

HASTINGS DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Occasional Paper 1977/3

"WRITING AND WRITERS OF OLD

PORT MACQUARIE"

Prepared by
Mrs. N. Sheather.

The first years of settlement in this remote region of the Colony of New South Wales, brought to Port Macquarie men and women of literary merit who, by the use of their special talents, have left in their writings a fascinating record of their environment and times. As it was an age when the written word was a fundamental means of communication, so it was an age of great literary competence. The despatches sent up to Sydney by the Commandants and the letters posted home across the seas to distant relatives can be read with appreciation for their expressiveness as well as their historical content. During the following short excursion into the past it is hoped to capture, by means of original quotations and references to records, something of the atmosphere and spirit of those years between 1821 and 1841.

In the 1820's, it would appear that despatches and letters comprised the bulk of writing. It could be expected to be so at a time of intense activity and industry when Government men and money flowed freely; when the initial rough stockade and rude hut were replaced by the first notable buildings; when the main objectives seemed to have been establishment and survival. Life was not easy in Port Macquarie in the beginning under "The System"; a curious blend of brutality and culture.

Because of the gravity of its contents, but also because of its brevity, precision and clarity, the despatch of Lieutenant G.R. Carmac to the Colonial Secretary, written on 19th November, 1824 is arresting. In addition to his own duties as Assistant Engineer at the Settlement, he then had as well, by the death of John Rolland, those of Acting Commandant. He wrote:

"I beg leave to announce to you with feelings of the deepest concern and regret the melancholy intelligence of the death of Captain Rolland, the Commandant, who expired on the evening of the 16th instant; he was so indisposed about the beginning of the month as to confine himself to bed and was under the necessity of relinquishing from that time the administration of affairs. Fever, the disorder of which he appears to have been the victim advanced in a few days rapidly and soon precluded all hopes of his recovery, he suffered no pain and felt persuaded that his dissolution was at hand. I cannot deny myself, on the present occasion the melancholy satisfaction of expressing my respect and esteem for this excellent and amiable officer and lament his premature departure from life in which his great talents, energy of character and high principles promised he would be so

distinguished. On the morning of the 18th inst. his remains were interred with due ceremony within the area of the Church now in progress."

If we desire a young lady's candid opinion of Port Macquarie in 1826, we have it from the pen of Ann Hassall, writing from her parents' (Revd. Samuel and Mrs. Marsden) home at Parramatta to her husband, Revd. Thomas Hassall, at Bathurst:

"My father tells me he understands you are to go to Port Macquarie again which is a circumstance I can hardly reconcile myself to think of it yet. I think God has put me to the test whether I was sincere when I once wrote to you that I would rather even live at Port Macquarie if it was the path of duty in preference to any other place without His blessing."

During 1830 a Scotsman, John Macdonald, held a civil appointment here in the Commissariat. From those days a poem written by him describing Lake Innes has survived. But his subsequent fame did not derive from his poetry but from the strange association formed between him and the local Tribes of Aborigines.

In her journal written in 1847, Annabella Innes referred to the event. This was seventeen years after John Macdonald left Port Macquarie. She expressed no doubt and obviously believed that George James Macdonald, the then Commissioner of Crown Lands for New England was the same man, the acclaimed "jumped up" kinsman of this district's native population. The difference in christian names has yet to be explained

Mr. Macdonald's account of the affair was written in a letter to his father, Major Macdonald, who lives in Scotland, in December, 1830 -

"A short period after my arrival at Port Macquarie I was on a visit at the Agricultural Establishment situated about 30 miles from the Settlement, and had been one evening conversing a considerable time in broken English with one of the Natives, when he suddenly stopped short in his discourse, looking eagerly at me with his large dark eyes and ended by stating that I was on the King's River Tribe who had been killed some time before, and that I had 'jumped up again as a white man.' I took no more notice of this ridiculous circumstance at the time; but I soon discovered that this idea had spread very generally among these simple and superstitious people, by whom I was ever after addressed by the name of "Bangar" which it would seem was my original patronymich."

Mr. Macdonald continued his narrative to his father by telling how he learned their language. This they always used when conversing with him. He frequently accompanied them alone miles from the Settlement in search of specimens in Natural History. His house, he wrote, was adorned with presents of native crafts and weapons and shared with a variety of wild animals and birds. By then he had become as fond of them as they of him.

Then word came unexpectedly of his recall to Sydney. The scenes enacted from the time it became known he was to leave until his departure - to do them justice - must be described in the words of the principal actor himself:-

"....they immediately started off to their camp which was then about three miles from the Settlement, and returned with the whole tribe after dark with torches and encamped about the house: they then surrounded me expressing their sorrow that I should leave them and using every epithet of endearment that their language afforded, most of them at the same time stating their intention to proceed with me.... The following morning they all accompanied me, men, women and children to the place of embarkation, sending forth every now and then one of those wild shouts that they use when leaving home on going to War. On our arrival at the 'Boat Harbour', the Men seated themselves on the fragments of rock that were strewn about the beach, their countenances gloomy and abstracted, and the tears starting from their full dark eyesthe women and children had in the meantime retired to a height immediately above us where they stood watching our proceedings and weeping most bitterly; and when the boat left the shore the men again commenced their wild and savage shouts which they continued at intervals till we were out of hearing."

