

The Oaks Historical Society Inc

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Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum

Newsletter

November 2023

RED CEDAR IN THE BURRAGORANG

By Dennis Ashton

The first recorded sighting of Red Cedar in Burragorang Valley appears to be during Thomas Jones' 1818 exploration down the Cox River when he sighted the trees near the junction of the Kowmung River.

In 1890 the *Katoomba Times* reported "the forests near the vicinity of the Cox's River abound with valuable timber of all descriptions such as Red Cedar. Penrith draws from the forest large supplies of cedar, which is floated in rafts down the Cox's River to that township."

In the early 1900's the *Alpha and Omega Timber Company* begun cutting cedar in the Kowmung and floating it downstream to Penrith when the river was in flood. Their access to the timber was along Scott's Main range then down to the Kowmung along the Wide Opening Range.

This method was not a success as logs often got caught on the banks on the way down.

According to Les Maxwell, apparently a marked log was floated down the Kowmung River at 4pm and retrieved at Penrith at 8am the next day (must have been a high flow).

About 1907, *Goodlet and Smith*, a company from Granville, made a road called the Cedar Road, from the junction of Butchers Creek and the Cox River, then up to Scott's Main Range and along to a ridge just south of Wide Opening Range and down to the junction of Gingra Creek and the Kowmung River.

They then constructed tracks up Gingra Creek until it was too steep and down the Kowmung then up Little Tiwillia Creek. The remnants of these tracks can still be found today.

The cedar cutters camp was on Gingra Creek near the Kowmung junction (pictured top). The timber was transport-

ed to Camden railhead by teams with timber jinkers.

The Cedar Road still exists as W2A fire road, from Lake Burragorang, then onto Scotts Main Range W2 then following down to the Kowmung Gauging Station along W2B Fire Road, basically following the same route as in 1907.

In addition to this professional timber extraction, many property owners also utilized Red Cedar throughout the Burragorang Valley for such items as bee boxes. Local Burragorang man, Leo Rideout said his father used red cedar to make bee boxes because of its hardness and it was easy to work with. Their bee shed along with the bottles set in the ground in 4's to keep the bee boxes off the ground to stop ants can be still found at the start of the Centre Ridge track off Sheep Walk Road (unknown if it survived the 2019 fires).

During the early stages of construction of Warragamba Dam in the late 1940's and early 1950's, Daniel Cleary had improved the track from the Yerranderie Road at Twin Peaks to Bindook along the Colong Stock Route then constructed a new road further west towards Mount Shivering then pushed a track down into Still Creek and Waterfall Creek to log the cedar. Jack Chalker was the dozer operator, and Les Maxwell was also engaged in this operation. The timber was then trucked out of the valley and up the mountain to their mill at Camden. This track and the remaining cedar and regrowth were inspected by Water Board Assistant Forestry Officer Red Mitchell and Ranger Ron Mortimer 26 February 1970 and found the track in reasonable condition but covered with fallen timber and growth.

Pictured Ranger Fred Morris at a Red Cedar on the Jenolan River 1964. Continued page 4..





President's Report

Trish Hill

All of our months are generally busy but some less so with bus group bookings and October was one of those with 2 groups, one from Holdsworth Community Centre, the other from Carrington also a Burraborang Reunion.

Last Saturday was our Working Bee which is always the last Saturday of each month. With many in attendance we got through quite a few jobs. Morning tea and lunch supplied is an additional enticement as well as good company and volunteers are always welcome. Thanks to all who attended for a great days work.

Maria Pozza is retiring from the Weekend Volunteer Roster and we wish her well and thank her for her valued service to our roster. Linda Bolton will be the roster replacement and we welcome Linda into her new role.

Our best wishes to Aileen Connolly for a speedy recovery and hope to see you back on deck soon.

Thanks to all of our valued members who have renewed membership. We want to advise that as of January 2024 postage stamps are increasing to \$1.50. We will need to ensure our mailing membership list is current and review our fees next year due to the significant postage fee increase. For members who haven't already, you might like to look at receiving an email newsletter and hard copies are always available at the centre.



