

NEWSLETTER

of
MUSWELLBROOK SHIRE LOCAL & FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY INC.

Affiliated with Royal Australian Historical Society

ABN 34611778680

(Founded 11th June 1958)

PO Box 450 Muswellbrook NSW 2333

Editor: Lionel Ahearn.

No. 3 June 2019

Railway Sesquicentenary

On Saturday, 18th May, Muswellbrook celebrated 150 years since the railway line reached Muscle Brook. The station was decorated, a special antique train made numerous trips to Denman, stalls were set up and a plaque was unveiled to commemorate the event.



Margaret Dolahenty at the decorated opening to the Muswellbrook Station



The two carriage locomotive loaded and ready to leave for Denman



Music was supplied by bands in the fore court of the station



Present Mayor Martin Rush and former Mayor John Colvin unveil the commemorative plaque.



A Day to Remember

The photos on the left are taken from the Muswellbrook Chronicle, Tuesday, 20th May, 1969 in which it was reported, 'A crowd variously estimated between 6,000 and 10,000 watched Sunday's Railway Centenary celebrations and procession.' The float depicted was entered by M Campbell & Co.

Members of the Muswellbrook Dramatic Society and Rostrum club re-enacted the Earl of Belmore's 1869 Ceremony

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 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>

Skellatar Park Racecourse

The following article prepared by Life Member Helen Ellis based on personal interviews with John C Davies, local accountant and Secretary of U.H.A.R.C. and discussions with Victor Oakes, Henry Oakes' son.

In 1826 the Chief Justice of the Colony, Sir Francis Forbes, received a grant of land being 10,000 acres adjoining his brother, George's grant, which had been named "Edinglassie". Sir Francis' land extended from Muscle Brook (now creek) to Edinglassie, and it was named Skellatar. The town of Muscle Brook (later Muswellbrook was not gazetted until 1833) the road to Sydney was via Sir Thomas Mitchell's line of road along present Sydney Street past "Balmoral" to Ayrdale then on to Lemington and then on to Sydney. However, by 1847 the new road from Singleton to Muswellbrook was in use and a great improvement over the old one which was in bad condition.

After Sir Francis died in 1842 the land between the brook or creek and present Forbes Street was given by his sons as a town to be known as "Forbes Town" to commemorate their father. However a great deal of confusion was caused by mail being constantly misdirected between Forbestown and Forbes in Southern N.S.W. and about 1915 the name Forbes Town had passed out of existence and the name South Muswellbrook took over.



Skellatar Homestead Photo D0436

"Skellatar" property was acquired by the Bowman family from Sir Francis' widow some years later. William Bowman was the first occupant. Then some of the land was divided to create "Balmoral" which William then occupied, and his twin brothers Andrew and Edward came to "Skellatar", and the handsome two-storeyed home was erected for them. The original-timber home had been burnt down. The twins were George Bowman's youngest children. Andrew Bowman took up "Gyarren" and Edward remained at "Skellatar"-and during that time a racecourse was built on the "Skellatar" river flats in the late 1800s.

Horses, of course, were bred in abundance and of necessity on the pastoral properties and the Hunter Valley is famous for its horses. They were bred for practical, commercial and pleasure purposes. There were horses for riding, racing, polo, harness vehicles, for cavalry purposes, surplus horses for sale, for stock work and heavier animals for horse-drawn implements and team-work. Picnic Races and polo matches and all horse events were very popular. On 9th May 1879, the Upper Hunter Amateur Race Club was formed, the first President being Thomas Cook, Secretary J.C. White and Treasurer R.G.D. Fitzgerald. The first race meeting was held in September of that Year at "Edinglassie" racecourse. The second racemeeting was held at "Rosebrook", Kayuga Road. The early race meetings included trotting, hurdles, buggy and pony racing. Three-day carnivals were popular, held at the various racecourses in the district, with polo matches alternating, with pony races. Since 1896 the "Skellatar" racecourse has been the Club venue. The U.H.A.R.C. was registered with the A.J.C. in 1900. Mr. Edward Bowman was Hon. Secretary for 30 years and Alan Bowman 39 years, and up to 1979 members of the Bowman family had filled this position for a total of 77 years.

The block of land on which the "Edinglassie" racecourse was situated was later acquired by the Muswellbrook Polo Club. The Club is inactive at the present time but the Trustees still administer it and the land is leased out as a paddock.

