

ORBOST & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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NEWSLETTER

This Newsletter and the October Newsletter will feature a research project completed by Di Weatherly who, in 1986, attended Orbost High School as a mature age student and studied Year 12 Australian History. Her teacher was Alan Walker, a former president of the Orbost Historical Society .

In a review written by Di in 1987 she describes her experiences as a student. This is included as an introduction to this newsletter.

“THE HALF STUDENT 1986 H.S.C.”

School again at 54, who'd have thought I'd be game enough, but there I was in the year 12 class of Australian History, and eleven months later waiting, like the other year 12's, for that slip of paper giving the results for my efforts.

It was very scary at first walking through to that elusive classroom, was it 12? No today it was room 15. It took me all year to get my timetable fixed in my mind.

How would the kids react to a grey haired student? How would I react to the kids? What did I call the teacher? Sir?, Alan? Would I remember not to swear? Should I try to blend in with the walls and be a mouse in class, or should I talk up and have my say? These were the thoughts that plagued me, most not the subject because I had chosen to do Australian History, because I had wanted to learn about my adoptive country and the local unit of the course really interested me and still does.

Now twelve months afterwards I recall the year with pleasure, the kids were great, they went out of their way to help me, no hassles about names, I become Di to all and felt years younger.

Whether in class or just walking through the school grounds I felt part of the institution and was thrilled to find out we had all passed H.S.C. Australian History, that's Karen [Flavell], Brendan [Shanahan], Jodie [Kleehammer], John [White], Lisa [Lay], Sarah [Hepworth] and me.

So give it a go all you “mature age would-be students” out there. The kids are great, you'll feel years younger and you will achieve those aims which alluded you in your youth.

Di Weatherly.

RIVER - ROAD - RAILWAY

THE 3 R's OF ORBOST — 1880 - 1916

PREFACE

Starting up in the Snowy Mountains the Snowy River makes its way down through gorges and inaccessible places till it opens up in the rich river flats of Orbost and finally spills out into the sea at Marlo.

This river is the thread which joins the three R's of transport in the Orbost Shire.

The need to move around a district, its isolation from other parts of Victoria, its difficult terrain and the need for transportation.

The Snowy provided the first means, its drawbacks provided the need to have other forms of transport its whims also at times destroying the other ways.

The isolation of Far East Gippsland is still apparent in this day and it must have been more so in the years 1880 to 1916. The River plays a major part in this time, the road a secondary role to the coming of the Railway, which is only an introduction and not an operable transportation means.

RIVER TRANSPORT

The means to open up the rich lands of Eastern Gippsland were the waterways of the area and the district around Orbost wasn't any different.

The vastness, the mountain ranges and the swampy low ground all combined to make transport difficult. The Snowy River meets the Brodribb River at Marlo and this small settlement, 30 persons in 1888 ⁽¹⁾, was to become the port of Orbost. The need was there for transport to the markets of Melbourne and in some cases Sydney for the crops grown in the area and the timber cut from the forests. Added to this need was a requirement to bring in supplies for the growing settlement of Orbost and its outlying district.

There were several drawbacks to the use of the Snowy River as a shipping route, the main and most costly to the shipping on the river was the bar at the entrance to the sea of the Snowy River This was extremely hazardous, the water levels varied a great deal and were often as low as 2 feet. Ships had to wait days before being able to get out and of course more dangerously had to anchor off the bar waiting to come in. Several ships came to grief on the bar, one of the last (of the river traders) was the "Wongrabelle" ⁽²⁾ which

⁽¹⁾ "Marlo the Township, the Plains, the Cape" O.S. Green p.

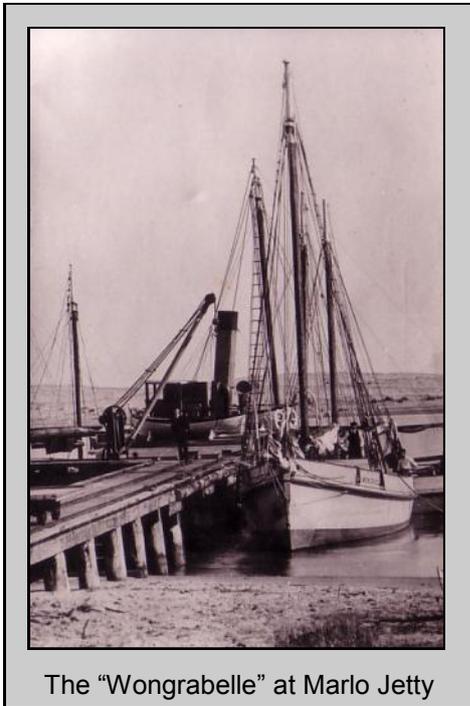
⁽²⁾ The spelling of the name of this boat varies but this spelling comes from a letter sent by the Captain a Mr Hegarty dated 11/7/1908 in the Orbost Historical Museum.

