

The Oaks Historical Society Inc

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Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum

Newsletter

November 2020

WARRAGAMBA DAM BEGINNING

Officially opened in October of 1960, now 75 years on and Warragamba Dam is again a much talked about topic for several reasons. In 2019, due to another dry period the Warragamba water reserves were depleted and we were faced with water restrictions, advance a year to 2020 and now the Dam is so full the threat is an overflow or spill. Additionally, for flood mitigation, the State Government are investigating raising Warragamba Dam. A current topic, we thought it may be an opportunity to look back at the origins of the Warragamba system.

The record drought of 1934-42 saw the development of the Warragamba Emergency Scheme in 1937 to 1940. This included an overshot weir on the Warragamba River and a pumping station-a large underground chamber 55metres below ground with the water piped across Megarritys Creek Bridge and over another 26 kilometres to Prospect Reservoir. This prolonged drought also forced a decision and the Water Board adopted a resolution making the Warragamba Dam the most urgent of its construction works.

Unfortunately for the Burratorang Valley Defence League (resident protest group) the need for a reliable water supply for Sydney prevailed. The present site was selected, work began in 1946 and was not completed until 1960 in time for the (then) near record floods of 1961.

To begin work, two coffer dams were built in the river bed and a tunnel driven along the east bank and the river diverted through this tunnel while the dam was being built. This tunnel was plugged with concrete when the dam was completed.

The concrete for the dam construction was mixed on site at Warragamba but the required gravel was transported by a remarkable aerial ropeway from McCann's Island at Emu Plains, 19 kilometres away. Large buckets containing the gravel left every thirty seconds and took five hours to make the round trip. On the construction site, two cableways were installed to handle the concrete and cement was transported by road from Berrima.



An unusual feature of the construction was the pre-stressed concrete tower, one of the first in Australia, which was built to house the ice-making plant, pictured right in 1953. Up to 170 tonnes of ice a day were produced to cool the concrete in the dam. Without the use of ice, the heat generated in the vast quantities of newly mixed concrete might have taken one hundred years to cool and would have cracked as the temperature gradually fell. For up to six months cold water was pumped through pipes embedded in the dam wall, in addition 15 metre square



concrete block construction ensured the wall wouldn't crack. A suspension footbridge was built across the Warragamba Gorge to provide rapid pedestrian access to the works site from the township built to house workers on the site. Socially, the Warragamba township is rather unusual. Many townships have been built on construction sites before but this one developed a life of its own and continued after the construction

was completed. At its peak the township housed about 3500 people in 500 houses as well as men's barracks, staff barracks and women's barracks where the few women workers of the town, such as typists, teachers and nurses were housed. Workers from over 25 nationalities worked on the dam at any one time and by all accounts it was a very harmonious environment ■ Pictured centre the suspension bridge erection trolley on main cables Source- 'The Sweat of their Brows' 100 years of Sydney Water Board 1888-1988 from our Library.



President's Report

Trish Hill

This past month has brought about some changes for the museum. At last we have a couple of school groups visiting and there has been a renewed interest –albeit small- in group bookings for next year.

As we have been doing since re-opening, we update our Covid plan at the end of each and every month and there are some small changes taking place. Thanks to Treasurer Debbie we now have an operative QR code from Service NSW as well as our normal Covid sign in.

Our 'Hope out of the Ashes' publication draft about the history and development of our local Fire Brigades has been

reviewed and is now being printed so hopefully in stock in our shop at the end of the month.

The Centre has been hosting a 'Yesterday's Stories' filming project with Sandra Pires, designed to teach young students interviewing/filming and editing techniques. This is nearing completion with a celebratory afternoon for those involved scheduled for early December.

This month we have received funding from Museums and Galleries for Disaster Bins so in the event of a mishap we will be better prepared ■



Family History & Local Archive Research Corner

Sue Davis

I have always found Probate papers very helpful in learning more for Family History and Local History. They often contain the deceased person's will as well as what they owned when they died. To learn more about probate, the NSW State Archives outlines that...