The winners of the Spring Garden Competition will be announced at The Bloom Festival on Sunday 5th November at the Picton Botanic Gardens. Details are on our back page or on Councils website.

Thanks to Dennis Ashton, Vicki Madeley and Noelene Mainwaring this month for their assistance with newsletter items.

Pictured on the garden across from the Burraborang Cottage is the bird bath in Memory of our dear friend and Patron, Richard Booth.

Hard copy, Summary Copies are available of the

Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Western Sydney Airport at the front counter for anyone wanting to pick one up. A full copy is available digitally at

<https://www.wsflightpaths.gov.au/>

The following Council project may be of interest to members. Council is developing a **Significant Tree Register** to recognise and protect Wollondilly's most important trees and are currently seeking nominations for trees in *Wollondilly, initially for trees on public land, that meet one or more of the following criteria: Exceptionally large/ Old/ Known heritage significance (especially if they are not heritage listed nor in a heritage conservation area). Nominations for this round will close on 16 November 2023. To find out more information or to nominate a tree – visit www.yoursay.wollondilly.nsw.gov.au* ■

Our heartfelt thoughts go out to Suzy Brandstater and her family for their recent loss ■



Schoolies Report

Bev Batros

As the Centre continues to gather its volunteers' profiles, the most common comment I hear is, "I don't remember when I started". It is indicative of how long some people have volunteered and how pleasant they find the Centre to be.

Vicki Madeley has generated her Mum and Dad's profiles which bring back fond memories of their incredible contributions, especially in the Schools' Program. Jim Whyte, Vicki's dad, was my mentor when I began as coordinator in 2016. He was there every Thursday morning when I arrived showing me how to do things and helping set up. For many years he took various roles in the Schools' Program including the laundry, timekeeping and making sticks and boomerangs for the Aboriginal Art.

We are fortunate in the program that we continue to have incredible people taking over. Kevin Wintle is the 'Jim' of this current period, constantly fixing things, setting up the

day, helping out in a million ways and leading the team in the agricultural shed.

Maureen, Jim's wife was also involved in the Schools' Program and was Treasurer for 27 years which is a remarkable feat! We hope that our current amazing Treasurer, Debbie Seymour, who took over from Maureen, will remain that long too! She is also involved in the Schools' Program.

We welcome back team member Adelina Austin from her long overseas trip and are glad to hear another team member, Bruce Brown, is on the mend after his operation.

Our schools this term will be Bradbury, Macquarie Fields, Bundanoon and a home school group. Bradbury has not been since 2016 and Bundanoon will be having their first visit. Currently we are on task to equal our 2016 record of 31 weeks filled and we have 4 weeks booked for next year ■



Family History & Local Archive Report

Sue Davis

A huge thank you to The Oaks Historical Society for sponsoring me to attend the Royal Australian Historical Society (RAHS) Conference held in Wagga Wagga on 21st and 22nd October. Right- The Conference Welcome on Friday night, was held in the heritage building of the Wagga Wagga Council Chambers. It was wonderful to be back sharing ideas and gaining new knowledge at a face-to-face conference. The RAHS are very organised in ensuring a quality-controlled conference and they did not disappoint this time. The theme for the conference was 'Local and Community Histories for Our Future'. The three sessions each day were strictly divided into three half hour sessions that allowed time for questions and answers.



The opening address was given by CSU Adjunct Associate Professor Bruce Pennay OAM. His focus was *Looking for Ways ahead: A local response from Albury-Wodonga*. In his address, Prof. Pennay, outlined the advantages of digitisation giving a wider access to history. He also spoke about collaboration between creative folk ensures different points of view can be presented. Other interesting sessions-based talks were on Stories from the Riverina; Digitising the Past; Voices from the past; and The Future. I was inspired by all the speakers which may have been connected with our family having spent 15 years living in Wagga Wagga! The conference also showcased a new Museum facility that has recently been opened in Wagga with a purpose-built building (see picture right) called MoR - *Museum of the Riverina*. The new museum is built on the site

of the old one. Part of the old one was demolished and part is now used as storage. A huge significance audit has seen a lot of objects being de-accessioned. The new museum tells the social history of the Riverina well, with lots of touch screens that minimise objects exhibited. All screens are situated low down to allow children or wheelchair bound to access. The museum is run and planned through the council with some paid staff and some volunteers.

