



HELM



Heritage of East Lake Macquarie

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MAY-JUN FROM THE MOUNTAIN TO THE OCEAN 2023

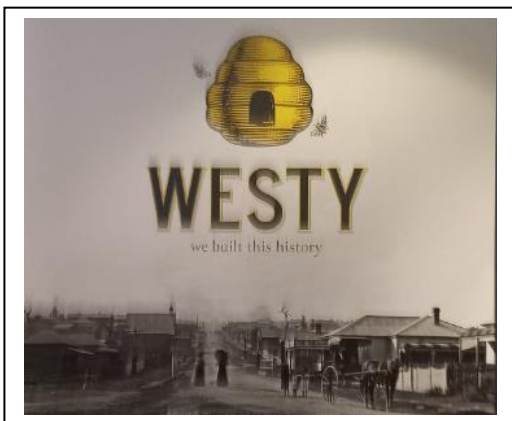
From Mount Sugarloaf summit, the view stretches from Sugar Valley just beneath, to Lake Mac and the ocean. The mountain offered timber and coal to the early European settlers, setting up home in the settlements of Mafeking, Ladysmith, O'Donnelltown, Fairley; and the village of West Wallsend. With sparse comforts and facilities in hamlets like Ladysmith, families began to relocate into the growing town of West Wallsend in the 1930s and 40s; some moving further east to places like Blacksmiths and Swansea. Many ocean and lakeside suburbs continued to be popular as holiday destinations for the families from the coalfields.

Mount Sugarloaf was an important site for the Awabakal people. From here they could see all their lands and were able to use it as a teaching place and hold sacred ceremonies. They felt it was shaped like a wedge-tailed eagle, the totem for the Awabakal. They called Mount Sugarloaf Keeamba Keeamba. A legend was passed onto their children, cautioning them not to wander because the monster Puttikin would bite and hurt them.

Beneath Mount Sugarloaf the newly opened Sugar Valley Library Museum, *kirantakamyari* (meaning North Creek), is next to the Cameron Park Shopping Plaza. The museum is the first in the Lake Macquarie region, showcasing the

history of West Wallsend and surrounding district known as Sugar Valley. It has been developed in conjunction with the West Wallsend District Heritage Group, who have relocated the museum from the grounds of the High School. The

museum was set up by history teacher Brian Hayes as a special project in 1985. Students canvassed the community for artifacts and many donated items, photos, and information. This LMCC museum lets us reminisce, discover, inform, and preserve for the future.



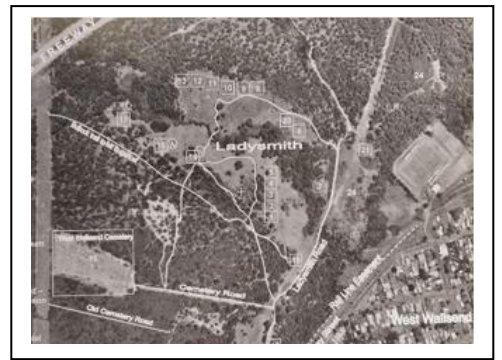
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Inaugural exhibition: "WESTY: we built this history". Check for opening

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

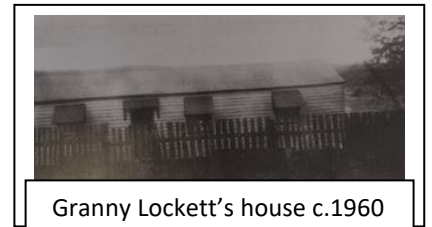
LADYSMITH

Ladysmith was typical of a number of small settlements that sprang up west of West Wallsend from the 1850s onwards. They were home to timber cutters harvesting timber for the Victoria Bridge, near Maitland; and later cutting pit props and timber from Sugarloaf as mines opened. West Wallsend Colliery began in July 1888, followed by Seaham, Killingworth, and Seaham No. 2. It was intended to call Ladysmith Yorktown, but when the British won an important battle at Ladysmith in Africa during the Boer War, this name was adopted. The



homes that were built were very basic timber slab and iron dwellings with open fires, no electricity or water. Some were on crown land with 99-year leases; some had 25-year leases from the mining company.

