

The Oaks Historical Society Inc

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Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum

Newsletter

August 2020

WOLLONDILLY FIRE CONTROL

By Jack Wilton

Jack Wilton was appointed SES Controller in October 1973 and shortly afterwards had a visit from Councillors looking for a Bush Fire Coordinator for Wollondilly Council area asking "would you be interested? So on 23rd December, 1973 Council announced that they had appointed Jack to the position of Fire Control Officer (FCO). He commenced on 1st January 1974 and held this position until he retired on the 3rd July 1999. Jack was given a tin shed in the middle of the council depot which was then located on the present day car park behind the Shire Building. This was Jack's office and was moved after it flooded in 1981. Jack spent 6 months in this shed which reached temperatures of 40 degrees in summer and freezing in winter. Jack said "it reminded me of prisoner of war torture".

Wollondilly's council area was very large and Wentworth Falls and Darkes Forest brigades were originally formed as Wollondilly Brigades. They come under Blue Mountains and Illawarra Districts now.

When Jack started as FCO, a radio was connected to his home so that he could take after hours messages. Wollondilly was one of the first local government areas to have local radios. It was a Bush Fire radio system that Council was allowed to use.

Council paid half the cost of the radio base station on top of Razorback on 1st November 1966. On 17th November that year equipment was set up for a radio base station on the County Council tower on Razorback. The radio licence was issued for the fighting of fires and prevention and suppression of bush fires with a call sign of VL2TG followed by the brigade name. Therefore, Lakesland's call sign was VL2TG Lakesland. Jack recalled working with a Wollongong

fire area team and they were amazed that Wollondilly crews had radios that they could use to communicate with each other. It wasn't long after that Wollongong obtained their own radio system.

Bruce Robertson is credited with teaching Jack how to do hazard reduction burning. This was done on a block of ground on the south side of Sandy Lane (Lakesland) using the Rega flame throwers. "I was amazed, at 3 or 4 o'clock it was a mass of flames. At 6 o'clock when the sun went down there was no flame to be seen. Bruce trained me in the practical side of fire behaviour and fire fighting".



Jack understood what volunteering was all about having been a volunteer himself. It was apparent when he took over there was no co-ordination between the brigades; each had their own area and the attitude was "It's our area you keep out of it". Jack worked towards a more cooperative approach. "Whilst I was doing the job, the captains got to know me and how I operated. We put on a Christmas party to which we invited Captains, Group Captains and their wives. Captains met monthly and we also had a few social gatherings. Through this, members got to know each

other and as a result started to work as a team. The meetings provided an opportunity for problems to be aired and solutions offered. The AGM for Wollondilly Bush Fire Service was attended by at least 2 members from every brigade. There were guest speakers who were senior Bush Fire Service members, NPWS speakers, representatives from NSW Railways and Water Board personnel such as Max Wootton." Continued on page 3.....



President's Report

Trish Hill

August already, the months are sliding away even though I feel our lives have slowed down immensely. We are still opening from 10am until 2.30pm with cleaning done on closing and we have been relatively busy. Thanks to our volunteers for soldiering on and adapting to the changes brought about by the Covid journey.

Our new Fire exhibition 'Out Of The Ashes' is progressing well with objects and mannequins now appearing in the exhibition space. Doreen, Ben & I visited Jack Wilton to document the development of Wollondilly Fire Control. From its inception, Jack was the Fire Control Officer for Wollondilly for over 25 years and has donated some valuable objects to include in our exhibition.

Thanks to Lee at the District Reporter the museum has been featured in several recent editions, socially distancing of course! →

An achievement for me this month is finally being able to participate in a couple of zoom meetings— a sign of the times.

Thanks everyone for your ongoing support of the recycling and to John Hickey for taking them to the recycling and turning them into cash for the museum.

Thanks Di Musgrave Smith for your donation of objects, photos and books

Our sincere condolences to the families of Joe Vandermolen and Ann (Scarlett) Deacon for their recent sad losses ■



Family History & Local Archive Research Corner

Sue Davis

I have included this before but I thought we need a bit of a laugh at the moment and August is National Family History Month! The piece found on the 'My Heritage' blog (with one exception!). I wonder how many of us can identify with it? Enjoy a laugh!

