

KANGAROO VALLEY

Glimpses of community life
in the 19th Century



by Alan Clark

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The two bridges

To generations of people who have passed through Kangaroo Valley, the Hampden Bridge is without doubt the district icon, and it is appropriate to look at the two major bridges over the Kangaroo River that have been so important to locals. Some £1500 had been placed by the Government on the 1873 estimates for the first bridge¹, but there were various problems even getting it started.

Towards the end of 1876 the Braidwood contractors Kelly & Walsh advertised for bushmen and sawyers to tender for the falling, squaring and delivery of about 5000 cubic feet of timber for the bridge, along with some 60,000 square feet of sawn timber². The work was let to this company during the following February, but even after contracts were exchanged, the site was altered. One reason was so that work could be undertaken in shallower water.

Thursday, August 14. 1879 was a momentous day for the local community when Member for Camden, Thomas Garrett officially opened the Kangaroo Valley Bridge and “smashed the inevitable bottle of fiz” on one of its central trusses, to the applause of about 200 people. The 245-ft. structure was 62 feet above the summer level of the river, and it cost £3000 to build³.

The crowd included some women, but it was 60 gentlemen who participated in the subsequent banquet in honour of the occasion, at the nearby Cosmopolitan Hall. Local resident, Neil Harper JP was chairman at the banquet served by host Charles Robinson, and the meal was followed by toasts and speeches from politicians and others that extended the function to some three and a half hours.

This bridge would not last 20 years, and it was April 1895 when Public Works Department engineer, Ernest De Burgh visited the site (upstream of the existing bridge) to take levels for a new one, and before work started, descriptions suggested a structure similar to the Traitor's Gate at the Tower of London⁴. That project which came to fruition on Wednesday, February 2, 1898 has been well documented⁵, but it is of interest to dwell on some of the characters involved with the Hampden Bridge.

Tom Loveridge, who represented the contracting firm of Loveridge & Hudson, lived at Bowral, drove his sulky over Barrengarry Mountain each Monday morning, stayed in one of the local hotels and supervised the work. The engineer was James Rorison, and when he returned to the Kangaroo Valley Show some 50 years later, his resume also included bridges over the Murray, Tweed, Darling, Murrumbidgee, Clarence, Nepean and Richmond Rivers⁶.

Two keystones were laid in 1896, one by Florence Comer ⁷, the 24-year-old sister of local publican Fanny Diggins, and the other by Barrengarry businessman Israel Karnofsky ⁸, but how they came to be chosen remains a mystery. Florence does not appear to have had a prominent role in community life, and sadly she died in childbirth some three years later ⁹.

Born in Lithuania, Karnofsky migrated to Australia in 1881 and spent seven years as an itinerant salesman before coming to the Valley and buying the store, from a fellow Jew, Peter Solomon. Israel was joined by his brother Meyer in the business, and they were later joined by their sister Annie Leah who in 1896 married Myer Reuben Rosenberg, a Russian-born tailor who had a shop at Kangaroo Valley.

When the Karnofsky store was burnt down in 1916, the brothers believed it to have been the work of arsonists who mistakenly believed them to be Germans. They rebuilt and continued in business, and would travel to Sydney for High Holy Days at the Great Synagogue. Their deaths occurred within six months of each other in 1933. Neither had married, and their significant legacy financed the restoration of an ancient Yeshivah in Tiberias ¹⁰.

John Lauder, who was the chief stonemason on the Hampden Bridge job, had learned the trade in his native Scotland before migrating in 1879 at the age of 27, and was involved in several important Public Works projects ¹¹.

Then there was John Clark, also born in Scotland who came to the Coolangatta Estate ¹², who had previously worked as a stonemason on the St Michael's and St Andrew's churches in Nowra. There are links to these men still around: Lauder has a great grandson living at Jaspers Brush, while I am also in contact with a great grandson of Clark who previously lived at Bomaderry.

Kangaroo Valley farmer John King had been involved in getting the 1879 bridge built, and he was given the honour of opening this one ¹³. Imagine his pride when with his wife beside him, he drove a buggy drawn by a pair of horses to the middle of the bridge where he paused before completing the short but important journey.

