

REID'S MISTAKE



Keith H. Clouten



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THIS book fills a long neglected gap in the regional history of New South Wales. Despite the fact that Lake Macquarie lies in the most densely populated coastal belt of Australia and is less than seventy miles from the nation's oldest city, the fascinating story of its past has never before been unfolded. These pages contain the first reliable and connected account of the early years of the Lake region.

The story is here presented in two parts. The first opens with the unusual story of the lake's discovery in 1800, and goes on to record the experiences of the early explorer-surveyors and pioneer settlers. Packed with interesting detail, this section tells of the first mission ever conducted for the Australian aborigines, of incidents in the lives of the first settlers, of assigned convicts and bushrangers, and the pathetic story of the aborigines. The second part traces the commercial development of Lake Macquarie following the gold-rush period. Coal and timber were the key items of trade, and the lake played a vital role in the transport of these commodities. Yet the shallow entrance to the lake presented a problem to shipping, and the story of ships wrecked, sailors' lives lost, and frustrated entrepreneurs is graphically told. Here, too, are traced the fascinating beginnings of lakeside towns such as Cooranbong, Belmont, and Swansea. The story concludes with the building of the northern railway just prior to 1890; this event brought remarkable changes in the pattern of transport, industry and population, and ushered in the present age at Lake Macquarie.

REID'S MISTAKE

TO MY MOTHER AND FATHER

*whose interest and encouragement
have led me to write this book*

OMISSION

The publisher wishes to acknowledge that the portrait of the Rev. L. E. Threlkeld and the illustrations facing pages 17, 32, 33 and 96 are reproduced by courtesy of the Mitchell Library and regrets that this acknowledgement was omitted from the captions during the printing.

REID'S MISTAKE

*The Story of Lake Macquarie
from its Discovery
until 1890*

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LAKE MACQUARIE SHIRE COUNCIL

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PREFACE

To the question 'Why do you climb mountains?' the young mountaineer is said to have replied, 'Because they are there.' He might equally well have said, 'Because I *like* to climb mountains.' And that is the only logical reply I could offer anyone who asks why I have written this book. Quite frankly, I did it because I wanted to.

This is not a social history, though it does concern people—many of them; it is not an economic history, since I have not the trained mind of the economist; neither is it a political history, for I have not always connected motives with events. In short, it is probably the kind of history which interests nobody because it sets out to appeal to everybody. But whatever brickbats are hurled at it, I hope that none will be aimed against its reliability, for I have tried to present an accurate account of the Lake Macquarie story. I have used documentation throughout the book, for I was taught that the historian who does not employ footnotes is not worth his salt.

I cannot claim to have written a comprehensive history of the Lake Macquarie district, for in any case the chronology peters out about the year 1890. This has seemed a most logical place to stop, but I am also conscious that numerous people still alive have memories reaching back to that time, and I dare not compete with their memories.

My gratitude is due to a number of organizations and individuals whose advice and information have made the writing of this book possible. My greatest debt is owed to the staffs of the Mitchell Library and the Archives Office, Sydney, for their professional attention. I am grateful for the assistance given by the librarians and historical officers of a number of government bodies in Sydney: the Lands Department, the Education Department, the Police Department, and the Postmaster-General's Department. The Editor of the *Newcastle Morning Herald* granted me permission to use the valuable research facilities of the *Herald* Library. I also appreciated the advice and assistance of the Newcastle City Librarian and members of his staff.

Among the many people whose information and encouragement have helped in producing this book are the members of the Lake Macquarie and District Historical Society. Its President, Mr. D. R. Blakemore, was kind enough to read the manuscript and to make helpful suggestions. Others who have made valuable contributions from their knowledge or recollections of the past include Miss L. Boon of Newcastle, Mrs. A. Burgman of Dora

Creek, Mr. P. Jepson of Teralba, Mr. and Mrs. I. Page of Belmont, Mr. C. Parker of Dora Creek, the late Mr. J. Pope of Martinsville, and the late Mr. C. Taylor of Cooranbong. My special thanks are due to Councillor T. R. Pendlebury, President of the Lake Macquarie Shire, who has graciously contributed a Foreword to this book and supported its publication; and to Mr. J. Levett, Shire Librarian, for his encouragement, criticism, and advice. And finally, my wife was extraordinarily patient, and gave valuable help in bringing this book to completion.

K.H.C.

July 1965

FOREWORD TO THE 1988 EDITION

In this Bicentennial year it is appropriate to re-issue this valuable history of early Lake Macquarie. It is twenty-one years since its first publication and it has been out of print for some time. Since the time of President Pendlebury, Lake Macquarie has experienced a large increase in population and development, and the area has progressed from a Shire to the status of a Municipality, and then a City.

As Mayor of this City, it gives me great pleasure to be involved in making this unique publication available once more. As well as providing an invaluable reference tool, it makes for fascinating reading.

IVAN J. WELSH, MP

Mayor, City of Lake Macquarie

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ABBREVIATIONS

CSIL	Colonial Secretary's In Letters (Archives Office, Sydney)
GPO	Gosford Police Office
<i>MA</i>	<i>Miner's Advocate</i>
<i>NC</i>	<i>Newcastle Chronicle</i>
NHDHS	Newcastle and Hunter District Historical Society
<i>NMH</i>	<i>Newcastle Morning Herald</i>
RAHS	Royal Australian Historical Society
<i>SMH</i>	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>
<i>TCJ</i>	<i>Australian Town and Country Journal</i>

I

INTRODUCTION

FOR almost a thousand miles, from Wilson's Promontory to Cape Byron, the coastline of south-eastern Australia is relieved by dozens of lakes and inlets. In size, these range from the shy little lagoons and inlets that are typical of the south coast of New South Wales, to the larger lakes and estuaries which have engulfed extensive areas of low-lying country near the coast. Some of these waterways are fairly regular in outline, while others present a complicated pattern of passages and islands, with armlets reaching out like the tentacles of an octopus. Of this last description is Lake Macquarie, which fills a shallow and irregularly-shaped basin immediately to the south of Newcastle. Possessing an extensive system of bays and passages, Lake Macquarie is one of the largest and best-known of Australia's coastal lakes.

Named in honour of one of Australia's greatest colonial governors, Lachlan Macquarie, this beautiful and extensive lake has proved to be a popular rendezvous with holiday-makers from the nearby cities, and the surrounding countryside has yielded considerable resources for both primary and secondary industries. The lake itself is contained in a rectangle measuring fourteen miles from north to south, and about eight miles from east to west. But these measurements belie the real character of the lake, for they ignore the unpredictable contour of its shoreline, its innumerable rocky points and sandy bays, many of them tucked away in a dozen twisting passages or extensions. These complications of shape tend to create exaggerated impressions of the size of the lake, and some peculiar judgements have been made at various times. In 1870 'competent judges' estimated the entire circumference of the lake to be little short of 500 miles, while its area was set down at from 800 to 1,000 square miles.¹ For many years it was popularly claimed that the circumference was 365 miles. However, fairly accurate measurements have been taken in recent years, and the Lake Macquarie Shire Council nows puts its total length of shoreline at slightly in excess of 100 miles.²

The Lake Macquarie basin is a natural physiographic region, occupying a total area, including the lake surface, of approximately 300 square miles. The boundaries of the Shire of Lake Macquarie almost exactly coincide with

¹ *TCJ*, 11 June 1870.

² From *Lake Macquarie*, a brochure published by the Shire Council in 1963.

the natural boundaries of the region, except at the southern end of the lake, where the neighbouring Wyong Shire robs the Lake Shire of a small part of lakeside territory. For the purpose of this study, we ignore this rather arbitrary local government boundary, and the physiographic region of Lake Macquarie is the subject of our interest.

It is impossible to have a clear understanding of the history of any place, be it an entire continent or a small locality, without some knowledge of its geography. This introductory chapter purposes to supply a brief survey of the Lake Macquarie district and its resources, as a basis for understanding its history. The accompanying map of the lake district should prove helpful to those who are unfamiliar with the area.

The natural boundaries of the region are not difficult to define. On the east is the Pacific Ocean from Redhead southwards to Catherine Hill Bay, a direct distance of about fourteen miles. From Redhead a ridge of hilly country leads north-westward, approaching to within three miles of the Hunter River at Charlestown and Cardiff Heights. From the second mentioned locality the line of hills continues westward, linking up with the Sugarloaf Range near West Wallsend. In the south, another range of low hills deviates from the seacoast near Catherine Hill Bay and forms a narrow divide between Lake Macquarie and Munmorah Lake, which is a part of the Tuggerah Lakes network. The hilly boundary becomes almost indiscernible in the vicinity of Wyee, but a little further westward the range becomes more distinct and rises rapidly to Yambo Hill south of Mandalong, at an elevation of over 800 feet. From here the range leads north-westward to merge into the Wattagan Mountains. It will be observed that the boundaries of the Lake Macquarie region both in the north and south are merely ridges of very low elevation, and consequently there are no barriers or impediments to land surface transport in either direction. However, the country to the westward of the lake does constitute a barrier to transport, and provides a very clear line of demarcation in that direction. This mountain barrier commences in the north at Sugarloaf Mountain near West Wallsend, where the elevation is approximately 1,300 feet. A range of only slightly lower height continues southward for a short distance, and then veers westward as it drops away to the Brunkerville or Broken Gap, where a main road crosses over into the Cessnock and Maitland districts. Mount Heaton (1,500 feet) rises sharply from the western side of the Gap, and from this point the Wattagan Mountains continue south-westward at an average height of about 1,400 feet. From the seacoast the Wattagans present the appearance of a single range facing the east, but in reality there is a complex of intersecting ranges which, when taken together, constitute merely the scarp or verge of a rugged section of country which spreads westwards for many miles, ultimately becoming a part of the Great Dividing Range itself. Though somewhat of a transport barrier, the Wattagan Mountains are covered with a luxurious natural hardwood forest, and this has

been the basis of a very important timber industry for over one hundred years.

Returning to the lake itself, we notice a number of facts about it that help us to understand the significant part it has played in the history and development of the district. With a few exceptions, for example, the lake is of sufficient depth to take vessels of light tonnage, and this opens up considerable possibilities for navigation, considering the large extent of the water surface. Unfortunately, however, its use in this respect is restricted by a shallow bar at its narrow ocean entrance, and the crossing of this bar, even at high water, has been proved to be a risky business. Despite this limitation, the lake was navigated during the last century by a convoy of small ketches and schooners moving coal and timber from the lakeshores to Sydney and Newcastle. Vessels had to be piloted over the entrance bar, and this necessity had something to do with the beginnings of a small settlement at Swansea, where a pilot station came to be established. Moreover, Swansea was a convenient bridging point across the entrance channel.

Since the lake contains salt water and is subject to small tidal influences, it is inhabited by a variety of fish, mostly the smaller sea species. The district aborigines discovered this valuable resource centuries before the first Europeans arrived, though it did not take very long for the white settlers to discover the lake's fishing potential. A commercial fishing industry developed about 1850, and expanded during the second half of the last century. It has decreased a little in recent years due largely to government restrictions.

The attractiveness of the lakeside scenery, heightened as it is by scores of bays and inlets, and the predominantly hilly foreshores, accounts for the value of the region as a tourist resort, with interests in swimming, fishing, cruising, yachting, and holiday living. Nearness to the cities of Newcastle and Sydney has accelerated the growth of these recreational pursuits. The proximity of the northern portion of the lake to Newcastle has also encouraged some thousands of people to build their homes along its shores, while depending upon the city for employment.

The extensiveness of the lake's surface, in addition to the fact that there are no places narrow enough for bridging, has had its influence on the settlement pattern of the region, and helps to account for the absence of a major local town serving the entire lake district. Instead, the population is scattered around the lakeshores, and we find a number of focal towns, each serving the local area. Such urban centres include Swansea, Belmont, Boolaroo, Toronto, and Morisset. Of course, the closeness of Newcastle to the whole district has tended in recent years to offset the importance of these provincial towns, which have come to possess some of the characteristics of outer suburbs of a metropolis.

Between the lake and the Wattagan Mountains to the westward lies an undulating stretch of country, rather poor as far as soils are concerned, and

covered with light forest and scrub. This land has practically no value for agriculture. However, a small number of creeks drain the mountains and cut across this tract of country before emptying into the lake on its western side. The narrow valleys and flood-flats of these streams are useful for agriculture because of their richer and deeper alluvial soils. The largest of these streams is Dora Creek, and along its valley and those of its tributary streams a variety of farming activities is carried on, including dairying, market gardening, citrus orcharding, and poultry farming. However, generally speaking, the Lake Macquarie region cannot be considered to be a primary producing area, as, indeed, many agricultural experiments of the past have demonstrated.

The climate of the lake region is best described as maritime warm temperate, and the graphs of temperature and rainfall are not very different from those for Sydney or Newcastle. The annual rainfall averages about forty-five inches, with probably a slightly higher precipitation on the eastern slopes of the Wattagan Mountains, where there are patches of dense brush and rain-forest. Rainfall is distributed throughout all months of the year, though the maximum rainfall period is usually the late summer and autumn. Temperatures are fairly warm in summer, and during the winter months frosts are common. Localities close to the seacoast tend to have a cooler summer and a milder winter due to oceanic effects. Generally speaking, the climate is attractive for settlement, while the summer is warm enough and long enough to make aquatic activities enjoyable for half of the year.

The two greatest natural resources of the lake district are timber and coal. The chief source of hardwood timber is the Wattagan area, though in earlier days there were valuable forests encircling the lake. With regard to coal resources, it is fortunate that the lake region is as close as it is to the Hunter River valley, where the rich coal seams of the great coal basin of eastern New South Wales come to the surface. The name of Newcastle has become almost synonymous with coal production, and it is significant that within a few months of the commencement of the Newcastle coal trade in 1799, deposits of the same mineral were discovered at Lake Macquarie and a cargo was actually taken in 1800. Mining has occupied an important phase of the lake's history, and today there are many collieries operating throughout the district. West Wallsend, Teralba, Redhead, and Catherine Hill Bay are long established coal mining centres, but recently mines have been opened near Awaba and Wyee to supply the thermal power stations at Wangi and Vales Point. Apart from consumption for local power production, most of the coal is taken to Newcastle for use in industries there, including the great B.H.P. steelworks.

Although coal is undoubtedly the chief mineral resource of the Lake Macquarie region, it was discovered a few years ago that important deposits of valuable rutile and zircon exist in some of the beach sands along the

seacoast. Despite some opposition from other beach interests, these twentieth century minerals are now mined at Redhead and near Catherine Hill Bay, as well as at numerous other points along the New South Wales coast.

The establishment of some large secondary industries in the Lake Macquarie Shire has resulted from two things: an abundance of coal, and proximity to Newcastle. At Cockle Creek near Boolaroo is the extensive plant of the Sulphide Corporation, which produces zinc, lead, sulphuric acid, and phosphate fertilizers. Close by are the Cardiff Railway Workshops where about one thousand men are employed in constructing, repairing, and maintaining railway rolling stock. Both the Sulphide Corporation and the Railway Workshops might be considered as industries subsidiary to the Newcastle steelworks and its related manufactures.

The main food processing industry in the region is the factory of the Sanitarium Health Food Company at Cooranbong. This industry was established in 1900, in conjunction with a Seventh-day Adventist missionary training college on the same property. The factory receives wheat, corn, and a variety of other primary produce, and distributes its food products by road and rail to Newcastle and Sydney.

A variety of light industries—cordial manufacture, printing, joinery work, boatbuilding, tyre-retreading, to mention just a few—is found chiefly in the northern part of the lake region, where the adjacent city can provide skilled labour as required, as well as markets for the products.

There has been a good deal of emphasis on the closeness of Newcastle to the lake region, and certainly during the post-war years it has become increasingly obvious that Newcastle is playing a tremendous part in the development of the Lake Macquarie district. The city's existence accounts for the high population of the lake region—over 100,000 in 1965—and explains why most of this population is resident in the northern part of the region, where Newcastle has literally spilled over into such lakeside centres as Boolaroo-Speer's Point, Warner's Bay, Teralba, Belmont, and even Toronto. This trend will continue, and in a few years' time the towns at the northern end of the lake will probably be regarded as outlying suburbs of Newcastle.

Nearness to the industrial city has likewise had an effect on the growth of transport and communications about Lake Macquarie. The major road linking Sydney with Newcastle and the north is the Pacific Highway, which passes through the Lake Macquarie district at Swansea and Belmont, and certainly its existence has had a direct influence on the expansion of the tourist trade and accommodation facilities in those towns. The construction of the main northern railway around the western side of the lake in the last part of the nineteenth century had an even more marked effect on development along that side of the lake. The railway was responsible for the early growth of towns such as Morisset, Toronto, and Awaba; while it was likewise responsible for the decline of other towns, notably Cooranbong

and its adjacent centres. In addition to the main northern line, there are numerous branch railways serving collieries and providing passenger services to Toronto and Belmont.

The Shire of Lake Macquarie was proclaimed on 6th March 1906, and a little over two months later, the State Governor appointed a temporary Council of five members.³ On 13th June 1906 this Council held its first meeting in the Teralba Court House, and six months later the first elected Council met in the same building. Since 1914 the Shire administrative headquarters have been at Speer's Point, at the northern extremity of the lake. There is no such thing as a central point in the Shire, but the Boolaroo-Speer's Point locality comes nearest to meeting this requirement. It is also one of the most densely populated parts of the region.

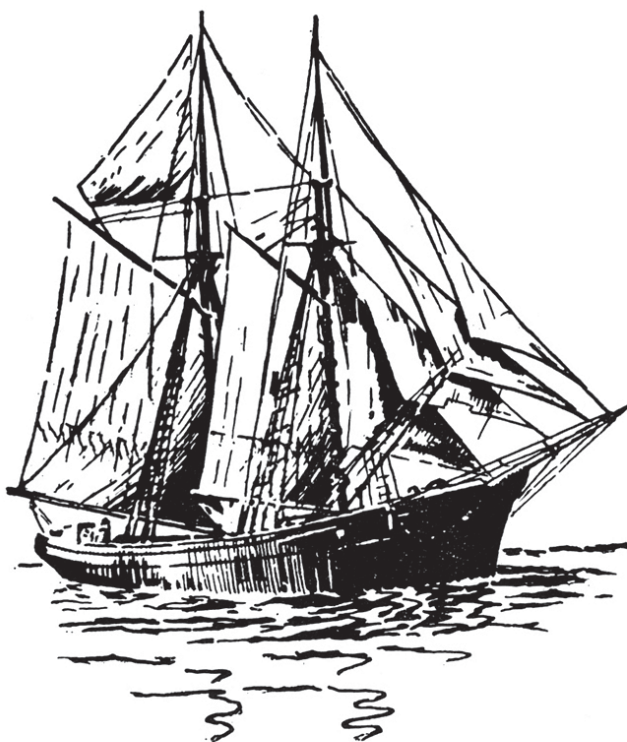
In the chapters that follow, it is our purpose to turn back the hands of time and to depict the story of Lake Macquarie. Unfortunately, some of the pages of the past are soiled, or missing, or the writing is very faded. But our search will not have been in vain if we can but catch a few glimpses of those people, places and events which are now not even memories in the minds of our generation. This introductory chapter has aimed to provide something of the geographical scene; to set the stage, as it were, for the scenes that are to follow.

³ From notes supplied by the Lake Macquarie Shire Council in 1965.

Part One

SETTLEMENT

1800-1860



An artist's conception of a coastal schooner of the 1790's.

FROM WARRAWALONG TO THE SEA

THE discovery of Lake Macquarie was an accident. Indeed most great discoveries have come about that way. History records the story of how Colonel Drake discovered oil in America many years ago, and how most people laughed at him at the time, and dubbed his oil derrick 'Drake's Folly'. In the same sort of way, Lake Macquarie was originally named 'Reid's Mistake' to commemorate the error of a sea captain who thought he had arrived at the Hunter River. The story of Captain Reid's expedition has been told many times before, and the account given by the late James Jervis¹ is unexcelled for its completeness and accuracy. There is practically nothing that can be added to Jervis' account, but in spite of that, the story is repeated here since it would be a serious omission to leave it out of this narrative.

The colony of New South Wales was an infant of nine years when in 1797 Lieutenant John Shortland sailed northwards from Sydney, looking for runaway convicts along the coast. He did not find the runaways, but he was able to report the discovery of a fairly large river which entered the sea about seventy miles from Port Jackson. The river was named the Hunter in honour of the then Governor of the colony, and Shortland reported the existence of coal outcroppings close to the river's mouth. This last discovery was considered to be important, and small vessels were soon employed in making voyages to the Hunter for coal which, though yet of little value in the colony itself, was in much demand in other parts of the British Empire.

One of the vessels sent to the Hunter River in the year 1800 to obtain a cargo of coal was the *Martha*, a small schooner of thirty tons, owned by Boston and Company, and mastered by Captain William Reid or Reed, there being this variation in the spelling. The *Martha* was built in Sydney in 1799, and according to a Port Jackson shipping list² dating from that time, the vessel entered the port on 14th December 1799, under 'William Reed', with a cargo of thirty tierces of seal oil and 1,300 seal skins. The historian Collins records that she again sailed into Port Jackson on 6th

¹ RAHS journal, v. 31, pt. 2, 1945: Jervis, James, *Lake Macquarie, its discovery and settlement*.

² HRNSW, v. 4, p. 164.

March 1800 with another cargo of oil and seal skins, and then sailed for Norfolk Island 'with some articles for sale, the property of her owners'.³ Collins' account of the *Martha's* adventures, published in 1802, is the earliest that we now have, apart from Governor King's despatches, and so it is worth quoting here. Describing the events of July 1800, Collins records that

The *Martha*, having been allowed to go to Hunter River for coals in the beginning of the month, on her return, having anchored in some very bad weather in the north part of the harbour, Little Manly Bay, was by the parting of her cable driven on a reef of rocks, where her bottom was beat out. With the assistance of the officers and crew of the *Buffalo*, she was got off, and, being floated with calks, was brought up to Sydney, where her damages were found not to be irreparable.

By the master's account it appeared, that he had not been in the river, but in a salt water inlet, about five leagues to the southward of the river, having a small island at its entrance. He was conducted by some natives to a spot at a small distance from the mouth, where he found abundance of coal.

Before sailing for the Hunter River, undoubtedly Captain Reid had been given a description of the mouth of the river, having, as it did, a small island opposite its entrance, and a seam of coal exposed on the southern side of the inlet. So the *Martha* set out and, hugging the coastline, Reid sailed into a salt-water inlet which at first appearance seemed to answer the description he had been given. He took the *Martha* into the entrance passage, was able to find an abundance of coal there, and returned to Sydney, where he must have learned that he had not been to the Hunter River at all, but had discovered another inlet a few miles southward of the river. Writing to Sir Joseph Banks in England in September of 1800, Governor King referred to this incident:

Nothing has yet been done respecting the coals. A small vessel* went some time ago to the river between this and Port Stephens; she missed the river and got into a barr lagoon, where she got loaded immediately with very fine coals, but in coming into this harbour she got ashore and was bilged. These rivers, which abound with coals, are not accessible to larger vessels than about forty tons . . .

*The *Martha*—she went ashore in Little Manly.⁴

This brief account from King's despatch contains the earliest known reference to Lake Macquarie, though it is very doubtful that the existence of a lake was supposed by either the discoverer or Governor King. No official name was bestowed on the 'lagoon', but it was soon widely known as Reid's Mistake. Henry Dangar, an Assistant Government Surveyor in the

³ Collins, David, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, from its first settlement, in January 1788, to August 1801* . . . , v. 2.

⁴ HRNSW, v. 4, p. 206.

colony some years later, referred to the naming of the lake in his *Index and Directory* to the Hunter district published in 1828, as follows:⁵

Reid's Mistake is situated fourteen and a half miles to the south-south-west of Port Hunter, and so called in honor of its discoverer, whose name was 'Reid', being master of a colonial coasting vessel, and intending to run into Port Hunter, whither colonial craft then resorted for coals, which were dug out of the cliff by their crews; instead of Port Hunter, this sagacious seaman took his bark into this opening, and thus, in memory of his error, the name has been given.

The body of water which William Reid had discovered was later proved to be of much greater extent than a mere 'inlet' or 'lagoon', but the name Reid's Mistake came to be commonly applied to the whole lake, and not only to its entrance. This name remained in general use for at least half a century, and until about 1826 it was the only name applied to the lake. Even today, Reid's Mistake is still the official title given to the lake's entrance, where the original error was made.

The reports of the incident in 1800 indicate that the *Martha* ran aground on her return to Sydney in July, and no further reference to the vessel has been located, though it was believed that the ship was not beyond repair. However, Jervis was able to trace a later reference to Captain Reid, and records that he departed from Sydney on 5th January 1801 in charge of a vessel named *El Plumier*, bound for the Cape of Good Hope, probably with another cargo of coal.

But Reid was not the only mariner of those days who entered the Lake Macquarie channel by accident. In June of 1801 Lieutenant-Colonel Paterson wrote to Governor King from 'Hunter's River', describing his voyage to that place in the brig *Lady Nelson* a few days earlier:⁶

As Mr. Grant gives you the details on our voyage to this place, it will, of course, be more explanatory than anything I could say on that head. He will, of course, inform you how near our pilot had brought the *Lady Nelson* into a very unpleasant situation, from mistaking an open bay about thirteen miles to the southward from this port.

The surgeon on board *Lady Nelson*, a man named Harris, also mentioned this incident in a letter to King, and according to Jervis, the surgeon went ashore at Reid's Mistake and there met an aboriginal. We quote Jervis' account of this:⁷

In June, 1801, the pilot of the *Lady Nelson* made the same error as William Reid. . . . As the weather was fair and the vessel lay in seventeen fathoms of water, a boat was lowered and Dr. Harris was sent to explore the place.

⁵ Dangar, Henry, *Index and Directory to Map of the Country bordering upon the River Hunter* (London, 1828), p. 57.

⁶ HRNSW, v. 4, p. 414.

⁷ Jervis obtained this information from log books of the *Lady Nelson*.

On his return the doctor reported that there was not the slightest sign of a river there, but that the sea broke over an inlet behind the island. He brought with him a native, who, on seeing the boat, had run towards it, crying out alternately, 'Whaleboat' and 'Budgerree (that is, good) Dick.' Budgerree Dick had some fish with him, which he threw into the bottom of the boat, and, without the least hesitation, jumped in himself. As soon as he got on board the brig he continued to cry out incessantly, 'Whaleboat! Whaleboat!'

This account of meeting a friendly native who had obviously been in previous contact with Europeans would seem to lend support to Collins' story that when Captain Reid had landed there a year previously, he was met by some friendly aborigines who conducted him to a place where he was able to collect his cargo of coal.

In 1802 a small coal mining settlement was established at the mouth of the Hunter River, but was abandoned in the same year. It was re-established by the Governor in 1804 and was named King's Town. It was developed as a convict penal settlement, and large numbers of Irish prisoners were taken there in succeeding years. For almost twenty years, this settlement at Newcastle was exclusively a place of punishment, a fact which is not without significance in the early history of the Lake Macquarie district. In those early years, of course, communication between Sydney and the Hunter was possible only by sea, there being no useful road connection until about 1830.

During the governorship of Lachlan Macquarie from 1810 to 1821, a number of attempts were made to extend the bounds of settlement from Sydney into the great interior of New South Wales. Most of the pressure came from pastoralists in the Cumberland region west of Sydney, who needed more extensive pastures for their cattle due to a series of very dry years. The Blue Mountains to the West of Sydney were successfully crossed in 1813, so opening up vast and valuable lands for pastoral use and settlement. The country to the south-west of Sydney, along the tablelands towards the Murrumbidgee, did not offer any great impediment to exploration or movement, and so stock owners moved out in that direction also. But during the Macquarie era, the lands in the Hunter River valley to the northward of Sydney were not settled by the pastoralists,⁸ and it appears that there were two reasons for this.

First, the nature of the country immediately to the north of Port Jackson tended to discourage movement of stock in that direction. The Nepean River, after flowing gently across the Cumberland plain west of Sydney, suddenly veers eastward and cuts through very rugged sandstone country for the last part of its course to the sea. This so-called 'Hawkesbury sandstone' extends for many miles northward and westward of the river, presenting a maze of barren rocky ridges, difficult to cross because of the

⁸ For a detailed account of the spread of early settlement into the Hunter valley, see Perry, T. M., *Australia's first frontier* (Melb. U.P., 1963).

steep gorges between, and almost as tricky to follow due to their sinuous nature and the ever-present saddles and branch spurs which may lead a traveller miles away from his intended course.

As stated, this mass of barren and waterless country presented a fairly effective barrier between Sydney and the Hunter plains; but a more potent reason why pastoralists did not invade the Hunter at this time had to do with the character of the settlement at its mouth. For until 1823, Newcastle was strictly a penal establishment, and in consequence the Governor forbade free settlement in the Hunter districts. In the selection of a place for secondary punishment, one of the foremost requirements was isolation from the settled districts of the colony. And so, while ever Newcastle was a colonial gaol, the Governor resisted any attempt to make the Hunter district any less isolated than it already was. This meant that the formation of roads and the coming of civilization to the Hunter valley was postponed for many years. Since the Lake Macquarie region was, to all intents and purposes, an adjunct of the Hunter valley, the same restrictions applied to settlement there, and this explains why twenty-five years elapsed between the discovery of the lake in 1800 and the coming of the first settlers.

In spite of the Governor's attempt to keep free settlers away from the Hunter, a number of colonists made early attempts to explore the ranges north of the Hawkesbury. In 1818 John Howe set out with a small party of men from Windsor Town, followed the Colo River west and then north, and after crossing some ridges and plateaus, descended into the plains of the Hunter River in the vicinity of the present township of Jerry's Plains. In the following year Howe was accompanied by Benjamin Singleton on another trip to the Hunter valley, this time following a slightly shorter route through the same general area. They reported having discovered a practicable route for a road, and took cattle through to the Hunter. Some years later, both men were rewarded with grants of land in the north.

The colonial government saw no need for a road linking Sydney with the northern district, for the mining establishment at Newcastle was easily accessible by water, and anyhow, the route discovered by Howe and Singleton was an extremely circuitous one for travel from Sydney to Newcastle. So the Governor limited the use of Howe's track to the holders of special permits. However, in 1821 a party of unauthorized persons travelled over it, blazing trees along the way. Convicts soon began to take advantage of this marked way of escape from Newcastle, and as runaways became frequent, the Governor began to consider a replacement for Newcastle as a penal settlement. Soon Port Macquarie was selected, and by 1823 most of the convicts under sentence at Newcastle had been transferred to the new place.

So 1823 proved to be an eventful year in the history of land settlement in the districts surrounding the Hunter River, and free settlers flocked to the rich pastures there. That year saw the humble beginnings of a township at Wallis Plains, soon to become the town of Maitland. The same year

witnessed attempts to find a practicable route for a shorter road than Howe's between Sydney and the Hunter. On 21st April Major Morisset set out from Newcastle, where he was the commandant at that time, to try to find a direct route to Windsor, and though we have no plan or detailed account of his journey, it is probable that he was the first to follow the route through the Wollombi to Wiseman's Ferry on the Hawkesbury.⁹ It took him nine days to reach Windsor. The major's route proved to be short, though difficult, and so later in 1823 John Blaxland, a relative of Gregory Blaxland, endeavoured to combine the advantages of both Howe's road and Morisset's route by following Howe's for a certain distance from Windsor, then cutting north-eastward across a relatively easy pass and valley to join the Wiseman's Ferry route near Laguna, a few miles south of Wollombi. Blaxland's track was used to a limited extent during the next few years, and other routes were variously followed to and from Newcastle and Maitland, including one via the western side of Lake Macquarie, of which more will be said later. However, in 1825 the die was cast in favour of the short Wollombi to Wiseman's Ferry route, and Surveyor Finch was commissioned to prepare plans for a road. Construction of a carriage road through this country was necessarily slow, and the Great North Road to the Hunter valley was not completed until 1831.

All of this provides us with a background or context for the events in the exploration and early settlement of the Lake Macquarie district. The desire of the colonial government to keep the Newcastle district as isolated as possible until 1823 is the main reason why settlers were so slow to arrive in the lake district. It is true that the coal deposits were known to exist at the lake entrance during all of those years, but it was also suspected that a shallow bar across the entrance could make navigation dangerous; and apart from that, the demand for coal was not so great that it could not all be supplied from the convict mines at Newcastle.

Doubtless many visits were made to Lake Macquarie during the years of the penal settlement at Newcastle, by runaways looking for a route to Sydney, and by officers chasing them. Major Morisset is reputed to have visited the lake by sea prior to 1820,¹⁰ and this would almost certainly have been connected with a search for escaping prisoners. But in 1821 Captain John Bingle, one of Newcastle's pioneer business men, joined a walking tour to the lake in company with a group of aborigines and the Newcastle chaplain, Reverend G. A. Middleton. Describing the visit, Bingle wrote:¹¹

Our parson, the Rev. G. A. Middleton (who was an especial favourite with the blacks) started with myself with the whole tribe of one hundred on a walking trip to Lake Macquarie. . . . On arrival I was enchanted with its beautiful scenery, and can never forget it. The whole surrounding country-

⁹ NHDHS journal, v. 3, 1948, p. 102: Goold, W. J., *The Great North Road*.

¹⁰ Macdonell, J. C., *Toronto Tourist Guide*, published 1924.

¹¹ Bingle, John, *Past and Present Records of Newcastle*, dated 1873.

side and lake were serene and still; solitude reigned, no tree disturbed, and no trace of the white man's civilization, and all in its natural wild state.

Bingle's comment about the absence of European civilization in 1821 remained true for another four years. In 1825 the London Missionary Society chose Lake Macquarie for the site of an aboriginal mission station, and a year later the first free settler received land in the district. Others followed, and by 1830 there were at least half a dozen land-holders in the lake district. The stories of some of these early settlers will be reserved for chapters to follow.

Discovery and exploration are inevitably accompanied by survey, and during the 1820's the first recorded surveys of Lake Macquarie were made. We have already referred to an early visit by Major Morisset to the lake by ship, but though Morisset Point near Swansea has been named in his honour, he has not left us any chart or description of the lake. Perhaps the earliest map of interest is Captain Dangar's chart of the coastline of New South Wales, dated 1826.¹² Henry Dangar was a familiar figure about Newcastle in those days, and as a skilful surveyor he recorded a considerable amount of knowledge concerning the Hunter River district and its surroundings. His 1826 map incorporates a sketch of Lake Macquarie, and though it does not show any grants of land, a few aboriginal place-names are recorded, and one or two of these are interesting. Wangi Point is marked as 'Wonde Wonde', and the mouth of Dora Creek is labelled 'Yererung', which is not unlike 'Eraring', the name of a village there today.

One of the earliest published descriptions of the lake is contained in Henry Dangar's *Index and Directory to Map of the Country bordering upon the River Hunter*, published in London in 1828. Here the surveyor-explorer attempted to assess the lake's potential for future development. Under the heading 'Reid's Mistake' he wrote:

Reid's Mistake is situated fourteen and a half miles to the south-south-west of Port Hunter, and so called in honour of its discoverer, whose name was 'Reid', being master of a colonial coasting vessel, and intending to run into Port Hunter, whither colonial craft then resorted for coals, which were dug out of the cliff by their crews; instead of Port Hunter, this sagacious seaman took his bark into this opening, and thus, in memory of his error, the name has been given.

The entrance to Reid's Mistake is unfortunately obstructed by a bar, so as to prevent the access of any vessels but those of the smallest class, there being not more than five and a half to six feet on the bar at high water. This is also the entrance into Lake Macquarie, a spacious and interesting sheet of water; the banks of which, on being occupied, will cause a small-craft intercourse coastwise between this place and Port Hunter, a distance which can always be accomplished in three or four hours.

Larger vessels can, however, lay under the island off the entrance, and

¹² The original plan is in the Mitchell Library.

load or unload from or into lighters. The banks of Lake Macquarie are yet but very partially occupied; on the south [*sic*] side of the lake the Government have engaged to grant 10,000 acres of land to the London Missionary Society, in trust for the aboriginal natives, and which society have formed an establishment there, under the direction of the Rev. — Threlkeld, with a view of instructing the natives, and preaching to them in their own language. On the lands thus allotted, on the shore of the lake, has recently been discovered Kendal coal¹³ being the first of that class yet known in the colony, which is of superior quality, and will meet the demand in Sydney; a trade in this article may, therefore, in a short time be calculated upon.

The unusual story of the mission to the Lake Macquarie aborigines, referred to by Dangar, is reserved for Chapter Three.

Perhaps the first plan ever drawn of Lake Macquarie alone is 'Captain Lamb's Boat Survey' which unfortunately is undated, but was certainly made some time prior to 1830. The original plan is preserved in the Archives Office, Sydney, is roughly drawn and is inaccurate, but marks two land grants—Percy Simpson's two thousand acres on Dora Creek, and 'Captain Lamb's 2,000 acres' near Speer's Point. There is no reference to the aboriginal mission, even though the survey must have been made after its establishment.

The first attempt to chart the land surrounding Lake Macquarie was made late in 1826, when Surveyor Finch was instructed to carry out a survey of the north-eastern portion of the County of Northumberland without delay.¹⁴ Finch's work in the Reid's Mistake district was, however, only of a very preliminary kind, and it was not until 1829-30 that a detailed and reliable survey of the lake and its precincts was undertaken by a surveyor named James Ralfe.¹⁵

Prior to this time there was a serious shortage of land surveyors in the colony, and Ralfe was probably one of a number of men taken on by the Surveyor-General about 1827 to assist in catching up with arrears. By 1829 a number of free settlers had selected grants of land about Lake Macquarie, and it was necessary that these should be accurately measured and charted, so that the government would have a clear idea of the portions of land already alienated, and the availability of land for future applicants. James Ralfe was sent to make the surveys, and he completed much of his work in 1829, for in December of that year he addressed the following report to the Surveyor-General from Lake Macquarie:¹⁶

. . . There are several salt water creeks which terminate in swamps, Dora Creek being of the same description, and not navigable for more than five miles, and the country on both banks is low, swampy, and partially of very

¹³ He probably means 'cannel coal'.

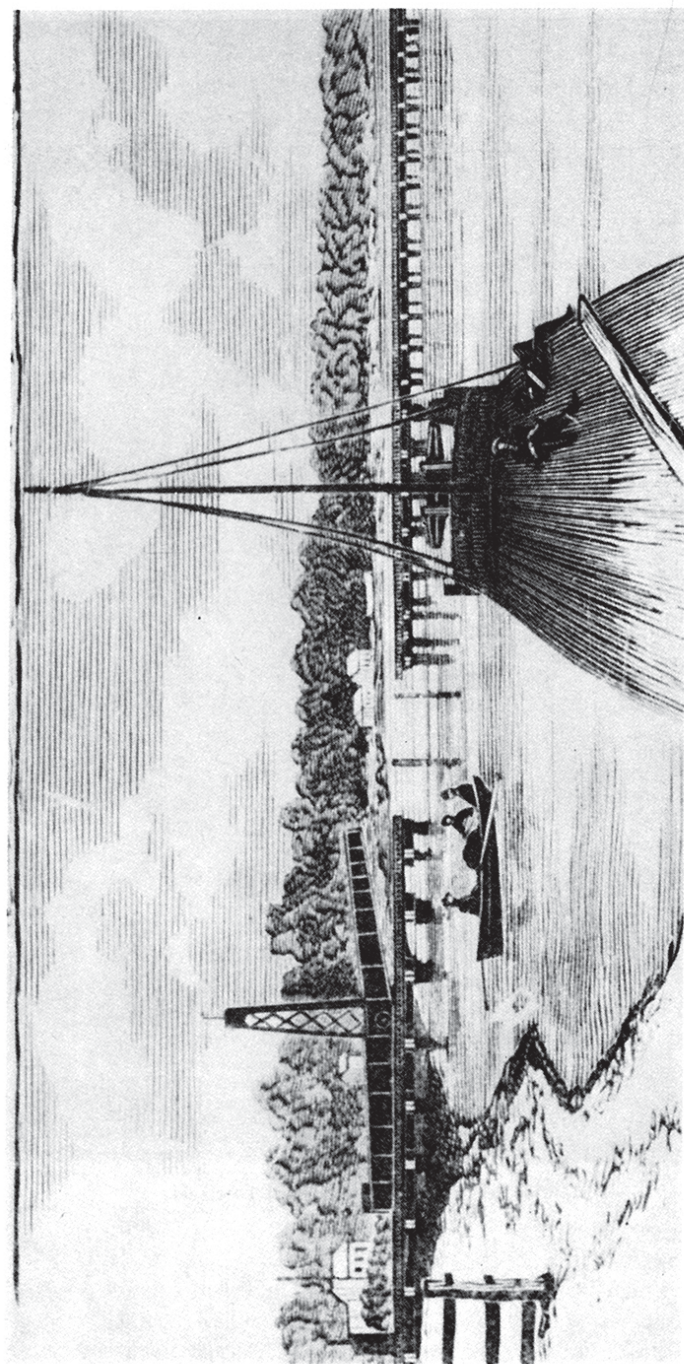
¹⁴ RAHS journal, v. 31, pt. 2, 1945: Jervis, James, *Lake Macquarie, its discovery and settlement*, p. 107.

¹⁵ Ralfe's plans of the lake are held in the Archives Office, Sydney.

¹⁶ Surveyor-General: letters from surveyors, 1829 (Archives Office).



Portrait of Reverend Lancelot Edward Threlkeld.



The first bridge across the entrance channel at Swansea, under construction, 1881.

rich alluvial soil. The navigation of this creek extending to a short distance, prevented my reaching the Broken Back Range from the boat, being between seven and ten miles inland, the country seems exceedingly broken for some distance eastward of the main range, which would require some time to survey, and then only by means of pack bullocks. I am now engaged in measuring the farms for the different individuals on the Lake who have orders for the same.

Ralfe was instructed to restrict his field work chiefly to the waterways and the farms on the lakeside. The task of surveying the ranges of hills and mountains to the westward was delegated to another man a year or so later.

Surveyor Ralfe set out from Sydney on a second survey expedition in January 1830, apparently to complete his work at Lake Macquarie and to continue with a survey of the Tuggerah Lakes a few miles southward. We are fortunate that one of his field notebooks from this expedition has survived and is held at the Archives Office in Sydney. It contains portion of a diary kept during the trip. The recorded details of the journey are interesting, and parts are worth quoting here, since they illuminate some unique aspects of our lake history. Accompanied by a party of assigned convicts to assist him, Ralfe sailed from Sydney on 8th January 1830. However, rough weather delayed the voyage, so they were not able to reach 'Tarriga' (undoubtedly Terrigal) until the 12th.

Wed. 13th. Put to sea at daylight but obliged to put back, the Wind from the N.E. All the provisions exhausted last night. Walked to Mr. Bean's at Brisbane Water but could only procure a little tea and sugar; all the men behaved well, notwithstanding.

The following day a land breeze assisted them, and with sails set, the crew pulled twenty miles northward to 'Bundry Norah' (now Norah Head) before the north-easterly set in. Here they again landed, and some of the party visited a nearby dairy farm belonging to a Mr. Anderson, and managed to procure some flour and beef for all the crew. At daybreak the following morning they were on their way once again, pulling with oars all the way to the Lake Macquarie entrance, which they reached by nine in the morning. Here Ralfe immediately despatched three men overland to Newcastle to fetch another boat, which was to bring much needed provisions, clothing, rations, and other miscellaneous articles. Quoting again from Ralfe's diary:

Sat. 16th. Kept a look out for the arrival of the boat from Newcastle, but at twelve it blew from the Southward, therefore expected the provisions would be sent over land to Mr. Threlkeld's whither I despatched the Whale Boat with the remainder of the men, where they remained all night.

Sun. 17th. The Wind from the Southward, therefore could not expect the boat, but towards the afternoon got round to the N. East. The men returned from Mr. Threlkeld's but left the boat. At night about eight o'clock the Boat arrived from Newcastle and was aground on the north shore just

within the Bar; called out the men and with a great number of the natives, who made torches (for it was very dark) we succeeded in getting her into safe moorings, after pulling her for upwards of two hours against the tide which runs very rapidly; myself, Mr. D'Arcy, and all Hands up to our necks in water the whole Time. . . . In common justice to the men I must state they all behaved very well when without Rations and exerted themselves to the utmost on every occasion.

The following day the longed-for provisions arrived at the Heads by means of a pack bullock from Newcastle, and after being detained by further bad weather for four days more, the surveying party set sail again for the Tuggerah Lakes, where the survey continued.

These notes from a surveyor's field book reveal some of the trials and frustrations faced by the men who set out to explore and measure up our country. James Ralfe's difficulty in bringing a comparatively small boat across the entrance bar of the lake is typical of scores of later experiences in doing the same thing. Over the years many eventful incidents—some of them tragic ones—occurred in crossing this shallow bar, and some of these will be related in due course. It was not until near the end of the century that any large-scale works were undertaken to improve the channel.

If the seafaring surveyors of those pioneering days encountered hardships, the men who attempted the first overland surveys had no fewer problems to contend with. In 1831 Surveyor Felton Mathew carried out a survey of the country surrounding both the Macquarie and Tuggerah Lakes, including the ranges westward towards Mount Warrawalong, and those leading northward and eastward to the outskirts of Newcastle. A number of Mathew's plans are now preserved in the Archives Office. These include sketches of the Wattagan Ranges (commonly known in the early days as the Broken Back, or Sugarloaf, or Myall Ranges), the valley of Wyong Creek, and the hilly lands bordering Lake Macquarie. These plans reveal remarkable detail in physical features, and much valuable information concerning the exact location of tracks and settlements in the district may be obtained from a careful examination of them.

In contrast to Ralfe's experience, Surveyor Mathew had frequent trouble with the convicts assigned to help him, and on one occasion four of these assignees left his party and became runaways.¹⁷ A careless and indifferent attitude by some of the men also caused annoyance. On the night of 13th July 1831 Mathew and his party were camped somewhere on the Wattagan Mountains west of the lake. On this occasion,

. . . the man who carried the theodolite being lost in the bush all night, dropped the legs of that instrument down a gully—myself, Mr. Edwards, and all the men engaged next day in searching for them—found them after some time, quite uninjured.¹⁸

¹⁷ Field notebook of Felton Mathew (Archives Office).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

To carry provisions for the men, Mathew used a bullock dray. In most places the bush was so thick that the entire party had to spend whole days cutting paths for the draw, or in searching for bullocks which, like the convicts, absconded periodically.

Another, rather better-known figure who carried out some early survey work in the lake district was Major Thomas Mitchell, one of Australia's greatest explorers and for quite a long period the Surveyor-General of the colony. In his book, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia*, Major Mitchell describes a survey which he made just prior to the opening of the Great North Road in 1831. Describing the dreary countryside along the North Road, he notes that:¹⁹

. . . the whole face of the country is composed of sandstone rocks and but partially covered with vegetation. The horizon is only broken by one or two summits, which are different both in outline and quality from the surrounding country. These isolated heights generally consist of trap rock, and are covered with rich soils and very heavy timber. The most remarkable is Warrawolong, whose top I first observed from the hill of Jellore in the south at a distance of 108 miles. This being a most important station for the general survey, which I made previously to opening the north road, it was desirable to clear the summit, at least partly, of trees, a work which was accomplished after considerable labour, the trees being very large. On removing the lofty forest, I found the view from the summit extended over a wild waste of rocky precipitous ravines, which debarred all access or passage in any direction, until I could patiently trace out the ridges between them; and for this purpose I ascended the hill on ten successive days, the whole of which time I devoted to the examination of the various outlines and their connections by means of the theodolite.

Major Mitchell must have made a thorough job of clearing the summit of Mount Warrawolong, for even today, over 130 years since his visit, the top is still relatively clear of vegetation, and the trig station which he established there is still an important survey landmark. Warrawolong is the flattened hump of a long-extinct volcano, and stands at least six hundred feet above the level of the surrounding ranges. It is visible from great distances away, and in the early days it was regarded as an important landmark by sailors of coastal vessels. They knew it as 'Hat Hill'.

The Reverend L. E. Threlkeld, who became an authority on the language of the Awabakal aborigines, published a brief reference to Mount Warrawolong in 1834:²⁰

¹⁹ Mitchell, Thomas Livingstone, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia* . . . (London, 1838), v. 1, p. 10.

²⁰ Threlkeld, L. E., *An Australian grammar . . . as spoken by the aborigines in the vicinity of Hunter's River, Lake Macquarie, &c. New South Wales* (Sydney, printed at the Herald Office, 1834), p. 52.

Warawallug, the name of a high mountain to the West of Lake Macquarie. This has been partly cleared of timber, by order of the Surveyor-General; as a landmark it is seen from a considerable distance. The name is derived from Wallug, the 'human head', from its appearance.

In the foregoing pages we have mentioned the work of a few of the early surveyors, but there must have been other men too who played a significant part in the exploration and survey of the Lake Macquarie district. We have yet to mention the important contribution of the first free settlers in the region, those pioneers who pushed through miles of bushland, blazing trails, clearing tracks, building stockyards, searching for straying cattle or runaway convicts. Theirs was not an enviable task, and indeed sometimes it was a tragic one. These were the people to whom we owe a good deal for the comforts of living in the twentieth century. Their names are mostly unknown or forgotten now, but on each of their resting places, wherever these may be, the words of a poet might well be inscribed for an epitaph:

We fought with the black and we blazed the track,
That ye might inherit the land.²¹

²¹ From *The Pioneers*, by Frank Hudson.

3

A MISSION TO THE ABORIGINES

The moon shed its silvery light, darkened every now and then by thick dense clouds. The wind whistled among the tops of the high trees and through the scrub. The distant roar of the ocean dashing on the sandy beach; the black naked figures stalking before me, streaked a little with pipe clay, to make the blackness more visible, raised sensations pleasing, yet dull. A few minutes brought us to some fires briskly blazing, amid the crackling thorns, surrounded by beings who were standing, squatting, or laying around, warming themselves at the cheerful blaze. The numerous half-starved wretched-looking dogs set up a cry at our approach, and were with difficulty silenced. The men, women, and dogs formed a company the picture of misery.¹

This vivid description came from the pen of Reverend L. E. Threlkeld a short time after he had established a mission settlement for the aborigines at Lake Macquarie in 1826, marking the commencement of fifteen years of labour for the district natives. And if this term of service to a primitive, maltreated race of human beings is insufficient to commend Threlkeld to our attention, it is only necessary to add that he was the first free European to make his abode in the lake district. The story of his comings and goings in the lake region is unusual and interesting, and has already attracted some attention from history seekers. Research is made comparatively easy because of the quantity of correspondence, reports and other papers left by the missionary and subsequently collected at the Mitchell Library, Sydney. An outstanding contribution to our knowledge of Threlkeld has been made by Dr. B. W. Champion, whose authoritative and well-documented study of the missionary's life and work appears in the *Journal* of the Royal Australian Historical Society of 1939.² Dr. Champion's article covers adequately all of the varied activities of Threlkeld's life, and it is not our purpose here to attempt to do what has already been done, or even to summarize it. We are concerned only with the parts of the Threlkeld story that relate to Lake

¹ Threlkeld, L. E., *Aboriginal Mission, New South Wales—A Report*, dated December 1825. (Original manuscript in Mitchell Library.)

² RAHS journal, v. 25, pts. 4, 5, 1939: Champion, Ben W., *Lancelot Edward Threlkeld, his life and work, 1788-1859*.

Macquarie, and in these parts we may wish to include some material additional to Champion's account. However, in some cases the doctor made references to sources not readily accessible to us, and so we have borrowed here and there from his article, at the same time acknowledging our debt to him. So, then, throughout this chapter will be found much factual material for which no source is given, but in all of these cases Dr. Champion's study is the happily acknowledged origin of the information.

Lancelot Edward Threlkeld was born in Devon, England, on 20th October 1788, the foundation year of Australian history. He married at twenty, and about eight years later he joined the London Missionary Society which was at that time sending missionaries to almost every part of the heathen world. The young minister accepted a call to the Society Islands of the South Pacific, and early in 1816 sailed from Portsmouth, arriving at his missionary destination more than a year later, due to a prolonged stay at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In the Society Islands, Threlkeld assisted the pioneer leader in that field, John Williams, until in March of 1824 his labours were brought to an unhappy end by the untimely death of his wife. Left with four young children, Threlkeld bade farewell to Williams and sailed across to Sydney. Here he wasted no time in courting a young lady named Sarah Arndell, daughter of Dr. Thomas Arndell of the Nepean district, and she became the new wife and mother in October 1824.

As events turned out, Threlkeld arrived in Sydney at a most opportune time. It happened that in 1824 Sydney was visited by two men appointed by the London Missionary Society to inspect and report on the Society's various mission stations throughout the world. These two gentlemen, Daniel Tyerman and George Bennet, were invited by Governor Brisbane to give him their views as to possible ways of helping the aboriginal natives of Australia. They expressed the opinion that the blacks should be instructed in the Christian religion by missionaries who would need to first learn the language of these people. Thus was conceived the idea of establishing a mission to the aborigines of New South Wales, under the auspices of the London Missionary Society. The Governor promised that land would be granted for this purpose as soon as a location should be decided upon.

The original site suggested for a mission was Moreton Bay, but this was soon abandoned, and investigations moved nearer to Sydney, with consideration being given to Wellington Valley and Bathurst, both west of the mountains. However, neither of these places was considered completely desirable. Then the Newcastle district was proposed, and the two Society representatives, Tyerman and Bennet, visited there in January of 1825 to make enquiries. They learned of two places in that district where aborigines were known to congregate. Of these, Port Stephens might have proved ideal, but all of the land in that vicinity was being granted to the newly formed Australian Agricultural Company. The other suggestion was Reid's Mistake, where natives were supposed to be prevalent, and though the two

mission representatives did not actually visit the lake to verify its suitability, it was adopted as the locality for the proposed mission station. It is possible that Reid's Mistake may have been recommended by the Rev. Middleton who, as the recently appointed chaplain at Newcastle, had already visited the shores of the lake in company with a large number of blacks.³

Meanwhile, the Rev. Threlkeld had been informed of the proposal to open an aboriginal mission, and he was very agreeable to take the lead in this venture. No time was wasted in planning at this stage, for the following announcement appeared in the *Sydney Gazette* of 3rd February 1825:

With a view to extending the benefits of religious and moral instruction to the benighted aborigines of this vast Continent, though in fact only an island, on which it is supposed that there are not less than three or four million of our fellow creatures in the grossest darkness, and most pitiable distress, Sir Thomas Brisbane, our excellent Governor, with his usual promptitude in such cases, has directed to be made over, at the instance of the London Deputation, in trust for the natives exclusively, 10,000 acres of land, in the vicinity of Reid's Mistake, which lies between Port Jackson and Newcastle, and about 40 miles from the Heads. In the event of the mission at any time being abandoned, which we think unlikely, the whole of the land in this case only will revert to the Crown. We understand that the Rev. Mr. Threlkeld, the gentleman intended to enter upon this missionary field, will commence his labours as soon as the land is located.

Governor Brisbane prepared a Deed of Trust for this grant of land, and sent a copy to the Home Office in England, explaining that the success of the London Missionary Society in the South Seas had induced him to encourage the establishment of this mission.⁴ Brisbane nominated as trustees for the land a fine group of colonial citizens: Rev. Samuel Marsden (who was a life director of the L.M.S., and its official agent in New South Wales), John Oxley (Surveyor-General), William Wemyss (Deputy Commissary-General), Edward Riley, Alexander Berry, Robert Campbell, and Francis Allman. It was expressly stated that these trustees should not in any manner interfere with the missionary appointed by the Society, but if any dissatisfaction should arise the matter should be referred to the Society itself.

It is noteworthy that the ten thousand acre grant of land was never actually made over to the Society, since the mission at Reid's Mistake was terminated after quite a short time. Some have tried to attach significance to this delay and ultimate failure to issue the deeds to the Society, but the fact is that long delays in the matter of issuing deeds were common. A quantity of land might be promised, and indeed settled upon, years before it was located, surveyed, and the deeds made over to the possessor.

Threlkeld made his first visit to Lake Macquarie in March or April of 1825, but no suitable site was found at that time. He returned to Sydney,

³ Bingle, John, *Past and Present Records of Newcastle*, 1873.

⁴ HRA—I, v. 11, pp. 512-14.

and then on 17th May of the same year, he sailed with his family to Newcastle, where he was instructed to reside until the site for the mission might be selected and the construction of buildings commenced. The missionary took with him to Newcastle a variety of articles for the natives, tools for erecting the mission house, a horse dray, as well as

. . . many other things necessary to form an establishment in the midst of a standing forest. . . . Independent of this, a road was to be found, and clearance effected before we could convey supplies and tools for those employed.⁵

While Threlkeld might have been free to select a mission site anywhere in the lake district, it appears that he restricted his inspections to the eastern side of the lake, where nearness to Newcastle was an advantage. During his temporary residence at Newcastle, Threlkeld and his men made several exploratory trips into this area seeking out the most suitable spot for the mission. According to Champion, ten acres were cleared at a place unknown to us, before it was discovered that the soil there was deficient, and so it was abandoned. Finally, after some weeks of deliberation, an attractive locality was selected on a low rise overlooking a broad bay of the lake, now known as Village or Belmont Bay. The mission house which the men now proceeded to build must have been situated right at what is now the commercial hub of modern Belmont. Threlkeld christened the place 'Bahtahbah', a name which he heard from the native inhabitants. A description of the locality was forwarded to the Governor, who shortly announced that the special grant of ten thousand acres would have as its southern boundary the lake's entrance channel, and would include all of the land northwards between the lake and the sea to an unknown line some distance north of the present-day Belmont.

Writing some years after all this, the missionary attempted to describe the difficulties which faced him in commencing the mission, and added,

I cannot express my anxiety and perplexities which continued until September 1826, when we left Newcastle to reside in the woods, fourteen miles from any civilized being—exposed to the attack of bushranging prisoners and uncivilized blacks.⁶

In December of that first year of exploratory work, 1825, Threlkeld made his first report to the London Missionary Society upon the progress of the work at the lake. At the time of writing the report he was still living at Newcastle, directing matters from there. We quote just one paragraph from this initial report:⁷

In a mission scarcely entered upon, little can be expected from communication. . . . The portion of land granted by Government for the use of the

⁵ Threlkeld, L. E., *A Statement chiefly relating to the Formation and Abandonment of a Mission to the Aborigines of New South Wales* . . . (Sydney, Government Printer, 1828).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Threlkeld, L. E., *Aboriginal Mission, New South Wales—A Report*, dated Dec. 1825.

Aborigines, being a little from the settlements, and affording by its local situation sustenance, so far as respects fish and wild animals, will be a means of withdrawing them from the evil influence of those who act with inconsideration. . . . The soil is, very unfortunately, very inferior. Unforeseen circumstances have prevented hitherto the possibility of residing on the spot, but a few months will, it is hoped, bring us to the future scene of exertion. The six months which have already elapsed, since the commencement of the mission, have not been lost, but progress has been made in the acquirement of the Aboriginal tongue.

By September of 1826 the mission house of six rooms was ready for occupation, the drays were loaded, and the Threlkeld family with two or three additional helpers jolted along the freshly-cut dray track from Newcastle to Lake Macquarie. Doubtless they expected to reside there for a good many years, while evangelizing a large section of the native population; but events were to turn out rather unhappily for the missionary family as far as this venture was concerned. In fact the mission had scarcely commenced before a quarrel broke out between Threlkeld and the Society's representative in the colony, the Rev. Samuel Marsden. Certainly there were faults on both sides, but in Mr. Marsden, Threlkeld found a man of evil temper and ruthless demeanour. In the context of our civilization, it is strange to try to picture a gentleman who could be the colony's chief chaplain, and at the same time an appointed magistrate of much authority; who could sentence a man to death at one moment, and then offer him spiritual consolation at the gallows. Marsden was this kind of man. Hated and feared by most of the convicts, and severely disliked by many of the colony's reputable citizens, including the Governor, it is not at all surprising that we find Marsden very frequently in friction with Threlkeld, himself a man of unusual temperament.

The earliest evidence of a dispute between the two clergymen over the conduct of the mission is uncovered in correspondence dated in October 1826, only a few weeks after Threlkeld had moved to Bahtahbah. In a letter to Marsden,⁸ the missionary complained of the inadequacy of the budget he had been given for running the mission, an amount of £250 per annum to cover all of the costs of the upkeep of the place as well as the missionary's salary. Threlkeld contended that the mission could not be conducted under £500 per year. He explained:

This includes every expense for three free persons engaged in agriculture, and one prisoner; one woman and girl domestics; the missionary, wife, and large family; tea, sugar, etc. for the natives who work, paying the wages of the free persons and prisoners, and the missionary receiving nothing but only a decent supply of food and raiment for himself and family.

⁸ Letter from Threlkeld to Marsden, dated 31 Oct. 1826. This and subsequent correspondence between the two men was printed in Threlkeld's *Statement*. See footnote 5.

Marsden replied to Threlkeld that already the London Missionary Society was concerned about the costs involved in establishing the mission station, and advised him to tread carefully. This brought a further letter from the missionary to the effect that he had simply obeyed the instructions, which were certainly vague as far as money matters were concerned.

From its outset, the mission moved very quickly into financial difficulties, and a real conflict began in 1827 when Threlkeld forwarded to the Society a bill for expenses and salary amounting to £400, which was considerably in excess of the budget. About the same time, the Society informed Threlkeld through its agent, Marsden, that in future only bills sanctioned by Marsden would be paid. This virtually made Marsden the business manager of the mission, and removed all financial control from Threlkeld. This was not to prove a satisfactory arrangement, and Threlkeld protested that he could not very well carry on under these conditions.

By another letter dated 22nd March 1827 the London Missionary Society warned that no more advances would be made to Threlkeld unless they were for personal expenses 'or objects strictly missionary'. The Society had become alarmed at the cost of running the aboriginal mission, and had decided not to pay Threlkeld's bill of £400. Instead, Threlkeld was instructed to sell the property of the mission in order to pay the bill. It turned out, however, that the land could not be sold under the terms of the trust, and so Threlkeld temporarily removed to Sydney to await further events. It was soon learned that the Society was agreeable to pay £250 of the £400 expense, the balance to be met by Threlkeld himself. Stunned by these actions, the aggrieved missionary wrote a bitterly worded letter to the directors of the Society. He made known his sacrifices and labours to make the mission a success, then exclaimed,

... but instead of receiving support and encouragement from the Directors, I am rewarded with the stigma of a returned bill, and the prospect of a gaol.

Threlkeld was actually threatened with arrest for debt, but he was able to produce two ex-missionary colleagues as his sureties. Subsequently the Society agreed to pay the remainder of the £400 account, but by this time Threlkeld had published and distributed widely an attack on the London Missionary Society,⁹ in which he vigorously defended his own actions.

It was clear that the aboriginal mission could not continue under these circumstances, and by a letter of 30th May 1828 Threlkeld was notified of the Society's decision to abandon it. Threlkeld was dismissed from the employment of the Society which, however, offered to pay his passage back to England if he did not obtain a situation in the colony. The missionary had no choice but to accept this decision to abandon the mission, but he

⁹ See footnote 5.

pointed out to the directors that it would require many months for him to remove his family and belongings from Lake Macquarie to Sydney.

The conflict over the administration of the Lake Macquarie mission received much publicity in the colony, and there were divergent views on the matter. The *Sydney Gazette*¹⁰ commended Threlkeld highly and deplored the miserable treatment he had received from the London Missionary Society. However, the *Monitor* voiced a less favourable attitude:¹¹

A vast sum of money has already been expended, and my informants from that quarter assure me, that the benefit derived therefrom is very moderate. The blacks ridicule the idea of *working*. They have been unchangeable on that score hitherto, and we are of the opinion that little good may be anticipated from this benevolent and Christian-like endeavour on the part of the Missionary Society of England, to enlighten the savages of the immense continent of New Holland.

This statement by the *Monitor* was not so much a criticism of the work of Threlkeld, as it was of the London Missionary Society's benevolence towards the Australian aborigines.

Having experienced so many frustrations with the Lake Macquarie mission, Threlkeld might have been expected to give up this venture on behalf of the natives. Surprisingly enough, however, we find him completely undaunted in his ambition to continue his pioneering work at the lake. When he learned that the mission at Bahtahbah must be abandoned, Threlkeld quickly enlisted the support of many friends, including Dr. Broughton of Sydney, to provide means to enable him to carry on alone with a mission. Explaining his plans to a friend in Sydney about this time, Threlkeld outlined the alternative proposals placed before him by the Missionary Society (that is, to accept a passage home, or find a situation in the colony), and commented,¹²

To either of these propositions I am disinclined.—I have addressed the enclosed to the Governor to be allowed a continuance of the four men on the stores as I intend to continue the mission to the natives, even when unconnected with the Society, that is to say to endeavour to instruct them in their own tongue the Gospel of Christ. . . . But I have not property sufficient to supply all the wants of a large family and some small pecuniary assistance will be necessary, for which I shall trust to the kindness of any friend to the Aborigines so disposed and to the Christian publick to whom my peculiar case will be made known. . . . It appears to me a pity to throw away all the trouble I have had in the language, and therefore shall venture without the patronage of any Society, trusting in Him alone whom I hope to serve.

It was a fortunate thing for Threlkeld that by this time General Ralph

¹⁰ *Sydney Gazette*, 12 Jan. 1830.

¹¹ From the *Monitor*, as quoted by Champion.

¹² Letter from Threlkeld to Dr. Broughton, dated 26 Oct. 1829 (Mitchell Library).

Darling had taken over the reins of colonial control, for the new Governor was sympathetic towards the would-be missionary. Threlkeld made known his 'peculiar case' and near the end of 1829 the Governor granted to him 1280 acres at Lake Macquarie.¹³ This land Threlkeld selected at a place called by the aborigines 'Derahbambah', 'Punte' or 'Puntei', actually the present-day location of the town of Toronto and the Coal Point peninsula. Threlkeld was fortunate in obtaining this fine piece of land, for by this time the useful lands adjoining the northern boundaries of the lake were rapidly being taken up by settlers. The Governor's assistance to Threlkeld did not end with the granting of land, for a little more than a year afterwards the Executive Council of the colony voted him a salary of £150 per annum, plus an allowance of £36 per annum for the maintenance of four convict servants. This meant virtually that the mission was to be government-subsidized, and Threlkeld, on his part, would be required to present an annual report to the Governor on the progress of the venture.

Considerably encouraged by this more-than-moral support from the highest authority in the colony, Threlkeld wrote to Marsden, informing the old chaplain that his efforts for the natives were not being terminated, but,

. . . compelled to leave this spot, I shall continue on the Lake, on land which the Governor has kindly given me. I have already translated a first rough translation of St. Luke as far as the fourteenth Chapter. . .¹⁴

We cannot fail to observe Threlkeld's emphasis, in all of his letters and reports, on his study and progress with the aboriginal language. From his very first contact with the natives, he seems to have been obsessed with a passion to conquer their strange and primitive tongue, and so language study took up a great proportion of his time. This, of course, was part of the plan suggested by the London Missionary Society. In those pioneering days of missionary endeavour, it was always the first work of a missionary to a new race of people to learn the language, so that the natives could be taught in their own tongue. However, in Threlkeld's case, instead of the language study being simply a means to an end, it became the end in itself. In the field of linguistics, Threlkeld proved himself a scholar, and he was able not only to learn the language for oral instruction, but also to translate and publish various portions of the Scriptures in the aboriginal tongue. From the point of view of language study, Threlkeld's work must have been successful. As a means of evangelism, however, it was to prove a failure.

It is not possible to quote the exact date of Threlkeld's move from Bahtahbah across the lake to Punte, but it was probably towards the end of the year 1830. In the early part of that year, we know that the missionary

¹³ According to an entry in the oldest County of Northumberland Register Book in the Lands Department, Sydney, this land at Punte was not granted until 1839. However, Threlkeld was authorized to possess it in 1829.

¹⁴ Letter from Threlkeld to Marsden, 26 Oct. 1829 (Mitchell Library).

was still resident at the old station, and it is equally certain that he was no longer there in March of 1831. The old mission house was completely abandoned, but was soon being utilized by runaway convicts who discovered it a convenient place to take shelter. In July of 1833 the district magistrate, Jonathan Warner, reported that vandals had removed the locks from the doors, had unhinged the doors themselves, and scattered them about the property, had smashed

. . . every frame of glass in the windows of the house, pulled out most of the window frames and broke them to pieces, broke and burnt down the mantel pieces, and otherwise damaged the building, sometime during this month.¹⁵

From Warner's correspondence with the Colonial Secretary, we learn that two years previous to this, specifically on 29th March 1831, the Director of Public Works for the colony had been given instructions to sell the materials of the mission building, 'that it might not become the haunt of improper characters'. This indicates that Threlkeld must have moved away before that date.

Immediately Warner had reported the vandalism in 1833, he received instructions to have the house demolished, and in a further letter to the Colonial Secretary in December of the same year, he wrote:¹⁶

I endeavoured to employ proper persons from Newcastle to pull down the mission house at Lake Macquarie, but failed in my attempt. I therefore employed my own men twelve days, have demolished the house and packed up the doors and timber worth removing, for which labour I charge £6 . . . I beg leave to suggest the propriety of having the materials of the mission house removed as early as possible, as in the event of the grass taking fire the whole of the timber will get burned. There is also a standing Stock Yard and a quantity of post and rails belonging to the paddock fence.

The Colonial Secretary authorized Warner to remove or dispose of these materials 'as he shall find best for the public service'.

On his own grant of land across the lake at Punte, Threlkeld selected a pleasant spot for his new mission house, and soon had erected there a comfortable homestead on the crest of a hill overlooking the water. Tradition says it was situated right where the Hotel Toronto now stands, and it could well have been on, or close to, that site. The house consisted of twelve rooms, probably in two stories, and was described as 'weatherboard built and plastered'.¹⁷ At a much later date, when the place was advertised for sale, the house was said to be 'beautifully and romantically situated on a Mount; fine views at west of the mountains, and at the east of the Lake'.¹⁸ Threlkeld

¹⁵ CSIL: Warner, 23 July 1833.

¹⁶ CSIL: Warner, 11 Dec. 1833.

¹⁷ From an advertisement in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 Dec. 1844.

¹⁸ NC, 14 Jan. 1869.

named this place 'Ebenezer'¹⁹ and gave this address on his correspondence. The soil in that locality proved to be more fertile than that on the site of the old mission, and the missionary cultivated gardens, ran a herd of milking cattle, and planted many fruit trees, some of which remained there for many years afterwards. Apart from the dwelling house, Threlkeld's men constructed a storehouse measuring forty by twenty feet, a barn sixty by twenty feet, and a hut of the same size divided into compartments to serve as living quarters for the men. When Threlkeld sold the estate in 1844, there were three acres of garden and orchard, and eight well-fenced paddocks enclosing about 200 acres each, and containing a herd of forty cattle.²⁰ Altogether, the Ebenezer mission appears to have been a much more progressive establishment than its predecessor at Bahtahbah.

At the new location, the missionary continued his work, which was very largely devoted to the study of the Awabakal language and the translation of various portions of the Scriptures into that dialect. As far as conversion of the natives to Christianity was concerned, the mission was a failure. During these years, Threlkeld prepared and published a number of works resulting from his language study, and kept faith with his supporters in Sydney by providing each year a report of the mission and its progress. In one of these reports²¹ Threlkeld described himself as fulfilling the duties of protector, interpreter, and evangelist to the aborigines. As a skilled interpreter, he frequently made trips to Sydney to appear in court for natives on trial, so that they would get a fair hearing. This was a useful service. The missionary also occasionally conducted short itineraries to districts adjacent to Lake Macquarie to meet aborigines. On more than one occasion he visited Port Stephens and addressed large numbers of blacks in their native language.

Threlkeld's first venture for the natives was abandoned because of financial difficulties, and though money does not seem to have perplexed the mission at Ebenezer, a different kind of problem manifested itself. Threlkeld soon realized that the Awabakal aborigines were a fast dying race, and this presented a real threat to the continuation of the mission. In his annual report at the close of 1837, Threlkeld expressed concern about the steady disappearance of the aborigines from the Lake Macquarie district in these words:²²

It appears that the decrease of the Black population is not local and temporary, but general and annual . . . Having therefore deliberately considered the peculiar state of affairs, the only course that appears suitable to the

¹⁹ Threlkeld's wife (née Sarah Arndell) had lived for some years in the Ebenezer district on the Nepean River.

²⁰ From an advertisement in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 Dec. 1844.

²¹ Threlkeld, L. E., *Annual Report of the Mission to the Aborigines, 1838* (Mitchell Library).

²² Threlkeld, L. E., *Report of the Mission to the Aborigines at Lake Macquarie, December 20th, 1837* (Mitchell Library).

pressing occasion, is for me to do the work of an Evangelist, in visiting the neighbourhood districts during the ensuing year, and endeavouring to meet, at stated periods, or as occasion serves, the various tribes at Port Stephens and its vicinity.

He believed one reason for the disappearance of natives from the mission was the fact that he refused to give them liquor, and hence many blacks who needed the help that the mission could give them, did not come. But, he added, 'we are responsible for the means we employ—we are not for the success'.²³

Another contributing cause of the diminishing numbers was, as he described it, 'the unmatrimonial state of the thousands of male prisoners scattered throughout the country amidst females, though of a different colour', which encouraged these men to take the aboriginal women from their own people by force, fraud, and bribery. Apart from the immorality of these practices, it engendered bitterness and anger among the men of the native tribes, and resulted in a movement of aboriginal families and sometimes of whole tribes into areas less populated by Europeans. Complaining of the disease and death brought upon many of the native woman by illicit intercourse, Threlkeld concluded, despairingly, that 'the continual ill treatment and frequent slaughter of the Black women can only be deplored, perhaps without remedy'.²⁴

In the same report, the ageing missionary speaks of some of his own tribulations. There is a note of bitterness, and perhaps self-sympathy, in his writing, as he tells of how the years of intensive study and translation were sacrificed to the injury of sight and health, in order to acquire a knowledge of the language and to make available portions of the Scriptures to the natives.

The 1837 report was published in the colony's newspapers, and while the majority of colonists were sympathetic or merely indifferent, a few were critical. The *Colonist* of 1st September 1838 produced the following comment upon Threlkeld's work:

Mr. Threlkeld speaks of his hardships, and sacrifices his family have experienced, through his connection with the Mission to the Aborigines. We must admit that this is new to us. Is it a hardship, or sacrifice, for Mr. Threlkeld and his family to be living at a comfortable homestead, enjoying a comfortable salary, and doing even on their own showing, very little, or no work, while their sheep and cattle are grazing under the care of some third person, far up the Hunter? These Reverend Cattleholders we abominate, one and all of them!

Threlkeld replied to this criticism, explaining that the sheep and cattle being kept in the Hunter district were entirely for supplying the mission and the natives, and that there were not even enough of them to do that.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

In the reply, he happened to mention that his family had increased to nine children.

