

# The Oaks Historical Society Inc

Est. May 1979

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## Newsletter

October 2023

## Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum

# THE HISTORIC UPPER CANAL

Some 135 years on, the Upper Canal is an unsung hero of Sydney's history. A precise piece of engineering still serving the needs of Sydney.

Built in the 1880's, now heritage listed on the State Heritage Register, the Upper Canal is still the only way of transferring water to Sydney from the four Upper Nepean Dams (Cataract, Cordeaux, Avon and Nepean). These dams supply an average 20 percent of Sydney's water but at times can supply up to 40 percent of Sydney's daily demand.

'Green' before its time, it uses no energy other than the earth's gravity to transport water 64 kilometres to Prospect Reservoir in Sydney's west. *"The canal drops just 50 metres in elevation over 54 kilometres after the Nepean and Cataract tunnels, just 0.1 percent grade—a marvellous feat of engineering following the earth's contours. It is a wonderful legacy left to us by the engineers and surveyors of the late 1800's"* said Ian Tanner, then Group General Manager, Assets and Major Projects with the Sydney Catchment Authority in 2013.

The canal is built from a variety of materials, depending on the nature of the country it passes through. Where the ground is soft, the canal is trapezoidal in shape (flat shaped with 4 sides of which 2 are parallel) and the sides lined with unreinforced concrete slabs. In other sections the canal is U-shaped and the sides are lined with sandstone masonry. Where the canal is cut into solid rock, it is unlined.

Tunnels allow the canal to pass under hills. These are unlined if cut through solid rock or lined with brick or sandstone if cut through softer material.

Aqueducts allow the canal to cross creeks and gullies. These were inverted iron siphons resting on sandstone piers.

In all, the Upper Canal has one kilometre of aqueducts crossing nine creeks and the Southern Railway Line, nineteen kilometres of tunnels and forty four kilometres of open canal.

Many of the original iron pipes remain in use, some lined with plastic sleeves to protect the pipes and keep them waterproof.

Original mechanisms to control and divert the water's flow—such as stop logs, penstocks and gate valves were also still in use however in the last decade canal upgrades include the installation of nine motorised con-

trol gates in order to improve safety, increase canal efficiencies and enhance management tools. Customised water control structures include: scour valves to drain the section upstream of the gate for maintenance work; trash racks to capture debris; safety features like fall arrest system handrailing; access platforms to facilitate inspection, operation and maintenance of the gates; and control systems including associated equipment.

### The Maintenance men of the Upper Canal

For nearly a century, the Upper Canal was maintained by men who lived in isolated cottages along the canal. They walked or rode horses to patrol the length of the canal assigned to them, a length of about eight kilometres. The cottages were phased out in the 1970's and replaced with mobile maintenance teams. Their main jobs were cleaning out the racks that collected leaves and other floating debris, repairing fences and removing the occasional stray animal. The upper Canal occupies a continuous corridor between 15 to 50 metres wide and public access is

totally restricted for public health, water quality, security and safety reasons.

Today, Western Sydney is growing in population, housing, and jobs. As growth of the Western Parkland City continues, demand for recreation areas will increase. The NSW Government are exploring new ways to expand opportunities to exercise, relax and connect with nature at Prospect Reservoir. They are seeking ideas from the community about the potential to expand recreation activities at Prospect Reservoir until September 30th.



Pictured a section of the Canal at Glenlee Road Menangle Park. Photograph by James Whitfield. You can find further information about the Upper Canal using the following link.

<https://www.waternsw.com.au/education/learning-about-water/upper-canal>



## President's Report

Trish Hill

This month has been quieter for group bookings however our schools program is going strong and holding the fort. Our bus group bookings this month have been Carrington Care, Baptist Care and Ray from ASF Tours with a group of retired Water Board employees. Both Maureen and Preston came along with Carrington and it was great to catch up with them at the museum.



David Campbell, you are amazing! The wall art backdrop you have created for our dairy exhibition and the dairy sign have made such an impact along with the new addition of a dairy cow all creating a splendid start for our exhibition.

Kevin Wintle was surprised to find he was one of the nominees for a Volunteer Achievement Award with Museums & Galleries Imagine awards in November. Good luck Kevin! ■



## Acquisitions Report

Allen Seymour

We had some very interesting items in this month. First off is a timber seat from a sulky (pictured). What makes this interesting is that it has "John E Moore – Registered Dairyman" painted on the end. It came originally from "Ellensville" and we will be looking at using it in the dairy display.

