

FEIGLIN'S SAWMILL

BY MR J FEIGLIN

The firm of M. Feiglin & Sons Nominees Pty Ltd with its present Headquarters in Nunawading, had its early beginnings in 1912 with the arrival of Moses Feiglin in Melbourne. Not content with city life he yearned for the country life he had been used to in the land of Palestine. So with a number of fellow pioneers, he took up orcharding in Shepparton. In 1913, his wife and five young children, came from Palestine to join him.

The war years of 1914-1918 were difficult years for the young pioneers, but by 1922 the young trees on the orchard bore fruit. The fruit required cases to be packed in before they were sold at the Melbourne Fruit Market.

Together with fellow orchardists, an eleven ton railway track of shooks was ordered from a sawmill at Neerim Junction. This was to contain material to make up twelve hundred fruit cases. Each orchardist ordered a certain number of case shooks, and together they required just twelve hundred. To everyone's surprise, an eighteen ton truck of shooks arrived containing sufficient material to make eighteen hundred cases. Moses Feiglin was compelled to dispose of the balance of the order to other orchardists as all the co-partners in the venture refused to take anymore than their original order.

Trying to sell the extra six hundred case shooks resulted in orders coming in to him for eighteen thousand. This number kept doubling itself every subsequent fruit season so that by 1927, it was necessary to buy a sawmill to ensure that sufficient supplies for his case business. A sawmill was bought from Messrs Elliot & Dibb who had a mill with sufficient power on the Dee Creek in Millgrove.

Whilst his eldest son, Abraham, went back to Palestine to help his grandparents on their farm at Metoulah in the Gallil, and Joseph, the third son, went off to study science at Melbourne University, the second son, Judah, spent some time every week at Millgrove to supervise the reconstructed case mill, which was managed by Mr Alf Smith. The rest of his time was spent with the family orchard in Shepparton.

The young area of private forest at Millgrove only lasted about three years before being cut out and a sawmill was bought from Messrs Drain & Anderson. This was situated above Powelltown, and had been cutting building timber. The serious depression in the early thirties resulted in most mills in the area being closed. Despite no sales of timber for twelve months

the Feiglin's Mill continued to work throughout, with married men being employed full-time and single men half-time.

As the recession was lifting, Feiglin's introduced Progressive Kilns for drying case shooks on a site near the Powelltown siding. Here, and in close co-operation with dedicated officers from the CSIR, and with their guidance, much was learnt about kiln drying and reconditioning of hardwood timbers (Eucalypts) cut into case shooks. In fact the early pamphlets issued by the forest section of CSIR on kiln drying hardwoods contained, and were partly based upon, information gained from the experiments within our kilns. In this project of kiln drying many teenagers from the surrounding areas were given much needed employment.

Joseph Feiglin took particular interest in these sincere earnest teenagers, and his guidance and efforts were adequately rewarded when he witnessed the progress made by these youngsters, some of whom eventually attained important managerial appointments with well-established companies.

From Powelltown, Feiglin & Sons moved to the Acheron Way with the acquisition, resulting from tender of 'Tim's' old site, along the Acheron Way. There during the 1930's and during the war years, Feiglin's No.1 and No.2 (and later No.3) mills were operating.

This, of course, was interrupted with the disastrous bushfires of 1939, when mills, houses and kilns were destroyed on the night of January 10th. Families living at the mills were evacuated to Narbethong on the Tuesday afternoon before the fires reached the mill. The men, including the brothers Judah and Joseph Feiglin, were saved in dugouts which were constructed summer months not too near the mill, during the early of 1939.

A concerted co-operative effort by employees, employers and the community resulted in Feiglin's No.2 Mill being rebuilt and operating within one month of the fire. No.1 Mill with Seasoning Works were completed several months later. A lowering-gear and a No.3 Mill was also constructed later. When No.3 Mill (a diesel mill) was required for the war effort, it was dismantled and sent to New Guinea, where an Australian team, including some Victorians, operated it.

When a creeping fire from the boiler and up the sawdust chute burnt the No.1 Mill again, we rebuilt it on a site out of the bush in Narbethong township. This mill, as well as a later twin edger mill, is still in operation.

The Mansfield mill was established near the middle of the century. Not long after this, the head of our company passed away. The younger members of the family, David, Aaron and Samuel were now actively associated with the

older brothers, Abraham, Judah and Joseph in the orchard, sawmilling and timber merchandising activities.

Nunawading was chosen for the site of our Headquarters, and a gang frame mill was erected there. Kilns for drying sawn timber, and moulding mills to process the dried timber, were erected. Most of the Mansfield production was directed to Nunawading for sale as green OB, or for treatment through the kilns and moulding mills to supply quality furniture timber, mouldings and flooring.

The Mansfield mill in its early formative years was powered by oil engines, and was managed by Ted Taylor, who came across from the Narbethong mill to take charge. Logs from remote areas beyond Mansfield, were carted to the mill by contractors with their motor trucks. Likewise, falling, logging etc was achieved through contractors. As time went on, logging syndicates were the means of supplying syndicate millers with their log supplies. This co-operative method was successful, and continues still, because syndicate members have mutual trust and interests.

Over thirty five years of the mill's existence hundreds of thousands of dollars were expended on road making, in opening up the bush for log extraction.

Many years ago Mansfield mill was electrified and this proved much better than oil power.

When Mr Ted Taylor retired, Mr Tom O'Meara managed the mill and now, in his retirement, still maintains contact with us. He was succeeded as mill manager by Mr Frank Crathern, who is currently in charge, assisted in the bush by Mr Ron Preiser.

Log allocations were reduced from time to time as the areas with available logs became smaller and fewer. The withdrawal of large areas of Alpine Ash for the development of the continuous Alpine Park greatly aggravated the insufficiency of log supplies.

It is indeed a great pity that a large part of what the Creator had supplied to the world for everyone's use should be commandeered by the conservationists. Properly managed forests can surely be utilised for all at the same time, provided there is mutual understanding, co-operation, responsibility and trust.

With the passing of Mr Judah Feiglin in 1969, much of the mechanical and engineering work associated with the family business is continued by Mr Samuel Feiglin, and all the Feiglin brothers still share in the running of the various sectors of the business known as, M. Feiglin & Sons Nominees Pty Ltd.

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