The Sunday Church Parade in those days was conducted by the Army, and an elderly lady recalled, from her childhood, that there was a good deal of pomp and ceremony. The congregation was made up of military personnel, civil officials, prisoners and the wives and families who lived on the penal station. The following short quotation was taken from a sermon preached in St. Thomas' Church between the years 1828-1831 by the Revd. John Cross:-

"The discharge of those duties which we owe to one another, our duty here extends to all the different expressions of righteousness and love: the rule is both short and plain. All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you even so do ye to them.... religious instruction, friendly advice and reasoning reproof cannot be dispensed with. According to the power and authority our station gives uswhatever

be our condition in life there are certain duties belonging to it which we must perform. I shall only add as the obligation is mutual both parties are equally bound and neither can withhold from the other what is due without an injury. The superior is not less strictly bound to those who are below him than the inferior to those who are above him....."

There came to Port Macquarie in 1831 a prisoner whose name was James Hardy Vaux, a man of letters who had been an actor on the London stage. Born in Surrey in 1782 he was the son of a retired butler. At fourteen years he embezzled money to pay his gambling debts. At eighteen he had served for two years as a midshipman paymaster's clerk in the Royal Navy. Soon after, he was on his way to Botany Bay with a seven year sentence for petty larceny.

In New South Wales, where Captain King was then Governor, the handsome convict was earning promotion as a clerk in the Commissariat at Hawkesbury when he forged Governor King's signature and was sent to a road gang at Castle Hill. There he so ingratiated himself with the Revd. Samuel Marsden that he became his confidential clerk. When Governor King departed for England in 1807, on board H.M.S. Buffalo with him, as his clerk, on the recommendation of the Senior Chaplain, went James Vaux. At Portsmouth he disappeared.

In 1810, having been convicted in London of the offence of stealing jewellery, he began the journey back to New South Wales. Soon after arrival in Sydney he joined in a conspiracy to rob the Judge Advocate, Ellis Bent, and on 27th April, 1811, he was banished to Newcastle.

There he pleased the Commandant, Lieut. Skottowe, by compiling and dedicating to him, for his amusement and use in his magisterial capacity "A new and comprehensive vocabulary of the Flash Language" - seventy-three handwritten pages.

Back in Sydney in 1814, he was caught trying to stow away on a ship, was flogged and sent back to the Coal River. In 1815 at Newcastle he wrote his Memoirs, publication of the book being sponsored by Judge Baron Field.

In 1818 he married and for some years afterwards held a position in the Colonial Secretary's Office. However, Governor Darling, when he heard of it was outraged that a man twice transported should be a civil servant. Vaux was dismissed.

In the late twenties he fled the Colony, but in Dublin was arrested for larceny and, for the third time, he was transported to New South Wales. However, he did leave in London a reminder

of his brief sojourn there. On 11th February, 1830, a play Settlers and Natives was staged at the Surrey Theatre in Blackfriars Road which made reference to Vaux's Memoirs. The author, W.T. Moncrieff, who was the original of Dicken's character, the "Literary Gentleman" in Nicholas Nickleby, listed in the Dramatis Personae: Hardy Vaux (Convict, pupil in the Barrington School).

At Port Macquarie in 1833 James Hardy Vaux was employed as a clerk. He would have been classified as a "Special". In August of that year the Police Magistrate in the town, Mr. Benjamin Sullivan, received an acid communication from the Colonial Secretary, which began:-

"I am directed to inform you that owing to the man (Vaux) being forwarded to Headquarters without proper escort and unaccompanied by any communication from you as to his having left Port Macquarie he has been for some time improperly at large in the town"

Clearly Vaux was not enamoured with life here for in July, 1835, he had, by some manouvre, reached Windsor where he was allowed to remain on the recommendation of the Port Macquarie Bench. The following year the Colonial Secretary enquired where he was and whether he had a ticket of leave. This led to a Public Enquiry at Port Macquarie at which it was found that although Vaux apparently had a ticket, his possession of it must have been effected by fraud or mistake. Vaux completed his seven year sentence here. A last glimpse of the man was given by Revd. Father Therry in Sydney, decrepit and ageing. His book of Memoirs was reprinted in 1963.

In 1841 the convict era was drawing to a close. It had created in Port Macquarie a town picturesque in a beautiful situation, with substantial Government and public buildings, dark red gravelled streets levelled like garden walks, cottages and cottage gardens. The climate was salubrious. Convicts assigned to free settlers, invalid prisoners and "Specials" remained in the town and district. The Police Magistrate was William Nairn Gray who in 1841 founded the Port Macquarie Literary Club. He was assisted by Captain Hyndman.

