

NEWSLETTER
September 2012

Brunswick Valley Historical Society Inc.

MUSEUM

Cnr Stuart & Myocum Streets MULLUMBIMBY 2482

OPEN: FRIDAY 10 AM – 12 PM

MARKET DAY (3RD SATURDAY OF THE MONTH) 9 AM-1 PM

MUSEUM NEWS

UPDATES

OPENING TIMES

Please remember that the museum is now open on Fridays from 10am to 12pm.

STOREROOM

The room has been lined, painted, extraction fan & powerpoints installed. Shelving has arrived and hopefully will be installed this week and then



MEETING TIMES

Please note the meeting times

Monthly Meeting: 1st Thursday of the month @ 1.00pm

Acquisition Meeting: 2nd Thursday of the month 1.00pm

Members are welcome at both.

IMPROVING OUR PROFILE

Members have been out and about improving our profile in the community in the quest of new members and improving visitor numbers to our museum:

- BVHS Inc has become a member of the Mullumbimby Chamber of Commerce
- Our Education Co-ordinator has been informing schools on ways we can supplement the curriculum.
- Nortec participants prepared a display for "Through the Written Window" Literary Event on Thursday August 23rd at the Byron Bay Community College campus at Mullumbimby.
- A powerpoint presentation was made to Mullumbimby Rotary Club last week.
- Next month a presentation will be made to U3A held at the Brunswick Heads Uniting Church: *The Brunswick Valley Historical Society Inc's Museum at Mullumbimby - an exciting hidden treasure trove.*
- Invitations have been forwarded to bus companies to include the museum in their tours in the area.
- Leaflets have been distributed to the 'Driver Reviver' van.
- The website has had new additions made to the potpourri page

<http://www.mullumbimbymuseum.org.au/potpourri.html>

- Our facebook page Mullumbimby Musuem has generated over 10,000 hits, encouraging visitors and purchases. Join the conversations online.

<http://www.facebook.com/MullumbimbyMuseum>

MULLUM COMMUNITY MARKET

We are trying to generate more attendance at our markets each month by introducing a special feature at each market. In June we had the Model T Fords, August was about safe cycling, September hosted a *Spring Hat Affair* with a prize offered. If you have any great ideas for an attraction for a market we would love to hear them.

Below are some of the hats on display on Saturday. We hope to make this an annual event.



King Banana

By the close of 1914 King Banana was subverting scores of Her Majesty's disciples. The Bower Bros bananarial club had baptised many new believers, including Charlie **Uptin** of the Mullum Star office, whose adverts for the sale of dairy farms were now rounded-off with the assertion '*Suitable for Banana Culture*'. In Mar15 Christian **Kunkler** of Mullum Creek, credited with being the pioneer missionary in 1911, displayed a record size bunch of Cavendish, the individuals averaging 12½ins and arousing such interest that the *Northern Star* helped spread the word. The story probably was submitted by correspondent Uptin who added that *...In common with many other districts on the North Coast the Brunswick River district is becoming dotted with banana plantations.... Round Billinudgel a number of persons have gone in for bananas, namely, Messrs O'Connor, Jarvis, Stevenson, Walsh, Jarrett and others.... Statements as to the returns vary, but at present prices £50 per acre would seem to be possible.* [Billinudgel remained faithful and by the end of 1916 the dairying **Tarlington** Bros had 10,000 stools planted out, with an additional 12 acres almost ready for planting, on a patch of virgin scrub they'd leased from George **Gardner** in silent partnership with S. Boyd and banker Hoskins of the Bank of NSW.)]

Another of the rising stars of Mullum Creek was ex-Alderman J.I. **Stewart** who had 9 acres producing by the end of 1915, piping Kunkler's '*Pioneer Banana Plantation*' in production but not in acreage. Kunkler was still the biggest grower with 24 acres planted out, 7 of which were in full production on his 103 acre property *...almost under the cliff of Boogram Range, and the soakage from the mountain keeps the soil fairly well moist.... The land was original clothed principally with cedar scrub, nettle tree and bangalow...*, and he estimates a return of £70/acre for the first year, £90 in the 2nd and *considerably over £100* in the 3rd year, if the current prices hold up. He was also into tobacco (getting good returns but conceding it's a labour-intensive activity) and pineapples, but advised farmers not to pension off their cows and pigs just yet. Also amongst the banana players further diversifying into pineapples were Messrs C.H. **King**, **Bower** Bros., **McCloy**, **Powell** and D. **Blanch**, the last having argued back in Jul15 that *Bananas were a coming industry* in getting the Agricultural Society to substantially increase prize money for champion bunches at the next Show, so aiding proclamation of the new gospel. Sugar cane was also looking good again as diversification insurance against unstable dairy returns - in 1915 cane returned 29/- per ton and for 1916 looked like averaging 36/-, leading to expectations of a gross ~£60/acre.



