

## **A Century Ago.**

Compiled by Carol Herben

The Illawarra Mercury carried this story in July 1904 and although at present we are in the midst of one of the severest droughts we can, on the other hand, feel sorry for those who suffered and lost everything.

### **THE RAIN STORM**

Terrible weather

Town Swamped

Saturday night's gale

Businesses closed

A Record Rainfall

The weather of the last few days has been unprecedented in the history of the district. The rainfall on Saturday night July 9, accompanied by a southerly wind, relentless in fury, drove everything before it; in fact only those who were compelled by duty, braced the elements to their cost.

The rain, such was the force of the wind, cut like a knife, and the strongest of macintoshes (sic) failed to keep the wet out. Business in Crown-Street had to be suspended most of the stores closing up a couple of hours before time. The town was practically deserted, and it was indeed a "black night" in every sense of the term.

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Early in the morning, during the height of the storm, the historic tree on Smith's Hill, opposite the residence of Mr John Richardson, was blown down. It and another the same size (blown down in a previous storm) were immense specimens of iron bark trees, and standing on the summit of the hill were in the early days looked upon as guiding marks for mariners trading up and down the coast. It will also be remembered by our readers that it was on this tree that "Krugers effigy was hung on receipt of the news of the relief of Mafeking".

\* \* \*

On Sunday the storm continued with unabated fury, and by this time all low lying land was in a flooded state, Tom Thumb being very high. Fences and trees had been blown down in all directions during the night. The sea was very rough. Pilot Fraser hoisted the ball to warn vessels to keep off the port. Tons of sand were blown over the road leading to Signal Hill and also on to the Mount Keira and Pleasant tram lines.

\* \* \*

On Monday, July 11, the rain still poured down and the weather conditions, even if it were possible, looked worse. Several horses exposed to the elements were seized with gripes and died, the procession down Crown-Street in the morning excited a good deal of attention. Houses have never leaked before; but many householders were compelled to remove the ordinary furniture and substitute the family buckets and tubs instead. They were found far more useful, if not ornamental, under the circumstances.

\* \* \*

Fairy Creek overflowed and washed away all vegetables; in the chinamen's garden <sup>1</sup>. In several houses water was 18 inches deep. At Bode's Royal Victoria Hotel the cellars filled up, and a portion of the garden washed away. At Fairy Meadow brick works, 7000 bricks, which had not been burnt yet, were washed off the hatch and returned to clay. A considerable amount of coke was washed across a paddock from Mount Pleasant coke works.

On Sunday afternoon a landslide occurred at the top of Mount Pleasant incline, bringing with it hundreds of tons of earth and stone. A large portion of ballast on the railway line near Fairy Meadow crossing was washed away, and a gang of men were employed on Sunday repairing the damage. Cabbage Tree bridge was under water. The weir at Stuart Park was also washed away.

\* \* \*

Up to 9 pm on Monday at Albion Park 18½ inches of rain were recorded. The downpour was the heaviest for many years. The dairying pursuits in the district have been greatly interfered with, and the usual supply of milk for Sydney could not be forwarded. The creeks and the Macquarie River are flooded, and many slight washaways have occurred, in one case a bridge over a creek has been washed away. All the low-lying grounds are inundated.

\* \* \*

Up to Monday morning at Clifton, the rainfall was 11½ inches. A few small landslips occurred on the railway and the main road. Traffic was not interfered with, shipping operations have been suspended since Friday, and hundreds of workmen are consequently idle.

\* \* \*

Mr John Brown, J. P. of Brownsville writes:- "From Friday morning until 5 pm on Monday 13½ inches of rain fell here. Mullet Creek is a banker and the flats are flooded".

\* \* \*

Sand was blown from the beach on to the road at the racecourse a couple of inches thick<sup>2</sup>.

\* \* \*

At Figtree all the low-lying land was flooded, and the chinese gardener's house near Mr J Dobinson's store, had a portion of the furniture washed out.

\* \* \*

During the height of the storm on Monday night it was thought by the driver of the Keira locomotive that a dreadful accident had happened. A bicycle was noticed by the driver, as the train was proceeding to the wharf, standing up against the post at the Wilson-Street crossing, and it was presumed that the rider had been mangled by the train. The brakes were put

on, and as soon as the train was brought to a standstill an examination was made with the rain coming down in sheets. Happily, the feelings of the searcher were such relieved when the owner turned out to be one of the junior messengers on the post office bike! Verily no other bicycle rider would weather such a storm or be out on such a night.