The other item is a small incubator powered by a kerosene burner. This was used at one of the Estonian farms at Lakesland. From the same



source there is also a large scythe with a home-made handle.

Another item is a 1969 set of match boxes produced by the Australian Match Co with Aboriginal scenes on them. This is a complete set and very hard to find these days

The dairy display is progressing well with the cow now in place, and the first part completed ■



## Schoolies Report

Bev Batros

Our Schoolies are now enjoying a well-earned rest over the school holiday break, although many of them will still be at the centre with working bees, weekend duties and bus groups.

At our recent Business Meeting we again discussed the need to complete profiles of our volunteers. The schoolies team have 11 permanent volunteers who come every week and have been doing so for many years. Shirley Carlon is our longest serving volunteer who has been involved for about 35 years. Pam Stephenson, John Mainwaring, Pam McVey and Jacquie Finley have been involved for 10 to 15 years while myself, Kevin Wintle, Margaret Battam, Pat Rawnsley and Adelina Austin have been working in the Schools' Program for 2 to 8 years. The fact that all these people have continued to come back year after year is a testament to the enjoyment the program brings and the friendly people who are involved.

The reasons people joined is interesting. I was a school teacher who brought my class to the program and found it so valuable that I vowed to return when I retired. Sue Davis, our Bookings Officer came to hear a guest speaker talking about a book she had written. Sue found everybody so friendly she decided to continue her involvement and has now volunteered for nearly 30 years also. A reoccurring theme is contact with other volunteers. Glenis Pride saw Pam Stephenson in her uniform and so asked her about the museum. Similarly, Jacquie Finley was co-opted by a previous coordinator Jan Noakes while Pat Rawnsley learnt about the program from Lurette and Phil Hughes. Our newest reserve volunteer Betty Peachey has connections with the orchard industry and came to the centre after talking with Ben and Doreen Lyon. Betty's knowledge is proving invaluable in our lessons about orcharding. Word of mouth is a powerful tool ■



# Family History & Local Archive Report

Sue Davis

## VOICES FROM THE KITCHEN HISTORY WEEK 2023

### Original owner of Recipe book

Marie Lousie Dobson

(GGGranddaughter of William Cox)

### Story related to the owner

Marie lived in Marrickville and attended Newtown Cookery School from the 9<sup>th</sup> February, 1911. Her recipe book started as her Homework Book but she continued it throughout her life until she passed away on 19<sup>th</sup> February, 1988.

One side of the book contained recipes she cooked and the other was for the Theory of managing a kitchen and household. When at the school, each entry was marked and dated by the teacher. Entries in the Theory end were often decorated with beautiful watercolour illustrations of birds or flowers. Her writing was very neat. My cousins and I loved to look through the book whenever we visited our Mama, as we called her.

Marie married James Charles Granger, a returned soldier from WW1, in April 1921. She then moved with her husband to the Soldier Settlement village of Kingsvale, near Young. She had no other family nearby so her precious book of recipes that she took with her would have been very useful.

Mama was a great cook and catered for many family and community gatherings using recipes from her brown paper covered exercise book that she had started when she was 15. Her descendants still use some of her favourite recipes.

### A special recipe from the book:

Rum Balls

Ingredients: ½ lb packet of arrowroot or coffee biscuits, crushed

2 tablespoons of cocoa

½ cup coconut

2 tablespoons rum or sherry

Tin condensed milk

Method: mix dry ingredients with slightly less of the condensed milk. Make into balls. Roll balls in coconut. Keep in refrigerator.

### PICTURE:



A Theory page from the Recipe book of Marie Granger, nee Dobson.

A Camden visit with siblings c.1911. Marie is on the far right.

Marie with her husband and 3 children c.1938

PRESENTED BY: Sue Davis (granddaughter of Marie Louise Granger)



# THE LIFE AND TIMES OF RALPH SHARP... 1995-2018

An extract of a compilation by Mick Starr

My first memory of Ralph Sharp, I went to boxing lessons at Albert Bakers home in Menangle road on a Sunday morning around 1956. The ring was on Alberts back lawn and consisted of his garden hose hung on tomato stakes.

I can't remember if Ralph was there working out or assisting Albert with his small squad.

Ralph was a good heavyweight boxer who fought in two State Championships bouts, as he told me in later years sitting on his front patio at Oakdale.

