

Handwritten Notes from Noel Charles (Nug) Ganderton - Dated 1956

Early history of Woolgoolga

Mrs W Younger of Woolgoolga the earliest living settler of the Woolgoolga district has given the accompanying account of the early history of Woolgoolga. Mrs Younger celebrated her 80th birthday on November 28th, 1956. She arrived in the Woolgoolga District with her parents 73 years ago.

On May 19th 1882 they came to Woolgoolga a family named Hofmeier with six children also Mrs Hofmeier's mother Mrs Weh. Mrs Weh died about three years later and is the first settler buried in the district. She was 84 years of age and is buried on the property she then owned and now owned by Mr Holland.

Mrs Younger was seven years of age when her family left Grafton and travelled via pillar valley, Corindi, Arrawarra, the journey taking three days as there were no roads.

On arrival they bought a selection from Mr Sneesby who lived about six miles up Woolgoolga creek.

This man left the district about three days after the Hofmeier's arrival, the only other white settler at the time was a Mr Cooper, who was managing the only other selection in the district, this being a cattle station whose boundaries extended as far north as Corindi and to Moonee in the south. Mr Cooper lived with his wife and four children in the homestead built on the block of land on the north side of the present Seaview Hotel.

The owner of the selection was a Mr Small and the homestead remained there for many years eventually being pulled down in 1924.

The blacks were very friendly in the early days and their only clothing was a loin cloth. Mrs Younger and her brothers and sisters once saw a corroboree out on the place called pound yard flat, it was between the Woolgoolga tribe and one from the Bellingin district.

It seemed that whichever tribe had the first member wounded lost to the other and it seemed the local men gained the victory in this instance, as there was a king crowned, he carried the name of 'Billy' he was often seen afterwards with a brass plate on his chest he is said to have been around these parts for many years with his gin named Lizzie.

The surrounding district was covered with a very long grass called kangaroo grass, the timber growing here at the time was mainly cedar, pine and hardwood.

At a later date when the timber was cut out for the mills, the suckers grew so densely that the grass disappeared. There was plenty of game in those days such as kangaroo, wallabies, native bears and dingoes, and the grass was alive with snakes.

Woolgoolga was the name given by the blacks, to the area and meant the place of many 'Waters' as there were four lakes, the creek and the ocean.

The first rural product planted in the district was sugar cane, the quality of which was so good that, at a later date, samples grown by Mr Hofmeier won first prize at the Grafton Show in competition with the Clarence River products.

It proved to have higher density than that grown on the river flats. Within 12 months of the arrival of the Hofmeiers, came the Taylors, Sares, Llewellyn's, Turners, Hearne's the last name remembered by having a lake on the back beach named after him.

In 1885 a Mr Pullen came to the district and built the first mill. It was for the purpose of crushing and refining sugar and was situated on the spot where the cordial factory now stands on the creek bank at the side of the pacific highway.

The sugar cane was delivered to the mill by horse teams the price paid being 14/- per ton delivered to the mill. To have sugar exported from the district Mr Pullen had a punt running from the Woolgoolga beach to a boat which was anchored about where the end of the jetty was.

As this method did not prove a success Mr Pullen built what was called a slip. It was built from the first bend in the headland, out on to the flat rocks at the front of the northern side. This still called for the use of the punt to pick up the cargo and deliver it to the ship.

The punt was winched to the ship and pulled back by bullocks. Mrs Younger has often ridden out in the punts with her mates to the ships stayed on board until the punt was emptied and then returned to land by the punt again.

When the sugar industry started to slump Mr Pullen converted his mill for the cutting of timber – this being the first of its kind in the district. Mr Pullen later bought and resided in the station house and also built the Hotel next door.

At first the hotel was only one floor and was managed by a Mr Webb and at a later date a second floor was added.

The first district school was built on the property now owned by Mr M Crossley, the number of pupils attending in those days, being from 15 to 20. The teachers name was Mr Mackie, the school was retained on that site until 1908 when it was rebuilt on its present site. In those days there was only one part time teacher and a sewing mistress.

Woolgoolga's first Post Office and store was a combined building on the site where Mr Lehmann now lives adjoining the building was a tin smith Charlie Backhaus and every article he sold was branded C.B.

The mail was delivered by pack horse from Grafton, the journey taking two to three days - depending on weather conditions. The goods for the shop were brought from Cowper by horse teams, in bad weather teams often were bogged getting here.

The Post Office a few years afterwards was removed next door to where Mr J Waterhouse's old shop stood across the road from his present new shop.

