

# **Seventy-Five Years on the Richmond.**

1847-1922.

## **James Ainsworth's Reminiscences**

(No. 6.)

(From the Ballina "Beacon.")

### **CASINO IN THE FIFTIES.**

Of all the community settlements on the Richmond in the forties and fifties, Casino made the most marked progress, and rapidly developed from a hamlet into the status of the first river township. Situated at the head of navigation, it became the convenient depot and trading centre for the many cattle stations that occupied the immense area of open country extending from Mt. Lindsay to Lismore. It was there also that river officialdom was given a first abode, and for many subsequent years Casino was in fact the absolute capital of the entire territory north of Grafton. The first river police were located there, also the first courts of justice, the first clergymen, the first Lands Office, etc., etc. Likewise as the outcome of one of the earliest public

outcome of one of the earliest public movements in the infant hamlet the squatters laid down the first horse-racing track. This track—a very good one, too, by the way—was situated on the north side of the river adjacent to the cemetery. The resultant race meetings held upon it were arranged and conducted wholly by the squatters, who also compiled the programmes, provided the prize-money, and for the most part supplied the horses and riders. It is of interest to recall that there were no “bookies” in those days, although betting—and sometimes for large amounts—was in high favor. Nevertheless it was regarded as an accepted fact on all occasions that every horse starting in a race was out to win. Any suggestion to the contrary was unthinkable. The cedar men of the Lower River shared with the squatters a racial love for this sport of Kings, and many of them were frequent visitors to the Casino carnivals in those days. Jim Brown, of Ballina, as an illustration, owned as far back as the mid-fifties two imported horses of special pedigree, one of which was named Sebastopol, after the famous Crimean siege of that time, the news of which had just reached Australia.

### **AN UNREHEARSED INCIDENT.**

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In 1854, when still a boy—and a lightweight rider of local repute—I found myself one of a Ballina party bound for a typical Casino race meetings. Others of the party included Geo. Williams, Joe Eyles, jun., Charles Coleman, Bill Hoskins, and Bob King. The party left by pulling boat at 4 o'clock one evening, and after rowing double sculls continuously all night, arrived at Casino at 10 o'clock the next morning—an eighteen hours' strenuous journey. The alternative horseback route at the time was to swim the river at Ballina and ride along the beach to Evans River, thence striking across to Rocky Mouth (Woodburn) and on to Casino via Bungawalbyn.

We found Casino in full holiday mood, where eating, drinking, dancing, and merry-making with a sufficiency of racing thrown in, constituted the programme, day and night. The Ballina contingent entered into the gay round with an enthusiasm characteristic of the time, but also with a precipitancy that afterwards proved somewhat unfortunate.

The grandstand on the course was a square rough-hewn structure with a flat slab roof, from which eminence those who cared to pay 2/6 for the extra privilege could view the different events. The space below served as a

events. The space below served as a weighing room and office for the stewards and committee. In common with the majority in attendance thus early in the carnival, Joe Eyles had imbibed not wisely, but too well, and to ease the exuberance of his spirits sought the seclusion and sanctuary of the grandstand. There he solemnly sat and stared, and blinked, and smoked and in turn—spat. Immediately beneath Squatter Mackellar, who was busily attending to the scales, became all at once visibly disconcerted. He was apparently interested in the meanderings of a copious trickle of insistent wetness which he felt slimily stealing down his back beneath his shirt collar. He was readily aware that it had not been raining, and for the moment was at a loss to account for the phenomenon. Then, looking up, he saw that it connected with a crack in the roof. Rushing out, his excitement registered breaking-point when he caught Joe in the deliberate, if unwitting, act of expectorating another full volley at the crack. Mackellar became instantly furious, and peremptorily called for all the satisfaction to his outraged dignity that the law and the particular circumstances would allow. In this attitude he was supported by the committee to a man, and the police were ordered to clear the stand.



