

Thomas Dick was not a professional photographer, yet in the space of just 14 years he produced no less than 500 photographs of such excellent clarity that those prints existing today are spoken of as works of art which have never been excelled, despite technological advances since they were taken.

Some of his best works were donated to various institutions during his lifetime and some have since been passed on by his family, to be given pride of place in historical displays.

The Cambridge University in England accepted a collection to assist in anthropological studies of the Australian Aborigine.

This particular collection of photographs of Aborigines living at the time in the Hastings Valley was enough to whet the appetite of anthropologist, Dr. Jean McBride, of the Australian National University, who came to Port Macquarie to obtain more knowledge of their lifestyle and to trace the life of the man who took the photographs. That was about two years ago.

The prints in this edition of Monday Magazine were borrowed from the Hastings District Historical Society's display at the Port Macquarie Museum.

### Early settlers

Thomas Dick was a son of John Stuart Dick and grandson of one of Port Macquarie's first free settlers, John Dick, who arrived in the colony in 1839 with his wife and one child — a daughter, Elizabeth. Two sons died of fever on the long voyage.

He set up business as a tanner in Port Macquarie, fared well, and became a strong force in local affairs. Six more children were born at Port Macquarie — John Stuart, William Burgess, James Wardrop, Mary Agnes, who became Mrs. John Glen, Isabella (Mrs. Turnham), Margaret (Mrs. G. Hayward). Elizabeth married John Morrison.

John Stuart married Elizabeth Wilkins. The union produced five children — Thomas, who married Jane Freeman of Green Point, Hastings River, John Stuart (Louisa Thurling), Ernest (Mary Wilson), Charles (Mary Fisher) and Elizabeth, who married Daniel McLaren. His wife died when still a young woman.

He married again and four more children were born into the Dick household — Ralph, Ruby, Olive and Sidney.

### Oyster farmers

John Stuart Snr. spent some years working with his father in his tanneries around Port Macquarie until the mid-1880s, when he took out one of the first oyster leases on the Hastings River.

His sons, Thomas, Ernest and Charles, followed in his footsteps, working alongside their father and then later operating this own leases, first in partnership and then on their own.

Thomas took out the first lease of his own in 1899.

Although cultivating oysters and marketing them kept Thomas away from his home in Waugh Street for much of the daylight hours, he still managed to find time for community affairs. For some years, he was secretary to the Port Macquarie Show Society, secretary of the Regatta Club, secretary of the Church of England Parochial Council, an alderman on the Port Macquarie Council and was also a part-time boat builder.

He also found time to pursue his favorite pastime — photography. His interest in the "magic box" began just before the outbreak of World War I. Noted zoologist-turned-Fisheries Department Superintendent, Theo Roughley, taught him the rudiments of the art and helped him with his purchase in Sydney of his first camera, a 5 x 4 Reflex.

Before long he had fitted out his own darkroom and began weekend excursions looking for suitable objects and backgrounds — sometimes taking his subjects with him.

### Paid to pose

Natives living around Port Macquarie at the time were always willing to pose for him, and even more willing when he offered them a fee. They were wearing European dress at the time, so it meant getting into "costume" to be in the act.

Thomas would often hire several cars to transport his equipment and subjects to the chosen sight, which was generally around the

base of Mount Seaview, streams in the Upper Hastings or Bonny Hills.

Bonny Hills was then known as Green Hills. The name was changed to avoid confusion with Greenhill, near Kempsey.

Thomas' eldest son, Ray, accompanied him on many of those trips helping to lump the equipment around for his father until the right setting was found.

Now 78 years of age, living with his sister at Allunga Avenue, Port Macquarie, Ray still has vivid recollections of those times.

"The Aborigines certainly liked to go along in the cars. They enjoyed every minute of the trip and loved to pose for dad.

"The gins were very shy and wouldn't get dressed up for the part until dad sent me deep into the scrub while they changed.

"With the exception of man who came across from the Macleay River they were all locals."

Ray is one of four children from the marriage of Thomas to Jane Freeman. The others are Jack, Milton and Margaret.

### Black Friday

As a naturalist and lover of all creatures big and small, photography fitted nicely into Thomas Dick's way of life.

Ironically, it was curiosity and thirst for knowledge in this field that led to his death in 1927, on Friday the 13th, his 50th birthday.

He left home after lunch on that day to study marine life in rock pools below the lighthouse at Tacking Point — one of his favorite spots.

He was so engrossed that he failed to observe a huge wave bearing down on him. Seconds later, he had been washed out to sea and then disappeared.

When he hadn't returned well after nightfall, a search began, but it was not until the following Tuesday that the mystery of his disappearance was solved.

Ray and his brother, Milton, came across their father's body lying on a sand spit near one of the headlands, just north of the lighthouse.

It was a tragic ending for a man, who sought no favor or accolades, but quietly and sincerely gave so much to posterity in his lifetime, and even more after his death.

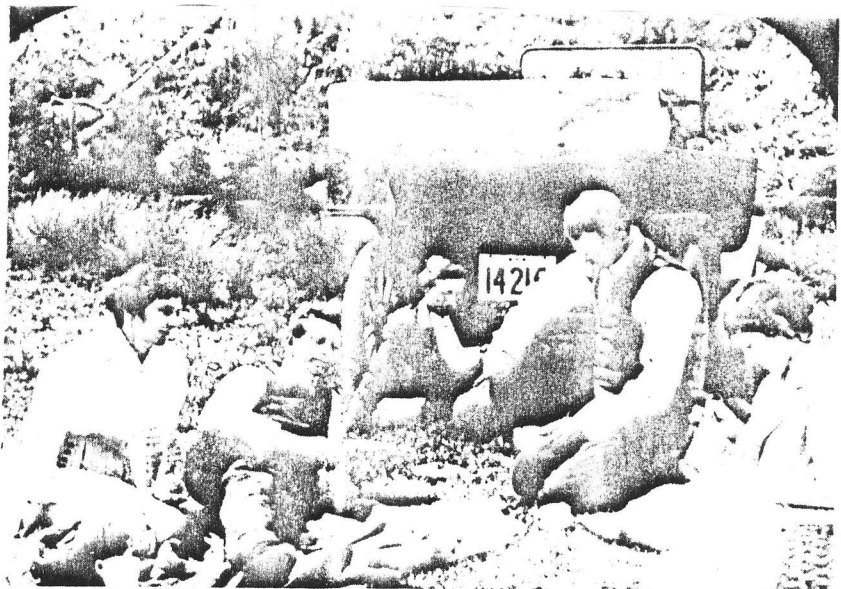
—Bernard Harte



Three generations . . . above John Dick, the tanner.



His daughter-in-law Elizabeth, wife of John Stuart Dick and mother of Thomas.



. . . and son Thomas Dick (pouring tea) enjoying a bush picnic about 1920 with Les Manfield (owner of the T model Ford) and two sisters, the Miss Fletchers. The other man is unknown.