THE FIRST BRIDGE OVER THE SNOWY RIVER BUILT BY JAMES GRANTER IN 1890



SNOWY RIVER AT ORBOST.

is still buried in the sands of the entrance of the Snowy River (albeit where the entrance used to be). It took from April 11th 1912 to August 12th 1912 for the loss of the "Wongrabelle" to be complete, the final entry in the Orbost Shipping Co. records reads:- "The Wongrabelle is completely covered in sand."



The "Wongrabelle" at Marlo Jetty

In 1910 the entrance was completely closed, from February 23rd to June 17th and no ships were able to move.⁽³⁾ This proved to very costly as a great deal of maize was stored awaiting shipment this became weevil infested and when eventually sold at Melbourne fetched only 1/6d as against 5s which was anticipated.

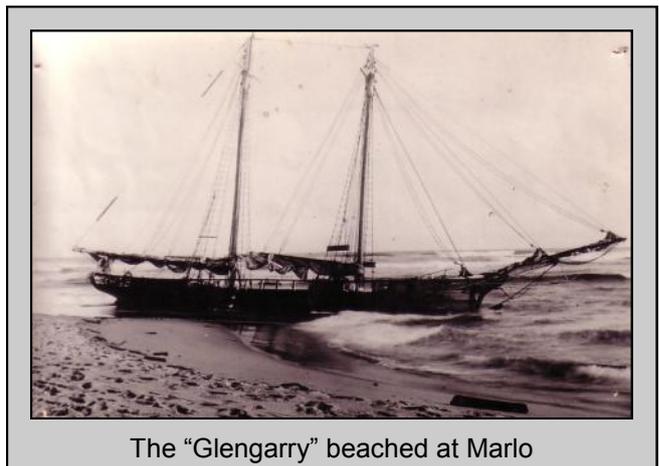
Another drawback to the river trade were the snags in the river, logs and debris from the many floods in the Snowy and Brodrigg rivers. Eventually a government snagging boat was introduced into the rivers and the waterways were able to be navigated by towed barges, which brought the maize, pigs, wattle bark and timber down to the jetty at Marlo from as far up stream as Pumpkin Point (now Bete Belong). The snags were hauled out of the river with a series of ropes very slowly, to give the sand and mud time to let up, then left to dry and eventually burnt.

Unfortunately for the shipping trade the coast off

⁽³⁾ These dates vary in different accounts, these have been taken from the Orbost Shipping Co. records in the Orbost Historical Museum.

the Orbost area was notorious for its ship wrecks. Some of the boats to perish were the "Glengarry" wrecked in the late 1880's off the beach at Marlo, in 1896 the schooner "Bogong" went down off Marlo with the loss of five lives and in 1893 the "Ridge Park" was lost off Cape Conran. One shipwreck which affected the course of the river trade was in 1895 when the Richmond River barquentine "Neptune" went down 25 miles east of the Snowy River entrance and a survivor from the crew was a Martin Jorgensen who swam ashore and stayed on to become a respected pilot on the river. His descendants still live at Marlo. So it wasn't just the bar which captured the ships; the winds and vagaries of the currents of the Far East Gippsland Coast drove many a ship to her death. One of the great mysteries was the loss of the "Orme" on a trip from Cunninghame (now Lakes Entrance) to Mallacoota it was probably lost between Marlo & Cape Everard (renamed Point Hicks in 1970⁽⁴⁾) when the full force of the storm caught her.⁽⁵⁾ Nothing was ever found, neither bodies nor wreckage.

The first known shipping on the Snowy was in 1869 when supplies were brought in for the Sterlings by cutter from Port Albert. Later in 1875 a Charles Petersen stripped wattle bark in the area and shipped it out from Marlo to Germany. This successful venture was followed by the formation of the Snowy River Shipping



