WAA RYDER MEMOIRS (2)

Pages 1 to 16 – typed from scans of originals

In my first letter to you re Kairuru memories I mentioned that my grandfather made the first hill country clearing on the slopes of Taylors Knob. His method of clearing was different from what became standard practice in later years. He chopped the trees down and straight away lopped all the branches off and piled them against the trunk to be burned later. The land between the sturdiest trunks was then grubbed over by hand with a mattock and was usually sown first in wheat. This was cut with a sickle (an enlarged reap hook) and when dry enough was threshed with a flail The grain he then carried on his back to the local flour mill which was situated just above the Umukuri School opposite where the Shaggery Road branches to the left. Of course, the trip called for fording the Riwaka River and then down past the Riwaka PO and straight along past the Packing Shed corner to near the back of the Motueka River where the road turned right and continued in a straight line past the Umukuri School. The lower end of this road was washed away in the big flood in the Motueka River in 1877 and the Brooklyn Stream now flows along it from the southern end of Factory Road which intersected it, both traversed an impassable swamp. This portion of the road now past the course of the Brooklyn stream was one of the main roads of Riwaka in the early days. My grandfather lived on it when he first came to Riwaka and walked to work at Rochforts sawmill which was situated just across the river from where he made his home. Later it is probable that being handy to his work was an inducement for taking up that particular section. He later took up half of the adjoining section, but was not interested in the other half of the section as the first portion near the river was largely swamp. Rochforts Sawmill was driven by water drawn from the Riwaka River, but the channel which was dug to bring in the water is mostly now filled in. The mill took only the best trees, and they were all roughly squared with axes before being taken to the mill by bullock team. The first sawmill that I remember was owned by Baigents and was located at the junction of the North and South branches of the Riwaka River, and there was no road up the Riwaka valley beyond the boundary of the Dehra Doon property. The timber wagons had to cross the river nine times before reaching this road. Shipped from Riwaka wharf. I have mentioned wheat being taken to the local flour mill which was owned by Mr Mikell. His first essay at flour milling was by utilising a small waterfall on a branch up the Atua Creek which crosses the road where Lance Cook lives. This was by an overshot wheel, but I think the volume of water proved

inadequate. The stone grinding wheels were cut from local stone by Mr Mickell and are now part of the memorial to the early settlers which stands on the roadside at Old Pah Point where the road to Kaiteriteri starts along the coastline. The mill was next tried with an undershot wheel near the Riwaka Library. Water supply was again unsatisfactory so it was eventually moved to Umukuri, water being drawn from the Brooklyn Stream. Then the mill was eventually abandoned and before being included in the memorial cairn, the millstones served for some years as part of the stonework in the approach to the first traffic bridge on the Riwaka River.The first bridge over the river was a footbridge but substantial enough to enable horses to be taken across as it was part of the bridle track to Takaka. This bridge was situated about forty yards above the present ferro-concrete bridge, but after serving many years was carried away in a big flood about 1895. The wooden traffic bridge spanned the river between the site of the footbridge and the present structure and was built of local timber the girders being squared by hand. The mill at the forks of the Riwaka valley was managed by Fran Baigent and Felix Baigent was in charge of the tram lines and bush work. I can remember viewing on a waggon load of timber three or four planks cut for a special order for counter tops for some Nelson firm. They were heart of matai two inches thick and thirty-six inches wide. The stump and roots are now being utilised for firewood after a lapse of nearly seventy years.

Felix Baigent later took charge of a sawmill at Marahau. This sawmill was driven by an overshot waterwheel, and the timber sent by sailing vessel to Nelson. This mill was originally owned by a family named Drummond and many of that name in the Riwaka area, are descendants of that family. Another family of Drummonds not related to the Marahau family also settled in Riwaka so the name is fairly common there now. The Marahau valley was later ruined by a severe flood, which changed the course of the river and covered much good soil with stones and gravel. The same cloudburst played havoc with one of the three valleys in Sandy Bay, known as Edward Askews Valley. The next of the valleys was known as Holyoakes Valley and was a continuation of the main channel through Kairuru The other branch of the Sandy Bay Stream was known as Woolfs Valley.