William and Catherine (nee McPaul)
Bower, ~1915

(William, born 1856 Norfolk, England, was close on Kunkler's heels when he diversified into bananas by planting out the slopes of Montecollum on his property 'Longfield' in 1912.)

One of those who went over-the-top with diversification was Walter **Reddacliff** of 'the Old Brunswick Road' who ran 500 sheep (the masochist doing all the shearing himself), amongst assorted cows, horses, pigs, corn and 5 acres of producing bananas, while watching another 5 acres about to come on stream. Over at the Bay they were also getting carried away with the new heresy, J.E. Glasgow announcing the auction of 8 blocks of 'banana land' subdivided by F.V. Wareham, from 10 to 22 acres each, *situated a short distance from his own splendid plantation...*, 10% deposit, 10% in 6mths, and the balance over 8yrs at 6% interest. In early Jan1915 J.J. Hayter of Cooper's Shoot put in a patch and was tickled to get a £50 cheque in mid 1916, prompting cordial maker W.E. Bryant (the son of W.D. of Mullum) to plant out 10 acres near Quarry Siding.

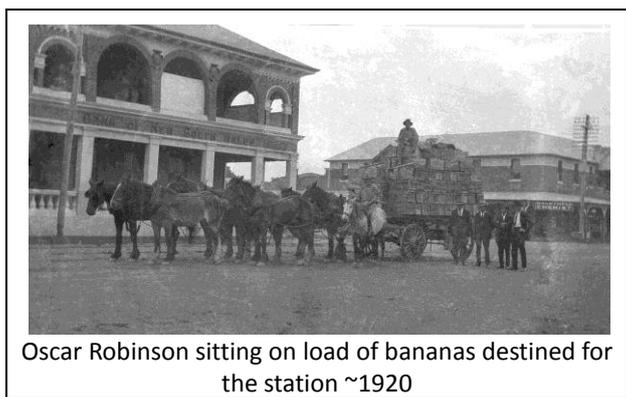
All of this good news led to J.I. **Stewart** calling for the formation of the Mullumbimby Branch of the Fruitgrowers' Association in Mar16, at which 20 turned up for an enthusiastic meeting, amongst whom were C.W. **O'Connor**, R.W. **Reddacliff** jnr, G. **Larkin**, W. **Williams**, Mr **Stocks**. They argued that they needed a union to protect themselves against unscrupulous agents at the markets, greedy shipping companies with excessive freight charges, and hungry flying foxes laying waste the plantations. Mr Stewart was elected president, H. **King** and R.P. **Fischer** vice-presidents and E.C. (Charlie) **Uptin** as secretary and treasurer. Three weeks later C.W. **O'Connor** was elected as another vice president, while Messrs Kunkler, Stocks, Gardiner, Tarlington and Archie **McKinnon** debated other constitutional matters, but all agreeing that a Flying Fox Fund be started by a levy of 1/- per year from which a bounty of 1½d per pair of legs would be paid to young lads with air rifles. (By Nov16 the beasties were getting out of hand and they *decided to organise shooting parties to try and eradicate the pest...*)

Almost immediately came calls for action to curtail another plantation pest, but at this time Chinese activity in the game was limited to the Sydney banana market, which was asserted to be controlled by a *...a ring of four*

Chinamen..., but *One Kwong fu Liu (of the firm of Wing, Sang and Co.)*... denied this, although... *It is interesting how the wily Kwong fuh Liu - true to his racial instincts - carefully dodges the real point at issue. Nothing was said in the article about the quality of the local bananas, but the ring of a few Chinese firms, four in number, who are now controlling absolutely the distribution of the fruit, and even fixing their own prices, was criticised at length....* said the *Tweed Daily*... but conceding that *the return to the grower is mostly up....*

