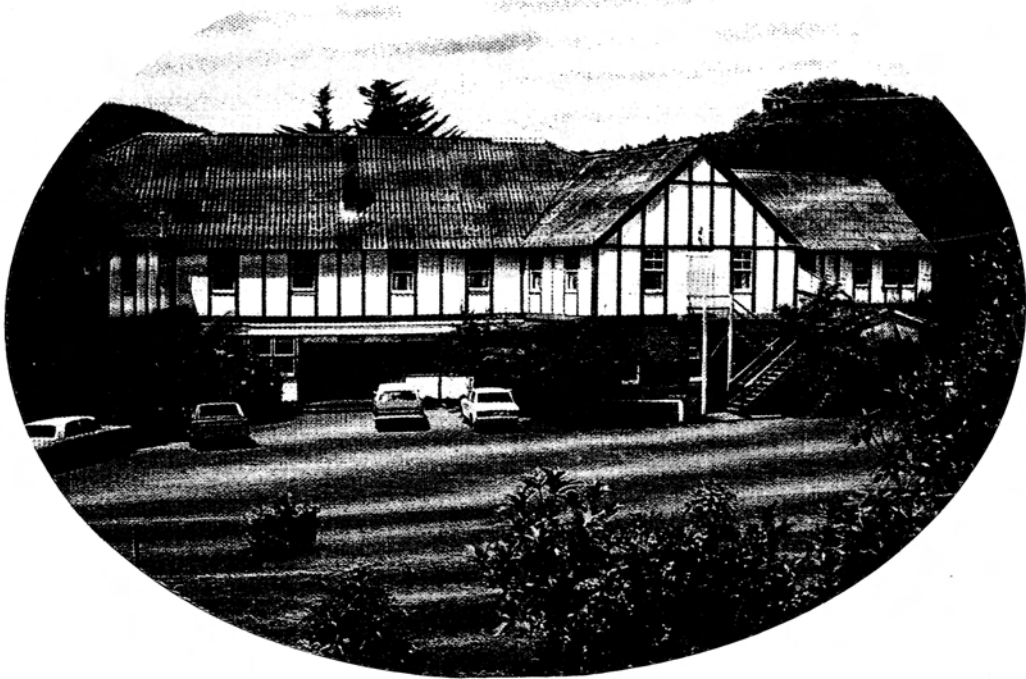


The Mary Chain Of Guesthouses



Compiled by Carol Loomes

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THE MARY CHAIN OF GUEST HOUSES

Mr. J. E. Dowdle and his wife Rita came to beautiful Marysville in the late 1920's to establish the Mary Chain of Guest Houses. Having run a hardware business in Brighton, a suburb of Melbourne, this Jewish Builder and his wife decided to turn their interests towards developing tourism and hospitality within this beautiful mountain village. Marysville is situated within The Great Dividing Range, one and a half hours drive from Melbourne (95 kilometres) and offers holiday makers rest and refreshment, as well as snow skiing, horse riding, bush walking, rock climbing and fishing.

Note 1

Mr. Dowdle's wife Rita was related to the "Griffith Tea" family. They had two children of their own, Allen and Lindsay. They later fostered three children, Frank, Norman and Violet Bones, after their mother was tragically killed in a horse and buggy accident in Richmond, near the 'Skipping Girl' vinegar factory. The Bones family were business people in the Caulfield area. The two boys, Frank and Norman, were cared for in a Children's Home until working age. They were then employed by Mr. Dowdle in various capacities around the guest houses, but mainly as Chefs at Marylands and at Maryport until WW11, when they both enlisted in the armed services, then later returned to Marysville.

Note 2

Note 3

Mr. Dowdle built six guest houses in the depression years when work was scarce and wages were low. He employed both local and non-local, skilled and un-skilled people to work for him. He would get groups of 10-20 men and send them to different job locations. After WWII about 1945 onwards Mr. Dowdle would set up Managers in the guest houses by assisting them to purchase or lease from him as the tourism industry was re-established.

