

RECOLLECTIONS OF “WANDELLA” IN THE 1920’s

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By Christmas 1920 the family was complete. Father was 49, Mother 45, George 21, Dolly 17, Norman 9, I was 7 and Bertha was one month.

The whole family was living at home, Dolly having recently completed her secondary education at Sale High School. George had been a full time worker on the farm since returning about 1915 from a year of secondary schooling in Melbourne. I am not sure whether it was at the Working Men’s College (now the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) or the Melbourne High School.

The farming properties comprised “Wandella” (Crown Allotment 23, Parish of Poowong East – 309 acres – which Father bought in 1909 from W. Henderson, the original Selector) and C.A. 30, Parish of Poowong, 293 acres, which was adjacent to Wandella – see Map. The western boundary of C.A. 30 was a fence line (with many bends) averaging about one chain (66 feet) from the bank of the Lang Lang River. The intervening strip, called River Frontage, was preserved as Crown Land.

The 293 acres was purchased earlier than I can recollect – possibly about 1916 – and it may or may not have all been purchased at the same time. At some earlier time it had been subdivided by an east-west alignment forming a southern section of about 178 acres and a northern section of about 115 acres. For farming purposes, Father treated this property as being divided into three parts:-

1. that part of the southern section west of the main road (as it still exists) was known as “Aviswood Top”. It contained the original homestead on C.A. 30, and “Aviswood” was almost certainly the original name of C.A. 30. I feel sure that this part at least of C.A. 30 was purchased from a Mr. Bennett.
2. that part of C.A. 30 east of the main road was known as “Aviswood Flat”. It contained 96 acres.
3. the remaining north-western part, north of the earlier subdivision line and west of the main road, was known as “Bremner’s”. Presumably at one time, subsequent to the subdivision, it was owned by a Mr. Bremner.

Based on my recollections of the early 1920s, I am reasonably certain that the sequence of arrangements for operating the farm was as follows:-

1. For some (unknown) time prior to George returning from college and extending until Father purchased C.A. 30, the Curwen’s (Mr., Mrs. & Florrie) lived in the cottage at Wandella (see Map). Mr. (Bob) & Mrs. Curwen milked the cows and Bob helped with the farm work.
2. When C.A. 30 was purchased the Curwen’s became share farmers on Aviswood Top and Harry Herring and his family came to the cottage to milk the cows at Wandella and assist Father and George in the operation of Aviswood Flat and Bremner’s as well as Wandella.
3. In the early 1920’s the Curwen’s purchased their own farm in Mountain View, the Herring’s became the share farmer on Aviswood Top and a semi-literate migrant from rural England was employed to assist Father and George. The migrant lived in a little hut beside the orchard at Wandella and had his meals with the family. (About every two years he would move on to widen his experience and be replaced by another new migrant. For the purpose of this story, each such employee will be called “Jack”.)

On the share farm, Father provided the dairy herd and all necessary facilities and the share farmer performed the dairying and the related activities for which he received one-third of the cream sales and one half of the income from pigs and calves.

General Condition of the Farm in 1920

The paddocks of Wandella and C.A. 30, as I first recollect them in the early 1920s, had:-

- (a) gum tress and blackwoods growing along the creek as now, but in greater numbers.
- (b) some clumps of trees left for stock shelter – the remnants of which still remain.
- (c) isolated large trees (many ringbarked) left for firewood – now almost all gone.
- (d) pasture on all rising ground except for two paddocks used for growing oats. Most of the hill at the northern end of Wandella (which was too steep to plough) had a native grass cover which was inferior to the sown pastures on the rest of the rising ground.
- (e) dense tussocks covering all of the flats.
- (f) many patches of bracken fern, particularly on the hill at the northern end of Wandella, but also on most of the other rising ground on Wandella and Aviswood.

The boundary fences of Wandella and Aviswood had “rabbit-proof” netting. (This was fairly effective, but rabbits were numerous in the district and they intruded from time to time, particularly via the banks of the creek, and established colonies that had to be eradicated – mostly by digging out their warrens.)

Evidence of the original homestead at the north-east corner of Wandella was still to be seen – including some of the fruit trees.