Finally, the name of the bridge was taken from the Governor of the day, Lord Hampden, who although he did not attend the opening, had visited the district on several occasions. One of them was in February 1896 when on his way to officially open the Berry Show, he briefly stopped in the Valley and had lunch in the Commercial Hotel ¹⁴.

The two bridges were very close to each other, and plans were made to demolish the older wooden structure. However just 10 days after the Hampden Bridge was opened to traffic, rain started to fall in torrents and the 20 inches produced a substantial flood that washed the old bridge away ¹⁵. A couple of months later there was an "official opening" for the Hampden Bridge held on May 19 when the Minister for Works, James Young officiated ¹⁶.

Impetus for a local hotel

Kangaroo Valley was strategically placed on the mail route between Moss Vale and Nowra, and this was a factor in Maurice Condon opening the first hotel, which he called the Pioneer. A small item in *The Shoalhaven News* in mid-1875 stated that the new building nearing completion would “be fitted up especially for the accommodation of the travelling public”¹⁷.

He was granted a licence on July 31¹⁸, and within months he took on a partner, Charles Robinson who had settled at Terara in the 1860s and most recently had been a butcher at Broughton Creek (as Berry was then known)¹⁹. The partnership was dissolved on June 26, 1876, leaving Robinson with sole control²⁰.

There was obviously not enough profit in the hotel, for in July 1876 he gained a slaughtering licence to continue in his butchery trade²¹. From the start of 1878 he opened the Cosmopolitan Hall on the eastern end of the hotel, and advertised it as “a large and commodious room, suitable for meetings, concerts, lectures and theatrical performances”²².

Kangaroo Valley's second hotel, the Commercial would not be built until 1891 to the design of Cyril Blackett from the noted family of architects²³, and it was licensed the following year²⁴. It would be renamed in 1948, the Friendly Inn. The Pioneer was delicensed in 1916²⁵ and was used by a doctor, then visiting dentists and solicitors, and later by rabbit trappers and wattle bark strippers²⁶. It was demolished in 1930²⁷, but around the same site has recently emerged, the Pioneer Motel.

Reporting the Valley news

Having been in newspapers for all my working life, I have also taken an interest in the papers of Kangaroo Valley, starting in 1889. According to Thomas Garrett, MP (founder of the Illawarra Mercury) it cost about £200 to establish a newspaper in this era²⁸, and P. Jefferson Wallace made the venture after previously founding the *St Leonards Recorder*, the *Murrumburrah Signal*, and the *Port Jackson Pilot* at Manly. It is interesting to note that he called his paper the Pioneer which was also the name of the village's only hotel.

The front page of an 1892 issue²⁹ gives the title of *The Kangaroo Valley Pioneer* with a sub-title of “Farmers’ and Graziers’ Advocate”, that was published every Tuesday morning at Kangaroo Valley, and claimed to be circulating largely in the Berrima, Shoalhaven and Illawarra districts. Address of the office was Shoalhaven Street, Osborne, Kangaroo Valley and the subscription was 12 shillings per annum, payable in advance.

Wallace had a sense of humour, for a large house advertisement stated, “No three-cornered patent pills, second-hand clothing, rat traps, or hand-organs taken in payment for advertising. Cash, and cash only, is legal tender.” He sold the paper in April 1894 to Gates & Bennett³⁰ who changed its name to The Kangaroo Valley Times, and in time Frederick Bennett had sole ownership of it which continued until 1904. During the 1890s there was a rumour of a second paper starting in the Valley³¹, but this did not eventuate. Bennett also decided to use humour in announcing its closure with a full-page advertisement³² in the following manner:

“Died, this day, Tuesday, September 27, 1904, from want of nourishment, caused through an indigestibly straight and non-pandering policy, the Kangaroo Valley Times, aged 10 years and five months. Immolated at the altar of caucus cliqueism and backboneless adherents. Requiescat in Pace. Note: In order that the funeral expenses may be met, it is requested that all accounts be settled at once.”

