

## Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser (NSW : 1886 - 1942), Friday 8 May 1931, page 2

### EARLY DAYS ON THE RICHMOND

MEMORIES OF AN OLD PIONEER.

BACK IN THE 40's.

The reminiscences of the late Mr. Jas. Ainsworth, Senr., of Ballina, were gathered together by the late Mr. T. Russell, back in 1923, published in pamphlet form, and sold in aid of Ballina Hospital. They constitute probably the most authentic history of the early days on the Richmond, and the booklet, therefore, was regarded as a very valuable document by the old hands and their descendants. Mr. J. Arthurson, of East Coraki, who possesses a copy, has kindly placed it at our disposal, and from time to time we propose to make use of lengthy and interesting extracts therefrom for the benefit of our readers.

Mr. Ainsworth, the narrator, was born at Moruya in 1842, and his father, a shipwright, had made several voyages to the Richmond in his own little vessel, the "Matilda Ann," bringing up supplies for the squatters on the Upper Richmond about Casino, and taking in tallow and timber as back loading. A rival ship at that time was the "Urara," commanded by Capt. John Skennar, after whom Skennar's Head is named. The "Ebenezer" and "Anna Maria" came into the picture in or just before '47, and shortly afterwards came the "Emily Jane," "Margaret and Mary" and "Christopher George." In 1847 the Ainsworth family came north in the "Matilda Ann," which grounded on a sandspit, and the women and children were put ashore in a boat near inner North Head. Let Mr. Ainsworth now take up the narrative:—

An incident of the landing was the peremptory collaring of a bag of sugar from the boat by a man named Houlaghan, who made off with it only to be collared in turn by my father, who speedily retrieved the bag. The hero of this escapade has long since handed down his name in Houlaghan's Creek, which lies between Tovea and Booyong, on the route of the Ballina-Booyong railway.

We lost no time in reaching the little colony of whites at East Ballina. There was no other settlement then anywhere else on the river nearer than Casino. There was none at Ballina proper, as we know it to-day. We occupied a rough shelter on the land. My father's title

to the land was by pre-emptive right—a right recognised in those days, in the case of first settlers. Our few neighbors at East Ballina included Joe McGuire and Steve King, who were members of the first overland party from the Clarence five years before, in 1842. A small stream of water, which emptied into the river at the pilot sheds, supplied the necessary commodity. Beside the stream, and underneath a big fig tree, was dug the saw pit at which, the first Richmond River cedar was cut. Other neighbors round about, near by, were Tommy Chilcott (father of Mr. W. H. Chilcott, J.P., of Cumbalum), Sandy Golding, Tom Woods, — Jarvis, and Joe White. The number of sawpits rapidly increased to six, and the camp became a scene of much activity.

There were obviously no police, no magistrate, and no legal or lawful authority of any kind on the whole of the Richmond in 1847, and the modern inquirer will doubtless wonder how rights and wrongs were adjusted. The method was as simple as it was ample. The strongest personalities commanded leadership as a matter of course, and with the confidence of the community to back them up if they were worthy men, a rough and ready justice was always obtainable. A case in point: "Fighting Sandy" was a noted blusterer in the settlement, and a bully, who it was known, would not hesitate to shoot if it suited his purpose. As a result, most of the folk were afraid of him. At length, a dispute arose among the sawyers, as a result of which this man set fire to the stack of sawn cedar and stood by it with a gun until it was consumed. Thereupon, Tommy Chilcott was put up to fight him and establish supremacy and law for the settlement. Tommy, by the way, had served an early apprenticeship in the British Navy, and had learned the rugged art of self defence in the fo'e'stles of the old line of battleships in commission after Waterloo. He readily met his man, and the two fought from 8 o'clock in the morning until 4 in the afternoon. It was a bitter grueling contest, which was battled out in the presence of the whole settlement. The men in bare pelts slogged each other unmercifully with bare fists and the blows on heads and ribs could be heard at no little distance away. They, however, rigidly obeyed certain defined rules, and would take spells watching each other out.

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rules, and would take spells watching each other at agreed intervals. The climax was reached when Tommy knocked his opponent out, and left him for dead. Upon his recovery, the battered Sandy had to leave the settlement. Defeated and baffled, he was absolutely frozen out. He rowed up the lonely river and early one morning, before daylight, unceremoniously broke into a new settler's hut at Coraki, where he was shot dead by the surprised occupier. "Fighting Sandy" was an undesirable who was proved unworthy by the community, and was not wanted, and the manner of his death called for no official inquiry. At the same time while the pioneers were, perhaps, sudden and summary in their treatment of wrongdoers, they were

also kindness itself to strangers and to all in need.