But again, not all were critical of the missionary pioneer, and a measure of praise and support came from James Backhouse, a Quaker, whom Threlkeld met in Sydney during 1836. Backhouse and a friend were visiting the Australian colonies at the time, and were eager to learn of the mission to the aborigines. A short time after the meeting in Sydney, Backhouse and his friend were staying in Newcastle and decided to inspect the Ebenezer mission. They walked all the way from Newcastle, guided along the track by a mission native known as Biraban or McGill, the second being his 'whitefella name'. The two visitors remained at Ebenezer a few days, and then returned to Newcastle by taking a boat across to Jonathan Warner's residence, and walking the remainder of the journey. Backhouse expressed admiration for Threlkeld's courage and persistence, and commended his language study as 'very useful labour, and may be a help to those of different gifts, who may hereafter follow in other paths'.²⁵

The number of aborigines in the lakeside districts continued to decline and the missionary wrote of this again in his annual report of 31st December 1840. We quote briefly from that report:²⁶

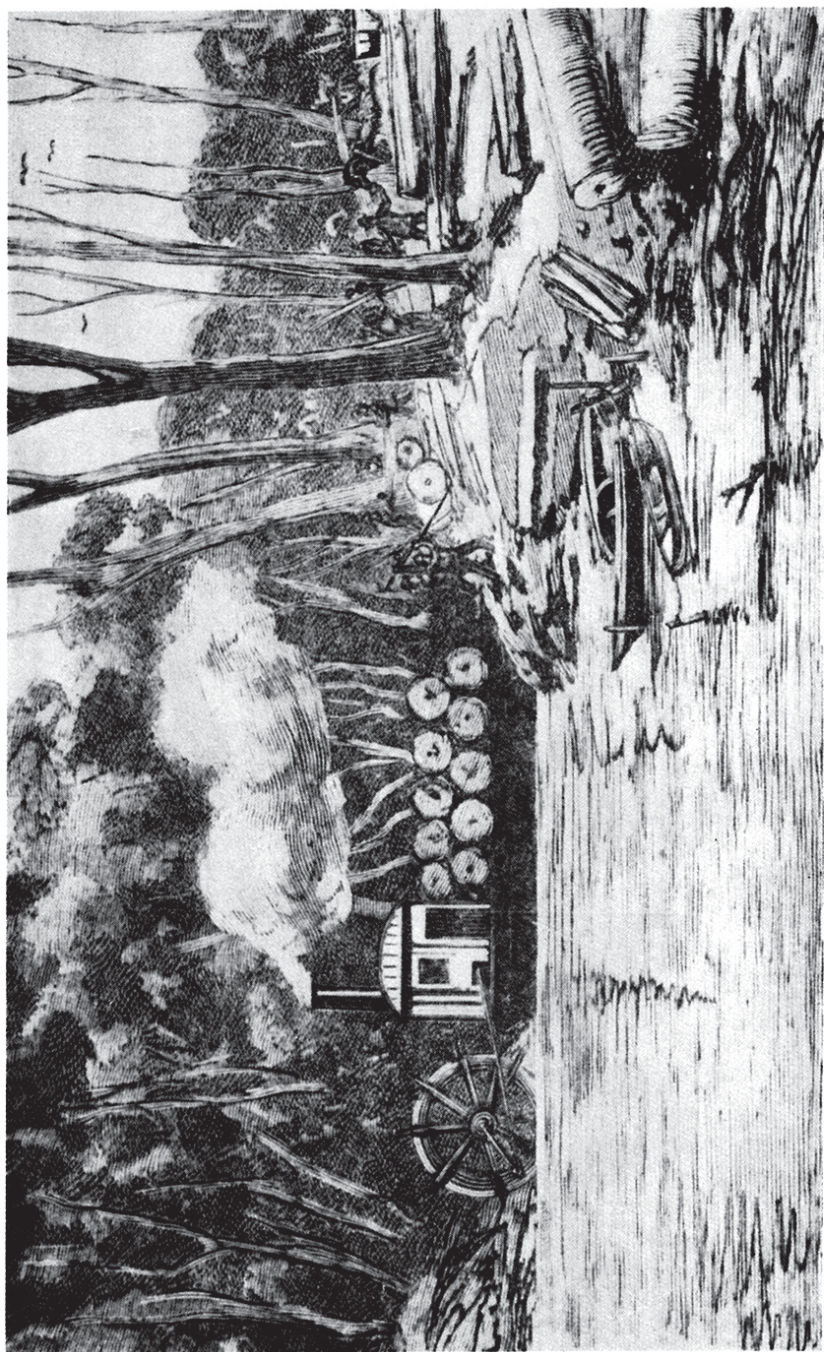
The blacks have nearly forsaken this lake, having found at Newcastle employment suitable to their habits; some being engaged in fishing, some as water carriers, messengers, servants, and some on board the numerous vessels. . . . Many have learned to become good horsemen with us, and then have gone to other persons. Two lads have been extremely serviceable, for several weeks past, in tracing out and pursuing, with the horse police, a gang of bushrangers who have plundered many persons in these districts in a most daring manner.

Reinforcing his earlier remarks about the malicious habits of irresponsible convicts, Threlkeld related the case of a young aborigine, whose employer had made an appeal to Threlkeld on his behalf. It was stated that a West Indian fellow, assisted by an assigned prisoner of the Crown, had forcibly deprived the young aborigine of his wife, at a neighbouring farm on the lake. In this case, Threlkeld had interfered so that justice might be done to the aborigines concerned in the affair.

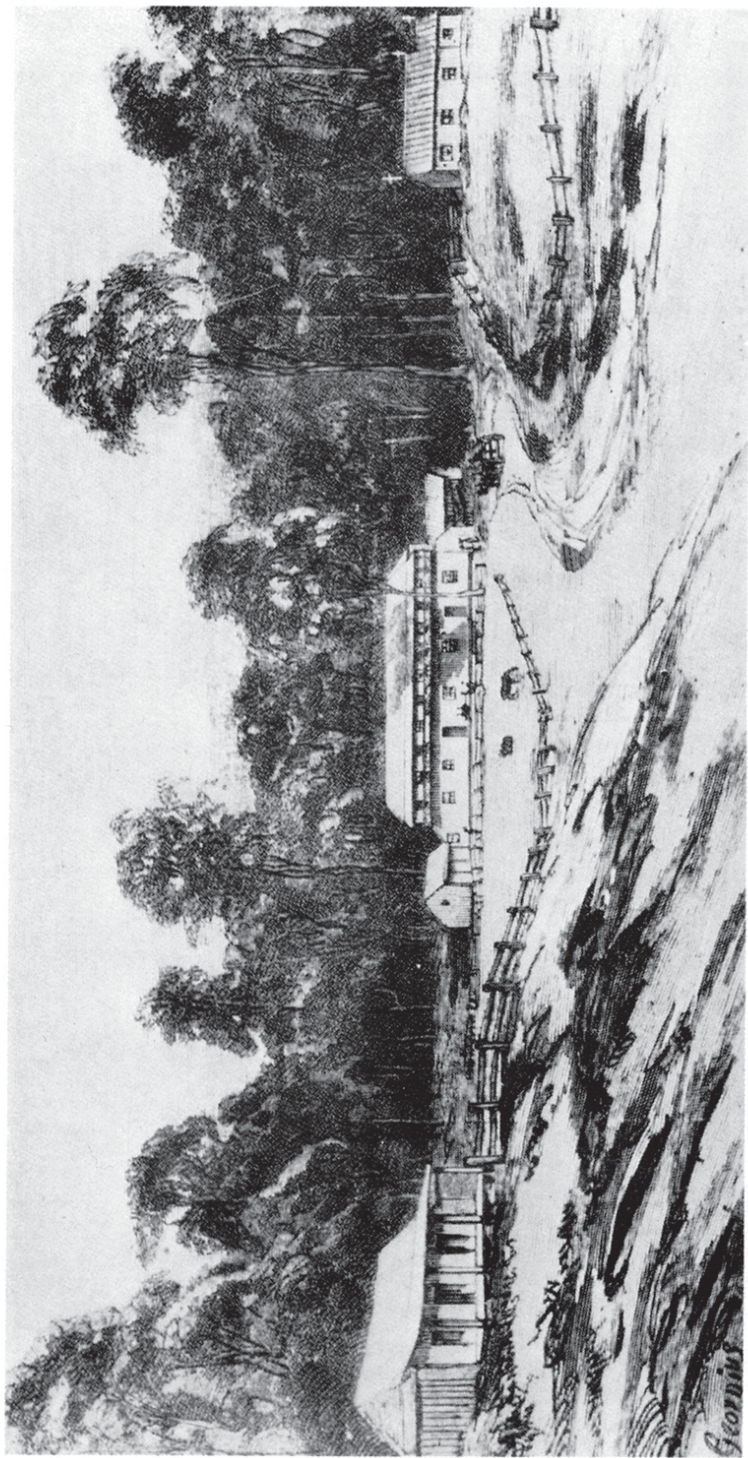
It was sometimes necessary for the missionary to intervene in quarrels that developed between groups of natives, and conflicts of this nature became more frequent when other tribes of blacks began to invade the lake district, being forced out of adjacent districts by white settlement. On one occasion, a large company of natives met

²⁵ Extracts from the Letters of James Backhouse, as quoted by Champion.

²⁶ Threlkeld, L. E., *Annual Report of the Mission to the Aborigines, Lake Macquarie Inlet, 31st December, 1840* (Mitchell Library).



Loading timber at Cooranbong wharf, 1884.



The 'Hand and Heart' hotel, Cooranbong, and the Roman Catholic Church, 1884.

... to decide by mortal combat, some disagreement, and unfortunately they chose a scene of action close to our house, just at a period when quietness was most needed, in consequence of family circumstances.

Many were assembled, and some intoxicated; their shouts, noise, clattering of spears and shields, with the loud whizz of a weapon they throw in the air, were exceedingly annoying; but, although highly enraged, yet at my request they departed, and shortly after dispersed.²⁷

In another published report, Threlkeld related another incident arising from conflict between tribes:²⁸

Not long since one of the blacks, belonging to this Inlet, named Boatman, was speared by the Blacks in Sydney, in such a manner that he lingered and shortly afterwards died of his wounds. He was buried by a stockman at Irriring²⁹ in this neighbourhood.

The death of Boatman was a blow to Threlkeld, for this aboriginal had been a genuine friend to him, and on at least one occasion had accompanied him to Sydney to interpret at a court trial of other aborigines.

Rev. Threlkeld watched the handful of remaining aborigines slowly becoming even fewer, and realized that the days of the mission were numbered. He had already admitted, in his report of 1838, that 'the present Mission is the most unpromising of any in the whole world'. The end came in the year 1841, for in May of that year Threlkeld was advised by a letter from the Colonial Secretary that the salary agreement entered into by the Government in 1831 would terminate at the end of the current year.³⁰ So ended a period of fifteen years' labour for the aborigines of Lake Macquarie.

Threlkeld, however, had anticipated the closure of the Ebenezer mission at this time, and it was a case in 1841 of abandoning one enterprise to commence another of a different kind, and the new enterprise proved to be more prosperous, financially at least. This venture was the opening of a coal mine on the Ebenezer estate. The mine was located on the lakeshore near the southern tip of Coal Point. Here coal was loaded onto barges, and at the lake heads transferred to ocean vessels for conveyance to the Sydney markets. The detailed story of this unusual clergyman's enterprise belongs to a later chapter. It will suffice to say here that the opening of this colliery at Ebenezer was an important event in the history of Lake Macquarie, and of considerable significance for the whole colony.

Threlkeld did not himself manage the new industry, but moved his family to Sydney at the end of 1841 or early in the following year, leaving another man in charge. In Sydney, Threlkeld was offered and accepted the pastorate of the Watson's Bay Congregational Church, and a few years later

²⁷ Threlkeld, L. E., *Aboriginal Mission, New South Wales—A Report*, dated Dec. 1825.

²⁸ From the annual report of the mission, 1839.

²⁹ Probably 'Eraring'.

³⁰ From copy of letter from the Colonial Secretary to Threlkeld, dated 17 May 1841 (Archives Office).

he was appointed chaplain of the Mariners' Church near Circular Quay, a position he retained until his death.

The missionary whose life we have been reviewing was certainly a peculiar and somewhat controversial figure, as we view him from the distance of the twentieth century. Historians of our age differ in their estimates of Threlkeld's character and worth. Some have portrayed him in point of fact as a hypocrite, pretending to sacrifice his life and means for a worthy cause, while he was chiefly concerned with his own welfare and ambitions. On the other hand, there are those who see the man as a sincere missionary worker, much misunderstood by his generation, and treated undeservedly by the London Missionary Society. Living so far removed from his time, we may only surmise as to the mind and character of the man.

Certainly Mr. Threlkeld was not very highly esteemed by the colony's leading chaplain, Samuel Marsden. But perhaps that was because the two reverend gentlemen were in some respects too much alike. Both men were preoccupied with very healthy side-line interests that brought them silver in one hand, and discredit in the other. Samuel Marsden is perhaps chiefly remembered today for having established the mutton industry in Australia, and it could well be true that the Rev. Threlkeld's greatest contribution to history was his little coal industry, and its significance in helping to break a monopoly in the mining trade.

And then again, we must not forget that the typical Australian clergyman of a century and a half ago was a very different character from the clergyman in modern society. No longer are ministers of the gospel appointed magistrates who may go about ordering thousands of lashings upon evildoers, and making the terrors of future judgement a living reality. During the early years of Australian settlement, the colonies were treated to some strange chaplains, and in the context of the times, Mr. Threlkeld appears to have been extraordinarily humane and kind to his fellow creatures.

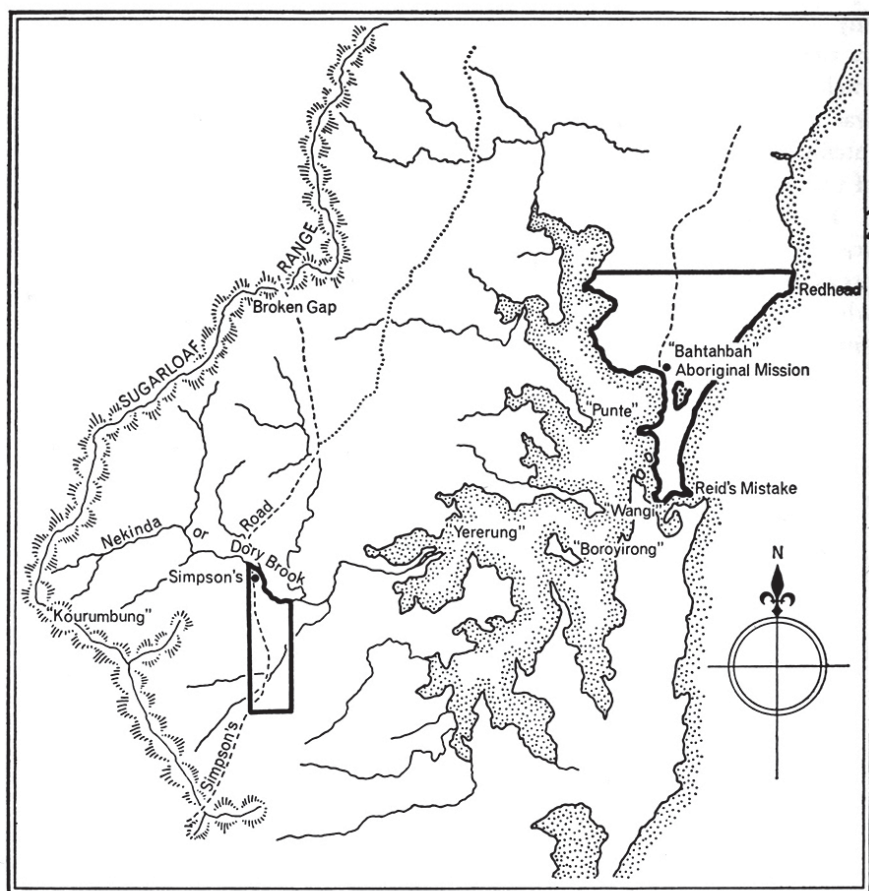
The Lake Macquarie mission to the aborigines cannot have been called a success on any account. While it is true that a few native souls received help in one way or another, Threlkeld's efforts for the truth and right were well and truly cancelled out by the practised moral code of hundreds of prisoners and free settlers who brutally took from the natives their land, their freedom, and too often their lives as well. The change in the site of the mission must also have contributed to its ultimate failure. And it is ironical that Threlkeld spent so much of his fifteen years mastering the language and preparing Scripture translations to give to the natives, but that when the translations were done, the aborigines were gone.

Though failure seemed often to dog his steps, Lancelot Edward Threlkeld was a great pioneer, worthy to be remembered. He may have been misguided, and perhaps he had missed his calling, but he worked with the

soul of a pioneer for a cause in which he believed intensely, for we cannot doubt his sincerity in working for the betterment of a class of people whom society treated more like animals than men. In a crude and cruel society, he upheld a way of life that was better. We have no evidence whatever that any natives hated or disliked him, but we do know that he was respected by the majority of them, and loved by a few. We read a good deal of an intelligent aboriginal named Biraban, a name meaning an eaglehawk, who was the missionary's almost daily companion for many years, and to whose intelligence he was indebted for much of his knowledge of the language of the Awabakal.³¹

Early in the morning of 10th October 1859, at the age of seventy-one years, the Reverend L. E. Threlkeld passed to his rest, after preaching the previous morning and afternoon at his Mariners' Church in Sydney. Those who admire justice without respect to colour or race will not easily forget him.

³¹ A portrait of Biraban is contained in the preface to Threlkeld's *Key to the Structure of the Aboriginal Language* . . . (Sydney, 1850).



LAKE MACQUARIE

1828

4

LIEUTENANT SIMPSON

I give this letter to Lieut. Percy Simpson who proceeds with his young family to New South Wales in the hope of improving his prospects in life . . .¹

It was the year of grace 1822, when the Simpson family embarked on the long voyage to New South Wales, not knowing what lay in store for them on the other side of the world, but undoubtedly putting a good deal of reliance in a letter of recommendation given to Simpson by Lord Torrens in England. Addressed to the new Governor of the far-away colony, the letter commenced with the statement quoted above, and then went on to say:

. . . Although he and Mrs. Simpson I understand are well connected, yet at this moment he finds it very difficult to get employment while reduction and retrenchment oppose so many obstacles to all such views in this Country.

He has held the situation of Judge Advocate and Local Governor of one of the Ionian Islands for some years, and he returned to this Country in consequence of the reduction of the Regiment to which he belonged, bringing with him a strong recommendation to me from Sir Thomas Maitland. . . . I feel assured that, should you have an opportunity of serving him, he will prove himself worthy of your favourable notice and protection.

At the time of his arrival in Sydney in November of 1822, Lieutenant Simpson possessed a wife and two children, and at thirty-five years of age it could still be said that his best years lay ahead of him. As a young man he had received a military commission which led to his participation in the Napoleonic Wars prior to 1815. Then, at the conclusion of the war, he had been fortunate to receive an appointment to the small island of Paxos, one of the Ionian group, as Governor and Judge-Advocate.² He had been there only two years, however, when the British government decided to reduce the regiment to which he belonged, known as the Royal Corsican Rangers, so that in the summer of 1817 Simpson returned to England without employment, though he was granted a military pension. He had remained in Eng-

¹ HRA—I, v. 23, p. 132.

² *Ibid.*, p. 133.

land until 1822 when the decision was made to come to New South Wales in the hope of furthering his military ambitions. A year earlier Sir Thomas Brisbane had been selected as the new Governor of the colony, and had already taken up the new post. This may have been of some significance in Lieutenant Simpson's decision, for both he and Brisbane had served in the Peninsular War under the Duke of Wellington. It is also known that Mrs. Simpson was related by marriage to Sir Thomas.³

After disembarking at Sydney, Simpson paid his respects to the Governor, and presented an order from the Colonial Office in London for a land grant of 2,000 acres. Sir Thomas Brisbane recorded this grant for Simpson on 20th November 1822, at the same time advising him that the land could be selected in any part of the colony already surveyed, and promising that six convict servants would be assigned to him to assist in the establishment of a farm.⁴ There was no necessity for Simpson to select his grant immediately, and indeed it was not until 1826 that he made the choice.

In the matter of a military appointment, the Governor was also able to oblige, and on the first day of 1823, just a few weeks after arrival, Simpson became the Commandant of a new agricultural station being established at Wellington Valley in the central west of New South Wales. In making the decision to form a convict agricultural settlement at Wellington, Sir Thomas Brisbane believed he was acting in accordance with a recommendation of Commissioner Bigge, who had expressed the opinion that Sydney should contain only four hundred convicts, and that the rest of the prisoners might be transferred to agricultural stations away from the towns.⁵ Brisbane endeavoured to carry out this suggestion, and was already enlarging the agricultural stations at Emu Plains and Bathurst when Simpson arrived. Under the circumstances, it seemed to Brisbane the most logical thing to place Simpson in charge of forming another agricultural settlement. Describing his plan to the Home Secretary in England, Brisbane wrote:⁶

The new settlement at Wellington Valley will afford future means for extending along the banks of a navigable river far removed from the undue interference of settlers and all the comforts of civilized existence, penal establishments throughout an immense space for the moral reformation of those who are too ungovernable to be restrained by the mild laws of their home.

On 1st January 1823 Percy Simpson entered into a written agreement with the colonial government to undertake the establishment and control of a proposed new station at Wellington Valley.⁷ It was the intention that

³ Commissioner of Claims for Lands: Case No. 153 (Archives Office).

⁴ *Ibid.*, letter from Colonial Secretary to Simpson, 20 Nov. 1822.

⁵ HRA—I, v. 11, pp. 74-80.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ HRA—I, v. 23, pp. 127 *et seq.*

wheat should be grown entirely by convict labour, and that Simpson would be paid on the basis of four pounds a year for each convict he was able to subsist on the wheat produce of the settlement. In other words, Governor Brisbane planned and expected that the new settlement would be financially independent. Simpson appears to have been happy with this arrangement, and moved out over the mountains with a party of convicts to get the establishment under way.

The detailed story of Simpson's work at Wellington Valley is not our concern here, but the settlement was not the success that Brisbane hoped it would be. The Wellington station had purposely been planned at a distance from the lands of free settlement, so that control of the convicts would be simplified. But soon the free settlers were moving their flocks and herds down the Macquarie valley, and were urging the government to make available to them the rich agricultural land along the Wellington River. The release of this country was strongly recommended to Governor Darling when he assumed colonial control early in 1826.⁸ In view of this request, and the fact that the Home Office had now decided upon a policy of reducing the size of agricultural penal establishments, Darling announced in June of 1826 that the Wellington Valley station was to be abandoned.⁹

When news of this decree of the 'new Pharaoh' was communicated to Simpson, he wasted no time in applying for the settlement of his account, according to the agreement drawn up three years earlier. But here Simpson proved to be deceitful. Instead of claiming four pounds per annum for each convict actually maintained on the settlement from the sale of wheat, Simpson calculated his remuneration on the number of men he *could* have subsisted on the total value of the wheat crop. By this means of calculation, Simpson arrived at the figure of approximately £4,000 as the balance due to him, and applied to the government for this amount.¹⁰ Darling refused to authorize payment of this large claim, and informed Simpson that he was due to receive an amount of a little less than £300 per year, under the terms of the agreement. Simpson, however, was obstinate, and quickly incurred the displeasure of the Governor by threatening to take legal action. The consequences were that the unhappy Simpson shortly found himself back in Sydney with his claim rejected, and without an appointment of any description.

It was now March of 1826, and Simpson had to replan his future in the colony, or return to England. The latter he probably could not afford to do. His wife, it seems, frequently suffered from ill health, and her condition was probably aggravated by the humid climate of New South Wales. It now appeared that a seaside or lakeside climate, tempered by cool breezes,

⁸ *Ibid.*, v. 12, p. 409.

⁹ *Sydney Gazette*, various issues of June 1826.

¹⁰ HRA—I, v. 12, p. 409.

was essential for her sake.¹¹ Simpson had been promised a 2,000-acre land grant at the time of his arrival in 1822, and in September of 1825 Governor Brisbane had promised a second grant of the same size. This second grant appears to have been induced by Mrs. Simpson, who exerted some influence upon a close relative of the Governor.¹² Both land grants had been recorded in the Governor's Order Book¹³ for land grants, and merely awaited selection by Simpson. He therefore decided to go on the land as a free settler.

By this time, the only extensive areas of good agricultural land still available to intending farmers were in the Hunter River valley and its adjacent areas. The rich grazing country of the south and west of the colony had been snatched up much earlier, and only the poorer locations remained unsettled. But the lands to the north of Sydney had been withheld from free settlers during the years of the penal settlement at Newcastle, and it was not until about 1823 that the valuable plains of the Hunter were released. By 1826 the majority of immigrants of the colony were settling in the Hunter valley, and under these circumstances it was natural that Percy Simpson should look towards the north for a place to settle; and keeping in mind the delicate health of Mrs. Simpson, it is not at all surprising that he elected to make a home in the Lake Macquarie district.

The existence of a fairly extensive salt-water lake a few miles southward of Newcastle had become generally known throughout the colony at this time, for in 1826 the London Missionary Society was in the process of establishing its aboriginal mission there. When the mission site had been selected a year earlier, the lake was still known simply as Reid's Mistake, and practically nothing could have been known of the agricultural potential of the surrounding countryside. It appears that the name of Lake Macquarie was introduced in the year 1826, when the earliest known reference to this name is found in the correspondence of Rev. L. E. Threlkeld. A letter written at Bahtahbah on 29th October 1826 bears the heading 'Lake Macquarie'.¹⁴ There is no indication as to how the name was bestowed, or who authorized it, but it was obviously given in honour of one of the colony's greatest Governors.

Simpson had in mind grazing a herd of cattle, and must have made a reconnaissance tour of the lake country to select suitable land. He must have carried out this inspection very shortly after returning from Wellington Valley, for he had men clearing his land by August 1826.¹⁵ There were two grants to select, each of 2,000 acres, and Simpson chose them directly adjacent to each other, in the neighbourhood of Dora Creek. Following the normal procedure, Simpson immediately submitted to the Surveyor-General a

¹¹ CSIL: Simpson, 1 Dec. 1837.

¹² Commissioner of Claims for Lands: Case No. 153 (Archives Office).

¹³ *Governor's Order Book*, 1811-1839 (Archives Office).

¹⁴ Letter from Threlkeld to London Missionary Society (Mitchell Library).

¹⁵ CSIL: petition of Moses Carroll, 20 Aug. 1829.

formal application to have his grants measured and charted at the first opportunity which, however, did not occur for at least two or three years.¹⁶

There were multitudes of difficulties and discouragements in hewing a farm out of virgin bushland in those days of long ago, and we know so little of them. Unfortunately, there are no records describing Simpson's pioneering venture at Lake Macquarie. However, his nearest neighbour to the southward, a well-to-do settler named William Cape, recorded some reminiscences of his early struggle with the strange new countryside. Cape had arrived in the Wyong Creek district during 1825, and in an article written some years afterwards,¹⁷ he referred to some of the difficulties he had experienced in developing

. . . lands which nearly cost me my life, having in my second attempt to explore the country about Wyong, lost myself for seven days, was given up for lost, without food or shoes to my feet, my clothing torn from my back in the wet and cold month of March. . . . The location of lands in a remote wilderness, is dearly bought; . . . tools, utensils, and every article for the first year carried on our backs for better than twenty miles, through a trackless road of thick brush, deep gullies, and swamps and creeks. . . . Compelled to use the dangerous coast, I lost four boats and their contents.

Simpson may not have experienced any of the privations mentioned by Mr. Cape, but doubtless there would have been circumstances equally trying.

As promised in 1822, Lieutenant Simpson was given the services of six convict assigned servants. One of these was Moses Carroll, an Irishman, whom Simpson appointed overseer of his farm, and of whom more will be told in a succeeding chapter. By the month of August 1826 Simpson's men were busily engaged in clearing certain sections of the 4,000 acres at 'Kourumbung', and in constructing a house and some stockyards in the north-western corner of the large selection. Simpson brought a large number of cattle to his farm, and it was stated in 1832 that 'upwards of seven hundred head' were running there.¹⁸

Often there is little truth in current legends relating to people and incidents of a century and more ago, but an interesting tale related by the late Mr. Clem Taylor, who was born at Cooranbong, has a ring of probability about it. It is said that when Simpson appointed his convict servants to clear the land at Kourumbung, an error was made by his men in determining where lay the northern boundary of the grant. Instead of restricting their timber cutting to the southern side of Dora Creek, which constituted a boundary of Simpson's land, they felled much of the bushland along a small tributary joining the main creek on its northern bank. This error was discovered later, and the branch tributary came to be known as Felled Timber Creek, a name which remains on survey maps to this day. As a commentary

¹⁶ Commissioner of Claims for Lands: Case No. 153 (Archives Office).

¹⁷ *Australian*, 28 Apr. 1832.

¹⁸ CSIL: Simpson, 4 July 1832.

on this story, it is peculiar to notice that one of the earliest maps of the County of Northumberland,¹⁹ dating from about 1840, has Dora Creek labelled 'Dorri Brook' up to its junction with Felled Timber Creek, and above this junction it is clearly marked as 'Manering Creek'. Interestingly enough, the minor tributary of Felled Timber Creek is indicated on the map as 'Dorri Brook or Nellinda'. This confusion may appear strange until we recall that in those early days there was frequently much misunderstanding about the exact boundaries of land, and a vagueness concerning the position and names of natural features, due to the fact that these places were being mentioned in letters long before their existence was shown on a map. And as often as not, the map would be in error. The result was much confusion over the names of streams and mountains especially. In the early times, Dora Creek itself went by many titles, including Nekinda, Nellinda, Dorri, Dorah, Manering, Manmring, and even Badge River.²⁰

As has been stated, Simpson selected a total of 4,000 acres along the southern bank of Dora Creek, extending westward from the confluence of Dora and Stockton Creeks to the vicinity of the village of Cooranbong as it is today, and southward in the direction of Mandalong and Wyee. In 1826 Simpson applied to have all of this land surveyed; but before the survey was carried out in 1829, a peculiar thing happened.²¹ After Sir Thomas Brisbane returned to England, the colony's Surveyor-General, John Oxley, checked carefully through the Governor's Order Book of land grants and came upon two separate entries for Percy Simpson, each for 2,000 acres. Concluding that this duplication must have been an error, Oxley wrote 'cancelled' across the second entry dated September 1825. Simpson was not notified of this action, but when Surveyor Ralfe visited Lake Macquarie in 1829 to measure various settlers' grants, he carried instructions to measure for Simpson a single grant of 2,000 acres. Ralfe's survey of Simpson's farm included his homestead, stockyards, and other buildings within the boundary of 2,000 acres, but a good deal of the land cleared for cattle grazing was excluded from the survey. Simpson remained unaware of what had occurred, and continued to assume that he had dominion over 4,000 acres. But the county plan in the Surveyor-General's Office in Sydney showed only half of this quantity in Simpson's name, and it was inevitable that sooner or later someone else would apply for the ungranted portion of his farm. This actually occurred in May 1830 when John Tingcombe selected 1,280 acres on the southern bank of Dora Creek adjacent to 'the east boundary line of Percy Simpson's 2,000 acres'.²² In the register of land grants, Simpson's property was described in this way:²³

¹⁹ This map is held by the Lands Department, Sydney.

²⁰ These names have been collected from maps, letters, and reports.

²¹ Commissioners of Claims for Lands: Case No. 153 (Archives Office).

²² Lands Department: Register of Land Grants (County of Northumberland), No. 9.

²³ *Ibid.*, Register dated 1823-37.

Two thousand acres at Lake Macquarie, parish unnamed, bounded on the north by the Western Rivulet; on the east by a line bearing south 280 chains; on the south by a line bearing west 80 chains; on the west by a line bearing north 333 chains to the Western Rivulet.

The homestead and stockyards erected by Simpson's men were situated close to the bank of Dora Creek, where a permanent supply of fresh water was assured. We are able to determine the location of the old house with some degree of accuracy from a plan of the ranges of hills about Lake Macquarie, drawn by Surveyor Felton Mathew during his extensive surveys about 1831. Mathew fixed the position of the homestead close to the old crossing of Dora Creek, and fairly close to the present site of the Roman Catholic church at Cooranbong. The house is identified on the plan as 'Kourumbung—Simpson's', and Dora Creek is marked 'Manmring Creek', while the tributary now known as Sandy Creek bears the name of 'Dorah Creek'. Other early drawings²⁴ show the existence of stockyards close to Simpson's house, other huts and stockyards being situated near Stockton Creek.

There is little in the way of records to tell of the various facets of agricultural life on Simpson's station during the short period of less than two years that he actually resided there. Until recent times, there was at the Taylor farm at Cooranbong an old plough said to have dated from Simpson's time, and to which small teams of convicts were supposed to have been harnessed to prepare the ground for planting wheat and corn.²⁵ The late Mr. Taylor, who was born at Cooranbong and spent practically all of his lifetime there, remembered an old stone grinding mill that had been used in the early days for milling the wheat into flour, again by convict labour. The concept of using prisoners to pull a plough is not out of harmony with the character of the times, though it is difficult to understand why horses or even bullocks should not have been used. On the other hand, Simpson had come from a penal agricultural settlement where convicts may well have been employed in work of this degrading nature as a form of secondary punishment.

From one or two letters written by Simpson to the Colonial Secretary during his period of residence at Lake Macquarie, we learn that the settler had his share of problems. Runaway convicts from Newcastle and Wallis Plains became bushrangers and these plundered property, including cattle.²⁶ Simpson's overseer, Moses Carroll, once mentioned an occasion when the homestead at Kourumbung was almost burned down in a grass fire started by either some blacks or convicts.²⁷ Life on the station must have been

²⁴ Most interesting is the early County of Northumberland plan dated about 1840 (Lands Department, Sydney).

²⁵ From a feature article in the *Gosford Times*, 23 Aug. 1951.

²⁶ CSIL: Simpson, 6 Apr. 1828.

²⁷ From a statement by Moses Carroll on 11 Jan. 1837, recorded in 'Brisbane Water Depositions, 1835-1842' (Gosford Police Records).

particularly trying for Mrs. Simpson who, besides suffering from ill health, gave birth to more children. By 1832 the Simpsons had a family of seven.

Simpson's attempt to raise cattle on his station does not appear to have been very successful. True, he had chosen for his farm one of the best agricultural situations in the Lake Macquarie district, as was proved in after years. During the dry seasons of the 1830's stockmen from other coastal farms brought their cattle to Simpson's cleared grounds where pasture was found to be reliable.²⁸ However, the geographical position and nature of the area made it unsuited for cattle grazing. At Kourumbung the natural grassland was poor in comparison with the fertile plains of the nearby Hunter districts. Doubtless finding a market for the animals was a major problem; and many of them ran unchecked throughout the dense bushland, where they were sometimes speared by blacks and bushrangers, or collected by cattle thieves. In short, Simpson had tried an agricultural experiment in a frontier region, and it proved to be unsuccessful.

Percy Simpson was not, however, destined to remain a farmer for very long. By the winter of 1828, less than two years after commencing his Lake Macquarie farm, he had moved to Wiseman's Ferry on the Hawkesbury, where we find him engaged in road construction for the government. The story of how he came by this employment is interesting, but requires a little digression to provide a background.

As we have noticed earlier, by about 1823 Newcastle had outlived its usefulness as a penal depot, and from that time free settlers flocked into the Hunter districts almost without restriction. At the time, the only existing land route from Sydney to the north was the very circuitous track opened up by John Howe, and it was now desirable that a more direct line of road should be found, to facilitate the movement of settlers and their stock to and from Sydney. Some of the prosperous and influential settlers were able to put pressure on the government for the construction of a reasonably good road to link their farms with Sydney, and it was finally decided that a carriage road would be put through by way of Wiseman's Ferry and the Wollombi, following somewhat the route marked out by Major Morisset in 1823. Surveyor Finch was directed to prepare plans, and work on the project soon commenced. By the beginning of 1828 construction of the Great North Road had proceeded from Sydney as far as Wiseman's Ferry. Here a works settlement had been formed, and preparations were in hand for the next stage of road-building into the barren and rocky mountains barring the way northwards to Wollombi. Already there were some misgivings about the proposed route, and criticisms of it, but no one had been able to find an easier or more direct way. We can imagine, then, what must have been the surprise and interest upon the appearance of the following announcement in the *Sydney Gazette* early in 1828:²⁹

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Sydney Gazette*, 21 Jan. 1828.

John Macdonald, an assigned servant to Mr. Crawford, of Prospect, has discovered (and marked most of the way) a new line of road from Wallis Plains to Wiseman's, on the Hawkesbury, by way of Singleton's Ferry on Mangrove Creek; by which road the journey may be easily performed on horseback in two days, without the necessity of even once dismounting while travelling. By the present intended line of road the journey, I believe, is four or five days, without grass or water, which Macdonald's Line offers in abundance the whole way; between the two places the distance does not exceed 64 miles. On this route, and within twenty-five miles of Wallis Plains, an equally good ridge leads in twenty-six miles to Newcastle, by inclining a little towards the coast.

Macdonald's Line was hastily rode over some time back by a gentleman of much experience, who every way high approved of it, except in one part, where it crossed a deep ravine, which objection McDonald has obviated, by his having since discovered that it can be avoided, by diverging about one mile round.

The superiority of this line, compared to that on which it is contemplated to make the New Road, or any other line now known, claims the attention of His Excellency Governor Darling, who, it must be admitted, ever studies the real interests of the Colony, and readily embraces any measure for its advantage, when really practicable, which McDonald's Line would be, in preference to the one now contemplated.

The news item was anonymously signed 'z.z.z.', but the author was none other than Percy Simpson. He was not very favourably regarded by Governor Darling, and by shielding his identity, the lieutenant was able to offer the flattering remarks of the last paragraph. We learn that Simpson was the author of the item from a letter he wrote to the Colonial Secretary a short time afterwards,³⁰ in which he made some reference to his announcement in the newspaper.

As the *Gazette* item stated, John Macdonald was a prisoner assigned to Mr. Crawford, a wealthy settler of the Sydney district, who also possessed a large estate east of Wollombi in the vicinity of modern Cessnock. It is very likely that Macdonald discovered the new route while being sent on errands from one of Crawford's estates to the other. The line he discovered³¹ led from Wiseman's Ferry across a mountain range to Mangrove Creek, where there were already some small-scale settlers in 1828. After crossing the creek, the new trail wound up another range and crossed the Kulnura plateau before dropping to the valley of Wyong Creek in the vicinity of Yarramalong, though there were no permanent settlers there at that time. Another extensive range of hills was encountered before Jilliby Creek was reached, but from this point it was comparatively easy travelling to Simpson's station at Kourumbung. Close by Simpson's house was a prac-

³⁰ CSIL: Simpson, 6 Apr. 1828.

³¹ A detailed description of the route is contained in CSIL: William Dumaresq's report, 18 May 1828.

ticable fording place on Dora Creek, and for the remainder of the distance to Wallis Plains, a blazed track could be followed. This was Simpson's access road, and it crossed the Sugarloaf Range at what used to be known as the Broken Gap, now more generally known as Brunkerville Gap.

It is no wonder that Simpson wished to bring Macdonald's discovery to the attention of the colonial government. If this new line of road were accepted instead of the Wiseman's Ferry-Wollombi proposal, considerable advantages would accrue to Simpson. His property at the Kourumbung crossing-place would occupy a strategic position on the new road, being at precisely the right distance from Maitland and Newcastle to become an overnight stopping place.

The colonial government considered it worthwhile to investigate this new route. During May of 1828 Jonathan Warner, an Assistant Surveyor of Roads, travelled over it, accompanied by John Macdonald. The colony's Civil Engineer, William Dumaesq, examined it about the same time, and addressed a report to the Colonial Secretary.³² Dumaesq's report emphasized that the new line of road was indeed shorter and would be more easily constructed than the one originally proposed. However, Dumaesq added, Macdonald's road would be of no use whatever to settlers in the upper Hunter districts, '... a numerous and respected Class of people. . . . This Consideration may have some Weight in determining the relative advantages of the Two Roads.'

This particular 'Consideration' did, of course, have 'Weight', and the colonial government decided to press on with the original plan. But by this time it was known that Lieutenant Percy Simpson had brought the new road to the notice of the administration, and despite the fact that he held no qualification as a surveyor, the scarcity of road surveyors at this time was such that Simpson was offered an appointment as an Assistant Surveyor of Roads and Bridges, to be stationed at Wiseman's Ferry.³³ This position carried a salary of £150 per annum, and also a small allowance for the use of a horse. Faced with mounting debts that had reached £800 by this time, Simpson was happy to accept the position. He was appointed on 16th June 1828, and two days later he wrote to the Colonial Secretary:³⁴

His Excellency the Governor having been kind enough to confer on me the appointment of Assistant Surveyor of Roads and Bridges at Wiseman's, I most respectfully beg to request the additional favour of being allowed four months salary in advance, in order to effect His Excellency's commands in providing myself with a suitable horse for that service. I would also beg the indulgence of leave of absence for one month from my Station in order to remove my family there from Lake Macquarie via Sydney, that being the only practicable route that can at present be pursued.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ HRA—I, v. 23, p. 256.

³⁴ CSIL: Simpson, 18 June 1828.

Since the nature of the work at Wiseman's Ferry involved much dealing with convicts, Simpson was temporarily appointed a magistrate, though this did not bring any additional increment. The Simpsons were soon settled at Lower Portland Head, near Wiseman's, while Simpson himself had the responsibility of supervising the building of the Great North Road into the wild country northwards. He was in charge of a large number of prisoners, many of whom were in irons as a result of colonial sentence, men who were frequently so wretched and debased that they responded to nothing save the lash, which Simpson as magistrate prescribed. He remained at this work for almost three years, by which time the Great North Road was completed through to Wollombi where it met other roads from Singleton and Maitland. Upon completion of the road in 1831, the Surveyor-General, Major Thomas Mitchell, travelled over it to inspect the work, and Lieutenant Simpson accompanied him on horseback for part of the way. At a place known as Hungry Flat, north of Wiseman's, Mitchell bade Simpson farewell, after expressing his great satisfaction at 'his clever arrangements for opening this mountain road, a work which he had accomplished with small means'.³⁵ Today the names of Mount Simpson near Bucketty, and Simpson's Pass³⁶ on the range a few miles southward, remind us of one man's contribution to colonial expansion.

As a magistrate, Simpson was required by law to be clear of debt. But it appears that his insolvency was unknown to the government at the time of his appointment in 1828. It seems that he attempted to rescue his financial affairs, for he mortgaged and later sold his land grant at Kourumbung. At a later time, he described how he had sold his land 'for a very inconsiderable sum'.³⁷

This measure failed to settle Simpson's accounts, for early in 1831 his creditors brought him before the Supreme Court. He was declared bankrupt, and the Governor immediately removed him from his magistracy. Describing the necessity for this action, the Governor wrote in a despatch to the English Secretary of State:³⁸

Lieutenant Percy Simpson never held the appointment of Resident Magistrate at Portland Head. Mr. Simpson, being employed at the Roads Department, and having a large number of prisoners under his superintendence, a great proportion of whom were working in irons under Colonial Sentence, was appointed a Magistrate, in order to enable him the better to control the ill-disposed individuals he had to deal with. He never received pay or allowance of any kind as a Magistrate. He is no longer a Magistrate, having been lately declared insolvent in the Supreme Court.

³⁵ Mitchell, Thomas Livingstone, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia...* (London, 1838), v. 1, pp. 8, 10.

³⁶ Some modern maps incorrectly refer to this as 'Sampson's Pass'.

³⁷ HRA—I, v. 23, pp. 127 *et seq.*

³⁸ HRA—I, v. 16, p. 358.

For at least the second time in his colonial life Simpson had come off badly moneywise, and this time he had no alternative but to sell his military commission for £700.³⁹ This was the more unfortunate because the commission had entitled him to a yearly allowance of £136 as a lieutenant on the retired list of the 5th Royal Veteran Battalion. He also lost a policy of insurance which he had kept up for several years to the full amount of his military pension. However, this sale did enable him to rise above water financially, and in March of 1832 he was able to write to the Colonial Secretary:⁴⁰

I have paid in full every debt I owed, and am still in possession of 2,000 acres granted to me by Sir Thomas Brisbane in September, 1825, and other property.

As this statement indicates, Simpson had by this time discovered the mistake made by the Surveyor-General's Department in omitting to measure his second grant of 2,000 acres, and he was distressed to find that a large portion of his selected land had been granted to another settler. In lieu of this loss of half of his farm, Simpson selected a further 2,000 acres near the mouth of Dora Creek at 'E-ra-ring'⁴¹ and applied to have title deeds issued. However, the new Surveyor-General, Major Thomas Mitchell, was not altogether clear about the issue, and so Simpson's claim was referred to the Commissioners of Claims for Lands.⁴² This caused a lengthy delay, and the case was not settled until 1838. Finally, however, Simpson's right to a second grant of 2,000 acres was upheld, and in April 1838 he was officially granted 2,000 acres at Eraring, Lake Macquarie.

Meanwhile, having cleared himself of debt to the satisfaction of the law, Simpson was reappointed a magistrate late in 1832. By this time he had been moved from Wiseman's Ferry, since construction of the Great North Road was completed, and in the following year he resided at Parramatta, where he retained his post as an Assistant Surveyor, but with a salary of £220 per annum, and rising to £300 a year or so after that.⁴³ Then in 1837 there were alterations to the administrative structure of the government departments. The Department of Roads, in which Simpson had been employed, was transferred from the Surveyor-General to the Colonial Engineer; and since the convict road gangs were now placed under military superintendence, there was found no suitable work for Simpson. Temporarily he remained with the Surveyor-General's Department until Governor Gipps assumed control of the colony in February of 1838. On enquiry, Gipps found that Simpson was nominally in charge of a depot of stores and tools at

³⁹ CSIL: Simpson, 4 July 1832.

⁴⁰ CSIL: Simpson, 27 Mar. 1832.

⁴¹ For a description, see Lands Department: Register of Land Grants in County of Northumberland, No. 9 (Lands Department, Sydney).

⁴² Commissioner of Claims for Lands: Case No. 153 (Archives Office).

⁴³ N.S.W. Blue Books, 1833-38.

Parramatta, and still receiving £300 a year. Wrote Gipps, in a despatch to England,⁴⁴

. . . as I could see no reason for keeping up this Depot, except for the purpose of giving nominal employment to Mr. Simpson, I abolished it; and not being able to provide for Mr. Simpson in any other way, I appointed him a Police Magistrate at Patrick's Plains, otherwise Singleton.

Settled at Singleton with a family now increased to nine children,⁴⁵ Simpson saw no necessity to retain his land at Eraring, Lake Macquarie, and even before receiving the title deed to this land, he wrote to the Colonial Secretary in an attempt to exchange it for land in a different part of the colony.⁴⁶ He stated:

Nine-tenths of the two thousand acres consist of barren scrub, without fresh water (except what is procured from sunken wells) and very difficult of access by land, but which position I had made choice of for the restoration of my wife's health in 1826.

This request for exchange was not granted, and shortly thereafter Simpson sold his grant at Eraring. At the time of the sale he could not have guessed that within a year or two it would be subdivided for a township and that speculators would pay extravagant prices for small segments of it. However, that is a story which we cannot relate here.

Simpson faced yet another employment crisis in 1843, when the government dispensed with the services of many police magistrates. Simpson was one of those considered dispensable, and Governor Gipps saw no prospect of being able to provide any other employment for him. In fact, Gipps had formed a rather poor opinion of Simpson, regarding him as a person of little ambition or achievement. This view he expressed in a despatch in 1844:⁴⁷

I cannot but remark that, during the years 1838 and 1839, the Government was greatly in want of Surveyors, and that the business of a Field Surveyor is not of so difficult a nature, but that a man of active habits and moderate intelligence might easily qualify himself in a few weeks to perform all the duties likely to be required of him. . . . Mr. Simpson, however, never qualified himself, and . . . remained a burthen on the Government.

Finding himself unemployed in 1843, Simpson returned to England,⁴⁸ leaving his family in Australia, in order to substantiate his claim to the £4,000 which he believed was still owing to him from the Wellington Valley episode. Despite his eloquence on this subject, his claim to the money

⁴⁴ HRA—I, v. 23, p. 526.

⁴⁵ CSIL: Simpson, 25 Sep. 1837.

⁴⁶ CSIL: Simpson, 1 Dec. 1837.

⁴⁷ HRA—I, v. 23, p. 526.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 127 *et seq.*

was not upheld, and he returned to Sydney, where he lived until his death in 1877, at the age of ninety years.

In this story we remember Percy Simpson chiefly as the pioneer free settler and farmer in the Lake Macquarie district. His homestead at Kourumbung remained for many years after he left it, and eventually this spot became the nucleus of the first permanent town in the entire lake region. We do not know at what time the old house disappeared, or how, but no person living today can remember it. When Simpson moved from the place, he left it all in the charge of his overseer, Moses Carroll, who himself died on the premises many years afterwards. However, the cattle-raising venture was never a success. Most of the animals strayed and were seldom, and many of them never, mustered. While at large they mingled with other cattle from various farms in the vicinity of Lake Macquarie and Wyong, and so became wild and unbranded. A Sydney butcher named Langdon purchased all of them in 1833, and employed men for more than twelve months in collecting large herds of unbranded cattle⁴⁹ that were supposed to have been Simpson's.

⁴⁹ CSIL: Jonathan Warner, 16 Apr. 1834.

THE FRONTIER YEARS

IN 1828 there was published in England a short account entitled *Index and Directory to Map of the Country bordering upon the River Hunter*.¹ The author was Henry Dangar, an intelligent surveyor who had spent some years of active service in and around Newcastle, and hence was exceptionally well qualified to attempt a description of the district. His brief report on the Lake Macquarie area is interesting and significant:

The next division of the country I feel necessary to describe, is that bordering on the Lake Macquarie, on the banks of which, besides the Station of the London Missionary Establishment for the instruction of the aboriginal natives, are only one or two settlers. The lands in the vicinity of this Lake partake of the characteristic quality of the country along the sea coast, viz.: thin strata of light sandy soil, tracts with sand and gravelly surface; but on the margin of the lake, together with the vallies surrounding it, are occasional tracts of productive land. For this reason, the district of Lake Macquarie is not adapted to the settler who contemplates becoming the proprietor of large flocks and herds, or a busied agriculture,—but is well suited to the retired naval, military, and civil officer, or merchant, inclined to 'quit the busy scene'—one who is fond of shooting, hunting, and fishing, or boat sailing; where he can enjoy cheap living, with a most salubrious air, and amply gratify all his wishes.

This short summary, penned so long ago, has been proved remarkably accurate. It shows that Dangar must have travelled extensively around Lake Macquarie with an observant approach. His assessment of the comparatively low agricultural potential of the region has been proved correct, though he did not overlook the patches of productive land in the Dora Creek valley and along the smaller streams. Certainly the lakeside country is unsuitable for large-scale agriculture, as Lieutenant Simpson learned as a result of bringing a large herd of cattle to his Dora Creek farm. Dangar's remarks concerning the attraction of the lakeside country for retired officers were also well made. Today, the pleasant scenery and many phases of aquatic activity appeal not only to the older folk, but to thousands of younger people as well.

¹ Published in 1828. The description of the lake country is taken from pp. 95-6.

Henry Dangar's description is interesting to us now, but it probably had little, if any, effect on the nature and pattern of early settlement in the lake district. In the development of a strange new region, the pioneering settlers must conduct their own experiments to determine the usefulness of the country, to make their own evaluation concerning the potential of the land for agriculture or industry. And as with all experiments, failure is often the hard lot of the pioneer. The learning process is a long one, there is much trial and error, but finally the settler acquires an understanding of the region, of what it is capable of producing, and of what it cannot produce. The story of the early settlement of the Lake Macquarie region is, consequently, a story of alternating failures and success, of men coming to terms with a new environment.

The Threlkelds and the Simpsons were in 1826 the only white settlers in the lake district, but it was not long before others also began to acquire lakeside properties. Even in 1826 there were at least two unsuccessful applicants for land at the lake. A man named William McMehan was advised by the Surveyor-General in July 1826 that he could not be granted any land at Reid's Mistake until the country had been surveyed and the necessary appropriations for government purposes made. In December of the same year, an applicant named A. Greig was informed that he could not obtain land at the lake entrance because it was reserved from sale.²

During 1829 Surveyor James Ralfe arrived at Lake Macquarie to survey the surrounding countryside, and this opened the area to settlement. Particularly at the northern end of the lake, because of proximity to Newcastle, a number of grants of land had been recorded by 1830, and many more portions were taken up during the next ten years. At this point we will steal a swift glance at the Lake Macquarie settlement pattern, as it emerged during the late 1820's and early 1830's.

When the establishment of the Lake Macquarie aboriginal mission was being contemplated in 1825, there were already numerous settlers around Brisbane Water to the southwards, communicating with Sydney by water. In the same year, a wealthy schoolmaster of Sydney selected a farm near the first practicable crossing-place on Wyong Creek, a few miles north of Brisbane Water. His name was William Cape, and his original 500-acre property was situated on the northern bank of the creek, a short distance upstream from the present town of Wyong. One of Cape's sons, William Timothy, acquired grants at Wyong and further up the Doralong valley; another son, Richard, secured a small property at Point Wolstonecroft near the southern extremity of Lake Macquarie. Unfortunately, Richard came to be involved in some doubtful occupations, including cattle stealing, and possibly used this isolated property in this trade. Old Mr. Cape had brought

² RAHS journal, v. 31, pt. 2, 1945: Jervis, James, *Lake Macquarie, its discovery and settlement*, p. 107.

a large number of cattle to the Wyong district early in 1826, and many of these ran wild and multiplied in the surrounding districts.³

By the middle of the 1830's there were some other settlers in the vicinity of Wyong, including a handful of timber-cutters who operated in the heavily forested gullies towards the west. At least some of these men were cutting cedar without licences. A man named Farrell acquired some property a little to the north of Cape's farm, and some miles further northwards in the vicinity of Wyee were one or two large selections belonging to a gentleman by the name of Walker, who does not appear to have developed his land in any way.⁴

In the Dora Creek district there were at least four important grants of land by about 1830. Two of them, each of 2,000 acres, were those belonging to Percy Simpson, and have been described previously. Adjoining Simpson's land at Kourumbung, on the eastern side, was a grant to John Tingcombe in 1830. The deeds of this grant were issued in 1837 to John Edye Manning, Registrar of the Supreme Court of New South Wales, and so the property was generally known as Manning's grant.⁵ On the northern bank of Dora Creek, opposite Simpson's Kourumbung grant, lay another large portion of 1,500 acres which was promised in 1829 to Patrick F. Campbell of Maitland.⁶ It was this property which was purchased over half a century later by the Seventh-day Adventists for the establishment of the Avondale College which is there today. At no time did Campbell reside on his grant, and it appears to have lain undeveloped during the 1830's.

In September of 1829 Edward Gostwyck Cory of the Paterson district selected 560 acres at 'Wangi Wangi'.⁷ Cory did little to develop this land at the lake, and Wangi Point became a favoured haunt of cattle thieves.

A little further northwards was Rev. L. E. Threlkeld's Ebenezer mission station on the Toronto-Coal Point peninsula, a locality known to the aborigines as 'Derahbambah' or 'Punte'. Threlkeld received authorization to possess his 1,280 acres grant in November 1829, and commenced the mission there about 1831, though the clearing of part of the land and preparation for the mission must have commenced some months earlier. A small farm was cultivated by Threlkeld's helpers, fruit trees of many kinds were planted, and a herd of dairy cattle was kept in well fenced paddocks.

Near the northernmost extremity of Lake Macquarie were some important grants. On 4th September 1829 Captain James St. John Ranclaud was

³ Swancott, Charles W., *Blue Gum Flat to Budgewoi* (Gosford, 1963).

⁴ Much information respecting these early grants has been obtained by studying early maps of the County of Northumberland, and registers of land grants at the Lands Department, Sydney.

⁵ CSIL: letters from Brisbane Water Police Office during 1835.

⁶ Lands Department: Register of Land Grants (County of Northumberland), 1840-64, No. 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*

authorized to possess 2,560 acres in the Teralba district.⁸ Ranclaud had served in the British Army for at least twenty years, part of which time had been spent in India. His extensive grant at Lake Macquarie was bounded on the east and north by Cockle Creek, and extended westward almost to the foot of the Sugarloaf Range at the village of Killingworth. In 1831 this district was identified by the name of 'Tirelbah', a title which Surveyor Felton Mathew used to identify a trigonometrical station he established near the lakeshore.⁹ Two years later a reference was made to 'Teralba' as the locality of Ranclaud's farm.¹⁰ The Ranclaud family settled on the estate and some cattle were grazed in the area. The homestead was built at some distance from the lakeshore, at a point where the tributaries of Cockle Creek carried fresh water. From the house a dray track was cut across the hills to Wallsend.

In May of 1830 Captain Ranclaud acquired a second smaller land grant at Lake Macquarie. Comprising 914 acres, it adjoined the original 2,560 acres on the south-eastern side, and was originally a grant promised to Madam Rens of Sydney, in 1829.¹¹

Then on 30th May 1832 Captain Ranclaud died at the comparatively early age of forty-six years, leaving his widow Susannah and at least one son, christened James St. John after his father, aged sixteen years. This son was the legal heir to the property, but within a few years the land was mortgaged and later passed to other claimants.¹²

On the eastern bank of Cockle Creek, and incorporating the lands taken up by the present-day townships of Boolaroo and Speer's Point, was a land grant of 1,280 acres possessed by William Brooks. The locality was variously known as 'Milloba' and 'Biddaba', both aboriginal names, but Brooks gave the estate the name 'Lochend', which was appropriate since his property lay at the northern end of the lake.¹³ Brooks selected the land in December of 1828, after it had been advertised in a Government Notice. Jervis mentions that prior to this time the grant was occupied by a person named R. Sadleir.¹⁴ William Brooks developed his estate in various ways, and during the 1830's much of the land was cleared and farmed. It appears that a small settler named William Clarke may have rented a part of it for a time. Evidence of this is contained in one of the informative letters of the Quaker James Backhouse, who traversed the area on a visit to the Ebenezer

⁸ *Ibid.*, Register No. 9.

⁹ Jervis, James: *op. cit.*, p. III.

¹⁰ *New South Wales Calendar and Directory for 1833* containing description of the road from Brisbane Water to Maitland.

¹¹ Lands Department: Register of Land Grants (County of Northumberland), No. 10: 1840-64.

¹² Commissioners of Claims for Lands: Case No. 343, 4 June 1839.

¹³ Lands Department: Register of Grants (County of Northumberland), No. 9.

¹⁴ Jervis, James: *op. cit.*

mission station in April 1836. Here is the brief reference to Clarke's farm, as retold by B. W. Champion:¹⁵

Their route took them to the farm of one William Clarke, who had been a member of the Life Guards, but had emigrated for his health's sake. Clarke's place was known as 'The Lower Farm', and was situated at the northern end of the Lake, about ten miles from Newcastle. Backhouse describes his dwelling as 'a rough hut of split timber and bark'—which, however, belied the settler's prosperous circumstances. Backhouse conceived a high opinion of Clarke's character. Leaving his farm, they pursued their way to Ebenezer.

Brooks received the title deeds to his grant in 1839, and a year or two later he opened the Lochend Colliery on his land.¹⁶ Some years later the property passed to the ownership of a wealthy business man named William Speer.

Brooks' 1,280-acre grant was adjoined on the eastern side by another of the same size, possessed by Jonathan Warner. This, too, was selected at an early date, July 1829, possession being authorized on 8th February 1831.¹⁷ Warner came to Lake Macquarie as a disbanded officer from the New South Wales Royal Veteran Battalion, and settled on his lakeside grant in or before February of 1831.¹⁸ Following retirement from military service, Warner was located in the Wiseman's Ferry district in 1828 as an Assistant Surveyor of Roads and Bridges, where he probably worked for a time in association with Percy Simpson. When Simpson called attention to the newly discovered line of road from Wiseman's to Maitland via the Lake Macquarie area, Warner was sent to examine it, and his very detailed report of his journey and of the suitability of the route for roadmaking was forwarded to the colonial government.¹⁹ It is likely that his journey through the Lake Macquarie district on that occasion in 1828 may have influenced him to apply for the 1,280-acre grant at the northern end of the lake a few months later. His beautiful estate, overlooking a broad bay, was an excellent place for an officer to retire, and with the assistance of his sons and a small number of assigned convict servants, he established a prosperous farm. A fine orange orchard was planted, a very respectable timber house was built overlooking the lake, and the spot thereafter became a famous landmark in the northern part of Lake Macquarie. From the farm, a dray track led back over the hills to Newcastle, and in later years this track was frequently travelled by parties of visitors who came down to Warner's place for picnics.

During the five years prior to 1830, the population of Newcastle increased fairly rapidly, and soon a broad belt of privately owned lands extended all

¹⁵ RAHS journal, v. 25, 1939: Champion, B. W., *Lancelot Edward Threlkeld, his life and work, 1788-1859*.

¹⁶ SMH, 9 Aug. 1843.

¹⁷ Lands Department: Register of Land Grants (County of Northumberland), No. 9.

¹⁸ CSIL: Warner, 28 Feb. 1831.

¹⁹ CSIL: Warner, 7 May 1828.

the way from Newcastle to the northern shores of the lake.²⁰ There would probably have been a similar pattern of land ownership along the eastern shore of the lake, between Warner's and the lake heads, except that this extensive territory had earlier been reserved for the aboriginal mission. The mission at Bahtahbah was abandoned by 1831, but it was a long time before the government yielded to numerous requests to release the 10,000 acres for sale. However, the land on the southern side of the lake entrance had not been reserved, and by the mid 1830's some small grants had been made in this area. A small property at Reid's Mistake belonged to J. H. Boughton, who lived in the Paterson River district, but had a small party of assigned servants operating a saltworks there.²¹

This, then, is the picture of settlement about Lake Macquarie in the first years of its development. With the exception of Threlkeld and Simpson, these settlers entered the lake scene just prior to, or shortly after 1830. Hence the 1830's in the Lake Macquarie district constituted a period of real Australian frontier life and turmoil. There were all sorts of developmental problems to be contended with, and many of these problems were the result of bad relationships between the three different groups of people that were scattered throughout the district. There were, first of all, the free settlers; those who owned the land and were bent upon its exploitation. These people we have been speaking about in the preceding paragraphs. At the opposite end of the scale there were the aborigines, the original inhabitants and owners of the entire countryside, but whose right to it was being rudely brushed aside by the free settlers. The lot of these people will be the subject of our next chapter. But between these two groups was thrust a third class of people, the prisoners of the Crown, the presence of whom had a good deal to do with the violence and vandalism committed during the years of pioneering.

No story of early Australia is complete without some reference to the part played by the convicts. However much we may regret our past history, to ignore some of its less pleasing features is to create a very untrue picture of life as our forefathers lived it. During the silent twenty-five years that elapsed between Reid's discovery of the lake in 1800 and the arrival of the first settlers, many prisoners must have come upon its peaceful shores while making a bid for escape from the inhuman treatment they received in the Newcastle coal mines. How many of these poor souls found their way southwards to Sydney is anyone's guess, and doubtless some of them perished along the way. Some of these things we shall never know.

These were men and women who had lost not merely wealth or status, but their self-respect and their freedom—the freedom to live, and for some poor wretches, the freedom to die. They were graded like apples. The most

²⁰ See Perry, T. M., *Australia's first frontier* (Melb. U.P., 1963), p. 70 (map of lands granted in the Hunter valley in 1830).

²¹ GPO: 'Brisbane Water Depositions, 1835-1842', from depositions taken in 1835.

depraved, either by character or reputation, as well as multitudes under colonial sentence, were exiled to remote places of special punishment—Norfolk Island, Van Diemen's Land, Newcastle, and other penal establishments. Others were consigned to the chain gangs, often working in irons on the roads and other government works of the day. Some few, because of special abilities or favour with the authorities, were privileged to fill important posts in the colony. But for the very large numbers of 'assigned servants' penal servitude meant being farmed out to the service of free settlers all over the country, and they were considered fortunate who found masters with some degree of sympathy, and respect for their manhood and womanhood.

But a good many of the assigned servants found themselves in virtual slavery. They were required to labour without wages, with no choice of employment, and very often with little hope of obtaining pardon. On the farms in the country districts—and these included Brisbane Water and Lake Macquarie—the men were lodged in earth-floored huts and out-houses, where they cooked, ate and slept under very primitive conditions. If they displayed indifference in their work, or were insolent, or were absent without permission, their masters reported this to a magistrate and had them flogged. If the free settler was absent from his farm, as many were for long periods, a favoured convict was appointed by him as an overseer of the others. Such a fellow was usually open to bribery, or was one who derived some satisfaction from having others punished. A few prisoners of 'suitable character' were appointed police constables and scourgers, and received a nominal wage for keeping discipline. These were generally ticket-of-leave men, who had earned a measure of freedom as a reward for good conduct.

Apart from some runaways from the Newcastle settlement who turned bushrangers and menaced everybody else, the convict population of the Lake Macquarie and Brisbane Water districts belonged to the assigned servant class, and the majority of these were of Irish blood. The Rev. L. E. Threlkeld and Lieutenant Percy Simpson brought the first assignees to the lake district in 1826, and others arrived with settlers who came soon afterwards. As early as about 1825 there was a nucleus of settlers around Brisbane Water, and the colonial government of the time regarded the Brisbane Water Police District as extending from the Hawkesbury River northwards to include the Tuggerah Lakes and most of Lake Macquarie, there being some vagueness about the exact boundary with the Newcastle Police District. In the entire Brisbane Water Police District, the convict population reached a maximum of about two hundred persons by 1840.²²

The earliest population statistics for the entire Brisbane Water district (including Lake Macquarie) available to us are for the year 1829, when a total of eighty-nine persons resided in the area, of whom forty-two were

²² According to the 1841 Brisbane Water Census (Archives Office), there were then 198 convicts in a total district population of 1,090 persons.

convicts assigned to the various free settlers.²³ From this time, however, growth in population was fairly rapid, and by 1831 the government had found it necessary to station three constables in the neighbourhood of Brisbane Water. At the small settlement which later became Gosford, a lock-up was constructed, a scourger employed from time to time, and a court was held there whenever a magistrate visited the locality.

These visits from Sydney magistrates were often infrequent and irregular, and as the number of free settlers increased, a need was felt for more regular visits by these officers to deal with problems arising from the convict population, and to investigate the dubious activities of cedar-cutters. Run-aways from Newcastle and Maitland were always at large in the district, and by the early 1830's there were many instances of robbery and plunder by these terrorists, who sometimes combined into gangs. One of the earliest reports of bushrangers in the Lake Macquarie district came from Percy Simpson at Kourumbung in a letter to the Colonial Secretary in 1828:²⁴

I, acting on a statement to me by some black natives proceeded in search of bushrangers whom they had seen at Manaring Creek distant from hence seven miles. On Friday last, I succeeded in capturing three of them. During my absence for two days, an armed man without a pass or certificate visited my farm, and my men, on being ordered by Mrs. Simpson to take him into custody, refused.

Simpson added that eastward of his station,

... towards the borders of Broadwater and Lake Macquarie, small herds of stray and wild cattle exist, where there are several bushrangers who subsist on cabbage tree roots, game, and probably cattle.

The problems of settlers were aggravated by the activities of the sawyers. As early as 1830 there were parties of men engaged in cutting cedar in the valleys westward of the Tuggerah Lakes and Lake Macquarie. The Australian cedar has, of course, always been a prized tree for timber of fine quality and beauty, and in very early times cedar logs were taken from the Hunter River flats, including the Maitland district, which was then known as Wallis Plains. By about 1820 most of the more accessible stands of cedar in the Hunter valley had been cut, and other sources of supply were sought after.²⁵ For a time, the cedar-getters obtained this timber from the rain-forests of the Illawarra scarp, southwards of Sydney, but in most places it was impossible to ship the logs from the coastline, and so they had to be carted overland to Sydney at great expense and with great difficulty. Meanwhile, the colonial government had become concerned about the reckless

²³ GPO: 'Brisbane Water Tickets of Leave, 1827-1841', containing a return of the population in 1829 (Archives Office).

²⁴ CSIL: Simpson, 6 Apr. 1828.

²⁵ See Perry, T. M., *Australia's first frontier* (Melb. U.P., 1963), p. 114 for a useful summary of the cedar-cutting.

cutting of the cedar stands with no thought for the future, and Orders were published prohibiting the unauthorized taking of cedar. Licences were issued to a limited number of sawyers, and these were permitted to cut no more than a specified quantity of this valuable timber.

These were the circumstances that preceded the discovery of vast quantities of cedar in the heavily forested ranges westward of the Tuggerah and Macquarie Lakes. Many applications were received by the government for licences operative in this new area, and a number of these applications were granted. However, the comparative ease with which the logs could be taken from the valleys to navigable waterways and shipped to Sydney, encouraged the participation of the 'cedar gangs' comprised of unlicensed cutters. In the extensive unpoliced and sparsely settled Brisbane Water district these cedar gangs were composed largely of disreputable characters who, as well as spoiling the forests, were almost constantly a menace to free settlers. In 1830 William Cape of Wyong complained to the government about the activities of the cedar gangs operating in his district.²⁶ 'I have neither ground nor men I can call my own since this has been allowed,' he said. Cape stated that the sawyers were carting the cedar to the nearest navigable creek, and either floating or sailing the logs across the Tuggerah Lakes to a point less than half a mile overland from Cabbage Tree Harbour, a small protected bay on the seacoast a little northward of Norah Head. From this harbour, the timber was shipped to Sydney. In response to Cape's appeal, a convict constable, Robert Chitty, was posted at Cabbage Tree to keep an eye on these activities, but in 1831 he was called back to the watch-house at Brisbane Water to carry out the duties of scourger there.²⁷ The presence of the cedar gangs caused much anxiety to the isolated settlers near Wyong and Lake Macquarie, who blamed the sawyers for robberies of cattle, foodstuffs, and other property. Further, it was believed that the timber-cutters were interfering with the district natives, breeding hostility which inevitably led to attacks on farms.

Already a number of settlers had made appeals to Sydney for a resident magistrate when, in October of 1831, an official request or memorial was prepared and signed by most of the residents of the Brisbane Water district, including such well-known property owners as F. A. Hely, J. E. Manning, William Cape, Thomas Scott, Henry Holden, Willoughby Bean, and many others. The prepared statement emphasized the urgent need for greater control in the Brisbane Water district where, according to one settler, 'four fifths of the population are prisoners of the Crown, many of which are unruly and insolent, as well as indolent and disobedient'.²⁸ The memorial was duly received in Sydney, from whence an officer was shortly

²⁶ CSIL: Cape, 10 Jan. 1831.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, and also a police officer's report to the Colonial Secretary, dated 6 Apr. 1831, commenting upon Cape's letter (CSIL).

²⁸ CSIL: John Moore, 7 Apr. 1832.

despatched to report on the situation. This officer urged that some action should be taken, and although it was not immediately possible to supply a resident magistrate at Gosford, it happened that a retired lieutenant had just settled at the northern end of Lake Macquarie, and an immediate approach was made to him to undertake regular visits to Brisbane Water to conduct a court there. The name of the retiring lieutenant was Jonathan Warner.

The call to be visiting magistrate came to Warner at the end of 1831. He was offered the sum of fifty pounds per annum to hold a court once a fortnight. Because of the distance between his farm and Brisbane Water, Warner considered that the allowance was insufficient, and explained this in his reply to the Colonial Secretary:²⁹

The distance I shall have to travel from hence to the District of Brisbane Water being forty miles, a Bush Road, and many Creeks to cross—the sum of fifty pounds pr. annum will not be sufficient to recover expenses, and my loss of time from my Farm, as it will take me upon an average throughout the year four days in each fortnight to perform the journey and one day to do the duty required there.

I shall feel most happy in performing any Duty for the benefit of government and the Public at large, but from the time I shall have to be absent from my Farm, having a wife and eight children to maintain from my small Pittance and Industry, . . . I do not perceive that I can perform this service for less than £100 pr. annum.

It took the colonial government a year or so to consider all this, but eventually Warner's counter-offer was accepted, and early in 1833 he commenced his fortnightly visits to Brisbane Water in the cause of justice.³⁰ It required two days' travel on horseback for both the forward and return journeys each fortnight, and because of the hazards of blacks and bush-rangers, two of Warner's sons accompanied him for security. They slept in the bush for a night during the journey in each direction. Sometimes the weather made travel unpleasant. On one occasion in August of 1834, Warner left his home at sunrise, and after crossing a number of streams swollen from recent rains, arrived at the 'Kuringbong Creek' at sunset; he found Dora Creek in flood, and had to camp on the northern bank for the night and wait to cross it at noon the following day.³¹

By 1833 the population of the entire Brisbane Water district had grown to a total of 315 persons, of whom 152 were prisoners of the Crown.³² These numbers included the comparatively few Europeans who inhabited the remote district of Lake Macquarie, where the increasing number of

²⁹ CSIL: Warner, 21 Dec. 1831.

³⁰ 'Schedule of Appointments for Quarter ended 31st. March 1833' (CSIL) lists Jonathan Warner as 'Visiting Magistrate, Brisbane Water'.

³¹ CSIL: Warner, Aug. 1834.

³² GPO: 'Brisbane Water Tickets of Leave, 1827-1841', containing a return of the population in 1833 (Archives Office).

settlers brought the usual problems of inadequate discipline due to the absence of even convict policemen. Warner studied this problem, and concluded that there were two spots in the lake district where trouble commonly occurred, due to the presence of runaways. These two places were the lake entrance at Reid's Mistake, and the locality of Simpson's farm at 'Kourumbung'. At the former place it was difficult to cross the channel without a boat, but at Kourumbung there was a very convenient crossing-place on Dora Creek. Simpson's farm was also visited periodically by groups of aborigines, who sometimes raided the gardens and the dairies, and even speared the cattle. Warner noted that the blacks were afraid of the mounted police, and in a letter to the Colonial Secretary³³ on one occasion he suggested that,

. . . if a party of that Corps was occasionally to visit Kuringbong and the neighbourhood of the Wyong Creek and Tuggerah Lakes it would no doubt intimidate the blacks from visiting those places so frequently as they do.

In another report dated in August of 1834,³⁴ Jonathan Warner made a definite recommendation to the Governor. He described the state of affairs in the Lake Macquarie region, and suggested that a convict constable should be posted at 'Kuringbong, . . . a remote station, as there are continually so many suspicious characters passing by that place'. And realizing that in all probability a new constable would have to be appointed to fill such a position, Warner suggested a suitable person in the same letter:

Moses Carroll, pr. *Regalia*, Life, 1826, assigned to his wife, and who has been living at that Station ever since 1826, and who until lately (when he was assigned to his wife on her arrival in the Colony) was Mr. Percy Simpson's Servant since his arrival, is a man I can recommend to be made a Constable.

From various items of correspondence dating about this time,³⁵ we learn a good deal about Moses Carroll and his family. He was a native of Dublin, Ireland, and it is possible that he was transported to New South Wales in connection with Irish riots against the British about 1825. At the time of his transportation 'for the term of his natural life', Carroll was married and had a family of three children—Mary, aged nine years; James, aged four; and Peter, about two. He arrived in Sydney on the transport *Regalia* in 1826, and was immediately assigned to Percy Simpson. With other men, he helped to clear the forest for Simpson's farm on Dora Creek, and remained there as a stockman to Simpson. When the latter moved with his family to Wiseman's Ferry in 1828, Carroll was appointed overseer of the station, looking after the several hundred head of cattle running in the vicinity.

³³ CSIL: Warner, 9 Nov. 1833.

³⁴ CSIL: Warner, 2 Aug. 1834.

³⁵ CSIL: letters from Carroll, Simpson, and Warner.

In December of the same year he directed a petition to the Governor, praying that his wife and children be granted a passage to the colony. He repeated this petition a year later, and with a recommendation from Simpson, it was finally granted. His wife, Sarah, and the three children arrived sometime before or during 1833. By this time Carroll appears to have held a ticket-of-leave for good behaviour, and since Simpson no longer owned the station at Kourumbung, Carroll petitioned the Governor for permission to be assigned to his wife in May of 1833. This request was also granted to him, and the family lived together on the old station at Kourumbung.

It will be recalled that a year or two prior to this, Percy Simpson had been declared bankrupt in the Supreme Court in Sydney, and his creditors had taken possession of his 2,000-acre grant at Kourumbung. It appears that Simpson's land was leased by Frederick Augustus Hely, who owned a number of properties in the Brisbane Water district. Hely already rented other properties in the Dora Creek district, including land at the mouth of Dora Creek where Eraring is now located. A convict overseer named Alexander Oliver was in charge of Hely's cattle there, and a dairy station was in operation.³⁶ When Hely died quite suddenly in 1836, his estates and property were transferred to his wife.

All of this property interest in the Dora Creek neighbourhood served to increase the importance of the Kourumbung region, and since the Carrolls were in all probability the only permanent residents there in 1833, it is not surprising that Jonathan Warner recommended Carroll for the duties of a district constable. In Sydney, the Colonial Secretary referred Warner's recommendation to the Surveyor-General, Major Thomas Mitchell, for a report. Mitchell must have been reasonably familiar with the area, and was able to pass on a further suggestion for the attention of the appropriate authorities:³⁷

The locality of Kourumbung is on Simpson's Road at his farm and which, though in a very thinly located country, is in a central position; a lock-up house might therefore be useful for the purpose of preventing the movement of runaways from the Hunter's River to the Hawkesbury.

When Major Mitchell's opinion was relayed to Warner, the latter was quite enthusiastic about the idea of erecting a lock-up at the Dora Creek crossing. In a letter dated in September 1834, he wrote:³⁸

I am not aware of any place so well adapted for a Lock-up as Kuringbong, and as I am so well acquainted with the locality of the creeks, brushes, and swamps in that neighbourhood, I do not imagine there are many places in the Colony so well suited for the occasion.

The paths from Maitland, Newcastle, or Lake Macquarie to Kuring-

³⁶ CSIL: Brisbane Water police, 30 Apr. 1836.

³⁷ CSIL: Warner, 15 Sep. 1834, enclosing Memorandum from Major T. Mitchell.

³⁸ CSIL: Warner, 15 Sep. 1834.

bong lead the traveller to a ford over the Kuringbong Creek, and if a bushranger, or any other person is not well acquainted with that Station, they would find it very difficult to pass in any other manner than the ford. The main creek is very deep below the crossing place, and above it the banks are so high and thickly timbered with brushes.

These recommendations were sufficient for the Governor, who thereupon issued the instruction:³⁹ 'Let Moses Carroll be appointed Constable in the Brisbane Water District and stationed at Kuringbong, and let a Lock-up House be constructed there.'

While the appointment of Carroll was taking effect, another of the district constables, Robert Chitty, was removed from office because of bad conduct, and his place was taken by Richard Gorman. This detail is of interest, for Richard Gorman had recently received permission to marry Mary Carroll, a daughter of Moses, and so he became Carroll's son-in-law. Richard Gorman fulfilled the duties of policeman for about thirty years, during which time he was stationed at Mangrove, Gosford, and possibly other places.