Farming Facilities on Wandella in the 1920's

The farm buildings etc. near the cottage on Wandella were situated around a general-purpose yard. They comprised:-

1. the milking shed with 12 bails (8 used for machine milking and four – with head locks and mangers – for any necessary hand milking and for veterinary or other treatment of cattle). These four bails were part of the original shed before it was extensively altered for machine milking.
2. adjacent rooms for the engine, vacuum pump and cream separator.
3. abutting high building where the hay was stacked and including an elevated platform on which the chaff-cutter was located immediately above the chaff room, which was lined with galvanised sheeting to exclude mice. The chaff entered the chaff room via a trap door in the elevated platform near the chaff-cutter and was accessible for use through a door in front of the mangers of the four bails.
4. a covered yard and adjoining open yard for holding all the cows.
5. a separate building housing the binder, wagon, wool press, harness and a wide range of hand tools. This building also contained horse stables with mangers, but they were not used for this purpose in my time. (At shearing time the binder, wagon and various other items were removed and this part became the shearing shed.)
6. a separate building comprising the pig sties, with wooden troughs, for rearing and fattening porkers.
7. an uncovered small yard with little bails for feeding calves with milk in buckets.

8. a separate room with a high wooden shingle roof and only one small window, fitted with two rows of shelves around the walls – situated close to the cottage (i.e. somewhat distant from the pig sties and cow shed) and called the cream room. In the 1920's it was only used for general storage, including grass seed on the shelves which were inaccessible to mice, but would have originally been planned and built as a "cool room" for production of butter and possibly cheese. (In the early days of dairying in the district – i.e. the 1880's and 1890's – road conditions prevented the marketing of milk or cream. The practice was to pour the milk into broad flat tin dishes where it would stand for 24 to 36 hours for the cream to rise to the surface. This was then skimmed off, left to ripen for a day or two and then churned by hand into butter. The butter was then packaged and conveyed by pack horse to be sold in Drouin or railed from there to Melbourne.)
9. sheep pens with a drafting race and dip.
10. a well with windmill and water trough.
11. a firewood saw bench (with circular saw).

The saw bench, the chaff-cutter and the cream separator were situated where they could each be driven from the Felix engine that powered the vacuum pump that operated the milking machines.

Petrol (it was called benzine then) for this engine and later also for the car was purchased in four-gallon tins – two tins in a wooden case. The used tins and cases had many secondary uses.

The milking machines ("RIDD" make) were installed at Wandella before my earliest recollection – quite possibly about 1919. These milking machines were the first installed in the district.

At that time, milking machines were a fairly new development and the milk was collected in containers on the floor between each pair of cow bails. As the containers held only about six gallons they had to be emptied fairly frequently and taken in buckets by hand to the vat feeding the separator.

The other farm buildings on Wandella included the blacksmith shop, the buggy shed, the shed for buggy harness, bridles and saddles, and the fowl house – all situated near the house and the hut.

All in all, Wandella was well set-up with farming facilities.

Farming Operations in the 1920's

The farming operations were many and varied, including:-

- (a) dairying, which comprised two dairy herds (with machine milking at Wandella and hand milking at Aviswood Top), cream separation at both dairies (using the skim milk with occasional supplements, including pollard, to feed pigs and calves) and transport of the cans of cream to the road about three times a week for collection by the horse-drawn butter factory wagon (superseded by motor lorries in the mid-20's). Milking the cows (twice every day) ensured long days for those involved – starting before 5 a.m. in the summer and not later than about 5.30 a.m. in the winter.
- (b) sheep farming with a flock usually of about 200, involving crutching, shearing (with hand shears), wool pressing, dipping and foot-rot control (involving paring of infected hooves and passing the flock through a foot bath of copper sulphate solution).
- (c) cultivation of oats, maize and potatoes and harvesting thereof:-
 - oats (cut by binder, stooked and stacked) for direct feed to cows in the winter and for chaff-cutting for feed for working horses during cultivation activities. (These horses were fed while the milking was in progress.)

- maize for cutting and feeding to cows during the summer months.
 - potatoes for household use and supplementary feed for pigs.
- (d) handling and use of horses ranging from heavy Clydesdales (for pulling cultivation machinery and the wagon) to lighter horses (for the buggy), stock horses and riding horses. Associated with this was breeding of replacement stock with consequential horse breaking.
- (e) handling, breeding and training of dogs for rounding up and droving stock and for rabbit and fox control.
- (f) harvesting of grass seed (principally Cocksfoot) from the orchard and other areas where stock had little or no access, involving hand cutting with a sickle, drying, thrashing with a flail on a canvas sheet and winnowing on a day with a suitable breeze to remove the fine straw and husks. (This seed, mixed with clover seed, was used for sowing new pastures following a period of cultivation.)
- (g) killing and dressing our own meat, usually a fat young sheep. This was done by Father whose father was at one time a butcher. The skins were dried and later sold.