A visitor to the town in January, 1841, for his health's sake was a Sydney business man, Thomas Smith. He was quite young and suffering, it could be supposed, from tuberculosis. During his holiday he wrote two charming and descriptive letters to his wife, Penelope, and their children in Sydney which have been preserved. The following passage is taken from the first letter and describes his arrival in the steamer:-

"The steamer got in between 7 and 8 when I fetched my little nag, Punch, ashore, and he no doubt was as glad as myself to get a comfortable bed. Dr. Fattorini drove me

in his Gig from the Boat to my Inn, called Phillips', which was most acceptable for I should have found the walk too much, it being excessively hot ...I think they will make me very comfortable at their house - the landlord only came to it however about a week since and things are not yet put to rights. There is evidently a good cook for I had some fish and broiled mutton chops for dinner yesterday dressed excellently. Robson, which is the landlord's name was Steward at the club in Sydney, so that he ought to know how to manage properly."

To be continued.

Nancy Sheather
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HASTINGS DISTRICT HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

Occasional Paper 1977/8

WRITING AND WRITERS OF
OLD PORT MACQUARIE

Prepared by Mrs Nancy Sheather

WRITING AND WRITERS OF OLD PORT MACQUARIE

(Part 2)

The eighteen forties was an era in which, to some degree, the diarist and kindred writer supplanted the official correspondent in providing a written record of places, events and personalities in the Port Macquarie district.

In addition to visiting writers, who came to observe and publish their findings for the information of intending emigrants, there were those who had settled permanently, in the wake of the opening of the area to free settlers, after the early pioneering work had been accomplished by the penal settlement.

These were the first landowners and they acquired large estates by Crown grant or purchase within the County of Macquarie, which formed the boundary on the north of the settled districts. They did well enough during the eighteen thirties, but as the depression of the forties worsened, and free labour ceased and markets failed, many were reduced to a state of near or absolute bankruptcy.

They were literate, well-informed men and women and their experiences in good times and bad were recorded in a variety of written expressions; by letter, diary or journal, poem or simple day-book. Those of their writings which have survived reveal their expectations, doubts, problems and fortitude. By 1850 many had been obliged to assess the worth of their enterprise and had decided to leave the district.

There was another kind of writer in Port Macquarie at that time. He was the educated prisoner, the "Special", the gentleman convict. The town was a depot for them until 1847.

Then, too, the Macleay River valley was being settled. Land was available there on short term leases and individual holdings of well to do squatters comprised thousands of acres. In 1840, a man with an important mission, Clement Hodgkinson, passed through Port Macquarie on his way to the Macleay, employed by government to survey that district. In 1845, while on a visit to London, he published his impressions of the North-east coast, calling his book Australia from Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay.

He was a step-brother of Sir John Millais, the artist. On the Macleay, he made his headquarters' camp on the property of F.W. Chapman of "Yarra-Bandini", to whom he had brought letters of introduction. He later married a daughter of that gentleman.

The following is a short descriptive passage from his book:-

"The first view from the sea of Port Macquarie is very pleasing. On entering the surf of the bar, one sees immediately beyond

the last breaker, the mirror-like surface of the river extending in a long reach; whilst on the left, dark serpentine rocks protect the base of a smooth round eminence, covered with green sward, and crowned by the signal-post, fire-beacon and windmill. A little farther on is the town, built on a gentle rise, which shows to advantage its pretty little cottages with pointed roofs, its broad straight streets...and its tall square church tower... A grove of magnificent trees encircles Port Macquarie, and extends along the banks of the river; whilst turning to the west and north-west, the eye ... can trace...the windings of the valley through which the river Wilson flows...the distant ranges at the Macleay river, and the huge frowning mountain at the back of Cogo, half dissolved in blue ether".

It would be remiss not to mention here the name of Mrs. Baxter, wife of Lieutenant Andrew Baxter, of Yessaba on the Macleay. A diary kept by this lady furnishes not only a memoir of pioneering life, but also evidence of the cheerful manner in which she, and others like her, accepted the rough conditions. She was quite familiar with Port Macquarie. On one occasion she rode horseback to the head of the Macleay, across the Tableland to the Hastings and down the valley to this town, calling on friends.

She described the Yarrows Inn as "Beautifully situated, a resort for neighbouring nobility and gentry". She continued to "Big House, owned by two gentlemen, a very nice cottage in a frightfully ugly situation". It was a disagreeable road to travel before she passed Colonel Gray's estate. At Thrumster Mr. Taylor lent her a horse to go into the settlement. She was rowed across the river to Gooloowa by a Hottentot. Her friends there "so English, so amiable, so good". She had excellent coffee. At Port Macquarie she spent a day with a Tasmanian friend and her family, old colonists originally from Skye.

This was the town to which a convict, James Tucker, was banished in 1844. He was a Special, a native of Bristol, educated at Stonyhurst College in that city. Born in 1807 or 1808, he was transported to New South Wales in 1826 for the crime of sending a damaging letter demanding money to a cousin who had helped him when he was in financial need. In that letter, which made such a strong impression on its recipient, Tucker used the name Rosenberg, and was charged under the name James Rosenberg Tucker. All his life in his writing he used the pseudonym Rosenberg.

