HISTORY OF THE UNANDERRA DISTRICT  
(By J. R. Maynes)

Unanderra in the early part of the last century was known as Charcoal Creek. Both Unanderra and Figtree were settled in about 1815 as was the rest of the Five Islands district.

It has been said and quoted by historians that the name of Charcoal originated from an aboriginal stockman named Charcoal Will who was employed by Throsby Smith, Wollongong's first settler, and whose hut was on the junction of the two creeks in the locality. Despite the changing of the name of the locality from Charcoal to Unanderra the name of the creek still exists.

Its Geographic Situation

It is most important to point out its exact location and its geographic situation. It is bounded on the north by Cobblers Hill; on the south to whereabout the Farmers Arms hotel was, and that is where the Illawarra railway line crosses the Princes Highway; to the west to the foothills of Mount Kembla and including Farmborough Heights; to the east which includes the Berkeley Estate and a boundary fence from Allan's Creek past the Public Works Department quarry on Five Island Road over to Lake Illawarra.

The Berkeley fishing village was a part of Unanderra in early times for the reason of fishing catches were loaded on rail at Unanderra for the Sydney market. Also their postal addresses were ascribed to the closest post office and that was at Unanderra opened in 1860 as Charcoal Creek.

Berkeley in that area is now a place of tremendous growth and no longer linked with Unanderra. Today Berkeley boasts a population of 10,000 people.

The Unanderra locality was fortunate in its geographical situation, being so close to Flagstaff Hill and the point at which produce could be delivered to Wollongong Harbour where Belmore Basin was serving farmers for transit of their produce to market. Farmers from Bulli to Dapto used Wollongong and likewise Shellharbour served farmers from Albion Park, Dunmore and Jamberoo.

First Schools in Unanderra

Up to the year 1840 Unanderra had practically no schooling but in that year two church schools opened with a Presbyterian
under J. McPhail and a Roman Catholic under J. Stapleton. Both of these buildings were used as houses of worship also.

Public Education from Appin to the Five Islands

It is interesting to note that the district of Appin was settled in 1810 and then overflowed into the Five Islands and similarly with early education. It was in 1866 that the first State Education Act brought public schools into being. The Act was brought by Henry Parkes who was later known as the "Father of Federation." It was at Appin that the first state school was built in 1867. From Appin there was an escalation of state schools into Illawarra. Some of the schools are Albion Park, Dapto, Gerringong, Jamberoo, Mount Keira and West Dapto.

The Public School at Charcoal Creek was completed early in October 1878, the teacher appointed on October 21 and opened soon afterwards. The history of the school with its name changed to Unanderra later is given in the booklet published in connection with the centenary celebrations.

Charcoal Creek's First Store

Unanderra's first store was opened by Julia and Phineas Beatus on the main road directly opposite where Farmborough Road joins the Princes Highway, in the 1850s.

The Tannery

In the year 1860 John Richards opened a tannery at Charcoal Creek and by all accounts was a thriving enterprise, employing many local residents and having an annual turnover of £15,000.

The Richards family figured prominently in the commercial life of Unanderra until about the 1930s.

Central Illawarra Council Moves To Unanderra

In May 1878, the same year as the school opened, the Central Illawarra Council transferred its operations to Charcoal and apparently a number of citizens objected to the name Charcoal. John Blackman of Farmborough said that Charcoal was "an ugly thing of the past" and unsuitable for the centre of the Municipality. Apparently the Council put the wishes of the people into operation. The name Charcoal carried on until March 1881 when the Government Gazette announced that Charcoal Post Office would be known as Unanderra Post Office and in 1888 Charcoal Public School would be known as Unanderra Public School.

Likewise when the railway line went through in 1887 the railway station received its rightful name of Unanderra.

Unanderra and the Dairying Industry

The locality of Unanderra before and early after the turn of the century played a very important part in the dairying industry in the Illawarra district for it was in this locality and most of Central Illawarra that the Ayrshire breed of cattle predominated. The Lindsay, O'Donnell and Barrett families bred and exhibited that breed of cattle with considerable success. It has been a considered opinion of cattle experts that the Ayreshire breed of cattle was ideal for the early colonists. They are a very sturdy breed and will adapt to adverse weather conditions droughts and so forth. The very fact of their origin in the hills and highlands of Scotland stamps them that way.
I liken the Camden district to Unanderra for it was in that district the Macarthur-Onslows, McIntoshes and the Antills played a big part in pioneering the Ayrshire breed of cattle.

