Early Recollections, ACB

These notes were written, about 1965 I think, by my father, Arthur Cyril BARNES(1901-1985)

By Way of Introduction

The young people I meet round about have all grown up in the age of television and jet travel, and I sometimes wonder how they regard the way of life as we knew it in the early years of this century. We who have grown up from the days of the horse have seen modern amenities develop gradually, but for the younger folk to see us as we used to be, and see the conditions under which we lived, would be to transport them almost to a world of make-believe. So I am going to put down some of the things I remember of the world in which I grew up. And because this is a personal story, I am afraid I must use the personal pronoun a good deal, and I must also use the names of my family and friends, not to hold them up to praise or blame, but like the dates in a history book - as pegs to hang things on. Most of the facts I shall be recording are remembered from my first years on a bush farm nearly forty miles from Wanganui, in the Mangamahu district, but some of them come from later experiences in the Waverley hinterland. In both places the conditions were very similar, and, although in the more settled areas improvements in the living standards were beginning to become general, the back-block people were still pioneers in every sense of the term. When we left Mangamahu in 1907, there was, I think, one motor car in the Wanganui district; there was not a mile of sealed road; many of the streams were unbridged; a few miles of distance meant an impossible journey. More thought and planning went into the arranging of a holiday ten miles away, than is necessary today for a trip to Australia. Perhaps that is why I remember only one holiday away from the farm until the time came for us to leave it. But there was much in the day-to-day activities to make life full and interesting.

The Home We Lived In

The house we lived in was not the first house that had been built on the farm. The first house was a slab whare with only a dirt floor. How long the family had lived in it I am not sure. I remember it as one of the sheds on the farm. But the first consideration was to get land cleared so that stock could be carried. Then thought could be given to the building of a more comfortable home. For this purpose, suitable trees were selected for felling, and saw-pits constructed for sawing up the logs into timber. This was a strenuous job. A flat-bottomed pit was dug on the hillside and a frame of heavy beams erected over it to take the weight of the logs. The long beams at the sides, and the end cross beams were firmly fixed in place, but a third crossbeam was not fastened, but free to move backwards or forwards according to the position of the saw-cut. When the log was levered on to the pit frame, and lined up, it was fastened by iron dogs to keep it in place. These dogs were iron bars about two feet in length, and having sharp points at each end. When in place, the log was first cut down the centre with a huge breaking-down saw, after which the two halves were sawn into the smaller sizes with a lighter saw. So that the saw-cuts would be in straight lines, a mark was made along the log where the cut was to go. For this purpose, a cord covered with lamp-black was stretched along the log and when tight it was flicked, leaving a straight, clear line which the top man was able to follow. The sawyers worked in pairs, the man on top of the log moving backwards ahead of the saw, while the pitman down below moved forward behind the saw. The handle at the bottom was detachable to enable the saw to be withdrawn from the cut. As the logs were cut up the piles of timber alongside the pit grew, being sorted according to size as they came off the pit. Thus almost at a glance the men could tell how much of each type of timber they had produced.

When the timber was assembled on the site, the building of the house could begin. Foundation blocks were set in the ground, and the building process followed on almost the same lines as the

builders use today. In the remote areas the chimneys were a problem. In our case the bricks were home-made. A pit was dug **in** a clay bank, and the clay, when mixed thoroughly with water, was set into home-made moulds and dried. Then they were fired in a crude fire and were ready to use. Our house was built on a simple plan, a square front part covered by a hip roof, and a lean-to across the back. The general set-out of the rooms put the parents' bedroom and the older girls' room in the front, separated by a short passage, and behind that the living room with two small bedrooms leading off from it. A small part of the lean-to was another bedroom, but most of it was the kitchen. The laundry was a separate shed behind the house and the toilet was a small outbuilding some distance away. The whole homestead was at the top of a bank of the river that at this place formed the boundary of the farm.

Surrounding the house was a fine garden and orchard where grew some of the finest fruit trees I have ever known - many varieties of apple, plum, pear, mulberry, and small fruit. The orchard was Grandfather's pride and joy. He had been trained in that work in Kent before coming to New Zealand in 1841, and his gooseberries trained up like standard roses are the only ones I have seen grown that way. But let anybody touch one of Grandfather's trees without his permission and the wrath of heaven would descend!

