

Seventy-Five Years on the Richmond.

1847—1922.

James Ainsworth's Reminiscences

No. 3.

(From Ballina "Beacon.")

A recent proposal to remove the graves from the old cemetery at East Ballina in order to open the enclosure as a pleasure ground for holiday-seekers at least suggests that a time has arrived when a little more should be known of this picturesque and historic spot. Prior to my arrival on the river in 1847, there had been no deaths among the settlers, and it was not until the following year that the grim Reaper made his first call among them. Jack Farrell had previously worked as a mate with my father at Raymond Terrace in the shipbuilding yards of Marshall and Rowe. He joined the settlement at East Ballina in 1848. In accordance with the general custom of those days, he was also upon occasions an imbibor of ardent spirits. The schooner Lucy Ann had only just re-

schooner Lucy Ann had only just re-
turned from Sydney with a supply of
rum fresh out of bond and lay off
Brown's Bay (known after as Mobbs'
Bay) alongside a raft of cedar. Far-
rell, after midnight, rowed over to the
schooner from East Ballina for a couple
of bottles of the liquor, but when cross-
ing the raft to the ship after mooring
the boat it was supposed that he fell
between two of the logs and was
drowned. His body was recovered from
the river near Fishery Creek and was
interred on the extreme point of the
old cemetery, where Thomas Ains-
worth's grave was afterwards placed.
Farrell was the first of the white set-
tlers to obey the final summons, and
his body was the first to be buried
where in after years the remains of so
many "forefathers of the hamlet"
were solemnly laid to rest. The spot
chosen for the burial was selected be-
cause it was the most convenient to
the settlement by land and was along-
side deep water, which permitted easy
access by boat. It was also a clear,
grassy knoll, with soft semi-sandy soil
situated on a commanding and secluded
eminence. All subsequent deaths were
followed by interments at the same
place until at last the whole of the
land now enclosed was definitely dedi-
cated by the Crown as "an area for
the preservation of graves." The

the preservation of graves. The Municipal Council was many years ago appointed a trust for its protection and preservation.

Other graves near by included those of Manny Davis, Fred Bacon, H. Williams, and W. Wollett, all of whom were among the earliest group of settlers. Wollett, by the way, was burned to death at Duck Creek Camp. He went with a naked light to procure some rum from a keg when it exploded, and setting fire to his clothing was the cause of his death. Capt. Copeland, whose grave is also a very early one in the same vicinity, was killed when loading his schooner, The Wave of Life, with pine logs at Keith Hall.

SOME OTHER NOTABLE 'FIRSTS.'

Due prominence has already been given to the trek of the first settlers from the Clarence to Woodburn in 1842 and the crossing of the first vessel ("Sally") over the bar in the same year, while proper importance has been attached to the first roads, the first bullock team, the first sawpit, the first publican, the first selector, the first sugar mill, the first saw mill, etc., etc. There are yet a number of others of much moment.

The first white child born on the river was the late Joseph Maguire, of Tintenbar, son of Old Joe, of the original pioneer party. The late "Jimmy"

pioneer party. The late "Jimmy" King (brother of the late Mrs. Chas. Jarrett, and son of old Steve, also of the first pioneer party) was likewise the first white born on the Clarence.

The first ships to be built on the river—and many fine vessels were afterwards launched on the mid-Richmond—were constructed at Woodburn, where in 1851-52 a Mr. Davis built and launched two fine three-masted schooners which he named the "Dart" and "Prince of Wales." They were larger and of a deeper draught than the earlier river traders of that time, and after crossing out in ballast entered the Melbourne-Sydney service.

The first marriages consequent upon the first visit of a clergyman did not take place until 1863, when in addition to two couples at Tintinbar the follow-

ing were united in the happy bonds in Ballina:—Mr. and Mrs. Joe Eyles (son of the landlord of the "Sawyers' Arms"), Mr. and Mrs. Jas. Ainsworth, Mr. and Mrs. John Holmes, and Mr. Snow, of the East Ballina Sawmill, who married the eldest daughter of the late Mm. Clements, of North Creek, and first Mayor of Ballina. The ceremony

first Mayor of Ballina. The ceremony took place in the National School building, then only recently erected by Mr. Clements, and which two years later was placed under the control of the late Mr. T. Russell, senr., who was the first official teacher appointed to the Lower Richmond. The officiating clergyman was the Rev. Selwyn, of Grafton, and afterwards Anglican Bishop of Newcastle.

The first pilot at Ballina, the late Capt. Geo. Richard Easton (previously master of the schooner Margaret and Mary trading to the river), was appointed to the position in 1853.

The first post office at Ballina was opened and conducted by Mr. E. Ross at his residence between Burnett and Bentinck streets, to the rear of Mrs. Doyle's present home in Norton-street.

The first telegraph office was opened in 1875 by the late Mr. A. Hunter, and was situated in Norton-street at the N.E. corner of the lane between River and Tamar streets.

The first vessel to be wrecked on the Richmond bar was John Skennar's schooner Urara, which was lost on a sandspit seawards off Pilot Point, all hands being saved.