Probate is the official sanction of the Court upon a testamentary instrument (e.g. Will) so as to authorise an executor to administer the Estate as personal representative of the deceased. Although a Grant of Probate is a grant by the Court, in ordinary non-contentious matters where no doubt is cast upon the validity of the Will, the matter does not usually come before the Court but is disposed of by the Registrar who merely requires a number of formal affidavits

The Executor derives their authority from the will and, on grant of Probate, the property of the deceased vests in them from the date of death as trustee for the beneficiaries as are set out in the will. An Administrator derives their authority from the Court and the property of the deceased is held by them in trust for those persons entitled to share under the rules of intestacy. Both the Executor and the Administrator are referred to as "the Legal Personal Representative" of the deceased.

In researching the history of The Oaks Hotel we paid for a copy of the Probate package for **Michael Hennessy** who was the original owner of the hotel. I had found the reference number on line and placed my order when we were in lockdown times. It then took about 3 weeks to arrive, which is usual for online requests. Some findings were...

Michael Lawrence Hennessy, retired hotelkeeper, died in Concord, on 26 February, 1937. The executors were, May Moore of Coogee, married lady (his daughter), James Reedy of Dulwich Hill, retired gentleman, and Sydney Louis Moore, of Concord.

The value of his estate at the time of his death was 10,023 pounds, fourteen shillings and 11 pence. Mr Hennessy was still actively doing business with local traders of The Oaks, including H.J. Noakes, L. Hogan and Furner Brothers. He owned several dwellings in The Oaks and received rent from them, including a cottage at Lot 21 John Street; Butcher's shop at Lot 22 John Street; shop at Lot 20 John Street leased by H.J. Noakes; and the largest was The Oaks Hotel leased by W.J McCoy. Mr Hennessy also owned land at the Peaks, Camden and Petersham.

In 1937 the Oaks Hotel consisted of downstairs accommodation of 3 parlours, a hall, dining room, bathroom, 4 bedrooms, a billiard room and a back verandah. Upstairs had 6 bedrooms, a balcony, hall, man's room and an out of order cordial machine! The furnishings were considered old and of little value.

Michael Hennessy was described as a man of simple tastes and at his death had no personal effects whatever, apart from necessary articles of clothing. More will come about Michael Hennessy when I finish some research to clarify a few more details about The Oaks Hotel. Newspaper articles of the early 1900s certainly describe a man who ran a well-regarded hotel at the Oaks.

If you would like to find out more about Probate Packets register online with the State Archives for a webinar on Friday, 30 October between 10am and 11am. If you are unable to participate then you can see a recording of the webinar in the State Archives library of webinars from the following week ■

Happy researching!



Acquisitions Report

Allen Seymour

It's been a quiet month with just a few items. From Bob & Vivian Allen we have some tickets to the First Annual Ball organized by The Oaks Historical Society and a spanner/hammer that was used with a horse plough. From out of

our old library area comes a Collins decimal reckoner from 1966. As a result of the Hope Out of The Ashes exhibition research, we now have the records from the Orangeville/Werombi Rural Fire Brigade ■

THE CROKE FAMILY OF WEROMBI by Allen Seymour

Thanks to Noel Collison, our collection includes journals from P. E. Butler's Funeral Parlour at Camden. Noel put the information in these journals into print format, and I am now putting this onto a spreadsheet. One entry I came across recently caused me to look into it further to find out the full story behind a really tragic event.

The Croke family, who were described as living 13 miles from Camden on The Oaks-Blaxland Crossing road. The tragic event was the death of their three youngest children when their house burned down. This occurred on the night of July 9th, 1938. This was a massive story at the time and looking at Trove, reports of the fire were carried by almost every newspaper in Australia.

The Croke family consisted of:

- Father, James Michael Croke was born in 1889 at Cowra to James & Winifred Croke. He was described as a driver, but had been out of work since 1932 due to the depression.
- Mother, Henrietta Gladys Croke was born at Yass in 1893 to David & Gladys Adelaide Davis. Gladys & James were married at Cowra in 1914.
- Lenis James Croke born 1915 at Cowra.
- Gladys Irene Croke born 1917 at Cowra.
- Edna M Croke, born 1920 at Newtown.
- Noel Croke born 1924.
- Shirley Patricia Croke born 1929.
- Winifred Adelaide Croke born 1931.
- David Henry Croke born 1933.

