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Heritage of East Lake Macquarie

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FEB-MAR

FERRY REVIVAL

2022



100 years apart. Wangi Wangi wharf 1920s; new Lake Mac ferry 2022. Source: LMCC; Lakemac ferry.

In order for pioneers to begin settling beyond Sydney, transport routes had to be established. At first the only transport north had been by sea. In 1826 the construction of the Great North Road began north-west of Sydney to access the Hunter Valley. Solomon Wiseman, a former convict had settled on his land grant in 1816, and in 1821 began operating an inn where travellers could stay overnight and buy provisions for the next stage of their journey. He established a ferry service in 1827 across the Hawkesbury River north of Windsor, to carry private passengers, goods and stock; and produce and provisions for the gangs of convicts building the road to Maitland. This has proved to be the oldest ferry crossing in Australia, which is still operating.



Crossing the Hawkesbury River.

Left: Wisemans Ferry, 1908, Phegans launch, "Merry Days".
 Aust'n Road Trip.

Right: 1885, Peats Ferry Wharf. Charles Bayliss, *Nat Lib Aust.*



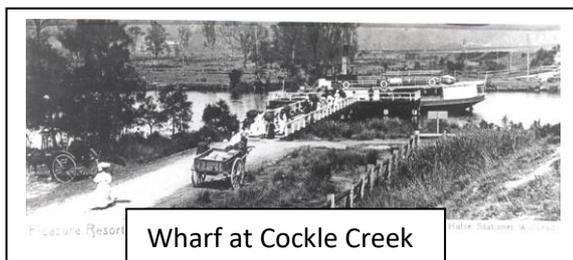
| | |
|--------------------|-----|
| Hawkesbury ferries | 1 |
| Boat or horse | 2 |
| Ferryman | 2-3 |
| Cruises | 4 |

An alternative route north was needed to access Newcastle from Sydney more directly. In 1847 George Peat established a ferry service between Mooney Mooney and Kangaroo Points; and convinced the Government to build a road to connect the ferry to Pearces Corner. This was completed in 1852; and the route became known as the Pacific Highway. Peats Ferry continued to operate until 1945. Meanwhile, construction began on the Hawkesbury Road Bridge in 1939, which opened in 1945.

Thank you to Pat Conroy and staff, kindly supporting our community; and encouraging the preservation and sharing of our heritage.

EARLY TRAVELLING AROUND LAKE MACQUARIE - BY BOAT OR HORSE?

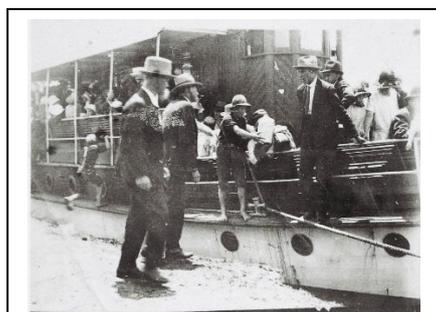
The early pioneer settlers included Rev. Threlkeld at Belmont, 1825; Percy Simpson at Cooranbong, in 1826; John Rancloud, Teralba and Jonathan Warner at Warners Bay in 1829; Edward Cory on Wangi Peninsula, 1831. In time, the villages grew, but they were sparse and separated by distance, and the lack of connecting roads. The early lake settlers relied on boats to supply all their needs until roads were constructed, improved and extended. Many jetties were dotted around the lake, not only for provisions to be delivered but products such as shingles, farm produce, timber and coal to be collected. Passengers could travel directly across the lake in far less time than attempting to travel along the rugged bush tracks, if any existed at all. People from places like Cooranbong would travel across the water to Belmont, then connect by road to Newcastle; or to Millers Wharf near Young Wallsend – now known as Edgeworth; or Cackle Creek Wharf where horse drawn wagons would complete the journey to Newcastle, Wallsend or Minmi. These expeditions usually took three days – one day to reach the destination, one day to complete business and shopping, another day to return home.



