



Rae Tassell

Interview Transcript 15 December 2016

Oral History Project
Reliving the past: Stories from our communities

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Interviewee: Rae Tassell

Interviewer: Liz Cutts

Date: 15 December 2016

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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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Interviewer (I): This is Liz Cutts and I'm recording an interview with Baradine resident Rae Tassell and the date is Thursday 15th December 2016. We're talking in Baradine about the history of the sawmilling and timber industries of the Pilliga forest in and around the Baradine area.

Rae thank you for agreeing to talk to me. Can you state your full name please and your place and date of birth.

Subject (S): Rae Tassell, I was Underwood, and I was born on the 24-06-1933 at Coonabarabran at Nurse Taylor's Private Hospital. From there I went to Wooleybah and I didn't move very far away from it.

[0:00:51] (I): So you've lived in the Baradine district the whole of your life?

(S): All my life apart from boarding school.

(I): Right. Before we go any further would you just like to tell me your parent's full name and do you know where they were born?

(S): Thomas Underwood was born at Newcastle, I feel. His father and brother had come out on some boat and he met up with grandma and married down there and I feel that he was born there and my mother was also born at Nurse Taylor's and she was a Casey.

[0:01:29] (I): Right, thank you. 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 a 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

[0:03:17] 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.



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

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.

[0:6:38] (I): Can you remember why your father started up the sawmill, what did he do at the sawmill?

(S): Well, they came from dairy farms between Narrabri and Wee Waa and when they used to milk cows and go to school and do all that kind of thing like kids did those days, then his father gave him 'Lone Pine' which was a small property and the other brother was given a picture show. But anyway, they always had this idea was that they would start sawmilling. So from Lone Pine they set up a mill and from there it was all private and then it went to the Forestry and they became the Underwood brothers for many, many years, well really until Tom [Rae's brother] got old enough after he left school to take over Wooleybah and they dissolved the partnership. So I would say for many, many years it was Underwood brothers, one at Rocky Creek, one at Wooleybah. And they must have just thought, well we'll see

how we will go with sawmilling. Jack (Rae's Uncle) later on went into farming and we just kept the mills going.

[0:07:53] (I): So was it just White Cypress Pine at the mill...

(S): Yes, yes.

(I): ...And they shipped it out obviously; can you remember anything about the methods of moving the timber or where it went to?

(S): Well we used to have Uncle Jim had the truck to cart the timber and it used to go to the siding at Kenebri and he would load it into the trucks and then we had an agent in Sydney and he would take charge of it and put it in the timber yards and sell it out as Cypress. Then in later years the Japanese picked it up because it's white ant resistant and they have a lot of trouble with white ants over there. They would have bought all the Gwabegar produce that they could have possibly gathered. It would have gone to Japan by ship. But a lot of it did go when Tom was in latter years before they closed the mill. But up until then it used to go by timber truck and be loaded at Kenebri and then trucked in timber - those big trucks you see around, to Sydney. It would take a while.

[0:09:04] (I): Can you remember what year - approximately what year the mill might have started up - the Wooleybah sawmill or Lone Pine was the first one?

(S): Lone Pine, oh well Wooleybah sawmill started in 1933, um dad was - I'd say the 1920's - Rocky Creek, Lone Pine probably before that. But it was only like a little two-man saw-benchy thing until they branched out and really and truly got the forestry licences they used to get those days and it started at Rocky Creek and then Mum came there as a subsidised teacher. It's where she met up with my Dad and then they moved to Wooleybah. So it would be 1933 the Wooleybah started. Yes, I would say well and truly in early 20's.

[0:10:16] (I): Was Rocky Creek was the first sawmill to close before the Underwood brothers became a partnership. Was Rocky Creek closed first and then everyone moved to Wooleybah...?

(S): No, no. Jack Underwood's family kept Rocky Creek going between the two of them. We had a manager, Henry Schwagger used to come between the two. And, oh no, they were both flourishing sawmills called Underwood

Brothers. And then, when Tom was old enough it was time for him to take up the reins of Wooleybah. Mum split the partnership up and we took over Wooleybah and they kept Rocky Creek, which moved to Kenebri, which became - Isabel and Steve Jack managed it and from there did Peter Featherbe buy it?