Very occasionally a prime steer would suffer a broken leg and, as it would have to be killed, it would be slaughtered for domestic meat. Most edible parts were shared with the share farmer and neighbours (with suitable cuts preserved for a time in brine) and the balance fed to the dogs.

All fresh meat was hung in a large airy fly-proof meat safe on the wall of the back verandah. (There were, of course, no home refrigerators at that time.)

Most of the meat was cooked by roasting, the sheep were fairly fat, and the suet (i.e. the hard fat from around the kidneys) was rendered down in the baking dish while the meat was being roasted. Accordingly, there were copious quantities of surplus dripping, which was deposited in a reclaimed four-gallon kerosene tin. Occasionally this was used to make washing soap, but mostly as the tin became full it was sold as tallow for making candles and soap. (We had candle-making equipment, but it was not used in my time.)

- (h) other action for domestic requirements included growing vegetables, harvesting fruit from the orchard, keeping and robbing bees for honey, keeping fowls for eggs (at times of surplus they were preserved in “OVO” for use in the off-season), making jam, drying prune plums in the sun and wood-cutting for cooking and heating.

Occasionally a tree would fall during a storm. If it had been a live tree or one that had recently died, as much of the trunk as was suitable would be used to make fence posts. If it was a large dead gum that had been ring-barked when the forest was cleared, as much as was suitable was used for firewood. This involved cutting into lengths of about 12 feet with hand cross-cut saws then splitting with wedges into sections that could be man-handled and then cutting to lengths of about 15 inches on the power-driven saw-bench to form wood blocks that could be readily split with an axe.

The large stumps were then removed by charring. This consisted of setting fire to the stump and, when it had burnt down to near ground level, covering it with a layer of sods dug from around the butt. The remainder of the stump down to a foot or two below ground level would then smoulder away over a period of several days. The ground would then be levelled and sown with a handful of grass seed.

- (i) Property improvements. In the early 20's a commencement was made to clear the flats which were heavily covered with tussocks and also contained a number of tree stumps. The practice was to:-

- grub out the tree stumps and plough the area with a double-disc plough. (Some of the stumps did not protrude above ground level and were therefore not found until hit by the plough – an unpleasant experience for the person sitting on the plough.)
- cultivate the area for a year or two growing maize and then leaving it bare for at least one summer (by which time most of the tussocks had died) and then
- plough again in such a way as to construct a carefully planned system of herringbone drains preparatory to sowing down the area to pasture.

This process went on for quite a few years progressively covering all the flats on Wandella, Aviswood and Bremner's. The first flats I recall being so treated were those around the foot of the hill on which our house on Wandella was (and still is) situated.

- (j) general maintenance, including horse shoeing; black-smithing to repair broken and worn components of farm machinery and tools; fern cutting, grubbing tussocks that survived the ploughing and cultivation; control of rabbits, ragwort and blackberries; and fence repairs. Eradication of vermin and noxious weeds was by hand methods – no chemicals being available for these purposes in those days.

Rabbits were skinned and the skins dried and sold. Selected carcasses were used for domestic meat – the others were good food for the dogs.

Rabbiting became a sport when the Lang Lang River was in high flood and the rabbits were flushed from their burrows in the bank of the river and became marooned on little islands.

- (k) veterinary activities (for which Father had various surgical instruments) including attention to sick stock, dealing with calving problems, marking male lambs and piglets and occasionally gelding a colt or spaying heifers. (When neighbours had a sick animal they called on Father for his services, which he readily gave – sometimes at night. In those days, a sick animal would probably die before a vet could be contacted and attend.)

Most calves were surplus to requirements and were killed within a few days, skinned and the carcasses fed to the dogs and pigs. There was no readily available way of marketing young vealers.

- (l) periodic action to expand and improve the stock watering facilities necessitated by the expanding stock numbers (following the property improvements) and the gradual silting up of the main water holes along the creek through Wandella and Aviswood as a result of forest clearing and cultivation in the catchment. The activities included enlarging dams, constructing additional dams and, on one occasion, deepening the well near the Wandella cow shed.
- (m) Rainfall records. To facilitate good farming practice, rainfall records were carefully maintained. Whenever there was any rain in the 24 hours to 9 a.m. (which was quite often) the rain gauge was read as near as possible to 9 a.m. and the reading recorded in a book – a practice which was commenced about 1916 and continues to this day. April 1923 was unique as it has been the only occasion in this 76 year period in which there was no rainfall whatever in a whole month.