We were fortunate that my father was a builder, as he was able to construct all the buildings needed on the place. In fact, much of the running of the place was left to the older members of the family while he was away on building contracts to earn some ready money to finance his growing responsibilities. As the older boys grew up, too, they were often needed by the neighbours to help with the farm work, and so were able to earn some pocket-money.

In the house all the work was done by Mother and the older girls. When I was old enough to notice such things, our cooking was done on a range with a woodburning attachment projecting in the front. But in the earlier years most things were cooked in camp-ovens over an open fire. This was very hot work for the cook. A metal bar with chains suspended from it allowed the camp-oven to be placed high or low above the fire, according to the degree of heat needed in the cooking. Bread needed embers below and on the top, and was usually done at one side of the fire, where a uniform heat could be maintained. Well-baked camp-oven bread has a taste that nothing can equal!

Bread-making days were Tuesday and Friday. The yeast was saved in a preserving jar from one baking to another, and the night before baking day, a “sponge” was made of potato-water, sugar, etc. and left overnight to set, so that in the morning it had risen to fill the special saucepan that was used for no other purpose. Then on baking day the flour, mixed with a little salt was set out in a huge mixing basin with a hollow in the centre of the mixture, and the sponge mixture poured in and gently mixed together. Later came the kneading, with time allowed for the yeast to cause the dough to rise, and after a couple of risings it was divided up into loaves, that were cooked in a moderately hot oven.

Another regular household task was the making of butter. As the milk came morning and evening from the milkers, it was taken to the dairy where the surplus not wanted for use as liquid milk was poured into wide, round enamelled vats and allowed to set until next morning, by which time the cream had risen to the top, and this was skimmed off into a bowl. In two or three days there was enough in the bowl for churning. After the churn had been scalded, the cream was put in it and the beaters turned with the handle. That seems a simple process. In fact, it was one o the most unpredictable. Sometimes the little lumps of butter began to form in about ten minutes; and sometimes after half an hour the cream was still liquid! Some people had queer notions about churning the butter. I remember once staying at my Uncle Dick's place, and watching him

do the churning, a job he always did himself. Seated on a bench beside the dairy he turned the handle for ages. But he wouldn't let me take a turn because I might turn it the opposite way, and according to his belief, would turn the butter back to cream!

When the butter was finally made, washed and worked, it was put up into pounds. Usually these were the well-known rectangular shape, but sometimes an old butter-mould that had been Grandfather Old's was used, and we would see a model of a long-tailed sheep imprinted on our dish of butter.

Meat was always farm-killed mutton except for the rare occasions when somebody in the neighbourhood killed a bullock, in which event those on nearby farms shared the meat. Sometimes the others bought the meat, but usually killing was done in rotation and all shared. Later on when my brothers had the farm at Moeawatea, there were times when a group of neighbours would organise a hunt for wild cattle in the bush. This could be very dangerous, as some of the cattle were very unpredictable, and on more than one occasion one of the hunters would be treed until one of the others came near enough to shoot the animal. Both at Mangamahu and at Moeawatea there were wild pigs which provided both meat and sport.

Pig hunting could be really exciting. My participation was very limited, but I have listened with great interest to the tales John and Albert have told. If the dogs got on to pigs in the bush, that was usually the signal to drop everything and give chase. Sometimes they had rifles with them, and sometimes they did not, and then anything they had been using was the hunting weapon. Once Albert had been cutting grass-seed, and his only hunting tool was the sickle. With this he killed a young animal by throwing the sickle and inflicting a mortal wound. His most audacious kill was when he knocked down a pig with a large lump of rock, and while it was stunned his mate jumped in and grabbed it, turning it over so that they could kill it with a knife.

I should like to say that both the older brothers were good shots, particularly Albert, who was also very good at judging distances. If he said a pig was four hundred yards away, that would be within a few yards either way. His favourite target was a line of pigs moving up-hill away from him. His usual weapon was an old army rifle, .303.

But hunting was only a pastime, usually on Sunday, while the rest of the week was spent in such tasks as bush-felling and land clearing, fencing, (when fencing materials were available) and the multiplicity of jobs that have to be done on a farm.

