



# Braidwood & District Historical Society

PO Box 145 Braidwood NSW 2622

## Newsletter

Number 10 September 2018

### Society Annual Dinner

Our Annual Dinner was held at the **National Theatre** in July. Our guest speaker, Dr William Westerman gave an informative talk on Australia's military commitment, and in particular pertaining to WW1.



*Dr William Westerman*



*Our Mayor Tim Overall and his wife, historian, Nichole Overall*



*The indispensable Richard Elliot who handled all our sound equipment and Roadie requirements.*



*Hello John Hindmarsh.*



***Some of well fed society members thanks to Vanilla Catering.***

### **Neta Davis - Deua River Woman written by Chris Woodland in 2001**

The Deua River begins its U-shaped course to the coast in the wild mountain ranges that finger out from the tablelands towards the NSW south coast. The clear descending waters commence their seaward voyage in the area of the Bendethera caves, once an isolated farm, now part of a national park. The Deua (pronounced by the locals as 'Jewie') runs over water-polished stones and -rocks, dropping in elevation every so often as it tumbles over bubbling white water rapids to the waterhole beneath. On its journey seaward the river picks up the waters of smaller, often not flowing, tributaries. When the Deua joins with the Araluen Creek it takes the name of the town near its entrance to the sea - it becomes known as the Moruya River.

A few rugged kilometres upstream from that confluence is Moodong Creek, a tributary that generally keeps flowing after the many smaller feeder streams stop, that runs into the Deua. However, dry times even see Moodong become a chain of small leaf- and bark-stained waterholes. Going up this creek one finds that the stream is fed by very high and steep mountains, in places too steep for

cattle and horses. After many kilometres the V-shaped valley opens up into a Y-shape, providing many protected acres suitable for grazing. This area was known as Cudgeegamah, shortened in recent years to Cudgee. The sheltered valley is surrounded by towering mountains that reach up to the high country of the tablelands and in earlier days was connected by a bridle track that ran from Dempsey's *Emu Flat* station all the way down through Cudgee valley and along to the Deua.

While rearing her two-year-old son Everett, Helena Eliza Davis (commonly called Nellie) built a vertical slab house in that remote valley in 1908. With the assistance of her father Harvey Davis, an L-shaped house was constructed consisting of split slabs for the walls and flooring, and shingles for the roof. The slabs and shingles were split from local timber, and it was said by the infrequent visitor in those early days of the dwelling that the shingles cut from red gum made the roof look like red tiles.



***Cudgee Hut built 1908***

A grapevine was planted there in those early days. The old vine is all that survives today. By the late 1960s the ravages of time and termites saw the old house reduced to a remaining single room, the kitchen. Iron roofing replaced the shingles, the walls were patched up, fencing wire strained between a kurrajong tree and a corner post corrected the lean of the structure for a while, but the inevitable happened sometime in the late '70s or early '80s when the place was no more.

Nellie's daughter Neta was born in that secluded valley in 1909. Later she would recall how, as a child, she would excitedly attempt walking around the top rail of the stockyard. With no permanent human company other than her mother and brother, Neta's development was centred on the day to day activities of a bush block cattle run. Occasionally there would be the excitement of a visitor. Always there was the surrounding bush, mountain slopes and wild animals. Such a remote area was forever under threat from rabbits and dingoes. It would be much later that kangaroos found their way down from the higher, more level country and became a problem. Then the redneck and black wallabies were also threatened to some marked degree by their larger relative.



***Neta Davis at Woolla 1981.***

Neta became familiar with horses and cattle at a very early stage, as she and Everett were the only constant support her mother had. The only way in and out of the valley was by horse or foot and all supplies were carried in by packhorses. It would be the 1950s before a rough steep track was formed by later owners to carry four-wheel drive vehicles into Cudgee, replacing the old bridle track. By that time Neta and her mother were living at *Woolla*, a place on the Deua River several rough kilometres above its confluence with Moodong Creek.

In 1919 Nellie gave the bush away and tried life in the city of Sydney. Two years later she and her two children headed back to the

bush. At one stage she lived at the junction of Moodong Creek and the Deua River. Here, as at Cudgee, and later at *Woolla*, kurrajong trees were planted and still survive. They were probably planted near the houses to provide some shade for both horse and human, as the peppercorns of the inland were.