The lock-up house at Kourumbung was constructed in 1835, and most of the work appears to have been carried out by yet another constable named Henry Worley.⁴⁰ He had been appointed to the police earlier in that year, and was located semi-permanently at Reid's Mistake, where he was commanded to obstruct the progress of runaways. Once completed, the lock-up at Kourumbung was placed under the superintendence of Moses Carroll. It must have been situated fairly close to his house, and probably within the grounds of the existing Roman Catholic Church at Cooranbong. If an absconding prisoner was captured by Constable Carroll, he could be detained in the lock-up until arrangements were made for his removal to Brisbane Water for trial. Punishment could vary from about fifty lashes to seven years' sentence. Scourgings took place at the watch-house at Brisbane Water.

In his police duties, Moses Carroll proved to be very faithful and active. On at least two occasions during 1835, he risked his life in capturing dangerous persons. At Adam Rainey's hut at Duralong, near Wyong, Carroll led three other men in the capture of three aborigines who had been involved in depredations on nearby farms.⁴¹ A reward had been offered for their apprehension, and presumably this was handed to Carroll. A short time later, he assisted another constable, George Woods, in the capture of a bushranger named James Morissey, and again qualified to receive a monetary reward.⁴²

What with bushranging, robberies, attacks by aborigines, cattle stealing

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ CSIL: Henry Worley, 10 Jan. 1835.

⁴¹ GPO: 'Brisbane Water Depositions, 1835-1842', from depositions taken in 1835 (Archives Office).

⁴² *Ibid.*

and illegal timber cutting, the 1830's were rather wild and disorderly years in the Lake Macquarie districts. On some occasions, runaways amalgamated to form gangs which plundered farms, robbed travellers, or in a few instances murdered them. Two such gangs operating in the lake district were those of Macdonald and Marshall. Macdonald had escaped from custody at Maitland, and was much feared in the country about Brisbane Water. In June 1834 he and another runaway were captured by Constable Robert Chitty and taken into custody. However, on the track between Kourumbung and Warner's house, the two prisoners managed to seize the constable's pistol, liberated themselves from the handcuffs, and escaped into the bush.⁴³ Constable Chitty was accused of negligence in the affair, and was removed from his position in consequence. Meanwhile, however, Macdonald was back with his gang and depredations continued. An aboriginal at Kourumbung was reported to have information as to the gang's whereabouts, and this brought Warner over to Carroll's place to learn all that he could. Warner was introduced to a native woman named Nelly, who normally lived at Kourumbung with her family, and she was able to give some information respecting Macdonald and his gang. Carroll himself was able to tell Warner that he had known Macdonald well for the past seven years, that he was an excellent bushman and very well acquainted with the surrounding districts.⁴⁴ Whether he was ultimately captured or not we do not know.

One day during the winter of 1835, four bushrangers appeared from the brushes on the northern bank of the Lake Macquarie entrance channel at Reid's Mistake. On the opposite side of the channel there was at this time a saltworks owned by Mr. J. H. Boughton, who was absent most of the time, leaving the works in the charge of three assigned servants. The four bushrangers were able to attract the attention of Boughton's men, and somehow managed to persuade them to provide a ferry service across the channel, so enabling the four runaways to make a getaway into the bush country southwards. This episode was later discovered and it led to an enquiry concerning the management of the saltworks. It was learned that Mr. Boughton resided at Paterson in the Hunter valley, and visited his salt industry only about once each fortnight. He possessed about 600 acres on the southern side of the channel where the town of Swansea is now located, and had owned this land since July 1833. Following the incident we have related, Boughton was warned that he should not leave the saltworks under the sole charge of assigned servants, so in 1836 he closed his little enterprise, and removed his men elsewhere.⁴⁵

Cattle stealing operated on a large scale during the 1830's in the Lake

⁴³ CSIL: Warner, 21 July 1834.

⁴⁴ CSIL: Warner, 30 Aug. 1834.

⁴⁵ CSIL: Warner, Aug. and Sep. 1835.

Macquarie district, and this business involved both free men and convicts. Typical of many incidents was an affair at the Wyhee stockyard in 1836.⁴⁶ Wyhee, meaning 'bushfire',⁴⁷ was the name given by the blacks to the locality of two small creeks about midway between Wyong and Kourumbung. The village of Wyee is situated there today. At this place John Moore, a property owner of Avoca Beach east of Gosford, had constructed a stockyard in November 1835 for the purpose of collecting cattle. Moore had agreed to purchase from Richard Cape of Wyong about two hundred head of cattle that were running wild, at fifty pounds for the lot, but with the understanding that Moore was to collect the cattle at his own risk. Moore purchased a small property near the southern boundary of Lake Macquarie at a place known as 'Chainbibber' (Moore renamed it 'Recovery'), and it was his intention to collect the cattle in small numbers, impound them in his stockyard at Wyhee, and then drive them through the bush to his property Recovery. Moore commanded two of his assigned servants, one of whom was Joseph Frost, to begin rounding up the cattle. These two men built a temporary hut for themselves close to the Wyhee stockyard.

Certainly John Moore was buying 'a pig in a poke' with this venture, especially since the transaction involved Richard Cape, an irresponsible young man who was later proved to be a cattle thief. Moore's men found difficulty in finding the cattle, since they were unbranded and running wild all over the Lake Macquarie district. Moore therefore put up notices warning all district land-holders that he was collecting wild cattle, and would brand all unbranded beasts that he found. This plan was proceeded with, until one day in July 1836 a stockman who looked after some of Mr. W. T. Cape's cattle at Wyong area, stopped by Moore's stockyard at Wyhee, and saw there impounded a red and white heifer that belonged to his master. About the same date, Moses Carroll passed by the Wyhee stockyard, and noticed the carcass of a dark brindle bull which he recognized as belonging to the station at Kourumbung. When this was reported at Brisbane Water, Constable Richard Gorman was sent to arrest the settler John Moore on a charge of stealing cattle. Jonathan Warner heard the case a short while afterwards, and Moore was found guilty. Inasmuch as Moore's assigned servant, Joseph Frost, had also been involved in the affair by his master's orders, he too was charged with the same offence and probably considered himself fortunate to escape with a flogging.

This story will have a particular interest for those who have at some time visited the graves of Joseph Frost, his wife Eliza, and daughter Emily, in a small clearing on a bush-covered hillside about a mile from Coorانبong. Born in 1808, Joe Frost was convicted of an unknown offence and

⁴⁶ GPO: 'Brisbane Water Depositions, 1835-1842', from depositions taken in 1836 (Archives Office).

⁴⁷ McCarthy, F. D., *Aboriginal Place Names and their Meanings*.

transported for life in the ship *Warbius* in 1827.⁴⁸ For many years he was an assigned servant to John Moore, but by 1842 he held a ticket-of-leave, and probably received a Conditional Pardon shortly after that date. He married, and in 1864 was able to take up a forty-acre property near Cooranbong as a Conditional Purchase. Here the family lived until their deaths, all around the turn of the century. Frost, his wife, and daughter, were buried together on a corner of their own small property, and descendants have since erected headstones over the three lonely graves. Bushfires in the intervening years have blackened the marble, but the memorials remain to mark these resting places. The Frosts had at least one son, Frederick, who in 1878 was almost killed when he fell from a horse. Reporting the incident, the *Newcastle Morning Herald*⁴⁹ described Joseph Frost as 'a farmer, and an old and respected resident of the Cooranbong district'.

Cattle stealing continued in the lake region for a considerable time, and occasionally an arrest was made of one or more of the culprits. In 1843 there was a party of cattle thieves in the Dora Creek district, operating with a good deal of success. Reporting on the situation to the Colonial Secretary,⁵⁰ the Brisbane Water magistrate described their tactics:

From the position which these men have chosen, they can with great facility steal and conceal cattle and get them by unfrequented ways which they are well acquainted with to the Upper Hunter and the Wollombi, and cattle from those parts may be temporarily concealed near and in the cedar brushes in the neighbourhood of Dora Creek.

Another favoured haunt of these cattlemen was Reid's Mistake. Here herds of cattle were driven and taken across the lake entrance. During the 1840's a man named Henry Denny squatted there on the land owned by Boughton and assisted the cattle stealers.⁵¹ An end to this business seems to have come only when there were no more stray cattle to be collected in the Lake Macquarie district, and the traders moved on to more profitable districts.

Moses Carroll remained in charge of the Kourumbung lock-up until the year 1840, when he was granted hard-earned freedom. Sometime prior to this date, his wife Sarah passed away, for in May of 1839 he requested the Governor's permission to marry a second time. At the time of the 1841 census, Carroll was still living at the old station on Dora Creek, and his address in the census records was given as 'Coorumbung'.⁵² We are not able to ascertain the year of his death, but there is no doubt that he ended his

⁴⁸ GPO: 'Brisbane Water Depositions, 1835-1842', from depositions taken in 1836 (Archives Office).

⁴⁹ *NMH*, 10 June 1878.

⁵⁰ GPO: 'Brisbane Water Letter Book, 1838-1846', p. 344 (Archives Office).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 224-5.

⁵² Colonial Secretary: Census of 1841, district of Brisbane Water (Archives Office).

days at Cooranbong, which had been his home since 1826. It is claimed that he was the first person to receive Christian burial in the district, and his grave is supposed to be in the Roman Catholic cemetery at Cooranbong.⁵³

When Carroll was first made a constable, the wage paid for that duty was 2/3d. per day, a scourger receiving 1/9d. per day. By 1840, constables in the Brisbane Water district were receiving 2/9d. daily, and when duty called them out at night to search for runaways, a bonus of 1/- per night was earned. The rewards for capturing dangerous persons seem ridiculously small to us today. In 1838, for example, Constable Richard Gorman received a reward of 2/- for his seizure single-handed of a runaway, John Walsh.⁵⁴

The close of the 1830's saw the crude and disorderly days quickly coming to an end in the Brisbane Water district, where the convict population reached its peak about 1840. Throughout the Australian colonies, the old penal establishments were gradually being broken up, runaways and bushrangers were becoming less troublesome in most parts, and free settlement displayed healthy signs of progress on every hand. However, the lock-up at Kourumbung continued to be maintained, despite periods of inactivity, until well into the 1860's. There was no constable at Kourumbung in 1844, but six years later a man named Archibald Elliott was stationed there.⁵⁵ When a township sprang into existence in 1861, Constable John Overall was in residence, and continued to fulfil his duties for some years after that.⁵⁶ But by that time the character of the district had radically changed. The days of the convicts had passed away like a bad nightmare. Certainly no one could have wished for them back again.

⁵³ Swancott, C. W., *The Brisbane Water Story*, pt. 4, chapter 'Cooranbong'.

⁵⁴ GPO: 'Brisbane Water Tickets of Leave, 1827-1841' (Archives Office).

⁵⁵ GPO: 'Gosford Depositions, 1841-1855' (Archives Office).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1855-1878.

‘NABOTH’S VINEYARD’

THERE have been some proud moments in the history of Lake Macquarie, but there have also been some inglorious ones. One of the darkest blots on our early history has been our treatment of the primitive native people whose home we invaded, and this chapter will be a necessarily brief record of the gradual extinction of our Awabakal aborigines. These were the people whose territory extended from the Hawkesbury country in the south to the Hunter River districts in the north, and westward across a sea of green mountains that rolls on into the Great Divide itself. They were a primitive people, but they were a contented and peace-loving people until the advent of the Europeans. The first contacts between the two widely different races were generally friendly enough, but as the white population increased, it became painfully evident that the two civilizations could not dwell together in harmony. The black race was doomed to destruction, and during the rough and raw colonial days which have long since passed, as little care was taken to preserve the lives of the Lake Macquarie aborigines as was taken to protect the koalas, the lyrebirds, or the tall cedars in the gullies. Human life was cheap, and it was valued according to skin colour.

The earliest contacts of Europeans with the Awabakal natives were peaceful. According to the historian Collins, Captain William Reid met some friendly natives when he sailed into the lake inlet in 1800, and these natives led him to a place where there was coal in abundance.¹ The Rev. L. E. Threlkeld found the aborigines to be kindly disposed towards him, and he was able to maintain their respect and friendship during his entire missionary endeavour. The first chaplain at Newcastle, the Rev. G. A. Middleton, was also much loved by the blacks, and Captain Bingle records how in 1821 the chaplain led an enthusiastic party of them on a walking trip to the lake.² These are typical incidents which illustrate the harmonious relations between the two races in early times.

It seems, too, that the government surveyors who explored and measured the unfamiliar countryside enjoyed friendly contacts with the aborigines, and appreciated assistance which they received in physical emergencies.

¹ Collins, David, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales* . . . v. 2, p. 298.

² Bingle, John, *Past and Present Records of Newcastle*, 1873.

When, in 1829, Surveyor Ralfe came into danger of losing one of his boats during a stormy night at the lake heads, he was saved from a nasty predicament by a large party of natives who lit flares and waded into the water to help pull the boat to safety.³ On another occasion, Major Thomas Mitchell stood on the partly cleared summit of Mount Warrawalong, and silently recalled the occasions when natives had assisted him in difficult circumstances:⁴

On turning to the eastward, my view extended to the unpeopled shores and lonely waters of the vast Pacific. Not a trace of man was visible on any side, except a distant solitary column of smoke that arose from a thicket between the hills on which I stood and the coast, and marked the asylum of a remnant of the aborigines. These unfortunate creatures could no longer enjoy their solitary freedom.

The early contacts were usually friendly. But what a different picture emerged during the 1830's in the Lake Macquarie region! During that time, the old ties of respect and co-operation between black and white were broken. Hatred and strife prevailed as the black men began to attack the white settlers and one another. Even the small number of free settlers who felt kindly disposed towards the natives were forced to defend themselves from parties of bewildered aborigines who had been stirred into a frenzy by the outrageous conduct of runaway prisoners. The only voice that cried loudly against this was Rev. Threlkeld. He worked very hard to win their confidence and loyalty, to give them protection, and to teach them the high ideals of Christianity which his fellow Europeans were trampling underfoot everywhere about him. During the years of his mission work at the site of the Ebenezer station, he sadly watched the numbers of aborigines steadily diminishing. 'The hundreds of aborigines have lessened to tens,' he wrote, 'and the tens will dwindle to units before a very few years will have passed away.'⁵ On another occasion he wrote, 'The blacks have nearly forsaken this Lake.'⁶ Threlkeld's forecasts proved true, for today there is not a single living representative of the tribe whose home was the Lake Macquarie district for centuries of time.

We do not have to search for any long or difficult explanation for the enmity that elbowed its way into relationships between the two races. Trouble commenced when the white settlers began to occupy areas of land that had always been the chief living and hunting grounds of the tribe. The vicinity of the lake entrance, the Toronto area, and the Cooranbong district are three places that are known to have been much frequented by the

³ Field notebook of Surveyor James Ralfe, 1830 (Archives Office).

⁴ Mitchell, Thomas Livingstone, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia...* (London, 1838), v. 1, p. 10.

⁵ HRA—I, v. 21, p. 739.

⁶ Threlkeld, L. E., *Annual Report of the Mission to the Aborigines, Lake Macquarie Inlet, December 31st, 1840* (Mitchell Library).

natives. For them, the lake and its precincts offered tremendous opportunities. Fish, and particularly shellfish, were to be obtained from the lake in abundance, while the thick bushlands around its shores were well stocked with kangaroos and other game. The aborigines did not forsake these places immediately the Europeans arrived, and for a short time the two peoples lived side by side. But when the natives began to help themselves to the gardens and livestock of the white men, the latter were not prepared to share. Some settlers began to use firearms to frighten away the blacks, and in this way violence began to occur. Slowly it dawned upon the simple native mind that the white intruder had come to take by force his hunting grounds and forests, and he must therefore either fight for his life or perish. And fight he did!

Perhaps the greatest single cause of strife between the two races was the presence of a large number of runaways and irresponsible persons. On occasions, aborigines were shot by bushrangers looking for game. At other times the natives invaded settlers' gardens, or they were given firearms by workmen on the farms. Many were offered alcohol by settlers in exchange for information concerning the whereabouts of runaways, about whom the blacks often had useful knowledge. Worst of all were the shameful practices of prisoners who enticed the aboriginal women from their own kin, and committed adultery with them. This was perhaps the worst feature of the whole convict system, which removed young men from their wives and families and isolated them in places on the other side of the earth, where there was little possibility of their ever seeing their womenfolk again. Under such circumstances, human beings descend to almost every form of vice and depravity. Threlkeld was particularly outspoken against these abuses, but he was a very small voice in the wilderness.

In the Wallis Plains district just over the hills from Lake Macquarie, the robbery of native land was even more serious than it was about the lake, and as a consequence parties of aborigines from the Hunter districts invaded the lake areas from time to time, and fights broke out between the tribes over possession of the diminishing countryside. The locality of Kourumbung seems to have been a favourite place for tribal clashes of this nature.

We cannot tell how many aborigines frequented the Lake Macquarie and adjacent districts before the advent of white settlement, since the earliest available statistics date from 1827 and 1828. It was about that time that the colonial government asked some of the well established settlers in various parts of the colony to prepare surveys or reports of the natives commonly seen in their respective districts, and to provide an estimate of their numbers if possible. Probably the reason for wanting this information was that from time to time the government issued items of clothing and blankets for distribution to the natives. Rev. Threlkeld was one who received one of these requests for information in 1828, and he forwarded a brief report on the

tribe which inhabited the precincts of his mission station at Bahtahbah. He referred to his group as 'Old Jackey's Tribe':⁷

There is no proper name for this Tribe, all the persons returned are related to him [Old Jackey] by birth or marriage and therefore congregate together as one family for defense, assistance, etc.

Their usual place of resort was described as the area bounded by the entrance to Lake Macquarie in the south, Newcastle and the Hunter River in the north, and the vicinity of Cockle Creek in the west. 'This boundary about fourteen miles north and south by three east and west, is considered as their own land.' The population of this tribe was given as sixty-four persons, comprised of twenty-four men, twenty-six women, ten boys and four girls.

In his return, Threlkeld mentioned that the Tuggerah Beach aborigines were occasional visitors to his mission station, and that another separate tribe existed on the western side of Lake Macquarie. He had no way of ascertaining the exact numbers in each of these tribes, but he did not think either of them would exceed the population of Old Jackey's tribe.

Some of the names of the members of Old Jackey's Tribe are interesting, being very often a peculiar mixture of native and English names. Werah-kahtah was the name of the 'King of the District', but his English name was Jemmy Jackass. His wife was known to be insane, and lived at Port Macquarie. Old Jackey himself was a venerable old fellow with two wives. The influence of 'whitefella' names is noticeable in the list, examples being found in two native couples—Moses and Mary, and Nanny and Gorman. Another blackfellow was known as Whip-'em-Up; his native name was Wawbah.

One particular member of this tribe became a special companion to Threlkeld, and gave much valuable assistance to him in learning the native language and translating the Scriptures. This aborigine was Biraban, also known as McGill. At a special investiture of certain aboriginal chiefs at Parramatta about 1830, Biraban received a specially inscribed metal badge (actually a brass plate) with the notation, 'Barabahn, or Mac.Gil, Chief of the Tribe of Barabah, on Lake Macquarie, a reward for his assistance in reducing his native tongue to a written language'. Biraban forever afterwards proudly wore this plate on his chest.⁸

In 1839 two or more members of the United States Exploring Expedition under Captain Charles Wilkes visited the Ebenezer mission station, and one of the men, Mr. Agate, drew a pencil portrait of Biraban. The report of the expedition contained the following reference to this native:⁹

⁷ CSIL: Threlkeld, 21 May 1828.

⁸ RAHS journal, v. 25, 1939: Champion, B. W., *Lancelot Edward Threlkeld, his Life and Work, 1788-1859*, pp. 375-6.

⁹ Threlkeld, L. E., *An Australian grammar* . . . (Sydney, 1834), p. 88.

At Mr. Threlkeld's, Mr. Hale saw M'Gill, who was reputed to be one of the most intelligent natives; and his portrait was taken by Mr. Agate. His physiognomy was more agreeable than that of the other blacks, being less strongly marked with the peculiarities of his race; he was about the middle-size, of a dark-chocolate colour, with fine glossy black hair and whiskers, a good forehead, eyes not deeply set, a nose that might be described as aquiline, although depressed and broad at the base. It was very evident that M'Gill was accustomed to teach his native language, for when he was asked the name of anything he pronounced the word very distinctly, syllable by syllable, so that it was impossible to mistake it. Though he is acquainted with the doctrines of Christianity and all the comforts and advantages of civilization, it was impossible for him to overcome his attachment to the customs of his people, and he is always a leader in the corroborees and other assemblies.

In the Brisbane Water district, a free settler named Willoughby Bean supplied a report of the aborigines there in April of 1827.¹⁰ He estimated that the Broken Bay tribe, the Tuggerah Beach tribe, and the Wyong tribe each consisted of about fifteen persons; and that there were approximately ten persons each in the Narara and Erina tribes. This gave a total estimate of sixty-five aborigines in the Brisbane Water region.

Clashes of various kinds between aborigines and settlers were very frequent during the 1830's. Jonathan Warner, the district magistrate, faithfully reported to the Colonial Secretary those incidents that came to his attention, and as a result we have in his letters the source of a good deal of information concerning the activities of the aborigines during that period. Not all of the incidents need to be related here, but the following paragraphs will convey enough to give an accurate picture of the situation as it then existed. A chronological, diary format has been followed to make the narrative seem more real. All of these stories have been taken from the letters of Warner.¹¹

September 1833. About the middle of the month, upwards of sixty aborigines from the neighbourhood of the Black Creek and Maitland came down to Kourumbung. They had in their possession five different types of firearms, and it was obvious that they had come to make war with the Lake Macquarie blacks. One of the invaders, identified as Jacky-Jacky, broke to pieces one of the window shutters of a settler's hut at Kourumbung, and entered the building. A number of other natives followed Jacky in, and they ordered the occupants, a man and a woman, to put on their kettle and give them tea and bread. While this was going on, other natives raided the gardens outside, destroying many beds of young pumpkins and melons. Finally, the whole mob of aborigines ran off into the bush.

¹⁰ CSIL: Willoughby Bean, 16 Apr. 1827.

¹¹ CSIL: Warner, various letters dated from 1833 to 1835.

Reporting this episode a few weeks later, Warner deplored the fact that so many of the aborigines managed to acquire firearms. He wrote,

I beg leave to suggest the necessity of preventing the blacks from being allowed to carry firearms, as the small farms in these situations will be continually robbed by these roving Blacks from the Black Creek, and its vicinity, who come occasionally to Kuringbong and places adjacent to try to kill all the Lake Macquarie blacks, they are too many in numbers for the native tribe at Lake Macquarie to resist.

He added that the native identified as Jacky-Jacky was a continual nuisance, and was frequently observed at Mr. Crawford's farm over the mountains at Ellalong.

24th October 1833. On this day fifty or more aborigines from the Black Creek and Maitland districts arrived at the farm of William Timothy Cape near Wyong. A man named Jacques was in charge of the farm at that time, and he reported that the blacks raided the huts of his men, and got away with two shirts, one handkerchief, three pocket knives, one waistcoat, one quart pot, two dampers, and twelve pounds of beef. Since the blacks were heavily armed with guns and pistols, and threatened to kill or spear the men, they were permitted to make a safe retreat without pursuit. The white men did manage to retrieve two of their shirts during the raid, by bribing one of the native youngsters with a little flour to go and fetch them. Before departing, the blacks threatened to return as soon as the corn was ready.

On their way back to the Maitland district, the same party of aborigines paid a whirlwind visit to Mr. Manning's dairy at Kourumbung, and forced the men in charge to hand over as many tins of milk as they required, by brandishing their weapons. Commenting on the aborigines' possession of firearms, Warner said, 'It appears they borrow the guns on the pretence of going to shoot ducks or kangaroos and then go out to plunder.'

18th April 1834. By this time, Mr. Jacques at Wyong had harvested his corn crop, and now the natives returned as they had threatened to do in the previous spring. They were again in possession of four or five shotguns, besides numerous spears, waddies and tomahawks. They broke into one of the huts of the station, and removed about twelve bushels of corn, thirty pounds of beef, and twenty pounds of tobacco. One of the blackfellows, identified as Hobbie, was seen coming out of a window with corn and tobacco. Hobbie was regarded by many settlers as a confirmed thief, and Jacques' men would like to have been able to lay their hands on him. After the blacks had departed, Jacques and his men padlocked the hut, but on visiting it again the next morning they found that the lock of the door had been wrenched, the windows again forced, and a further quantity of corn had been stolen. The men spent all of that day shifting the remainder of the corn to other premises, leaving only about half a bushel, which the

natives removed during the next night, as well as several fowls. On the fourth and fifth nights the whole of the ducks and fowls were taken. Jacques named two small black boys—Little Nobody aged about ten years, and Little McGill about fifteen—as being most active in catching and killing the poultry.

30th April 1834. On this day Mr. Jacques had occasion to go down to Brisbane Water, and when he returned home in the evening his men informed him that the blacks had been once more and robbed the huts. This time six pigs were missing. Determined that some action must be taken before anything else disappeared, Jacques and four of the men armed themselves and set out in search of the natives. They found the blacks encamped less than two miles from the house. As the Europeans approached, the natives fled into the bush and a brief inspection of the campsite revealed a bag containing about ten pounds of flour, the hindquarters of a pig, and some fowls' feathers. After a short interval, the blacks in the bush began to make calls to each other, and without warning the whole tribe sallied from the bush, armed with spears and guns and making a hostile war-cry which put terror into the hearts of Jacques and his men. The five white men dashed away into the bush, pursued closely by the yelling mob. Even when the yelling stopped, the five continued to run on blindly. They covered four miles before darkness fell. Then they halted and, being afraid to proceed home, remained in the bush for the night.

On arriving home next morning, Jacques learned that the same party of aborigines, covered in pipe-clay to disguise themselves, and well-armed, had on the previous day also raided Mr. Hely's dairy farm near Wyong. The dairyman had been so much alarmed that he had run into the small dairy and locked himself inside it. The natives entered his nearby living quarters where they removed his damper from the fireplace, pilfered two shirts, speared and took eight fowls and one duck, and pulled up the potatoes in the garden. Then they came over to the dairy where the trembling man was hiding, and commenced to tear off the slabs under the window with their tomahawks, threatening to kill the prisoner if he did not give them cheese and flour. Fortunately, at this crucial moment another man approached, and the blacks ran off into the scrub.

The natives had not finished their rampage, however, for on the following morning the raiding party appeared at Mr. Bloodsworth's stock station a few miles up the valley in the vicinity of present-day Jiliby. It happened that the overseer of the station had left for Sydney earlier that morning, leaving an assigned man in charge of the place. The blacks forced their way into the man's hut and, while threatening to kill him if he interfered, took from the station buildings about two hundred pounds of flour, a quantity of salt pork, some fowls, and articles of clothing. Then the mob departed, and for a couple of months the settlers enjoyed comparative peace.

11th July 1834. Jonathan Warner had expressed concern about the marauding parties of aborigines, and had instructed the various district constables to catch the chief culprits if possible. These instructions had come to the ears of the native ringleaders, who determined to kill Warner. A Brisbane Water settler, Mr. Donnison, heard of the plot, and on the above date he sent Constable Robert Chitty on a trip to Warner's Lake Macquarie residence, with a letter warning him that the blacks had been heard to say that they would waylay and spear him somewhere along the track between his house and Kourumbung. Chitty was instructed to deliver the letter to Warner before the latter departed for Brisbane Water in three days' time. However, Warner received no word of the proposed ambush until he arrived at Kourumbung, where he met Constable Chitty at a stockman's hut. Here Chitty delivered the letter, excusing his delay by stating that his horse had been injured on Dangyangy hill near Wyong, but Warner considered the real reason was his fear of the blacks.

23rd October 1834. Jonathan Warner was returning home from Brisbane Water, and had occasion to call at the Rev. Threlkeld's mission house at Ebenezer. On arrival, he was told that more than forty blacks from the Brisbane Water, Wyong, and Sugarloaf tribes were at that moment on the hills behind the house, and that they had come down to kill two of the Lake Macquarie aborigines who were sheltering at the mission station. Warner remained at Threlkeld's for about an hour, and since all seemed very quiet, he then departed on his horse for his own residence on the opposite shore of the lake. He had scarcely arrived at his house, however, when one of Threlkeld's men came in haste with the news that the blacks had reappeared at Ebenezer, and had broken into the men's huts. They had apparently waited in the bush until Warner had departed. Immediately he heard this news, Warner armed himself, called his two eldest sons and three of his own men to accompany him, and set off in a boat across the water to the mission house. The distance across the lake was about four miles, but the wind was against them, so it took about an hour and a half to pull the boat across. They landed at Threlkeld's to learn that the blacks had already escaped with quite a deal of property. The natives had forced their way into the huts and during the robbery had thrown many spears to prevent Threlkeld's men from approaching. There were no casualties, but one of the spears had gone through the leg of one man's trousers, fastening him to the ground. At the time of this incident, Mr. Threlkeld was absent with all of his assigned servants except three, and these had been too fearful to fire at the natives during the robbery.

Warner went with his men to the hilltop behind the mission house, and observed from the blacks' fires that they were on their way to Kourumbung. He could therefore do little except question Threlkeld's men about the affair, and then return home to write a report of the incident to the Colonial

Secretary. After telling of the attack, Warner supplied some information concerning this tribe of aborigines:

On my way to Brisbane Water last Monday, I met about thirty blacks, well equipped with plenty of their usual implements of war, firing the bush as they passed along. I asked them where they were going, they replied to fight at Kuringbong, but on my return there, I learnt that they had not passed that way. This was the same tribe that robbed Mr. Threlkeld's; my son and self know most of them.

Warner then appended a list of the chief offenders, as follows:

Abraham and Paddy—brothers
 Old John—father of the above
 Hobby
 Little Jack
 Molly Morgan
 Emu
 Jack Jones, Jim Jones, and Jago—three brothers
 Long Dick—carries a musket
 Nambo, Big Jimmy, and Big Harry
 Corrumbung Jimmy—speared a man
 Whip-'em-Up
 Little Dick—principal agent and messenger
 Monkey

13th December 1834. Of events on this date, Warner wrote:

Yesterday on my way hence from Brisbane Water, I called at Duralong, Mr. Bloodsworth's Stock Station (about four miles from Wyong) and was informed by Rainey, the Overseer, that several Blacks had been about his hut for several days, occasionally two or more coming to his hut, but did not offer to plunder, but on Saturday last one of the Blacks speared a Cow and the Overseer drew the spear out of her side, and from some drug being attached to the jag on the point of the spear it had entered her abdomen. On the same day the Blacks also knocked off one of his bullock's horns with a waddie that had been thrown at it.

Warner believed that the aborigines were planning to raid the station.

15th December 1834. A native known as Abraham, one of the ringleaders of the local tribes, came to Adam Rainey's hut at Bloodsworth's station and warned him that 'the whitefellas must be very quiet now'—meaning that if the natives robbed the station and Rainey put up any resistance, his life would be taken. On this occasion, Rainey was in a position to capture the blackfellow who gave him this warning, but he was afraid to take this action, believing that many more natives were hiding in the bush nearby. No more was seen of Abraham that day, nor during the days that followed, but it was evident that the blacks were hovering about the station. Rainey

communicated his fears to Warner, who could do little except urge that some soldiers be sent from Sydney to these districts:

In consequence of the whole detachment of the Military having been withdrawn from the District of Brisbane Water, I am fearful that the Black natives will again be troublesome. If a party of about eight men had been left and a few of them stationed in the neighbourhood of Wyong where it appears the blacks are as usual lurking about, it might have been the means of keeping the natives in terror (although I am aware the soldiers could not apprehend them) until such time as some of the principal ring leaders were apprehended by reward.

2nd January 1835. Since the events of mid-December, the natives had continued to lurk in the scrub near Adam Rainey's hut, occasionally calling at the hut and asking for milk and other items of food which Rainey handed out to avoid stirring them up. But by this time rewards had been offered for the arrest of five native ringleaders by a notice published in the *Gazette*, which identified the five with robberies in the Brisbane Water district. On 2nd January four men—Moses Carroll, Adam Rainey, Henry Anderson, and George Mason—concealed themselves in Rainey's hut and armed themselves ready to attack any natives who approached. Their ambush was successful, for after a short time six natives entered the hut, five of them being the ringleaders mentioned in the *Gazette*. When the blacks had entered the hut, one of the white men sprang to the door and bolted it, and the other three pounced on the intruders. During the scuffle that ensued, three of the blackfellows escaped through a small hole they made in the slab walls, while another native named Jack Jones, a powerfully built fellow, was shot and wounded severely in the neck. He and the other two blacks, Jago and Nimbo, were handcuffed by Constable Carroll, and taken to the lock-up at Brisbane Water. The three blacks managed to escape from the lock-up the same day due to carelessness of the keeper, but because of his injuries, Jack Jones was caught again and consigned to Sydney gaol, where doubtless he finished his days.

One could go on with many stories similar to those related above, but enough has been recorded in these pages to give some impression of the state of affairs in the Lake Macquarie and surrounding districts during the frontier period. These are tragic stories, for between the lines they tell of primitive human beings who, during the droughts of the 1830's, were being deprived of their lands, and who, hunger-driven, were coming back for their share of the food. The white settlers called it stealing, a crime which called for punishment; but the aborigines did not conceive of their actions in this way, for their simple civilization did not have to contend with property rights in the same way as did the European in his code of living.

Finally, inevitably, the aborigines were beaten in their fight for survival. In the lake district their numbers diminished quickly, coinciding with a sudden decrease in the numbers of kangaroos and wallabies to be found in the bushlands. Some of the tribal leaders of the aborigines were arrested and removed to distant places; some of the natives were slaughtered by white settlers, or brutally treated. Whole parties of them moved away from their ancestral home country into less settled districts, and just a few remained and learned enough of the European way of life to obtain employment on farms or in the townships, and their special knowledge of the bush made these natives valuable to the police as trackers of wanted men. But in the few who stayed on in this way, the old spirit of the tribe was broken. They did not care to remember or preserve the past, for it could bring them no proud memories, but only humiliation and defeat. Having ceased to identify themselves with the traditions and customs of their race, they passed away one by one until the time came when there were no longer any living representatives of the Awabakal people in the territory that had been their home for so long.

In the early 1860's, when settlement about Lake Macquarie was beginning to expand rapidly, the miserably few remaining aborigines congregated on the eastern side of the lake, in the vicinity of Reid's Mistake, where memories of the early contacts with the white men were happiest. Here, too, the fish were plentiful, and kangaroos still abounded in the scrub. A correspondent to the *Newcastle Chronicle* in 1863,¹² describing his impressions upon settling at the lake heads, mentioned the existence of the aborigines:

A few blacks, the remnant of the tribe belonging to Lake Macquarie, are dwelling near us. They are a grotesque people. What has become of their ancestors I know not; they say they are all dead.

The district settler who made this statement does not indicate how many aborigines there were in this small company. However, eight years afterwards, there remained at the lake but one small family of the Awabakal tribe, and our chapter cannot conclude without some reference to this last surviving remnant of the Lake Macquarie aborigines. The story of Old Ned and his family is an appealing one, with an undertone of pathos. These folk came into the news in 1871, when an attempt was being made to take away the land on which they resided:¹³

We hear . . . that Old Ned, the last of his tribe in these districts, and whom all fishing and shooting parties at Lake Macquarie are acquainted with, through his willingness to assist in and further their sport, is threatened with expulsion from his little holding on the south side of the Lake by a person who has made a free selection of the land on which this aboriginal

¹² NC, 23 Sep. 1863.

¹³ NC, 2 Sep. 1871.

has his habitation. It seems that Old Ned, who is the only native ever known to have adopted civilization and domestic habits, has long resided on this spot, his household consisting of his wife—who bears an irreproachable character, and, strange to say of her race, has never been known to taste liquor—his four or five children, and his blind mother.

This publicity concerning the intended action of a free settler brought some comment from the public, and fortunately there was a good deal of sympathy towards the old aboriginal and his family. Under the caption 'Naboth's Vineyard at Lake Macquarie', the Rev. John Shaw, formerly a clergyman at Gosford, but at this time resident at Scone, wrote to the editor of the *Chronicle*,¹⁴ expressing his very definite disapproval of any action to evict Ned from his land. Shaw wrote:

Ned is a hard-working inoffensive old man. . . . Margaret, his wife, is an ornament to her sex . . . She has had some Christian instruction, and her daughter did, at one time, know the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. Some of the family are baptized. The house they live in is divided into rooms. Margaret also acts as dressmaker and is an excellent needlewoman . . . She is a skilful cabbage-tree hat maker, and her hats realize from £2 to £4, according to order. Ned grows a little corn, a few vegetables, a little tobacco, attends sporting parties on the lake, and maintains his aged mother. His home is everything to him. It is on the Lake side, close to the honey, close to the fish, close to the cabbage-tree, and close to the fresh water. Without his home he will be something like a ruined man. There is another instance in the above district of the same kind as Ned's, but that Aboriginal is a bachelor, and belongs to another tribe. Moreover he is a man of violent temper . . . But Ned is a peaceable, inoffensive, hardworking old fellow.

Mr. Shaw concluded his letter by promising that if a subscription fund was opened for Old Ned, he would contribute the first pound. He expressed the hope that the government would take action to protect the family, as he believed that it was its responsibility to do so.

Fortunately, events turned out kindly for Old Ned. A month or so after the publication of Rev. Shaw's letter, it was announced that the Mayor of Newcastle, James Hannell, had acted to protect the aboriginal's rights by bringing the matter to the attention of the Minister for Lands in Sydney. In response, the Minister had issued an order:¹⁵

That Old Ned is not to be disturbed in his occupation, and that the surveyor is to measure 20 or 30 acres for him, to be notified as a reserve, which will render him and his family secure from all intrusion.

It is uncertain whether or not this small reserve was situated at the spot where Old Ned and his family had been residing. Some believe that Ned

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9 Sep. 1871.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21 Oct. 1871.

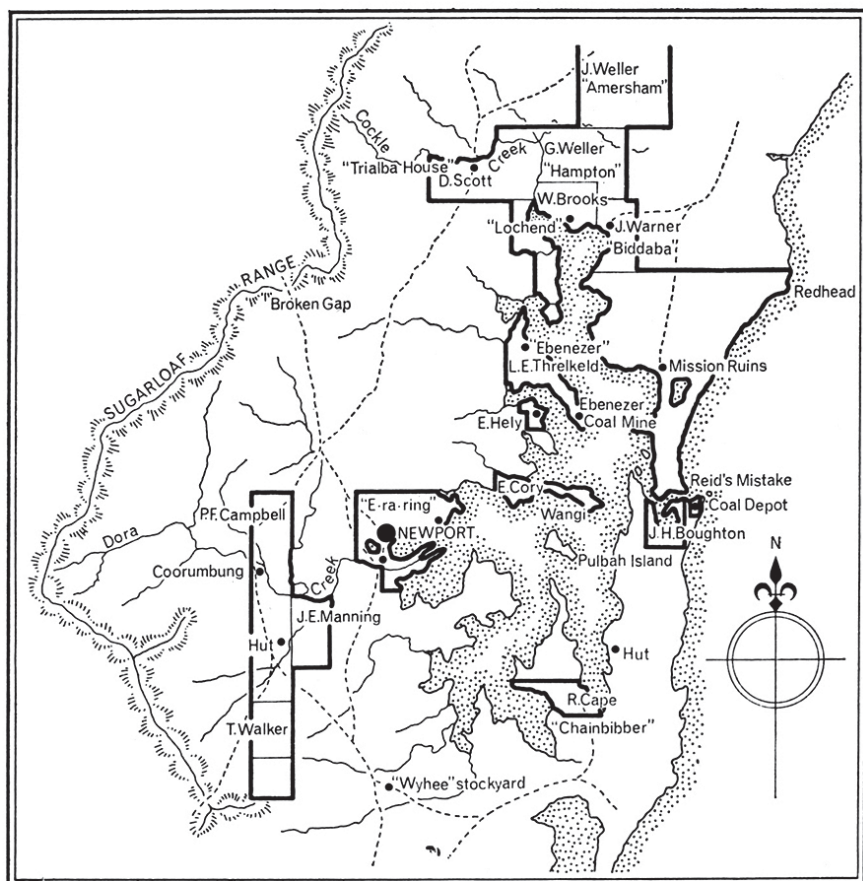
lived on the lakeside near the Pelican Islands, whereas the reserve was made at what is now called Black Ned's Bay, adjacent to the town of Swansea. Certainly, however, the little family lived on their reserve for a good many years. As the years went by, Ned's blind old mother died, then Ned himself passed away. His wife Margaret was some years younger than he, and she lived to be the last member of the Awabakal tribe on the lake. Known to her neighbours as 'Old Margaret' and 'Queen Margaret', she lived with her two children in a neatly kept slab cottage, and was highly respected by all who knew her. She managed to support her family by her own industries of making cabbage-tree hats and various items of clothing, which were sold to people living near and far. In 1892 John Fraser of Sydney made the following comment with reference to Margaret:¹⁶

'Old Margaret' is the last survivor of the Awabakal. She is now living in her slab-hut on a piece of land near Lake Macquarie Heads, and supports herself by her own industry. She had the advantage of early training in an English home in the district, she is respectable and respected. Her features, as compared with those of other natives, show how much the type varies; and yet she is an Australian of pure origin. She was born at Waiong, near the Hawkesbury River, and is now about 65 years of age.

The fine character of this dark-skinned old mother, and the respect shown to her, form a silent tribute to the missionary work of Rev. L. E. Threlkeld, who had taught Margaret and her family something of the Christian way of life. And so a story that started with bitterness and misunderstanding, ended with peace and kindness.

But Old Margaret was soon forgotten, and there are few living today who can remember seeing her. It had taken but a century to destroy the Awabakal people and their civilization—from Captain Reid's first contact in 1800 to the death of the last survivor about one hundred years later.

¹⁶ Fraser, John, in *An Australian Language, as spoken by the Awabakal, the People of Awaba or Lake Macquarie . . .* by L. E. Threlkeld; rearranged, condensed, and edited, with an appendix, by John Fraser. (Sydney, Government Printer, 1892), p. x.



LAKE MACQUARIE

1841

DRAY ROADS AND BULLOCK TRACKS

It is a commonplace to say that where there is settlement there must be communication. Few of us choose to live in total isolation, and when our forefathers arrived as pioneer settlers in a new country they spent a good deal of time and effort in cutting some form of track which would provide access to their properties and link them to the outside world. In the later 1820's and the early 1830's the first settlers were moving into the comparatively unknown Lake Macquarie region, and the story of how they slashed dray tracks through the tea-tree scrub, of how they found suitable fords across deep running streams, and explored possible routes over mountains, is an interesting phase of our regional history. The history of road development is always fascinating and revealing, for it reflects the needs of people for efficient communication with their neighbours and the rest of the world.

The story of the development of communication in the Lake Macquarie region is somewhat complicated because it was communication of two kinds—by water and by land. The lake itself, by virtue of its comparatively deep waters and its extent, formed a natural and usable transport medium, while its channel connection with the ocean made it a potential seaport and safe harbour for shipping. We say potential, because the necessary improvements to the channel which would have made it navigable for even small steamers were never carried out, though this was not for the want of pressure from enterprising citizens and shipping companies. But water transport was not the only factor in the movement of people and supplies. The relatively level country surrounding the entire lake meant that construction of roads was comparatively easy, apart from the necessity of bridging some of the creeks that flow into the lake on the western side. In some respects, the development of trafficable roads throughout the district lagged because of the existence of the ready-made waterways offering cheap transportation. This was particularly true along the western side of the lake, where the timber industry came to depend almost entirely upon water transport for getting its products to the city markets; and so there was no great impetus for road-building. At the same time, the backward state of the few existing roads tended to keep the district in semi-isolation for many years. In fact, this situation persisted until the construction of the northern railway linking

Sydney with Newcastle and the north. This revolution in transport dealt a death blow to the lake shipping trade, while it also held up the development of really good roads until quite recent times. Thus, in the Lake Macquarie district, land and water transport media have taken turns in being of primary importance to the expanding settlements and industries.

In this chapter we do not aim to trace the complete history of transportation and communication in the lake region. At this stage we are concerned only with the beginnings: to add a background, as it were, to the chapters that have gone before, and to those which follow.

Before launching into a description of the early routes of travel, it is necessary to say something of what we mean when we use the term 'road' when referring to the early days of Australia. If the modern concept of a roadway is adopted, we are apt to jump to all kinds of unwarranted conclusions concerning the existence of old highways. The surveyor-explorer, Henry Dangar, in his description of the Hunter River districts in the middle 1820's, explained to his English readers what was meant by a colonial 'road' at that time:¹

The method adopted in first pursuing a route into any distant country is this:—The first settler, or party of settlers, proceeding with their men, teams, and baggage into a new and distant country, having, as is usual, before making a journey to such, and having obtained every information the Crown surveyor of the district can give, he or they, on entering upon the journey, keep two or three men following the carts, and with axes mark the trees, by fractures in the bark, denoting the route the carriages pursue. This done, the settlers' men can proceed back with the teams, and get up their second loadings without any apprehensions of losing the road; and thus, in a short period, the tract is so beaten, (some improvements to the right and left hand being occasionally made) as to be designated the road; and is frequently used as such, without any repair, for a great number of years.

In some cases, a settler or surveyor marked out a route that he followed on horseback between two places, by merely blazing some of the larger trees along the way, no attempt being made to clear any sort of a track, yet the early maps of the district marked the route and labelled it as a road of some importance. It is true that some of these blazed trails did eventually become carriage roads, but there were many that did not develop in this way. There were some of these in the Lake Macquarie district, and nowadays one is apt to study an old map, and then go out into the hills looking for the vestigial remains of a road which, in fact, never existed.

When the Rev. Threlkeld contemplated the establishment of his aboriginal mission at Lake Macquarie, there were no roads or tracks in the entire district. So before commencing the mission, his men were employed

¹ Dangar, Henry, *Index and Directory to Map of the Country bordering upon the River Hunter* (London, 1828), p. 59.

in cutting a dray track most of the way from Newcastle to Belmont, and probably Henry Dangar's description quoted above could have been a fair account of the missionary's road-making adventures. Threlkeld used bullock drays to bring his equipment and household necessities to the mission site, and his dray track continued to be used while his mission remained at Bahtahbah. After the mission was removed across the lake to the Toronto area, the old dray track to Belmont became overgrown through disuse, and was probably not used again until settlers came to the lake heads district about thirty years later.

There were certainly no tracks on the western side of the lake when Percy Simpson came to the Dora Creek area in 1826. We have no account as to how Simpson moved his family and goods to his selections, but it seems most likely that they were brought through the Broken Gap by bullock drays from Wallis Plains, as the township of Maitland was then known. There were already settlers as far out as Brunkerville, which is only ten miles or so from Dora Creek. In this case, the Brunkerville Gap provided a convenient low-level crossing of the range between Mounts Sugarloaf and Heaton. Certainly by 1831 a regular dray track connected Simpson's station with Wallis Plains over the Broken Gap Mountain, and was at that time known as 'Simpson's Road'.² There is a less likely possibility that Simpson arrived by water transport via the lake and Dora Creek, which is navigable right to Cooranbong. We know that boats came up the creek to his property prior to 1828,³ and parties of surveyors also visited the lake by boat about this time. We may add, too, that the Wyong district's pioneer settler, William Cape, made considerable use of boats on Tuggerah Lakes and along the coast during his early years of settlement.

Reference has already been made to the discovery by John Macdonald of a new route from Wallis Plains to Wiseman's Ferry in 1827, and of how it was considered by Simpson, Warner, and others to be a superior line for a road to the one adopted through Wollombi. Jonathan Warner rode over Macdonald's trail in May of 1828 and penned a very detailed description of the route from the road engineer's point of view.⁴ Although a road was never constructed or formed, Macdonald had been employed to mark out the track by blazing trees along the way, and for these and other exertions he ultimately received a ticket-of-leave and later became a pioneer settler in the district about Cessnock.⁵ Macdonald's blazed route was frequently used by horseback riders in the early times, and it became widely known as 'Simpson's Road', and is so indicated on many of the early maps of the district. Most sections of Simpson's Road were never formed or used by vehicles, and so today there are no traces of Macdonald's work.

² Surveyor-General: letters from surveyors: Felton Mathew, 11 Jan. 1831.

³ CSIL: Warner, 7 May 1828.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Bloomfield, William, *Cessnock. 1826-1954* (Eagle Print, 1954).

A brief description of the route of Simpson's Road finds a place here, for apart from Threlkeld's track to Bahtahbah, it was the first line of road ever marked out to pass through the Lake Macquarie district. In the south, the marked track commenced north of Wiseman's Ferry at the Twelve Mile Hollow, where it branched from the Great North Road. From the Hollow it led across the ridges to Mangrove Creek where there were a small number of settlers in 1828. From here it climbed onto the Kulnura plateau area, and traversed this for some distance before descending a well-rounded hill to Wyong Creek at the present locality of Yarramalong. On the northern bank of the creek the track ascended a steep spur and finally crossed the ranges to the creek which runs through the valley at Doralong, nine miles from the town of Wyong. Near this place Warner noticed many 'fine white cedar trees' on either side of the creek, and then rode on over a scrub-covered flat which he believed would be swampy in wet weather. A little further on, the track crossed another small creek before rising over some low hills which separated this valley from the tributaries of Dora Creek. After passing over the Mandalong flats, Warner crossed another swampy patch immediately before arriving at Simpson's cattle station on the southern bank of Dora Creek. Describing this part of the route, Warner wrote as follows:⁶

Pass Mr. Simpson's Stock Yard—now 53 miles from Wiseman's—pass through a forest a few yards and cross a Salt Water Creek that runs into Lake McQuarry and where boats come up to Mr. Simpson's ground—at high water this creek has two feet of water in it . . . Proceed on NNE one quarter mile and cross a dry creek, . . . then proceed through a forest for one mile—where a line of road could be made to Newcastle (in abt. twenty five miles). A few miles further on observe Sugar Loaf Ridge bearing NE and N.

About five miles north of this point the track began to ascend

a very steep hill but short (this is called Broken Back ridge)—a road can be made up this hill with very little ascent, by winding around the side of it without any turning.

From the top of this rise, now known as the Brunkerville Gap, the trail descended into the plains of Wallis Creek which were followed to Maitland, which was reached within seventy-eight miles of Wiseman's Ferry, according to Warner's calculations. Even today, Simpson's Road could still be the shortest practicable route for a road linking Wiseman's Ferry with either Newcastle or Maitland, but in the intervening years settlement and transport patterns have radically changed. The rugged Hawkesbury country has been conquered and the Pacific Highway today follows a much more direct route from Sydney, crossing the Hawkesbury River many miles eastward of Wiseman's.

⁶ CSIL: Warner, 7 May 1828.

North of Simpson's farm, the track to Maitland was probably negotiable with bullock drays, at least in most parts, before 1830. By this time there were settlers around Brisbane Water in the south, and farms were being opened up at Blue Gum Flat (Ourimbah) and at Wyong Creek. There was a crossing-place on Wyong Creek a couple of miles upstream from the site of the present-day town of Wyong, and it was not very long before tracks linked these farms with Brisbane Water, and with Simpson's farm to the northward.

During January 1831 the government surveyor Felton Mathew travelled over many of the tracks north of Wyong, and made these comments:⁷

The lowlands are almost invariably swampy, and abounding in small water-holes, so numerous as to render travelling for a dray at least, both difficult and dangerous. The country, on the whole, and particularly that part of it northward from Kourumbung is highly favourable for the construction of roads and even in its present state, a loaded dray might travel either northward by Simpson's Road towards the Sugarloaf Range, or North-Eastward by Ranclaud's from whence there is a regular dray road (although a very bad and circuitous one) to Newcastle. . . . The only obstacles are Manner-ing or Dora Creeks.

Dora Creek must have remained an obstacle to the movement of wheeled vehicles for at least another thirty years after this, for the first bridge over the creek was constructed in the 1860's.

The *New South Wales Calendar and Directory* for the year 1833 contained a description of most roads in the colony, including the track linking Brisbane Water with Maitland. An itinerary of the route was given, and the first point of interest for us is the reference to the crossing of Wyong Creek, twelve and a half miles from Brisbane Water. Here the track passed by the properties of the Cape family and Mr. Farrell. The *Directory* informed its readers that 'the Wyong Creek takes its rise under Warrewolong, flowing to the south-east in a tolerably straight direction'.

After passing Mr. Cape's huts immediately northward of the Wyong Creek fording-place, the old track led along the Jilliby valley approximately two miles to a point at which a track branched to the left and in two miles reached the valley of 'Nallarang Creek', where William Bloodsworth's cattle station was situated at a spot then known as 'Touralong', or sometimes 'Duralong'.⁸ Mr. Bloodsworth was ostensibly a cattle farmer, but he used his comparatively isolated location to take cedar without authority from the valleys round about, and managed to convey the logs to Cabbage

⁷ Surveyor-General: letters from surveyors: Felton Mathew, 11 Jan. 1831.

⁸ These details were obtained from two sources: (1) *New South Wales Calendar and Directory* for 1833; (2) Plans of the ranges about Lake Macquarie and Tuggerah Lakes, drawn in 1830 and 1831 by Felton Mathew.

Tree Harbour. He was caught at this game by the Brisbane Water police a year or so later.⁹

From what appears to have been the approximate locality of the Jiliby cemetery of today, the Maitland track in 1833 proceeded northwards to a low gap in the hills, marked on the old maps as 'Turrin-Durrin'. From this locality a Sawyers' Road followed up into the valleys where excellent timber, including the cedar, grew prolifically. In the vicinity of the modern village of Doralong, this sawyers' road crossed the route of Simpson's Road, and some travellers probably utilized this combination of routes to journey from Wyong Creek to Dora Creek. There were other tracks, rather more direct, passing through the Wyee area, but all converged on Simpson's farm at Dora Creek. Having reached this point, the traveller was instructed by the 1833 *Directory* to

Cross Nekinda, or Dory Brook, on whose banks are the grants of Messrs. Percy Simpson, Tingcombe, and Campbell, also a village reserve. About four miles from its entrance into the Lake, at its confluence with a creek running from the south-west, through Tingcombe's grant, the Nekinda assumes the name of the Badge, or Manning River.

Five miles north of Simpson's station, a track branched to the right towards Newcastle. By this time, Threlkeld was resident at Ebenezer (Toronto area), and his own dray track linked with this main track which wound on past Ranclaud's farm to Newcastle.

At an estimated distance of thirty-four miles from Brisbane Water, the Maitland track crossed the Brunkerville Gap, described as

a low part of the Myall Range. About three miles to the left is the Myall Mountain, and immediately under it the Mulberring or Wallis Creek takes its rise.

The description adds that

The whole of this country, from Wyong to the Myall, and from Warre-wolong to the Lakes, is very heavily timbered, particularly in the gullies; great quantities of cedar, and other valuable woods, abound, but are fast disappearing under the hands of the sawyers.

The route published in the *Directory* of 1833 probably remained the official route between Brisbane Water and Maitland until about 1840, when a new road was surveyed along a shorter line. Meanwhile, as settlers moved into outlying areas, branch tracks sprouted out in all directions. By 1835 there were signs of activity on the Wyee flats, where John Moore's stockyard was built for collecting stray cattle. There were also some huts at this point, and a branch track led eastward to Moore's cattle station on the lake at Chainbiber. Another dray track from Wyong passed through the scrub around the Tuggerah Lakes to a farm at 'Podgewoy' (now Budgewoi), and

⁹ GPO records (Archives Office).

another one near Norah Head. This track may have been utilized by the cedar gangs operating in the valleys west of Wyong.

At the northern end of Lake Macquarie the small number of well-to-do settlers—Warner, Brooks, and others—had constructed their own cart tracks leading from their lakeside farms towards Newcastle.

It will be observed that the earliest roads of the lake district were formed to serve a variety of purposes. There were, in the first place, a number of key routes connecting isolated settlers with Brisbane Water and Newcastle, and with each other. Then there were the tracks used by the stockmen and butchers, who rounded up herds of wild cattle and drove them to specially constructed stockyards in the bush, from whence large mobs were driven to the distant markets at Maitland and Newcastle. And there were the timber tracks of the sawyers, providing access to dozens of gullies in the mountains, from where the logs were hauled by bullocks to the main shipping point, Cabbage Tree Harbour.

As mentioned earlier, the existence of one or two wide and deep salt-water creeks—notably Wyong and Dora—presented obstacles to the settlers, who were unable to use drays and carriages to convey their goods to and from the towns. This meant that many of the early settlers were more isolated than they would otherwise have been, and it imposed a greater need for self-dependence. The farmers achieved this independence by combining a variety of agricultural pursuits. Each settler kept a herd of milking cows, the dairy containing primitive equipment for butter and cheese making. Wheat and maize were grown, some for grinding into flour by convict labour. Dampers and 'johnny cakes' were common articles of diet, and every bushman learned the art of making these and other simple recipes. A variety of vegetable crops was planted by the settler, the main ones being potatoes, pumpkins, and melons. Attempts were made to cultivate fruit trees also. Meat was obtained 'off the hoof' as required, and fish might be caught to supplement the diet. Provided that the climate was favourable, only two or three staple articles of consumption had to be carried in from outside the region. These were tea, sugar, salt, and tobacco. A storage hut was provided for these commodities so that it was necessary to replenish supplies only two or three times a year.

Conveyance of mails to and from Sydney must have presented a problem for the settlers in the Lake Macquarie districts. Those residing in the northern part—Threlkeld, Warner, Brooks, and others—probably sent their men to Newcastle once each week or even oftener to obtain supplies and to carry letters. At Brisbane Water, mails were brought to residents by the small vessels trading in the area, but these boats arrived irregularly and the mail situation was described in 1838 as 'greatly inconvenient'.¹⁰ It must have been considerably more inconvenient for settlers at Wyong and Kourum-

¹⁰ CSIL: A. Holden of Brisbane Water police, 4 Apr. 1838.

bung, who had to ride down to Brisbane Water whenever they wished to despatch or collect mail. Probably Jonathan Warner delivered letters to many of these settlers during the years when he travelled fortnightly from Lake Macquarie to Brisbane Water to hold court.

In 1838, after Warner had ceased to make these journeys, Moses Carroll of Kourumbung offered to convey the Brisbane Water mail to and from Maitland on horseback each week for the sum of £100 per annum.¹¹ Carroll stated that he could carry the mail from Brisbane Water to Maitland each Sunday, and there rest his horse on Monday, the day on which the Sydney mail arrived by steamer. He would then return to Brisbane Water with the incoming mail on Tuesday. This proposal was submitted to the Colonial Secretary in Sydney, but probably Carroll's scheme was considered to be too expensive a proposition in view of the small number of settlers in the Brisbane Water district, and the plan was not accepted. But shortly afterwards a track was opened between Gosford and Wisemen's Ferry, via Mangrove Creek, and a weekly mail service overland from Sydney was begun late in 1838, the first contractor being Peter Fagan.¹² This arrangement, though it provided some regularity of service, did not assist very much the settlers further northwards, for whom the village of Gosford remained the nearest delivery point until the opening of a post office at Mount Vincent many years later.

By this time, settlement at Lake Macquarie was steadily expanding, particularly on the lands adjacent to Dora Creek, because of their fair agricultural quality. During 1839 Surveyor Dalgety was employed in marking out a considerable number of grants and purchases of land in the lake district, especially about Dora Creek, and it was clear that a properly surveyed and constructed road through this part of the country was necessary. A line of road was agreed upon, and Dalgety was commissioned to carry out a detailed survey of the route from Gosford northward to Dora Creek, this being about the half-way mark to Maitland. By January of 1840 Dalgety was able to submit a plan for this section of the road,¹³ and presumably he continued with the survey of the second half of the road between Dora Creek and Maitland. The new road was planned to follow the approximate line of existing tracks northwards as far as the Wyee area, but from here it deviated from the traditional route. Instead of leading to the comparatively easy fording-place on Dora Creek at Simpson's station, Dalgety's road followed a ridge further to the east, and so arrived at the creek about four miles downstream from Kourumbung, approximately where the railway now crosses the creek. This point was reached in just over twenty-seven miles from Gosford, a distance considerably less than the older

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² CSIL: A. Holden to Postmaster-General, 20 Aug. 1838.

¹³ Surveyor-General: letters from surveyors: Dalgety, 28 May 1841; also see Dalgety's plan of the road from Gosford to Dora Creek, dated 1840 (Archives Office).

routes. It was planned that a punt would operate to convey travellers over Dora Creek, since it was rather too wide to bridge without going to a large expense. From this crossing-place the road was to continue northwards to Maitland, though the exact route of the survey is not very clear to us. It is possible that it was intended to pass a few miles easterly of Simpson's Road, keeping to the eastern side of the Sugarloaf Mountain range. The real weakness of Dalgety's plan lay in the fact that he deliberately overlooked the existing crossing-place at Kourumbung, where there would have been no necessity for a punt, although a low-level bridge would have been required for the movement of vehicles. However, as it appeared on paper, Dalgety's survey appeared to meet the needs of landowners on the western side of the lake, as well as providing a short route between Brisbane Water and the north, and so the southern half of the road survey was approved by the Executive Council in August of 1841. Work on the formation of the road may have commenced soon after that date, though it was never completed, even as far as Dora Creek.

While Dalgety was engaged on the road survey, the Surveyor-General had instructed him to mark on his plans any portions of land adjoining the new road that he considered worthy of reservation for villages or other government purposes. In obedience to these instructions, Dalgety examined the Dora Creek area, where most of the valuable agricultural land had already been applied for by various people. He wrote in January 1840:¹⁴

I beg leave to state that there is a portion of land of 650 acres advertised in the Government Gazette of 5th December as Lot 14, to be sold on the 13th inst, that I consider ought most particularly to be reserved as a Township, on account of its being on the line of road, and being about midway between the Town of Gosford, and the Towns of Maitland and Newcastle, and also on account of its situation on Lake Macquarie, and the great additional value it would give to the land in the neighbourhood.

The land to which Dalgety referred was a fairly large section at the mouth of Dora Creek, on the southern side. This area was generally known as 'Stingaree Point', and in view of Dalgety's recommendation, it was immediately withdrawn from sale, creating keen disappointment for Henry Jacques, who had applied for this land four years earlier.¹⁵ Opposite Stingaree Point, on the northern bank of the creek, was Percy Simpson's old E-ra-ring grant, though it was no longer owned by Simpson.

The Stingaree Point reservation was never subdivided for a town, and the new Gosford to Maitland road did not eventuate. Construction of the road stopped far short of the Dora Creek ferry, and although a punt seems to have operated there for a short time (old Lands Department plans show the existence of a punt-house on the northern bank at the crossing), the number of travellers who made use of the route was disappointingly small.

¹⁴ Surveyor-General: letters from surveyors: Dalgety, 6 Jan. 1840.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12 Aug. 1840.

Even before Dalgety's road was contemplated, settlers about Brisbane Water were pressing for a shorter road connection with Sydney than the devious route through Mangrove and Wiseman's Ferry. In a letter to the Colonial Secretary in June of 1839¹⁶ the Police Magistrate at Brisbane Water, Alfred Holden, enclosed a petition from the district's residents for a direct road to Sydney. No immediate action was taken, but according to one report,¹⁷ in 1847 a road was being constructed from Sydney to Gosford, passing over Peat's Ferry which was already operating on the lower Hawkesbury River. This road, the forerunner of our Pacific Highway, was completed as far north as Gosford by 1850, but here the formed road ended. As a matter of fact, the Peat's Ferry road served Gosford merely as an afterthought. Its main function was to provide a carriage road between Sydney and Wollombi, as a shorter alternative to the Great North Road via Wiseman's Ferry. Travellers from Sydney to Maitland or Newcastle during the 1840's and 1850's had the choice of Peat's Ferry or Wiseman's Ferry to cross the Hawkesbury, but there was no practicable alternative to the very circuitous road through Wollombi. The roads between Gosford and the north, along the coastal plain, could not be attempted with coaches or drays chiefly because there were no bridges over the numerous creeks that flowed eastward of the ranges. Not until the 1860's was any real effort made to provide a vehicular road through the Lake Macquarie district.

Nor should we imagine that the Great North Road via Wiseman's Ferry and Wollombi was a popular route. One might have expected that, after having been formed at the cost of much sweat and blood, it should have become one of the best-used roads in the colony. This was far from true, however, and there were more reasons than one why this was so. The Great North Road had been designed and routed to serve a minority—the wealthy and respected class of squatters in the upper Hunter districts, particularly those around Singleton. It gave less attention to the needs of the citizens about Maitland and Newcastle. But even before the road was completed in 1831, the rapid increase of population in the eastern part of the Hunter valley was clearly evident, and for the people at Newcastle and Maitland, the Great North Road was a very weary overland route to Sydney, detouring back into the wilderness beyond Wollombi. Furthermore, the road itself could not be kept in a satisfactory condition for the passage of coaches and drays. Some of its mountainous stretches were too steep, and there was no fresh water to be obtained on some of the most barren sections. But the die was fully cast against this road when in 1831, the year of its opening, the colony's first steamship arrived in Sydney, and began to operate regularly between Sydney and Newcastle, thus providing a safe and fast service between these ports. Those enterprising citizens who had acquired land along the Great North Road, believing it would become valuable as the traffic

¹⁶ CSIL: A. Holden, 9 June 1839.

¹⁷ NHDHS journal, v. 10, pt. 11, August 1956, p. 167.

increased, were disappointed; innkeepers discovered that the small amount of patronage they received could not pay for their expenses.¹⁸ The road was never used very extensively, and today some sections of it rarely see an automobile.

With the advent of the steamship *Sophia Jane* in 1831, it was clear that for the time being at least, the northern area had chosen water transport as being more efficient than the land routes, with all of the difficulties they presented to the traveller bound for Sydney. The introduction of steamships in the colony was destined to have a great influence on coastal trade and communication, and these new possibilities for water transport were ultimately to have particular significance for the development of Lake Macquarie.

¹⁸ CSIL: petition of Patrick Doolan of Wollombi, 4 Apr. 1832.

THE EBENEZER COAL WORKS

WHEN the Rev. L. E. Threlkeld terminated his Lake Macquarie aboriginal mission in 1841, he had already commenced a new enterprise of a very different character. This was his Ebenezer colliery on the Coal Point peninsula, where operations were begun in 1840. Threlkeld's mining venture is an interesting story, and deserves a description here. To locate the beginnings of the affair, we must take a brief backward glance at the beginnings of the coal industry in New South Wales.

The *Sydney Gazette* in 1834¹ published this item of news:

A discovery which it is expected will prove to be a very valuable one, has recently been made by the Rev. Mr. Threlkeld, at Lake Macquarie, in the district of Reid's Mistake. He was about to build a chimney with what he considered to be a very fine black stone, which he found in abundance in the neighbourhood of his dwelling, when, upon a close inspection, he ascertained it to be what is called in England cannel coal. The overseer of the Newcastle Mines has been at Reid's Mistake to examine the coal, and reports it to be of very superior quality, far beyond the Newcastle coal. The vein lies almost on the surface of the earth, and can therefore be worked at a trifling expense.

Threlkeld had not, of course, made an original discovery. Thirty-four years before Captain William Reid had found a seam of coal at the Lake Macquarie heads, and removed a cargo of it to Sydney. However, there had been no attempt to follow up his discovery, or even to examine the Lake Macquarie coal for its quality and extent. There were reasons for this lack of initiative. The Newcastle coal mines had been opened in 1802, and were worked by convict labour for the next twenty years, the period during which Newcastle was a penal settlement. There was at that time only a small market for coal in the Australian colonies, so most of the product was exported. With prison labour, the Newcastle coal was cheaply produced, and there was no need to commence mining operations anywhere else. Then, about 1823, the penal establishment at Newcastle was broken up and the majority of the convicts were taken northwards to Port Macquarie. The

¹ *Sydney Gazette*, 3 Apr. 1834.

coal mines were not closed at this time, but a smaller number of prisoners were employed by the government to continue the work there. However, the Newcastle mines were not conducted very efficiently, and by 1829 the total yearly output of coal amounted to only 780 tons, and most of this was of only mediocre quality.²

This unsatisfactory state of affairs caused the colonial government in 1830 to hand over the Newcastle mines to the Australian Agricultural Company, commonly known as the A. A. Company. This company was formed in 1824, and two years later it commenced agricultural activities on a huge grant of land extending from the Port Stephens district northwards to the Manning River. The company took over the coal workings at Newcastle in the belief that the industry could become a paying proposition, and under the superintendence of its colliery manager, Mr. Henderson, many improvements were brought about in the mining operations.³ In 1831, the year after the takeover of the mines, coal production amounted to 5,000 tons, a very different figure from the 780 tons of two years earlier. The industry continued to expand, and in 1840 the collieries yielded over 30,000 tons of coal.⁴ By this time, too, the A. A. Company had established a firm monopoly of the coal trade in New South Wales, a fact which was much resented by many of the colony's business men and traders.

This is the background to the Rev. Threlkeld's discovery of coal at the Ebenezer mission station, and his plan to exploit this mineral resource; for we find that Threlkeld encountered some opposition from the A. A. Company when he started out in the mining industry.

It appears that the Australian Agricultural Company was granted the sole right to mine coal in New South Wales, when it acquired the Newcastle mines in 1830. This was the first obstacle to Threlkeld's plans, and in 1840 he wrote to the Governor upon this subject. A reply was received in February of 1841,⁵ pointing out that all coal resources were reserved for exclusive working by the A. A. Company. However, Threlkeld had taken the trouble to point out that the Punte estate on which the Ebenezer coal had been found, had been promised to him in 1829, a year prior to the commencement of the company's mining adventures. This fact was taken into account, and Threlkeld was granted the right to mine coal on his property. There was one restriction, however—he could not employ convict labour in his mine, this right being reserved for the A. A. Company. In spite of this restriction, the enterprising ex-missionary decided to go ahead with the venture.

² NHDHS journal, v. 8, pt. 4, pp. 50-51.

³ Gregson, J., *The Australian Agricultural Company, 1824-1875* (Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1907).

⁴ NHDHS journal, *op. cit.*

⁵ From the Report of the Select Committee on the Coal Inquiry of 1847, in *Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council*, 1847, v. 2, pp. 335-92.

Threlkeld's operations in coal mining commenced some time during 1840, at least a few months before he received the Governor's permission in February of the following year. This means that he started his industry either with faith in the Governor's decision, or in ignorance of the A. A. Company's mining rights. His coal mine, which he named the Ebenezer Coal Works, was situated just a few feet from the edge of the lake on the western side of what is now Coal Point. The old drive in the low cliff-face is still visible today, although it is many years since coal was taken from the pit. A few yards off the shore is the remnant of an old loading platform, built up of rocks, and in water deep enough to enable barges to take on coal.

The first shipment of Ebenezer coal to Sydney must have taken place in April or May of 1841. The *Sydney Gazette* of 22nd April contained this announcement:

A vessel will be in from Newport, Lake Macquarie, in the course of a few days with coals from Mr. Threlkeld's. Parties desirous of making trial of them will find them fully equal to the Newcastle coals.

The vessel referred to here was the *Ann*, a small ship of 20 tons, and was at that time the largest vessel ever to have entered the lake, according to the newspaper *Australian*, which stated that its voyage had proved that the entrance to Lake Macquarie was navigable.⁶ The arrival of the *Ann* in Sydney with coal from Threlkeld's mine was hailed with much enthusiasm, for it represented an attack upon the A. A. Company's monopoly of the coal trade. The *Sydney Gazette* carried this paragraph:⁷

We heartily congratulate our townsmen and fellow colonists upon the now certain prospect that we can be supplied regularly with coal of a superior quality from Lake Macquarie. The *Ann* has arrived here with the first cargo ever imported from that port. We have seen some of the coal. It is certainly of a very high quality. It burns and cakes as well as the best English coal. We trust that some exertions will be made in the next Session of the Council to break the present disgraceful monopoly of the coal trade held by the Australian Agricultural Company. The age of monopolies has been numbered with the days that were. Free citizens will never tolerate such an infringement of their rights and privileges.

Later in 1841, the *Ann* made other trips to the Ebenezer mine for small cargoes of coal, and in this way a regular trade was begun.

The comments of the *Gazette* with respect to the quality of the Lake Macquarie coal are interesting. It must be kept in mind, of course, that in those days the coal obtained from the Newcastle mines was not of the best variety, and had to be screened before it was sold. During a government inquiry into the A. A. Company's monopoly, Threlkeld was asked to give an opinion as to the character of the Ebenezer coal. This was his comment:⁸

⁶ *Australian*, 13 May 1841.

⁷ *Sydney Gazette*, 23 May 1841.

⁸ From Report of the Select Committee on the Coal Inquiry, 1847, *op. cit.*

There is this drawback to the Ebenezer coal, it is what is called open burning coal, that is, it does not cake, and therefore it is of no use to smiths; it is however admirably adapted to furnaces, and anything in which it is not required that the coals should clinker; it is adapted for smelting and makes excellent coke. . . . It is large coal and free from dirt.

Certainly Mr. Threlkeld's coal met a strong demand in Sydney for a number of years, and this testifies to its suitability for most purposes.

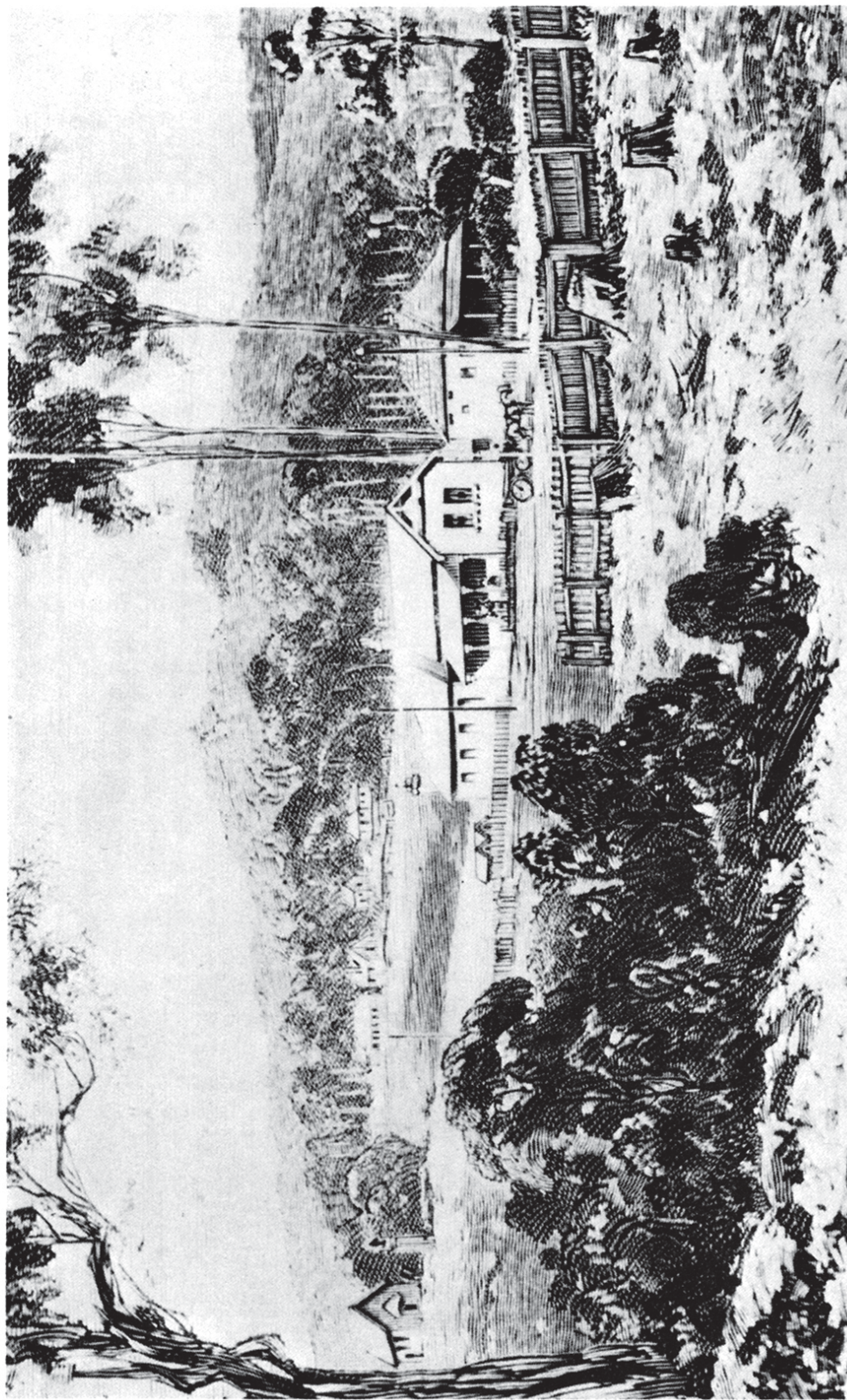
The operation of the Ebenezer mine brought its problems, however. Threlkeld was not permitted to use government men (that is, convicts) as miners, by order of the colonial administration. But Threlkeld was determined to test fully the rights of the A. A. Company, and in November of 1841 he took on for employment a small number of men who had previously been employed by the company in the Newcastle mines, but had left its service as a result of some disagreement. Before taking them on, Threlkeld informed the company's agent of what he was about to do, and questioned whether the company had any legal claim against him in these circumstances. Apparently no reply was received at the time, and the men commenced to work in the Ebenezer mine. But in June of the following year Threlkeld received a notice that he would be prosecuted if these miners continued in his employment. Threlkeld immediately released them to the A. A. Company, though he observed that the company refused to employ them.⁹

Because of this employment restriction, it is held by some that Threlkeld employed aboriginal natives in his Ebenezer mine. There seems to be no real evidence for this, and it is difficult to imagine how primitive aborigines who were renowned for their fear of dark caves and holes would be willing to work in a coal mine. On the other hand, Threlkeld was highly respected and trusted by the natives, and he may have been able to persuade some of them to conquer their instinctive fear of the underground.

