to be traversed: first a length of flat lands, then several kilometres of low hills, and then about fourteen kilometres of bush tracks – sand, stone, and black soil plains. No difficulties occurred until the black soil plains were reached. While passing through some tussocks (cutting grass) a wheel became jammed against a particularly large one, and Bluey refused to move or budge another inch. One of his shoulders was rather sore and I think that was the reason for his stubbornness. I tried for help at the nearby Elgin Hollestead (a sheep station), but the homestead was deserted. Soon, having un-harnessed Bluey I led him away toward my destination. I had neared the end of a long elevated ridge when I was met by Dad, much to my surprise.

“How did you know I needed help?” I asked.

He looked at me closely and replied, *“I saw you and your horse against the skyline!”*

Dad’s eyesight was very keen. We soon reached the abandoned cart and its load, and a fresh horse easily hauled it over the obstruction. Dad censured me for allowing the wheel to touch the tussock, and I recollect that I was somewhat to blame for that.

Termites

Some of the land cleared for arable purposes was on that occasion planted with potatoes and by appearances the growing plants should have yielded heavily at maturity. However, that was not to be. Critical examination disclosed the fact that probably fifty percent of the tubers had been ruined by severe termite infestation and had to be discarded as they were not fit for human consumption. Whether other growers of potatoes have ever had a similar experience I do not know, but I do know I have never heard of such infestations in any other potatoes-growing areas. Clay Wells termites, a particularly voracious type, apparently were somewhat unique.

Our Orchard at Clay Wells

Our extensive orchard had been planted at Clay Wells, probably under the direction of my grandmother, who was a keen gardener. Apple trees, about ten varieties, several fig trees, several varieties of plum, an apricot tree, two cherry trees, a mulberry tree, a peach tree, and a grape vine had been arranged in orderly rows, and a protective barrier of eucalyptus, wattle and elm trees made the whole setting rather picturesque. During the fruit season we always enjoyed the day-long trip to the orchard for the track passed along country lanes full of rural beauty. Travelling was usually rather slow, because we invariably used a heavy dray and the horse walked all the way.

One trip lives vividly in my memory. About one half hour after leaving home (Athelney) our off side wheel's axle began screeching like several demented devils. To solve our difficulty and to preserve our ears from intolerable agony, and to procure a cure for the punishment and abrasion that plagued the axle, we called in at Woakwine Station homestead. Barney McCourt, who had surely heard the screeching and had diagnosed the trouble kindly greased our axle and thereby surely alleviated our distress. Luckily we were able to reward him. About a mile back along the highway we had discovered a small package lying on the road and Barney immediately recognized it for what it was. It contained his weekly supply of tobacco which he had lost when returning home from Beachport. He was immensely pleased to have his tobacco ration so miraculously restored to his pocket, and we were equally extraordinarily pleased, for such piercing sounds as those that came from the wheels could not in reality be endured for long. Soon after our arrival at Clay Wells a very eager gang of pickers filled the empty cases we had brought with us, and as they were filled they were loaded on the dray ready for the return journey. Such delicious fruit was too tempting and much appreciative munching of the sweet juicy apples and luscious green-gage plums etc. took place as the picking and loading proceeded. Early in the afternoon we turned homewards, and we usually arrived home, tired but happy, just before the rosy sun disappeared below the distant horizon. The fruit picking gang, consisted of Mum, brothers and sisters, plus a couple of dogs!

My Encounter with Tiny Wildlife

Winter was over and spring was upon us. Warmer days and more sunlight just suited the water loving smaller creatures and they thrived and multiplied. There were many swamps and pools, stagnant to a certain extent, but full of nourishment. Henry, my senior by seven years, who had invited me, a five-year-old; to accompany him on his search for some horses, dared me to walk through one of

the smaller patches of water. Intrepidly and with grim determination I entered the water. I stood still for some few seconds while I savoured my bravery and proudly drew my brother's attention to me. I proceeded to leave the water, and glancing down I was horrified to find about eight yellow and black "worms" clinging to my legs. I screamed with fear for I had never seen leeches before. Henry, laughing uproariously, calmed my fears, and removed the offending creatures busily feeding on my blood. Henry, the rascal, knew the leeches were in the water, hence the dare! He, at least, enjoyed my astonishment, and laughed heartily again and again. Later as my education increased I observed how "bloody" the lower parts of the horses legs were at a certain time of the year. The leeches had been busy on them too, but they were not terrified like I was. Ignorance can be frightening.

Eating Dangerously

Years later, as a hungry eight-year-old boy, I had an excellent appetite, and appreciated my Mother's cooking. I breasted the dinner table ready to do justice to the midday meal provided for the family.

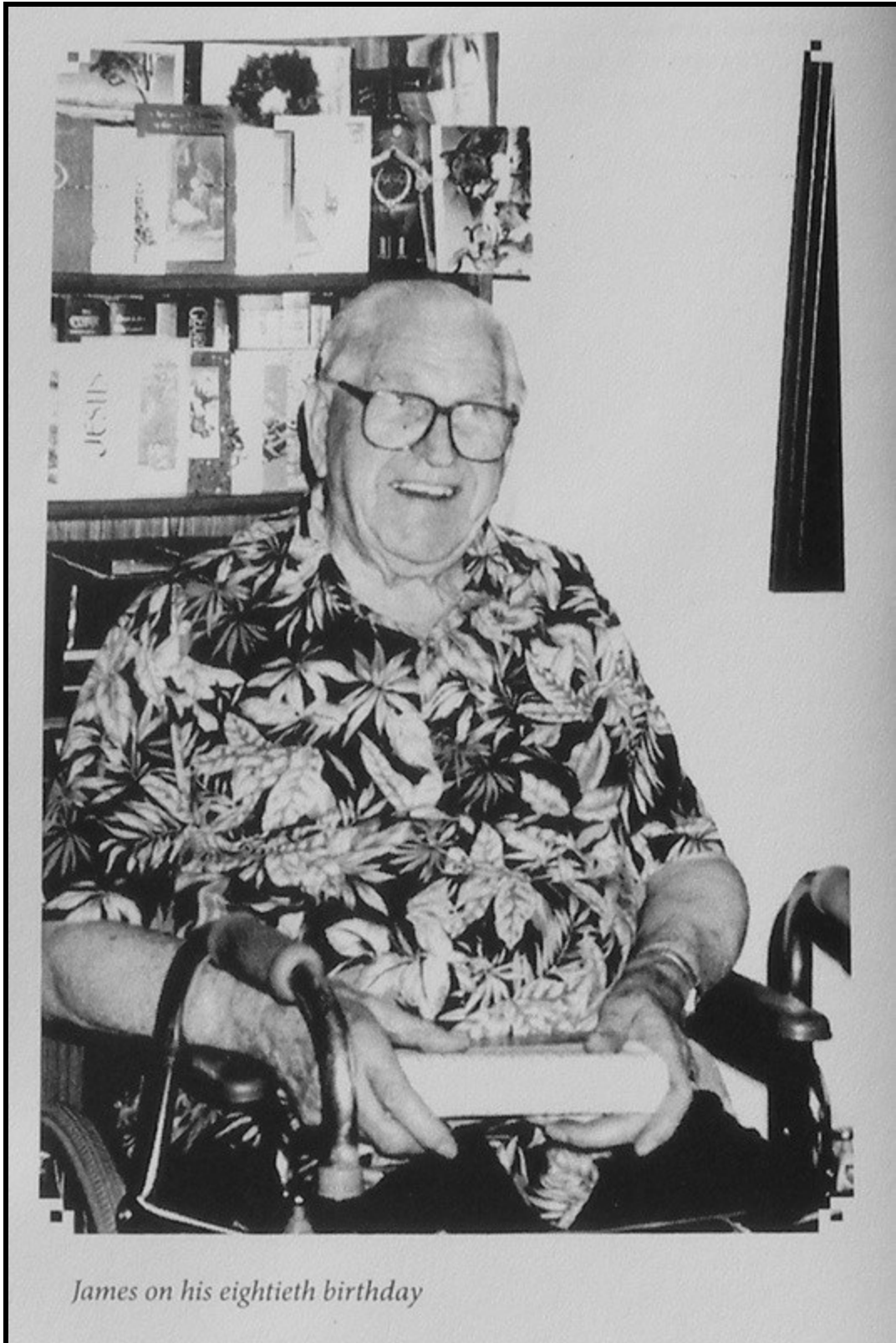
The first course might probably have been roast mutton and vegetables, or a delicious aromatic rabbit stew, or maybe, a very tasty homemade pasty. It has faded from my memory. But the course to follow consisted of homegrown rhubarb and custard. The tender, juicy stems were cut to the right length, stewed to perfection and sweetly sugared, it was a confection I delighted in and vividly remember.

First came a tentative tasting to test the heat and sweetness of the serving. This was executed by a small spoonful taken from the edge. Finding it to my satisfaction, I loaded my spoon from the very centre, ladling it carefully into my mouth. *"Ouch! What's the matter? It's too hot!"*

To ease the scalding I swallowed the lot in one great gulp thinking hazily, *"Oh! The burning in my throat is dreadful!"* Suddenly I collapsed and lay spread-eagled on the sofa moaning pitifully, my eyes rolling and a deathly pallor spreading over my anguished face. I had fainted, but I soon regained consciousness. It was many a day before this hungry eight-year-old took courage enough to sample again, (even tentatively), my Mother's delicious rhubarb and custard dessert.

The moral to this tale can be found in the ancient adage, *"Once bitten twice shy!"* Oh, how true this proved to be in this case.

* * * * *



James on his eightieth birthday

CHAPTER TEN

A LEISURELY AGE

Droving

When the settled areas of South Australia were surveyed for closer settlement, provision was made for the safety, feeding and even watering of travelling sheep, cattle and horses. Wide lanes, sixty metres or more across, which stretched for many kilometres and usually well grassed, were surveyed, especially for the purposes mentioned. Similar stock routes are found in other states also.

One such lane stretched almost from Kingston to Mt Gambier, traversing the Millicent and Tantanoola plains for part of its distance, and we made good use of its wide acres, utilising its rich supply of grass on the Millicent Tantanoola section to keep our animals in good condition. Since the advent of motor cars these wide stock routes have been utilised in parts as marvellous highways as they lend themselves towards easy construction of roads with very long curves. Stock transports made the disappearance of travelling or walking flocks inevitable, and now it is rare indeed for flocks of a thousand or more, nibbling as one, and eagerly running from one juicy mouthful to another, to be seen on our roads. I well remember the relaxation, the pleasure, the satisfaction, and the feeling of being at one with nature on those long droving trips when the weather was nigh on perfect.

Careful Preparations

Before undertaking a droving trip careful preparations were necessary. Gear had to be checked twice over for certain tools such as an axe, a hammer, and a spade had to be taken along besides chaff for the horse, sleeping clothes, blankets, and pillows, changes of wearing apparel and a plentiful supply of food in the tucker box. Nor should the camp oven, billy- can, knife set, or frying pan and mugs be forgotten. Other items sometimes included were a gun, grease, shears, staples, a maul and wedges for splitting posts and a wire strainer. Everything having been loaded, the sheep were released and amid the exciting barking of dogs and shouts of goodbye and the bleating of sheep, the intrepid drovers would start on their long, slow journey to distant places, one driving the horse and cart, the other probably walking behind the flock and accompanied by the dog or dogs, the sheepman's special pride. Soon after leaving Neetchee, Dad's Kongorong block of land, we would enter unfenced land (paddocks) owned by Coola Station and a sharp lookout had to be kept to make sure our flock did not gather extra animals belonging to Coola. We traversed several paddocks, each one large and almost flat and thickly and richly grassed. We used windmills as a guide to the exit gates and a sense of relief filled us as we left the station property and entered a fenced road.

From then on our leisurely progress took us past New Stoke, Grandfather's homestead, and across the Tantanoola plains and onto the wide fertile Millicent

plains, which stretched onward to Kingston, one hundred and sixty kilometres away. We would pass by the Snuggery, a tiny railway siding. Millicent a sizeable town, and Hatherley, a small hamlet.

Important drains, Tantanoola, Pinch Cut, Narrow neck, and Drain M would be crossed before we reached Clay Wells, our destination, which is situated about seventy kilometres from Neetchee.

Many, many days of droving and many hours of walking behind the sheep were enjoyed as the “woollies” were persuaded to walk from German Creek to one or other of our distant blocks of land, but I cannot recall ever losing a sheep except by accident, on all of these long trips. I claim it was good droving, more than good luck, for a drover should always check bushes and drains as he follows along behind his flock. A sheep could be hiding in them or behind them.

Speed was not important seventy years ago. We drove a horse hitched to a cart, sulky, buggy or dray, or rode on horseback, or walked, or, on odd occasions, travelled by train. Always time was available for quiet musing, and there was little reason to be in an unnecessary hurry; but most owners of well-bred horses indulged in “show-off” speedy trots or gallops. I know that we did, but not very often. The most appropriate time for looking and dreaming and musing, and perhaps soliloquising, and learning about nature, were the slowly passing hours when following a grazing flock of sheep along a wide stock route. I always rejoiced when I was selected to accompany Dad on one of his droving trips, such trips entailing an absence from home for about 14 days. Hooray! Two weeks away from school! And a lovely, lovely period of leisure and of watching for all those interesting creatures, both domestic and wild that unexpectedly made their appearance.

