

THE ANDREWS FAMILY OF WOLLONGONG AND TROOPER FRANK ANDREWS - A BOER WAR CASUALTY

The Society was recently favoured with a letter from Mrs. Olive Everard of Liverpool - she being a spritely 92 years of age - offering to supply us with some reminiscences of Wollongong from early this century (c1900 - 1920). What was of special interest in her letter was the revelation that she was the niece of Trooper Frank Andrews, known to many local historians via the memorial water fountain (formerly sited in Wollongong's Rest Park) which commemorated his death in battle at Ottoshoop near Mafeking, South Africa, on 27 August 1900.

Mrs. Everard was only 1 year old at the time of her uncle's death, however as a child she was told many loving stories of Frank by his parents and brothers and sisters. Olive came to feel a special affection for her departed uncle, even to the point of telling her young friends that they would have to answer directly to her if they messed around with Frank's memorial water fountain which was then located at the corner of Crown and Kembla Streets, Wollongong, adjacent to the Town Hall. Olive was very protective of the fountain and Frank was her childhood idol. She had been told that as a baby he had held and cared for her in those final few months before he left his native shore forever to fight in the Boer War. They also told how he used to sing her to sleep.

Following on from her letter Mrs. Everard, accompanied by her daughter, visited the Museum on 27 September where she spoke at length about her uncle Frank and her fond memories of Wollongong in the years prior to her marriage in 1923, when she would frequently visit her grandparents at Wollongong, especially during the summer holidays. Throughout this period her own family was variously resident at Lithgow and Sydney, however for a 6 month period during 1909 she was a pupil of Wollongong Public School. Part of what Mrs. Everard recalled is outlined below, along with details of her uncle 'Trooper' Frank Andrews one of the first Illawarra men to give his life for his country on an overseas battlefield.

The Andrews Family of Wollongong.

Frank and Emma Andrews (Mrs. Everard's grandparents) arrived in Wollongong from England around 1875 with their three children Harry, Netta, and Fanny. Frank Andrews was a mining engineer brought out to work at the Mount Pleasant coal mine. He later became part-owner of Wongawilli Colliery and lived up near the mine at one stage in a small cottage where Olive and her grandmother would visit him with supplies. He was also a cousin of Mr. Figtree who operated the Mount Pleasant coke ovens (refer *Old Pioneer*).

The Andrews family variously lived in two houses near the corner of Bourke and Keira Streets, Wollongong, where a further 4 children were born - Clara (b.1878), Frank (b.1880), Emma (b.1882), and George (b.1884). It is only Frank and Emma who concern us in any detail from hereon. Fanny eventually married and moved to America where she was involved in the great San Francisco earthquake of 1906. After that catastrophe she was sent parcels of clothing etc. by Illawarra residents when the true scale of the city's destruction became known. Fanny's husband had worked at the Flagstaff Hill garrison before leaving for America in 1902. They returned to Australia once in September 1923, shortly after Olive's wedding. Clara Andrews eventually became Clara Walters and re-

mained in Wollongong for the rest of her life. Harry, the oldest son, was chief engineer on the Mattai during World War 1, and later took German internees back home after the war. He eventually went to New Zealand to live.

Emma, the youngest of the Andrews girls, later married Colin Johnson, an iron foundry moulder. The Johnsons had 7 boys and 2 girls, one of whom was our correspondent Olive, born in Sydney on 11 July 1899. For the first four years of her life she lived with her grandparents in Wollongong, moving to Lithgow in March 1904. She returned to Wollongong regularly for school and christmas holidays, staying on for six months in 1909 and attending Wollongong Public School under headmistress Miss. Long. As a child she remembers playing with the Figtree children at Bourke Street, and granny Andrews taking her to the beach.

The family lived at Lithgow until about 1914 when they returned briefly to Wollongong while Colin Johnson secured employment in Sydney as manager of a steelworks. Eventually Olive and the rest of the family followed their father to Sydney in 1916. Despite these movements the Johnsons maintained close links with Illawarra and Olive's grandparents Frank and Emma. Olive's own mother Emma had been born in Wollongong and always considered it her home. She did not like Lithgow and had no qualms about regularly bringing her large family down to stay with the grandparents in the house at Bourke Street. She was also concerned for her ailing mother.

