

NEWSLETTER

No. 5 September 2017

of

MUSWELLBROOK SHIRE LOCAL & FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY INC (Founded 11th June 1958)

Affiliated with Royal Australian Historical Society

ABN 34611778680

PO Box 450 Muswellbrook NSW 2333

EARLY MILLS



An early photo of South Muswellbrook showing Sydney Street and one of the early bridges across Muscle Creek. On the right can be seen Chiver's Mill with a plume of steam or smoke.
MSL&FHS Inc photo 0122 Photo dated 1866.

An interesting article presented to the Society by Margaret Ashford reveals an insight into the early industry of Muswellbrook and district and also gives a brief history of her great, great grandmother Eliza Gardner.

She was born in Ireland, but by the time Eliza was 14 she and her family had travelled to Australia, arriving in Muswellbrook in July 1843. According to her grandson, Mac Bridge, she described the timing of her arrival as being "two days before the death of Lewis Ward, whose tomb is in the Catholic Cemetery, Muswellbrook".¹ It seems unusual that a young girl would later use this event as a reference point, but a report in *The Muswellbrook Chronicle* of 21st June 1935 states that Lewis Ward, an employee of Colonel Dumaresq of St Helier's, Muswellbrook and St Aubin's, Scone, was the first person buried in the Roman Catholic Cemetery in Muswellbrook – a significant occurrence in the town and even to people such as the Gardners who were staunch Presbyterians.

Aged about 15, Eliza worked for "Boshie" Nowland at a hotel in Bridge Street, Muswellbrook. She was expected to keep her employer informed of the time of day, but he had no clock in the hotel. So, she would walk along the street to Stringhaul's store, read their clock, then return to inform Mr Nowland. When asked why he didn't simply install a clock, his response was, "I won't have anything about the place that won't breed."² Around this time, Eliza met John Morrison, a Scottish immigrant who worked at the local Chivers' tweed factory. They married in 1845 and went to live in rooms attached to the tweed factory, on the bank of the Hunter River. There, they increased their family with the birth of two daughters, Margret and Mary Ann, the latter reputedly the first child to be baptised in the then new, now old, Presbyterian Church.

DETAILS ABOUT THE SOCIETY

Objectives:

- To collect, preserve and promote the social, cultural and physical history of Muswellbrook Shire, its environs and its people for future generations.
- to promote public access to our collections and research facilities, and
- to provide information, advice and assistance to individuals, community groups, organizations and businesses.

Meetings

The Society meets on the third Tuesday of each month starting at 7.00 in the Society Room, Muswellbrook Library, come to the rear of the building. All members and visitors are welcome to attend the meeting and stay for a cuppa, biscuit & a chat after.

Premises

The Society maintains its records in a section of Muswellbrook Library. You will find us at the rear of the Library. The Research Centre is open every Saturday from 9.30am to 1.00pm. The Research Centre may be opened at other times by appointment. Bus & tour groups are most welcome.

Annual Fees

Single \$25 Double \$35 Pensioner Single \$15 Pensioner Double \$25 (There is a one off joining fee of \$5)

The Hon Secretary may be contacted via the post office box or email mei2@bigpond.com The Society also has a web presence thanks to Darrin Khan and Lionel Ahearn at <http://www.mbkhistorical.org> and a research site at <http://research.mbkhistorical.org>

¹ M H Bridge, *The Gardners of Rouchel Brook*, unpublished manuscript, Muswellbrook, 1965

² M H Bridge, *The Gardners of Rouchel Brook*, unpublished manuscript, Muswellbrook, 1965



The Mill in 1975 being used as the office for the Riverside Caravan Park. MSL&FHS Inc photo 0161

A few years later they moved to Aberdeen, where John took over the flour mill, the first of its kind in Australia to use a single cylinder steam engine. John announced through the *Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser* of 5th January 1850, that the mill would soon be fully operational, “as the whole of the machinery has undergone a thorough repair”. Things seemed secure for the little family. Even the little girls were integral players in the success of the mill – “as very young children Mary Ann and her sister had to help in the mill by feeding the wheat

from the top floor, by means of a scraper, to the lower floor where it was ground. She and her sister were so small they had to wear safety belts as a precaution against going down with the wheat”!³



Aberdeen Flour Mill MSL&FHS Inc photo 440.3 dated 1987



Gears photo 440.1 - 1987.



Grinding pans 604.3 dated 1967

The good life didn't last. The next year there were huge floods in the Hunter. There's no record of how much the family lost in the flood, but there is evidence of its impact in Eliza's little Bible which somehow survived – with no cover and looking much the worse for wear, it holds the records of their marriage and the births of the first two girls, accompanied by two locks of hair, apparently theirs. Then in 1853 John tragically lost his life in an accident while carrying wood from the nearby hills to power the steam mill. So, aged only 26, Eliza was widowed and left with the mill to run and by then, three young daughters to rear.