Writing of cloudbursts reminds me of an occasion when I was working on the boundary fence at the east of Kairuru. About 4pm one day we noticed some very black and heavy looking clouds coming across from the direction of Astrolabe. We decided to call it a day and make for shelter. I was camping in a lean-to attached to the woolshed which was near the old bridle track immediately above the Kairuru homestead. The cloudburst reached there shortly

after we arrived and the deluge and noise was terrific. The corrugations of the iron roof were quite inadequate to cope with the flow of water, which for a few minutes poured off the roof like a waterfall and made the gullies appear like rivers. In my first notes I mentioned gangs camped on the Takaka road widening it from the bridle track to wheel traffic standard. I remember going with an uncle of mine (H G Ryder of Petone who died there last year aged 95) to deliver some meat to a camp situated on a spur on the lower side of the road past above where there is a drinking trough a short distance below Ryder's Dip (You will know the spot quite well I guess.) Kakas were very plentiful in those days and used to fly fairly high in droves, never singly. My uncle decided to take a single barrel muzzle loader and on the way back a flock of kakas flew overhead and my uncle (a good mimic) whistled them down to some dry birch trees. The first shot broke the wing only and as kakas are very curious birds, the noise it made when we were securing it attracted the others around again. My job was to annoy the wounded bird so that his cries would attract the flock back again, as they flew off each time the gun was discharged. We had five or six kakas in the butcher basket for the homeward journey. In the early days many of the homes used to keep a kaka with a very light chain attached around one leg and the other attached to a wing which could slip along a long manuka pole. These birds were used to call down any kakas which were flying over and were sometimes taken to some prominent ridge where a kaka whare would be built of a few poles covered with manuka branches much after the lines of a duck shooting mai mai. The idea of building these on a ridge was that the call bird would be much nearer to any flock which might be flying high overhead.

Snares only were used in these kaka whares so as not to scare the rest away, as the cries the birds made when caught in the snare and when being released, only served to arouse the curiosity of their mates.

I have given you a few anecdotes on the Ryder side who arrived in Nelson in 1854. So perhaps a few of my maternal grandfather would not go amiss. He was Edward Fitzgerald McNabb and was one of the first batch of settlers to come to Riwaka in 1842. He was a carpenter and boat builder chiefly but traded in small sailing boats for many years. He and a brother built a ketch at Sandy Bay and loaded it with potatoes and sailed to Melbourne to supply the gold miners of Victoria. After their return to NZ they were taking a further load to the West Coast gold diggings when their ship was wrecked on the Hokitika bar. In the nineties tramps were quite common on the roads, and as children we were rather nervous of these 'swaggers'. One day we reported to mother that one was coming down the road from

Takaka and she came down to the sheds to see if he should want anything. Imagine our surprise when she walked up to him and kissed him as we had never seen our grandfather before. He had lost his wife about the time of my mother's marriage and had been staying with the eldest son at Karamea. He had walked solo from there via the Heaphy Track and Collingwood. From then on he spent most of his time at Riwaka. He was soon building a boat for himself, and I was called upon to crawl into the awkward corners to help with the riveting of copper nails and painting. Then I had many fishing excursions over the years down as far as Separation Point. I have often regretted that I did not write down some of the anecdotes of his early travels and he would reel off tales about every little bay as we were sailing by. One of his favourite fishing spots close inshore at the northern end of Adele Island is still known locally as Ned's Hole. Naturally I have very vivid memories of the first groper that I caught. That was taken several miles out in the Bay from Bark Bay reef. I had to have assistance to get it aboard the boat as we found when weighed at home it went 84 pound. I could give you a few more true fishing experiences but in view of the usual reluctance or reservations or allowance for exaggeration which is commonly attached to fish stories, and in view of their improbability under present day fishing conditions, it is possibly better not to test the credulity of any readers overmuch.