[0:11:04] (I): I think so.

(S): Yes. Yes, and then Underwood Brothers, Jack Underwood's family were more farming. They just got rid of theirs whereas Tom liked his little bit of Cypress Pine sawdust I think and he and mum bought Gwabegar from Bradley and Whitemans, no, yes Bradley and Whitemans, I think, one of them - and they took over that and in those years the timber had to be dried so they had to have big drying sheds. As Gwabegar was a much more superior mill, the little mill at Wooleybah closed for a while and then Colin Head took over and he rented it for quite a few months until he went out of business and it is still there.

[0:11:55] (I): That was an era in the 30's when there were sawmills throughout the Pilliga, it was a thriving industry for the local people.

(S): Absolutely, there was about, in the '50s I think, there would have been 17 sawmills in this area and 30 odd sleeper cutters because when we were in business that was the main thing in Baradine was the sleeper pay, the millers, the little Kenebri store and everything like that, that kept this district going. It really was - we were flourishing because everybody was earning big money and the sleeper cutters used to come in and get their groceries. It would be easily 35 of them. The Keegan brothers and all those...

[0:12:45] (I): Can you remember any of the names of the other sawmills that were in the Pilliga at that time?

(S): Um. Bradley and Whiteman, Tanner and Middleton, we were at Gwabegar, Pichams were here (Baradine), Milawindee was Pinchams, umm another Pincham's down the back of the creek. There was a Schwagger,

they were all around Pilliga, there was the Underwoods. Yes, there were quite a few thriving. And everybody lived around the mill and they kept their homes nicely, that was where they lived for the rest of their lives really.

[0:13:34] (I): The mills were really a self-contained community?

(S) They were. We used to get a mail three days a week and we got all our groceries and everything out on that and everyone come down. It was the hub - have a yarn over the mail while the truck was coming. The women would be bringing babies and there'd be quite a gathering. We were completely self-sufficient and you did not want anything else; you did not know anything else, I suppose. But we used to get bread out. I remember, I always thought it was workman's bread because there was only mum, at this stage and she used to buy dainty little loaves of bread, the millers used to get those great big 'tank loaves' they called them. I used to love to go to one of the women to have bread and honey on this great big slab because my mother only had what we'd get today. And they were beautiful old tank loaves; we would break them in half. The mail would do anything for you, he'd would go anywhere to pick up anything, so really you didn't need transport a lot.

[0:14:45] (I): What was transport like then?

(S) Pretty rugged. The old cars with the canvas hood; oh, we did graduate when I was about ten or twelve we got - Dad had an old Oldsmobile and the rest of them gradually got cars so they could get around. We'd come into the pictures twice a week and they'd would be loaded with kids; 'course there might be two or three carloads and you'd be gathering up who went with who to go home, (laughs) but that is how we lived. It was community living.

[0:15:24] (I): What about entertainment apart from tennis and obviously some sport going on?

(S) Nop, you had to make our own entertainment. We didn't click a button like they do to get a picture on the phone. No, we just played cubbies. We played - I was a pretty good marbler. Golly, I could play marbles and

hopscotch and cricket and rounders. We just never stopped, but it was all entertainment today that the kids would not know how to do it. But we had to make our own fun (phone rings in background).

It's just that we were outside kids and we had the brumbies. We used to hang around when the brumbies would be coming in of an evening we would all; fairly way back, but we used to love our brumbies. And they would all come into the trough. Because some of them, we always had a few cows you could run your cows out there then. We had an eight acre lease and you could run a cow or two if you wanted to. The women used to milk and then one of the farmers used to come and he'd kill a beast or a sheep, and he would come down on his truck with wet hessian bags and people would come and buy it. Very hygienic it must have been, but none of us ever died. As I said the groceries used to come and the mail used to come, but well you didn't have anything to make fun, you had to do it and we had enough kids on the mill to do that. I mean we had our own cricket team, we had our own rounder team, tennis team. There was a heap of us and we had old bikes and if one didn't have a bike well the other one got on the back and we would go for miles and miles and miles quandonging. The kangaroos used to come into the trough for a drink. And we had an albino once and someone shot him; broke our hearts.

