

SOME NOTES ON THE EARLY HISTORY OF

THORPDALE & NARRACAN

by

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(1899-1991)

Narracan West, which is now called Thorpdale South, was first settled about 1875. I am not sure of the correct year, but I know that my Grandfather, John Lloyd, was one of the first to build a home in Thorpdale South, & he first selected land in 1876 & built his home in 1878, when his wife & family came to live in Thorpdale South. Like most of the early settlers, they travelled from Oakleigh to ^{Moe} ~~Trafalgar~~ by train, I should say that my Grandmother & children travelled by train; prior to that, the menfolk travelled on horseback along the Old Sale Road To get to Thorpdale South, the settlers travelled from Moe along McDonalds Track, through Narracan East, which I understand was settled a little earlier, there being a Hotel at Narracan East, opposite to where the Narracan East Hall now stands, a Mr. Joe Savige owned the Hotel. All the country was dense bush & McDonalds Track was only a track 7 feet wide, put through by a surveyor named McDonald in 1862 & ran from Tobin Yallock to Morewell, originally as a stock route.

McDonald had to pack supplies 60 miles from Cranbourne whilst carrying out the work of making the track. When we consider the nature of of the country he had to survey, it was an amazing achievement.

The names of some of the first settlers in Thorpdale South were:-

Mr. John Lloyd, Mr. J & A Gunn, Mr. H. Watkins, Mr. J. Willis, Mr. Connor, Mr. W. Cornthwaite & Mr. Mahoney built the first Hall.

Mr. Cornthwaite who was a surveyor & lived along McDonalds Track measured a Mountain Ash which was 375 feet high. I may be wrong, but I think it was one of the tallest trees in the world, that had been measured at that time. The timber was so dense that the settlers had to fell as many as 60 trees before it was safe to build a home, as there was always the danger of falling trees on the houses.

In those days most of the homes were built near creeks so as to have a permanent water supply as it was no easy matter to cart in tanks.

Mr. Frank Dickinson had the first store, built where the Thorpdale South Post Office now stands. Mr. Boyles was the second storekeeper.

A lot of the timber was ruined by ringbarking the trees. Later they split palings & these were carted by bullock waggons to Trafalgar & sent by train to Melbourne. For a while brought in good money but made a mess of the land with all the discarded branches, then came the task of clearing up the rubbish before grass could be sown so that the farmers could commence dairy farming & I believe there were a few rather lean years & times were hard.

I am a bit ahead of myself, as before the paling splitting, a School commenced in a Hall where the Thorpdale Hall now stands. A Mr. Stranger was the first teacher, about 1880. The School was only part time, the teacher doing 3 days one week at Thorpdale South & 2 days the next week at Narracan, this lasted for a few years.

This small Hall which was used as the School was also used as a Church. Before that the Church services were held at my Grandparent's home.

My Mother has told me that in the early days, people used lighted bark torches to light them on their way at night.

There were no Doctors & when babies were born the women just helped their neighbours & my Grandmother had the sad experience of a woman dying while she was trying to help her. The woman was Mrs. Stranger, the teachers wife. This poor soul was the first death in the district & she was buried in the paddock near her home.

The railway line from Moe to Thorpdale was put through in 1888. Thorpdale was called Warrington for a short time, named after one of the councillors; but the name did not please the public & it was changed to Thorpdale & Narracan West was changed to Thorpdale South.

As soon as the railway line was opened at Thorpdale, a small township sprang up, with shops & this made life a little easier, as all food & goods had previously been carted by bullock drays. The roads in those days were axle deep in mud for about 9 months of the year, on account of the tall timber on each side of the road, very little sun could get through to dry out the mud.

The road from Trafalgar to Thorpdale is the road which runs at the back of the Trafalgar South School. The present road from Traf. to Thorpdale was opened in 1920. I think Uncle Fred Shackelton was Shire President at the time & Mrs. Thelma Mann (nee Shackelton) cut the ribbon for the opening

Before the railway to Thorpdale, the mail was carried 3 days a week to Moe. Mr. J. Lloyd carried it to Narracan East & Mr. Powell, my Great Grandfather carried it from Narracan E. to Moe. Both these old gentlemen were very politically minded & spent many hours enroute talking politics, forgetting people were waiting patiently or impatiently for their mail.