In 1888 timber mills sprang up around the district, the biggest at that time being the British Australian Timber Company. This mill was on the north side of the jetty, on the terrace.

The year 1890 saw the commencement of the jetty and it was completed in 1893. With the completion of the jetty the B.A.T. mill had rails laid for it into the mountains up over the incline this got the logs to the mill quicker than in bullock teams.

Passenger boats called at the jetty in the early days and cargo was landed there until about 1940. The GNT was shifted. The BAT was later shifted to where the present mill now stands to-day. It was burnt down on April 17th 1921 and was rebuilt at the jetty end of the south side where it stayed until about 1943 then was rebuilt back onto the site where it is working to-day it was then converted to be run by electricity and owned by Mr and Mrs Allen Taylor and Co it was again destroyed by fire in 1955.

In 1895 bananas were first grown in the district. Three acres were planted by Mr W Younger Senior on the property on which the Hofmeier's first settled and which today belongs to Mr A Johnson. These bananas did well for a while but were wiped out in a very cold winter. Mr Younger replanted them the following year but the same thing happened again and the

venture was dropped. About 1930 bananas were again grown in the district and the town boomed.

In 1896 gold was discovered at Bucca Creek by the Taylor Bros. This brought prospectors from many places and claims were pegged everywhere. The first mine in Woolgoolga was behind Mr O Featherstone's butcher shop. There was a large amount of gold taken from Bucca Creek, also Woolgoolga.

The best known mines were Taylors Reward, Rising Sun, Wedding Bells and Black Prince. The first butter factory was started in 1919, as there were many dairy farms at that time around Woolgoolga, Bucca Creek and Corindi. This factory was built on the north side of the jetty but it was closed down in 1924.

Among the first settlers was one who had faith in the future of Woolgoolga. He was Mr W Younger Senior who came in 1887, died in 1954 and always said that Woolgoolga had a future even when others gave up hope.

Signed N.G.

Notes from David Fayle, 26 Oct 2012, including information from family tree and other research provided by Karen Filewood

This article was provided to the Woolgoolga Heritage Walk project in Sep 2012 by Mrs Jackie Ganderton (b.1916), widow of Noel Charles (Nug) Ganderton, who (it is presumed) had interviewed Mrs Anna Martha Younger in 1956 and hand-written the article. (Alternatively, the "Notes" may in fact have been made by Martha Younger.)

The NSW Marriage index shows Anna M(artha) Hoffmeier marrying Dennis N Younger in 1896 [1129/1896]. She died three years after the date of this article [30619/1959].

Anna's grandmother was Anna Maria Weh nee Dilger, born in 1801 in Kassel, Germany. She married Ernest John (probably Ernst Johann) Weh in Germany about 1832. Ernest is assumed to have died before Anna and her children migrated to Australia. One of those children was Anna Martha Weh, born 21 Dec 1841 in Essendorf, Germany.

Anna Martha Weh married John Adam Hofmeier at Warialda NSW on 21 Oct 1871. They had nine children, but the family tree only lists five, and they do not include the girl (also Anna Martha) who became Mrs Younger, and whose reminiscences these are. Moreover, her birth does not appear to be present on the NSW or Queensland Births Indexes. Yeates (p261, ref 24) gives a birth year of 1876.

(Her mother Anna Martha Hofmeier died on 30 April 1931, and her father John Adam Hofmeier, on 26 Jul 1926. The grandmother Anna Maria Weh, said to be the first settler to die in Woolgoolga, though technically not in the village that was later gazetted, died 7 Jan 1886.)

Karen Filewood wrote: [Anna Maria Weh] "immigrated to Australia from Germany in 1854, aged 53 years. Travelling with her from Grafton to Woolgoolga on 19th May 1882 were her daughter Anna Martha and son-in-law John Adam Hofmeier, her 6 grandchildren and a family friend Mr Michell ... taking three days to travel the distance by horse and cart. On arrival she bought a selection from Mr Sneesby who lived about six miles up Woolgoolga Creek. She passed away in her sleep on 7th January 1886 (aged 83) during a lunch-time nap after stripping corn that morning. The cause of death on her death certificate states she died of 'natural decay from great age'. She is buried on her property at Woolgoolga along with her granddaughter, Hannah Elizabeth Hofmeier." [25 Oct 2011;

http://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=208731529197904&id=166099960127728&comment_id=2209370&offset=0&total_comments=8]

Yeates, N., *Woolgoolga: History of a Village* (edition 3 p103) states that Denys Younger came to Woolgoolga in 1893 and three years later married Martha Hofmeier, whose recollections of the 1880s are mentioned on earlier pages of the book. Denys and Martha Younger had at least 9 children, 7 of whom are listed on the Index, born either in Bellingen (1896 to 1900) or "Grafton" (probably Woolgoolga; 1902 to 1909): 28976/1896 Florence A ; 19392/1898 William F ; 10731/1900 Charles L (who probably died in 1968); 3227/1902 Ernest N ; 3648/1905 Albert V ; 3505/1907 Ethel M ; and 3847/1909 Amy A (who became Mrs Woldseth). The public register currently finishes at 1911, but two other children appear to have been Alice May (married Harold James Thompson) and George. Alice was known to have been a keeper of family records.