We had an albino koala colony out there too for years. I suppose it's gone now too. They were there, they used to come in, you'd hear them in the creek and that was our life. There was no, go to town and buy a bag of lollies, or - it was just great.

[0:17:50] (I): How did you manage for water out there?

(S): We had a bore. Beautiful water but not much good for a garden, it was too sodary but you could grow. We had umm - they all had lovely vegetable gardens and things like that. Dad had a big pump on it. It was a forestry bore that was already there with the forestry house when we got there but we maintained it and then he just laid the pipes around all the little houses. There were about eight or ten houses around and the men built verandas if they had another baby or wanted another room they built one. And they

just looked to their own houses and the water was piped to each house. They had their own, well I suppose they drank it too, but most of them had tanks for the rainwater. But the bore water was very, very good and each little house had its own water supply. Toilets of course were drop and err and they just - yes, it was good water. Good living.

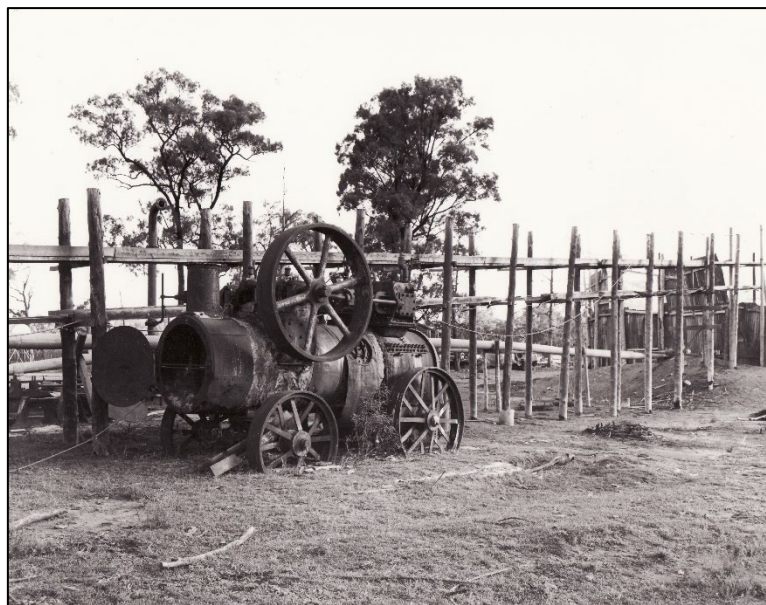
[0:19:07] (I): Can you remember roughly how many people would have lived on the sawmill at its peak?

(S): Two (pause) there would have been 10-20, twenty at least husbands and wives, and at one stage we had forty kids. Yes, there'd be about ten couples and then we had a teacher and his wife and his family. They built a house for them. And, yes there would have been fifty or sixty at a gathering. We had Christmas break up parties and always had our Christmas concert, we thought we were pretty special in it. I can remember one episode was that 'I'm a little Dutch girl' and we had to sing and dance and I was the little Dutch girl and Alan Cornwell grabbed me and he tore the paper sleeve out of my frock and I was most upset and stopped in the middle of the whole show and said, 'now look what you've done.' I brought the house down, I believe but I didn't really mean to, I was most upset. But Mrs Cornwall who was the forester's wife used to make all our costumes and we had beautiful concerts out there and beautiful Christmas break ups with Christmas trees and, no it was pretty special.

[0:20:38] (I): Going back to the sawmill and the actual operation of the sawmill, can you tell me a little bit about how it was operated. I believe they used steam driven...?

(S): Yes. Ah, there was a steam engine driver. He came with dad from Rocky Creek near Euligal and Vera Plank was their daughter and Sam was the engine driver and he used to have to get up the old steam [engine] and they had a bath house with the hot water piped through to the showers so the men could have a shower, a nice warm shower or a hot one, whatever they liked in this bath house and they used to use that. And Mrs Cornwall - Mrs Woodrow and Mrs Cornwell in latter years they ran a boarding house for the single boys and they used to have three or four men just for meals because we had Bachelor quarters built for them and, but they always had

breakfast, lunch packed for them and then they had the saws and everything were looked after by bench men and - . General care, I lost my Dad when I was eight so really and truly we were only at Wooleybah seven or eight years. But we always had a good manager and he more or less did the maintenance and things like that with the men and kept things going. Then once a week Henry Schwagger would come over, he was like the over manager.