13 ways to know you're a genealogist:

Whether you are a family historian or just someone interested in learning about their family's heritage, there are certain things only a genealogist will understand.

You've been hit with the genealogy bug if...

1. When introducing someone you say, "this is my sister's grandmother's father's son."
2. You are more interested in what happened in 1815 than in 2015.
3. A perfect vacation includes trips to cemeteries, archives and libraries.
4. A family vacation is going to visit an ancestor's hometown.
5. Your doctor asks about your family background and you reply, "how many generations back?"
6. Many family albums are filled with photos of ancestors.
7. You explore unusual, non-related family names for fun, as well as your own family names.
8. You know more about your ancestors than your oldest relatives who knew them.
9. You thrive on finding an old family heirloom and learning about its history.
10. If you could have any tech gadget, it would be a time machine to go back and meet your ancestors.
11. You've called in sick because you woke up late after a research all-nighter.
12. You named your kids in alphabetical order to make indexing easier.
13. You regularly visit Wollondilly Heritage Centre and Museum to see what is new to help your research!



This last month we have helped two different families with research for their Tomkins ancestors. We have also provided information for families of Willis, Longhurst, Reid, Seymour and Mitchell. A busy month ■
Happy researching!



Acquisitions Report

Allen Seymour

This past month has been very busy with a large influx of items for the fire display. A lot of these are on loan from John Fergusson and Dennis Ashton and include:

- A number of backpack units.
- Different types of fire starters for back burning.
- Canvas hoses, hose fittings and nozzles.
- Boots, goggles and gloves.
- First aid boxes.
- Fire extinguishers.
- Rakes.
- Fire beaters.
- Plastic water filled vest.
- Fuel storage container for helicopter transport.

- Remote area back pack.
- Both 25 and 50 year rural fire service badges
- Helmets from Lakesland brigade.

Jack Wilton was the fire controller for Wollondilly Shire for many years and has donated his orange helmet and his leather dress jacket complete with badges. We have also received some metal doll's house furniture and some metal pie dishes. A T-shirt from The Oaks Bush Fire Brigade, and a Wollondilly Council dog registration tag from 1983 are other items along with a souvenir programme for the opening of the Camden Museum in 1999.

Additionally we have received a large collection of bottles and we are working through these to decide what we will keep■

WOLLONDILLY FIRE CONTROL –CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

Jack recalled *Operation Challenge*. "There was an after dinner session when it was dark and no lights on. We were taken to an area where we had to stand on a steel rope and hold another steel rope in our hands. We were to shuffle sideways along the rope until we reached the other side. No one could see this rope between two large rock formations. The trainer had realised I had a problem with heights and he was out to solve problems. When I reached about the middle of the rope the lights were turned on and I could see my situation!

My response was to freeze; my boots bent down around the wire and my hands locked on to the top rope. The instructor with his knowledge of my fear of heights asked what I was going to do. The instructor talked me through the situation until I got to terra firma. My legs wouldn't hold me up when I got off and it was like a cartoon, I fell flat on my face."

Most of the training at this time was organised by Paul McMichael who was the Highlands Regional Officer. It is Jack's opinion that Paul was way ahead of his time in his approach to training. *Learn or Burn* was another excellent training opportunity at Nowra Navy Base.

The Water Board divided their area into sector areas and lit on a rotation of 7 years. They used controlled burning, low flame height at the right time, usually autumn to have the whole of winter for it to burn out. This was very effective and it worked well. Jack recalled the first fire he attended

with Water Board which was at Oakdale. The chief ranger was not sympathetic to Bush Fire Service volunteers and his attitude showed it. "He had left his vehicle with the window open and a passing crew put a hose in and filled it with water. The Volunteers got their own back. The ranger was not happy on return to his vehicle".

An incident occurred with a brigade doing a hazard reduction when the Captain became impatient at the slow progress of lighting up. He grabbed a can of fuel and said "I'll show you how it's done" He went in 20 metres, slopped the fuel around and lit up. There was a 'boom' and the captain came running out charred and unhappy. He had grabbed the petrol can instead of the drip torch fuel.