The RAHS General Manager, Suzanne Holohan, conducted an excellent business session for local and community histories. It was designed to help societies and museums to better run their organisations into the future and covered, *Managing a Cashless Society; Making the Most Out Of Meetings; and Managing Volunteers*. I invited Suzanne to come and visit us some time and she is interested in organising an excursion for her team in the future.

The 2024 RAHS Conference is to be run in Campbelltown! It will be a great opportunity for us to have a publication stall and entice some of the delegates to come and visit us! The plans are still underway for a theme and location.

I will have a more detailed report on the Conference, and implications for us, available at our next General Meeting ■



Acquisitions Report

Allen Seymour

There have been a few items this month. John Doggett donated his old mining helmet and some mugs. Two of these were awarded to John during Clutha First Aid Competitions in 1975 & 1976. Two more were safety awards to Oakdale Colliery. Also on the mining front is a personal danger safety tag used at Brimstone by Phil Hughes. From Dennis Ashton comes two books about Berrallier's journeys in Burragarang. These have gone straight into the library. From Bob & Viv Allen is Bob's old army blanket, which has gone onto the shearer's bed in

the cottage. Maurice Brown has donated some hammers, chisel, tongs, coal shovel and hay knife. These were all part of Bill Macklin's collection. Bill used to run the hardware shop and collected a lot of unusual items. The hay knife appears to be very old, as the blade is made in one piece and very heavy, probably done by a blacksmith. The coal shovel is also one piece and looks like it is blacksmith made and the sort of thing that would have been used to shovel coal into a boiler at a mine. Thanks everyone for these items ■

Red Cedar in the Burratorang continued

After the Warragamba Dam was completed, the Forestry Section of the Water Board carried out surveys and studies of the timber and forests within the catchments for the better protection of water quality for the stored waters of Lake Burratorang. Generally, most timber harvesting was now prohibited.

Max Wooton (originally appointed as Assistant FO in 1957 and later appointed FO) was the Senior Forestry Officer with Red Mitchell (1963) and later John Wrigley (1971) as Assistant Forestry Officers.

During the early to mid-1960's, the Forestry Section commenced trials of tree plots to re-establish a forest cover back onto the large areas of old cleared farmlands that now existed above the full storage level of Lake Burratorang, both to prevent or improve any soil erosion issues and for better water quality objectives.

Red Mitchell was particularly interested in Red Cedar (*Toona ciliata*) and included this species not only within the many tree plots established throughout the catchments, but also individual and multi plantings in different areas. He also took note of the many still natural stands of Red Cedar throughout the area.

His plantings, mainly done during the mid-1960's and early 1970's were all numbered, monitored and measured and notes on soil types, aspect, shade, insect damage and interference by rabbit, wallaby or trampling by wild horse or cattle were observed.

His work on 'Planting trials with Red Cedar' was published in 'Australian Forestry', Volume 35, No 1 June 1971 and featured in the Water Board Journal.

Red Mitchell retired in early 1977 and some monitoring of his trial work carried on but not as extensive.

In 1992 Catchment Protection Officers Terry Farmer and Dennis Ashton rekindled the interest in red cedars and realized that the Water Board had the chance of recording a 30-year experiment and gaining valuable information on the re-establishment of Red Cedar.

An invitation was conveyed to the 15-year retired Red Mitchell if he would like to inspect some of his old Red Cedar plantings and he was keen to be involved.

