Sydney at the time, living at great expense at the King’s Head Inn in Clarence street, his “pecuniary funds” almost exhausted. On 6 August 1834 he furnished the last formal particulars for inclusion in the deed. His home was given as Wollongong, and he advised that the name of the property was to be Athol Hills: a name very suitable, no doubt, for land of someone to found a dynasty on. But Fraser could not fail to be his wayward self; apparently having second thoughts, he had the august name of Athol Hills struck out, and in its place there appeared, with brutal realism, “Struggle Farm”. Nor was that all; in a very short time after the deed was in his hands he sold out to his old comrade and neighbour, Joseph Harris; and thereupon he disappeared.

His later life is only sketchily known. He joined Sturt’s party which in April 1838 set out overlanding cattle to South Australia, and is last heard of at Willunga in that new province, apparently in the service of Sturt’s brother Evelyn, who had a station in that locality. There he died, aged 42, on 19 January 1843, his occupation stated as gardener. According to Sturt (see M. Langly, Sturt of the Murray, London 1969, p. 157) he died “repeating my [Sturt’s] name almost to the moment he expired”; but too much credence should not be given to mawkish touches like this; they abound in the Sturt legend. It is more probable that the stricken Fraser was groaning from pain of the cause of death, revealed in the death certificate as “An abscess in his side”.

So his connection with Illawarra, though tenuous and brief, is real enough; and the name Struggle Farm was retained by the new owner, his old comrade Harris. It survives to this day; and so we may go on to study the Harris story.

(To be continued) Edgar Beale

RAILWAY POLICY IN N.S.W. 1889

[At the Editor’s request, Dr. Robert Lee, of the Macarthur Institute of Higher Education, has kindly furnished the following summary of the talk given by him to the Society on 1st. April]

In acquiring the Sydney Railway Company’s assets on 3 September, 1855, the Colonial Government assumed the responsibility for planning and managing what was to become easily its largest enterprise. It was at first very uncertain as to how it should exercise this responsibility. The rapidly changing political situation following the introduction of responsible government in 1856 and of a democratic franchise in 1858 increased this uncertainty. At first the government relied on the contractor who had completed the line from Sydney to Parramatta, William Randle. He leased and operated the line for the first year after the opening 26 September 1855. Thus the N.S.W. railways began as a government-owned but privately-operated concern.

This temporary arrangement was followed by reliance on Royal Engineers. The new governor, Sir William Denison was himself an R.E. and recruited Captain Ben Hey Martindale to act as Commissioner for Internal Communications, which included management of main roads, telegraphs, harbours and rivers and railways. Martindale’s term was fraught with difficulties. Denison, domineering and accustomed to command, believed the Colony could not afford steam railways and so should build horse tramways. The railway’s Engineer-in-Chief, John Whitton
recruited in England in 1856, believed with even more passion that steam railways were essential. The members of parliament voted only small sums and then complained about slow progress. An attempt to pass the responsibility for construction over to the great English contractors, Peto, Brassey and Betts, failed due to the conflicts between Whitton and the contractors' engineers. Nevertheless by 1863 they had completed the first phase of railway construction and the lines were open from Sydney to Picton and Penrith and from Newcastle to Singleton.

The next phase would be far more difficult, as the lines had now to cross the Great Dividing Range. Martindale and Denison had both left in 1861, and the Premier from 1861 to 1863 was Charles Cowper, founder and first President of the Sydney Railway Company as well as a politician dedicated to breaking the squatters' monopoly on the land. Railways could give inland small farmers access to the markets they would need to survive, so for Cowper railway construction was both a personal and political commitment. He persuaded Whitton to adopt lower and cheaper standards for the new lines, but agreed that steam traction must be used. Thus the second phase of construction saw the lines extended over the difficult terrain to Goulburn in 1869 and Raglan (near Bathurst) in 1873 and over the rather easier country to Murrurundi in 1872. These railways involved some massive works, including the two zig-zags on the western line, and had cost about half as much again as Whitton had told Cowper in 1861. With their completion the aims the Sydney Railway Company had stated in its prospectus in 1848 were at last achieved.