Transport

Up until the mid-1920's there were four forms of transport:-

1. a wagon, used principally for transporting pigs, wool, etc. to Drouin railway station for rail to market in Melbourne, for bringing in fertilizer and other bulky requirements from railway trucks at Drouin or from stores in Drouin or Warragul and for general transport on the farm, including carting hay sheaves to stacks. (On some occasions neighbors combined to purchase a full rail truck of fertilizer

and then travelled in convoy to Drouin and back so that if anyone met difficulty due to the bad road, as sometimes happened, there were others to help.)

2. a buggy for going to church and social functions that Mother wished to attend (she did not ride) and for occasional trips to Drouin (13 miles) and sometimes to Warragul for purchase of clothing and other necessities. Trips to Drouin took at least two hours each way, depending on the state of the road. I clearly remember two particular trips to Drouin in the buggy:-

- (a) to visit Mother in hospital and see the brand new baby in the family. (This would have been in November 1920.)
- (b) a night trip to the Drouin doctor to stitch up a deep gash in my left hand that resulted from an accidental misunderstanding with Norman while we were trying to split firewood blocks with axes at the wood heap in the back yard about sunset one evening. (That must have been in 1920 or 1921.)

Each trip to Drouin by wagon or buggy had to be preceded by removing the wheels and greasing the axles.

3. stock horses for rounding up and droving stock. Fat lambs and sheep were railed from Drouin to the Melbourne “Newmarket” saleyards on Monday evenings for sale on Tuesday. On Sunday they were driven half-way to Drouin, yarded at an obliging farm and driven on to Drouin on the Monday. Norman and I often participated in the Sunday component on the ponies, but on the Monday it was back to school for us.

Cattle were mostly bought and sold at the Warragul Saleyards and were driven to and from there. Occasionally store cattle were bought further afield (e.g. Sale) and a drover engaged to bring them to within about 20 miles of Wandella where they were met and taken over by members of the family.

4. Riding horses. (See under Community and Social Activities)

Home Deliveries

Basic groceries – bags of flour and sugar, butter, cheese, tinned foods, oatmeal, etc. and various cooking ingredients, etc. – were obtained from the co-operative store belonging to the Korumburra Butter Factory. An order left with the outgoing cream cans resulted in delivery of the groceries in the cans when they were returned. (In due course, I think about the late 20’s, Father became a Director of the Butter Factory Company.)

Mail and “The Argus” (Melbourne) newspaper were delivered six days a week by a mailman (Mr. Stroud) in a rickety jinker from the Poowong Post Office. A Post Office Agency at the Mountain View Hall, operated by a local lady, opened for about one hour each day primarily to exchange with the mailman letters, parcels and telegrams to and from the residents east of the hall – as the mailman did not proceed beyond the hall.

Community and Social Activities

In 1920 Father agreed to a request to become the local representative on the Buln Buln Shire Council – following the resignation of Christian Byriell who owned the 320 acre property abutting on the eastern boundary of Wandella and which he had sold to the Soldier Settlement Commission to subdivide into three soldier settlement farms. This involved trips to Drouin for regular council meetings each month and special trips from time to time for other council matters.

This position added to his activities on the State School Parents' Committee and the Committees of the Mountain View and East Poowong halls. These local meetings were always held at night and, attending on horseback on a cold, wet winter's night, was accepted as something to be done.

We attended Anglican Church Services in the original East Poowong Hall (long since demolished). I think they were held only about once a month and the music for the hymns was provided by Hans Schmidt with his violin.

A Union (all Protestants) Sunday School was held on Sunday afternoons in the Mountain View Hall. It was conducted by Bob Henry and his wife (assisted by Bob's father, Willy, and his wife). Norman and I and many others rode our ponies to Sunday School and, on the way home, often bombarded one another with acorns we picked up under the oaks at the hall.

The East Poowong football team competed against other district teams. George played for it during most or all of the 1920's. One year the school teacher (Miss Day) donated a trophy for the most consistent player and George won it – a shaving stand. In my earliest recollection, the football ground was on our farm – on the low hill on the north-east side of the main road about half a mile from the Mountain View corner. (See Map.) The south goal post was close to the road and the "change room" was a big gum tree close to the road fence. By the late 1920's the football ground had been relocated on to Richardson's property across the road from the original Aviswood homestead.

Other social functions included fairly regular dances and occasional euchre parties in the local halls and Athlone Hall (attended by George and Dolly – by riding until the mid-1920's), a concert from time to time, which usually included a comedian, and occasional functions to "send off" someone leaving the district or to honor someone who had retired from rendering valuable community service.