Some of the inspection sites were carried out at: Nattai River, Sheehys Creek, Blue Gum Creek, Little River, Ripple Creek, Gogongolly Creek, Pocket Creek, Wolams Creek, Pearses Creek, Oaky Creek, Alum Springs, Cedar Creek, Butchers Creek, Brimstone Gully, Lacys Creek, Yerranderie, Quigtown, Tonalli River and others by boat and vehicles and satisfactory conclusions were observed and documented, some sites the trees had reached 18 meters in height with a circumference of up to 96 cm.

Encouraged with these findings, Terry Farmer along with Wyn O'Brien of the Blue Mountains Society for Growing Australian Plants had grown and planted some 80 Red Cedar trees in the Cedar Creek area on the 24th September 1993, 30 above Hayes Crossing and 50 below. It is not known if these plants survived the 2019 bushfires but one of this batch of Red Cedars certainly did as it was grown at Dennis Ashton's property at Thirlmere and is now a large and healthy tree, it too was monitored during its growth. Story & photos by Dennis Ashton

Information sources-Notes from Red



Red Mitchell at Higgins Creek 1966



Natural Red Cedar tree at the Kowmung 1969



Red Cedar potted at Nepean Depot 1966



Mitchell and his Australian Forestry article, Report from Terry Farmer, personal knowledge and discussions with Jack Chalker, Les Maxwell and Leo Rideout and Shack Country -(Jim Barrett).

← Natural Regeneration Wollums Creek 1976

1951 School Milk Introduced by Menzies Government

Far from being a conspiracy to put a whole generation off drinking milk forever, school milk was conceived as a benefit. The *State Grants (Milk for School Children) Act* was passed by federal parliament in 1950 and by the end of 1951 most states were inflicting this benefit on children up to the age of 13. A report to the government in 1973 deemed school milk poor value for money and the Whitlam government abolished it. School milk plans had been in existence in many states prior to the introduction of the federal scheme. The idea originated in Britain in the 1920s and some schemes, funded by private benefactors, were operating in Sydney as early as 1924. Several



early schemes provided cheap, rather than free milk. From 1925 the Ashfield Dairy in Sydney operated a school milk program where each child paid sixpence a week and received the equivalent of a breakfast cup of milk each day. In its first two years, the dairy dispensed more than a million bottles, complete with straws. At a time when the objective was to fatten children up rather than slim them down, it had dramatic results. As the proprietor of the dairy wrote: *'Examples of children gaining five to six pounds in weight in the first three months, as well as improving mentally, is almost daily brought under my notice: in one case, in particular, of a weakly boy who gained 7 ¼ lbs. in eleven weeks, and became much brighter in his class.'* During the 1930s there was an increasing call for school milk. In New South Wales, both the Fresh Food and Ice Company and the Dairy Farmers' Co-operative Company indicated that they were willing to supply milk to schools at specially reduced rates if the cooperation of teachers could be secured. The Co-operative proposed to supply the milk in cans with taps, with mugs for each child to use and protested that the need to supply bottled milk would require a large-scale, expensive remodelling of their plant. In Victoria, a Government-funded scheme supplied milk to schools, but only in winter. School milk schemes were proposed in Queensland, but not implemented.

The federal scheme for free milk required the cooperation of state governments to arrange for distribution. Victoria initially refused to participate but, by the end of 1951, the program was operating in all states except Queensland. Queensland eventually implemented the school milk program in 1953. Milk was distributed to creches, kindergartens, nursery schools and private and public schools. In total, close to a million students aged up to 13 received one-third of a pint of milk each school day. Recollections of the scheme vary. While some remember it fondly, most seem to have

unpleasant memories of milk left to become warm and unappetising. Many claim it put them off milk forever. Personally, I would rank the abolition of school milk as one of the crowning achievements of the Whitlam government.

"Remembering School Milk"

What are your memories of drinking milk at school?

This may have been a good or bad experience it seems depending on if the milk was cool or had sat in the hot sun before consuming. It may also depend on if you were well fed or poor as some children looked forward to drinking milk as they had not had breakfast.