Along with many other stories when I sat with him, he fought a bloke called Sandy Herbert who at the time was playing for the Manly first grade side and did so for some years.

Ralph said that he was as tough as they come. He defeated Ralph on points then went on to win the State Belt.

Ralph fought a four round Exhibition match against Herb Narvo in 1947 in John street Camden. This bout was arranged by George Griffiths the Manager of Nattai Bulli Colliery and also the Mayor of Camden who offered to pay Ralph an Afternoon shift if he agreed to the fight to raise funds for a charity.

Herb Narvo being a former Australian Heavyweight Champion and Australian Rugby League International representative player as well as a Sydney Newtown first grader for some years. Herb was the Publican of the Plough and Harrow Hotel at the time.

Ralph's Father Sid had heard in town that someone had talked Ralph up to Herb Narvo prior to the bout saying that young Sharp would give him a run for his money. This worried Sid and he wanted Ralph to pull out. Ralph replied to his Father, if he knocks me out Dad then that will be the way of it.

Ralph gave me a blow by blow account of how the four rounds went, he said round one Narvo put on a flamboyant show and danced about. In the second round Ralph said that Narvo caught him with a big right hand in the bread basket and that was the end of him but he hung on. He also said to Narvo's credit he did not try to push him off to finish it so he made the bell.

Round three went with both boxers scoring equally. Round four came and Ralph said that he caught Narvo late in the round with a right left right combination and it was Narvo's turn to hang on till the bell ended the bout. Ralph said he was a very difficult fighter as a Southpaw but could change to orthodox when it suited. I, like so many men in the Burratorang Valley Collieries who held Union positions, were more than fortunate to be mentored over the years by Ralph with his quiet words of advice and persuasion and assistance if he thought you were heading in the wrong direction.

During one of our discussions in Ralphs later years sitting on the front patio having a cup of tea that Julie brought out for us then left us to it, Ralph said to me, who will ever record the story of the men who lost their jobs at the Glen Lee Coal Washery. I replied that it was before I

entered the Coal Industry, so Ralph filled me in on the dispute and he seemed to think that I should record it for the Heritage Centre where much of the areas mining history was kept and displayed.

The story is an illustration of Ralph's commitment to his members and his determination not to see them lose their jobs.

This commitment would be carried by Ralph throughout his mining career and his leadership over the years as head of the Federated Mine Mechanics Association.

This is as close as I can get to the story as told to me by Ralph Sharp in the latter stages of his life, sitting with him on the patio of his home at Oakdale in 2016.

Ralph was concerned that no one would ever record the story of the Mine Mechanics that were sacked at Glen Lee Coal Washery. This dispute became a demarcation issue, one of the worst to be involved in, a Court decision led to their sackings.

He gave me the Stewards Financial Statement with the names of the Mine Mechanics Members as listed in February 1962 and then told me the story.

As I have been interviewing and recording the Retired Mineworkers Members who worked in the Burratorang Valley Collieries for the Wollondilly Heritage Centre records for future generations to see, Ralph asked me to write the Glen Lee Mine Mechanics story. The Mine Mechanics Union had enrolled some twenty members at the new Glen Lee Coal Washery located east of Elderslie. This was opposed by the Company and the AWU, ETU, AEU, and the FEDFA, and the matter went to court.



A parade in Central Camden featuring Mick Bardsley and Ralph Sharp on the right hand side.

The Mine Mechanics Union supported by the Miners Federation had a decision handed down in their favour.

The Company and the other Unions appealed to the full bench of the Arbitration Commission and had the previous decision overturned.

The Mine Mechanic members were subsequently sacked as apparently most of them were not prepared to join the AWU and

associated Unions.

Ralph Sharp met with Bill Clinton at the Narellan Hotel on a Saturday morning and asked him what he was going to do about the sacked workers.

Failing to get any satisfaction for the future of his sacked members Ralph made the decision he had to make to attempt to have some future for these sacked members in the Burratorang Valley Coal Industry.

After hours of discussion Ralph had indicated to Bill Clinton that the Nattai Bulli Colliery would go idle in support of these displaced workers. This took place the following week when mineworkers from Clintons Collieries took industrial action in support of the sacked Mine Mechanics. Continued over page.....

## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF RALPH SHARP CONTINUED

Bill Clinton finally agreed to hire the displaced men at Nattai Bulli Colliery and I think a few in Valley No1 Colliery, but told Ralph that not all these men would be Mine Mechanics, some would have to be placed in the Miners Federation.

