

Early Memories of Tuross

By: Jessie Overgaard

1923 Tuross Estate was bought from Mr. Stockman by Hector McWilliam, my late father. A previous owner was Mr. Mylott, the Baker in Moruya, (Please see important footnote below)

The house consisted of a stone building with a weatherboard wing. The big Norfolk Is. Pine had the top branches cut off by Stockman's stepson, Arthur Tiedman, who used to race his sister on their ponies from school to see who could climb the highest up the tree.

There was no electric light, so candles and oil lamps were used. Cooking was done on a huge double fuel stove. My father had a large kitchen, dining room and general store added so that it could be run as a boarding house by Mrs. Wood and Mrs. Mitchell. The store only kept essentials and took orders for bread.

The original toilet was made from timber washed up by sea from a shipwreck (2 people could sit side by side on 2 open portholes over a deep pit). Roads were really only tracks (very rough) and Carmy Berriman used to bring the mail down from Turlinjah twice a week on horseback. From the turn off at the main road into Tuross House there were 4 wooden gates which had to be opened and shut by all. The remains of an orchard were in front of the house, only a pear and quince tree were left.

Bed sheeting was bought for the boarding house by Dad in 100 yard rolls, cut but not hemmed, consequently frayed by severe winds they wound threads around trees for miles.

Christmas 1923 saw exceptional rain, all roads were cut, no one could leave Tuross or any resort south of Tuross. During the years following (1923-1930) my father began to develop Tuross as a holiday resort. He was very interested in English history and named all the roads after British Battles and Admirals.

1926 My sister, Jean & I took over the running of the boarding house with the help of Mrs. Mayes (cook) and "George", a little old man who did the washing up. He lived in a room attached to the foul shed. Fred Davis, a local fisherman, lived in a small bush camp on Tuross and in return for looking after the place while Dad was away he was allowed for six pound a week to rent the "Barn" (previously the cream room when the property was a dairy - the separated milk ran down an open trough to the Piggery below). The old bails were where the road now passes.

Fred's parents joined him in the "Barn" together with their 20 cats which preyed heavily on many beautiful birds. One day when Fred and his parents were away Dad mixed strychnine in a large bowl of milk, locked 2 old favourite cats in a shed and watched the rest of them clean up the bowl and walk away purring, He later found out that milk was the only antidote !!

Some of the first visitors to Tuross (where the fishing was great at that time; were Mr. & Mrs. Saggors and family, Tom Royds and his two sisters, the Laing family (Jim now has the boat shed), the Morton, Tiedman and Black families and many others from the Braidwood district. They all had to call at Tuross House to ask permission to camp on the property and to secure drinking water. The water had to be hand pumped from the huge tank under the house to the tank on the verandah near the store

A few years after the first subdivision was granted, cottages started to spring up, and as the population grew so did the need for a school bus for the 10 or 15 children. The very old school bus had a hole in the floor, resulting in the children being covered in dust on arrival at school. The roads, or tracks were still very rough.

Tennis Courts were built about 1926 in Jellico Rd, and Fred Davis was employed to poison the weeds. This he did, but, unfortunately he chipped them out, threw them outside the gate, and Dad's cattle promptly ate them and died. About the same time a 9 hole golf course was also started. An annual Gold Cup Tournament was held for 2 or 3 years but petered out through lack of funds.

Jean and I were still running the boarding house in the summer **1927** when the Scoutmaster from Moruya, Harry Overgaard, called in if he could bring 40 Boy Scouts to camp in the bush, by Coila Lake, for a month. Christmas week was extremely busy and at Tuross House the hostesses were sleeping in tents as boarders occupied all the bedrooms. The scouts gave a concert for all the guests and many of the campers. The Scoutmaster, Harry, had a beautiful tenor voice, which helped win my heart. Harry, who was "First Aid Officer" at Moruya Granite Quarry, (where stone for the Sydney Harbour Bridge was being cut by Scottish and Italian stone masons), became a frequent visitor to Tuross House, arriving on his beautiful horse "Black Bess". A two year courtship resulted in our marriage in August, 1929.

The campers complained about a lack of meat deliveries so Harry bought a sheep from Les Hawden, killed and cut it up himself with a tomahawk. He sold it to campers who said the meat was excellent but why were there so many bones in it?

About this time Carmy Berriman, the mailman, married Elsa Tiedman, whose family had bought land and built a house and store with a small Post Office. Else ran the post Office and store for many years.

Dad had started on a mammoth program of tree planting, going back when he first purchased Tuross. The magnificent Norfolk Is, pines are a lasting testimonial to fifty years of hard work. He started with eight seedlings from Norfolk Island and then noticed seedlings growing in guttering at Tuross House from seeds which had dropped off the big tree adjacent to the house.

This led to his extensive cultivation of the seeds from the old tree and subsequent planting out. These young seedlings had to be watered frequently so a horse drawn water cart was purchased and trees over the whole estate were watered every few days.

My husband Harry often did this job on weekends. Strong Tree guards had to be built around each of the young trees to prevent damage from stock (cattle and sheep were agisted on Tuross by Les Hawden). Each year weeds had to be chipped out and it was many years before the trees survived without constant attention. Apart from the eight original seedlings the thousands of Norfolk Pines have originated from the big tree.

1929 saw the closure of the boarding house with the onset of the depression and growth in Tuross slowed considerably. Harry and I ran the Boarding house for a while in 1932/1933 but it again closed and became vacant.

It was a target for vandalism until after WW2 when Dad moved to Tuross permanently in 1946. He found the house completely stripped of windows, doors and everything which could be removed. Starting from scratch he gradually restored the house to his home and continued his subdivision and his beloved tree planting.

