WHAT THE COLONEL THOUGHT OF US:

In the summer of 1849 I made a trip to Illawarra, a sea-coast district, about sixty-six miles south of Port Jackson. This district may be sixty miles long, is hemmed in and narrowed to the westward by a lofty range of mountains, and has the character of being the garden of New South Wales. Wollongong is the chief town. Strange and shameful to say, there is no road practicable for carriages from Sydney to this long-established, fertile, and beautiful province—the passage of the mountains presenting difficulties weighty enough to deter private enterprise and public effort, and thereby virtually shutting up the most fruitful lands in the colony from the markets of the neighbouring metropolis.

As fifty years of prisoner labour had failed to produce a suitable means of communication by land, I was driven to the sole alternative of adopting the existing most unsuitable one by sea. With many misgivings I removed my household goods, my wife, two servants, and a horse, on board a wretched little tub of a steam-boat—which it was absolute disloyalty to have named after England’s Sailor King, and which seemed to have been built expressly to disprove the omnipotence of steam as a motive agent. On the morning of the 24th of January we got on board and under weigh—a perfect understanding existing on the part of the captain, the engineer, the boilers, the passengers and the winds, that if anything like a moderate breeze was to blow up from the south we were to consider ourselves weather-bound ... Accordingly up sprung, about mid-day, a tolerably fresh air from the proscribed point, and, after paddling six miles down the harbour, our craft laid itself up snugly in one of the great port’s little offshoots, called Vaucluse Bay, where, within an hour’s drive of our own comfortable drawing-room, dinner, and bed, we indulged in the variety of dining and sleeping on board this little floating dungeon ... At seven o’clock, P.M., we again got under weigh, and, after a rough night, reached our destination on the following morning at eight o’clock. There were on board several Illawarra settlers, who seemed proud of their little sea-port, town, and picturesque district—describing with admiration and minuteness the various objects as we neared the anchorage ... “Pray, Sir!” said I to a gentleman of responsible and courteous exterior, who had been kindly supplying information on the different points of view around us.—“Pray, Sir, what may be that singular looking building near the beach?” “That, Sir,” replied he readily, “is popularly styled Brown’s Folly—my name’s Brown, Sir!”

The boat harbour of Wollongong—for it is little more—consists of a basin and jetty, constructed by convict labour. The remains of the old stockade, and the officer’s cottage, crown the top of a verdant promontory, which protects the port from the southern gales. The site of the town, with Mounts Keera and Kembla in the background, is extremely picturesque. Its salubrious sea breezes and quiet seclusion have made this little place a sort of sanitarium for Sydney.

We took rooms at “The Marine Hotel,”—“nice hairy apartments,” as they were described by the civilest of hostesses,—the same apartments, we were assured, as were lately occupied by his Excellency the Governor ... Nothing could be cleaner, quieter, or more comfortable than this establishment, which I hereby recommend to all tourists for health or pleasure. The house is only separated by a field from the sandy beach,
whereon a heavy surf continually thunders. Many curious shells are to be picked up along the shore, some of which are prettily worked up into necklaces by the native women.

—Lt.-Col. G. C. Mundy, “Our Antipodes.”

(To be continued)

WOLLONGONG HIGH SCHOOL IN ITS EARLY YEARS:

(Continued from October Bulletin)

Over the years, strangely enough, changes in schoolwear fashions have been more pronounced in the case of boys than of girls; until the move took place to Smith’s Hill there was no specific uniform—boys continued to wear their primary school short pants and the girls turned up in assorted dress. Upon elevation of the District School to High School status the girls adopted the serge tunic, white blouse, black stockings and panama hat which outfit, with variations, has continued down the years; but there was no alternative summer uniform.

The boys, after wearing out or growing out of their shorts gradually went into knickerbockers, buttoned below the knee and worn with gay-topped golf stockings and a Norfolk jacket which had a half belt and a pleated back. Boots were always worn, as shoes for men would have been regarded as most effeminate. Few graduated to long trousers before the age of seventeen and the arrival of a boy in his first long ‘uns would be the occasion of great hilarity and horseplay for a few days. In fact they were the exception, and generally not worn until schooldays ended.

The no-hat cult was unheard of. It was universally regarded as an open invitation to sunstroke to go out of doors bare headed; felt hats and school badge were worn in summer and cricketer’s skull caps in winter. The boy who appeared on morning assembly minus hat, owing to losing it from the train window, would be sternly quizzed as to its whereabouts and told to keep in the shade as much as possible. To turn up without a coat and tie would have been unthinkable—equivalent to today’s students arriving in their underwear.

Cut lunches were the rule for those travelling any distance, but by walking half a mile to the main street one could buy a sit-down meal of pie, peas and coffee for sixpence; the locals went home for lunch and the teachers walked to their homes, hotels or boarding houses. (Cars for teachers lay in the future). The tuck shop initially consisted of a box of cold meat pies and a few dozen jam tarts sold from a table on the back porch. From its meagre profits, egg days and other fund raising efforts, the sum of £70 was painfully raised. This was the purchase price of a “Mignon” piano, used chiefly to march the classes to their rooms. A further £20 was made and applied to an insurance policy for one soldier overseas.

In 1918 the staff comprised twelve women and five men, including the headmaster who taught for five of the seven daily periods at a salary of £750 p.a.

There was no telephone, no assembly hall or library, no lighting, although town gas was piped to the science room. On wet days we huddled about miserably on open verandahs.

This chronicle of change would be incomplete if reference was not made to the sweeping, almost 100% alteration in girls’ Christian names in one lifetime; it is a rarity now to meet a girl named Mabel, Madge,