One of the worst features of a back-block farm is its isolation, although this engenders a self-reliance often not found in people who have more ready access to the amenities of more comfortable living. We had to find our own playthings. I remember making sheep yards with chips from the wood-heap, and using the hard seeds from some of the trees for the sheep. We also at an early age learned to use some of Dad's tools - the really sharp ones were usually well out of our reach. Sometimes, however, they weren't, and I have a few scars still where chisels or sharp axes cut something they were not intended for. When one of us was hurt, Mother was the doctor. She had quite a flair for first aid, and if any of the neighbours was sick, or hurt, somebody would ride over to see if Mother could go to the home. She had a calm approach which immediately put the patient's mind at ease, and went a long way towards the beginning of recovery. In case of an accident she dressed the wound with gentle hands, if necessary applying one of the simple remedies that a doctor friend had recommended that she keep on hand, or resorting to old family "cures", or sometimes turning to the knowledge of the curative properties of native plants learned from the Maoris.

With the nearest doctor forty miles away, in the days before the telephone or the motor car, sudden emergencies had to be dealt with on the spot, with whatever means were to hand. There were times when a man was injured in the bush and had to be taken out where the doctor could attend him. Then a rider would be sent on ahead to get a message to a doctor, probably by relays of horses or horsemen, and the farmers around would arrange for the transport of the wounded man. If the road was open to vehicular use, he would be laid in as comfortable position as possible and taken that way. But when the road was not open it would mean carrying him on an improvised stretcher, probably an all-night journey. Too often it was found that the patient could not survive the trip. Usually if he did make it, he would be met by the doctor many miles from town, the doctor having driven as fast as his horses could make the distance.

One of the advantages of the isolation was the freedom from epidemics. Winter, of course, had its quota of colds and chills, but serious infectious diseases seldom found such remote areas. Perhaps people away for a holiday would pick up something and be ill while they were away, but they seldom brought the infection back. Even the vegetables grew without many of the diseases we now have to spray for. I do,not know of potato blight, for example, at Mangamahu.

The mail came in to us once a week. There were more frequent deliveries to the Mangamahu township about eight miles nearer to Wanganui, as the coach ran three days a week from Fordell, on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. But the outlying settlements were serviced less often. I have a vague picture of the mailman, Mr Shaw, coming along the road and leaving our mail and other parcels in a box at the road gate. He was a bearded man, and as a young child I felt a bit scared of him. In summer he drove in a trap, but in winter he rode, leading a pack-horse which carried the mail and other things. The roads were for the most part, unfenced tracks through the farms, so that it was most important that the mailman and other travellers should shut all the boundary gates.

Farm Work

I suppose that farm work varies little from place to place, or from time to time. Yet over a long period of years the changes are very noticeable. I knew the farm only after it had been cleared of its bush, but when it was first taken up, the whole area was standing bush, and the trees had to be cleared and the land sown down in grass before a sheep could be grazed. This had been a long-term project.

First, the clearing plan for the whole farm had to be decided upon and the initial area surveyed. Then, either the owner himself and his family did the work, or a contract for the felling was let. The felling was usually carried out in winter, because then labour was available, and the felled logs would be dry enough to burn in the following autumn. It seems to us now that such a waste of good timber trees should never have been allowed; but sixty years ago timber was plentiful and few people could see that we were wasting one of our greatest natural resources. Before the trees were felled, the land had to be "scrubbed", that is, the bushmen went over the forest floor and chopped with a slasher, all the undergrowth such as supplejacks, so that, when the trees were felled there would be nothing to hold up a failing tree, causing it to endanger the lives of the men working. Trees were not chopped down one at a time, but in drives. A suitable big tree well up on the hillside would be picked out as the driving tree, and all the other trees below it had a front "scarf" (a V-shaped cut) chopped out of them. When all those in the line had been so prepared, the driving tree was felled on top of the nearest ones, and the others fell like a house of cards. Great skill was needed in felling the "driver", as it had to land exactly into the lower trees at a spot where it would be most effective. First the front scarf was cut about half way through, and then the back was put in, about six inches higher than the front one. When the back cut was nearly through there would be some ominous loud cracks, and the top of the tree would begin to

shake; then it would slowly start to topple forward, and the bushmen would step back out of danger, while the tree, gaining momentum, would crash forward into the nearest clump to start a chain reaction which would continue right down the hillside. On a good day, a big area could be cleared, but if the trees were not suitably placed many days of hard labour were needed to show much progress. Gradually as the months went by, the foliage turned to a reddish-brown colour and by March or April the felled strip was ready for burning.