From what I can gather some of these men were employed for some weeks at the Narellan Coal Loading Bins near the Narellan Rail station, cleaning up around the screens until such time as they were sent for Joint Coal Board medicals.

After they gained their medicals they entered Nattai Bulli Colliery and the last one of these members to remain at the Colliery until closure was Ray Cagney.

Ralph also said that Dave Cohen went on to be the President of the Miners Federation at Nattai Bulli and he spoke very highly of him.

About this time Clintons sold their mine holdings to Conzinc Rio-Tinto who held large contracts for the Japanese Steel Mills.

With the passing of Ralph Sharp, and the years I have been unable to ascertain exactly who the fifteen men were that came to Nattai Bulli. With the help of Ray Cagney we can identify these names. E Baker, D Barr, R Cagney, A Crow, D Cohen, W Dalton, A Gay, A Moore, A Harrison.

I somehow feel that some most probably got a start at Valley No1 Colliery.

Such was Ralph's commitment to his members. He would leave no stone unturned to seek a solution for their welfare.

Ralph first entered the Coal Industry at age fifteen, about 1941 for a short time. However he had to go back to the farm to help with the war effort when his Father joined up. He later came back to the Colliery once again in 1947 then left for a short time when his Father became ill.

Ralph then returned to the Colliery when the family situation improved. In 1951 Ralph was elected to the position of Vice President of the Nattai Bulli Miners Lodge, this was then the Federated Mining Mechanics, Tradesmen and Truck Drivers of NSW, the Miners Federation that covered all the men who mined the coal.

In the early 1950's Ralph became Secretary and later Camden District Delegate to the Mine Mechanics Headquarters in Newcastle.

Ralph became the Camden Delegate for the Federated Mine Mechanics Association in 1957 and held that District position until 1968. He then stood and was elected to the Presidency of the Union a position he held until 1984 when he retired for health reasons.

During Ralph's twenty seven years representing his many members in NSW he was always the voice of common sense and reason, not only for his members but for those from other Unions that sought his advice. On many occasions over the years at aggregate Combined

Mining Unions meetings in Camden Showground, mainly called in support of endorsing the National Unions recommendations for renewal of Award provisions, support and levies for other mineworkers involved in protracted Industrial actions.

With feelings running heated as was sometimes the case with mineworkers if they thought they were getting a raw deal from the Mine Owners, Ralph invariably became the steadying voice of reason and on most occasions they followed his advice.

I was fortunate to be able to attend the Coal Industry Tribunal on all days that it sat to arbitrate the Combined Mining Unions log of claims in the late 1970's.

The major claims were presented by Evan Phillips the General President of the National Miners Federation, and Ralph presented the case for full pay on Workers Compensation for the first 39 weeks, before dropping back to the old rate.

These two Union Leaders highlighted their cases over many days without legal aid, unlike the Coal Owners who had a couple of Legal Eagles to present their opposition to the Unions claims.

Both Evan and Ralph were men that had grown up through hard times and had received basic education before going to work, their education was gleaned through experience in a tough Industry.

Like most Log of Claim cases before the Tribunal, some points were successful and some lost. However Ralph's presentation for the Compensation claim for injured workers was successful, and was acclaimed as a major achievement for the National Coal Mining workforce.

Ralph was able to stand on his feet for hours in the Tribunal, without reading off documents and present a clear argument in favour of the workforce. I also saw him do this on many occasions at aggregate meetings to steer the course best suited to the situation in his opinion.



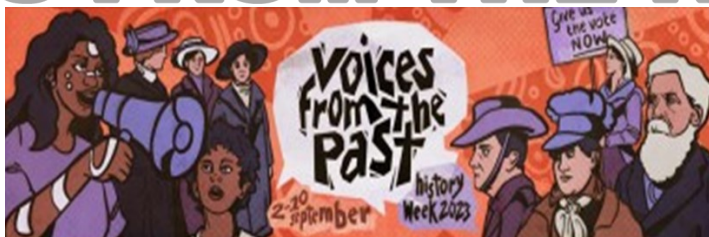
If one looks back over the years in the Burragorang Valley Mining era, Ralph would figure prominently as a very respected Union Leader, as well as a person involved in many other matters in the Oakdale and Camden Districts. As well as Ralph's duties as the President of the Mine Mechanics Union he was also an inaugural member of the Clutha Credit Union and was very instrumental in its formation.