Mr. Edward Bowman's son, Edward Hunter Bowman, became a prominent racehorse breeder and made use in full of the "Skellatar" racecourse with his own string of horses and full race meetings were held there. The Muswellbrook Jockey Club had also been formed. Hunter Bowman was the President, his cousin Alan Bowman was Chairman for many years. When Alan Bowman's son, A.S. (Gus) Bowman joined his father on the Committee at the age of 18 it was thought he was the youngest committeeman in the State at the time. Meetings were held at Muswellbrook R S L Club.

Hunter Bowman was a familiar figure driving around Muswellbrook in his blue Rolls Royce, and "Skellatar" was the scene of many garden parties and social occasions. Mr. Harry Oakes came to "Skellatar" employed as Manager for Hunter Bowman in 1921. He was a great horseman and although he had lost a hand in a mishap he did not let it deter him from working with horses in any way. From 1931-51, Hunter Bowman and Harry Oakes were keenly involved with racehorses and were a highly successful owner-breeder, trainer team. Mr Oakes bought a horse at a Yearling sale for 120 guineas. He had been bred by Sir Sidney Kidman and he was named "Allunga". He was stabled with Hunter Bowman's horses and they formed a half interest racing arrangement. "Allunga" was a wonderful horse' being second in a Derby in Victoria, and a dead heat in the N.S.W. Derby. He was fourth in two Melbourne Cups and won two St. Ledgers. Harry Oakes built his home in Sydney Street and appropriately named it "Allunga". "Flying Knight" was a successful horse of Hunter Bowman's, who, as a 2-year old had the first win of the season in the Breeder's Plate at Randwick and had many other wins in his racing



Allunga
Racehorse

career. Hunter Bowman owned "All Pride" who won the 1928 Great Northern Stakes as a 2-year old. "Prince Consort" was another very promising horse but died tragically while racing. He had been leading but dropped dead 100 yards from the winning post. When the "Skellatar" horses were taken to Sydney they were stabled at Peter Riddle's stables. These stables were later acquired by well-known trainer Tommy Smith.

Hunter Bowman died in 1951 whilst still in his fifties, and his property was subdivided into lots for sale. The land between Forbes Street and present Tindale Street was acquired by the Housing Commission of N.S.W. for housing, The homestead block was acquired by the Catholic Church for schools. Mr. Oakes was given the continued use of "Skellatar" stables for his training activities. The land on the river flats was bought mainly for dairy farms. The subdivision had split the race track into two sections. To retain the track, at the instigation of Mr Alan Bowman, a company was formed to acquire these two blocks of land and administer the "Skellatar Racecourse" which would have been at the time one of the very few privately owned racecourses remaining in the State.

By around 1954 Upper Hunter Farms Ltd had been formed, a mortgage raised and so "Skellatar Racecourse" continued. Membership of Upper Hunter Farms Ltd. consisted of Members of U.H.A.R.C.

In December, 1966, the Upper Hunter Racing Club Ltd. was incorporated under the Companies Act, replacing the unincorporated Muswellbrook Jockey Club, and acquiring by purchase the course from Upper Hunter Farms Ltd. This company was then wound up. The terms of purchase included a guarantee of two days per year for Picnic Races at a set fee.

Over a period of time the venue has become known-as "Skellatar Park Racecourse" which is appropriate for its well-kept appearance. In 1962 the Muswellbrook Cup was introduced. This has proved a very popular race meeting particularly since it has been regularly conducted on Melbourne Cup Day, making it a real gala affair.



Skellatar Racehorse Society photo 0466.14



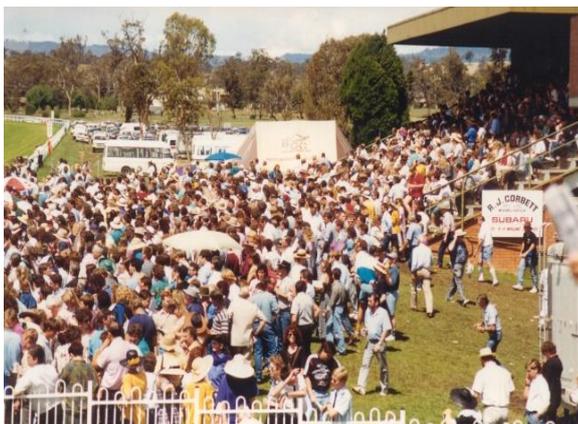
Skellatar Park Aerial view Racecourse D2842

It is interesting to note that the winner of the first Muswellbrook Cup was Grand Lee, trained by Harry Oakes. Mr. Oakes' son Victor and his family bred a horse which they named "Skellatar" in 1964. He ran well, winning each of his first eight races. Harry Oakes died in 1967 suffering a heart attack whilst dressing a horse in "Skellatar" stables. In 1979 a programme booklet was produced to commemorate the occasion. A costumed ball was also held at night.