I know when and where all the various creatures, birds and animals, built their family quarters. Plovers needed a slight hollow on the ground; and on occasion many pairs would nest in one paddock, generally in or near prolific cropping areas such as the Millicent Plains. Swallows nested under bridges, starlings in trees, sparrowhawks and parrots in hollow limbs of trees, ducks near water, cockatoos in trees and smaller birds in bushy shrubs or boxthorn bushes.

***“Tis peaceful and quiet, wild nature in sight
A plover or two and magpies so smart
And wattles in bloom, and butterflies so airy
With dragonflies, ibis and ducks so wary!
Ten miles a day is our creeping pace
As Dad quietly follows the feeding flock
For some are weak and some are lame
And odd ones lazy, or suffering pain***

(Extract from the poem “Droving”)

When cereal crops covered thousands of acres around Tantanoola and Millicent, quail in their thousands nested among the tall stalks. Many a late-nesting pair paid the penalty for being so tardy for when the harvesters moved in to garner the ripened grain, their eggs and young were crushed by the mighty humming harvesters.

Quails are prevalent still, but their numbers have dwindled since cropping ceased to be so profitable, for tall grass is not quite so protective as the luxuriant oat and

barley crops. Predators such as feral cats and foxes catch their quota of the ground-nesting birds, and also eat their eggs and chickens. Before the advent of white men, ground nesters had little to fear hence the dangers inherent in the arrival of such unknowns, as cats and foxes, could not be comprehended.

***Who taught the weaver bird to sew leaves to make a home,
Or the eider duck the down to pluck from her own soft breast
For cosiness and warmth, for her youngsters in the nest!
Now animals galore and birds of every breed,
And reptiles so venomous, and insects that on plants do feed
Are all endowed with clever traits, their existence guaranteed
For our Maker in his wisdom, foresaw what each would need
So teeth and claws and sucking tubes, and fins and wings as well
Were cleverly on them bestowed to complement their needs,
To help these creatures gather food they all must clearly seek.***

(Extract from the poem "God's in His heaven")

Oh, For the Gift!

Had I been endowed with the gift of descriptive writing, (the gift that the great poets undoubtedly have), I could have used the hundreds of hours when I followed quietly and peacefully behind a flock of nibbling, bleating sheep, eating their way along the grassy south-eastern lanes, usefully and profitably by recording my impressions and experiences on paper. Hour after leisurely hour I sat in our cart idly watching the slowly passing scenery, mountains, plains and farmlands, while our sheep dog gently nursed the stragglers along. Those hours, as I recall, constituted a time for learning about new surprises in nature, for making observations, noticing new varieties of birds, animals, insects, and plants, and for musing, dreaming, wondering and appreciating the magic of God's work in the creation of our stupendously amazing beautiful and complex world. In fact, the complexities and varieties of the Creator's work, animals, insects and plants constantly fill my mind with an abiding wonder!

Today, instead of long, tranquil days enjoyed by drovers, covering perhaps sixteen kilometres a day, huge stock transports cover the same distance in less than one half hour. Sheep, cattle, pigs, calves, lambs and horses are moved rapidly from place to place, and when trailers are added to the prime mover the combinations are often known as "cattle trains"!

To me, those long droving days, full of peace and tranquillity had a fascinating attraction. The memory of them lures me back with nostalgic affection for those far off days when droving was not only a necessity, but also usually a pleasure.

There was time to speculate and wonder at the foolishness of early migrants who unwittingly loosed upon posterity so many bird, animal and plant pests and thereby caused inevitable losses, and even bankruptcy to so many.

Wet Blankets

Sometimes certain unavoidable phenomena in the way of drought conditions brought about by low rainfall, and an enormous explosion in the rabbit population,

caused a devastating shortage of fodder for our sheep and cattle. To eke out our meagre supplies, Dad depastured his sheep on the nearby grassy lanes. This was quite legal provided the sheep were encouraged to move along a certain distance each day, roughly around four to six kilometres. This was commonly referred to as “the long paddock”.

Now it so happened one day that as night closed in Dad’s sheep were on a lane where a shepherd had to be in attendance for the rest of the night for the whole flock could be liable to stray. Dad elected himself as the guardian, and asked that bedding, and toiletries be delivered to him forthwith. Having settled himself as comfortably as possible in the shelter of a large stump, Dad prepared to wait out the long night, hoping for some catnaps during the weary, boring hours of darkness. Unfortunately and most unexpectedly, heavy showers of rain fell during the night, and Dad suffered a cold, wet and decidedly uncomfortable few hours. But his flock was safe and accounted for!

After the evening meal about fourteen hours later when all were preparing for bed, we realised with shameful chagrin that no one had thought to hang Dad’s thoroughly dampened blankets out to dry. A long wire stretched between two hefty shed posts was usually rigged for such a purpose. Each of his sons offered one of his own dry blankets, but Dad solicitously refused the well-meaning offer. He surely knew that another uncomfortable night would be his lot!

You may be sure that very early the next morning Dad’s blankets were carefully draped over the drying wire. A sharp wind soon sprang up dispersing the offending moisture.

Cold days, stormy days, mild days, hot days, scorching days, dull days, sunny days, wet days, dry days made little difference to the even tenor of our existence. Our comfort suffered, of course, but not excessively, although we sure found out that frosty mornings numbed both our bare feet and bare fingers when driving or walking to school, and rainy storms interrupted our normal activities!

Leisure Periods

Activities not usually associated with farm work were also indulged in when opportunity offered. Weekends and slack periods allowed for practice periods and every participation in actual games of football, cricket and tennis in season, and foxhunting, fishing for lobsters and scale fish (the Southern Ocean was distant about eleven kilometres), and, visiting neighbours on rare occasions. We developed and matured in an environment of freedom of movement. Early in life self-confidence, an awareness of one’s ability to perform most tasks was built into us, and this enabled Dad to establish a smooth-running business with little interference from him.

Flowers and Birds

Spring and early summer was the time for flowers, and quite a variety grew in our homestead block adding some beauty to the somewhat ordinary landscape of Athelney.

Orchids, several species, were fairly common and a number of varieties of native bulbs grew and flowered amid the low ground cover. One particular bulb produced a feathery-looking purple flower. Another tiny bulb, only native to swampy areas, thousands of them massed together sent up a single flower stalk with one tiny

purple flower, much like a legume flower. My brother Henry often gathered a small bunch and fashioned them into a “nose-gay” which he presented to his favourite girl-friend, usually one in his same grade at the Beachport School.

Besides the flowers already mentioned here and elsewhere in this record, certain heath plants flourished and flowered in an area we named “The Wattles”. Of course, wattles, ti-trees (several varieties of each) and boxwood trees flowered profusely in season. The busy bees, native and imported, had little difficulty in gathering more than ample supplies of nectar and pollen, and they flourished accordingly.

Birds, rich in numbers and variety, were ever present in the vicinity of our homestead, Athelney and in the environs of Beachport generally. Large areas of swampy land encouraged water birds of all descriptions. Drain M and Lake George also provided good feeding grounds. Hence, we had an excellent mixture of land, fresh water and seashore birds, some varieties of which visited us from remote Siberia and other northern climes. They were summer visitors. Jacksnipe were in this category. On rare occasions, birds from the tropics added a touch of the exotic.

To name a few, there were waterhen, divers, musk-ducks, and five varieties of common ducks. There were broilgas, cranes (small blue ones) swans, swamp hawks, cormorants, sea-gulls, spoonbills, ibis, bronze-wing, pigeons, crows, eagles, sparrow-hawks, black cockatoos, parrots (grass, rosella, and Blue Mountain) silver eyes, robins, finches, wattle-birds, butcher birds, kookaburras, white cockatoos and galahs. These all frequented many areas of the south-east. Certain imported birds were also prevalent. We did not cage birds but we cherished a tamed magpie, and a young “laughing jackass” (kookaburra), both of which survived for a few years.

Dave Kallock

Dave was in his early sixties, tallish, wiry, weather tanned, blue eyed, mostly full of merry laughter, and he sported a bushy beard and a somewhat scraggly head of hair. He was a Victorian, and Dad employed him to strip some wattles, that is to pull the bark off in long strips and fashion it into bundles ready for transport to the bark mill where it was subject to a certain process before being sold to tanners, for the bark contained rich supplies of tannin.

We were led to believe that Dave was an excellent horseman and could handle buck-jumpers with the best. However a serious buck-jumping accident when he was about thirty years old had partly crippled him and he found walking somewhat difficult. However he was healthy and strong and managed to live a normal life. He kept a tribe of dogs of various breeds and a horse which he was convinced understood every word he spoke to it. He would cry “*Wooby-ai-eck! Go straight through there!*” and the horse and sulky would pass clearly through a gap in the trees or a gateway.

With a twinkle in his eye and a look of pride on his face he would triumphantly exclaim, “*There, I told you she understood me.*” Of course we had to agree.

While stripping the wattle trees, Dave camped close by. He had his own tent, bed, utensils for washing, and cooking, and sometimes we would visit him in his humble abode. On one such occasion Dave was robbing a beehive that had taken up residence in a hollow tree. One of my brothers ventured too close, and Dave warned, “*Now don't go too close! Them's female bees! So look out!*” My brother took little notice until a bee managed to crawl up inside his pants and sting him very near his crotch.

With a wicked grin on his face Dave cried, *"There I warned you they was female bees!"* Laughingly he added, *"You believe me now!"*

I can't remember the answer but I suspect my brother was too busy getting rid of the bee and its sting.

After stripping the wattles Dave was employed as a drover by various farmers and stock firms and he called in at Athelney several times while so employed. I believe he delivered flocks of sheep to some rather distant towns such as Robe and Kingston, and sometimes across the border to towns situated in Victoria.

In some ways he was surprisingly particular for a man who lived so roughly and who was somewhat uncouth in others. I remember hearing him berate a drover employee unmercifully for daring to dip his pannikin into the freshly brewed billy of tea instead of lifting the billy and pouring the liquid refreshment into the cup. He most definitely opined it was a filthy thing to do and used some choice epithets at the same time. What eventually became of him I don't know, but I believe he became the recipient of an old age pension and camped in retirement in some secluded spot. Probably among the wattles and eucalypts that he loved and where ample room was available for his dogs to roam and hunt the elusive "bunny". Be that as it may he was a character in his own right and his general speech indicated he was a man of some learning and discernment. He was a picturesque old gentleman about whom many interesting anecdotes could no doubt be written if they were only known, and I do trust he had at least one friendly face nearby when he breathed his last.

* * * * *



The Old Homestead at German Creek, it was built of stone sawn from a nearby quarry



Another view of the Old Homestead

CHAPTER ELEVEN

FAVOURITES

Old Toby our Lovable Clown Dog

I suppose most every farm has its quota of dogs. I know ours did and the polyglot collection included hunting hounds, cattle dogs, sheep dogs, fox terriers (foxies) and the usual mixed breeds. One of the mongrel dogs we owned was one named Toby. Toby was a lovable no-hoper but a good friend, playful and a source of immense amusement to us all. I doubt whether he ever had an original thought, or whether he thought at all, but he just revelled in copying the actions of the other dogs, albeit not always as exactly as desirable. One eventful day, for him, he sat on his haunches and watched with fascinated interest while our clever Queensland heeler casually nipped the heels of a hefty Clydesdale. One could see old Toby trying to fathom it out but as events proved, the art of heeling was beyond his mental capacity. He certainly failed to evaluate its dangers or its extremely painful consequences to those unskilled in its art.

"What fun!" he told himself as he turned his head on one side and then the other. *"I think I'll try that. It looks so easy. Here goes!"* He did try, in his usual enthusiastic exuberance. But Toby, obviously still rather unobservant of the finer points of heeling overlooked the necessary levelling of his head to the ground accompanied by a backward crouch immediately after nipping the heel. Poor Toby, he caught the full force of a powerful, large, heavy hoof, driven with speed and great weight full and square on the face! He came around about three hours later confused and wondering. After that mishap he was more unpredictable than before and as for heeling, ever afterward he had a strange aversion, even fear, of being anywhere near the hind legs of horses, especially big horses. However his queer antics still brought smiles to our faces, and we all loved him for what he was, a lovable clown dog.

My brother Bob relates that our Toby had one very disagreeable habit, a developed habit whose origin is rather difficult to explain, and one which needed sneakiness and cunning to maintain. Somehow his miniature brain was able to memorise or trace all the rabbit traps in turn and one by one during the night with great assurance he unerringly visited each trap and removed each rabbit he found and buried it some distance away. Apparently Toby would kill the rabbit, chew through the leg caught in the trap, and do his undercover work. Of course, once discovered Toby was securely chained up each night and his midnight depredations ceased. The anguish of the unlucky trapper, who relied on his catch for a living also ceased.

I don't know how he met his death, though it was probably of old age, for I had left home to attend high school, and many incidents common to farm life remain unknown to me.

Sandy a Clever Sheep Dog

Sandy was a very special, golden haired sheep dog that Dad valued highly. However he sometimes wandered away from home, especially in the mating season, and he died a painful, and unnecessarily early death as a consequence. During his peregrinations one night he swallowed some tasty pieces of meat that had been laced with strychnine. Next morning when found near our back door his spasm-racked body, his rigidity, and frothing at the mouth told us he was in the last stages of poisoning. Dad endeavoured to force some bluestone (copper sulphate) down his throat but he was too far gone. We just watched and agonized with the poor suffering dumb animal and mourned the loss of a clever and faithful friend. He was the best sheep dog Dad ever owned. The poisoned bait had been laid to destroy foxes which preyed on the young lambs.