The three country towns in New South Wales where he served his long sentence, Emu Plains, Maitland and Port Macquarie, all had a redeeming feature in a lively interest in amateur theatricals. His was a creative talent and at Port Macquarie, perhaps due to favourable circumstances, he wrote prolifically during the few years between his arrival in 1844 and quiet departure in 1848-49, his ticket of leave still valid only in the Port Macquarie district. From that time,

his fate remains obscure for Mr. Colin Roderick, who established his identity, was mistaken, according to later research, in asserting that he was the man, James Tucker, who died in the Liverpool Hospital in 1866.

In 1827 official records described him as 5'3" tall, with hazel eyes, brown hair and a ruddy freckled complexion. Tradition in Port Macquarie endowed him with an engaging personality. He was thirty-seven years of age when he arrived here.

William Nairn Gray, the Police Magistrate who had in 1841 founded the Port Macquarie Literary Society, placed him as storekeeper to the Superintendent of Convicts, Stephen Partridge. It was a humane act. Tucker was allowed to use government paper and writing materials, a fact which one hundred years later proved his identity.

In those days the open land near the waterfront in Hay Street - where stood the first hotel - was known as The Esplanade. On the western side of the street a building, probably the granary of the twenties, was still standing in a state of decay. In it Tucker's plays were performed.

None of his manuscripts is known to have survived, but the titles of three plays, though legendary, are beyond doubt authentic, being so apposite to the place and times. "Old Tumbledown" was a skit on the building: "Makin' Money", a satire on the rum traffic: "Who Built that Cosy Cottage", a comedy with an obvious principal character.

After the closure of the penal settlement in 1847, Tucker lived with Tom and Sarah Widderson in Widderson Lane and was employed by a local firm of general merchants Rowe, Ewan & Co., as a clerk-storekeeper. The Widdersons were teamsters who carried goods for the same firm to New England. In 1853 the Widdersons' names were on the books of Tiara Station, employed by the McNab family near Walcha. In 1867 Tom Widderson did casual work for Mr. T.G. Wilson on his vineyard at Clifton. He died in 1871, his wife some years later.

Between 1846-1848 two prose works were written by Tucker, "Fearless Frederick Fraser" and "The Life of Mary Nailer". The manuscripts of these stories, which dealt with the lives of convicts at Port Macquarie were left, an old resident believed, with the Widdersons when James Tucker went away. Four other manuscripts, which included the novel "Ralph Rashleigh or the Life of an Exile" by Giacomo di Rosenberg, were apparently taken by him. When found, Ralph Rashleigh was seen to be dated 31st December, 1845.

Of the four manuscripts which an old man handed to the Public Librarian and President of the Royal Australian Historical Society in 1920, Mr. C.H. Bertie, one of two copies of "Jemmy Green in Australia",

a comedy written at Maitland by the author of "Nix", was bound with sheets of paper torn from the Assignment of Convicts register at Port Macquarie. Another manuscript was a drama "The Grahame's Vengeance". The fourth was the manuscript of Ralph Rashleigh.

The true identity of the mysterious Mr. Rosenberg, a writer of old Port Macquarie, was not discovered until 1951 when Mr. Roderick, after two years' patient research in the Mitchell Library, noticed that the handwriting in the manuscripts was the same as that of the storekeeper who worked in the office of the Superintendent of Convicts at Port Macquarie, James Tucker. Since then two editions of the book Ralph Rashleigh have been printed and it is regarded by many as an Australian classic.

A captivating version of life and society in Port Macquarie and its environs during the forties was the inimitable journal of Major Innes' niece, Annabella Innes, who lived at Lake Innes from the beginning of 1843 until mid 1848. In that beautiful and ordered home "The Lake Cottage" she grew to young womanhood, in a convivial clannish atmosphere; where her uncle's business reverses were hardly allowed to intrude, unless through the presence of guests sharing similar declining fortunes, and where the young were carefully shielded from the less pleasant aspects of the settlement.

With confidence and a bright perception her ready pen detailed the domestic life of the estate; and at the same time she described the beauties of nature which were part of it and the embellishments added by her kinsfolk to the primeval scene. She wrote of the town and of the homes she visited, thereby leaving a reliable record. All that she wrote, she enlivened with vignettes of friends and acquaintances; their appearance, dispositions, actions and habits. Some of her opinions were doubtless reflections of those held by her elders; but Annabella herself was quite adept at slipping off the point of her quill an occasional wasp to settle among the butterflies which adorned her pages, especially when describing her contemporaries.