It was to become the Macarthur Credit Union in 1978. Pictured is the second Board of Management of the Credit Union 1972 with Ralph seated front R/H side. Ralph's complete story as compiled by Mick Starr along with Ralph's family and can be found in the folder of interviews at The Wollondilly Heritage Centre & Museum archives ■



# VOICES FROM THE KITCHEN

History Week is promoted annually by the History Council. This year the theme was "Voices from The Past". The Oaks Historical Society chose to have the voices from the past to come from the kitchen! We started with promotion on the History Council website, our website, Facebook page, the District Reporter Newspaper and the Wollondilly Express Newspaper.



During History Week we had a segment at our monthly meeting where Sue gave a presentation on what voices from the kitchen may be about something other than cooking. People participated in a multiple-choice quiz to learn about things such as...How can rust stains be treated? ( A. soak in water that rice has been cooked or B. Rub with soap and water... ANSWER BELOW). Some participants earned themselves prizes of items from the garden that can be used in the kitchen, such as lemons, bay leaves, lavender and scented geraniums.

At our *Voices From the Kitchen* event on Sunday, 10 September, people were encouraged to bring vintage recipe books that may have been passed down through their family and came with a story to retell plus a recipe to share for afternoon tea. We had 15 attendees and a few apologies. We heard many interesting stories about books that were sometimes over 100 years old. Here are some of the results:

- Vicki Madeley made "Nelly's Lemon Cheese" a handed down recipe from her mother, Maureen Whyte, who learned from her mother, Ria Sheppard.
- Julie Byrne (nee Carlon) rescued a recipe for Rabbit Stew from her grandmother, when the book had been disposed in a garbage bin. (Nola Tickner) .
- Pat Rawnsley made some delicious ginger bread from her mother's handwritten recipe.
- John Fergusson lent us his Aunt Bertha's recipe book that was over 100 years old and included recipes she used when living out west. One

pudding steamed in a cloth.

- Allen Seymour had an exercise book of handwritten recipes that his mother first had when she was married in Rabaul, PNG, in 1947. One was for Prickly Pear Jam.
- Colleen Haynes made some Honey Bubble slice from a recipe given to her husband, Michael. It was on the back of an envelope and given to Michael when he first went to visit cousins in Tasmania in 1965.
- Vivian Allen shared some advice from her mother-in-law's cook book that included "How to drive better than a man". It was written in 1904 and told ladies how a car worked!
- Doreen Lyon made fairy cakes and lemon butter from her Granny Fowler's recipe book that was given to Doreen when she was married in England. When she reads it, Doreen, has vivid memories of those people from her younger days.
- Sue Davis made Rum Balls from her grandmother's recipe book that was started in 1911 when her grandmother, Marie Granger (nee Dobson) attended Newtown Domestic Science School. Sue can still imagine her grandmother, Mama, rolling the mixture before putting it into the fridge to set.

ANSWER FROM ABOVE: A. soak in water that rice has been cooked ■

If you would like to add to our collection and possibly be part of a future publication then please use the proforma that you may access on this QR code and send to Sue Davis at [tohs1988@bigpond.net.au](mailto:tohs1988@bigpond.net.au)

These are some photographs of our special event:



stand out was Rich Plum

# Reminders, News & Info

WEEKEND ROSTER	
OCTOBER	
<b>Viv &amp; Bob</b>	<b>Sunday, 1</b>
<b>Debbie &amp; Allen</b>	<b>Monday, 2</b>
Doreen & Ben	Saturday, 7
<b>Bev &amp; David</b>	<b>Sunday, 8</b>
Sue & Helen	Saturday, 14
<b>Trish &amp; Kevin</b>	<b>Sunday, 15</b>
Colleen & Kathy	Saturday, 21
<b>Maria &amp; Vicki</b>	<b>Sunday, 22</b>
Laurette & Phil (Working Bee)	Saturday, 28
<b>Sue &amp; Judy</b>	<b>Sunday, 29</b>
<b>SUPPER</b>	<b>ROSTER</b>
<b>October</b>	<b>Vivian &amp; Pam Mc</b>



## General Meeting

Monday, October 2nd 2023 at 7pm

Guest speaker Mick Webber - RFS talking about fire preparedness for the approaching fire season and revisiting aspects of Green Wattle

Meeting followed by supper/All welcome

### Scenes from around the Museum



## DONOHOE FAMILY REUNION

A Family Reunion will be held for the Descendants of Thomas and Jane (nee Madden) Donohoe on the first weekend of May 2024.