Olive fondly remembers those holidays at Wollongong in the first two decades of this century, and the long days spent down at North Wollongong beach with her family and local friends.

Olive loved the beach, and surfing was her most favoured pastime. She would spend her holidays variously gathering shells from the beach to make necklaces; helping her aunt Clara with her sewing; heading off to the local picture show; or collecting coal from alongside the Mount Pleasant rail line which used to pass along North Wollongong beach and head towards the loading facilities at Belmore Basin. With her special bag Olive and her brothers and sisters were able to pick up enough lumps of stray coal by the tracks to stock their grandparents fire for a couple of days. Olive also told how some of the train drivers would throw the children a lump or two when they saw them collecting by the line.

During these holidays the Johnson children were never allowed on the beach alone, but were always accompanied by an elder member of the family such as granny or an uncle or aunt. The old saying "early to bed, early to rise" was also applicable during these Illawarra visits, with the children not allowed out at nights, apart from Saturday evening shopping. Some early mornings were spent gathering mushrooms in nearby fields, of which there were many. Mrs. Everard also remembers that most of her days were spent sitting down by the beach, swimming and talking with friends, and watching the surf carnivals. She especially liked body surfing, as opposed to using the nearby rock pools at North Beach. During later adolescence she would travel down to Wollongong on weekends with a girlfriend, such was her attraction to the beach.

A highlight of any week in Wollongong was shopping on a Saturday night, or meeting at O'Brien's pub (located on the corner of Crown and Keira Street) a well-known landmark at the time.

Olive spoke with some amusement - and fear - of "Old King Billy", a local

Aborigine from Port Kembla who would every now and then come into town with his family and friends and put the wind up the local residents. Olive remembers on one occasion being quickly dragged off the street by her uncle and whisked into O'Brien's pub where she was hidden after the call had gone up that King Billy and his people were coming to town and Billy "was in a very bad way." All the shopkeepers in Crown Street were "scared stiff of him" and they would close up shop and bolt the doors awaiting his passage. King Billy was a big man - at least in the eyes of the children of Wollongong. Whether he deserved his fearful reputation, or was being used as something of a "bogeyman" by local parents to frighten their children is unclear.

Mrs. Everard also remembered New Years Eve in Wollongong as a special time of the year. Her aunt Clara was a member of the local Salvation Army and during this festive season the Salvation Army band would play in front of her uncle's monument near the Town Hall and also further up Crown Street by the Mount Kembla monument, before heading on out to her grandparent's house in Bourke Street where granny Emma Andrews and Clara would put on a special meal for the members of the band. The children would also accompany the band singing carols during this festive season.

Unfortunately grandma Emma Andrews was much aggrieved by the death of her beloved son Frank in 1900 and according to Mrs. Everard never really recovered from the shock, passing away at the end of 1910 after a long illness. She was buried in Wollongong cemetery on 2 November of that year. Olive's grandfather Frank lived on in Wollongong until 1935, comforted with regular visits from his children and grandchildren. He was buried with his wife on 25 November 1935.

Olive remembers that her late uncle Frank was spoken of regularly by the family and her grandparents during her visits to Wollongong, and from these stories and conversations she came to cherish his memory. Her "protection" of his monument in Crown Street during her youth, and sense of attachment even to this day, is therefore understandable. It was with some concern that the family discovered that the fountain had been removed from Crown Street early in 1954 to make way for a temporary stand to be used by Queen Elizabeth during her visit to Wollongong in that year. The Illawarra Historical Society was later instrumental in having it re-erected in the Wollongong Rest Park where it remained until the mid eighties, well used by local residents. Fortunately the Frank Andrews memorial fountain is now located in MacCabe Park alongside the World War 1 and later war monuments, and hopefully will remain in that position for many years to come. Whilst we may look on it now as simply a memento to a long forgotten war, to the descendants of Frank and Emma Andrews it will always be more personal than that - a tombstone for the cherished son who never came home.

Michael Organ

(to be continued)