On the day in question, the family were at a party at the home of a neighbour, Mr P. J. Jessop. It seems the whole family were there but the youngest three were taken home and put to bed. Shirley was sleeping in a back room, while the other two were asleep in a front room. Lenis was the last one to leave the house and reported that the kerosene lamps were all out, and a light in Shirley's room had also been extinguished. There was a fire in the stove which had been banked down, and a fire in the living room, which had screens placed in front of it. During the night, Jessop noticed flames coming from the property and thought they may have been burning off, but upon discovering that they weren't everyone ran to the house. Unfortunately it was already totally engulfed and with no water available, nothing could be done to save the children.

Sergeant Stephenson and Constable James from Camden

attended the scene, along with Dr Crookston and Mr H. S. Kelloway, the coroner. Next day Detective Sergeant Nye, and 2 other Detectives also attended. It was determined that all three children had perished in the front room, and it is believed that Shirley was trying to rescue the two younger children when she was overcome.

The funeral was held on July 17th, with a service at St Paul's Catholic church in Camden, and they were buried at The Oaks Catholic cemetery. The Reverend Father O'Dea officiated. Butler's donated their services and the burial costs. The inquest was held at Camden and an open finding was returned. The Police believed the fire was accidental, but there was no evidence to support this. The home had a galvanized roof, but the rear section had a bark roof, and a spark from the chimney may have set fire to this. The other possibility was that the lounge room fire had no hearth, and the fire could have originated here.

On July 18th there was a public meeting held in the town hall at Camden. And was chaired by the Camden Mayor, Alderman W. Larkin, and the Wollondilly President, Eric Moore to discuss ways of relieving the distress of the Croke family. After much discussion it was decided that a committee be formed, called the "Croke Relief Fund Committee". Representatives were appointed from the various districts, and H. S. Kelloway was appointed as the Honorary Secretary, with E. S. Carruthers as the Treasurer. The Camden News reported each week on the fund's ongoing total. On August 13th it stood at £125/7/10, £167/6/1 on September 15th, £176/19/1 on October 13th, £196/17/3 on November 24th, at which point the committee decide to close the appeal. On December 15th, it was reported that the committee had decided to proceed with the erection of a home at Silverdale for the family. Ten pounds was refunded to Messrs Morris and Angilley of Werombi who had advanced the family that sum immediately after the fire. Expenses incurred in running the appeal amounted to £2/1/10, leaving £184/15/5 available. £30 was reserved for furnishing the completed home, and the home was to be vested in the name of Mrs Croke for her lifetime.

James Croke died in 1966, while Henrietta died in 1973. Both are buried with their children at The Oaks.

Lenis Croke married Mavis Rowlands at Mosman in 1942. He died in 1982.

Gladys married Albert McGowan in 1939.

Nothing is known of Edna or Noel ■



Schoolies Report

Bev Batros

Well there is finally something to write about in our Schoolies column! We have 2 schools booked in for Term 4. The Oaks, always a starter, is our first. Then Narellan Vale. They had booked 4 weeks at the start of the year and had completed 3 of those weeks before all excursions stopped, so we are delighted they will get an opportunity like the rest of their fellow classmates.

Almost all our volunteers have returned and we thank them for their dedication to our program, especially when there is quite a bit of extra work to do at each activity.

Needless to say there was a lot of work undertaken so we could develop a COVID Safe Schools' Program. The basis of

our plan is sanitising children's and volunteers' hands between activities, increasing social distancing, increasing time spent outside and limiting numbers. Each volunteer will have disinfectant to wipe down frequently used surfaces between groups.

One of the children's favourites, the pikelets, will not be a starter, as schools have restrictions on home made things but the apples will hopefully keep them going for the 2 hours!

Whilst it was going to be a bumper year, with nearly every week booked, we are just glad to be underway again and count our blessings for where we live!



Exhibitions Development

Doreen Lyon

Now that the Hope *Out Of The Ashes* display is ready for a launch – it is time to look at the new space which has been



created in the main building by the move of the library and Liz Vincent collection to the archives.

