abounded in ferns of all descriptions, some of which we took for transplanting. In about another month, blackberries will be as common as dirt almost, in this part and while we were walking another time through a part of the bush we came across good passion fruit, the only fault about them being that they were not ripe enough to eat.

"The day after (Saturday) we hired a buggy and drove into Wollongong, visiting the beach and a neighbouring park, besides strolling through the town. Our evenings were spent principally on the verandah, discussing the merits of single tax, whether American democracy has been a failure, and Bellamy’s ‘Looking Forward.’ [This was a Utopian romance of 1888 which for many decades to come served as a fillip to socialist thinking.] Our landlord who was a Yankee born gave us a vivid description of the decisive battle of Gettysburg, which he saw.

"On Sunday we went to the Presbyterian Church with another young fellow who was staying at the same place, and astonished the rustics by taking possession of the two front pews, and helped the choir which consisted of 4 children about 11 years old; our landlady presided at the organ and after service the parson thanked us for the great help we had given the singing. We returned to Sydney on Monday morning just in time to get me to work % hour late. While staying at Robbinsville I also saw one of the largest trees in the Colony, a large Black Butt Gum Tree measuring 57 feet round the trunk with a tape measure as high as an ordinary man can reach and rising in a straight stem for about 100 feet before it starts to branch forth. Standing in all its strength the tree looks like a king of the forest and inspires the looker on with awe as he stands and thinks of the great might of God that planted in such a small seed the possibilities of so large a result, and ‘if God so clothes the trees shall he not much more cloth us.’ If he plants in a perishable substance such great possibilities what shall be implanted in an immortal soul."

On that high plans ended Fred’s account of his holiday and, virtually, the correspondence. His search for the lovely, the pure and the true led him to find those qualities in a young lady. Fred was in love, and after a few more bits of news and more elevated thoughts, he ended his last letter. The rest is silence - on Robbinsville, as on everything else.

THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT AT PORT KEMBLA

According to John Barnes Nicholson, Independent Labour M.L.A. for the area to the north of Wollongong, the Public Works Department built the deep-water harbour at Port Kembla in 1900 because they were influenced by powerful coalmining interests and the Wentworth family who owned the land.

Nicholson accused the Public Works Department of bias in the Parliamentary Standing Committee hearings. He wanted the port to be built at Bellambi which was in his electorate. The debates in Parliament were heated and lengthy because other groups opposed the construction of the new facility. The Newcastle Labor M.L.A.’s felt the Hunter Valley coal-mining areas would be adversely affected and supporters of a consortium of Anglo-Australian financiers headed by future Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, urged the defeat of the bill because it would destroy a scheme to build a harbour inside Lake Illawarra.

Despite the controversy, the Public Works Department built the eastern breakwater and later the northern breakwater during the early years of the twentieth century. In 1911 more than 170 labourers were employed by the Public Works Department at Port Kembla. Many were Irish or of Irish descent with names such
as Toomey, Toohey, O'Brien, Moriarty, Kelly, Murphy, Fenney and Mulligan. They toiled in the quarry or in the tipping gang which tipped the huge boulders from the railway trucks “into the greedy, gaping, gasping gorge of the Pacific”. It was a massive operation and the local community appreciated their efforts. An Illawarra Mercury article written in 1905 described the Public Works Department District Engineer, H. A. Blomfield, as “brave commander Blomfield”.

A new coal jetty, No. 1 Jetty, was built at Port Kembla in 1915. The coal loading plant was driven by electricity and its rubber belt was over 3,000 feet long. It was hailed as a marvel of modern technology. Only Hull in England had a scheme as revolutionary. This coal loader served the coal industry for 50 years until, a new coal loader was built by the Department inside the Inner Harbour.

The construction of the deep water harbour, the harge expanse of land owned by either the Public Works Department of the Wentworth family and the excellent coking coal of the Illawarra made the area originally intended its land to be subdivided for residential purposes. But various factories located at Port Kembla and quickly the Public Works Department realised the area’s potential and drew up plans for a State Steelworks and smaller subsidiary industries.

Hoskins Iron and Steelworks was built on Wentworth land but Charles Hoskins consulted the Public Works Department before the purchase and negotiated agreements with the Government over the kind of infrastructure the steelworks required.

Until 1936 the Public Works Department had a measure of control over the industrial development of the district because it owned 2,500 acres of industrial land near the port. However in that year the Public Works Department sold over 1,600 acres of its land to the Broken Hill Proprietary Company which had recently taken over the Hoskins Works. It was a turning point for Wollongong because its economy was increasingly masterminded by B.H.P. and not by the Public Works Department.

