

Richmond River Express and Casino Kyogle Advertiser (NSW : 1904 - 1929), Friday 30 August 1912, page 6

Early Days on the Richmond.

Mr. F. Withers, sen., of Lismore, in his reminiscences now running in the "Australian Baker" mentions that when he launched out in Ballina in the 80's his capital was less than £50, but his landlord (the late W. Wigmore) never asked him for a penny till he owed £100. Mr. Withers tells the story of his early struggles thus: "In the first year there was nine months rain. It sometimes took me an hour to travel 1½ miles, the roads were so bad. I sent a man and a boy with a load of bread to Alstonville, about 9 or 10 miles, on a Monday, and they returned on Wednesday. This would be about 150 loaves—two horses, man and boy, nearly three days. During the nine months' rain the road to Tintenbar was absolutely closed. Mud up to the horses' knees or more. For a time we tried to negotiate it, my son taking two horses and a spade, and a towel. He had sometimes to unload his bread and put it on the grass while he dug out the wheels of his cart. The towel was to wipe his hands. Even that had to be given up. I tried panniers. They too had to be abandoned. At last for four months we had to get a flat-bottom boat and place the bread on the banks of Emigrant Creek, not seeing a customer or getting any money for that time. The boat would take two days, and often stuck when the tide was out, and then would begin a feast of fat things—mosquitoes of gigantic size and of a bloody intention all night, and no chance of escape. I once left my two boys stranded on a mud bank all night, with swarms of mosquitoes in Fishery Creek. Well, I put in about seven years in Ballina, bullocking, speculating, looking ahead, and I came out well at last, my property and business together selling for £1800. Of course my banker had a big say in it, yet I was able to go to Alstonville, buy two sections of town lots for £145, which I sold by auction for over £400. I also built a small oven with my own hands and started baking once more, and then sold out for £200." Mr. Withers claims to have built 22 or 23 bakers' ovens on the Richmond and Tweed, and he pays a glowing tribute to the progress made in the district during his 29 years of residence.