

ORBOST & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

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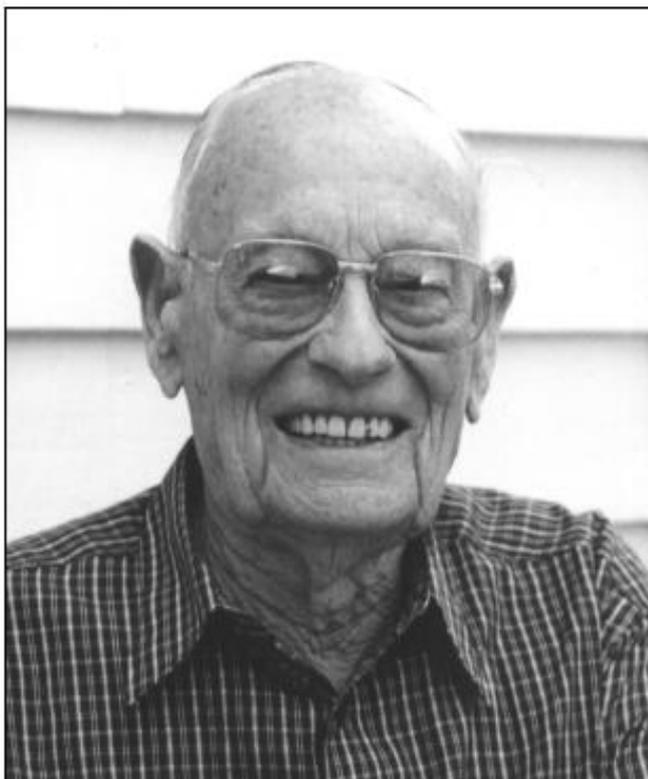
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NEWSLETTER

No. 114 February 2015

TOM JOINER b 1914, d 2009

This interview was conducted in 2006 by May Leatch at the home of Lachie and Beryl Macalister in Orbost. At that time, Tom aged 91 years, was living in Queensland and had returned to Orbost for a visit.



JOINER FAMILY AT NEWMERELLA

My father Charles William Joiner lived down Warrens Road at Newmerella. Dad used to cart goods from Harbeck's store in Lakes Entrance until 1914 which is when I was born. He had his stables and horses at Newmerella. He had teams of eight horses mostly and would cart to the Snowy River Stores and also deliver with a horse and spring cart around town.

He was born near Daylesford in 1883. My Grandfather was born on a ship coming from England. His name was Daniel and he is also buried in the Orbost cemetery.

They settled on a little ridge near where the old Highway goes up the hill to Newmerella. There could still be some of the old fruit trees which my father planted when he was a boy.

My father left school at age 12 and had to work. His father was a contract fencer. My father finally saved up enough money to buy a horse and dray and did road work. He then bought 12 bullocks and started carting to Lakes Entrance. Later he bought a horse team and wagon.

The Lay Bros. were in partnership with my father in the carting business. They would cart furniture, beer, cheese, all sorts of goods. On the return trip from Orbost, they would take the local produce.

As a child up until I was 7 years of age, we lived on Grove's Hill. There was an Aboriginal fellow named Andy Chase who lived out on what we called the "Pig Hole" in the forest which backed onto our back fence in those days. He used to come to within 50 yards of the house and cooee and my mother would go out and give him food, sugar, tea and flour. He used to live on possums and that sort of thing in the bush. He was dressed in kangaroo hides, had long hair and a beard.

The "Pig Hole" got its name because it always held water, and when they were driving pigs from the Lochend area to join up with the pigs going to Bairnsdale from Orbost, that is where they used to get water.

MOBS OF CATTLE

In the 1920s, there were big cattle runs from Mt Ellery to the coast. The country was quite open. Each year thousands of head of cattle were driven to Orbost saleyards along Forest Road which was an old droving

route. Some of the drovers were Billy Witts, George Richardson, Alf and Jack Green and Joe Bomford.

My brother Leo and I used to wag school and go down to the drafting yard where they had about five or six gates. They'd call out "*the yellow baldey, the mottled feller, the polley bloke, the skinny felleretc.*" We loved it.