Childers was noted in the early days for the beautiful raspberries which were grown there, these were carried in wooden buckets into Thorpdale to be sold.

The Mayo family were early settlers & Mr. Ted Mayo was one of the first pupils on the School Roll. A Mr. & Mrs. Dickinson were the first couple to be married in the town of Thorpdale & their son Sidney was the first baby born around 1888.

I forgot to mention that in the early days, the settlers had to take their milk to the creameries to be separated, as no one had separators. You can imagine the time it would take every day, I think it was only done once a day & each man had to wait his turn. I have heard my Father tell of the races the lads would have to see who could get there first. My Grandfather, Mr. T. Savage was one of the first to own a separator & one of the first to have a Reaper & Binder. The cream was sent 3 days a week to Trafalgar or Moe butter factory by train. There was a cream carrier who used to collect the cream cans along the roadside & deliver the cream by road to Trafalgar, he was Mr. Stewart (Mrs. H. Forsyths father). He drove his waggon over shocking roads in all weather.

Morewell must have been the nearest stock market, no easy task driving cattle along an unfenced track through the bush. Before the railway, supplies were carried in on pack horse. Mr. Harry Howlett & my Father have often told of when they were only lads of 10, they had this job & if a heavy bag such as flour or sugar fell off the horse & they could not lift it on again, they often sat on the roadside & shed tears. The farmers often walked into Morewell from Narracan East to sell a few eggs or a little homemade butter, a matter of 24 miles by the time they got home again. Butter at 4 pence a pound & eggs 6 pence a dozen. One of the men, on his return journey, with a few shillings in his pocket from the sale of his goods, leaned down at Wilderness Creek to have a drink, & to his horror, the money fell into the creek & was lost. Two other farmers met him & asked why he looked so downcast, & he told them he'd just had the most expensive drink of water ever.

Mr. T. Savage & Mr. H. Heal, both of Narracan, walked to Sale to have their blocks of land registered. There have been many new roads put in during the last 30 years, the present road to Mirboo was surveyed & made in early 1920. The Trafalgar road from Narracan was dreadfully steep & just dreadful for the carting of potatoes or any produce, in fact the settlers had to sledge their potatoes to the foot of the hill when the mud was too bad, & that was as recent as 1920. Mr. Albert Rodder & Mr. Kennedy were the first men in the district to use trucks for carting goods & always carried a set of chains in readiness for rain when all the roads became slippery with mud. Mr. Heal settled in Narracan in 1874 & was one of the earliest settlers. Miss Mary Heal was the first woman to live in Narracan & later married Mr. Sam Adamson. Mr. Heal had settled & built a small dwelling & Mary & her brothers came from Melbourne by horse & cart, Their bread supply ran out before Shady Creek, where they hoped to replenish it. To their sorrow the baker had sold out, so they kept going until Moe, but that baker had also sold out, so onto Narracan. Imagine walking from Shady Creek to Narracan with no food? I think they boiled the billy & had tea to drink, not very nourishing. When they arrived at their brothers camp, the first thing that greeted them was a freshly baked damper. The weary travellers did not waste too much time on greetings, but sat down & devoured the damper.

Life was very hard for most of the early settlers & their families as most had to live on what they could earn from their land & that had to be cleared of timber before it could produce. It was hard to even manage to keep a house cow for a start. It was hard for the men but must have been much harder for the women.

The days were lonely while the men were out timber cutting & the homes had no conveniences. No fresh fruit or vegetables until the trees they had planted grew & produced. Raspberries & gooseberries bore fruit quickly & were a great help. One poor man cleared away many trees so as to have a patch of ground for a garden, only to find it was on the surveyors line for a road.

I have had an old Minute Book sent to me by Fred Lloyd's daughter. It is of the Narracan West Library dated 1883. Examined & found correct by the late Thomas Gunn. Then dated 1888 it is titled Thorpdale Circulating Library, so I take it that this was the time that Narracan West became Thorpdale.

It may be of interest to the young of this generation to know of the way we found our pleasures in the 1920's & earlier.