Normally we kept the dogs safely chained during the night, but at odd times that chore would be overlooked and the dogs roamed freely. Sometimes strange dogs visited us, but we always endeavoured to persuade them to return home. They usually did for several methods of persuasion were used. The one we found most successful was to tie a tin can to the tail of the wandering dog and this ploy was invariably a success.

Bluey, a Dog of many Talents

Bluey was Henry's dog, and Bluey could be trusted to obey, to watch, to track, and to guard. If he were left in charge of the horse and cart no stranger would be allowed near the outfit. He would guard the night's catch of rabbits hanging over a fence, or a heap of traps left lying on the ground, and yet he was a loving and gentle dog. Further he had learned the art of rounding up sheep, and his assistance was often called for.

Sometimes a trapper finds a rabbit, or a cat, or a fox has managed to loosen the peg holding the trap, dragging the trap away. Bluey was an excellent tracker and invariably sniffed his way to where the cowering creature was hiding and trap and captive were retrieved, which certainly pleased the trapper. Henry was a master of the craft of fooling the elusive "bunny" and he knew better than most the likeliest burrow to shelter a bobtail, for he managed to trap rabbits where others failed. Maybe he had a sixth sense which guided him in his endeavours. He sure knew what trapping was all about.

Kalu, a More Recent Beloved Companion

KALU

*A foxy coloured dog was Kalu
White tipped ears erect
White feet with speed adept
Of loving nature, loyal sincere
And liege-dog of real might
A zealous guardian of home and friend*

*Kalu loved a friendly game
Of chasing a bouncing ball
Or daring a participant*

*To strike it from his pointed teeth
A shouted charge, "Where is that ball?"
A hunting he would slither
Return triumphant, take a stance
Now do please do hit it thither!*

*No stranger ever neared our doors
Morning, noon or night
But raucous barks made us aware
That "martians" were in sight
But not to worry over much
For he was standing by
And watching for a hostile act
That he would rectify*

*What haven there is for loving dogs
I'm afraid I do not know
But, if faith, loyalty and adoring jogs
And senses alert live-long days enow
Mean anything to our Father in Heaven
Kalu sure earned the right
To bask within the Creator's realm
A domicile amid such heavenly delight*

(Extract from the poem "Kalu")

Games of Childhood

Because of the size of our family the organisation of a team to play one of our favourite games was not very difficult. Activity on a farm in those now far-off days centred upon horseback, or involved the employment of horses in one way or another. Hence the younger boys preferred activities in which horses played a prominent part. The make-believe horse was usually a long straight stick easily obtainable from thickets of ti-trees and wattles, which abounded at Athelney.

Astride their "horses", stick goads in hand, the gallant horsemen cantered and galloped as they mustered a mob of stubborn sheep, or headed off a wild mob of stampeding cattle, or brumbies. Sometimes these skilled riders would attempt the capture of a racing emu, a kangaroo, or a fox. Shouts of glee would herald the conclusion of a successful chase, and the panting horsemen would rest while they regained their wind! 'Twas fun indeed, even though purely imaginary!

Housekeeping

The girls' inventive fancies were otherwise. Many a happy hour was spent in the shade of the dense foliage of the ti-trees, which grew profusely near their home, playing at imaginary housekeeping. Fertile minds imagined all the correct activities appertaining to a successfully run home. Shopping was not forgotten. Neither was the milking of an imaginary cow. Pulling on wattle tree leaves produced the "milk". This was a mixture of slaked lime and water.

It was surprising how the amateur cooks were able to provide such a variety of foodstuffs all were imaginary, of course. Even more surprising were the devious

means by which they were produced. It beggars description. Mud pies, stone biscuits, mud cakes, watery soups and leafy concoctions all turned up (The stony limestone biscuits, as described earlier, occurred naturally). The busy scene is clear in my mind after the lapse of nearly seventy years! Broken pieces of china shards were used as money!

Another game we enjoyed had the rather topical name or title of *"Sheep, Sheep Come home!"* Every sheep in Base One when called upon had to run to Base Two. Lurking in the bushes about midway between the bases waited the hungry "wolf", ready to spring upon a hapless, careless, lamb or sheep!

A rhyme controlled the game. Here it is!

"Sheep, Sheep Come Home!"

Answer: "We are afraid!"

Reply: "What of?"

Answer: "The wolf!"

Reply: "The wolf has gone to Devonshire

And won't be home for seven years

So run, sheep, run!"

(They run and the wolf attempts a capture! He has returned from Devonshire).

One game was probably played more than the others. It was *"Hide and Seek!"* You'll appreciate the fact that the trees and bushes and other obstacles provided many good hiding places, and should the seeker wander far from the home base, a hider could easily and successfully race him home, and call out,

"Touch, touch, I'm home."

Sometimes all the hidere would be successful in reaching the home base before being named with the words *"I Spy!"* When that happened the seeker had to take another turn, and count up to one hundred before seeking those who were hiding. Of course the faster runners had an advantage.

Other games enjoyed by the family members included Rounders, which was much like the modern American game of Baseball, a game still played in schools.

Tops and Marbles

Interesting activities included the now forgotten skill of spinning tops, an activity that unaccountably ceased to interest boys about fifty years ago. Not only were competitors interested in being able to make their tops spin the longest and hum the loudest, but tops were won and lost by making spinning tops force "dead" tops out of a large ring. Playing various competitive games of marbles was also popular, and each school had its champion. We always had a few marbles in our possession.

Collecting

Boys usually like collecting special items and seventy years ago collecting cigarette cards was very popular. The cards were given away, one in every packet of cigarettes. A competitive game was devised whereby a solid card was flicked against a wall, and the boy's card that was closest to the wall after each round of flicking had the right to collect a card from each competitor. Competition was keen and very competitive!

Egg collecting was another activity beloved of boys who lived in the country areas where trees provided both shelter and safe nesting sites such as hollows in stumps and trees for birds that preferred such places and tall trees for those who built nests among the leaves.

Naturally competition lay in collecting the greatest number of varieties.

We constructed bows from thin young wattle tree trunks, which were usually smooth, strong and springy once the bark had been removed. But all creatures had little difficulty in avoiding our badly aimed and dawdling arrows! However we boys did have fun trying to "nail" a wild duck or similar creature.

Conditions at home were ideal for playing the game of hopscotch. The game required a small area of flat, clear ground. We had many patches of such ground around our homestead, and many were the hours spent in competition while playing hopscotch. The "we" mentioned included both brothers and sisters, the sisters usually being a little more skilful than the brothers. Our game varied little from the hopscotch that is popular among children of today.

Old Fashioned Medicine

Mother had, and used, several favourite medicines such as Wood's Great Peppermint Cure (which we liked), Liquorice powder (which we didn't like), Bates' Salve (quite good for boils) and others.

Two of her cures for childish ailments were somewhat extraordinary. Both contained sulphur, one being sulphur plus mutton fat, well mixed. This was revolting, offensive and detestable and we simply abhorred it. The sulphur and treacle mixture we accepted as being reasonably appetising.

Why we were given such concoctions I do not know, but upon reflection I think it reasonable to suppose that they were "old wives" cures for threadworms!

Another good stand-by for colds was three drops of eucalyptus on a teaspoon full of sugar. It was always available.

Growing in the homestead block at Athelney were two varieties of the same plant. They were identical except that one had pink flowers and the other yellow. We spoke of them as being yellow and pink medicine. Now, somehow we knew that Pink Medicine was quite edible and if boiled in water provided a safe and beneficial potion, though an extremely bitter one.

Contrariwise, the yellow variety was poisonous, and not to be handled even. Consequently we experimented with the "pink" but never with the "yellow".

While motoring and camping in Western Australia I was interested to notice the same plants growing in the southern regions of that state.

As children we loved experimenting. We had been advised that the green coloured fruit of the she-oak tree was edible if well boiled and sugared. As I remember,

however, the ones we boiled were always tough, acidic and rather unpalatable. Perhaps we should have boiled them much longer or sliced them first, or soaked them in salt and cold water beforehand. Or perhaps we ought to have been more discerning and picked even less matured fruit. Our experiments were reasonably successful, I believe, for we all attained a ripe old age.

A Few Notes

Robert, my brother, advises that once only, probably in a very wet year, the tiny purple, legume-type flower mysteriously appeared in a small area on a block of land he then owned near where he lived at German Creek, nine kilometres from Kongorong!

A tiny white daisy grew on most of the ridges, which formed a large part of Athelney. The plant seldom exceeded eight to ten centimetres in height. Ladyfinger orchids were sometimes discovered too, and various plants that grew from bulbs. The ti-trees flowered profusely, masses of white composite flowers, each summer. The yellow wattle flowers added their masses of colour also.

Nearer the sea, a native pea which we referred to as the Darling Pea, had certain powers which created an irresistible desire for more and more of its strange taste; it acts as a narcotic. Horses, especially, were susceptible to the drug contained in the plant. It usually killed them! Some pea plants produced purple flowers and others white flowers, but both produced the same narcotic influence. The plants usually favoured sandy soils, but how widespread the variety was in South Australia I do not know.

A Native Berry

A certain creeping plant which we know as a "muntree" spread over considerable areas of the sandy ridges that paralleled the sea coast. In early spring myriads of white flowers appeared on each tentacle of the spreading, creeper-like plant, and the busy, buzzing bees flitted from flower to flower in search of the precious nectar. Soon, passers-by, especially hikers, as we were, could observe the swelling berries that literally smothered the branches that had flowered earlier.

Then came the day when a sweet aroma permeated the atmosphere above the muntrees and we knew that soon we would be able to gather and eat the tasty berries.

Often, with pockets bulging we would munch our way the rest of the distance to school. Whether the berries are still available in quantity I do not know, but they were good eating and a rather unusual jam could be made from them. Incidentally, judging the large number of half eaten fruit left on the creeper-like branches, rabbits found the muntrees good eating too.

During the year 1980 while motoring through the Koorong area of South Australia, my companions and I stopped for a rest period. Near the road I found a muntree creeper, which I examined and I observed many half eaten berries adhering to its branches. The berries seldom exceed one and a half centimetres across and are quite green in colour until near maturity when the green fades a little, and a sweet aroma is given off.

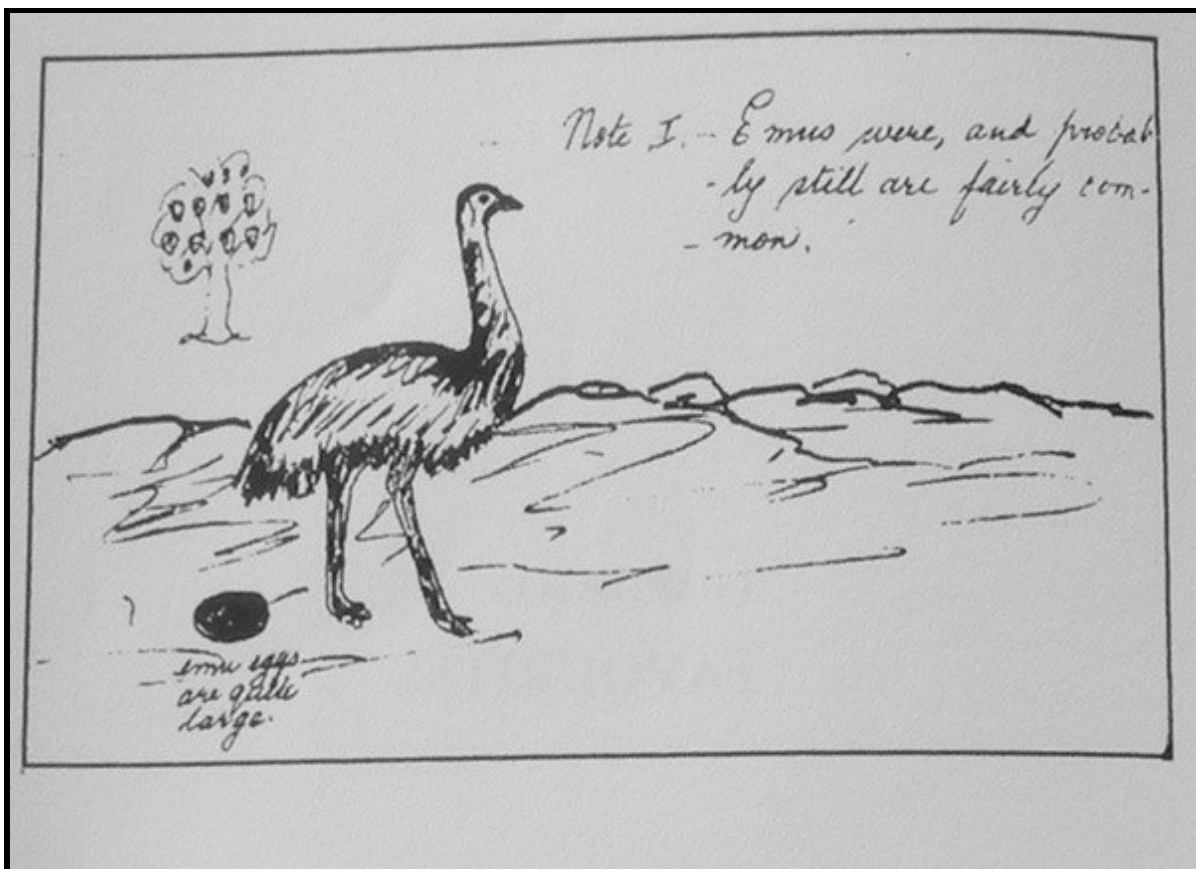
Observations of Wild Life

During the warm summer evenings, and just after sunset when tiny insects were on the wing, a whirl of silently fluttering small bats diving and zooming with consummate ease gathered their fill of natural, sustaining food, while the hours of darkness permitted their almost unseen activities. We were interested spectators of their rather delightful aeronautics.