As she raised her children and worked the difficult and remote bush blocks Nellie became admired as a very capable woman, but a hard person. Local oral history tells of Nellie travelling a mob of cattle past the Araluen hotel and riding over to speak to some men she knew who were having a drink under the verandah. Andy Keys, a property owner and local councilor said, 'Nellie, that horse of yours looks pretty knocked up'. To which she replied, 'If you'd been between my legs as long as this horse you'd be knocked up too'. In later years men were to become very respectful of Nellie and her abilities with stock and in the bush, and with her stern reputation, gossip developed her image into a woman that men should be wary of. Some even said that if a man went near her home she would take a shot at him. Of course legends often have little to do with reality, and no man was ever shot at. The simple fact was that as Nellie grew older she preferred to stay at *Woolla*, keeping to herself in her bush isolation - a certain scenario to start uninformed tongues wagging.

In 1925 Neta moved with her mother and brother to take up *Woolla*, a picturesque bend on the Deua with towering rock-faced Beamer Mountain nearby. As at Cudgee, a house was built from the surrounding timber, this time of horizontal slabs. Corrugated iron for roofing was brought in on a horse-drawn slide over country so rough and steep that a four-wheel drive vehicle could not manage the tortuous track into the homestead sight until the 1960s. Nellie and her two children cleared the land, built the fences from logs they split themselves, mustered, branded, marked and

drove their cattle out to market. Their horses were very important to them and Neta became an excellent horsewoman, winning many awards at the Araluen Sports events over several years.

In 1928 Neta's brother Vern was born at *Woollla*. Sometime during the '30s Everett left home and went timber cutting on the north coast of NSW. Neta and Vern remained at *Woollla* working the place with their mother. In later years Vern would go off to work at clearing scrub for landholders out from Braidwood. He spent time as a dogger around Cooma for the Southern Tablelands Dingo Destruction Board and picked peaches in season at Araluen. This outside work supported *Woollla*, which needed all the assistance it could get during leaner times.



***Myrtle Davis right at the top of the Apple Box tree lopping to feed cattle after fires 1952.***

Before the Davis family acquired their first motor vehicle in 1950 (which had to be left in a shed on a neighbouring property some rugged five kms away) all loads in or out

were by packhorse. In earlier times Neta would ride down the Deua River to Waddell's on the Moruya Road every three or four months to meet the mail then pack supplies back to *Woollla*. To supplement their income wattle bark was cut, dried and also packed out. Wattle bark was used in great amounts by the tanneries in those days.

Other than riding, Neta became adept in the shoeing and handling of horses. The Davis women - Nellie, Neta, and later Myrtle, Neta's daughter, - became renowned for their horsemanship, and respected by all in the district. Vern was a rider but never the horseman that the female members of his family were. A very tall, lean and gentle mountain man, Vern's long legs earned him great respect by all able bushmen that knew him. His long easy strides would leave many good walkers well down the slopes as he headed up those steep hillsides along the Deua.

At one stage sheep were tried on *Woollla* and Neta found them an exciting challenge, including the shearing of them with hand shears. Mutton was also a welcome change to their diet. The experience with sheep was short-lived however as dingo attacks drastically reduced the sheep numbers, bringing that venture to an early conclusion.

Other than a visit to a dentist on one occasion, Neta actually spent thirteen years of her life without going to Braidwood, the nearest town. (During those years Neta did visit the Araluen valley, which was more of a spread out community than an actual town.) The Rankin sisters of Bendethera would ride their horses up over the mountain to *Gundillion* on the upper Shoalhaven, change for a dance then ride home the following day. Nellie denied Neta this enjoyment; subsequently her main socialising occurred during cattle musters and kangaroo drives when people would come together, as folk of the mountains do when extra hands are needed. A 'gather up,' Neta would call the

get-together, 'it was always a sort of playtime, mustering time,' she said. Other than new faces, mustering brought the excitement of shoeing horses, repairing yards and preparing packsaddles and other gear. The evenings would be spent around a crackling fire in some mountain hut. Colourful incidents of past musters would be retold, more recent news would be shared, joyful laughter would travel out beyond the lamp-lit camp into the dark bushland and dissipate along the gullies and creeks and echo back from the steep slopes towering overhead. Following the muster cattle would be walked out to sales somewhere. These were sociable and exciting times for Neta.



