

Seventy-Five Years on the Richmond

1847—1922.

James Ainsworth's Reminiscences

(No. 2.)

(From the Ballina "Beacon.")

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 Byles, with 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 Chums' 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.

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 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 envisages a picture the opposite of to-day. 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 golf 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. Ross his old butcher's shop, residence and first post office. I am reminded that in the interim much of the old fore-

in the interim much of the old fore-shore 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.

THE FIRST UPLIFT AND AFTERMATH.

The general conditions of the river settlement were bad in the extreme until about the middle fifties, when the discovery of gold took place. They were of such a character, indeed, as to be scarcely intelligible to the men and women of nowadays. At the beginning there were neither horses, nor cattle, no police, no doctors, no schools, no clergy, no churches, no banks, no money, no roads, and only scant and interrupted supplies of the bare necessities of life. The outbreak of the diggings, however, brought widespread prosperity to the colony and better days for the river. The price of cedar, which had hitherto ranged from 10/- to 15/- per 100ft in Sydney. at once bounded up to £3/2/6 per 100ft. At this fabulous sum it was as valuable as the gold itself. Men flocked to the river to seek their fortunes in the scrubs, but the matter of transport be-

scrubs, but the matter of transport became a serious difficulty owing to the sailors deserting the sea for the various "rushes." Every man on the river at this time worked for himself. There was no such thing as hired labor, excepting on the few vessels that continued in the trade. Ashore men agreed to help each other as mates, but not as master and man. The one great drawback was the marketing of the timber, and this soon more than counterbalanced the enhanced price. Northwood, a merchant of Sydney—incidentally the man who fitted out Hargraves for his quest for gold—was also the principal timber buyer. He controlled the cedar trade in the city, and used his monopoly for a time to his own advantage. Billy Wright then entered the lists as an agent, but there was no benefit from the competition. Wright,

however, soon got a footing, and with Mr. Charles Jarrett as his river representative rapidly built up a big connection. The cutters after their logs were measured up were paid with "I.O.U.'s" on Billy Wright, but as this paper "money" could only be realised in

Sydney the losses to the owners of it will be readily understood. I cut cedar for a year and was supplied with stores by Mr. Jarrett, who procured them from Wright (as the latter's agent) at 25 per cent. above cost. When retailed to me I was charged another 50 per cent. additional and was obliged the while to look pleasant. The timber getters, owing to these methods, were rarely out of debt, and Mr. Jarrett himself was in the long run ruined by this pernicious agency system. After a campaign of many years, when he expected a deferred settlement would leave him about £10,000 to the good, he was faced with the position that it actually left him about that much to the bad. Financially he never recovered the blow.

Eventually when old Billy Wright died his widow married another Billy Wright, a nephew of the former. They removed to Ballina after the Sydney estate was wound up, and for many years conducted a store and timber agency on the site of the present creamery. Young Billy, by the way, upon his advent to the district, brought with him a black bag filled with "p.n.'s" for the cedar men to sign in liquidation of alleged debts owing for years previously to the deceased uncle! It was the last consideration the old

It was the last consideration the old fellow extended to them before he passed out into the Great Beyond.

RECREATION AND OTHERWISE.

Notwithstanding that men were busy on the Richmond in the late "forties" and "fifties," they were still lonely days. Outside the gun and fishing line the means of recreation were extremely limited. Quoits was a popular pastime, as were skittles (home-made) and cards. It is conceded that "the eup (or pint-pot) that cheers" was not overlooked. Every hut, humpy, or tenement had its supply of rum. Whatever else ran sort, every care was taken that this "ration" was on tap in abundance. And it was of excellent quality, too. A rich amber in color, it was absolutely pure and unadulterated. In the early "fifties," after communication had been established with the squattages up river, horses began to come into vogue. Horse racing followed. The usual convincing ground was the outer beach flanking the present golf links. On one occasion a schooner belonging to Jimmy Stocks (first Mayor of Lismore) was driven ashore on this sandspit after crossing the bar. High and dry, the stranded hulk was used as a grandstand at one of the periodical race meetings, and probably affords the only instance of a full-rigged ship acting in that capacity.

full-rigged ship acting in that capacity on a racecourse in maritime history.

FIRST CATTLE AND FIRST ROADS.

