



Forrester history newsletter



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The highlight of our October 2008 **Bush Mills Discovery Day** was the presentation by Jim Spiers of a superb collection of historic photographs of the bush mills in their hey day and some remarkable historic film footage of a bullock team pushing its way through the bush dragging logs, and horse and steam drawn trains with logs and sawn timber coming through the bush, over massive trestle bridges on the way to the Forrester Railway siding.

Our history day was to mark the end of **150 years of logging of native forest in the Otways which ended on the 30th June 2008**, when the last logging licence expired. The timber industry has played a dominant part in the history of Forrester right up until recent times. The mills and the associated timber industry provided a firm basis for the economy of the township and we have felt its loss.

But if the industry helped Forrester it was absolutely essential for Barramunga which soon died as mills were closed. So it was appropriate that we included in the day a survey of the information we have on historic **Barramunga**. The settlement of Barramunga predates that of Forrester, which only came into existence with the creation of the Rail link from Birregurra in 1891.

Jean Whitehead wrote an excellent short history of Barramunga which headed up our data sheet for the day's research.

In her paper she identified the early families which settled there and the businesses and churches that sprung up to meet their needs.



There are some excellent histories of Barramunga and we were pleased to have **Norman Houghton** at our meeting as we had drawn heavily on his booklet

OUR BUSH MILLS AND BARRAMUNGA



Don't be misled by the smiles of members on our October tour of Barramunga, on a cold, wind-swept, hill top in East Gellibrand, the site of a private school established by early settlers, after a long but exciting day, their thoughts are of getting home to a hot coffee, or something stronger.

By the Barwon. One of the principle aims of the day was to locate exactly where these places were, such as the Blacksmiths, The Anglican and Methodist Churches, the Community Hall and School and of course the store and Hotel.

It was disappointing that neither Norm Gardiner or Albert Stevenson was able to attend, representing two of the main families in the area, but we were able to view recent video interviews with them. Unfortunately both have died since. A great loss.

They told some amusing stories and gave us a good feel for the type of hardships which those early settlers in the area faced. **Norm** recounted how his football team would arrive sick at a football match having negotiated all the bends in Turtons Track on the back of Alf Frizons' truck and how one day they arrived late at Carlisle River and the opposing team had already gone home to milk. They rounded up the team finally but sadly his team scored nil while the other team kicked something like 60 goals.

Albert recalled the time in the early days when things were hard and they were producing butter in 60 lb packs which were carried out the 3 miles to Forrester as a back pack walking all that way and when they took delivery of some second hand furniture for the

house it had to be carried piece by piece down the track from Barramunga with each piece slung on a pole, carried on the shoulders of the two members of the family.



It brought back a lot of memories for **Jean Whitehead**, nee Taylor, to walk around the grounds of the former school which she attended and it was a special moment for **Bob Caspar** to stand on the site of the original Blacksmith's Shop, run by his grandfather Ted Caspar.. The original pine tree under which it stood is still there, just before the intersection, but fallen.

We were able to locate the site of the Methodist Church, burnt in the 1911 bushfire, which is above the road opposite the lookout across the dam. Nearby was one of the earliest hostels built to accommodate travellers. For further information the full Barramunga data sheet is available for \$3 inc. postage.

WHO REMEMBERS GERANGAMETE?

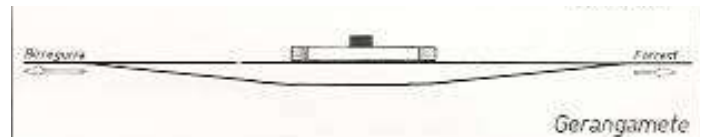
Society field day 5th March 2009



Beech Forest Methodist Church was acquired and became the Gerangamete Methodist Church.



Gerangamete State School around 1958



Plan of the Gerangamete Railway Station from Norman Houghton's *Sawdust and Steam*.

NOTES FROM MARGARET FACEY (NEE MC GRATH)

My parents were dairy farmers, milking cattle by hand, Frank and Alice McGrath.

Mum and Dad milked about 40 cows and we had 4 paddocks. At the back of our property was all timber and there was a spot mill in the back but I'm not sure who had that. On the corner as you come down and in between the Hall and the school was all bush and it was all bush on the opposite side of the road. We used to go to the Post Office through the bush at the back of the school on a little track and take the mail and deliver it.