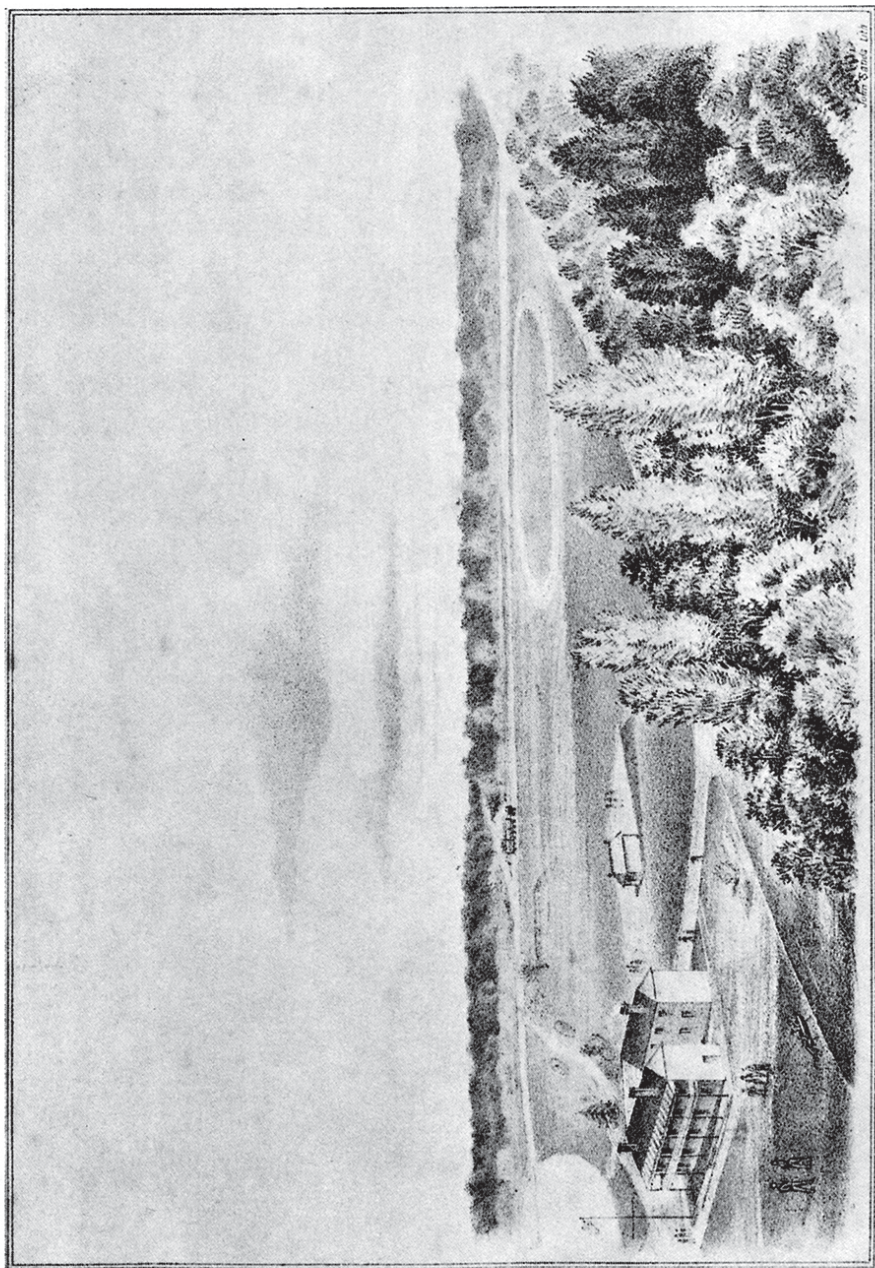
A second problem which Threlkeld faced was the navigation of the Lake Macquarie entrance channel. Although at first the *Ann* was able successfully to cross the bar with small cargoes of coal, the passage was soon found to be dangerous, and after the first year or so of mining operations a different transportation arrangement was tried. In 1842 Threlkeld purchased a small portion of ten acres at the lake heads as a coal loading depot. The ten acres were situated on the southern side of the channel, and contained a fine outcrop of coal, which Threlkeld believed was the seam from which Captain Reid obtained his cargo in 1800.¹⁰ Unfortunately, Threlkeld was not permitted to take any coal from his ten acre lot, since the government regulation gave the A. A. Company the option of mining there. But Threlkeld's purpose in acquiring this small portion of territory was to make it merely

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Threlkeld, L. E., *An Australian grammar . . . as spoken by the aborigines in the vicinity of Hunter's River, Lake Macquarie, &c.* (Sydney, 1834), p. 51.



Cooranbong police station, post office, Church of England and public school, 1884.



Toronto ca. 1887 showing the hotel, the racecourse, the wharf, and the old tramline.

a depot for coal loading. Wharf facilities were constructed, and this enabled Threlkeld to transfer coal from small lake barges into ocean vessels. The necessity of twice loading coal for its conveyance from Ebenezer to Sydney increased considerably the cost of the mining industry, but Threlkeld managed to offset this by owning his own vessels, instead of depending upon hired ones. By the end of 1844 he possessed six vessels of various descriptions. Two of these were colliers of fifty tons each, and designed for the purpose of conveying the coal from the lake heads to Sydney. These two schooners were named *Lancelot* and *Sarah* after Threlkeld and his wife. Then there were four smaller boats used for moving the coal from the Ebenezer loading platform to the lake heads—the barge *Hope* of twenty-five tons, a small schooner of sixteen tons christened *Henry*, and two smaller boats, the *Tiger* and *Calcutta*, each of twelve tons. With this small fleet of ships, and the use of the depot at the heads, Threlkeld was able to land coal in Sydney at a price considerably lower than the A. A. Company charged.¹¹

Though Threlkeld owned the Ebenezer Coal Works, he did not himself manage the business. In fact, less than a year after its establishment he moved from Lake Macquarie to Sydney, where the remaining years of his life were spent. In 1844 the colliery manager was receiving a salary of £150 per annum. Under his direction were six miners who earned £25 a year, plus rations of basic foodstuffs, and ten mariners who were more highly paid. Two of these mariners were the masters of the schooners *Lancelot* and *Sarah*, and each captain was assisted by four sailors. This means that a total of seventeen men were connected with the coaling enterprise. The huts of the miners were situated on the shore of the lake, close to the mouth of the pit. At this spot there was also a store building, where the quantities of food rations were kept and issued to the men on a weekly basis. The colliery manager seems to have resided in the former mission house, about two miles from the coal workings.¹²

At the close of 1844, Threlkeld sold his entire Lake Macquarie estate, including the Ebenezer Coal Works, by public auction for the sum of £3,450, which was only a small fraction of the estimated value.¹³ The reason for this unexpected disposal of the profitable enterprise by Threlkeld is said to have been a financial disaster which overtook his eldest son, Joseph Thomas Threlkeld.¹⁴ This young man had acquired a large holding in the Gwydir district of north-western New South Wales, but drought and depression had led to failure. The father felt duty bound to rescue his son from financial ruin, and under the circumstances decided to assign his Ebenezer estate to a group of three trustees—John Campbell, T. W. Smart,

¹¹ From the Report of the Select Committee on the Coal Inquiry, *op. cit.*

¹² *SMH*, 19 Dec. 1844.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ RAHS journal, v. 25, 1939, p. 359 (Champion).

and H. Bourne. After a short time the whole property was put up for auction, and an advertisement for the sale appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 19th December 1844. Portions of the advertisement are printed below:

For absolute sale: All that valuable and princely Coal Estate (upon which upwards of £15,000 has been most judiciously laid out), the EBENEZER COAL MINES—Works, Wharfs, Sailing Vessels, Barges, Boats, Shipping Depot, Residence, Paddocks, Gardens, Cultivation grounds, Milking Cows, Cattle, Horses, Dray, Implements, etc. etc.

Mr. George A. Lloyd takes the earliest moment in making known to the several capitalists of the Metropolis that he fearlessly challenges the whole Colony, and with every respect to the value of other properties, asserts that there is not one amongst the whole that can be brought in anything like the scale of comparison with the Estate, now in full operation, upon the best and cleanest vein of coal that the miner can wish to work upon.

It will be brought to public competition under instructions given him by the trustees, under deed of assignment of L. E. Threlkeld, John Campbell, Esq., of Pitt Street, At his rooms, Lower George Street, 2 doors from the 'Herald' Office . . . Absolutely without reserve . . . on Monday, 30th. December 1844; sale to commence punctually at 12 o'clock.

The Coal Mine yields at 1d. per ton, £34,416. The Coal Mine contains 2 square miles, the seam of which on being worked is 8 ft. thick. Worked on the level, too. A calculation has been made by one of the most eminent engineers and which perfectly tallies with Mr. McCulloch, that allowing one third for Dykes, and Casualties, 8,260,000 tons of coal should be yielded, and which at only one penny per ton, turns out £34,416, and this is obtained in a healthy wholesome manner at half the cost of labour employed elsewhere, and by men always ready and willing at less wages, and may explain why this mine is so Easily and Well Worked, added to which a Shaft has been sunk, and the Fact of Another Seam below is ascertained beyond doubt, but the extent not carried out, yet.

To Observe. The Mine is now in full operation, and any quantity of coal to 'any amount' can be supplied weekly—The Miners' huts, Store, Wharf, Railway, etc. etc. being on the spot, or rather, The Coal Mines are Perfect.

LOT 2 Brings before the Public (though and with great perseverance only obtained specially from the Crown for the purpose), Five Acres constituting that valuable portion of land at the entrance of the Lake . . . The Depot and the Wharf . . . for the shipment of coal on board the colliers employed in this trade. . . .

Despite the suave wording of the advertisement, the 'princely estate' realized only £3,450, the successful bidder being Ralph Mayer Robey. It must be kept in mind, however, that in the mid-1840's the British colonies were being severely shaken by a financial depression which brought about the ruin of many business men. The colony of New South Wales experienced more than its share of the slump, as it coincided with widespread droughts

throughout the country. It turned out, therefore, that Threlkeld could not have chosen a less opportune time to sell out his business.

The new owner of the Ebenezer estate, Mr. Robey, formed a company in which, interestingly enough, Threlkeld's second oldest son had a share in connection with his uncle.¹⁵ It is significant that the deed of grant for the Ebenezer property had never been issued to Threlkeld, but Robey obtained it on 28th February 1846. Robey still worked the coal mine in 1847, though it was then being worked 'at a much less rate than formerly'.¹⁶ According to one source of information, a miner named Russell was killed at the mine during May of 1848, as a result of a fall of coal.¹⁷ In the same month, there appeared the following item in the *Maitland Mercury*, as reported in the *Journal* of the Newcastle and Hunter District Historical Society:¹⁸

On the Queen's Birthday there was great excitement at Stockton. Mr. Winship, the shipbuilder, had constructed two barges (intended for Lake Macquarie). They were launched today, and these being the first to be launched and it also being the Queen's Birthday, Fisher & Donaldson of the tweed factory fired a Royal Salute.

The Newcastle historian believed that these barges were to be used at the Ebenezer colliery. This is possible, though unlikely. The Ebenezer works already possessed its own fleet of barges and boats for the carriage of coal, and the amount of coal taken from the mine was diminishing. But at this time there were some other small mining enterprises going forward around Lake Macquarie, and the builder of the two new barges, Mr. Winship, himself owned a section of land containing coal on the eastern side of the lake, so it is more than likely that Mr. Winship intended the new barges for his own use.

In January of 1850 a colonial newspaper made a reference to the arrival in Sydney of coal from the Ebenezer colliery,¹⁹ but a year later the *Sydney Morning Herald*²⁰ reported that the working of the mine had been suspended. The reason was not given, but some believe that the tunnel was considered dangerous by the workmen. It also seems likely that there were problems of water seepage in the pit, and the primitive equipment kept there was inadequate to cope with it. A third factor may have been the necessity of transferring coal from small to larger vessels at the heads, which tended to diminish the profitability of the coaling enterprise. It may have proved impossible to sell the coal in Sydney at any profit at all.

Giving evidence before a Parliamentary Committee in 1853, George

¹⁵ From Report of the Select Committee on the Coal Inquiry, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ NHDHS journal, v. 9, pt. 1, 1954.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, quoting the *Maitland Mercury* of 26 May 1848.

¹⁹ *SMH*, 6 Jan. 1850.

²⁰ *SMH*, 16 Apr. 1851.

Alfred Lloyd, a son-in-law of Rev. Threlkeld, stated that the New South Wales Coal and Intercolonial Steam Navigation Company, of which he was a principal, had recently purchased the Ebenezer colliery and intended to work it.²¹ Lloyd's company may have worked the mine for a short period shortly after 1853, but the pit was certainly abandoned again during the 1860's.

Interestingly enough, however, the Ebenezer mine was operated again many years later, shortly before the turn of the century, by another company. At that time it was known as the South Hetton Colliery.²² New drives were put through, and an extensive system of passages was developed before finally the mine was worked out and abandoned, in which condition it is found today.

As mentioned earlier, in 1830 the Australian Agricultural Company was granted exclusive rights to the mining of coal in New South Wales. Rev. Threlkeld was the first to remonstrate against this unfair monopoly, and he succeeded in gaining the right to mine coal, solely on the basis that his 1,280-acre estate had been promised to him prior to 1830. However, now that the entering wedge was found, others followed after Threlkeld in attempts to secure mining rights. William Brooks, whose extensive property at the northern end of the lake (Speer's Point) was granted in the same year as Threlkeld's, discovered a seam of coal on his land, and successfully appealed to the colonial government for the right to open a mine. The following announcement concerning his venture appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1843:²³

Lochend Colliery, Lake Macquarie. The Proprietor of the Lochend Colliery begs to intimate . . . that he has now commenced mining, and is enabled to state with perfect confidence, that his Coal is of the first quality, similar in character as the Newcastle coal for Engines, for the production of Gas, for Furnaces, or for Family use. In order to induce the proprietors of such vessels as are adapted to the trade to support his undertaking, he will supply the article at his Wharf, on the Lake, at 7/6d. per ton. A cargo will shortly be sent to Sydney, of which due notice will be given. The proprietor, who is now at the Royal Hotel, will leave by the steamer this evening, but letters may be addressed to him as under,

William Brooks, Lochend, by Newcastle.

Unfortunately, William Brooks' little industry did not meet with very much success; for although his price of 7/6d. per ton at the mine was probably reasonable, the cost and difficulty of removing it from the lake were undoubtedly sufficient to keep most buyers away. The proprietor of the

²¹ RAHS journal, v. 31, pt. 2, 1945, p. 114 (Jervis).

²² The Lake Macquarie and District Historical Society holds a copy of a 'Plan of South Hetton Colliery Tunnel Workings, Toronto, copied for Colliery Mining Record, September 25th 1898'.

²³ SMH, 9 Aug. 1843.

Ebenezer Coal Works had removed this obstacle by employing his own fleet of specially constructed craft in order to keep delivery prices down, and the Lochend Colliery could not compete against this. We have no knowledge of the quantity of coal actually shipped from Lochend, but it appears that by 1847 the works were no longer in operation.²⁴

One year after the opening of the Lochend mine, the Brown Brothers commenced coal mining operations at Four Mile Creek, near East Maitland, and with this courageous attempt the monopoly of the A. A. Company was effectually undermined. This encouraged other parties to join the mining industry, and the sequel to all this was the appointment by the New South Wales government in 1847 of a Select Committee to inquire into the monopoly on coal mining held by the A. A. Company.²⁵ A good deal of evidence was taken by the committee from a number of business men and citizens, including Rev. Threlkeld.

In his evidence, Threlkeld summed up the mining situation as far as Lake Macquarie was concerned. He pointed out that coal existed at many points around the lake, and believed that the region held a great future for mining. He described his own experiences in challenging the A. A. Company, and mentioned two lakeside landowners who were restricted from mining: 'Both Mr. J. H. Boughton, of the Paterson, and Dr. Mitchell, have beautiful coal at the Lake; Dr. Mitchell has a seam 8 or 10 feet thick.' Boughton's land was situated on the southern side of the lake heads, while Dr. Mitchell's land was the estate originally promised to Madam Rens, at the northern end of the lake. Threlkeld also mentioned that,

At the Heads there are 10 acres of ground which I formerly purchased for a depot at the Heads, from the Government, which is pure coal field, and the coal is reserved there; 5 acres of that belong now to Mr. Robey, and 5 acres to Mr. Holden, the solicitor, but they cannot work the coal.

Questioned concerning any lakeside properties where mining was not restricted, Threlkeld mentioned Warner's 1,280-acre grant dating from 1829. He added that although no attempt had as yet been made to work the coal there, the widow of Jonathan Warner was contemplating this, and wished to let part of her property for this purpose. Here Threlkeld seems, however, to have been mistaken, for it is clear from Lands Department records²⁶ that Mary Warner was not given the right to mine coal from her estate until 1873.

The ultimate result of the 1847 Coal Inquiry was that the exclusive mining rights enjoyed by the Australian Agricultural Company were removed, and the coal industry was more or less thrown open to all comers.

²⁴ There is no mention of Lochend in the Report of the Select Committee on the Coal Inquiry, *op. cit.*

²⁵ See *Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council*, 1847, v. 2, pp. 335-92.

²⁶ Lands Department: Register of Land Grants (County of Northumberland), No. 9.

Consequently there was a general expansion of the mining industry after that time, and particularly during the 1860's and 1870's, when Australian colonies were experiencing a rapid growth of population and industrialization. Meanwhile, the small number of capitalists who might have been interested in working the Lake Macquarie coal resources were probably deterred because of the navigational difficulties presented by the lake's entrance channel.

However, there were some isolated mining ventures about the lake after 1847. The construction of two coal-carrying barges by Mr. Winship in 1848 has already been mentioned. Then in 1854 a coal mining venture was under way at an unidentified spot at the lake. Our evidence for this is a letter written to the *Newcastle Chronicle* in 1868²⁷ on the subject of tube wells and their value for water supply. The writer was a Mr. J. J. C. Stewart, who made this reference to Lake Macquarie:

For the reason that tube wells have a small reservoir capacity, they cannot come into general use; . . . for the principle was known to many, and was put into practice by me, in the year 1854, on the shores of Lake Macquarie, twenty miles from Newcastle. The circumstances calling it into use were these—I was putting down a bore for coal by contract, for the agent of Mr. Corrie. Fresh water was scarce, having to go some miles in a boat for it . . .

Some of these references to early mining ventures are rather vague, but are sufficient to indicate that there were at least one or two coal workings at Lake Macquarie during the 1850's. We gain the impression, too, that there was not a widespread interest in lakeside mining at the time, despite the fact that the mineral resources of the area were much publicized. However, a lively interest in Lake Macquarie coal developed during subsequent years, and the narrative of this second phase of the industry will be the subject of a later chapter.

But we return again to the Rev. L. E. Threlkeld and his Ebenezer works, for this was an enterprise of large significance in the history, not only of Lake Macquarie, but of the coal mining industry of New South Wales. In a previous chapter, we traced the life story of Threlkeld the missionary and protector of the aborigines; in this present chapter we have been concerned with Threlkeld the pioneer industrialist, and there are three things which we may remember of him in this connection. The first point to remember is that he was the first person to exploit the coal seams of Lake Macquarie, and in doing so, he rendered a valuable service to the colony by breaking into the monopoly held by the Australian Agricultural Company. The second thing is that he proved Lake Macquarie to be navigable, though with definite limitations because of its shallow entrance bar. In his evidence to the Coal Inquiry Committee in 1847, Threlkeld himself admitted that 'the navigation of Lake Macquarie was hardly known until it was opened

²⁷ NC, 27 Aug. 1868.

by me when I commenced the mine'. On the same occasion he stated that the largest vessel ever to have entered the lake was one of his fifty-ton schooners, 'and that was built expressly for the purpose. . . . A vessel could not go in or out safely whose draft was more than 4'6".' The problems which Threlkeld's Coal Works faced as a result of these natural limitations were faced over and over again in the years that followed by a score of companies and private persons who used the lake for transport of goods to and from Sydney and Newcastle.

The third thing to remember about Lancelot Edward Threlkeld is the faith that he had in the future of the lake which had captured his interest. He was convinced of the magnitude of the region's coal deposits, and believed that quantities of iron ore also abounded at the lake. There were also deposits of shell lime, and on the basis of these three raw materials, Threlkeld conceived that the future might see the establishment of a steel-making industry at Lake Macquarie.²⁸ He was aware, of course, that Newcastle had the better shipping facilities, but he believed that if the Lake Macquarie entrance could be deepened, the natural harbour thus opened to shipping would grow to become one of Australia's greatest seaports.

²⁸ From the Report of the Select Committee on the Coal Inquiry, *op. cit.*

9

NEWPORT

THE year 1840 was a significant one for the colony of New South Wales, and was in a particular way notable for the Lake Macquarie district. For the colony as a whole, that year marked the cessation of convict transportation to Sydney and other eastern ports. True, there remained many Crown prisoners in New South Wales for the next two or three decades. But by 1840 it was clear that the Australian colonies were something more than mere penal establishments. A large number of free settlers had arrived in New South Wales by this time, and many of them had become wealthy pastoralists, their stations extending ever further out into the vast interior, and even beyond the 'limits of location'. Newcastle had made considerable progress since it ceased to be a convict settlement, and in 1840 boasted a population slightly exceeding one thousand persons. A few miles up the river from Newcastle, the town of Maitland had shown even more remarkable growth. From a tiny depot in the early twenties, Maitland had expanded rapidly to become the major agricultural marketing point north of Sydney. Steamboats and other craft proceeded up the Hunter to the port of Morpeth, a few miles east of Maitland, and these carried on a vigorous trade in wool, wheat, timber and a multitude of other items. The Brisbane Water region had displayed less remarkable growth, but it had increased in importance over the years. The townships of Gosford and East Gosford were laid out about 1840, regular steamship services now connected the district with Sydney, and the total population of the Brisbane Water Police District, which continued to include most or all of Lake Macquarie, numbered almost one thousand persons, of whom about one-fifth were convicts assigned to free settlers.¹

For the Lake Macquarie region in particular, the year 1840 brought two developments of special interest. One of these—the opening of the Ebenezer Coal Works—has already been described, and it marked the beginnings of the industrial phase of the lake's development. The second event of 1840—the opening of the town of Newport—is the subject of this chapter.

We must remember that by this time the stigma of a penal settlement was being removed from New South Wales, and free settlers were arriving

¹ GPO: 'Brisbane Water Tickets of Leave, 1827-1841', containing a return of the population in 1841.

in the colony in increasing numbers, with the result that most districts were experiencing a shortage of lands. Plainly, the day of the big land grants was almost over, and now the purchase of smaller portions was common. Many of the newer immigrants were interested in buying small farms or town allotments in attractive situations away from Sydney, and it is not surprising that in 1840 Lake Macquarie was considered hopefully to be one of these attractive areas. Many applications for small sections of lakeside land were lodged at the Surveyor-General's Office, and in particular the patches of reasonably fertile land along the western edge of the lake were being applied for. We have already noted that there was a rush for the alluvial flats of Stingaree Point, at the mouth of Dora Creek, and that the government had been persuaded to reserve this land from sale.

It seems that about 1840 a land boom caught up with Lake Macquarie, for in that year and the one following, at least three of the original land grants in the district were bought by enterprising land agents who converted portions of them into small allotments and township sections, and then offered them to the public. The first such venture at Lake Macquarie was the development of a town called Newport, as advertised in the *Australian* in July of 1840.² The announcement informed readers that:

The township of Newport, forming part of the Bourke Estate, will be found, on reference to the map, the mid-way station between the Brisbane Water and the Maitland or Newcastle districts, having the Hawkesbury and the Wollombi Ranges on the West and the extensive and picturesque Lake Macquarie . . . on the East. Among the many natural advantages of its position for which it was selected as a grant by one of the early commanders, who was also an eminent surveyor or engineer, the following may be enumerated.

The article then went on to mention some of the resources of the district, which included

forests of the best Colonial timber, especially cedar of the finest quality, quantities of which have been for years cut in the district, and the trade is, at this time, carried on in its full vigour.

This Newport estate was Percy Simpson's original E-ra-ring grant, to which he had received the title on 7th April 1838, after years of remonstrating with the government. For many years Simpson had resided away from the lake district, and shortly after 1838 he sold his E-ra-ring grant to rescue himself from financial difficulties. It was eventually acquired by one of Sydney's most assiduous and speculative land agents, Mr. Smart, who had inserted the advertisement in the *Australian*. Probably not all of the original 2,000 acres was subdivided for the town of Newport. It appears that the area offered for sale comprised the land along the northern side of Lake Eraring, and extending to the shore of Lake Macquarie proper.

² *Australian*, 16 July 1840.

A second land subdivision at Lake Macquarie was announced in the *Sydney Morning Herald* a month later.³ An advertisement stated that Mr. Samuel Lyons would be selling by auction 'on an early date, . . . of which due notice will be given', the allotments constituting the township of Lymington on Lake Macquarie. The place was described as being eighteen miles distant from Maitland, eight miles from Newcastle, and twenty-six miles from Brisbane Water on the new road to be constructed between the two last-named towns.

The ground chosen for this township of Lymington is on the north eastern side of the splendid Lake Macquarie. . . . The site selected for this township is on a beautiful piece of ground gradually rising on a gentle ascent from the Lake . . . and it will be laid out in half acre allotments, and there is an abundant supply of water in the driest season.

The advertisement also mentioned that grapes grew in profusion on the land being offered, and this fact helps us to conclude that the Lymington subdivision constituted a portion of the Warner estate, probably near the south-eastern boundary of the original land grant and having only a small water frontage. It appears that the 1840 sale met with complete failure, for there is no record of any sales, and the name of Lymington does not appear again until 1855 when, according to James Jervis,⁴ the unsold lots were again advertised, with no more success than in 1840. A third attempt to sell the township was made in 1885,⁵ and on this occasion it met with some success, for at this time the northern railway line was opening up new settlements in the lake district.

A third land subdivision at Lake Macquarie was announced in the *Herald* of 1841,⁶ and comprised: 'The splendid estate of Hampton, divided into 25 village allotments and 30 farms, situate upon the left bank of Cockle Creek, Lake Macquarie'. These lots were to be offered for public auction on 14th October by Mr. Samuel Lyons in Sydney. The Hampton estate consisted of a portion of the land of Messrs. G. and E. Weller, and occupied the country on the eastern bank of Cockle Creek a couple of miles upstream from its confluence with the lake. The Wellers' grant extended back into the Cardiff district.

The town of Hampton was pleasantly situated on the bank of Cockle Creek:

in 25 allotments, of about $\frac{1}{2}$ acre each, some a little more and some a little less. There is a Reserve for a wharf and Market of better than one acre, and about two acres for Church and Parsonage. This Estate is generally well-

³ *SMH*, 3 Aug. 1840.

⁴ *RAHS journal*, v. 31, pt. 2, 1945 (Jervis).

⁵ A copy of an advertisement-plan for the sale of Lymington allotments in 1885 is held by the Lake Macquarie and District Historical Society.

⁶ *SMH*, 2 Oct. 1841.

watered. The Southern boundary is a range of hills, on the surface of which is found plenty of coal; the remaining portions of the estate are undulating and well-timbered, particularly with Blue Gum. Hampton is situated about 10 miles from Newcastle. . . . The 30 Farms vary in extent from 31 to 131 acres, bounded by the lands of W. Brooks, J. Warner, and J. B. Weller, Esqrs., and Crown Lands.

As was the case with the Lymington proposal, this plan for Hampton aroused little interest at the time. Thirty years later, a visitor to that part of the countryside reported finding only bushland, with the exception of a small dairy with some vegetable gardens attached to it.⁷

There were many reasons why the Newport venture met with some success, while the other two enterprises failed to engender much interest, and these reasons should become clear as we trace the story of Newport. This is a fascinating story, especially in view of the fact that for many recent years the exact location of Newport was unknown to most historians. Some have stated that Newport was situated near the lake heads at Reid's Mistake, or that it was a development of the Coal Point peninsula; and some features of the newspaper advertising in 1840 and 1841 do appear, at first reading, to support one or the other of these locations. However, after a careful examination of all of the available evidence, we are left in absolutely no doubt as to the situation of the place. It was located at Eraring, and was contiguous to the mouth of Dora Creek.

The most attractive feature of the Dora Creek district to the early settlers was its fertile soil. In the years of exploration, Surveyor James Ralfe had examined most of the lakeside country while engaged in measuring farms, and he had concluded that the best agricultural soil in the area lay in the Dora Creek district:⁸

The land immediately on the Lake is good, but of no extent, being backed by low, undulating hills, barren and thickly covered with grass trees and only adapted for small farms. . . . There are several salt water creeks which terminate in swamps, Dora Creek being of the same description, . . . and the country on both banks is low, swampy and partially of very rich alluvial soil.

Not many years elapsed before settlers discovered these patches of alluvial soil, and began to apply for them. Percy Simpson acquired some fine patches of farming land in his Eraring grant, though it is not known whether he had any of it cultivated for gardens. In 1836 Mr. H. Jacques requested the Surveyor-General that he be permitted to purchase a block of 650 acres of very good land on Stingaree Point, opposite Simpson's piece. No steps were taken at the time to fulfil Mr. Jacques' request, and after further petitioning, the applicant was informed by letter in May 1839 that for the time being

⁷ *TCJ*, 11 June 1870.

⁸ Surveyor-General: letters from surveyors: James Ralfe, 5 Dec. 1829 (Archives Office).

it was quite impossible to have the land surveyed, and it was suggested that the application should be cancelled or postponed.⁹ A year later the Surveyor-General received another request for the same piece of land from Edward Hely, who gave his address as 'Donoughmore, Lake Macquarie'.¹⁰

I should feel obliged by your informing me when that section of land (Stingaree Point) and situate on the south bank of Dory Creek, Lake Macquarie, applied for in 1836 by Mr. Jacques, but on consequence of not being freed land at that time could not be sold. But as Mr. Dalgetty surveyed it when last in the district, I should think further delay was unnecessary.

Hely, too, was disappointed, however, for Surveyor Dalgetty had already recommended that the 650-acre section at Stingaree Point might be reserved from sale, because of its potential value as a town or village reserve. Actually, no township was ever laid out on the land, and some years after 1840 Stingaree Point was released for general sale.

From the nature of the requests mentioned above, it is clear that the land about the mouth of Dora Creek was in considerable demand for agriculture by about 1840, and it is not surprising that a number of the first residents of Newport were active farmers. Results achieved were encouraging, though the correspondent who contributed the following item to the *Sydney Morning Herald* must have been wearing tinted spectacles. Speaking of Newport, the correspondent wrote:¹¹

It is with much pleasure we refer to, and can with confidence speak of, the appearance, improvements, prospects, and growing importance, of this township and neighbourhood. . . . At the few farms in the suburban allotments of the township, which our limited time permitted us to visit, were to be seen good fat pigs and fowls in abundance, also some very good milking cows of the improved breed, which would not disgrace the best herds of the largest proprietors in the Colony.

The wheat crop, growing in well enclosed paddocks, appeared well and luxuriant.

The gardens, in which were growing all the substantials, and many of the delicacies of the season, in the greatest perfection, excited our astonishment, more than anything we had before seen. In truth, seldom or never have we seen at any season, even in the most favoured spots of Britain, larger or finer potatoes, turnips, green peas, etc., than those growing in the grounds of Messrs. Carter and Smith, of which we had the pleasure not only of ocular proof, but also of substantial demonstration.

They, one and all, have ceased to longer grumble or repine (as at the first

⁹ Surveyor-General: copies of letters sent to individuals: H. Jacques, May 1839 (Archives Office).

¹⁰ Surveyor-General: letters received from individuals: Edward Hely, 2 May 1840 (Archives Office).

¹¹ *SMH*, 28 July 1842.

they were so forward to indulge in) but now that they are beginning to 'reap of the fruit of their labours', and to taste of the 'milk and honey' of the land, they seem much pleased with themselves, the place, their present position, and future prospects, and we trust, more so than of late, with one another.

To the diversity of agricultural pursuits remarked upon in the above paragraphs, we may add that at least one or two Newport settlers kept sheep. This we learn from the Brisbane Water census records of 1841.

The first batch of allotments for the planned township of Newport were advertised for sale on 30th July 1840,¹² and in spite of the known agricultural value of the land, the sale would probably have met with failure, had it not been for announcements concerning the new road being surveyed from Brisbane Water to Maitland. As has already been noticed, this new road was designed to cross Dora Creek a short distance from its mouth by means of a ferry, and it was expected that the road would pass along the western boundary of the Newport estate. The *Australian* in December of 1840 promised that an early start would be made on construction of the Gosford to Maitland road, adding that the road would greatly benefit the residents of the northern districts who would be able to travel by road to Gosford, and thence by sea to Sydney.

The matter still more recommends itself to notice from the circumstance of an inn being about to be built at Newport, half way between Maitland and Gosford, which village is situated upon Lake Macquarie.¹³

We cannot be certain as to the success of the first sale of Newport sections in July of 1840, but the following item in the *Australian* in February of the following year offered considerable inducement to colonists:¹⁴

It will be a matter of much general interest to our readers, and more particularly to those who reside in the districts bordering Maitland to the south, to learn that a new township, situate upon Lake Macquarie, has been formed, as a kind of intermediate station between Maitland and Gosford. The name of the township is Newport. . . .

It is a great advantage to the inhabitants of these districts, that the new road from Maitland to Gosford, discovered by Mr. W. H. Wells, proves so excellent a one. It avoids the hilly range of Wyee and the Sugar-Loaf Mountain, and is also shorter than the road lately in use. It is, our readers will observe, upon this road that the town of Newport is situated, having Lake Macquarie on one side and the road on the other. A bridge has been constructed, nearly a furlong in length, across a small arm of the lake; by crossing which, and also by means of a punt at Dora Creek, a saving of eight miles will be effected.

The public will further hear with interest, that the entrance from the

¹² Advertisements for this sale appeared in the colonial newspapers.

¹³ *Australian*, 19 Dec. 1840.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4 Feb. 1841.

sea to Lake Macquarie, an entrance which is commonly called 'Reid's Mistake', IS DISCOVERED TO BE NAVIGABLE. An inlet for shipping is thus given into a most safe and beautiful harbour, 300 miles in circumference; the only located spot of which at present is the aforesaid town of Newport.

It seems obvious that the settlers on Jerry's Plains will, instead of going out of their way to Newcastle or Maitland, bring down their wool to Newport direct, as shipping can lie within a cable's length of the shore.

The 'Kangaroo' will shortly be engaged to perform a trip from Sydney to Newport, passing through the Strait called Reid's Mistake, and affording the passengers a view, almost for the first time since the existence of the Colony, of Lake Macquarie in its entire beauty.

Some interesting and remarkable statements are made in the newspaper announcement, and one or two comments seem desirable. First, it is necessary to keep in mind that the item which we have quoted was undoubtedly prepared by someone who had a commercial interest in the plans for Newport, and hence these statements should be accepted with the proverbial 'pinch of salt'. The article makes some mention of the newly surveyed road from Maitland to Gosford. This was primarily the work of the government surveyor, Dalgety, and the circumstances have been described in an earlier chapter. The newspaper item suggests that another surveyor, W. H. Wells, was responsible for the discovery of the route which Dalgety subsequently worked out in greater detail, and this may well have been so. It is mentioned, particularly, that this new road managed to avoid the 'hilly range of Wyee' and the Sugarloaf Mountain. It may be argued that there is no significant range of high hills near Wyee; however, a mile or two westward of that locality is the commencement of an important spur of the Wattagan mountain range, actually the watershed divide between tributaries of Dora and Wyong Creeks. Yambo Hill is the real beginning of this range, and just beyond this hill of over 800 feet elevation, the old track known as Simpson's Road passed over a low part of this range. The road linking Mandalong with Doralong crosses at the same place today, and it was probably this regular crossing of the range which the new road of 1841 avoided. The statement that the new road also by-passed the Sugarloaf Range suggests that instead of using the traditional Brunkerville Gap near Mount Heaton, the surveyors of the new road had in mind a route leading along the eastern side of the Sugarloaf Range towards the Hunter River, passing through the general localities of Wakefield, Barnsley, and Minmi. If this assumption is correct, then the plan of the surveyors to cross Dora Creek by punt some miles eastward of the Kourumbung ford can be better appreciated, since this would allow the entire course of the road north of Wyong to pass considerably to the eastward of the older tracks used since Percy Simpson's time.

The *Australian* correspondent stated that a bridge across a small arm of

the lake—by which he must have meant the swamp at the western end of Lake Eraring, according to an old Lands Department plan—had already been constructed in 1841. This would tend to indicate that some work on the formation of a carriage road was carried out about this time; but it seems certain that little or nothing in the way of roadwork was accomplished northwards of Lake Eraring, for the early maps of the district merely show one or two tracks leading from the Dora Creek punt in a north-westerly direction connecting with the older tracks from Cooranbong to Maitland via the Brunkerville Gap.

The assumption expressed in the newspaper article, that the graziers on Jerry's Plains in the upper Hunter would bring their wool down to Newport rather than to Morpeth, reveals an overdose of enthusiasm and speculation concerning the future of Newport. There is, of course, no evidence that Hunter valley products were ever shipped to Sydney from Newport.

As a final comment on the *Australian* item we have quoted, mention may be made of the ferry-boat *Kangaroo* which was to bring the first party of tourists and prospective land buyers to view Lake Macquarie. The *Journal* of the Newcastle and Hunter District Historical Society¹⁵ makes reference to the *Kangaroo*, and it quotes from an advertisement in the *Newcastle Chronicle* of 1869:

For Sale, the KANGAROO, a paddle steamer built on the Hunter River, of 40 horsepower, and 52 tons register. Built of colonial hardwood; boiler two years old and has used fresh water ever since. Draught of water 4 feet six inches. For particulars apply R. B. Wallace, Newcastle.

The draught of the vessel indicates that it could have successfully navigated the entrance bar leading into Lake Macquarie, though there would have been only a few inches to spare at high water. The writer in the *Journal* says that the old paddle steamer was built at Raymond Terrace in 1839, by John Korff. She was first placed on Sydney Harbour as a ferry-boat between Sydney and Parramatta, and in 1859 was removed to Melbourne to ply between Port Melbourne and Williamstown. The ship is supposed to have seen sixty years of service before being broken up.

The attractively worded advertisements appearing in the colonial press during 1840 and 1841, as well as a touring voyage by the *Kangaroo*, must have presented powerful inducements to colonists to settle at Newport, and it is a fact that many township allotments were sold during the early months of 1841. A living resident of Dora Creek district today, Mr. Charles Parker, has in his possession a title deed for a half-acre portion 'in the town of Newport', which was sold on 18th March 1841 to John Redding. The allotment is described as lot no. 5 of section 7, and originally cost ten pounds.

In the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 30th April 1841 twelve town lots were

¹⁵ NHDHS journal, v. 9, pt. 3, 1954, p. 42.

advertised for sale. These comprised six lots with a frontage to Woolloomooloo Street, and six on Parramatta Street, Newport. The advertisement went on to give an up-to-date description of the progress of the town:

There are so many proprietors of allotments in this township, and its advantages are now so well known, that any particular description of them is deemed unnecessary. . . .

A wharf of 50 feet in length, by 15 feet wide, has just been finished, and a vessel of 20 tons has lately completed loading there. This circumstance alone shows that the object has been attained of this township being a port. Indeed a cargo of coals may be expected from thence every day.

The town is well supplied with water, there being a plentiful supply at Woolloomooloo Street, one of the principal streets of the town.

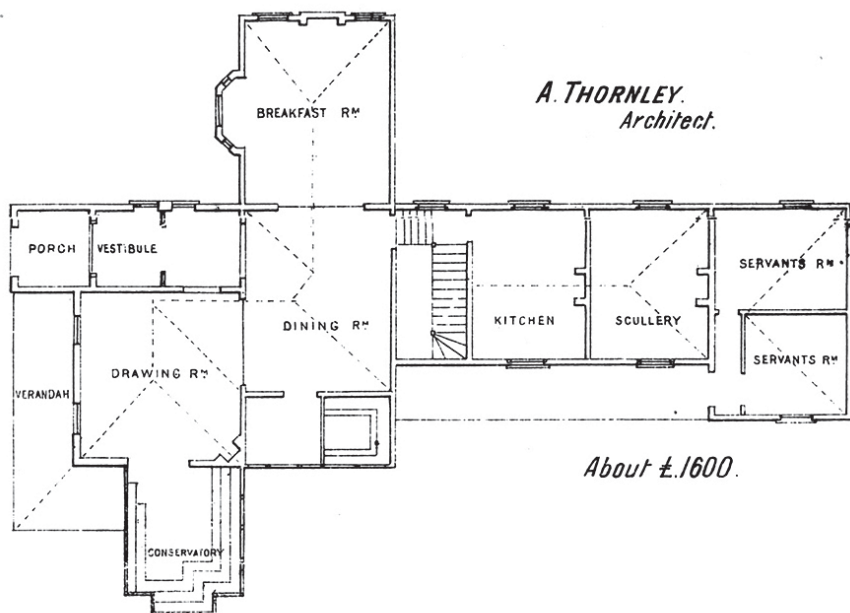
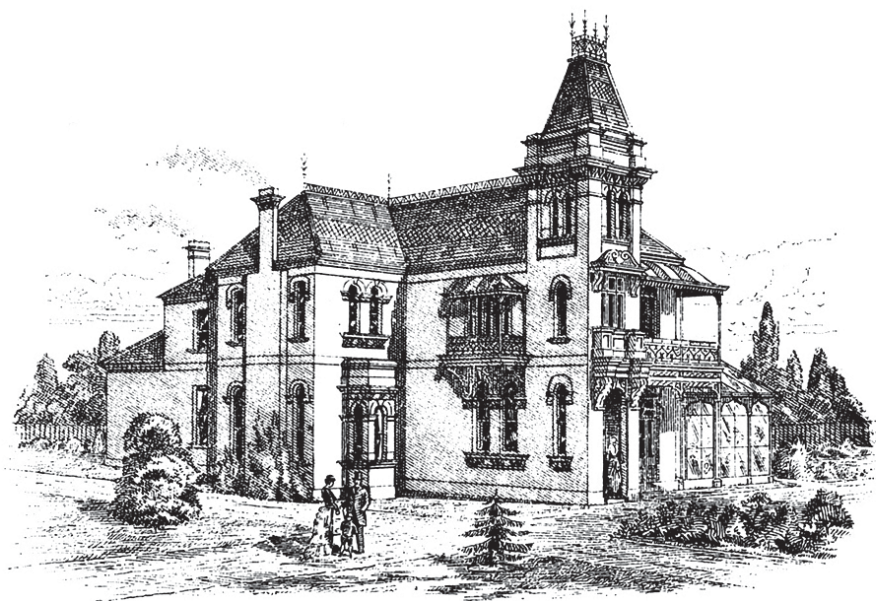
The great Gosford to Maitland new road, under a Government Surveyor, passes through the western part of the town and brings Gosford within the distance of fifteen [*sic*] miles. A road is in progress to avoid the Sugarloaf Range, and opens a line with the Wollombi, which, when accomplished, will make Newport a shipping place for Jerry's Plains and the Wollombi districts.

There is abundance of timber in the neighbourhood for all building purposes, and cedar is also obtained in some of the brushes.

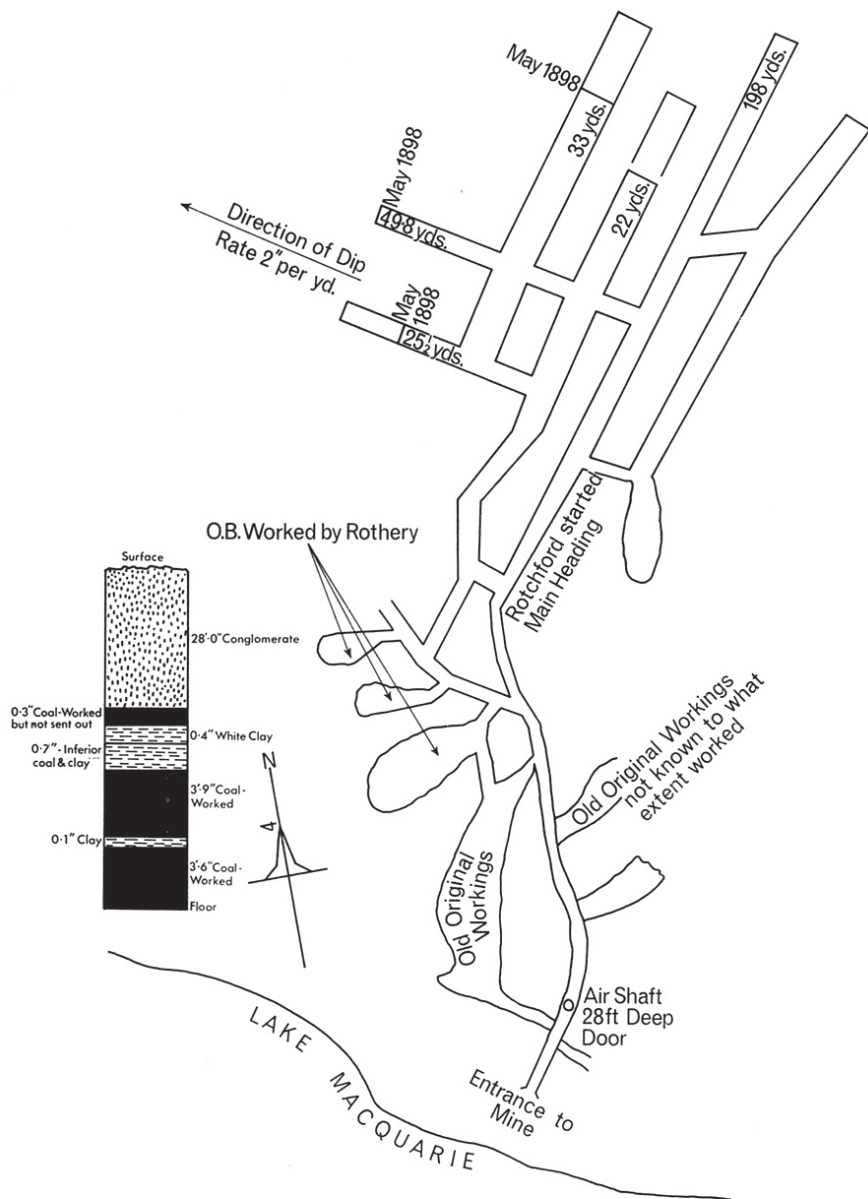
As with the Newport advertisements referred to earlier, this one is a good example of the advertiser's art. For example, the reference to the construction of a wharf and the taking of a cargo of coal must be taken as an allusion to the Ebenezer Coal Works at Coal Point, from whence the small ship *Ann* made her maiden voyage to Sydney with coal. Citizens of Sydney would have to be forgiven for believing that the Ebenezer mine was situated right at Newport, especially in view of the occasional references in the newspapers to the 'Newport coals' from Threlkeld's colliery. On the other hand, a wharf of some description must have been constructed near the Newport estate itself, for when the Ebenezer Coal Works began to use their own vessels *Lancelot* and *Sarah* for the carriage of coal, the 20-ton *Ann* provided a passenger and cargo service between Newport and other places, including Brisbane Water and Sydney. During April of 1841 Mr. N. G. Carter of Newport presented evidence in a Gosford court hearing,¹⁶ in which he stated that he had moved from Gosford to Newport three months previously, and that all of his stores and baggage had been taken there on board the *Ann*. He mentioned that on this occasion there were several passengers on board.

The total effect of all the colourful advertising and publicity centred on Newport was the creation of a small speculative land boom during 1841. Only a few years previous to this, Adelaide had experienced the detrimental effects of just such a boom, but of course the Newport affair was on a

¹⁶ GPO: 'Brisbane Water Depositions, 1835-1842', from evidence taken in April 1841 (Archives Office).



An example of the type of residence proposed by the
Excelsior Land Company for their Toronto Estate.



Plan of the Ebenezer (later South Hetton) Colliery, showing the workings of the mine.

much smaller scale. It was reported in April of 1841 that already some of the Newport allotments were being resold at a profit of seventy-five per cent.¹⁷ This meant that while most or perhaps all of the advertised lots were sold to the public, the majority of the initial buyers resold their sections at higher prices without ever having developed or built upon their land. So although there was much frenzied land buying activity in Sydney, there were comparatively few buyers with serious intentions to settle at Newport. At the time of the 1841 census¹⁸ there were but four houses in the town and fifteen persons, the four householders being Joseph Sherlock (store-keeper), Henry Worley (sheep farmer), Edward James (sheep farmer), and John Minton (agriculture). Henry Worley also acted as police constable in the surrounding district, and probably spent much of his time at Gosford where he later resided as the Chief Constable of the entire Brisbane Water district.¹⁹ However, many of Worley's descendants continued to live in the Newport district, and may be traced there today. Another of the four residents mentioned in 1841, John Minton, had come to Newport from the Hawkesbury River area, where he had for some years carried on the trade of a shoemaker.²⁰

Some other citizens took up residence at Newport late in 1841 and during the following year, as we learn from newspaper items and correspondence. There were the market-gardeners Carter and Smith, and another man named Vogan who may have been associated with them.²¹ Another resident was Timothy Ryan, who had arrived from England as an immigrant in August of 1841.²² The Ryans were still living at Newport thirty years later.²³

During 1842 most of the Newport land speculation diminished, and the small and scattered community was settling down to the hard life of pioneering. Agriculture seems to have been the main occupation of the Newport settlers, though the existence of valuable forests of timber in the vicinity was not overlooked, for it was reported in 1842 that Newport was carrying on 'a pretty fair' trade in shingles,²⁴ which must have gone to Sydney by water transport. There was much disappointment at the little progress being made with the new Gosford to Maitland road, and it appeared that Newport would not be the great overnight stopping place that it had seemed destined to become. There was no boarding establishment in the town in 1842, although a man named Ainsworth had constructed a large weather-board house suitable for an inn, and was said to be selling liquor to the

¹⁷ *SMH*, 30 Apr. 1841.

¹⁸ Census return for Town of Newport, 1841.

¹⁹ GPO: 'Depositions Book, 1855-1872', various references.

²⁰ GPO: 'Brisbane Water Depositions, 1835-1842', from evidence taken in 1838.

²¹ *Ibid.*, from evidence taken in Apr. 1841. See also *SMH*, 28 July 1842.

²² 'Gosford Depositions, 1841-1855', from evidence taken in Feb. 1843.

²³ 'Depositions Book, 1855-1872', from evidence taken in Sep. 1872.

²⁴ RAHS journal, v. 31, pt. 2, 1945 (Jervis).

district settlers.²⁵ He did not have a licence, however, and this fact soon came to the notice of the appropriate authorities in Sydney, as the following *Sydney Morning Herald* item indicates:²⁶

Newport, Lake Macquarie.—Since my last, this township and neighbourhood have been the scene of much stir, bustle, and gossip, in consequence of the active and praiseworthy exertions made by the authorities to stop illicit traffic and nefarious practices of sly grog selling. A second conviction against the same party has been carried upon, and a third case against another party, of the name of Ainsworth, was heard last week.

By February of the following year, 1843, there was an hotel at Newport, for the *Herald* published this report during that month:²⁷

On Friday night, the 6th ultimo, the Newport Hotel, the house of Mr. Boyce, was broken into, and a quantity of stores, blankets, and wearing apparel, were stolen therefrom. The intention of the burglars, it is feared, was to have burnt the premises down. . . . The tracks of a man and woman were found between the house and the stables, which, it is hoped, will be the means of tracing the parties, who it is supposed are residing in the township.

We have had plenty of rain here, the crops look remarkably well, and the young grass has made a visible alteration in the appearance of the cattle for the better.

A new mode of cattle stealing has been tried here, but it does not answer well, as it has been found out, and the party will shortly be tried and probably convicted, for exercising his ingenuity in that line.

Cattle stealing was, during the 1840's, still very prevalent throughout the Lake Macquarie district. During the month in which the above report was published, the Police Magistrate at Gosford mentioned the activities of some cattle thieves, in a letter to the Colonial Secretary.²⁸ He supplied the names of three men who carried on this trade in the vicinity of Newport and the surrounding area. These were Jeremiah Diplock, a stockman of the Dora Creek district, and well known as 'Captain of the Blue Company, the flash name of the notorious gang that so long infested the Williams and Paterson'; John Kindrick, who was better known to the populace as 'Hellfire Jack' or 'Jacks Alive'; and William Bramble, another stockman supposed to be in charge of property in the Newport region. Magistrate Holden explained the methods used by these men:

From the position which these men have chosen, they can with great facility steal and conceal cattle and get them by unfrequented ways which they are well acquainted with to the Upper Hunter and the Wollombi and cattle from those parts may be temporarily concealed near and in the cedar brushes in the neighborhood of Dora Creek.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *SMH*, 28 July 1842.

²⁷ *SMH*, 4 Feb. 1843.

²⁸ CSIL: A. Holden, 15 Feb. 1843.

Though the town of Newport was the focal point for settlement during the early 1840's, much of the surrounding country was also being occupied. In the Kourumbung locality, Hovenden Hely, a son of Frederick Augustus Hely of Gosford, had taken over his father's old dairy on Manning's grant, and employed a number of assigned servants there.²⁹ Another member of the Hely family, Edward Hely (believed to have been a brother of Frederick Augustus), resided somewhere in the lake district, for he supplied as his address 'Donoughmore, Lake Macquarie'. His residence was probably at what is now known as Rathmines,³⁰ across the bay from the Ebenezer Coal Works and its nearby miners' huts. Certainly the Helys lived at Rathmines for a good many years. Edward Hely also applied to purchase land near the mouth of Dora Creek and at Kourumbung in a position adjacent to Simpson's old grant.³¹ Another landowner of the district was Mr. E. Cory, who resided at Paterson River, but held title to all of the Wangi Point peninsula. There seems to have been little development of his property, however, and it became a regular haunt of cattle thieves.

Somewhere approximately four miles from Newport, Henry Eckford of Maitland operated a dairy station on rented land, and during the early 1840's this dairy was in the charge of Eckford's assigned convict servants.³² At the southern end of Lake Macquarie a man named William Forster had taken possession of the property on Wolstonecroft Point known as 'Recovery', originally kept as a cattle station by Richard Cape, and later by John Moore of Avoca. Forster also had a cattle run in the 'Wyhee' area, and his dairy there was cared for by a ticket-of-leave man named Haddock. A runaway convict girl, Catherine Reynolds, was captured there in 1842.³³ The Gosford police records contain references to many persons connected in one way or another with the Dora Creek district during the 1840's, and so it is evident that the area boasted plenty of activity, even though much of this was of the bad variety.

Early Newport achieved its peak of uncertain fame and short-lived prosperity two or three years after its establishment in 1840. After that, the town of promise declined rapidly both in significance and population, and its name practically disappeared from the records for the next twenty years. Then the place re-emerged gradually in the more humble role of a small agricultural and fishing village. Only a very few of the original residents remained there during the silent years that intervened.

There are many reasons why the town of Newport failed to fulfil the

²⁹ GPO: 'Gosford Depositions, 1841-1855', from evidence taken in Feb. 1843 (Archives Office).

³⁰ Surveyor-General: letters from individuals: Edward Hely, 21 Aug. 1844.

³¹ *Ibid.*, letters dated 2 May 1840 and 18 Dec. 1842.

³² *Ibid.*, letter dated 31 Oct. 1842; also see 'Gosford Depositions, 1841-1855', evidence taken in Feb. 1843.

³³ GPO: 'Brisbane Water Letter Book, 1838-1846': see copy of letter from A. Holden to William Forster, dated 27 May 1842.

ambitions of the enterprising characters who planned it, and some of these have already been mentioned. Most noteworthy was the failure of the much-vaunted new road to connect Maitland with Gosford via the Dora Creek punt. This failure dashed the hopes of those who predicted that Newport would develop as a prosperous 'half-way house' for travellers using the road. Then, too, the district proved not to be the land of promise it had been painted to attract settlers. The very name given to the town proved to be a misnomer, for the town failed to develop as a lakeside port. Small shipments of timber products and a little agricultural produce may have been made, but were of little significance. No coal was ever mined at Newport, and the graziers of the Hunter valley and Wollombi did not bring their wool down there for shipment. Even the agriculture, which appeared at first to flourish, must have brought disappointment during the prolonged droughts that the colony experienced in the later 1840's. Early visitors to Newport had commented on the healthy state of the wheat crops there, but it was during the 1840's that the damaging rust began to appear in wheat grown in the wetter coastal areas in the colony, and this must have spelt ruin to the wheat crops around Newport, as it did in other places.

The timber industry probably offered the greatest possibilities for development of the Newport district, but even this was of limited attraction at this period. It probably took only a short time to extract the best timber from the hillsides bordering the lake, and from the flats of lower Dora Creek. But almost unlimited stands of really valuable timber lay untouched in the deep valleys further to the westward, beyond the farms at Kourumbung. Almost twenty years must elapse before the requirements of the building industry in Sydney would bring a new opening for the Lake Macquarie timber industry.

These were some of the factors that hindered the early proposals for Newport. In the beginning the promises had made their appeal, and this had caused a speculative land boom in land values which caved in rapidly after a short time. By the middle of the 1840's the entire colony of New South Wales was gripped by an economic depression, an inheritance from the 'Hungry Forties' that were choking the economic life of England. The settlers around Lake Macquarie shared, to a certain extent, in the suffering.

IO

AN INTERLUDE

It is impossible to study effectively the history of any local area without an understanding of the broader sphere of events. The history of the Lake Macquarie region becomes merely a chronicle of unmeaningful incidents, unless we relate those incidents to the wider scene of Australian history, which is itself inseparable from the world scene. An intricate mesh of outside influences has shaped the story of Lake Macquarie's development from one decade to another, and in the foregoing chapters we have attempted to give some prominence to the inter-relationship of situations within the locality and without. The broad background of things must be appreciated particularly in order to explain the happenings of the years 1850 to 1860 at the lake.

Each of the three decades preceding the year 1850 was crowded with events of interest and significance in the settlement and development of the lake region. We have briefly described the course of events during each of these three decades, and tried to capture the picture of frontier activity, of the steady progress being made in settlement, of the establishment of the first industries and their early problems. The overall picture during the period of twenty-five years from 1825 to 1850 has been one of advance, as European civilization became established in a new region. But as we extend our study into the ten-year period commencing in 1850, we are immediately struck by the silence and inactivity at the lakeside scene during those years. The 1860's brought a renewal of activity and development, which continued until the close of the century; but the Fifties emerged as a very unimpressive period. These were years of inactivity and stagnation, with sometimes a tendency to move backwards. On first acquaintance, we may regard this as a strange state of affairs, and it certainly requires explanation. For the explanation, we need to look briefly at the Australian situation during that period.

The dawn of the Fifties found the Australian colonies recovering from the depression years of the previous decade. A time of economic crisis in Britain had spread its influence half-way around the world, and Australia was affected by a series of economic setbacks which, in conjunction with widespread droughts in the colonies, caused a noticeable slowing down of the pulse-rate of growth. The Lake Macquarie region shared to some extent

in this world-wide crisis, as we have seen in the failure of the township of Newport to retain its early promise of development. But by about 1850 the depression period was over, and the immediate future for Australia seemed reasonably bright.

Then, suddenly, the gold rushes commenced, bringing an unprecedented tempo to colonial life. Beginning with Edward Hargraves' discovery at Summer Hill Creek in western New South Wales in 1851, the rush to the goldfields spread into other areas of the colony, as well as into the neighbouring colonies of Victoria and Queensland, where rich deposits were uncovered. Many labourers flocked from the cities onto the goldfields, and then as the news spread around the world, thousands of people poured into the Australian colonies to share in the wealth. They came from many different continents and countries, representing many variant cultures. Chinese, especially, arrived in masses and in 1858 it was estimated that there were 33,000 of them on the Victorian goldfields alone.

Throughout the 1850's the gold rushes continued, creating tremendous upheaval in the cities, completely halting some industries, and yet at the same time doing something for Australia that nothing else could have done so quickly. Whenever a farmer or prospector found gold in a new district, the crowds flocked to that area, and there were many communities in New South Wales that commenced their history in those days. But nobody discovered gold around Lake Macquarie, and so for that district the only immediate effect of the gold rush was to rob it of some of its population, particularly the unsettled section of the community—those who floated about the countryside or hung around the farms receiving casual employment. So the 1850's did not constitute a golden age for the Lake Macquarie region. Its turn was to come in the decades that followed, while some of the gold-rush communities were on the decline.

If the years immediately following 1851 were characterized by a large-scale movement of people away from Sydney and other colonial cities, the years that followed 1860 witnessed a rapid growth of these cities such as could not have been imagined prior to the gold rushes. At the commencement of the Sixties, many thousands of people were returning to the coastal towns. Some arrived with sufficient wealth to initiate firms and industries of their own. Others came back poorer and disillusioned, satisfied to accept jobs that offered at least some security and reward for their toil. In this way the cities developed quickly into hives of secondary industry. This was happening in Sydney and Newcastle as the 1850's drew to a close.

This new phase of colonial development had two important effects upon the growth of the Lake Macquarie area. First, the rapid surge forward of city industries brought a demand for coal, and the lake district possessed extensive reserves of this 'black gold'. Second, the accompanying increase in the construction of homes and factories brought a tremendous need for timber, and again the Lake Macquarie region stood to benefit, since the

district's vast and largely untapped forest resources were relatively close to Sydney and Newcastle, and the lake itself provided a cheap and speedy means of transport. These two products—coal and timber—became the great influences in Lake Macquarie's development for nearly half a century.

In the preceding paragraphs, we have tried to create a useful background for the narrative of lakeside happenings after about 1850. With this setting in mind, we turn now to a description of the local scene, or more correctly, what little we know of the local scene. There are no exciting developments to relate, but there are interesting incidents and cross-threads that throw light on the events of after years. And so we will conduct ourselves on a rapid survey of the lake region, noticing affairs of interest or significance. Our commencing place will be Reid's Mistake, where the whole story began half a century earlier.

Along the stretch of country on the northern side of the lake entrance, very little appears to have happened since the abandonment of the aboriginal mission station at Bahtahbah soon after 1830. Ten thousand acres of this land had originally been reserved for the aborigines, and though the mission had long terminated and most of the natives had left the area, the government resisted at this stage any attempts to release the area for settlement. Eventually, at the conclusion of the gold rush in New South Wales, a severe shortage of land for small settlers led to the breaking up of the large reserve, but this development does not concern us here. The 10,000-acre block of country simply lay undeveloped during the Fifties, remaining clothed in virgin bushland except for the old clearings left from the mission days.

The situation was a little different on the southern side of the Lake Heads, where some forms of development were taking place. During the previous two decades, the Reid's Mistake district had been a favourite haunt of bushrangers and cattle stealers, and from time to time the Brisbane Water police office was compelled to station a constable there. After 1841 the proprietors of the Ebenezer colliery across the lake made use of ten acres of land at the heads as a coal loading depot. A wharf was constructed there, and although the coal industry lapsed during the 1850's, the loading facilities remained for some time.

At the Heads district, the only event of real significance during the Fifties was the arrival of the first permanent settlers, the Taaffes and the Boyds. The date of their arrival is uncertain. It may have been as early as 1850, although the year 1853 is quoted by a living descendant of the Taaffe family. This family settled near the lake shore at Galgabba, and were shortly joined by the Boyds. Thomas Boyd was a master mariner whose small ketch transported both families to the Swansea district.

During the Fifties there came a party of Chinese people to the Lake Macquarie district, and they chose to settle on the Pelican Flats a short distance from the Heads. They had almost certainly been attracted to Australia by the gold fever, but their main business at the lake was fishing,

at which sport they proved to be illustrious. The Chinese settlements in the Swansea district soon became an accepted feature of the local scene, and they remained for a good many years. By 1870 the Chinese had established a successful fish-curing industry.¹

Southward of the Heads, the country lay unoccupied as far as Lake Munmorah. There was an old farm near Budgewoi, and a little further southward on the seacoast was the home of the gold discoverer, Edward Hargraves. His residence, 'Noraville', was erected about 1852 or shortly afterwards, and still stands today. Considering its age and prolonged exposure to the salty air and coastal storms, the house is in a remarkable state of preservation. Edward Hargraves lived at 'Noraville' for a number of years, and was a well-known and highly respected identity throughout the surrounding districts.

In the southern reaches of Lake Macquarie there appears to have been little human activity during the 1850's. During the preceding decade, a settler named William Forster owned an old property on Wolstonecroft Point, as well as a dairy farm in the Wyee area, but by the year 1860 he was no longer a resident of the district. It is possible that his property at Wolstonecroft Point was purchased by John Taaffe during the Fifties, for in 1860 Taaffe owned a property 'on Chain Valley Plain near Craingen Road and Lake Macquarie'.² It seems certain that by this time the only residents in the Wyee area were the Freemans—James Freeman and his son, also christened James. Their hut and an adjoining stockyard were situated a short distance from Wyee Creek, and between it and Mannering Creek.³ Though the land surrounding the hut was partly fenced, it was Crown land and neither of the Freemans held a title to any of it. These settlers kept some cattle which roamed the adjacent bushland, and this seems to have been their chief means of livelihood. From the hut, a track led to a small wharf at the head of navigation on Wyee Creek, where a small boat was kept, though an observant lakeside settler commented in 1861 that 'these men [the Freemans] are not in the habit of fishing, they get their fish from the Chinamen'. From their place, a number of bush tracks led towards 'Coorumbung'.

Throughout the 1850's the Dora Creek area held the greatest concentration of population in the lake region. Though the town of Newport had collapsed by this time, there were some scattered settlers about, including the Ryans and the Worleys. There must also have been a number of deserted homes and farms as mute reminders of more ambitious days.

The establishment of Newport had removed the focus from Coorumbung district as a major settlement on the western side of the lake, though this transfer of dominance was only temporary. It appears that Coorumbung was

¹ *TCJ*, 9 July 1870.

² GPO: 'Gosford Depositions, 1855-1872', p. 70.

³ *Ibid.*, from evidence taken on 23 Mar. 1861.

abandoned as a police station for at least two or three years prior to 1844, for at that time the police officer at Gosford wrote to the Newcastle office strongly recommending that constables should be placed at Reid's Mistake and Coorumbung to intercept runaways.⁴ The officer mentioned that an 'old police station' existed at Coorumbung, but that the Brisbane Water police office was too inadequately staffed to place a constable there. However, by 1850 a man named Archibald Elliott was stationed as constable at Coorumbung,⁵ and ten years later constable John Overall resided there.⁶

We have little knowledge concerning the state of things at Coorumbung during the Fifties, but it seems that the district made no progress, except towards the end of the decade, when one or two portions of Crown land were taken up by settlers. In the upper valley of Dora Creek, where Martinsville is today, a military officer named Owen Beardmore was granted 100 acres in May of 1854.⁷ This adjoined a much earlier grant to Thomas Moore, dated 8th April 1834.⁸ Neither of these two properties appears to have been cleared or settled in any way before the 1860's. In 1858 Richard Gorman purchased fifty-five acres at Coorumbung 'on Mannering or Dorah Creek' at the price of one pound per acre.⁹ Gorman was a constable of the Brisbane Water police, and received appointments to various locations. It is likely that he did not reside at Coorumbung until late in the 1860's. He was an officer at Gosford in 1866,¹⁰ but two years later he was described as a farmer at Coorumbung,¹¹ where he died in 1877.

At the close of the Fifties, Coorumbung was on the eve of a new period of development as a timber settlement, with farming also occupying a place. Geographically speaking, the district was well endowed with resources. It contained some of the most valuable forests of timber within a hundred miles of Sydney, it was located at the only convenient crossing-place on Dora Creek, and it was approachable by small sea-going vessels from Sydney. Only two historical factors were needed to make the place a centre of industry: an expansion of the colonial building industry to create a strong demand for timber, and government legislation to make available small sections of Crown land for purchase by settlers with small means. Both of these developments came in the wake of the gold-rush days.

One of the few representatives of the 'gentleman' class of settlers about Lake Macquarie was Edward Hely, a brother of the former Principal Superintendent of Convicts, Frederick Augustus Hely, whose comparatively

⁴ GPO: 'Brisbane Water Letter Book, 1838-1846': copy of letter to Newcastle Police Office, dated 23 Feb. 1844.

⁵ 'Gosford Depositions, 1841-1855', from evidence taken on 19 Sep. 1850.

⁶ 'Depositions Book, 1855-1872', various references.

⁷ Information supplied by the Lands Department, Sydney.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ From Richard Gorman's title deed, dated 20 June 1859.

¹⁰ 'Depositions Book, 1855-1872', from various references in 1866.

¹¹ GPO: 'Day Book, 1861-1881': entry for 10 Mar. 1868.

early death occurred in September 1836. Edward Hely settled at the lake about 1840, choosing an attractive site at Rathmines. The specific date of his arrival at Rathmines is uncertain, but in 1844 he applied to the Surveyor-General for the purchase of some additional land in that district:¹²

Being desirous of purchasing the under-mentioned portion of land, I have the honour to request you will obtain His Excellency's authority for its survey:—25 acres of land on the western borders of Lake Macquarie—situate between Cory's and Threlkeld's grants.

An officer of the Surveyor's Department wrote on the back of the letter: 'The land between Cory's grant and Threlkeld's 1280 acres being all vacant, there does not appear any objection to the disposal of a small portion.'

If, as it is claimed,¹³ the Hely family came from Rathmines near Dublin, Ireland, then there is no question as to the origin of this name at Lake Macquarie. Over a period of years, Edward Hely established a prosperous farm, and it is believed that he planted a variety of fruit trees, as well as vineyards. A visitor to the lake during 1870 commented that much land had been cleared by Hely, and was under cultivation.¹⁴ Various members of the Hely family were buried on a portion of the estate close to the water, and the headstones were visible until fairly recently, when the area was subdivided for housing.

Across the bay from Hely's farm was the Ebenezer coal pit which ceased to operate about 1850, leaving only a few deserted miners' huts to mark the place of the abandoned enterprise. Ralph Mayer Robey had purchased the entire Ebenezer estate from Threlkeld in 1844, and had resided at Threlkeld's old home while he managed the affairs of the colliery. With the closure of the mine, Robey leased his property in 1850 or 1851 to Richard Fennell, who kept up the dairy and orchard for at least twenty years.¹⁵

The picture of settlement at the northern end of the lake during the Fifties is not very clear, but it is apparent that the period brought little change. Doubtless all of the major grants in the area—Ranclaud's, Brooks', Wellers' and Warner's—were occupied in some way, but nothing exciting happened. By this time the original Ranclaud grant of 2,560 acres had passed out of the family's hands, for when James St. John Ranclaud, Junior, attained the age of twenty-one years in 1837 he mortgaged the property to a certain James Walker for the sum of £700, and a year later he sold the estate to David Scott, who agreed to pay the mortgage debt. It was to David Scott that the title deeds were issued on 12th July 1839.¹⁶ The second and adjoining Ranclaud grant of 914 acres was the subject of a

¹² Surveyor-General: letters from individuals: Edward Hely, 21 Aug. 1844.

¹³ NHDHS journal, v. 1, 1947: Goold, W. J., *Rathmines*.

¹⁴ *TCJ*, 9 July 1870.

¹⁵ RAHS journal, v. 31, pt. 2, 1945 (Jervis).

¹⁶ Commissioners of Claims for Lands: Case No. 343, 4 June 1839.

case heard before the Commissioners of Claims for Lands in February 1842, and as a result this estate passed to Dr. James Mitchell, who had already acquired a grant of 560 acres at nearby Bolton Point in 1836.¹⁷

Across Awaba Bay lay Warner's estate, where lived the widow of Jonathan Warner with her family. She endeavoured to keep up the fine orange orchard, which was widely acclaimed a few years later as the best in the colony. A reasonably well-defined track connected Warner's farm with Newcastle, and the comparatively short distance between the two places encouraged visitors to come to the lakeside farm on special occasions. Jonathan Warner had constructed a fine house there in the early years, but his premature death prior to 1847 left Mary Warner to carry on the estate. She leased a portion of the property to a coal-mining company in 1861,¹⁸ and after her death around 1877 the estate went to mining interests.

This completes our survey of the Lake Macquarie scene during the 1850's, which surely must have been the most unprogressive decade that the region has ever experienced. The lake district was passing through an almost static phase in its development, as it were an interlude before the grand symphony of progress burst forth again, louder and grander than it had been before. These were the years of silence. Events in the outside world had made them so.

¹⁷ Lands Department: Register of Land Grants (County of Northumberland), No. 10, 1840-64.

¹⁸ *NC*, 22 May 1861.

Part Two

DEVELOPMENT

1860-1890

II

DIARY OF A TIMBER SETTLEMENT

THIS chapter could quite legitimately have been headed 'A Town is Born'. Not all communities arise naturally, of course. Some are, in fact, 'made'. The origin of such a town may be traced back to a deliberate plan or project which some enterprising body put into operation, and projects of this kind have met with varying degrees of success. The story of the lake-side settlement of Newport during the early 1840's illustrated rather well the failure which may overtake a town that is manufactured or bred artificially. But many other towns and cities are 'born', in the sense that they somehow germinated under the right conditions at the right time, and have since simply grown in size according to circumstances. At this point in our lake history, we are concerned with the origin and early growth of a town that was never planned, a town which simply grew in response to the stimuli of geographic and economic circumstances.

Cooranbong—or 'Coorumbung' as it was generally spelt and pronounced one hundred years ago—occupies a position on Dora Creek that was once very vital. Something of its early importance has already been said in connection with the coming of the first settlers to the district. According to an authority on the meanings of New South Wales aboriginal place-names,¹ Coorumbung denotes 'a creek with a rocky bottom'; which is significant, since the town grew up near the first fordable point on the creek, where large flat rocks in the bed of the stream provided a safe crossing place for travellers. At the same time, the creek is both deep enough and wide enough below the crossing-place to allow small sea-going vessels to approach to within a few hundred yards of it. These geographical factors played an important role in the early development of the town.

To present a vivid and at the same time accurate picture of the early growth of Cooranbong is the difficult and probably unattainable object of this chapter. An attempt will be made to reconstruct the old scenes by telling the story in diary form, and in this fashion the first ten years of the town's history will be covered. Unfortunately, the available records of some of those

¹ McCarthy, F. D., *Aboriginal Place Names and Their Meanings* (Sydney, Australian Museum).

years are fragmentary and undescriptive, and so it will be necessary to call for a little imagination to see clearly some of the early struggles and triumphs of a small timber-getting community as it existed a century ago.

1860

For almost twenty years life had not changed much at Coorumbung; or, more accurately, changes had taken place so slowly and imperceptibly as to give that impression. From the western perimeter of the lake to the Wattagan Mountains and beyond, the entire countryside was clothed in an apparently unending forest of trees. The only significant interruptions in this sea of dull green were the broad clearings on the southern side of Dora Creek at the foot of the mountains. These were the cleared grounds that had once been Percy Simpson's, now generally identified as the Coorumbung locality.

