

THE CAWLEY FAMILY AND ST. PAUL'S COLLEGE, BELLAMBI

A publication has come to hand called St. Paul's College, Bellambi 1962-1982, consisting of a fairly large magazine-style brochure of 120 pages. It is well illustrated and covers the life of the school since it was opened in 1962. Copies are still available from the College. The publication marks the end of a stage in the development of the College because from the beginning of 1983 it has become a co-educational school and the name has been changed to Holy Spirit College.

Of particular interest to our Society will be the notes on the school's origin in the generosity of members of the Cawley family. With the kind approval of the school this historical background is reproduced below:-

"The land on which St. Paul's and Holy Cross Colleges have been built, are part of an original grant of land made to a Miss Harriett Overington on March 3rd, 1827. The Bellambi Estate was subdivided in 1842 and John Cawley, an Irishman, who had arrived in Australia in 1841, took up this land.

"John Cawley was a farm labourer, who came from Kilmacallane, County Sligo, Ireland. He was born in 1803, and had married Mary Callaghan, a house servant from the same county. They had 10 children, one of whom was Michael, born in January, 1830. The whole family emigrated to Australia, travelling in a ship called the 'Columbine', which arrived in Sydney in December, 1841

"From Sydney the family moved to Charcoal Creek, now known as Unanderra, where John Cawley followed business interests, until 1846, when John took up a large parcel of land in the Russell Vale area. This land stretched in the east to the sea, to the beach which is now Bellambi. At Russell Vale, John built his homestead, called 'Chestnut,' near the present Princes Highway. John's eldest son Michael, settled on the land and married Jane Geraghty, from Thirroul. They were married in Sydney, 1859. Michael had five sons and five daughters. His eldest son, John, was born in February, 1860. Michael worked the land and built an orange orchard. The produce from the land was sent by ship from nearby Bellambi Beach. When the land was subdivided and sold, Michael had to pay the costs of putting in a road to Bellambi from Russell Vale. He named the road Kerong Avenue. At this time Bellambi was little more than an hotel, a blacksmith's shop, a school of arts but no Post Office. The town was situated at the jetty.

"Michael planted a fig tree on the Terania Avenue side of what is now Cawley Park. In those days, the tree was at the entrance to the home paddock. This tree, which Michael planted to commemorate the birth of his daughter, Mary, is still standing. The land was divided among the five sons of Michael, when he died, and four of them sold their portions and moved to the North Coast of New South Wales. John, the eldest, retained his land and built a homestead 'Brightside,' on the site which is now Holy Cross College. When his second daughter died, John's wife died and he left the area to live

on the North Coast. He kept the land, and left some 60 acres of it to the Marist Fathers for educational purposes. John died on August 13th, 1944.

"The land left by him was rented by various people until the 1940s. Subsequently, the Marist Fathers Stud Farm 'Meadow-stream' at Toongabbie, used the land for agistment purposes for their Australian Illawarra Shorthorn cattle. In the early 1960s the decision was taken to build a school on the eastern end of the property. Much work had to go on to improve the land, as most of it was very swampy. A great deal of coalwash was brought from the mines to provide covering and fill. St. Paul's College was opened for students in February, 1962. So began 21 years of Marist Fathers involvement in education at Bellambi.

"Memories of the Cawley family remain in the school, such as Cawley House, one of the sporting houses of the school. The street alongside the school is Cawley Street. Two descendants of the Cawleys taught at the school, Father Peter Gahan, one of the original members of the staff, and Father John Burns, who taught at the College in 1975."

(The information contained here was prepared by Father L. Molloy, S.M.)