At that time, there were saleyards in Clarke Street down towards the Butter Factory. They had pig yards there as well. Auctioneers were Jimmy Webster, Macarthur and McLeod, Tony Cavanagh and Stan Cowell, Jack Morgan, Brian Campbell, and in later years Joe Geer. James and Bird also had yards where the Farmers Store is now.

PIGS

A chap on the Orbost flats, Jack Yates, used to grow a lot of maize and harvest the maize by putting the pigs in to eat the maize. He had to get the pigs to Bairnsdale with other chaps, droving about 600 pigs. It would take them 12 days. A wagonette would go in front and dribble out the maize. When they got to Swan Reach, the drovers went over to the old grog shanty and got drunk and my Dad had to keep the 600 pigs together. It was a difficult job. The pigs were ferried across the rivers. That would have been in the late 1890s.

A MEDICAL EMERGENCY

When I was 14 years of age, I had a terrible attack of appendicitis. They took me to Bairnsdale in an old Willies Knight car. It took three and a half hours. The pain was terrible and I can still remember it. In those days, there were only open cars and this was July so it was very cold.

SCHOOLS

I started school at Orbost when I was 6½ years old. My first teacher was Miss Bennett. A few months later, I went to the Newmerella school which was opposite where I was born at Ashby's corner. Mrs Ashby was a midwife and delivered the babies. You can hardly see where the school used to be now. I can say that I was born on the banks of the Snowy River. After Newmerella School, I went to Lochend School in 1921 until about 1925, and later to St Joseph's in Orbost. Above the Lochend School there used to be an old racecourse through the forest for training racehorses.



Lochend School, opened 1913, closed 1942.

There were about 15 kids going to the Lochend School. Some of the names of students I remember were Tommy Robinson and his sister, two boys by the name of Lowater, Ted Coverdale, Maurice Coverdale, Clyde Day, Powneys. Miss Shortell was the first teacher I had there, and Mr Rollison and Mr Anderson just before the school closed.

FARMING AND OTHER ENTERPRISES

In the early days, farmers were mostly growing maize and had pigs, and were milking some cows. There weren't so many vegetables because there was no transport for them. The bean industry started after the railway came (1916). There may have been a few grown before that, but not much.

I don't know when the slatted barns were built. They were already there when I was a child.

After I left school, I worked on the farm, growing sunflowers, potatoes, beans and dodging poddies and calves. We used to graze some at Buchan.

After I married, we went on to Hughie Adams' farm down the Marlo Road until the War started. Then I lived at Lochiel Park for about 8 years, doing contract work with tractors etc. From there, I bought the place at Tostaree and was there for about 20 years. From there, to Hallam and built a motel and ran that for about 4 years, sold it, and came back to Orbost and had several properties. Then to Berwick and built another home, and to Bundaberg in Queensland where I now live [since the 1970s].

DEPRESSION TIMES

I don't think that it affected this area quite so much. People always had something to eat. You could raise a family on the river bank, just living under poles and bags, fishing and eating pumpkins, rabbits and maize, or go up to the police station and get an order to buy food. No one was given money. People used to walk from Orbost right out to dig the main drain from Lake Curlip into the Brodribb. They would get into the water and shovel the mud out by hand. They were paid a shilling a cubic yard for shoveling. [This was a sustenance project for unemployed people].

THE RAILWAY

"like putting blood into a vein....."

I can remember my father paying a "railway rate". I believe that all the landholders paid a rate to get the railway from Bairnsdale to Orbost. They paid it for a number of years. The train coming through was just like putting blood into a vein and a great boost to Orbost. Timber cutters produced sleepers from here for many of the lines in Victoria.

HAY PRESS

I used to do contract hay baling, also bean straw. Our hay press was pulled by a Farmall H tractor. Bean straw was sent away to some of the drought affected areas. People would use a sweep to collect the hay and bring their hay into the press and hand feed it into the press to make bales. The sweep has fingers on it, about 8 or 9 ft. wide, with a handle on it, a chain on either side and a horse pulling it. You go along the windrow and it sweeps the hay up into a heap.

THE WAR YEARS

“We were like greyhounds....”

Once the War started, money seemed to come “out of hollow logs” as the saying goes.