Another occasional activity was "tin-kettling" a newly wed couple shortly after returning from their honeymoon. The night of this event was kept secret from the recipients and only announced to them about 9 p.m. by loud banging on tins, etc. – starting about half a mile from their home. All participants took household presents and a plate of supper.

Various ladies in the district (including Mother) visited one another from time to time. Each took a turn at entertaining the others, always on a Thursday (following the regular routine of washing on Mondays, ironing on Tuesdays and baking on Wednesdays).

Purchase of "Dobbin's"

In 1922 Father purchased "Dobbin's" (lot 31, Parish of Poowong) from Colonel Dobbin. It was a long, narrow property of about 125 acres abutting on the full northern boundary of lot 30 (already owned) extending from Wandella to the Lang Lang River, with a width of only about 16 chains. (See Map.)

The farm sheds and house were situated where indicated on the Map. Some of the original garden flowers still survive. The whole property was in a very run-down condition.

Of the 83 acres east of the main road, practically all of the elevated part (about 50 acres) was covered with dense bracken over 6 feet high and the flat was covered with tussocks. The only clear land on this 83 acres was a small area around the house and sheds and a narrow strip along the foot of the hill. At evening time this strip was always "crawling" with rabbits nibbling at the remnants of pasture.

Father, George and "Jack" cleared a fire break along the northern boundary at the top of the hill and on the eastern boundary abutting Wandella and, on a warm day with a southerly breeze, warned the neighbours and then lit the bracken along the foot of the hill.

Norman and I were allowed to come home from school at lunch time to view the event and it was certainly spectacular. The fire went from the bottom of the hill to the top in about 10 minutes. Later in the

afternoon, when most of the fire was out, there were many dead rabbits and a few foxes that had been unable to reach their burrows. To our surprise we also found a small flock of about six singed goats huddled at the bottom of the steepest part which we later called “the gorge”. This was the only location at which they could have survived as it consisted of a stand of timber (partly still there) with only light bracken, and the fire would have mostly passed over it through the tree tops.

George used a “hill-side” plough to plough as much as possible of the hill, which was then sown to pasture, but involved several years of fern cutting before all the ferns were eradicated. George, Father and “Jack” also grubbed the tree stumps in the flat before ploughing as a first step towards eradicating the tussocks and establishing pasture.

Norman and I were of an age that we took a keen interest in the clearing of “Dobbins” and one of my clear recollections is following the plough on the flat and every now and again hearing a sucking noise which indicated the proximity of a giant earthworm (a species unique to South Gippsland). Occasionally we could dig them out and hang them over the fence – the full grown ones reaching the ground on both sides. Their eggs were about three inches long and about half inch diameter with a soft, but tough, brown skin.

The purchase of Dobbin’s led to the establishment of a second share farm comprising that part of lot 30 known as Bremner’s and that part of Dobbin’s west of the main road. The house and sheds for the share farm were built on Bremner’s. The house was built by Albert Horner and the first share farmer was Wally Richardson (and his family), followed by the Willis family. At least one of the farm buildings was transferred from where the Dobbin’s had lived, but the house and other sheds there were too dilapidated to repair and were demolished.

When George married in 1928, the Willis’ bought a farm at Colac and George and Elizabeth set up a home in the fairly new house and remained there for the next 44 years.

When the Herring’s were in a position to buy their own farm, they were succeeded at Aviswood by other share farmers until about 1946 at which time George took over the farming of that land, and the house and farm buildings – which had become very old – were demolished.

Other Significant Events of the 1920’s

- (a) Father purchased our first car, a Fiat 501, in 1924 – which initiated a new phase in transport.
- (b) The Koo-wee-rup to Strzelecki railway was constructed with nearby stations of “Topiram” and “Triholm” (see Map), which greatly facilitated transport of stock and produce and also provided a passenger service by means of a carriage included in the goods train. In 1920 Father was appointed a Member of the Railway Construction Trust, the functions of which included the rating system whereby properties within the area served by the railway were rated on a sliding scale depending on proximity to stations – to provide revenue towards meeting the operating costs of the railway.

The day the line was officially opened (29th June, 1922) we all went by special train to the terminus at Strzelecki where various dignitaries all had their say. As kids, our main interest was the excitement of the rail trip and the food provided, but it was a very cold day. There was also an evening dance in the Strzelecki Hall to further celebrate the occasion. George and Dolly rode their horses to the dance, but had to endure a snow storm on the way home.

For some years after the railway began operation Norman and I picked several cases of mushrooms each autumn and railed them off to a produce agent in Melbourne and earned some pocket money.