Wooleybah Mill Steam engine, c.1935

[0:22:16] And we had the dump men and the trucks coming in with the logs and, as I said, poor old Jimmy. And so the trucks would come in and the men on the dump would take them with hooks and unload the truck. Well they would go through the first saw and take the sides off them and then they would come back down and go through the main saw and that sliced them into boards. Then we had the stacker-outer, he'd come and gather them all up and saw them up into what he wanted and then would put them in the piles. Then the trucks would come in and load them. As I said, they would go to the railhead at Kenebri and that would be, there would be about ten men there. We had bush men, they would be cutters; they were young men from Gwabegar and Kenebri, two or three of them in my day. They would come in early and we would play tennis. And they'd be out

there, they'd lived out there in tents from Monday to Friday and do the cutting and the forestry used to come out and mark the logs so that they could go ahead. And the old snig horses, Gordon Cooke and Victor were sniggers there for years after Jimmy retired with his two old ones. We had them there for years, Gordon and Joan and Victor and Joyce. Oh, Joan lost her baby girl out there but the other kids were reared there until they really got old to go, and then they all went to Sydney. So we kept our families very close together, in a big unity which was good.

[0:24:05] (I): What happened with umm if you needed medical or anything for your health; what about accidents on the sawmill how did you cope with it?

(S): Mother was chief taxi. My mother, she did all the first aid courses and if it wasn't her looking after someone and me driving - I wasn't much good so I did the driving - so, no, you just brought them in. You did first aid on the mill which mum was really, really good at. You know, just the bare necessities. We had a couple of deaths there that gave us a bit of a start but we worked those out and - but she was very special. She was always there and I have never heard - the respect those men gave her was unbelievable. She was the matriarch and the men knew she was boss and they never queried. She was their boss and they respected her for that. And, yes, she was really the first aid kit (laughs).

[0:25:13] (I): How far was the sawmill from Baradine?

(S): Ah, twenty five miles.

(I): So how long would that have taken back then?

(S): Nearly an hour. Yes, it was twenty-five.

[0:25:31] (I): On rough roads?

(S): Oh yes, yes, they weren't, well I don't think they have changed much now very much. But no, they were just bush tracks and that's all you could say about it and when you, in the old cars they would bump about a bit I would imagine. But no, they were very, very rugged, yes.

[0:26:10] (I): So you left the sawmill to go to boarding school....

(S): Umm

(I): ...So can you tell me a little bit about your life when you went to boarding school and then what in your personal life?

(S): I went to boarding school for four years, to Sydney which was a bit of a culture shock to this old girl, believe you me. From Wooleybah high to a boarding school, but I managed. We used to come home for the school holidays on the old Mudgee mail. Leave Sydney ten o'clock at night and get to Baradine 3.30 next day all over in soot, but we did it. And just stay out there, I used to go to Pilliga a lot those days. Mum had a sister there and I used to play tennis at Pilliga a lot. And therefore I put those four years in and I came home and took over the logging books at Wooleybah until I met, well Stan happened to be there one day and I liked the look of him. He was travelling for the co-op and I really liked the look of him so I set out to catch him. No, so anyway I came, I married Stan when I was nearly twenty-two just about, and settled in the shop and had a good life.

[0:27:28] (I): So this was a shop in Baradine?

(S): Yes.

(I): Would you like to talk a little bit about that?

(S): Ah yes, we had a shop with a residence and I think we had the same customers as we started with twenty-five years. All the sleeper cutters. We used to buy everything for them. We had the farmers and then we had school lunches. As a matter of fact some of the kids now say 'hello, Mrs T.' Hello, I might not have altered but it is thirty years and it is just lovely catch up with the Gwabegar girls I met the other day and they were telling me about it, 'Do you remember us?' and I said, 'OK what did you do? Margaret Pickett was the sewing teacher and Tracy Howe and, oh, an Anderson girl, Julie Anderson and Margaret Pickett would make them take their hems down on their frocks when they got to school and unbeknown to me they used to come in at lunch time and borrow a needles and cotton and go to the back toilet and take them up again. And I didn't know for a long time what that needle and cotton was about so I was an accessory to the fact and they were telling me at the funeral the other day. Oh dear, now I know.