The first live cattle brought to Ballina were for a man named Peate (the first butcher), and came from Clark Irving's station. They were driven to the beach from Woodburn—a portion of the station then known as "Rocky Mouth"—and thence to the South Beach opposite Ballina, where they were slaughtered. Prior to this, and again after Peate had given up the butchering enterprise meat supplies were brought down the river by pulling boat from the Pelican Tree on the South Arm a few miles above Coraki. The first cattle to reach Ballina proper overland from the upper river was the result of action on the part of the late Mr. Charles Hugh Fawcett (afterwards wards first Parliamentary representative for the Richmond and Tweed). Mr. Fawcett was interested in a squatage up Kyogle way, and in order to supply much needed bullock teams—as well as meat—to the cedar men in the lower river scrubs, he had a track cut from the forest country at Wollongbar through to Newrybar and on to Tallow Beach round via what are known to this day as "Fawcett's Ridges." The remaining distance to Ballina was spanned by the open intervening

spanned by the open intervening beaches, and along this route the first horses and cattle made their entry to Ballina. At a later date, in 1863, or '64, the late Edmund Ross opened a Government road via Tintenbar to Teven, which was eventually connected with Lismore, via Alstonville. The route of this Tintenbar-Teven road was via the racecourse, thence to the property known as "The Hill" and owned by Miller Bros. It continued along the top of the scrub ridges east of Emigrant Creek until it descended into the Tintenbar camp. This roundabout way to Tintenbar, Teven and Lismore was necessary at the time to avoid the many swamp barriers which were then flooded all the year round and impassable, and the bridging of the many creeks separating Ballina from the mountain foothills.

THE ORIGINAL SQUATTERS.

The passing reference to the late Mr. Fawcett, or "Daddy" Fawcett, renders it necessary to make a small digression from the lower river narrative. In 1847 Lismore did not exist. The river from Ballina upwards was just at Nature had left it. The open country, where Lismore now stands, was then a squattage owned by Messrs. Wilson and Garrard. On the South Arm, Tomki station, owned by Mr. Clark having extended down below the arm

Irving, extended down below the arm on the left bank of the main river to the coast. The homestead of this station was then located on the Clarence, but was later transferred to Irvington, a few miles below Casino. Other squattages lying between Lismore and Mt. Lindsay at the time included those of the Bundocks, Henry Barnes, Donald Campbell, Geordie Sparkes, the Mackellars, and Mr. Fawcett.

SOME ORIGINAL SELECTIONS.

Prior to the passage of Sir John Robertson's famous Land Bill in 1861, there was little or no traffic in land. Outside the large cattle runs on the Upper Richmond it had no value to the timber settlers lower down. The latter merely used it for convenient camping purposes and sought no title interest in it. As a matter of fact it could be put to no profitable account owing to the entire absence of markets, and anything approaching settled agriculture had not yet been introduced to the district. Up North Creek, where the first cedar was obtained, James

Ainsworth took up the first selection in
that locality comprising the land on

that locality, comprising the land on the left-hand side of the road and fronting the cutting descent to the Seven-mile Beach. William Clements (afterwards the first Mayor of Ballina) selected the property now held by Mrs. Fitzgerald, of Sydney, and later in 1864 or '66 took up the property south of Prospect on the border line of the existent municipality. About 1865 the late John Sharpe, senr., came north from Kiama and selected the Prospect estate—adjoining Mr. Clements' holding—and upon this land in the following year erected the first sugar mill on the Richmond River. Meanwhile John Skennar originally acquired the Skennar's Head estates and was followed in turn at later periods by the Williams, R. King, Jas. Ross, and others. Up Emigrant Creek the first selectors included Dick Glascott and Jack Holmes, who took up small blocks at Knoekrow. At Teven, Dick King was probably the first selector. Jack Johnston (father of Mr. J. W. Johnston, of Fishery Creek) and E. Sonter, senr., were first selectors in the Keith Hall district, while Mark Hancock similarly led the way at Woodburn. At German Creek (now Empire Vale) a couple of Germans were the original selectors—hence the name given to the creek. The old hands had no warm feeling for

The old hands had no warm feeling for "foreigners," as they very properly termed the Germans, and it logically followed that the Teutons as a matter of taste and policy preferred to settle down apart. In 1862 or '63 the late Mr. Pierce Simpson and the late Mr. Heugh free-selected the first land at Pimlico, which by the way derived the name from the crew of an earlier vessel broaching a case of Pimlico ale when opposite the adjacent island during a voyage up river.

THE FIRST SAW MILL.

The first saw mill was established on the northern foreshore of Shaw's Bay by Messrs. Snow and Essery in 1853. This site was chosen because in the earlier years of settlement at East Ballina the small trading vessels could proceed no further up river than Shaw's Bay owing to the shoal crossing above Pilot Point. The maximum draught of the earlier craft did not exceed 4ft. 6in. It was therefore imperative that the mill should be in operation where the timber could be transferred to the ships conveniently and with despatch. Snow and Essery continued to work this mill for a few years until the river entrance improved and the centre of timber activities shifted to West Ballina and other camps up river. It was ultimately purchased by the late Mr. Breckenridge and removed to Wv.

Mr. Breckenridge and removed to Wy-
rallah, where it was largely extended
and continued in sauccessful operation
for many subsequent years.