

## ELEANOR SPENCE IN ILLAWARRA

After recently reading the autobiography written by children's writer, Eleanor Spence, I was taken not only by her marvellous evocation of growing up on the central coast but her mention in the closing pages that she met her future husband at a guesthouse in Austinmer. As I knew she'd written a book called Jamberoo Road, I wrote to her seeking details of her south coast experiences and received the following very kind reply:

30/8/98 "Dear Dr Davis,

Thank you for letter. I'm pleased you enjoyed my autobiography and I hope you'll like "Jamberoo Road" as well. It's a sequel to another story set in Illawarra, "The Switherby Pilgrims".

My first visit to the area was in 47 or 48 when I was a student (Arts) at Sydney University. A friend, Marion Mortlock, was the daughter of the manager of Port Kembla Steelworks, and we stayed at the house called (I think) 'Lindenfels' which went with the job. I remember seeing the glow of the steelworks at night, and the then undeveloped hills by the Lake. A few years later I went to stay at Austinmer - the guesthouse was called "Headlands" set on a cliff between 2 beaches. Probably because we had happy memories of the district, we returned in the 60s with our 3 children, this time going further south to Shellharbour.

For some 10 years we had January holidays with our 3 children at a small block of flats overlooking the beach between Shellharbour town and Bass Point. From there we toured to all sorts of interesting places - Dumnore, Minnamurra, Jamberoo, Kiama, sometimes to Robertson. I think what fascinated me was the proximity of the sea to beautiful farming country, with the escarpment and rainforest in the background.

I expect much of the countryside has been developed now as it has here on the Central

Coast. I haven't been back to Illawarra for some time, but when I decided to write "Switherby Pilgrims", then "Jamberoo Road" I wrote to the Illawarra Historical Society and they sent me a most informative booklet. I also used the Royal Australian Historical Society Journals, dating back to the 20s - they belonged to my father.

My books are, of course, fiction but the house and farm called "Mount St Matthew" was based on my recollection of a grand old place that used to stand on a hill facing north east of Dunmore Road - somewhere. In the stories, the name recalls my favourite NT text: Matthew 25:31:46.

Thank you for your interest. Sorry about the delay in answering.

Best Wishes - Eleanor Spence. "

Does anyone know the precise location of either of the two residences mentioned in Eleanor Spence's letter?

Joseph Davis