

NOTES FROM DISCUSSION BETWEEN MRS. LOUISE PARKER AND MRS. PHYLL REED OF (C/- WALTER REED) 22 GARFIELD STREET, W. GRATHS HILL (NEAR WINDSOR) ON HER RECOLLECTIONS OF RATHMINES AND RATHMINES PUBLIC SCHOOL.

Mrs. Reed and her husband, Herbie, came to Rathmines in about 1933. It was just a little village at the time. Mr. and Mrs. Reed were instrumental in the push to start a school. The school was subsidised to start with, first teacher was a Miss Mavis Grills (Mrs. Reed said she saw Miss Grills in later years and she had married and had children though didn't know her married name).

Miss Grills boarded with the Reed's in 1936/37. Mrs. Reed was paid 5 shillings a week to go towards Miss Grills' expenses by the Department of Education.

They didn't have sufficient children to start a school but Mr. Reed heard of one school that had 10 children so they pushed to get a school as we had 11 children.

During the time they were first setting up the Base, the RAAF personnel were billeted out with the locals. Mrs. Reed took in 6 and first and then another 5 - they slept in tents but ate etc with the Reeds (1939).

The Progress Association owned the building which became the school. It was a "weekender" as were many of the buildings around the area at the time. It sorely needed painting and so Mr. Reed set about organising a painting day however, all the men who turned up to paint the school were bachelors!

The oldest house in the area is situated two or three blocks from the corner of Secret Corner Road and Fishing Point Road.

Before the Ross's went into the shop, people by the name of Hughes owned it - then Mrs. Ross in 1933. Mrs. Watts sister brought it next (her name was also Hughes). then it was sold to someone who Mrs. Reed can't remember and then it was sold to Archie Robinson, then it was burnt down.

(Mrs. Reed recommended that I try to locate a Mr. Wilbur Watson of Fishing Point Road as he has many photos of the Base as he was an Engineer there).

The Hall (which they called the "Tin Troc") used to be in Johnson's Bay. When the Progress Association folded there, Mr. Halloran, who was the owner of the property it stood on in Johnson's Bay and also the owner of most of the land around the area through his company Realty Realisations (my grandfather - Jack Denney was the Ranger for Mr. Halloran, Mrs. Reed remembers him fondly) purchased the hall and moved it to its position in The Circlet. Mrs. Reed remembers this occurring in 1936

Mrs. Reed offered the following as a description of the area around the hall: There was a big tree at the waterfront. Fruit trees, a playground, an Orchard was there in 1933, it had grape vines, quince and pear trees.

Mr. and Mrs. Reed's house/shop was the hospital and all sorts of other facilities to the local people. One person had been out shooting - he shot a Kangaroo - he found that it had a joey, which he promptly brought home. His wife then refused to take it in and said "take it down to the Reed's - they'll have it". The Reeds named him "Billy". Billy became a popular figure around the area and Mrs. Reed told of many funny things Billy would do.

If Mr. and Mrs. Reed went into their vegetable garden (they grew fresh vegetables for the shop) they had to be very careful to stick to the paths as Billy would follow them wherever they went, so therefore if they walked over the garden instead of the path, so would Billy.

The Reeds also had a dog called Pal, he was a cattle dog. Pal also had a sense of humour. Mrs. Reed told of how Pal and Billy entertained a bus load of Americans one day. Pal used to hop around on his hind two legs, behind Billy, to mimic him. The tourists found this very funny and cameras clicked wildly.

A cockatoo also featured at the Reeds. Mrs. Reed remembers one day a Mr. Kemp pacing up and down their verandah and mumbling to himself. The cockatoo said "what's wrong with you?" and this sent Mr. Kemp into raptures and seemed to lessen his problems.

Billy the Red Kangaroo grew to a size of 8ft 3 inches from the tip of his tail to his nose. He was poisoned and died. The Reeds had had him for about 8 or 9 years.

Mr. Stanton used to be a councillor on Lake Macquarie Council and a member of the Rathmines Progress Association. Mrs. Stanton lives at Valentine. He was a great fighter - the Council wanted to buy the Base and turn it into a high density housing area. Mr. Stanton and Mrs. Lil Booth fought hard to keep it parkland. Mrs. Reed also featured in this fight to keep it parkland.

Around the point (that the Base was on) was a patch of water they called "The Haven". It was called so because whenever they rowed to Killaben Bay it would be rough until you came into the protected waters of The Haven. At this site the RAAF Base was constructed. There was an area known as Kemp's Hill and when they levelled this "hill", it was found to be an Aboriginal midden full of mud oyster shells - the RAAF levelled it. It is near the Bowling Club, down near where the Swimming baths were, it was near a huge Oak Tree (This oak tree used to be in Willcox's backyard). This hill used to be used as a greyhound training track.

Mrs. Reed suggested I contact Mrs. Fishburn and her grandmother used to live on the waters edge and as a child, Mrs. Fishburn came here for holidays.

Mrs. Reed remembers the school being held in the Tin Troc for only a short time. They had plays and frolics in the Tin Troc. In 1960's they used to have a Teenagers Club (run in part by Walter Reed, Mrs. Reed's son). Mrs. Reed remembers teaching some teenage boys to "do the twist". Walter played guitar Johnny Miller mostly, he also had a record player. Mr. and Mrs. Reed were often cheperones at the dances.

Mrs. Wilson purchased the small school building in Secret Corner Road from the Progress Association.

Mrs. Reed remembers the baths down near the Ferry Wharf. There was a big tree there. The dressing sheds were built over the water. There was a big flood in 1954. The boat sheds in the area as well as the dressing sheds were irreparably damaged and knocked down. The council refused to repair the dressing sheds and they fell into disrepair.

Through functions organised by the Progress Association, they raised thousands of dollars and built new baths in 1960 down in the same place as they were before. She remembers men coming in with large machines to build the piers.

After working in the shop all day, the Reeds would go down to the baths for a swim. They would take their petrol lamp with them. This attracted the locals as they always knew when the Reeds were swimming however, they mainly carried the lamp down to keep the eels away from the baths. Mrs. Reed remembers Mr. Reed diving under the water and pinching people's legs hoping they thought it was an eel.

The old road to Toronto started about where Bayswater Hall is and went near waterfront, across a creek, along towards Mount Waring. The road up Mount Waring was known as "Slippery Kate" - Mr. Reed used to have to take a shovel with him on his trips to Toronto just in case he was bogged. Mrs. Reed said it was a matter of going up two and coming back three. The creek that this road went across was known as "The Hawkesbury" as it resembled the Hawkesbury area and had beautiful orchids. Before the Base came, Mrs. Reed remembers catching the "Ghost Train" home from Sydney. It left Central at 12 midnight and arrived in the early morning at Awaba Railway Station. Mrs. Reed sent a telegram to Herbie to pick her up, however, he didn't arrive so she walked home. The Station Master cautioned her not to leave as someone had escaped from the Morisset Hospital. However, Mrs. Reed, feeling rather trusting, embarked, in the dark along this old unlit road. She thought she heard someone following her - she picked up her shoes and ran the whole way home. This would have been 1937/38.

The Tin Troc was pulled down in the '70's or '80's.

RAAF Base - in 1939 they had the surveyor stay there. They used to bring the Sikorskys down in "The Haven".

Mrs. Reed is going to write down further memories, and go through her old photos for us and mail them to us.

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