Trish, Ben and I have been working with Kazan Brown on updating the Burragorang display to include more of the Gundungorra story. Some time ago before Covid19, Ben

and I saw an exhibition at the National Museum which featured Creation Stories across several language groups and noted the pride in which these stories were told. It is therefore significant that we have our own Creation Story here in Wollondilly and across into Wingecarribee. The epic adventures of the Ancestor Beings, Gurangatch and Mirragan have been extensively documented so it is fortunate that we can readily access the story which describes the creation of the Wollondilly/Cox river systems. The story taken as a whole describes the geography of these rivers which is still relevant today. We can plot the stories on current maps and add images and audio to provide a unique introduction to the worlds of the Gundungorra - many of which have been lost under the flood waters and others which are threatened. This is very much in the planning stage so we will keep you informed ■



Local History Publications

We have an amazing array of history publications on a diverse range of Wollondilly's local history.

They are readily available in our shop and we can also do a gift pack of your choice. They are great reads and make excellent gifts. Prices start from \$7 to the larger more comprehensive publications at \$50. Available at the counter or contact us by email and we can arrange a post out.

BURRAGORANG ROAD IMPROVEMENTS AND DEVIATIONS

Following the **Burrangorang Road or Main Road 259** story by Dennis Ashton in our September issue some further facts have emerged on improvements and deviations to Burrangorang Road that are worth sharing.

An Extract from Trove/Camden News in May of 1937 gives us an insight into the conditions of the time. Interestingly, what is referred to as The Top of The Mountain is just what it was known as then but is today's Nattai. *'At the Wollondilly Shire Council meeting on Friday last, the engineer submitted another detailed report concerning the proposal to reconstruct the Burrangorang Road from The Oaks to the top of the mountain and the council unanimously adopted the report and gave authority for tenders to be called for the whole of the work, or in three divisions 1. Between The Oaks and Back Creek 2. Back Creek to the 53 mile post 3. From 53 mile post to the top of the mountain. The work will commence at the end of the existing black surfacing at The Oaks and extend to the top of Burrangorang Mountain, just below the junction of the Lookout Road. Across the flat at The Oaks the road will be built of metal and at present it is proposed to build the balance of the road with shale as a paving material. Tests are now on trial to ascertain whether shale will stand the heavy traffic that the road carries. Should these tests be satisfactory, the finished roadway will receive two coatings of bitumen and screenings. The completed roadway will be 24ft. wide, super elevated and rounded on corners, and will have 16ft. of black surface pavement. All corners will also be widened. At Back Creek the alignment will be improved by widening certain sharp curves and eliminating two of the existing curves or corners. There are to be two new large concrete culverts, one of which will be double 5ft. pipe culvert, which will be built in place of the existing culvert, the old timber structure to be removed altogether. At the Oakdale school and again at Sounding Rook there are to be two small deviations which will improve the curves. Also there will be another small deviation to remove a blind corner near what is known as the Red Hill. Safety fences and guide posts are to be erected at all corners on the road, and the surfacing so constructed to make a fast traffic road and as safe as it is possible and for this purpose trees and scrub will be cut to aid visibility. The full distance is 8 miles, the steepest grade will be 1 in 11 and that at Reilly's Hill just outside The Oaks. The highest point on the road will be at Red Hill 1800 feet above sea level.'*

Maintenance issues were often reported and by the 1950's coal mining was underway and the road now used for the transport of coal. **March 1954 Camden News (Trove)** and again maintenance a priority; *'The Department of Main Roads has requested a count of traffic during a twenty four hour period from 7am on February 9th to 7am on February 10th. The check, which was carried out at the foot of Loomes Hill disclosed a total of 1010 vehicles passed that point in both directions. The various types of vehicles counted were:- cars 154, taxi-cabs 1, buses 17, motor cycles 4, utility vans 44, trucks and heavy vans 699, semi trailers 90, power vehicles 1.*

Asked by Councillor Austin whether anything special was in mind concerning the count, the Engineer said it was for the purpose of establishing the number and size of vehicles using the road but not to ascertain the weight.'

