EARLY CORDEAUX:
To-day when we talk about Cordeaux our thoughts wander to our beautiful picnic area and dam.

In the early nineteenth century a spot over the range west of Mount Kembla was surveyed, mapped out and named Cordeaux.\(^1\) It was a valley with hundreds of acres of beautiful bush, rich red soil and a crystal-clear river running through it.

About the 1840's many pioneers took up grants in this valley, but little has been recorded of those early days; we now have to rely on stories passed down by old-timers and descendants of those first pioneers who settled there.

It was not a large settlement, and to the best of my ability I will endeavour to write a little about its history. My memories over many years, and stories told by my parents, gave me some knowledge of its early days. My mother's school friend, Sarah Stone, a daughter of the well-known Mount Kembla family, married William Rann junior of Cordeaux, and our visits to their beautiful property were frequent.

Between 1900 and 1926 the three Cordeaux dams were built;\(^2\) but the life-pattern of Cordeaux went on as usual. At that time only the land in the path of the making of those dams was resumed, and only a few families were affected. It was not until 1940-45 that the properties of all but two landowners were resumed, virtually bringing to an end the life span of many early settlements.

The first pioneers who took up land at Cordeaux were James Fishlock, William Moran, Patrick Hayes, Joseph Marceau, William Stafford, James Young, Patrick Collins, Michael Cole, and three sea-captains, Charles Jackson, John Andrews and Michael Guilfoyle. Very little is known about many of these men, or about how long they worked their land. Early in the district's history many properties changed hands, some being divided and split up.

Then followed members of other well-known Cordeaux families such as I. Brown, L. Carr, W. Rann, Mr. Walker, Mr. McNamara, E. Rees, Mr. O'Brien, J. Murphy, Mr. Thornton and H. Ellison. Many holdings passed down to the second and third generations, and so those early pioneer names were carried on throughout the history of Cordeaux, which grew and flourished by the hard work of these pioneers, and became a beautiful and picturesque settlement.

For many years there were only bridle-tracks. One can easily visualise the hardships of those first families going into that valley, the steep climb over the range via Mount Kembla, the temporary shelters they built from bush timber, and the years of work clearing their land before producing goods for market. Old hands say many of their goods were carried in and out on their own backs. The packhorse was their main form of transport, but not all were lucky enough to own a horse. Horse and bullock teams later became their transport, followed by carts and sulkies.

In the early stages their ventures out of the valley were not very frequent. Old-timers were quoted as saying that if there were enough provisions such as tea and sugar in their cupboards they could otherwise live off their guns, shooting game such as wallabies and pigeons. Wild honey was gathered from the bush, and crayfish were caught from the many waterholes.

The Cordeaux River starts its journey beyond the West Dapto
Range, being fed by seepage from the swamps and springs at the head of the sandstone valley. As it travels, the Wattle and Sandy Creeks join it from the west side, and the Kembla, Goondarrin and Kentish Creeks come in from the east. So it continues, linking up with the Nepean.

Most settlements were on either side of the river, so that they had access to water from the river or one of its tributaries. When established, most settlers became mixed farmers, growing everything from fruit and vegetables to bacon, eggs and butter. These items they would sell around the district, some going on to Sydney by ship from Belmore Basin.

As the families of the settlers grew up the land did not always provide enough income for all. Many sons went to work in the bush splitting timber. Others rode out of the valley to work at Kembla mine. The building of the three dams employed many members of a later generation.

(To Be Continued)

—IVY MURRAY.

1.—The Cordeaux River was apparently named after William Cordeaux (1792-1839), who came to New South Wales in 1818, and became Deputy Assistant Commissary-General. Mr. Vince Ward in his articles “The Mountain Men,” which appeared in the “Illawarra Mercury” in August-September 1972, says that the name was given by Allan Cunningham, the botanist and explorer.

2.—The No. 1 Dam, constructed to supply Wollongong, was completed in 1903. No. 2 Dam 1 ½ miles downstream, was completed in 1915. The large Cordeaux Dam, five miles further down, completed in 1926, was originally intended to form part of the Sydney water supply, but the growth of population and industry in Illawarra has led to its water being pumped back over the range to supply the coast. (See W. V. Aird, “The Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage of Sydney”).