Burning off was a dangerous and exciting task. The wind had to be coming in the right direction, and not too strong, the weather settled, and other conditions suitable. A sudden change of wind could endanger fives and property. Often two or three people.would light the fires at different points to ensure a controlled burn. The first great clouds of smoke would curl upwards and turn downwards until the breeze picked them up and drifted them together into a solid dark mass, thickening and darkening the sky. The sun looked like a huge red disc, and the flames leapt and spread into a surrounding inferno. If the wind eddied the air was chokingly hot and dry. All day, and if necessary all night, a watch was kept to see that the fire did not spread to the standing bush or to other places where it could do harm. When it had died down, for days there would be smoking stumps and tree-trunks sending up their spirals of blue smoke, until perhaps a shower would finally remove all danger. But the haze blotted out even the nearest hills, and the smell of burning lasted, it seemed for weeks.

Even while the ashes were still warm, the sowers were out with the grass-seed to sow on the new ground. For sowing in hilly country, a sower usually made a sowing bag out of a sack, cutting a slit to put his hands in, and fastening a strap to each end, passing the strap over his shoulder. Thus he was able to walk along, dipping his hands into the seed bag, and, with a swing to right or left with his hands, scatter the grass-seed evenly over the soil. At strategic intervals there would be sacks of seed from which the operator could replenish the bag he was carrying.

So the hillside would remain bare and black for a few months until the green film of young grass began to make its appearance. Often a fodder crop such as rape was included in the mixture, and this was a valuable crop for fastening the young lambs the following spring. But in getting to the feed the lambs had to move among the blackened logs and stumps, and they sometimes looked more like wild pigs than lambs! The wool from these animals looked uninviting, and had to be sold at a lower price.

One of the first things needed for the new burn was to have a fence of some kind to enclose it. When fencing materials were scarce the farmer often had to make blocks along the bush line, with poles cut from the bush; but these blocks were only partially successful, and before long the stock broke their way through them. The worst were the wild pigs, which rooted their way under and broke down the low rails, so that the lambs were soon in the standing bush, and mustering them was no easy task. As soon as practicable the farmer tried to have a wire fence erected, and assembling the material on the job often called for quite a bit of ingenuity. I remember as a small boy being fascinated as I watched the older ones bringing posts from the hillside across the gully. The posts had been split well up on the hill, above the place where they would be needed. A long length of fencing wire was stretched from a stump nearby, right across the gully to another stump handy to the site where the fence was to go, and along this wire all the posts were sent. One method I have seen used was to staple the posts, one at a time to the wire, and let the gravitational pull carry the posts across. On another occasion, a kind of cage was used, with ropes attached so that the load could be hauled across. In this case there was not so great a difference in the levels of the anchoring stumps. If a permanent cage was erected, a much heavier wire was needed.

Getting the fencing wire was a different problem. This had to be brought in from the "outside", and in the case of most bush farms, it had to come on packhorses. The packing of supplies was always an adventure. In the first place the man in charge had to know the individual animals in his train. Some of the horses had very decided dislikes as to what they would carry and coils of wire figured high on the list of many of them. One old horse that my brothers had, had the answer to almost everything in the packing category. At various places along the route he had stumps, or other fixed objects which he used for the purpose of loosening or removing his load. While he was being harnessed he would blow himself up, so that the surcingle would scarcely go round him; and when he was being loaded up he would bite, or kick, or paw the ground, or suddenly swing round to unsettle the load. So it was with particular glee that the heaviest and most awkward loads were usually his to carry. But a gentle rub on this stump, or that bank, or the end of the bridge, quite often found Baidy minus his burden before he was halfway home. If his load was sugar or flour some instinct seemed to tell him, and those were the times when he would stumble while crossing the ford and get his load thoroughly soaked. Often a year's supplies of some commodities were packed in at the one time, and the supply wagon would have to be met at the road terminus which was probably ten or more miles from the farm. Some of the horses in the pack train were quiet and reliable, and these were often loaded and sent on their way, while the "narks" were kept till they could be kept under close supervision.

Even catching the horses could be time-consuming, as there were a few animals that would be caught only when they wanted to be. , One such used to wait till the catcher was nearly to him, and then quietly trot away, a game he would keep up for hours. However, John had a good heeling dog, and one day, becoming exasperated, he set the heeler on to the horse with such good effect that, all John had to do was to go out and whistle, to make the horse back his hind end into a stump, and let himself be caught.

