

## Alice Jane ("Ma") Whitton

As related by Marj Haines to Don Clinch 20.5.2013

One of Woolgoolga's great pioneer characters, Alice Jane ("Ma") Whitton and husband Robert moved from Nymboida to Dalgetty Street in 1912. They built a modest house there on the north side and ran dairy cattle round the house grounds, and kept their cows-in-calf on an area west of the Pacific Highway opposite Safety Beach Golf Course.

"Ma" had many faces.

First of all she was the town milkman. Milk was delivered daily by horse and sulky to all residents in town and close by.

Then she was the town's midwife on call 24/7. Despite having no formal training as a nurse, she was expert in delivering the town's babies and gave daily attention to the new mother and child for at least a week - more if needed. As a result she also became the source of help to all and sundry in the case of injury or sickness.

She also considered it her duty to assist a succession of police officers including Sen. Constable Cecil Marsh in laying out and preparing the dead for burial.

From time to time "Ma" added "wings" to her house, and it became a rambling residence but new rooms had some special use. The kitchen was big enough to have three wood fired stoves.

Christmas was a time of great activity in Woolgoolga, with visiting relations, and all the campers at the beach reserve. "Ma" needed those stoves! She put on a roast chicken Christmas dinner with all the festive trimmings for 5/- . With neighbourly help, all the chickens were plucked under the camphor laurel trees outside, some of which still stand. That was a sight in itself.

She had four children of her own to look after... Viv., Myra, Muriel, and Britta.

Husband Robert mustered the cattle on horseback. In 1930 he had a bad fall from a horse, and his injuries were sufficiently serious as to require him to be sent to Sydney for medical care; sadly he died. And it was in the Great Depression. Hard times followed; and there were many "swaggies" on the road - people out of work, people out of money, people out of food. It was common practice for them to call at homes with an offer to cut up some wood or do odd-jobs to earn a meal. "Ma" needed those stoves! She would sit them down, and cook them a hot meal, and pack up another meal for them to take on their way. There was a saying of the times 'don't know where their next meal is coming from' but the people who were fortunate enough to find "Ma" Whitton did know.

The history of Woolgoolga includes quite a number of tales of aboriginal involvement, and "Ma" employed Amos Harvey to help grow sugar cane to help feed the cattle. Amos became sufficiently close to the Whitton family that, when he enlisted in the army in the 1939-45 war, he corresponded regularly with "Ma"'s granddaughter, Marj Haines, until he returned to Australia.

"Ma" had a dog - a Pomeranian named "Teddy" and they were great mates.

"Ma" died on 22nd. July, 1946 She used her adult years in selfless service in being kind and especially concerned for the unfortunate people of the town, and the "swaggies" on the road, whether she could afford it or not. As well as that she gave away any money she had to the needy. She died penniless.

"Teddy" the dog went missing the day she died. He was found four days later..dead.. under the house directly under the floor of the bedroom where "Ma" had always slept.

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