\* \* \*

The 5.55 and 8 pm, trains from Sydney down the South Coast had some exciting experiences, especially on the cliffs and round the rocks at Stanwell Park, and Clifton where the gale brought the trains nearly to a standstill!! several times. On Saturday evening and Saturday night and Sunday morning the rain came down incessantly and copiously at Wollongong accompanied all the time by violent hurricanes and terrific gusts. A good deal of damage was done to hoardings, fences, and structures of a not too substantial order, including many dwellings and sheds.

\* \* \*

At Bulli torrents of rainfall read 11 inches. Numerous small landslips occurred on the mountain side. The roads suffered considerably by the overflow of creeks washing the metal completely away.

\* \* \*

A strong southerly gale prevailed at Dapto where at the time 450 points of rain were registered. The creeks are all running banker high and the low-lying grounds are under water. This greatly interferes with a large number of milk suppliers who are unable to reach the stations with their milk.

\* \* \*

During the whole of the storm the railway men with tricycles kept going over those portions of the line which are most dangerous, or subject to landslip, breakaways and washaways, but fortunately found that nothing had happened along the line that would interfere with the train service. Here and there a few landslips had taken place, portions of the embankment having slipped down into the water channel beside the railway, but no landslip or washaway was so great as to get over the rails and interfere with the regular running of the trains. In coming up the coast by the early train on Monday morning passengers had the opportunity of seeing many fine waterfalls, the water falling, dashing and splashing down the rocky face of the mountains with much grandeur. The streams in the valleys were all greatly swollen and flowing at a rapid pace. In glens beside the railway the cataracts and brooks were very beautiful.

Mr F. O'Donnell writes from Five Islands stating according to the Government gauge that 1542 points were registered since 9 o'clock on Friday morning to 9 o'clock yesterday.<sup>3</sup>

\* \* \*

Taking fifteen miles square, it contains 144,000 acres. The rain which has fallen over that area since Friday July 8, (av. 8 inches) would weigh 115,200,000 tons, worth (at the Water and Sewerage Board's charge of 1s per 100 gallons) £207,143.

\* \* \*

A chimney at the hospital was blown down on Sunday night.<sup>4</sup>

\* \* \*

Port Kembla breakwater stood the test better than was expected. This was attributed to the gale being from the south instead of the east. The gale of a fortnight ago did far more damage, the tram lines on that occasion being twisted and washed about in all directions.

\* \* \*

The steamer Dunmore owned by Mr G. L. Fuller which is engaged in the metal trade of the South Coast went through the gale on Saturday. She left Shellharbour shortly after 10 o'clock on Saturday morning. Capt. Hansen reported that a terrific gale was experienced immediately after getting outside, and as the vessel came north it increased in violence, the squalls being exceptionally fierce, some of them lasting fully an hour. There was a terrible sea, but the Dunmore proved herself a splendid sea boat, and weathered the storm safely.

\* \* \*

A large lifeboat and many lifebelts together with oars and much wreckage were washed up on Cronulla Beach on Monday marked "Huddart Parkes". It is feared that a wreck has occurred. Mr Angus McDonald who discovered the lifeboats has taken the matter to the Sutherland police on that afternoon.

\* \* \*

All at Terragong Swamp was flooded on Monday, as it never was before. Mr W Milne, who has a number of cattle on an allotment is likely to lose the lot, as they were nearly up to their heads in water with no possible hope of rescuing them. It was also reported that a barn belonging to Mr John Wood containing a great quantity of corn was flooded to a depth

of two or three feet, while the growing crops on the common are practically ruined. Nearly the whole of Mr Hugh Colley's farm at Jamberoo was a flood plain.

\* \* \*

A few comparisons in rainfall: Bega 181 points, Bowral 1025, Eden 332, Inverell 25, Katoomba 1297, Molong 3, Moss Vale 1243, Newcastle 231, Nowra 2150, Wollongong 1412, Robertson 2600. (100 points equals 1 inch)

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<sup>1</sup> Market garden of Thomas Dion.

<sup>2</sup> The racecourse was situated just south of WIN Stadium today.

<sup>3</sup> The rain was recorded between Friday 8-7-1904 to Tuesday 12-7-1904.

<sup>4</sup> The hospital was Albert Memorial Hospital.