
SHERBROOKE VILLAGE

Reminiscences of a child

Seen through the Mists of Time – before the turn of the century (1900) – Sherbrooke appears to have been a wonderful place to grow up in and enjoy life as a child. It was situated on Bulli Mountain, five miles from the township of Bulli.

The residents of Sherbrooke were genuine pioneers. When a home was needed the men would go into the bush and fell a suitable tree or trees. Then the work of sawing, chopping, adzing and planing would be carried out on the spot. All the work of loading and transporting would be done with drays and the aid of faithful bullocks. Frequently a road had to be made to the site of operations. In those days neighbours who were disengaged would be there bright and early to lend a helping hand. Later on Germans, Norwegians and other nationalities moved into the locality bringing with them new ideas concerning building and painting, so gradually more modern homesteads appeared.

The people residing at Sherbrooke cultivated acres of fruit trees and grapes. The ground was very fertile. Apples, peaches and plums grew in abundance. They also had more than a hundred beehives. Much of the success with the foreign plants was attributed to the bees pollinating the flowers.

There were no shops at Sherbrooke. A butcher with his horse and cart appeared periodically, but mostly the established residents killed their own meat, and of course, when there was a surplus, shared it with their neighbours. Fuel stoves and open fires were used in every home. Kerosene lamps and candles were the only lighting they had.

Properties along the banks of the Cataract River were never short of water due to the abundant rainfall. There were no tanks, water for domestic use was collected in large casks.

Sherbrooke was somewhat hilly place for a child. The cabbage tree palms grew very tall there. Quite a number of the residents plaited

the leaves of the palms and made very neat serviceable hats from the strands. Which proved a useful shade during the hot summer days.

The road down Bulli Pass was very picturesque, but had to be negotiated carefully as some bends were difficult to manipulate. Luckily there were not many accidents because there were no hotels about. The "Lookout" on the top of the Pass is really world renowned and truly breathtaking.

In the early stages of occupancy the residents made the roads to their properties and kept them in good repair. Eventually the Council sent along "maintenance men" with their horses and drays. Children at that time loved to watch the men as they broke up stones into small pieces to fill up holes in the road. They seemed to accomplish a lot of work and took pride in it too. If the men worked near a home and lunch time was drawing near the lady of the house would send a big billycan of tea which was much appreciated.

Sherbrooke had amongst its many attractions a large expanse of vacant ground called "The Swamps". Its ground was mostly sandy and flat; quite unlike the fertile soil prevalent on the farms; but during the summer the Swamps were simply ablaze with colour and the perfume from the flowers had to be inhaled to be believed. The Musk had not lost its scent: acres of Jockey Club grew everywhere with an all overpowering scent. Brilliant Waratahs flourished in profusion and lovely dogroses grew in every shady place. Children on bright summer days would bring arms full of sweet wild flowers home for their mothers to place around the house.

Wild animals did not often come near the homes. Once a halfstarved-looking dingo paused at somebody's front fence, but quickly disappeared when shouted at. Wallabies prefer rocks to live amongst and seem very nervous when they encounter dogs. Flying foxes were a menace in the orchards. Their scent is most objectionable and after they have touched the fruit the terrible odour lingers.

There were numerous wattle trees growing around Sherbrooke's houses. People would come from far away and collect the bark for tanners. Some camped in front of people's properties. The children were thrilled to see tents for the first time and thought what a wonderful invention they were.

Too soon, however, everything altered. The Government resumed all the properties including orchards and vegetable gardens to prepare to build the Cataract Dam. Railway tracks crisscrossed the once beautiful orchards, engines and trucks clattered all day past the homes of the remaining residents. Eighty or more large canvas tents were erected around Sherbrooke. There was the constant noise of blasting the blue-metal in the quarry to make the Reservoir. To a child's mind the workers seemed orderly and quiet people, but all the free happy times were ended.

By 1904 most people had left Sherbrooke and with the compensation they received were able to establish themselves elsewhere.

The above story was based on an article by Mrs L Drinkall printed in the September 1981 Bulletin.