There were no cars in the district, or very few as the roads were all unmade & when it rained it was impossible to drive without putting chains on the back wheels. Every car had a set of chains & a bag for the driver to kneel on, whilst putting on the chains in the mud. One night we were going to a dance along a very muddy road when one of the chains came off, the poor boys in their good suits had to crawl out into the mud & fish around in the deep rut to find the chain & put it back on again. You can imagine the mess their hands & cloths were in. Before cars we had to ride on horseback or drive in a buggy or jinker. Dances were usually held on moonlight nights as a rule, as it made it easier riding or driving. We usually hung a kerosene lantern on the back of the jinker, there used to be lamps with candles in them on the side of the vehicle, but we found the lantern hanging from the back axle the best way to give a good light. One night I rode on horseback to a dance carrying my evening frock in a suit box & the lad I was going to the dance with had his good suit in a suit box too. When I went to the Ladies room to change, out fell a pair of trousers, then there was a knock & a plaintive voice asking if I had a pair of trousers instead of a frock; I was glad to recover my frock. The boys always had to carry their good trousers as horse riding is not too good for good cloths. We often reached home at dawn, as the dances would go on until 2.30a.m. & then there was the ride or drive of 10 miles or more, but we had fun & enjoyed ourselves. There used to be a lot of tennis played on Saturdays & quite a few of the farms had tennis courts & we had many a happy weekend playing on a neighbours court.

Lots of children had a long way to walk to School & most of the boys had to help milk before leaving for School. Some parents did not make the boys change out of their milking trousers & they had very smelly trousers, especially if they stood near the Schoolroom fire. Moleskin trousers had a horrible smell even when they were clean. Those days we all crowded into the Schoolroom with one teacher to teach 8 grades. A sewing mistress used to take the little ones every afternoon & one day a week taught the girls sewing. A tin mug used to be chained to the tank & we all drank out of the one mug, I can still taste the tinny flavour. Quite a few children had over 3 miles to walk to School, a few rode ponies, one girl used to ride side saddle & wore a little riding habit. I was a few years younger & by the time I rode, mens saddles were accepted but not by my Mother & her age group, they always rode sidesaddle. The first style of riding costume for riding astride was a divided skirt frightful looking things, even though I was young, they made me think of those black hens who have feathers all over their legs.

We used to go bathing in the Narracan Creek, we had quite a nice bathing pool, but mixed bathing was not done. The men used to bathe at different times to us & our bathing garb was certainly neck to knee. I fear the men used to bathe nude.

All smiles as 300 Saviges meet



THE youngest of the Savige clan, eight-months old Brianna Laugher, was oblivious of her place in history as she sat on the knee of the oldest of Thomas and John Savige's descendants to attend Sunday's "Corroboree of Saviges". But her line goes directly back to those Savige pioneers who settled in Narracan East in 1876. The knee she is occupying belongs to William Savige, at 88 the oldest Savige at the gathering. Both William and Brianna received engraved silver spoons as tokens of the day, as did Charles and Bertha Savige, who travelled all the way from Brisbane for the gathering.

Sunday's "Corroboree" was the eighth organised for the Saviges and attracted about 300 people, several from interstate. The bad

weather in the morning forced the gathering to take to the Narracan Hall instead of the Narracan Falls, but they were fully occupied with reminiscing and catching up on the news.

Many family members, including Powells and Russells who were the first branches of the family to migrate to the area, brought along old photos and photograph albums. These included many photographs of the Saviges seven other reunions, the first of which was in 1961.

A new book, the fifth in a series relating to the Savige, Russell and Powell families, was on sale. It was written by Walter Savige and Margot Titcher to mark the occasion of the 136th anniversary of the first family members leaving England for Victoria. The book is

called "A Kettle, a Skillet and a Warming Pan".

Organiser of the Corroboree, Mrs Meryl Jackson, retired from the job at the end of the gathering on the understanding that, among all those relatives, there would be at least one ready to take on the task of bringing the family together next time.

Pictured (back row) — Meryl Jackson (nee Savige) the reunion organiser, her husband George, Bertha and Charles Savige who travelled from Queensland, the authors of the new book Margot Titcher and Dr Walter Savige, Edgar Savige and organiser Lloyd Savige. Front — organiser Roy Savige, Janice Laugher, mother of Brianna who is on the knee of William Savige, Gwen Ryan the oldest woman there, and Shirley Savige.