Some of the loads posed problems to the packer. I think that one of the worst I have ever seen was corrugated iron. It was too big to pack on the animal's side, and had to be balanced across the top of the pack-saddle, and firmly secured to the harness. A stove for the cottage was dismantled and packed in pieces. Windows, even when carefully crated, were too fragile to be entrusted to any pack-horse and were carried on the men's own shoulders. After the shearing, the wool was packed into small sacks and taken to the shed of a neighbour who was within reach of the road. Here it was put into proper wool packs and pressed; the full packs would be far too heavy and bulky for pack animals. It was sometimes wise to have the horses strung together with ropes, but they usually travelled better if free to go at their own individual pace.

The Roads

Backblock roads are anything from reasonably passable formed road-ways, to overgrown tracks, which, if you did not know the area, would be almost impossible to find or follow. When my parents first took up their bush farm, the only road was a line on a map. The place was reached by following a bush-covered ridge which turned off the marked route about eight miles down the road, and following this ridge some distance, and then crossing the hills until finally you came in sight of the property across the "Creek", which was easily forded at normal times, but after rain was often impassable. Dad, of course, went in ahead of the rest of the family, to prepare some form of habitation, and later the family was brought in. My brother, George, was only a few months old at the time, and Mother carried him in front of her the whole way, a matter of about thirty miles. It took her a whole day, and she told us many years later, that she was many days before she could straighten her arms. Many times she rode the ridge, often in the most appalling weather. Often there would be slips on the track, bringing down sections of the bush that blocked the way, necessitating detours which were often round headlands or across steep ravines. Often a slip would take away chains of track, leaving only sheer cliff face. Across the river from our

home there was a hut used by those travellers who were blocked by the weather, and in it was a quantity of dry firewood and matches. But sometimes a forgetful traveller would put the matches in his pocket, or forget to replenish the wood-box. On one such occasion my mother had to spend the night, soaked to the skin, with no matches or dry wood to make a fire, and the stream was in flood.

All the visitors arrived by horseback. Some of them who had lived all their lives in town were stiff and sore for days, and I am sure that their stay would scarcely be looked upon as a holiday. When I remember the farm, the road had been put through. It was quite wide enough for wheeled traffic, although on the bluffs there was not passing room. There was no metal on the surface, and it wasn't long before there were deep ruts all along it. Where the road ran through the farm paddocks, it was unfenced, and this created problems when stock was moved from one farm to another. Usually the farmer through whose place the stock had to be moved would shift his animals out of the adjacent field, but there were times when this could not be done. Then the value of a well-trained pack of dogs became apparent. They would quietly herd the farmer's flock away from the roadway, and the passing flock went through without mixing.

In these days, when we think of roadmaking in terms of bulldozers and suchlike machines, the methods I remember being seem primitive and crude. I saw some of the road construction in the Moeawatea in the days of my youth; in fact after one of the big floods I actually was one of the settlers' working party helping to get the road in working order. Our tools were mainly shovels and picks, although some points of rock were blown off with explosives.

In general, the roadmaking was done by private contractors who were not settlers in the district. The major obstructions were the deep gorges which every stream had gouged out of the soft soil. These gorges would be probably sixty or more feet deep. When only riding and pack animals were passing that way, the steep cliff faces of the gorges had zig-zag tracks made down to the creek-bed and up the other side. But when a more permanent road was made, the gorges had to be filled so that the roadway went across at a higher level. Tunnellers were engaged to excavate a tunnel high up on the face of the cliff, a passage-way sometimes some chains in length, and in that country, often through very hard rock. When the tunnel was completed the spoil from road-cuttings on either side of the gorge was dumped into the gully, gradually filling it up. The water of the stream impounded behind the filling formed a lake, often some chains back, and when the level rose to the height of the tunnel it flowed through it to the lower side of the filling and away to the main stream. Big fillings needed spoil to be brought a good distance, and the usual conveyance was a hand-cart, although for short distances a barrow was almost as good. In the wet weather, boards had to be put down over the fresh fill so that the wheels would not sink in.

Trees on the road line had to be removed, and the usual means was by explosive charges. Sometimes a tree which would be useful was chopped down and used for timber or posts or firewood.