I was only in grade 1 or 2. The school was Gerangamete school down the road from our house before it was shifted over to the Colac-Forrest Road. Mr Beaumont was the teacher and there was about 20 – 30 children going to school. Only one teacher and full time. This was in about 1941.

At the corner there were two hall's one being used as Sunday school. They used to hold dances in the hall there. The two halls had a partition between them. In the main hall there was a stage but in the other hall there was the kitchen and they did all the cooking in this one. If it was cold they

used to light the fire in there. The other room was also used for playing cards like Euchre or 500 and I remember Dad and a few other members putting lighting in the hall as before we had pressure kero lights.

Mr & Mrs Anderson ran the Post Office in 1941, an elderly couple.

Dad's father was sick and we left and moved to Irrewillipe and came back for a little while. I would have been in High School by then. I had to ride my bike to the Colac-Forrest Road and catch the bus.

The railway service was the Tiger. When I was about 12 or 13 I used to volunteer and collect the mail on a Saturday and school holidays and then take the mail back down to the Tiger at 5.00 at night. I used to hand the mail to the man who drove the Tiger at the crossover. Occasionally they used to use the big red one. But mostly it was the black and yellow motor car. The Big Red One we used to call the Tiger too. I remember it from the photo. I used to ride my bike down to the station.

I remember the railway station. Before you went over the railway line you turned to the left and went up there and the station and the shed was on the other side It was just a tin shed. It was unmanned and there was no gatehouse. This shed was for storing goods that were being sent out or delivered via the Tiger. The Tiger would stop and put produce in this shed. The mail bag wasn't left there, I would give the mail bag to the driver. I would sit on a gate post. You could hear the tiger coming by the noise on the rails,

both ways.

The telephone exchange was in the back of the post office in a little room out the back. Christine, the post mistress, could play the piano and had one in the back room.

The Hall and the Sunday school were burnt down at one stage. The Post Office was still standing

General mail to my knowledge was the only thing dealt with at the Post Office. Milk and bread would come out with the CDC. Mum or Dad would ring up and order bread. It was Bilson's at the time. The butcher was Flannagan's at the time. If we wanted meat they would take it around to our cream cans at the CDC and then it would be delivered to us. For other supplies we had to go to Forrest to deal with Mr Green and he was the shopkeeper at the time. I think I remember there was a dress shop or drapery or some type of thing there. We used to go to the pictures over there to the Hall.

WHAT ELSE WE FOUND?

~~The Gerangamete Hall was between the school and Meadowell Rd.~~

Frank Whitehead remembers sports meetings held on the Forrest side of the Gerangamete tennis courts.

The tennis club rooms has the memorial plaques for WW1 and WW2.

The full Gerangamete Data Sheet is available for \$3 incl. postage.

Early Settlement including Gerangamete Station, Roadnight, Dewing and other families is well covered in pages 7&13 of Pam Jennings's *Farming the Otways*.

Yes there was a **Rifle Range**, and to prove it Edna and Allan Crabbe produced the 1930 records with some recognizable names:

Aggregate for skins		
J Balcomb Capt	2	49 47
John Balcomb	1/2	50 47
G Barwick	2/4	47 41
B F Balcombe	2	49 50
W Hammond	2	46 41
P Hammond	2	48 47
A Hammond	2/6	50 48
J F Redward	2/4	0 48
J H Sullivan	2/6	0 0
A J Muir	2/6	33 43
A J Muir	2/6	50 50
F Crabb	1/6	38 0
C Crabb	1/6	45 0
J Wilson	1/6	0 0
B Back	1/6	27 0
C A Coastello		0 0
W J Pyle	2/6	47 47

most having paid their 2/6 d. They shot mainly 303s towards Forrest into a mound of earth with a trench below.

Audrey Miller provided our only photo of the **Gerangamete Railway Station**. Norman Houghton was able to tell us



that there was a **goods shed** on the west side of the line and from around 1900 to 1915 C. Fletcher operated a **sawmill** in the yard. We found the platform embankment and it was a **spectacular site to see 15 members'** cars driving off road to park at the railway station clearing. Several other **sawmills** operated in Gerangamete.

(See Document File: *Gerangamete Sawmills*, Norman Houghton.)

When Margaret Facey and Audrey Miller helped out by doing the mail run there was only a bush track between the station and the Post Office and it passed through a **swamp** which was sometimes impassable.