The focal point of the area was the spot where Simpson had established his cattle station, on the crest of a low rise not many yards south of the creek bank. Here stood some old slab huts and a stockyard shaded by a couple of fine blackbutt trees. One of the huts was recognizable as a crude lock-up house which had obviously seen a time of more active service in the years gone by. Towards this miserable batch of buildings a number of tracks converged. From the low wooded hills to the south, a rough but well marked dray track entered the Coorumbung clearings, passed right by the stockyards and lock-up, then continued northwards over a narrow swampy flat before disappearing into a dark and crooked line of trees that marked the meanderings of Dora Creek. This was Simpson's old road, still the main avenue of movement between Maitland and the scattered farming districts southwards as far as Brisbane Water. From the western side of the old farm there emerged a number of bullock tracks—deeply rutted tracks that originated in the nearby gullies, or on the high ridge tops from which they climbed down very abruptly. From time to time small quantities of timber were brought from the mountain forests, and were dragged past Simpson's to a point about half a mile eastward of the old station, where a convenient loading-place existed on the southern bank of the creek. It was to this spot that three small ketches came regularly to take on cargoes of pit-sawn timber or shingles.²

It would be difficult to comprehend a more disorderly and haphazardly developed community than Coorumbung as it was in 1860. Probably no more than half a dozen families inhabited the locality, and these in a semi-permanent fashion. Their homes were crudely erected slab-and-shingle huts that were scattered about the bush clearings. Small herds of half-wild cattle mooched about without restriction, for scarcely any boundary fences existed. The absence of dividing fences is explained by the fact that practically no

² GPO: 'Gosford Depositions, 1855-1872', evidence taken in 1860 mentions that three boats traded with the Dora Creek area.

settler held a title to the land on which he lived. Most of the useful farming land was tied up in two or three large primary grants made in earlier days, and this left the timber-cutters and stockmen to knock up temporary dwellings on Crown land, or to 'squat' on abandoned private properties. Small land sections were not readily made available to settlers, and in 1860 the only small-scale landowner at Coorumbung was Richard Gorman, whose family kept up a small farm while he himself was stationed for most of the time at Gosford, where he fulfilled the duties of a police officer.³

But despite the disorganized state of the little settlement, Coorumbung was a place of much local activity and importance, with the promise of a robust future. Though it was not yet a real centre of population, it was nevertheless a focal point for an extensive district. It was a place to which sawyers came once or twice a week with a waggon load of pit-sawn timber to dump at the loading wharf; a place visited regularly by the three small trading ketches, to drop off some essential supplies for the settlers, and take on their cargoes of timber and oak shingles; a place where travelling stockmen stayed a night or two to rest their cattle and exchange news and views with the inhabitants of the district; a place to which widely scattered settlers came to obtain essential food rations, to do business with the sailors, or to report some theft or incident to the district constable, John Overall, who was permanently stationed there.

Though he probably had little occasion to make use of the old lock-up house, John Overall was called upon to fulfil a variety of civil duties. His district was not heavily populated, but extended over a wide area, reaching to the seacoast between the Lake Macquarie Heads and Bungaree Norah on the east, to the Wyong area in the south, and to the boundaries of Maitland and Newcastle in the north. Most of the trouble centred around land or cattle, and this came as a result of the floating character of much of the population, and the presence of many ex-convicts in the area. The aborigines no longer presented a problem. Their numbers had diminished alarmingly since the bitter feuds of the Thirties, and the remaining blacks huddled together in small isolated camps. One such camp existed in the Mandalong valley, sufficiently removed from the Coorumbung settlers to avoid molestation, yet sufficiently near to enable the blacks to carry on some barter with the Europeans, and, we suspect, to bargain for quantities of spirits.

The majority of the Coorumbung settlers followed what might almost be described as a subsistence manner of living. It was true that good money could be earned by cutting oak shingles from the trees that grew abundantly along Dora Creek and adjacent lakeshores, and supplying these to the proprietors of the trading vessels. But the isolation of the district made it a necessity for the struggling settler to attempt to grow corn, wheat and some

³ From the records of Gosford Police Office.

vegetables, to milk a few cows or goats, and to slaughter his own meat. Fish provided a welcome variation to the diet, and bees' nests might be robbed for honey. There were other pastimes which sometimes brought in a little cash. One such occupation was swan-catching. During the moulting season, when the birds could not fly very well, the men went after them in boats and used crooks or swan-sticks to catch them. Swan down fetched a fairly good price in Sydney, and the birds could be used for meat.

One of the settlers at Coorumbung in 1860 was James Armitage, who lived there with his family for a good many years. Old Armitage described himself as a labourer. For a good deal of the time this meant shingle-splitting along the creek bank, but at other times fishing was reckoned to be more profitable. He shared a small boat with a companion named James Batchelor, and together the two men often fished around the lake. The month of December had arrived, and the fish were scarce, so the men decided to try their luck with swans on Munmorah Lake. They took a boat into Chain Valley Bay, which is the most southerly extension of Lake Macquarie, and from here carried or dragged it over the narrow strip of bush-land separating the two lakes. It was late in the day when they arrived at Munmorah, too late to go out after swans. However, they went back into the bush to look for suitable swan-sticks, and some honey if any could be found. Their attention was diverted quite suddenly that evening by the firing of a gun in the scrub close by, and the two men became witnesses to the shooting of a mare by a settler from Bungaree Norah. The mare happened to belong to John Taaffe of the Lake Heads, and when the matter reached the ears of Constable Overall, an enquiry was held and court proceedings followed a few months later.⁴

Coorumbung in 1860 needed a combination of events to weld a scattered and disorganised district into a thriving community. These events were to take place during the very next year, and would quickly convert the settlement into a town of throbbing activity.

1861

The New South Wales Land Act of 1861 was an important piece of legislation, in that it brought the squatting age to an end. For years vast areas of the most valuable land in the colony had been locked up in runs and primary grants to settlers. The new Land Act provided for the subdivision of many large properties, and introduced the Conditional Lease and the Conditional Purchase to enable thousands of intending settlers to take up small quantities of land. Under the scheme, much Crown land was made available for lease or purchase, on condition that the land so obtained was to be developed, and not left idle or merely resold at a higher price. This Act had tremendous significance for Coorumbung, for it brought many

⁴ GPO: 'Depositions Book, 1855-1872', from evidence taken on 14 Feb. 1861.

new settlers who could possess their own land, while taking an active and profitable part in the expanding timber industry.

As the autumn of 1861 merged into winter, Coorumbung became a scene of busy activity. The first small-scale land sales had already taken place, and no time was being lost in clearing the land and erecting permanent dwellings. On each successive day the bushlands rang with the sharp resonant peal of axes, the grinding thunder of crashing trees, and the triumphant shouts of men, women, and children. In those days the atmosphere was pungent with the fresh aroma of slaughtered tree-tops, and saturated with the clean white smoke of burning gum leaves. These were exhausting but exciting days for the newly arrived settlers—the Blackfords, the Malones, the Deaves and others who inadvertently were welding a scattered, half-baked community into a prosperous village.

But a price had to be paid by these pioneers, the price of a few lives lost in the early struggles with the environment. The first recorded tragedy occurred one Tuesday late in the month of July 1861.⁵ It happened that late in the afternoon the youthful John Malone, seventeen-year-old son of Michael and Bridget, was busily engaged in felling a large tree near the creek, watched by his aunt, Mrs. Winifred Blackford, and his young cousins. Suddenly the tree uttered a warning crack and commenced to fall swiftly. Mrs. Blackford called to her children to come away, but tragically her fourteen-year-old daughter, Mary, ran towards the creek and directly in the path of the crashing giant. She was caught by a falling branch and buried in the foliage. Nearby settlers rushed to the spot as the alarm was spread around. Mrs. Sophia Deaves hurried down from her house, where she had been preparing the evening meal, to comfort the frightened mother, while the bewildered young axeman ran to fetch help from the menfolk. Three men—James Armitage, John Grant, and Henry Murdoch—came from their huts to assist in removing the offending branch of the tree, but the girl was already dead. Three days later an official police inquiry into the circumstances of the death was conducted at Coorumbung, and it is from the evidence given on that occasion that we have been able to reconstruct the incident in so much detail.

Both at Newcastle and Gosford, sales of Coorumbung land were transacted during the last half of 1861. On 10th August a total of seven lots were sold, varying in size from 10 acres to 272 acres, and a Lands Department plan marked the location of a further '9 portions of land at Currumbung, within easy land carriage of the Public Wharf on Dora Creek'.⁶ The majority of the small land portions purchased at this time adjoined the western boundary of the old Simpson 2,000-acre grant, on the southern bank of the creek, and so this area naturally became the village centre. It was through this vicinity that the track from Gosford to Maitland passed, pro-

⁵ *Ibid.*, evidence dated 26 July 1861.

⁶ From Lands Department records.

viding a kind of main thoroughfare for the developing town; this area, too, was the nearest approach that land buyers could make to the timber loading wharf situated about half a mile downstream. From the point where Simpson's boundary met Dora Creek, the early land purchases fanned out predominantly in two directions: southwards for a short distance to the foot of the mountains which prevented further advancement, and westwards along the main valley of the creek to the vicinity of Martinsville today.

Besides the families mentioned already, there were a number of new settlers in 1861 whose names were long connected with the district. These included Patrick Condren (the Condrens were related by marriage to the Malone and Blackford families), William Booth, Patrick McGuinness, James O'Neill, Charles Tucker, John R. Bonnett, Patrick O'Leary, George Stockdale, William Manton, James Charles Bonnell, and John Kelly. The last two families penetrated the Mandalong district, Bonnell being a shingle-splitter by occupation, and Kelly a dairy farmer. William Child acquired some property about three miles northwards of Coorumbung, in the Inglewood district; while Frederick Alfred Hely purchased land in the Newport district downstream from Coorumbung.

Probably the Police Department must be given the credit for establishing the first public institution at Coorumbung, since in 1861 the police post and lock-up had already existed for over a quarter of a century. However, two other institutions came to the town during 1861.

By far the majority of the early residents were Roman Catholics, and it was natural that the growing population should wish to establish a house of worship. In this venture, they were supported by H. N. Woolfrey, the Catholic priest of the Brisbane Water district, and by November of 1861 a very humble church building had been erected. It was placed in the same general area as is occupied by the present Roman Catholic Church, was of weatherboard construction and measured forty-five feet in length by fifteen in width.⁷ To this spot practically the entire population of Coorumbung came together on the occasions when the priest made the horseback journey from Gosford.

The second institution established in that eventful year was a public school, of the type then known as a Non-Vested National School. It seems that the settlers began pressing for a school almost as soon as they arrived in the community, for on 18th November, after some preliminary correspondence, an official application was addressed to the National Board of Education in Sydney.⁸ This application gave the name of the town as 'Coorumbong' and mentioned Gosford as the location of the nearest post office. It was accompanied by a petition signed by Frederick Hely of Newport, John Bonnett and Patrick O'Leary of Coorumbung, and supported by the Roman

⁷ National Board of Education: correspondence relating to Cooranbong school, 1861.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Catholic priest, H. N. Woolfrey. The petition stated that a church had recently been constructed, and it was proposed that this building should be used also for a school. It was available for lease to the National Board for a period of seventeen years.

The school was actually opened on 25th November 1861, and on that day thirty-six children were in attendance. Of this number, twenty-six were of the Roman Catholic faith. The teacher was Jeremiah Crouin, assisted by his wife Catherine. This young couple were untrained, but had taught previously in a Catholic school at Mudgee. Crouin remained in charge of the Coorumbung school during the next year or so.

It was a rapidly growing demand for good timber in the cities of New South Wales that had provided the real impetus to the settlement of Coorumbung in 1861, while the passing of the Land Act accounted for the rapidity with which the town came to life. There was just one other factor which may have had a small influence on the town's rapid settlement at that time. An announcement had been made in the month of August that the Governor of New South Wales, with the advice of the Executive Council, had decided to make a road 'from Gosford via Jambo Hill to Dora Creek at Coorumbung'.⁹ Although, even in those days, road construction was a very slow business, this announcement must have brought confidence to intending settlers by assuring them that they were not going to be entirely forgotten by the government of the colony. Altogether, the Christmas of 1861 must have been a merry time for dozens of newcomers to Coorumbung, with a bright outlook for many prosperous years ahead.

1862

It was late in the afternoon,¹⁰ but John Malone was still down at the creek, busy with the task of splitting oak shingles. There existed a tremendous demand for roofing shingles, and every hour of daylight must be spent at the work. John's companion was his younger cousin, Dennis Condren, an active lad of fourteen. About a year had gone by since the tragic day when John had felled the tree that had killed another of his cousins, little Mary Blackford. The memory of that incident may have flashed into John's mind again on this June evening, as he reflected that for the time being he was the master of the Malone household. Both his parents were away in Sydney for a few days, leaving him in charge of his many brothers and sisters. The youngest of them, baby James, was only a year old, and with the other youngsters was being cared for by Catherine who, at seventeen, was John's younger sister by little more than a year. From the place on the creek bank where John and Dennis were working, the simply built Malone house could be seen a short distance away on a cleared

⁹ NC, 17 Aug. 1861.

¹⁰ GPO: 'Depositions Book, 1855-1872', evidence given on 10 June 1862.

hillside, and the wisps of smoke from the kitchen chimney indicated that Catherine was preparing the evening meal.

John suddenly dropped his tools as he distinctly heard a shout from his sister. This was no ordinary call to tea, but an urgent scream for help. Dennis jumped to his feet, and in a moment the two boys had reached the house, where they were dismayed to find that John's thirteen-year-old sister, Annie, was on fire. Instantly the boys seized containers of water and soon succeeded in quenching the flames from her clothing. Then they all tried to comfort Annie, but it was evident that the girl was severely burned. Not knowing what to do, John sent Dennis to bring help from his aunt, Mrs. Blackford. She arrived shortly afterwards, and carefully dressed the burns with oil. She stayed on during the night with Annie, who did not appear to suffer very much pain, but her condition seemed to grow worse, and she died about two o'clock the following morning. A day or so later she was buried beside the little church at Coorumbung, and her grave may be inspected there today.

1863

During April of this year Jeremiah Crouin resigned his position as teacher at the Coorumbung school, and moved away from the district. His successor was one named Michael Sheeby.¹¹

One day in mid-July Constable John Overall returned home from Gosford, and received a message to pay an urgent visit to the home of the Deaves family. Here lived two brothers, William and James.¹² William, a sawyer by occupation, was a married man with a young family, and his wife Sophia also cared for brother James, who was unmarried and a splitter by trade. When John Overall called at the Deaves home that July evening, he found James very ill. His condition worsened that night, and the poor fellow died the following day only minutes before Peter Moran arrived from Newcastle with medicine.

From his enquiries,¹³ John Overall learned that the deceased had suffered short periods of illness at intervals during the previous few weeks. For some days he had been employed in putting up a house for a farmer settling in the district, James Horgan. As the house was nearing completion, Deaves had to stop work because he felt bad, and he told Horgan that a little rum was what he needed. There was no store or hotel in the district, but Horgan sent to Sydney for a quantity of rum. When it arrived a few days later by one of the trading ketches, Horgan invited both James and William Deaves to come over to his place for a party. The merriment lasted the whole night, but James was very sick the next day and never recovered from it. John Overall was required to furnish a report on the death, and he summarized

¹¹ National Board of Education: correspondence relating to Cooranbong school, 1863.

¹² GPO: 'Depositions Book, 1855-1872', evidence given on 20 July 1863.

¹³ *Ibid.*

it in these words: 'I am of opinion that the deceased died from natural causes accelerated by drinking a quantity of ardent spirits.'

1864

In Sydney, the National Board of Education received the following letter from two supporters of the Coorumbung school. It was dated 22nd February:¹⁴

We, the undersigned patrons of the National School at Cooranbong, have the honour to apprise you that Thomas D'Aran has been appointed Teacher of this School with our approbation by the Revd. Mr. O'Quinlivan and we trust, by his assiduity, to establish a good school here, but, we most humbly beg leave to bring to your reminiscence that this being a very isolated locality and the people so much scattered that it is impossible in wet weather such as we have had latterly, for all the children to be in attendance and we hope that the gentlemen constituting the National Board will take this into consideration. The present teacher has on the roll 15 boys and 14 girls.

The letter was signed by Ambrose Brown Blackford, one of the earliest settlers in the village, and Thomas M. Humphreys, a new arrival who planned to set up a store in the developing community.

The new teacher, Thomas D'Aran, was a married Irishman of thirty years of age. He had been trained at St. Benedict's in Sydney, and prior to his Coorumbung appointment, had taught at Shoalhaven and Raymond Terrace. He was schoolmaster at Coorumbung until 1870.

A letter which D'Aran forward to the National Board in March 1864 is interesting for the light it sheds on the local scene:¹⁵

I hereby, in accordance with the wish of the Board of National Education to have Salary Cheques made payable to some Agent in Sydney, appoint Mr. Thos. Russell, Master of the Village Maid to receive my salary for the months of January and February. It may not be irrelevant to state that, owing to the very unfavourable weather we have had lately it was and is at present unpracticable for me to get to the Post Office, the distance being upwards of 15 or 16 miles, and the road in several places is impassable caused by the heavy rains and I trust the Gentlemen of the Board will make some allowance in such cases if my returns are not forwarded punctually.

We hear a good deal more of Thomas Russell a little later in the Cooranbong story.

1865

The best description of the town at this time comes from an item which appeared in the *Maitland Ensign* and a little later in the *Newcastle Chronicle*.¹⁶ The article is worth quoting practically in its entirety.

¹⁴ National Board of Education: correspondence relating to Cooranbong school, 1864.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ NC, 12 Aug. 1865.

COORUMBONG

I dare say some of your readers, when they see the above heading, will say—Coor-um-bong—where the deuce is that? . . . Coorumbong is situated . . . sixteen miles from Mount Vincent or the Sugar Loaf, and some five or six miles from the head of Lake Macquarie. It is an isolated village on the main road between Maitland and Brisbane Water, a road very little traversed, excepting by a few butchers and teamsters. The inhabitants of Coorumbong—some 150 perhaps altogether—are chiefly shingle sawyers and splitters, and most of them live from Monday morning until Saturday night in the mountains sawing timber or splitting shingles. This timber and these shingles are got to market by first of all carting them to the Lake, whence they are shipped in small crafts to Sydney and elsewhere. The township of Coorumbong, as it is pretentiously designated, consists of about ten or twelve houses, and a handsome, commodious, and really first-class school, which, however, it is only due to state, was built for, and is still, at certain intervals, appropriated as a Catholic Chapel. The school is built on the banks of a creek called, I think, Cockle Creek, and which runs into Lake Macquarie. About half a mile from the schoolroom there is what by country-people is called a 'wharf', and it is at this that the timber and shingles are shipped for Sydney. The township is most romantically situated, and when a few more buildings have sprung up, it is likely to assume a very pretty aspect. A more secluded and out-of-the-way place it would be difficult to imagine. To get to it from Maitland, via the Sugar Loaf, the traveller has to pass over Broken Gap Mountain, which, if he does not happen to be behind first-class horseflesh, he stands but a poor chance of getting to the top of. . . . Once over the mountain, the road is better, and you can journey along with comparatively few interruptions until you reach the township.

By way of Newcastle is the most direct and easiest way to get to Coorumbong. Owing, however, to the shifting bar at the mouth of the Lake, weeks sometimes elapse before vessels can get in or out. There is, I believe, a road from Newcastle, but it is very little frequented. . . . Owing to our isolation we seldom see anything strange. . . . It may be a matter of some surprise to many of your readers to learn that in Coorumbong we have a cricket club, which meets every Saturday afternoon, weather permitting. . . . Sly grog-selling is said not to be wholly unheard of in this locality.

The brief reference to liquor selling is interesting, for about this time James O'Neill opened a public house on the main north-south road as it passed through the town. The hotel was licensed, and traded under the name of the 'Cricketers' Home Inn', a title which was indicative of the proprietor's interest in the local sporting activities.

The place was still without a general store, and the chief source of food supply must have been the sailing ketches coming up Dora Creek regularly for cargoes of timber. Perhaps the most enterprising of the master mariners

was Thomas Russell of Sydney, who took orders from the district settlers for quantities of flour, sugar, tea and other commodities, and delivered these the following week. Russell had already been doing this for at least a year, and his rugged little ketch *Village Maid* was a well-known sight at the Coorumbung wharf.

During 1865 the townspeople banded together to ask for a local post office. The nearest office was Mount Vincent, sixteen miles away by a road that was often impassable. Consequently mail deliveries were erratic, causing a good deal of inconvenience to residents. So during the year a petition was sent to the Postmaster-General, asking that a post office be established at Coorumbung, and that a regular mail delivery be commenced between the town and Mount Vincent, to which mails from Sydney came regularly. The Postmaster-General acceded to the application, and arrangements were made to open an office at Coorumbung early in the following year.¹⁷

As usual, the year did not close without its tragedies. This time fate struck at the Deaves and Armitage families.¹⁸ Old James Armitage had always been a keen fisherman, and one September day he left his Coorumbung home to take a boat to the Lake Macquarie Fishing Station some distance away. For company he took with him sixteen-year-old William Deaves, who enjoyed boating with the old man. When the two did not return after three days, search parties were organized. First the boat was found on the lakeshore lying upon its side, and then the bodies of the two men were discovered in different parts of the lake. It appeared that a violent wind squall had overturned the little boat, with disastrous results.

1866

Cooranbong Post Office was opened on 1st January.¹⁹ The postmaster was a local cabinet-maker named John Bonnett, who received an allowance of twelve pounds per annum for conducting the postal duties at his own residence. Bonnett named as his sureties Moses Gorman, farmer, and James O'Neill, publican, both of Cooranbong. A regular mail service between Mount Vincent and Cooranbong was also commenced at this time, the initial contract being held by J. F. Foster of Mount Vincent. He provided a horseback service one day each week for the yearly salary of twenty-five pounds.

It is interesting to notice that the post office opened under the name 'Cooranbong' which now became the official name for the town. For many years afterwards the place was frequently spelled and pronounced 'Coorumbung', but gradually the version adopted by the Postmaster-General's Department came to be the accepted usage.

¹⁷ Postmaster-General's Department: *Cooranbong, a Post Office History*.

¹⁸ GPO: 'Depositions Book, 1855-1872', evidence given on 8 Oct. 1865.

¹⁹ *Cooranbong, a Post Office History*.

John Bonnett held the position of postmaster for only a few months before his wife died, and he then tendered his resignation, at the same time nominating the schoolmaster, Thomas D'Aran, as his successor. This transfer was acceptable to the department, and D'Aran became the postmaster on 1st August 1866. His sureties were James O'Neill, and John Douglass, a newly established storekeeper in the Newport district.

The postal business was carried on by D'Aran at his home. If a store had existed at Cooranbong by this time, it is reasonable to suppose that the postal duties would have been given to the storekeeper, a practice which is still followed in many small communities. This suggests that there was not yet a general store at Cooranbong, though Thomas Humphries must have opened the first one about this time, probably before the close of the year.

By the later part of the year, James O'Neill had closed his public house, the Cricketers' Home Inn. The reason for the closure is not known to us, and the business was not re-opened under licence until 1868.

The commencement of a regular mail service to Cooranbong in 1866 may have emphasized the need for an improved road linking the township with Maitland, for it was announced in September that a bridge was to be erected over Dora Creek at Cooranbong. According to the *Chronicle*,²⁰ a tender had already been accepted for its construction, and the contractor was working on the preparation of foundation beams for the bridge. There were still some patches of very poor road, but the provision of a safe crossing-place over Dora Creek was an important step in road improvements.

1867

Apart from the numerous small land allotments, much of the valuable land in the expanding township of Cooranbong was owned by Thomas Humphries, who had come to the community a few years previously as a farmer. Humphries soon became an active member of the local school board, and also operated the town's first store. Unfortunately, his business ability did not match the undertaking, or he was unable to compete successfully with the trading ketches, for he was soon forced to sell out the store to a more enterprising and experienced man. The buyer was none other than Thomas Russell, the master mariner who, over a period of years, had established a firm trade with the settlers by means of his little ketch *Village Maid*. The date of the store takeover by Russell cannot be accurately stated, but it must have occurred during 1867 or the following year.

The mail service between Maitland and Cooranbong was now increased to twice weekly.²¹ The mails were carried from Sydney to East Maitland by steamer, and on Wednesdays and Saturdays the contractor carried them on horseback to Cooranbong via Mount Vincent, returning to Maitland

²⁰ NC, 5 Sep. 1866.

²¹ *New South Wales Post Office Directory*, 1867.

with the outgoing mails on the same days. As yet, there was no direct overland mail between Cooranbong and Gosford, although it was only a short time before residents at Blue Gum Flat and Wyong Creek began to request regular mail connections with Gosford and Maitland.

1868

On 11th February an officer of the Gosford police wrote to the Department of Finance and Trade as follows:²²

A Certificate was granted upon the application of John O'Leary of Coorumbong, Farmer, for the issue of a Publican's License to him, for the House in which he now dwells, formerly licensed and known as the 'Cricketer's Home' Inn situated at Coorumbong . . . which he intends to register as an Inn or Public House under the sign of the 'Cricketer's Home'.

Thus Cooranbong's first hotel changed hands from its original publican, James O'Neill, to another local settler, John O'Leary. It is very unlikely that O'Leary had to cope with much accommodation business, but this was more than compensated by the popularity of the place as a refreshment bar. The hotel was patronized, not only by local residents, but also by the crews of sailors operating the increasing fleet of boats which came regularly to the Cooranbong wharf for timber.

During 1868, the public school was visited by an inspector from the National Council of Education.²³ Perhaps the visit was prompted by a sharp decline in school attendance in the first few months of the year. This was attributed to a large flood which washed away most of the crudely constructed bridges used by scattered settlers to cross the innumerable creeks separating them from civilization. The attendance figures rose again later in the year. The department inspector examined the teacher's residence and reported on its condition. It consisted, he said, of a slab-constructed floorless hut with a shingle roof. He did not, however, recommend the erection of a new house. As a result of the inspector's visit, a third member was added to the local school board. The person selected was one Patrick Griffin. The other two members, appointed previously, were Frederick Hely of Newport, and Thomas Humphries of Cooranbong.

1869

Thomas D'Aran had taught at Cooranbong school since the beginning of 1864, and it seems that he had developed the school to everyone's satisfaction. Now the Council of Education planned a transfer for him, and he was notified that he should leave Cooranbong at the end of 1869. On 27th September he wrote to the Postmaster-General,²⁴ stating that he was about

²² GPO: 'Gosford Letter Book, 1846-1874' contains copy of this letter.

²³ Council of Education: correspondence relating to Cooranbong school, 1868.

²⁴ *Cooranbong, a Post Office History*.

to be appointed to another school, and consequently must be relieved of the duties of postmaster. In the same letter, he urged that Thomas Russell, the storekeeper, be appointed as his successor. D'Aran's recommendation was accepted, and Thomas Russell was appointed postmaster in October of the same year. The post office was moved, of course, from the schoolmaster's residence to Russell's store.

1870

The new teacher arrived early in the new year. Her name was Mrs. Maria Healy, and she came from the Blue Gum Flat school near Gosford. She remained in charge of the Cooranbong school for the next four years.

By far the majority of the district's residents were Roman Catholics, and the schoolhouse served for them the dual purpose of school and church. But by this time there were enough adherents of the Church of England to warrant the existence of an Anglican church in the community. The Rev. John Shaw at Gosford gave encouragement to the proposal to build, and a small portion of land was obtained. The building commenced in 1870, and the church was in use by the following year.²⁵

The *Sydney Mail* in May published a short article on Lake Macquarie,²⁶ and it made a brief reference to Cooranbong. The article described

the fine navigable inlet, called Coorumbong or Dorah Creek, near the head of which is the small township of Coorumbong. The country immediately around this settlement, and for many miles inland, is remarkably well-timbered. There is no sawmill here, but a considerable quantity of timber sawn by hand—shingles, etc.—is exported. The trade of the place employs altogether about half a dozen small craft of from 15 to 30 tons burden.

The town was not much longer without a sawmill. The story of the establishment of the first steam sawmills in the district, and of the subsequent rapid growth of the town of Cooranbong must wait for a later chapter.

So ends our brief diary narrative. Our stopping place is arbitrary and, in some respects, an unfortunate point at which to interrupt the story. And yet there appears no appropriate place to terminate, for the town's history of advancement admits of no halting place for the ensuing twenty years. Our purpose has been to record, as intimately as possible, the beginnings. This done, we turn our attention to other sectors of the lake district to examine developments of a different character.

²⁵ The oldest grave in the grounds of the Anglican church at Cooranbong dates from 1871.

²⁶ *Sydney Mail*, 7 May 1870.

TILLERS OF THE SOIL

OVER the last hundred years or so, a tremendous amount of knowledge has been accumulated with respect to Australia's agricultural potentials and problems. Today we would regard as foolish or ill-advised any attempt to grow wheat commercially in the wet coastal valleys of the east; yet the lower Hunter valley was described as 'the granary of New South Wales' a little more than a century ago. Nor is it any less strange to hear that sugarcane, pineapples, bananas and other tropical crops were cultivated in the Lake Macquarie district in colonial days. Nowadays we expect to find these tropical products growing only in the more northerly parts of Australia. Why, then, were such absurd ventures undertaken by our lake district pioneers?

To the early English settler in Australia, all was strange and new. The climate particularly of each locality was an unknown factor, and of only one thing about it could the settler be certain: that it was a very different climate from cool temperate England. Experience gained in the English countryside was of limited value here, so the courageous farmer entered upon an era of experiment. Nor was it the kind of experiment that could be concluded swiftly. A period of many years was required to test the productivity of the soil, to assess the effectiveness of the annual rainfall, and, more significant, its reliability. A series of wet seasons, associated with abundant and sometimes luxuriant growth of crops, had to be set against a succession of drought years accompanied by ravenous bushfires and searing summer temperatures. Under these situations, a good many of the early agricultural experiments were failures, and the pioneer farmers painfully learned that a chancy rainfall is one of the most characteristic features of the Australian climate.

The comment has already been made—but it belongs again here—that the Lake Macquarie region taken as a whole is not suited to commercial agriculture. It is true that the alluvial flats adjoining creeks and lagoons are moderately productive, but these flood-plains together constitute but a small percentage of the total area. The residual soils of the region are uniformly poor, and the absence of permanent streams in many places further lessens their agricultural value. Basically, the lake region's resources are mineral

rather than agricultural. These facts must be borne in mind throughout this chapter.

The early cultivation of wheat in the humid coastal districts has been mentioned, and for many years this crop appeared in the Lake Macquarie area. Flour, of course, was an essential food item for the frontier settler, and so attempts to cultivate wheat were very widespread in New South Wales in the years of pioneering. A visitor to the Dora Creek district during 1842 commented upon the healthy state of the wheat crop there,¹ but even as his statements were being published in the colony's newspapers, the destructive rust was beginning to appear in the Maitland wheat, and the spread of this disease ultimately led to the abandonment of commercial wheat production in the wet coastal districts.

The first orchardist at Lake Macquarie was Jonathan Warner, of whom we have heard previously. As early as 1830 or 1831 Warner settled at the northern end of the lake and commenced a farm, assisted in its cultivation by his sons and assigned servants. An extensive orange orchard was planted on the land adjacent to Warner's home, and for decades this orchard faithfully yielded its annual harvest of fruit, much of which was taken by dray to Newcastle for the market. By the year 1847 Jonathan Warner had passed away, but his widow and sons kept up the farm and the orchard for many years. During the autumn of 1861 a small party of tourists visited Mrs. Warner's place and were 'much struck with the beauty of the orchards and grounds, and more especially with the orange trees'.² Another visitor to the lake a few years later prepared a lengthy article for the *Town and Country Journal*.³ He regarded Mrs. Warner's property as one of the finest on the lake, and mentioned that 'the principal attraction here is an extensive orchard, the produce of which I have frequently heard spoken of in highly flattering terms'. This was published in 1870, by which time the proprietress was aging and less able to care for the extensive property. She died a few years afterwards, and her sons decided to sell the estate. A small amount of coal had already been mined from the property, so the agents advertised it in May 1878 as 'valuable coal land'.⁴ The advertisement referred to the extensive orchard in the following terms:

These blocks form that portion so long occupied by the late Mrs. Warner, and embraces that famous orangery and orchard so long noted throughout the Newcastle district for its prolificness, as well as producing fruits of unequalled choiceness . . .

This statement is, of course, a fair specimen of the advertiser's art, but from a variety of references it does seem that the Warners' orchard did indeed produce some good oranges a century ago.

¹ *SMH*, 28 July 1842.

² *NC*, 22 May 1861.

³ *TCJ*, 11 June 1870.

⁴ *NMH*, 29 May 1878.

Another citrus orchard was for some time cultivated near the lakeside at Speer's Point, though it never achieved the fame of Warners' orangery. The leader of a party of excursionists on the lake in 1874 recorded some brief remarks about this orchard:⁵

Mr. Spier's homestead, on a rising hill, was conspicuous, and commands an excellent view of the surrounding country. About a quarter of a mile from the house are several orange trees, and the remains of what was once a fine orchard.

The same writer visited the mining settlement at Catherine Hill Bay, which he reached by walking along the rugged coastline southwards from the lake heads. Describing this journey, he stated:

In the course of our walk we passed some very wild, yet grand scenery. . . . Even while wondering where our guide would lead us, we would unexpectedly come upon tidy cottages, and pretty little orchards all round, with orange trees in abundance.

There are many other references which indicate that orcharding, and particularly the growing of oranges, was a popular and sometimes profitable venture at the lakeside a century ago. However, these orchards were abandoned when it was proved that the riverside flats further inland produced citrus fruits of a superior quality. Today, the cultivation of oranges in the lake region is limited to the pockets of alluvial silt along the fresh-water creeks at Martinsville, Mandalong, Wyee, and other localities near the western boundary of the region. In these locations the soil is fertile, irrigation is possible in dry weather, and winter frosts are heavy enough to assist in the ripening of the fruit.

After 1861 settlers were able to obtain small selections of lakeside land, which they farmed in various ways. A variety of crops was tried by these farmers, sometimes with disappointing results. Most of these small selectors aimed to provide vegetables and fruits for their own needs, but always hoped for a surplus which could be sent to the markets. Unfortunately, we know very little about the agricultural successes of these farmers, but it will be worthwhile to record here what little we do know, since their experiences illustrate very well the experimental character of agriculture in an unfamiliar region.

Most of the narrow strip of land from Belmont southwards to the Swansea Heads is only a few feet above sea-level, and therefore Marks' Point stands out prominently as a high steep-sided knoll reaching into the lake about half-way along the low-lying shore. Today Marks' Point is covered with fine homes, but a hundred years ago it was chosen as the site for an orange orchard and a pineapple farm. In those days the entire point was owned by the Marks family, whose house on the crest of the hill

⁵ *MA*, 10 June 1874.

commanded a fine view of the lake. There is only one short reference to the pineapples,⁶ and we may conclude that their cultivation was not highly successful, although a comparatively frost-free location had been selected.

There were other farmers in the Belmont district during its period of settlement in the late Sixties. From the lake at Village Bay as far as Redhead Point on the ocean were scattered a number of farms and gardens, the majority of them not very prosperous. However, according to the *Newcastle Chronicle* of 1871, Mr. James Parker had an orchard at Big Redhead, 'in which fruit of every description, home and foreign, are to be found in profusion. It has been six years only in the process of formation.'⁷ Mr. Parker's bananas were described as 'superior', producing seven and eight dozen to the bunch. According to the newspaper later in the same year,⁸ there were many productive farms at Redhead, including Mr. Bailey's and Mr. Cross'. These farms yielded fruits and vegetables in abundance.

What is now the commercial centre of Toronto was for many years the site of a prosperous farm, originally commenced by Rev. L. E. Threlkeld. In an endeavour to supply the requirements of his mission station, Threlkeld planted a variety of crops and many fruit trees. It is generally believed that he cultivated a large number of mulberry trees, and that these survived for a long time after the missionary left the property. When Mr. Fennell rented the place, it was named 'Mount Mulberry', and under this title it was advertised for tenancy in 1869.⁹

Another of the early farmers was Edward Hely, whose property at Rathmines contained some fair agricultural land which has since been occupied as an air force base. We know little of Hely's farming activities, except that for many years the farm was covered with orchards and vineyards.¹⁰ Generally speaking, the summer climate on the lake is too wet for successful grape harvesting, but there have been numerous attempts to cultivate vines, including Whitehead's vineyard at Myuna Bay about the turn of the century.

After 1861 a number of small settlers secured parcels of land along the numerous creeks which flow from the base of the Sugarloaf Mountain and unite to form Cockle Creek. By 1865 a very scattered community of farmers was spread over the countryside now occupied by the townships of Barnsley, West Wallsend, and Edgeworth. Through this area ran the road connecting Brisbane Water and Cooranbong with Wallsend, but at Barnsley (which was then known as Teralba) a branch road led northwards to Minmi and on to East Maitland. A miscellany of orchardists, dairy farmers, and vegetable growers worked this part of the countryside, some of the pioneers

⁶ *TCJ*, 13 Mar. 1886.

⁷ *NC*, 14 Feb. 1871.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 2 Sep. 1871.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 Jan. 1869.

¹⁰ NHDHS journal, v. 1 (1947): Goold, W. J., *Rathmines*.

being William Johnson, Duncan Cherry, Edward O'Donnell, Job Morgan, Joseph Notley and Joseph Holmes.¹¹ A school was opened in a privately owned hut near Flaggy Creek in 1865, and named Teralba, but its attendance fluctuated very considerably during the next twenty years due to the scattered nature of the farming community.

Among the early farmers at the lake, the Chinese were outstanding for their enterprise and production. They invariably selected the most fertile land for their gardens. During the second half of the last century their well ordered gardens were a feature of at least three lakeside localities—the Pelican Flats near Swansea, the alluvial flats along the lower course of Dora Creek, and the flats close to the delta of Cockle Creek. In each locality, the Chinese cultivators supplied vegetables to many of the district settlers, and achieved some remarkable successes with their crops. While dozens of European settlers struggled incessantly to produce crops on the comparatively sterile soils of the lake shores, the Chinamen seemed to know instinctively that the only worthwhile agricultural lands were the patches of silt clinging to the banks of the small streams which feed the lake.

It is difficult to obtain very much reliable information respecting some of the farming ventures of which we have been speaking, and hence many of the descriptions have been necessarily brief. However, there were two interesting agricultural establishments on the lake about 1870, of which we have a good deal of information from a series of articles in the *Town and Country Journal*. These articles, written by a correspondent who spent a few days holidaying at the lake, describe two farms in detail—'Arundinetum' and 'Terzeny Park'. The peculiarity of these names is matched by the unique character of the farming ventures which they represented. The full stories in the *Journal* provide fascinating reading, but we can attempt only a summary of them here.

The background to the Arundinetum story is interesting, and we turn back to 1864, when the following item appeared in the *Newcastle Chronicle*¹² under the caption 'Lake Macquarie—Fish Curing Establishment'.

We have received some tins of fish, prepared at the above establishment, consisting of fresh whiting, schnapper, bream, mullet, flat-head, guard-fish, salmon-trout—in short, a variety of the fresh water fish contained in our lakes—cooked and hermetically sealed in such a manner as to render them capable of exportation or for consumption in the interior. The establishment, we are informed, is already capable of producing, on an average, about half a ton per diem, and, to effect this, only ten men for the different divisions of the work are required. The tins are made on the spot, and the fish are cooked by means of a six-horse steam boiler. The fish are caught in the Lake, some distance from the entrance to the sea. . . .

¹¹ National Board of Education: letters received from schools, 1865 (Archives Office).

¹² NC, 3 Sep. 1864.

The item went on to state that the product was marketed by Marshall's Paddington Brewery, South Head Road, Sydney, and that the prices were nine shillings per dozen for the one-pound tins, and twelve shillings per dozen for the two-pound tins. It was hoped that this new industry would become a permanent concern.

The news item did not describe the exact location of the establishment, except that it was at some distance from the lake heads. There is evidence to suggest that it operated either at what is now known as Fishing Station Point, a short distance south of Rathmines, or in the vicinity of Sugar Bay where Mr. Marshall, the brewery proprietor, acquired land about 1864. The name of Fishery Point is still attached to the rocky point at the head of the bay, though Sugar Bay is now better known as Bulgonia, a village of holiday cottages scattered along the lakeside.

Only on about two other occasions did the fish curing industry feature in the news, and both times in connection with tragedies. One evening during August 1864 a youth named Thomas Callon, a fisherman employed by the company, had his clothes catch fire while he skylarked with his workmates.¹³ Daniel Venteman, the resident manager of the fishing company, was at his house when he heard Callon's screams for help. He ran to the scene and assisted the other men in putting out the blaze, but the young man of eighteen years died a day or so later. A little more than a year after this, two other men died by drowning while taking a boat from Cooranbong to the fishing station.¹⁴ One of the victims was a fisherman, James Armitage, and the other a young lad of sixteen years named William Deaves.

There is no record of the existence of the fishing company after 1865, so it would appear that the business failed only a short time after it started. However, the brewery proprietor, Joseph Marshall, turned his land and equipment to a different use, and one which proved to be at least a little more profitable. During 1865 Marshall experimented by planting about one acre of sugar-cane at his lakeside selection at Sugar Bay. The cane, which he obtained from Mr. Scott of the Brisbane Water district, was of the Tahitian variety, and Mr. Marshall was pleased with its progress on his land at the lake. In fact, it thrived so well that he planted six to eight acres in the following year, and again received a good yield. Further plantings in each successive year resulted in a total of sixty acres under cane cultivation by 1870. That was the year in which his plantation was visited by the holidaying reporter from the *Town and Country Journal*, and we quote at some length from the journalist's article:¹⁵

Occasional references have, during the last two or three years, been made in the Press to this establishment, but owing to its isolated position, and the

¹³ GPO: 'Gosford Depositions, 1855-1878', inquiry dated 18 Aug. 1864.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, inquiry dated 8 Oct. 1865.

¹⁵ *TCJ*, 9 July 1870.

extreme difficulty of getting to it, either by land or by water, no connected narrative of the origin and progress of the plantation and works have yet appeared. In the present stage of the Sugar Industry in New South Wales, and especially in the Hunter River district, where one or two attempts to plant cane rather extensively have partially failed, the absence of such an account is a matter for regret; the more so, because the experiment made by Mr. Marshall at Lake Macquarie having to a certain extent, proved successful, a knowledge of the same, had it been generally disseminated through the medium of the Press, might have induced others to venture on the new industry. . . . When they have perused what I have written, they will be able to form their own opinions as to the suitability of the Hunter River district for the growth of the sugar cane and the manufacture of sugar.

Mr. Marshall's plantation is situated close to the water's edge, in a small bay or bight near a point called 'Fishermen's Rocks', distant some twelve or fourteen miles from the 'Heads', or outlet from Lake Macquarie to the Pacific Ocean, and about eight miles from the small postal township of Coorumbung. . . .

The first glimpse we obtained of the plantation struck me as being exceedingly beautiful and picturesque, the bright green of the growing cane, as it stretches up from the water's edge to the top of the slope on which it is planted, stand out in strong relief to the sombre tinge of the surrounding gum and oak bush. . . . The picturesqueness of the scene is considerably heightened by the presence in the middle of the plantation of a small cottage, as well as of a substantial and large shed close to the water, under which is erected all the necessary machinery for converting the juice of the cane into sugar.

Upon stepping ashore at Arundinetum, the visitor was greeted by the resident manager, Mr. James Norris, who volunteered to guide him over the works and supply him with the story of the plantation's development. The visiting journalist was surprised at the quality of the cane, which reached a height varying from ten to thirteen feet. Two types of cane were growing on the plantation, the Bourbon and Tahitian varieties. The former was chiefly grown on the flat land along the lake edge, where the soil was dark in colour and semi-alluvial in nature. On the adjoining hillside, where the loam was lighter in colour and considerably inferior, the Tahitian cane yielded acceptable results. For the most part, the plantation consisted of rising land terminating in a gentle eminence, with an easterly aspect. The canefields were separated by roads twelve feet wide, along which the cane was drawn on drays to the mill.

In 1870 there were sixty acres planted with cane, but already another thirty acres had been cleared, and it was planned to plant this area in the following year. A short distance from the farm was a further section of about thirty acres considered suitable for cane, so that the proprietor hoped eventually to have 120 acres under sugar.

We are given a detailed description of the sugar-mill situated on the

plantation. It was a massive two-storied structure, located about 150 feet from the water's edge, and it enclosed

a large steam engine of 25 or 35 horse-power, a splendid mill with large four-foot rollers, weighing two tons each, a small four horse-power engine, together with all the other requisite apparatus for converting the juice of the cane into the purest description of sugar.

The crushing mill was erected on the second story of the building, and was termed a 'four-foot roller mill', consisting of three heavy iron rollers four feet long, which was claimed to be one foot longer than any other mill in Australia. Most of this heavy equipment had been brought onto the property during 1869, but some of it had arrived much earlier.

The large steam engine, providing power for the crushing plant, was a massive piece of machinery, as this description indicates:

The engine itself is what is known as a Whyper horizontal engine, and registers 25 horse-power. Some idea of the size and capacity will be gained when I mention that the large fly-wheel is 12 feet in diameter. The boilers are two in number, and 15 feet long each. They rest on timber of the heaviest and most durable description, some of the logs being 30 feet long, and 3 feet in thickness.

It is not surprising that Mr. Marshall experienced difficulty in transporting some of this machinery to the site at Sugar Bay. The boilers were brought to the lake heads in small vessels owned by Marshall, but due to the weight of the cargoes, the draught of water required by the schooners was too great to allow them to cross the entrance bar. There was no alternative but to throw the boilers overboard and float them into the lake. Similar problems were encountered in bringing other pieces of equipment to their destination.

The description of the progress of sugar-making at Arundinetum is very detailed, and does serve to impress us with the magnitude of the undertaking. Briefly, the unit comprised the three heavy rolling or crushing mills; three copper clarifiers, each with a capacity for 400 gallons of juice, and each steam heated; a large 'ripper' or evaporating unit constructed over a furnace; and other large vessels for cooling the sugar. The bulk of the sugar thus produced was of a coarse nature, commonly known as 'ration sugar', and suitable for use in Mr. Marshall's brewery in Sydney. However, the mill was fitted with machinery for refining the sugar, including what was described as a 'centrifugal' and a copper 'revolver'. The finished product—fine white sugar—was valued at approximately thirty-five pounds per ton.

Add to all of this machinery a bone-crushing plant and a steam-operated saw-bench, and we have some conception of the magnitude of the Arundinetum sugar plantation and works. The journalist visitor estimated that the value of the machinery alone was 'fully £6,000', which must have represented quite a large investment in 1870.

The successful years experienced at the Lake Macquarie sugar plantation must have been due to plenty of hard work, plus a succession of good growing seasons. However, the lake climate is unfortunately far from adequate for commercial sugar production, and Mr. Marshall's worthy experiment could not be destined for permanent success. During January 1875 the property was almost entirely destroyed in a bushfire, and no attempt was made by the owner to re-commence sugar growing at Lake Macquarie. The story of the mill's conflagration was described in the *Miner's Advocate* as follows:¹⁶

A great loss of property has occurred by bushfires. It appears that one day last week Mr. James Norris, the gentleman in charge of Mr. Marshall's sugar plantation, at Lake Macquarie, was walking among the cane, and happened to notice a bushfire making rapid progress towards the plantation. He at once got a watering pot and as much water as he could in tubs and prepared for the coming conflagration; for by this time the flames were in the cane and sweeping everything before it until it reached a splendid weatherboard cottage which Mr. Marshall had built and well furnished, for the purpose of having a comfortable dwelling while on visits to his sugar works. And in spite of all Mr. Norris's efforts to stay the raging flames, the whole of the premises were burnt to the ground. Mr. Norris then made for his own little cottage, which stood some distance off; and there with his watering pot he, after persevering with water for several hours, succeeded in putting out the fire without any damage being done to that part of the premises. The loss to Mr. Marshall must be considerable, for 12 acres of cane of two or three years' growth, were completely destroyed; and the cottage and furniture (which was of the best quality) were also very valuable.

Marshall decided to abandon the sugar works, though James Norris continued to reside on the spot for many years after the fire. He is remembered by one or two surviving residents of the Dora Creek district today. They say that Norris was a very deaf old fellow—not a very surprising thing in view of the tremendous noise the old steam sugar-mill must have generated in its working days.

Many miles of lakeshore separated Arundinetum and Terzeny Park, for the latter place was situated on the banks of Stoney Creek, near the spot where it empties into the lake. This farm, described in 1870 as 'about the largest patch of cultivation on the lake', was the place where the *Town and Country* correspondent stayed during his short vacation at the lake.¹⁷ Terzeny Park was actually a share-farm operated by two men named Chapman and Lyster. We hear practically nothing of Mr. Lyster, but certainly Mr. Chapman resided on the farm with his family, and they had been there for a few years prior to 1870. It would appear from the journalist's

¹⁶ *MA*, 10 Feb. 1875.

¹⁷ *TCJ*, 9 July 1870.

report that the two farmers had purchased the estate from a previous occupant, but the date of the transfer is not given.

Terzeny Park was almost completely surrounded by water, having Stoney Creek on one side and a bay of the lake on the other. Just a few feet above water-level, it consisted of alluvial land of fair quality. The estate comprised 200 acres, approximately half of which had been cleared, and about 50 acres of this were under cultivation with an unusual variety of crops. The homestead was 'very pleasantly situated', consisting of a substantial weatherboard house of five or six rooms, a detached kitchen, dairy, barn, and outhouses.

In spite of much determined effort by Messrs. Chapman and Lyster, the farm at Stoney Creek had not proved to be a profitable undertaking up to the date of the journalist's visit. And this was not for the want of imagination and resourcefulness on the part of the owners. As a matter of fact, within a short period of years an amazing diversity of agricultural pursuits had been attempted. But failure seemed always at hand in one form or another. The wheat harvests were entirely ruined by rust. An attempt to grow maize was said to have been 'a dead failure'. A number of grape vines were planted, but they soon died completely away. A small orchard of fruit trees, including oranges, showed little promise of development, despite careful cultivation.

Yet there was a brighter side to the picture. A few crops yielded acceptable results, including potatoes, millet, sorghum, arrowroot, and the castor oil plant. Wrote the journalist:

The last named article [castor oil plant], singular to say, appears so far to thrive luxuriantly; and, unless I am much mistaken, will be grown somewhat extensively in the Colony before very long. Arrowroot also grows well on Terzeny Park, and by the aid of a small mill, which they have on the premises, Messrs. Chapman and Lyster have already converted a good deal of it into a first class marketable article. The figure realised, I think, was about 1/- a pound.

To supplement the farm income, three other industries were developed at Terzeny Park—curing fish, manufacturing brooms, and breeding goats. We are told nothing of the first of these operations, which was probably undertaken only on a small scale. However, the broom-making experiment was interesting. Normally, millet is used for the straw of brooms, but the Stoney Creek farmers conceived the idea of utilizing the fibre of the native lily, sometimes known as the giant lily, which grew in abundance on the hillsides a short distance inland from the northern end of the lake. The lily fibres required a good deal of preparation before being suitable for broom-making, and although the farmers lacked the proper appliances for this work, a very fair product was turned out.

The visitor to Chapman's farm in 1870 was especially interested in the goat-breeding experiment, and the story is best told in the journalist's own words:

Perhaps the most novel feature in connection with this farm is the attempt on the part of Mr. Chapman to rear a flock of goats of a superior breed, with the ultimate object in view of exporting their hair, which, as everybody knows, is of considerable commercial value. To this end he has devoted a small island to the exclusive use of the goats which already number about fifty. It appears from what I gathered from Mr. Chapman, that the Government, in order to encourage the breed of a superior class of goats, have offered to supply any person rearing fifty common goats with a ram of the well-known Angora breed free of expense. This is the prize Mr. Chapman is aiming at; and as his flock now numbers within ten of the required number, and some twelve or fifteen of the nannies are in kid, he will probably secure the much coveted Angora before very long. In the meantime Mr. Chapman's goats are no loss to him, as the quantity of milk they give is very considerable, ranging from a quart to half a bucketful per day, while the feeding of them costs little or nothing. The flock is under the entire control of Master Edmund Chapman, an intelligent lad of about eight years of age, and who evidently takes great delight in his charge.

Having seen the sugar plantation at Arundinetum, the writer indicated his belief that the alluvial soil of Terzeny Park could be put to really effective use by growing sugar-cane. He added, of course, that it would require a good deal of capital to convert the farm into a sugar plantation. But given the capital to set up a crushing mill, any possessor of the 200 acres would, he vowed, make 'a sure fortune'.

With our twentieth century knowledge, we smile at some of these glib statements of our forebears. Yet their judgements were based upon the limited facts and experiences available to them, and on some occasions their predictions and assessments have been remarkably accurate. As early as 1828 the surveyor Henry Dangar had correctly summed up the character of the lakeside country as being generally unsuitable for agriculture. His brief statement concluded with these words:¹⁸

. . . The district of Lake Macquarie is not adapted to the settler who contemplates becoming the proprietor of large flocks and herds, or a busied agriculture, but is well suited to the retired naval, military, and civil officer, or merchant, inclined to 'quit the busy scene'—one who is fond of shooting, hunting, and fishing, or boat sailing; where he can enjoy the cheap living, with a most salubrious air, and amply gratify all his wishes.

With that assessment of 1828 compare the opinion expressed by the author of the journal articles in 1870:

¹⁸ Dangar, Henry, *Index and Directory to Map of the Country bordering upon the River Hunter* (London, 1828), p. 96.

Some writer in the Newcastle Chronicle recently put forth in all seriousness the ridiculous statement that there was an abundance of land on the lake fully equal to the rich alluvial flats on the banks of the Hunter, and that such land was capable of sustaining a population of 20,000 people. Anything more absurd than this assertion never appeared in a newspaper. . . . The fact is, good land at the lake is exceedingly scarce and is only to be found in isolated patches. . . . As to its being able to support a population of 20,000 people, the bare idea is preposterous in the extreme. I should be very sorry to see one thousand take up their abode there, unless, indeed, they were possessed of independent fortunes, in which case they could not possibly choose a more delightful or healthy retreat in which to spend the remainder of their days.

We may be inclined to laugh at some parts of that statement; but grains of truth are sometimes hidden where we least expect to find them.

MULLUNG-BULA TO GALGABBA

ACCORDING to Rev. L. E. Threlkeld, whose knowledge of the Awabakal lore and legend is authoritative, 'Mullung-bula'¹ was the name given by the aborigines to

. . . two upright rocks about nine feet high, springing up from the side of a bluff head on the margin of the Lake. The blacks affirm, from tradition, that they are two women who were transformed into rocks, in consequence of their being beaten to death by a black man. Beneath the mountain on which the two pillars stand, a seam of common coal is seen, many feet thick, from which Reid obtained a cargo of coal when he mistook the entrance of this lake for Newcastle. A portion of a wharf built by him still exists at this place, which is still called Reid's Mistake.

Mullung-bula is now the site of the Swansea Heads pilot station, situated on an eminence on the southern side of the lake entrance. Reid's Mistake is still the official name given to this headland, reminding us of the time when the entire lake was known by this title. Thus is perpetuated the name of the lake's discoverer, and the unusual circumstances associated with the discovery.

Though Captain Reid's find of coal at the Heads did not immediately attract attention to Lake Macquarie, it was inevitable that with the arrival of settlers in the surrounding districts, the vicinity of the Heads would come to occupy a position of importance. Why this was inevitable will be understood as the story of the district's development is unfolded in this and a succeeding chapter.

For at least fifteen years after 1827, when it was reported that eight armed bushrangers had appeared at Reid's Mistake,² the scrub-covered flats contiguous to the Heads were a favoured hiding place for runaways, who were able to cross the comparatively narrow Swansea channel without much difficulty. This fact was known to the police officers at Brisbane Water and Newcastle, and it caused them almost constant annoyance. On at least two

¹ Threlkeld, L. E., *An Australian grammar . . . as spoken by the aborigines in the vicinity of Hunter's River, Lake Macquarie, etc.* (Sydney, 1834).

² GPO: 'Brisbane Water Tickets of Leave, 1827-1841', copy of a letter dated 24 Feb. 1827.

separate occasions, a Brisbane Water police constable was posted temporarily near the Heads to try to intercept the movement of escapees, though it is hard to imagine that one policeman could have done very much to catch and arrest runaways who usually moved about in small but well-armed parties.

All of the land on the northern side of the channel had been made over in trust for the aborigines in 1825, and remained 'locked' to intending settlers for the next forty years. This restricted early settlement to the southern side of the channel, and the first landowner there was J. H. Boughton, an early settler of the Paterson River district. Lands Department records reveal that Boughton was granted 149 acres at Reid's Mistake on 25th July 1833, and that he purchased a further 450 adjoining acres in the following year.³ This gave him a fairly large portion of land bounded on the western side by a line in the approximate position of the main street of Swansea today, and on the north by the lake entrance channel. Boughton acquired this land for the purpose of establishing a salt manufacturing industry, and by 1835 a small saltworks was in operation. The enterprise was, however, shortlived, for in August of that year the police officer at Brisbane Water was informed⁴ that

four bushrangers appeared at Mr. Boughton's Saltworks at the entrance (and on the south side) of Lake Macquarie, where, we were informed by three 'Prisoners of the Crown' assigned servants, who were stationed there, that they had put four men over the entrance of the Lake in their boat.

The four strangers were runaways, and this led to a police investigation. It was learned that Boughton's assigned servants were in charge of his saltworks, and that Boughton himself visited the works only about once a fortnight. This arrangement was thought unsatisfactory, and the owner was advised by letter of 14th September 1835 that he should make some other arrangements for the management of the salt industry. Since compliance with the request was difficult for him, Boughton closed the works before January of the next year.

But the closure of the works did not altogether succeed in accomplishing what it was meant to do. Although the assigned servants employed by Boughton were removed from the locality, the property and huts were left unattended, and this was an open invitation for lawless characters to occupy the living quarters. And so within three years the place had literally become a 'den of thieves' of the cattle stealing variety. Writing to the Newcastle police in August 1838, Alfred Holden of Brisbane Water stated:⁵

³ Lands Department, Sydney: from early register of land grants in County of Northumberland.

⁴ CSIL: Gosford Police Office, 3 Aug. 1835.

⁵ GPO: 'Brisbane Water Letter Book, 1838-1846', letter from A. Holden to Newcastle police, dated 24 Aug. 1838.

A man named Jackson, holding a Ticket of Leave for your district and some others are at present sawing timber near Denny's near Reid's Mistake, principally cedar taken from Crown Land.

Henry Denny occupied Boughton's land without the owner's permission (though Boughton did not appear to care about this), and was described as 'a notorious cattle stealer'.⁶ He seems to have been the leader of a company of cattle thieves who annoyed some of the free settlers about Lake Macquarie for a number of years.

As early as 1835 the Brisbane Water police office had appointed a constable to Reid's Mistake, the man then chosen being James Worley.⁷ But he did not remain at this post for very long, for the reason given in this letter written by Holden in 1839:⁸

Near Reid's Mistake there are some suspicious characters and as it is over the ford at that place that the stolen cattle are chiefly driven, I placed a constable there, but a lone man was of no use, and was in personal danger.

Holden repeated an earlier recommendation: that the Newcastle and Brisbane Water police officers should each place one constable at Reid's Mistake. He believed that this would give the added strength required to discourage the activities of unlicensed cedar-cutters, cattle stealers, and bush-rangers.

The government did not act upon this recommendation, and for the time being the bad men at Reid's Mistake carried on their nefarious practices undeterred. Mobs of cattle from places as far distant as Wyong Creek and Dora Creek were driven through the scrub to Denny's station, from which at regular intervals they were taken by unfrequented paths to parts of the Hunter valley. Not until 1841 were the police able to lay definite charges against the cattle men, and then five were arrested at the one time. Henry Denny and his closest colleague, William Bramble, were each committed to gaol terms in Sydney.⁹ This was a major breakthrough by the police, and with the arrest of these ringleaders, cattle stealing declined in the Lake Macquarie district.

In 1842 Mr. Threlkeld purchased ten acres of land at the Lake Heads for a coal storage and loading depot. A wharf was constructed, so that the small barges from the Ebenezer colliery could deposit their coal, which was subsequently loaded into larger schooners for conveyance to Sydney. This laborious and costly operation was necessitated by the shallow bar at the lake's entrance. Sea-going vessels could cross this bar only at high tide, and

⁶ *Ibid.*, letter from Holden to Colonial Secretary, dated 11 June 1839.

⁷ 'Brisbane Water Letter Book, 1835-1838', a copy of letter from James Worley to Gosford Police, dated 1835.

⁸ CSIL: A. Holden, 28 Feb. 1839.

⁹ GPO: 'Brisbane Water Letter Book, 1838-1846', copy of letter from A. Holden to Attorney-General, dated 3 Aug. 1841.

even then it was a risky business requiring an experienced seaman at the helm. Threlkeld considered the crossing of the bar to be too perilous a manoeuvre for vessels laden with coal, and so he went to a considerable expense to establish the coal loading depot at the Heads. While ever it was possible to employ convict labour in these loading operations, the double handling of the coal between the colliery and Sydney probably did not add very much to the expense of marketing the product; but with the termination of the convict assignment system, cheap labour was no longer available, and it is no wonder that the working of the Ebenezer mine was suspended by 1851. However, this early mining episode served to indicate very clearly the type of industry that would be required at the Heads in later years when the lake trade in timber and coal was resurrected and increased. It was inevitable that the Lake Heads district would be settled by seafaring men who would become familiar with the channels, the winds and the tides about the Heads, and whose experience would enable them to pilot vessels of many descriptions over the dangerous bar. It was equally inevitable that there would have to be facilities for doing exactly what Threlkeld had done—facilities for loading and unloading goods of various kinds, and for their temporary storage.

This leads us to the next event in the history of the Swansea district, the arrival of the two settlers Taaffe and Boyd. According to a living descendant of the former, the date of their arrival was 1853. Certainly this date fits in well with our knowledge of the lake's development, and it is known that both of these pioneer families were well and truly established in the Swansea district before 1860. The story of their arrival and settlement has been told by Miss L. Boon of Newcastle,¹⁰ who is a great-granddaughter of the original settler, Thomas Boyd.

In or about the year 1853 Thomas Boyd sailed his ketch *Turtle* from Brisbane Water to the Lake Macquarie Heads, bringing with him John Taaffe and family who proposed to settle there. A relationship existed between the two families Boyd and Taaffe, for the two men had married sisters belonging to the Freeman family, relatives of the Freemans who settled in the Wyee district and who in later years gave their name to Freeman's Waterholes, a few miles north of Cooranbong. The Taaffe family selected a small portion of land on a hill at Galgabba, the name belonging to a small point on the lakeshore at the southern end of the Pelican Flats. Here John Taaffe built a small cottage, and about two years later Thomas Boyd settled nearby. There the two families remained for a number of years.

It seems that John Taaffe was a settler with a variety of interests. He was skilful in the use of boats, and doubtless acquired much knowledge of seamanship from his brother-in-law. Taaffe was also a farmer. In 1861 it was recorded that he owned a property 'on Chain Valley Plain near Craingen

¹⁰ On 8th August 1963 Miss Boon addressed a meeting of the Lake Macquarie and District Historical Society, on the early history of Swansea.

Road and Lake Macquarie' and he was described as a 'stockholder' by occupation.¹¹ Taaffe's land mentioned here was situated at the southern extremity of the lake.

Thomas Boyd probably took less interest in farming. He did not need to work the land, for he was a man of the sea, a mariner of exceptional skill. A navigation certificate which was given him in 1872 contains the information that he had been a master mariner since 1846. His little ketch *Turtle* was a familiar ship on the lake for a good many years, and it is known that he operated other sailing vessels for the lake trade. Boyd was, perhaps, the only seaman who seemed to be completely at home when manoeuvring ships over the lake entrance bar, and for well over thirty years he piloted hundreds of vessels into and out of the lake. His tireless assistance and ability in this dangerous kind of navigation was not officially recognized until the government established a pilot station at the Heads about 1883. Then Thomas Boyd was appointed the first pilot at Swansea.¹²

During the early history of the Swansea district, the name Boyd was almost synonymous with boats, as a result of a tradition of boatbuilding and seamanship established by various members of the family. A son of Thomas, James Boyd, became a boatbuilder at Swansea towards the close of the century, and the business which he commenced expanded into the firm of J. L. Boyd and Sons, of Newcastle, which retained its reputation for fine workmanship until it closed its shipyards in recent years.¹³ Among the early arrivals at the Lake Heads was a brother of Thomas Boyd, William by name, who is noteworthy because he was the first fisheries inspector on the lake. Like his brother, he was a man who loved and understood boats. A grandson of Thomas Boyd was Thomas Humphries of Swansea, whose boatbuilding activities are well-remembered by many residents of that district today.

By 1860 there were three different races of people residing in the Lake Heads district. The number of European families was at least three, for besides John Taaffe and Thomas Boyd at Galgabba, a settler named Frederick Chaney had come to the district.¹⁴ Easily outnumbering the Europeans at this time were the Chinese fishermen on the Pelican Flats. The first Chinamen had come to Lake Macquarie quite early in the 1850's, and it was around 1860 that their numbers reached a maximum, which one writer estimated as being between thirty and forty persons.¹⁵ Almost all of these were settled on the Pelican Flats immediately north of Galgabba, where the blunt point of land between the lake and the channel became familiarly known as 'The Chinamen's'. The third race of people in the Heads

¹¹ GPO: 'Gosford Depositions, 1855-1878', evidence dated 14 Feb. 1861.

¹² Newcastle Almanac, 1884: see description of Pelican Flat.

¹³ *NMH*, 5 Nov. 1955, containing feature article on history of Swansea.

¹⁴ GPO: 'Gosford Depositions, 1855-1878', evidence dated 14 Feb. 1861.

¹⁵ *TCJ*, 9 July 1870.

district comprised one or two families of aborigines, a tiny remnant of the once powerful and populous Awabakal tribe at Lake Macquarie. The story of Old Ned and his faithful wife, Queen Margaret, has already appeared in these pages.

The Robertson Land Act of 1861 had the same effect in the Lake Heads district as it had in many other parts of the colony. It unlocked the land for the small settler, and discouraged both the squatter and the settler without legal title to the land on which he resided. From various issues of the *Newcastle Chronicle* during 1863 we can discover something of the progress of settlement in the Heads district in that year. A correspondent living at the Lake Heads contributed this item:¹⁶

Several persons have lately come to take up their quarters with us, and ground here has been sold at a high figure. The importance which this place must eventually hold is every day becoming known, and though at present mustering but a small population, still, it may not be many months before our settlement is enabled to rank with many other more favoured, but less important places. . . . The scenery of this place is interestingly beautiful, presenting some of the most charming views that ever were witnessed, and the establishment of a tea garden, or similar place of amusement, would at once make it a fashionable resort. . . . A store is badly wanted here, at present we obtain our goods from Sydney by the little crafts which trade here. I have heard a company are about to start an establishment of the kind, and there is little doubt it may prove successful. . . . Postal arrangements are not very prompt here owing to the scattered condition of the place; but very few letters go astray, and we manage to get our papers regularly each fortnight.

A few days after the publication of this item, the *Chronicle* advertised a sale of twenty town allotments 'at Reid's Mistake, in the vicinity of Lake Macquarie, at an upset price of £8 per acre'.¹⁷ It seems that land subdivisions of this kind met with a ready response from the public, for newspaper reports tell of an influx of new settlers to the Heads district. These reports make it clear that the rapidly developing water cargo trade in timber and coal had a lot to do with the arrival of the new settlers about the Heads. One writer gave a summary of the coal mining developments, and then supplied some general information about the locality:¹⁸

A few blacks, the remnant of the tribe belonging to Lake Macquarie, are dwelling near us. They are a grotesque people. What has become of their ancestors I know not; they say they are all dead. . . . A number of Chinese are fishing on the Lake. They appear to have good success, judging from the quantity of fish they are drying for the Sydney market. Fish of all kinds are plentiful. . . . We have had a great many new arrivals here

¹⁶ *NC*, 2 Sep. 1863.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9 Sep. 1863.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 23 Sep. 1863.

during the month; and a great deal of ground has been taken up for cultivation. There is some talk of a school being started shortly. . . . I suppose it is useless to hint at a Government School for some time yet!

About this time, a number of Chinese fishermen moved away from the lake district, leaving only about half the number that were there two or three years previously.¹⁹ This emigration may have been connected with the new free selection regulations, which tended to discourage non-titled settlers as the Chinamen probably were. Those who remained at the Pelican Flats organized themselves into two fishing parties, and the leaders of each party may have obtained some legal title to the land they occupied.

The following account of the Lake Heads settlement published late in 1863 is of interest:²⁰

Several Chinese, old residents at the Lake, have left for Sydney, having amassed a considerable sum by fishing. A large influx of new chums are visiting this place, with a view of settling down, they having taken up land under the free selection regulations.

A great quantity of coal still leaves this port by regular traders. . . . The Hartley and other collieries are going on as brisk as ever. Several of our residents are complaining of the want of a post office and school; and as there is a large population here at present, I think the Government should not fail to notice these requirements. There is, as yet, no church or chapel here. . . . Communication with neighbours is all performed in boats. A good road to and from the Heads is absolutely necessary.

It must be remembered that up to this time, all settlement in the Heads district had been restricted to the southern side of the channel, since the land on the northern side was still bound up as part of the 10,000-acre reservation for the aborigines. However, the pressure from intending settlers became significant after 1861, and various concessions were made to allow some colonists to take up small portions of the reserved land. Then, in July 1865, the newspaper announced²¹ that the Newcastle Bench of Magistrates had received from the Surveyor-General's Office a copy of an 'approved design for the village of Kahibah, at the entrance of Lake Macquarie'. This village was laid out on the northern bank of the channel, on the land now taken up by some portions of the townships of Pelican and Blacksmiths. But though the plans for Kahibah were drawn up in 1865, there was no attempt to mark out lots or to call a sale, and the scheme was never put into effect. A large parish on the north-eastern side of the lake has been named Kahibah, and the name has since been used for an outer suburb of Newcastle. Marks' Point was known as Kahibah Point for several years.

But despite the fact that the Lake Heads settlement was restricted to the southern bank of the channel, it was by no means a closely settled or

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 26 Dec. 1863.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 8 July 1865.

cohesive community that emerged during the Sixties and early Seventies. On the contrary, it was a remarkably scattered settlement with no central point of commerce, unless the lake channel be regarded as the community's thoroughfare and point of trade, and this it virtually was. During the early years of settlement, no township was laid out, and practically all of the land sold to settlers was in the nature of farm lots which were sufficiently large to separate settlers' homes from each other, so creating a widely spread community.

Though the settlers at the Heads wanted a post office and a store, the first institution to benefit them was a school. At the close of 1874 a man by the name of Henry Blyth came to reside with the family of Thomas Boyd at Galgabba Point. A middle-aged bachelor, Blyth was a trained teacher who had taught at a number of government schools throughout New South Wales.²² A school had recently been opened at Belmont, six miles distant, and the residents at the Heads lost no time in planning for a school at Galgabba. On 25th February 1875 seven residents of the district applied to the Council of Education for a Provisional School. The names of the seven were:

John Taaffe (2 miles from school)	6 children
Caroline Noard (2 miles)	3 children
William Forbes (2 miles)	4 children
Henry Jackson (1 mile)	1 child
Thomas Boyd	4 children
William Boyd ($\frac{1}{2}$ mile)	4 children
Samuel P. Cam	

The last-named settler was a medical practitioner who, though without a young family, gave full support to the establishment of the school. Later he was elected secretary of the local school board.

By the end of March 1875 a schoolroom had been erected adjacent to Thomas Boyd's cottage. It was a slab building, shingled and floored, and measured 26 feet by 12 feet. When a Council inspector visited the locality three months later, he found the school already in operation with an enrolment of twenty-six pupils and nineteen actually attending.²³ The inspector mentioned that the school was situated on the eastern shore of the lake about two miles south of the entrance, and that the district was chiefly occupied by free settlers who were also engaged in fishing. The Council accepted his recommendation that a Provisional School be recognized. The Galgabba school attracted candidates from as far away as Catherine Hill Bay mining settlement. It functioned until the early 1880's, when the harbour improvement works brought a large population to the Pelican Flats, where a new school was opened.

Besides the Taaffes, Boyds, and Chaney's, all of whom were resident in

²² Council of Education; miscellaneous letters received from Galgabba, 1875.

²³ *Ibid.*, letter from inspector dated 7 June 1875.

the Heads district by 1860, there were a dozen or more settlers who came to the area during the next ten or fifteen years. Some of their names have become familiar in the Swansea community: William Forbes, a sea captain, arrived early in the Sixties; Michael Murray, a master mariner, had settled by 1869; Donald Stachan, a shell-digger by occupation, was also resident by that date;²⁴ Jackson, Merriett, and Noir were the surnames of three other sea captains who featured in the activity of early Swansea.²⁵

The nautical flavour of the early settlement is clearly evident from the occupations of these first settlers. They were salty sailors who shared a common fervour for the way of boats, and an appreciation and understanding of the dangerous waters that tormented them almost continually. But there were other modes of living besides manning schooners and ketches, though still connected with the water. In the early times there were mounds of old cockle shells along the lakeside at Pelican Flats, where in bygone days parties of aborigines had feasted on shellfish and left the empty shells in untidy heaps. These heaps were quickly overgrown with grass and vines, apparently forgotten. However, the time came when sea shells were an important source of commercial lime, and so at least one or two of the early lake settlers found it profitable to dig into the old mounds of shells, wash the cockles free of dirt, and send them to Sydney by the ketches that passed through the channel.

Other useful occupations were swan-catching and the manufacturing of cabbage-tree hats. With regard to the first of these, it must be remembered that in the early days huge flocks of black swans inhabited the lake. During the moulting seasons, when the birds could not fly very well, some of the men would go out after them in boats, using crooks to hook the birds by their wings, and drag them from the water. Swan down was valuable for filling eiderdowns and the like, and after plucking, the birds were cooked and eaten. During the swan-catching season, hundreds of cooked birds were exported to Sydney. The making of cabbage-tree hats was a pastime carried on by the Chinese, Europeans, and aborigines alike, and some fine hats were made in the Lake Heads district. The raw material, a fibre, came from the palms which used to grow in abundance all over the Pelican Flats. Some of the best hats were manufactured by the Chinamen, and in 1870 it was stated that their finest products were sold for £2/10/- and £3 each, while 'a very fair article' was priced at £1/5/-.²⁶

Early in 1870 an unidentified tourist visited Lake Macquarie, and prepared a series of articles which were published in the *Town and Country Journal* later in the same year.²⁷ Some extracts from these articles have already been included in an earlier chapter. However, we make no apology

²⁴ GPO: 'Day Book, 1861-1885', see entries for 1869.

²⁵ NMH, 21 Sep. 1876.

²⁶ TCJ, 9 July 1870.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

for quoting again from this source, since the tourist writer has left us a very informative and interesting account of the Chinese fisheries on the Pelican Flats. He was very favourably impressed by his brief contact with these fishermen, as his own words indicate:

I arrived at the house of Mr. Ah Tie (the principal boss of the whole concern) late one night, in the middle of a strong gale of wind and a terrific downpour of rain. The reception we met with was hearty and cordial in the extreme; and notwithstanding that all the fires were extinguished, and the party about to retire to their virtuous couches for the night, Mr. Ah Tie, with a degree of courtesy and hospitality rarely evinced by Europeans, insisted upon our having some supper. Being pretty hungry, we made no demur to the invitation, and, after a lapse of about twenty minutes, we were comfortably seated before a table smoking with boiled whiting, cooked in a style that defies description. The very thought of that delicious repast makes my mouth water! Never in my life before had I tasted fish cooked like that was; and I very much question if I ever shall again until I pay another visit to the Lake. The night being dark and wet, I was unable to make such a thorough inspection of the settlement as I should like to have done; but, with the aid of lanterns, I managed to see nearly everything that was worth seeing.

The visitor learned that there were at that time seventeen Chinamen engaged in catching and curing fish on Lake Macquarie. This number was almost equally divided into two parties, living about half a mile apart, and organized by two intelligent men, Ah Tie and Hop Lung. Each of the parties inhabited two or three 'very comfortable' slab cottages, 'well lined and shingled, and perfectly weathertight, which is more than can be said of all the European dwelling places on the lake'. The cottages were situated about two hundred yards from the lakeshore, and the intervening space was occupied by several sheds and huts used for the various operations of curing fish for export. The two fisheries were on friendly terms, and shared four long-boats and a large quantity of net.

As regards the taking of the fish, I could gain very little from the fishermen themselves, but a great deal from their less successful European rivals, some of whom complain loudly of the unfair and unlawful way which John Chinaman has of making a haul. The unlawfulness of their procedure is said to consist in the immense nets which they use—nets more than twice the size that the law allows. . . . The Chinamen have no particular times for fishing, but sally out (weather permitting) whenever their supply for curing is exhausted. Several years ago, when the fisheries were in their infancy, a great number of the larger kinds of fish—schnapper particularly—used to be taken with lines and hooks . . . but of late the lake has been too well scoured with nets to admit of line fishing, excepting for mere amusement.

The main varieties of fish taken by the Chinamen were snapper, bream,

whiting, flathead, and mullet; smaller fish were also caught and converted into a kind of semi-liquid preserve, marketed in small tins.

After a successful draw, the boats were brought in to a large pier, and the fish were taken in baskets to the nearest shed which housed the splitting tables. Here the fish were opened, headed, and cleaned before being taken to the next shed for salting. After spending a determined number of days in pickle, they were washed in a large trough, and finally laid out in the sun on slabs or sheets of bark. Drying by this method was necessarily a long operation, and involved much shifting and turning of the product, but finally it was pronounced cured, and needed only to be packed for the journey to Sydney, and ultimate exportation to Melbourne and China.

The two fisheries were first established about 1863 and operated with fluctuating success during the next ten years or so. At first the quantity of fish caught and cured in a year reached sixty or seventy tons, but by 1870 the average yield had fallen to thirty or forty tons per year, representing about three-quarters of a ton each week. Since the final product realized approximately £20 a ton in 1870, it is obvious that the Chinamen at Lake Macquarie were not in the category of poor fishermen.