(However, it turned out that the construction of the railway was soon to be followed by better roads and motor trucks, and the rail service was discontinued in 1941.)

- (c) A “Gloria” lighting system was installed at Wandella – a system fuelled with lighting kerosene with an outside pressure tank (pumped up from time to time as necessary with an air pump similar to a tyre pump) and small copper tubes to lights in the ceilings of the kitchen and the dining room-lounge. (At that time the room in the north-west corner of the house was the kitchen and the present kitchen was Dolly’s bedroom.)

The actual light was an incandescent mantle burning vaporised kerosene. Lighting up involved heating the vaporiser (a brass tube with a very small hole in the end) with a methylated spirits flame on a wick, turning on the fuel tap and then passing the flame under the mantle. Mantles were produced by tying on a silky “purse” and burning it with a candle. Mantles broke from time to time, but usually lasted about 12 months.

It was good soft light and was a vast improvement in those rooms as it superseded a kerosene lamp sitting on a table. (Candles or small kerosene lamps were still used in the bedrooms until electricity arrived in 1939.)

This improved light in the kitchen must have been a great boon to Mother cooking and sewing or knitting, etc. on winter evenings and to Father looking through the “Argus” at the livestock reports, general farming news and news headlines, if he was not occupied in some maintenance matter (e.g. half-soling our boots or mending harness, etc.) or going to a meeting.

- (d) In 1920, Norman and I were part way through our primary schooling at the (present) East Poowong State School which, at that time had only one classroom and one teacher for all eight grades. We were within walking distance, but many children rode their ponies to school. (This school was built about 1916 to provide proper accommodation for school classes which had been held in a nearby Methodist Church Hall since 1911. For the first two years after Father bought Wandella – 1909 to 1911 – the nearest school was Hallora, a six-mile ride for George. Presumably Dolly was taught at home until the local school opened in March, 1911, when she was 8 years of age.) From about the 5th grade on, we spent part of our time supervising the 1st and 2nd grades. We also celebrated each “Arbor Day” by planting a tree or two in the school ground. (The present day tree planting programs are far from new!)

During the early 1920’s there was a progressive increase in the number of children at the school and the school qualified for a second teacher, called a Sewing Mistress, and the second classroom was built in 1922. Dolly was appointed to the new position of Sewing Mistress, which in turn led to her becoming eligible to take charge of a one-teacher school. Her first school was Berringama in north-eastern Victoria near Cudgewa – a long and slow train journey from Drouin. Towards the end of the 20’s she was transferred to Chillingollah in the Mallee, where she met Aub. (They were married in 1931.)

- (e) For some years in the latter part of the 1920’s Norman and I attended Warragul High School. This involved boarding in Warragul during the week but, as a school bus had commenced running from Strzelecki, we were able to get home for the week-ends by leaving the bus on the Warragul-Korumburra road and walking home (some four miles partly through farms) on Friday evenings (in the dark during the winter months). On Monday mornings we rode our horses up to the bus, tied their reins to the saddles, gave them a whack on the back and sent them off home.

A memorable event of that period was the effect we experienced in Warragul of the great bush fire in the Noojee area (20 miles north of Warragul) where several people were burnt to death on a February day in 1926. A strong north wind blew great billows of black clouds over Warragul carrying a lot of ashes and burnt gum leaves resulting from bark and leaves being swept up high in the sky by the updraft at the huge fire. A surprising situation was the outbreak of several grass fires in paddocks around Warragul resulting from the falling of remnants of large pieces of bark that were still burning.

