

BROWN FAMILY

There were several families named Brown who settled in the Ringwood district, but the connections between them are vague. There was a Dennis Brown, a selector of 20 acres under Section 49 of the Act, whose land was in the vicinity of Mullum Creek between Oliver and Rupert Streets. Thomas Brown was supposedly 67 years of age (but actually about 74 years) when he died in, his wife, Maria, December 1922, and had lived in Ringwood since 1872.

Samuel Alexander, one of the eleven or more children of Thomas Brown, and the father of Sam, Henry, Lucy and Bill Brown, died on 4 October 1947, at the age of 67 years. He was born in the family home in Harrison Street and went to school in Heatherdale Road and later was in the new building in Ringwood Street. Until his marriage to Pauline Maria Delmo, Sam. worked for his parents on their orchard, but then had to find other employment, at first on the Healesville railway line and then in the city as a gripman on the cable trams. It was said of him that he was so tall that when seated in the cabin his head could not be seen.

About 1907, Sam returned to live on his own land over the creek from his parents, but continued to travel to Melbourne to work on the five o'clock morning-train until he managed to clear the property and plant an orchard. At that time, three loads of firewood weekly brought in £1.13s., and Sam also took on cartage contracting and carrying as a livelihood. His obituary claims he was 'probably the strongest man in Australia' and one of his cartage jobs was taking telephone and electricity poles to Templestowe and Lilydale which Sam Brown lifted end-on to the truck himself with ease. When Georges Hackenschmidt, 'the Russian lion', came to the Tivoli under contract to Henry Rickards, Sam wrestled with him, and on the occasion John Wren promoted the Jack Johnson fight at the Richmond Racecourse, Sam collected the sovereign placed under a 200lb. bag of flour for anyone who could raise it to his shoulder. Sam's wife died in 1960 at her home at 6 Bedford Road, aged 81 years, having lived in Ringwood for 50 years.

Ambrose J. Brown, an older brother of Sam Brown, lived in Ringwood for most of his adult life on the south side of Loughnan's Hill where he owned 52 acres which he bought at £ 1. 10s. an acre. His dwelling of two rooms was said to have been built with one bag of nails and one bag of cement! Saplings were used for sole plates and studs, and Wattles for laths, and the walls were made by plugging clay between the laths and trowelling it smooth. When dried it was washed down with cement. Scorched Stringybark for the roof and spouting, and slabs of timber for the floor, completed the bush hut. Two oil drums laid flat and set in clay were used for cooking.

Charlie Brown 1870 – 1952

When tracing the history of Charlie Brown of Waratah Bay, who died more than fifty years ago, I found it remarkable that so many people remembered tales of the man and in fact Charlie Brown himself. He made such an impression on this area so long ago.

When I telephoned Prue Fleming, the daughter of the late Dr Robbie Fleming of Foster, to ask about the history of "Waratah Village", she demanded to know if I was inquiring about Waratah, The Gap or Charlie Brown's? When I replied, "Charlie Brown's", she became extremely amenable and ready and willing to offer support.

Her mother Pattie Fleming recalled that "he was a long, lanky, silent fellow who grew wonderful strawberries".

On reading through accounts of the area written by or about residents of the area, many references were made to Charlie Brown.

Jim Williamson said, "I have friends who camped at Brown's Beach during the mid to late 1950s."

Gwen and John Cochrane said that John's father used to be a bank manager at Fish Creek. He could remember Charlie Brown coming into the bank with

Don Nicoll advised that Charlie fished in the rocks between Cooks Creek and Walkerville. There was a narrow entrance into the rocks and when the tide was coming in, so too would the cod. Charlie would put a chaff bag at the entrance and, at the right time, one might get half-a-dozen fish in the rock pool.

From Dr Wilson's notes in the Foster Museum; "Another delightful character who lived at Waratah was Charlie Brown who had brilliant blue eyes and an equally brilliant sense of humour. He, too, had once worked at the kilns but latterly lived about four miles around the beach towards The Gap where he grew superb strawberries at the spot that has become known as 'Charlie Brown's'.

"Waratah had its share of old identities, and many colourful personalities have lived a hermit-like existence around the shores. These men lived alone, supplementing their pensions by panning for gold and ever ready to spin a yarn to any gullible listeners," the doctor wrote.