In 1935 Mr. Dowdle purchased land at the Taggerty bridge together with an adjoining piece of crown land, giving him access rights to the river for household water and for generating electricity. Mr Dowdle ran his own electricity supply for all the guest houses, using water from Stevenson's River in an open water race made of dirt. He would use a turbine to generate electricity to Mary Meadows guest house. He also built a water wheel on the Stevenson's River at the base of Stevenson's Falls behind the football oval, which supplied electricity carried on poles and lines to the three guest houses; Mary Lands, Mary Lodge and Mary Lyn in Marysville. All the guest houses were built with septic tanks.

Note 4

Note 5

Mr Arnold Spooner and his brother inlaw, Arthur Dickinson, came to Marysville from Melbourne to do electrical wiring for the guest houses. Mr Spooner bought a block of land near the Marysville hall and built a house with a shop annexed out front selling fruit and vegetables. Mr. Dickinson became involved in the hospitality industry managing a guest house on the Buxton Road Marysville.

Note 6

The "Mary" chain of houses, all with modern amenities, prospered through the depression years. When business began to drop off during winter, Mr. Dowdle bought a Cadillac tour bus to ferry his guests to Cumberland Valley. As snow sports became a popular past-time, he

Note 7

would take them to the snow fields on Lake Mountain. In 1926 a new route connecting Marysville to Warburton called "The Acheron Way" was completed, cutting through the O'Shannessy river catchment area, across the Great Dividing Range into Acheron country. Before WW11, Mr. Dowdle bought three Packard cars with extended chasis, two which carried eleven passengers and another which carried seven passengers. Mr Dowdle started up the "Marysville Tours", a bus company that was licensed, owned and operated by the Dowdle's. He ran local half day bus tours around the district to Lake Mountain, Cumberland Falls, Stevenson Falls, Acheron Way, Alexandra and Eildon, for the exclusive use of the Mary Chain of Guest Houses. The town also boasted a second bus company called "Mountain Tours Pty Ltd" which was owned and operated by Laurie and Mary Mac Kenzie of Mackenzie Motors, Marysville.

Mr. Dowdle continued to expand on his interests in Marysville by building a horse stable in the street behind Mary Lyn. This provided 20-30 horses for a riding school for all the guest houses. To provide food for the horses, Mr Dowdle purchased some 20 foot high haystacks at Acheron. Mr. Dowdle then employed a travelling chaff cutter to cut the hay stacks into chaff for his riding stables. One day he didn't have any bags to put his chaff into, so he asked Ken Fiske, then only 16 years old, to ask his father Fred Fiske Snr. for some bags, as he had a hay and grain store at "Carmyle", Buxton. Mr. Dowdle let Ken drive the Hudson motor vehicle to obtain the bags to be used to store chaff, a 14 mile trip from Marysville to Acheron. One day as Ken and another worker were loading the chaff cutter with a pitch fork and getting to the bottom of the stack, they found a very agitated Tiger snake, which they picked to death.

There was quite a skill to hay stacking. Usually one person would specialize in starting and stacking. A hay stack was commenced from a central point, on level ground or a timber floor, which is continuously raised from this point so water will run off to ensure the hay stack would not rot. Turning the sheaves is another specialized skill. The sheaves were laid in order and continued to be built up making sure the center was raised so as to remain water tight. Travelling Chaff Cutters would come to the district and cut the hay and then bag or bin it.

In those days a bachelor named Paddy Lovett Nancy Lovett's uncle, lived in a little hut near Fred and Vi's cottage behind Mary Meadows guest house. All the worker's needs were supplied by Mr. Dowdle from his guest house, Maryland's. Fred Fiske Junior was Farm Manager and oversaw the supply of food grown for the houses and the piggy. Les Thomas, nick named 'Pumpkin', was in charge of picking up Paddy and Ken and getting the daily food supply for workers from Marylands and taking it down to Acheron near Taggerty, in time to have the Billy boiling for lunch.