MAY MEETING:

The speaker at the May meeting of the Society was Mr. Ian Young, B.Ec. (Foundation President, Kiama and District Historical Society), who has kindly provided the following summary of his talk:

The Robertson Basin, Kiama Harbour

From the early days of its settlement Kiama, and indeed the whole Illawarra Coast, was almost totally dependent upon the sea and upon ships for its contact with the outside world. Roads were virtually non-existent and at best were little more than bridle tracks. Travel from Sydney, by land, was by way of Campbelltown to Appin and thence around Mount Keira to Wollongong, Albion Park and Jamberoo. Thence the track ran over the slopes of Saddleback Mountain to Gerringong, passing several miles to the west of Kiama. The route via Tom Ugly’s Point and Bulli Pass was not practicable for use by vehicles until 1871. The sea, therefore, was the lifeline of Kiama by which settlers and supplies were brought in and produce was shipped out to Sydney and the rest of the world.

For many years Kiama’s harbour was the sheltered bay, discovered in 1797 by George Bass, sheltered by Blowhole Point from
EARLY CORDEAUX (Continued from June Bulletin):

Early this century Mr. A. James of Mount Kembla worked a saw-mill near the head of the river. Timber was brought over the range by horse team.

William Stafford was a prominent early settler at Mount Kembla, and owned much land. He later acquired his Cordeaux property, where members of his family lived and played an important part in its establishment. Numerous descendants of the Stafford family live around our district. William and many of his family are buried in Mount Kembla Cemetery, in which there is also the tombstone of Robert Fishlock, his wife Elizabeth and members of their family. The inscription states that they were the first settlers on the Cordeaux. Robert passed away on 20th September 1885 aged 85. His wife pre-deceased him by eight years. All were natives of Wiltshire.

Two great-grandsons, Albert and James Fishlock, died in January and March 1976, aged 82 and 86 respectively, and were laid to rest in the same cemetery. Both had lived with their parents at Cordeaux till their farm was resumed for the making of No. 3 Dam.

Living at the head of Cordeaux River was Isaac Brown, who came from England as a young man and went to the goldfields. He found little gold, so came to Mount Kembla and got a job at the kerosene shale mine, which had just started. He then bought land at Cordeaux, married Matilda Stafford, and reared a family of nine children on what he called a mixed farm.

Adjoining Mr. Brown’s on the west side lived Mr. L. Carr with his wife and family—another mixed farmer who excelled in potato-growing. A corner of his farm was resumed about 1900 for the making of No. 1 Dam. Mr. Carr moved off the Cordeaux to farm at Unanderra, his sons working his Cordeaux property. Carr Parade, Unanderra, derived its name from this family.

Before the turn of the century, on the west side lived Mrs. Ellen O’Brien with her son and daughter, Paddy and Katie, who worked their mother’s orchard after her death until its resumption. Mrs. O’Brien was a daughter of the Moran family (first settlers). There was a small cottage on her property which she let for holidays. Many a Wollongong businessman with his family enjoyed their holidays there.

Mr. and Mrs. Joe Walker and family lived close by. It was on their property that the first one-room school was built about 1882. Before its completion classes were conducted in Mrs. Walker’s sitting-room. In later years this school was moved to the east side of the river and rebuilt. The reason for moving was that more children lived around that area, and it made a difference of some miles’ walk to school.

Still on the west side, and taking in Wattle Creek, was the home of Mr. and Mrs. W. Rann senior, their four daughters and one son William. Over a period Mr. Rann divided his farm, sharing with his family. Two daughters married two Stafford brothers (grandsons of William). Two Misses Rann moved from Cordeaux, conducting a small business at Fairy Meadow. Rann Street, Fairy Meadow, derived its name from the family.

William junior was a member of the Light Horse Regiment, a
fine horseman, and an experienced bullock-driver. He used very few words in working his team, and it was a treat to watch him and his bullocks working. He inherited his parents' home and 150 acres. The house was a fine example of workmanship, being built of pit-sawn slabs with a shingle roof. Avenues of oak and elm trees grew around. It was a magnificent setting and, being built on a high slope, could be seen from almost every corner of the Upper Cordeaux region.

Mrs. Rann junior opened the home to holiday-makers. Horse-riding over the swamps to see the wild flowers, waterfalls, and the famous aboriginal cave, was a highlight of those times.

Mrs. Rann predeceased her husband by many years.

After resumption of the property between 1940 and 1945, the house was demolished, and at the age of 85 Mr. Rann left his home of almost a lifetime and moved to Ulladulla. He died at the age of 88 and is buried in Mollymook Cemetery.