She attempted to maintain the status quo, advertising in the *Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser* of 2nd July 1853, that she would settle all debts and accounts outstanding at the mill while her brother, William Gardner, would continue the business of the mill and fulfil all orders as his brother-in-law had done. Apparently, the situation was unsustainable, because Mary Ann's story tells us that Eliza and the three girls made a home for some time with Eliza's sister, Mary McMullin, at Oswald in the Lower Hunter and that as a young child Mary Ann worked shepherding for her Uncle William on his property at The Rouchel.

No information is available to tell us how this came about, but Eliza's occupation is shown as a storekeeper on the record of her marriage to William Walker, in 1856. They were married at the *Bluebell Inn* at Halcombe Hill north of Aberdeen, her brother William being the innkeeper there at that time, according to her grandson, Harry Spencer.⁴ Eliza probably felt secure again, but some time after the family had expanded to include daughters Emma and Ellen, William died on a droving trip. He was burnt to death in the Dirranbandi district, in southern Queensland. Again Eliza, still only about 30 and now with five girls to raise, was adrift.

Personal Note: The Aberdeen Mill was again inundated in the 1955 flood. After the flood we were unable to get to High School at Muswellbrook so we were given the task of helping to clean out many places in Aberdeen. I spent most of one day at the mill hosing out the house. The mud was quite thick but was mixed with bags of feathers apparently being stored to make pillows or an eiderdown. Lionel Ahearn

³ H J Ashford, *Mary Ann Morrison's Story*, 1987, submission to *The Gentle Arts: 200 Years of Australian Women's Decorative Arts*, Jennifer Isaacs, Landsdowne Press, 1987

⁴ H C Spencer, *The Gardner Family, Scone and Upper Hunter Historical Society Journal*, Vol 4, 1973, Part 1

It's not known whether she continued or returned to her storekeeping days after his death, but we do know something of her reputation as a storekeeper. According to Mac Bridge, she "helped many a lame dog over a stile, including John Robertson [later of Robertson's Lands Act fame], giving real and genuine help."⁵

Again, her brother William came to her aid. *The Muswellbrook Chronicle*, 16th October 1959, quotes Eliza's grandson Aubrey Spencer: "grandmother lived with her brother, William Irwin Gardner, at *Segenhoe House* for many years. It was there my mother [Emma Spencer nee Walker] and her sister lived from their early childhood days ... [till] 1880 at the time of her [Emma's] marriage at the age of 24 years. During that time the late M C McKenzie came to Aberdeen; Eliza prevailed on her brother to let McKenzie occupy a room in *Segenhoe House* as a store."



During her time living with William at *Segenhoe House* the establishment included the House, the store, a butchery and post office. There, an interesting event occurred, as recounted by Harry Spencer:⁶

That was in the days of Thunderbolt, the bushranger. Like many more local residents at the time, Granny was on friendly terms with "Ward", as she called him, and many a tale she would tell of the outlaw, tales which in some instances would rank him on level terms with Robin Hood. One tale I remember related to a night when Ward was buying (not taking, mind you!) some goods from Murdo Cameron Mackenzie's store, which at the time consisted of a single room in the Segenhoe Inn. When the 'bush telegraph' let it be known that the troopers were coming to arrest him, Thunderbolt was smuggled through a private passageway leading to the stables and was well on his way to his secret hideout on Mount Sugarloaf when the troopers arrived.

Even though it seems that Eliza Gardner spent many years in Aberdeen with her brother, in later years she lived at "Rosebrook", just outside Muswellbrook, with her daughter Mary Ann and her son-in-law, William Bridge. There, according to family legend, she "sat at the corner of the round table", a "fact" that my grandfather, Mac Bridge, loved to recount. This was her final residence and where she died in 1919.

There she welcomed others, such as my grandmother, Annie Bush. My grandfather travelled a lot for work and Annie didn't like to stay at home alone overnight. So whenever he was away, each afternoon Annie would put my mother in the pram and walk 2-3 miles from her house on Skellatar Street out to Granny Walker's, stay there for the night and walk back home again in the morning.

In many ways Eliza's was an unexceptional life. However, it is one which exemplifies the lives of women of the late 19th century – strong, vigorous women who carved out lives for themselves and their children despite adversity.

Margaret Ashford

BERRYWOOD

At the August Meeting of the MSL&FHS Inc it was moved that a letter be forwarded to the Muswellbrook Shire Council asking that permission for the demolition of the historic homestead, Berrywood, be refused. The right to purchase the land was first granted to William Cox of Clarendon in 1825. In 1838, William Cox of Hobartville registered a claim for the 2560 acres. After many sales and subdivisions of the land, the following notice of auction which appeared in the *Muswellbrook Chronicle* on 23rd May 1913 on behalf of Mr I G Budden gives an excellent description of the property.