Jack was a member of the State Training Committee which was tasked to look at training of bush fire officers. Lots of photos that were used in the training literature were of Wollondilly fire fighters because Jack provided the images.

After bringing brigades together had been accepted, those that didn't like the new system moved on. Jack

said "we ran a good show with help from the training team. It was not easy being an FCO; there were some difficult times but the good times far outweighed the bad"■

Pictured— A field day at Menangle in 1985.



MRS SHEPPARD 1849-1938

Women are almost invisible in historical documents unless they are famous or notorious. When the name of Mrs Sheppard appeared in a list of lady visitors to a children's home in 1886, I was intrigued. From the other names on the list that included Mrs Onslow, it was obvious that she was most likely a middle-class woman of some status and not the wife of a labouring man. But apart from the list and one other reference she remained a mystery. A one sentence line in the card index at our museum gave the vital clue. D. Sheppard was the station-master at Picton.

So, on a cold afternoon, a warm fire, the internet and a later visit to NSW Archives I found Mrs Sheppard and her life and times. However, much was missing – her appearance, personality, temperament and all those features that intimately describe a person. But I did have a name; Matilda.

Matilda Brazier Kippen was born in 1849 at Pitt Town near Windsor to James and Eliza Kippen. Eliza died in 1860 and the 11 year old Matilda, oldest daughter of a widowed farmer, would have taken on duties and responsibilities that such a child would not experience today. James died a few years later before Matilda's marriage at Bathurst in 1872 to David Arthur Sheppard, a young English migrant from Drayton in Northhamshire. David was stationed at Sofala, a booming gold town. It was here that six children were born – Charles, Irene, Alice, Mabel, Lillie and Arthur who died as an infant.



David Sheppard was appointed station-master to Picton c 1884 (pictured) and the family moved into the new two-

storey station-master's house nearby. Another three children were born in this house at Picton. They were Violet, Amelia and David. All the children went to Picton Public School which was then situated in what is now the Shire Hall in Menangle Street. The family were active members of St Mark's and were involved in those social events befitting the status of the station-master. In country towns he was a man of importance as were the postmaster, schoolmaster, police sergeant and local doctor who was the government officer. These men who all outsiders and government officials had proved their competence.

Matilda Sheppard was a busy woman with a large

family but still had time to engage in local fund raising. The family lived a comfortable life and was shielded from the Depression of the 1890s with David, in 1891, on a salary of £255 per annum. Sixteen year old Charles was employed at the station as an assistant controller at the princely wage of ten shillings a week. Matilda arranged the weddings of her three eldest daughters at St Mark's. Irene married Joseph Mitchell, from Picton in 1897 followed in 1901 by Alice to Abi (Abizah) Murray, a solicitor from Cairns. Then in 1904, Mabel married Frank Dengate from Cawdor.

Alice Murray lived in Cairns where she enjoyed an active social life. Matilda made the long journey by a coastal steamer as roads and railways did not exist. There she was feted in the small elite society that gathered around the Murrays. Alice in her turn came south on several occasions on long visits. She arrived in October 1910, pregnant and with her two sons and little daughter. She gave birth to another daughter in January and eight weeks later embarked on the SS Yongala for her return home.

The alarm was raised on 23th March 1911 as contact with Yongala was lost during a severe storm. Within days debris and cargo were washed ashore off the Barrier Reef south-east of Townsville. It was believed the ship had hit a rock and sunk immediately, taking 122 'souls' to the depths. Alice and her four small children – Ian 6, Alistair 5, Dora 3 and 8 weeks old Ailsa, drowned.

This terrible news reached the Sheppards by telegraph. David Sheppard retired and he, Matilda and the remaining children lived at Burwood. His retirement, grief-stricken was short lived as he died in September 1911 at the age of 65. Matilda's nightmare was not over. A year later she received news that Charles, her eldest son, had died at Majuro in the Marshall Islands.

