

The Beautiful Brunswick

(From the *Mullumbimby Star* of Thursday, November 6, 1924)

Mr **Alton Richmond MacLeod** came from Lismore to Mullumbimby in 1903 to run a coach service but 2yrs later joined the staff of the newly founded *Mullumbimby Star*. He subsequently became editor of the *Manilla Express*, from where *he waxes enthusiastic, and recalls the Brunswick as he knew it in his day...*, when it was still free of noxious Norfolks.

Yes! of all the wonderous beauty spots endowed by nature the Brunswick Heads was one of the most favoured in days 20 years ago, before the hand of man wrought havoc among the wild grandeur of the tropical jungle, which on all sides covered the gently sloping hills right down to the water's edge. The editor of this paper remembers many happy hours afloat on the expansive stretches of water just inside the Heads, where all manner of the fish tribe was easily caught and where oysters could be picked from their rocky beds without any trouble. Here and there piled up on the sandy beaches laid the iron ribs of a small cargo vessel that had come to grief on the treacherous bar endeavouring to get away with a load of rich red cedar which in bygone days grew very prolifically on the adjacent hills. Entering the main course of the river, magnificent views could be obtained of the famous 'big scrub' in all its magnitude. Giant trees of every description peculiar to tropical life grew in profusion, and these were laced together with dense masses of lawyer vines. Beautiful tree ferns and bangalow palms raised their stately leaves wherever opportunity offered, the former, in season, being the favoured feeding trees of teeming swarms of flock pigeons. The scrub was alive with bird and animal life, among the former being such rare and brilliant plumed species as the lyre bird, the rifle bird, and the satin bird, the regent bird and numerous varieties of pigeons, including wonga and the large green pigeon. In the few patches of forest near the river, perched snugly on the highest branches was the ever to be remembered freak of nature, "the Keala." (Probably Eudynamys Orientalis, the 'Eastern' or 'Common' Koel). What a target he presented and how hard it was to resist the temptation of a shot and hear the plaintiff cry so weird and yet so human like.

The old Tweed road wound its way down the mountain side and crossed the river per medium of an old ferry punt about two miles from the Heads. The ancient ferryman was a well-known character who lived the life of a hermit. He was a great dog and cat fancier, and kept scores of these animals, feeding them on fish. He was of a musical turn of mind, and during the evening would send forth his vocal abilities over the broadwaters of the river, to be accompanied in every key in the tonic-sol-fa by his four-footed pets. For a confusion of weird noises as aboriginal corroboree was not in it - but it was worth the hard row against the heavy tide to hear. But those days have gone. The axe has left its mark, and where once the scrub turkeys and paddy melons reigned supreme now "Strawberry" roams knee deep in paspalum. Settlement has followed in the axes' wake, and the ever attractive fishing grounds and safe bathing resorts allures hundreds of visitors annually from all parts of both NSW and Queensland, despite the fact that the magnificence of the wild natural beauty has gone forever. The writer has visited practically every seaside



The "punt" about to dock at south bank on Christmas Eve 1918 (says a recently donated photo with a precise date.) (In 1916 592 motor cars used the thing, crossing one at a time. Complaints of long car queues eventually forced the Shire Council into mechanisation in 1926, and road rage was eliminated entirely with a bridge in 1934. But the bulk of the north-south traffic continued to travel via Mullumbimby until the Pacific Highway was re-routed through Brunswick Heads in 1945.)

resort on the eastern coast... and the beautiful Brunswick wins by a street. No wonder the Governor was pleased with the place.

[On 18Sep1924 the Mullum Star had reported that Sir Dudley De Chair has been so impressed with the natural beauties of the little sea-side spot that he has decided to return..., leaving a record in the

*distinguished visitor's book at the "Ocean View" Hotel that the food provided at the Hotel excelled any other during the tour.... And a guest of Massey-Greene in 1917, Governor-General Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson sang high the praises of Brunswick Heads.... Not to forget Billy Hughes, another Massey-Greene guest in 1922. Unfortunately they all missed the operatic ferryman, **Bill Hunter**, who was forced into retirement 1909, becoming a resident of the Old Mens' Asylum at Parramatta 2yrs later, allegedly aged 80. By 1906, when Byron Shire Council took command, he had been operating the ferry for ~15yrs, the Council re-employing him on a wage of £60/yr. Upon retirement at his old shack was demolished and a new six-room mansion erected for his replacement (**Thomas Allen**).]*

Mr Macleod turned up when Brunswick Heads was on the road to recovery, the place having spent many years in the doldrums after being eclipsed by Mullumbimby with the arrival of the train in 1894. The *Ocean View Hotel* went into mothballs in 1897 until resurrected as a boarding house 2yrs later by **Robert Smith**. The *Court House Hotel* was purchased by **W.J. Reilly** in 1899 and moved to his block opposite the School of Arts in Mullum. The Bruns School of Arts was carted off in 1898 to fulfil the same function at Billinudgel. And the public school took a long sabbatical in 1896 until reopened in 1903.

The NSW census of Mar1901 had listed only 4 identifiable householders at Brunswick Heads - **William Hunter** operating 'McCurdy's Wharf Ferry' on 'the old Tweed road', **Arthur Houghton** operating the privatised ferry from the village to the North Head, **Sgt J.S. Boyd** occupying the police quarters, plus **James Reddacliffe** and **Gerard Wheat**. In 1902 Wheat relicensed the *Ocean View* and the Reddacliffs reopened their boarding house. By Christmas 1903 Bruns was becoming the favourite playground for Lismoreite weekenders and promoting itself as a 'health resort' that was serviced by diesel-powered 80-seat launch 'Edith' from Mullum. The obituary for 'old Bruns' was finally written in late 1909 by **W.J. Reilly** when he purchased the Signal Station for re-erection in Mullum.

On 6Feb1906 it was reported that *At present the township comprises an hotel, well managed by Mr and Mrs M. Currie, two boarding houses, kept by Mrs Gibson and Mr J. Reddacliff, a brick public school, small store, and a number of residences. Mr Currie runs a coach daily to meet the trains at Mullumbimby, and in the absence of a postal receiving office generously brings down and takes to Mullumbimby mail matter for all residents.*

Michael Currie became licensee of the *Ocean View* in late 1905, shortly after which his brother-in-law, William Webster of the *Australian Hotel* in Ballina, bought the freehold for a serious £1500. In late 1908 Webster acquired the next door property of Auctioneer Dunn of Lismore and began construction of a posh new 2-storey place, at the same time **Gerard Wheat** started building a new 17-room boarding house, by which time **Thomas Logan** of Murbah was plying between Bruns and Mullum with the 150-seat *SS Brunswick*.