With your background of farm experience, you may have observed a tendency among farmers to indulge in a certain degree of profanity. While it is not an accomplishment one should boast about, I seemed in my youth to have acquired rather a reputation locally for my proficiency in this respect. About 1908 I had working with me an English chap Jack Lighottee who had spent several years in the British Navy. He was a first-class hockey player having played in navy games and for United Services against an England team. He schooled the Motueka team to the degree that four members of the team were included in a Nelson rep team to play Auckland for the shield. Our visit to Auckland coincided with the visit of the American fleet, and there were four British naval ships also in the harbour and Jack found me one of his old shipmates. As a lieutenant on the HMS Powerful he duly invited the four Motueka members to dine aboard. Jack was an excellent raconteur and when introducing us to the company, referred to me in words as follows: "When I told a friend in Riwaka that I was going to work for Albert Ryder, the reply was that 'he will teach you how to swear.' With my knowledge of naval boatswains I very much doubted if he could teach me much. After working for several months, I found the opinion that my friend must have been mistaken or having a joke with me. However, after a hot and tiring day mustering sheep

for shearing, an excellent dog of his missed by a split second in making a long head to retrieve some sheep which were breaking back while we had been dealing with an awkward corner. That split second meant that we had an extra hour's work to collect the few which had managed to cross over a track across the head of a gully. That slight lapse on the part of the dog lifted the lid off and I was treated to a display that I never thought possible. He kept going for a full ten minutes without stopping to draw breath and never repeated himself once. You can take it from me that the naval boatswain is not even a beginner at the game."

The last remark brought doubting murmurs from many in the assembly and several clamoured for a demonstration. I had to excuse myself by saying that "Jack was very prone to exaggeration and in any case, high performance could only be expected in a special atmosphere, and those conditions were entirely lacking in feature. Another anecdote touching upon the same topic, either of which may serve as a slight diversion at a stag party if ever you indulge in such functions, relates to another introduction which took place near Matata while on a motor tour of the North Island we made in 1951. We spent one night at Ohope Beach and as I wished to advise some friends near Tauranga of our movements, I visited a telephone box. While scanning through the directory I chanced upon the name of Jack Pattie As a boy he had lived in Riwaka for several years with an uncle Matata whom I used to assist with his mustering. Jack when introducing me to his wife added that "This is the chap who taught me to swear." Her reply given with a smile was, "Well he certainly made a good job of it."

I was pleased to hear that your mother is still cheerful and alert but sorry to hear that her eyes were troubling a bit. That is a common failure with advancing years but a great pity as reading seems such a comfort to old people when the health begins to fail. Please give her my kind regards and tell her that I am sorry that I missed seeing her when she was visiting Ron recently. I only heard of her visit a few days after she had left Motueka. Seeing that I am dabbling with memories perhaps it will not cause much concern now if I refer to your sister, Joan. She was a lovely girl and I was often intrigued with the thought that could it be possible that she could also inherit the cheerful nature and other pleasing attributes with which your mother was so richly endowed. If so she would be a - - woman!!! My command of adjectives or superlatives I find are quite inadequate so I trust that the exclamation marks will be more expressive.

Seeing it is a showery day I am passing the time and amusing myself by penning these few rambling notes. If you find them too dull and uninteresting well, I guess that you keep a wastepaper basket handy.

When in Nelson yesterday I secured a plan of the Kaiteriteri survey district which shows the old bridle track to Takaka. I will mark some of the spots I have mentioned, which should tend to clarify things for you. On my arrival home I received your request re some notes on fencing.