Sometimes when removing chaff bags that had been stored by hanging them over the tie beams of the implement shed, we would disturb sleeping bats hidden among their shadowy folds, a safe haven from predators during the daylight hours. Panic-stricken they would flutter desperately away, hoping to find some dank haven in which to hide!

Now and again we would capture one and marvel at its comparatively huge ears (for such a tiny body); its extremely sharp little teeth, its soft fur and leathery wings, and the clever way it was able to move its head in impossible directions. Their natural home was in the hollow trunks of ti-trees, and she-oaks. We knew, for we watched them emerging from such trees, several of which grew quite near our home. If one remained still and silent they would emerge in a steady stream from their haven of safety. Nearly all bats consume night-flying insects.

* * * * *



CHAPTER TWELVE

FARM LIFE

***It sounds a lot of fun and it surely is
When shearing time comes at the close of the year
And the sheep are all mustered and brought to Claywells
Where the wool is removed and the sheep new branded
Are counted and ear marked and then disbanded***

(Extract from the poem "Claywells")

Shearing Time

Shearing time! A busy time! And would you believe it, this is the one period of a sheep-man's working year when all processes (except that carried out by the pressers and the rouse-a-bouts) are governed by the clock. Each working day is divided into four equal runs, separated by "Smoke-oh", and midday lunch. Conditions of work, sleeping time off, starting and finishing times, presswork, and prices. were strictly controlled.

Here is a typical day as I remember it almost 60 years later. The "boss of the board" would signal the start of a new work day by cranking the engine that drove (via a belt) the overhead gearing to which the handpieces were attached. A subdued rumbling sound added to the engine's noise and was almost immediately joined by the typical whirring of the cutters, which were activated by each shearer as soon as he had dragged a sheep from the holding pens and onto the shearing board.

After a few minutes a shearer would push a sheep out nose first through a porthole. A shed hand who had been keenly watching, would grab the fleece, throw it over the slatted skirting table and hurry back for the next one. In between he would sweep the board clean of dags and odd bits of wool. The board had to be kept clear of fleeces for the whole run. The shedhands, the skirter, the classers and the pressers were a busy gang indeed.

The Boy

Usually a tin of Stockholm tar, a healing dressing, would be called for. The cry "*Tar Boy!*" would trigger the tarboy into action. He would grab the tar, race back to the caller and dab a generous dollop onto the place where the shears had slipped and cut the sheep's flesh.

A second cry of "*Smoke-oh!*" would ring out when a huge pot of tea appeared from the house kitchen accompanied by cakes and biscuits or, maybe, sandwiches. Welcome refreshments indeed to the hungry men.

Each run varied little from the last. The whole shed was a scene of activity where each worker had his task. The shed hand, the shearer, the wool classers, the pressers, the board sweepers and tally and penmen, each were vital links in the

successful running of the shed and the preparation of wool for export to foreign places.

One other man surely ought to be mentioned. He was the “expert”, the one whose job was to keep the combs and cutters in first class condition. Much of that work was carried out after the day’s activities.

Another important job usually done by the owner was to keep a correct tally of the sheep shorn by each shearer and to enter the tallies in the daily records. Moreover, he often supervised the branding of shorn sheep before they were turned out to pasture again.

The period set aside for shearing was most certainly a busy time. But of all those that made up the shearing gang I firmly believe that the busiest of all were the cooks. They began early and finished late and did all they possibly could to satisfy the appetite of everyone.

Shearing Time Risks

Shearing time is often an anxious period for the farmer who has a property in the colder areas of our country. Should the weather turn very cold, wet and stormy, and the inclemency persist for several days and nights then heavy losses of new born sheep may be expected. Such a change in the weather happened during the shearing time at German Creek I think during October 1928 or 29. Dad, assisted by his son Bob, spent two days and nights carting frozen sheep, their legs entirely immobilised, into the warmth of a fairly comfortable hut, where a roaring fire provided the heat, for there was a large fireplace in the hut.

Almost miraculously, creatures that could scarcely breathe, let alone move, came back to life as the warmth entered their tissues, and circulation of the sluggish blood stream was restored to normal.

As each batch recovered it was transferred to the holding pens in the wool-shed where their collective body temperature kept them reasonably comfortable. Hundreds of almost frozen woollies that would otherwise have perished were treated in the same way and fortunately losses were minimal. The hard work and the loss of sleep certainly paid dividends and Dad and Bob must have been well pleased with the final result.

The Destination of Our Wool (c. 1924)

At home, shearing time came around again and wool was being baled as it came from the sheep’s back. Somehow a discussion as to the probable final destination of our wool, came up. Finally we decided we would make some endeavour to solve the mystery as to where our fleeces at last ceased to be fleeces. Short notes, placed in several bales, we thought might be the answer. We asked the finder of the note or notes to communicate with us and a John A. Dent, of 10 Star St. Haworth, Via Keighley, Yorkshire, England was interested enough to write to us. He was a wool sorter, and he actually sorted our wool and discovered our somewhat greasy and ragged epistle. Whether Dad’s wool ever reached the mills of continental Europe, Japan, or America we never did find out. But as an exercise to satiate our curiosity our notes at least partially found the answer to what happened to our bales of wool!

Farming Chores

There were quite a number of farm chores I disliked:

Number One: I didn't like carrying buckets of water several chains just to water thirsty plants in the flower garden on hot summer evenings. Sometimes vegetables were included in the watering – but not often because they were growing in ground where water was closer to the surface.

Number Two: I detested having to pick over a very large heap of potatoes until I had filled 2 large buckets with very small ones. These were later boiled and cooked and fed to pigs along with boiled and cooked dried rabbits. The pigs enjoyed eating both foods.

Later I discovered that bags of potatoes that had not been emptied onto the large heap (which covered most of the floor of a large room we called the chaff room) contained quite a large percentage of small, marble-sized potatoes. Cunningly I would tip out a couple of bags thereby greatly shortening the time necessary to fill my two buckets!

Generally the process was a long and tedious task. Digging into the heap of potatoes (about one metre deep) was not easy nor was it comfortable. Having cooked the pigs' meal we then were saddled with the responsibility of carrying the heavy buckets several chains down to the pigpen, and emptying the contents into the feeding troughs provided.

Remember that we were still schoolboys at the time!

Number Three: When full grown the pigs were slaughtered at the rate of about one every couple of months. The meat was salted down for future consumption. We did not exactly fancy the chore of pouring boiling water over the carcass to facilitate the scraping off of all the bristles and hair, and generally cleaning the carcass ready for butchering into joints and chops, etc.

But, as many hands make light work we all pitched in and surprisingly the chore was soon finished. The clean white carcass was then swung from the strong branch of an ancient dry-land ti-tree, where it was left overnight securely wrapped in a large calico bag gently swaying while the meat properly set.

Sheep killing was a regular event, for Dad always saw that our larder was well supplied with mutton. It was often supplemented by roast rabbit or rabbit stews. Strangely we seldom if ever consumed poultry in our home; I think because our chickens were producing birds, and the eggs were a valuable addition to our food requirements.

Number Four: "Bringing in the horses" sounds somewhat like a rural ditty, or part of one. But literally we did just that, running and jumping, shouting and moaning (when the horses dodged back), dodging and bending (when running under the trees) and generally performing an exhausting chore, usually accomplished barefooted. Ti-tree scrub, tussock grass, gullies and ridges (fortunately quite low) and a very roughly vegetated terrain created difficulties at every turn, but somehow we managed to yard the frisky creatures.

Frost-covered ground on winter mornings added to the discomfort of our bare toes – with an occasional snake disputing the right-of-way added a touch of risk also. I didn't like being ordered to yard the horses. These were free to wander over about 500 acres, and they certainly appreciated how easy it was to make yarding them a difficult task for us.

Number Five: A most exhausting sheep farming necessity was the act of "dipping

the sheep"! Good reasons existed for this unpopular job. Firstly, several blood-sucking insects (ticks) infested sheep, sometimes the whole flock, and dipping in water charged with suitable poisonous and conditioning chemicals destroyed the pests. Secondly certain ingredients added as extras in the dipping mixture improved the condition and quality of the wool. Even so, this annual event, hot, dusty, exhausting enervating and frustrating, was always undertaken with a good deal of trepidation and reluctance.

The dip was a long trough mostly below ground level, built of stone blocks all cemented together and then given a watertight coating of cement on the inside. At one end an expanded portion into which the sheep plunged was provided, and at the other end there was a gentle ramp up which the sheep walked to the draining pens – usually two pens side by side. The surplus run-off returned to the dip.

Sheep soon learned the characteristic smell of the dip, and used every stratagem to avoid being pushed beneath the watery solution. Stubborn fearful sheep require a power of strength on the part of the workers to move them to their ultimate destination! Often tempers became a little frayed, but good humour soon returned and those "woollies" four hooves dug in, and stubborn as a mule, learned the hard way that the inevitable would come to pass, no matter what they did.

Refreshing "cuppas" plus a snack had wonderful recuperative powers, and during a long, hot, dusty day, were really appreciated.

Each day was lengthened somewhat by the need to be sure the dipped sheep had shed perhaps eighty percent of all water caught in the wool. Waiting was very necessary. Of course, each sheep farmer was careful to dip his sheep as soon as possible after shearing, that is before the woolly fleece became too long and thus failed to shed the very necessary quantity of water caught in the fleece! Obviously the powder as liquid dip was expensive, and badly drained sheep meant several recharges to the depleted fluid in the dip and a greatly increased cost for the annual dipping.

Number Six: Bringing in the hay! Scorching hot summer days when the outside temperature exceeded 100 degrees Fahrenheit often occurred during the "hay season". The old proverb commands us to "make hay while the sun shines!" We, being obedient servants of nature, did just that, and usually worked from daylight to dark with tea breaks, a midday meal and an hour or two for a siesta (if the heat was really fierce) and a meal break late in the evening.

The most enervating and trying job was packing the sheaves on the wagons – slippery sheaves, radiating heat and refusing to stay properly in place until anchored by other slippery sheaves. Some years the hay paddock, because of a rotation system, was distant about three-quarters of a mile from the hay stack yard, which meant that the hay season was unduly extended. But we laboured on, always somewhat exhausted at the end of each day, when our last load, near sunset, was placed close beside the stack ready for daylight start next morning – about 4.30am.

Our routine went something like this. Cuppa at 6.00am. Breakfast at 8.00am. Cuppa at 9.00am. Midday dinner from 12.30 to 1.30pm. Cuppa at 3.00pm. Cuppa at 5.30pm.

No one ever grumbled, but I, for one, did not really enjoy the haymaking season although I appreciated the virtue of physical exertion, and at the end of the season we were certainly physically fit and abounding in good health.

Some excitement did occur – especially when a snake that had been hiding in a

sheaf fell at one's feet. A pitchfork usually pinned down the wriggling creature while the second man on the loaded wagon despatched the venomous reptile.

Sometimes a snake would escape into the load, which posed some problems, and great care was exercised in unloading the hay onto the stack. Obviously there was a risk of a snake strike!

On rare occasions part of the load might suddenly act like an avalanche and suddenly slide swiftly to the ground – much to our chagrin. Careful packing usually prevented such catastrophes, and each load was safely transported to the storage site, and sheaf by sheaf built into the layers which constituted the stack. A stack, depending on the amount of hay to be stored, could hold as much as a hundred tons of hay. It really was a man-sized job, bringing in the hay. The equipment necessary was a wagon, plus four horses; a pitchfork for each man, or boy; a waterbag and cup.

Number Seven: Digging post holes in stony ground! Dad purchased two blocks of land that adjoined some areas he already owned. These two blocks which contained areas of stony hills, and large patches of bracken fern were unfenced and one of our jobs was to dig all the postholes, ram in the posts, bore the holes (using brace and bit) and thread in the wires. Some of the posthole sinking was in sandy ground, and little difficulty was experienced in reaching the required depth. However, where the fence line straddled the hills, or where sand drifting had bared the rocky sub-strata, heavy crowbars had to be used to punch a hole of the right size and depth into the hard, flinty rock.

I remember working the whole of one long, tough day to excavate *one* hole. It was about half a metre in diameter and about a metre deep – a “strainer” hole. This required taking out a layer of hard stone about four centimetres thick, until the required depth was reached.

Obviously a hole one and a half metres deep needed four layers removed before a corner posthole was deep enough! Strainers in line with the fence – every five chain or so, were kept in line by equal pressures from opposite sides. Even manhandling the heavy corner posts into the already excavated receiving hole was no easy task!

The method used was to punch a hole in one “corner”, four centimetres deep, and expand from that small hole until the wield of the bar had chipped away a complete layer. This process was repeated over and over, and by the end of the day you knew you had been working!

***“For it was punch, punch, punch
With fingers weary and worn,
To build a fence, to keep the sheep
Just waiting to be shorn!*”**

More About Fencing

Building new fences which were needed to fence off hay paddocks, or for economy in the running of the farm, or repairs to old fences damaged by the larger farm animals, or just replacing decayed or rusted posts and wires which had to be replaced, was a constant operation on our wide-spread holdings.