***Packing out wattle bark in the upper Deua River about 1930***

Life was often difficult. In later years Neta said that life was more difficult than it had to be because of her mother's austere ways. However, fighting bushfires, droving their cattle across the tablelands during times of drought, lopping scrub for feed, battling the dingoes, rabbits and roos that threatened their existence were, like others who know the bush life, experiences that had to be accepted. There was no stove in the *Woolla* kitchen; the open fire with its large cast iron kettles and camp ovens was her life-long cooking facility. Kangaroo skin rugs lying on beds and bunks were not uncommon sights in the huts along the Deua. Neta's skills also included the tanning of hides by using the time-tested wattle bark method.

At one stage Neta joined a cantankerous Anglo mare of hers with an Arab stallion hoping to breed out the disagreeable nature of the mother. Unfortunately the gelded offspring retained the trait of the mother. Riding the grey gelding and leading another saddled horse through the mountains one day when she was in her early 50s, the horse started bucking wildly then bolted madly down a gully and threw Neta into the rocks and uneven ground. Then, in her own words: '...and when I hit the ground it busted my head open and the horse turned then and backed onto me and kicked me underneath the eye with his back foot, breaking one of the bones in my face and splitting my lips off. I came to after some half-an-hour or two, an hour or so I laid there. The ground was covered with blood all around me. I scrambled to my feet and went and caught my horse and made for home.' Suffering shock and losing blood Neta led the horses up a hill where the recalcitrant gelding played up again when she tried to lead it through an improvised gate which was little more than a brush panel in a fence.



***Myrtle Davis (left) and her mother Neta (1909 – 1990) arriving back at Woolla, having picked up their stores and mail from Waddell's on the Araluen-Moruya Road 1948***

Mounting the quiet horse and leading the rogue, Neta made for Moodong hut (where she and Myrtle lived for many years), where

she let the horses go, tied up her dogs, washed herself and changed out of her blood soaked cloths. There were some wattle bark cutters there who took her to neighbouring *Yang Yalley* station, from where Kevin Griggs rushed her to Braidwood hospital. Over time the facial injuries became less apparent, fine scars being the only obvious evidence of a terrible experience.

Nellie died in 1977 at the age of 92. Everett, who served in the RAAF during WW 2, then resided in Sydney, passed away in the mid-1980s. Myrtle has her own well-managed, improved cattle property in country not so far from *Woolla* in distance, but light years away in terrain and productivity. Vern, now 73, is a resident in a Braidwood nursing home where he enjoys the constant company of other residents, visitors and the comforts of the town – television to watch and an electric powered scooter to travel the side roads and pathways of Braidwood. There now stands a double brick residence in Cudgee.

Neta, a woman who lived in a pioneering environment all her life, died in 1991. No more will the staccato reports caused by the crack of her whip or the firing of her twenty-eight inch barreled shotgun resound throughout the gullies and crags of the mountains. She is remembered fondly by those that had the good fortune to have shared experiences with her and she would rest easily to know that her beloved *Woolla* has changed little since her passing. The lyrebirds still call in the gullies, the odd dingo sometimes trots furtively across the flat below the house in the early morning shadows, cattle still graze across the small river flats and scatter along the sides of the hills, as do the wallabies. Riders using the river bridle track call in as they pass to yarn to the new owners. The eels, bass and platypus still feed in the river and the wedgetail can still be seen souring in the air currents above. Neta would be happy to know that the present owners of *Woolla*

intend to maintain the original home and out buildings and keep the memory of that pioneering woman alive, a tribute respected by all who knew her.

### **Braidwood & District Historical Society AGM**

**21<sup>st</sup> September 2018 at 7pm**

The meeting will be held upstairs in the Oddfellows Hall at the Museum. All nominations for committee positions must be received by **Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> September**.

At the conclusion of business there will be a talk about the early days of the Australian film industry and the showing of the 1920 version of ***Robbery Under Arms***. This old film features many Braidwood people and district scenes.