(To Be Continued) —IVY MURRAY.
EARLY CORDEAUX (Continued from July Bulletin)

Four generations of history were made by the late Robert Walker's family. His four sons in early days helped with the running of his property, and in later years were important workers on the dam constructions and maintenance. Their property, although resumed, is the only one on the west side of Cordeaux River still inhabited. Lionel, a retired Water Board employee, the youngest of the family, still lives there. His late brother Ernie lived with him until his death on 24th November, 1976, aged 84. His passing was a great loss to Cordeaux—he took with him its history. Ernie helped with the clearing for No. 3 Dam, and later with its maintenance.

Their brother Robert, also retired, held important positions at Cordeaux and Woronora Dams. Another brother, Charles, a well-known Cordeaux identity, and their only sister Pearl are deceased. Their mother Mrs. Walker was a wonderful horsewoman. She participated in many shows, riding side-saddle, and was much admired.

Her daughter Pearl married James McNamara. The history of this family would be a record for Cordeaux. Five of their nine children (one deceased) still live at Cordeaux, and are descended by both parents from pioneers. On their mother's side they are the fifth generation of the first settler Robert Fishlock—a family who loved Cordeaux, the spot their great-great-grandfather had chosen to live.

The late James McNamara owned a fine orchard on the east side of the river. With the filling of No. 2 Dam, it is now on the edge of the dam and is resumed. The five children of Pearl and James still live in the home, the sons being employed by the Water Board.

Mr. and Mrs. E. Rees senior and family were also well-known Cordeaux pioneers. Their sons Edward and Lloyd continued to live at Cordeaux after the family left. Lloyd, a well-known Cordeaux identity and expert on apple-growing, laid out his own orchard and produced some of the finest apples in the State. He left his property after its resumption and is now living in Wollongong. Edward, now deceased, became the owner of the family property, which has now passed down to his son Bruce. It joins the property of the late Thomas McNamara, now owned by his son Ellis. These properties just over the range are not resumed—Ellis McNamara and Bruce Rees, both descendants of early pioneers, are now the only landowners of Cordeaux—and are still producing the famous Cordeaux apples.

One may note how many children of these early settlers were linked by marriage. Ellis McNamara's mother was Miss Thornton. James Fishlock married another Miss Thornton. The McNamaras' only sister married John Murphy (all of pioneer families).

The Post Office Directory of 1867 shows three members of the well-known Moran family—Martin, Michael and Andrew—as residents of Cordeaux. It is some years since the last member of this family left Cordeaux, but many of their descendants are living around the Illawarra district. Members of this pioneer family are laid to rest in the West Dapto Catholic Cemetery.

A family named Saunders owned land at Cordeaux and lived there for many years, although not first settlers. Mr. George James
and Mr. Frank March and their families were also residents for many years. At different periods other families lived at Cordeaux, renting or leasing from the owners.

Many taught at the small school in the course of its history. The first teacher (in 1882) was Mr. Alfred Wilson. He is said to have walked every Sunday from Cordeaux to Mount Kembla to teach in the Sunday School at American Creek, now Mount Kembla Sunday School. Only recently two of his elderly grandchildren went to Cordeaux to seek information and see where their grandfather had lived and taught.

Other teachers were Mrs. Jenkins, Miss Bassett, Mr. Thompson, Mr. W. Cram, Miss Latham, Miss Granger, Mr. Walter Buckland (a member of the well-known Wollongong family), and Mr. Carl Morriset. The school closed as a public school in 1933. It was a subsidised school after 1934; Allan Robertson, a Kembla lad, and Miss Matchett taught there. It closed again until 1941. A Miss Calman taught in 1941-42; then Miss Flo McNamara, a local Cordeaux girl, taught from 1942 until November 1954, when the school finally closed and was demolished. It consisted of one room and a verandah.

Miss Bassett, the teacher about 1902, married Mr. Robert Gibson, on whose farm the Figtree High School now stands. Gibson's Road derives its name from this family. Another teacher was Mr. Wheeler Cram, whose daughter Grace many years later went back to live at Cordeaux as Mrs. Edward Rees. She still lives there with her son Bruce.

—IVY MURRAY.

(To Be Continued)
EARLY CORDEAUX (Continued from August Bulletin):

“Andrews' Hill,” on the property where John Andrews settled early, has had for many years a Trig Station, it being the highest point on Cordeaux. No descendants of this sea-captain remained there, so little is known of him. A pretty spot on the way to Cordeaux, behind Mount Kembla, is called Andrews’ Lookout. The view over Dapto, Lake Illawarra and the farmlands around is expansive and beautiful. A bridle-track from this spot wound down the mountainside to Kembla Grange. The finger-board at Kembla Grange showing directions was removed only in recent years.