The Reunion is to be held at the Oakey RSL, which is about 15 minute drive west of Toowoomba, Qld.

Thomas Donohoe 1832-1910 born in County Clare, Ireland, immigrated to Australia in 1851, living in Burragorang Valley and later at 'Hardwick', Orangeville Rd, The Oaks. Thomas is buried at the Catholic Cemetery The Oaks. At the time of his passing he was survived by 8 children.

One of them, William Denis married Margaret Kenniff in

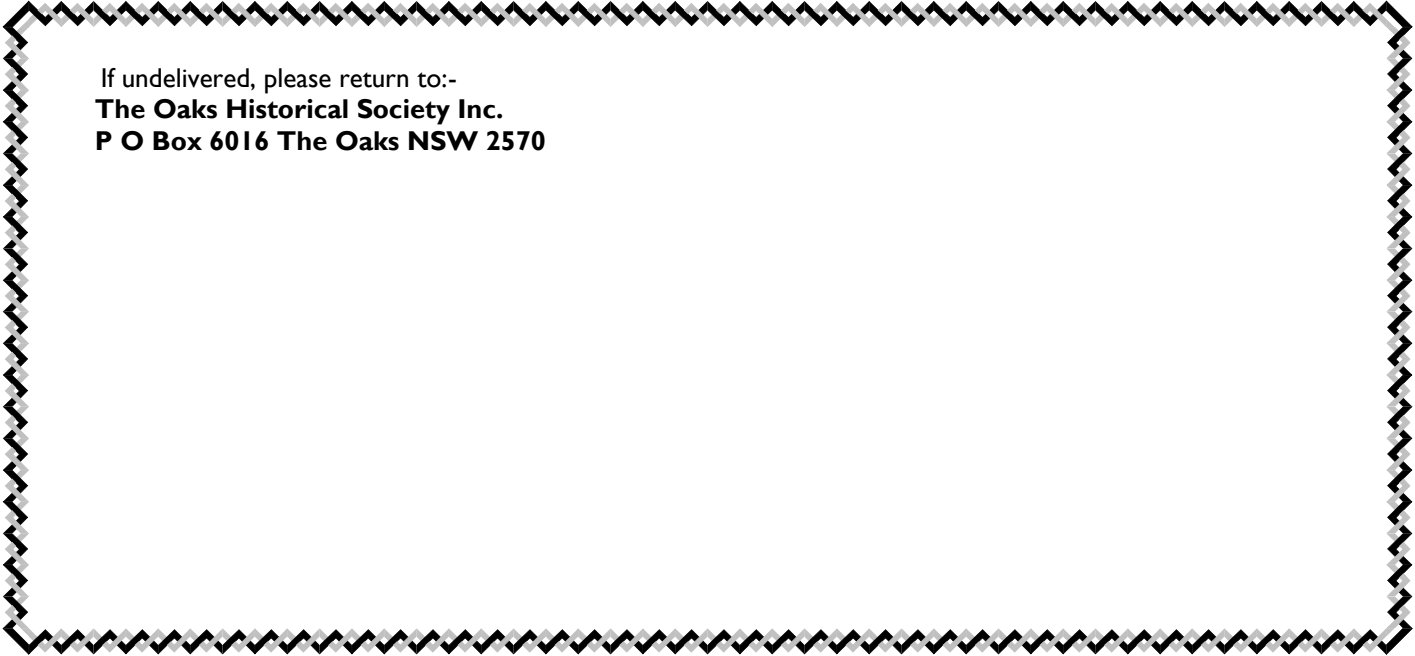


1903, and a few years later they later travelled to Mount Darry near Oakey, Queensland, where they purchased a property which to this day is now owned by his Grandson Mick Donohoe. If you are interested please contact either ;

- [Cecilia Donohoe](mailto:cv.donohoe@bigpond.com) at: cv.donohoe@bigpond.com
- [Angela Weber](mailto:moggysmum@hotmail.com) at: moggysmum@hotmail.com
- [Frank Donohoe](mailto:ad_donohoe@hotmail.com) at: ad\_donohoe@hotmail.com

Pictured L to R: Jamie, Thomas, Michael, Jane & (Cousin) Louie Carlan. Back L to R: Bridget, William, Joseph, Charles & Anne ■

**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 October 2nd followed by the general meeting on November 6th 2023. Our patron is Judith Hannan. 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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