The first freight to be shipped at Byron Bay was a wrecked cargo of tallow in 1864, salvaged from Tallow Beach.

Beach.

CONCERNING SHIPS AND SHIPPING.

As was pointed out in the reference to Snow's sawmill, the earlier mosquito fleet which maintained touch between the pioneer settlers and the outer world did not go further up river than Shaw's Bay immediately in front of the first settlement. There were only two exceptions to this rule. and they related to the Anna Maria and the Louisa. These two vessels being absolutely flat-bottomed, drew so little water that they could at high tide safely negotiate the shallow crossing inside the bar between Pilot Point and the South Beach, and proceeded on up stream to the tallow depots. All other craft attempting the same passage had first to discharge their ballast in or about the Bay and then undergo the hard process of anchor haulage over the shoal ground.

The mean depth of water on this crossing in those days was as low as four feet six inches at high tide. This depth sensibly increased later on when the timber men cleaned out the upper arms of the tributaries and creeks of the river in order to float the logs out of the scrubs to the main stream. This clearance allowed the upper waters—especially in time of floods—to come

especially in time of floods—to come down quicker, with the result that the accentuated scour at the entrance swept away every barrier and for some time afterwards left bar conditions generally much improved. One of the results of this improvement was speedy and appreciable increase in the size, draught, and character of the shipping. Thus, while the earlier vessels were of the smallest possible sailing standard commensurate with a hazardous safety, the later larger ships had deeper keels and were of a draught ranging up to 8ft.

The original flat-bottomed scows were really large sailing punts. At best they were treacherous, and under adverse weather conditions little better than death traps. To enable them to keep a course under canvas they carried lee-boards, which were manipulated by tackle from the rigging, and were lowered or raised on each side of the vessel according to the particular tack she was on. The later deeper schooners were enabled to dispense with this cumbersome and forbidding contrivance.

Naturally there was often great rivalry among captains and crews as to which vessel could put up the best sailing record. In this connection Joe Eyles' schooner Josephine at one period stood easily first. She was a veritable clipper, and could do the round trip

clipper, and could do the round trip fully freighted from Ballina to Melbourne direct and back to Ballina—with a cargo to and from Sydney—inside of six weeks. The Josephine was launched by Malcolm and Newton, of the Manning—a firm of builders which turned out many smart coasters at the time. This Newton, by the way, was the father of Capt. Newton, afterwards pilot at Ballina in succession to Capt. Easton, and still later for many years harbor master at Newcastle. The Josephine finally left her bones on the South Beach in or about 1864.

THE LATE WM. YEAGER.

When the late Captain G. R. Easton, of the Margaret and Mary, stepped down from his quarter-deck in 1853 to take up command of the first Richmond River pilot service, he had for one of his boatmen a vigorous young sailor named William Yeager. This worthy was at once both capable and vigorous and of a type for whose ability and ambition the circumscribed boat soon became too small. He left the service in '61 to engage in his first personal river enterprise. He conceived the idea of droghering the supplies for the squatters at Lismore and Casino from the ships at Ballina direct to those settlements. To this end he purchased a ten ton lugger, which Thomas Ains-

a ten ton lugger, which Thomas Ainsworth had built at East Ballina in the first instance for Henry Barnes (squatter) to carry station supplies to Tomki. Yeager worked this cutter by himself with oars and sails and with the tides, and the undertaking was the beginning of a notable commercial career. He succeeded so well, that in a short time he went to Sydney to purchase a larger craft. This time he acquired a 15-ton cutter, and loading her with cargo at the metropolitan end sailed for the Richmond. Bad luck, however, attended him. When crossing the bar in due course the little vessel struck a sand-spit, and became, along with her cargo, a total loss. Yeager, notwithstanding this rebuff, remained undaunted. He continued river operations with the old craft, and steadily prospered until at length he became the owner of ships both sail and steam, in the river and ocean trade, and engaged at one period in the Ballina tug boat competition. In 1885 he took up the magnificent

Both tugs had their fires banked overnight, so that a sufficiency of steam was only a matter of minutes. Venturing out in his shirt at the first light to

have a peep at the bar, Fenwick saw the signal on the headland at the same time that he also saw by her smoke that the Index at Lewis' wharf was stoking her furnaces. If it was to be a race for the tow no time was to be lost. The Alchemist's engineer had not yet turned out, and without further ado Fenwick ran down and tickled up his fires. Next he saw the Index casting off her lines and following her lead, still minus his trousers, engineer, and deckhand, he also let go with no one else on board to lend a hand. He was captain, fireman, engineer and crew in one. In the race for the bar Fenwick was first. He was also first over it, and although hard-pressed he continued to beat his rival to the ship until he finally secured her by passing his line to her waiting crew. It was surely an unprecedented achievement for any man to fire and drive, and steer a fair-sized tug-boat unaided over a river bar in such circumstances, and it may be taken as an accepted fact that it has never been attempted since. Before crossing in Fenwick requisitioned a man from the ship to attend to the furnaces, while he piloted the tug with her prize in tow back to port and safety. The neglected trousers, it is needless to say, were a welcome garment awaiting his return.