The Chinese settlers were an accepted part of the early community in the Heads district. They were generally well-liked and respected by the European settlers, who relied upon them for vegetables which they cultivated in extensive gardens, for rice cakes, and for fish on some occasions. The Chinamen were particularly skilful in diving for mutton-fish about the Heads.

There must have been some rejoicing among the settlers in 1873 when it was heard that the government had voted £112 for the repair of the road from Newcastle to the Lake Heads.²⁸ Prior to this time, residents at the Heads had tolerated an unformed dray track in an atrocious condition. It is recorded that on the occasion of the wreck of the coaling schooner *West Hartley* in July 1866,²⁹ the wounded captain and the mate 'were conveyed by Mr. Boyd to Newcastle suffering terrible torture as the dray jolted over the rough roads. Captain Hudson died shortly afterwards.' The small vote of money in 1873 did little more than improve some of the worst places in the track to Newcastle, but it was indicative of the government's interest in the Heads district.

It was during 1873 that coal mining operations were commenced on the seacoast at Catherine Hill Bay, a few miles south of the Lake Heads. A township sprang up at the new mine, and settlers at the Heads began to benefit from the frequent movement of miners between Catherine Hill Bay and Newcastle. At first, these travellers followed land routes on either side of the Heads, and crossed the channel in boats belonging to settlers. This proved to be a very tedious journey due to the unsatisfactory state of the

²⁸ NC, 1 Apr. 1873.

²⁹ NHDHS journal, v. 9, pt. 2, p. 17.

road and the necessity of crossing the channel, and it was not long before travellers performed most of the journey by boat, travelling down the lake between Speer's Point wharf and a wharf situated in Crangan Bay, one of the southernmost arms of the lake. This mode of travel left only two comparatively short stretches to cover on foot or horseback—from Wallsend to Speer's Point at the northern end, and from Reece's wharf over the hill to Catherine Hill Bay at the southern end. Of course, this method of transport bypassed the settlers at the Heads, but there were still occasional travellers who came by the land route.

In 1874 a party of tourists took the journey from Newcastle to Catherine Hill Bay in Thomas Boyd's yacht. They embarked at Speer's Point, and had an interesting journey down the lake, passing the estate of Mrs. Warner, Williamson's community at Belmont, the Chinese fisheries, and finally arrived at Galgabba:³⁰

At last we reached Boyd's Farm, and as the majority of the men needed refreshment, and expressed their desire to halt here, the boat was steered into a small creek . . . and we all landed. We then found that Mr. Boyd kept a small store and sort of refreshment house.

This was probably the first store in the Heads district, and may have existed for some years prior to that date. However, by 1876 a second store or public house was doing business in the district. A brief reference to it is contained in an article which appeared in the *Miner's Advocate*³¹ in that year. A correspondent described a horseback ride from Newcastle to Catherine Hill Bay, and the following extract is taken from his article:

The route from this place [Belmont] now skirts the edge of the Lake for some little distance, where we see some boats drawn up on the beach, and a few fishing nets hanging drying. The Lake then recedes to the right, and does not again come into view until we reach the Heads. . . .

On the opposite side of the entrance, the headland projects into the sea and is densely timbered down to the water's edge. . . . The mode of crossing the Lake at this place is by a flat bottomed boat, rowed across by a man whose house is on the opposite shore. Previous to crossing, the traveller takes the saddle off the horse which he puts into the boat, then stepping in himself, the boat is pushed off and the horse is held by the bridle and has to wade and swim alternately as he follows behind.

The ferryman's residence on the opposite bank of the Lake stands in a pretty spot, and with some little labour could be made a very attractive place. . . . We observed a signboard at the end of the house announcing that Colonial Wine was sold here. . . . Our course from the wine shop lay through a tangled mass of scrub for half a mile, which opened out to a plain some half a mile across; where the sea burst into full view, and which would be a splendid site for picnics and pleasure parties.

³⁰ *MA*, 10 June 1874.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 23 Feb. 1876.

It is difficult to positively identify the proprietor of this wine shop at the Heads, but it was very likely William Boyd, who lived on the southern bank of the channel, where his main business was connected with the shipping trade. As an agent, he arranged and directed the transfer of goods from small barges to the larger sea-going vessels. William Boyd also commanded a small number of ketches actually engaged in the timber trade from Lake Macquarie.

By the middle of the Seventies the scattered community about the Heads showed promise of developing into a seaport of some importance. One writer in 1877 stated³² that there were already 120 inhabitants at the Heads, and these were served by two wineshops and one store 'where everything can be obtained for the convenience of excursion parties'. Another writer, contributing to the *Illustrated Sydney News*, was optimistic enough to make this assertion:³³

Pelican Flat may be regarded as the seedling of a second Newcastle, and when once the industries of the district become fairly developed, it will be found one of the busiest and most thriving townships in the Colony.

The whole place wore an air of expectancy about it, for it was rumoured that the government was about to grant a very large sum of money for the deepening of the lake's entrance channel and on other harbour improvements. Already a dredge was at work in the channel near the Pelican Islands, increasing the depth of water for shipping. This was expected to benefit the already extensive Lake Macquarie trade in coal and timber.

It is at this point that the story of early settlement at Pelican Flat and Galgabba naturally terminates, while the history of modern Swansea properly begins. The Lake Macquarie Heads district was about to enter a period of interesting development, while the events of its colourful past were rapidly fading into the blurry images of memory. Already the story of Captain Reid's expedition of 1800 had become a legend, almost forgotten.

³² NMH, 5 May 1877.

³³ *Illustrated Sydney News*, 23 Apr. 1881.

BEGINNINGS AT BELMONT

WHEN in 1825 Reverend L. E. Threlkeld sought a place on Lake Macquarie for a mission station, he chose the locality of Belmont. It was not because the land there was fertile—Threlkeld complained that the soil was ‘very inferior’—but probably because this was one of the closest points on the lake to Newcastle, while still being not too distant from the aborigines’ rallying point at Reid’s Mistake. And so the Bahtahbah mission station at Belmont became the first European habitation at the lake, while Threlkeld’s rough dray track across the hills from Newcastle became the very first road into the lake area.

The mission at Belmont was, of course, closed about 1830, and in accordance with the conditions under which the land had been gazetted, the entire mission grant of 10,000 acres reverted to the Crown. Jonathan Warner employed men to pull down the disused mission station in 1833, and the place remained abandoned for about thirty years. Then, in 1866, a large party visited the mission site for an Easter picnic. The *Sydney Morning Herald* described the day’s outings in these words:¹

The Lake had its attractions; a large number spent a very pleasant day on its banks; a good many went to the part known as Warner’s, but the larger party went to what is known as the ‘Old House’, being the original settlement, a beautiful elevated situation commanding a magnificent view of the Lake and surrounding lovely scenery. But the Old House no longer stands there. . . . But a small heap of stones remains to mark the spot where a goodly edifice once stood, and promised to form part of a large township. Trees and brushwood have sprung up in abundance. . . . But of late, a change has been wrought, some attention has been turned to this place. The land has been purchased under the Mineral-Right—and is now being worked. Mr. T. Williamson, the enterprising owner, has had erected two substantial weatherboard cottages, just on the rise of the hill, and close to where the ‘Old House’ once stood.

As with the early growth at Cooranbong, so the beginnings of settlement at Belmont were very much a direct result of the provisions of the New South Wales Land Act of 1861. Prior to that year, the government did not

¹ SMH, 4 Apr. 1866.

permit any subdivision of the original mission grant for private sale. But this land was gradually released after 1861, and the terms of Conditional Purchase were available to selectors. In the first few years there was not a rush for land at Belmont, as there had been at Cooranbong, because there was no pre-existent nucleus of settlement or locally developed industry. However, by 1870 a small village had arisen close to the lake shore.

For a time, intending settlers on the lake were attracted to the Lake Heads vicinity, rather than to the Belmont area, doubtless for the reasons that water transport was freely available to the lake entrance, and the lake shipping trade was increasing. However, Belmont was bound to attract settlers sooner or later, particularly as coal mining developments took place along the lake shore immediately to the north of Belmont Bay in 1862. But the real initiators of a village at Belmont were two immigrant farmers from the Shetland Islands, their names being Williamson and Anderson.

Thomas Williamson, we are told, operated a business in Newcastle for some time before he decided to settle at Lake Macquarie.² It would appear that he was in a partnership with a Newcastle hotelkeeper named Robert Kircaldy. Williamson became interested in acquiring a small estate on Lake Macquarie, and about 1863 he applied for 100 acres at the site of the former mission station. He was resident at Belmont by 1864, and commenced to lay out an attractive farm, which at one stage included an orchard, vineyards, and some bananas.

John Anderson was a hard-working farmer in the Shetland Islands until late in 1863, when he emigrated with his family to New South Wales.³ Almost certainly he was influenced by Thomas Williamson in choosing to settle at Belmont, where he selected a forty-acre farm adjoining Williamson's in 1864. Like his neighbour, Anderson planted some fruit trees, and he also established a small dairy.

Another early settler in the area was Henry Marks, who had commenced a lakeside farm some time prior to 1870. There were other newcomers, too, the majority of them small selectors who endeavoured to derive an income from the soil. Unfortunately, though, the land about Belmont was not naturally fertile, and the difficulty of getting products to the Newcastle market over the badly formed dray track was a further discouragement.

But Thomas Williamson had an eye to business. He had sufficient faith in the lake's potential as a tourist resort to believe that a guest house, properly operated, would attract visitors. So he constructed a commodious weatherboard house, which he named 'Belmont', and which was nicely furnished and equipped for the convenience of guests. It is generally believed that Belmont House was erected in 1866;⁴ this may be so, for it was

² NMH, 3 Nov. 1956 (feature article on history of Belmont).

³ Council of Education: correspondence relating to Belmont school, 1873-75.

⁴ *Australian Encyclopaedia*, art. Belmont.

certainly in existence as an accommodation house by 1869, when this item appeared in the Newcastle press:⁵

Mr. Henry Marks, an enterprising conveyance proprietor, has made arrangements for running a bi-weekly coach between Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, the fare, for a single journey, being only 3/6d. The distance between here and the Lake is about sixteen miles, and as the road is anything but good, we have no hesitation in saying that the charge is as moderate as it could possibly be.

This passenger service was meant to bring tourists to Williamson's guest house. At the lake, Williamson constructed a large wharf at the front of his premises and had small boats available for the amusement of his patrons. In Newcastle, his hotel partner, Robert Kircaldy, assisted by opening a booking office for lake-bound tourists, and thus publicized Williamson's enterprise in the best possible way.

In view of the expense which must have been involved in this tourist venture, it is sad to discover the following commentary penned by a visitor to the lake in 1870.⁶ Describing a boat excursion around part of the lake, he said:

After passing the Cardiff Coal Works, the next point of interest we came to was the late residence of Mr. Williamson of Newcastle, at present occupied by Mr. Archibald, recently the public school teacher at Waratah. . . . From this point to Newcastle the distance is about twelve miles over one of the worst roads in the Colony. For some considerable time past Mr. Williamson offered some sort of accommodation to visitors in the shape of furnished apartments and the use of a boat, but owing to the abominable state of the road, he was not very frequently troubled with guests. An enterprising settler in the same locality, thinking that something like regular communication between Newcastle and Williamson's would pay, recently 'laid on' a one-horse vehicle, which was advertised to run on stated days. So far as I observed, I don't believe the unfortunate man got passengers enough the whole time he was going backwards and forwards to reimburse for the expenses he went to in making the enterprise known to the public. To tell the truth, the speculation was a complete failure, and so it will always be until the road is put into something like decent state of repair, and ladies can venture on the journey without the risk of having their limbs dislocated on the way.

The writer was favourably impressed by the attractive surroundings of the guest house:

The site of the house is exceedingly pretty, being on the top of a gentle rise close to the water's edge, and immediately contiguous to a number of beautiful trees, the umbrageous shade of which forms a delightful cool

⁵ *NC*, 21 Aug. 1869, and 18 Sep. 1869.

⁶ *TCJ*, 11 June 1870.

retreat, even on the hottest of days. The contrast between the calm quiet, and at times deep solitude of this sequestered nook, and the bustle and noise of the 'coaly city' is very striking. . . .

During 1868 the *Newcastle Chronicle*⁷ printed an advertisement for the sale of town lots 'on the road from Kahibah to Newcastle, about two miles northerly from the village of Kahibah'. This referred to the Belmont locality, where a total of forty acres was being offered in small lots at £6 per acre. It is doubtful whether these blocks obtained a ready sale at this particular time. However, numbers of miners lived and worked only a short distance away from Belmont, and to these men, as well as the increasing numbers of fishermen on the lake, 'Williamson's' was a place where stores could be obtained, and mail collected or sent. The nucleus of a commercial centre was there, and it needed only an improved road to Newcastle to establish a thriving township. In the meantime the settlers were, generally speaking, of the poorer class of farmers. The visitor in 1870 made brief mention of these settlers.⁸

Adjacent to Mr. Williamson's selection, there are several other small freeholders, some of whom, however, I fancy are not in a very prosperous condition, the indifferent quality of the soil, and the distance of their homesteads, giving them quite as much as they can conveniently do to gain an honest livelihood. I am speaking here of those whose farms are nearest the lake; further away, in the direction of the Tick Hole, I was informed the land is somewhat better, and being so much nearer the markets, the settlers in that vicinity are, as a rule, better off.

Though the mountains west of the lake contained the best resources of timber, many acres of forest covered the hilly land near Belmont, and it was inevitable that a timber industry would develop there sooner or later. As far as we can tell, the pioneer timberman at Belmont was David Cumming, who owned some fairly extensive tracts of land in that locality. In August 1871 the *Newcastle Chronicle*⁹ announced that Cumming was offering some portions of land for sale, and added that he was about to erect a steam sawmill and wharf upon part of his ground, with a view to sending timber by boat to Sydney and Newcastle. It was anticipated that this enterprise would attract more settlers to the Belmont district.

Less than six months later, the same newspaper described the ceremonious opening of the sawmill.¹⁰

On Monday last, the new steam sawmill at Lake Macquarie, the property of Messrs. Cumming and Lane, commenced operations, and during that day, the ceremony of naming it the Cardiff mill was performed by Miss

⁷ NC, 23 May 1868.

⁸ TCJ, 11 June 1870.

⁹ NC, 22 Aug. 1871.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1 Feb. 1872.

Williamson, daughter of Mr. Thomas Williamson—a lady resident in, and well-known by visitors in that locality. In the evening the occasion was celebrated by a supper.

The Cardiff mill was situated close to the lake's edge in the vicinity of Cardiff Point, where a coal mine had already operated for a short time. The newspaper stated that in close proximity to the mill there were 'vast quantities of first class timber'.

Unfortunately, the Cardiff mill ceased operations less than a year after its commencement, due to the untimely deaths of both partners in the venture. Mr. Lane accidentally shot himself through the heart while out on a sporting expedition, and shortly afterwards Mr. Cumming died as a result of an equally unfortunate tragedy.¹¹ The *Chronicle* of February 1873¹² reported that a large schooner was part-way under construction at the stocks at the Cardiff mill. It added, however, that the sawmills were idle, and the establishment was for sale. The mill changed hands several times after that, and had acquired the name of 'Fatal Mill' by the time it was purchased by John Henderson about 1884. The mill continued to operate for at least a few years after that date.

The establishment of the sawmills back in 1872 must have helped to encourage new settlers to Belmont, for the very next year saw the opening of a school in the locality, as well as the first attempts to improve the condition of the road leading to the township. An announcement concerning the road appeared in the *Chronicle* of 1st April 1873, which stated that the government had voted the sum of £112 for repair of the road from Newcastle to the Lake Macquarie Heads. It was expected that this amount would suffice only to improve some of the worst places of the road. However, it was a beginning.

Thomas Williamson had moved back to Newcastle for a short period about 1870, leasing his premises to a Mr. Archibald, but he was back at the lake in time to assist very nicely in the opening of Belmont's first school during 1873. Williamson saw that there were enough children in the community to warrant the existence of a school, and he thereupon opened a private school at his premises, taught by a governess named Mary Aspinall. This was a fine beginning, but the advantages of having a government-supported school were quickly realized, and before the first school year was through, application had been made to the authorities for a Provisional Public School. In response to this, an inspector visited Williamson's early in 1874, and reported favourably on the request for a school. He wrote:¹³

This locality is situated about twelve miles south of Newcastle on the northern shore of Lake Macquarie and is inhabited by a small population

¹¹ *TCJ*, 13 Mar. 1886.

¹² *NC*, 22 Feb. 1873.

¹³ Council of Education: correspondence relating to Belmont school, 1873-75.

of, for the most part, fishermen and timber-getters who have also small selections of land. Hence it may be inferred that the circumstances of the place are by no means prosperous: and such is the fact. There is no school within nine miles while the number of children of school age is about 27, out of which an ordinary average of 20 may be expected. I found 22 actually present.

The school room is a neat weatherboard building, the property of Mr. Williamson, pleasantly and conveniently situated.

The petition for the school was signed by most of the parents residing within the district, as follows: Thomas Williamson (six children), Charles B. Marks (one son, George), Maurice Marks (two boys, Richard and Henry), Mary Cumming (widow of David Cumming, with one son, David), Matthew Cobbin (seven children), John Smith (one daughter), John Anderson (three children), William Grubb (two children), and a Mr. Pritchard (three children). Williamson's governess continued to teach at Belmont until 1875, when the Provisional School actually opened. Its first teacher was John Anderson, the pioneer farmer from the Shetland Islands.

The school inspector's remarks, quoted above, refer to fishing as an important occupation of the folk around Belmont. Another visitor to the district mentioned the large number of fishermen's huts along the lakeshore towards the Pelican Islands.¹⁴ The brothers Charles and Maurice Marks were amongst the keen fishermen of early Belmont. Maurice Marks possessed some land on the lakeshore a little to the north of the main settlement. Charles resided with his family on the point which now bears his family name, and there he cultivated a reasonably prosperous farm and orchard.

A newcomer fisherman to Belmont during 1874 was George Clouten from the Maitland district. He purchased a section of land right at Belmont village, and commenced fishing operations immediately. The *Sydney Morning Herald* of June 1874¹⁵ referred to his contributions to the fishing industry:

A new species of industry has been opened up by Mr. George Clouten, of Lake Macquarie, who has initiated a regular fish trade between the Lake and Newcastle or Sydney. Fish has become very scarce, and Mr. Clouten has received orders for as much fish as he can supply either in Newcastle or to be forwarded per vessel 'Kembla' at night to Sydney. The fish has to be brought fifteen miles on horseback from the Lake, and is of a remarkably fine character, consisting of mullet, tailors, whiting, etc. The whiting was particularly good and large.

Other fishermen joined George Clouten in this business, and by 1877 it was reported that about six tons of fish were taken from the lake each month to the Newcastle and Sydney markets.¹⁶ As well as taking fish by

¹⁴ *MA*, 23 Feb. 1876.

¹⁵ *SMH*, 23 June 1874.

¹⁶ *NMH*, 5 May 1877.

horseback from Belmont to the Newcastle wharves, some fishermen carried their baskets of fish from Miller's wharf on Cockle Creek across the hill to Wallsend.¹⁷ Here the fish were either sold locally, or sent by rail to Newcastle, and thence by boat to Sydney.

Unfortunately, fishing was not always a game of fortune. In 1883 John Marks was drowned while engaged in this occupation, leaving a widow with eight children, and a ninth was born shortly after the tragedy. Mrs. Marks struggled to support her family by keeping a boarding house, though this did not yield a reliable income.¹⁸

Another widow was Mary Cumming, whose husband had been a partner in the Cardiff sawmills venture. She was fortunate, in 1876, to be appointed schoolmistress at Belmont. The previous teacher, John Anderson, apparently found the vocation too demanding—he had never received any teacher training. Mary Cumming taught the school until 1882, when she was reported to be moving to Sydney, 'having sufficient means to live comfortably'.¹⁹

The village at Belmont developed steadily during the mid-1870's, as a number of small land allotments were taken up. In 1875, for example, the *Newcastle Chronicle*²⁰ announced the sale of almost seventy lots at the 'rising township of Cowper', situated about one mile from 'Williamson's, on the Lake'.

By 1876 Belmont was able to boast a church and a licensed hotel. The church, an interdenominational house of worship, was erected in 1874 or early in the next year. Reference to it was made in June 1875.²¹

At Lake Macquarie, a picnic took place on Queen's Birthday which . . . was well attended, and in every respect was a success. A first class tea was provided for us in the afternoon, in Mr. Williamson's paddock, in front of the little chapel, to which ample justice was done. In the evening, we had a concert, which took place in the chapel, and it came off well. . . . With the proceeds of the tea and concert, we not only cleared the debt off the church, but have a balance in hand. . . . We were favoured with the presence of visitors from Newcastle, Lambton, and Wallsend; and, had the steamer not unfortunately broken down, we should have had a large number from Old Wallsend, who were at Mr. Spear's jetty waiting for her.

We are told little else about Belmont's first church, except that it was ' . . . a neat little church, occupied alternately by the Revds. J. S. Dobson and Bain, with a congregation attached of about thirty persons'.²²

Thomas Williamson's accommodation house became a licensed hotel in

¹⁷ *NC*, 18 June 1874, and *NMH*, 29 June 1876.

¹⁸ *TCJ*, 1 Mar. 1884.

¹⁹ Education Department: correspondence relating to Belmont, 1876-82.

²⁰ *NC*, 19 June 1875.

²¹ *MA*, 5 June 1875.

²² *NMH*, 4 Oct. 1876.

1876. The Newcastle *Herald* in December of that year²³ announced the granting of the licence to Williamson 'for sale of Colonial Wine at his house, Belmont, Lake Macquarie'.

It will be apparent that Thomas Williamson's establishment was the hub of early Belmont. The township itself took its name from his guest house, which had been the starting point of development. To the town's first residents, Williamson's was synonymous with school, church, hotel, post office, public wharf, and tourist accommodation. It was, in every sense, 'Belmont'. At the same time, Williamson's was a farm, still as attractively laid out as it had been from the outset. Notice this description left by a tourist in 1876:²⁴

Mr. Williamson's estate is situated on a moderate elevation, rising directly from the Lake, and is covered with a thick healthy sward. . . . The lower part of the site is laid out as a Vineyard, which slopes gradually down to the flat, where a somewhat extensive batch of bananas are growing most luxuriantly. . . . We are satisfied that were a good road constructed from Newcastle to this place it would be largely patronised by pleasure seekers. As it is, however, the state of the road prevents any considerable amount of travelling except for horsemen.

A post office was opened at Belmont on 1st September 1877, in premises owned by Thomas Williamson, who also held the appointment of postmaster until his death in 1880.²⁵ Prior to the establishment of this office, a petition had been signed by over 270 people throughout the entire lake district, asking that a post office be opened at Belmont, from which mails to all other lake centres could be distributed, either by land or water. This called for a complete reorganization of existing mail services affecting places as far away as Cooranbong, Catherine Hill Bay, and even Brisbane Water. After some enquiries, the Postmaster-General decided not to proceed with this proposed arrangement; but he agreed to open an office at Belmont.

Initially the mails to Belmont were conveyed from Newcastle via Charles-town on horseback twice a week. John Gordon, of Lambton, held the first contract and was paid the sum of £21/15/- per annum. In 1879 the mail run was extended southwards from Belmont to serve the Swansea district and Catherine Hill Bay.²⁶

An interesting tourist venture was started in 1876 by Thomas Russell, the proprietor of the Cooranbong general store. Russell pioneered tourist ferry services on the lake, and the *Miner's Advocate* of January 1876 contained advertisements for steam launch trips. Passengers would be picked up at Speer's Point and Belmont, and could enjoy a day's outing on the lake for the modest outlay of five shillings a head. Russell's launch was a large

²³ *Ibid.*, 21 Dec. 1876.

²⁴ *MA*, 23 Feb. 1876.

²⁵ Postmaster-General's Department: *Belmont, a post office history*, 1963.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

passenger ferry which he christened S.S. *Pioneer*. In a bold bid for the tourist trade, he arranged for his launch to connect at Belmont with the arrival and departure of a special coach which conveyed passengers to and from Newcastle.²⁷ This coach service was inaugurated in April of 1877, when it was advertised²⁸ that John Anderson of Belmont intended to run a coach between Newcastle and Belmont every Monday, Thursday, and Saturday, the fare for a single journey being five shillings. Anderson's coach was described as a 'nice Waggonette', and from the advertising it appears that the venture was being sponsored by Thomas Williamson who, it was reported, had enlarged and improved his accommodation. How successful was Anderson's waggonette service we cannot tell. It received extensive publicity in connection with the *Pioneer* launch trips, but it is doubtful whether at this stage either the coach or the launch attracted many tourists. By 1881 Anderson's passenger service had been replaced by Hubbard's coach to Belmont.

The truth is that the state of the road to Belmont at that time was a discouragement to tourists, and this held back the town's development more than any other single thing. A correspondent to the newspaper in 1876²⁹ spoke about the 'improvements' recently made to the road. His description is interesting:

Parties leaving Wallsend and Lambton will find the road leading past Mr. Croudace's residence the best they can take, as it leads right to the new line of the Australasian Coal Company; and immediately after you have crossed that you are on to the Newcastle Road. The course to be pursued when once you have entered on this road is indicated by the attempts . . . made to make the track as good as possible. From the point where Croudace's track intercepts that from Newcastle, drains have been cut on the high side to take the water off and corduroy crossings have been put in at given distances, to facilitate its passage across the track into the lower ground. These improvements have been carried out from this point to the edge of the lake known as 'Williamson's', some seven or eight miles distant.

Another writer, a few years after that, had this to say about the trip to the lake by passenger coach:³⁰

You should ride from Newcastle by Hubbard's Coach to Belmont. . . . Mr. Hubbard will always be found ready to accommodate intending visitors, but at present the road is a mere track, and about half way the ascent becomes extremely steep, the passengers generally being compelled to dismount, and continue their way on foot to the summit. This part of the journey is called Drag Hill. . . . On arriving at Belmont, the visitor will find superior accommodation at the establishment of Mrs. Williamson.

²⁷ *MA*, various issues of Jan. 1876.

²⁸ *NMH*, 21 Apr. 1877.

²⁹ *MA*, 23 Feb. 1876.

³⁰ *Illustrated Sydney News*, 23 Apr. 1881.

In 1882 James Haydon was appointed to the school at Belmont, replacing Mary Cumming who had resigned. Haydon was required to move his family and possessions from Richmond Vale, where he had been teaching prior to this time. Under normal circumstances, this transfer should have involved three regular transport connections: dray from Richmond Vale to Sydney, ship from Sydney to Newcastle, and dray from Newcastle to Belmont. However, the road to Belmont was considered too risky a proposition for the transport of household goods, so the new schoolmaster was forced to adopt an unusual route of travel. His removal expenses in February 1882 were as follows:³¹

Cartage from Richmond Vale to O'Neal's, Cooranbong,					
per dray	..	..	£3	0	0
Cartage from O'Neal's to Cooranbong Wharf	..	..		10	0
Cooranbong Wharf to Belmont Wharf	..	..	..	1	4
Belmont Wharf to house, per dray	..	..	..	5	0

By this time sufficient had been said and published about the shocking state of the Belmont road to shame the government into action. During 1883 a large sum was spent on construction of a better carriage road out to the lake.³² This was a great event in the history of Belmont, for the trade and development of the town depended then, as it does even now, on its road connections with the major centres of population.

Belmont of the Eighties was a prosperous township, with a promising future as tourist resort. Any description of the town's facilities at that time must commence with the Belmont Hotel and boarding establishment, from which the community had germinated. Its founder and proprietor, Thomas Williamson, died early in 1880, closing a chapter of important beginnings for Belmont. His wife, Elizabeth, was left in charge of the hotel and post office. This soon proved too heavy a responsibility, and so the hotel and boarding house were leased, first to John Overall, then to a Mr. Wood, and later to John Anderson. Mrs. Williamson remained postmistress for some years, before resigning in favour of her daughter, Anne. This occurred in 1887, by which date the electric telegraph had come to Belmont, so the office there became a post and telegraph office. The original premises at Williamson's were used for the office until 1901, when permission was given for the erection of a new building.³³

The public school at Belmont was transferred into a new building about 1884. Two years before that, many of the town's residents had petitioned for a new and larger school, pointing out that no less than 43 children were now enrolled, and that 50 were expected the next year.³⁴ Signatures on the

³¹ Education Department: correspondence relating to Belmont school, 1882.

³² *Sydney Mail*, 26 Jan. 1884.

³³ *Belmont, a post office history*.

³⁴ Education Department: correspondence relating to Belmont school, 1883-86.

petition included those of William Clouten (carpenter of Sandy Flat), Charles Escott (fisherman), and John Overall (hotelkeeper). The Department of Public Instruction was able to lease five acres from Mary Cumming as a site for the new school. The section was officially described as

That piece of land in area about five acres, situated on Mount Pleasant, Belmont, bounded on the West by Mrs. Thomas Williamson's 100 acres of freehold, and on the other three sides by William Clouten's 40 acres of freehold.

James Haydon taught at the new school for a year or more, but during 1885 the teacher there was Abraham King.

Since there were many visitors to Belmont during the 1880's, we are left with many published descriptions of the town at that time. An *Almanac* of 1883 supplied the following information about the town:³⁵

Belmont is the principal watering place of the Northern District, situated 12 miles from Newcastle, on the shores of Lake Macquarie. Public conveyances run daily between Newcastle and Belmont, leaving the former place at 10 a.m., returning in the evening. Belmont Hotel and Boarding Establishment, commanding a magnificent view of the Lake, is leased by Mr. Overall, who carries on business in both establishments. There are several other accommodation houses in the neighbourhood; also a steam saw-mill, owned by Messrs. Goodsir and Company, employing some 30 hands. A Public School, presided over by Mr. Heydon. Divine Service is held by Church of England, Presbyterians, and Primitive Methodists. Mails are received and despatched three times weekly.

The steam sawmill referred to in this item was the original Cardiff mill which had changed ownership several times. During 1878 the business was owned by Brown and Goodsir,³⁶ but by 1884 it was operated by John Henderson.

During 1883 a party of business men and officials came to Lake Macquarie to inspect the improvements being carried out at the Heads. They arrived at Belmont after travelling over the newly constructed road.³⁷

A quiet drive of an hour and a half from Newcastle brought the visitors to Belmont, the Lake Macquarie township, which consists of a few neat and substantial wooden houses, the principal of which are the local hotel and accommodation house, kept by Mr. Overall. After the party had had a snack and some champagne they embarked aboard the neat little ferry steamer 'Adeline' for the Heads to inspect the works at present in progress there.

A tourist in 1884 has left us a slightly more informative sketch:³⁸

³⁵ *Newcastle Nautical Almanac and Guide to the Port of Newcastle*, 1883.

³⁶ *NMH*, 8 June 1878.

³⁷ *TCJ*, 25 Aug. 1883.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1 Mar. 1884.

Belmont consists of a public house, a public school, a post office, two churches—one a Methodist, the other an English Church—and some scattered buildings, whereof some three are devoted to the entertainment of travellers. I wondered much where the pupils for the public school came from, and was surprised to learn that the district musters some 50 candidates for the privilege of education, free and secular. . . . The house which I had made my temporary abode commanded a fine view of the Lake below it.

This visitor inspected most of the surrounding scenery. On one occasion he walked a short distance through the bush to

a house on a hill, from which I can see a vast extent of the Lake. The view is most charming. . . . This house belongs to a Mr. Marks, brother-in-law of my landlady. Hard by is an orchard which, I am informed, is the largest and best in this region.

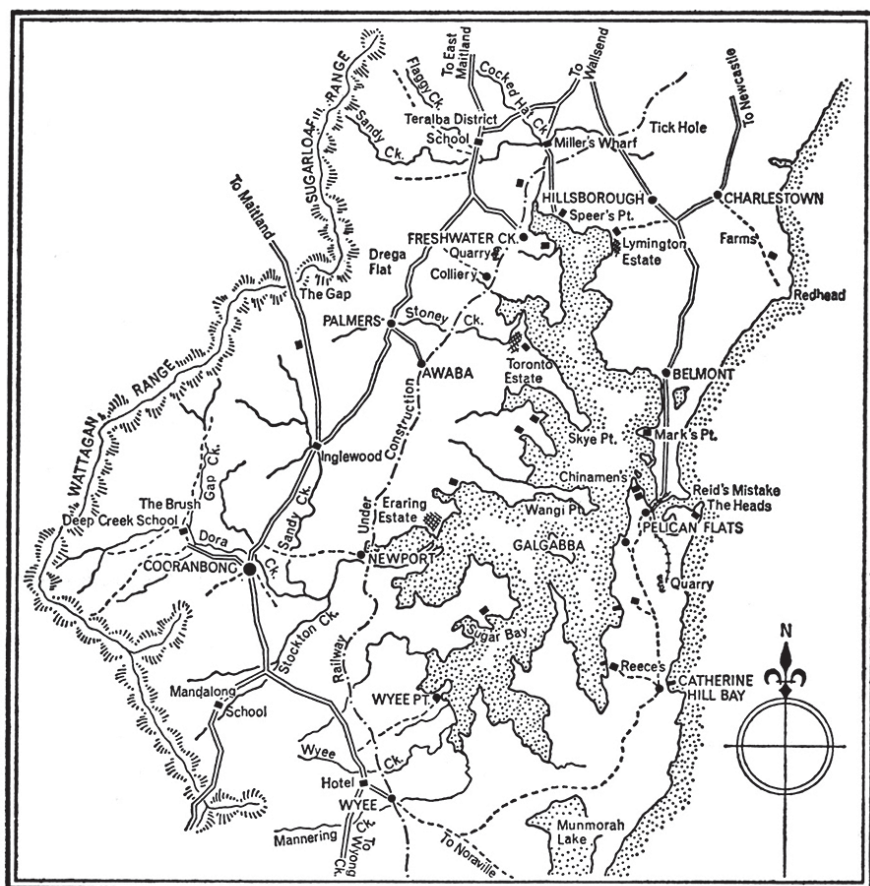
About two miles from Belmont along the lakeshore in the other direction, this tourist came upon an old coal shaft, which he understood to have been the first mine worked in that neighbourhood. Along the shore he passed

. . . a good many fishermen's huts, here and there meeting with fishermen mending their nets. Among these was a coloured gentleman of African origin, with whom I had a long gossip.

The coloured gentleman proved to be a native of Bermuda, who had come to the lake seventeen years previously, and had since lived by fishing.

When railway services commenced to operate between Sydney and Newcastle in 1889, it became a popular practice for passengers to alight at Cockle Creek station, from whence passenger ferries conveyed tourists to Belmont and other parts of the lake. The increased trade benefited the town. By 1888 the place had a general store owned by a Mr. Leith, a public hall for entertainment, and a greater number of accommodation houses.³⁹ Belmont had in fact grown up. Its days of beginnings were over.

³⁹ Newcastle *Almanac*, *op. cit.*, 1888.



LAKE MACQUARIE

1885

THE BAR TO PROGRESS

The great drawback to Lake Macquarie is the shallow entrance to it from the sea, which admits of navigation only by craft drawing about five feet or six feet of water. It is not denied that if the Lake were navigable by vessels of the largest tonnage, the place would speedily become one of the great commercial entrepôts, not only in New South Wales, but in the southern hemisphere.¹

These optimistic words were published in the *Town and Country Journal* of 1883. They provide a very suitable introduction to this chapter, which aims to trace the early development of the coal mining industry at Lake Macquarie, and to show how the shallow bar at the lake's entrance presented an obstacle to this development. But 1883 is too advanced a date to open the story, so we must turn back a few years and resume the narrative of coal mining where we left it—at the closure of the Ebenezer colliery some years prior to 1860.

The founder of the Ebenezer mine, Rev. L. E. Threlkeld, revealed a good deal of faith in the industrial future of the lake area. During 1847 he was questioned by the Select Committee on the Coal Inquiry, appointed by the government, and his answers and statements give evidence of a wide knowledge of the lake and its resources.² Replying to a question concerning the existence at the lake of minerals other than coal, Threlkeld stated that about 1830 Mr. Busby of Newcastle 'had some thoughts of taking part of Lake Macquarie for the purpose of smelting iron which abounds there'. This venture did not materialize because of the unknown nature of the lake's navigation at that time. Threlkeld observed that 'at Lake Macquarie there is shell lime, iron, and coal on the spot'—the three raw materials of a steel industry—but he admitted that Newcastle had the advantage of shipping facilities for the establishment of such an industry. He held that most of the land about the lake was rich in coal, and mentioned numerous properties where reserves of this mineral were in evidence. Of the spot near the Heads where Captain Reid obtained his cargo in 1800 Threlkeld had this to say:³

¹ *TCJ*, 25 Aug. 1883.

² N.S.W. Legislative Council: *Votes and Proceedings*, 1847, v. 2, pp. 335-92.

³ *Ibid.*

At the Heads there are ten acres of ground which I formerly purchased for a depot at the Heads, from the Government, which is pure coal field, and the coal is reserved there; five acres of that belong now to Mr. Robey, and five acres to Mr. Holden, the solicitor, but they cannot work the coal.

The Ebenezer colliery operated for about ten years before a combination of circumstances forced the proprietor to close it. Prominent among these circumstances was the obstacle to navigation caused by the rocky bar at the Heads. This treacherous bar was to prove a hindrance to development of the lake for many years.

The gold rush brought a tremendous influx of people to the Australian colonies, and with the dawn of the Sixties, New South Wales was being swept into the industrial age. The character of the colony was changing rapidly from a 'sheep's back' economy dominated by squatters to an industrial society controlled by capitalists. Sydney became a city, factories were built, railways were constructed, and suddenly there was an unprecedented demand for coal, the new black gold of industry. Newcastle had proven coal resources, and mining developments after 1860 ensured that Newcastle became second only to Sydney as a port and industrial city. Near at hand to Newcastle, the Lake Macquarie district was bound to share in the boom.

The earliest indication of an awakened interest in Lake Macquarie coal is contained in a brief statement which appeared in the *Newcastle Chronicle* during May 1861.⁴ Some visitors to Mrs. Warner's residence on the lake reported that a company of miners were sinking a shaft on her estate, but they were prevented from opening up the coal seam by a large seepage of water. The report of the visiting party then contains this significant piece of news:

The Government Surveyors are down examining the Heads with a view to opening them for ships of 300 or 400 tons. At present only small craft can trade there.

During 1862 several companies secured leases of lakeside coal-bearing land, and preparations were made to mine the coal. In response to urgent requests for improvements to navigation at the Heads, the Government Engineer was sent to examine the lake's entrance, and to inform Parliament of the possibilities and costs of deepening the channel for large vessels. The engineer reported that a layer of a few feet of sand and clay covered a ledge of rock at the lake's mouth. It would be comparatively inexpensive to remove the sand, he said, but this would not deepen the channel to any appreciable degree. On the other hand, to attempt removal of the underlying rock or to cut a channel through it would involve a large expenditure of public money. His recommendation was that the silt and sand should be removed, which would slightly improve the channel, and that construction of training walls of stone ballast for regulating and straightening the

⁴ NC, 22 May 1861, and *Maitland Mercury* dated 23 May 1861.

current might be undertaken.⁵ The government showed no enthusiasm about the engineer's report, but was immediately subject to further pressure from the coal companies, as shown by this newspaper article published in November 1862:⁶

Operations in coal mining on an extensive scale are about to be commenced at Lake Macquarie. Seams of great thickness and of excellent quality, close to the water's edge, have been opened there within the last few weeks, and extensive and spirited preparations are being made to work them by Sydney capitalists. Application has been made to the Government to devote a sum of money, the amount necessary being estimated by the Engineer for Harbours at £40,000, to the improvement of the entrance to the Lake. The proprietors of the coal mines, it is understood, are willing to guarantee five percent interest to the Government on the actual expenditure incurred in deepening the channel. It is intended to employ iron schooners of a small draft of water for the Lake Macquarie trade, and orders for ten of these vessels will go to England by the present mail. . . . It is understood that the Government are willing to undertake the improvements of the navigation of the Lake on the terms proposed by the parties interested in the coal mines. A large portion of the lands on the shores of the Lake is still Government property, and would be enormously increased in value by the outlay of the sum necessary to effect the improvements referred to.

Evidence of the widespread interest in the coal mining developments at the lake is the following press item from the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 8th September 1863:

Lake Macquarie has apparently of late presented more than ordinary attraction, if one is to judge from the many parties continually proceeding thither, either for pleasure or for business. The discovery of coal in that quarter and its subsequent development, have in a great measure no doubt led many parties to give more attention to this somewhat romantic and beautiful spot. The attraction of the Lake appears to have extended to Sydney, and preparations are being made to receive his Excellency and suite down about the middle of the present month.

Despite this profession of interest by the administration of New South Wales, no improvements to lake navigation were forthcoming during the next year or two. The mining companies, however, were hopeful enough to go ahead with the coal industry, and called tenders for the construction of suitable vessels of shallow draught.

One of the newly formed mining companies in 1862 was the Cardiff Coal Company, which leased some land on the eastern side of the lake at the head of Belmont Bay, now officially known as Cardiff Point. The most significant thing about this company was that its director, George Alfred Lloyd, was connected by marriage to Rev. Threlkeld, the pioneer colliery

⁵ N.S.W. Public Works Department: files relating to Lake Macquarie, 1862.

⁶ *NC*, 26 Nov. 1862.

proprietor on the lake. One of Threlkeld's daughters, Mary, married Lloyd, who first came to New South Wales in 1833 and farmed in the Hunter valley for some years. But he was a man of initiative and shrewd business ability, and just prior to the drought and depression years which severely crippled the pastoralists, he moved to Sydney and entered the then profitable auctioneering business. That was about 1840, and by the time of the gold rushes he had become a general merchant with sufficient capital to buy gold from the diggers. After a trip to England, Lloyd returned to the colony in 1860, and within two years had formed the Cardiff Coal Company for mining at Lake Macquarie. A wealthy business man, he was elected Member of Parliament for the Newcastle district in 1869, and was re-elected several times. During the Seventies he served the colony, first as Postmaster-General, and later as Minister for Mines.⁷

The failure of the Cardiff Coal Company was one of G. A. Lloyd's few financial setbacks. Lloyd claimed that his company invested £10,000 in labour and equipment in an attempt to mine the coal and get it to the market,⁸ but the shallow bar at the lake entrance proved too great an obstacle to the vessels used for the trade. Lloyd's determination to succeed if at all possible is seen in his specifications for the construction of a vessel in 1863:⁹

Tenders have been invited by the Cardiff Coal Company (Lake Macquarie) for the construction of a tug steamer of not less than 30 horse power, and not to draw more than 2'9" with steam up and one day's coal on board.

At the mining site on Cardiff Point, preparations were undertaken on a large scale, and a *Chronicle* correspondent in 1863 commented¹⁰ that the Cardiff works seemed to be in a very favoured state, employing at least twenty men. This prosperity was more apparent than real, for within a year or two the company was forced to abandon its mine. A visitor to the lake in 1870 described the abandoned works:¹¹

At the Cardiff Works, all the plant for raising and shipping the coal is still on the ground, and a portion of the wharf alongside which it was intended the colliers should go to receive their cargoes is still standing, the remainder having been washed away from time to time.

Another enterprising mining company on the lake in 1862 was the Hartley Coal Company. Some land was leased on the lakeshore about a mile northwards of the Cardiff works, and here shafts were sunk, engines placed in position, and a wharf constructed nearby. Schooners were procured for marketing the coal, namely the *West Hartley* vessels numbered 1 and 2, and a number of shipments were made before disasters overtook the com-

⁷ RAHS journal, v. 25, pt. 2, 1939 (Champion).

⁸ *SMH*, 20 Aug. 1883.

⁹ *NC*, 5 Aug. 1863.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 23 Sep. 1863.

¹¹ *TCJ*, 11 June 1870.

pany. According to one journalist in 1870,¹² the first of the *West Hartley* schooners was wrecked at the Lake Heads shortly after its arrival in the colony, and though the vessel had originally cost the company £800, the wreck was sold for just fifty pounds.

The Hartley Company suffered another loss at the time of the fateful 'Cawarra' gale of July 1866. The *West Hartley* No. 2 was caught near the lake entrance in this fearful windstorm, and was blown ashore at the Heads, causing considerable damage to the vessel, and injuring the captain and mate, whose names were Hudson and Clarke respectively. These men were conveyed to Newcastle in Boyd's dray, but Captain Hudson died shortly afterwards.¹³

In the face of these losses, the Hartley Company collapsed. In any case, the risks involved in getting cargoes across the entrance bar made the task of taking coal to Sydney much too expensive. While the proprietors of the Lake Macquarie mines went to tremendous expense to market their coal, the mining companies near Newcastle were able to land theirs on the Newcastle wharves for 8/3d. per ton, a ridiculously low figure, even in those days. So the Hartley shafts were abandoned, the mineral lease reverted to the Crown, and within a few years little evidence remained of a courageous enterprise.

Yet another company attempted to mine coal on the lakeside immediately northwards of Belmont Bay. This was the Green Hills Coal Works, of which we have little information, except that less capital was invested than at either the Cardiff or Hartley collieries. However, one shaft was put down by the proprietors before the mining operations were discontinued.¹⁴

This catalogue of early mining failures is not complete without some reference to the Murray Brothers' venture at Morisset Point, a short distance south of Galgabba Point. About 1863 the Murrays purchased 340 acres in that area, and opened out tunnels in a cliffside at the water's edge. A jetty was built at the spot, and for a short time the men were able to put out about 400 tons of coal each week. The following report, appearing in the press in 1863, probably refers to the Murrays' pit:¹⁵

Another mine, containing a fine seam of splint coal, is in course of working by a small company of miners. Their tunnel is distant about six miles from the heads, and the seam is said to be five feet thick; it is an excellent quality. . . . From this mine being approximate to the entrance, and the tunnel being entered from the water's edge, it is believed this seam will be found the most remunerative of all at present working.

Again, however, the problem of moving the coal from the lake proved insurmountable. The mines at Point Morisset were soon closed, and some hundreds of tons of coal lay forgotten near the lakeshore for many years.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ NHDHS journal, v. 9, pt. 2, 1954.

¹⁴ *TCJ*, 11 June 1870.

¹⁵ *NC*, 23 Sep. 1863.

In spite of the long exposure to the elements, some of this coal was used by a steam-powered dredge at the Lake Heads in 1877, and still proved to be excellent steam coal. A visitor to Morisset Point in 1883¹⁶ described

... heaps of coal now lying on the jetties and at the tunnel mouths, which are within a few feet of the water's edge, and there is a deep water frontage here as well as around most of the lake. In fact, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that good coal could be dug out of the hillsides overlooking the water's edge, and pitched into the vessels lying alongside.

There was, of course, much pressure placed on the New South Wales government by these early mining companies to have the lake entrance deepened. In June of 1864 a deputation from the Lake Macquarie mining interests approached the Minister for Works in Sydney, and urged that immediate steps should be taken to improve navigation.¹⁷ It was pointed out that, independent of the coal resources of the district, the Lake Macquarie region contained an abundance of splendid timber of the quality which was in heavy demand throughout the colony. The deputation presented a petition worded, in part, as follows:¹⁸

Your Memorialists are interested in the working of coal mines on the shores of Lake Macquarie, but their efforts to develop the mineral resources of the district are impeded by the obstruction to the navigation of the entrance to the Lake ...

That a number of rich coal mines situated on the banks of Lake Macquarie, which were formerly worked, have been abandoned in consequence of the difficulty of access, but that within the last eighteen months the Cardiff Coal Company and other Coal Companies have recommenced operations and are now engaged in bringing up coals to Sydney.

The petitioners estimated that only two or three hundred yards of the lake channel would require deepening, but they added that it would be essential to place buoys at the entrance to guide shipping.

Owing to the want of buoys two vessels, the *Esther* and the *Carrywell* were a few months since nearly wrecked and they have been withdrawn from the trade in consequence.

The government met this renewed request with indifference, and no steps were taken to remove the hindrances to navigation. Unfortunately the Lake Macquarie investors failed to receive any support at this time from the influential citizens of Newcastle. In fact, the *Newcastle Chronicle*¹⁹ expressed mild opposition to the opening of the lake for shipping. A leading article in that newspaper suggested that it would be more profitable to

¹⁶ *T CJ*, 25 Aug. 1883.

¹⁷ *NC*, 22 June 1864.

¹⁸ N.S.W. Public Works Department: files relating to Lake Macquarie, 1864.

¹⁹ *NC*, 25 June 1864.

construct railways to Lake Macquarie so that the coal could be brought in to Newcastle, and shipped from the wharves there. The tone of the article reveals clearly that the Newcastle financiers feared the competition that might result from the creation of a harbour and coaling port at the lake.

As we have seen, the various mining companies at the lake were forced to abandon their workings shortly after 1864 due to the government's failure to provide safe shipping facilities. In the face of collapse, the Hartley Company even turned to the production of shale oil for a brief period. It was reported in 1865²⁰ that the manager of the West Hartley mine, Mr. Lindsay, had been able to extract kerosene oil from small pieces of shale he obtained from the mine. The process was described as 'very crude', but a trickle of oil was being obtained. Mr. Lindsay was also reported to have discovered quicksilver in the area adjacent to his mine.

When a tourist correspondent for the *Town and Country Journal* visited the lake in 1870, he commented at some length on the navigational problems at the Heads. Here are some of his main points, the bulk of the description having been omitted:²¹

Shortly after passing Kahibah Point we came to the outlet, or river, as it is called, leading up to the Heads and out into the open ocean. . . . I gleaned from the parties who were with me in the boat that the bar at the Heads is exceedingly shallow, the depth of water at high tide never exceeding six feet six inches, while at low tide it is barely two feet, thus precluding all navigation to vessels of any size or tonnage; and even with the small ketches and schooners that do venture inside, the task of entering is often attended with much danger and difficulty. In rough weather, it is no uncommon thing for the masters of these tiny craft to have to wait for days, and even weeks, before they dare venture over the bar. . . . The great hindrance the bar at the Heads is to navigation will be more clearly apparent, when I mention that the rate for freights between the lake and Sydney is £1 per ton, whereas from Newcastle to Sydney (fourteen miles further) it is only eight or nine shillings. Some years ago, I believe, a spasmodic kind of effort was made to deepen the bar, but owing to the want of funds, and costly nature of the undertaking for private enterprise, nothing came of it. . . . Residents on the lake hope yet that the time will come when the Government of the Colony will take the matter in hand; but with Newcastle for a rival, this is hardly likely to happen for many, many years to come.

A year after the publication of this article, an unidentified Newcastle gentleman submitted to the Government his own scheme for improving the entrance to the lake.²² We have no details as to the nature of this plan, but it too failed to budge the government from its apathy to the lake's development.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5 July 1865.

²¹ *TCJ*, 11 June 1870.

²² *NC*, 9 Feb. 1871.

Meanwhile, however, the dozens of little ketches which left Lake Macquarie loaded with timber were making their own small contribution to the improvement of the entrance channel, though in an unusual way. These vessels sailed regularly from the lake heavily laden with shingles or timber, and returned carrying small quantities of stone for ballast. It became the practice of these ketches, after entering the Heads, to deposit their ballast material along both sides of the channel at Pelican Flats. The Stockton Breakwater at Newcastle had already been built up in this way, at practically no cost to the government. By 1873 the dropping of ballast along both sides of the Pelican Flats channel had resulted in a narrowing of the waterway, and this created a scouring action which removed a great deal of silt and sand from the bed of the channel. The *Chronicle* reported on this,²³ and made a further suggestion:

It appears that, in some parts of Pelican Flat, over which there was only about three feet of water, it has become deepened to a depth of from twelve to fourteen feet, by small vessels trading up Dora Creek to Cooranbong. . . . If the Government could be induced to send a small dredge here for a few months, the entrance into this magnificent sheet of water could be so improved as to become not only a port of refuge but a place for the export of many valuable productions.

The same news item made reference to a revival of coal mining interest at Lake Macquarie. It stated that Mr. Speer, the possessor of a large estate at the northern end of the lake, had invested in the construction of a schooner which was christened *Mary Warner*. This vessel was a product of the Cardiff sawmills near Belmont, and on its maiden voyage from the lake it carried about twenty tons of coal and a quantity of timber. When leaving the lake, the schooner was observed to be drawing four feet of water, but thanks to the piloting of Thomas Boyd, it passed safely over the bar at the Heads without grounding. A second schooner, larger than *Mary Warner*, was partly completed on the stocks at the Cardiff mill in 1873, and was expected to be ready for launching in the same year.

The coal taken away by Mr. Speer's new schooner came from his own land, where a seam of coal outcropped close to the water. However, about this time a party of wealthy gentlemen which included Mr. Speer and the Hon. John Robertson, obtained a lease of the land formerly worked by the Hartley Coal Company. Their intention, it was stated, was to reopen the old colliery.²⁴

As it turned out, 1873 was a year of optimism for the Lake Macquarie coal mining industry. This was a year of beginnings at Catherine Hill Bay, where a large mine was opened and a township formed. During March of that year a small sum of money was voted by the government for the

²³ *Ibid.*, 22 Feb. 1873.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

repair of the road from Newcastle to the Lake Heads, a move which was interpreted to have significance for the future development there. It may have influenced some parties to take up coal-bearing land about the lake, for the Newcastle newspaper reported in July of 1873 the following item:²⁵

During the past three or four months upwards of 27,000 acres have been leased by the Crown for the purposes of coal-mining, and it is now only just to suppose that the Government will now encourage private enterprise by undertaking to deepen the entrance, so that the largest vessels can enter.

Ten years after the unsuccessful deputation of 1864, another group of business men waited on the Minister for Works to press for deepening of the Lake Macquarie entrance, with results that were a little more hopeful. Members of this new deputation repeated the demands of the coal trade, and a lot was also said with respect to the very large timber trade which had developed at the lake by this time. They pointed out that the contractor for the construction of the northern railway near Tamworth had just established a large sawmill on the lake, and had himself signed a contract for the building of a specially designed steamboat for the lake trade. The Minister listened patiently to the arguments, and finally promised to send a dredge to assist in deepening the lake entrance.²⁶

But between the promise and its fulfilment there was a lapse of many months, and meanwhile there was reluctance on the part of the coal companies to actually commence mining works. A Newcastle news reporter participated on a launch trip around the lake in June of 1875, and in his write-up²⁷ failed to mention the existence of even one active coal mine, though he did record the names of a few inoperative ones—the old Hartley mine ('long since abandoned'), the original Ebenezer colliery, and the Murrays' abandoned pit on Morisset Point. But the newsman did mention that a map published by the government showed 60,000 acres of coal land around the lake, and of this approximately 21,000 acres were in the hands of private individuals.

The promised dredge arrived early in 1876,²⁸ and commenced to clear sand and mud from the channel near the Pelican Islands. A man named Orr was in charge of the dredge, named *Titan*, and it was able to operate cheaply by consuming the coal lying in abandoned heaps at the mouth of the Murray Brothers' colliery near Galgabba.²⁹ The dredge accomplished some improvements to the entrance channel, as this news item indicates:³⁰

Also we have the dredge *Titan* making improvements. Twelve months ago we only had 3'6" on Pelican Flat, but now we have 5'6", at a width of

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10 July 1873.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19 Nov. 1874.

²⁷ *MA*, 5 June 1875.

²⁸ *NC*, 8 Apr. 1876.

²⁹ *TCJ*, 25 Aug. 1883.

³⁰ *NMH*, 5 May 1877.

about 8 feet. Now she is working down below Pelican Flat, and I hope soon to be able to say that we have 5'6" down as far as the bar. Captain Orr, of the dredge *Titan*, is doing all that lies in his power to give us a good depth of water. . . . All we require is the bar opened and then we will show the colonies what coal we can produce at Lake Macquarie, as we have several mines all ready to work as soon as there is sufficient facility to get them away in quantities to suit the market.

Sometime during 1877 the *Titan* finished its work at the Heads district, and by November had commenced to dredge at the mouth of Dora Creek,³¹ in order to facilitate the movement of the small timber-cargo vessels travelling to and from Cooranbong. In fact, all of the work performed by the dredge at Lake Macquarie was primarily of benefit to the timber trade, which employed small ships. It was of only small value to the coal-mining interests whose larger schooners required not merely a deepening of the channel through Pelican Flats, but removal of the rocky bar at the Heads itself. Until the government saw fit to remove this obstacle, the Lake Macquarie coal trade was hamstrung.

However, let it not be concluded that the small timber ketches did not experience difficulty in passing in and out of the lake. Even for the smallest of these craft, the crossing of the bar was fraught with risk. Hardly a year passed without a shipwreck or loss of life taking place there. It was after the wreck of the *Sea Gull* ketch in 1876, with the tragic drowning of the entire crew, that there were demands for some navigational aids at the lake entrance. One of the seamen resident at the Heads wanted a lifeboat placed there for use in emergencies. In a letter to the *Newcastle Morning Herald*³² he pointed out:

There is about fifty residents at the Heads and all accustomed to boats; as the most part get their living by boats. There is Forbes, Boyd, Jackson, Meriott, and a dozen others . . . that would willingly give their assistance if required.

The same writer urged that moorings should be provided outside the Heads so that vessels could wait in safety without being driven onto the bar. The idea was well received, for a short time later the *Herald* announced³³ that tenders had been called for the provision of moorings outside the Lake Heads near Moon Island.

Meanwhile, the interest in the Lake Macquarie coal measures did not lessen. Each year brought new purchases and leases of land rich in coal, and increased pressure on the government for navigational assistance. During the late 1870's a number of citizens developed plans for mining in the lake district. Some of these plans will be briefly reviewed.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 13 Nov. 1877.

³² *NMH*, 21 Sep. 1876.

³³ *Ibid.*, 18 Oct., 1876.

The Newcastle press in June 1878³⁴ carried an article entitled 'Awaba Park Estate', referring to a large grant near Teralba at the northern end of the lake. The owner of this large estate was William Bell Quigley, who was in the process of erecting a fine house there. He planned to sell timber from his property to one of the district sawmills. It was also mentioned that a valuable seam of coal existed on Quigley's land. This seam was about one mile from the water frontage, and the owner planned to open up a mine there 'at no distant time'.

The same newspaper in the previous month printed advertisements for the sale of two Lake Macquarie estates containing coal.³⁵ The first referred to Watt's estate of 927 acres which had a water frontage and adjoined the lands of Messrs. Warner, the Australasian Coal Company, and E. C. Mere-wether. The second advertisement offered a portion of the Warner estate:

Brunker, Wolfe, and Badgery have received instructions from Messrs. Warner to sell . . . 679 acres of valuable coal land . . . adjoining the properties of the Wallsend Company and the Australasian Company . . . and 7 delightfully-situated blocks of land, from 3 acres to 6 acres, overlooking the Lake. . . . These blocks form that portion so long occupied by the late Mrs. Warner, and embraces that famous orangery and orchard so long noted throughout the Newcastle district for its prolificness, as well as producing fruits of unequalled choiceness. Upon Lot One there is a substantially built two-storied dwelling house, containing thirteen rooms, with kitchen, storeroom, and necessary outhouses.

A company headed by three gentlemen named Hyde, Waterhouse, and Cowlshaw acquired the lease of the Warners' estate. In 1883 a party of interested coal company officials and other persons visited this property.³⁶ Arriving by water, they landed at the coal wharf and saw nearby the old tunnel which had yielded coal many years previously. Climbing up from the wharf, the group of visitors passed by 'one of the oldest orangeries in the colony' planted half a century before by Jonathan Warner, and noticed sadly that in recent years the trees had been very much neglected. From here a rough walk led to another coal tunnel.

From this tunnel about 150 tons of coal have been taken, and it is the intention of the leasees, as it has been found too difficult and expensive to carry coal round the hill from the second tunnel to the jetty, to put in another tunnel 40 feet below the level of the jetty, on the same seam of coal.

In the southern part of the lake region, there was some renewed coaling activity at Morisset Point. According to a Mines Department Report of 1879, the small mine formerly worked by the Murrays was reopened in that

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8 June 1878.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 29 May 1878.

³⁶ *SMH*, 20 Aug. 1883.

year.³⁷ It was still being worked in 1882, but by the following year the tunnels had again been abandoned.

Away from the lakeshore and towards Newcastle, a number of valuable coal-bearing properties were being purchased about this time. The Redhead Coal Company, which was formed late in the Seventies, purchased an extensive tract of land about mid-way between Belmont and the outskirts of Newcastle. Unlike many other mining firms, the Redhead Company was not dependent upon the opening of the lake entrance for marketing its coal, though this would have been an advantage, if only because it would have added to the value of the property. By 1883 the company had received permission from the government to construct a railway to Newcastle, but even then the Redhead proprietors were very desirous of using the lake as an additional means of access to markets. Speaking of the Redhead Company, the *Town and Country Journal* said:³⁸

If the Lake were navigable by vessels of large tonnage, they would have two strings to their bow, and work their property from the south-east as well as the north-east extremity.

In the meantime, the company was not bound to wait for lake improvements, so it went ahead with preparations for mining. Within a short time, a total of £21,000 had been expended on the estate, and at least one large shaft was in working order.³⁹

A brief reference must also be made concerning the growth of a township at Charlestown, on the road between Belmont and Newcastle, for this town was founded upon coal mining. The *Newcastle Chronicle* in April of 1876⁴⁰ mentioned that the settlement of Charlestown was being established, and information from the newspapers a year later indicates that the early growth of the town was rapid. The Waratah Coal Company pioneered mining there, and the heavy investments of the company were reflected in the progress of the town. The *Herald* in November 1876 marvelled that 'this place only a few months ago was a desolate bush, with not a single house near'.⁴¹ Now there were two 'large and splendid' hotels completed, while two more were in the course of erection. Two or three stores had been opened, and as many butchers' shops. Two large houses, one of brick construction, were being erected for Mr. M. Short and Mr. John Simpson, who were probably the men concerned with the management of the collieries. Besides these, numerous private dwellings were making their appearance, and it was predicted that within a few months 'a tidy township will be formed'.

³⁷ RAHS journal, v. 31, pt. 2, 1945 (Jervis).

³⁸ *TCJ*, 25 Aug. 1883.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *NC*, 25 Apr. 1876.

⁴¹ *NMH*, 3 Nov. 1876.

One and a half miles from Charlestown, the township of Hillsborough was established with a land sale advertised in February 1876. Apparently little came of the venture, for the Newcastle *Almanac* of 1883 described Hillsborough as a deserted locality.

Meanwhile, a point of stagnation had been reached in the history of coal mining at Lake Macquarie. At the Heads in 1875, the heavy seas still thundered on a ledge of rock that constituted the only barrier to progress. For long, the government had been indifferent to its removal, ostensibly because of cost, but more probably because of opposition from Newcastle interests. However, a period of more than fifteen years had placed Newcastle in a dominant and unchallenged position for industry and trade outside of Sydney, and now no one seriously feared competition with Lake Macquarie as a seaport and an exporter of coal. The government of New South Wales had reached the stage when it could no longer turn a deaf ear to the rising demands of Lake Macquarie coal companies. A change in its attitude was imminent.

SOUTH OF THE CHANNEL

WHILE a dozen or more mining interests waited for improvements to the navigation of Lake Macquarie, there were two companies in the fortunate position of not having to depend upon the opening of the Heads. One of these was the Redhead Coal Company, whose extensive property reached to the environs of Newcastle, and to which brief reference has already been made. The other was the New Wallsend Company, which purchased a quantity of land with a frontage to the sea at Catherine Hill Bay, a few miles south of the Heads. This company was able to ship coal to Sydney after constructing a jetty adjacent to a pit which opened almost onto the beach.

Surveyor Felton Mathew, on a plan which he drew of the ranges about Lake Macquarie,¹ had identified the approximate position of Catherine Hill Bay by the native name Toolouweraraba, to which we are unable to attach a meaning. The place received its present name following an incident in the year 1867 which has been described by the Newcastle historian, the late W. J. Goold:²

It was a wreck that gave the name to Catherine Hill Bay. On June 21st 1867, the schooner 'Catherine Hill', bound from the Richmond River to Sydney with a cargo of pine and cedar, ran into a heavy gale off Newcastle. After some hours of battering, with seas continuously rolling on board, she began to leak badly. When daylight appeared the land was made, and the skipper decided to beach the vessel. Soon after the schooner had been headed for the beach, she broached to and the mate (Thomas Hayward) and the cook (John Doring) were washed overboard. Shortly after this occurred the 'Catherine Hill' stranded on a sandy beach, where the four remaining members of the crew scrambled ashore.

All were completely naked, and in that condition, without food or warmth, they huddled on the beach in the pouring rain and intense cold until the next morning, when they were found by Mr. Taaffe, of Lake Macquarie, who provided them with food and shelter.

This 'sandy beach' thence became known as 'Catherine Hill Bay'.

¹ From the plans drawn by Mathew in 1830-31 (Archives Office).

² NHDHS journal, v. 9, pt. 3, Dec. 1954.

A slightly different story was related to a visitor at Catherine Hill Bay immediately prior to the turn of the century. In an article entitled 'A Sketch of the Bay'³ he gave this explanation:

Before proceeding to give a detailed account of the mine as we find it today, I may say it was here that the vessel, the unfortunate Catherine Hill, was lost many years ago, when two of the Captain's children were drowned, and now sleep on the shores of the Bay. I was shown one post which was part of a fence that enclosed the little mounds beneath which the little ones are at rest. . . . The fence has gone to ruin, as there remains but one solitary post to mark the sanctified spot.

The history of mining at Catherine Hill Bay dates from 1873, when the New Wallsend Company commenced operations which were carried on, with fluctuating success, for about six years. According to an informed correspondent to the *Miner's Advocate* in 1874,⁴ the coal at Catherine Hill Bay was discovered by a Mr. Pembledon, at whose suggestion the New Wallsend Company was formed in April of 1873. Three months later the company's manager, Mr. De Flon, and some others arrived at the bay and almost immediately a tunnel was driven at the edge of the beach. A jetty was built to connect with the mouth of the pit, and the first shipment of coal was actually made on 17th December 1873. Within six months of that date the company was marketing about 300 tons weekly, and employing almost seventy men, forty-five of whom were miners. A newspaper report of November 1874⁵ quotes the production figure of 800 tons of coal weekly from the mine.

Early in June 1874 a party of sightseers made a two-day excursion to Catherine Hill Bay, and recorded their impressions.⁶ They reached the mining settlement after walking from Wallsend to Speer's Point, sailing from there to Galgabba in Thomas Boyd's yacht, and covering the remaining seven miles of the journey to the bay on foot. On this last section of the trip, the travellers were accompanied by an old seaman named Noir, who acted as their guide along the rugged coastline. Passing across the hills, they came at intervals upon tidy little cottages surrounded by fruit trees or small orange orchards. One of these small cottages was the residence of Dr. Khon:⁷

As we neared his door our guide, who was on familiar terms with the doctor, introduced us to him, and we received a most cordial welcome from a venerable headed gentleman. . . . The doctor is not practising his profession there but lives in seclusion with his only son, a man of about thirty years of age. . . .

³ Mitchell Library: 'Newspaper Cuttings', v. 78—unidentified article dated 22 Feb. 1897.

⁴ *MA*, 10 June 1874.

⁵ *NC*, 19 Nov. 1874.

⁶ *MA*, 10 June 1874.

⁷ This probably refers to Dr. Samuel Cam.

It was growing dark by the time the party bid the doctor farewell, and after proceeding along the track for a short distance they came to a place where they looked down upon a patch of lights, marking the cottages of the miners. A short descent through the scrub brought the visitors into the settlement itself, where they were able to find accommodation for the night. On the following morning they explored the township:

The manager's house is situated on a hill and commands an excellent view of the ocean, the pitworks, and the surrounding hills which are, for the most part, very barren looking. What is called the township is a little further in. We found about twenty houses and several tents, with a butcher's shop and store, but there is as yet no public house. The houses are very small, but substantially built, and erected with a degree of uniformity not frequently followed in new settlements.

Later in the day the visitors walked over the hills three miles to a wharf situated on the south-eastern extremity of the lake. Here they were again met by Mr. Boyd with his yacht, but there was a dead calm on the lake, and the men had to take turns at pulling the boat all the way back to Speer's Point.

Keeper of the store at the New Wallsend Company's settlement was Charles Albert Boulton, who was described by the company's manager, Andrew De Flon, as 'an educated married man'.⁸ On 22nd May 1874 the manager wrote to the Postmaster-General requesting the establishment of a post office at the settlement, and recommended Mr. Boulton for the office of postmaster. In his letter Mr. De Flon stated that over one hundred persons were engaged in mining or other work in the township, and that there was no post office nearer than Cooranbong or Newcastle. A petition bearing over sixty signatures supported the request. The Postmaster-General acquiesced, and on 15th October 1874 the Catherine Hill Bay Post Office was opened in charge of Mr. Boulton, who was also engaged to perform a twice-weekly mail service on horseback between the settlement and Cooranbong. This connected with the arrival at Cooranbong of the Newcastle mails, which at that time came by way of Maitland and Mount Vincent.

During 1874 the Catherine Hill Bay residents were fortunate to have also a direct mail connection with Sydney. The coal steamer, *Susannah Cuthbert*, provided this service, and the following timetable was listed for the vessel:

Leave Sydney	Mon.	Wed.	Fri.	5 p.m.
Arrive Catherine Hill Bay	Tues.	Thurs.	Sat.	5 a.m.
Depart Catherine Hill Bay	Tues.	Thurs.	Sat.	5 p.m.
Arrive Sydney	Wed.	Fri.	Sun.	5 a.m.

Unfortunately, the steamer was not always able to meet this timetable. In April 1875 it was reported that the vessel frequently operated only twice

⁸ Postmaster-General's Department: *Swansea, a post office history*, 1963.

a week, and sometimes only once weekly. A short time later the vessel was wrecked and the direct mail service to Sydney was abruptly terminated.

The latter half of 1874 and the first six months of the following year proved to be the most successful period for the New Wallsend Coal Company's mines, though even then there were problems of marketing the product. The company's coal tunnel entered the mineral seam only about twenty-five feet above the level of the beach, and a jetty was built up to the same level so that the coal was carried directly from the mine onto the jetty. Horses were employed to draw the loaded skips from the mine to the end of the jetty where a chute was placed to empty the skips into the company's steamer.⁹ The mine proprietors had in mind further plans for expansion, and a writer made this comment in 1875:¹⁰

I notice they are getting on well with the engine which is to be used to pull the coal from the dip; so that, in course of time, they will open up a great deal more work, as every preparation is being made for it, and I have no doubt that this place will then be the means of finding employment for more men. I have been informed that there is likely to be more work opened up close by here; if so, it will make our township present a more lively aspect, which is much needed, as it is very dull at present.

At this time Catherine Hill Bay—or New Wallsend as it was more generally known—was a township of some significance. About 100 inhabitants were accommodated in some forty houses which presented themselves in disorderly array on the land close to the beach. One public house served the community. This was the New Wallsend Hotel kept by Robert Talbot, but the opening of a second hotel was predicted for the immediate future. Besides the post office, there were 'a couple of stores, butcher's and baker's shops, etc.', but because of difficulties in securing goods, the price of most food items was excessive. One resident complained:¹¹ 'We are paying fearful prices for all articles of consumption. Only fancy, 8/- per cwt. for small potatoes, not much larger than marbles!'

The township was essentially a mining settlement, and 1875 proved to be a year of intense activity in coal development in the area south of the Lake Macquarie channel. A visitor to the New Wallsend community in June 1875¹² described the company's mines as 'flourishing'. Mr. De Flon continued to hold the position of manager of the works, which were reportedly employing sixty or seventy men. The weekly output was from 800 to 1,000 tons of coal, and it was confidently predicted that this figure would be doubled as the mine was further opened out. The only problem faced by the company was the rather inadequate loading facility, for the unprotected nature of the bay meant that the loading of vessels was often held up by bad

⁹ *MA*, 26 Feb. 1876.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5 June 1875.

¹¹ *MA*, 5 June 1875.

¹² *Ibid.*, 12 June 1875.

weather. Some persons were suggesting that a railway be constructed from Catherine Hill Bay southwards along the coastline to Cabbage Tree Harbour, a safe and sheltered anchorage near Norah Head. This idea never received serious consideration.

A severe blow to the New Wallsend Company was the loss of its cargo steamer, the *Susannah Cuthbert*. Early in July 1875 the vessel was wrecked at Long Reef while carrying a load of coal to Sydney.¹³ The skipper, Captain Wallbrook, believed there was little chance of salvaging her, and this proved to be the case. All mining activity at Catherine Hill Bay was suspended for three or four weeks, while the company made arrangements with a certain Captain Summerbell to freight its coal to Sydney by the steamer *Eagle*. It was considered likely that the company would charter this steamer until such time as a replacement for the *Susannah Cuthbert* might be purchased.¹⁴

Up to this time, the coal cargo vessel had provided a direct mail service between Catherine Hill Bay and Sydney; this service was now discontinued, owing to the irregularity of the shipping, and the township became solely dependent on the twice-weekly overland post from Wallsend via Cooranbong. During 1875 and the following year the mail was conveyed to and from New Wallsend on horseback by Patrick Owens of Cooranbong. At first Owens received only thirty pounds per annum for this contract, but the sum was increased to fifty pounds in 1876.¹⁵ At Catherine Hill Bay there were two changes in the administration of the post office during 1875. Charles Boulton resigned from the office and was replaced on 1st October by Mrs. Elizabeth Simpson. She was postmistress only a short time when she advised the Postmaster-General's Department that her husband was leaving the district owing to 'immediate changes taking place with the New Wallsend Mine'. Mrs. Simpson was succeeded on 5th November 1875 by Thomas P. Caldwell, who named as his sureties Andrew De Flon, company manager, and H. W. Parker, mineral agent, both of Catherine Hill Bay.

Besides the New Wallsend Company, there were other bodies interested in exploiting the mineral resources of the Catherine Hill Bay district. The *Miner's Advocate* mentioned a large number of interested persons:¹⁶

To the east of Manmora Lake, with frontages to the ocean and New Wallsend, the land has nearly all been taken up under mineral leases, in blocks of from 40 to 320 acres, by Messrs. Kelly, Reynolds, Harwood, Connor, Bull, Bradley, and Bates; while Messrs. Pope, Hardy, and Company have a magnificent mineral block of about 2530 acres which adjoins the New Wallsend Company's, and is undoubtedly a most valuable property; and I have no hesitation in saying that it would pay any company handsomely to work it.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 10 July 1875.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31 July 1875.

¹⁵ *Swansea, a post office history*.

¹⁶ *MA*, 12 June 1875.

West of the New Wallsend Company's grant, another large mineral estate was held by Messrs. Brown, Lamb, and Saddington. It was reputed that this estate would be 'opened out before long'.¹⁷ So far as we can tell, however, the only activity commenced by any of these companies was the sinking of a shaft by Pope, Hardie, and Company. Tenders were called for this operation during July of 1875,¹⁸ and seven months later the newspaper reported that the work was being carried on as quickly as possible under a contractor named Swinburne, who had already carried the shaft to a depth of ninety feet.¹⁹ It was mentioned that this company's estate had a sea frontage of about two miles.

In its early years Catherine Hill Bay was a peculiarly isolated township largely because of the unbridged lake entrance a few miles to its north; and though the mining community looked to Cooranbong for its mail services, as well as its nearest police and stores-purchasing centre, it was obvious that New Wallsend depended also upon Newcastle. Since no steamer provided a direct coastal service with Newcastle, there remained only two possible routes which the miners could use. The *Miner's Advocate* of February 1876²⁰ commented upon both routes, but stated:

The route generally taken is along the shores of the Lake to the Heads, where the entrance is crossed by a ferry boat, the remainder of the distance being performed on foot or horseback, as the traveller thinks best.

Though horses could not be taken on the ferry, it was customary for the animals to swim across, their bridles being tied to the stern of the boat. A wineshop on the southern bank of the channel provided a convenient resting-place, and between this point and Catherine Hill Bay a bridle track wound through the scrub and along the rugged coastline.

The other route to Newcastle made use of the lake itself, and though at first it was little used because there was no steamer service, with the advent of a regular ferry service a few years later, this became the more popular mode of travel. To connect with the ferry, travellers had to walk or ride about three miles over the hills from Catherine Hill Bay to Reece's wharf near the southern end of the lake; and after disembarking at Speer's Point or Miller's wharf on Cockle Creek a further overland trek was necessary to reach public transport at Wallsend. The first operator of anything like a regular steamboat service between Reece's and Speer's Point was Thomas Russell of Cooranbong with his ferry S.S. *Pioneer*.²¹ Once established, Russell's steamer carried not only passengers, but also a considerable cargo of foodstuffs, beer, and other items for the business traders at Catherine Hill

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *MA*, 17 July 1875.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19 Feb., 26 Feb. 1876.

²⁰ *MA*, 23 Feb. 1876.

²¹ *NMH*, 25 Dec. 1875.

Bay. Bullocks were used to transport these goods over the steep hills from Reece's wharf to the settlement.