Most of the necessary materials could be purchased from merchants whose main business was supplying farmers with special lines such as wire, netting, staples

and, latterly, posts and rails. Posts were usually obtained by our visiting a forest nineteen kilometres away where selected trees were felled and sawn into lengths. These lengths were split into post-size slivers, or retained as strainers.

Our team consisted of four brothers each with his own allotted task of barker, sawyer or splitter.

All the operations necessary proved somewhat beyond the capacity of my enfeebled frame to perform with the ease and facility my capable brothers enjoyed. However, I could bark the logs and I could split the logs into post-size pieces without becoming distressed in any way. But when the crosscut saw was being used I invariably dodged my turn if at all possible.

My weakened legs and stomach muscles ached and protested so strongly that emotional distress built up until I felt I would burst with the agony. Especially was this so while I was still less than 14 years old. **I did not like**, nor appreciate, being at the end of a crosscut saw! The saw was usually about two metres long and the steel of heavy gauge!

We had one big advantage over other folk who visited that particular forest! We always allotted a day to making absolutely sure that our tools were in excellent order and all cutting edges newly sharpened-including our crosscut saw!

My last visit to that forest was when we four brothers arrived back home early! *"Why aren't you getting the posts I ordered you to cut!"* said Dad. *"We have more than completed the number you asked for,"* was the smug reply, *"And we cut twenty strainers as well!"* We had, too!

A Smack in the Face

Jobs are always waiting to be started or completed on a farm.

On a certain day Dad decided that the cow-yard would be completed forthwith. All that remained to be done was to mortise a standing post to enable rails to be placed across the entrance.

Brace-and-bit, an axe, adze and chisel were placed in a handy position, and Dad set to work. First, he marked out rectangles of an appropriate size in strategic places on the post. Then he proceeded to outline the oblongs with neatly spaced boreholes, these holes penetrating to the opposite side. So, neatly marked rectangles appeared on both sides.

With chisel and mallet and a tomahawk and adze Dad attacked the mortise hole, gradually whittling away at the stubborn wood from both sides until the mortise was almost complete. Several of the children were standing around as interested spectators, myself being one of them.

Suddenly Dad gave a final thwack with the adze. Equally as suddenly I let out a startled yell. Hard to believe, but I was directly in the firing line!

The chunk of wood finally released from the erstwhile mortise hole flew with dazzling speed smack into my face almost flattening my nose. After the initial shock and loud yells of protest I was found to be uninjured. Thereafter I did have a wary approach to anyone swinging an adze!

Much sympathy and consoling words with a cool dressing soon alleviated the agony that usually follows a bash on the nose.

Bullock Teams

During my early years of maturation (before I left home to attend High School) I saw many a bullock team, hauling heavy wagons laden with bales of wool, high, and roped securely to the wagon frame. The wagon and team moved slowly and steadily along the road which led towards the sea port and rail head at Beachport. I watched fascinated as the grinding wheels crushed the gravel and if the going was tough the wheels would be hardly turning, but those patient, persistent and courageous bullocks would never give in as long as they could keep the wheels turning, however slowly, and a bullock team's pace was never fast. I was past middle age before I learned that bullocks were shod with a special type of narrow steel shoe. To shoe the bullocks was very necessary, should the team (or teams) be employed in work that entailed long hours of trudging on hard road surfaces.

The "bullocky's" language was somewhat more than picturesque, and the more outlandish it was the more effective it seemed to be. A fearsomely long and thick whip at least four to six metres long, sometimes cruelly wielded, and accompanied by some blistering words, enabled him to reach the leaders even, and all learned quickly that obedience is best. Often the driver walked beside the team, encouraging them in their work, naming each in turn and chastising the lazy ones.

***The young bull's wild and demented eyes,
As his forefeet raked the ground,
Challenged all men to be careful and wise
For the foolish could soon be gored around.***

One day, quite near our home at Athelney (c. 1916) a bullock team hauling a heavy load of wool came to a culvert (small bridge) six kilometres from Beachport. Suddenly the near side back wheel crashed through. The decking of the culvert had collapsed and the wheel had jammed in the empty space. Of course the loaded wagon assumed an unnatural, twisted topside position, and more or less completely blocked the highway. How the bullocky got the wagon mobile again I do not know, but no doubt long experience had taught him a trick or two. By next morning his wagon, team and load were not in sight. The patient and persistent bullocks probably had again proved their worth in a crisis.

***With eyes half shut by the blinding dust,
And necks to the yokes bent low, the beasts
are pulling as bullocks must,
And the shining tyres might almost rust,
while the spokes are turning slow.***

(From "The Teams" by Henry Lawson).

Curiously the sleepers that formed the decking of the bridge (culvert) had been laid parallel to the edge of the road, and occasionally a single sleeper would bear the whole load, borne by one wheel, and provided the load was heavy enough, the sleeper could, though rarely, collapse under the strain.

Drought

The year 1914 was a difficult one for thousands of farmers in Southern Australia, because a terrible drought ravaged the land and the grass was just unable to grow. Odd boggy areas claimed the lives of animals seeking the last vestiges of lush water plants that grew in them, or perhaps the last drop of water. Five draught horses could be bought for thirty pence, and the sheep weakened by starvation, died by the hundreds. Our Dad's stock suffered and dwindled with the rest, and I well remember Victorians seeking agistment for their starving animals, hopefully, no doubt, for they must have known that our own farmers were finding it extremely difficult to keep their sheep, cattle and horses alive. To see the gaunt frames of the starving stock filled many a heart with a deep frustration, and each day, often before breakfast, farmers searched the pitiless skies for signs of approaching changes in the weather. At last the weather did break and 1915-1916 were years of liberal rains and record crops of wheat, and an abundance of grass. Perhaps the suffering was worthwhile. Who really knows?

A year of great scarcity of saleable products (on the part of the farmers) was followed by several years of rich harvests of wheat, barley, oats, fat lambs, and wool and for a while at least smiles of prosperity and well being wrinkled the weathered faces of the rural folk.

Sheep Sale at Millicent

About the year 1920, for certain reasons of which I have no knowledge, Dad decided to sell all his sheep. The day before the sale Dad and several of his sons (I was one) arrived with his sheep at the Millicent sale yards. During the afternoon, and again next morning, busy hours were spent doing the necessary drafting, and the work continued until a satisfactory grouping of the sheep (age, breed, fineness of wool, etc) had been accomplished.

The auctioneer, the Honourable John Livingstone and his assistants arrived by train from Mt. Gambier and soon the auction, under the auspices of Elder Smith & Co. began. Sad to say, only fifty sheep were sold I think because the firm in control did not normally conduct business in the Millicent area. So, the thousands of sheep literally were driven back to their familiar paddocks.

Excitement however was not lacking. One day a two-seater biplane landed in a paddock adjacent to the sale yards. That was our very first sight of an actual machine that flew. Everyone was both excited and curious at the same time. Little did I realise then that in the future I would fly many thousands of kilometres on various tours to foreign lands, - four tours to England, five to America and Canada.

To celebrate the aircraft's visit to Millicent, thousands of leaflets were dropped over the town, partly to advertise an entertainment and several specially marked leaflets entitled the finders to a memento of the "plane's" visit. Our brother Jack found one of the special leaflets, and upon presenting it at the specified address he, much to his delight, received a Swiss watch as a memento. Although of inferior quality the watch was proudly displayed for several weeks, but I'm afraid it soon succumbed to the maltreatment of several curious boys who just couldn't resist frequent examinations of the movement, and that is not a very clever way to treat any respectable watch!

Memories of Long Ago

Henry and I visited Mt. Gambier on the last day of the year of 1923. We wished to celebrate the passing of the old year with fun and games.

In the course of our hilarious pursuits we learned that bowler hats could be purchased for one shilling. We promptly took the opportunity to add some dignity to our appearance. To emphasise our “importance” (socially speaking), we purchased several large four-penny cigars, which we smoked with aplomb, hoping we really looked the part as we went strolling down Commercial Street.

Next morning we lit up another cigar each. Sad to say, my stomach rebelled and I vomited distressfully. I really did feel ill. Never again did I attempt the lighting of another cigar. Even now, after sixty years, I find it hard to remain in a room where a cigar smoker is puffing away. Queer sensations stimulated by my sensitive nasal passages alert my stomach, and queasiness soon follows!

Notes on Smoking:

It's grand to go up in the clouds (of smoke).

It's horrible down in the dumps (of misery).

* * * * *



James and Vera shortly before her death at the age of forty



Kenneth, Barry and Coralie

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

GERMAN CREEK

Living at German Creek (1922-1940)

The move to German Creek was decided upon while I was at High School, and the actual labour and inconvenience of moving was experienced by the other members of my family.

Our new home, almost eighty kilometres south of Athelney was even more isolated. Originally the residence had been built by either Morak or Berara station to house a shepherd and his family and it was about twenty-eight kilometres from Mt Gambier.

Grandfather Chant bought the property when it came onto the market, and he later sold it to Dad who had expressed an interest in it. Dad owned land next to the property and had done so for several years, and the purchase of German Creek was therefore economically sound. At one stage Dad held about 4,000 acres within easy distance of the homestead, and he had built a shearing shed, sheep and cattle yard and a sheep dip. All were necessary for the efficient management of the property (c 1924).

It was while we lived at German Creek that a tragedy occurred which affected us all deeply.

Tragedy - Our Sister Grace Accidentally Killed

“Alma Grace”

*A lovely, sweet little girl, Alma Grace by name
A smiling face, a determined face
A loving tender mein
A general favourite, loved for herself serene
But cruel fate, in store for her, a cruel death did scheme
A fall from a vehicle, a slow but turning wheel
A tiny form beneath, little more did she ever feel!
We mourned her death for many a day
Her sweetness lingers still
And love in my heart will ever stay
Until my God decrees, you must away!*

Alma Grace, pretty, charming, somewhat strong willed, intelligent and affectionate was much loved by us all, and her passing left a very real emptiness in our lives, a feeling of deep loss. The injuries which caused her death occurred at one of the many gateways between German Creek and Mt Gambier. Our sister “Maidie” (Mary) had been commissioned to drive to the market town in order to purchase necessary supplies, and she had been granted permission to take Alma Grace on

the outing. On the third gateway "Maidie" alighted to open the gate and while she was leading the horse through the opening Alma Grace fell from the vehicle, how I do not know, and she landed face upwards, in front of a wheel, which passed over her little stomach. Had she fallen face downwards, she may have escaped serious damage. Unfortunately that was not so and terrible internal injuries, which were impossible of treatment, caused a rapid deterioration in her condition, and two days later the little darling had left us for ever. She lies in the old Mt Gambier cemetery which is near the Blue Lake. Many years later her Mother and Father were interred in the same cemetery. Before Grace died a surgeon had discovered that massive internal bleeding caused by contusions and crushed organs made recovery impossible. Fortunately her last hours were free of much suffering, for she was in a semi-conscious delirium and mostly devoid of conscious feeling. Her only reaction was to stretch out her little arms imploringly towards her Mother as if pleading for comfort and reassurance, something it was impossible for her Mother to grant.

A gentleman from Coola Station who lived next door rode over to tell us of the accident, and, as I was home from School at the time, I rode over to Kongorong to telephone the Mt Gambier hospital. A Mrs Kemp assisted in getting through on the telephone, and a Mr Boardman of the Kongorong Cheese Factory loaned me his Ford car so that we could quickly cover the kilometres to Mt Gambier. Unfortunately the car became bogged on the slippery tracks and I had to run the last couple of kilometres to reach our home. Next morning we retrieved the borrowed car and we soon motored to the Mt Gambier hospital. Mr Boardman's kind act in lending his car was very neighbourly. I have not seen him or a member of his family in all of the fifty years since, such are the vagaries of fate!

Rabbits Finally Overcome

The land was rabbit infested, devastatingly so, and a continuous battle was waged against the teeming millions of bob-tails that more than competed with Dad's sheep for the little sustenance left after their scourging of the grasslands. Not until the introduction of myxomatosis, a deadly killer of rabbits, was the battle finally won, and the farmer could then look forward to prosperity, not ruin.

For many years clever trappers had trapped thousands upon thousands of rabbits, and their carcasses were dispatched to freezing works or canneries for processing before being exported to foreign countries. Some trappers made excellent profits and they were sorry to see the destruction of their livelihood.

The nearest market town of commercial importance was Mt Gambier and it was there Dad conducted most of the business connected with the buying and selling of stock and collecting of necessary supplies. To visit the town meant a round trip of fifty-seven kilometres, and as our transport was usually a buggy drawn by one horse, it took a whole day to complete business chores and make the double trip.

Dad's wool was carted to Burrungule, about thirteen kilometres distant, and loaded on to a railway truck ready for transport to markets in Adelaide or Melbourne. To get to Burrungule it was necessary to cross Coola Station, and that meant the opening and closing of a number of gates. The same was true on the road to Mt Gambier, for six gates barred the way. In fact it made no difference in which direction one travelled, for gates always had to be opened and shut, and it was not until the end of the Second World War that the last of the gates finally disappeared and all the roads were fenced off. Closer settlement and denser traffic forced the change. Fine bitumen roads now have taken the place of what were very rough

country tracks, and hazards such as cattle and sheep, are a thing of the past. Cars and motor trucks now race along at speeds undreamed of when our patient horses leisurely and tirelessly followed the same routes.

