

# NEWSLETTER

No. 2 April 2019

of

**MUSWELLBROOK SHIRE LOCAL & FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY INC** (Founded 11<sup>th</sup> June 1958)

Affiliated with Royal Australian Historical Society

ABN 34611778680

PO Box 450 Muswellbrook NSW 2333

Editor Lionel Ahearn



The launch of the Show Book, compiled by Ted George, took place at the Official Opening of the 2019 Muswellbrook Show. The initial printing of 100 books is almost sold out and the Show Committee has ordered a further 50 copies. For those who have not yet obtained a copy see Ted or pick one up at the Society on Saturday morning.

While inserting information for the various shows I noticed that there were numerous observations on the weather. Numerous droughts and dry seasons led to shows being abandoned for one or two years.

**1876** Entries for the first show were fewer than expected due to the prolonged dry weather.

**1878** No show held due to the unfavourable season, a drought having been prevailing for some time previously. It was deemed to pass this year without having a show.

**1884** Mr E Bowman considered the association acted wisely in not holding a show this year, in face of the severe drought, but hoped that a show would be held next year.

**1885 & 1886** No show due to unfavourable weather.

**1897** At a meeting of the committee of the P & A Association held this afternoon, a resolution was carried postponing the show for twelve months by fifteen votes to eleven. (**Maitland Daily Mercury, 1 April, 1897**)

The Show to be held after all.

A resolution, proposed by Mr W Clendenning, that the Annual Show to be held as usual on the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of May next was carried by 86 votes to 15. Those who favoured the postponement on account of the dry weather are now working harmoniously with the majority.

(**Maitland Daily Mercury, 12 April, 1897**)

It is interesting to note the huge turn around in just eleven days.

1906, 1913, 1919, 1920 and 1939 entries all mention the dry conditions and droughts as having a huge effect on the holding of these shows.



This photo donated to the Society by Col Ellis shows their property on Denman Road during the drought from 1980 to 1983. Photo D2616

While it is hard to deny global warming, it would appear that droughts have always featured in our weather pattern and will continue to do so.

## 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 at the rear of the Muswellbrook Library. 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

The Hon Secretary may be contacted via the post office box or email [mei2@bigpond.com](mailto: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>

## Wickham's Store at Denman

While doing research for the book 'Standing the Test of Time' an interesting article was found in the Muswellbrook Chronicle. It is reproduced below with a couple of photos from that period.

### Business Change at Denman.

In 1909, nearly 14 years ago, a new store opened, and commenced business in Denman. The town then was nothing like it is to-day. A few houses, a couple of hotels and a small shop or two grouped themselves on the bank of the Hunter River and promptly called themselves a town.



Ogilvie Street, Denman c1900 about the time Wickham's Store opened across from where Denman Hotel stands today. Photo 2534.1

In those days the coach which travelled from Muswellbrook to Merriwa stopped to change horses in this little settlement, beyond the pasture areas of Pickering, Merton, Martindale, Woodlands and Baerami. Here and there were a few smaller settlements, but anything like closer settlement had not begun on any scale.

So, when the firm of Wickham and Co. employing two hands took down its shutters and commenced business it seemed to be quite a large business house for so sparsely settled a district. But the heads were far-seeing men. The town was going to grow, the district could not for ever continue without Closer Settlement taking the place largely of the great areas for pasturing cattle. Dairies were established on the share system on all the large holdings. One after another, people came and took up blocks and settled on them, making dairying and mixed farming their means of livelihood.

The butter factory gradually assumed greater importance in, the life of the district. The Government in later days established a Soldier Settlement on Baerami and Yarrawa, and later still a large area of Martindale was thrown open for selection, and the blocks are now one by one finding owners.