We grew lots of cabbages. I can remember three train loads of cabbages going out of here in the one day. We grew a lots of carrots, all sorts of vegetables for drying. There were other people making bearings or something for Bren guns. [Sprockets for Bren Gun carriers were made at a garage in Clarke Street]. Butter and meats were needed. It was quite prosperous then.

Farm workers were hard to get. Some of the Land Army girls came here, and also the Prisoners of War from the camp at Bete Bolong. The community pitched in and worked very, very hard. We were like greyhounds. We never walked, we ran.

I had help from a few of the POWs with the hay baling. They were very nice men and did a good job.

My brother Pat went into the Air Force and won the DFC. He was shot down but was fortunate enough to get back.

If a farmer wanted to join up, he was refused. I tried to join up twice, but was told that I was needed to produce foodstuffs.

There was an airstrip at Mallacoota and lookouts everywhere, like fire lookouts, manned all the time. There were some funny incidents though.

One time, there was a car coming through Tostaree and someone said that it was a Japanese person in the car. So the car was stopped at Orbost and it was a Chinese herbalist or someone like that. There were several such “sightings” of Japanese and people were quite anxious at times.

AFTER THE WAR

Things prospered for quite a few years after the War. Then we lost the butter factory to Bairnsdale, then Bairnsdale lost it to Maffra. I don't think that was good for the area. There used to be a butter factory at Cann River, and at Buchan too. These little communities fed on those industries.

The vegetable industry gradually died out too. Travelling up and down the river now, you'd never believe that this area was so active. Men worked everywhere in the paddocks, three or four men working on every farm. Now one man might work two or three of those farms with the help of modern machinery. The farms have got bigger and the people have got less.

The dairy industry would not be one-third of what it was in earlier times. There is practically no maize grown here now. Most of what is grown now is sweet corn, and sweet corn seed.

There used to be a big frozen bean industry here too, and now it's all gone. There's many more beef cattle here now.

WALNUTS AND PEACHES

Walnuts grew very well here. On the Hossack (Boucher) property, there were a lot of walnuts. Also over the River on the Ashby side there were quite a few more.

Old Mr Griebenow used to grow peaches and can them on his property at Newmerella. He had a couple of orchards of clingstone peaches.

CHANGES TO THE RIVER

You'd be lucky to get a canoe down the river now because it has sanded up so much. In the early days, it was all a jungle on either side of the river. That contained the river. Mankind has changed things, sheep and rabbits too – a number of things have caused the silting.

The flats were mostly cleared by the time I was a boy. There were a number of old dead trees that had been ring-barked still standing and they had to plough around them. I believe that with some of the huge logs, they would bury them into a trench and I've heard that some of those logs are still there.

The first levee was built around 1927. We had a big flood in 1925 which did a lot of damage. The 1934 flood went over the levee and they had a terrible job to drain it from behind the levee.

THE TOWN

Like most towns, Orbost was a busy little place. It was only for the local people, not for tourists. That's different from now. Orbost will never grow very big. I think that it will always remain as a nice little town at about the size it is now. Towns like Bairnsdale will grow bigger.

The main street has changed dramatically, become more modern. There were more shops in earlier times, more grocery shops, different shops, whereas there's just a supermarket now.

ELECTRICITY

We should have got it much earlier than we did. Other places got it before us. It made an enormous difference. We changed from using old stationery engines to being able to just throw a switch. We didn't have to wind up the old motor any more, with the smell of fuel etc. We got things like TV, electric stoves and fridges etc., things that we never dreamt of having before.

WATER SUPPLY

We pumped from the River or depended on tanks or dams. Water is a product that we can't do without. People waste too much. I think that the seasons have changed. We don't get the rainfall that we used to, possibly through more clearing of the land.



Bean threshing with a horse and roller, Warren's farm, Newmerella, 1930s.

THRESHING BEANS

- "like waves behind a boat"

I used to have two horses and a rolling pole. You would have to trot pretty fast over the beans. The straw would come up like waves behind a boat. Then they'd turn it over again, and you'd go over it again with the roller. Then they'd shake it all up and tip some more bean plants on. You'd end up with just the beans and would shovel them up into bags. Sometimes they would use two bean sheets and get a good long strip. Then it would go through a winnower.

Finally, the beans would be hand sorted. They used to do that at the Bean Factory which was opposite Lochiel Park. A lot of local women sorted the beans. Then machine thrashing came along. There's no dry beans grown here now.