The article on fencing appears in Jim Henderson's (of Kairuru) "Open Country" book and appears after this page but is omitted here. Many of the former remarks were to Jim Henderson,

Some of the forgotten arts

Pit sawing – Where no sawmill was available the early settlers used to cut their requirements of timber by hand, using a saw with a somewhat longer blade than the usual cross cut saws (eight to ten feet in length) with the teeth of the blade all pointing in one direction much as an ordinary handsaw only much more widely spaced. The handles at each end were fitted at right angles to the blade of the saw, with a hand grip on each side of the blade. A pit is dug about seven feet deep and about three feet wide. Three or four saplings or other stout pieces of timber are placed across the pit, and the log which is to be sawn is rolled on to these cross beams. One man stands on the top of the log, and the other man in the pit. The saw is always worked in a vertical position and the cutting done with a downward stroke only. The top sawyer does practically all the guiding, the lower one working in the pit, and out of any breeze, would not be able to follow any guide marks owning to lack of light and the falling sawdust. In building a home any timber required to be dressed was planed by hand even to the flooring. After planning the boards, a plane called a plough was used to cut grooves in both edges of the floor boards and a small strip was cut to fit the grooves of the two boards in contact. I may mention that old time nails were cut from sheet iron about one eighth inch thick with no point and a lug protruding on one side about one eighth inch, the nails being slightly tapered. The timber was always bored to insert the nails.

Thatching

While not many of the early settlers' homes were thatched, a few were and I know of one built by Mr Stephens on a slight elevation on the Dehra Doon property now known as the

ruins. This was a two storeyed house, and I have heard that the staircase was a wonderful example of the art, by an expert carpenter. A spark from the chimney setting fire to the thatch caused this dwelling to be burned down.

Corn and haystacks were always thatched with either rushes or toi-toi grass in the early days but one rarely sees a stack thatched now, nor a thatched shed.

Charcoal

Another lost art is that of burning charcoal. To dry their hops the early settlers had no coke or other smokeless fuel, so they set to work and made charcoal for the firing. A site with some good turf was usually selected for the charcoal pit. The turf was cut into neat blocks and placed handy to the pit which would be about eight feet square. A trench about eighteen inches wide and eighteen inches deep was dug from one side of the hut to a bit beyond the centre. This was filled with kindling and then small pieces of dry wood built over it so that a really good fire could be established before closing the pit. Before lighting the fire, the heap of wood to be made into charcoal was so stacked in the pit that the fire could spread through the whole heap of wood about four or five feet in height. The blocks of turf were pilrd neatly like bricks to form a wall all around the heap of wood leaving sufficient turf to cover the top also. When this is completed the pit is fired and it must be burning strongly before any attempt is made to close any of the smoking chinks in the turf by smothering them with loose earth. The charcoal burner would pitch his tent quite handy as the pit requires almost constant attention, as with some of the wood burning away, the blocks of turf are apt to sag causing too much draught which would burn the wood clean away instead of charring it. A pit of charcoal would take four or five days to reduce the wood to charcoal and the fire was damped out by throwing some water on the heap, thus dowsing the fire with steam. When the fire was definitely out the pit would be opened up and the charcoal bagged into sacks. It was found that matai was one of the best woods for charcoal, but it was a good pit which yielded fifty percent of charcoal from the pile of wood.

Another use for charcoal was for heating the charcoal iron. The top of the iron was hinged so more fuel could be inserted, and there was a hole in the heel of the iron with a regulator to control the intake of air and so govern the heat required. These irons were very bulky affairs and it was always a source of wonder to me how the housewife could manipulate them around all the frills and flounces which adorned the dresses of the day. As if these frills each were not enough, petticoats were built to match the crinoline skirts and were a mass of tucks

embroidery and insertion. How they managed to keep all these free from spots with a charcoal iron is beyond my comprehension. I marvel too at the variety of tasks undertaken by these pioneer women. Apart from cooking the meals, often with a camp oven, they baked their own bread after making the yeast for themselves, they made their own butter and cheese, often salting butter in crocks for the winter months, They made tallow candles for the household by rendering the fat from any sheep killed, and pouring it into moulds specially built for that purpose to which soft cotton wicks had to be adjusted and fastened. Apart from all these chores, they generally did all their sewing and mending, often without the aid of a sewing machine, and yet had the time to raise a family of ten or twelve.