The "Glengarry" beached at Marlo

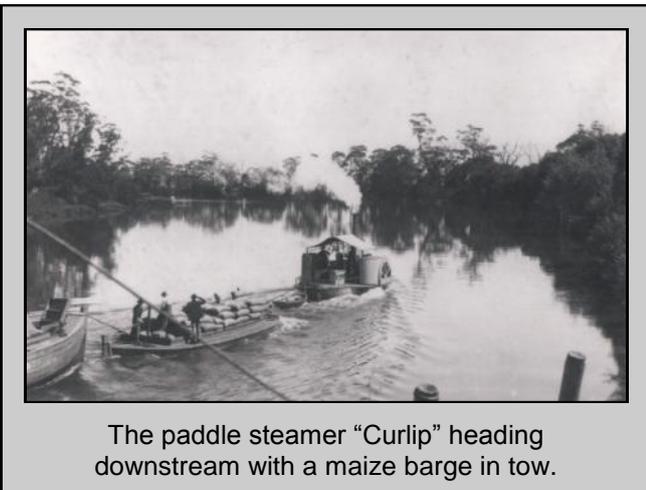
⁽⁴⁾ Interesting the renaming of Cape Everard to Point Hicks as the original Point Hicks as designated by Captain Cook is thought to be Cape Conran.

⁽⁵⁾ "Shipwrecks", Bull p.60.

⁽⁶⁾ Many accounts differ as to the first shipping company referring to the Orbost Shipping Co as being formed in 1880 but I sighted a cheque in the Orbost Historical Museum headed Snowy River Shipping Co dated 18...

Company ⁽⁶⁾ which operated till the turn of the century when a new company was formed called the Orbost Shipping Co. managed by James and Bird. This company eventually fell victim to progress when the roads began to improve and the railway came to Orbost. There is mention of a small steamer called the "Cheviot" ⁽⁷⁾ being run by A. and R. Cameron in competition with the Snowy River Shipping Company but little is known of the boat or what became of her. In O.S. Green's book about Marlo the author makes reference to a store owned by the agent for the "Cheviot" a Mr Cox and of the P. S. "Cheviot" towing barges in 1900 but I really think this is a mistake and the boat in question is the P. S. "Curlip" built by Samuel Richardson at his mill at Tabbara on the Brodribb River in 1890.

The P. S. "Curlip" deserves a mention on her own, this sturdy paddle steamer was built out of local snowy river mahogany by Sam Richardson. Her measurements were 43 feet in length, nine tons gross, a very shallow draught (a necessity on the bar) and a steam engine rating at 2 horse power. She was registered in 1893 and could carry passengers as well as tow barges. When towing she was allowed 10 passengers and during excursions was allowed 25. She was a veritable workhorse towing barges up and down the Snowy and Brodribb rivers and pulling other boats through the shallow entrance of the Snowy. Many Sunday School children had wonderful outings on her when used as an excursion boat. Unfortunately she ended her days a victim of the Snowy River washed out to sea during a flood and breaking her back on the beach. ⁽⁸⁾



The paddle steamer "Curlip" heading downstream with a maize barge in tow.

⁽⁷⁾ Scrap Book cuttings 'Bairnsdale Advertiser' series on local history in the 1960's belonging to Mary Gilbert.

At the start of the river trade goods were shipped from Marlo to Melbourne but when the railway reached Bairnsdale this became unprofitable and the ships plied only between Marlo and Cunninghame. Some of the boats built especially for the Snowy River trade were the "Orbost", "Peter Nell", "Endeavour" (built at Tabbarra), "Lady of the Lake" (altered to suit the conditions at Marlo). The "Stormbird" and "Sea Bird" were of about 50 tons, other ships to ply the route were the "Glengarry", "War Hawk", "Magnolia", "Corringle" "Wongrabelle" and "Kiora".



"Stormbird" (at back) and "Kai Ora" at Marlo jetty.

The means of transporting goods to Marlo was decided by the river and barges were the only boats that could be used. Before the river was snagged the barges were poled upstream and floated back down, after the river was snagged the barges were able to be towed. This is where the "Curlip" came into her own towing as many as four astern. There were three landings on the Snowy, one at Pumpkin Point (Bete Bolong), another at Orbost and the third about 3 miles from Marlo called Heggartys. Wooden chutes were built along the river banks and bags of maize were sent down the chutes into the waiting barges. The main produce transported from the area was maize, pumpkins, pigs, wattle bark and timber.

It is a fair observation to say that only the lack of good roads allowed the river trade to flourish as the drawbacks were great. It is sad to record the final entries in the Orbost Shipping Co's records:- "Last Ships to Leave", March 15 1915 "Alma", "Topsy", "Gipsy". July 2 1915 "Alma" arrived Sydney.

Oct 1920, Company has been put into liquidation the whole of the assets have been sold and Company is now being wound up."

⁽⁸⁾ Two dates are recorded as the death of the "Curlip" 1919 and 1925.

[To be continued in October Newsletter]