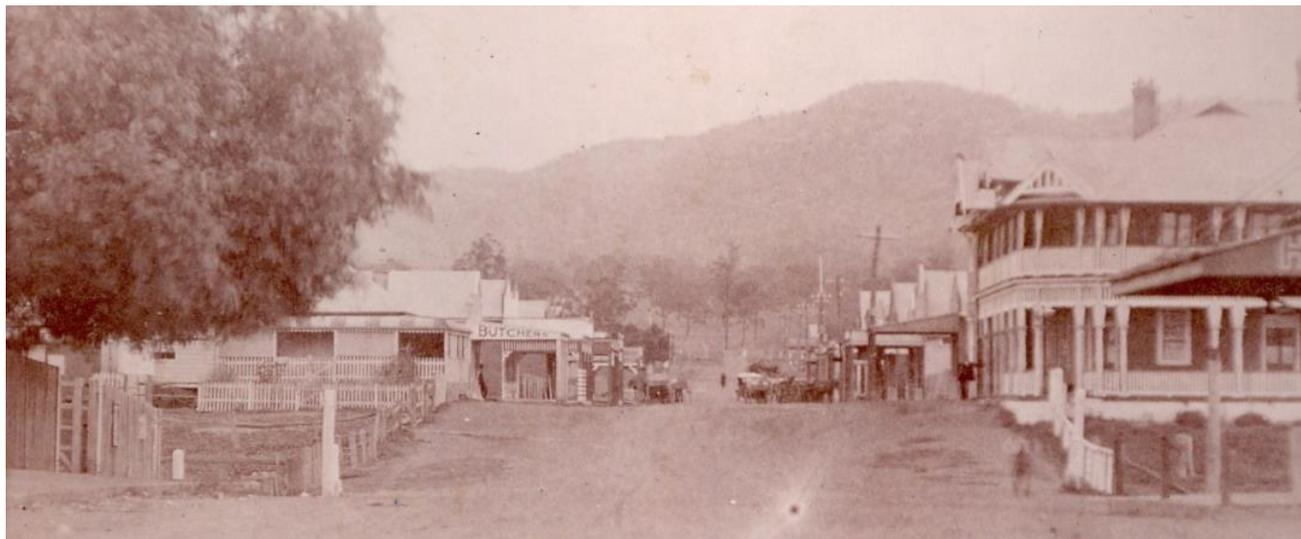
Society photo 2535.4

With all this, settlement slowly and surely proceeding in the neighbourhood, the little town of Denman grew, just as surely other business houses opened their doors. And the firm of Wickham, and Co. grew too. It was found necessary to get into larger premises and the present fine store was built in the main street, which will stand as a monument to the progressive nature

of the firm, which to-day employs eight assistants and boasts of the proud position of being Denman's oldest store. The success which has attended the firm's efforts has no doubt been mostly due to the energy, courtesy and ability of the manager, Mr. W. A. Wickham, and now in the height of its prosperity, we have to record the fact that the business is changing hands. Soon the old familiar sign of Wickham and Co. will disappear, and a new one will take its place. Soon the happy face and obliging manner of Mr. Wickham will pass out of the life of Denman and leave a gap in the everyday life of his numerous circle of customers.

It is very hard for a man in business to give satisfaction to everybody, but Mr. Wickham seems to have the happy knack of just exactly doing things in the right way without sacrificing the primary aim of a business man, to make his business a success. Mr. Jay, who has purchased the business, and will in future carry it on, comes to Denman with a wide business experience, and though he is as yet a stranger, he has already been shown that he is welcome. From what we have already seen of him we are quite sure that the same courtesy, civility and satisfaction will continue to exhibit themselves under the new regime. And while we are reluctantly compelled to realise that Mr. Wickham will soon go, we extend the right hand of welcome, to Mr. Jay, and assure him of our best wishes to himself and family, and his business. We hope that the business will continue to grow as it has done in the past and extend to the new proprietor our congratulations on his enterprise in entering into business in such a prosperous little town as Denman.