Cobble Stones

With the advent of cement, we no longer see any yards or stables paved with cobblestones. To cobble any area, it was first excavated about six or eight inches deep and then a layer of several inches of clean but coarse sand spread over the area. In most rivers the stones are worn fairly smooth and inclined to be flat. It was possible to select a quantity of stones about an even length of eight to ten inches. These were stood on end in the area to be paved, great care being taken to ensure that the outside was secured either by some lasting timber or by ringing the area with larger stones firmly bedded in the ground. The cobble stones are set into the sand with the narrower end, if any, uppermost. Then after firming them in the sand with a wooden mallet so that the upper surface is fairly uniform or level, sand is spread over the stones to fill up the crevices. A very similar method was sometimes used in crossings of Wstreams, especially where floods were liable to cause deep holes in the bed of the stream which could not be seen if the water was discoloured. This method was called pitching, and great care had to be taken to ensure the lower edge was secure from damage by scouring. It was usual to have extra large boulders that floods could not move or else a log to secure the lower edge. The stones were placed much after the style of cobble stones except that greater care had to be taken to fit them snugly together and all the stones had a pitch or lean down stream. The stones would be slightly longer than with cobbling, and the stream would soon fill the crevices with sand or gravel.

When W^{m} Ryder Sen^{r} took up Section 75 Kaiteriteri SD he was working at Rochfort's sawmill on the part of the section across the river. The mill was driven by water power, the lead from the Riwaka River starting near what is known as the 'ruins'. The logs were roughly squared and hauled by bullocks to the mill. Only the best trees were taken and logs

were drawn from as far as the confluence of the north and south branches of the river. The water from the mill was afterward returned into the Jordan creek. The locality known as the 'ruins' was the site of the homestead of Mr Stephens. (Stephens Bay is named after him). It was a two storeyed house with thatched roof. I have heard that the staircase was the work of an expert carpenter. Unfortunately, a spark from a chimney set fire to the thatch and all was lost.I can well remember the cobble stoned floor of the stables and yard on the flat below the house and near the river.

There were some plum trees on the bank of the river below the stables, an oval purple plum somewhat like a miniature blue diamond only with a very pleasant flavour especially when ripe. Some of the same variety were planted in the Hawthorn hedge where the Takaka Road starts up the hill. The homestead on Sec 75 was first named Fuschsia Hill Farm because there were many Konini trees along the stream where the homestead was built. At first all water had to be carried from this creek, and I think I could still find some flat stones which were used as steps. When the family were growing up each claimed the berries from a Konini tree which they claimed as their own. A small spur the nearest to the home was called Gooseberry Hill, and each member of the family had their own gooseberry bush and a small patch of garden. There is a small spring at the foot of gooseberry hill which provides excellent drinking water, and which is always cold, and so became the source of supply for cool water for butter making in the summer time.

The road at that time followed the river, more a right of way than a road, and since the early days the river has changed its course many times, and also the road has been changed too. In the early days no cultivation was done near the river owing to the periodic flooding, although there had been some small Maori gardens on a slightly elevated bank. The trees on this portion were chiefly Ake-ake although there were three Titoki trees on the bank of the river just below where a suspension bridge was built about 1895. Just below the suspension bridge there was an overflow channel and the piece of land was always known as the 'Little Island'. Immediately below this the river had two channels, the portion between (mostly gravel) being known as the 'Middle beach'. An orchard was planted near the Ake-ake bush which had the following trees, procured I believe from Chapman who had his homestead and nursery some distance up the Shaggery Creek. I understand that a cloudburst ruined their farm so they transferred to near the Motueka River where the Chapmans are still located. The trees procured were: five Walnut trees, three Blue Orlean Plums, one yellow Christmas plum (very similar to a cherry plum) two Winter Nelis pears, one Bishops Thumb pear, one Sugar Pear,