Compiled by Vicki Madeley.
Continued.....over page

'My memories are of sitting on the seats in the playground, drinking little bottles of milk with silver foil lids and a straw. We would line up first and walk past the wire crate of milk bottles and pick up one as we went past then move to a seat to consume it. Our milk was generally cold so I didn't mind it, later Mum gave us some milo in a little paper bag and we would pour that into the milk to make it more flavoursome. We also collected the silver foil lids for the classroom and made all sorts of craft and artwork with them.'

Vicki - Baulkham Hills Infants School. 1960's

'My first memories of drinking school milk were at Oakdale Primary School, the milk would arrive in large milk cans from a local dairy, I think the Milko was Caddy Chesham from "Craigend Dairy". Each class would line up on the veranda or in front of the main building assembly area, the milk was laddled directly from the milk cans into your mug. We would then sit on the seats under the big turpentine tree in the playground. (I also recall at times milk was replaced by Hot soup)' Bob - Oakdale Primary School - late 1960s.

'In 1970 I started at Camden Primary School, what a change, Milk stacked high in crates in the weather sheds in small bottles 1/3 pint not refrigerated. Depending on the weather the milk ranged from cool to warm. When the milk was unattended for too long the Magpies would peck a hole in the lid. Every class member wanted to be on milk duty. You would walk to the weather shed and carry a full crate back to the classroom, pass out the straws (paper, ahead of times). Our teacher would tell us to punch a hole in the lids with a sharp lead pencil to reduce the mess. Most of the boys would compete who could drink theirs the fastest.' Bob - Camden Primary School 1970s.

Remembering School Milk Continued.....



My first memory of being given milk was about 1946 at Padstow Park Public School when we were required to bring a cup or mug each day. My father made me a mug by soldering a handle onto a condensed milk tin. The milk was distributed at recess (11 o'clock) each morning but I think some parents considered that this was unhygienic and the milk was stopped until a year or two later bottled milk was introduced. The milk was left under the trees at the front of the school and was warm by recess. I had a note from my parents informing the school that as we had a milking cow at home it was not necessary for me to have the extra school milk.

As a teacher in the late 1950's and early 1960's I remember that the milk was still being supplied and although I supervised the distribution of the bottled milk, I never compelled any child to drink it because of my own experience as a child -Vivian

UNVEILING THE KUNGLA STORYBOARD

In late 2020 after discussion at a Wollondilly Council Heritage Advisory Committee meeting about the Kungla building in Thirlmere and its significance to the local Estonian community, Cr Banasik provided an overview of consultation that had been conducted with Mart Rampe from the local Estonian community. A decision was made to investigate funding to restore the sign and clean the brickwork and The Oaks Historical Society applied to the Estonian Cultural Foundation in Australia (ECFA) and were successful in obtaining funding in the 2021/22 Grant Program.

The 'KUNGLA', is the store on The Oaks Road at Thirlmere. This building with its iconic KUNGLA sign represents the endeavours of many hardy people who came to Australia after the First and

Second World Wars. Amongst those people who found sanctuary in Thirlmere, were Estonians who arrived with very little. In the beginning, they endured without electricity, mains water, communications or medical facilities and built simple dwellings from bush timber and found materials. Despite these difficulties, many of these Estonians soon established the beginnings of a local poultry industry. To overcome logistical issues, the Kungla Farmers Association was established in 1938 and in 1952, this organization was reconstituted as the Thirlmere Farmers' Co-Operative Society Limited. Following the creation of the Co-operative, the original store was constructed on this site. The building was crowned with the KUNGLA sign which, legend has it, was adopted from the epic Estonian poem Kalevipoeg - meaning a land of opportunity. During the 1960's and 1970's the store, under the leadership of

the Co-Operative, had a very successful commercial life as the poultry industry in the Thirlmere district prospered. At the time, it was described as "The Largest Egg Producing District in NSW". However, due to the imposition of a range of negative economic and regulatory conditions during the late 1970's and early 1980's, the local poultry industry declined and as a result, the Co-Operative was officially wound up on 9th June, 1982. Whilst the ownership of the building and land has changed several times since then, the Kungla sign has been retained and its historical significance has been recognized by Wollondilly Shire Council as a heritage item.