It was a titillating literary composition, and when it first reached Port Macquarie, having been published by its author in her latter years, it made interesting conversation over the teacups. Credit for the second edition in 1965 must be given to the Hastings District Historical Society. To refresh the memory, what better than her account of the departure of His Excellency the Governor, Sir Charles Fitzroy and party from Lake Innes for New England:-

"Monday, 8th March, 1847

As they did not go off at once, we had time to observe, if not admire, their bush costumes. The Governor wore a very light coat, and I had the honour of tying on his veil of blue purse silk (netted by Miss Icely and the best possible for keeping off flies, as it is so cool and light). Mr. Fitzroy appeared

with a great green veil, wrapped round a tall white hat. I thought it must be a kind of mourning....He wore long boots with a great piece cut out under the knee, and dark cornered unutterables, a stable jacket and waistcoat of small black and white check, a coloured shirt and neckerchief, and in this behold a bushman's costume of the year 1847!"

Another distinguished member of the visiting party was Lieut-Colonel Mundy, whose dress must have been unremarkable, but who, Miss Annabella averred, "was a gentleman like looking little man."

"A sojourner," wrote John Cross, "is one who makes only a passing visit to a place with a resolution to leave it again and proceed on his journey." One such, in Australia, was Colonel Mundy, a much travelled gentleman, old staff-officer, sportsman, and, it should be added, a writer of no mean ability. In anticipation of his return to urban living, he was keeping a journal of his experiences in the colony, later published in London under the title "Our Antipodes". He too entered in his diary the departure from Lake Innes and subsequent events.

By the evening of the 8th, the party had arrived at Yarrows, the Major's stock-station and inn, where they spent the night.

The arduous ascent of the mountain to the tablelands the following day, with accompanying descents into deep gorges, over a road almost impassable for horses, Colonel Mundy apparently did not expect or relish. It rained. In the depths of the rain forest, there was darkness at mid-day. Whilst recruiting himself at Messrs. Todd & Fenwick's station that evening, he wrote:-

"I never recollect being so sick of my saddle as I was this day".

However, he was able to quote Samuel Pepys: "But I find that a coney skin in my breeches does preserve me perfectly from galling."

The next day the party met their host for the third night, Mr. Marsh of Salisbury Plains, who drove "a desert transit van, built on the principle of the Egyptian overland carriages and driven by him four in hand. It something resembles a large jaunting car on two wheels, rigged like a curricule...well suited to flat roads and sandy stony plains of Egypt. After an hour of galvanic exercise to our bones and joints..." the governor and the colonel were placed down safe and sound at Mr. Marsh's hall door.

The next day Sir Charles Fitzroy was thrown from his horse, which rolled on him.

At the end of a week, however, without further incident, the gentlemen were back at the Yarrows Inn, but a day's ride from the

comforts of The Lake Cottage. But their adventures were not over. Emerging from the house at daybreak, the Colonel's experienced eye encountered the fresh horse provided to carry him back in triumph, and the ensuing scenes were narrated by him in retrospect:-

The horse "A tall raw-boned brown with a spine like a park paling, every vertebra visible. No sooner had I mounted than he rushed against the garden fence, before my right foot had found the stirrup, and tried to rub me off; and, finding that did not succeed, he gave a kick and a rear, and then getting his head down, commenced and sustained a series of jumps straight up and down, with his back hogged and his four feet collected together like the sign of the Golden Fleece...one of the men seized the snaffle by a sudden spring, and the buckjumper with one entrechat of greater force than the rest, concluded the dance..."G.F." (George Fitzroy, of the tall white hat and green veil) "fared worse, for his horse, after carrying him quietly at first, suddenly became restive, ran among the trees, and finally struck him off by a blow on the face. The Governor also, getting into a tandem to perform the last twelve miles of the journey, and the wheeler falling over the root of a tree, he was thrown fairly over the splashboard".

It may be deduced from the foregoing that in those days life was not easy for the Governor, or his entourage.

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PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM (1910-1911)

This Album with photographs taken during the months of May, 1910 and 1911 is of interest for two reasons: firstly, the photographs with their typewritten descriptions are now historic; and, secondly, the Album is said to have been owned and compiled by Louis Becke. It was an early acquisition of the Hastings District Historical Society and records do not reveal the donor's name. It is therefore hoped to positively identify the owner, the unnamed traveller, - especially in view of the claim made for Louis Becke, distinguished native son of Port Macquarie.

The contents record two tours, both of which commenced and ended at Warwick, Queensland. The tours were made by rail and bicycle.

On May 1st, 1910, the photographer, with a companion, Mr. C. Newcombe, left Warwick by train for Armidale. From there they set out on bicycle to Hillgrove. Newcombe was a fisherman but the other was interested in viewing the country and visiting mines. The journey proceeded in stages down the Macleay River to Kempsey and from there to Port Macquarie.

The photos taken at Port Macquarie are of particular interest in trying to establish a link between the person unnamed and Louis Becke. To summarize, briefly, Louis' association with the town - he had lived here for the first twelve years of his life from 1855 to 1867; he had returned and worked in the district for a time prior to his marriage at Port Macquarie in 1886 to Mary Elizabeth Maunsell, daughter of the Police Magistrate; and he was back here, at least once more for some months with his daughter Nora in 1895-96.

Louis Becke was the youngest child of Frederick Becke, Clerk of Petty Sessions at Port Macquarie, and his wife Caroline Matilda. He had five brothers and one sister.

