

ALBION PARK - ITS POSSIBILITIES
 ITS REPRESENTATIVE MEN
 EX-MAYOR JOHN FRASER J.P.
 AND
 BRUSH GROVE FARM

(by Edwin Howell)

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In initiating a series of articles under the above heading, to appear from time to time in the columns of this paper, I must perforce, let it be understood, that since the innovation in journalism by the introduction into its columns of biographical sketches, the word "Representative" has continuously been a bone of contention some averring that the term admits of application, only, to politicians and such individuals as born in the purple, or to positions incidental to birth and a possession of a plentiful supply of the dross of this world, have ever been compared to the lilies of the field which toil not, nor do they spin and are yet clad like Solomon in all his glory; whilst another section of society, taking a broader and more sensible view, incline to the opinion that such as have through their foresight, perseverance, and dogged industry raised themselves to prominence, and in so doing, have been not unmindful of the interests of the community in which their lot happened to be cast, and the general weal of the place of their birth or adoption, are the ones to whom the term "representative" is pre-eminently applicable.

Accepting the broader or more liberal view, I do not think any explanation necessary in regard to the subjects who will be chosen to fill the special columns of the SOUTH COAST TIMES, and in my humble opinion no fitter individual could possibly have been selected to open the series than the man who, for his life-time, has so thoroughly identified himself with the pains, pleasures, wants, and sorrows of this community, that his name to-day is inseparable from any and every movement that has had for its object the bettering the condition of the son of toil, and the placing him in a position whence he could satisfactorily consider the lot, not only of himself, but of his fellow laborer.

Perhaps to-day no section of the colonial community is better respected than that which devoting itself to dairying has gradually forced the consideration and good opinion of purchasers and consumers to such an extent that the export of butter, which a few years ago was a nominal item, has to-day gained a most respectable dimension.

The South Coast, which through the beneficence of the Almighty has been so endowed that the lines —

She reaps

Her corn, her wine, her oil:

And plenty leaps, with laughing gladness

To her redundant horn.

become peculiarly appropos in writing of it, has taken rank as one of the richest dairying districts of the State, and of this particular portion of the producing country, Albion Park, it may justly be esteemed, takes precedence, and of all those who have helped to place this particular spot in its pre-eminent position, no one is more deserving of honorable mention than John Fraser, who casting aside all

considerations of fleeting *kudos* and personal aggrandisement has steadfastly worked for years to bring his portion of the richly blessed South Coast country to the front and to so place it permanently in that position, that even a few successive unfortunions blows of the fickle goddess can in no wise materially damn its position.

Those who have more than perfunctorily considered and watched the progress of events from the time when producers lying at the mercy of middlemen and the decentralisation which autocratically condemned them to a bondage, must and for the most part do acknowledge that the action taken by the gentleman in question, in conjunction with a very few others, saved them from that very deplorable position, which may be more euphoniously described, but cannot more incisively be set down than as between "the devil and the deep sea."

With a far reaching insight to possibilities, and a determination to pursue a course even inimical to his own *prestige*, Mr. Fraser may be said to have brought into existence an industrial institution in the Park which has tended to place each and every dairy farmer in his district in a position independent of those who miles away from him and his farm practically controlled him, and in some measure nullified if not paralysed all his efforts. In every matter which involves a question, despite the apparent unassailability of the obverse side of the affair, there will be found one if not more to uphold the reverse; and this was exemplified in the slight though unaccountable opposition that came into life on an action of Mr. Fraser's, which, though calculated to benefit every milker in the district, seemed to displease one or two of his opponents. The matter in question will be referred to later on in several other articles which will deal with the dairying industry of the coast.

John Fraser was born in Sydney in 1839. His father, who came to the colony in 1838, joined the band of pioneers which in 1840 and therabouts was induced, under a description of grant which was termed a clearing lease, to act under such a grant, and commenced in 1840 to clear the land on a portion of which the premises of the present Albion Park Dairy Company stand. In those days of pioneering, schools were not quite so much in evidence as now, and the mastering of the three R's was made much subservient to the felling of trees and the clearing of scrub; consequently young John Fraser acquired knowledge very spasmodically, and at hands, that, to say the least of it, were not very eminent.

Laboring heroically till 1864, he, at that time, decided to cut the painter from the parental sloop, and marrying one of the Misses McGill, leased a farm of 50 acres (a portion of his present property) from the late David Johnson, and commenced dairying with twelve cows. His perseverance, intelligence, and uprightness, became so notorious that in 1870 or 1871, he was appointed a Justice of the Peace and at about the same time he had the honor to be elected an alderman of the Shellharbor Council, his fellow councillors giving expression to their confidence and estimation by choosing him Mayor two or three years after his first election. Some difficulty having cropped up with the then carriers of goods from Shellharbor to Sydney, the Shellharbor Steam Navigation Co was formed, and our subject chosen a director. From the date of his first election to the Shellharbor Municipal Council to the present with the exception of a period of five years he has continuously served the ratepayers, having during that period occupied the mayoral chair for eight years, the last three of which were in succession. He was one of the first of the body of men which resolved itself into the Albion Park Agricultural Association, and has been for seven years in succession its president.

