Second of Berkeley:

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF W. W. JENKINS

(From the Illawarra Mercury, June 3, 1884)

Mr. William Warren Jenkins was familiar to every resident of the South Coast. He was a native of the colony, having been born on July 11, 1816, in a house in O'Connell-street, Sydney, then occupied by his father. His mother's maiden name was Pitt, she being the daughter of Mrs. Pitt, who came out to this colony in 1801, with a family of four daughters and one son, under the recommendation of Lord Nelson, who gave her letters of introduction to Governor King, and through whose influence grants of land were obtained for each of the family. This enterprising lady's maiden name was Matcham, being a cousin of George Matcham, who married a daughter of the Rev. Mr. Nelson, father of Lord Nelson.

On her arrival in this remote settlement, then known as Botany Bay, Mrs. Pitt, who was a lady of no ordinary parts, proved a worthy acquisition to the grand old stock that laid so well the foundations of Australia's colonisation. The reasons for her coming to this colony were these: Her husband, Mr. Robert Pitt, though possessed of good property, lived beyond his means, and thus left his widow unprovided for at his death, which occurred at a somewhat early age. Being too high-spirited to remain in England in reduced circumstances, she resolved, on the advice of her friends, to embark for this colony, being inspired, as she was, with a laudable ambition to provide permanently and advantageously for her rising and promising family. Mr. W. W. Jenkins was but six years old when his father was killed. Shortly after the death of her husband, Mrs. Jenkins removed into the country to a property called Eagle Vale, three miles on the Sydney side of Campbelltown, and there resided until her death in 1842. As a matter of course, the two sons received the very best education available in the colony at the time. In the course of his scholastic career the subject of our notice, with his brother, attended respectively the Rev. Dr. Lang's Australian College, the Rev. Dr. Halloran's educational establishment, and Mr. Cape's academy. Among his fellow pupils at these institutions were several who since have played prominent and useful parts in connection with the social and public affairs of this colony. The Honorable William Forster, who was one of these, had no small pleasure during his candidature for this electorate, not long since, in visiting Berkeley as frequently as he could to re-associate with his esteemed old schoolmate, Mr. W. W. Jenkins. At the age of twenty-two, Mr. Jenkins married his cousin, Miss Matilda Pitt Wilshire, youngest daughter of Mr. James Wilshire, who came to this colony in the year 1792, with an appointment from the Imperial Government in the Commissariat Department, from which he retired in 1812, with a certificate under the hand of Governor Macquarie of having discharged the duties of Deputy Commissary with His Excellency's approbation. In his wife Mr. Jenkins had a most estimable partner of his joys and sorrows until her death, which occurred in 1876. For some time before his marriage he visited this district frequently to set matters in order on the Berkeley Estate prior to his going to reside there permanently. Part of his grand estate of three thousand seven hundred acres was purchased, but the greater portion was a grant from the Crown—the name, Berkeley, it may here be stated, being given to it from the estate of Lord Berkely in Gloucestershire, the part of England, as already stated, from
which his father came. At the time of his first visits to this district the estate was a mere cattle run, with an overseer’s headquarters of the usual crude style in those days not far from Unanderra. Mr. Jenkins, then a stalwart, athletic young man, majestic in stature, powerful in physical capability—a grand specimen of the old natives of the colony—and as resolute in courage as he was kind in disposition, usually made his journeys “over the mountain” to and from Illawarra or the “Five Islands,” as nearly the whole of the South Coast was designated about that time. Parties who have come to Illawarra only within the last thirty years have little idea of the state of things that existed here even when Mr. Jenkins first decided to become a resident of the district. On every hand were wild forests in their primeval state, and thousands of acres of bush so dense that the rays of the sun seldom penetrated many parts of it. Roads worthy of the name, it may be said, there were none, even the main thoroughfare of the settlement being little more than a bush track. The aborigines far outnumbered the European population, the great majority of whom were assigned servants or “Government men,” a term already become unknown to many persons in this district, although it was then a “household word” here. These and many other drawbacks and discomforts that might be enumerated characterised the South Coast when Mr. Jenkins first became a resident of it. Within a short time he had a house erected, and about 1839 he came to reside there with his wife. Eventually he enlarged that edifice into the present stately mansion of the estate. Almost simultaneously with the taking up of his residence at Berkeley he himself surveyed the estate into divisions for clearing leases. At this period of his life he was most active, his favourite exercise being walking. He was a splendid horseman, however, and thoroughly understood not only the art of riding, but that of driving. He was likewise quite proficient in regard to a knowledge of rowing, as practised in his younger days, and even up to comparatively speaking years, his favourite waters for that kind of exercise very frequently being those of Allan’s Creek, Tom Thumb Lagoon, and the Illawarra Lake. Of horses and dogs he was passionately fond, and not long after coming to this district he did a good deal in the way of endeavouring to facilitate an improvement of the breed of horses in this end of Illawarra. On making a daring attempt to cross Broughton’s Pass (between Mount Keira and Appin) on horseback, while travelling to Eagle Vale to see his mother on her death-bed, he narrowly escaped losing his life. There was a flood running at this treacherous place at the time, and had it not been for his experience and excellent knowledge of horsemanship, he would have been swept away over the fatal rocks, as several others were from time to time—the most recent victim in that way being Mr. John Hetherington, an hotelkeeper in this town—considerably upwards of twenty years ago.

(To be continued)

MUSEUM VISITS BY SCHOOLS:

The Museum records show that in 1973, apart from visitors during normal opening hours, the Museum was visited during school hours by 249 high school and 1881 primary school pupils. It was also visited by 40 Teachers’ College students and at week-ends by various Guide and Cub groups.

Mrs. Evans and her helpers are to be congratulated on their fine contribution to local education, often involving considerable personal effort and inconvenience, and the council of the Society records its appreciation.