

## Some of the history of Cockatoo Creek & district

Thomas Simmons selected what later, was the site for the township of Cockatoo Creek, about 1870, the land was opened up for selection at that time. There were 2 tracks from Emerald to Gembrook and then on to Pakenham and Gippsland. One track came through Paternaster's corner and then over the hill and became the main street of Cockatoo Creek. It then followed east to Gembrook. The other track branched off at Sayce's (later known as Uen Hill Farm where Mrs Mrs Sayce kept a Guest House) it went through West Gembrook, now known as Mt Burnett. It then joined the Gembrook to Pakenham road known as Brashe's corner. Along this road lived Mr D. A. Glenn who had a store and was the receiving office for mail. Wade's had a store & post office at West Gembrook. Alexander Crichton was the biggest landowner in the district, and through many and devious means, and through his brother David (who was then a prospector) he was able to select large tracts of the best land, to the extent of 4000 acres. These were scattered throughout the whole district. The "Braes" at West Gembrook, "Mosshead" at Nanjanna and a large holding at Gembrook 1300 acres which he sold to a Queensland squatter named John Turnbull for £10 (pounds) an acre. Nearly everyone in the district, at one time or another worked for Crichton. He bred Remount horses, ponies, and cattle. Thomas Simmons drove a bullock team for him for 10 shillings a week. Further along the road towards Gembrook a man named Le Secuf, head of a zoological society fenced a large tract of bush land, with a slab fence 6 feet high. The slabs split by local bushmen. He released a few head of Sambar deer in this compound but in due course a bush fire burnt the fence and later the deer multiplied & were a real menace to the farmers.

Thomas Simmons lived on his land (later known as the

Main Street of Cockabo). With his ~~own~~ bullock team he cleared enough land to erect a "dwelling". With the help of his brothers, he split palings for the walls and slabs for the floor. Shingles for the roof. He then brought his family from Berwick & reared 11 children. About 14 years later the narrow gauge railway was completed & trains started to run from Fern treeully and Gembrook. At the same time as Thomas Simmons selected land, so did John Orchard and later had a large family. His land extended from the Railway back to the creek and right over to where the railway turned to run into Cockabo - His wife was the only midwife for the district and walked many miles through the bush to confine women. She often rode a draught horse 40 miles to help pregnant women. While using a sausage machine she lost all of her right hand except her thumb and first finger, this however didn't interfere with her work as a midwife, she never lost a case. While their family was young, John Orchard (my Grandfather) grew raspberry canes, the raspberries were ripe in the summer and were put into wooden buckets for sale. While waiting for the raspberries to grow bare fruit, my Grandfather used to catch all kinds of birds and take through to Melbourne to the "Eastern Market" which was situated on the site of the present Southern Cross Hotel. He had a covered waggon & a draught horse. He always chose my mother (who was a girl of 8 years) to go with him. They would leave home at 3 AM. My Grandfather was an excellent whistler and could imitate the birds he wanted to catch. He put bird-lime on the trees, the birds heard his whistling & while Grandfather acted as a decoy the birds perched on the trees, then he would catch them, put them in cages & load the waggon. After boiling the telly & making a hot cup of tea he would go off to market, while my mother rode home through the bush. She said, on frosty nights she

I almost froze and, if she dared to move, her father was very angry, he said she frightened the birds. He caught (mostly) Diamond sparrows and different kinds of finches. He lived to the age of 98, his family found him sitting by the creek with his rod in the creek & sitting beside a tree. He had given up the farm & work many years before when he lost his wife in 1910. They had a huge open fireplace in the house & she had to cook over the open fire, making bread etc in a camp oven which was suspended by a chain over the fire. Apparently she took some sort of turn while stooping over the fire and couldn't get up, when the sons came home for lunch they found her burnt to death. Three of their sons married 3 McBride girls, McBrides bought the store and post office from George Simmons, son of Thomas Simmons. McBrides also kept a Guest house. I went to work for them after leaving school at Jannathan in 4th Gippsland. At the age of 14. At this time all the McBride family were married, except Edith and Fred who chose to go to Melbourne to work. I was paid six shillings a week. I did the post office work, and helped in the shop, also helped Mrs McBride <sup>in the first world war</sup> in the house (it was known as "Fernholme" Guest house). Each day I rode a pony and delivered mail. Monday Wednesday & Friday I went to West Gembrook, delivering mail enroute to Gardiners, Glenns, Gut Nelson & Lamborn's, then took a bag to Wades P.O. A four wheeled vehicle came there also from Pakenham & delivered groceries bread etc, driven by a man named Anderson. We waited there for an hour before taking the return journey. There were no made roads & on the steep hills my pony slipped & fell many times in winter, I just had to sit & wait for her to flounder about till she was able to stand up, Tuesdays Thursdays &