Trove Camden News/March 1951 →

By the 1970's deviations that corrected the road alignment at both Spotted Gum and Loomes Hill were in place.
The Glenmore bypass took place in the 1980's

BURRAGORANG ROAD.
The Minister for Transport, the Hon. F. H. Hawkins, writing to Mr. Blake Pelly, M.L.A., states: "I am writing with reference to previous correspondence regarding the maintenance of the road from Burrangorang Valley to Camden.
"The Wollondilly Shire Council has agreed to undertake the strengthening of the pavement of this road between Camden and the turn-off to the Burrangorang Coal Mine, and this is now proceeding, 36 men being employed on the work. It is understood that the Council is making application to the Commonwealth Employment Service for the supply of additional labour, and this question is being followed up by the Department of Main Roads.
"The Department is assisting the Council in the search for deposits of suitable stone and other road making materials, and in the testing of sub-grades. The Department is also making available the additional mechanical plant required by the Council."

Pictured below is an aerial photo of Loomes Hill section of Burrangorang Road taken in 2009 with the old road section visible to the right of the current road.



Continued over page.....



← Pictured left is an aerial view of the aligned section of Spotted Gum on Burragorang Road 2009 with the old/original road roughly shown in the red dots & arrows.

Photo courtesy Sam Laybutt.

Photos below shows the Werriberri Creek new bridge site from Burragorang Street.

The left photo has the site sheds and stand pipe installed in preparation for construction and photo to the right is during construction.

The Werriberri Creek Bridge construction information was published in a February 1983 edition of Construction Equipment News (CEN).



Werriberri Creek

The Department of Main Roads has accepted a tender for the construction of a new bridge over Werriberri Creek on Main Road No. 259 at The Oaks, 15 km west of the Hume Highway at Camden.

The successful tender was submitted by **Ripma Constructions** in an amount of \$313,347.00.

When completed the new concrete bridge will replace the existing timber structure which is subject to flooding.

The new two-lane bridge will be 81 m long and will be 9.2 m wide between kerbs. It will comprise five simply supported 15 m long spans of prestressed concrete precast planks with a reinforced concrete deck.

Construction of the new bridge is expected to take 50 weeks from commencement of construction.



seen at DMR Divisional Office, 71-77 Kembla Street, Wollongong, 2500.

BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION: NEW BRIDGE OVER FLAGGY CREEK AT 10.7 KM WEST OF CAMDEN. MAIN ROAD No. 259 (CLOSING 21st DECEMBER, 1983)

From *CONTRACTORS PRE-QUALIFIED IN MAIN CLASS 3 for the construction of a 74.97m long bridge over Flaggy Creek on a proposed deviation of Main Road No. 259 at 10.7 km west of Camden in the Shire of Wollondilly.

The design provides for three spans (22.19, 22.0, 22.19m) of simply-supported P.S.C. girders acting compositely with a cast-in-place concrete deck. Concrete approach slabs 4m long are provided at both ends.

The width of carriageway is 9.2m between kerbs and the overall width is 10.2m.

The substructure consists of single column piers and spill-through abutments on spread footings.

Tender Documents including drawings (Reg. No. 0259.496.BC.0105) may be purchased at DMR Head Office Plan Room for \$8.53 a set.

Tender Documents may also be seen at DMR Divisional Office, 71-

Flaggy Creek Bridge Construction tender notice published in the Daily Telegraph, Saturday 19th November 1983.

Reminders, News & Info

WEEKEND ROSTER	
NOVEMBER	
Bev & David	Sunday, 1
Sue & Helen	Saturday, 7
Collen & Kathy	Sunday, 8
Doreen & Ben	Saturday, 14
Marlane & Cheryl/Kate	Sunday, 15
Vivian & Bob	Saturday, 21
Maria & Betty	Sunday, 22
Working Bee	Saturday, 28
Debbie & Allen	Sunday, 29