Mick Ryan recalled, that when under the influence. Charlie would

could spend an hour standing on the corner of Collins and Elizabeth Streets and would see all of Dickens' characters marching past. Charlie told me that his father sailed the first sailing boat coming into Port Phillip Bay and that he was the captain," Keane said. (Author's note: I cannot find any such record. Charlie Brown's father was an orchardist, according to Charlie's death certificate).

"Charlie enjoyed a drink. Most of his friends were non-drinkers. But alcohol never effected him adversely. He was always a gentleman. He was a great fisherman and would walk to Shallow Inlet to fish mostly for flathead. He was also a good reader," Keane remembered.

Charlie Nicholl knew Charlie Brown fairly well, and recalled that, "he did a lot of work building the sea wall for Harry Murray. He was a fine looking man – over six feet tall. A lean, hard man and a great fossicker. He washed for gold below Cooks Creek for pocket money. He walked to Fish Creek through the bush to get his bread and beef. He used to have a cat. Old Bill Falls came to

A collection of memories and anecdotes

By Joan Newman

Creek district. He used to go on the tear occasionally as they all did in those days.

"He could generally be found at the Fish Creek Post Office on a Thursday, which of course was pension day. Sid Barry was the postmaster at the time. Charlie never expressed his views on politics but delighted in joining the queue to collect any mail, particularly when all the local women were congregated there, there was a chat. When his turn came, Sid Barry would say, 'no mail for you today Charlie' ... 'what?' said Charlie, 'no letter from Moscow?', much to the consternation of the local housewives!" Terry said.

"Charlie had a brother who was a fruiterer at Footscray. I learned of this about 1924 when my eldest brother joined the Police Force and was stationed at Footscray. The policemen often chatted to local shopkeepers on his rounds and when talking to the fruiterer who asked him where he came from and he mentioned Fish Creek, the fruiterer said, 'oh I've got a brother up there somewhere.' Charlie would buzz off occasionally to see his

planted with cement to make it rainproof, and caught water from the roof. He felt Charlie's great success with his strawberries, was due to the fact he burned the seaweed and used the ash to feed the fruit.

"Charlie also worked for Dick Skinner and on one occasion he was working with my father, who always ascertained from the Department of Agriculture as to how he could improve anything," he said.

"The Department planted potatoes on our farm and Mr Whelan was in charge of planting, digging and weighing the potatoes. He was assisted by Charlie and by Dick Burns, who was known as 'Dick the Devil' because he had been shot up badly in the First World War and his face was badly distorted. Dick and Charlie knocked about together and would often go prospecting – even up to the gravel pits, around Amber Creek and Cooks Creek."

Terry said Charlie was also well-known for the large overcoat he often wore – at all times of the year. He claimed it kept him warm in the winter

Brown's. He gave me a strawberry or two and I thought that was great. Charlie supplemented his income with his little 'extras'."

Ashton Farrell recalled that, "Charlie would collect seaweed and he had a rack on which to hang and dry it and then burn it and dig it into the soil – potash.

"I can visualise him in a big heavy army coat. He was a big man – broad shoulders. I thought him to be very old in the late 1930s or early 1940s. I think he left Waratah Bay about eight years before his death.

He washed for gold after a big storm down by Cooks Creek. His hut was along Halls Creek. I was not frightened of him – he was a gentleman," he said.

From various references: "Charlie Brown lived for many years along the beach towards McPhersons Creek where the current Caravan Park now stands."

"The remnants of a well he had remain on the side of the hill. He planted Boobialla trees

to protect his garden."

Jim Wilson claims that Brown Street in Waratah Bay is named after Charlie Brown.

Charlie Brown was Waratah Bay's first beachcomber and his little terrier dog was well known for miles around.

There was a move sometime ago to have Waratah Bay renamed "Charlie Brown" but this was dropped.

Charlie Brown died at Bairnsdale on 27 February 1952.

He wanted his creek to become a pleasant camping park for families one day and in support of this idea he worked at clearing a track along the creek and beautifying it in anyway he could.

Years later, of course, it did develop far beyond Charlie Brown's dreams.

A monument to Charlie Brown is currently being installed in Gale Street at Waratah Bay, with the support of the South Gippsland Shire, the Foster and District Historical Society Incorporated and the local community.