

ORBOST & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY, 2008

"Snowy River Mail", Wednesday, April 13th 1977:

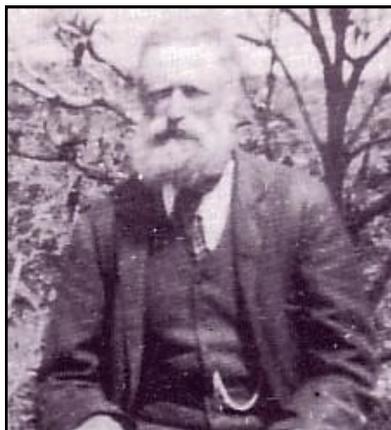
MEMORIES OF MARLO

This delightful story 'Memories of Marlo' was penned by Mrs Elsbeth Conlon (nee Stirling) prior to her death in August 1976 in her 88th year. A member of one of the early pioneering families of the Orbost district, the late Mrs Conlon (pictured below) was an exceptionally fine and loveable person.

As the years pass by we are inclined to think back in time. I for one find myself thinking of the time our great-grandfather, James Stirling, came to this great land inhabited by a primitive black race of people.

Great grandfather arrived in Melbourne on January 26, 1842, bringing with him, his wife and family of three sons and three daughters (James, Peter, William) (Jane, Margaret and Elizabeth) from Greenock, Scotland, in the ship Robert Benn.

Our grandfather, James Stirling, then 19 years old, moved around a lot to Whittlesea, Ballarat goldfields, Cunninghame, now Lakes Entrance, then to the Old Station about 36 miles to the east along the coast near the mouth of the Snowy River and for a time settled there with his wife also from Wigton, Scotland, and their family four sons two daughters (James, John, William, George, Margaret and Polly).



**Mr James Stirling,
Snr.**

While at Cunninghame George and Polly died of illness.



Mrs Elsbeth Conlon (nee Stirling)

Eventually they crossed the Snowy River, a very wide stream, by rowing boat and swimming the horses behind the boat to Marlo and granny said she was never going to move again — she never did.

A big heartbreak was the loss of another young son there William.

They took a land there acres and acres of wild bush country.

The Snowy River flats, some of the richest in the world was quickly settled. People coming from New South Wales, travelled down the coast looking to land, stayed with our grandparents and all were welcome in that faraway country.

The aborigines too came in numbers and at times, granny was afraid of them.

She was worried, too, hearing the native bears crying at night, she thought it was little pickannies lost in the bush, they sound very like a child crying.

Later, our father, James Stirling, married a Melbourne girl (Jessie Finlay) and took her there to settle. Marlo and Snowy River were growing and our family increasing.

Each time there was a new baby coming, our mother journeyed to Melbourne for the event — 36 miles on a sandy track to Cunninghame, across the Lakes by steamer to Sale, then to Melbourne by train three days journey, then back again with the little one to the wilds.

As time passed maize was grown on a large scale on the Snowy flats and shipped to Melbourne. Marlo was the port but at times dangerous and unreliable.

Schooners were held up some times for weeks loaded with their cargo of maize, wattle bark and skins.

In bad weather the big seas closed the entrance with sand which eventually washed away again, with the force of the river coming down.

There was a light pole at Marlo, on which our grandfather hauled up a red light at sunset every night and took it down in the morning to warn ships outside to keep clear.

He was getting old but it gave him an interest and responsibility for three years, besides this he kept the vegetable garden and fruit orchard in good order.

The fruit was mainly apples of several sorts. We dried bags of them in the season and lived on them all winter.

The Brodribb River joined the Snowy about 1½ miles upstream from Marlo and helped to swell the flood waters.



Punt Crossing the Brodribb River at Marlo

In the early days it was crossed by punt but became impassable in flood time, which was quite frequent — each flood laid more silt on the flats enriching them also damaging the crop if it laid too long under water.

In the 1893 flood, the largest of all, my father went up over the fences in his steam launch to rescue his sister, her husband and children plus a dog and six pups and brought them to Marlo House, already filled with holiday campers who were unable to reach home and all getting short of food. We children were given potatoes and milk for days.

This was Christmas 1893.

These were the times referred to as the good old days. I wonder perhaps they were right — after all we children were happy.

Quite early, people came from Melbourne to stay at Marlo house for quiet fishing and shooting, amongst them were Mr Agg and Mr Wilson.

More people came through, staying overnight and in 1888 a licence was granted and Marlo House became Marlo Hotel.



Marlo House which later became Marlo Hotel when granted a licence in 1888

I have memories of an old bark house behind the one standing there, an underground tank and meat house under ground with a bark roof and of our father killing the beast and hauling it up on a stand for the purpose to cool overnight.

There was a saw mill started by the Richardson brothers (Albert, Mark, Alan and Frank) on the Brodribb River near Marlo.