**Muswellbrook Chronicle Friday 2 February 1923.**



Ogilvie Street, Denman in 1924 just after the article was printed. Society photo 2534.2

### A HISTORY OF LUCERNE SEED GROWING IN BAERAMI CREEK.

Thomas Hungerford had introduced the Hunter Valley variety of lucerne to his "Baerami" station sometime in the period 1860-1890. Following Thomas's forfeiture of the "Baerami" station through bankruptcy in late 1892 because of the severe Australia wide economic depression at that time his sixth son 'Kenneth' immediately took up a homestead selection of 118 acres two miles up the left branch from the junction of the two creeks. He farmed there until 1897 when he sold his selection to a relative, Charles Simpson, for 400 pounds.

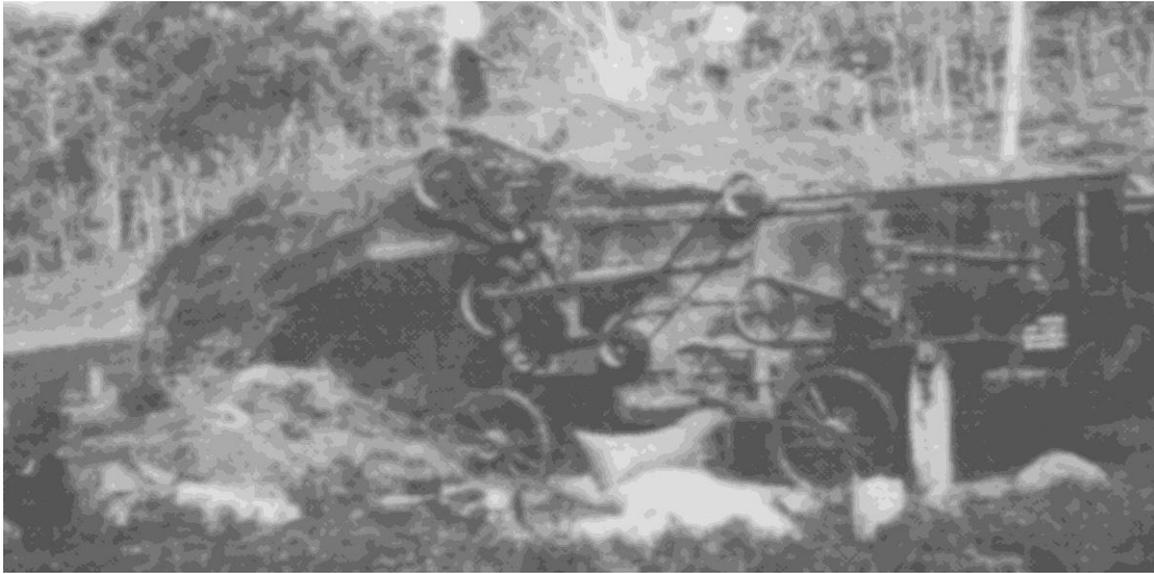
It was while on this selection that Ken Hungerford harvested the first known commercial crop of lucerne seed to be grown in Baerami Creek. This event occurred in the summer of 1896 on his then three year old lucerne stand of fourteen acres. This crop was cut with scythes by Reuben Rose, Thomas Elliott and Arthur Frazer and threshed by Harry Myer of Giant's Creek with a thresher powered by a horse-works. Thirteen men worked on the thresher for three shillings a day with four meals included but no accommodation. About one and a quarter tons of lucerne seed was obtained and sold to shopkeeper Stringer of Giants Creek for 6d a pound.

This crop was the beginning of an important industry for the Baerami Creek Valley, one that has been worth hundreds of thousands of pounds to it.

Lucerne continued to be grown in the valley but the next record of a lucerne seed harvest was not recorded until about 1906. This was when Douglas Bell, the then recently appointed manager for "Baerami" station, newly purchased by E.R. White of "Merton", renovated and fenced that same paddock and secured consecutive crops of seed from it which he used to increase the lucerne acreage on the station. Douglas was the 23 year old son of F. S. Bell of "Pickering" near Denman.

