

ORBOST HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.



P.O. BOX 284 ORBOST VIC 3888

President: Beryl Macalister
Vice President: Geoff Stevenson
Secretary: Paul Dawson
Treasurer: Paul Dawson
Museum Curators: Geoff Stevenson
Eddie Slatter
Research Secretary: John Phillips

NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER, 2004

‘SNOWY RIVER MAIL’

Wednesday April 8th 1981

MEMORIES OF 1870 FLOOD

Most Orbost and district residents have vivid recollections of the Snowy River in an angry mood in recent times, but little is known of early floods, of the devastation caused and the hardships suffered by the pioneers of those days.

Recent visitors to Orbost were Mr. and Mrs. D. Lemon, from Picton (N.S.W.).

Mr. Lemon is a great grandson of Mr. Archie McLeod, an early settler in this district.

He brought along a letter written by Mr. Dalmahoy Campbell McLeod to his wife, Isabel, which gives some insight into the trials and tribulations faced by the early settlers.

The letter reads:

My Dearest Isabel, - I arrived here all safe and there has been a dreadful flood. The people on the station are all safe - they lived up on the loft during the flood. It has destroyed nearly everything on the station - nearly all the fences are gone - even the new cultivation paddock has suffered. It was four feet in the house and has destroyed everything in your storeroom except the things that were on the top shelf where the books are and the second shelf. The drawers are all wet and I had to take them partly to pieces before I could get at the things in them as I could not get the drawers open - the wood had swollen so much. Everything is not only wet, but dirty with mud, even in the drawers and boxes that were locked. Your desk is all safe - not at all wet - but my letter and papers are all wet and muddy. I left them on the top of the drawers and the water separated the drawers so they got wet.

All the goats are drowned. The flood came on while Willy and Lavelle were on the run and

old Buck was down at the canoe, and when he saw the flood coming over the banks he left the canoe and came home, and nobody could get near it after that.

Although there was five white men on the place before the water was near the hut or house they saved nothing but the tea and all the bedding that was in Mr. Bruce's room and some of Mr. Lavelle's.

Instead of putting the goats on top of the milking shed or blacksmith's forge they tried to make them swim up to the hay stacks, but to no avail.

Three of Tom Roberts' boxes went away with the flood, one of which we have found since.

I have a great many of the things washed - that is washed the mud off them to keep them from rotting - the things out of the box in the storeroom I am washing myself - also the things out of the drawers - I am only washing the mud out of them and drying them well. The rats are dreadful. What the flood has not destroyed they are trying to - they have gnawed holes in every mattress in the house and have gnawed the blankets and the clean table clothes and sheets that were in the store. The water washed up the floors in the store room, nursery, store and servants' room; also all the slabs in the verandah and many of the things went through underneath and was

swept away. Your store room had the slabs under the window knocked out and some of the things went out through there. Nearly all the windows in the house are broken and all the plaster in all the rooms is knocked down as high as the water went in.

Jack and I never saw such a dreadful looking place. It nearly drives one mad to think about it, let alone seeing it. Most of the tubs are gone and we have to wash the things in the big bath and foot pail, also dairy tub. All the fire places have fallen in and some of the slabs have fallen and the water washed the mortar out, and then the house fell down - the only exception being the kitchen. My box of pigeon holes went away with the flood and it had all the keys of the rooms in it - your store and all.

The blacks were down the morass yesterday on the other side and saw over twenty head of cattle that have been drowned and there has been two seen on the beach near the entrance of the Snowy. I have sent Willy and Lavelle down to look at their brands and also to bring up Mr. Turton's boat. It is now eight o'clock and they have not come home yet.

All the pigs on the place are drowned except a few - I think about (20) twenty. All the horses I think are safe, but very poor and a great many of the cattle are sticking in trees. Two sides of the hop paddock has been swept away; also Tom Roberts' stacks that were over in the hop paddock.

The river has made a number of large holes in the paddock near the house - some of them are sixty yards long, twenty or thirty yards wide and from four to twelve feet deep.

I do not know when I will be down - not for a week at any rate - as it will take that time to get things straight. Your sewing machine is alright, but the needles are very rusty.

I wish you to read this to Arch, so that he will be able to write to Norman about it.

My hands are sore from washing and I am tired. I have to send this to meet Mr. Bruce tomorrow on his way down to Bairnsdale. I will be sure to be down in a week or eight days as I must come down for rations, as they only got two bags of flour after the water went down.

- Dal. C. MacLeod.



Railway Station

RECORD OF FLOODS ON SNOWY RIVER AT ORBOST 1884-1900

DATE	NO. OF FLOODS	HEIGHTS
1884	1	24ft
1886	1	23ft
1887	1	18ft
1888	Nil	
1889	1	21ft
1890	1	28'4"
1891	4	25ft, 28ft, 22ft, 23ft
1892	Nil	
1893	2	21ft, 31'3"
1894	1	19'5"
1895	Nil	
1896	3	22ft, 21ft, 22ft
1897	2	26ft, 24ft
1898	1	24ft
1899	1	23ft
1900	2	24ft, 23ft

Flood photos from the 1950s



Army Duck



Passenger and Mail Bus



Gilbert's Gulch