At Unanderra there were some notable breeders of the Shorthorn type of cattle—families such as Burgess, Gorrell and Cook bred and exhibited that breed of cattle.

It is well-known that these two breeds of cattle together with the Durham in cross breeding were largely instrumental in the breeding of the famous Australian Illawarra Shorthorn cattle which are now well known throughout Australia.

The locality also had a well-known name linked with the Jersey breed of cattle—the Cochrane family on Five Islands Road.

The Cochrane family is linked with early Jersey cattle breeding throughout New South Wales and particularly in the Bega district. The dairy of this family was where the Commonwealth Steel plant now is.

Some twenty years ago, with members of my family, I made a research of the number of dairies that operated in the Unanderra locality and between 1900 and 1940 there were between 80 and 90 dairies supplying the Unanderra receiving depots of the Dairy Farmers and the Farmers and Dairymen.

That was before those two milk companies amalgamated. However it was in the year 1929 the two companies, together with the Camden Vale, which was operated by the Macarthur-Onslow family at Camden, went into amalgamation to form the Dairy Farmers Milk Company Ltd. as it is known today. When amalgamation was complete the two Unanderra depots were closed down and milk was transported to Dapto where there was a larger and more up-to-date plant for receiving large quantities of milk.

From 1930 the number of dairies started to decline for the obvious reason the coming of the Australian Iron and Steel made land grow in value and consequently rate to rise steeply. As a result there is only one dairy operating in the area, the Porter family of Mount Keira. Of course some of these dairies come from Figtree, Mount Kembla and even Port Kembla.

The locality was again fortunate in respect of being so close to Sydney and its situation ideal to be linked with the Sydney milk trade as the returns for liquid milk sales is about twice as much as for butter rates.

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HISTORY OF THE UNANDERRA DISTRICT
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(Continued from December Bulletin)

The Unanderra Butter Factory

The district of Unanderra, like other localities, had its butter factory which was situated in Factory Road behind the former Central Illawarra Council Chambers. Some localities in Illawarra had quite a number of butter factories in their local areas for the obvious reasons of poor roads and poor means of transport.

The Unanderra establishment was built in December 1887. It was a weatherboard building 78 feet long and 20 feet wide and had verandahs for coolness but its duration was short for it was burnt down before World War I.

It was managed by W. E. Fackender, a member of an old Unanderra family. Very little is known of its existence but in the 1880s the separator came into being in Illawarra so gone were the hours spent skimming cream from large pans and reducing labour. The Hindmarsh family of Alne Bank at Gerringong used the first home separator in 1883. Another milestone in dairying was the Kiama Pioneer Butter Factory opened in 1884. Farmers brought milk to the factory to be separated. It was the first co-operative undertaking in Australia.

Formation of the Dairy Farmers Milk Company

It was in January 1900 the dairying industry in the whole of Illawarra moved into a much more prosperous stage. It was the year some 50 or 60 farmers met at Albion Park and formed the Dairy Farmers' Milk Company. Again Unanderra made a big contribution to that historic meeting for it was represented by some pioneering names such as O'Donnell, Wilson, James, Barrett, Jenkins and Chinnocks. Now that vast co-operative is the largest in the Southern Hemisphere with an annual turnover of $112 million for 1977.

Mount Kembla Coal Mine

It is interesting to note that in 1878, the same year as the Unanderra school opened, a mining company was formed to mine coal at Mount Kembla although it was not until about 1880 the first coal was mined. Over its long existence many men from around Unanderra were employed there.

The mine closed in September 1970. It must not be forgotten that Mount Kembla mine was the scene of Australia's worst mining disaster on 31st July, 1902, when 96 men lost their lives.

The Coke Works at Unanderra

Early colonists were too busy with cattle raising and cedar getting to look at other means of getting a livelihood and it was not until around 1888 that coke works were established at Unanderra by the Australian Coke Making Company. The Figtree family played a
big part in pioneering the coke industry in and around the Wollongong district. One would imagine the Illawarra region ideal for coke manufacturing as ample supplies of coal and slack were being mined. It was in 1849 the first coal was mined for commercial use in Illawarra by James Shoobert at Mount Keira. It is also noteworthy that the first shipment of coal to leave Wollongong Harbour was followed with a procession and great celebrations to mark a great occasion.