- (f) I remember “getting the phone on” – presumably it was in the early 20’s. It was a party line with about four neighbours and when the exchange or a neighbour wanted us they rang “one long and two short” from a handle attached to their phone. It was a one-line system with earth return – the latter being via a pipe driven into the ground. When reception was bad we poured water down the pipe to improve the earth connection.
- (g) The house (Wandella) was found to be infested with white ants. To overcome this, all the wooden stumps were replaced with brick stumps. This was one of the rare occasions when Father and George engaged experienced assistance. When the stumps were replaced, damaged pine lining boards in several rooms were replaced. The hardwood studs were not affected.
- (h) For about two years (I think 1923 and 1924) Norman and I were required by Mother to have piano lessons. The teacher (I think Miss Peterson) would arrive on horseback after school and, after our lessons, would move on to one of the neighbours.
- (i) Norman and I and two or three neighbouring children were given several Confirmation lessons at our place by the Vicar from the township of Loch – some 10 miles to the south-west. He came by car and, on each occasion, Father filled his petrol tank as some recompense for his action. We were Confirmed at Loch and I think this was the first time either of us had been inside a real church.
- (j) For a time, perhaps a year, in 1922 or thereabouts the school teacher lived with us because no-one else near the school was prepared to have her. This increased to nine the number of people for whom Mother provided daily meals.
- (k) The annual Show Days at Warragul and Korumburra included some events that have long since disappeared:-
- (i) tent pegging – an event for returned lighthorsemen from the 1914-18 World War, each in full uniform, including the distinctive plumed hat, and mounted. It involved a race in which each contestant had to pick up, with his sword, a line of about six pegs protruding about 9 inches above the ground and deposit them in a barrel at his starting point. The pegs had to be picked up one at a time, involving short bursts of speed, skill at stabbing the peg and rapid turns, particularly if a stab missed a peg.
 - (ii) the boxing tent, where any local could pit his skill against one of the small troupe of “has been” professional boxers.
- (l) Grass fires, generally resulting from lightning setting fire to the top of a dead tree and live sparks being blown on to dry grass. On one occasion a tall tree near the cottage on Wandella was lit at the top by lightning and sparks were blown towards the cottage, which was unoccupied at the time. This involved George and “Jack” taking turns throughout the night for two or three nights to save the cottage.
- (m) On three or four evenings each year throughout most of the 20’s, Norman and I would fish in the creek that flowed through Wandella and catch black fish and eels that provided a tasty breakfast the next morning. (The holes in which we caught the fish subsequently silted up as a result of cultivation on the catchment of the creek – and that rendered the creek unsuitable for fish life.)
- (n) From time to time we would see a bullock team passing Wandella or elsewhere in the district. There were two or three teams in the general area used for various purposes including hauling logs to timber mills (the nearest one was Duncan’s mill on the east side of the road to Drouin and about four miles from Wandella) and occasionally shifting houses. They were better than horse teams for this latter purpose as they started gently and moved slowly – never jerking the load.

- (o) Occasional visits from Indian hawkers with their wares in a covered wagon and from swaggies seeking tea and “tucker” as they passed slowly on their way to wherever. (Some swaggies operated a “bush telegraph” system, using stones on fence posts to indicate the more sympathetic homesteads.)
- (p) Koalas (we called them bears) were seen from time to time in trees on or near Wandella and, on rare occasions, we would see a spiny anteater (we called them porcupines) in nearby bush land.

Now, Something about our home life in the 1920's

By present day standards we led very much a self-sufficient and isolated existence, particularly in the early 20's before the advent of better roads and the acquisition of the car in 1924. Except for Father's necessary interest in Melbourne's livestock and produce markets, anything that happened more than 20 miles from Wandella was of little interest. (International news was very important, of course, during the preceding war years.)

Mother performed her complex role admirably. She gave great attention to our physical well-being and she did her best to teach us good house manners and basic social graces. The main meal of the day was preceded with Grace, children were required to say their prayers before getting into bed and she ensured that, despite all the work of running the farm, Sunday work was strictly confined to the essentials of milking the cows and dealing with any emergencies that may arise.

Clothes washing included boiling up the wood-fired copper and use of a washing board and a hand-wringer. Ironing was with a flat iron heated on the top of the wood-fired stove, supplemented during the 20's with an iron that had a built-in liquid fuel (methylated spirits?) heater. However, it was heavy and bulky and was used only intermittently.

Christmas and birthdays were celebrated in a simple style. Each year our Christmas tree was a bushy branch cut from a large shrub growing on the side of the road. This shrub was selected because it blossomed at that time with a mass of small white flowers. On Christmas Eve, children hung a sock (the biggest that could be found) on the foot of the bed for Santa to put his present in. The chimney was also inspected to see that he had ready access. Christmas dinner included the traditional plum pudding containing silver coins.

I still have two of my early birthday presents – a bible with my name and date written by my Father for my 16th birthday in 1929 (it would have been Mother's idea) and gold cuff links inscribed with my initials and date for my 19th birthday.

Occasionally one of our numerous aunts would visit us for a short holiday. Aunt Emily, who was deaf following a childhood infection, was an excellent lip reader and also a good child entertainer. We particularly enjoyed her amusing actions with her hands whereby, when the table lamp was alight in the evenings, she could form animated shadow pictures of various animals and birds on the wall.

Because our domestic water supply was limited to roof water, baths were taken only once a week unless we were going to a social function. The water was heated on the wood-fire stove, which also limited the amount of water that could be used for a bath.