Mr. Dowdle also had the foresight to see the need to enhance his business and the township within the district, so he purchased land across the road from Mary Meadows on the Buxton-Marysville Road and developed a nine hole golf course. Mr. Dowdle purchased this land from Fred Fiske senior's sister, Zoe, and husband, Fred Tucker, who was the Senior Constable at Marysville. Paddy Lovett worked as a green keeper at this golf course for many years. Somewhere between 1953-1973 a golf professional, from Melbourne Norm Murphy

owned and ran the Guesthouse for a short time, but unfortunately it never really was successful. The golf club struggled for many years. It originally had an honesty box for people to pay their dues, but it was not until volunteers daily manned the door that finances improved. When in 1973 the Dowdle estate was wound up, the golf club bought the nine holes and later added another nine holes and bowling club, with the voluntary assistance of local people.

Mr. Dowdle was quite a character in his own right. He was known to wear his jumpers back to front. Some timber for the construction of the guest houses was carted from the local Mt. Ash forests by horse and dray. Mr. Dowdle was known to cut the messmate timber beams with a broad axe and just guess the angle to cut! He used cheap timber and sometimes used a tree stump if it was in the road of a bearer. Mr. Dowdle's philosophy was that a 2 inch nail would hold up 2 tonne of weight. Locals, Stan and Percy Postlewaite would also cut these huge beams 30-40 foot long by 15-23 inches thick, to be used in the construction.

Mr. Dowdle's family lived in Toorack and apparently one day they had a goat that escaped. When Mr. Dowdle found it quite some distance from the home, he brought it home on the local tram, much to everyone's amusement. One time Mr. Dowdle gave his chauffeur driven Rolls Royce to his grand-daughter, Helen to drive her children to school as her old car was falling apart. Note 8

Mr. Dowdle and his wife Rita had two sons, Lindsay and Allen who were all involved with the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The eldest son Lindsay was a builder when he married Gwen Foot and they lived in a home on Fall's Road. They had one child, a daughter Helen Simension (her married name). The second son, Allen Dowdle (also a builder) married Conny and had three sons and lived in the Mt Martha area. Note 9

Frank Bones was very much a man into detail. He enjoyed playing the saxophone and it was his love of music which ultimately introduced him to his future wife, Sheila. Sheila was employed by the Dowdle's as a pianist, as well as for general duties. They were mainly based at Marylands, but did play at other guest houses. During WWII, Frank enlisted in the armed services in the Army Store Room Division. Upon returning from the war, he managed Mary Lyn Guest House. Thereafter, he moved from Marysville to work with Ansett Airways in the Catering Division. Frank became the General Manager of a chain of Hotels owned by Reg Ansett. Thereafter Mr. Bones went into administration in the tourism industry for Reg Ansett on Fraser Island, restoring the island after a tornado had devastated it.

Norm Bones, like his brother Frank, started work at Marylands but often worked at Mary Port at Mt Martha before WWII. After the war he managed Mary Meadows (now Elkanah) for 2-3 years. Norm married Thelma, whom he met whilst working at the guest houses. Norm and Thelma had two sons and two daughters. They then moved to Albury where Norm worked as a chef in the Albury Hospital and later moving back to Marysville where they went into partnership with Fred and Violet Fiske running Marylyn for some 10-15 years. Finally they bought "The Cross Ways" Cabaret and Restaurant on the Stevenson's River until retiring.

Violet Bones worked for Mr. Dowdle as a private maid at Marylands and sometimes she worked at Mary Port at MT Martha. She married Frederick Fiske Jnr. a resident of Buxton who worked as Farm Manager for the Dowdle's at Marylands. Mr. Dowdle built a little cottage behind Mary Meadows which Fred and Vi lived in and had three children, Kingsley, Shirley and Norman. It burnt down many years later.