Even in the construction stages, provision of water-tables and culverts was vital, as a fresh might undo the work of months. I have seen new work so scoured that days of extra work had to be done. Then, new banks are always liable to slip. In shallow cuttings this is not a great problem; but sometimes on a high bank considerable quantities may come down, the spoil consisting of clay and soil and all that grew on it. Quite large trees often helped to cause the blockage, and these had to be chopped or sawn up before they could be dragged off the roadway. Sometimes a flooded stream undercut the roadway round a bluff that some chains of it fell into the stream and was washed away. Then a new road had to be cut, and sometimes it had to be re-routed. This happened many years after we left Mangamahu, and the new stretch was so steep and difficult to

negotiate that it became know as the "Burma Road" after the famous route to China in the wars of the 1940s.

Sheep Work

I had never seen a sheep shorn by machines until I was about twelve years old, and that was at an agricultural show. All the work in this field was done with the blades before that, as far as my experience went, and a man who could shear one hundred a day was quite fast by the standards of that day. Of course there were faster men, but they were out in the older settlements. In the bush the farmers had to do the work with whatever local labour was available, and that meant by men who were self-taught on the farms. The sheep were held in a more upright position than the machine shearer uses; and the quiet snipping of the blades was very different from the noise of the machines, particularly the early petrol-driven ones, with the "oil engine" in the same room as the shearers.

In the shed, the "fleeco" had no difficulty in looking after three men, in contrast with a demonstration I saw recently where some fast shearers seemed to have one person to each shearer for picking up the fleeces. The wool was roughly sorted out bellies, pieces, stained or daggy bits removed from the fleece wool - and the fleeces were baled according to the type. The actual pressing was done in a home-made press, a man with a spade standing in the wool-pack, and, as the rolled fleeces were handed to him, he would put them in place and work them down the sides of the pack with the spade. It is surprising how much wool could be worked into a pack with this method. In those times the bales were the 'lull-size" type, about a quarter larger than the ones used today. Some of them weighed nearly six hundred pounds when full, and the men carting them away were pretty vocal about the weight, especially when there was no loading platform, and the heavy bales had to be lifted by hand from ground level. Of course, it was only the last bale that had to be lifted the full height. The others were rolled up on to one placed behind the wagon, and from it on to the vehicle itself. At most sheds, however, there were either loading platforms or a bank alongside of the shed, one side cut away so that the carter could pull in at a lower level and load without having to lift the bales to the floor of his wagon.

A wagon-load of wool always looked top-heavy, especially as the second tier of bales projected beyond the sides. On my father's wagon four bales were laid on the floor transversely, and six in the next row, laid lengthwise in pairs, so that the two side rows had nearly half a bale over the side. The load was securely roped in place, and a tarpaulin tied over everything. But when I saw the load moving off up the hill and on to the road around the first bluff, I thought in my childish mind that the whole outfit would topple over the bank. And I still remember after more than sixty years, my terror at riding on top of such a high load of furniture when we finally left the farm.

Sheep work involved much more than shearing, and even at shearing time the other jobs, such as mustering, which meant getting out to the far hills before the summer sunrise, the yarding, drafting, dagging, and the other incidental work, kept everyone busy. For the women in the house it meant extra work too, with so many extra "smoko" teas as well as the. big ordinary meals for men doing hard manual work.

Later on there was the dipping, which we younger fry were allowed to see only from a safe distance. In those times the dip was a long swim type, with a ramp at the far end for the sheep to walk up after they had had their immersion. The undipped sheep were crowded into a small pen at the deep end of the dip and forced to plunge into the smelly liquid. Dad stood about halfway along the side of the dip, armed with a "crutch" with which he forced the swimming sheep down so that all of it was disinfected. Then it was allowed to walk up the ramp to the draining pen, a small square of concrete (the only concrete on the farm), where the excess of dipping fluid ran out

of the wool and back into the dip. We hadn't any fancy tipboards such as I have seen elsewhere; I don't even remember a sack at the head of the dip, but there may have been one. After the dipping the smell of the disinfectant seemed to hang around for weeks. Perhaps that was because the working clothes were hung near the back door.

Lambing time, perhaps the most anxious time of year for the farmer was the responsibility of the older ones, and so I have little recollection of the work involved. But I do remember visits of the stock buyers, and the mustering, and drafting and marking and the re-drafting that took place. Then the stock selected would start on the long journey away. Sometimes John and Albert would be the drovers, but usually a drover accompanied the buyer, and, as the quotas from each farm were selected a mob of two or three thousand would be built up and driven together. A drover's work was a very skilful occupation. A good man would get his flock to its destination in good condition, without any losses and with no undue delay. There were no stock moving trucks in those days; all sheep or cattle had to be moved on the hoof. A good pack of dogs was a very necessary part of the drover's equipment, and these dogs had to be well fed. So when a long journey was involved, some old sheep were included in the flock for "dog-tucker". Every few miles there were accommodation paddocks provided by the county councils, where the flocks could be put for the night.