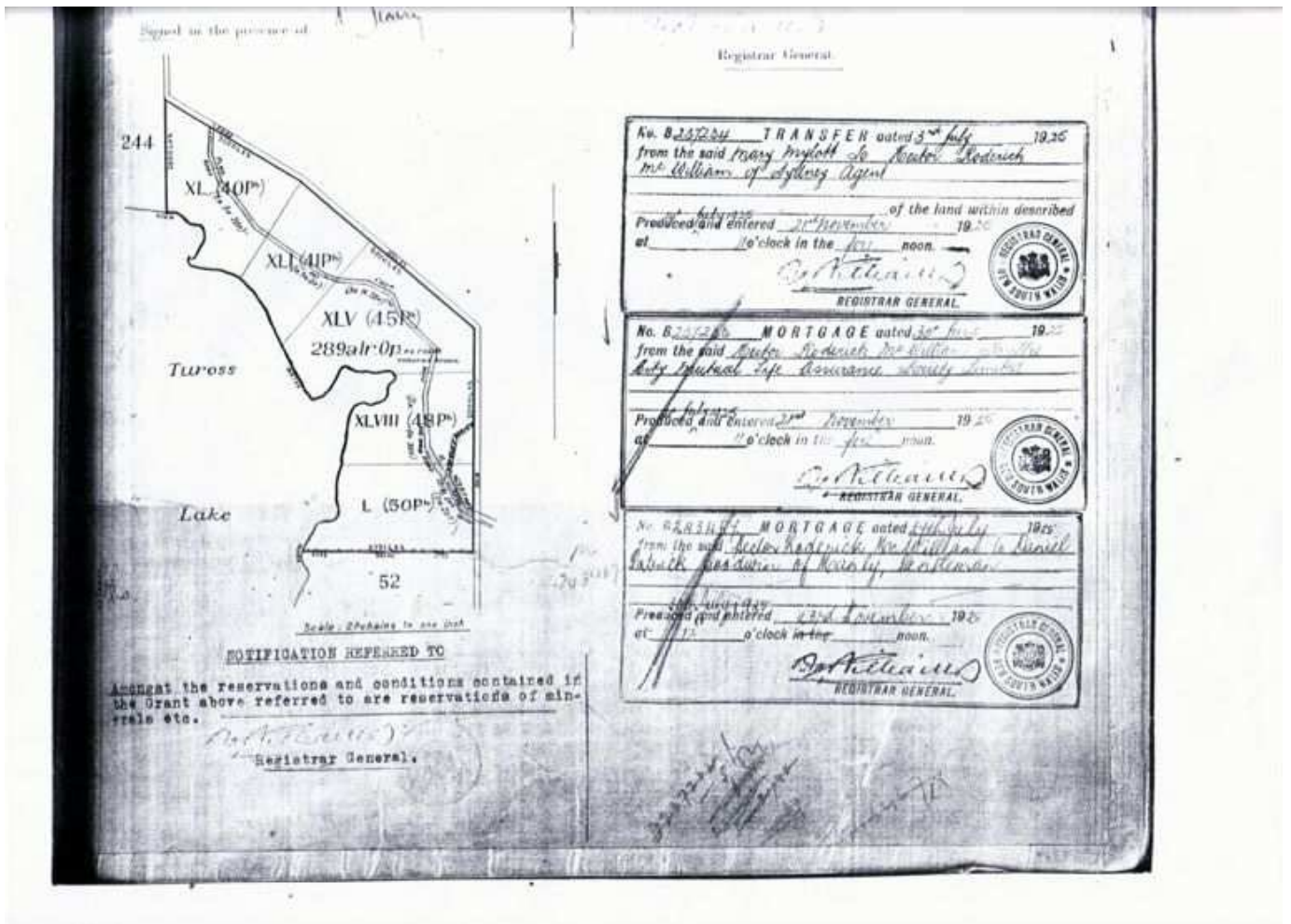
As our four children had married and gone their various ways we also returned to Tuross House in the early sixties. About this time dad dedicated the area of land for a bowling green and club house and the Tuross lakes Bowling Club came into existence. Water for the greens was always a problem and after battling for many years with insufficient water, Harry, together with an assistant, dug a large hole which a soak drained and supplied just enough water to keep the greens alive. When water was eventually laid on to Tuross Head the problem was overcome.

Dad also donated several blocks of land to the Presbyterian Church, enough for a permanent church, a Manse and Sunday School. The present church was brought down from a village on the mountains. Athol Hawdon being involved in the process. It was also used by the Church of England until they bought a block and built for themselves. Karl and Muriel Luders were the driving force behind the formation of the Anglican Church.

As told to: R.Keith Lennon

Footnote: It is important to note here that Mrs Overgaard is actually incorrect regarding her statement "Tuross Estate was bought from Mr, Stockman by Hector McWilliam, my late father. A previous owner was Mr. Mylott, the Baker in Moruya,"

The land was owned by Patrick Mylott Snr up until 1904 under a mortgage with Colonial Mutual when it was signed over to Mary Mylott, wife of Patrick Snr. Mary then sold the land directly to Hector McWilliam as proven by the signatures and stamps at the back of the titles



Transfer own ownership from Mary Mylott to Hector McWilliam July 1926

Where Jessie says: "A previous owner was Mr. Mylott, the Baker in Moruya"; It was Patrick Mylott Jnr who bought the Mylott Bakery building in 1914 which happens to also be the year of birth of his son Jack. It was many years later that Jack was to become a baker.