James Tomkins

The death of Mr James Tomkins on 28th December last recalls old associations of the Oaks and Burragorang Districts. He was the eldest son of the late Ephraim and Maria Tomkins of The Oaks and was born at St Marys in 1855. Seventy years ago the family went to Burragorang clearing land at Coxs River for farming. Sixty years ago they lived on Roughleys Farm and later at Marsh's place both being on the same river. Their next place of settlement was in the vicinity of what is now known as Steveys Forest of the Burragorang Road but the land then taken up was so far in the thick bush that it faced Councillor George Adams at Werombi. From that farm Mr Tomkins senior took out a wine licence at Oakdale first in the vicinity of Sounding Rock and later near Back Creek. This was fifty years ago. James Tomkins married the daughter of the late James and Matilda Bridges of The Oaks who sixty years ago conducted the wine licence in that township and afterwards kept the hotel which was then situated at the back of Bensleys old store towards the creek. Mrs Tomkins, who survives her husband remembers The Oaks when there were only five families in the settlement; J Bridges, Paddy Martin, Luke Reilly, Ned Reilly and Lacey. At the age of seven years the present Mrs Tomkins attended the sale of Wilds at Vanderville and recalls Thunderbolt (Ward) who broke from Cockatoo Dock and evaded the Police by riding through The Oaks to Coxs River. That night the police forced her father to stay up all night to be on watch but while a search was being made for the bushranger in the settlement he camped in the gully above where Roberts old mill stood. After his marriage James and his wife went to live in Sydney but came back to Oakdale where he carried on as farmer and orchardist. A keen worker and of charitable disposition gained him life long friends. (From Trove-Camden News 19th Jan 1933)

BILL

Bill rode his bike to town today

His bag upon his back
He waited till the day got cool

Before he started back

He spent his cash around the town
With all the wower push

They always fleece a bloke like Bill
That comes in from the bush

He bought a hat for fourteen bob

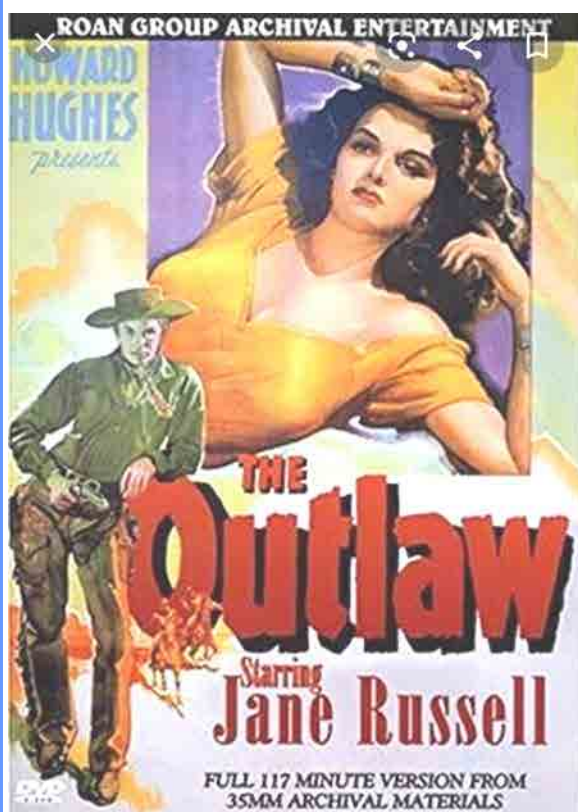
It suits him to a T
Its like the hat the Mrs. Bought

Last Friday night for me

When the get these upon our heads
You'll wonder who we are

Bill looks like the blooming Prince
And I'm like Phillip Schmarr.

From The Picton Post, (Trove) Thursday 6 November 1947, page 4



"THE OUTLAW"

Screening Picton Theatre
Wednesday Next

The most discussed picture of recent years "The Outlaw" will be screened at Picton Theatre on Wednesday next, November 12th, at 7.45 p.m. It brings to the screen its sensational find, Jane Russell, also Walter Huston and Thomas Mitchell.

1947 MELBOURNE CUP

Special arrangements have been made for the screening of this year's Melbourne Cup on Wednesday next, November 12th, in addition to the sensational feature "The Outlaw."

Footnote: **Hiraji** ran the race of his life at the 1947 Cup, finally victorious after racking up a record number of minor placings in the lead up to the carnival race. This was the first year jockey Jack Purtell won the Cup, but he would go on to do so three times.

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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