The house in which the Becke family lived and where he spent his first twelve years was situated on the corner of William and Owen Streets, Becke's Corner. That house and the cottage next to it in William Street were owned by Louis' family, but the corner home was the one which old residents associated with Louis Becke.

It was built of sandstock brick, one-storeyed, with a low, leading hip-roof which was thatched. The northern verandah with French doors opening onto it was supported by plain wooden posts and the floor joined and was level with the footpath. The verandah continued along the western wall where the main entrance door led into a passage running from west to east with rooms on either side. More rooms faced the Street. There was a large detached room off the end of the western verandah, probably the original kitchen. A few feet away on the western side was the smaller cottage of six rooms built in an early style without verandahs and with three rooms facing north and three south opening into another. There was a verandah on the southern side and another on the north with French doors opening onto it from the three front rooms. Joinery work in both houses was of cedar and this wood was used in the slabs in lintels and door and window jambs, indicative of a period

en cedar was plentiful. Like most early Port Macquarie buildings the
uses were plain without the refinements in joinery to be seen in other
settlements. As with most other early local buildings, the two houses
neither damp-course nor basement.

Becke's Corner was bought from Henry and Elizabeth Cohen in 1854
E.T. Beilby, probably an uncle of Louis, and later transferred to
Frederick Becke. It remained in the family until 1895. The title to the
land was Old System and something of its history may be of interest:-

10th April, 1854, Conveyance, Henry and Elizabeth Cohen to
Edwin Thomas Beilby, No.557 Book 31.

1st October, 1856, Mortgage, Edwin Thomas Beilby to Ebenezer
Bourne, No.523 Book 45.

20th October, 1860, Conveyance, Ebenezer Bourne to Frederick
Becke, No.579 Book 70.

6th November, 1860, Conveyance, Henry and Elizabeth Cohen to
Frederick Becke, No.598 Book 70.

15th November, 1860, Mortgage, Frederick Becke to Ebenezer Bourne,
No.599 Book 70.

29th May, 1866, Conveyance, Ebenezer Bourne to Edwin Thomas
Beilby, No.679 Book 98.

23rd May, 1895, Edwin Thomas Beilby, Caroline Becke and Others
J.H. Young, No.900 Book 557.

When Louis Becke was a child the headland in front of his home,
Macleay's Camp Site, was traversed as it sloped to the beach by the track
which led from Boat Harbour into the town. North-west across open grass-
land were the walls of the gaol, east lay the Flagstaff, and on the
downline to the south stood the windmill, its sails still intact, still
functioning. Many years later when he wrote "Some Memories of Port
Macquarie" he told of relics of the "Wanderer" he had found at low tide
wedged in the rocks on the beach below and of a great octopus he had seen
jamming in the hull of the wreck of the "Richmond" nearer the town.

Clearly the Becke family had maintained a long acquaintance with
Port Macquarie.

Supposing, then, Louis Becke to be the author of the notes written
for the Album, one's first impression is that the author lacks the
familiarity with his subject - views of the town - which might surely be
expected. Instead, he writes of graves of officers bearing the date 1820.
The view which he states to be "Across the harbour" was really taken from
the west bank of Kooloonbung Creek at high tide looking towards the
northern part of the town.

Continuing their tour the men moved north again to the Macleay
River and a photograph was taken at South West Rocks. A comment attached
stated that the prison (Trial Bay) had never been used since it was finished.
The prison was in use for prisoners from 1886 until 1903, a fact which
Louis Becke would most likely have known. Prior to 1886 he had been
employed for a while on the Macleay River Times, and, in addition, his
interest in the gold and arsenic mine at Valla had kept him in contact
with the districts north of Port Macquarie.

Another clue to the man's identity is given as they come to the Ambucca River. There they parted, Newcombe electing to take the coast road while the other went inland through Bowraville to the Bellinger. On the road he met an old friend, Mr. Norris, and spent some hours with him. An enquiry might be worthwhile to see if the Norris family still reside there and if any recall Louis Becke.

The writer's interest in the harbours, including Coffs Harbour, could have been very much in character with Louis; and it is not hard to imagine him at ease in that splendid hotel of its day, Walker's of South Coffs Harbour, and his contentment there "watching the boats on the Clarence River". The remainder of the tour by way of the Clarence to return to Armidale was apparently made alone and Newcombe was not mentioned again in the Album.

The following year on May 11th the cyclist set off again, travelling as far as Glen Innes by train. After a night there and a long cold day to follow he camped at Ben Lomond. The next day he reached Armidale. From there the tour took him west to Coonabarabran. He photographed, in the main, views which included mountain peaks and rock formations. Again, a lead in establishing his identity might be his reference to Mr. Wilson of "Gowang" station, Coonabarabran, with whom he stayed.

Returning to Gunnedah, the traveller took the train to Walcha Road. His intention to visit Apsley Falls and descend the old New England Road to the Hastings Valley would surely have appealed to Louis Becke's adventurous spirit. It must have been an arduous and lonely passage down the cutting in 1911 - no amenities such as Tobin's Hole which helped Colonel Mundy and party on their way. Gone too the inn at Yarras. Arriving, eventually, at Long Flat he fails to record the name of the public house, "Travellers' Rest" from quite early times.