A picture of the mining township in February of 1876 is obtained from the *Miner's Advocate*.²² This description came from the pen of a visitor:

Catherine Hill Bay is a scattered settlement of thirty or forty houses . . . amongst which are the two hotels kept by mine hosts Messrs. Talbot and Trevillion; a store by Mr. Caldwell, to which is attached a post office; there is also a baker's establishment. The position of the township is a healthy one, standing as it does on the top of a hill directly overlooking the sea.

The visitor also mentioned that a policeman was stationed there, a fact which he thought indicated the idle character of the town's inhabitants. He observed that the coal loading jetty must have been poorly constructed, for it was already sagging in one or two places. However, the company had announced a plan to enlarge the jetty and to provide additional skips so that up to 200 tons of coal could be temporarily stored while awaiting shipment.

These improvements were not carried out as projected. The Newcastle papers of 4th March 1876 printed a statement that the New Wallsend Coal Company had called a meeting of its shareholders and it had been decided to wind up operations and dissolve the company.²³ This decision probably did not come as too great a shock for the miners at Catherine Hill Bay, for there had been many problems of coal marketing since the loss of the *Susannah Cuthbert* eight months previously. The decision to close the mine would obviously put an end, at least temporarily, to the township at Catherine Hill Bay, though the winding-up operations were expected to take some time, and the optimists were not without hope that some other company might be interested in taking over the mine. In the meantime, the sinking of a shaft on the adjoining land of Pope, Hardie, and Company was still proceeding, and it was possible that the opening of a mine there could salvage the future of the town.

There is little to record about the history of Catherine Hill Bay during the remaining months of 1876, except that the place suffered a steady decline in mining activity and population. Early in the following year the Lake Macquarie Coal Company (the new name for the Pope and Hardie enterprise) struck a twelve-foot coal seam at a depth of 250 feet,²⁴ but this failed to produce any startling development. Each month saw the departure of a few miners, and soon there were more cottages unoccupied than there were inhabited. In February of 1877 the town's storekeeper, Thomas Caldwell, closed his business, and at the same time tendered his resignation as postmaster. He nominated Mr. De Flon as his successor. However, another

²² *MA*, 26 Feb. 1876.

²³ *Ibid.*, 4 Mar. 1876.

²⁴ *NMH*, 2 Feb. 1877.

applicant for the position of postmaster was the hotelkeeper, Robert Talbot, who wrote:²⁵

I am the owner of the principal store, hotel and other property here. I have the required room off my store, and apart from the Hotel, which meets all necessary requirements.

Talbot was the successful applicant and was appointed postmaster at Catherine Hill Bay on 15th March 1877. Unfortunately, however, this date coincided with the final abandonment of the New Wallsend Company's coal workings, as was indicated by a brief news item which appeared in the Newcastle *Herald*²⁶ a few days later. The paper reported that the mine was no longer working, that much of the settlement had already been abandoned, and almost everyone, including Mr. De Flon, was departing to Little Bulli colliery on the South Coast. The acting postmaster, Mr. Colly, was leaving for Sydney, and Mr. Talbot, the proprietor of the New Wallsend Hotel, was in the process of taking charge of the post office. Only a handful of men were still working on the Lake Macquarie Coal Company's bore.

Despite the deserted nature of the settlement, Robert Talbot kept up his business establishment for another two and a half years. For most of this time, the postal service continued to be connected with Cooranbong by a twice-weekly mail service, but in 1879 this service was replaced by a more direct link with Newcastle. The mail carrier was John Gordon, of Lambton, who held a contract as follows:²⁷ 'Charlestown, Belmont and Catherine Hill Bay, via Lake Macquarie Heads, two times weekly, by horseback, for £54.5.0 per annum.'

When finally Robert Talbot closed his premises at the bay and moved with his family to the Lake Macquarie Heads, only one other family remained in the deserted settlement. A number of years elapsed before mining was resumed at Catherine Hill Bay, and then it was the Wallarah Coal Company which reopened the township. When a tourist visited the place about 1897 he found a fairly prosperous town boasting a number of facilities that had never existed in the days of the New Wallsend Company. One or two short extracts from this visitor's pen will show how the settlement progressed under the new management:²⁸

Catherine Hill Bay is a coal mine owned by the Wallarah Coal Company. The mine was worked by a private company over twenty years ago. The remains of the old jetty are still to be seen. The tunnel at that time was put in immediately on the shores above high-water mark and run straight to the jetty. This company worked the mine for about five years. . . .

²⁵ *Swansea, a post office history*.

²⁶ *NMH*, 6 Apr. 1877.

²⁷ *Swansea, a post office history*.

²⁸ Mitchell Library: 'Newspaper Cuttings', v. 78: unidentified article entitled 'A Sketch of the Bay' dated 22 Feb. 1897.

The whole of the Wallarah Company's affairs are under the direct supervision of an astute business manager in the person of Mr. F. Parton, who has everything up to date. The Company has expended a large capital, but I have no doubt . . . that the return must be something handsome. . . .

The township is a private one with the exception of one or two allotments. One thing that strikes the visitor on his entrance into the town for the first time is the similarity which exists in all the buildings, each house being exactly like its neighbour, but all models of cleanliness and neatness. The manager's mansion, occupying a pretty site overlooking the ocean from a nice eminence, has an air of comfort surrounding it which is unmistakable.

There is a Post and Telegraph Office in charge of an obliging officer in the person of Mr. Williamson. . . . Dr. Atterbury is the follower of Esculapius who looks after our physical requirements, while our spiritual ones are attended to by ministers of the various denominations. The Public School building and teacher's residence are very fine buildings. . . . There is a public hall and two churches (Church of England and Free Methodist), one inn, where the evergreen Michael Tobin dispenses creature comforts. Several small stores constitute the principal business places on Catherine Hill Bay. The jetty is a magnificent structure, running out into the sea about 300 yards into about 30 feet of water, at an elevation of something like 36 feet. The coal is conveyed to the jetty from the mine, some two-and-a-half miles distant, by means of large trucks which run on tram lines. . . . A sawmill is in full swing.

A new shaft is being put down, the jetty is to be carried farther out into the ocean, and on every side the future prospects of the Wallarah coal mine at the Bay are bright and cheering. . . .

The township of Catherine Hill Bay is still in existence, mining is still carried on there, and steamers continue to take coal to Sydney.

But the history of Catherine Hill Bay does not stand alone. Its early development was inseparably connected with the growth of settlement at Swansea. In one sense, the town of Swansea grew out of the ruins of the New Wallsend community. We have already traced the origins of settlement at the Lake Macquarie Heads, and now we resume the story near the point at which we left it.

For at least fifteen years the individuals and organizations interested in coal mining developments at Lake Macquarie had been hammering at the colonial government to have improvements carried out at the lake entrance, with small result. Yet certain promises had been made, and the year 1879 brought long-awaited activity. The government approved, as an initial step, the expenditure of £20,000 on what was planned to be an extensive programme of improvements to lake navigation.

The commencement of these harbour works in 1879 happened to coincide with the abandonment of mining activity at Catherine Hill Bay, and so there was a migration of families from the bay to Pelican Flat, the site of

the new harbour works settlement. One of the last persons to leave the mining township was Robert Talbot, whose decision to move was communicated to the Postal Department by a letter dated 3rd September 1879.²⁹

The New Wallsend Colliery at Catherine Hill Bay, and other works being permanently closed, I am about to remove my residence to Lake Macquarie Entrance, five miles distant from Catherine Hill Bay, where a large population have settled down and extensive works opening up. The improvements to Lake Macquarie Entrance will employ over 150 men, £20,000 having been granted for the purpose. Messrs. Lamb, Knox and Parbury are opening a Colliery and large saw mills which will also employ a large number of men, so that in a very short time in addition to the settled population we will have something like 300 men on the ground, when a post office will be absolutely necessary. I would therefore most humbly suggest that you allow me to continue the position of Post and Money Order Officer at Lake Macquarie Entrance where a large business is to be done.

A petition supported Mr. Talbot's request and confirmed that the Catherine Hill Bay township was deserted. A month later, Talbot advised the department that his family had already moved to the new settlement, and he intended to join them after closing the post office. He said that now only one family was residing at Catherine Hill Bay. Talbot also pointed out that, since the newly established mail service from Newcastle already passed by the lake entrance, the transfer of the post office from Catherine Hill Bay to the Heads would save the mailman five miles of travelling in each direction.

A postal inspector reported that only one family named Freeman was living at Catherine Hill Bay, 'the husband working at the Heads'. He endorsed Talbot's recommendation for the removal of the post office and added:

The place is known as Pelican Flat, which should be the name of the post office, and the Postmaster at Catherine Hill Bay, who has built a Store and a nice place for a post office, might be appointed Postmaster. . . . The removal of the Post Office from Catherine Hill Bay will shorten the mail line from Charlestown by five miles.

And so, on 1st December 1879, the Pelican Flat Post Office opened for service at the new store of Robert Talbot. The mail contractor, John Gordon, agreed to convey the mails to the new post office on Tuesdays and Saturdays, but he requested permission to make new arrangements for crossing the lake entrance channel. Up to this time, Gordon had used William Boyd's ferry which connected with the track from Catherine Hill Bay, but he now claimed that Mrs. Forbes' ferry was a more conveniently situated crossing-place to reach the Pelican Flat Post Office. It appears that Gordon was

²⁹ *Swansea, a post office history.*

anxious to avoid using Boyd's ferry because the owner made a weekly charge of five shillings for conveying mails over the channel. Since Gordon received only about thirteen shillings weekly for the entire mail service, he objected to paying these apparently excessive charges. He wrote, 'There are other boats on the lake besides Mr. Boyd's Crazy punt.'³⁰

A newspaper item in December 1879 described the progress of Pelican Flat:³¹

The above as yet almost unknown place has made rapid strides towards civilization since the commencement of the improvements to Lake Macquarie entrance. A large store has been built and opened by Mr. R. F. Talbot; a post office has been established, and a large hotel is in course of erection, as is also a butchering establishment.

Mr. Hubbard has lately started a coach running daily between Newcastle and the Lake; it has been expressly built for the road, and it need be.

All this indicates that by 1880 the Pelican Flat township was well established, and it had drawn together what had for years been a very scattered settlement. A public school was constructed, and the first teacher was Mr. Blyth from the old Galgabba school, which now closed. In the first year or two much of the accommodation for the settlers at Pelican Flat was rough and primitive, there being a great many tents and huts. The population of the works settlement was rather cosmopolitan, since labourers were being attracted from a wide area.

As far as the actual harbour works were concerned, the plan was to begin by constructing large breakwaters on either side of the entrance channel. This required the establishment of a stone quarry at the southern extremity of Pelican Flat, the construction of a railway for conveyance of the stone to the waterfront, and the erection of a railway bridge over the channel so that the stone could also be dropped for the northern breakwater. The formation of the breakwaters was regarded as a preliminary step, the ultimate plan being to deepen the channel at certain points by removal of rock from its passage.

Apparently the preliminary work did not move ahead very quickly, for the *Illustrated Sydney News* in April 1881 had little to record of progress, and it seems that neither breakwater nor bridge had been commenced.³²

When the breakwater is commenced, large numbers will be employed in the various works connected with the construction of the same, numerous wooden buildings having already been erected for the use of the men to be employed at Pelican Flat (the native name of which is Kahibah) on the southern side of the entrance to the Lake. Messrs. Amos Brothers, the well-known contractors, have a large quantity of plant and machinery for use in the construction of the new breakwater, the stone for which is obtained

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ NMH, 17 Dec. 1879.

³² *Illustrated Sydney News*, 23 Apr. 1881.

from a quarry, situate about half a mile from the township; a tramway being laid down for the purpose of conveying stone from the quarry to the works. The mineral richness of the district is shown by the fact that the quarrying operations have exposed in the face of the solid rock an immense bed of coal, 19½ feet thick, merely awaiting the labours of hewing, to be ready for conveyance to Sydney.

Pelican Flat may be regarded as the seedling of a second Newcastle, and when once the industries of the district become fairly developed, it will be found one of the busiest and most thriving townships in the Colony. . . . Mr. R. Talbot, who acts as the Postmaster at Pelican Flat, may be regarded as one of the leading men in the district, in the industrial development and prosperity of which he takes great interest.

Perhaps it was the slow rate of progress at the Pelican Flat works that motivated the formation of the Lake Macquarie Improvement Association in 1883. This body was created for the express purpose of promoting the development of the lake's resources, and its membership included a number of well-known business men: Sir Edward Strickland, William Speer, George A. Lloyd, Michael MacMahon, Thomas Brooks, John Henderson, William Boyd, Thomas Russell, Joseph Creer, and many others. In August of 1883 the Association organized a field day which included an inspection of the numerous mineral-rich properties around the Lake and in particular the works being carried out at the Heads. The party was composed of a number of gentlemen from Sydney, who joined the Newcastle contingent at the Great Northern Hotel. There they all boarded coaches and set off on a quiet drive of an hour and a half to Belmont, where a brief stop was made for refreshments at Mr. Overall's public house. Then the party embarked on the ferry steamer *Adeline* which brought the visitors to Pelican Flat.³³

A brief inspection of the improvement works followed. It was noticed that the breakwaters were in process of formation, and a substantial wooden bridge connected the north and south banks of the channel. A drawbridge span was provided to allow the passage of ships to and from the lake. After the inspection, everyone adjourned to William Boyd's residence, where lunch was served in a specially prepared pavilion. A period of speechifying followed the repast, and this gave opportunity for some of the colony's leading citizens to voice their opinions concerning the lake's development. During the afternoon the party visited the coal mine of Lamb, Saddington and Parbury, situated in a hillside at the southern end of Pelican Flat. The visitors were told that a large quantity of coal had already been taken out of this mine, and at the time of the inspection there were about a dozen skips of coal at the mouth of the tunnel, ready for immediate consumption. Unfortunately, however, the only consumer of this coal was the steam engine which moved loads of stone along the railway leading from the quarry to the sides of the channel.

³³ *TCT*, 25 Aug. 1883.

The excursion was considered to have been highly successful, and a lengthy report appeared in the *Town and Country Journal* a few days afterwards. The entire article is of interest, but here we can include only a couple of short paragraphs:

The object of the visit was to demonstrate the vast richness of the Lake Macquarie district by actual observation, to excite public interest in the importance of facilitating the development of its resources, and to point out the necessity for the Government proceeding with the work of opening up the entrance more speedily than the present rate of progress. The vote for the current year is £20,000, and this is being expended in the formation of dykes, but a more comprehensive and systematic scheme is strongly urged. The following areas or companies have found coal on the lake:—Lamb and Saddington (2,965 acres), Macquarie Coal Company (Pope, Hardie, and others) (2,000 acres), Beulah Estate (474 acres), Coal Point Estate (Whiting, M'Mahon, & Roberts), Redhead Coal Company (Edward Flood and others) (4,123 acres), Sir Edward Strickland's 1,280 acres, A. & R. Amos (2,000 acres), Warner's Estate (1,280 acres), Speer's Estate (1,250 acres) and Brook's Estate (500 acres). The above constitute a portion only of the many coal properties on the lake, all of which must ship through the Lake entrance.

The contractors for the works at the Heads are Messrs. A. & R. Amos, and the work is being efficiently carried on under the supervision of Mr. John Cairns. To see these works was one of the chief objects of our visit. There were three little ketches lying in the channel inside the Heads at the time, either laden with timber or waiting for a cargo. These little craft are engaged solely in the timber trade. The stone used in forming the dykes is obtained from a wall of rock immediately overlooking the sea about a couple of miles below the lake entrance. To reach this quarry the contractors have constructed a light but substantial line of railway about three miles in length, which runs in a rather round-about way, and through some heavy cuttings, and must have been a rather expensive undertaking. . . . It will thus be apparent that of the £40,000 of the public money voted during the past few years for improving the Lake entrance, the great bulk has been sunk in preliminary works, while some practical men assert that not a little has been wasted in uselessly forming a dyke on the northern side of the channel. . . . About fifteen or twenty men were employed about the quarry.

The report had little to say about the township of Pelican Flat, but the Newcastle *Almanac*³⁴ of 1883 provided a description of the settlement. We quote the entry in full:

Pelican Flat is a small township lately formed on the entrance to Lake Macquarie, on account of the Harbour works carried on there, and the prospect of an increased timber and coal trade. It is probably the commencement of an important commercial town. The principal coal companies—

³⁴ *Newcastle Nautical Almanac and Guide to the Port of Newcastle*, 1883.

Messrs. Lamb, Knox, and Parbury; Pope & Hardie; Copeland and Amos; Murray & Co.; and others. The largest seam of coal in the northern district is situated $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from the Lake Macquarie entrance, being 19 feet in thickness. The harbour improvements consist of two training walls from the Lake to the Ocean, a distance of 2 miles, with a break-water to protect the mouth of the entrance. The works are progressing rapidly under the management of Mr. John Cairns, who represents the contractors, Messrs. A. & R. Amos. Up to the present time there are about 2 miles of training walls constructed, with a viaduct and drawbridge across the lake entrance; also a viaduct spanning the entrance to a large bay. The principal business places are R. F. Talbot's General Store (to which is attached the Post and Money Order Office and Govt. Savings Bank), the Pelican Flat Hotel by John Taaffe, a butcher's, a baker's, and several boarding establishments; Mr. Mathew Kenah, ship and boatbuilder; several companies of fishermen; Public School—teacher Mr. Blyth.

On 1st October 1883 the Pelican Flat Post Office became also a telegraph office, following the completion of a telegraph line from Newcastle. Mr. W. J. Gwynne, a young man, was appointed telegraph station master, and on the above date he took charge of the new two-roomed premises which Mr. Talbot had erected next door to his general store. A branch of the Government Savings Bank, as well as money order facilities, was functioning at the Pelican Flat Post Office when Gwynne took charge, and the new post-master felt that some new equipment was necessary to handle all of this business. So he requested some additional office fittings which included a safe and a cash box 'for the security of monies'. He advised his department that

These fittings cannot be obtained at Pelican Flat—you can have them sent direct here by any of the ketches that trade between Lake Macquarie and Sydney, in fact there is no other direct way.³⁵

By 1884 a pilot station had been established at the Lake Heads, and old Thomas Boyd was appointed to the office of pilot,³⁶ a position which he had occupied unrecognized for a number of years. His brother-in-law and partner in early settlement, John Taaffe, had already established for himself a successful business as proprietor of the Pelican Flat Hotel. Thomas Boyd's brother, William, who also resided at Pelican Flat, earned himself the portfolio of Assistant Inspector of Fisheries for the colony, a position which he filled for a number of years. A calamity struck William Boyd's family early in February 1884, during a gale which brought down the chimney stack and other portions of their house. Fourteen-year-old Elizabeth Boyd was killed by the falling debris.³⁷

³⁵ *Swansea, a post office history.*

³⁶ *Newcastle Almanac, op. cit., 1884.*

³⁷ *Sydney Mail*, 9 Feb. 1884.

The *Sydney Mail* of 15th November 1884 contained this description of the town of Pelican Flat:

Pelican Flat is a struggling township called into existence by the navvies on the Government works. The butcher is the publican, the grocer is the draper, and Billy Boyd (Fisheries Inspector) is the general arbiter and peace-maker.

It was reported in 1885³⁸ that a Temperance Lodge had recently been established at Pelican Flat, and was known as 'The Rose of the Lake, No. 353'. Also, St. Peter's Church of England had recently been erected and was dedicated on 5th April 1884 by the Bishop of Newcastle. Services were being conducted regularly by the Rev. W. Tollis.

During 1886 the government works continued to drag along, with barely visible signs of progress. A visitor to the place made this brief comment:³⁹

At the Island [i.e., the Pelican Islands] a dredge is busily engaged in cutting a channel from the northern side into the river, the original channel being to the southward. From the lake to the ocean, massive training walls, built of huge masses of stone, are being constructed for the purpose of affording sufficient scour to clear the bar at the entrance. Passing along the channel, we come to the Government and other buildings at Pelican Flat, and notice several huts inhabited by fishermen, and also observe the ubiquitous 'chinkie' is here, conducting horticultural operations on a large scale. Six miles distant are the quarries from which the large quantity of stone is obtained, a railway line being laid the whole distance for the carriage of the same. The railroad crosses the channel by a viaduct and drawbridge.

It is interesting to notice that in 1886 the original drawbridge across the lake channel had been replaced by a large and more substantial structure which incorporated a roadway. The Newcastle *Almanac* stated that a good road was being formed from Newcastle to Pelican Flat at that time. And so for the first time it was possible to travel without impediment southwards from Newcastle to Pelican Flat, Catherine Hill Bay, and Wyong. This road increased in importance in the ensuing years, and has eventually become, with modifications, the busy Pacific Highway of today. With the provision of a traffic bridge over the channel in 1886, the commercial future of Pelican Flat was assured.

A year later, the township boasted a new police station, with Constable E. Coolahan in charge. Other newly erected amenities were a public wharf and storehouses. But the most historic event of 1887 was the official adoption of the name Swansea for the Pelican Flat township. The man who influenced the alteration of name was Robert Talbot, the pioneer storekeeper

³⁸ Newcastle *Almanac*, *op. cit.*, 1885.

³⁹ *TCJ*, 13 Mar. 1886.

who had come from Catherine Hill Bay. On 8th October 1887 Talbot wrote to Mr. R. Stevenson, M.P., as follows:⁴⁰

At a public meeting held here on the 7th. inst. it was unanimously carried that the name of this rising Township should be altered from Pelican Flat to 'Swansea'.

As you are aware Pelican Flat is situated on Lake Macquarie Entrance as Newcastle is on the Hunter. As soon as there is sufficient water on the bar to admit steam Colliers (which cannot be very long) this harbour will become one of our most important commercial centres and coaling ports, it has advanced rapidly within the last few years. We have: Post and Telegraph Office, Public School (average attendance 60), and Teachers Residence, Police Station and residence, Resident Engineer Har. and Rivers Department, Pilot Station; besides Hotel and other businesses, and many private places.

We would therefore kindly ask you to use your influence with the Postmaster-General to have the name altered.

The change of name was approved by the Postmaster-General to take place from 1st November 1887. As a matter of interest, it was only a few weeks after this date that the Swansea Post Office was reduced in status to a non-official office, because of the small revenue being derived each year. Postmaster Gwynne was appointed elsewhere, and Robert Talbot was later reappointed to that position. Mr. Talbot, and later his wife, remained in charge of the post office for the next ten years.

By 1888 the work of improving the lake's channel seems to have been suspended, though the government's steam dredge *Minos* was stationed at Swansea at that time.⁴¹ The harbour works had been carried on for nearly ten years, and had cost a large amount of public money. Although nothing had been done to attempt removal of the bar directly at the Heads, some success had been achieved in producing a stronger tidal current which kept the channel free of silt and increased the depth of water over the bar.

But the end of this story is an enigma. For the better part of twenty years an increasingly active and vociferous company of capitalists had pressed for harbour improvements to the Lake Macquarie entrance. They had argued insistently that the shallow entrance was the only barrier to the full development of the lake's coal resources. Time and again it had been predicted that, once the channel had been made navigable, Lake Macquarie would enter upon a remarkable phase of industrial activity, and become a major port. Lakeside land-holders envied the activities of the Redhead Coal Company, the New Wallsend Company, and other undertakings which were able to operate independently of the lake entrance. The pressures of the capitalists on the colonial government eventually produced action, and the navigability of the lake had been markedly improved after the expenditure

⁴⁰ *Swansea, a post office history.*

⁴¹ *Newcastle Almanac, op. cit., 1888.*

of a large sum of money. Yet the promised trade did not eventuate, for during the later part of the 1880's an event of greater importance than the opening up of the lake had taken place. That event was the construction and opening of a railway line from Sydney to Newcastle, passing along the western side of Lake Macquarie. A new era of transportation had come to the region, and its effects on industry and settlement of the lake district were far greater than those which the deepening of the harbour entrance could ever have produced.

In this chapter we have traced the vicissitudes which affected the history of Catherine Hill Bay and Swansea. Fate had played a skilful hand in undermining the progress of one and then the other of these two towns. It was clear that Swansea could never become a significant seaport, and for the time being its future was unpredictable. But while Swansea waited, the focus of activity moved again to Catherine Hill Bay. The Newcastle *Almanac* of 1889 contained this piece of information:

The Wallarah Coal Mining Company, Catherine Hill Bay, have commenced activities in coal mining, having three good workable seams of coal; they intend at present to ship from the Ocean side, and in order to do so, are constructing a jetty which will cost £11,000.

CEDAR KINGS AND KETCHES

IN the last few chapters our attention has been concentrated on developments along the eastern perimeter of Lake Macquarie, where the operations of the coal mining industry have been our main concern. Now we return to the western side of the lake, where the timber industry was being carried on in full vigour. The inhabitants of the longer established communities on the western side viewed with some apprehension the rapid influx of population on the opposite side of the water, as is evident from reports in the newspapers. A news correspondent residing in Cooranbong in 1875 made this comment:¹

On the opposite side of the lake almost all the land has been taken up for mining purposes, and I think it only fair on my part to try and show the public, who may not be aware of the fact, that we have quite as good inducements for capitalists here in our little secluded place as our worthy neighbours over the water. In fact, one great advantage we have over them is timber. Now, every foot of timber they use there of any consequence they have to take from this place, where we have almost a never-ending supply of first-class timber, of almost all descriptions, both hard and soft wood.

The miners' dependence upon Cooranbong for their requirements of pit timber could not be denied.

The quest for timber in the lake district had been going on ever since 1830, and perhaps even for a year or so before that. Lieutenant Warner mentioned in 1828 that boats came up Dora Creek as far as Percy Simpson's ground,² and in view of the tremendous demand then existing for colonial cedar, plus the fact that considerable stands of this species occurred in the brushes along Dora Creek, it is difficult to conceive of boats coming up the creek for any other purpose than to take away cedar wood. A very definite reference to the cedar-cutting was recorded in 1833:³

The whole of this country, from Wyong to the Myall [that is, the Sugarloaf Range], and from Warrewolong to the Lakes, is very heavily timbered, particularly in the gullies; great quantities of cedar, and other valuable woods, abound, but are fast disappearing under the hands of the sawyers.

¹ *MA*, 5 June 1875.

² *CSIL*: Warner, 7 May 1828.

³ *New South Wales Calendar and Directory*, 1833, p. 146.

Five years after this report, some cedar and other timbers were being taken, without authority, from Crown land in the vicinity of the Lake Heads,⁴ a fact which reveals the widespread growth of cedar about the lake in pre-settlement times. However, the valuable timber was chiefly concentrated along the alluvial flats of Dora Creek and in the maze of mountains further to the westward. At the time of Newport's establishment in 1840, a steady exportation of cedar from Dora Creek was taking place. The *Australian* published this statement:⁵

Newport has, in its vicinity, forests of the best colonial timber, especially cedar of the finest quality, quantities of which have been for years cut in the district, and the trade is, at this time, carried on in its full vigour.

The early colonial cedar trade was not carried on in response to any real demand in the colonies themselves, but to supply a practically insatiable market for fine softwoods in far-away England. During the twenty or more years previous to the Australian gold rush, tremendous quantities of cedar wood were exported to the home country for interior building and cabinet-work. During those years the forests of New South Wales were almost bled white of their red cedar, and unfortunately the loss of the species was largely irretrievable.

But the forests of the western part of Lake Macquarie were rich in many timbers other than cedar, and the real history of the timber trade dates from about 1860, when the goldseekers were settling down in the cities and a building boom was beginning to flourish. Some fine timbers including blackbutt, blue gum, turpentine, and tallow-wood were plentiful in the Dora Creek watershed, as was also forest oak, an important source of roofing shingles. Through the Sixties there was a firm demand for shingles and general hardwood, as well as a lesser requirement for wheel spokes and plastering lathes. As roofing iron came into more general use in the colony, the need for shingles lessened considerably, but the development of coal mining about Newcastle and Lake Macquarie created a demand for pit-props and other mining timber. An additional timber market was secured for the lake industry when the government commenced to construct railway lines in the northern districts of the colony, and some huge contracts for supply of sleeper wood were given to Lake Macquarie sawmillers during the late Seventies and Eighties. It was at this time that the timber industry around Cooranbong reached a production peak.

It appears that there were no steam sawmills operating in the lake district until after 1870, but the timber trade flourished at Cooranbong for at least ten years before that date. Those were the days of the pit-sawyers. In the gullies and other places where the ground was fairly flat, the pit-method

⁴ GPO: 'Brisbane Water Letter Book, 1838-1846', letter from A. Holden to Newcastle Police, 24 Aug. 1838.

⁵ *Australian*, 16 July 1840.

usually involved the digging of a trench or pit deep enough for a sawyer to stand in. Trees near the pit were felled and sawn on the spot into manoeuvrable lengths, which one by one were levered and rolled across the entrance of the pit. Then two sawyers—one in the pit, the other above—cross-cut the log into planks which might later be further sawn into pieces suitable for building uses.

The procedure of digging a pit was not usually followed where the land sloped steeply or was too rocky, but a different method was employed. We are indebted to the author of *Settlers and Convicts*, published in 1847,⁶ for the following description of cedar-cutting in the Illawarra district:

The ground was so rough and thickly wooded that we had to build a fresh pit to almost every tree. These pits were merely scaffold side-strikes lodged on posts against trees, with long easy skids leading up to them for pitting the log. Sometimes six inches or even a foot of earth might be excavated; but to have dug regular ground pits would have been much too tedious a job; besides which in many places it was so rocky that it would have been impossible. . . . It was seldom we cross-cut the logs off longer than ten or twelve feet, but our planks were sometimes a couple of feet square on the end, or three or four feet in depth, by six, eight, or ten inches in thickness. . . . As the various planks came off the pit, they were rolled over into one large stack in some convenient spot a few feet off; and when the whole tree was cut up, this heap was covered over with cabbage tree leaves, on the outside, to protect the timber from the weather.

In a descriptive article published in 1865 the *Newcastle Chronicle*⁷ told how most of Cooranbong's estimated population of 150 persons were timber workers—'chiefly shingle sawyers and splitters'—who spent six days and five nights a week in the mountains sawing timber or splitting shingles. Teams of bullocks hauled dray-loads of sawn timber and shingles down to the Cooranbong wharf, where the wood was stacked while awaiting the arrival of ketches which took cargoes to Sydney and Newcastle. As early as 1860 three ketches were engaged in this trade with Cooranbong, and the number of ships steadily increased in the following years.

Then steam sawmills began to appear on the lake scene, and this gradually put an end to the primitive methods of the pit-sawyers. Instead of sawing up the timber near the place where the tree was cut down, the timber-getters now merely felled the tree, trimmed the log of its branches, and rolled it onto a specially constructed waggon to be hauled by a team of bullocks to a sawmill some distance away. There it was possible for the log to be quickly converted into beams or battens of almost any desirable size or length, which could then be supplied directly to the customer. The era of the pit-sawyer was over, and the age of the bullock team had begun.

⁶ Harris, Alexander, *Settlers and Convicts; or, Recollections of Sixteen Years' Labour in the Australian Backwoods*, p. 44 of reprint by Melbourne University Press, 1964.

⁷ NC, 12 Aug. 1865.

It would appear that the pioneer sawmilling business at Lake Macquarie was that commenced by Cumming and Lane near Belmont in January 1872. Less than two years earlier the *Sydney Mail*⁸ printed a short article which mentioned the absence of sawmills in the lake district:

There is a fine navigable inlet, called Coorumbong or Dorah Creek, near the head of which is the small township of Coorumbong. The country immediately around this settlement, and for many miles inland, is remarkably well-timbered. There is no sawmill here, but a considerable quantity of timber sawn by hand—shingles, etc.—is exported. The trade of the place employs altogether about half a dozen small craft of from 15 to 30 tons burden.

Some reference has been made previously to the sawmilling venture of Cumming and Lane on Cardiff Point. The mill commenced to operate on the day of its christening ceremony, 29th January 1872.⁹ Shipbuilding facilities were installed at the mill, and within twelve months of the mill's commencement, a schooner named *Mary Warner* was constructed for the lake coal trade. The vessel was built for William Speer. When the mill closed down in February 1873, following the deaths of the two proprietors, a second schooner, described as being 'much larger than the *Mary Warner*', was on the stocks in the process of building.¹⁰ The sawmill did not remain idle for very long, but it changed hands several times during the next fifteen years.

It is strange that the first sawmill at Lake Macquarie should have been established, not amongst the big timbers on the western side, but on the eastern shore where stands of good timber were not so plentiful. This is a surprising thing. However, even in the north-eastern part of the lake district there was an ample quantity and variety of useful timber to keep one relatively small sawmill fully occupied. When the mill was originally established, the proprietors claimed that in close proximity to it there were 'vast quantities of first class timber'.¹¹

Six years later, when the Cardiff mill was owned by Goodsir and Company, the main source of supply of logs was the Bolton Point peninsula a short distance across the lake. In those days much of Bolton Point belonged to an extensive estate owned by a business man named Quigley, who called his property 'Awaba Park'. An article in the *Newcastle Herald* of 1878 described Quigley's extensive estate, and mentioned the owner's interests in the timber industry.¹²

⁸ *Sydney Mail*, 7 May 1870.

⁹ *NC*, 1 Feb. 1872.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22 Feb. 1873.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1 Feb. 1872.

¹² *NMH*, 8 June 1878.

On this Bay [Awaba Bay] at its southern side, is situated Awaba Park Estate, containing about 1750 acres of the best land in that vicinity, and having a water frontage of 10 miles. Numbers of bays indent this water frontage, giving it a most charming appearance. The owner of this large and valuable estate is William Bell Quigley, Esq., son-in-law to the late Hon. James Mitchell.

There is, under the superintendence of Mr. Charles Robinson, now in course of erection a fine house, being built expressly for the residence of Mr. Quigley, and in about a month's time he intends settling down there. . . . The timber alone is worth about £7,000. . . . Mr. Quigley has at the present time a contract to supply 100,000 spokes to a New Zealand firm, and he also supplies to a great extent the timber cut at the sawmills of Brown and Goodsirs', situated about 6 miles distant.

With this brief reference to the Cardiff mill, we again turn our attention to the Cooranbong district, where big things were taking place in the timber industry during the 1870's. The beginnings of sawmilling in that area are not clearly defined, but it seems that there were two mills operating on a small scale by about 1874. In November of that year a deputation approached the Minister for Works to press for the deepening of the lake's entrance channel, and one of the gentlemen comprising the deputation stated that there were already three sawmills on the lake.¹³ These belonged to Mr. Wakefield (the Wyee mill), Mr. Thomas Russell of Cooranbong, and Mr. Robert King, also at Cooranbong. The mill near Belmont commenced by Cumming and Lane had been closed temporarily by this time.

Thomas Russell's sawmill was probably a small affair. In the development of early Cooranbong, Russell managed to place a very firm finger in every commercial pie. He kept the only general store, had charge of the post office, operated one or two timber ketches, owned the largest (and probably the only) ferry-boat on the lake, and played an active part in many progress bodies. It is, then, not at all surprising that he owned a sawmilling business, though this enterprise did not apparently survive the competition it soon met from King and Company's steam mill.

A good deal is known about King's timber industry, because some of the old company's business records have been preserved.¹⁴ The narrative of Robert King's sawmill establishment must commence on the goldfields of Victoria back in 1856. During that year, in the newly formed town of Ballarat, two brothers named King were partners in a prosperous business registered as 'R. & A. H. King, Ironmongers, Main Road, Ballarat'. The brothers' names were Robert Henry and Alexander Henry, and they operated what we might term a mining engineering business on the goldfields. We know that the undertaking was fairly successful financially, for an account

¹³ NC, 19 Nov. 1874.

¹⁴ These business records are preserved in the Library at Avondale College, Cooranbong, N.S.W.

of stock at 31st December 1856 shows total assets worth £3,820, which included stock, equipment, a building, furniture, cattle, horses, and waggons.

Then in October of 1857 the partnership of the two brothers was dissolved by mutual consent. The dissolution agreement stated that all debts due to or by the firm would be recovered and paid by Alexander Henry King who would continue the business on his own account. We cannot be certain why Robert King pulled out of the firm at this time, but it appears that he joined the gold diggers on the nearby Scotchman's Field. Gold mining licences issued to him bear the dates of the consecutive years 1870, 1871, and 1872.

We are ignorant of Robert King's fortunes on the goldfields, but in 1873, at the age of forty-eight, he came north to Cooranbong and decided to set up a sawmilling business there. He arranged to purchase the lease on a property fronting Dora Creek about a mile downstream from Cooranbong, where an unnamed person had been cutting and loading timber on a small scale. King's business began officially in September of 1873 when twenty shares of one pound each were issued. Three of these shares were bought by a man named C. A. J. Henry, a relative of King's, to whom Robert later entrusted the management of the business for a period of some years.

It required some time to build up a large sawmill in a remote place like Cooranbong, and certainly the mill that King operated on the bank of the creek in 1874 was a small affair; but from this mill he exported his first cargo of timber on 5th July 1874. It was consigned to Messrs. Laing and Wylie of Newcastle, was conveyed by Thomas Russell's steamer to the Lake Heads, and from thence to Newcastle by William Boyd's ketch *Agnes Rose*. The second cargo was despatched to Newcastle a fortnight later by the *Agnes Rose*.

Robert King was not entirely happy with the creek bank effort, perhaps because it was too far from the township and on the wrong side of Dora Creek. So he purchased a small property, under the terms of Conditional Purchase, on the western side of the town, and in a favourable position for receiving logs from the cutters working in the mountains. The purchase was dated 1875, though preparations for the new project were begun a year earlier, when King made a number of purchases—two boilers for fifty pounds each, circular saws, blacksmiths' tools, saw buckles, engines, angle irons, a crab winch, fire bars, spindles, and other items. Since a good deal of heavy equipment was needed, which Robert's engineer-brother could supply, Robert now entered into a new partnership with Alexander, who had moved from Ballarat to Melbourne. Thus was formed King and Company, saw-millers of Cooranbong.

Under an announcement headed 'Cooranbong Saw Mills', the *Miner's Advocate* stated in April 1875:¹⁵

¹⁵ *MA*, 8 Apr. 1875.

From Cooranbong we learn that these saw mills some time back projected by Messrs. King and Company of Melbourne, under the energetic supervision of the local manager, Mr. C. A. J. Henry, are about commencing active operations, and will, on Thursday next, begin work in earnest. About seventy persons are employed on the establishment, and the works are very extensive and when completed a very great quantity of timber will be turned out.

Two months later, the same newspaper reported¹⁶ that the steam mills were now in active operation, and there were sufficient logs on hand to cut about 150,000 feet of timber. Forty men were actually employed by the company, and it was predicted that more workers would be required when the mill increased its output to an expected 35,000 to 40,000 feet of timber weekly.

Among the names which appeared on the company's wages list in 1875 were many that are familiar to former residents of the Cooranbong district: T. Humphries, M. Gorman, R. Gorman, T. Healey, G. Deaves, S. Randell, J. Lewis, J. Edgerton, W. Edgerton, W. O'Neill, J. Owen, J. Martin, E. Taylor, D. Condren, James Blackford, A. Blackford, John Malone, D. Horgan, J. O'Neill, and W. Booth. Many of these men were probably cutters who felled trees out in the bush and received payment for the number of logs they delivered to the mill.

Three years later the partnership between the two King brothers in the timber business was terminated. The dissolution agreement, bearing the date 1st June 1878, reads as follows:

The partnership existing between the undersigned under the name of King and Company of the Cooranbong Steam Saw Mills has this day expired by effluxion of time. The business will be carried on as hitherto by R. H. King who will receive all monies due to the firm and pay all debts owing by them.

The signatures of the two brothers concluded the agreement.

Another five years of successful sawmilling passed by. Then, in July of 1883, Robert Henry King died as the result of an arm injury received at his sawmill. The administration of the business passed to his wife, Annie, who had the assistance of her sons. Sometime about the turn of the century the old mill closed down, though the milling business was revived in or about 1933, when Alexander, a son of R. H. King, established a new mill on the old property.

While King and Company's mill was being established at Cooranbong in the mid-1870's, another large steam sawmill was commenced on the lake at Wyee Point. The proprietor was a gentleman named Wakefield who had successfully contracted for the construction of the northern railway between Murrurundi and Tamworth, and so required a very large quantity of

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5 June 1875.

sleepers. The mill was in the process of erection during 1874, a large wharf was built on the lakeside nearby, and a specially constructed vessel for removing the sleepers from the lake was under construction at Brisbane Water.¹⁷

Wakefield appointed a manager, Joseph Lancaster, to take charge of the Wyee Point mill, and by 1875 a large quantity of sleepers was being turned out. The following description by a visitor to the district indicates the magnitude of operations:¹⁸

While alluding to sawmills, I must not omit mentioning Mr. Joseph Lancaster's situated at Wyee. . . . These mills are the property of Mr. Wakefield, the successful contractor for the railways, and do a large trade. The timber used is got from the Lake and surrounding districts, and altogether some 60 men are employed—squaring, felling, and at the mill. When in full work from 40,000 to 50,000 feet weekly is cut. To increase further their output, another steamer is being built for their use, which will be finished in about two months; also a large punt to lighter their timber over the flats, which it is impossible for vessels to cross.

Although the government had promised to dredge a channel through the Pelican Islands near the lake's entrance, this work had not yet commenced, and this accounts for Wakefield's arrangement to use a large punt or lighter to move heavy cargoes of timber from the lake. A further reference to this lighter was published in the *Miner's Advocate*.¹⁹

One of the best things that ever happened to this place is Mr. Breckenridge bringing a lighter into the Lake for the purpose of taking timber down to the heads where large vessels can ship it. It is a thing that has been wanted here for some years, for up to within the last three months, it was impossible to get heavy timber taken from this place and I think it only fair that the public should patronise him to help pay the heavy cost of bringing such a large lighter in here. Her dimensions are—length 70 feet overall, with 18 feet beam, and only drawing about 3 feet with 20,000 feet of timber on board.

Lancaster's mill received a little more publicity during 1875 due to an accident which occurred there. A young man named Edward Barden cut his leg very badly with an adze while squaring girders, and it was feared he would not survive unless medical aid could be procured quickly.²⁰ The complete absence of medical help at Cooranbong in those times, together with the sorry state of the roads, made the timber-worker's life an unnecessarily hazardous one. It is small wonder that so many fatal or near-fatal accidents occurred at the sawmills and in the bush.

¹⁷ NC, 19 Nov. 1874.

¹⁸ MA, 5 June 1875.

¹⁹ MA, 16 June 1875.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5 June 1875.

The opening of the timber mill at Wyee Point drew a small resident population to the area, and a number of small selections were taken up along the adjacent lakeshores, two of the selectors being John Overall and Thomas Bridge. In January 1879 another of these settlers, James Armitage, applied to the Department of Public Instruction to have a school teacher appointed to the neighbourhood.²¹ Giving his address as 'Wyee, or Manner-ing Point', he wrote:

During the last 12 months the residents of the above locality erected a building for a school and employed a teacher at their own expense. . . . There was 17 children on the roll during that time and there will be an addition of 5 more in one month from date (Mr. William Armitage's).

The teacher of this private school was 'a very clever and worthy young lady'²² and her little school flourished for some years. It had closed by 1883, when some of the settlers again negotiated for a government school at Wyee. By this time a large population of railway workers was moving onto the Wyee flats, and the settlers near the lake came in for less attention.

But although a small settlement was formed on Wyee Point, a good many of the mill hands preferred to live in and around Cooranbong, where there were now two hotels, four general stores, post office, public school, and the promise of a future. It will be realized that the simultaneous opening of two large sawmills—King's and Lancaster's—in the Cooranbong region brought a very marked increase of population to the town of Cooranbong, and this was accompanied by expansion of the commercial functions of the town. The number of small ships trading at the Cooranbong timber wharf had reached a dozen by 1875, and the exports of forest products were considerable. The port activity is reflected in a list of shipping at Cooranbong during a fairly normal week in May of 1875. This list was published in the *Miner's Advocate*:²³

Cooranbong. Shipping list . . . Departures for week ending May 16th —For Sydney: Village Maid, with 45,000 shingles; The Rose, with 55,000 shingles; The Star of Peace, with 65,000 shingles; Sea Gull, with 65,000 shingles. For Newcastle: Maggie Scott, with 25,000 feet timber; The Turtle, with 10,000 feet timber. Arrivals up to week ending May 21st.: Village Maid, H. Jackson master; Star of Peace, A. Blackford master; Sea Gull, C. Coulter master. From Newcastle: Maggie Scott, H. Blackford master; The Queen, S. Coulter master; The Turtle, W. Boyd master.

Expansion of the timber industry continued, and by 1877 there were four steam sawmills operating in or around Cooranbong.²⁴ A correspondent to the Newcastle press supplied the following average weekly production figures

²¹ Department of Education: correspondence relating to Wyee school, 1879.

²² *Ibid.*, 1883.

²³ *MA*, 29 May 1875.

²⁴ *NMH*, 20 Feb. 1877.

for each of the mills:²⁵ James Lancaster's mill at Wyee Point, 40,000 feet of timber each week; King and Company of Cooranbong, 20,000 feet weekly; Moon's Mill at Cooranbong, 20,000 feet weekly; and Mr. Steel's mill (apparently located at Cooranbong), averaging 15,000 feet each week. The only other mill operating on the lake at that time was the one on Cardiff Point; after a period of inactivity, Mrs. Cumming, widow of one of the original owners, had revived the business, and it was now producing about 10,000 feet of timber weekly. With the five sawmills in production, Lake Macquarie was exporting over 300,000 feet of timber each month during 1877. The mills gave direct employment to an unspecified number of men, but besides these, there were about fifty pairs of sawyers working in the bush cutting 'felloes, junk and house timber', as well as a 'great number' of men splitting shingles, or cutting lathes, spokes, and railway sleepers.

A description of the early timber industry at the lake could not be complete without at least a brief mention of the little ships involved in the trade. While the coal industry was hindered in its expansion by the shallowness of the Swansea channel, the timber trade was not hamstrung in this way, because it involved smaller vessels and lighter cargoes. This is not to say that the state of the channel did not present navigational difficulties for the timber-carrying boats, but that these difficulties were less severe than they were for the big coal schooners.

In the early stages of the lake timber industry, the small wind-driven ketches were utilized. One of the few surviving men who can remember seeing these ketches on the lake is Mr. Henry Robarts, whose parents settled at Dora Creek nearly one hundred years ago.²⁶ Mr. Robarts remembers the ketches to have been sturdy but graceful vessels, from twenty to almost sixty tons in weight, up to seventy feet in length, and wind-driven by sails, a mainsail and a topsail on one mast, and a mizzen at the stern. He recalls that on still days, when the boats were becalmed in places where the sea breezes could not reach them, the four sailors on board each ketch would have to pole four miles from the mouth of Dora Creek to the wharf at Cooranbong, where provisions and general cargo were unloaded to make room for the outgoing load of timber. As the incoming ketches swung around Big Wangi Point, one of the crew would blow a bullock's horn and the signal could be heard for miles around. Settlers living around the foreshores and along Dora Creek would take their boats out to meet the ketches, which carried supplies of essential foodstuffs. Sometimes a ketch would stop to unload a heavy item of cargo, but Mr. Robarts recollects that goods were mostly thrown from one vessel to the other while both were on the move.

Undoubtedly the first ketch employed in the Lake Macquarie timber

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5 May 1877.

²⁶ *NMH*, 25 May 1957 (feature article).

trade as it developed about 1860 was Thomas Boyd's *Turtle*, which brought the Taaffe family to settle at Galgabba about 1850. The *Turtle* was almost certainly one of the three small ships mentioned as trading to the Dora Creek district in 1860, and ten years later it delivered a cargo of school furniture to the Newport Provisional School being established at that time.²⁷ Although it was a small vessel, of perhaps twenty tons, the *Turtle* performed in the Dora Creek timber trade until 1877.²⁸ Two years before that, a newspaper item identified the ketch as one of a small fleet plying regularly between Newcastle and Cooranbong, and commanded by William Boyd.²⁹

Another of the early ketches was the *Village Maid* of only eleven tons. Our earliest contact with this vessel is in 1864, when it was piloted by Thomas Russell,³⁰ who used it to bring food provisions to the growing township at Cooranbong, and to take back to Sydney quantities of shingles. Four years later, William Boyd was the pilot of *Village Maid*,³¹ but by 1875 her master was Captain H. Jackson of the Heads district.³² At this time the *Maid* alternated between carrying shingles from Cooranbong to Sydney, and taking loads of railway sleepers from Wyee to Newcastle. In 1876 the little vessel was sold to Mr. Russell of Cooranbong, and a few months afterwards it was reported³³ that she had been wrecked on the rocks near the Lake Heads. The newspaper described how the ship was dashed onto the rocks while crossing the bar at night. The skipper on that occasion was Robert Campbell, who was saved with the other two sailors on board.

A pioneer in the lake shipping trade was Captain William Forbes, one of the early settlers at the Heads. During the Sixties he owned at least two ketches which took cargoes of shingles from Dora Creek; these were named *Lorra* and *Hope*. We read of them operating in 1868,³⁴ but there is no later reference to them, and it may be assumed that they were out of the trade by the mid-1870's. However, their places were taken by two more vessels which Captain Forbes introduced to the lake. The first of these was the twenty-four ton ketch *Contest*, registered in November 1869.³⁵ Exactly seven years later, the *Contest* was reported to be stranded on a reef outside the Lake Heads.³⁶ Captain Forbes was himself the skipper on that occasion, and thanks to his seamanship no lives were lost. The other ketch that Forbes added to the trade was small enough to have been the baby of the fleet. Of only eleven tons weight, it was christened *Rose*, and was registered in

²⁷ Education Department: correspondence relating to Newport school, 1870.

²⁸ Records of King and Company.

²⁹ *MA*, 29 May 1875.

³⁰ Education Department: correspondence relating to Cooranbong school, 1864.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1868.

³² *MA*, 29 May 1875.

³³ *NMH*, 13 Sep. 1876.

³⁴ Education Department: correspondence relating to Cooranbong school, 1868.

³⁵ *Newcastle Nautical Almanac and Guide to the Port of Newcastle*, 1883.

³⁶ *NMH*, 16 Nov. 1876.

February 1873.³⁷ The *Rose* was mentioned in a shipping list two years later as taking a cargo of 55,000 oak shingles from Cooranbong to Sydney.³⁸

The establishment of the steam sawmills in and around Cooranbong about 1875 resulted in a sudden increase in the quantity of timber available for export. Prior to this time no more than half a dozen ketches had been simultaneously engaged in the trade, but now this number was very inadequate. This encouraged a number of the Cooranbong townspeople to enter the shipping industry, and at least ten new cargo vessels were built within a period of about three years. Some of them were constructed right at Cooranbong, where a man named Kenah opened a shipbuilding yard in 1874. Probably the first vessel launched at his shipyard was the large ketch *Sea Bird*, described as 'the fastest ketch on the coast' soon after it was launched.³⁹ *Sea Bird* boasted a fifty-foot keel, a sixteen-foot beam, and a hold of five feet. It was built to the order of the Tobin brothers of Mandalong and Cooranbong.⁴⁰

An even larger boat came from Mr. Kenah's shipyard late in 1877. This was the *Emily and Mary*, built for the Coulter brothers who also managed the Heart and Hand Hotel at Cooranbong. The ketch measured sixty feet in length, possessed a sixteen-foot beam, and a hold of five and a half feet.⁴¹ An item in the Newcastle *Herald*⁴² described the launching ceremony, in which Emily, a daughter of Samuel Coulter, performed the christening in the traditional fashion. Samuel Coulter was to be the captain of the new craft, which the newspaper correspondent described as being 'the style of vessel that suits the Lake Macquarie trade—carrying a large cargo on a light draught of water'.

Samuel and Edwin Coulter operated a small fleet of ships in partnership with the Blackford family, who also resided at Cooranbong. Two years before the *Emily and Mary* was launched, the two families were together operating at least four vessels on Lake Macquarie. Two of these craft, the *Maggie Scott* and the *Queen*, seem to have been utilized mainly in taking hardwood from Cooranbong to Newcastle.⁴³ Two other small ketches, named *Star of Peace* (17 tons) and *Sea Gull*, made regular trips to Sydney with oak shingles, the cargo averaging approximately 65,000 shingles for each boat.⁴⁴ The *Sea Gull* met with an untimely end in the spring of 1876, while endeavouring to cross the lake entrance bar. From a newspaper report

³⁷ Newcastle *Almanac*, *op. cit.*

³⁸ *MA*, 29 May 1875.

³⁹ *NMH*, 19 May 1877.

⁴⁰ *MA*, 5 June 1875.

⁴¹ *NMH*, 19 May 1877.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 24 Nov. 1877.

⁴³ *MA*, 29 May and 5 June 1875.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 29 May 1875.

of the incident⁴⁵ we learn that the two vessels *Star of Peace* and *Sea Gull* left Sydney together at three o'clock one morning, bound for Lake Macquarie. The *Star of Peace*, being the smarter of the two ketches, outsailed the other and arrived at the Lake Heads in time to have the benefit of a flood tide. The *Sea Gull* arrived two hours later, and her skipper decided to wait outside the bar for the next high tide. Unhappily, however, a gale blew up and the helpless vessel was driven onto a reef and totally wrecked. All hands on board the craft were drowned.

Other ketches which assisted in the export of timber from Cooranbong after 1875 included the following which were listed in the Newcastle *Almanac* of 1883: *Free Trade* (39 tons), *Leo* (21 tons), *Alfred Edwards* (34 tons), and *Agnes Rose* (35 tons). The last three were first registered in 1876, and the *Free Trade* a year earlier. The *Growler*, built by a man named Rinah, is believed to have been one of the last of the ketches to enter the lake trade, in 1879.⁴⁶ Altogether, there were fifteen or more vessels plying to and from Cooranbong during the period from 1875 to 1880. As time moved on, however, the sail-driven ketches were gradually replaced by steam-powered vessels of various sizes and designs. The Newcastle *Almanac* of 1883 reported that twelve vessels were at that time employed in the Lake Macquarie timber trade.

The building of boats at Lake Macquarie was itself an important facet of the timber industry. One of the first shipwrights at the lake was a man named Matthew Kenah, who transferred from Newcastle to Cooranbong in 1874. The following news item was contributed by a resident of Cooranbong that same year:⁴⁷

Shipbuilding is again going ahead here. Messrs. Kenah and Braid, shipbuilders of Newcastle, have started to build four vessels for the Lake Macquarie trade. They will have the first one finished before Christmas. She is to be 45 feet on the keel, and will be capable of carrying from 20 to 30 tons.

Kenah's partner in the business was John Braid, but a number of other shipwrights were employed as well.⁴⁸ A number of very seaworthy ketches were launched from Matthew Kenah's shipyard, including two of the largest ones on the lake. After a few years of operation at Cooranbong, Kenah moved his works across the water to Swansea, where he was in business by 1883.

A correspondent to the Newcastle *Herald* in 1877⁴⁹ described Mr. Kenah's activities at Cooranbong, and then mentioned two other shipbuilders at the lake:

⁴⁵ NMH, 21 Sep. 1876.

⁴⁶ RAHS journal, v. 31, pt. 2, 1945 (Jervis).

⁴⁷ NC, 23 July 1874.

⁴⁸ MA, 5 June 1875.

⁴⁹ NMH, 5 May 1877.

We can boast of our ships that are being built. Mr. W. Spears has one built to order, which will be ready for launching in about ten days. Her length is 90 feet, beam 20 feet, depth of hold 12 feet, and she is all built of spotted gum, and threatens to be the most faithful craft that has ever been built in New South Wales. Her decks are of spotted gum, and her frame is large enough for a ship of 1,000 tons. She is built by Mr. Batten, to the order of Mr. W. Spears, Senior.

Then we have the Monaghan vessel, which is 70 feet on keel, 19 feet beam, and 6 feet depth of hold, and is a likely looking craft to sail. . . . She is just on the point of launching.

Both of these vessels were intended primarily for the coal-carrying trade. The builder of the first one, William Batten, constructed a number of small boats at the northern end of the lake. The one he built for Mr. Speer was the largest vessel he ever attempted, and it was named *William Brooks* in memory of the original landholder of the Speer's Point estate.⁵⁰ There is little to say about the 'Monaghan vessel' referred to above, except that two brothers of that name carried on shipbuilding at Cardiff Point for a number of years. A visitor to the lake in 1870 reported that the Monaghans were preparing to launch a schooner of about 200 tons, 'the largest vessel yet built on the lake'.⁵¹ Many settlers believed it was too large, and that it would never succeed in crossing the entrance bar. We hear nothing more of this large schooner, but the vessel under construction in 1877 was obviously a somewhat lighter craft. Apart from the Monaghan brothers' shipyards, the Cardiff sawmill close by also had facilities for building and launching small ships.

Much more could be written concerning some of the other shipbuilding works on Lake Macquarie during the period of the 1870's and 1880's; of the Boyds at Swansea, for example, who earned a long-standing reputation for boatbuilding; and of the lake fishermen who frequently built the sturdy little boats which earned them a livelihood. But enough has been said about boatbuilding to show that it was developing as an important secondary industry at Lake Macquarie.

As we continue our story into the 1880's, we cannot fail to observe that the lake timber industry had been changing in character since its beginnings in 1860. During the Sixties, the greater part of the export consisted of shingles, which were cut by a few dozen splitters scattered all about the shores and along the creeks; twenty years later, roofing shingles occupied only a very small part of the export, and the quantity diminished from year to year. The market demanded instead large consignments of colliery timber and railway sleepers. The pit sawyers, working in pairs in the bush, had passed from the scene, their place having been usurped by the steam-powered sawmills which gave employment to large numbers of men. Once the timber

⁵⁰ *Newcastle Sun*, 3 Dec. 1939.

⁵¹ *TCJ*, 9 July 1870.

trade had been adequately served by no more than half a dozen wind-driven ketches, but now a dozen or more steamboats moved heavier cargoes in less time. In short, the colony of New South Wales was developing rapidly, and the Lake Macquarie timber industry was sharing in the boom.

One of the unforgettable names associated with the trade during the 1880's is that of W. W. Johnson, a general storekeeper and contractor of Wallsend. About 1879, Johnson introduced a scheme whereby he supplied timber direct from Cooranbong to the collieries at Wallsend. He built a steamer, which he named *Pinafore*, to tow punts laden with pit-props from Dora Creek across the lake to Cockle Creek. The cargoes were unloaded at Miller's wharf at the head of navigation on Cockle Creek, and Johnson's 'teams' consisting of horse-drawn waggons drew the pit-props less than three miles over the hills to Wallsend. Despite the necessity of twice loading and unloading the timber, the venture was a financial success because it short-cut the long boat trip through the perilous Lake Heads and along the sea-coast to Newcastle. The little *Pinafore* soon proved too small for the haulage of timber, and it was not long before Johnson introduced a larger ship, which became popularly known as *Big Pinafore*. Johnson reportedly purchased this vessel from Captain Limeburner of Newcastle.⁵²

The construction of the northern railway through Dora Creek and Cockle Creek to Newcastle threatened W. W. Johnson's timber trade, but not before he had added a third and superior class of vessel to his fleet of steamers. This was the *Maggie Johnson*, a powerful boat which was fitted up to convey passengers. As the new railway stole his timber haulage business, Johnson turned to passenger ferry services around the lake, and for a few years *Maggie Johnson* operated in competition with Captain Peterson's ferry *Helen Taylor* and Captain E. Hannell's ferry-boat *Cora* in the carriage of passengers and cargo. The following extracts from the Newcastle *Almanac* of two consecutive years show something of the nature of the lake ferry services:

1888. S.S. 'Cora', Captain Hannell, calls [at Swansea] every alternate day with passengers and cargo from Newcastle; also S.S. 'Helen Taylor', Captain Peterson, runs daily between Pelican Flat and Cockle Creek on arrival and departure of trains.

1889. S.S. No. 1 and S.S. No. 2 'Pinafore' and 'Maggie Johnson' owned by Mr. W. W. Johnson of Wallsend, run daily between Swansea and Cockle Creek.

Besides providing the Cockle Creek-Swansea service, Johnson catered for the newly re-established mining settlement at Catherine Hill Bay after 1888. His steamer service provided an avenue of employment for retrenched miners from the Wallsend and Minmi districts who wished to obtain work at Catherine Hill Bay. These men were able to travel to the mine on Sunday

⁵² *Newcastle Sun*, 26 Nov. 1946 (feature article).

evenings and return to their homes on Friday evenings. Cam's wharf, about two miles south of Galgabba, was the ferry's port of call, and the miners had to walk the remaining distance to the mines. Naturally, Johnson's steamer also carried consignments of food and liquor for the mining settlement.

The *Maggie Johnson* had given only a few years of service to its owner when it was destroyed by fire at its moorings at Miller's wharf. This was the signal for Johnson to close his lake transport business, not because he could not afford to replace the *Maggie*, but because of the intense competition presented by the railways. The opening of the line between Sydney and Newcastle in 1889 marked the collapse of water transport services on Lake Macquarie, so closing a great era of the lake's development.

The work of constructing the northern railway did, however, create a boom period for the timber industry, as thousands of sleepers and quantities of other kinds of timber were needed by the railway contractors. Four sawmills at Cooranbong operated at full capacity to meet the need, and cutting was carried into new areas of forest. The Awaba district developed into an important timber-collecting centre, and for some years a sawmill was in production at Fennell's Bay.⁵³ But the high level of timber production fell dramatically soon after the railway works were completed; for it happened that the loss of this major timber market coincided with the arrival of a severe economic depression in the Australian colonies. Hundreds of men in the lake district suddenly found themselves without work when the railway contracts finished, and the sawmills began to close down.

Cooranbong was the worst-hit area, for the timber industry had been its mainstay; indeed, the reason for its existence. Thirty years of mostly heavy cutting had seriously depleted the forests surrounding the town, and although tremendous reserves of excellent hardwood in the rugged gullies of the Wattagan had not yet been touched, exploitation of these reserves was dependent upon the arrival of the powerful caterpillars, winches, and motor trucks for haulage. But in 1890 these machines were hardly dreamed of. The immediate problem was to find work for some dozens of men living in and around Cooranbong. In desperation, the government voted a sum of money for the construction of a road leading up towards the summit of Mount Falk, a high ridge facing Cooranbong from the north-west. A large number of men were employed on construction of this road, which led nowhere and became known as the 'unemployed road'. It remained an unfinished edifice until 1961, when construction of the Mount Falk road was continued along the ridge in order to provide access to a new television transmitting tower on Mount Heaton. The observant traveller along this road can see clearly the remains of the old stonework: a reminder of the collapse of an industry which was the major source of income for over thirty years.

⁵³ *SMH*, 20 Aug. 1883.

A TOWN WITH A
FUTURE

WITH a background of steady growth, Cooranbong in 1875 was considered to be a town with a future. Situated on the lonely road connecting Maitland and Brisbane Water, at a point about half-way between the two places, Cooranbong was a popular resting-place for travellers who frequented the road. Small hamlets existed at a few other places along the track—at Mount Vincent, Wyong Creek, and Blue Gum Flat—but none of these was yet worthy of the title of township. In the Lake Macquarie district, Cooranbong occupied an unchallenged position as the principal centre of population and trade. In 1875 Belmont was just emerging as a village community, Swansea was yet non-existent, and the newly born settlement at Catherine Hill Bay was already threatened with collapse. So Cooranbong filled an unchallenged role in this era of the lake's development. The town was already indisputably bound up with the timber industry when King and Company established its large milling plant in the autumn of 1875. Yet the opening of this plant, followed as it was by the setting up of other sawmills in the district, unfolded a new chapter in the town's history, and Cooranbong's premier position in the Lake Macquarie region was assured, apparently, for many years to come. Its sphere of influence extended over most of the lake district, and to some points outside of it. It is noteworthy that Mr. Hargraves, who resided on the seaside near Norah Head, regarded himself as a resident of the Cooranbong district.

We are fortunate in having a very clear description of the town just at the time when it was entering upon the new phase of development. During the month of May 1875, a journalist from the Newcastle press went on a three-day excursion to the southern parts of the Lake Macquarie district, and prepared an account of his trip for the *Miner's Advocate*.¹ Accompanied by one or two friends, the journalist travelled on horseback from Newcastle to Mr. Speer's wharf at the northern end of the lake. Here the visitors embarked on the steamship *Pioneer*, the newly built luxury cruiser operated by Thomas Russell of Cooranbong. Two hours of steaming brought the party to Reece's wharf at the southern end of the lake, where some

¹ *MA*, 5 June 1875.

passengers for Catherine Hill Bay disembarked. Then the *Pioneer* headed westward towards Dora Creek and the public wharf at Cooranbong:

While running in we passed the ketch VILLAGE MAID (H. Jackson, Captain) going to load timber at Mr. J. Lancaster's mill at Wyee; the ketch SEA GULL (Ed Coulter, master and owner) bound for Newcastle with a cargo of hardwood; and the ketch ROSE (Captain W. Forbes) bound for Sydney with a cargo of oak shingles. . . . We also passed a couple of small craft after entering Dora Creek, viz., the MAGGIE SCOTT (Captain Henry Beech) at anchor and loading girders at Dora Wharf, for Newcastle, and the QUEEN ketch (Captain S. Coulter) at the extreme end of the creek, loading timber for Newcastle. On each side of the creek we passed numbers of comfortable little farms and cottages. . . . At the end of the creek a ketch is in the course of erection to the order of Messrs. Tobin Brothers, of Cooranbong, by the well-known shipbuilder, Mr. Mat Karnard, who has several shipwrights employed. . . . It is to be 50 feet keel, 16 feet beam, and 5 feet hold, and is intended for the Lake trade.

The visitors were duly impressed by the busy trade being carried on from the head of Dora Creek. Arriving at the Cooranbong wharf, they alighted and completed the half-mile journey into the township in Mr. Russell's comfortable buggy. They discovered that although Cooranbong was not an 'incorporated town', it was a prosperous place and a hive of activity. About fifty houses and other buildings comprised the town itself, and there were many other farmhouses in the surrounding countryside. The place had become a service centre for a large, though not heavily populated district, and the presence of many functional institutions gave evidence of this. The post office, which handled mails from three or four different directions, was controlled by Thomas Russell at his store, which was easily the largest and best-stocked shop in the town. On the opposite side of the road to the store stood the police station, where Constable Robert Gamble was in charge. A Police Magistrate named Elliott also resided there, and it was part of his business to hold a Court of Petty Sessions periodically. Two churches belonged to the town, and both conducted services about once each month. The Rev. Father O'Tighe officiated at the Roman Catholic Church, while the Church of England was cared for by the Rev. John Dixon. The public school, with a large enrolment of about seventy children, was taught by Mrs. George Taylor. The school was still conducted in the Catholic Church, as it had been since 1861, but the rising enrolment was causing acute problems of accommodation. Two hotels were situated in Cooranbong, the older of the two being James O'Neill's Cricketer's Arms which had been trading for about ten years. The other public house was John O'Leary's Welcome Inn consisting of a small wine saloon and some limited accommodation for travellers. Four stores were owned by Thomas Russell, Thomas Healey, Edwin Coulter, and John Blackford.

The journalist concluded his description of Cooranbong by referring to the new sawmills:

Another important enterprise was recently started at Cooranbong in an extensive way—the Steam Saw Mills of the energetic firm of King and Company of Melbourne—which are under the able management of Mr. J. C. Henry. The mill is now in full working operations, and there are sufficient logs lying on the ground to cut about 150,000 feet of timber straight away. There are about 40 men employed, and it is estimated that from 35,000 to 40,000 feet will be cut weekly, and as the work extends, a number of other hands will be required.

Altogether, this account gives us an interesting glimpse of the town as it was in the middle 1870's. Yet it does not reveal much of the rapid expansion that was occurring in Cooranbong at that time. To picture this development, we ought to spend a short time tracing the history of the various businesses and institutions that contributed to the town's growth. And it seems best to commence this survey with that very important function, the post office.

Storekeeper Thomas Russell had conducted the post office at his store since October 1869, when the office was moved from the schoolmaster's residence.² Arrangements for delivery and despatch of mails were much the same as they had been when the post office was first opened in 1866. The mails were carried from Sydney to East Maitland by steamer, and twice each week the contractor, James Wamsley junior, of Cooranbong, picked up the mail bag from the post office at Mount Vincent and travelled on horseback to Cooranbong, Blue Gum Flat, and Gosford, delivering letters to farms scattered along the road. Near the crossing of Wyong Creek was a small inn kept by Matthew Woodbury, and here the mailman stopped for refreshment and changed his horse before continuing the journey. For this mail run, Wamsley received the sum of ninety-five pounds per annum.³

A directory published about 1872⁴ printed the following timetable of mail services to Cooranbong:

Cooranbong. 123 miles north of Sydney. Mail closes at G.P.O. Mon., Fri. at 5.30 p.m.; arrives Wed. at 10.00 a.m., and on Sat. at 4.15 p.m. Leaves Cooranbong on Sat. 9.00 a.m., Wed. 3.00 p.m.; arrives Sydney Tues. and Thurs. evening. Route: steam to Newcastle, or Morpeth; rail East Maitland, 36m. Cooranbong.

In 1874 a post office was opened at Catherine Hill Bay, and since mails to that settlement came via Cooranbong, a contract was given to Patrick Owens of Cooranbong to conduct a twice-weekly service on horseback between the two places, for which he received thirty pounds per annum. A year later the contract price was raised to fifty pounds.⁵

² Postmaster-General's Department: *Cooranbong, a post office history*.

³ *Swansea, a post office history*.

⁴ *New South Wales Country Directory*, published about 1872.

⁵ *Swansea, a post office history*.

An interesting petition for an improved mail service was signed by residents of the Cooranbong district in November 1874.⁶ The petitioners explained that they were currently receiving four mails from Sydney each week: two coming via Maitland and Mount Vincent, and two via Peat's Ferry and Gosford. It was requested that a 'more direct' mail service be provided, and it was suggested that mail might be forwarded to Cooranbong from Wallsend, which had the benefit of a daily mail from Sydney. The petitioners mentioned that they were receiving 'four mails a week by such a roundabout way that we would willingly be satisfied with one less, by a direct route'. The postmaster at Wallsend supported this, but the department hesitated to introduce this service when the contractor, James Wamsley, advised that he could not undertake to convey the mail to Wallsend instead of Mount Vincent, 'because the road to Wallsend is far worse than the road to Mount Vincent, and besides there are three creeks to cross which are not crossable by any little fresh'.

After giving careful consideration to the matter, the Postmaster-General decided in favour of the Wallsend route, and the residents at Cooranbong were advised that from 1st February 1875 Mr. Wamsley would convey mails twice weekly between Wallsend and Cooranbong.⁷ However, the *Miner's Advocate* of 30th January regarded the new arrangement with some disfavour:

Mail arrangements between Wallsend and Cooranbong.

According to recent arrangements mails are to be transmitted between the above mentioned places twice a week. The mails arrive in Wallsend on Thursday and Saturdays, but we think the post office authorities have made a mistake in the days fixed for their despatch from Wallsend. The Government professes to have a tender conscience in all that relates to Sabbath observance and to the quick delivery of mails. In this case, however, they have defeated their good intentions, as by despatching the mails from Wallsend on Fridays and Sundays, they force the postmaster to break the Sabbath, while they keep the Cooranbong people a day later out of their letters and papers, the Saturday morning mail not being taken from Wallsend until Sunday.

A few days later the same newspaper announced⁸ that the mail arrangements between Wallsend and Cooranbong had fallen through because the contractor had refused to carry mail on the Sabbath. Eventually, though, a compromise was reached, and the new service became a reality. It is interesting to notice that the government did not abandon the twice-weekly mail service via Mount Vincent, and for a time both services operated. Wamsley managed somehow to handle both mail runs.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *MA*, 23 Jan. 1875.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 13 Feb. 1875.

Having achieved the improved mail services, the residents of Cooranbong began to press for the introduction of the electric telegraph to the town. A request was submitted in the form of a petition signed by many settlers of Cooranbong and Gosford districts. The petition read, in part, as follows:⁹

There are at present, in and immediately around the township of Cooranbong, four large steam sawmills in active operation, regularly shipping large quantities of sawn timber to the Newcastle and Sydney markets.

In addition to this the important industry of shipbuilding is extensively carried on at both Gosford and Cooranbong. These places are, in consequence, daily increasing in population and importance.

From the extensive operations carried on with these townships, and the number of steam and sailing vessels employed in the trade, your petitioners are frequently being placed to great inconvenience for the want of telegraph communication.

We, therefore, most respectfully request that you will be pleased to cause to be established an electric telegraph station at each of the townships of Gosford and Cooranbong . . . that the line at present reaching Wallsend might be extended to Cooranbong, a distance of 18 miles, and thence to Gosford, 30 miles.

Again the government was sympathetic, and plans were made for the extension of the telegraph line from Wallsend to Cooranbong, and south to Gosford. In those days telegraph offices were often established independent of post offices in small towns, due in a measure to problems of finding staff who could operate the telegraph instruments. In Cooranbong, however, Thomas Russell felt qualified to handle the telegraph, and in March of 1878 he advised the Superintendent of Telegraphs¹⁰ that he was enlarging his business premises and was building an office 'for the telegraph' adjoining the post office. He wrote:

If you approve of what I have done would you kindly instruct H. Watsford, Esq., Inspector of the Line now in course of erection from Wallsend to Cooranbong and Gosford, to cause the wire to be brought to the Post Office at Cooranbong. . . . Any time that you intend to inspect the line from Wallsend to Cooranbong and Gosford I will meet you with my buggy if you would kindly give me notice.

In submitting this plan, Russell was opposed by a large number of the residents of Cooranbong, and a further petition was prepared, bearing over eighty signatures, claiming that

the building lately used as a temporary Court-house is now obtainable at a nominal rent and would answer well for a temporary Post and Telegraph Office till a permanent one could be erected on the spare land adjoining the Court-house where is ample space.

⁹ NMH, 20 Feb. 1877.

¹⁰ *Cooranbong, a post office history.*

Another offer was made by John O'Leary, who was prepared to let or sell to the department a small sawn-slab cottage of three rooms for conversion as a post and telegraph office. This building was located at the rear of O'Leary's house, which had formerly been used as a public house, known as Welcome Inn.

Ultimately the Postmaster-General's Department decided to erect its own building to house the post and telegraph offices. Meanwhile the telegraph line from Wallsend reached Cooranbong, and on 2nd September 1878 a telegraph office was opened with George P. Webb from Maitland in charge. The office was located temporarily at Russell's store, and for six weeks the two branches of the department were cared for independently of each other, Russell handling the mails and Webb the telegraph. However, on 16th October 1878 Russell was relieved of his duties, and George Webb became the community's post and telegraph master. By this time a young man named Reeve had been appointed to the office as a telegraph messenger.

About this time a postal inspector visited Cooranbong and recommended that a portion of the five-acre paddock on which the court house stood might be obtained as a site for a post and telegraph building. Transfer of some of the land was arranged, and approval given for the erection of a suitable building. Two years after the amalgamation of the post and telegraph offices, in September of 1880, the tender of William Humphreys for the erection of the post and telegraph office was accepted. The contract price was £1,316, and the work was to be completed in nine months.

William Humphreys resided at Cooranbong, and with locally obtained sandstone he was able to erect a very fine building, which was occupied in May 1881. At the front of the building, Humphreys provided a circular recess where a town clock could be fitted. However, the clock was never provided. The building housed the post office for over seventy years, and is now used as the postmaster's residence.

By 1883 Cooranbong received three mails each week from Wallsend, the times of arrival being 7 p.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.¹¹

While the post office was experiencing this period of development, a number of interesting changes were affecting the public school at Cooranbong. When the Provisional School had first opened in 1861, it convened each day in the Catholic Church which was leased for that purpose for a period of seventeen years.¹² The early history of the school has already been chronicled up to the end of 1869 when the teacher, Thomas D'Aran, was transferred to another school. D'Aran was replaced by Mrs. Maria Healy, who came from the Blue Gum Flat school early in 1870 and taught until August 1873, when she resigned. Her successor was Elizabeth Taylor from the school at Mangrove. Her husband, George Taylor, taught at Mandalong school for a short period.

¹¹ *Newcastle Nautical Almanac and Guide to the Port of Newcastle*, 1883.

¹² Education Department: correspondence relating to Cooranbong school, 1861-80.

After 1875 the school enrolment increased rapidly, and the Catholic Church building proved inadequate to accommodate the children. On 12th August 1877 the residents of Cooranbong forwarded a petition to the Department of Public Instruction:

We, the Police Magistrate and the undersigned residents of the township of Cooranbong, beg most respectfully your consideration of the following reasons which we earnestly urge for the erection of a public school and the appointment of a suitable teacher. . . . Our school is at present conducted in a building used by a Church for religious purposes, and although many of us who sign this petition are members of that denomination we consider it undesirable to continue the school in the present building.

Almost seventy signatures were appended, the first five being those of the town's Police Magistrate, Edward Reeve, and the four members of the local school board: Patrick O'Leary, Thomas Humphreys, Frederick A. Hely, and Edward Taylor. The Rev. John Dixon, Anglican clergyman for the Lake Macquarie district, supported the petition with a letter of his own.

