

Seventy-Five Years on the Richmond.

1847—1922.

James Ainsworth's Reminiscences

(From the Ballina "North Coast Bea-
con." Intro. by T.R.)

Just inside the first gateway of the old cemetery at East Ballina fronting the approach from the bridge lies the grave of Thomas Ainsworth, the father of the dictator of these memories and reminiscences. Hard by in the same hallowed enclosure are the graves of many another of the original settlers, of whom there is now, alas, little or no record. There are, for example, the little mounds covering the long buried remains of Joseph McGuire and Steve King, of the first small settlement party that came over from the Clarence in 1842. It was this little band of men who, in their day planted the seed from which all subsequent river progress and prosperity had its genesis. A glance at the inscription on the stone indicates readily what a huge gulf interposes between 1922—the present year of

grace—and 1812, when Thomas Ainsworth first opened his baby eyes in troubled England. Yet the crowded lives of the two men, father and son, more than cover the 110 years common to the two careers, one of which happily has yet, we hope, some distance to run. Memory at once recalls that it was the fated year when the great Wellington began on Spanish battlefields, to shatter the power of the mighty Napoleon, the year also when Providence itself dealt the hitherto invincible conqueror a first arresting blow in the tragical Moscow retreat. Nearer home it was likewise the year when the party headed by the indomitable Blaxland successfully forced the barrier of the Blue Mountains, and thus opened the first accessible road to the Western plains. These reflections, however interesting though they be, necessarily hark back ultimately to one point—the immediate present. Extending out in front of the graveyard stretches a beautiful and compensating panorama of river and sea, rippling sands, and rocky headlands. Not 300 yards distant on the land covered by the spacious North Coast College and grounds is the spot to which Thomas Ainsworth brought his young wife and family in 1847, and housed them for the first time on the Richmond River.

THE FIRST TIME ON THE MOUNTAIN RIVER

Again does the alert mentality work overtime in response to quickened thought. One pauses in the case of James Ainsworth's entry into the perspective to reflect that it was only 15 years earlier (1842), or five years before the coming of the Ainsworth's, the "Sally" (Capt. Steele) from the Clarence brought the first white folk over the bar to establish the first settlement on the river. This, be it borne in mind, was a decade before the institution of responsible government in Australia, and before the creation of separate colonies. It was nearly a decade before the Indian Mutiny and the Crimean War. It was long years prior to the American Civil War and the later downfall of the second French Empire. It was considerably before the final abolition of the convict system and before the explosive democratic expression of the Eureka Stockade. It was at a time when the only white settlements on the whole length of the coastline between Sydney and Moreton Bay were the penal establishments at Newcastle and Port Macquarie. In short, it was 75 years back in the lifetime of Mr. James Ainsworth, senr., who now undertakes to carry on the story:—

My First Voyage.

At the Mouth of the Mountain River

I was born on the Moruya River (N.S.W.) in 1842, so that on the 10th of September next I will be 80 years old. At five years of age I had a clear recollection of my father—who was a shipwright by trade, with a knowledge of seamanship—having made a number of voyages from Sydney to the far-away Richmond in his own little vessel, the Matilda Ann. He came north with supplies for the squatters, who had settled some time previously on the open country on the upper river about Casino, and went to the ranges, and to bring back tallow, this commodity at the time being the only commercial end to which cattle so remote from civilisation could be put. As well as owner, my father was skipper of the Matilda Ann, which had a carrying capacity of about 100 tons, or an equi-

valent of about 14,000 feet of timber when snugly stowed. She was topsail rigged and had as a rival in the same service the "Urara," another schooner under the command of John Skennar, who later gave his name to Skennar's Head, a property on the ocean front a few miles north of the Richmond, on which he resided afterwards for many years. Incidentally, Mr. G. A. Skennar, senr., of Ballina, is a son of this

nar, senr., of Ballina, is a son of this old pioneer mariner.

At the time I refer to, the whole coastline was practically unlit, and, at Ballina there was neither pilot nor lighthouse to help or direct the sailor. The manner of crossing the bar was to sail over it if the wind and sea were favorable—that is, if it was blowing from seawards. A breeze off shore was helpful only in crossing out. Otherwise the vessels were hauled in and out by means of anchors and long lengths of hawser or rope.

There were four regular traders in '47, namely, the *Matilda Ann*, *Urara*, *Ebenezer* and *Anna Maria*. Shortly afterwards came the *Emily Jane*, *Margaret* and *Mary* and the *Christopher George*.

Arriving at the river in due course we found the channel to be under the North Head, following the base of the hill round Shaw's Bay and past Pilot Point, whence it ran beside the long south beach and up river to West Ballina and beyond. These local names it is needless to add were not known then. The *Matilda Ann*, when crossing in, grounded inside the bar on one of the many shifting sandspits, and remained fast. My mother, my two sisters and myself were taken ashore in a boat, and were landed on the inner North Head on a grassy knoll a little

North Head on a grassy knoll a little to the eastward of the present rifle butts. My sisters (since deceased) afterwards became Mrs. Charles Coleman, senr., and Mrs. James Ross, senr., of North Creek, and later of Ballina.

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 Teven and Booyong, and on the route of the proposed Ballina-Booyong railway.

East Ballina Settlement.

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 now occupied by the big brick college. 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. Mr. Jim McGuire senr. of Ballina. is a son, and

Guire, senr., of Ballina, is a son, and Mr. Steve King, of North Creek, a grandson of these men. King's and McGuire's habitations were amid the brush, on the ground occupied by McSweeney's refreshment room.

A small stream of water, which emptied into the river at the pilot sheds, supplied this 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. These sawpits, it might be mentioned, were situated about where Pilot-boatman Johnson's house now stands.

Establishment of Community Law.

There was obviously no police, no magistrates, 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

with the condence 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 o'clock in the afternoon. It was a bitter, gruelling 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 the 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 at agreed intervals. The climax

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.

Genesis of West Ballina.

West Ballina, or Ballina proper, was a secondary settlement. In my earliest

recollection of it at East Ballina, Bill Johnson had a blacksmith's shop 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

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. Yeates' present residence) came along with Fred Bacon and others.

At the beginning, the first cedar was felled at Prospeet 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 serubs it was at length found convenient to remove the settlement from East Ballina to what is now Ballina proper.

Emigrant Creek and its Camps.

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 camps at Cumalum, on the land afterwards free-selected by the late Mr. Geo. Topfer, senr. In due course larger and more

senr. In due course larger and more important camps were formed, the principal ones being at Duck Creek, Teven and Tintenbar. It is worthy of note to recall that Mesdames McCurdy senr., J. Ainsworth, senr., J. Henderson, senr., and J. J. Lewis, of Ballina, are daughters, and Messrs. Charles (North Creek), William (Ballina), and Henry (Queensland), sons of Henry Williams, the first Emigrant Creek pioneer.

In 1851 the Tintenbar camp was second only to Ballina in importance. Among those who constituted it were Chas. Jarrett, John Skennar, Charles McNeill, Dick Glascott, Jno. Holmes, — Phillip, Jas. Ainsworth, Dick King, B. McCurdy, Steve King, and Wm. Smith (the latter being the father of Mrs. J. E. Roberts, of Ballina). The wives and families of the timber men were also domiciled in the camp.

The Teven camp included Joe Maguire, Billy Rose, the Johnston's 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 Woolett, Manny Davis, P. Simpson (afterwards of Pimlico), Jno. Barnes, and Frank Morrish, who was later one of the original se-

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 Boatharbour, near Lismore, from whence the industry rapidly extended up the creeks into the Big Scrub beyond the present Queen City.
