A NIGHT AT THE GERAGHTYS:

Meantime such in this respect were our night's quarters. The hut was well built of slabs split out of fine straight-grained timber, with hardly a splinter upon them; and consisted of several compartments, all on the ground floor. The only windows were square holes in the sides of the hut, and a good log fire was blazing in the chimney. On stools, and benches, and blocks about the hut sat a host of wayfarers like ourselves; and several lay at their ease in corners on their saddlecloths or blankets, whilst saddles and packs of luggage were heaped up on all sides. Supper was over, and the short pipes were fuming away in all directions. Our hosts were two Irishmen, brothers, who had got a little bit of good land cleared here in the wilderness, and refused nobody a feed and shelter for the night. They soon put down a couple of quart pots of water before the blazing fire, made us some tea, and set before us the usual fare, a piece of fine corned beef, and a wheaten cake baked on the hearth.

And here I should inform the reader how a damper is made. Flour is mixed up merely with water, and kneaded for about a couple of minutes; the dough is then flattened out into a cake, which should never be more than an inch and a half or two inches thick, and may be of any diameter required; the ashes of the wood, which is burnt almost everywhere in great profusion, owing to its plentfulness, are then drawn off the hearth (for the fire is on the ground, not in a grate) by a shovel; and on the glowing smooth surface thus exposed the cake is lightly deposited, by being held over it on the open hands, and the hands suddenly drawn from under it. The red ashes are then lightly turned back over the cake with the shovel. In the course of twenty minutes or half an hour on removing the ashes, the cake is found excellently baked; and with a light duster, or the tuft of a bullock's tail, every vestige of the ashes is switched off, and the cake, if the operations have been well conducted, comes to tables as clean as a captain's biscuit from a pastry-cook's shop.

Merrily sped the couple of hours betwixt our arrival and going to bed. One sang a song, another told some tale of the olden time, when but few white men were in the colony, another repeated the news he had just heard of the bushrangers, another described a new tract of land he had just found out for a cattle-run, and others contented themselves with that endless subject of dissertation among the colonists, the relative excellences of their working bullocks. My share was to answer all the questions (rather all that were answerable) which any and all thought proper to put to me on the subject of affairs in England; and to pocket with the best grace I could (for most of these men had been convicts) the jokes they not very sparingly, but I must say with very good humour, cut on me for having come to the colony "to make a fortune," or for being "a free object" (subject) or for having "lagged myself for fear the king should do it for me." All these little matters notwithstanding, the evening passed away very pleasantly; if there were many things in these men which I could not approve, there was much more that I could not but admire. There was a sort of manly independence of disposition which secured truthfulness and sincerity at least among themselves. If the penalty for the practice of that truthfulness toward the superior classes had been fixed too high, I felt that allowance ought to be made for it in estimating their character.
Some time before midnight a general collection of bedding took place, as usual; the customary belt of bed was constructed all across the hut in front of the fire; and as in this instance the hut happened to be about 12 feet or 15 feet across, and we mustered nearly a man to each foot of the diameter, a very pretty row of capless heads and bare feet soon displayed themselves beyond the opposite ends of the blanketing. On blazed the merry fire made up for the night; loud snored those who were so disposed; and louder grumbled ever and anon those who were not; hither and thither bounded and barked the dog around the hut, till he thought his master was asleep, and could no longer take notice of his vigilance; and dreams came and realities went; and memory had no more added to her task of the day.

With the dawn all was bustle, for Jem and Pat Geraghty were early risers and hard workers. The latter of them, poor fellow, was killed two or three years afterwards by a pistol going off in his pocket. Many a kind word has there been uttered over his memory by the traveller when passing the hut where his good-natured voice is heard no more!

—Alexander Harris, “Settlers and Convicts,” Chapter III.

(The Geraghtys’ hut stood about where the Woonona bowling green was later built [“Black Diamonds,” p.p. 3-4]. It was the first house encountered by Harris after descending the range by the Old Mountain Road. The Geraghtys were the heroes of the Battle of Woonona [1828], when they shot it out with four bushrangers. Pat Geraghty was wounded, and one of the bushrangers killed, whereupon the rest made off. The dead man was shovelled into the sandhills near Peggy McGawley’s point, “the first point on the beach north of the Bellambi jetties,” and presumably his bones are there still).

PERSONAL:

Congratulations to Councillor Fred and Mrs. Healy on becoming grandparents for the first time, with the birth of Karen to their daughter Mrs. Janet Schleter. As they proudly mention, Karen is the fourth generation, and she is doing fine.

Also to Mr. and Mrs. Stan Small, lifelong residents of Port Kembla, who celebrated their Golden Wedding on June 25th. Stan played for “The Mighty Blacks” when they wore green!

Former Councillor Ken Marshall sends his sub. from Western Australia, with best wishes to the Society from Mrs. Marshall and himself. (They are off on a cruise to Indonesia!).

Her many friends are pleased to have Museum stalwart Mrs. G. Watters back on the job after a spell in hospital.

Recent visitors to Illawarra included the well-known maritime historian of Victoria, Mr. J. K. (Jack) Loney and Mrs. Loney. To date Mr. Loney has concentrated on the Victorian coastline, but his latest work (January 1974) deals with wrecks along the Murray River. We look forward to the fruits of his local researches, which we are confident will be a significant contribution to our history.

—A.P.F.