I remember well returning home late at night after a special day's outing, and all of us would be asleep in our cart as our trustworthy horse trotted serenely and confidently towards home. Only when the patient pony stopped at the first gate would one of us awaken, possibly because of the cessation of movement of the vehicle, and sleepily climb down, open the gate, guide our outfit through, close the gate, climb aboard and move onwards once again. Usually our horse kept in the middle of the road and passing vehicles had to detour around our outfit, or rely on their blaring klaxons to rouse us from our slumbers. Providence looked after us for we never had an accident of any kind on those trips to Mt Gambier and back.

Snakes Alive

Snakes and still more snakes always managed to make their presence felt at German Creek. When twenty-five tiger snakes are discovered inhabiting the stooks of hay in a twenty acre paddock you will appreciate the fact that they did make their presence felt. Occasionally grass snakes entered our house, tiger snakes were found lying along posts or resting on top of one, or hiding in a sheaf of hay and, of course, being pitched along with the hay cuts on our partly loaded hay wagon. I have had snakes land at my feet! And I'm sure that the mysterious deaths of some of our farm animals could be attributed to reptiles which had been trodden on, or otherwise disturbed.

***Creatures always feared were snakes – black, tiger and brown
But some we adopted as friends to be known
Lizards sleepy, frill necks, lizards very small
And blue tongues, and tail doppers, and tiny skinks and all
We learned were quite harmless, though ugly and quite spiny
And we gave them free passage among the reeds so shiny.***

(Extract from the poem "Small Creatures")

Modern Shearing Methods

Once or twice Dad hired a gentleman by the name of Dave Fletcher to provide nourishing meals for his shearers. Dave was a good cook and provided us with hearty meals of meat and vegetables, freshly baked bread or camp oven damper, and puddings of one kind or another. A special favourite of mine was a boiled pudding, whitish in colour and laced with raisins and currants. It was wrapped in a cloth, tied securely, and placed in a square tin bucket (made from a petrol can) of boiling water. It was delicious if served with a white sauce. Sometimes Mother and my sisters would do the cooking, depending on whether Dad was able to get a genuine shearer's cook.

Dad's shearers used the blades; a kind of large wide bladed scissors. In those days a constant clacking of the "knockers" on the blades told of a busy shearing scene.

Soon after the family moved to German Creek near Kongorong, Dad built a new wool shed (1923) in which he fixed a modern shearing plant worked by an internal

combustion engine. "Click go the shears, boys" as glamorised in the old song, is no longer applicable to the wool industry, but a buzzing and the low mumble of the spinning shaft to which the driving wheel is attached, is typical of all modern day sheds. Where necessary an internal combustion engine, diesel, petrol, or kerosene, adds its quota of noise to a busy scene.

While the "boss of the boards" looks on there is constant movement of shearers finishing one sheep and then hastily grabbing another. Time wasted means less money, for shearing is always done on a piece work basis.

Simultaneously the employees whose job it is to pick up the shorn fleeces hurry about their work. As the fleeces are thrown onto the table, "skirter" remove the stained wool and sometimes the whole "back" before rolling them into bundles and placing each fleece in the appropriate bin. The "rouse-a-bouts" fill the pens as each one is emptied of its quota, meanwhile the "pressers" are busily filling and pressing the bales. At the end of each "run" (two hours in length) the shorn sheep are branded and counted – with each shearers' tally being increased by the number he has shorn during the run. A shearing shed is a busy place when shearing time comes round.

"Shearing"

*The sheep are shorn and the sheep are cut,
and the tar boy angles a dob,
And the sheep are counted, branded too, and
hurried out to grass;
While the fleeces, clear are in the bins,
'til the presser has done his job.
And the heavy bales of compressed wool are
branded true to class,
And the critical eye of the of the "boss of the
board" and the manager's critical pass!
The "rouse-a-bouts" shout as they fill the
pens, the pickers rush and sweep,
And the whirr of the cutters bisecting the
combs could lull a watcher to sleep.
A two hour stretch is called a run, when a
"smoke-o" is the rule
And cups of tea, maybe coffee too, and cake
and "goodies" so sweet,
Refresh the men, the whole team, for another
two hours toil.
For shear they must to fill the bales nor from
the horns recoil*

White Smoke

A strange phenomenon occurred one day, huge clouds of white smoke rolled out through a window aperture in one of the old huts at German Creek. Hasty investigations were made and inside flames were seen licking upwards toward the roof. A sealed gallon tin containing yellow phosphorous had somehow sprung a

leak and the phosphorous, exposed to the air, had instantly ignited. Buckets of water, four gallons at a time were rushed to the hut and thrown upon the raging flames, which were soon quenched. What was the reason for the leakage? We soon discovered some unthinking person had driven the prongs of a fork into the can, and evaporation over a period of days had been sufficient to uncover the phosphorous. Why was the chemical stored on the farm, you might ask? It was used in attempts to exterminate the teeming rabbits by poisoning them. The chemical element was mixed into bran and pollard plus a special oil, and an ingenious cart cut it into pellets which were laid in a shallow furrow. Rabbits have the habit of following tracks, and those that followed the furrow discovered and ate the baits. Death always followed, a somewhat cruel and painful death, but the rabbits bred so rapidly that the farmers had no option but to try every means to destroy them.

* * * * *



Alma Grace Chant a few months before she was accidentally killed in 1924

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE PRESENT DAY

Chosen to Have an Education

After recovering somewhat from my attack of poliomyelitis I was allowed to enrol at the Beachport School along with my older sisters and brother. Shortly after finishing my primary school education I was very, very surprised when Dad informed me that I was being enrolled at the Mt. Gambier High School. This astounding piece of news was conveyed to me while Dad and I were on a visit to my Aunt Florrie who lived in Mount Gambier.

Subsequently I spent four very interesting years obtaining my Intermediate and Leaving Certificates. My scholastic success enabled me to make application for acceptance as a Probationary Student which would automatically guarantee my entrance to the Adelaide Teacher's College, providing I achieved satisfactory passes in my final exams. The college was graced by my presence for one year only; and I was then posted to the primary school at Wallara. The headmaster was C. S. Bartholomaeus, (c.1928). An informative and interesting year followed. Then I applied to be transferred to a school nearer home and was favourably considered. I was ordered to commence duties at the Naracoorte school at the beginning of the next school year, 1920.

More About High School and University

Because of my polio my maturation lagged behind what was normal for those of my age. I was handicapped in another way. My enrolment at the Mount Gambier High School took place in early March and I missed the vital first few weeks of what was to me the mysterious world of book-keeping, shorthand, economics, and advanced algebra.

However a pile of stubborn persistence, allied with a special brand of horse sense enabled me to overcome initial obstacles that often seemed insurmountable, and like that intrepid navigator, Captain Cook, I successfully completed my first year's voyage through the mysteries of secondary studies.

All students were elected to belong to a "House". The names were Lake House, Tower House, Gambier House, and another whose name eludes me. I was elected to Lake House and as I always managed to be in the top, or near the top two or three when tests were given, I managed to score many points for my "House". As my athletic ability was almost nil you may well imagine how much I valued my ability to score through top marks in my studies. I have treasured a gold medal for seventy five years that I won for achieving top marks in the Leaving Commercial Class of 1925.

I attempted to obtain a BA degree – but huge classes in schools where I taught, my tired body, and a certain weakness in my ability to assess what was a normal

behavioural pattern made higher studies a real drudgery, and certain studies relating to the mental sciences – psychiatry, ethics, logics, and the study of psychology – were a little beyond my limited ability. Being simple minded is no hardship as long as the person concerned has no inkling of his disability, but when a person so afflicted has the “ability” to realise his disability he carries a heavy burden indeed!

My Wife Vera and Our Children

Three years after my work at Naracoorte, having served my teaching apprenticeship in country schools, I found myself on the staff of the Croydon Primary School where I remained for many years. During this long period I did two things of note. I continued with my academic studies and I married my fiancée, Vera Penno.

In due time our three children arrived, Kenneth, Coralie and Barry, and we sometimes took a break from the mundane activities of life. The day-to-day living was necessary for Vera's welfare, but we all needed an occasional holiday. Several times we made visits to her parents who lived in Yankalilla. Vera's Father conducted a carrying business and special treats in the form of short trips in the trucks provided quite a thrill for the youngsters.

A two-mile drive was necessary to reach the beach. Occasionally a vehicle was available to transport the whole family for an exciting day playing in the sand and splashing in the water. Yankalilla is a valley town where one can take pleasant walks along a tree-lined creek or over grassy hills. Of course, something interesting was always happening in the trucking yard. It was sometimes rather surprising that such a variety of goods and animals needed to be transported to places near and far.

I think a visit to the country estates of their grand-parents were enjoyed most of all. There were animals sheep, cattle, horses, calves, lambs, cats and dogs, creatures heard of but never seen in close proximity. To the children's delight, these came within touching distance especially when sheep were yarded or when cows were being milked or when pet lambs and calves were being fed. Hungry calves could be quite scary to the uninitiated, and screaming children would race wildly towards the house to escape the bellowing calves. The children, of course, were unaware that the calves were merely obeying the dictates of nature, for feeding was near and they believed the children were bearers of their evening meal! These animals eagerly looked for their meals of bran plus linseed meal and a sugarcane extract mixed with hot water, or maybe it was just milk with certain additives, which had been recommended by expert veterinary surgeons.

When the temperature soared above the century mark, the favourite beach at Carpenter rocks had many visits. Moreover, visits were made to the Tantanoola Cave at Hanging Rocks, also to the Queen Elizabeth caves just over the border in Victoria. These caves were on the right bank of the Slevely River – a rather picturesque area.

The numerous relatives in and around Mt Gambier were not left out of the list of visits to be made. Another attractive picnic spot favoured by the holidaymakers was in the lake area, which is quite close to the city of Mt Gambier. At the right time of year the famous Blue Lake always fascinated the eye with its remarkable blue colouring, nestling at the foot of its sixty metre circular wall of cliffs.

A visit to the family estates had marvellous recuperative effects on the happy

visitors, and healthy appetites, a noticeable increase in energy, a healthy tan and sparkling eyes clearly indicated the benefits bestowed upon the recipients. The only discomforts suffered on these excursions into the countryside of the distant southeast were “stevies” (fleas) and occasional injuries plus one or two minor allergies.

As a family we were lucky in that the children were privileged to enjoy farm life during their most formative years. Certain historical features were within easy reach and the history of early discoveries was readily learned. For instance, Mount Gambier was first observed by a Captain Grant, Master of the Lady Nelson in the year 1801. There was Dingley Dell, the home of Adam Lindsay Gordon, famous for his poetry. There were the Volcanic Lakes first seen by the Henty Brothers of Portland, Victoria. There was also Rivoli Bay which was discovered by the navigator Captain Baudin who, during 1801 met Captain Flinders near Encounter Bay.

Visits were made to historic Port MacDonell, once one of South Australia’s busiest ports where cargoes were carried by “lighters” (large barges) to and from the ships which were anchored in deeper water beyond the guardian reefs.

Holidays in the South-east provided much of interest to our children, periodic visits to Mt Gambier always aroused some extra excitement. Something different was lunch at a café. Local football or cricket matches were attended depending upon the season. Sometimes these activities took us as far as Beachport and even Robe!

One memorable day Bob’s two youngsters, Lindon and Jan Chant, and I ascended to the summit of Mt. Muirhead from where we had magnificent views of Mt Burr and pine forests. The Millicent Plains were set out in orderly pattern far below us. Certainly the South-east can be recommended as a real place of interest to visit with its history of nautical wrecks, drainage works and caves.

The End of the Chant Chronicles

I think this chronicle of events is about completed, and I trust that future generations may develop some interest in learning about the way we lived, and our life style during the first eighty years of the twentieth century.

As I write it is now. the twenty-fourth of March 1986 and I have lived in the same house in Leslie St. Woodville for fifty years. Woodville High School with its buildings and oval occupies all the land on the other side of Leslie Street. Occasionally I cannot help comparing my comfortable dwelling and its restricted views and modern conveniences with the primitive dwellings and lack of conveniences and the wide open spaces that surrounded each of our parents’ homes. However the loneliness that resulted; and the fascinating rural life we lived often has nostalgia for those who love the never-ending, unlimited distances which fade away into a shimmering mirage of mistiness, where the plains are bathed in the enervating heat of a midsummer sun.

Only in their last home at Moorak, near Mt Gambier, did our parents enjoy some conveniences common to most modern homes, even though the sum total was but very modest indeed.

Dad had certain philosophies that controlled the kind of life he favoured. Primitive conditions of living bothered him not at all. However, lying, swearing, stealing and certain immoralities were definitely taboo. Seldom did I hear him utter an expletive

of doubtful origin. Come to think of it, I cannot ever remember my Grandfather swearing within my hearing! He was proud of his good name and delighted in the good opinion of others.

I think I was about ten years old, and Dad and I were spending a night or two in a spare room of the German Creek Homestead. Steve and Mrs Smith occupied the rest of the house. They had kindly invited us to an evening meal. Two courses were served: the main course and then a pudding of some kind after which I reached for a slice of bread and some jam. I had a healthy appetite!

Afterwards Dad admonished me, declaring that good manners demanded that one take what is freely offered, but no more! He continued: *"They'll only talk about you afterwards and accuse you of being greedy!"* I took that lesson to heart and have practised the precept ever since!

As far as I know, Dad never went to church. Certainly he never encouraged us to worship as a family – which is the ideal Christian way. However, during the last few years he joined the Society of Friends, and worshipped regularly with them. He studied the Bible assiduously, and I know he received the assurance and comfort he was seeking through the only real Comforter in this crazy world.