MARYLANDS

Marylands was the first 120 bed guest house to be built in March 1928 in the Mary chain and was subsequently the home for the Dowdle family and headquarters for the future business developments. Mr. Dowdle's nephew Berry Higgs started work at Marylands as an office boy and later managed most of the business ventures of the Dowdle empire. It is believed that the Dowdles purchased an existing property and ^{burnt down} home of 4-5 acres from the Jellicoe family, called "Wych Cross". This home was badly burnt just before Mr. Dowdle purchased it. Marylands, like all of the Mary Chain of Guest Houses, started with a small main section with extensions built on later as required. In the mid 1950's, Jack and Leslie Haycraft purchased and ran it for many years. The Haycraft's, having previously worked at "Marybrook" in Sherbrooke, were very much involved with the Marysville community. During the war years Mary Land was used by a private girls school, ^{M.E.S.S.} ~~Tinturn~~, while their school in Melbourne was used by the air force for unit training, route marches, Officer rest and relaxation, leave etc.

Note 10

Note 11

MARYLYN

Marylyn was the second guest house to be built in Lylle Street in 1930's. Mr. Dowdle built the shell of Mary Lyn and completed the bottom level, the dining room and kitchen first, then used the upper level as a work area where he made the furniture for all the guest houses. During WWII, Mary Lyn was used by the School for the Deaf and Dumb. In about 1952-53, Norm and Thelama Bones and Fred and Vi Fiske went into partnership and purchased Marylyn and operated it for 10-15 years. In that time their third son, Glen, was born. In the years that followed family and friends including myself were able to enjoy working holidays their waiting on the tables, helping in the kitchen, laundry, house cleaning or office reception work while leisure time was often spent in the swimming pool or at the stables. The weekends were great fun with organised dances, fancy dress or games nights. Norm Bones took up an opportunity to purchase "The Crossways" Caberete and Restaurant while Fred and Vi continued to run Mary Lyn until Fred's retirement after which his son Norman and his wife Rose ran it until they sold it to Malcolm Reid. Mr. Reid was first introduced to Mary Lyn on family holidays, later evolving into working holidays while attending teachers college and university over the next four years. Later he moved to Drouin operating a Richmond based coach company before moving to Marylyn. He decided to upgrade with extensions to the main building and more recent developments of a bowling centre, inground pool area and covered walk ways to link it all, successfully catering for the "fifty and over" segment of the tourist market to this present day.

Note 12

MARY LODGE (originally Kerami)

Mary Lodge, previously known as 'Kerami' was situated on the Cumberland Road and was purchased, renovated, extended and re-named by the Dowdles. Jim and Madge Walker, Ken Fiske's uncle and aunt, managed this guest house after WWII (1944-1949). They later

purchased a guest house called 'Dudley House' in Hepburn Springs, in partnership with his sister, Louisa Williams (nee Walker).

MARY MEADOWS (later known as 'The Golf House', now 'Elkanah')

Around 1934-35 it started with a main central structure, using hardwood from the Vic Oaks Sawmill, about 1 mile from where it was located on the Marysville-Buxton Road. Then left, and later, right wings were added. Thereafter, the dining room upstairs and the lounge room, downstairs (under the dining room). Mr Dowdle later dug out under the left and right wings to add more bedrooms, which Ken Fiske worked upon in 1934. For many years the left wing was not completed, but sometimes the Hampton Rovers would use it. They eventually, buildt a Scout Hall near the Stevenson's River on Dickerson's track. Mr Dowdle built the nine hole golf links to enhance the region and his business. A Scottish batechlor , Paddy Lovett worked as Greenkeeper for many years. Paddy later worked as general maintenance and rouse-about, keeping the fires burning. Paddy lived in a little hut out the back of Mary Meadows, near Fred and Vi's cottage. There was a little bit of a story about Paddy that whenever it was time for Mr Dowdle to sack (put off) some of his workers, he would have them sit in the old wood house and boiler room at Mary Meadows and Paddy would always sit on the end seat, near the door. When Mr Dowdle pointed the finger, along the line, saying " it is time you caught the bus out of here" Paddy would quietly slip off the end seat and go around the corner. That way he never lost his job! Mr. Dowdle started a Dairy and Pig Farm to supplement the houses, building a milking shed and pigery behind the guest house. The cows were grazed on paddocks near the golf links.