An unusual feature of the sandstone valley is a strip of ironstone some miles long. I remember as a child cantering our horses over a paddock in this area and hearing the hollow sound echo from underfoot.

There was never any shop or post-office at Cordeaux. The mail went through Kembla Heights P.O. and was delivered from there. (The first P.O. was established at Mount Kembla in 1883 and at Kembla Heights in 1892. Kembla was going through its developing stage about the same time as Cordeaux, and was originally called American Creek by its residents, so one wonders what address those early Cordeaux settlers used, and how mail ever found its owner).

Many old hands remembered the dance nights. The Carr and McNamara families at different times cleared their barns for the great occasion. Young folk from Kembla, including my mother, would walk over. Others drove from the district around in sulkies, or rode, to dance till the early hours of the morning. My mother used to tell how she admired Miss Basset (who was the school-teacher about 1902) dancing, and the lovely dress she wore. “I couldn't take my eyes off her, she looked so beautiful,” were Mother's words.

At one time Cordeaux had its own cricket team made up of local boys, competitions being held there.

Mrs. Rees senior opened her home once a month for church services, the minister driving over in his sulky from Wollongong or Port Kembla.

Many homes were built of pit-sawn timber with shingle roofs.
A feature of some was that the kitchen was built a short distance from the main building. The climate is very English, with heavy frosts in the winter, so all had their large open fireplaces. A few bachelor huts were dotted about the bush, the men finding work helping farmers with their fencing or splitting bush timber.

The only road to Cordeaux for many years was via Mount Kembla. A few bridle tracks were also used as outlets. During the Second World War a road was built along the range linking Kembla Heights with Mount Keira. A Water Board road from Cordeaux linked up with this road and so gave another outlet for Cordeaux.

The steep grade on Cordeaux Road coming out of the valley was always called Grindstone Hill. Horses pulling their loads up this steep ascent mostly had a few spells, their drivers often walking alongside to lighten their burden. Now with our motor-cars the grade is hardly discernible. Another steep road was on the west side of the river, passing Mrs. O'Brien's property. It passed over the ironstone section, so was always very rough. Otherwise the Cordeaux settlements were on nice slopes, some with almost level flats.

The swamps and creeks around Cordeaux were beauty spots. Sandy Creek had its special features, with large waterholes and cascades along the sandstone creek-bed. A beautiful waterfall had a small cave near its base. All kinds of ferns grew around and it was a paradise for all wildlife. Our picnics to this area are always remembered.

One of my precious memories of Cordeaux was a launch ride from the head of No. 3 Dam to the dam wall before its completion in 1926. Mr. Buchanan, a supervisor on the project, was boarding with his wife at Mrs. Rann's for a short time while working at the head of the dam, their temporary home during the making of the dam being at the wall end. Mrs. Rann gave our family an invitation to join them on this trip, and needless to say the Benjamin family didn't refuse. It was a glorious outing.

—IVY MURRAY.

(To be continued)
EARLY CORDEAUX  (Continued from September Bulletin):

At the time of the building of No. 3 Dam, there were pioneer families living on Goondarrin and Kentish Creeks. Their properties were resumed in the early stages, and with the filling of the dam the waters backed up both creeks and covered much settlement. The entry to these properties had been via Mount Keira.

No. 1 Dam was completed by 1903, having been built by the Public Works Department. No. 2, also built by the Public Works Department, was completed in 1915. After the Water Board had taken over the dams, No. 3 was completed in 1926.

The manager's cottage had been built during the making of No. 2 Dam. On the completion of No. 3, four cottages were built near the head of the dam for men and their families. With these families and the four pioneer families (only two landowners), Cordeaux is now a very small settlement.

The pioneers' womenfolk shared the burden of work with their men, often driving alone out of the valley with fruit and goods for market, and many times during the winter months not getting home till well after dark. They had their good times and their lean times, but very few wanted to leave. After their properties were resumed and their homes vacated, all buildings had to be removed or destroyed. There is little evidence now to show where these pioneers' homes stood: a tree or shrub indicates where a garden once grew, the flowers of bulbs open up in season to remind one that a tender hand once tilled the soil there.

So much was accomplished by those early pioneers; it is sad that nearly all of it has gone and is now only a memory.

—IVY MURRAY.