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Joe, meanwhile, from his elevated perch, viewed the tumult below him with a complacency that was as admirable as it was seemingly disinterested, until it was slowly borne in on him that he was the centre figure of the disturbance. Then assuming a hurried but comprehensive aggressive, he unsteadily unended himself into action. Between hiccoughs he accepted the situation, and addressing the crowd he defied the police and challenged the whole fraternity of squatters to do their luridist uttermost and most absolute worst. Fired by the heat of his own eloquence and the potency of the rum, he concluded with a declaration of hostility against the entire population.

Attracted by the commotion, George Williams happened along in time to gather that Eyles' mates had resolved to stand by him in the event of police interference, irrespective of any question of right or wrong. Williams saw that a crisis had been reached and that a serious conflict was imminent. He appealed to the crowd, and roundly condemning Joe, urged his inebriety as a set off against the offence committed. At the same time he intimated that if the police put a hand on Joe he would actively support his party.

**The upshot was that in order to**

avert a riot Mackellar backed down and a truce was called for the day.

### **THE "BULLY BLUES" BALL.**

Following the Eyles grandstand incident, the Ballina men were known in Casino as the "Bully Blues," because of the blue turbans they affected round their hats in contrast with the white turbans worn by the squatters, turbans having come into popular fashion at the time. Though invitations had been issued generally by the station proprietors for the race ball, it was regarded as significant that the "Bully Blues" were omitted. Taking hasty counsel together to consider reprisals, they learned that Burley, the one fiddler in the district—whose services as musician were retained for the ball—was as fond of a drop of rum as the next man. They lost no time in making friends with Burley, who was only too willing to accept the lavish hospitality offered him. They kept him under close guard while they arranged an opposition ball, so that by the time the "White Turbanites" had assembled for the aristocratic hop, and only awaited the fiddler the latter, well primed, was busy scraping out music for the "Bully

scrapping out music for the "Bully Blues" dance in another quarter of the town.

Next day the squatters openly acknowledged defeat, and the combined ball the following night was enthusiastically attended by every one—squatter and timber-getter without exception.

### **SOME DETAILS.**

A man named Meanley kept the public house in Casino in the early fifties, and Constables Alcock, Teddy Welsh and Jimmy O'Rourke had charge of the police station. The lockup of the time, and which for a critical hour had so much interest for the "Bully Blues" was a 6 x 6 slab structure with 6ft. walls and a bark roof. A heavy hardwood log was embedded in the earthen floor of the interior, and into this were screwed four iron ringbolts, to which prisoners were handcuffed when locked up.

### **FIRST BALLINA POLICE.**

The foregoing mention of the Casino police in the early fifties brings to mind that in '55 or '56 Constable Jack McLeod entered upon duty at East Ballina as the first Lower Richmond police officer. He died over there, and his widow afterwards became the wife of Mr. Joe Eyles. The John McLeod who succeeded Mr. Joe Eyles, snr., in the conduct of the Sawyers' Arms Hotel at

conduct of the Sawyers' Arms Hotel at West Ballina, was a son of the deceased, and Mr. Curtis McLeod Hughes, of Cumbalum, is a descending relative. The late Mr. J. A. Henderson—one of the original selectors at North Creek, and father of Mr. E. Henderson, of Lennox Head—was the second constable to be appointed to Ballina. The first local court house and lockup was erected somewhere about the site of the present building. It had a two-roomed dwelling attached which served as the officers' quarters. The dwelling contained one of the old-time open fireplaces, and one night after the occupants had retired to bed it somehow caught alight, and the whole structure was burned to the ground. The second establishment, which was more commodious and comfortable, continued in use until the early eighties, when it was demolished and replaced by the present group of brick buildings. For many years in the absence of churches, or a suitable hall for such a purpose, the second court house was used by all visiting clergymen for divine worship.

In '52-'53, before the advent of Constable McLeod, the West Ballina Cedar men had a method of their own for preserving order and punishing offenders. A 200-gallon vat open at one end, and originally intended for boiling-



down purposes at the Pelican Tree, had been landed on the river bank opposite the Sawyers' Arms Hotel. When a man imbibed more than his share of liquor the sober element, without further ceremony, dumped him into the vat until he recovered. It was the practice also in the case of those suffering from an excess of drink to so fix their clothing that when they attempted to stand up the garments would fall down. This was likewise regarded as sufficient justification for summary detention in the vat.