Matilda Sheppard died at Burwood in 1938 aged 89 years. She had lived through great personal tragedies and momentous and changing times. There appears to be no descendants in this district. Three of Matilda's children remained single. Irene and Joseph Mitchell settled in Sydney. Mabel and Frank Dengate lived in Camden and were well-known there. Their son Morton did not marry. Mabel Dengate died in 1969 at Camden.

As for the SS Yongala, its wreck was found and identified in 1958 and is now a popular diving site ■

Written by Betty Villy with a lot of help from Marlane Fairfax.

JOHN & MARY WILD - A LEGACY OF LETTERS

Vanderville 8th May 1857

August is Family History month and Sue suggested it may be a timely opportunity to look at Vanderville and the Wild family who founded it. Mary Caldwell was the guest speaker at the August 1980 meeting of The Oaks Historical Society and the following is an extract from that meeting. Mary Caldwell, was the great great granddaughter of John Henry & Mary Wild. In this digital era I can't help but wonder whether or how today's written information will survive for future generations. Will our text messages or social media posts stand the test of time as have the letters of the Wild family?



John Henry Wild was an adjutant in the 48th Northhamptonshire Regiment and as most of the members of the regiment were recruited from that area, we guess that Northampton was John Wild's home but we are not sure. In the beginning of 1804 the 48th Regiment was sent to Mallow, a market town in County Cork, Ireland. As there were no army barracks in the town, members of the Regiment were billeted in private homes and that is how Mary and John met.

In May that year, John Wild married Mary, whose family had lived in Mallow for generations and whose maiden name was Lynch. But Mary had been married before and when John Henry Wild married her she was Mrs Edward, with a daughter, Margaret Edward. It is probable that Mary was a widow because she and John were married in the Catholic Church at Ballyvourney and it is doubtful if they could have been married in a Catholic Church if her first husband was living.

Eighteen months later in October 1806, the Regiment was transferred to a town called Birr, in Queens County. This was just a month before their son John Benton Wild was born, so Mary must have had to uproot her home and move to a new area when she was 8 months pregnant.

The Regiment arrived in Sydney under Governor Macquarie in 1817 when young John was 10. In December of that year Mary wrote her first letter to her mother. I have found the letters written by Mary and her son John to be enlightening with regard to how they found the Colony, how they adjusted to the very different environment and how things were in this new land. Mary's letter read in part: ***"It would be impossible for me to describe the beauty and grandeur of the sce-***

ne we witnessed when we came within sight of Port Jackson. It appeared like a fairyland and such a prospect I never beheld. It is summer time and the people are busy harvesting and getting in their corn, everything is in a flourishing state and the crops abundant.... "

The next year, 1818, Mary's daughter Margaret married a young Naval Lieutenant, Charles Vendermeulen. The marriage seemed to bring great happiness to everyone concerned except for the Colonel of the Regiment, who was Vandermeulen's guardian and who felt that Margaret should have brought to the marriage a dowry of at least £5000, whereas she brought a dowry of somewhat less. It appears that the better catch a bridegroom was, the better the corresponding dowry was supposed to be. However, Governor Macquarie and Captain Piper, the Naval Officer were of the opinion the match was a most suitable one and sent their private carriages to take Margaret and her family to the church for the wedding.

John Henry Wild had been in the army for 27 years. He was subsequently appointed as Superintendent of Stock at Cawdor, prior to becoming a magistrate. In a letter dated August 1823, Mary wrote to her mother saying: ***"We are living at a Government Station called Cawdor on the Cowpastures and it is one day's journey from Sydney. We have a beautiful house and a garden containing nearly 4 acres, well stocked with fruit and vegetables and our Farm (she is referring to Vanderville) is within 6 miles of us. Our stock is small, 11 cows, 1 calf, 3 working bullocks, 1 horse and cart, 60 pigs and plenty of fowls, ducks, turkeys and geese. I have learned to ride a horse and I like the country much better than Sydney."***

A couple of years later they were still at Cawdor and the letter which Mary wrote in 1825 or 1826 was the last of her letters as far as we can find. Although she lived at Vanderville for 8 years before her death, there is no record of her ever having written from there-the rest of the letters were from her son John. In this, her last letter Mary wrote to her mother: ***"What would I not give to see you at this moment. I would think it the happiest day of my life. Sometimes when we talk of removing from here at Cawdor to our farm at Vanderville, John says that the little verandah room will do for grandmother when she comes..."***

John & Mary Wild –a legacy of letters continued...