Berrywood, Muswellbrook, Situated on the outskirts of the town of Muswellbrook, and containing an area of 251 acres Freehold, subdivided into four paddocks, of which about 112 acres are on the flat, admirably adapted for lucerne culture, 10 acres now growing lucerne. The balance of the area is well improved.

The improvements comprise a charming up-to-date residence of 8 rooms with numerous outbuildings. Also, Dairyman's cottage (new) of 5 rooms. Dairy with Turbine Separator, 7 bails, with concrete floors, Piggery, with concrete floors and troughs; and everything necessary for an up-to-date dairy farm.⁷

⁵ M H Bridge, *The Gardners of Rouchel Brook*, unpublished manuscript, Muswellbrook, 1965

⁶ H C Spencer, *The Gardner Family, Scone and Upper Hunter Historical Society Journal*, Vol. 4, 1973, Part 1

⁷ From Mount Pleasant Historic Heritage Study for Rio Tinto Coal Australia by Veritas Archaeology & History Service p439



Plate 362 Berrywood Homestead

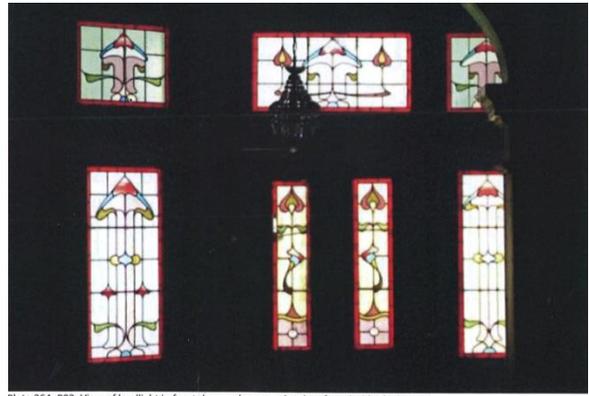
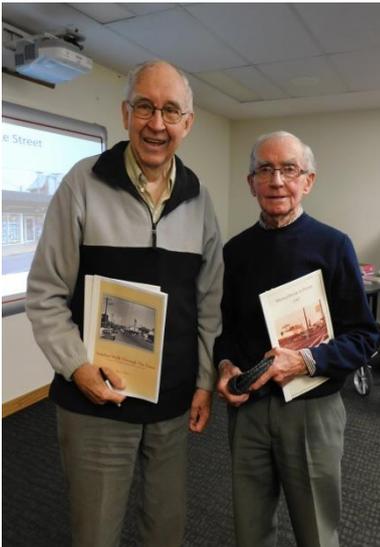


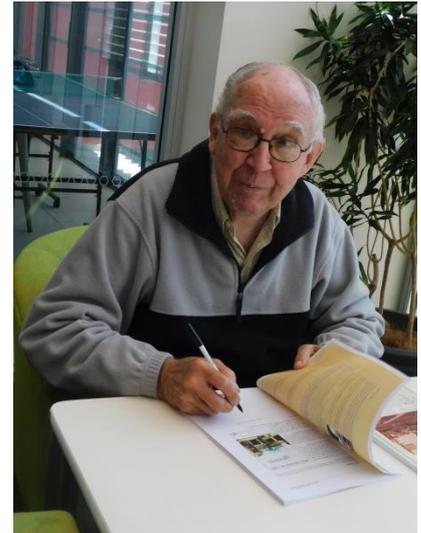
Plate 364: P02. View of leadlight in front door and surrounds taken from inside the house.

SOCIETY'S HISTORY WEEK CELEBRATION

On 9th September the Society celebrated with the launch of two books written by Bruce James. Mr Tony Neate, Muswellbrook's Citizen of the Year, did us the honour of officially launching these two works that built on past works by Bruce.



Bruce James & Tony Neate after launching the two books



Bruce James autographing purchased book

Muswellbrook in Picture 1985

Features over 100 photos of Muswellbrook Town Centre as well as churches, schools, clubs, hotels and many more taken in 1985

Bruce presents a concise history of each building featured.

Incorporating Muswellbrook in Picture c1912

Another Walk Through The Town

This updated edition of Bruce's earlier work describing the changes in buildings and their uses over a period of 60 years.

The book features 58 pages of photos and description of changes which have taken place in Muswellbrook's town centre.



The morning also involved the Muswellbrook Library. Displays showcased the theme 'Pop' which brought to the attention of visitors the changes over time, especially in dress and the way music was presented.

The members of our Society once again excelled in providing such an excellent morning tea which was commented on by visitors from as far away as Newcastle. Both books proved to be good sellers with further printings taking place. Books are still available by contacting the Society Secretary. (See front page for details).

⁸ From Mount Pleasant Historic Heritage Study for Rio Tinto Coal Australia by Veritas Archaeology & History Service

⁹ Pictures and words from flyer by Bill Spicer

¹⁰ Photos of Bruce, Tony and showcase by Margaret Dolahenty