The Unanderra coke plant at one stage was the largest in Illawarra, comprising some ninety ovens. It supplied coke to the Dapto smelters; Lithgow and many other parts of the state. It seems that by 1912 the plant was obsolete and it closed down. Its location was where the Comsteel plant now is.

The Unanderra Bakery

Robert Benjamin of Mount Kembla came to Unanderra and opened a bakery before the turn of the century. The bread run extended over a large area serving a large rural community around Unanderra, Figtree and Lake Illawarra. The original bakehouse was on Berkeley Avenue but later a new bakehouse was built on the main road and adjoined the school of arts building which was on the corner of Berkeley Avenue and the road now the Princes Highway. Benjamin made his yeast from potatoes and often boasted his best bread was made from this ingredient. He also was of the opinion that in oven heating the best wood was wattle tree. Oak tree was another wood that was used extensively as it gave out great heat. In and around the Five Islands before the growth of industry much oak grew. It seemed to thrive in land that seemed to be low and wet but there is no evidence of oak in and around the Five Islands locality and the Tom Thumb Lagoon.

The Rees family acquired the bakery from Benjamin from 1915 until around 1940. It had two subsequent owners but was later absorbed by large interests such as Buttercup and Fielders. The Rees family also had extensive bakery interests in the Port Kembla area.

It is seen that Benjamin whilst sponsoring the locality of Mount Kembla contributed to the light industry of early Unanderra.

The Cross Country Railway

In commenting on some great events that have happened in Unanderra in the past 40 to 50 years I must bring forward the linking of the coast and tablelands by railway. As far back as 1880 there were some attempts to bring about a rail link connecting the two areas, particularly from Moss Vale end but to no avail. However the coming of the Hoskins Kembla works in 1928 threw a different aspect on the possibility of such a venture.

So it was in 1922 that the first bright hope of such a venture seemed a possibility. No doubt Hoskins works at Lithgow had in
mind a shift to Port Kembla at that early stage to set up plant on the seaboard to minimise transport costs.

The vast limestone deposits in southern New South Wales also had a big bearing on the construction of such a rail link. Charles Hoskins was a great driving force behind the scheme and pointed out to the government of the day the great benefits that would come of such a venture, not only of a means of bringing large quantities of limestone to Port Kembla plant but also shorter rail links to southern ports and states for iron and steel as well as a short circuit for superphosphates to southern New South Wales and Victoria.

Hoskins in pursuing the scheme with great vigour could see great merit in such a venture and entered into agreement with the government to transport 100,000 tons of material annually over the line. On the agreement Hoskins failed to transport the 100,000 tons in the first year of operation and the company had to forfeit £25,000 of the agreement money. But of course they were early depression times with steel sales low.

In June 1924 legislation was enacted for the go ahead of construction of the line from Moss Vale to Unanderra. In June 1925 the Premier, Sir George Fuller, turned the first sod for its construction at Unanderra. So after some 50 years of many deputations and meetings with statutory bodies and people, on 20th August 1932 the Premier, Sir Bertram Stevens, officially opened the line at Unanderra.

The inaugural train, which consisted of twelve carriages, was crowded to the limit and flag-bedecked on its first journey to Unanderra. One of its passengers was the former Premier, Sir George Fuller, who in June 1925 had turned the first sod for its construction.

Following the arrival of the train from Moss Vale a large banquet was held for the official party at the Central Illawarra Council Chambers.

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HISTORY OF THE UNANDERRA DISTRICT
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(Continued from April Bulletin)

SOME EARLY PIONEERS AND FAMILIES

William Warren Jenkins:

In January 1817 Robert Jenkins received a grant of land of 1000 acres on the eastern perimeter of Charcoal Creek and later by private treaty an additional 2280 acres, making a total of 3280 acres. The latter acquisition came in on the west of the original grant and encompassed the Charcoal locality. In May 1822 Robert Jenkins lost his life by a fall from a horse and the management of the estate was then the responsibility of his son William Warren Jenkins.

W. W. Jenkins proved to be one of the district’s best citizens. He was a member of the Illawarra District Council in 1843 and of the first Central Illawarra Municipal Council in 1859. He was also a trustee of St. Michael’s Church of England in Wollongong. He also gave the land, an area of two acres, for the Charcoal Creek school and for the council chambers. He set aside one acre of ground for a private cemetery at Berkeley for the family and in which they are all buried.

