



Peter Milling

Interview Excerpt 28 August 2016

Oral History Project

Reliving the past: Stories from our communities

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Interviewee: Peter Milling
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Peter Milling
The 1955 Flood

Peter talks about his memories of the 1955 flood, as a young man working in his family's stock and station agency in Macquarie Street. He vividly recalls his experience assisting aviator Max Hazelton to drop feed packages from his plane to stock isolated by the flood water. He also discusses some of the interesting consequences of the flood for Dubbo's citizens.

This recording created on the 28 August 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 Dubbo area.

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[0:05:55] (I): So after the water started to come up at Brisbane Street - that was quite an unusual occurrence I take it - the minor floods you mentioned before that had never happened?

(S) No it hadn't. No.

(I) And then what happened after that?

(S): Well, it just kept rising, of course. We didn't expect to get it - we got the floods down by the river - the river plain was flooded and it just kept coming, kept coming and coming and coming. Of course it was cut off the old, what we call the old White Bridge was there in those days, and that was cut off pretty quickly, because it was on the plain of the river. But it just kept coming up and up and up.

And then we finished up getting all that water through the middle of Macquarie Street. I swum up Macquarie Street that day - I swum up Talbragar Street and I rowed a boat up Macquarie Street. I was a young fellow and it was quite exciting (laughs). Most of the people that had property were very concerned about it, but, you know, it seemed quite an adventure to me.

(I): Where were you when you found out that Macquarie Street was flooding and what did you do?

(S): Oh well, my family had a house in Macquarie Street, 320 Macquarie Street, so we could stand on the front verandah and look out. It never actually got into that house but it came up to the top of the top step, at the front of the house. That's in a bit of a higher area there. Those houses up there, on the other side, they were all flooded of course. But on that side of the street it wasn't so, I watched it just get higher and higher. And of course, we had a business where we had lots of records and, you know, they just sort of got soaked, and washed away, and all sorts of things, yes.



Watching the flood from the southern end of Macquarie Street.¹

(I): Did that have any consequences for your business, losing all those records?

(S): No, not really, it had a lot of consequence for a lot of farmers in the district because a lot of them were avoiding tax (laughs). Of course, we didn't do much to sort of keep their records, they went down the creek. So I think they were very pleased to see that flood at the time, (laughs) because the taxation man was about. It was in the '50s when they had - - - a lot of people were avoiding tax by selling in other people's names and doing all sorts of funny things, and I think a lot of them would've been caught, other than for the flood.

(I): So you had tax inspectors actually working out of your office at the time, didn't you?

(S): We did, we had three tax inspectors there at the time, from the Taxation Department, they came and asked us if we could provide accommodation for them, and they worked out of there because they were interviewing people. Not so much they worked out of there, they did interviews there with farmers. They needed somewhere to sort of take them in and talk to them. And I think a lot of the farmers were quite appreciative of the fact that we couldn't supply the evidence that the tax man wanted.

(I): What would've happened if they'd been caught?

¹ Image courtesy of Macquarie Regional Library Pictures Collection, Digital Image No. D0000573

(S): Oh well a lot of them were caught. A lot of them were caught. Oh my word, lots of them, and they were fined of course. *Severe* fines, you know, enormous amounts of money. Because they'd avoided tax and they were fined and then they had to pay tax as well. So that was in the time when, you have to remember at that stage, we had a boom in agricultural activity, inasmuch as wool was worth a pound a pound. You know, sell a bale of wool and nearly buy a Holden car.

Sheep people around throughout the western districts and the central districts - they'd never had that amount of money before and of course, they were selling wool on the black market, if you know what I mean. They were selling it - a fellow would arrive at their properties with a truck and say, "I'll give you so much cash for a bale of wool," and they'd sell it. So they were all very, very affluent. They were having holidays and buying new cars and doing all sorts of things.

So that was one of the effects of the flood inasmuch as a consequence of all that money, a lot of them attempted to, perhaps, cheat the tax man. And a lot of them got caught. But a lot of them in our business didn't get caught because we couldn't provide the records. Yes, so that was an interesting - I would've thought that was a pretty interesting part of the whole affair. I can't just recount all the incidents, but there were a lot of them, yes.

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