

## **Andy and Thelma McFeat – A HISTORY OF TUROSS HEAD**

There were many "characters" who were responsible for the development of the village of Tuross Head but few had the immediate impact of Andy McFeat.

Those of us who remember Andy will immediately link him with the building and development of "The Pines". Andy was one of those people who was used to assessing and developing an idea and working towards its fruition. His ideas were sound for the development of Tuross but he forgot to carry the local villagers along and encountered some difficulties. He was always thinking of the "big picture".

Some of this story is culled from a few old letters and other information is as I recalled the events. I shall be more than happy to change the story should some of your correspondents have better information.

Andy McFeat and his wife Thelma had a newsagency at Blakehurst near the Georges River, Sydney for about six years until 1950 when he decided on a caravan trip and came to Tuross Head and stayed at the camping area at Sandy Point for 6 weeks.

It rained for three weeks during this period but he was infatuated to "see an old gent catch 700 good fish with yabbies during the three weeks and decided that Tuross was where they wished to live."

It was during this period that he drew up the plans for a Private Hotel come Motel.

Within one week they bought 15 blocks of land including the hill where the old Pines Private Hotel stands (now the Pines Field Study Centre in Craddock Road, Tuross Head). He set about building and running the hotel and "going broke each year for the nine years that they owned the Pines."

Andy had a builder mate from Sydney who came down to set out the foundations and locals Sid Lewis from Moruya and Ray Knight from Tuross worked on the foundations. The project was then taken over by a Sydney builder.

Andy was, to say the least, a bit of a shock to a fairly conservative mixed Presbyterian/Catholic community of the 50's and he, in a business-like way, set out to purchase the old hotel at Cobargo with the idea of transferring the liquor licence to the Pines.

This caused no end of difficulties with the locals, who were adamant that they did not want a pub in the village and the development was opposed quite strenuously. The fact that the Pines was not licensed did not prevent Andy from putting on some entertainment that, in present day terms, could be called "average" but at that time was almost shocking to some of the community, believing it to be almost "Bacchanalian." Remember that Tuross did not have television and radio reception was primitive; the Progress Association had not as yet built the theatre. Tuross was a quiet country village that came to life with visitors during the Christmas holidays.

In 1955 Tuross was a village of only 17 permanent families with two shops, two boatsheds, no roads (they were shockers). Power was restricted to 1 power pole and 2 lights. Stock roamed the streets and scratched themselves on the cottages at night. Rabbits, fish and prawns were plentiful. Ice was impossible; the closest was Narooma and many of the campers purchased old kerosene "silent Knight" refrigerators. They used them, covered them in canvas and pushed them into the bush for their next visit. Tank water and deep pit toilets were the accepted amenities.

Andy often boasted about the official opening of the 1st stage of the building, containing approximately 24 bedrooms. He put on a "lost week-end" for his business associates from Sydney with two DO aircraft from Mascot flying the happy crowd to Tuross. He reported that they "slept very little, danced all night" and that there were 100 guests "who sat at a banquet fit for a queen."

Andy McFeat in his letters refers to Hector McWilliam as a "fine old gentleman who sold us the land." He also refers to Hector McWilliam owning 1600 acres and another gent, Athol Hawdon, who owned a big acreage.

He mentions taking an interest in art and his association with the brother of Eric Lanker who lived at Tuross (Wanda Taylor's house) at that time. He also refers to the arrival at Tuross of Sir Eric Woodward, Governor of N.S.W. and Sir Frank McDowell with police on motor bikes escorting his old Bentley. "We danced the whole night through until the early hours."

Andy was very proud of his developed artistic talent and that he had given away most of his works and that this generosity had been suitably recognised.

He was also conscious of the boom-time period from the 1950 to the 1960's when the Bowling Club started and reminisced about visitors Bobby Limb, Dawn Lake and the announcer Chuck Faulkner.

He was involved in the sale of property when Milton & Grant, the original sub-dividers of the Gold Coast, came to Tuross. He became heavily involved in the Tuross developments; one on the lake shore near the Narrows which fell through as a venture and the second development from Hawkins Road towards Coila, which was also a failure.

He claimed that he brought them to Tuross, flew over, and then cut up 1600 blocks and then unloaded the venture to Latex Investments which in turn went bust.

Many were the subterfuges used to convince the potential buyer from Sydney that the area was a well-developed project. Andy had some locals photographed hauling fish from the ocean at the beach north of Tuross Head. The fish emerging from the water was gaffed ... it was a snapper, it was frozen and gutted and as dead as a dodo ... but it was still suitably fighting, to the delight of the locals.

The primitive golf course (where the shopping centre now stands) was photographed and a club house was superimposed to show future developments, but that's another story.

"The bad old days. Even Anthony Hordern went broke. Associated Securities went bust for \$130,000,000 and Andy McFeat lost \$300,000. No joke I can tell you."

Perhaps we should preserve a little of the history of the "Characters of Tuross". Many were villains ... gamblers would be a better word ... but I prefer to remember them as damned likable villains.

My thanks to Ray Knight for filling the gaps in my memory at a recent "gabfest".

R.Keith Lennon