Wharf at Cackle Creek

FERRYMEN

The first ketch to service the timber trade from Cooranbong was **Thomas Boyd's** "Turtle" in the 1860's. This was a growing town, originally established for dairy and cattle, where the enterprising **Thomas Russell** settled in 1860. He became the postmaster, receiving mail twice a week delivered on horseback; and established several businesses. His inn, the first in the area, capitalised on Cobb and Co making Cooranbong an overnight stop on the long and arduous journey north. The provisions that were required he brought in on his boat "Village Maid"; which became the first boat to trade around the lake. Within a decade 12 boats were trading with Cooranbong. In 1875, his steamboat "Pioneer" was capable of carrying 100 passengers with all conveniences for tourists. The service catered for passengers to Newcastle via Belmont; and miners working at Catherine Hill Bay. Provisions for the Bay were taken by bullocks over the steep hill from Nords Wharf. The next major player was another provisions merchant **William Walker Johnson** based at Wallsend. As the lake population and small settlements grew he began ferry services. His first venture was "Little Pinafore" which towed a punt behind to deliver pit timbers. She proved to be too small and was replaced by "Big Pinafore". Daily ferry services operated from Cackle Creek to Speers Point, Toronto, Belmont, Swansea, Cams Wharf and Nords Wharf for a 2 shilling fare. As business expanded the stylish "Maggie Johnson" was built in 1888 and featured in many excursions and picnics around the lake until she burned down in 1902.



LMCC: Passenger ferry, Swansea



"Maggie Johnson" at Cackle Creek



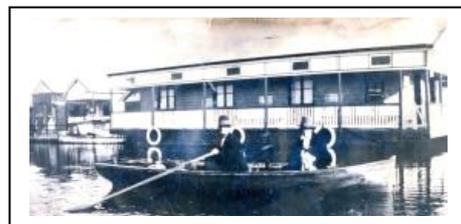
Launch "Toronto" Swansea wharf, 30s

"Fishe Jack" Richardson was a boat owner and ferryman; nicknamed when he ran a fish and chip shop at Minmi. He owned shops and a picture show in Holmesville. He operated the launches Swansea, Wangi Pioneer, Oakarua and Toronto. These boats were used to transport workers, picnic parties and deliveries. His service ran between Cackle Creek and Swansea, Carey Bay, Toronto, Belmont, Pelican and Coon Island. Produce was carried for a shilling a bag; 100 bricks for 2 shillings. He often carried building materials to places such as Croudace Bay because the roads were very poor or had not been made yet.



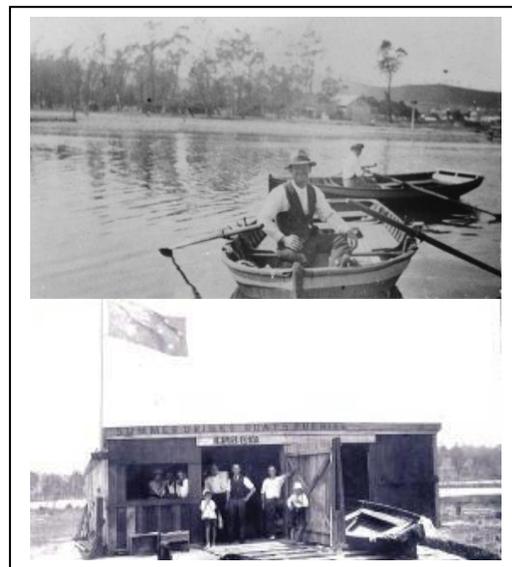
Fisho Jack became involved in the project to establish a native flora and fauna reserve on Pulbah Island. He transported the native animals and additional food supplies to the island. Among his many projects were to build the jetty and caretakers cottage on the island.

For many years he lived with his family in a houseboat built on a punt in 1930. With the advent of World War II, the houseboat was relocated on to land. All boats on the lake were immobilised and relegated to the western side of the lake in case of enemy invasion. Jack was employed by the Department of Defence to oversee all the craft in the Cockle Creek area.



LMCC

Harry Linsley adapted his ferry service to his unique situation in 1919. He was a returned soldier who had lost his right leg in the war. His ferry business was based on the largest of the Five Islands opposite Speers Point Park. He and his son would row miners from Warners Bay and Speers Point to the island and return for 3 shillings. From the island they would take a rough track to Teralba, and then cycle to their work in the mines. Even though the boats were small by comparison, they would sometimes carry 15 people, some standing. Fortunately the creek offered much greater protection from wind and waves than the open lake. To boost his income, Harry diversified and set up a kiosk on the island. People could buy drinks, sweets and fruit; and hire boats. Even swimming costumes could be hired. This venture proved to be very popular during weekends and holidays. The business prospered until a footbridge was built across Cockle Creek in 1928, forcing the business to close in 1929.



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Many took advantage of opportunities. ***“FISHING METHODS DIFFER BUT THE THRILL’S THE SAME”*** “Few would see any similarity between the Lake Macquarie ferry streaming down Cockle Creek 50 years ago with a picnic party on board and the hundreds of small launches which now chug around Lake Macquarie every weekend. But half a dozen men in the stern of the ferry had similar ideas to many of those in the launches today. They were hopeful of catching tailer, a fish whose fighting ability and table qualities have always been much admired.....”