On Saturday 30th September 2023 during the early afternoon we gathered together to commemorate the contribution Estonians made to Thirlmere

and to celebrate with the Thirlmere community, the restoration of the KUNGLA sign and to unveil the commemorative storyboard at 39 The Oaks Street, Thirlmere. Attendees included many members of the local Estonian community, Sulev Kalamae - Estonian honorary consul, Maie Barrow-honorary archivist of Estonian Archives in Australia and Ingrid Galloway - Director Secretary of ECFA, Judy Hannan MP and Councillors Michael Banasik and Suzy Brandstater. The team who planned and organised the Kungla sign restoration and created the Storyboard included Mart Rampe, Councillor Michael Banasik and representatives of The Oaks Historical Society at the Wollondilly Heritage Centre and Museum- Trish Hill and Doreen Lyon.

Pictured- Sulev Kalamae, Maie Barrow, Mart Rampe Ingrid Galloway with members of the local Estonian Community in front of the Storyboard ■



Reminders, News & Info

WEEKEND ROSTER	
NOVEMBER	
Viv & Bob	Saturday, 4
Kaye & Jim	Sunday, 5
Debbie & Allen	Saturday, 11
Trish & Kevin	Sunday, 12
Sue & Helen	Saturday, 18
Bev & David	Sunday, 19
Laurette & Phil (Working Bee)	Saturday, 25
Marlane & Cheryl/Kate	Sunday, 26
SUPPER	ROSTER
November	Bring a plate
December	Bring a plate



General Meeting

Monday, November 6th 2023 at 7pm

Meeting followed by supper/All welcome

BLOOM 2023
Wollondilly
Garden Expo
& Plant Fair

On Sunday 5 November head to the Picton Botanic Gardens and enjoy live entertainment, informative gardening workshops, specialty market stalls, food trucks, a Children's Corner with activities and face painting & more!



Time: 8am-2pm at Picton Botanic Gardens. The Expo will feature demonstrations throughout the day including the announcement of the Spring Garden Competition winners for 2023.

FROM THE WILLIS FAMILY REUNION

This year marks 190 years since William Willis arrived in Australia and researcher Don Willis organised a reunion for descendants in April this year at Redlands Bay QLD with 60 people attending, including John and Noelene Mainwaring. Willis was a 16 year old convict



boy who arrived in Sydney aboard the 'Mangles' on 19th April 1833. He was sentenced to 7 years for stealing bacon and cheese at his home town of Trowbridge, England. He was assigned to work for George Harper at Abbotsford property, Picton.

William received his certificate of freedom 14th October 1839 and started to acquire land in the Burrangorang Valley in the 1840's for farming.

In July 1849 William married Celia Mitchell at St Johns Church Camden and they made their family home at Upper Bur-



ragorang Valley. They moved in the early 1870's to their property named 'Longacre', which was over 600 acres on both sides of Picton Road, now Montpelier Drive. William & Celia had 12 children. Three of their children married three

children from the Hanger family. The other children married members of Harris, Armour, Williams, Mulholland, Johnstone, Halliday, Gibson, Wheeler & Butler families, some of whom may not know their Willis connection. Descendants are still living here in this area.

William & Celia are buried at St Matthews cemetery The Oaks.

If anyone has any photos or information

Don can be contacted at don.willis189@gmail.com ■ Pictured the Reunion group and the celebratory Reunion Cake

MONTHLY MEETINGS: The Oaks Historical Society Inc. holds its meetings on the first Monday of each month (except January) at the Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum, 43 Edward St. The Oaks starting at 7.00pm. The next meeting is our General Meeting on Monday November 6th followed by the general meeting on December 5th 2023. Our patron is Judith Hanan. The Oaks Historical Society Inc. takes no responsibility for the accuracy of the articles, papers or reviews that appear in this newsletter. The statements made or opinions expressed are not necessarily those of The Oaks Historical Society Inc. Copies of the minutes are available.



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