Now is it no longer a private burying ground for ownership has passed to the Sydney Church of England Diocese. There are no known descendants of the family living in Illawarra.

George Lindsay:

George Lindsay arrived in the colony in May 1841 from County Tyrone, Ireland. On arrival he had four sons and one daughter. They were William, aged 11; John, aged 8; George, aged 5; Anne Eliza, aged 3; Thomas Francis, aged 1.

William became host at Farmers Arms hotel and he entered in sports of all kinds. His son George Lindsay was a keen rifle shot and won many honours in that field. He was a member of a team from New South Wales that won the Bisley Cup in England. It was he who was appointed town clerk of Central Illawarra Council in 1903 and remained in that post until 1930. He had seven sons and five daughters.

John Lindsay of Kembla Park:

John Lindsay commenced farming on the 30 acres of land which was granted to his father, George Lindsay of “Lake View,” but he found the area insufficient. There is still evidence today where the house was. He eventually bought adjoining holdings and amassed a large holding of over 1000 acres. He was one of the district’s most successful dairymen and a great exponent of the breed of Ayrshire cattle. It was he who bred Honeycomb who broke a record in butter-fat production.

In 1866 he purchased some 500 acres in Dapto and set up his sons Jack and George and called these properties Horsley and West Horsley. He had four sons and one daughter. He was a member of
the first Central Illawarra Council in 1859 the same year that he took over Kembla Park holding. He died there in 1894.

George Lindsay II:
George Lindsay II went to Avondale and bought some 300 acres of land between Cleveland Road and Bong Bong Road which he called Sunnyside. It remained in the Lindsay family until around 1900. He had six daughters and one son.

Thomas Francis Lindsay:
He remained at Lake View and carried on farming operations. Some 60 acres of the original Lake View remain in the family. He had seven sons and four daughters.

Acquisition of Lake View:
In September 1848 a deed was executed of 114 acres of land for George Lindsay at a cost of £142 10s. 0d. It lay south of the Berkeley Estate and encompassed Flagstaff Hill with a great view of Lake Illawarra, hence the name Lake View.

There are living today a great many sixth generation people from George Lindsay. All the Lindsays are buried in the historic churchyard of St. Luke’s at Brownsville. There are five George Lindsays buried there. In March 1852 a grant of 30 acres to George Lindsay of Charcoal was executed for £96.

The O'Donnells:
The O'Donnells were early settlers on the Five Islands Estate. Michael O'Donnell first was a teacher in a Wollongong Roman Catholic School in the 1840s. Later he resigned teaching to take over the management of the Five Islands Estate which was originally a large share of Andrew Allan’s Illawarra Farm. He had four sons and they all lived around the Five Islands area and Unanderra. Mrs. Richard O'Donnell was postmistress at Unanderra from about 1900 to 1930.

One son, Frank, was a prominent figure in the milk industry activities and local government. He was an alderman of the former Central Illawarra Council and was Mayor on eight occasions.

Our present Lord Mayor of Wollongong, Alderman Arkell, is a member of the O'Donnell family. The O'Donnells, like the Lindsays, were great exponents of the Ayrshire breed of dairy cattle. They bred and exhibited this breed of cattle with considerable success.

John Blackman:
John Blackman was an early settler in the Unanderra locality at Farmborough Farm. The family arrived in the colony in 1833 and in 1856 took over Farmborough from Captain Cole. It is reasonable to assume the naming of the locality Farmborough Heights comes from Blackman’s holding. His daughter, Miss Fairie, taught at Unanderra school between 1895 and 1900.

The locality here has something in common with the historic town of Mudgee for it was James Blackman who was the first white man to enter the Cudgegong Valley in 1821. He was a relative of John Blackman of Farmborough. Mudgee is the second oldest settled town in Australia west of the Great Dividing Range and was first settled in 1822 by George and Henry Cox. It is 14 years older than
Melbourne. James Blackman Park in Mudgee commemorates this man’s early exploits in the Cudgegong Valley. In Unanderra, Blackman Street is named after the family in this locality.

**Christopher Cullen:**

Christopher Cullen was a noted citizen of the Figtree-Unanderra locality and a member of a pioneering Jamberoo family. The early Cullens received a grant of land in Jamberoo and located where the township is today.