This was not the end of the Kangaroo Valley Times, for one of Bennett's employees, Alfred Watson took it over, and it was published as usual the following week, with the new owner explaining that “having gained his experience from his predecessor, that will be sufficient guarantee that the journal will be conducted on clean and wholesome lines, and that local news will, as usual, be given the utmost of prominence”³³.

In answer to the full page advertisement of the previous week, the new owner had one of his own, starting with a word he appears to have made up:

“Resurgam. The Kangaroo Valley Times, under new management, has come to life again and intends to live. A. Watson, proprietor.”

Despite his disappointment at the Valley, Frederick Bennett was reported to be starting a paper at Stroud later in the year³⁴.

Culture at the School of Arts

The School of Arts is usually thought of as a building, but this was not the case on Wednesday, October 4, 1893 when an organisation known as the Kangaroo Valley School of Arts was opened with the Church of England Sunday-school being used as a reading room. It boasted 120 volumes, half of which had been loaned by the Government, while the others, of a lighter kind, had been purchased by the committee³⁵.

It was a formal occasion with president, Rev. Henry Tate delivering an eloquent address that included extracts from Bacon’s Essays; and Dr G. S. Samuelson read a paper on “Literature and the benefits derived from its study”. Members were looking forward to the next event when Rev. Norman McLean of Berry would lecture on Robert Burns.

The first School of Arts building completed in 1895 has been described as “a humble structure of galvanised iron”, it was conveniently located in the main street, and would serve the Valley community for a decade before a modern hall was built.

Ambitious plan of Wesleyans

Christian worship services were conducted by various denominations from the early 1870s, usually starting with modest church buildings. However Kangaroo Valley's Wesleyan Methodist congregation had ambitious plans in early 1884 when Sydney architects Bolster & Justilens were commissioned to design a new church to accommodate 150 people. It was to be constructed of brick on a stone foundation, and was estimated to cost between £600 and £700³⁶.

Mr H. Hanlon donated the site, valued at £50, across the road from the Presbyterian Church, and the ceremony to lay the foundation stone was set down for October 3, 1884. Considering it was a Friday, there was a remarkable turn-out with people starting to arrive at 10am, and there were 500 there when the assemblage was called to order around 11.30.

Using a handsome silver trowel, Isabella Osborne (the wife of Alick) laid the stone, and the minister, Rev. William Glasson delivered what was described as “a short, pithy, forcible address”. The ceremony also involved the Church of England and Presbyterian clergymen, and the tables were filled three times for the tea-meeting that followed.

In the evening a concert was held in the Presbyterian Church featuring a choir of men, women and children (conducted by local school teacher Richard H. Bell), who sang 29 items that were well received. At the conclusion of the day the treasurer banked £80/14/4. It was subsequently reported that with the amounts promised, the committee had about £300 to work with.

However the project did not go ahead smoothly, the brick plans were shelved in favour of a weatherboard structure with iron roof which was completed more than two years later.

The official opening took place on Sunday, January 9, 1887 when morning and evening services were conducted by the President of the Methodist Conference. Next day there was a tea-meeting at noon, at a cost of 1/6 per head, which was followed by a public meeting³⁷. The changes saw the overall cost reduced to £555, and at the opening the patient congregation was told there was no debt³⁸.

Cricket on Osborne's meadow

The major sport in the district in the 1870s was cricket, and from what I can find, the first Kangaroo Valley Cricket Club was formed in December of 1871 with 20 men signed with the club ³⁹. The first recorded match in the following February was played on Mr Osborne's meadows between the eleven of Moss Vale and eleven of Glenmurray. This may suggest that the players were tenants of Ben Osborne, but the wicket was sporting as first innings scores were 27 and 25 before the visitors won outright by eight wickets ⁴⁰.