Yeates (page 15) quotes Martha Hofmeier as follows: "... [another] white settler at the time [May 1882] was a Mr Cooper. He was managing the only other selection in the district, this being a cattle station whose boundaries extended as far north as Corindi and to Moonee in the south. Mr Cooper lived with his wife and four children in the homestead built on the block of land on the ... present site of the Seaview Hotel. The owner of the selection was a Mr Small, and the homestead remained there for many years, eventually being pulled down about 1946."

(on p19): Martha Younger (nee Hofmeier) has recorded her memory of the punts: they were "winched to the ship and pulled back by bullocks. . ." and she "often rode out in the punts with her friends to the ships, stayed aboard till the punt was emptied and then returned to land by the punt again".

He also says (p23): "The only first-hand written account of the Aborigines who frequented the Woolgoolga area in the early 1880s appears to be that of Martha Younger. She described them as "very friendly" and said that they wore nothing more than a loin cloth. They camped on sites behind the sand dunes and occasionally held corroborees on the flat ground beside Poundyard Creek. As a child Martha Younger (then Hofmeier) and her brothers and sisters observed a gathering of local Aborigines with a visiting group from the Bellingen district. Some skirmishing went on; but the "combat" appears to have been a harmless part of the corroboree rather than serious fighting. According to Mrs Younger one of the local leaders was later seen wearing a brass plate engraved with the name "Billy", and that "he and his gin, named Lizzie" were reported to have remained in the district for "many years". The brass plate provides evidence that the wearer had by then come under European influence.

On particular points of interest:

- the date of demolition of the original Weelgoolga slab hut – Yeates' quote says 1946, Nug Ganderton says 1924. Whether Nug's original handwritten notes still exist has not been ascertained.
- The article mentions the location of the hut, but unlike Tom Richards, assigns it to a cattle station owned by Mr Small that in fact would be a combination of the Weelgoolga run of Thomas Small to the south with the Redbank or Corindi Run of Samuel Cohen to the north – Woolgoolga Creek being the boundary. Richards says it was the hut of the manager of the Weelgoolga run [*Woolgoolga, Past present and future*, by Thomas Richards 1932].
- the article indicates where Henry Sneesby lived, and that he left Woolgoolga in May 1882. This is consistent with the free selection records, in which I have found selections by him on 17 Feb 1881 (Portion 10) and 10 Mar 1881 (Portion 11).
- Free selection 15 Jun 1882 by John Hoffmeier, Woogoolga, 40 acres, county of Fitzroy, parish of Woogoolga, starting from the N.W. corner of T. Cook's c.p. of 40 acres selected on 4th May, 1882, on Woogoolga Creek, and running thence up said creek, with frontage

to creek, on T. Small's run. Deposit paid, £10. (Portion not yet ascertained; Cook had portions 15 and 17 southward from Woolgoolga Creek) Source: Free Selections. (1882, June 17). Clarence and Richmond Examiner and New England Advertiser (Grafton, NSW : 1859 - 1889), p. 4. Retrieved July 26, 2012, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article62125049>

- Free selection 6 Sep 1883 (Portion 34) by Anna Maria Weh, Woogoolga, 60 acres, county of Fitzroy, parish of Woogoolga. commencing at a tree marked No. 3-13, bounded on the north by J. A. Taylor's c.p. of 80 acres. No. 3. to the water reserve, thence south along west line of reserve, thence west, thence north to the marked tree No. 3-12. on T, Small's run. Deposit paid, £15. Source: Free Selections. (1883, September 8). Clarence and Richmond Examiner and New England Advertiser (Grafton, NSW : 1859 - 1889), p. 4. Retrieved July 26, 2012, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article62140297>
- Poundyard Creek is the modern name of the north arm of Woolgoolga Creek, known as Myrtle Creek on an 1892 map.
- Note the incorrect derivation of the name Woolgoolga, a popular belief perpetrated in part by folding postcards.
- Note the information on timber mills and bananas, which may be helpful to steer further research.