We always disliked walking along the road after a mob of sheep had been along, because all those thousands of feet broke up the surface and made the walking hard, and in the Fordell district later on, they seemed always to leave the roads covered with thistles, and briars, and any other prickly twig that had caught the wool. In the summer time the mobs of sheep could be seen miles away by the huge clouds of dust that rose from the roads. It was the practice of the rural local bodies, where the width permitted, to have a "summer road", an unmetalled strip, beside the metalled way, to give easier surface for the horses. This summer road was usually just dust, about six inches deep, and after the passage of a large flock, the surrounding hedges, trees, fields, and anything else nearby had a coating of grey dust. In the winter, of course, it was mud, and then the driven stock was covered with it.

Entertainment

Young people must always have some way to occupy their spare time, and, in an isolated area, much of this occupation had to be of one's own devising. But there were times when a community activity took place. The days I remember were before the motion picture became the popular form of amusement, and the usual outside pleasure was enjoyed by attending dances. There were no public halls within many miles, but some of the neighbours had woodsheds large enough to hold a number of dancers. On the night chosen, families from all around would gather at the shed where the dance was to be held, some coming in traps and buggies if the road was usable, but most arriving on horseback, usually bringing something for supper, and carrying a bag containing their evening wear. Dancing went on till the small hours, when it was a case of changing back into riding clothes and returning home. Music for the dances was often a problem, as few of the settlers had pianos, or could play one. So it was a Godsend if there was somebody who could bring an instrument and play it. In this respect my father was a most valued member of the community. He was a very competent performer on the concertina, with a wide repertoire of the dance tunes of the day. Sometimes a neighbour would bring along a fiddle or an accordion. In the confined space of a woolshed this was loud enough for the dancers.

The dances of those days must sound strange to the ears of the folk of today. There was of course, the waltz, but who now can dance such square dances as the Lancers, the de Alberts, or even the "round" dances such as the polka, the mazurka, or the schottische? The programme usually followed the pattern of two round dances to one square dance, the square dances being

made up in'ligures" of eight dancers, with each dancer having to know all the figures. With learners in a set, the lancers could be quite a strenuous activity.

Later, when we had moved to Fordell, there was a hall in which public entertainments were held. As a family we did not go to many of them. However we did go to all the local concerts, which were usually for the school, or the church, or for patriotic funds (in the 1914-18 years).

Daytime gatherings were mostly sports meetings, and were held at the Mangamahu township eight miles down the road. This was always a summer activity, held, I think, on Anniversary Day; but apart from vague pictures in my mind of many kiddies running about, I have little recollection of them.

I don't know whether I am right in listing church services with amusements, but at least it was a social activity. Our church days were limited to those months when there were five Sundays in the month, and the minister was not expected to those preaching places he had to go to on the first, or second, or third or fourth Sunday. The services were held in the public school, and all the settlers for miles around attended. It made no difference whether the preacher belonged to the Presbyterian, Anglican, or any other denomination, the same people attended. Later, at Fordell, we had regular services only at the Presbyterian church and so the younger members of the family were brought up to that church, although both Mother and Father were Anglicans. Still later I married a Methodist, and have been a regular attendant there ever since. But the name means little if one is sincere.

Individual interests gave rise to some interesting leisure-time occupations. We were all fond of reading, and all sorts of books came to our house, to be read in turn by most of the family. Dad, because of his very limited formal education, took a long time to finish a book. Some of the older ones were also slow readers, and if they tried to read orally, made some curious mispronunciations. Papers that came in the weekly mail were read to the last word of the smallest advertisement, and this was especially true of the weekly paper. Other occupations were, for the girls, various types of needlework, especially crochet and knitting, and all the boys did woodworking of one form or another. For many years we had pictures in frames that Mother had decorated with berries gathered from the bush. We did not appreciate them and allowed them to fall into disrepair, but in their way they were unique.

Of a more active use of spare time, riding was always popular. There were always horses handy, and the older ones were good riders. Sometimes some of the neighbouring young came along and helped break in young horses.