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 the opposite side. What is now the Brighton Hotel was then known as Moon’s Illawarra Store, where all cargo not taken away before sundown was stored. The drive out to Fairy Meadow was something to be remembered, particularly after coming off a long sea voyage of 158 days. There was very little clear land along the road. The mountain scenery was grand then as now, and the singing of the different variety of birds charming, particularly the bell-bird. It was at the foot of Mount Corrimal we first settled.

Coulson’s Hotel at the Market-square was the principal one, and the Presbyterian Church was the only building of its class erected, and there were very few buildings of note in the town. The Waterloo Stores at the upper end of Crown-street were the largest, but that building has disappeared long since, the site upon which it stood being still vacant between Mr. Wiley’s modern “Carrington Terrace” and Mr. Cutcher’s well-known “Wedge Hall.” The owner of “Bustle Cottage” and pioneer of the district — the late Mr. C.T. Smith — had gone for a trip to the old country. Garden Hill was occupied by its owner, Dr. John Osborne, and everything was carried on in a quiet easy-going style. Land was mostly let on clearing leases, and the first crop taken off was generally maize. But I must stop, else I should be going into the history of the district, which I do not wish to do at present.

October 3, 1888. Happening to be on a visit to Sydney from my home some 300 or 400 miles away, I could not allow the opening of the Illawarra railway to pass without availing myself of the opportunity to revisit the district where I lived for over a quarter of a century, and note the changes that had taken place — what a change, too!

When I arrived at the Redfern railway station, the platform was crowded with an eager throng of well-dressed citizens, all ready to make a start for the
"Brighton of Australia". The vice-regal train started punctually to time, but the train to follow did not get away until nearly 10 o'clock. Having secured a comfortable seat on the side I knew the best view was to be obtained, we sped on our way, and as we passed along I could not help thinking of old times. After emerging from the great tunnel, where the ocean comes in sight, the scenery is indeed beautiful, but as we got on towards Bulli it was then I noticed the wonderful progress made in the surrounding country. Where it was at one time dense scrub and heavy timber is now clear country, with neat miners' cottages all along the line. I remember once having to get a guide to pilot me from what is now known as Russel Vale to Woonona, then owned, I think, by a Mrs. Jettings. As the train approached the town, the view near the Hospital astonished me; quite a suburban village has sprung up there. We arrived at the Wollongong station about half-past 12. When the railway is fairly at work two and half-hours will be about the time occupied on the journey.

On strolling down the street, I noticed many fine substantial buildings; the Town Hall, banks, stores and cottages all seem to have sprung up as if by magic. The Court House is a fine building — few like it in the colony. What a contrast to the first old building that served that purpose, which I notice still standing, and looking neat and trim. It is the yellow-tinged building now used as a lock-up and constable's quarters. I might here remark that the first Illawarra Agricultural Show was held in the building situated between the Queen's Hotel and the post-office, and the stock (few in number) were kept in a little yard at the back. I remember that show well, having been a prize-taker. What a contrast to the present show building with its surroundings! When crossing the Market-square, and admiring the trees planted all round it, I rested for a time on a seat place under a fine fig-tree. It brought to my recollection the time the "Stocks" stood on the same spot, where I had seen a man sitting with his legs secured in them and a constable mounting guard over him.

I have already written more than I intended, but when I take my pen to write about old times I find it a difficult matter to stop, so many incidents arise fresh on my mind.

We had a pleasant trip back to Sydney, and on arrival there I carefully noted down in my diary all the chief items of note of what was to me a red-letter day in my calender. One thing I felt very much. It was that of being, I might say, a stranger in the place where I was once so well known and where I knew everybody. I met three of four old friends, who gave me a hearty welcome.

Another word or two and I finish. What a pity the station was not placed in a more central position, and why did not the Government give more appropriate names to some of the new stations along the line? Native or old familiar names could easily have been obtained if sought for.

Excuse these hurried remarks. Some day I may feel inclined to take up my pen and relate a series of incidents of the "days of auld lang syne" well worth recording.

**QUINBURRA**

*Oct 5, 1888*

**ILLAWARRA MERCURY** 9th October, 1888
mentto 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

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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.

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QUINBURRA
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ILLAWARRA MERCURY 9th October, 1888

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Paul Brunton Senior Curator State Library of NSW speaker for October.

The Society was fortunate to obtain Paul Brunton of the State Library of NSW to give a talk on Lachlan Macquarie during the bicentennial year of his arrival in the Colony. Lachlan Macquarie named the ‘Father of Australia’ was a very important Governor. Please attend his talk on Thursday 7 October at 10am at the Museum.

JH