THE RACE FOR THE BAR

THE MASTER OF THE BAR.

The foregoing story of the late Capt. Fenwick was characteristic of the man. No situation ever appeared to daunt him, and danger had no place in his vocabulary. In character equipment he had much in common with his early rival, Wm. Yeager, and both men won their way to fortune by much the same attributes. Fenwick came to the river first in command of the schooner Atlantic, and meanwhile took stock of the opening there was for an efficient tug service at Ballina. As events proved, Yeager had also noted the same chance and had acted on it by commissioning the Athletic for the work. Fenwick soon followed with the Alchemist in partnership with his brother John, of Sydney, and in a short time after the removal of the Athletic had the field to himself. He then added the steamer J. and T. Fenwick, the name of the firm) to the service for inside towage purposes up and down river. His way to wealth was now speedy and secure. In the seventies, eighties, and nineties, owing to an enhanced timber trade and the opening up of the river and Big Scrub lands to agricultural settlement, shipping activity reached its zenith. Sailing vessels continued to carry most of the freight, and as bar conditions were at their worst—prior to the con-

were at their worst—prior to the construction of the breakwaters—almost every craft in and out and up and down river had to be towed. Fenwick's tugs were in constant requisition night and day. For a passing interval he had pitted against him the opposition of Wm. Yabsley, but again he finally won out. After the total wreck of the Alchemist on Woody Point, to the north of the Clarence, he purchased the Francis Hixon, a new and powerful paddle steamer, which in turn he also lost after a lapse of years when attending to the stranded steamer Platypus on South Beach. Other later tugs lost on the bar were the J. and T. Fenwick, Comet, William Langford, Sarah Fenwick, Protector, and Rescue. The worthy tug master was also recognised as an expert in bar work, and his presence at the wheel was universally regarded as synonymous with safety. Many stories are told of his prowess, and perhaps the finest achievement in his crowded life was his rescue from imminent destruction of a big China steamer during an easterly gale. In the early "nineties," the Chingtu, bound from China to Sydney, became disabled off the bar in the height of a snorting easterly gale. The signalman at North Head had given the alarm that the helpless ship was dragging her anchors and apparently driv-

ging her anchors and apparently driving ashore under the violent pressure of wind and sea. This meant not only destruction of a fine international steamer, but also untold loss of life. Her own distress signals pathetically accentuated the call for help. The bar, judged by all known standards, was absolutely impassable, and represented nothing more under the fury of the storm than a foaming, seething cauldron of huge, tumbling breakers and crashing water. Fenwick decided he would go to the derelict if the crew would work the tug with him. To a man they volunteered, and the resultant passage of the bar by the Protector that morning will never be forgotten by the hundreds of spectators who were privileged to see it. For seeming minutes at a time after smashing through the first wall of water she disappeared in towering mountains of spray, but always she held on. Every shore watcher was nervously expectant that the next moment would certainly be her last in the fearful boiling smother, but in the end Fenwick was victorious, and by noon had the disabled vessel snugly at anchor in Byron Bay. In 1896 the intrepid sailor passed away in Sydney as the result of a later contest with the bar, but his honored remains were taken north to rest in the old cemetery at East Ballina

rest in the old cemetery at East Ballina within a stone-throw of the modern mansion he had built, and in full view of the scene of his life's labors and stirring exploits.

Oaklands property below Coraki, which he long held, and on which the late Wm. Webster controlled one of the best equipped sawmills on the North Coast. He passed away some years ago a wealthy man, whose affluence came to him as a reward of wonderful foresight, enterprise, thrift, and a determination that only met a difficulty to overcome it. Mr. Yeager was one of the few pioneers who in his own case really succeeded.

THE FIRST TUG STEAMER.

My attention has been drawn to a recent published statement to the effect that the Index a wooden paddle steamer owned by the late Wm. Yabsley, of Coraki, was the first Richmond River tugboat. This statement is altogether incorrect. The first tug was the paddle steamer Challenge (Capt. McIntyre), owned by A. and J. Brown, of Newcastle, which took up duty in this capacity in '72. The Challenge was quickly replaced by the Culloden (Capt.

Johnson), which was lost on the bar in '74. Then came the Athletic, owned by the late Wm. Yeager, of Coraki, under the command of Capt. Jas. Stranger, and almost simultaneously with the Athletic Capt. Tom Fenwick arrived with the Alchemist under the flag of J. and T. Fenwick, of Sydney. After a brief period of profitable competition, the Athletic returned to Sydney for repairs and was sold to a Melbourne buyer. It was following the departure of the Athletic that Mr. Yabsley entered the field with the Index under Captain "Lochy" McKinnon, in opposition to Capt. Fenwick with the Alchemist, in conjunction with the J. and T. Fenwick. It was a most spirited competition, too, while it lasted. An example: Early one morning just as day was breaking the flag appeared on the staff at North Head for a schooner somewhere in the dim offing.