On the 5th October, 1885, he together with a few other progressive men brought to life the Albion Park Dairy Factory, of which he subsequently became chairman. When the Sydney Farmers' Co-operative Association was formed he was offered the position of a director of that society, and believing that he could in some way benefit the farmers of the South Coast, he accepted the offer.

In 1899, when dissatisfaction was so rife in regard to the manner in which the farmers began to be treated, the Illawarra Co-operative Central Dairy Company, through his instrumentality and that of a few others, was formed, he taking the position of chairman. The principal object for the formation of this company was the treatment of the cream produced in the Coast in a home centre, and that the object has already been gained beyond the anticipation of the most sanguine is amply testified to by the fact that its last report (after an existence of about 18 months) furnished the marvellous information that its output for the year had been 706 tons of butter, which represented a turnover of 69,787.

Very recently, coming to the conclusion that owing to the multiplicity of offices, which were not merely perfunctory, but, owing to his honesty and determination to look after the interests of those who trusted him, entailed a large amount of work, he retired from the position of chairman of what is familiarly known as the Central Dairy Co., reserving, of course, the position of one of the directors. Two years previously to that, he had vacated his position of president of the other factory to enable younger blood, which was hopelessly excluded whilst he kept the field, to come forward.

The fifty acres leased by Mrs. Fraser on his marriage soon became his own property through indomitable energy, and have gradually added wings to themselves till now, Brushgrove Farm, so named owing to a beautiful clump containing perhaps every known variety of indigenous trees, consists of about 270 acres of both arable and grazing land of exceptional quality, and has the very great advantage of being not only permanently, but picturesquely watered by the Macquarie, which wends a sinuous course throughout the whole. The farm, which is an upland one, set as it were in the centre of a kaleidoscopic picture with the commingling of the deep purple and russet hues of grasses in various stages of life, relieved by dashes of light and dark greens of growing and maturing corn and other cereals; with the sheen and glimmer of living water here and there; and having hills and towering ranges for a frame all around, is situated about three miles from the growing little township of Albion Park, and is bounded on the north by the property of Mr. Armstrong, on the west by that of John Bartlett, on the east by the Macquarie, and on the south by Alexander Fraser's land. The North Macquarie road runs through Brush Grove, and on approaching the gateway that leads to the homestead, on the left hand one sees a large milking yard, where a substantial shed holding six bails with concreted floor is set up. The greatest possible care has been had to the drainage of the floor. Further forward, the buggy-shed and stables open up, and these are supplemented with the machinery shed which houses a modern horse-rake, a mowing machine, a planet junr. scarifier, two ploughs, a double iron harrow and a wooden one. Still going forward a building comes into view, which, on enquiry, turns out to be the old dairy, which, in the days prior to the establishment of creameries and factories, was the scene of many a day's energetic labor on the part of the wife and daughters of Mr. Fraser, and which is now used as the milk

room, and is connected with the milking yard by a wooden tramline. Looking to the right, and facing the homestead, a meadow opens up with a line of willows and pines reaching to the homestead enclosure, which affords admirable protection from heavy winds. To the left a large building, on investigation turns out to be the fowl-house, and here are seen three incubators which Mr. Fraser informs me were responsible last year for the hatching of over 1000 ducklings in addition to innumerable chickens.

Heing back to the North Macquarie Road, and negotiating a gate opposite to that which gives ingress to the honestead enclosure, in a spacious fenced paddock, that serviceable and reproductive adjunct to farming — the pig sty — next draws attention; and Mr. Fraser is to be complimented on his selection of Berkshire and Yorkshire animals. Behind the styes stands the hayshed, 72ft. by 30ft, which can hold about 60 tons of hay, and which, on the day of my visit, was amply stocked. Adjoining this is the barn, 30ft. by 24ft., containing a corn sheller, a corn cracker, a fan mill, &c. ; and in the outlying yard two spring carts, a bullock dray, and a horse dray, give testimony that ample work is done on the farm.

Just now some 60 milchers, a cross between the Durham and Ayrshire, are daily bailed, the whole herd consisting of 100 head of cattle. About 30 acres are constantly under cultivation.

The homestead, a commodious, comfortable building surrounded by flower gardens, stands on a coign of vantage whence indescribably pleasing views of the deeply-scored Macquarie ranges, with the softening influences of the Green mountains nestling in its lap; ; the Macquarie meandering in a silver streak at the foot; the Yellow-rock valley opening to view, and the meeting of the Macquarie and the Yellow Rock Creek fill the soul of the beholder with an intuitive belief in the omniscience and omnipotence of Him whom the trend of present deplorable fashion is to question, if not deny. When, super-added to the above, one sees field upon field of soft pasturage in various shades, and a chiaroscuro of lights and shadows produced by herbage and foliage and mountain clouds, one is unconsciously led to incline his lowly head and murmur; Who am I that I should doubt?