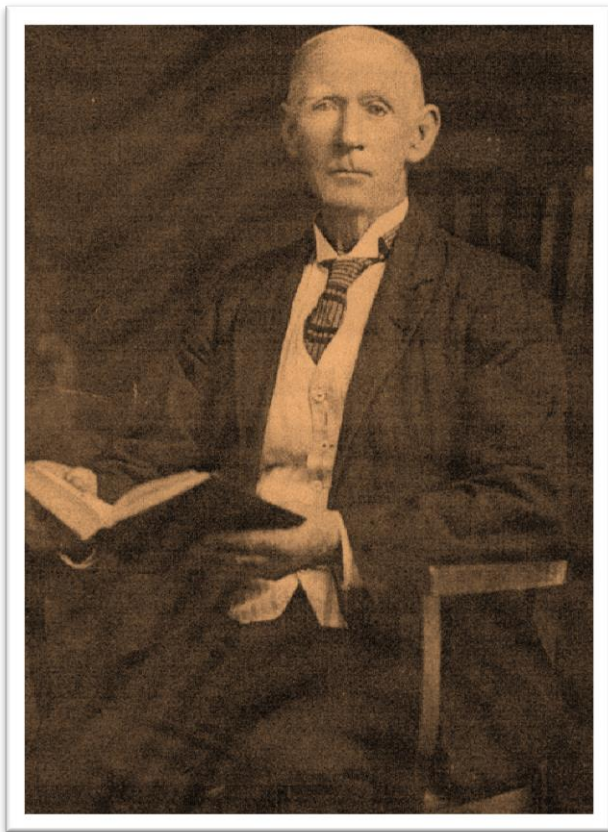
## **John O'Toole**

**1832-1936**

### **The Oldest Man of Braidwood**

**written by Kerry Moran (nee Slattery)**

As a descendent of John O'Toole I was asked to write a short piece about my family's heritage in Braidwood. Where do you start when the Braidwood connection dates back to the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788. My information was mainly provided from the many memories my Grandmother Charlotte Anne Slattery (nee Fletcher), who was John's granddaughter, shared with me. Charlotte was born in 1893 at Monkittee, Braidwood and raised by both sets of grandparents, the Fletchers & the O'Tooles.



***John O'Toole***

John O'Toole was born in Kings County, Ireland in 1832. Tough times in Ireland saw him sail from Ireland to arrive at Port Jackson in 1847. His fare was paid by his aunt who provided him board and work in her bakery at Newtown, Sydney. With the

gold fields beckoning, John set out to seek his fortune and arrived in the Braidwood area

around 1860. He remained in Braidwood until his death in 1936. John was a road builder on the old Clyde Road. Many of the cuttings between Braidwood and the Clyde Mountain were made by him. He was also a carrier from Braidwood to Nelligen along with being the local postman for Braidwood. John married the widow Margaret Lupton (nee Maher) in October 1866 at St Bedes Catholic Church. Margaret was well known as a midwife in the local area. Together they had 7 children of which 2 died not long after birth. Margaret was known to have a fiery temper and my grandmother fondly recalls John gathering her up and telling her to "put your coat and hat on and we'll go for a walk". He was seemingly a very kind and gentle soul much loved by her. John was also known as a good Irish step dancer and the story goes that he won the handsome amount of 10 pounds in a Goulburn dance competition.

John lived to the ripe old age of 104 years and to our knowledge remains the oldest resident of Braidwood. Interestingly his death certificate notes cause of death as "Severe decay"! My grandmother insisted that his good health was due to his daily consumption of rolled oats. He was known to have up to 4 bowls of porridge a day. The last bowl as he retired to bed each night was topped off with a toddy of rum.

His youngest son Edward John (better known as Ned) never married and remained on the property to care for his mother and father until their deaths. As Ned aged he was cared for by his favourite niece Charlotte. Ned died in 1963 in Sydney and the property at Monkittee (Narranghi) was left to Charlotte.

Naranghi, with its' majestic views of Braidwood and Gillamatong, is now home to

my sister Diane and I and our husbands. With such a long family history here we feel

Narranghi, with its' majestic views of Braidwood and Gillamatong, is now home to my sister Diane and I and our husbands. With such a long family history here we feel very privileged to be able to enjoy such a special place.

### 100 Years Ago

### Braidwood Happenings in 1918

### How Lucky We Are

In 1936 Paul Nomchong was the proud distributor of this amazing life changer.

**SPECIAL EXCLUSIVE AGENCIES**  
Paul Nomchong advertises in this issue several very exclusive agencies he has been appointed sole distributor for in the **Braidwood** district. The **Lehmann vacuum washing machine** is a marvellous patent. No rubbing is required; just lift a handle up and down and it creates a vacuum, suction driving the dirt out of clothes. It washes a pair of blankets or six double sheets in five minutes. Mr. Nomchong will be pleased to demonstrate and leave one of these wonderful **machines** for any housewife to try out on one **washing day**, with no obligation to purchase. The "Newmaid" non-electric vacuum cleaner is another very useful household instrument. Its operation is very simple, hardly any effort being required. It is absolutely safe, and performs its duties efficiently. The Kriesler Wincharger is an electric light plant, which requires only a small wind of a velocity of 10 m.p.h. to deliver 10 amperes to charge up your house or radio batteries. The advantage of all these items is that, once installed, there are no running costs.

