TALES FROM COBBLER’S HILL:

Living at William Street, Unanderra, is Mrs. Ettie Wells (nee Murray), a fine lady who will be 90 in September. She is my late husband's aunt, and I have always been interested in the stories she tells of old times. She lives with her brother Eric, aged 81, who is at present in hospital. They and the baby of the family, Mrs. D. McInnes, who is 80, are the only three left of a family of eleven. Ettie Wells was the middle child.

One afternoon while browsing through the old Roll at our Museum, I looked up the Murray family. The address of John Murray senior and John Murray junior (my father-in-law) was “Springfield.” I asked Aunt Ettie, “How come?”, and she told me that when the children were young the family had moved from McPaul’s farm at Unanderra to “Springfield.” The people who lived there before were Mr. and Mrs. Taylor, and Mrs. Taylor was Rachel Henning, whose letters, now in book form, I feel sure we have all read.

The Murray family did not buy the farm; they only rented the Taylors’ house. The house had verandahs around three sides, and one side was covered with ivy. Before Rachel left the farm she asked Ma Murray to look after her pets who lived in the vines and make sure they were given plenty of milk to drink. The pets turned out to be snakes. Rachel had saucers for their milk, and after they had drunk the milk she would wash the saucers ready for their next drink. By all accounts the snakes didn’t last long after the Murray family moved in.

After living at “Springfield” for some years, Ma Murray decided she would like a home of her own. Mrs. Wells remembers as if it was only yesterday her mother saying to her, “Come and put your pretty dress on; we are going to see Mr. Jenkins.” (She says she still remembers that pretty dress, pink with buds on it). She walked with her mother from “Springfield” to the Jenkins’ home, where William Jenkins met them and took them inside. After talking for some time, he said to Ma Murray, “Well, Annie, what brings you here?” She replied, “William, I’ve come to buy some land from you.” “Oh,” he said, “I don’t think I could do that, Annie; but why do you want land?” “My family are growing,” she answered, “and I need a larger home, and one of my own.” He then asked, “Where do you want this land?” Said she: “Come and I’ll show you.”

She pointed to Cobbler’s Hill. In surprise he said, “I couldn’t let you have that land—it’s got no road to it.” “Let me have it, William,” said Ma Murray, “I will put the road in and call it after you.” After some talk and thought he said, “Annie, you can have it. We will go to town tomorrow and get it fixed up.”

She immediately produced £100. “Wait till it’s finalised,” he said “No,” said she, “you might change your mind.” “I wouldn’t go back on my word, Annie,” he answered.

She did not go back on her word either; because that is how William Street, Unanderra, got its name. There must have been two acres of land in the block he sold her. It is at the top of the hill, now all built on, with the street going through the middle, though it is still a “no through road.”

—IVY MURRAY.