After WWII in about 1948, Norm and Thelma Bones managed Mary Meadows for about three years and then went to Albury Hospital as chef. About 1950-56 Alex and Rene (nee Fiske) Sievers, with their two children, Robert and Ann, were caretakers and lived there rent free. While Aunty Rene was there my cousin Shirley and myself used to have many happy holidays there and one of the fun times was waxing the dining room floor and then putting on lots of thick woollen socks and skating all over the floor to polish it up. Alex worked in the timber industry, as a driver with Bill Walker, who was a "Bush Boss" for Cooks Timber Mills. Whilst caretaking, the Essendon Baptist Girls Club and the Police Boys Club (9-10 year olds) and some Catholic nuns stayed there on weekends. Mr. Dowdle stayed there from Monday to Friday to renovate Mary Meadows for possible sale to the army, which did not ultimately eventuate. Alex was offered a job in Tasmania with Cooks Timber Company. Alex and Rene had a son John, while in Tasmania.

Somewhere between 1953-73, a golf professional from Melbourne called Norm Murphy ran Mary Meadows as the Golf Guesthouse. A small portion of the house was used as a Guesthouse (the remainder was in very bad disrepair). The Guesthouse was vacant for some time, until 1974 when it was leased by a group of men from the Eastleigh Gospel Chapel (who formed a 'company limited by guarantee') for three years, paying \$1,000 per annum. The company later purchased the property in the 1980's. From 1976 - 1979 volunteers worked to build the outstanding facility that stands on the property today.

In 1975, Pastor Graeme and Julie Cann arrived at the property and were Directors of the El-Kanah Christian Community for the next 16 years. More than 3,000 people a year came

through the newly renovated house. Most of the guests were participants in Church camps, some guests came mid-week and as part of a residential counselling ministry established by El Kanah.

The 15 acres of land adjoining El Kanah was also owned by Mr Murphy and was later purchased by the Evangelization Society of Australia (now known as ESA Country Ministries). The Cann's later moved to Melbourne with their family in 1996.

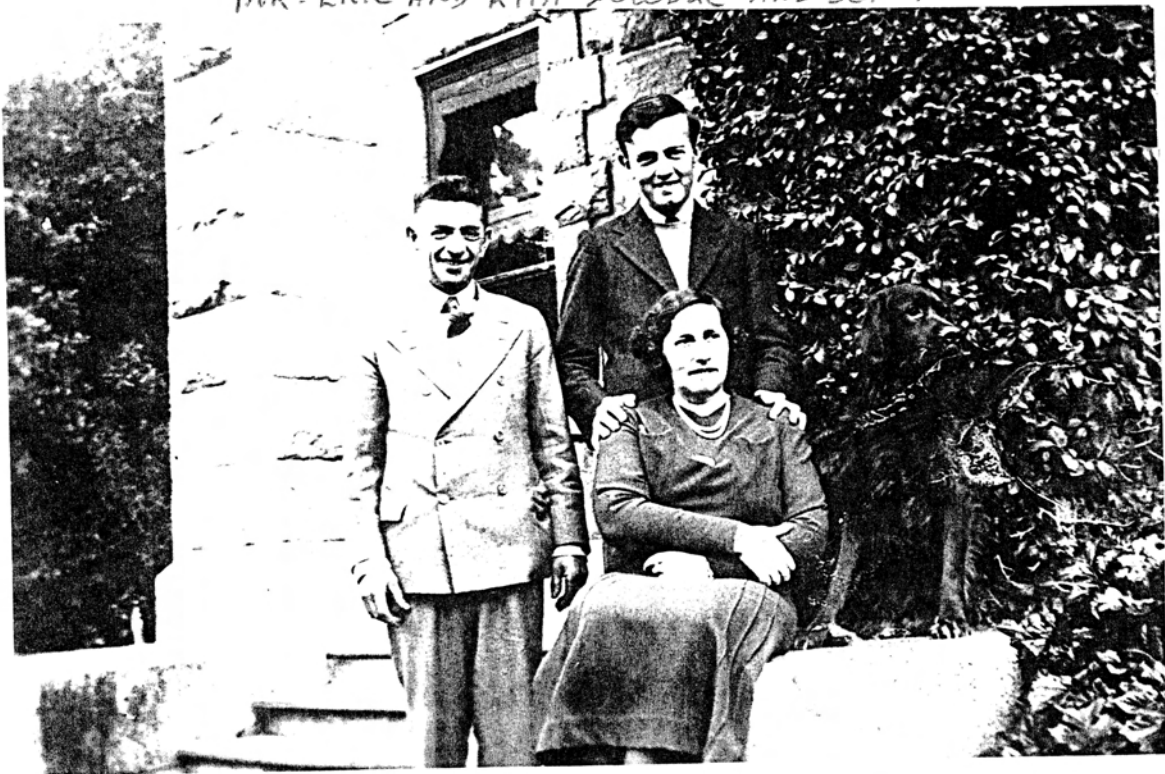
MARY BROOK (now 'Barron of Beef')