In Jul16 things got more serious when George Cameron editorialised that *The advent of 15 Chinamen to work a banana farm on the Main Arm is causing perturbation of spirit in many papers. The Sydney correspondent of the Brisbane 'Daily Mail' says: "Fifteen Chinamen have arrived at Byron Bay to engage in banana cultivation on the Tweed River. It is said to be a most profitable occupation, and one not requiring any superhuman talents.... There is no knowing what triumphs in bananarial art 15 Chinamen may produce. Doubtless ere long we shall only buy Tweed bananas – pure Chinese grown!"* The *Tweed Daily* then explains that they did not go to the Tweed at all but to the Brunswick. The plantation which the chows went to is owned by a Chinamen, and the natural effect followed. So long as the Australian Parliament allows Chinamen and Hindoos or other coloured races to own land there will always be these howls, and the White Australia policy a farce.

A week later banana bending was the talk of the town. *Land, virgin land, and uncleared, is procurable at from £12 to £13 per acre in the high lands. Lantana scrub land is now realising £30 to £55 per acre at Cobaki.... Even at Byron Bay, 10 acres were sold at £35 per acre. This was uncleared land three miles from the port. Land in the Brunswick River district, for a similar purpose, is being sought after, and quite recently 60 acres were acquired by a Chinese planter, who is speeding the clearing of the land with the aid of 20 fellow-countrymen....* Over the period Oct15 to Aug16 the Bay shipped 48,199 cases of bananas, an increase of nearly 3000 over the Oct14-Sep15 period. And it continued to rise exponentially.



Oscar Robinson sitting on load of bananas destined for the station ~1920

But at this time not even the prospect of a Chinese invasion could rouse the Mullumites from their usual complacency. At the Apr1917 AGM of the Fruitgrower's Association *there were five others present (besides president Stewart).... Several meetings had lapsed for want of members attending. He could not understand the cause of such apathy, unless it was that the majority of the growers had not yet started to market fruit. However, it was for the meeting to say whether they would continue. On motion of Messrs Stocks and Gaudran it was decided to keep the Association going and meetings be held at least once a quarter.... Election of officers resulted - President,*

Mr J.I. Stewart; vice-presidents, Messrs C.W. O'Connor and A. Gaudron; hon. sec. and treas., Mr C. Uptin....

Meanwhile bananas were looking good for soldier settlement blocks. In Jul16 the Committee of the Richmond and Tweed Returned Soldiers' Aid Fund began passing out money, one bloke getting £100 to start a banana farm with a generous repayment schedule to kick in only after the 3rd year. In Feb17 members of the Soldier Settlement Board visited to *inspect areas suitable for intensive cultivation, principally banana growing, which flourishes in the Tweed River district...*, and in May17 the Director of Soldier Settlements announced that his team had identified large blocks in the Mullum and Tweed districts, *which could house up to 100 families in production of bananas.* By the end of the year word was widespread on the booming banana industry and prices started to escalate, small acreage blocks suitable for growing the things achieving up to £75 per acre.

But into 1918 Mullum meeting phobia was still a problem for the administrators at the Brunswick Fruitgrowers' Association, the usual handful of people turning up at the AGM to elect the same team, who voted to make Charlie Uptin's secretarial position a paid one due to his escalating workload, part of which was wasting his time informing uninterested members from Burringbar to Tyagarah of new pests and diseases breaking out in the plantations, notably 'bunchy top'. It was however, Charles **Rose**, manager of the Mullumbimby Soldiers' Settlement, who sounded the loudest alarm in Apr19 *in making representation to Mr Allen, chief fruit expert (accompanying the Minister for Lands on a visit), that unless drastic measures are adopted there will be grave danger of the disease becoming established....*

The rising tide was lifting all carriages, the railway shipping 135,174 cases of Tweed-Brunswick production for dispatch through Byron to the Sydney markets in 1917, increasing to 213,581 in 1918, while the Fruitgrowers' Association separately estimated that total Brunswick production, inclusive of those who made their own

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This newsletter is written by and
for the members of the BVHS

Cnr Myocum & Stuart Sts
Mullumbimby
P.O. Box 378 Mullumbimby 2482
bvhs84@yahoo.com.au
www.mullumbimbymuseum.org.au
Facebook: Mullumbimby Museum
02 6684 4367