No names were mentioned in that report, but they would be for later fixtures. From a game in March, the Valley team included three by the name of Bailey, three Francis, with C. Abbott, R. Gordon, D. Lewry, A. Nugent and G. Oak ⁴¹. Because of Kangaroo Valley's relative isolation, the roads and transport of the early 1870s, the club played a series of five matches against Cambewarra between February and June, on fields provided by Osborne at the Valley and Zaccheus Bice at Cambewarra. There was obviously plenty of interest with some matches being contested by the Second XI ⁴².

For the rest of the 1870s and throughout the 1880s, Kangaroo Valley's matches were mainly against Cambewarra and Burrier, and at one stage in 1879 the team was described as "The Marsupials". When the Shoalhaven District Cricket Association was formed in 1892-93, Kangaroo Valley was one of the eight original clubs and its team colour was red. It featured in the second match against the home team at Cambewarra ⁴³, but few of its results were published during that summer.

It is worth noting that four years later ⁴⁴ Henry M. Osborne was the club's patron, the president was L. S. Arnott who worked in the local branch of the ANZ Bank ⁴⁵, and a vice-president was Tom Loveridge whose company was then building the Hampden Bridge. At the start of the season the club ran a plain and fancy dress social in the National Hall that saw dancing continue until 3am, and although the profit was only about £2, the level of social enjoyment was high.

Finally, some facts on cricket at Kangaroo Valley during the 20th century the club went on to win 11 senior premierships in the Shoalhaven association, one in first grade (1971-72), eight in seconds (1938-39, 1954-55, 1961-62, 1965-66, 1974-75, 1975-76, 1976-77 and 1978-79) and two in thirds (1976-77 and 1978-79) ⁴⁶. There were also a couple in juniors including the first ever in the under 16 age group (1963-64), and the highest ever grand final score for under 14s (320 in 1969-70).

Looking at the wider picture of the sport, a State player from the 1920s, Bernard Leslie "Barney" McCoy (1894-1970) had been born at Kangaroo Valley ⁴⁷; while the popular Australian wicketkeeper Bert Oldfield officially opened the Kangaroo Valley Show in 1939 ⁴⁸.

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Kangaroo Valley

by Philip D. Lorimer

I know there are no joys like thine.
Sweet vale, 'tween mountain steeps-
No other home where gladness true
With peace in wonder leaps;
Where one loud voice forever rings
From streamlet, wind and birds,
And fills the blue with deaf'ning song-
With Freedom's choicest words.

My thoughts are ever poisoning o'er
The loveliness that's thine,
Where tree, and shrub, and wild thorn
form
A trellis for the vine:
Where white and purple blossoms droop
O'er dark green shades below,
And clust'ring fall o'er grassy beds
Where wild the violets grow.

Where sassafras and thickets hide
The bramble's juicy fruit,
And out from moss-robed stones appear,
The messmate's gnarled root:
Where in the noon I often sit
And drink from Nature's hands
The sweets that flow from jewelled cup
That's filled with her commands.

Thou twit'ring bird, with flut'ring wing.
Half hid behind the ferns,
My heart with fondness leaps to thee;
From thy lone song it learns
How true the gladness of this earth
Can be enhanced by those
Whose softer tones are only heard
When they in calm repose.

I see the top of Kangaroo,
Bold mount with giant trees;
So grandly oft the battle ground
Of land - and ocean breeze.
Before me rocky Broughton stands
Like fortress dark and grim;
Where waters in my youthful days.
Have kissed my ev'ning hymn.

And Barrengarry with her crown.
Scarce seen through rainy haze;
Where wildest mountain birds abide
To utter there their praise.
My heart is bare to her, for I reach,
And nestle in her calms:
Within her shady nooks-where brooks,
Hear now my morning psalms.

There is no solitude when here,
No rushing after gold;
I read the book that Nature opes,
Within her tender fold.
And when inclined to think of care
I hear a choir above,
Goburras, in their laughing strains,
Drown all my thoughts in love.

They reach my heart and drain from it
The tears life brings to life;
They spread their charms upon my soul
And hush all human strife;
That while I roam the flow'rets seem
All gathered to my breast,
They wreath the dreams I often dream,
When in the vale I rest.

The Shoalhaven News, Saturday, 2 September, 1893.