The high cost led some conservative politicians to ask if the Colony could afford any more railways. A select committee led by Alexander Macleay of Elizabeth Bay House once again argued that future extensions should take the form of narrow gauge horse tramways. However, Public Works Minister John Sutherland and Whitton mounted an effective campaign to continue construction of standard gauge steam railways. Once again Whitton had to compromise and build the extensions to lower standards than he desired. Sutherland also determined the future pattern of construction. In 1873 he produced a plan of the future railway network. Although subsequently modified in detail, sometimes for engineering, sometimes for political reasons, Southerland's 1873 plan was, in essence, implemented over the following twenty years. Thus in 1873 funds were voted to extend the main line to Wagga Wagga, Orange and Tamworth.

By the time these lines were nearing completion in the late 1870's the financial situation of N.S.W. Railways was transformed. Although never worked at a loss, for the first twenty years, they had only occasionally returned sufficient revenue to cover the interest on the cost of their construction. By 1881 the Railways were returning a very respectable 5.31 percent. In these circumstances colonial governments found it far easier to borrow funds on the London market and during the 1880's construction advanced rapidly. The main lines to Albury (1881) Bourke (1885) and the Queensland border (1888) were completed and important branch lines to Hay (1882), Mudgee (1884) and Narrabri (1882) built. Two new lines out of Sydney were also built, to Newcastle (1889) and Kiama (1887). For the first time railways were duplicating a service provided by coastal steamers. Their construction is evidence of the optimism of the times.

(to be continued)
OBITUARY: MR. F.M. GREGORY

We learn with regret of the death of our Newcastle member Mr. F.M. Gregory. His connection with this Society began in his long-standing friendship with Alec Fleming, and was maintained after Alec's death, to our great benefit. He was a mine of information on matters associated with the history of Newcastle, and acted as local contact and guide on our excursions to that district.

His services to the Newcastle and Hunter District Historical Society, as Research Officer, Bulletin Editor and in various other capacities, were outstanding but his interests, by no means confined to his own district, ranged over many fields. He will be greatly missed.

To his relatives, and to the Newcastle Society, we extend sincere sympathy.

RAILWAY POLICY IN N.S.W. TO 1889

(A summary of the talk given by Dr. Robert Lee, of the Macarthur Institute of Higher Education, to the Society on 1st April.) (Continued from July Bulletin)

It has often been alleged that railway development during these years was subject to considerable political interference, some of it of a corrupt nature. Henry Parkes used this argument to create an independent board of three railway commissioners in 1888. The building of the Illawarra line provides an interesting example of such interference and its effect on railway policy. Whitton had proposed to build the Illawarra line to much the same route it follows at present. However in 1883 the Public Works Minister, Francis Wright, ordered construction suspended while an alternative route via the valley of Hacking River instead of via Engadine and Waterfall was surveyed. Wright produced spurious technical arguments in favour of the deviation which were effectively countered by Whitton. Cabinet ultimately decided to build along Whitton's route. Later evidence was produced which revealed that the Premier, Alexander Stuart, owned virtually all the private land through which the proposed deviation would pass. What is significant about the incident is not so much that a politician attempted to use public policy for private gain, but that Whitton was able to frustrate this attempt. It is an example of his dominance of railway policy from his arrival in 1856 to his retirement in 1889. This dominance was in part achieved through political allies like Cowper and Sutherland and in part by the force of his arguments and personality.

(Concluded)

STURT'S MEN: HARRIS AND FRASER IN ILLAWARRA

(continued from July Bulletin)

PART II: JOSEPH HARRIS

If Fraser had an engaging whimsy in his makeup, Joseph Harris was the direct opposite: a stolid Englishman with both feet on the ground. Since in the 39th Regiment there were two soldiers of the same name, they were designated by their county of origin. Our man was from Monmouthshire, on the border of Wales. The need to differentiate between the two Joseph Harrises may have been the reason that Captain Sturt invariably called his man John; but then he was generally rather careless with names.

When Harris died at West Dapto on 6 July 1862, his death certificate recorded