But those kids, we had lunches for both schools till we left the shop, we didn't have tuck shop those days. Then we put in drapery and it was seven days a week, 24/7 we worked hard until we both decided we needed Sunday off. But they were the best twenty-five years. I got to know people - I didn't know them when I came to town. But our customers, I still love them to death, they were very, very special people that stuck to us for twenty-five years. That is a long time to be looking after someone. But it was, it was very special time and then when Jenny went to school and I went to work full time. Up until then I used to just work after hours and things like that. So then when she went to [school], I took over the place and one of the girls that had left and I stayed behind the counter. I don't want to see another one, it's hard work. These grocery shops are very hard work but it was very rewarding. I saw all the babies, Amy Featherbe was my baby and I'm Nana T to this day. Mary used to bring her in and the babies that I've seen grow up; we had such a personal touch with them all, but it was a great time, yes.

[0:30:10] (I): Can you talk a little bit about when things started to slow down on the sawmills and in Baradine too; when the peak of the industry seemed to be declining.

(S): Well, really when the sleeper cutters went and they put in cement sleepers instead of the ironbark ones. We lost a lot of people and there was no occupation for the children here; whereas in our day when dad was on the mill and the kid got to be fifteen, He [Tom] went on the mill with dad and he became a mill-hand. But when the mills started to decline, as they did for some reason, the kids had to go away and get jobs and that was the beginning of the end. I think then the Forestry had forty-something, forty-eight men working for them those days and we used to have sleeper pays and all that type of thing. Well, when the sleeper's went they took half the town and I think they have around five [employed] around here in the forestry now because it is not a thriving industry, of course. No it's not good and, of course, our shops are going. But then so is everybody else's, it's not Baradine's fault.

So it's a great place to live. The community spirit in Baradine is unbelievable. If you are in trouble or you've had a bereavement, it is unbelievable the people who look to you and it's really special, it's a very special town.

[0:31:51] (I): Anything else you would like to say about, in particular about the sawmill, or living on the sawmill? Any funny stories, any humorous incidents you can recall or any special memories that you haven't forgotten?

(S): Not really. It was just day to day living. We had our tragedies, we had our joys, I suppose. Life just went on. It was very calm, there was no great excitement about the place. No I don't think so.

(I): What about drought, floods, any of those weather phenomenon affect your industry or affect your lives?

(S): No. We didn't know there was a drought. We had sawdust coming out our blood and the mill went on and if there was drought well that was good because it didn't rain, to get the trucks bogged. So really, weather didn't worry us, not at all. Only if it rained and we couldn't go out that was about all that spoilt it. No, nothing - our life was pretty humdrum I suppose, when you think about it, Liz.

[0:32:58] (I): What about keeping in touch with the rest of the world because, you were only young, but back in the thirties there was a Second World War coming. Can you remember anything about the communications that might have been happening round about then, that you remember?

(S): No. I remember the day war ended. We all had to go up to the plain and take a picnic, we were all so excited. We didn't know what the war was about; it didn't worry us. I mean there was no TV like there is today. And we just knew there was a war but we had no idea the Japanese were here. We just - Oh they just had a celebration, the [mill] hooter went 'toot, toot, toot,' the war has ended and we said, 'hooray' and went for a picnic. So that was our lives. No we were pretty, pretty backward, I suppose when you think about it. Well, we didn't have papers. There were no newspapers.

[0:33:54] (I): What about radio?

(S): We had a radio. We used to listen to 'Blue hills'; 'Dad and Dave' but during the war years we were kids; they were out there somewhere, you know; it didn't worry us.

[0:34:11] (I): Was there any mixing with the communities from the different sawmills? Did you ever get together for anything?

(S): Yes. Heads used to come down and play tennis with us. Yes, Marge, Annette and mum were wonderful friends. Yes, they used to, well Marge and mum would travel all over America and everywhere with Rose Head in latter years. But Marge and Annette were great friends of mum's and, therefore, the Heads used to come down and play tennis with the boys and Dummy. Not so much Dummy, Collin and Pud and Kevin and Neville. They were older and we'd play tennis with - in later years there was no competition. The men on the mill did not play tennis in later years but the rest of us had a bash. We always kept them good order and anybody that came down to play tennis, well, we played tennis. That was our main, our main sport I suppose. We had two very good tennis courts out there and they would come from Kenebri, Gwabegar - in dad's day - he was a good tennis player. Mum never played it, I don't think, no.