As the racing industry became more regulated it was agreed that Denman Racing Club should hold their meetings at "Skellatar Park Racecourse". This led to the Sandy Hollow Cups being held there also. This novel cup is certainly a contrast to the many beautiful and valuable trophies competed for and awarded over the years on this historic course.

The dairy farms have gradually disappeared from its surrounds and been replaced by houses and stable complexes, mainly occupied by people involved in racing. They include familiar names like trainers Pat Farrell and family, and the Englebrecht families. Well-known jockey Wayne Harris was apprenticed to Pat Farrell.

Many hours of hard work and planning and foresight by committeemen and members have been spent over the years, continually improving and developing this popular course to bring it to its attractive and well-appointed condition.



Skellatar Park Racecourse Society photos 2500.3 and 2500.4

The following letter and photo were received from our member Jeff Wolfgang and gives us an insight into the early history of the district. It is of special interest in this present time of drought.

I read with interest the article in a previous newsletter about the Flanders from Eaton's Hotel.

Our grandfather, Bill Wolfgang, who selected part of the Woodlands Estate, bought off Flanders (he called him Paddy Flanders) a 20 horsepower Hornsby suction gas engine used to flood irrigate the land he owned before Weidmann bought it. The water ran in drains across the Wybong Road.

Our grandfather moved the engine and plant to his dairy farm 'Tahoma Woodlands' where it stood on the bank of the Hunter River for more than a hundred years.

We are making arrangements to move the big engine into The Heritage Village in Denman for future generations to see.

Operating this gas engine was a far cry from the way we use electricity with the touch of a button. First you had to cut down the trees, dig a big pit to burn them in and when well alight you had to cover the fire with sheets of iron and seal with dirt, wait 2 days for the wood to cool and turn into charcoal. Then get into the pit and shovel it into bags, then start the fire going in the engine gas plant by turning the blower for half an hour to make the gas before you started the engine by hand.

When Flanders first installed the plant on the river at Muswellbrook it must have been a gala occasion in the district as Grandfather said he had a special dinner at his hotel with invited guests to celebrate the commissioning of the plant. It was the first irrigation suction gas plant installed in the Upper Hunter and its history needs preserving.

Jeff Wolfgang.



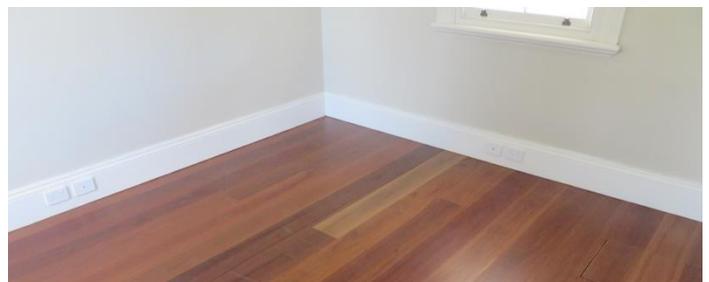
Visit to Bengalla Homestead

On Thursday, 13th June members and friends of the Society travelled by bus to visit the Bengalla Homestead west of Muswellbrook. Our thanks to Genelle Scott and Sam Parkinson for taking the time to show us through the house and explain what has been done to repair and preserve this magnificent homestead. The high quality of the workmanship and the attention to detail was a pleasure to behold.



The 1890s addition with servants quarters in the roof cavity reached by a step ladder.

This addition from the 1890s has undergone extensive repair. The floor which had been laid directly on the ground had been completely eaten out by white ants. It was completely removed, soil was excavated to allow for an air gap and proper foundations and then the beautiful floor shown below was laid.



The historic Bengalla Homestead with the new bull nosed corrugated iron verandah. When the house was built the original roof was of cedar shingles. The original plaster which was beyond repair has been replaced using the same method as when the house was originally built.

Photos by Lionel Ahearn