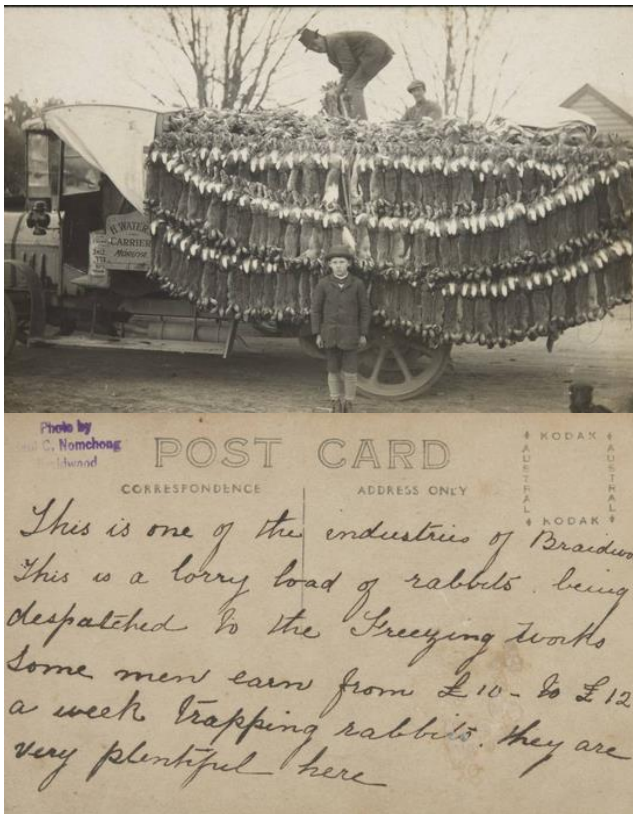


The Lehmann was the only Washer to employ Compressed Air and Suction. When the plunger was pressed down, the air and suds were forced through the clothes turning them at the same time.

### from the Dispatch 27<sup>th</sup> May 1918

The rabbit business is getting into its stride again. Last week 4000 pairs were received at the Braidwood works, and the manager informed our reporter yesterday that he expects to exceed this pack during the present week. The spell in trapping has necessarily allowed the crop of kittens to develop, with the result that there are very few of this class now being caught.





**From the National Library Collection**

Questioned as to how long the works would be kept going to supply the Imperial Government's last contract, Mr Vider said they were in for a long run. Mr Draper's new works at Ballalaba opened last week. Rabbits in that neighbourhood are also reported to be unusually numerous. A number of trappers took up other work when the freezers closed down and many of them have not yet returned to their traps. When they do, both freezing works will be kept busier than ever, since the rabbits have now to be skinned, necessarily a lot of extra labor. Reports from Tomboye state that a strange animal has been seen in the neighbourhood by several parties. It stands 15" or 18" high, is of a bluish grey color, and has no tail. It resembles a large cat without a tail, although it is said to differ in other respects from this animal.

The eucalyptus industry in this district continues to expand. Many new distilling plants have been installed recently, and the demand for the article continues to increase. A large number of people now obtain employment gathering and distilling these leaves.

**from the Dispatch June 1918**

An enormous and brilliant meteor passed over Braidwood last night, travelling from east to west when it fell, apparently north-westward of the town, lighting up the sky with daylight brilliancy, and two explosions were heard, like heavy thunder claps. The effect was particularly beautiful and impressive, the meteor leaving a trail of fire when it passed away.

**from the Braidwood Review June 1918**

"According to Regulation 329 of the Education Board, all teachers of 6<sup>th</sup> class schools, whose student attendance falls below 21 during the year, shall be penalised £24 per annum in salary and the reduction of their status to 7<sup>th</sup> class." This was felt acutely in Braidwood.

**Join us at the museum as a volunteer and learn of the many ways you can contribute.**

**The museum is a paradise for Braidwood descendants. All the items are from old local homes and sheds and to the memory of their forebears.**

See our website at

**[www.braidwoodmuseum.org.au](http://www.braidwoodmuseum.org.au)**

**Museum Opening Hours**

Friday-Sunday 11am-2pm

**Address:** 186 Wallace Street, Braidwood

**Telephone:** 4842 2310

**Admission:** by donation

**Email:** [help@braidwoodmuseum.org.au](mailto:help@braidwoodmuseum.org.au)