But you just made your fun. We went to Teridgerie to dances and umm Gwabegar. Tennis, we just go to tennis at Gwabegar; that was about our main attraction I suppose. There wasn't much; we didn't drink. We would go to dances, but no way in the world would you go out and have a beer or go out that door; you just weren't allowed, you just didn't want to do it. Ronnie Muller's shop; we would go in there on a Friday afternoon and go out to the beer garden - I suppose it was an illegal one - and the women would get the groceries and there would be a great gathering at the back of the Kenebri store with Ronnie and Bill Muller. You can imagine the stories that would be floating around. But you made life, you just had to.

[0:36:20] (I): Can you remember the businesses that were in Kenebri, because Kenebri is only very small now.

(S): Well, there was Ronnie Muller in the store with and he had Jim Burchill as a partner at one stage. And Ronnie had the butchers shop. Then there was Jacky Prose¹ the Indian was up the other, about halfway up that great big street. That would be about all and he sold clothes and I don't think he had groceries - must have had. Then there was the post office next to him and Mrs Moore was there in my day. And we had the exchange; you didn't say terribly much because it was a community line and one ring and everybody picked it up, didn't matter whose it was.

So Miss Morrissey was ours at Teridgerie [on the telephone exchange] and she was priceless, she listened to everything. And mum would be taking an order, or they'd ring to see if the order was ready and told him, 'I will have to check on that one,' and Miss Morrissey would cut her off and say, 'Now, Mary, Henry Schwagger he promised him that would be there today so go over and see if it's ready before I put him back on.'" So between us all we managed everything beautifully, yes. No, it was great.

[0:37:43] (I): Was there a school? Going back to Teridgerie, it was a very small place, was there a school in Teridgerie?

(S): No.

(I): A church?

(S): A church. Two churches. Dad used to drive mum 'cause mum didn't drive and she was a Catholic and he would drive one fortnight to Kenebri to have Mass in the hall and he'd boil the billy. Then he'd drive her Teridgerie, dad gave - that church that is in the bush at Teridgerie - have you ever seen it? I think Steven Pentes bought the Anglican one. But dad gave most of the timber to the Catholic one. I pulled in coming from Coonamble the other day; it's still there, this big old church with big old altar and everything; it's still there. And he used to, father used to say to him, mum would tell me this story, "come in Tom, it won't hurt you," "Oh, I'll stay and boil the billy for you." They had a kerosene drum, dad used to put the fire under it when everyone come out of church. He would have a car load of Catholic kids because we were all Catholics, the kids out there,

¹ The spelling of this name may be incorrect.

well, most of them. And Dad would pile them all in and one of the other fathers would bring the rest of them. So we'd all have, I suppose door-stop sandwiches and a cup of coffee out of the billy can. It tasted good; a cup of tea - billy tea and Dad would be boiling the billy and we'd all come out and he'd have it all ready and we'd drive home again.



Father Whelan's car c.1940

That was our mass at Teridgerie. But it was just lovely the other day to drive there; I took Stan Jones there and said, 'There used to be a church here and I did not expect it,' it was still there and it was just lovely. The kangaroos are living in it, I think, but it was there. But that was our religion. I never came to town to go to church 'til I was married and living in here; we didn't have to. The priest used to come out with the little dicky seat - I've got a photo of him somewhere. He used to bring the nuns to Kenebri and the Coonamble fellow would come through and the priest would come out to Wooleybah and say 'Any christenings?' he'd christen them in the school. Tom was christened at the Wooleybah School and we'd have the service there and they just had to, because we never moved, I suppose. No, we had our own little religion and our own bits and pieces that you just made do.

[0:40:15] (I): So a good life? Good memories?

(S): Lovely. Wouldn't have changed it for quids. I wouldn't have lived anywhere else. What is it they say? You love where you live. Well, I loved Wooleybah in my young life; I loved it.

This story will form part of Macquarie Regional Library's Oral history Project. The interview was conducted by Liz Cutts on the 15 December 2016