The Government has given young John 600 acres of land within a mile of the farm. We purchased a few cows and with their increase we now have nearly 100. We have 17 men whom we have to feed and clothe with two suits of slops each in the year, 4lbs of pork, 10 lbs of flour, 2ozs of tea, 1 lb of sugar, 2 ozs of tobacco and ¼ lb of soap for each man per week. There is also a female servant and a boy. The men are employed on the farm. We have 26 acres of wheat in this year, the pork we raise ourselves, 35 pigs are now fat in the sty. John grows the tobacco, I make my own soap, starch and vinegar. Pepper is grown in the garden and as for the tea, sugar, slop clothing and shoes for the men, I make my dairy pay for them; I must not forget to mention to you that I am a celebrated cheesemaker. I have made upwards of 1000 pounds since last year.

John is a dear boy. He is most affectionate and best of sons. He is now 6'1" tall.

We have good prospects of doing well and only John to settle, so if he lives he will be a rich man and a good one. John is calling his estate Williamwood after his cousin and we are calling our estate Vanderville after Margaret's husband. He has now risen to the rank of Captain."

William Cox was the cousin of John Benton Wild and he was still in Britain. John wrote many letters to William and it was in his honour that John Benton Wild named his own grant Williamwood. They were always hoping for relatives to come to join them as they felt very isolated from the family they had left behind, so many miles away (In 1980, there had been no information found to indicate extended family came).

In July 1833, John Benton Wild wrote to tell his grandmother of his marriage to Emmaline Gaudry in 1832. They were married in Heber Chapel and Emmaline left for her marriage from Macquarie Grove, just near Camden Airport, where she had lived with her Aunt, Susannah Mileham.

"It is 17 months since I was united to the one I am certain you would be delighted with, if you could know her. She is accomplished, amiable, pretty and thoroughly good tempered and possesses many other good qualities. We have a son named John Henry, the finest child in the land, but it does not become me to praise him.. My father and mother seem to vie with one another in trying to see who can love my Emma of John Henry the

best. Emma doubtlessly deserves their love and I trust that Johnny, when he grows up, will also merit their goodwill..

Two or three months after my marriage I took this 1000 acre farm where we now reside, for 3 years. It is 6 miles from Vanderville and at the expiration of my lease we shall remove to my own grant, which is 3 miles from Vanderville."

At this time the father, John Henry, was still Magistrate and John Benton was still Clerk to the Bench of Magistrates at Camden , having held that position for nearly 9 years.

He also spoke of an injury which had befallen his father, who subsequently walked with a limp, due to poor medical attention, and said that it had been a sad blow to his father who had always prided himself on his erect walk and military air.

John had often expressed his affection for his parents and it must have been a very difficult time for him when , within a few weeks he lost his mother, father and sister who all died in early 1834. At the same time he had to assume the responsibility for the Vanderville estate ■



I certify that I have known Robert Read for upwards of twenty years—nearly the last seven years of which time he has been employed by me. He is a most excellent carpenter—and I have not the least doubt of his being as honest, upright and industrious a man as any in New South Wales. His only reason for leaving this neighbourhood is that in consequence of the bad times he cannot get employment at his Trade.

Vander Ville 5th July 1844
John Wild

The above letter reads: ***I certify that I have known Robert Read for upwards of twenty years—nearly the last seven of which time he has been employed by me. He is a most excellent carpenter—and I have not the least doubt of his being as honest, upright and industrious a man as any in New South Wales. His only reason for leaving this neighbourhood is that in consequence of the bad times he cannot get employment at his Trade.***

Vander Ville 5 July 1844

John Wild

WEEKEND ROSTER

AUGUST

Colleen & Kathy	Saturday, 1
Vivian & Bob	Sunday, 2
Pam & Louisa	Saturday, 8
Debbie & Allen	Sunday, 9
Debbie & Allen	Saturday 15
Trish & Kevin	Sunday, 16
Sue & Helen	Saturday 22
Bev & David	Sunday 23
Pacita & John (Working Bee)	Saturday 29
Doreen & Ben	Sunday 30

MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE DUE IN MAY EACH YEAR



Thank you to everyone who has renewed their membership. Our members are very important to us.

