

Early Days on the Richmond

INTERESTING LETTER.

FROM AN 81-YEAR-OLD NATIVE OF GUNDURIMBA.

The early history of the district, as given in these columns recently, has created no end of interest and drawn appreciative comments from a number of the old hands. The most interesting and informative letter that has yet reached us comes from Mr. John J. Cooper, of Tomki, Casino, whose connection with the Richmond covers the long span of 81 years, and whose father was one of the first white men to set foot in the virgin scrubs of the Mid and Upper Richmond. We congratulate Mr. Cooper on the interesting story he tells, and hope the fine old gentleman will be with us long enough to achieve the distinction of being the first native born centenarian of the Richmond. Mr. Cooper's letter reads:—

I derived great pleasure from reading the articles on "Early Days on the Richmond" which appeared recently in your columns and must compliment the writer on the accuracy of the articles, and also on the length of the subject. I do not think I have ever read a more comprehensive account of the early days, of which I know quite a little, having been born at Gundurimba 81 years ago. There is just one statement in article II, paragraph one, that I do not agree with, viz.: " . . . it is believed the 'Sally' . . . was about the first vessel to come into the Richmond River." In 1837, or early in 1838, the "Northumberland" and "Little Sally" crossed in over the bar at what was then called Black Rock—now Ballina. These boats carried Jimmy Pearce, Jimmy Johnston, Jack Smith, Billy Woodward, Jim Shaw, and my father, George Cooper, together with their wives, families and equipment.

These were the first men to cut cedar on the Richmond, their first camp being at Camp Creek, near Wyrallah.

The site of their first camp was after-

wards selected by Mr. Thos. Moss. Later, they moved to Gundurimba, and my father was the first man to take up land on the North Arm, securing 13 acres pre-emptive right on the southern side of the river at Gundurimba ferry where the slaughter yards stand to-day.

Perhaps a few remarks on the first trip from Black Rock (or Ballina) as told by my father may be of interest. After they had proceeded some distance up the river one boat took one channel while the other boat took another channel, and both grounded. As it was three weeks since they had left Sydney, and there was fresh water on this island, they all disembarked and, while the womenfolk got busy and washed the clothes, the men had a "picnic," and included on their menu was one cask of Pimlico ale—hence the name the island still bears.

They named the site of the present village of Wardell, Blackwall, as the country around was, in appearance, very similar to that of Blackwall in England. Broadwater they also named, on account of the broad expanse of water. Woodburn they named Rocky Mouth, on account of the creek emptying into the river there having rocks at the mouth. Devil's Elbow they called what is now Swan Bay.

They proceeded past the Junction (Coraki) for about four miles up the South Arm, and, seeing a pelican sitting on a tree, named the spot Pelican Tree. Here they scouted around looking for cedar, but, not being at all satisfied with the outlook, returned to the Junction (Coraki) and proceeded up the North Arm. At some distance from the Junction they espied a fallen tree sticking out from the river bank, and, looking very much like a piece of artillery, they called the spot Cannon Point—a name that endured for years (and still does—Ed.). They also named a four-mile straight stretch of river Longreach (but afterwards changed it to "Murdering Reach," as it was believed that one of the early cedar men was murdered, by his mate somewhere along this stretch of water when returning from Ballina. However, the crime could never be traced home to the perpetrator).

It seems almost unbelievable to-

It seems almost unbelievable to-day, but on two occasions, between the Junction (Ooraki) and Camp Creek (or Old Camp Creek, as they called it) sailors had to climb up in the rigging and cut away vines that were stretching right across the river, before the vessels could proceed.

Some time after the arrival of the above band of cutters on the river, there was a three years' drought, and they had to row in boats up past Coleman's Point in order to obtain fresh water. It was on these excursions that they discovered Gundurimba, and, taking a fancy to the spot for a camp site, shifted thither.