Mary Brook is located in the Dandenong Ranges. Vi Fiske remembers as a young girl, driving back from Mt Martha with Mr. Dowdle when he suddenly stopped the car and disappeared into the bush to look at a run down granite building. Mr Dowdle later purchased the building to renovate and extend. This property was run by quite a character by the name of John McClure. The Haycraft's ran it for a short time after. Mary Brook was one of the first guest houses to be sold.

MARY PORT

Mary Port was located at Mt Martha and was originally part of a private Estate. Mr. Slim Duncan, a keen footballer who was in charge of operations recalls how Mr. Dowdle (being an unassuming character) when explaining to Slim about some renovations, would draw the plans in the dirt, only to have them blown away by the wind. Mr Dowdle would walk away and say "I'll see you soon". Mr. Dowdle owned several race horses and had some involvement in Mornington race course also. Allan and Lindsay Dowdle and Norm and Violet Bones all worked at the guest house at some stage as well as a house keeper named Miss. Gun. During WWII the army used the guest house as a Rehabilitation Hospital.

MR. ERIC AND RITA POWDLE AND SON ALLEN



GROUP AT
MARY MEADOWS
LEFT. PADDY LOVETT



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Note 1: Can find no evidence he was Jewish. He married according to the rites of the Congregational church and stated he was a Baptist in his World War 1 enrolment.

A Presbyterian minister conducted his funeral in 1964, and he is buried at Springvale Cemetery.

Conversation in 2021 with Kingsley Fiske - his father said he was not Jewish although many thought so.

Note 2: A search has found no connection. Needs further study.

Note 3: Accident involved a car and a tram in Bridge Road, not near Skipping Girl factory which was in Victoria Street, Richmond. Newspaper articles from 1922.

Note 4: 1935 Land for Mary Meadows. Details for water and electricity as per remainder of paragraph.

Note 5: Steavenson River and Steavenson Falls.

Note 6: Arthur Dickinson was already in Marysville. His father built the family guest house Marysville House on the Buxton Road, where his son Peter still lives (2026).

Note 7: In 1930 Eric formed the company Marysville Tours P/L.

Note 8: The Dowdle's lived in Sandringham until 1927, then moved to Marysville and finally Mt Martha. No member of the family ever lived in Toorak.

Eric was quite a character, and many fanciful stories sprang up about him.

Note 9: Seventh Day Adventist Church? This may refer to his sons.

Note 10: Wyche Cross was burnt down in 1926. Although Jellicoe considered rebuilding it, he did not and Eric purchased the property.

Note 11: Melbourne Girls Grammar School – also known as MEGGS or Merton Hall - did evacuate to Marysville during the World War 2.

Tintern in Hawthorn did not evacuate to Marysville.

Note 12: Lyell Street.