Cullen embarked on many public activities in the Unanderra area. He was the first secretary of the local school board. He served on the former Central Illawarra Council and was elected mayor on twelve occasions. He was president of the Dapto Agricultural Society and very active in dairying organisations in the local area. He had three sons and two daughters who all passed through the local school and there are many descendants of Cullen throughout Illawarra.

The present Mayor of Kiama, Alderman Val Noble is a grandson. He also was a brother of Sir William Cullen, Chief Justice and Lieut. Governor of New South Wales between 1911 and 1930. The name Cullen is commemorated in Unanderra by the naming of a street after him.

**Edward Hammond Hargraves:**

E. H. Hargraves was born in 1816 at Gosport in Hampshire, England. He went to sea at 14 and arrived in Sydney in 1832. He then went on a voyage to Torres Strait gathering beche-de-mer and tortoiseshell after which he returned to Bathurst and worked on the station of Captain Hector. Authorities conflict on which he did first.

An article by A. P. Fleming in the March 1973 Bulletin of the Illawarra Historical Society says Hargraves left Bathurst and went to Illawarra, taking up 100 acres of leasehold land near Dapto with a frontage to Dapto Creek. Fleming continues, "Here he married and in 'The Australian' of December 27, 1836, there appeared the following notice: 'By special licence by Rev. McGarvie A.M. Mr. Edward Hammond Hargraves, third son of John Edward Hargraves formerly Captain of the Sussex Militia to Clara, youngest daughter of John Mackie Esq. of George Street, Sydney.' Hargraves took his bride to the Five Islands near Dapto and opened a general store. Historians do not state whereabouts the store was."

He was a very imposing man 6'5" tall. On 11th November, 1839, Hargraves sold his holding and moved to East Gosford. At this point there are some conflicting views. The "Australian Dictionary of Biography" states his time in Illawarra from 1836 to 1841. From Gosford he went to the Manning River but in 1849 he went to California where the great gold rush was on.

Evidently gold seeking was in his blood. Returning to Australia at the beginning of 1851 he headed for the Bathurst-Orange area. It was there he started with some local men, Lister and Tom brothers, washing for gold in the tributaries of the Macquarie river. On 12th February, 1851, gold was found at the junction of Summerhill
and Lewis Ponds Creeks about 20 miles north-east of Orange at a locality which Hargraves called Ophir.

Although gold had been found in Australia previously, it was this discovery that triggered off the great gold rushes of the 1850s and 1860s. Hargraves in no way exaggerated his importance when he told Lister, "My boy I shall be a baronet, you will be knighted and my old horse will be stuffed and put in a glass case and sent to the British Museum." It did not work out quite like that but Hargraves got the lion's share of both the cash and the credit.

He was voted £10,000 by the N.S.W. Parliament and £5,000 by the Victorian Parliament (never fully paid); was made a Commissioner of Crown Lands; visited England and was presented to Queen Victoria, a far cry from cockeying on Dapto Creek and storekeeping at the Five Islands. But high living and extravagance reduced him to poverty and dependence on a small government annuity and when he died in 1891 he left an estate of only £375.

Hargraves claims to the glory and the rewards were bitterly contested by Lister and the Toms. They claimed to have been his partners (not as he said, his employees) and to have led him to Ophir and been the actual discoverers of the gold. But from what the Orange Historical Society claims there is still strong local feeling about this.

Ultimately the N.S.W. Parliament voted Lister and Toms a mere £1000 between them (as against Hargraves £10,000 and fringe benefits) but a later Legislative Assembly Select Committee found that although Hargraves had taught the others how to use the dish and cradle, the Toms and Lister were undoubtedly the first discoverers of gold obtained in Australia in payable quantities. However Hargraves had had his reward.

Unanderra Families:

There are many more prominent names of probably fourth and fifth generations and whose names appear on early Unanderra school records, namely Waples, Neaves, McPaul, Fackender, Gillespie, Clout, Timothy, Jolliffe, Duncan, Burgess, Patton, Dobinson, Murray, Alger, Richards, Hart, Chapman, Stapleton, Woods, Carr, Gorrell, Todd, Eady, Catterell and Black.

In conclusion I would pay special tribute to former Central Illawarra Council aldermen who not only in Unanderra but in other parts of the municipality by the naming of roads and districts after pioneers are perpetuating such names in the locality. (Concluded)