Once the bean seed come out, what is left is very light. The straw is forked off. They used this straw for stock feed. Everyone had a house cow in town in those days, and people would get a dray load of the straw and put it in the corner of the paddock for the cow over the winter.

SALEYARDS

There were three sets of saleyards in Orbost. In Clarke Street was Macarthur and Co. (which became Dalgetys). Where the Farmers Store is now, was the James and Bird saleyards. Over the road from them (where the saleyards are now) was the Gippsland and Northern saleyards.

To keep three lots of saleyards going meant that there were a lot of cattle and pigs. There were never many sheep, only a few. The climate does not suit sheep very well. The country is too rich for sheep and they get problems.

BARNS

They were two and three stories high. Every farmer had a barn for drying their crops. This was before maize cribs. They could put things up in the top loft and out of the way of floods.

The idea for them might have originated in England or where the settlers came from. I've never seen them in any other district where I've travelled throughout Australia.

Also, they used to grow hops here in the early days, so they could have used them for drying the hops. On the dividing fence between the Fisher property (at Lochend) and the Morris property which I owned, I can remember hops growing along the fence there.

Richardson's barn at Bete Bolong (next door to McKeown's barn) used to be a place for dances sometimes. Mostly the dances were held in the halls, the Mechanics Institute and places like that.

A BOY'S LIFE

We used to milk cows, turn the separator to get the cream and deliver it in a jinker to the factory before we went to school. Then in the evening after school, we'd milk the cows again. I don't know how we learned anything at school. But we always seemed to have energy. I left school at 14 years of age. Most of what I know, I've learned throughout my life since I've left school.

Mostly, we rode horses to school, also for a number of years, we drove a horse and jinker to school. When I first started school, I rode an old ex-racehorse with no saddle (just with a bag) and I really suffered because it was very boney to ride. We had about 4 ponies. Bikes cost a lot of money.

Our family used to breed Clydesdales, mostly sold locally. We did not shoe them. We just used to trim their feet with a sharp axe on a bit of firm ground. It would cut them off really clean.

The main thing to learn, the most important things, are love and respect for people. That's the most important ingredients of life.

FISHER'S BEAN FACTORY AT LOCHEND [now Crofts Barn]

This was operating before the Fishers took over the old Butter Factory in Lochiel Street. They had sorting tables there in the 1920s. In Orbost, the Fishers had a Shell fuel depot at the back of the bean factory.

The Fishers were very enterprising people, very smart. One of their uncles is supposed to have invented the knot that was used to tie the sheaves of hay in the fields.

At their Lochend Barn, they had a Blackstone engine which ran on oil. They used to light a fire under it and hot it up to start it. This engine drove all the bean machinery in the barn.

BARK HOUSES

There were a lot of bark huts around, with bark on the walls and roofs with poles along the top to wire them down with the bark overlapping. It would last for a long time. It is very insulating, warm in winter and cool in summer.

They used to take the bark off the trees and spread it out on the ground with weights on it so it would dry flat.

I can remember seeing large trees in the forest near Lochend where the Aborigines had cut off bark for their canoes.

ROADS

The gravel roads used to become very corrugated. One fellow might have several miles to look after, maybe 8 or 9 miles of road to maintain. He would have a plane which was made out of two big heavy pieces of timber joined together and with a piece of steel in them. The fellow would pull the plane with two horses and cut off the top of the corrugations and fill them in. A number of people used to do that. That was how they graded the road. The fellow would stand on the plane behind the horses. When the iron wore out they could put another piece on.

MATES

Tom Joiner:

Lachie Macalister and I have been mates for many years. We've grown potatoes together, had cattle, and done a lot together, yet we've never ever doubted one another. We've never robbed one another for one dollar. That's trust.

Lachie Macalister:

I was only 14 years old when my father died, and Tom Joiner looked after me a bit. Tom was renting Lochiel Park and used to live there. I milked on shares with Tom. We had about 30 cows which we used to run on Snaggers Lane on the Marlo Road in the day time, and put them in Lochiel Park at night. I can remember when I was taking the first cans of cream off with a horse and cart. Tom came out and said, "When you take that over, it's in your name and when you get the cheque we will go halves."