A **Sunday school** existed on the corner of Dewings Bridge Rd. and Seven Bridges Rd and later a **Recreation Hall** was moved there. Many members remembered the dances held there and the presentation nights for the **Gun Club**. (See Maree Lamanna's Book. *The Life and Times* etc.)

The former **School Site** is now heavily wooded but still owned by the Education Dept.

We viewed the former **Methodist Church** before proceeding to the **Tennis Club**. The club rooms feature **commemorative boards for soldiers in WW1 and WW2** from Gerangamete.



Happily these boards were rescued from potential destruction by Allan Crabbe who stored them at his home for a time. Delwyn Seebeck presented a copy of a booklet, *Gerangamete Tennis Club, the First 40 Years* for our library. It also contains some interesting information of the **Gerangamete schools** including a



Thirty one members attended our Gerangamete Day

On the East side of Seven Bridges Rd, about 300m north of Meadowell rd we were shown the site of the **Engineering Shop and Progress Association Hall** by Allan Crabbe.



Opposite and towards Forrest there was **Bill Reid's place** where **Sports Days** took place. Here's a woodchop.



Jim Speirs, Allan Crabbe, Dorothy Frizon and Edna Crabbe.

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Another Great Booklet



Following closely on the heels of **Hop Growing at Forrest** Pam Jennings has come up with another fascinating booklet, **Farming the Foothills**, covering Pennyroyal, Muroon, Barwon Downs and Gerangamete, with

lots of new and interesting information and some excellent photographs. It is available for \$11 incl. postage.



It is exciting to see the new Barwon Downs History Centre taking shape.

In support of its opening soon we have republished two out-of-print booklets on Barwon Downs history.



They were published to celebrate the Primary School 1888 to 1965 and to 1988 but contain a vast amount of town history including sawmilling, sport, churches, the railway, businesses etc. and include some enjoyable memories from former residents. Available for \$8 & \$11 inc. postage.



Once again David Widdowson has kindly donated a supply of his colourful and useful **astronomy calendars** for Society

fund raising. \$11 incl. postage.

Sadly, this month, we have lost another Forrest pioneer, **Bob Halliday** who had only recently celebrated his 100th birthday. Bob grew up in Forrest, moving to Barwon Downs in 1962. He was a proud member of Forrest's 1934 premiership side. In a birthday interview with the Colac Herald he



said " The secret to a good life is choosing the right parents..... It's been long but good life."

SOCIETY HELPERS



Our document archives took a giant leap forward when Jen and Ron Cunningham volunteered a day's work assembling material ready for entry in our data base. Thank you.



NEW LIGHT BEING THROWN ON HENRY'S NUMBER 1 MILL

Pam Jennings and Ros Mainland have located some interesting new references on Henry's No 1 Mill. A thesis by Peter Davies describes life at the Mill and the findings of an archaeological dig which took place there. He has also written a fascinating article on the life of the school teachers there:

For months at a time, a teacher is practically a prisoner in the gully, for he cannot get away, even on weekends, on account of the remoteness of the district.

Bernard Flood, teacher, 1914

Even the mill owner, WR Henry, acknowledged that the site was 'in an almost inaccessible Forest',²⁷ while a District School Inspector noted the 'wet weather, 6 months practically of very wet weather, and the mountainous character of the country'.²⁸ Another inspector recorded that the school was 'situated in an inaccessible part of the forest. There is no road to it; no horse can get over the mountains. The only way in is from Forrest by a sawmill tram'.

Preparations for the Christmas bazaar were under way months before the event. The girls, taught by Nina Branditt, sewed prizes for the occasion. The boys raised young plants to sell to mill residents and made dolls' cradles from lolly boxes. They also erected an 'Aunt Sally', a painted figure of a woman smoking a pipe, and on the day offered small prizes for a knock-down at four

shots for threepence. Mothers baked cakes and toffee, and made up jars of lollies and peanuts. The needlework pieces made by the sewing class were auctioned, before the schoolroom was cleared for the dance. Almost £30 was raised to buy books.

CAN YOU HELP OUR RESEARCH

John James has drawn attention to the fact that the **tunnel under Kanglang Rd** linking the West and East branches of the Barwon River was not built as part of the new dam in the 60's but was actually built around 1931. He believes that it was about 600 meters long, built by six men who started at either end and met in the middle without today's sophisticated technology. Can anyone help with information or photos? Who were they? What tools were available to them? Were explosives used? What did they do for light? Where was the water transported from and to? John would be pleased to hear from you.