The views of the Upper Hastings are of interest as they are an indication of the extent of the land cleared at that time. The photo of Long Flat shows the village on the left and the Churchill property on the river. The photo at the lower right hand corner of the same page shows Broken Bago Mount and includes a house which resembles the old homestead Reid's at Colonel's Creek.

The traveller continued down the river, passing through Wauchope, without revisiting Port Macquarie, crossed the Hastings at Blackmans Point. He went on through Telegraph Point and Kempsey and then west up the Macleay to the Jeogla Mountain. His photographs of the Upper Macleay would doubtless be of interest to persons now living in that area. His comment on the road there was one of the prettiest he had seen in any part of the world was one that might well have been made by Louis Becke.

From Wollomombi Hotel, where he spent the night, the cyclist rode to Armidale, calling at Hillgrove to see the gorge and take a photograph of the Hillgrove Creek Mine. From Armidale he took train to Tenterfield, thence by train to Drake, Woodenbong and Killarney where he caught the train to Wauchope. There the Album finishes.

Since this Album was given to the Society with an assertion that had been the property of Louis Becke, and since it portrays two off the ten track - or off the railway track - sightseeing tours by someone with an interest in mining as well as scenery, the kind of tour which must have had appeal for one such as Louis, especially after years abroad; could that assertion be doubted?

Louis' maternal grandfather, Charles Beilby, a Sydney merchant, lost a fortune in cattle and the search for gold and copper in the Port Macquarie district. Louis was born in 1855 when gold fever was at a high pitch. Stories of lucky strikes inspired the hope that gold would be found in this part of New South Wales. Particles of the metal were present in the pools on the sea-shore at Tacking Point and elsewhere and it was thought that a main lode might be found. In his youth Louis had spent two years around the North Queensland goldfields at Pine River and Porters Towers where his brother was the manager of the Australian Joint Stock Bank. Again, on the Nambucca River at Valla he had dabbled in the old and arsenic mine.

However, in 1910 Louis Becke was fifty-five years of age and in very poor health. Could he have undertaken the tours described? On the other hand, he might have undertaken them in the hope of an improvement in health.

The Becke family returned to Australia from abroad in 1909 after some fourteen years absence. Louis was then married to his third wife, formerly Fanny Sabina Long, with whom he had eloped to Europe in 1896. He was divorced by Elizabeth Maunsell in 1903. Louis' tales of the South Seas had brought him fame, but fortune had eluded him. In his biography A. Grove Day wrote: "Bad health and more frequent drinking . . . alienated him from his family". And: "Recurrent malaria added to the sufferings from rheumatism".

From his return to Australia until his death in February, 1913, information concerning his movements and activities is somewhat vague, apart from the fact that on 7th September, 1910, he was elected a member of the Royal Society of New South Wales. The letters in the possession of this Society which he wrote in March and May of 1912 to Mr. A.E. Pountney, Editor of the Port Macquarie News reveal that he was then domiciled in Sydney. From the information at our disposal Louis Becke could have been at Warwick in May of 1910 and 1911.

But one hesitates to attribute to Louis Becke the errors relating the town and its history made by the visitor to Port Macquarie in 1910. Again, the notes are in typescript and the likelihood of his having had them remote. Louis wrote his letters and manuscripts and it was that copy for the printer was impeccable, even a year or two before death.

It could be surmised that few boys have known Port Macquarie and environs better than did Louis Becke. By the time he was twelve years, in 1867, he had explored every corner of the town, the beaches and h. Twice he had been returned to his home by the mounted police. He sailed the harbour and beyond in the family ketch. He had also entertained the Yankee whalers in the family home. As a man in his late twenties, Louis Becke had returned and had worked in various occupations which must have added to his knowledge of the area. We are told that he was in the bush: we know, too, that he spent some of the time in Port Macquarie where, on 10th February, 1886, he married Bessie Maunsell. Ten years later he was again in the town accompanied by his daughter Nora. It would be strange if Louis had not remembered the town where he was born so well indeed.

In 1910, while Newcombe fished, his companion recorded his impressions of the town and its historic places, including St. Thomas' Church. If the man were Louis Becke then in the church his memory was at fault. For in his childhood Louis had attended the church, which he confessed to dislike. He attributed the impediment in his speech later in life to fear of a severe schoolteacher or Sunday School teacher at Port Macquarie. In this regard, it is interesting to recall an entry in the diary of Mr. T.G. Wilson J.P. in 1867. In October of that year he wrote attending a meeting held by the board of the local Church of England Denominational School to enquire into the conduct and hear charges against a teacher. Mr. Crummer was there with witnesses. The teacher subsequently resigned after "acknowledging consideration of the board in allowing him to resign instead of suspending him". Was he the teacher Louis Becke remembered so well?