SINGLE -\$10 FAMILY -\$18

Membership includes newsletters emailed free but if you would like to receive a hard copy posted please include an additional \$10.

For direct deposit our bank details are ;
BSB: 062516

A/c No. 00904093

A/c Name. The Oaks Historical Society

12 EXERCISES FOR STRENGTHENING THE

WILL—written by Reta Maxwell.
(nee Garlick) Reta married Mitty Maxwell and lived in Burrarorang moving to Bents Basin when it was flooded. Pictured is a young Reta →

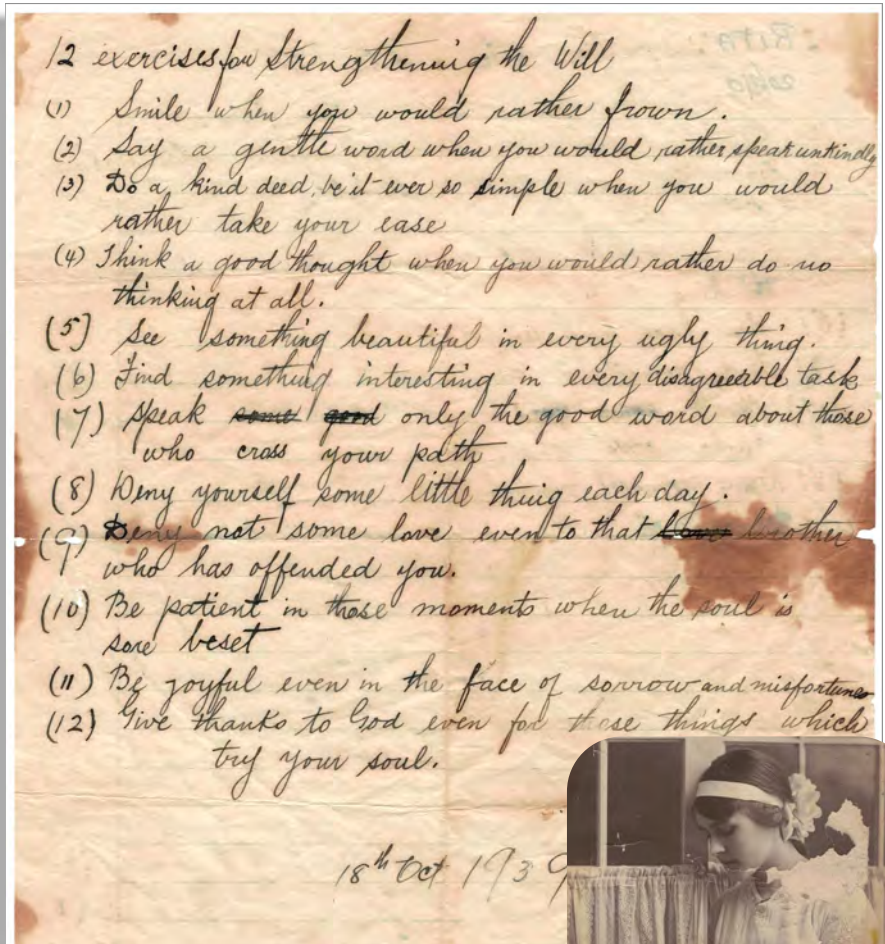
Reminders, News & Info

A GOLDEN COUPLE

Half a century ago, they say
A wonderful marriage began that
day
Two beautiful people joined as one
And worked together to make life
fun
We celebrate now those fifty years
We raise our glasses and give three
cheers
To partners in life in both work and
play
It's our honour to share your golden
day.



Congratulations Bev & David!



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. Due to the effects of Covid-19 our meetings are currently suspended. Our patrons are Judith Hannan and Richard Booth. 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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