...The ferry from Cockle Creek was one of the most popular picnic outings in the district. Transport was readily available by train to Cockle Creek, from where the ferry left regularly to various parts of the lake. Wangi Wangi and Lake View being two of the more popular spots. Because the number of fishing places from the stern of the ferry was strictly limited, no more than eight at the most being able to fish, there was always a rush by those wishing to include fried tailer in their picnic fare.....

...When a fish was hooked the ferry skipper was always asked to slacken speed, He invariably complied. The fact that it might be a Sunday School picnic did not necessarily deter the ardent fisherman from using language more than a little blue if, when several fish were hooked at once, the trolling lines became hopelessly tangled and the fish, always the biggest, was lost.....”

David Scowcroft, NMH 1954

Some sympathetic skippers would even turn around and troll back through a school of fish again if not enough had been caught.



Left: West Wallsend Fishing Club c. 1915. This photograph was taken in Swansea. It is likely that the occasion was a monthly picnic on a boat hired from and piloted by Fisho Jack. He can be seen standing at the the centre back. Often residents of West Wallsend, especially the miners, spent their leisure time and holidays in Swansea. In those times people dressed quite formally for outings.

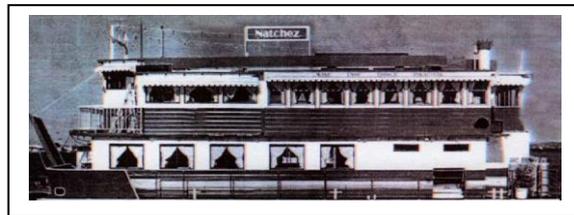
LMCC

The use and dependence on ferries declined as other means of transport were improved and extended. The first trains to travel from Sydney to Newcastle were mainly freight carriers, beginning in May 1889. The steam passenger express – the Newcastle Flyer began to make serious inroads on ferry traffic; as did the pending completion of the Pacific Highway. The surface of the road network was greatly improved and extended. Ferry owners found this new competition was making it difficult to sustain their trade, The final blow came with WWII and the inability to use their water craft. Many did not return to work on the lake; some deteriorated beyond repair, some went to other places, some adapted to other uses.



MV "Julie" began life as a Norco cream boat on the Richmond River in 1950. From there she went to Forster and Tuncurry in 1953 to ferry passengers who arrived by plane from Sydney to spend holidays and honeymoons on Wallis Island. She became very popular, taking passengers for cruises on Lake Wallis. After the turmoil of several airline takeovers East-West discontinued the service. Julie was sold to Fellowes Bus company of Swansea and continued her work of cruising and charters on Lake Macquarie, working out of Toronto. Featured in the 1972 Lake Macquarie Tourist Guide, she was often referred to as "Big Julie", as she had the relatively small capacity to carry 72 passengers. After modifications were made, she became known as the "Macquarie Lady". She passed into the hands of Warren Hollis of Marks Point who proposed to revive a cross-lake ferry service between Toronto and Belmont in the mid 80s. Despite interest this did not eventuate and she continued her journey south to the Hawkesbury River, to take on the role of making deliveries on the popular Riverboat Postman run, under a new name – the "Hawkesbury Wanderer".

The waters of the largest salt water lake provide a beautiful backdrop for functions, conferences and dining. Over time, a number of ventures operated. Warren Hollis of Marks Point Marina advertised his "Natchez" ferry restaurant in Lake Macquarie Tourist Guides, boarding at Cockle Creek and Speers Point Park.



Lake Macquarie Cruises based at Toronto, offered a variety of scenic cruises – coffee, luncheon and twilight, on their 3 vessels – **Macquarie Star, Macquarie Enterprise and Macquarie Supercat.**

Happy 100th birthday to the "Wangi Queen", Showboat Cruise.

Launched in 1922 at Empire Bay, Central Coast, she was a traditionally crafted wooden ferry. Her timbers were cut in the Watagan Mountains and transported by bullock teams. Teak timbers used in the upper deck were recovered from a ship wrecked on North Head. First named "The Ettalong", she serviced the ferry needs of Brisbane Waters. In 1938 she was relocated to Sydney Harbour and became known as "The Ettalong Star", ferrying Sydney-siders around the Harbour. Purchased in 1974 by Graham Burgess, she moved north to Lake Macquarie and was renamed as the second "Wangi Queen", after the original ferry owned by the Wangi Ferry Company. After nearly 40 years, several owners and badly in need of a refurbishment, the Wangi Queen left Lake Macquarie in 2012 to return to Sydney Harbour. Her new owners, Sydney Harbour Tall Ships, have based her at historic Campbell's Cove, The Rocks. Now part of the heritage fleet, her cruises showcase the convict history of Goat Island.



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