But other recollections of the church of his childhood quoted by Grove Day are less convincing and rather support the interesting conclusion his biographer came to in respect of his subject: "The things remembered best were the things that never happened."

The visitor photographed the building and in his notes described the box pews and the circular interior of the square tower. He did not state as one with previous experience of the church. He informed the reader that troops sat in the gallery while the convicts stood beneath it. It was never so in St. Thomas', and savours of a resident's answer to a stranger's query. The tales circulated by successive generations have been at times fanciful and related for mutual entertainment - especially to elderly gentlemen. To this day visitors scan the cedar wainscoting for the rings which they are sure were there to anchor the bolts on the prisoners' chains.

When the church was built (1824-1828) it was decided to omit a gallery. Instead a wooden beam was placed in the brickwork of the western wall so that it could be added and attached to it at a later date if required. The organ loft, which was restored to its original appearance in the late 1960's, was not built until 1844. A seraphine was placed in the gallery on completion and it was occupied during services by the organist and Mr. In 1856 a combined pipe and barrel organ was imported from Walkers of London and the gallery was extended across the entire western wall; before the turn of the century the organ was removed to the front of the church and seats for the choir provided in the chancel. The gallery fell into disuse and by 1930 was considered unsafe. The visitor of 1910 would have seen it as a large, capacious and empty structure. Louis would have remembered it when it housed the organ.

However, the relevant fact was that by 1844 when the gallery or organ loft was built, the convicts who remained in Port Macquarie were invalids or "Specials". As early as 1836 Governor Bourke in a letter to Lord Glenelg referred to the place as a demi-penal settlement. In 1839 his successor, Sir George Gipps explained to Lord Glenelg that Port Macquarie with other penal stations situated at a distance from Sydney, had been abandoned as a station for doubly convicted men. According to tradition, in the earliest days the prisoners stood in an open space at the back of the church. Later the invalids sat on forms at the back on the north and south sides facing inward. In 1851 at least one holder of a ticket of leave was renting his own pew.

A mistake such as the above could well be attributed to hearsay or Louis' recollection, personally, could not have carried him beyond about 1860. It is just possible that he wrote that annotation.

We are told that the visitors of 1910 had friends here. So had Louis Becke. The two men had rooms at the Royal Hotel; a hotel right on the bank of the channel, we are told. The tourist wrote that he could photograph a steamer from a doorway. The photograph is there in the Album. This facet of the puzzle is interesting because it so happened that Louis transported himself, either in person or in his mind's eye, if not to the same doorway at least to the same verandah when he wrote the sketch "An Austral Beach". But the unnamed visitor does not write in the easy familiar style of Louis, whose opening sentence reads: "As we eat and sleep on the shady verandah of the local 'Pub' (otherwise the Royal Hotel)". The description which follows of a ride on horseback to Cathie (which he spells Cattai) and a visit to a miners' camp there could leave one in doubt of Louis' closeness to his native heath.

That sketch, written late in his life, after years of travel and adventure, when his health was failing, seemed to presage a desire to write about "home". Though he had dubbed his birthplace "Dots o' Time" and disparaged it over the years, yet in May, 1912, his letter to Mr. Pountney, after reading an article in the Daily Telegraph, was full of nostalgia. He wrote: "Old memories of the dear old 'Port' arose in my heart, for I was born in Port Macquarie and long to see it again and have a few days popping out at Cattai....."

Louis had agreed to write a series of sketches for the News "Some Memories of Port Macquarie". He had plans to come here for he asked Mr. Pountney to find a house to rent for himself and his Samoan servant boy. The arrangement was made to have Miss Halliday's cottage, but the move did not eventuate. He did commence the articles, however. One of them, an irresistible vignette of his childhood days "Old Simon the Windmill Hill" recorded a better likeness of the old town than any photograph.

Louis Becke was once described as "the laureate of the prosaic, the curator of things as they actually were". It was also written of him: "men....as they leaf through the graceless stories of this awkward town, suddenly they are gripped in a veritable typhoon of nostalgia".

The writer's father, James Neville Parker who was born in 1869, met him once. He was staying with his uncle, John Cross McIntyre, at the North Shore, and one morning Louis came to the house for breakfast, having walked down the beaches from the Macleay River. The talk was of his going to Port Macquarie to fight a man.

That incident occurred about the time of his marriage to Elizabeth Maunsell, who has been labelled by latter day biographers of Louis Becke as "so dull". Perhaps his years of knocking about the Pacific islands with characters like Captain "Bully" Hayes, blackbirding, marrying Nellea Tikina of the Ellice Islands, had ill-equipped Louis for marriage to the young Irish lady, the Magistrate's daughter. Bessie may have wilted in the atmosphere of a trading post on an island in the ocean, and it very dull indeed. But, certainly, in Port Macquarie, the Maunsell family, parents and her brothers, "the Maunsell boys" had many friends.

But Louis, who possessed the magic of words, grew up in a hard school. It would be pleasant to think that he came home on his bicycle with his camera in 1910 and was the owner of the Album. Could this have been so? Unproven.

ancy Sheather,

and November, 1975.