The Marlo House we lived in was built of sawn timber with a shingle roof and had a very big dining room with big pictures on the walls.

One I remember so well was “The Successful Squatter” the old man lighting his pipe and the light reflecting on his face resembled grandfather a lot.

The house also had a long verandah, which was not changed much from the original.

Now with a sawmill, other houses were built — our father and mother’s cottage; Mr Francis and Mr C. Towners, an engineer connected with the shipping. Mr and Mrs Towner had a large family (Caroline, Clara, William, Alice, Martin, Frank, Henry, Tom and Annie).

Mr and Mrs Tomlinson, another large family, lived on the Brodribb River (Lettie, Agnes, John, Willie,

Lucy, Edna, Dorothy and Mary).

Another settler in the early '90s was Mr F. P. Conlon, from Senceon (England), who brought his wife and elderly mother and aunt and seven children (David, Edith, Henryetta, Edward, Cathlein, Constance and Winnifred), and took up land at Point Ricardo, about seven miles further east along the coast.

At one stage, our grandfather and others chartered a boat and took cattle and horses to Camden Harbour in Western Australia, intending to start a station there, but the story is that this failed, because the aborigines killed the animals.

At the time of the ninety-three flood, the river was filled with snags, trees and logs that I can remember seeing. This was cleared by a snagging punt and for years there was a large heap of logs on the river bank at Marlo.

Near the Cabbage Tree Creek there was a very large tree. Several people could stand inside the hollow and, looking up, you could see the marks that each flood had left.

The aborigines said there was one before the '93, bigger still and our father believed them, as he said other things they told him were correct.

This is where the Cabbage Tree palms grow. The only place known in Victoria at that time.

The State School (No. 3433) started about 1900, before that we had a private school. Our teacher, Miss Mulfahey gave us a good start and before this still, our mother taught us.

Mr W. Scott, our first State School teacher, was young and a wonderful teacher.



Marlo State School No. 3433

One of the highlights was the opening of the Brodribb Bridge, so constructed that logs, etc., would flow over the top in flood time without damage.

There were also drought seasons. In 1910 the Snowy entrance closed completely and the river water banked up covering the low lying ground to such an extent that men with horses and scoops dug a channel through the sand. This caused a very wide entrance for a time. As the years passed the entrance has gone miles east of this.

Mr and Mrs Duncan Cameron were the next in the Marlo Hotel after our father (James Stirling). They also had a family of five children (Charles, Alan, Douglas, William and Jessie).

During his time there, Mr Martin Jorgensen

arrived from a ship wreck, walking along the coast and stayed. He was able to build a boat, or a house, which he did and many more jobs. He eventually married a young girl, Eva Eaves, in the hotel dining room at Marlo. She looked very lovely in a lavender wedding dress. The couple set up their home, which later became their guest house and brought up their family, three girls and two boys (Evelyn, May and Ethel, Harold and Rupert).

All these men spent the rest of their lives at Marlo.

Our father went to Club Terrace, Buchan, Woods Point and Walhalla in charge of a Government Battery for crushing stone and obtaining gold.

I remember Mr ... (cannot recall the name) calling at our house and showing us all a very large mould of gold in a handkerchief in his coat-pocket, whilst on his way to the Melbourne Mint.

Captain McNeil, another old timer was always jolly and cheerful and we children had many times sailing with him on the river also Captain Mortimer. There were old photos of them and their wives in the Snowy River Mail, 6th December, 1967. They lived on the opposite side of the river.

Captain McNeil with tug went out through the entrance and brought in the schooners and sometimes in good weather, would take my brother Jim and I with him. Mr Towner also took us at times.

In the drought years, we became very short of water. The old house we were last in, had a shingle roof and it took a heavy shower to run off to the tanks. So at times we had to go miles up the river to get fresh water, as the high tides made it brackish so far up.

We had a tank to fit the dray and my sister and I carried the water up the bank in buckets to fill the tank and on the way home, the tank burst and we lost most of the water. It was a square tank of galvanised iron, not round and corrugated.

We, too, sometimes took Old Skippie in the dray with the copper and tubs, to a fresh water spring on the beach, to do the washing. The spring came out of a high cliff.

McDonald, Hugh and Duncan Cameron were very early settlers on the Snowy. Mr Hugh Cameron became a very large land owner, and his son Alaster became the largest dairy farmer on the flats.

This was in the early 1890s. I can remember our parents getting the telephone at Marlo Hotel and we children being called to listen to the rain in Orbost. It was a wonderful help as messages were sent from Kiandra to warn people on the flats that a flood was expected.

These were hard times and the pleasures simple and delightful, like watching the moon rise over the sea.

Things have come a long way since then and I wonder if the young people are any happier. So maybe these were the good old days.