
Jack McNamara, the last Cordeaux Bushman.

by Carol Herben.

With the release of his second book "Life at Cordeaux River, NSW" Jack McNamara, gives us a fascinating insight in the life and death of the Cordeaux River Community.

Born John Leo (Jack) McNamara in 1922 to James (Jim) McNamara and Julia (Pearl) Walker, Jack grew up in the community of Cordeaux River. Born the sixth child from the family of nine, Jack's childhood, was spent living in a slabhouse built by his paternal grandfather, who established himself on Lot 199 in the year 1874.

Jack's maternal side of the family dates back to the very early Cordeaux River settlement. He is the great-great grandson of Robert Fishlock and Elizabeth Amber, and the great grandson of William Walker and Mary Ann Fishlock.

Like most of the old farm cottages Jack's childhood home was constructed from slab timbers which had been felled on the property. A short distance away was the kitchen, with an open fireplace, which had a rod placed in the brick chimney, from which a camp oven, pots and the kettle, to make a cuppa, were suspended by chains.

The family were never acquainted with any modern conveniences such as electricity, running water or telephone. Not even a corner shop to replenish their larder. Like all young children at that time Jack's playground was the whole valley. In this way he became personally acquainted with the last of the Cordeaux River pioneers. He also became aware of their background and pioneering spirit of caring for and sharing with their neighbours as part of life that we, city dwellers, have not been accustomed too.

Jack has witnessed the boom period of the residents and also the lean times suffered by many. The standard of life of the residents would never let a family go hungry, even to the mere fact of sharing the produce from their

gardens to the freshly killed lamb, steer or pig for their table. The McNamaras were a self-sufficient family, the garden always produced a bountiful amount of vegetables grown in the rich volcanic soil. The apple orchard covered some fifty acres and the apiary always provided them with fresh honey. Pearl, Jack's mother always provided a larder stocked with sufficient preserves, jams, honey, and cured bacons which would hang from the rafters. Milk and home-made butter were always plentiful. Even during the depression Jack never knew a time when the family couldn't call on the reserves his mother had stored.

Jack was educated under the Public School system at the small one room school house at Cordeaux River. At the age of 14 years he worked as a farm labourer, where he gained the experience of his bushmanship by borrowing his first set of tools. At a very young age Jack made the acquaintance of a most colourful couple of characters at Cordeaux River, Reuben Garrett Stafford and his wife Annie Rann. Many years were spent clearing their properties, "Iona" and "Peerless View", as well as fencing and ploughing. It was during this time that Jack met two of his dearest lifelong friends Vince Ward and Frank March jnr. During the 1940's Jack gained employment with Corrimal Timber Company, which had acquired the rights to log timber from the Cordeaux River district to supply Mt Kembla Colliery with pit sawn timbers.

This quiet but industrious valley has always had a shroud hanging over its future. Long before 1856 when Surveyor General Thomas Livingston Mitchell first selected the area for water catchment to supply the town of Wollongong and surrounding suburbs.

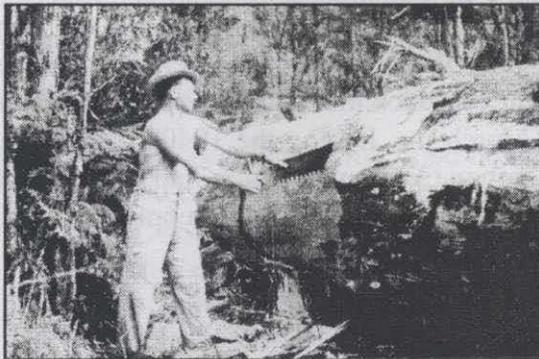
Jack has witnessed the closure of the farming lots of the old pioneers and saw the families disappear forever. In the meantime these old farms have reverted to what the valley was like before his Fishlock ancestor cleared the first area and settled at Cordeaux River.

As early as 1937 Jack had gained part time employment with the Water Board, it was not until much later that he gained full time work at which Jack remained a loyal employee until his retirement.

Since retiring Jack has maintained his grandfather's and father's apple orchard, vegetable garden and chicken coop, although scaled down in size, the produce is sufficient to support his family. Jack still lives near the waters of the No 2 Dam, his childhood home. It is only since the closure of the valley, where only the sound of the wildlife break the silence in the valley.

Over the many years Jack took the opportunity to document many of the facets of daily life of the residents of Cordeaux River. With the assistance of the descendants of the pioneers their origins and experiences were freely discussed at various get-togethers and homes around the fire providing Jack with a mountain of information on the families.

Reading Jack's new book gives me the opportunity of appreciating the hardships my ancestors, the Cooks/Hayes endured so long ago.



Jack McNamara at work the hard way.