Now, five years later, after severely injuring my left knee (a complicated fracturing of the lower end of the femur) I have been living with my son Barry and his family. For about two years we have lived together agreeably and comfortably for most of the time. Periods of hapless loneliness have beset me occasionally.

As I look back over the last eighty-five years I see an unending line of change. Some of the changes have happened with a blinding secrecy, like a hardly noticed wind change or a cloud shadow passing over a quiescent landscape, unimpeded by those solid hills and valleys, trees and rocks, and buildings.

The Telephone

Telephones were such quiet intruders. For ten long years very few could afford such luxuries, but almost overnight, suddenly numerous buildings, factories, office buildings, schools, houses, colleges, shops and so on were equipped with a telephone. The lines stretched into distant farming areas in ever-increasing numbers.

Ambitions and aspirations of politicians and Telecom envisaged the day when all homes would be connected to one phone at least. Where I now live, there are three telephones and the home I owned was served by three separate sets in three different rooms. Such an arrangement is particularly advantageous to the elderly should they become immobile through accident or some other cause. I, personally, have had painful occasions when I blessed the foresight that prompted me to have installed the extra telephones in my home.

Maughan Church Memorial

Soon after the old Maughan church was demolished in preparation for the construction of a new one, members of the congregation were given the opportunity to append their names to memorial lists. These were later carefully sealed in water tight containers which were then deposited in a selected place somewhere in the foundations of the present day church. My name, James O. Chant, was inscribed on one of these lists, an insignificant contribution to the history of South Australia. Maughan church is in Franklin Street, Adelaide, and when the canisters containing

the names and other memorabilia are opened one hundred years hence I wonder whether my name will be recognised by my distant descendants?

* * * * *



Irene, Edwin, Leslie, Henry, and Robert, children of James Henry Chant who served in the armed forces during World War II



Corporal Bob Chant, Christmas 1946



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

DREAMS

Have dreams any real substance? I wonder and wonder as I try to unravel the mystery behind the creations fantasised by the mind of a sleeping body.

Long years ago I dreamed of Wallaroo and remarkably, during my twentieth year I was stationed in that town for 12 months. Similarly I dreamed of Perth and also a voyage to England, and both dreams eventually became reality within one year of each other.

Several times two other extremely realistic dreams have created great interest during my slumbers. One of them concerns Clay Wells, a place much in my memory and an area much in my affections. All around stretches a wide, featureless plain with scarcely a building in sight. Our Clay Wells itself consisted of one two-roomed hut and a medium sized woolshed. Yet, in my dreams, I have visualised a busy industrial area generating jets of steam and having tall smoking chimneys and many large buildings in which hundreds of people were busily at work. Railway engines pulled heavy freight trains puffing loudly as they did so. Other traffic seemed to be present. That meant there were roads.

Strangely, so far, the only new work to reach Clay Wells has been a fine bitumen road that eventually stretches to Brisbane and beyond one way and to Perth and beyond the other way. I have a feeling that industrial life may originate with the discovery of petroleum in the area.

I wonder and wonder! Dreams are made of such shadowy, misty and shimmering pictures, but to the dreamer they are very real indeed. Are dreams a picture of the future? Maybe they could be.

The second dream, which I have had several times, concerns Rivoli Bay, Beachport. I do not see the bay as a large sheet of water, sparkling in the sun or showing an angry grey face; or as a reflection of glowering, cloudy skies, disturbed by stormy south westerly gale force winds. I see it as a series of peninsulas and islands separated by narrow channels of extremely shallow water. People would wander, in my dream, out across the newly revealed land searching and exploring, perhaps finding shells and valuable jettison or such, and wading in the salty water as they passed from one exposed land area to another.

Fishing, perhaps for crayfish, had come to a standstill. Much of Beachport's tourist trade has I suppose, disappeared along with the sandy beaches.

My dreams have not yet revealed what other changes had taken place in the environs of Rivoli Bay.

Geographical and geological changes have taken place long, long before the white settlers arrived in the southeast. For example, an ancient coastline, now ninety-six kilometres inland forms a line of low hills that stretches NNW from Naracoorte.

Apparently, parts of the southeast continue to move upwards, but at a phenomenally slow pace. Rivoli Bay may be one of those areas. Perhaps an earthquake or some volcanic disturbance may accelerate the earth movement and

thus cause the emergence of land from under the waters of Rivoli Bay. Maybe! But it is an interesting supposition! And should my words be preserved and the phenomenon postulated actually happen in the unforeseeable future, the dimensions of dreams will be greatly widened, and maybe a new study programme created! Excellent!

* * * * *

APPENDIX ONE

Property Sales and Acquisitions

Properties

1 - J. H. Chant purchased the "Old Place" from a Mr. Hanel, and he and his family took up residence there the same year. I have no particulars of the sale of his shop and residence in Tantanoola.

2 - About the same year 3 blocks of land at Clay Wells were purchased from James Chant, his Father.

3 - C.1913. J. H. Chant purchased Athelney , an unfenced area of nearly 700 acres, from the S. A. Government. Personal residence was a condition of purchase, hence we had to leave the Old Place. The house and sheds were demolished and removed to Athelney.

4 - C.1916. Glens (a Mr. Eden owned the land) a large block of land across the railway from the Old Place was purchased. It consisted entirely of parallel sand-ridges covered with flag irises, bunch grass, a variety of shrubs and she-oaks.

5 - C. 1916. Neetchee, a block of land about five and a half kilometres from Kongorong was purchased from the Government. Osborne's block about 50 acres and only three kilometres from Beachport, was purchased about the same time.

6 - Payne's block, situated about nine kilometres north of Clay Wells, was purchased also, but I do not know when, but it may have been purchased at the same time as the Clay Wells property.

7 - 1922. Clay Wells properties were sold to a Mr Jack Lee, and German Creek, about 2000 acres, twenty-five kilometres from Mt. Gambier, and which was owned by Grandfather Chant, was purchased as a replacement for Clay Wells

8 - About the year 1926 two ferny, sandy and hilly range blocks adjoining the German Creek property were purchased. A few years later both blocks were sold to a Forestry Company.

9 - 1940. A block of 70 acres with a residence and situated about five kilometres from Mr. Gambier was purchased and J. H. Chant retired to this property.

10 - Between 1946 and 1948 all the land, except the block at Moorak was disposed of to family members.

11 - Previously all the land near Beachport, approximately 2000 acres had also

been sold, one block, Athelney, to a Mr. Edwards, and another to Burke Island Estate (The Old Place). I do not know who bought Glens.

Old Identities of Beachport (1914-1925)

Lately I have racked my brains in my endeavour to remember all the old identities of my hometown, Beachport. After so many years the task has been extraordinarily difficult. Memory is a fickle jade; but here is my list.

- 1 - Mr Corigliano and his wife, sons and daughters.
- 2 - Mr Pennifeld and his wife, son and daughters.
- 3 - Mr & Mrs Gilders – Farmer.
- 4 - Mr & Mrs T. Healey – Market gardener.
- 5 - Mr & Mrs Chambers and their sons and daughters.
- 6 - Mr J. Lyons – Farmer
- 7 - Mr & Mrs Walter Pretty and their sons and daughter – Butcher.
- 8 - Mr & Mrs Wilson and their sons and daughter.
- 9 - Mr & Mrs Blacketer and their sons and daughter.
- 10 - Mr & Mrs Mounce and children
- 11 - Mr & Mrs McCarthy, and family - Enginedriver
- 12 - Mr Tom McCourt and family (2) Woakwine Station
- 13 - Mr Paddy Nash and wife.
- 14 - Mrs Tothill and children, Mack and Mary - Hotelkeeper.
- 15 - Mr Birchell – Drainage engineer.
- 16 - Mr. Buick – Motor mechanic
- 17 - Mr Solly & wife – Harbour Master.
- 18 - Mr Archie McLean & wife - Policeman.
- 19 - Mr & Mrs Alden and Alice – Steam engineer.
- 20 - Mr & Mrs Crow and family
- 21 - Mr & Mrs Maddox and family

- 22 - The Walker brothers (2)
- 23 - Mr Humphries & family – Coffee Palace
- 24 - Mr & Mrs Cavis and family – Dalgety agent
- 25 - Mr & Mrs Bell and family
- 26 - Mr & Mrs Colin Sutherland and family – Elgin Station
- 27 - Mr & Mrs Moody and family
- 28 - Mr & Mrs Anderson and family
- 29 - Mr & Mrs Bull and family
- 30 - Mr & Mrs Vorwerk and family
- 31 - Mr & Mrs Ted Carthew and family
- 32 - Bob Smith
- 33 - “Snuggery” Holder.
- 34 - Mr & Mrs Grosser, Euthene and Doris.
- 35 - Mr & Mrs Goodhand and 2 girls. – Railway Employee.
- 36 - Mr & Mrs Drewelt and family
- 37 - Mr Roy Justice – Harbour Master.
- 38 - Mr Peakes and family – Station-master.
- 39 - The Lush Brothers. (2).
- 40 - Mr Pinscher – Engine driver.

Also the Fords, Riddells and Turners, all railway employees and Mr.& Mrs. J. H. Chant and family.

* * * * *

APPENDIX TWO

Chant Family Scattered

James Henry lived at German Creek until 1942 when he bought a small property at Moorak about five kilometres from Mt Gambier and there James Henry died in the year 1948.

The property was later sold to my brother Henry, who farmed it for a few years before selling it and moving to Victoria where he purchased a General Store at Mt Evelyn (c. 1950).

The land at German Creek had been divided and sold to several of James Henry's children before his death, Bob, Jack, Edwin and Mary Jane. Mary Jane erected houses on each of the two halves of Neetchee flats, and two of her sons, Vernon and Laurence McLean occupied them and worked the land. Upon the death of her husband, nearly all of the remaining land had to be sold to pay death duties and probate. The other portion was taken over by her son John, who after a few years sold it and moved to Dalby, Queensland.

Mary and her husband Lindsay McLean had purchased Loudon Hill, near Mt Gambier which was occupied and farmed for some time after Lindsay died by Mary and her son Bruce. Soon after his Mother died, Bruce sold the property and moved to Victoria where he bought a dairy farm at Bamawn near the River Murray.

Several more changes took place. Jack sold most of his block to his son Graham, and later still he sold the remainder also. He now lives in Mt Gambier. Edwin arranged for his two sons to work his land on a rental basis, but the venture failed, and Edwin sold the property and now lives in Mt Gambier.

Upon the death of his wife, Robert disposed of his holding, plus two other blocks he had purchased and is now living in Port Lincoln. Thus the only part of James Henry's land now occupied by a Chant is that held by Graham, Jack's son.

Those of James Henry's children who did not inherit land were bequeathed a sum of money instead, and at the time the money was sufficient to place a substantial deposit on a home of generous proportions.

Now our old home at Athelney, near Beachport has long since disappeared. The ancient shed and chaff room, however withstood the ravages of time for many years, and maybe they are still in existence. (1985).

For some time my brother Henry and his family resided in the galvanised iron chaff room which had been remodelled into three or four rooms, and a comfortable, cosy residence resulted. Henry acted as overseer-manager as it were of the land our Dad still owned within the council area of Rivoli Bay, about four blocks of land.

Later, all the land was sold, including a block belonging to Henry, and Henry and his family moved to Mt Hope, where he had purchased some rather undeveloped land. I remember helping Dad to dismantle the old Athelney home and while we were doing so, I first realised the destructive power of termites. I'm sure we were fortunate in that we were not seriously injured, because, almost without exception the rafters, peerings, etc had been hollowed out to the point of collapse! I think it one of the marvels of nature how such tiny creatures know instinctively when to stop chewing at the wood if a collapse is to be avoided. The only worthwhile timber salvaged were a few rafters that had been dressed with coal tar, which apparently is distasteful to termites.

The Year 2000

Now, of the large family of twelve children (two having died in infancy) there only remain myself, my brother Robert, living in Port Lincoln and my sister Hilda, living in Mt Gambier.

Note from the Editors 2005

James Oswald Chant passed away peacefully in his sleep on St. Bartholomew's Day 2002 at the grand old age of ninety-four years. His brother Robert and his sister Hilda are still living, the last of a grand family with their roots in the soil of the Mt Gambier district.

James' last ten years were spent in Sydney in the home he shared with his older son Ken and his wife Alison. We will close this volume with the eulogy given at James' funeral by his son Barry.

* * * * *

EULOGY

EULOGY FOR JAMES OSWALD CHANT (1907-2002)

**Prepared by Barry Chant
28 August 2002**

James Oswald Chant, my father, died on St Bartholomew's Day, 24 August 2002. I think he chose this day deliberately. On 24 August, 1572, 3000 Huguenot Christians were slaughtered by Catholic authorities in Paris. Some estimate that as many as 70 000 lost their lives elsewhere in France. Dad claimed the name 'Chant' came from Huguenot stock prior to 1500. This was impossible historically. There were no Huguenots then, although there may well have been some Huguenot Chants in later years. In any case, Dad was pretty anti-Catholic (a prejudice exceeded only by his animosity towards the Liberal Party) and he may well be smiling a wry smile that he, too, died on St Bartholomew's day.

The name was originally Chaunt, certainly of French origin, and ancestors of our line of the family may be found as far back as William Chaunt (1563-1614) at Stoke-sub-Hamdon in Somerset from which Dad's grandfather, my great grandfather, James Chant, migrated to Australia at the age of 21. He arrived on 7 May 1865 and dwelt for a short time in Kapunda, but spent the last 53 years of his life in the South East of SA, where Dad was born and bred.

