

Introduction

This is a book about what life used to be like in days gone by in the Murray's Run/Watagan Creek area. Conventional histories tend to deal in large events and the activities of people who are in public life, and it is only relatively recently that we have become aware of the need to record the details of everyday life of past times before they become lost forever. This book is intended as a contribution to that project, and attempts to mine the memories of sixteen people who grew up in the district. It is made up of minimally-edited transcripts of tape-recorded conversations.

When I began, my knowledge of the area was limited to driving through from my place at Brush Creek to Wollombi and places further north. I had decided to do another book similar to the one about Yarramalong that I had finished the previous year, but I had no idea where to start as I knew nobody in the area. Friends in Bucketty suggested the Sternbecks, so I contacted them. They, of course, knew all the long-term residents of the area, and so I simply followed up the names they provided.

The interviews appear in the book in the order they were done. I mention this to explain some of my more naive questions in some of the earlier interviews. Running through all the accounts of past times are certain recurrent themes, like the '49 flood; the silting up of the creeks and the differing theories as to its causes; the impact of technology on the dairies in the district (especially the introduction of the bulk pick-up), and the cutting-up of larger holdings for sale to "the newcomers" (to name only a few topics). In each conversation they are dealt with slightly differently, and as the discussions proceed the picture of the area gradually comes into better focus as later conversations enlarge upon material covered in earlier ones. Mostly this results in a more complete picture, but sometimes contradictions are evident - this is what provides the richness of accounts like these. It also highlights the often rather arbitrary or at least ambiguous nature of much that comes to be taken as historical 'fact'.

It hasn't been my intention to try to write a social history of the area - I just wanted to get these memories down for the record. Sometimes the conversation wanders away from earlier years into the present or the recent past, but where it was relevant I left that sort of thing in because the present will be the past in years to come.

As for the spelling of place-names, is it Watagan or Wattagan? George Downs or George Downes? St Albans or St Alban's? All versions appear in one place or another - on maps or on road signs, and there is no real consensus. I just settled for one in each case and stuck to it. In the case of Yengo and Yango, I reserved "Yengo" to refer to the mountain.

Putting this book together made my appreciation of the area round Murray's Run and Watagan Creek much richer than it was when I began. I hope that these accounts convey some of that richness.

*Bill Bottomley
November 1994*