

MEMORIES OF ANDERSONS MILL & WILKS CREEK STATE SCHOOL 1940-1946

BY JIM BROWN

I was born in Melbourne early in 1935 and at that time my parents lived at Andersons No.1 Mill outside of Marysville.

The mill, producing mainly Mountain Ash sawn timber , was situated on Wilks Creek and was established some years prior to 1935. My knowledge of it really started in 1939, when I remember being put into a car along with other children and mothers and being taken to Marysville, because bushfires were coming. Transport was very limited in those days and I don't know who owned the car we were in. The mill was about 5 kilometres from Marysville and partly over rough bush roads. We were taken to the hotel in Marysville and I can remember seeing the fires burning on the hills surrounding the town that night.

The mill and most of the workers houses were lost in the bushfires. There were a large number of timber stacks and sawn boards drying and these were all lost, along with the Wilks Creek State School, which was also burnt down.

After the fires were over we returned to live at the No.2 Mill, which had not been burnt out, so timber production continued. The No.1 Mill was rebuilt and the housing re-established, while we were living at the No.2 Mill. My father left Andersons and went to work at the Cumberland Mill, later to be known as Cambarville. This mill was established at the time and we lived in two tents until housing was built. I don't remember how long we lived there for, but it couldn't have been very long as we did correspondence school and I was in grade 1 when we returned to live at the Andersons No.1 Mill, which was in full swing again.

My sister Eileen and I started school at Wilks Creek State School. On the first day of school the teacher, Mr Frank Austin, said to me, "good morning James". This was the first time anyone had ever called me James and the memory of this has remained with me all my life.

The school was a one roomed building with a shelter shed room attached. It had a black board across one end wall over an open fire place. There were about 15 desks of sizes ranging from small, to medium, to large, for grades 1 through to 8. It was normal to leave school in those days when you finished grade 8. At the time I was at this school World War II was going on and we had a succession of teachers. To the best of mine and my sister's knowledge

they were, Mr Frank Austin, Miss Lee, Mr Roy Southwell, Mr Colin Album, Mr Brenton Smith, and Mr Alexander Craig. There were other teachers there after we left. Some of them were Mr Bernie Goodwin, Mr Don Prentice, Mr Kevin Rye, and Mr George Bryan, who I think was the last teacher there.

We often had bush nature study walks with the teacher to look for birds, unusual plants and fungi. We would at times have competitions to find the longest gum leaves or other bush items. We would take our lunch and leave early and I am sure the teacher enjoyed these days as much as we did.

In the winter we often had snow and the school was heated by the open fire place burning wood. On one occasion the teacher told two of the bigger boys to build up the fire, so Horrie Wilson and Kevin Webb stacked the wood up high. When it got burning it became too hot and the black board and the timber behind it started to burn. It was extinguished with water and had to be rebuilt.

The Wilks Creek School opened on the 20th September 1936, with head teacher Miss Jean Young. It was closed on the 10th June 1955, when only two pupils remained.

My brother Mick, who is 10 years older than me, spent most of his school days at Wilks Creek and my sister Eileen, who is 5 years older than me, spent all her school days at Wilks Creek as well. I went to Wilks Creek from grade 1 through to grade 6. My younger brother Tom went to Wilks Creek from grade 1 through to grade 4.

The Mill Settlement, at both No.1 and No.2 Mills, were driven by steam engines. There were a number of single men's huts along the creek side of the mill. There was a boarding house with a number of rooms in it. There were, as I remember, 14 other houses, which were supplied with water from a water race, which ran from Wilks Creek along the top side of the settlement. Each house had a smaller water race to the house, which continued down to re-join the creek again, this race also supplied the school.

There was a small dam up from the settlement which supplied water to the mill. There was no electric power, so lighting was from kerosene lamps or candles. People living in the houses had to supply their own stoves, baths, coppers and wash tubs. The women did the washing by boiling it in the copper and then used a wash board to rub clothes up and down it. No rent was charged for the houses.

On the 15th March 1945 my father, Alfred Edgar 'Mick' Brown, sustained an injury in an accident while pulling logs with a crawler tractor in the Acheron Valley below the No.2 Mill. He had trouble with the connections to the log he was pulling and the wire rope came off, so he drove the tractor around to

hook it up again. The tractor picked up a branch, which then swung up and hit him on the head. He was unconscious and Bib Gale and George Webb ran to stop the machine and the men working with him, carried him back to the mill, which was a very long distance. George Webb took him to Healesville to Doctor Phillips, who told him to go straight to Royal Melbourne Hospital. There was no Ambulance Service at that time. My father died without regaining consciousness on the 17th March 1945. He was just 41 years of age.

The mill we lived at was owned by a group called C.J. Rowe, Webb and Anderson, but we just knew it as Andersons Mill.

The Andersons.

My memories of the Andersons go back as far as I can remember. There was, as all us kids knew him, the blacksmith named 'Old Ned'. He was also known as 'the Grey Bull'.

He was always going to kick our arses for something or other, but he never did. All of the kids around the mill would often be with him in the blacksmith shop, pumping the bellows or holding the horse while he put some new shoes on them. He was a very good smithy and made anything that was required by the mill.

The logs came from Mount Bismark (later renamed Mount Kitchener). They were lowered down a rail line, which we called 'the gravity', and were then pulled some 3 miles by horse team to the mill on what was called, 'the bogeys', which ran on a tram line. 'Old Ned' made all the bogeys. He always had a couple of horses that he rode around the bush.

Around the end of World War II he purchased an oxy welding outfit, with metal cylinders, some lengths of hoses and welding torches. He called us kids into the blacksmith shop and showed it to us. He told us it was very dangerous and that we were never to touch it and if we did, he would know who it was as he had a hidden camera that would take our head coming and our arse going out.

I knew him from my early childhood and when I grew up a bit I came back to work at the No.2 Mill in the log yard, on the breaking down and lever on No.1 bench. I found 'Old Ned' Anderson to be a very kind and tolerant boss and we all respected him.

Ron Anderson.

Ron Anderson, 'the Red Bull', was 'Old Ned's' son. He was second in charge and was responsible for all the maintenance required around the mill and on the machinery associated with it. He could be found in what we called, 'the Tractor Shed', repairing any one of the machines with an offsider called Jack Savage. We spent a lot of time with them after school hours.

Ron was a good boss to me. He was always very patient and took the time to teach me whatever job I had. I don't remember a time where Ron and his wife, Beat, weren't a part of my life. She was a lovely lady and always treated us with great kindness.

Ron and Beat lived on the mill for a number of years before moving to live in Marysville. Ron remained in charge of operations including the construction of a mill in Ballarat during the 1960's, known as the Ballarat Pine Industries, until his eventual death. I remember the Anderson family with great affection.