The department favoured the building of a school, particularly since the seventeen-year lease of the church building was due to expire in 1878, but there did not appear to be any government land available in the town. This problem was communicated to the school board, and late in 1877 a meeting of citizens was called to try to find a site for a public school. It appears that the only satisfactory offer was made by Thomas Russell who owned a fairly large portion of land on the hill behind the post office and court house. The Department of Public Instruction finally accepted Russell's offer, and plans were drawn up for a schoolroom, teacher's residence, and an underground water tank.

Residents of the town were not satisfied with the progress of events, however, and a second petition was sent in March 1878, urging that tenders be called immediately for the erection of the new school: 'The school that do exist at Coorombong is not sufficient for the number of children that is in Coorombong.' A report in October 1877 indicated that fifty-seven children were then attending the school. However, the enrolment in 1878 was expected to reach seventy.

At last tenders were invited for the erection of the school, and the successful contractor was Robert Creighton of Gosford, whose tender price for the classroom, teacher's cottage, and underground tank was £620. By February of 1879 he had erected the framework of the schoolroom, and the building was ready for occupation by the end of the year. The building was urgently needed, for the school enrolment had reached seventy-five pupils by the end of 1879. The new classroom was designed to accommodate a maximum of seventy-seven children.

Mrs. Taylor was not privileged to teach at the new school, for she was transferred at the end of 1879, and the new teacher was a Mr. Farrell, who

came expecting to cope with a class of almost eighty children. Instead, within a few weeks of opening the new school, the attendance fell to less than twenty-five pupils. Farrell explained the cause of this dramatic decline in a letter to the Department in April of 1880:

A short time ago the Rev. Dean Sheridan visited this locality for the purpose of ascertaining whether there was an opening for a Catholic School, and as a result of his visit, four Sisters of St. Joseph arrived here lately and on Easter Monday last they opened a school in the Catholic Church. All the Catholic parents have been ordered by their clergyman (who comes each week from Brisbane Water) to withdraw their children from the Public School, which the majority have done. . . . About 50 children have been obliged to leave the Public School, and during the last week, I have had an average of only 23 children, half of which were Roman Catholics.

The decision to open a Catholic school at Cooranbong was not made as hurriedly as Farrell's letter would appear to indicate.¹³ In January 1879 a proposition had been made to the trustees of the church estate to build a church and a school, or a school-church, of brick or stone construction, to replace the existing weatherboard church. This proposition had taken definite shape in March of the following year, when Rev. Sheridan visited Cooranbong and recommended that a new church and school should be erected in the town. Finance was not immediately available, however, and for the time being the school classes were to be conducted in the old church, where the public school had convened for nineteen years. The trustees of the church land made one important condition: that a new school or church, if erected, must be completed ready for use by 1st January 1884, when the current five-year lease would expire. As events turned out, the expiration date arrived before any attempt was made to erect the new building, and so the question of constructing a new Catholic Church had to be postponed indefinitely. However, the Sisters of St. Joseph were able to acquire or lease another small piece of land at Cooranbong, and there a two-storied Catholic school was erected. Generally known as the 'Cooranbong Convent School', it contained facilities for a limited number of boarding students, who came from outlying districts.

We must return now to the story of the public school, where we left Mr. Farrell with a class of only twenty-three pupils. The District Inspector of Schools was asked to report on the situation in April 1880, and he advised that the school might be forced to close if the enrolment fell below fifteen. He suggested that if the average remained below twenty-five pupils, the school should be downgraded to a Provisional School. Mr. Farrell requested a transfer elsewhere, and at the commencement of 1881 he was replaced by James Lappan from the Cessnock school, to which Farrell was appointed. A year later the teacher at Cooranbong was John Shanahan, and he was

¹³ Letter from J. S. W. Buckland to Rev. Mr. Keating, Cooranbong, dated 8 June 1885 (Mitchell Library File Ab. 107).

shortly followed by a man named Blackwood. During this time the school attendance had been falling steadily, until in July 1884 the public school was closed because only six pupils were in attendance. The teacher's residence was rented indefinitely to Mr. F. E. Brunker from Maitland.

The school remained closed for about eighteen months. It reopened early in 1886, following an application from a number of parents who guaranteed that there would be a minimum enrolment of twenty-four pupils. The new teacher was Mr. Mark Lee, who came from the school at Hamilton, and arrived at Cooranbong by Johnson's ferry-boat in November of 1885. The attendance remained small for many years, but the school was never again forced to close.

Much of the early history of the Catholic Church at Cooranbong has already been chronicled in connection with the school developments. The original wooden church building was used until about 1906, when the existing brick structure was erected. The Anglicans at Cooranbong had a wooden church constructed in 1870 or very shortly afterwards. It was situated on a small portion of land adjoining the post office, and services were conducted there for upwards of seventy years. Finally the church was pulled down after a period of disuse.

In 1875 the number of hotels in Cooranbong corresponded with the number of churches—that is to say, there were two. It appears that the town's first publican was James O'Neill who opened the Cricketer's Arms about 1865. It was a single-storied building, and the main hotel in Cooranbong until about 1880, when the Heart and Hand joined in the trade. In later years, O'Neill's hotel was popularly known as the Royal.

James O'Neill's first competitor in the liquid trade was John O'Leary, who opened a winebar prior to 1875, when he traded under the sign of Welcome Inn. Shortly after that, O'Leary closed his business for a few years, but his premises were again open as a wine saloon during the Eighties.

On the western side of the Catholic Church, Edwin Coulter established a general store about 1875. With his brother Sam, Edwin owned and operated one or two ketches of the timber cargo fleet, and in those days a general store was a profitable concern if you possessed your own means of importing stock. About 1880 Edwin Coulter turned his business to greater profit by erecting a two-storied hotel which he christened the Heart and Hand. This and O'Neill's Cricketer's Arms were the two hotels mentioned in a description of the town in 1883.¹⁴ The Heart and Hand was pulled down after the railway boom, and a house now standing on the site is said to contain some of the timber from the old hotel.

About 1886 a third hotel was opened in Cooranbong. The proprietor was Thomas Healey, who had managed a general store since the early 1870's. In 1875 Healey was reported to be erecting a new store in the town.¹⁵

¹⁴ Newcastle *Almanac*, *op. cit.*, 1883.

¹⁵ *NMH*, 16 Oct. 1875.

Several of our enterprising townspeople have done a little in the building line recently, but the most notable is Mr. Thos. Heley, whose business has increased so much that he finds it necessary to increase his storage accommodation, and with this object in view is erecting a substantial and commodious building in a more central part of the town, viz., adjoining Mr. James O'Neill's Cricketers' Home Hotel, where he hopes to meet his friends from the four points of the compass.

It was about ten years after this move that Healey enlarged his business a second time by opening an hotel in the premises he had been using as a general store. Healey entered the hotel trade when Cooranbong was enjoying a period of unprecedented prosperity, brought about by the construction of the northern railway through the district. The Healey hotel was forced to close shortly after the railway work was completed, and prior to 1900 it was rented to the Seventh-day Adventists who came to Cooranbong to establish a boarding school.

There were two storekeepers of early Cooranbong who chose not to enter the business of hotel management. Thomas Russell had opened the town's first store, and it maintained pre-eminence throughout the nineteenth-century history of the town. Russell entered the storekeeping business as the owner of a trading ketch, by which he transported to Cooranbong the commodities which he sold, and in this way he became the first of the 'ship-owner-cum-storekeeper' class which characterized the town's early years. We must credit Russell with being one of the most enterprising business men in the lake district, for he played an active part in a number of organizations, including the Lake Macquarie Improvement Association during the 1880's. For many years he was a member of the local school board at Cooranbong, and was the town's postmaster for nearly ten years. In 1875 he pioneered the lake tourist trade by launching the steam ferry appropriately named *Pioneer*, a large and comfortable boat which carried excursion parties about the lake, and transported mine workers from Speer's Point to near Catherine Hill Bay. Russell's store at Cooranbong was a large building, situated opposite the post office and the court house. Eventually the store was sold out to the Jurd family, who carried on the business until the shop was burned down on the night of 28th January 1925.¹⁶

The second storekeeper who did not turn publican was John Blackford. He carried on business in a 'miniature way' until 1875, when he was reported to be making extensive improvements to his premises.¹⁷ John and his brother Adolphus owned one or two of the ketches engaged in the timber trade.

One of the most essential institutions in the town's early history was the police station. It is significant that this was the community's oldest institution, for a police officer had been placed there in 1835, when a lock-up was

¹⁶ From a personal diary kept by Mrs. Annie King (Avondale College Library).

¹⁷ *MA*, 5 June 1875.

erected for the purpose of detaining runaways. In the following years the Brisbane Water Police Office had kept a constable stationed there. Then in 1873 the Police Department established a police station at Cooranbong, on a section of land opposite Russell's store.¹⁸ One of the first constables at the new station was Robert Gamble. There was also a resident magistrate who held a Court of Petty Sessions at regular intervals. The court was well patronized, with cases coming from Catherine Hill Bay as well as from the local area.¹⁹ The new police station did not contain a lock-up, but it was not uncommon for drunken and disorderly persons to be placed in the old convict lock-up situated near the roadway at the front of the Catholic Church.

A new court house adjoining the police quarters was constructed by 1878.²⁰ At this time the local Police Magistrate was Edward Reeve who conducted the courts at Cooranbong for about ten years; the constable in charge was a man named Coglán. The constable had often to interfere and break up riots, which usually occurred when a large number of the townspeople came together in one place. The citizens of Cooranbong took an active interest in the political affairs of the colony, and public meetings were frequently called to voice a protest against some measure or other. The *Miner's Advocate* publicized one such meeting:²¹

Cooranbong. There is great dissatisfaction in this little town concerning Mr. Piddington's Immigration Scheme, and a large meeting will be held at Mr. James O'Neill's Cricketer's Arms on Saturday next, for the purpose of petitioning Parliament against the measure.

Brawls were the usual outcome of these meetings. Generally a few persons suffered minor injuries in these scimmages, but on one occasion a man was killed and a police officer seriously injured. This was a notable riot, and brought the town a good deal of unfavourable publicity. Here is the story, as quoted in the *Sydney Mail* some years after the incident:²²

It was at Healy's Pub that a ding-dong fight occurred between a band of navvies engaged at that time in building the railway bridge at Dora Creek, and two policemen, Jordan and Mackenzie. The men arrived one Saturday afternoon, vowing to take charge of the pub, and quickly went into action. Mackenzie found himself pinned to the ground by three drunks, one of whom brandished a knife in his face. At that moment Jim Wellings, now a hearty man of 85 years, blew in upon the scene, and seizing a twitch-stick from a waggon, laid out the prospective murderer with one blow, then kept the mob at bay by swinging a paling torn from the fence about him. The

¹⁸ From Police Department records.

¹⁹ *MA*, 5 June 1875.

²⁰ *Cooranbong, a post office history*.

²¹ *MA*, 5 June 1875.

²² *Sydney Mail*, 3 Aug. 1938.

battle ended in two casualties, one of the navvies receiving a shot through the throat, another a bullet in the groin, whilst a third escaped with a hole drilled through the rim of his hat. The wounded men were attended by the nuns of the convent then established at Cooranbong, and in due course the marauders received sentences at Maitland.

Wellings was commended by the Judge for his action and presented with a gold watch and £10 out of the police funds for gallantry. That was not the only service Jim has rendered to the State. He lived to be the father of 20 children and also cared for the child of a young mother in indigent circumstances.

In the Newcastle *Almanac* of 1883, Edward Reeve was listed as Police Magistrate for the district, and Mr. Cogan as Officer in Charge of Police, Acting Clerk of Petty Sessions, and Registrar of the Small Debts Court. A year later Cogan was transferred to another district, and a man named O'Brien succeeded him. At the same time Mr. Reeve junior was appointed Clerk of Petty Sessions, thus raising the police staff at Cooranbong to three. Constable Jordan succeeded O'Brien, and by 1889 Cogan was back for a second term.²³ Both the police station and court house continued to function at Cooranbong until 31st December 1919, when the station was closed. A new station was opened at Morisset on the following day.²⁴

Cooranbong was not without its sporting life during the period of its prosperity. As early as 1864 a cricket club had functioned in the town, but by 1875 the main interest had changed to horse-racing. A racecourse was developed by clearing a portion of the bushland on the northern side of Dora Creek, at a distance of almost a mile from the town. The earliest report of the 'Cooranbong Races' is located in the *Miner's Advocate* of 16th October 1875. It stated that the races had been held the previous Friday on John O'Leary's course. The attendance was described as 'very large', and two mounted policemen were there to keep order. After the race, a horse and cattle sale was conducted at the Cricketer's Arms hotel.

On 26th January 1877 the Gosford Jockey Club held its annual races at the Cooranbong racecourse. President of the club was Edward Reeve, the district Police Magistrate, and on this occasion Matthew Woodbury of Wyong Creek was the judge. There were four hundred spectators from places as far away as Wollombi and Gosford. A visitor who sent a report of the event to the Newcastle press²⁵ was not at all impressed by 'the miserable little structure they call the grand stand'.

Shortly after this event, advertisements began to appear for the Cooranbong Races scheduled for Easter Monday. Richard Gorman of Cooranbong was the secretary of the organizing committee.²⁶ Other local personalities

²³ Newcastle *Almanac*, *op. cit.*, various issues from 1884 to 1889.

²⁴ From Police Department records.

²⁵ *NMH*, 2 Feb. 1877.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7 Mar. 1877.

who owned racehorses included James O'Neill, Thomas Russell, and James Wellings.

Much of the activity that characterized life at Cooranbong centred about the town's importance as a lake port. There was a constant stream of traffic between the main wharf and the town, and the numbers of sailors seen lounging about the hotels on almost any evening gave the place a salty atmosphere. The success of Cooranbong as a port was dependent to a great extent upon the navigability of Dora Creek, and there were times when it became necessary to clear fallen trees and other obstructions from the waterway. During 1877 the government dredge *Titan* was engaged for some weeks²⁷ in moving silt from the mouth of the creek. Eight years later, Samuel Randell of Pelican Flat signed a contract with the Public Works Department to remove snags from Dora Creek. Randell was required

to find all barges, labour and tools, and materials necessary for the removal of all logs, trees, stumps, etc. from that portion of Dora Creek lying between the loading place at Cooranbong and the mouth of the Creek, leaving a clear depth of 6 feet of water throughout. . . . Also to erect 12 dolphins of approved turpentine at such places as are required. The total sum for both jobs being £100.²⁸

This work was completed within three months.

We commenced this chapter with a descriptive picture of Cooranbong at the time of a journalist's visit in 1875. It seems appropriate to conclude with a description of the place during the Eighties, when the town had reached the highest point of its prosperity. The following extract is printed from the Newcastle *Almanac* of 1883:

Cooranbong. About 25 miles in a south-westerly direction from Newcastle. It is at present the principal town on the Lake, and where the greater part of the timber is shipped. There are four steam sawmills, owned by Messrs. King and Co., J. Lancaster, Shea, and Moon; two Hotels, the 'Cricketer's Arms' by James O'Neill, and the 'Hand and Heart', by Edwin Coulter; three stores, by Messrs. Thomas Russell, T. Healy, and J. Blackford, and another about to be erected by Messrs. Dodd, Gould, and Livingstone. There is also a new Court House and Police Station. Mr. Edward Reeve, Police Magistrate and Coroner for the district, holds Court on the second Monday in every month. Mr. Cogan, Officer in charge of Police, who is also Acting Clerk of Petty Sessions and Registrar Small Debts Court; new Post and Telegraph Office, Mr. G. P. Webb, Postmaster. Divine Service is held by Church of England and Roman Catholic. There is also a Public School, presided over by Mr. Blackwood; and a Roman Catholic School by the Sisters of St. Joseph. Cooranbong is destined to become a very

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17 Nov. 1877.

²⁸ Public Works Department: file of contracts, 1 July 1885 (Archives Office).

important town—coal crops out in every direction, it is situated in the midst of a fine timber and agricultural country. The Railway to connect the Northern Line with Sydney will probably go through its centre, and Dora Creek is navigable to within half-a-mile of it.

Surely this depicted a town with a future! Yet some surprises were in store for the prophets of prosperity. By a remarkable chain of events, the principal town of Lake Macquarie was shortly to become an almost forgotten relic on a back-road to Sydney.

19

TALES OF THREE VILLAGES

FROM the township of Cooranbong comparatively minor roads lead away to three villages. Eastward, and downstream from the town, is the community of Dora Creek, which sits astride the busy railway line connecting Sydney with the north. Westward of Cooranbong, and about three miles upstream from it, is the village of Martinsville, populated for the most part by farmers and timber-workers. The third of the three communities is Mandalong, a very scattered and sparsely populated district occupying the valley of Stockton Creek, a tributary of the Dora. Each one of these hamlets has an interesting past, since each developed originally as a dependent settlement of Cooranbong. The fact that these communities shared a common relationship to the regional town is a sufficient reason for us to place them together in this chapter.

The village of Dora Creek has the distinction of having developed from the first town ever formed in the Lake Macquarie district. This was the town of Newport, whose establishment in 1840 has already been described. This early attempt to create a town and lake port proved a failure, and demonstrated the futility of trying to build a town on little more than over-enthusiastic newspaper publicity. By 1861 only a handful of settlers clung on in the Newport district; but with the passing of the Robertson Land Acts in that year, and the sudden emergence of Cooranbong, a new set of economic factors began to affect the neglected Newport district, and by degrees a prosperous village developed. And this time it was a permanent community.

During the Sixties the movement of timber and shingles down the lake from Cooranbong increased steadily, and this trade benefited the settlers along the banks of Dora Creek. It provided them with new contacts with the world outside, and the little ketches returning from Sydney brought the settlers their rations of flour, tea, sugar, and other basic commodities. It also brought a small but active population of timber-workers and shingle-splitters who provided themselves with slab huts of rough-hewn timber, and then settled their families in the area.

By 1870 there were a dozen or more families residing in the Newport district, many of these having come as timber-workers during the years immediately preceding. By this time, too, a general store had been opened, and as community consciousness developed, a need was felt for a school. It was in January of 1870 that the residents of Newport petitioned for a Provisional School.¹ Their petition was prepared by Rev. John Shaw, an Anglican clergyman of Newcastle whose parish included the entirety of Lake Macquarie. He nominated four local citizens who were willing to constitute a school board. These were Henry Robert Worley (a farmer), James Mills (bootmaker), Henry Denny (farmer), and Dennis Culla (carpenter). Mr. Shaw also mentioned that another of the local settlers, John Douglass, could offer a room suitable for a school and was prepared to teach, although he had received no training for this profession. The proposed schoolroom was contained in a building of weatherboard and shingle construction, measuring thirty-seven feet in length, and with a width which varied from fifteen feet at one end to nearly eighteen feet at the other. The schoolroom itself had a dimension of roughly sixteen feet on each side. The rest of the building constituted 'Mr. Douglass' apartments'.

The petition for a school was supported by the following residents:

Thomas Penfold—2 miles from school. 4 children.

Dennis Culla— $\frac{1}{4}$ mile. Children Daniel and Mary, and he was guardian of

Elenor Moroney, aged 10 years.

Frederick Smith—100 yards. 3 girls.

John Douglass—William, aged 4 years.

Henry Denny—1 mile. Children William, George, Joseph, Sarah.

Henry R. Worley— $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles. Henry, aged 6 years.

James Mills—Newport. James, Alexander, and 3 girls.

William Boyed—Newport. 2 girls.

DI. McGuinness—Newport. Thomas.

Daniel [??]—Newport. Guardian of William Moroney.

Thomas Calleen—Dorah Creek (1 mile). 2 girls.

This list contains a total of twenty-seven children who were considered to be of school age. The department granted the application immediately, and John Douglass was appointed schoolmaster. A number of items of school furniture arrived later in 1870 on board the ketch *Turtle*.

In addition to the eleven families whose names appeared on the school petition, we know of at least four other settlers who were residing in the Newport district by 1870: Frederick Hely, John Goodman, Timothy Ryan, and John Fuller. The Fuller family suffered a sad bereavement in 1872, when their infant daughter was burned to death in their home. It appears that the parents, John and Jane Fuller, had gone to a stockyard about one hundred yards from the house to milk their cattle, leaving three young

¹ Council of Education: correspondence relating to Newport school, 1870.

children in the house. When they heard screams, the parents rushed over to the cottage and found their daughter had been severely burned. They ran a short distance to the home of Mrs. Elizabeth Ryan, who treated the child, but the little one died shortly afterwards.²

A circumstance that militated against the development of a 'community' at Newport was the fact that there were almost equal numbers of settlers living on each side of the creek, and there was no bridge or fording place. The school was on the northern side of the creek, and because of difficulties in ferrying children across the stream twice daily, two of the parents, James Mills and James Wamsley, requested in 1875 that a boat be supplied by the Council of Education.³

We beg respectfully to enquire if the Council of Education would be pleased to grant a boat for the Newport Provisional School to enable the teacher to ferry the children over Dora Creek mornings and evenings. . . . We wish to explain that eleven children of the twenty-five now attending this School are from families residing on the south side of Dora Creek, and that during the past five years Mr. H. R. Worley has allowed the use of his boat, and his family has kindly ferried the children across. But now his boat has become so old and leaky that it will be soon unfit for use.

The Council replied that it was not its practice to supply school boats.

The Newport schoolmaster, John Douglass, may be described as having been the leading citizen of the place during its developing years. He was born on Norfolk Island in the year 1840, his father having served there as a member of the 50th Regiment which kept the convict population in order.⁴ Young John and his wife Mary purchased a number of adjoining allotments at Newport early in the Sixties, and by 1866 Douglass had opened a store to supply the needs of the district settlers.⁵ This enterprise may have preceded Thomas Russell's store at Cooranbong. When in 1870 Douglass became the village schoolmaster, his premises came to be regarded as the hub or gathering place of the community, and it is not surprising that some years later a post office was established at his store. Nor was it unusual that regular Church of England services should have been held in his school-room before a church building could be erected.

A brief description of the village of Newport was published in 1875, the author having completed an excursion to the Cooranbong district.⁶

New Port, situated on the banks of Dora Creek, about four miles from Cooranbong. It is a pretty little hamlet, and comprises about twenty houses, with perhaps one hundred inhabitants—who are chiefly engaged in the timber trade. There is a very comfortable building there used as a

² GPO: 'Gosford Depositions, 1855-1878', depositions taken 9 Sep. 1872.

³ Correspondence relating to Newport school, 1875.

⁴ Correspondence relating to Newport school, 1870.

⁵ Postmaster-General's Department: *Cooranbong, a post office history*.

⁶ *MA*, 9 June 1875.

Provisional School, which was established mainly through the representations of Rev. John Shaw. There are some 60 children on the roll, with an average attendance of about 40. Mr. John Douglass is the teacher—a gentleman of most amiable and retiring disposition.

The writer added that Mr. Douglass kept a fine orange orchard, some grape vines, and cultivated an attractive flower garden outside the schoolroom.

Timber-cutting was the major source of income for the early residents of Newport, and nearly half a dozen small sawmills operated there at various times. One of these mills was operated for many years by the brothers Frederick and William Hely, on the creek bank a short distance upstream from the railway station. A wharf alongside the mill enabled timber to be loaded directly onto boats. When the railway line was opened in 1887, the Helys moved their sawmill to a new site close to the railway station, and there it remained for some years.

The Newcastle *Almanac*⁷ of 1883 designated Newport as 'an agricultural village on Dora Creek' and having a scattered population mostly employed in farming and timber-getting. The Provisional School had an enrolment of twenty-one children, and Church of England services were conducted regularly in the community. The *Almanac*'s emphasis on agriculture reminds us that for some years prior to this time a number of Chinamen cultivated grapes, passionfruit, and vegetables along the banks of Dora Creek near its entrance to the lake.

After thirteen years of teaching, John Douglass resigned from this profession in June 1883, in order to give his full energies to the storekeeping business. The new schoolmaster was a young man named Peter Gardiner, who a little later married a local maiden, Lydia Wamsley. In 1885 the Newport Provisional School was raised in status to a public school, with an average attendance of twenty-one pupils in that year.⁸ It was eleven years afterwards that an acre of ground west of the railway station was resumed for a school, and a new building erected there.

During April of 1885 John Douglass addressed a request to the Postmaster-General that a post office be opened at his store, which now occupied a building separate from the school, though next door to it. His letter stated that there were about seventeen permanent residents (resident families?) at Newport, besides a large number of persons employed on the railway works which included the building of a bridge over the creek. Douglass supplied his postal address as 'Doree, Cooranbong', by which he intended that the post office should be known as the Doree Post Office. The postmaster at Cooranbong, George Webb, reported favourably on this application, but commented that Newport was the correct name of the place, 'Doree' being merely the name of Douglass' residence.⁹

⁷ *Newcastle Nautical Almanac and Guide to the Port of Newcastle*, 1883.

⁸ Department of Public Instruction: correspondence—Newport, 1883-85.

⁹ Postmaster-General's Department: *Dora Creek, a post office history*.

A postal receiving office was opened with the name of Newport on 16th July 1885 under the superintendence of Louisa Douglass. Her father was paid an allowance of thirteen pounds per annum to carry the mail twice weekly to and from the Cooranbong Post Office, though after a short time this mail contract was taken over by Mr. Webb of Cooranbong, and a few months later by James Wamsley junior.

The receiving office at Newport had been open only a few days when Miss Douglass wrote to the department with the complaint that confusion was arising through the use of the name 'Newport'. She said that letters addressed to Newport Beach near Sydney were in error being sent to her office, and to avoid this she recommended that her office be renamed 'Doree'. This change was authorized as from 16th September 1885, exactly two months after the office had been opened.

Following a petition for an improved mail service, an extra mail delivery per week was granted in 1887, and Doree was raised to the status of a full post office. Six years later the village's Progress Association formally requested that the name of the post office be altered again, this time to 'Dora Creek', which was the name of the new railway platform there. At about the same time, the Postmaster-General received a petition from some other residents, asking that the name Doree be preserved. A postal inspector who was asked to report on these requests pointed out that the village of Martinsville, about eight miles distant, had had for some years a post office under the name of 'Dora Creek', and he felt that confusion would arise if any change was made in the name of the Doree office. The inspector suggested that the Railway Commissioners might be asked to change the name of the railway station to Doree. This the Commissioners refused to do. The persistence of the Progress Association won out in the end, and on 16th January 1894 Doree Post Office was renamed Dora Creek, which has been the official name of the village ever since.

The construction of the railway line and bridge at Dora Creek increased temporarily the population of the place, and to accommodate some of the 'navvies', one of the Worleys opened a small hotel near the railway line on the southern side of the creek. It survived only while the railway was being constructed, and ultimately the building was burned down. The railway works also influenced John Douglass to move his business a little nearer to the site of the new line. There he kept up the post office-store for a few years more, but finally sold out to another proprietor.

While the majority of the men who worked on the railway line were only temporary citizens of Dora Creek, there were some who remained in the community. The opening of the railway line brought a new period of development to the village, and people tended to settle down close to the railway station as they became more dependent upon this new form of transport, and less dependent upon the boats that plied up and down the creek. When the railway work was completed, some of the residents turned

to fishing, which has become an important industry in the Dora Creek district.

In 1885 the Excelsior Land Company purchased a number of estates near Dora Creek, and subdivided them for housing. One of these estates was situated at Eraring. It was a portion of the original grant to Lieutenant Simpson half a century earlier, and part of the estate which was subdivided for the town of Newport in 1840. Few people today, however, even among the residents of Dora Creek, are aware of the unusual circumstances by which the settlement originated.

Martinsville today is a sleepy village. To many, the place is regarded simply as the 'gateway' to the Wattagan Mountains, and they can call to mind the tiny post office that stands at the commencement of the mountain road. Opposite the post office is an old house that used to be Gearing's general store. But the store has been closed, the windows are boarded up, and there is just the hint that times were once more prosperous than they are today.

To the settlers of a hundred years ago, Martinsville was referred to simply as 'The Brush', the term which settlers used to signify the big timber country that commenced on the western boundary of the Cooranbong clearings and extended back into the mountains for a great and unknown distance. The Brush was not an hospitable country for the early European settlers, but it was a country that contained wealth, and it had to be conquered. In the deep gullies and on the rain-drenched slopes, nature had been prodigal in the production of a forest of the best hardwoods in the colony, and even after a hundred years of slaughter, large patches of forest are still practically untouched by the sawyer.

The first landowners in the upper Dora Creek region did not make any settlement there, and apparently effected no improvements to their properties, which remained as unfenced virgin bushland for a good many years. There were two such landowners, and the first one to receive his grant was a gentleman named Thomas Moore, who is thought to have been a military officer in the colony. On 8th April 1834 Moore was granted sixty acres near what is now identified as the junction of Dora and Deep Creeks at Martinsville, this land being portion 37 of the Parish of Dora. The grant was described as 'a Crown Lands Sale to Thomas Moore under the Seal of Governor Bourke'.¹⁰ We also have a list of the several parties who held the land after Moore, and the dates of transfer were as follows:

8th April 1834	Grant to Thomas Moore
19th July 1834	Mortgage to government and release
30th April 1846	Thos. Moore to S. Elwell
24th June 1846	S. Elwell to E. Close
23rd May 1848	E. Close to W. R. Fripp
1857	R. Fripp to Wm. Andrews
16th Feb. 1877	Sarah Andrews to Sydney Dodds

¹⁰ Correspondence relating to Martinsville school, 1878.

The last mentioned title-holder, Sydney Dodds, became the first school-master at Martinsville.

The second grant of land in the valley was made to Owen Beardmore, dated in May 1854, though it may have been promised to him many years earlier than this. His was a 100-acre grant adjoining Thomas Moore's, and identified as portion 10 of the parish.¹¹ Moore's and Beardmore's were the only two grants in the district when the County Map of 1857 was prepared.

In 1861, when a village emerged at Cooranbong, a few settlers purchased farming land along the creek upstream from the main settlement. But perhaps the first settler to reach Martinsville proper was William Martin with his wife Sarah and their children. Having come originally from Ireland,¹² the Martins settled first in the Brisbane Water district where William joined the timber-cutters. Sometime prior to 1866¹³ the family moved northwards, and the discovery of the wonderful stands of timber in The Brush beyond Cooranbong caused them to make their home right in the heart of it all. A fairly large tract of timbered country was purchased from the Crown, and soon the Martins had established themselves as a family of pioneers in the timber industry beyond Cooranbong. When William Martin died in 1875, his sons continued to work in the forest. One of them, Patrick, worked in the industry until just a few years before his death in 1932.

Other settlers followed the Martins into The Brush, but no real community emerged until after 1875, when King and Company opened its Cooranbong sawmill and the timber industry entered upon a period of rapid expansion. By this time considerable areas of The Brush had been completely cleared of forest, bullock tracks penetrated almost every valley, and settlers were coming to the area with thoughts of farming. One such settler was Sydney Dodds.

Dodds came to The Brush district as a young bachelor soon after 1870, and purchased the sixty acres of land that had originally been Thomas Moore's grant.¹⁴ His intention was to set up a farm, but he knew nothing of the work involved, and within a few years he had lost almost everything. However, young Dodds was a man of talent and initiative, for in 1878 he opened a school after erecting a suitable building on a part of his land. He actually commenced to teach a small class in September of that year, charging a small fee for each pupil who enrolled. In the same month, however, an application was made to the Department of Public Instruction to have the school officially designated a public school with Sydney Dodds as the master. The application was submitted by three residents of The Brush—James Maher, John Edgton, and Denis Martin, all sawyers by occupation—on behalf of the entire community. The school was described as being

¹¹ See map of Parish Dora.

¹² *NMH*, 15 Aug. 1953 (feature article).

¹³ Jeremiah Martin, a son of William, was buried at Cooranbong in 1866.

¹⁴ Correspondence relating to Martinsville school, 1878.

located at 'Deep Creek, Cooranbong', but a more precise statement placed it 'at the junction of the Deep, Gap, and Dora Creeks'. It was stated that the Cooranbong Public School existed within a radius of five miles, but thirty-five children lived within a two-mile radius of the Deep Creek School. Dodds had already arranged for the lease of one acre of land for twenty-one years, and the trustees of this lease were the three citizens who submitted the application. Appended was a statement showing the number of children of school age:

William Barnes	2 miles	2 girls
James Barnes	2 miles	Earnest
Edward Kilday	$\frac{3}{4}$ mile	John, James, and one girl
John Edgton	$1\frac{1}{4}$ miles	James, Albert, and one girl
Catherine Read	$\frac{1}{4}$ mile	Bridget, William, George
Patrick Martin	$\frac{1}{2}$ mile	William, Sarah, Eunice
D. Horigan	1 mile	James, and one girl
James Capper	3 miles	Thomas
D. Culla	1 mile	Daniel
J. Horgan	1 mile	Margaret, Dan
James Maher	$\frac{1}{2}$ mile	5 children

This list yielded a total of twenty-six children. Accompanying the application was a recommendation for Sydney Dodds as a teacher, and this was supported by a short testimonial from George Hadlow, who claimed to have been Dodds' neighbour at Deep Creek for two years. A second reference was enclosed from John Blackford, the Cooranbong storekeeper.

Reporting on the application, the district education inspector wrote:

These people live about three miles back in the Brush from Cooranbong. They need a school. They have provided a building and all things necessary and have a teacher of good local reputation.

And so on 14th December 1878 Dodds was notified of his appointment as teacher of the 'Deep Creek Provisional School, Cooranbong', and the three trustees of the lease were constituted as the local school board, James Maher being secretary.

In May of 1880 Dodds applied for a transfer to a school at Newcastle in order to gain wider experience, and his wish was fulfilled exactly one year later. His successor at Deep Creek was Miss Gleeson, who taught there for eight years. At the time of Dodds' departure, the acre of land on which the school was situated was sold to the Education Department. The name 'Deep Creek' remained attached to the school until 1883, when the title was changed to 'Dorah Creek Public School'. In January 1889 Mr. John Stark replaced Miss Gleeson as the teacher.

The following brief reference to The Brush community dates from 1883:¹⁵

¹⁵ Newcastle *Almanac*, *op. cit.*

Brushgrove. Located about five miles South-West from Cooranbong. This is a farming district—its scattered population employed in farming and timber-splitting. There are some important selections. There is a Public School with fair attendance.

In some respects, the early growth of Martinsville was hampered by its closeness to Cooranbong, where all of the basic community services were provided. Since the residents of The Brush were widely scattered, they tended to think of themselves as outlying settlers of Cooranbong, and not as belonging to a satellite village. Hence, although the population of the valleys at the head of Dora Creek was considerable by the time of the 1880's, hardly any community services existed there at all. The public school alone helped to preserve the identity of the district.

It was not until November 1889 that a post office was established at Martinsville, and then it opened under the name of 'Dora Creek' office.¹⁶ This choice of name was unfortunate, for a short time prior to this a railway platform named Dora Creek had been established at Newport village, less than eight miles away. When the inevitable confusion arose, the Postmaster-General's Department altered the name of the Martinsville Post Office to 'Brush' on 15th December 1892. But by this time a sense of local patriotism had arisen at The Brush, and a meeting of local citizens was called to decide upon an official name for the village. The meeting adopted the name 'Martinsville' in memory of the pioneering family. The new name was adopted officially by the post office on 1st January 1894, and by the Education Department when a new school building was erected a year later.

The first house of worship at Martinsville—the original 'Union Church' with a shingle roof—was erected about the same time as the post office was established. The site for the church was donated by Mr. Isaac Winn of Newcastle, and this gesture prompted its construction by the voluntary labour of local citizens. The church was used as a meeting place for many denominations represented in the district, until it was pulled down in 1924.¹⁷ A new union church was erected on the same spot, and this building still stands today.

The scattered character of the Martinsville population along the valleys of the creeks led to the building of a second, though smaller, church along the Gap Creek road at a distance of some three miles from the first church. Early in the present century a bushfire swept through the little Gap Creek church, reducing it to ashes. A new church was erected near the same spot, but in the early 1930's it too succumbed to the ravages of a forest fire. No attempt was made to rebuild after the second destruction.

Martinsville was founded on the timber industry, and although cutting has been steadily pushed away from the populated valleys into the furthest

¹⁶ Information supplied by the Historical Officer, Postmaster-General's Department.

¹⁷ From the diary of Mrs. Annie King, widow of R. H. King (Avondale College Library).

recesses of the Wattagan, the industry still plays an important part in the village employment. But during the prosperous 1880's dozens of men and teams of bullocks shared the task of bringing tremendous quantities of logs to the sawmills at Cooranbong. There were no large sawmills at Martinsville, though a number of small ones operated in the district at various times in its history. Among these little mills were Barnier's at the top of Mount Falk, Mullard's at the foot of the Wattagan road (this later was the site of the village store), and Espley's near the crossing of Blarney Grove Creek. Other mills were operated at various times in the mountains overlooking Martinsville, but most of them have long since vanished, and their only monuments are largely overgrown clearings, rusted pieces of machinery, or grass-covered mounds of rubble.

Today timber-getting is no longer the occupation of the majority of the residents of Martinsville. Farming activities now predominate, including dairying and citrus orcharding. The shouting of bullock drivers, cracking of stockwhips, bellowing of bullocks, and screech of iron wheels are sounds no longer heard. Today's silence is punctuated only by the whirr of circular saws at Brown's sawmill, or the occasional whine of a heavily-laden 'jinker' creeping down the steep Wattagan road.

In some respects, the history of Mandalong has paralleled that of Martinsville, except that there is less to tell about Mandalong. The district comprises much of the watershed of Stockton Creek, which drains the hilly country south-west of Cooranbong. This area was opened up when Simpson's track led along the main valley to the crossing of the range into the Doralong district. Simpson's 2,000-acre grant, bounded on the north by Dora Creek, extended into the vicinity of Mandalong, and cattle often grazed on the short natural grasses of the flat country.

By 1870 a small population of timber-cutters and farmers had settled in the Mandalong valleys, among them the Tobins, Kellys, Booths, and Morans. Some of these had settled as early as 1861, when so many came to the Cooranbong and surrounding districts. Practically all of the early settlers at Mandalong were Roman Catholics, and by 1876 a small church had been erected at a central point about five miles from the town of Cooranbong.¹⁸ Services were conducted at the church very infrequently, and for a short time a private school was conducted in the building.

As early as June 1875 three residents of the district petitioned the colony's education authorities for a public school. A portion of the petition read as follows:

We, the local Committee of the Provisional School at Mandelong, do hereby send you a description of the proposed site of the land [for a school] . . . It is bounded on the East by the Yambo or Parish road and about 20

¹⁸ Correspondence relating to Mandalong school, 1875-92.

chains more or less from the South side of Mr. John Taylor's selection, and on the opposite side of the road and facing Mr. C. F. Jolling's last selection.

The letter was signed by John Kelly, Michael O'Leary, and Thomas Booth, representing all of the district's residents. It was hoped that the department would purchase the site they had selected for a school, and that a building could then be erected.

The first part of their hopes was realized in March 1877, when two acres of land at Mandalong were set aside for school purposes, and a year later the residents repeated their requests for the provision of a building. It was stated that for some time a certain Miss Buckley had been teaching about twenty children in the Catholic church, but she was resigning in favour of a Mr. George Taylor, whose wife Elizabeth taught at the Cooranbong Public School. The Mandalong citizens asked that a school building be provided, and that George Taylor be appointed schoolmaster. The Department of Public Instruction acceded to the request, and in November 1878 certain materials for the construction of the schoolhouse were sent by steamer to Cooranbong. On the 25th of the same month George Taylor was officially recognized as the master of the 'Mandelong Provisional School'. The parents whose children attended the new school included John Tobin, John Kelly, Thomas Durrington, Peter Carroll, Thomas Booth, Peter Moran, and Thomas Kennedy.

George Taylor taught at Mandalong for five years, when he was replaced by Miss Kenny who came from Wollombi. By 1888 the teacher was Miss L. A. Doyle, who married Albert Worley of Dora Creek three years later. Mandalong School remained a provisional one until 1910. In that year it was raised to public status, but fifteen years later it was forced to close because of a very low attendance. This was in 1925, and although the school was reopened during the period 1932 to 1948, it was finally closed permanently, and the building was removed to Sunnywood in 1953.

Mandalong's days of prosperity lasted while the timber boom continued, and while there was plenty of forest for cutting. During the twentieth century the village has undergone a gradual decline as the older people have passed to their rest, and the younger ones moved to other places. At the present time, Mandalong has neither school nor church, the only village institution being a small telegraph office which is conducted at a private house. There are one or two neat and productive farms in the area, including a dairy and a citrus orchard. But for many years now, the trend of the population has been downward, and this trend will continue unless something new and unforeseen happens to Mandalong.

THE RIBBONS OF STEEL

THE history of Lake Macquarie could be written as a history of communication. This would be a particularly rewarding study, for the region has many natural features which have placed a more-than-usual emphasis on the ways and means of transport.

The most notable influence upon communication is exerted by the lake itself. On the one hand, its sinuous contour allows of no practicable bridging place to connect the eastern and western shores. On the other, the narrow channel opening to the sea is deep enough to enable the smallest classes of vessels to pass through, yet shallow enough to close the lake to navigation by larger ships. This means that while the existence of the lake creates some barriers to land communication, it does to some extent provide opportunities for water transport.

For almost ninety years after the discovery of Lake Macquarie in 1800, overland transportation failed to fill any significant role in the region's development. Of course, dray tracks were cut to provide access to the various settlements and to link the settlers with one another, but these were merely dray tracks and nothing more. It was not until the mid-1880's that anything like a trafficable road connected Belmont with Newcastle, though a dray track had existed there for sixty years. For at least twenty-five years the settlers of Swansea and Catherine Hill Bay districts had no land route to Newcastle, unless they were prepared to tackle a long and circuitous track via Cooranbong, or were content to swim their horses across the Swansea channel. As late as 1880 the residents of Cooranbong could not rely upon any of three existing roads to bring them to neighbouring towns without the risk of mishap: the road to Maitland contained a steep and dangerous section where it crossed the Broken Gap Mountain, the track to Wallsend was almost impassable to vehicles of any description, and the traveller on the southern road to Gosford encountered some perilous creek crossings. A rider from Gosford to Maitland during 1880 was grateful to discover that a bridge had been built over the Wyong Creek, and he commented that prior to this time several people had been drowned at the crossing.¹

¹ Swancott, C. W., *The Brisbane Water Story*, pt. 4, p. 85, quoting from the *Maitland Mercury* of 1880.

After 1850 it was theoretically possible to travel from Sydney to Newcastle by the coastal road. From Peat's Ferry on the lower Hawkesbury a road led across the mountains to the vicinity of Gosford. From here the Old Maitland Road passed through small settlements at Blue Gum Flat and Wyong Creek, and crossed Dora Creek at Cooranbong. After fording Sandy Creek at Inglewood Flat, about three miles north of Cooranbong, the road branched, the westerly branch leading over the Sugarloaf Range to Mount Vincent and Maitland, the easterly one following a fairly direct though largely unimproved route to the old 'Trialba' homestead² and on to Wallsend, from whence a first-class road led to Newcastle. This coastal road from Sydney offered by far the shortest journey to either Maitland or Newcastle, but it is clearly apparent that very few travellers attempted the trip. The majority considered that the direct road was too hazardous, and chose the much longer and less populated route via Wiseman's Ferry and Wollombi.

But the state of the coastal road was of little consequence to the settlers at Lake Macquarie, for they had at their disposal a superior form of transport—the creeks, the lake, and the sea. The timber-workers at Cooranbong were less concerned with the state of the road to Newcastle than they were with keeping Dora Creek free of logs and silt. The coal companies at the lake were much more interested in having the Swansea channel improved than in having a first-class road to connect their properties with Newcastle, though they would have liked to have had both. For the majority of the lake district citizens the waterways were highly valued because they presented the only available effective method of moving the lake's products to distant markets. The roads, though poor, were good enough for droving cattle and presented few problems for the mailmen. At one period the Postmaster-General actually considered the possibility of having practically all of the Lake Macquarie mails carried by ferry-boat services.³

Initially, boats were introduced on the lake purely for the purpose of transporting goods, chiefly timber and coal. Later, however, passenger services were introduced. The leader in the ferry traffic was Thomas Russell with his steamboat *Pioneer* in 1875. This ferry-boat was furnished with all conveniences for tourists, and was highly praised in the Newcastle press.⁴ Powered by a ten-horsepower steam engine, *Pioneer* comfortably carried one hundred passengers while drawing only three feet of water. The ferry provided regular passenger services for Catherine Hill Bay miners, and for Cooranbong people who wished to visit Newcastle. For the latter, Belmont wharf was the ferry's terminus, and from that point passenger coaches made daily journeys to Newcastle.

Russell's successor in the ferry enterprise was the Wallsend merchant,

² NHDHS journal, v. 10 (1955-56): *The Great North Road* by W. J. Goold, who quotes a description of the road from an unspecified source.

³ This was in 1877. See *Belmont, a post office history*.

⁴ *MA*, 5 June 1875.

W. W. Johnson, whose steam launches known as 'Little' and 'Big' *Pinafore* made daily trips between Miller's wharf (Cockle Creek), Swansea, and Cooranbong. By 1888 Johnson was meeting opposition from at least two other ferry-boat proprietors. The sawmilling firm of Brown and Goodsir introduced the steamer *Helen Taylor*, which Captain Peterson chartered on daily passenger trips between Swansea, Belmont, and Cockle Creek railway station. Another competitor was Captain Hannell of Newcastle, whose fine vessel *Cora* provided services every alternate day connecting Newcastle, Swansea, and Cooranbong. Johnson's answer to the competition from *Cora* was his launching of a vessel of comparable quality, *Maggie Johnson*, believed to have been built at Cooranbong.⁵ For a year or two, these ferry services operated on the lake concurrently, and then all at once they practically ceased. Possibly there was an over-supply of ferry-boats, but their disappearance was hastened by the appearance of a new competitor for their trade—the 'iron horse'.

With the building of the Sydney to Newcastle railway, a great chapter in the history of the Lake Macquarie region ended, and a new one was opened. No one sensed this fully at the time, though a writer in the *Illustrated Sydney News* in 1884 made an interesting prediction. Accompanying a sketch of a steamer taking on a cargo of timber at Cooranbong, this comment was published:⁶

The contour of the country and the want of roads render it difficult to utilise bullock teams to their full extent, so that nature's highways have to be availed of by means of light draught stern wheel steamers, of which the old 'Commissary-General' formerly plying on the Parramatta River, was the original type in Australia. The character of this means of conveyance can be familiarised by reference to sketch 4 on page 8, which represents shipping timber on Dora Creek. The advent of the iron horse will bring about a transition, and the forests of valuable indigenous trees which now cover thousands of acres, being converted into marketable lumber, leave corresponding spaces of rich soil to be dotted with comfortable homes amidst fields of shining grain and luxuriant pastures.

Certainly the coming of the railway to Lake Macquarie brought about 'a transition'. It brought to a close an important phase of the region's development, and a new pattern of things emerged.

The linking of Newcastle with Sydney by railway in 1889 was an event of very considerable significance for the colony. Up to this time the northern railway system of New South Wales was based on Newcastle, and developed separately from the southern and western systems which fanned out from Sydney. The major obstacle to a linking of the two systems was a physical problem—the wide and deep Hawkesbury River, with rugged mountains on

⁵ Details of ferry services are contained in the Newcastle *Almanac*, *op. cit.* of 1888.

⁶ *Illustrated Sydney News*, 2 Aug. 1884.

either side of it. There was also some opposition to the plan from influential citizens of Newcastle, who feared that a railway connection with Sydney would rob their city of much of its export trade.

As early as 1875 an exploration party was examining the practicability of building a railway line between Lake Macquarie and Sydney.⁷ It was proposed that the private line of the Wallsend Coal Company should be connected to Sydney by a line passing close to the western boundary of Lake Macquarie. The exploration party met with little difficulty in choosing a route through the coastal country north of Gosford, but the rugged, rocky country about the Hawkesbury presented a great obstacle.

During 1876 a government surveyor named Stephens led a team of men in an attempt to locate a suitable railway route. Stephens recommended a crossing of the Hawkesbury River close to Wiseman's Ferry, but his survey was abandoned when a series of discouraging reports reached the Minister for Works in Sydney. A year later, Surveyor Hoyle spent many difficult weeks in trying to work out a trial survey for a line between Windsor and Singleton by way of the Bulga plateau. But Hoyle's reports were also depressing.

The first breakthrough occurred in September of 1878, when another surveyor named Cummings was instructed to explore the coastal country between the Parramatta River, the Hawkesbury, Brisbane Water, and Lake Macquarie to Newcastle. In commissioning this survey, the government may have been influenced by a certain Caleb Foster, who had written a letter suggesting a line along Brisbane Water through Gosford. Cummings reported favourably on the proposal of a line along the coast, and his report formed the basis of the plans from which the Sydney-Newcastle railway was eventually constructed.

Throughout the early part of 1879 trial surveys were in progress between the Parramatta River and Newcastle. However, as details of the proposed route were publicized, protests were received from localities which felt themselves bypassed by the coastal survey. Among the suggestions received at that time was one from the Mayor of East Maitland, who asked for a survey from his town to 'Corumbong', passing over the Broken Gap Mountain.

The government decided to investigate all reasonable proposals for the line, including the Cooranbong-East Maitland suggestion. On this survey few difficulties were encountered, except that a tunnel of fifteen chains length would have been required under the Broken Gap Range. Naturally, Newcastle interests opposed this survey because it bypassed their city.

Violent disagreement over the various railway proposals led to the whole scheme being shelved until March of 1881, when a fresh effort was made to

⁷ Unless otherwise specified, all information relating to the history of the railway has been taken from an official history of the Homebush to Waratah railway prepared by the N.S.W. Department of Railways.

initiate railway legislation. At this time there was considerable support for a 'fork line' proposal. This would have involved the construction of a line from Sydney to Dora Creek, where it was proposed to split the line, and to have separate branches to Newcastle and East Maitland.

However, the 'fork line' would have involved greater cost, and on 30th March 1881 Parliament approved the construction of a branch railway from Homebush to Waratah, following in the main the 1879 survey by Cummings. Some further delays followed, and it was not until May of 1883 that tenders were called. Three months later it was announced that Amos Brothers would construct the section of line from Gosford to Waratah. This firm was already engaged on the Lake Macquarie harbour improvements. Amos Brothers also successfully tendered for the section of railway between Homebush and Hawkesbury River.

Work commenced almost immediately on the construction of the line, and on 15th August 1887 the section between Gosford and Waratah was opened to rail traffic. South of Gosford, the crossing of the Hawkesbury was still uncompleted, and for a few months prior to the opening of the bridge, trains terminated on either side of the river. A ferry transported passengers and goods across the estuary. Finally the bridge was completed, and on 1st May 1889 the Governor of New South Wales officially opened the line that brought all of the colony's railways into one centralized system.

Even as the line was being constructed, a number of new villages and towns were appearing in its wake. Many settlements came into existence as construction camps were established at intervals along the track. At the crossing of Wyong Creek a large gang of men was employed on bridge works, and by the time the line was opened in 1887 there were about eight permanent cottages and a hotel beside the line on the northern bank of the creek.⁸ This formed the nucleus of the town of Wyong, which quickly supplanted the older village of Wyong Creek, located about two miles upstream where Matthew Woodbury's inn stood at the traditional crossing-place.

Twelve miles north of Wyong the work on the line created the village of Wyee. 'Wyhee', the 'place of bushfires', was the name attached to an area of flat country where two small creeks flowed side by side towards the lake. Early settlers had grazed cattle there, and the first sign of human occupation had been a stockyard and some huts close by the track which connected Wyong Creek and Cooranbong. In very early times a man named Thomas Walker⁹ held two large grants of land in the Wyee district, but he never took up residence, and failed to make any improvements to his properties.¹⁰ By 1860 a stockman, James Freeman, lived in a hut adjacent to one of the creeks at Wyee, but he did not own any land in the area.

⁸ *Australian Encyclopaedia*, articles Railways and Wyong.

⁹ Register of land grants in the County of Northumberland (Lands Department, Sydney).

¹⁰ *MA*, 9 June 1875.

For many years after that, the only significant thing about Wyee was that a number of dray tracks converged thereabouts. From around the southern edge of Lake Macquarie came a track which connected the settlers at Catherine Hill Bay and Norah Head with Cooranbong. At Wyee, this track formed a junction with the road from Gosford to Maitland. From the heavily timbered and hilly country westward came a number of timber-getters' tracks which crossed the Wyee flats en route to Lancaster's sawmill on the lakeshore a mile or more to the east.

It was not a coincidence, then, that the railway contractors decided to establish a construction depot at Wyee; and when, after a time, the majority of the navvies moved on to other jobs, a residue remained at the site, so creating a small village. At first the railway platform there was given the name Norahville, but it was not long before the place was officially known as Wyee. A small hotel made its appearance near the Maitland road, and shortly afterwards a provisional school was established on the western side of the railway line.

When the original survey of the northern railway was carried out in 1879, the townspeople of Cooranbong mistakenly assumed that the line would pass directly through their town.¹¹ Their hopes of future prosperity were further raised when the proposal of a 'fork line' was being discussed, for Cooranbong was to have been the place from which the two lines would diverge. But the 'fork line' proposal was abandoned, and it came as something of a shock to the citizens of Cooranbong to learn that the new railway would pass three miles eastward of the town. The townspeople were assured, though, that a railway platform would be placed for their convenience about one mile south of the Dora Creek railway crossing. This platform would be named Cooranbong.

However, this small advantage was lessened when the government laid out the new township of Morisset where the Cooranbong railway station was designed to be. There were many buyers for allotments at Morisset, and by 1887 a few homes were already occupied. When the railway was opened in that year the platform was officially named Cooranbong, but it was only a matter of weeks before the station was renamed Morisset. A road was formed linking Morisset with Cooranbong, and daily coach services commenced to operate between the two centres.

On 16th June 1888 a post office was opened at Morisset.¹² A month earlier the Department of Public Instruction had acquired a portion of land for school purposes, though a public school was not opened until August 1891.¹³ Among other buildings erected in the town during its infancy were a Church of England and a School of Arts, which soon incorporated a library.

¹¹ See description of Cooranbong in *Newcastle Almanac*, *op. cit.* of 1883.

¹² Information supplied by the Postmaster-General's Department.

¹³ Information supplied by the N.S.W. Education Department.

By 1909 the public school enrolled seventy pupils and the population of the town was estimated to be about 320.¹⁴

Apart from the railway activities, the first industry established at Morisset was sawmilling, and the pioneer in the industry was H. B. Mullard. A number of the townspeople—among them the Healys, Frosts, Wellings, Hansons and O'Learys—were actively engaged in the timber industry, either as millhands or as teamsters. Logs were carted to Morisset from a wide area, and in 1909 the weekly output of Mullard's mill included 2,000 tool handles, 200 pairs of naves for wheels, 8,000 spokes, 100 pairs of rims, 200 pairs of shafts, and 500 swingle-trees. A large proportion of these products was exported to New Zealand.¹⁵

After 1887 a good deal of the timber from the Cooranbong area was forwarded from the railway station at Dora Creek. At this point a large number of men had been employed in the building of a railway bridge which was the subject of innumerable threatened lawsuits because it offered insufficient clearance for timber schooners to gain access to the lake. During its construction many fights took place in the hotels at Cooranbong, where the navvies came for refreshment.

When the new railway was first opened to traffic, there was no platform at the Dora Creek crossing.¹⁶ This omission was soon pointed out to the Railway Commissioners, and a small platform was placed beside the line on the northern bank of the creek. Although the locality was known as Newport, the railway platform was named Dora Creek, which gradually became recognized as the name of the community.

Northwards from Dora Creek, the railway headed into thickly forested country for seven or eight miles, keeping well clear of the lake shores, and passing through the small village of Awaba.¹⁷ Like so many others, this village developed in response to the needs of the railway contractors, and yet the locality was identifiable several years before the line was opened. The *Town and Country Journal* in 1883 made this reference to Awaba, while briefly describing the various coal-bearing properties around the lake:¹⁸

Among other properties that are worth enumerating is that of Mr. W. A. Kingscote, 1100 acres situate near Lake Macquarie at Awaba, on the railway line to be made between Homebush and Waratah. The ground has been proved to be coal-bearing by the Government diamond drills, one of which completed a depth of 523 feet, proving one very good seam of coal. The other drill, besides proving coal, has tapped an artesian supply of water, which now rises 30 feet above the surface.

¹⁴ *TCJ*, 29 Dec. 1909.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Sydney Mail*, 17 Sep. 1887.

¹⁷ 'Awaba' is an aboriginal word meaning 'plain or flat surface', and was the term used by the natives to identify Lake Macquarie.

¹⁸ *TCJ*, 25 Aug. 1883.

The existence of two coal shafts was mentioned by a Newcastle press reporter who travelled on the first train to pass over the new line on 16th August 1887.¹⁹ He noted that near Lake Macquarie station, later named Fassifern, the Northern Land and Coal Company was sinking two 500-foot shafts. If these two references relate to the same development, it would appear that the coal shafts were drilled somewhere along the line between Awaba and Fassifern.

There was no immediate attempt to extract coal from Mr. Kingscote's property. However, Awaba was selected as a site for a railway construction depot, and by 1885 a large number of men were living there in tents and crudely built huts. Two miles west of the Awaba depot, the road from Cooranbong to Wallsend crossed a small rivulet known as Palmer's Creek, and it was not long before a road linked Awaba and Palmer's. A hotel was shortly opened at the junction of the two roads, and this encouraged other settlers to come there. Many of these people were timber-getters who cut railway sleepers and carted them over the hill to Awaba. The importance of Palmer's lasted only while the railway was being formed, and when all the activity had ceased the community gradually disintegrated.

But the village at Awaba progressed. Among the pioneers of the place were the families of Field, Puddy, and Wellard, all of whom appear to have come from the Mount Vincent district on the other side of the Sugarloaf Range.²⁰ The early development of the village was haphazard, with homes scattered over a wide area. One settler operated a small general store, another a primitive kind of butcher's shop, and about 1890 the government established a school in the community.²¹ The pattern of settlement at Awaba has not changed radically over the years, but in recent times coal mining has developed, and a branch railway transports the coal to the Wangi Power Station.

One of the most significant developments in the wake of railway construction was the birth of Toronto. This progressive town occupies a very favourable position on Lake Macquarie, and being less than twenty miles from the heart of Newcastle, it has recently attracted hundreds of citizens who have erected comfortable bungalows with lakeside frontages or views. The town is laid out in an attractive though conventional manner, and the credit for most of this layout must go to the Excelsior Land Investment and Building Company, which launched the town nearly eighty years ago.

It was inevitable that sooner or later something exciting would happen to Threlkeld's 1,280-acre estate at Punte. The estate had been a free grant to the missionary in 1829. Here he established the Ebenezer mission station and opened a coal mine before selling the land by auction in 1844. The

¹⁹ *NMH*, 18 Aug. 1887.

²⁰ *NMH*, 12 May 1956 (feature article on Awaba).

²¹ A school site was purchased in July of 1889 (Lands Department records).

buyer was Ralph Mayer Robey to whom the first title deed to the estate was issued two years later. But Robey was soon forced to close the mine, and by 1851 he had leased the property to a farmer named Richard Fennell, who occupied the premises until about 1870. Then the estate passed into the hands of a partnership—Michael MacMahon and a man named Whiting—interested in the coal-mining prospects.²² Nothing in the way of coal extraction seems to have eventuated, however, and in 1885 the entire estate was acquired by the Excelsior Land Investment and Building Company of Sydney.²³

Before going on to describe the development initiated by the company, we should refer briefly to some other land sales in the Toronto district prior to 1885. In an earlier chapter an account was given of the 'Terzeny Park' farm on Stoney Creek owned by the partners Chapman and Lyster. These men commenced their farm a few years prior to 1870. Then, in May of 1868, the *Newcastle Chronicle*²⁴ advertised the sale of some government lands, which included a sixty acre lot 'on the left bank of Stony Creek, at about 1 mile above the junction of that creek with Lake Macquarie, and adjacent to R. M. Robey's 1280 acres on the Lake'. This section was offered at one pound per acre, but we have no knowledge as to whether or not it was sold at that time.

Another interesting land sale which pre-dated the Excelsior development was briefly mentioned in the *Sydney Mail* in 1884.²⁵ In a report on the Newcastle district, a correspondent wrote:

Land sales are becoming again very prevalent in the district. Mr. Creer sold on Saturday last 280 lots in Sunderland township, Stony Creek, Lake Macquarie, at an average of £3 each.

The apparent success of this sale in 1884 must be attributed to the fact that work had already commenced on the construction of the northern railway. It is interesting to notice that 600 lots at Sunderland township had been offered two years earlier, but it appears that the sale was not a success.²⁶ After 1884 we hear nothing more about Sunderland, but it must have adjoined the estate purchased by the Excelsior Company, and so have become part of the Toronto urban development.

The Excelsior Company acted rapidly in drawing up a plan for a town near the western boundary of the estate, since this was the closest point to the new line of railway. By 1887 the company had prepared and published an attractive booklet designed to interest the public in the new township.

²² *TCJ*, 12 Mar. 1886.

²³ *Plans, Views, & Particulars of the Toronto Estate, Lake Macquarie*, published by the Excelsior Land Company in 1887.

²⁴ *NC*, 23 May 1868.

²⁵ *Sydney Mail*, 8 Mar. 1884.

²⁶ *NMH*, 20 Apr. 1882.

The pamphlet began by introducing Lake Macquarie as a whole, then particularized the Punte estate:²⁷

Here the first coal ever mined in the Newcastle district was obtained, years ago, by the Rev. Mr. Threlkeld, from which it takes its name of Coal Point. . . . Locally this estate is also known by the names Skye Point and Ponte, the latter name being given to it by the rev. gentleman previously mentioned, who had a mission station there. Traces of the old homestead still remain, while some very large fruit trees, planted many years ago, give abundant proof of the fertility of the soil.

It went on to explain that the directors of the company had decided to rename the estate 'Toronto' after the Canadian city on Lake Ontario, where the world-renowned sculler Hanlan had developed his remarkable prowess. This was a timely decision, for Hanlan was currently visiting the Australian colonies, and commanding a good deal of publicity.

Then followed a most tempting recital of the scenic attractions of Toronto. Here, at times, the directors succumbed to the world of fantasy in their zeal to sell the land. They spoke of 'yonder Wangi Wangi lifting his lofty pinnacle (enveloped in snowy clouds) to the heavens' and predicted that 'a person dwelling on Toronto Estate, say three months in the year, adds 20 per cent to his life'.

By 1887 the Toronto Hotel had been erected at the company's expense. The building was of brick, and contained about thirty bedrooms besides parlours, bar, dining room, and billiard rooms. Spacious lawns were laid out beside the building, and a dancing pavilion was provided. Pleasure boats were always available to guests, and two swimming baths were created at the lakeside.

A highlight of the planning was the Toronto Boulevard, an avenue one hundred feet wide extending westward from the wharf to the boundary of the estate about three-quarters of a mile distant. On either side of the avenue ornamental trees were planted for beauty and shade, and numerous seats were placed there for the comfort of visitors and inhabitants.

The northern railway was designed to pass about one and a half miles westward of Toronto, and where the line came close to the shore of Fennell's Bay a platform was erected and named Lake Macquarie. Train passengers bound for Toronto alighted at this platform, and proceeded by rowboat or steam launch through Fennell's Bay to the Toronto wharf.²⁸ By 1888 the Lake Macquarie railway platform had been renamed Fassifern.

During the railway construction period a small village had developed at Fassifern, and even before this, in 1883, a sawmill existed at the head of Fennell's Bay.²⁹ After the opening of the northern railway a coal mine

²⁷ *Plans, Views, & Particulars of the Toronto Estate, Lake Macquarie*, printed in 1887.

²⁸ *Sydney Mail*, 9 Nov. 1889.

²⁹ *SMH*, 20 Aug. 1883.

known as the Northumberland Colliery was commenced on the western side of Fassifern, and a branch railway connected this colliery with the main line. The coal mine is now operated as the Newstan Colliery.

In 1889 the Excelsior Company secured permission to construct a tramway more than two miles in length from the Toronto wharf to Fassifern station.³⁰ This private tramway was opened on 2nd August 1891. It followed fairly closely the present course of the branch railway, but originally there were three intermediate platforms between Fassifern and Toronto. These intermediate stations were provided at Blackall's (1 mile 30 chains from Fassifern), Fennell's (1 mile 53 chains), and Bowers' (2 miles 16 chains). The company purchased a small tank engine from the government, and a new passenger car seating fifty passengers. During the twenty years that the company owned and operated the tramway, some peculiar forms of locomotion were used. The most famous engine employed on the line was a four-wheel steamer known as 'The Coffee Pot'. On some occasions horses were used for the haulage of goods and passengers.

When A.nos Brothers secured the Gosford-to-Waratah railway contract in 1883, one of the firm's first operations was the opening of a gravel quarry near the present-day town of Teralba. Between the headwaters of Fennell's Bay and Awaba Bay the new railway was designed to pass over what was soon christened the 'Big Hill', and a substantial deposit of stone was found to occur on the northern side of this hill. By 1884 a quarry had been commenced at this point, and a large construction camp appeared on the hill-sides nearby. An adjacent stream provided a source of water supply, and earned the name of Fresh Water Creek. The quarry settlement was generally known by the same name, though it was sometimes referred to simply as 'The Gravel Pits'.³¹

When the gravel quarries were opened, only one or two isolated families inhabited the Teralba district. Near the lakeshore at what is now known as Booragul was a fine house owned by Mrs. Margaret Quigley. Her husband, William Bell Quigley, had died as a result of an accident in 1879, only a few months after the completion of the house.

The Quigley family had inherited an estate of 914 acres from Mrs. Quigley's father, Dr. James Mitchell.³² This estate was originally promised in 1829 or early in 1830 to Madam Rens of Sydney, as compensation for a portion of land in George Street, Sydney, which she was obliged to surrender for government purposes. She did not develop her outlying estate, however, and on 17th May 1830 the entire 914-acre grant was selected by

³⁰ Notes on the Fassifern-to-Toronto Tramway, supplied by the N.S.W. Department of Railways (Bulletin No. 20, June 1939).

³¹ Lake Macquarie and District Historical Society: *Notes on the History of Teralba*, published 1966.

³² Details relating to the Quigley family have been obtained from an Abstract of Title to Lands at Teralba, made available by the Perpetual Trustee Company of Sydney.

Captain James St. John Ranclaud, who already possessed a huge adjoining estate of 2,560 acres. When Ranclaud died in 1832,³³ the 914-acre estate was the subject of a case heard before the Commissioners of Claims for Lands, and as a result the estate was made over to James Mitchell by Crown grant dated 12th March 1842.

Doctor Mitchell died in 1869, leaving three children: David Scott Mitchell (whose outstanding collection of Australiana formed the basis of the Mitchell Library, Sydney), Augusta Maria (who had married E. C. Mere-wether some years previously), and Margaret Scott, who married William Bell Quigley soon after her father's death. So it came about that the Quigley family received the 914 acres, which William Quigley named the 'Awaba Park Estate'. The *Newcastle Morning Herald* reported in June 1878 that 'Awaba House' was in process of erection by Mr. Charles Robinson, and gave details of Quigley's intention of exploiting some of the valuable timber on his property.³⁴

When Quigley died his wife carried on the estate until she in turn passed away in November 1886. According to report,³⁵ her death was caused by burns she received while rescuing valuables from her house, which burned down about this time. A new home was erected on the site, and it was occupied by the Quigley children for many years.

Another family whose residence in the Teralba district predated the building of the railway was that of John Black.³⁶ The Blacks for many years occupied a large weatherboard house, which still stands, on a low rise close to the marshland on the western bank of Cockle Creek. Their large estate adjoined the Quigleys', and was a portion of an original grant of 2,560 acres to Captain Ranclaud in 1829.

The original railway construction settlement of Fresh Water Creek, near the gravel quarry, was destined to be the beginnings of an important town. In 1886 a number of developments affected the little settlement. In that year two coal companies commenced to sink shafts close to the railway, which was still under construction. The Great Northern Coal Company employed ten men in a mine close to the creek and the lake, which is worked today as the Pacific Colliery. Less than two miles to the north shaft sinking was commenced by the Teralba Co-operative Coal Company, and the mine became known as the Teralba Colliery. Problems of water seepage delayed developments at this mine, but these difficulties were finally overcome, and the mine is still operating as the Stockton Borehole Colliery.³⁷ A third colliery was opened near Fresh Water Creek a year or two after

³³ Information from a living descendant of Captain Ranclaud.

³⁴ *NMH*, 8 June 1878.

³⁵ *NHDHS* journal, v. 9, pt. 3, 1954, p. 36 (Goold).

³⁶ *Notes on the History of Teralba*, *op. cit.*

³⁷ Notes on the history of Stockton Borehole Colliery, supplied by a representative of the company.

the railway was completed. It was initiated by Andrew Sneddon, and his effort later developed into the Northern Extended Colliery of the present day.

On 1st February 1886 the Department of Public Instruction opened the 'Gravel Pits' School at Fresh Water Creek, with an enrolment of twenty-seven pupils.³⁸ Its name was changed to Glen Mitchell in 1889 and to Teralba two years later. Henry Wilkinson taught the school for the first twenty-five years of its history.

It was in 1886, too, that the government decided to survey a township near Fresh Water Creek. The surveyors selected an area of gently rising land adjoining the lake shore and the new railway, but a short distance away from the existing quarry settlement. The name Teralba was chosen for this township, because of its historic association with Captain Ranclaud's extensive grant of 1829. By August 1887, when the northern railway was opened, a number of buildings had already been erected within the new township, and by the following year the Lake Macquarie Hotel on the waterfront was in business. Naturally, a railway station was provided at Teralba, though it is interesting to notice that its construction name was 'Five Islands'.

Leaving Teralba, the new railway line proceeded northwards to a crossing of Cockle Creek a short distance after passing the coal shaft of the Teralba Coal Company. On the eastern bank of the creek a bridge construction camp was established. It was here, too, that the railway intercepted a track from Wallsend to the Speer's Point area, and so a railway platform was provided with the name Cockle Creek. From this point the railway continued its way through sparsely settled country and there was no other railway station and no significant development until after it passed through a tunnel at Kotara.

The construction of the railway brought a period of unprecedented expansion to many localities along the western side of Lake Macquarie, as the preceding pages have shown. Not only did the settlements alongside the railway line benefit from the employment boom, but there was a significant trickle of population into many adjacent districts. The mining industry received a tremendous lift from the opening of the railway, because of this new transport facility, and there were rapid coal mining developments in nearly a dozen different localities on the western side of the lake. Collieries appeared in places previously unentered by the industry. Developments at West Wallsend, Killingworth, Rhondda, Teralba, and Fassifern all owe their beginnings to the coming of the railway.

Land subdivisions were the essential prerequisite to settlement in the new areas, and so there were many important land sales during the 1880's. The subdivisions of Highgate were announced in April 1882.³⁹ The sale of

³⁸ Information supplied by the N.S.W. Education Department.

³⁹ *NMH*, 20 Apr. 1882.

allotments at Deepwater township on Cockle Creek were advertised in March 1884,⁴⁰ and in the following year numerous allotments comprising the town of Lymington on Warner's Bay were put up for sale.⁴¹ An attempted sale of allotments at Lymington over forty years earlier had been unsuccessful. In May 1886 three hundred lots were sold at the township of Ramsgate.⁴² All of this land buying was brought about by the stimulus of railway development.

But if the new railway brought expansion to the western districts of Lake Macquarie, its immediate effects were damaging to the eastern side, where the towns of Belmont and Swansea had come into existence over a period of years. Prior to 1890 Belmont could boast of being the only real tourist resort on the lake, but now it became second to the newly developed and advertised pleasure grounds of Toronto and Speer's Point. The loss of the tourist trade to Belmont was not made up until the opening of the Pacific Highway through the town in the 1920's.

The future of Swansea was likewise jeopardized by the opening of the railway line. This will be understood clearly when it is recalled that Swansea had come into existence solely in response to the requirements of the lake export trade. The northern railway completely upset the old pattern of lake transport, when boats had provided almost the sole means of moving goods in and out of the region. A considerable export of timber and coal, not to mention a miscellany of other goods, had passed through the Swansea channel each year, and the government had considered it worthwhile to embark on a long and expensive scheme to improve port facilities at the Heads. Now all this was seen to have been a waste of public money, and it is ironic that the contractors for the lake harbour improvements in 1879 were chosen four years later to construct two of the major sections of the Sydney-Newcastle railway. It was evident that the era of water transport on Lake Macquarie was forever past. Even the most modern of the cargo ships was now out of date, since it was far outstripped by the new monster of efficiency, the steam locomotive.

And yet neither Belmont nor Swansea was the main sufferer when the northern railway came into existence. The most shattering blow fell upon the town that had been the commercial 'capital' of the region for thirty years.

The most remarkable thing about the opening of the railway line was the effect it had on the town of Cooranbong. Those who believed that the new transport facility would add to Cooranbong's importance were quickly and bitterly disappointed. In pre-railway times the town fulfilled a key role in the economic development of the lake region. As a centre of the timber

⁴⁰ *NMH*, 1 Mar. 1884.

⁴¹ For details, see chapter 9.

⁴² *NMH*, 24 May 1886.

industry and trade, it was without a serious rival, for it occupied a unique geographical position. From its front door streamed a navigable waterway which provided direct shipping with Sydney or Newcastle; at its back door lay one of the most extensive and valuable hardwood forests in the colony. The timber industry at Cooranbong gave employment to a great number of men: not alone the men who felled the trees, or laboured at the sawmills; but also the men who drove the bullock teams, the men who built and operated the sizable fleet of cargo vessels, and the host of other people who derived indirect benefit from the industry. These last included the store-keepers, mail contractors, innkeepers, schoolmasters, and farmers. Cooranbong was without question the leading town in the Lake Macquarie district. It influenced very largely the pattern of population in the southern half of the lake, and it was only the proximity of Newcastle which limited its influence in the northern half. In 1884, when the railway employment boom had barely begun, it was estimated that Cooranbong held a population of 700 persons,⁴³ and this hardly seems an exaggeration. To all appearances, this was a town with a future.

But the change came abruptly. The new railway bypassed Cooranbong, and almost immediately the town began to depend upon Morisset for its transport connection. When the railway works were completed, a large number of men were released from employment, but there was no local industry to absorb them. To aggravate the situation, the Australian colonies were at that time plunging into one of the most severe economic depressions they had yet experienced. A wave of unemployment hit Cooranbong, and as it receded a dismal picture emerged. Hundreds of people left the district, and an atmosphere of neglect and emptiness soon hung about the town. The sailors were no longer seen lounging about the hotels, for the once-crowded bars with their scenes of merriment and larrikinism, their political debates and fights, had vanished. The doors were barred, the verandahs deserted. Many of the houses were empty, and the official census of 1891 gave the population of Cooranbong as 206 persons. A visitor to the place a little later described it as a 'peaceful-looking village . . . so quiet and out of the world that it might be a thousand miles away from any railway'.⁴⁴ Many a citizen of the township might well have wished that it had been.

Yet something peculiar and novel happened to Cooranbong, and it occurred soon after the opening of the railway line. In 1894 a small party of Seventh-day Adventists in New South Wales were looking for a suitable locality in which to set up a boarding school. It had to be away from the cities, yet relatively accessible to public transport, and the land had to be cheap. Under these circumstances, it was not a coincidence that the party arrived at Cooranbong and were shown an estate of almost 1,500 acres. It

⁴³ *Illustrated Sydney News*, 15 Mar. 1884.

⁴⁴ N.S.W. Department of Agriculture: *Agricultural Gazette*, 1899, p. 200.

was the land that had been granted many years before to Patrick F. Campbell of the Maitland district. This tract was situated on the northern bank of Dora Creek, and having been little developed over the years, was 'going cheap' at much less than one pound per acre. The Adventists bought the property, which they christened 'Avondale', and within a year or two a college had been established.⁴⁵ A short time later the Sanitarium Health Food Company established its first factory adjacent to the college, and as workers and students came to the community, a new future opened for Cooranbong. It was a future very different, however, from what had been envisioned before the days of the northern railway.

It would be difficult to over-emphasize the importance of the new railway to the Lake Macquarie district, for it brought nothing less than an economic revolution to the region. The ribbons of steel, curving in an unbroken line across the landscape, snapped the old lines of communication and disconnected the pattern of industry and commerce as it had developed since the days of the first settlers. It was as if a ligature had been placed upon the economic arteries of the region, damming the flow of trade that had been its life-blood.

But if the new railway closed up the old channels of commerce, it opened up a vast new channel of its own. Unexpected possibilities for the economic development of the lake region were revealed, and unprecedented growth began to take place. No longer was Lake Macquarie a backward and isolated province of New South Wales, but it was an integrated part of the whole colony's development, for it now lay astride one of the most important lines of communication in Australia. It was not that the lake region would lose its individuality, but its future development would now be closely tied in with Newcastle, and it would share in, and contribute to the industrial growth of this neighbour city.

Indeed an era of the past had ended. The age of the present had begun.

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A History of Lake Macquarie

Keith H. Clouten