one Round Pear late (name unknown) one very early pear (ripe at New Year) one Egg Plum (like a Blue Diamond for size only yellow), three Quarrendon apples, one Emperor Alexander apple, one Alfriston apple, two Greengage Plums, two Pear Pip apples, one Aromatic Russet apple, one Codlin Apple, one Fig tree. At the home there was a Damson Plum, two large green cooking apples and one Emperor Alexander apple, one clump of Raspberries, one Red Currant and several Black Currants. Near the SE corner of the house there was a Cypress tree and lower down were two Scotch firs, and right by the small garden gate was a double pink Flowering Hawthorn. There was also a Quince tree near the NE corner of the house and a Wisteria climbed along the front of the verandah. There were a couple of Holly trees near the Cypress one of which had berries and the other white flowers only. There were also a rose of Sharon bush an Oleander, a scented Verbena, a tree with white flower a Syringa and a shrub with white berries. The flower gardens were all edged with Box Hedges which were kept trimmed. A summer house stood on the edge of the bank and it was covered with Banksia roses, Honeysuckle, Jasmine and Ivy. Cloth of Gold roses grew near, also a Deutsia bush. A clump of Lilac grew near the bridge over the creek leading to the sheds, also snowball tree and two Elderberries and four Wild Cherries grew along the bank of the creek. Other things near the creek were: a bunch of Flax, a Dog Rose, a Myrtle bush, a Sloe tree, a Lemon tree, Orange Ball tree and a rose bush (a small pin buttonhole type) and a Moss Rose.

W Ryder Sen^{r} leased for some years the portion of the Dehra Doon estate on the north side of the river, there was no road up the valley at that time. The first three creeks when going up the valley road were called the Sawpit Creek (so called because rimu trees near it were pit sawn to build the house and sheds) Lewis's Creek and Foley's Creek (named after Captain Foley whose house stood just over the creek, though the creek now has a different course.)

A strip was felled and grassed over the years, to beyond Foley's Creek. A French walnut and an apple tree were planted near the Sawpit Creek and two or three acres were stumped and ploughed, a ditch being dug to keep off surface water. This grew wonderful crops of potatoes as there was no potato blight at that time. The blight first came to NZ soon after 1900.

In the early days, and before the wooden traffic bridge was built over the Motueka River (about 1878) the Riwaka Wharf was the chief port for the district. Sailing cutters and ketches used it regularly taking timber, hops, fruit and produce. When going to the Riwaka School we could tell from their rig which boat was at the wharf. The only names I can recall now are

the cutters – Maid of Italy and Anatuero (The Maori name for Sandy Bay) and the ketches Transit and Calyx. After spending some years on a bank just below where the Motueka rubbish tip is now situated, a Thomas Reeves undertook to sail the Transit to Nelson for a re-fit, but before embarking he caulked all the gaping seams with bars of soap. Unfortunately, a strong wind sprang up when about halfway across, with the result it filled and he and his waterlogged craft had to be towed into Nelson. An enquiry was held, but the only result that I remember was that the caulking was used as an advertisement for Browns A1 soap. A small steamer (Elsie) later started a regular service to Riwaka and the agent was Fred Batchelor who built a house and shop combined near the old school. The venture was evidently not a success, as it was discontinued after a few years. The building was taken over by a blacksmith, and in the 1890s he had Joe Hart (later of Upper Moutere) as an apprentice. The buildings were later taken over by Newman Bros, being the starting point of their daily run to and from Nelson. They had changing stage post just at the foot of the Moutere Hill on the Nelson side. A fresh team of horses would then be used for the journey into Nelson and the horses would be changed there on the return journey in the afternoon. The only drivers I can recall are a Schwass and Jack Leahy, the latter being the first driver when they switched from horses to motors. The first landing place used by the Riwaka settlers was along the Eddy Creek, a small creek leading into the Motueka River about halfway along Lodders Lane. There is a public road leading along the north bank of this creek. The next landing place was on the tongue of land called the Green Tree Road, so called because a large Ngaio tree grew there.

However, a gale blew this tree over and an adjoining land holder planted a blue gum tree. A small wharf was erected at this point, but later a wharf was built where the present Riwaka wharf now stands. In the early 1890s when my mother's father came to live with us, he built a twenty-two foot cutter which he called the *Spray* and he used the piles of the old Green Tree wharf to moor the boat.

ENDS

From the writings of WAA Ryder, typed by Sarah Ryder in 2020.