Dad was born in Mount Gambier on Christmas Day 1907. According to his memoirs, his first year was one *'of a kind of agony, that tore at my body and forced to me emit long wailings until twelve months had passed.'* The cause was never diagnosed but by his second year he settled down and his *'brothers and sisters marvelled and became my friends.'*

In 1912, the family moved to Athelney, eight miles from the coastal town of Beachport, initially in a temporary dwelling. The following year he contracted polio – a complaint which was to affect him ever after. It was three years before he was able to live a nearly-normal life. He and his brothers and sisters attended Beachport primary school, set on a windy hill overlooking the town. Usually they walked to and from school, often bare-feet. A surviving Grade VII drawing book shows that Dad was a pretty fair hand at sketching.

Later they lived in Clay Wells and then Kongorong, thirty kilometres south-west of Mount Gambier. But farming life proved both too dangerous and too rigorous for a boy with a wasted leg, and in 1922, his father wisely opted to send him to Mount Gambier to high school where he specialised in commercial studies, but *'most of all'*, he later wrote, *'I learned to appreciate the classics eg Shakespeare, Shelley, Burns, Wordsworth, and Tennyson.'*

Sport was really out of the question, although in adulthood he did play tennis

(doubles) and proved to have a strong serve and a quick arm at the net. So the only area in which he could excel was the academic. School diaries from the period show consistently high marks (his average for June 1925 earned a comment of 'an excellent result' from his teacher) and the distinctive, neat handwriting that was his hallmark even into his 90s. He topped his class in his first year, won a school medal and gained entry into Adelaide Teachers' College. He was there only one year before being appointed in 1928 to Wallaroo Primary School, in SA's mid-north. His first class comprised 85 grade four students! 'A colossal task for a starter,' he observed.

In 1929, he was in the South East again, at Naracoorte Primary School. He boarded with an apiarist, and soon discovered that he was allergic to bee stings. (I remember when Dad was stung by a bee once while he and I were driving from Mount Gambier to Adelaide, and he suffered an extreme reaction.)

Three years later, in 1932, he was appointed to Croydon Primary School, in Adelaide, where he was to spend the next quarter of a century. At the end of that same year, on 31 December, he married my mother, a petite and charming young woman named Vera Gweneth Penno, and they moved into a house in Allenby Gardens. The next year, Kenneth David Chant, who is now the family patriarch, was born. On 7 August 1934, Coralie June joined the family.

The following years were tough ones. The family moved to 17 (later 15) Leslie Street, Woodville where Dad was to stay until 1989. He tried to continue his studies. Initially, he had 72 Grade VI boys to teach. He coached football and cricket teams. He joined the 27th Battalion for a couple of years where he learned to play the bugle. He also trained some classes in singing. Sometimes he would be so tired he would fall asleep in the evenings over his marking.

In January 1938, Dad was in the South East working on the farm while Mum and the two kids stayed at home. On 3 January, he wrote to her, *'I feel that something is missing... however I know that I shall survive the loneliness, or that something I miss, and I am looking forward to the day when I shall see you again.'* Ten days later, she replied, *'Am missing you rather much tonight, dear, and just feel like going to bed with your arms around me for comfort.'* On 17th January, he responded, *'As time goes along, I am getting more homesick for you, Darling, and the comforts you so willingly provide for me...'* The reunion must have been warm enough for nine months later, on 23 October 1938, I made my squawking entry into the world. A little sister named Christine Gweneth was to be born a decade later in October 1948, but she only lived one day. So I grew up as the youngest in the family.

When the Second World War started, Dad would love to have enlisted, but the effects of polio prevented this. On 6 September 1942, his 31-year-old brother Bob wrote to him from Singapore, *'You don't have to tell me that you would like to be here. I think I know how you feel about it.'* Dad became an Air Raid Warden. I remember him going out at night with his metal helmet, his khaki bag over his shoulder and his torch in his hand to watch the skies for possible enemy aircraft. For years a large certificate hung on our dining room wall as a tribute to his work. (* 2018 - See pic below)

Nineteen forty-eight was a sad year. After months of illness, on 2 November, mother died of cancer. The suffering had been long and dreary. At times, the treatment was worse than the cure. After one visit to the hospital in January of that

year, Mum wrote that she felt 'crook enough to die' and wanted the treatment discontinued. Dad was again in the South East with Ken, while Mum holidayed with Coralie and me at Yankalilla with her sister Ol, and did his best to cheer her in his reply, noting that he was writing the letter in bed and wished he was in bed with her. As the months passed, Mum's condition deteriorated. She spent long periods in hospital while Ken, Coralie and I were farmed out to neighbours, relatives and friends. Finally the end came.

'Our loss was great,' he wrote in his memoirs. 'But I would have wished her demise had happened months before, as no good and loving person should have been asked to face such agony.'

These were hard times for all of us. It was not easy for Dad to raise three children on his own. And it was not easy for us without a mother. Coralie, in particular, missed her Mum, and Dad did not always seem to understand her needs. Ken and Dad had some tight times. I guess as the youngest one, I just kept out of the way. Ken later left home and worked in places as far removed as Kongorong, Woomera and later Ballarat, Victoria.

Dad was a stern teacher and a stern father. He instilled strong values into us. A few years ago he wrote –

***One thing should clearly be our bounden aim
To use all rich things wisely and all wickedness disclaim.***

I remember one occasion when I borrowed from some money I had been collecting for something at the church, intending to pay it back later. He was furious. It was not my money and I should not have touched it. Another time, I failed to turn up to a Baptist meeting to which I was committed and went to a Pentecostal meeting instead. He was more angry that I had not kept my word than that I had gone to another church. I never forgot these lessons.

But there was a softer side to him, too. Shortly after Mum died, Ken was on holiday in the South East when he contracted appendicitis and finished up having surgery on three occasions in all. Dad wrote of the 'deep fear' he felt for Ken's life. Prior to the third operation, one doctor told Dad all was well, but he insisted on them keeping Ken in hospital overnight. An hour later Ken had emergency surgery. Dad later wrote, *'Sometimes it pays to argue. If I had listened to the doctor's advice and taken Ken home, he would probably have had a burst intestine before I was able to return him to the hospital. And when I stop to conjecture what might have happened horror fills my mind and I thank God for those medical folk who saw the danger and provided for a vital need. Act first, worry afterwards.'*

Sometime during this period, he gave up smoking, which he did by a simple act of will. I remember him pointing to our new round-edged Kelvinator refrigerator some time in the 50s and saying, *'That represents the money I would have spent on cigarettes over the last two years.'*

A couple of times after Mum died, he struck up relationships with lady friends. I remember hoping that he would marry at least one of them – a woman named Grace Neale. He asked her once but she declined. He later told me that he would never ask her again: if any woman, no matter who she was, said 'no', that was it: she would never get a second chance. As it happened, it was probably just as

well they did not marry, as Grace, like Mum, later died of cancer.

In 1952, Ken and I were baptised in the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. Dad did not approve of such goings on. It was all self-hypnosis as far as he was concerned and he forbade me to attend Pentecostal meetings. But in later years, I think he was really rather proud of what we both achieved.

The years rolled by and in 1956, Dad took long service leave and travelled overseas – by ship to England and Europe; by air to the USA; by Greyhound Bus across the States; by air back to Sydney; and by train to Adelaide. On the morning he returned, I was to drive his nearly-new Morris Minor car to town to meet him. Reversing out of the drive, I did not notice that the car door had not shut properly and it caught on the gate post, and was almost wrenched off its hinges. I was appalled at the prospect of meeting him with his car in such a state. If I remember rightly, he was not as angry as I feared he might have been! This trip revealed a new love in Dad's life – the love of travel.

In 1958, he began a different role as a relieving teacher. On 20 July that year, while Dad was teaching in Minnipa, 700 kilometres away, I crashed a motor cycle into a tree and nearly killed myself. Dad had to make the long drive home not knowing if he would find me dead or alive. After that he often spoke of the way God answers prayer. In fact, with the perverseness of which most people who knew him were well aware, when Dad was in the presence of believers he often argued against the faith, but let anyone attack what we believed and he would spring readily to our defence!

After several years of relief teaching in schools all over South Australia, he finally retired at the age of 60. He was very weary and spent most of the first year just sitting around watching television and reading. My wife and I were really concerned that he was just going to fade away. We need not have worried. It would be 34 years before that happened!

Now began a life of travel and lawn bowls and a new hobby, gem stone collecting and polishing. He went overseas several times visiting all parts of the world. His diaries are loaded with extensive reports of these trips. He enjoyed his bowls and played fairly well, if his own assessment is to be believed. And there are hundreds of gem stones to bear witness to his hobby.

Dad was tough. His gall bladder was removed in 1968. Ten years later, he had open-heart surgery. His polio-affected leg would sometimes give way on him without warning and too often, he fell and injured himself, in a couple of cases when he was overseas. He broke his foot and his knee and had several operations. Eventually he had to use a walking frame and sometimes a wheelchair. On one occasion, he fell at home when he was on his own and had to struggle to get to the phone. On another, when I was wheeling him in his wheel chair, his foot slipped and his knee snapped. I felt very guilty about this but he never blamed me. In 1982, he had a pace-maker inserted. On more than one occasion, when he came out of the operating theatre, we wondered if he would pull through. But somehow, he always bounced back.

He loved a game of Scrabble or chess – although he was wont to use some interesting words on the Scrabble board. Coralie and Alison both spent many hours accepting his challenge.

Photos of Dad in his thirties show him to have been a manly man – handsome

and debonair. In spite of the polio, he was strong and vigorous. Sometimes he railed about the difficulties his weak leg created, but most of the time he just got on with life without complaining. He did things that others in better health often failed to do. *'Destiny is like a resting frog,'* he once said. *'No one knows for certain which way the creature will leap!'* He was feisty at times and loved an argument – especially about politics. He was thrifty and worked hard to save his money – which militated against him in some ways as it stopped him getting government benefits. He was always honest and decent. He was a good man. His faith was a fairly private thing – I cannot imagine him ever being a Pentecostal! – but it was real nonetheless. He was a God-fearing man. *'Life has been good,'* he wrote, *'interesting, rewarding, and, by the forgiving grace of God, reasonably comfortable and successful.'* And a short couplet –

***Who has experienced the miracle of birth
And then declared, 'There is no God on earth!'***

There is a great deal more that I could say. For those who are interested, he has left extensive diaries and memoirs which give much more detail—together with enough money to have them typed and printed.

In the last decade of his life, he lived for two years with Vanessa and me in Adelaide and then came with us, with little protest, to Sydney where he lived with Ken and Alison. In later years, he spent a lot of time listening to hymns and playing the New Testament on tape. In the last few months, his health deteriorated to the point where professional care was essential and it was necessary for him to go to a retirement home. By this time, unfortunately, his memory had failed and he knew very little of what was happening around him and no longer seemed to recognise his family members. On the other hand, he was peaceful and seemed more contented, cheerful and genial than he had ever been before. He rarely complained. It was a pleasure to spend time with him.

He once wrote some verses about an engine that wouldn't start because a small part was out of place. His concluding stanza in many ways summarises his own life –

***Life, like that engine, by small things is upset,
But unlike a machine, we have brains to think
And with a little cranking and a faith in God instead
We can beat sad travails that carry us to the brink.***

During the last weeks, Ken, Alison, Vanessa and I tried to ensure he had a visit every day or at least every two days, as Coralie would also have done had she been in Sydney. Someone once asked me, *'What is the point of going to see him so often if he doesn't even know who you are?'* My answer was simple, *'He's my Dad.'*

When I saw him last, I said, *'I'll see you in a couple of days.'* Well, it may be a bit longer than that. But one day we will all meet again, and then we will see him as he might have been—not lame, but well and strong. And he will walk the heavenly fields as he always wanted to walk those on earth—without fear of falling and without a limp.

* * * * *

THE RAAF VAOC CERTIFICATE

FOR KING AND EMPIRE

*"Presented to J O Chant by the RAAF
as a record and in appreciation of Patriotic Response
to the Call of Country by serving in the VAOC.
20th September 1945."*



Original back cover of the 2008 book
(Picture of the Author)

*** END ORIGINAL BOOK ***



In memory of
Alma Grace Chant
 1920 - 1924
A short and tragic life.

Lake Terrace Cemetery - Mt Gambier
Row M - Plot 104
 Photo of Jamie W. Ryan
*(Son of Coralie...grandson of the author
 and creator of this eBook - 2018)*

** We hope you enjoyed the book **

* * * * *



ALMA GRACE - MUSIC CD

While creating this eBook I became inspired to write songs about it.

The 14 songs fell together (very easily) from April to July 2018.

I would like to cite *divine intervention* in its creation...

but I do not, however, *firmly* believe in ethereal inspiration.

This is a well crafted and professionally produced CD.

TRACKS

1 The Last Day - 2 Alma Grace - 3 Termites - 4 Robin Hates Strangers
5 Halfway To Heaven - 6 The Haunted Hut - 7 Strangles - 8 The Old Place
9 Clay Wells - 10 Drain M - 11 Athelney - 12 Uncle Arthur
13 Alma's Haunt - 14 Mary's Lament
(Melodic Rock/Ambient - 53 mins)

More info...

RUN415.COM

BANDCAMP

* * * * *

Thank you for reading...

**Six Hundred and Forty
Acres To Play!**

= THE END =

[BACK TO TOP](#)