4 / Saturday I rode 7 miles to Crichton's Mossvale  
at Nanfana - delivering mail enroute to people  
named Dilton, Jells, Henham morey / Hultgren  
Knights, Gale Bayley Lishman Bedford, MacLeod  
and Carrigy - then took the mail bag on to Crichton  
People came there for their mail, I waited there 2  
an hour and the housekeeper for Jack Crichton  
gave everyone a cup of tea and biscuits. On  
the way back to Cockabo I called at the mailbag  
& took mail to post, Over into the bush from  
Jell's was a mine, Owing to the wrong type of  
machinery it was not working for very long -  
The gold was being washed away in the  
mullock because quartz crushing machinery  
was put in & the gold was not in quartz -  
Getting back to the early days! - Another road  
came from Emerald & was known as Moor Yallock  
On this road was Nobelius's Nursery, Carl Nobelius  
was a Swede, He made it into a show place and  
it became the biggest Nursery in the Southern Hemisphere  
It was later known as Aronsleigh and a person  
(Mrs Wright) started Aronsleigh Guest House -  
she ran a coach every day from Emerald to bring  
guests, the railway station there was named after her -  
There were many Sawmills in Cockabo & the  
surrounding districts. It gave lively food to  
most of the families, as wages were very poor  
the people had a big struggle, while I was there  
they could not pay Mr McBride for their  
food, and he was a marvellous man & did not  
press for payment. He had owed hundreds of  
pounds. I stayed with them till I was 19 and  
still only getting 6 shillings a week, we left  
the post office & Fernholme and Mr McBride built  
the shop later taken over by Mr Fairbridge,  
then I went to work at a place near  
Wonthaffer in Sth Ceylon where I was paid 10  
shillings a week. People named Gould bought  
Fernholme and they had 3 sons, Jack was the  
eldest and at 14 was building brick houses and

5 Chimneys with his father - Eddie rode and delivered the mail and Bert was at school - Eddie was very sick at West Gembrook one day there were no doctors nearer than Fern tree so he was in terrible pain & had to wait for an ambulance to come from the Gully, the roads were in such a bad state that the ambulance became bogged somewhere near Clematis & it had been decided that Eddie had appendicitis & they were bogged so long that the appendix burst & he died later that night - There is only Bert left of the family and he is a retired Detective - Mr Gill taught school while it was being held in half of Mr McBride's grain store, later he married Katy Drager from Northcote (a suburb of Melbourne) and Mr McBride built 2 houses up the hill towards Gembrook, Mr Gill & his wife lived in one. The other was let to William Bell and his wife. The Bells were a big family who owned one of the Saw Mills. When the new school was built Miss Florence Mitchell taught school for many years (before & after I left Cockatoo) - She gave up teaching when she married a member of Parliament & lived in Camberwell where she died a few years ago - After I left Cockatoo Mr & Mrs McBride gave up the shop (which they sold to Mr Fairbridge) and lived in the house where Mr & Mrs Gill had lived.

I could write much more but it would take me too long, I have many photos of Cockatoo but I value them too much to lend them to anyone.

I hope what I have written will help you.

Yours Sincerely  
(Mrs) M. Grayson

While at Cockatoo I only saw my parents once a year, it meant riding across country 40 miles with a change of clothes strapped on the front of the saddle. I only stayed a week then rode 40 miles back to