E.R. White disposed of "Baerami" in 1918 to Clift, Button and King of Maitland. At this time the prime lucerne flats at the junction of the two creeks were already flourishing as a lucerne farm. From 1922 these flats were managed by brothers George and Alexander Cameron, both originating from Nemingah near Tamworth. These flats were producing crops that, in 1926, were made into hay and sold as chaff. This chaff was taken to Sandy Hollow railway station by a solid rubber-tired Sentinel steam-driven truck towing a trailer, the two carrying a load totalling eight tons. At this time these flats were also producing lucerne seed crops, the seed then bringing circa one shilling and six pence per pound. There were also many other low-lying fertile creek flats in the valley, some of which were sown to lucerne and others which could be. The total of these acreages would probably be about thirty per cent of the arable acreage in the valley.

When Clift, Button and King sold the "Baerami" estate at the end of 1926, of the prime flats of established lucerne at the junction, which were the best lucerne flats in the valley, half were bought by Joseph Castledine and half were bought by Frank McTackett. Frank McTackett also established a dairy based on his flats while Castledine devoted his to the production of lucerne hay, chaff and seed. Castledine secured a good crop of lucerne seed soon after buying which almost paid for his purchase.



**Castledine Lucerne Seed Thresher. Society photo 2534.2**

Both Castledine and McTackett purchased threshing machines with which to thresh their lucerne seed crops. Castledine purchased a new American "Birdsell" thresher largely built of wood and McTackett purchased an all-metal American "Case" thresher. Castledine's thresher was the best machine for lucerne seed threshing as it had been especially designed for small seed threshing. Both threshers needed to be driven by tractor power and needed a few men on hand labouring during their operation. The "Birdsell" thresher was contracted by other local farmers to thresh their crops for the next twenty-five years. It was always under the control and management of Bill (Stanley Arthur) Castledine, one of Joe's sons.

A very severe drought set in from early 1937 and lasted for 10 years during which time the Baerami Creek did not run at all in that time. Indeed the depth to water in the valley wells dropped significantly and a large proportion of the existing lucerne died as a result of the lowering of the water table. Consequently the annual lucerne seed harvest in the valley greatly diminished. The drought ended at the end of 1947 and many lucerne flats were replanted and again flourished. In the ensuing wetter years trouble was had with Green Vegetable Bugs attacking the pods of the standing lucerne seed crops and sucking the seeds dry with their proboscises. Spraying with DDT was found to be effective but with drier years ensuing the problem disappeared.

With the advent of the Baerami valley being included in the Sydney Milk Zone in 1940 and the consequent production of whole milk instead of cream and the consequent emphasis on constant production instead of a seasonal one and with the increased introduction of irrigation into the valley as well as the exodus of many experienced lucerne seed farmers, the production of lucerne seed in the valley began to fall, however there was still a significant amount still being harvested.

In late 1952 Darrell Ellis and his sons purchased a Case 6A Harvester with a 6ft. wide pick-up attachment. This machine could harvest and thresh all types of grain and was a great success. It revolutionised the production of lucerne seed in the valley as the cut and dried crop was picked up and threshed in the field in the one operation instead of being the subject of labour to gather, stack and thresh. As an example in 1960 this machine harvested four tons of lucerne seed from a paddock of 15 acres and would have probably completed it in a day or two at the most. The seed would have then fetched between five shillings and six shillings per lb.

Burgess of Maitland and then of Singleton operated a special gravity seed cleaning machine and cleaned the lucerne seed so it was ready for sale to the lucerne growing public. He would come around and purchase much of the valley's lucerne seed at this time.

A big catastrophe occurred in the 1970s when two new pests from overseas first put in their appearance in plague proportions in Australia and soon came to the valley. These were the blue-green aphid and another similar aphid. The Hunter River lucerne variety, exclusively used here and in most parts of Australia, was very susceptible to attack and began to be replaced by especially bred resistant varieties such as Nova and Trifecta. The Hunter River variety then faded into oblivion as more resistant and specialised varieties emerged.

At the same time the agricultural authorities established a system of grower registration and inspection and only one grower registered as such operated in the valley in the late 1970s and did so until 1986. No commercial lucerne seed harvest in the valley has taken place since that date.

**Contributed by Ian Ellis**