West Ballina, or Ballina proper, was a secondary settlement. In my earliest recollection of it at East Ballina, Bill Johnson and a Javalasmithe ship somewhere where Fenwick's slip is now. Fred West (late of Gundurimba) was camped where the Occidental Hotel stands, afterwards to become the property of the late Mr. Tom Mobbs. Tom McCann was also there, and Micky Jones lived on the North Creek side. In a short time afterwards, Joe Eyles (who, in 1850 or '51, opened the Sawyers Arms Hotel, opposite Dr. Yates' present residence) came along with Fred Bacon and others. At the beginning, the first cedar was felled at Prospect and up the North Creek, and rafted down to the pits at East Ballina, and later on to pits at West Ballina, at the present ends of Norton and Martin streets.

Mr. Wm. Yabsley (founder of the respected Coraki family of that name) had a small station on the Big Plain, the property now intersected by the Tintenbar and North Creek roads.

With the increase in shipping, the growth of population, and the opening up of other cedar scrubs, it was at length found convenient to remove the settlement from East Ballina to what is now Ballina proper.

The second cedar waterway to be opened up and developed after North Creek was Emigrant Creek. This latter name was given to the fine tributary owing to the fact that Henry Williams and Tom Brandon, who were emigrants, fixed their

Brandon, who were emigrants, fixed their camps at Cumbalum, on the land afterwards free-selected by the late Mr. Geo. Topfer, Senr. In due course larger and more important camps were formed, the principal ones being at Duck Creek, Teven and Tintenbar. In 1851 the Tintenbar camp was second only to Ballina in importance. Among those who constituted it were Chas. Jarrott, John Skennar, Chas. McNeill, Dick Glascott, Jno. Holmes, — Phillip, Jas. Ainsworth, Dick King, B. McCurdy, Steve King and Wm. Smith. The wives and families of the timber men were also domiciled in the camp.

The Teven camp included Joe Maguire, Billy Rose, the Johnstons, and the McCanns. Teven, the aboriginal word for stinging tree, was the name given to this creek because of the numerous stinging trees that grew upon its banks. At Duck Creek, or Uralba, as it is now called, were Billy Woollett, Manny Davis, P. Simpson (afterwards of Pimlico), Jno. Barnes and Frank Morrish, who was later one of the original selectors at Alstonville, at the top of the present cutting.

About this time also, cutters were beginning to get cedar out at Beatharbour, near Lismore, from whence the industry rapidly extended up the creeks into the Big Scrub beyond the present Queen City.

Bullenah was the aboriginal name for Ballina at the time of my arrival in '47.

I am not clear as to the meaning, but I always understood it related to fish and oysters, their abundance in the neighborhood and the ease with which they could be obtained. It was later corrupted to "Ballina," and became permanently known as Ballina in the official records. The first town lots to be acquired from the Crown were submitted at the instance of Joe Eyles, when Jim Brown also purchased the land afterwards comprising the Fenwick estate which extended from the river bank back to Tamar street.

Shaw's Bay at East Ballina was originally known as New Chum's Bay. It was later called Shaw's Bay owing to the fact that James Shaw erected a house on its northern shore a little to the eastward of Snow's sawmill. Mobbs' Bay at South Beach was in like manner named after Mr. Tom Mobbs, Senr., who resided there in 1854 or thereabouts. Mark Hancock (father of Mr. Charles Hancock, of Pimlico) also lived there about the

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of Pimlico) also lived there about the same time and later removed to Woodburn, where he took up one of the first selections in the latter district. Mr. M. Lewis (father of Mr. H. T. Lewis, of Cherry Street) lived with his family early in the "fifties" at South Beach, near where the magazine was erected afterwards in connection with the breakwaters.

\* My earliest recollection of West Ballina naturally envisages a picture the very opposite of to-day. Then it was for the most part a huge lightly timbered flat with ribs or ridges of heavy box and gum trees. There were also patches of thick brush with large areas of ti-tree swamp choked with cutting grass and carrying water all the year round. The boat channel from the town to North Creek was via the present site of the baths, thence across the gulf links, finally joining the creek a little below the residential property now owned by Ald. Berry. Fronting this channel and upon its banks Mr. Charles Jarrett built his first residence and Mr. Rosa his old butcher's shop, residence and first post office. I am reminded that in the interim much of the old foreshore has disappeared. Where the baths are, for example, the river bank was originally ten feet high and a couple of huts were erected upon it. As the result of a sweeping flood in '55, accompanied by a heavy sea, this land was swept away and the occupants of the huts only rescued with difficulty.

(To be continued.)

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