



Rae Tassell

Interview Excerpt 15 December 2016

Oral History Project
Reliving the past: Stories from our communities

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Interviewee: Rae Tassell
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The sawmilling and timber industries of the Pilliga Forest

Sawmilling in the Pilliga Forest started as early as the 1870s. By the 1930s it had become a thriving industry and Baradine had become the centre of the forestry industry for the region. Small but thriving communities developed as forestry men and their families lived and worked at the remote sawmill sites. In this interview Rae Tassell recalls the fun she had as a child living at the remote Wooleybah Sawmill.

This recording created on 15 December 2016 is part of Macquarie Regional Library's oral history project, "Reliving the past: stories from our communities". Each recording contributes to the developing story of life in the Baradine area.

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(I): So would you like to start talking about your earliest memories of living in the Pilliga Forest, I guess, and at Wooleybah. How did you come to get there, do you want to talk a bit about your family history on the Wooleybah sawmill?

(S): Well, my uncle and father had a partnership at Rocky Creek and then Euligal; there was a sawmill that dad took over when he married mum. They moved to Wooleybah and I was nine months old and her recollection of Wooleybah was absolutely shocking - wattle trees and scrub because she used to go across to Coonamble - when she got there, there was a forestry home; a family of mother father and six kids, I think they had, and boy did they give her a welcome. They were so isolated, they just woopy-dooded the mill coming to them. And from there on she was such a wonderful friend. We eventually - they had a little old subsidised school, there was about - Ted Taylor and a few of those came. There were about ten children I think, but when they all started to get around, we had families stayed with us really until the kids had to go to work. And we got a public school and we had a teacher, and we had up to sixth class and then you did the leaflets in Year One and then I went to boarding school. But in those days then Heads mill joined up with us and we had two teachers, but I was married in the meantime and the childhood I had in the Pilliga was absolutely superb.



Wooleybah school children, c.1950

Dad built tennis courts and they had great tennis tournaments out there and they had a Wooleybah Cup and one of the men had made it and it was a jam tin on a piece of board and he had it engraved

and to that I would have loved to have found it but everyone came to Wooleybah to play tennis for the Wooleybah Cup. It was a great social outing. The women used to do all the cooking, and they had a cricket team at one stage. They used to get on the back of the truck and go round playing cricket and the atmosphere of all those people, they were just such special people.

I did not know anybody in Baradine until I came really, to say that I did, because we had such a mob of us out there that where ever we went we had carloads of kids; you didn't want to know anyone else. And it was absolutely wonderful the childhood we had. We would go north, south, east and west on our bikes and around Quandonging. We weren't allowed near the dams; that was a no-no but when that hooter went at that mill at five o'clock look out if you didn't scamper for home. And you could not do it now, you really couldn't do it, when you think about it. You'd be worried sick about your kids all day, but that was our lives – it was free.

We had old Jimmy White with his cart and he was an old snigger and he had Dobbin and I can't think of the other old one and he'd trot into the mill. He must have lived on the back of the cart, I think, he'd been in the bush all week. He'd trot into the mill - 'Can we go with you Uncle Jim?' 'OK kids, hop on'. And we'd go to the five mile ramp and he'd say, 'Ok you lot, get off and run home'. That was the highlight of our Friday afternoon.

But it was great it really was a wonderful childhood. Everybody got on with everybody and we had lots of social gatherings out there. Cracker night – we'd be weeks and weeks dragging up logs. Oh, I suppose everyone had a little bag of crackers. We didn't have much money. We had a mail three days a week. We had a grocer who used to come out from ah - Coonamble. I think he came about once a month on an old truck – oh got you - So they would all gather and buy their groceries. Christmas time he would bring ice-cream in those big canvas things with hot ice. I've got photos of us all around this old truck really relishing the ice-cream. That was our life, and what a life it was. Now kids wouldn't do it, they would be stuck at TV.

No, but very carefree, very loving community; anybody had anything wrong with them, everybody backed them up. We got the Italians in the War; the Italians that were interred that they sent to us. I'll always remember Henry Schwagger came and he put two of them in a hut and Hartley went back and they had a lots of tins with them, but they did not know how to use a tin opener so they were nearly starving. No, we had lots of little funny things happen, but I haven't regretted a minute of it.



Local children at Wooleybah eating ice-creams, Coonamble grocer Norman's Hinds truck can be seen in the background, 1935.