As part of a progressive improvement in household amenities, a separate building comprising a laundry and a store room (still existing) was erected in the late 20's. This also provided some additional roof water, which enabled more frequent baths and the installation of a septic tank system to receive and treat toilet waste, and enabled the toilet to be located close to the house. (For once we had an amenity – a flush toilet – that many city people did not have.)

To make the best use of our limited domestic water supply, usage by the toilet system was reduced by placing a brick in the cistern. This had no effect on its operation and was one of many innovations applied from time to time to make the most of limited resources or to cope with unexpected situations on the farm or in the household.

Another innovation, or more particularly an expediency, resulted from Mother dropping the sewing machine (table-top type) in the course of a sewing bout. The cast iron base plate broke across the middle, separating the bobbin end from the end which supported most of the machine, including the needle. Well, Father made two steel straps, drilled appropriate holes through the straps and the broken base plate, made some rivets out of old bolts and riveted the straps across the break – with a precision that positioned the needle in its true position directly over the small hole through which it had to pass to pick up the bobbin thread. The sewing project was finished with a minimum of delay and the machine continued to work quite satisfactorily for many years thereafter.

For the first half of the 20's, Norman and I seldom went to Drouin or any other township. When we needed a haircut George obliged.

As children, life was never dull as there was a variety of interesting things to do and see on the farm including learning at an early age to ride our ponies, feeding pet lambs, helping with rounding up stock and with shearing, milking cows, building hay stacks and, from time to time, watching exciting activities such as horse breaking.

From an early age, George, Norman and I were each encouraged to take part in the farming operations. Father had a good sense of fun and humor and often would create quite a degree of amusement for us in participating therein. Accordingly, by our teens each of us had acquired quite a reasonable degree of ability in most farming procedures. (How different from most city children who have very limited opportunity to gain experience in an occupation while still at school.)

Conclusion

Considering the times, we children were very fortunate. Our parents were fine examples of good citizenship and Father was a very industrious, intelligent, versatile and proficient farmer – substantially self-taught in all his farming activities (including essential book-keeping) except for spending several months in his early life learning some black-smithing (including horse shoeing) from one of his brothers-in-law.

Nevertheless Father felt he could have achieved much more if his formal education had extended beyond an interrupted primary schooling. He became more conscious of this as his activities embraced association with shire engineers, business people, school teachers etc. Accordingly, our parents ensured that each of us had a least some formal education beyond primary school even though this involved each of us in turn boarding away from home at some cost and at times when we would have been very useful on the farm.

As the 1920's progressed it became quite apparent that Norman would be the better farmer and I would be better in some engineering position.

By the end of the 20's George was married, Dolly was school teaching in the Mallee, Norman was working full time on the farm, I was about to attend Melbourne University and Bertha was well advanced in her primary schooling and had entered into the phase of "occupational experience" in the home.

It was good life on the farm and the 1920's was one of the many good decades for Wandella.

P.S.

To some extent the 1920's was the end of an era on the farm. The 1930's (which started with the Depression and ended with the start of World War II) saw significant changes resulting from greater mechanisation of farming operations, use of motor vehicles for transport of live stock and in home amenities with the arrival of electricity at Wandella in 1939. It also saw the replacement of dairying on Wandella with an expansion of cattle fattening. Nevertheless many former practices continued, including further acquisitions of adjacent and nearby farms.

Of the farm as it existed at the end of the 1920's, Wandella is owned by Norman's family, those parts of Aviswood, Bremner's and Dobbin's situated on the south-west side of the main road (total about 237 acres) were sold when George had to retire because of ill-health in 1972 and I inherited the balance (the remaining parts of Aviswood and Dobbin's, totalling about 186 acres) when Father died in 1955. (Dolly and Bertha benefited in other ways from the financial success of Father's farming operations.)

My land is leased to Wilf and Val Boscombe, who purchased George's farm in 1972, and is used primarily for rearing and fattening young cattle.

I have always maintained a close interest in the farm as I knew it in the 1920's and, particularly since I retired from full-time work in 1978, Betty and I have made fairly regular visits to ensure that my land is well maintained and to call at Wandella to keep in touch with members of the family.

Over the past 10 years Betty and I have planted many native trees to provided replacement shade and shelter for stock and to encourage more bird life to help control grubs and insects that attack the pastures. Most of these trees were grown from seed we collected from the limited number of trees remaining from the original shelter patches left when the forest was cleared, and they contribute materially to the appearance of the farm.

One of our pleasures these days is to wend our way up our hill on a nice day and, in a totally peaceful atmosphere, admire the view of the farm and of miles of surrounding district. It includes a commanding view of Wandella, which also reminds me of my early life there.

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