

SHERBROOKE - GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Eileen James. (Fletcher)

William and Ann McDonald, my great grandparents, arrived in Australia c1852 from Montrose, Scotland, and settled at Mt Keira where William erected the first screens at the Colliery which had been opened in 1849.

Jessie Elizabeth, their youngest daughter, was born at Keira in 1860 and married Abraham Fletcher at Wollongong in 1879. The Fletcher family lived at Keira, then moved to Sherbrooke c1892. There were seven children by this time, my father, Alexander, being the sixth child. The family moved to Bulli after Sherbrooke was resumed by the Water Board for Cataract Dam, the dam being completed in 1907. Most of the families mentioned in Alf Dorin's article in the May issue of Illawarra Branches also moved to the Bulli/Woonona area on the coast and descendants are still living there today, 1985.

The friendships formed at Sherbrooke were continued in the new area and the community spirit, begun at Sherbrooke, continued to flourish. Fruit growing, bee-keeping, farming, blackberry picking, timber cutting and milling were continued on the coast. Charles Blinco and Annie Murray both married into the Fletcher family.

In January and February each year at the height of the blackberry season, tents were often pitched on Bulli Mountain and the berries picked and sold to the jam factories in Sydney. Blackberries were harvested on a commercial basis at Sherbrooke in the 1890's. According to William Bayley in his book "Black Diamonds", four tons of berries were sent to Sydney in 1894 and by 1912 this amount had increased to 200 tons. Blackberry bushes were eventually declared a noxious weed and have almost disappeared.

Sherbrooke and its' environs became very popular with visitors from Sydney and the coast because of the beauty of the wild flowers that bloomed in profusion in the spring. Funds for the Union Church, which Anglicans and Methodists had built together, were raised at Wildflower Shows, with visitors often coming from afar to see these unusual displays. Until the early 20th century and the passing of the Wildflowers Protection Act in 1927, wildflower pickers roamed the Bulli Mountain and Sherbrooke Forests every spring, including myself and cousins. Today there is very little evidence left of the past spring beauty on top of Bulli Mountain owing to the building of the freeway and the claiming of the area by the Water Board, which has also claimed a one-time favourite picnic area at Muddy Creek and another at Loddon Falls.

Following the resumption of Sherbrooke in 1903, all buildings except the stone public school (which became the Rangers' cottage), were removed. The bushfires of 1968 destroyed the school and left only the outside shell. According to a report in the 'Illawarra Mercury'. "A" Class Spare Parts of Revesby purchased the remains for \$40,000 and rebuilt it as an Australiana Museum at Milperra to house a valuable collection of Australiana collected by company directors.

"Cataract City", down river from Sherbrooke was a township established for men working on the dam construction. This was quite a busy settlement - besides married and single quarters there was a post office, three stores, seven boarding houses, butchers,

billiards room, a hall, public school with 100 pupils and Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches. Rock for the dam wall was cut at Gallagher's quarry at Sherbrooke and transported the seven miles to the dam wall by means of a two foot gauge tramline.

Today, Sherbrooke and the catchment area is forbidden ground and the opportunity for exploring this pioneer location which my generation had and took advantage of in the early part of this century has gone but is not forgotten.

The foundations for living as a community which helped to serve God, King and country over the years has been handed down to succeeding generations of the Sherbrooke pioneers. We give thanks that their caring and sharing is with us today.

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AND A GOOD TIME WAS HAD BY ALL! - The Combined Conference of the Affiliated Societies of the R.A.H.S. and N.S.W. Family History Societies.

This weekend conference was held at the Cascades Motel, Dubbo on the 18th-20th October last. Bev Booth, after a week of crawling in the mud around Nyngan and Trangie, cemetery hopping, joined Noeline Mearing and myself in Dubbo for this very interesting, friendly weekend.

In between meeting members of the other 27 family history groups and the 65 historical societies, we attended 4 lectures and 2 long business sessions.

After the Official Welcome on Friday night at the Dubbo Museum, we started at 9.30 am on Saturday morning with the Keynote Address, given by Dr. Carol Liston, ex-R.A.H.S., who spoke on the Conference's theme, "Working Together for the Future". Dr Liston stressed that family history societies, historical societies and local libraries MUST work together to keep our heritage for the future. She suggested quarterly meetings to plan joint projects. (It became obvious during the Conference, that many towns are not as fortunate re their local libraries as we are here.) Dr Liston concluded by asking researchers seeking information from local volunteer groups, to tell them ALL the details you know, to stop them wasting their valuable time duplicating research. When you have pieced together your family history, return the compliment by sending them a copy.

Following morning tea, where we had a chance to look at publications from other societies and from Gould Books of S.A., Richard Gore from the NSW State Archives spoke on the Genealogical Research Kit and local history research in the Archives. This was very interesting - how they tackled the immense task of putting the kit together, Part 2 of which is currently being distributed. 80% of all visitors now to the Globe Street, The Rocks, premises are family history researchers, so Richard gave us all a big 'thank you' for putting pressure on the government for facilities, and getting them out of the basement of the State Library! Richard's request to us was - when writing to them, please be specific - you've more hope of getting a helpful reply in 2 months time if you do!