Patron: Frank Mills OAM.
President: Stephen Hall
Vice President: Gordon Wright
Secretary: Janelle Barram
Treasurer: Susan Tsicalas
Assistant Treasurer:

Sarah Newsome

Committee Members:

Sadie Mudge
Jennifer Elward
David Roupell

Market Co-ordinators:

Gordon Wright
Rusty Selvey

Newsletter team:

Susan Tsicalas, Liz Walton
& Work Experience
Participants

Public Officer: Susan Tsicalas

All members are invited to contribute to this newsletter

*Please leave material with Sarah or
Liz

Tues Wed Thur 10 am - 2 pm.

Or email to:

bvhs@tridentcommunications.com.au

NEXT MEETING

Thursday 4th October

2012 1.00 pm

See you there!

*Deadline for agenda items

Wednesday 3rd October 2012.

MUSEUM HOURS

Friday 10am - 12pm

Market Saturday 9am - 1pm

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Participants and BVHS Inc.



freighting/marketing arrangements, had grown to around 300,000 cases. Mullum Station had experienced the biggest percentage jump, from 3591 to 20,068 cases, a lot now by-passing the Chinese agents and marketing through the Coastal Farmers' Co-operative Society, the major handlers of Norco's butter.

At the Fruitgrowers' Association AGM in May19 Charlie Uptin said *It is pleasing to have to chronicle the fact that the Association is growing in membership, but ...it is equally unfortunate to have to draw attention to the apathy of the majority of the members in attending meetings. Several meetings have been called, but they lapsed for want of a quorum. This is not as it should be, seeing that the association has a membership of close on fifty....* C.W. O'Connor said at least they showed an improvement on the Tweed River Association, from which they had broken away. He would like to see the soldiers at the Settlement join in.... J.I. **Stewart** was again elected president, C.W. **O'Connor** and J. **Bower** vice-presidents, E.C. **Uptin** secretary, L.J. **Hoskins** treasurer and O'Connor and N.C. **Smith** appointed auditors. A week later they were all staggered to learn that the ongoing banana bonanza had produced a new record of 35/- per case.

The Tweedies also had formed the Tweed Fruitgrowers' Co-operative Company Ltd *with the object of purchasing in bulk all the varied commodities and requirements of the growers, thus cheapening the cost to members.* But they also had their fingers in other aspects of the industry, notably marketing. The Brunswick Association also had attempted to become a co-op with a trial run of bulk buying of nails, but it apparently wasn't a success and 15 members had joined the Tweed co-op. Compromising, the Bruns Association decided to accept the Tweed offer to become distributors of its cheap banana cases.

A lot of Brunswickians also signed up for a Tweed proposal to contribute 1/- per acre for a fund to feed the lawyers fighting the latest round of AWU claims for increased wages for banana labourers. President Stewart reckoned *...the AWU claims represent a serious problem to banana growers in their demands for £4/10/- for a 48hr week to drivers and those carrying out the fruit....* Two weeks later they decided to hand the money to the PPU to take up the cudgels of the banana growers in the North. *...the claims of the unionists for 2/- an hour were considered much too high, and a flat rate of 1/3d an hour, or 10/- per day, was suggested as a very fair remuneration, in the event of exemption of banana growers being refused....* At the same meeting on 31Jul19 John **Macgregor**, a Director of Coastal Farmers' Co-operative Society, accompanied by the manager of the Fruit and Vegetable Marketing Division, made a pitch for more business because *Concentration of fruit in co-operative hands had a steadying influence on values...*, after a few recalcitrant growers had drifted back to private agents at the markets.

But into Aug19 the bad news from the Tweed that *"bunchy top" disease is spreading in an alarming manner...*, (and closer to home the spread of the yellow peril disease), was causing great anguish. *...The Dept of Agriculture has been apathetic and negligent. Clean blocks are quarantined, but infested areas are left to breed and spread the pest...*, and urgent action is required. On the Chinese pest, Masy Greene MHR had set in train an investigation into the plantation invasion, while every whiteman and his working dog continued planting bananas at a frightening pace and speculators continued buying and selling blocks at exponentially increasing prices. But irrespective of bunchy top and Chinamen spoiling the picnic, the astute could see a giant glut on the horizon that would end the party for all players.

By Peter Tsicalas