William Davies, one of the local Labor M.L.A.’s complained during the debate in Parliament on the sale that E.S. Spooner, the Minister for Public Works in 1936 “would sell the Pacific Ocean if he were able to do so”.

The large tract of land owned by the company persuaded B.H.P. to concentrate its post war investment in steel at Port Kembla. The company’s commitment to Port Kembla was one of the major reasons why the Public Works Department agreed to build an inner basin at Port Kembla by dredging Tom Thumb Lagoon to the west of the Outer Harbour. Big government and big business co-operated throughout the construction of the Inner Harbour. Plant for the steelworks was located so that it would benefit from the new wharves.

Although the Inner Harbour was primarily built to service the steel industry, the Department’s most significant recent achievements there have been for the coal and wheat export industries.

Both the new Coal Loader and the Grain Terminal now under construction were commissioned after control of the port was transferred from the Public Works Department to the Maritime Services Board in 1978. The Public Works Department, however, was retained as Project Manager for these extremely important facilities. The last contract awarded for the Grain Terminal on 19th September, 1986, was described by the Minister as “the largest single contract ever awarded by the Public Works Department in its entire history”. A statement such as this explains why the Public Works Department was keen to write a history of its involvement at Port Kembla and why the role of the Public Works Department at Port Kembla is an important topic for any Wollongong historian to study. (from an address to the Society, 6th. May 1987.) Beverley Firth
compared to the convenience so obtained in the grade. The road leads directly to the Dapto railway station, a fact which renders it exceptionally important. Altogether, it is an avenue for traffic between this district and the tableland that could be opened up, and now that it is a settled matter that so good a grade can be obtained there, it is to be hoped the Central Illawarra Council will do its duty farther by following the matter up until Government constructs the required road.

**The Macquarie Pass**

Mr. Weber informs us also that an opening discovered by inhabitants of the Macquarie River is of a most extraordinary formation. He states that it is an opening of about fourteen feet wide, with perpendicular sides of solid rock, fully sixty feet high, extending a length of about ten chains. The opening, he admits, is the most remarkable he has ever seen anywhere, and although it is rather narrow for road purposes, he says a very good track can be made along it between the towering walls on either side. At the instance of the Shellharbour Council, he inspected the Pass a short time ago, and was astonished to see the opening in the rock as here mentioned. He says a very fair grade could be obtained along the whole course of the opening, a fact which he proved by a pocket instrument he had with him when inspecting the extraordinary natural gateway. The said Council is employing him farther to define the grades from the bottom of the opening to a favorable point on the Pass-road below it. This he intends to do before long, and it is to be hoped that the road from the top to the bottom will then be improved in accordance with the present traffic, which is very considerable, and would increase enormously under favorable conditions. It may be stated that the wonderful cleft in the rock alluded to is some distance south of the top of the present road, a fact which is rather an advantage in some respects. We have always advocated very strongly that this road should be rendered as fit for traffic as possible, being (as it is) a direct connecting link between the populous and important Wingecarribee settlements on the tableland and the still more populous and important locality of Albion Park in this district.

Illawarra Mercury 31 December 1887

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An article dealing with the Public Works Department at Port Kembla reprinted from October 1987 Bulletin.

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Another interesting article. This time a letter by a visitor writing about his experiences 47 years apart. Reprinted from July 1988 Bulletin.

TWO TRIPS TO WOLLONGONG
IN 1841 AND 1888
A CONTRAST

It was about the middle of February, 1841, I first left Sydney for Wollongong to take up my residence in the Illawarra district. At that time the easiest mode of travelling was by steamer. An overland journey in those days would have occupied too much time and been almost impracticable. The route by land was via Campbelltown and Appin, across that dread of travellers – Jordon’s Creek – and on down the Mount Keira Road. This route was in many places unsuitable for vehicles. But to return. The well-known and fastsailing (?) steamer William IV was employed in the Wollongong trade. We left the wharf (now known as the Phoenix) at 8 p.m. and as the night was fine, with a smooth sea, we arrived at Wollongong about 5 o’clock next morning, just 9 hours – a remarkably fast passage in those days, but was accounted for by the fine weather. (I was fifteen hours going to Sydney some time after in the same old clipper). It was a lovely morning, but no wharf to go alongside of. The steamer anchored off the beach, and passengers were landed in boats, which were run up as far as possible on the sand. The ladies and children were carried ashore by one of the crew, and all the cargo was also landed in the same way, being carried up clear of high water mark. The first thing of note was the prisoners at work, excavating the basin, a dam being erected across from near where the present light-house stands to