In the 1930's some 20 families called Ladysmith home – among them the Lockett, Groves, Mortlock, Cizzio and Nott families. During the Depression years when there was little or no work, they had to make every shilling count. To supplement family food, rabbit traps were set; butter and bread were home-made; fats were used to make soap; fruit and vegetables were grown and preserved in jars; many kept chickens. Billycarts and wheelbarrows were used to collect manure for fertilising. Clothing parcels could be applied for, consisting of army tunics dyed blue; shirts and boots made in jail; women were supplied with shoes and material to make a dress. After police inspection, some received black bush blankets; others used corn sacks for blankets, sewn together lengthways and covered with bright pieces of leftover material. Some relied on weekly dole food vouchers:- 4 loaves bread; 6oz. (170g) tea; 12oz. (340g) butter; 24oz. (680g) jam; 2lbs (900g) sugar; 2 tins milk; ½ bar of soap, small amount of meat. Many lost their houses and moved away into West Wallsend or east to the lake, where seafood could be gathered.



Granny Lockett's house c.1960

Bob Lockett recalled that a few still worked at the pit; others on relief work

building Ladysmith Road then Sugarloaf. Transport was by horse and cart, and bicycles; The timber cutters used bullock teams. Coal pieces were gathered along the railway line in corn sacks. Other animals such as kangaroos, wallabies and bandicoot were hunted and added to the meals; their hides were tanned. *Shirley Boon*, born in the nursing home near West Wallsend school, shared her memories. Many of the houses at Ladysmith were fenced to keep in cattle, horses and dogs. People walking past through the bush to Sugarloaf, often stopped for water, which was drawn from wells; not an easy chore and grandma fell in a few times. The water was usually milky and had to settle in buckets. A meat safe hung from a tree outside as there were no fridges. Fruit was gathered from trees, raspberry and blackberry bushes; watercress and crawchies, often into recycled kerosene tins. Chooks were a Sunday dinner treat, hollyhocks were made into soup, roos provided breakfast meat, wallaby tail soup was on the menu, as was rabbit stew and young paddy melons. When she got married, they moved to New Lambton, then Belmont and Blacksmiths. The *Groves family* described how groceries, fruit and ice were delivered regularly. Beer was chilled in the water wells. To get into Westy and the Museum Hotel you had to walk across the bridge made of 2 logs topped with wood, over the creek, at times carrying a hurricane lantern. People gradually left to move into Westy and surrounds for the amenities of electricity and town water. Some left for Swansea where the lake provided a fishing supplement. By 1973 there were only 2 houses left.

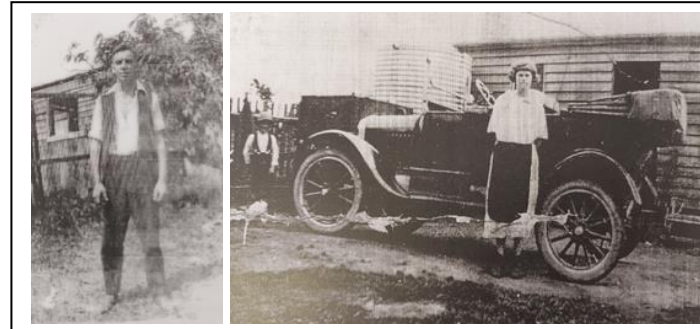


Old dray covering well remains



1. Carbide light for mini golf course.
 2. Remains of brick oven.
 3. Looking north where 3 families had settled.
- Source: "Footprints of Ladysmith"
Anne Andrews

The *Nott family* finally settled in the area. Lewis and Elizabeth Nott with baby Thomas Rees migrated first to America in the 1870s. After a number of years, they travelled to Australia on the British East India Navigation Company (now P&O) ship “Bulimba” in 1887. In the same year, son John Bulimba was born. At first living in Mereweather, they moved to Barnsley in the early 1900s as Lewis and their son were mine workers. Thomas Rees married Isabella McLuckie and they had 9 children at Ladysmith. Amongst this generation were another Thomas and John Bulimba. John established a farm at Clarendetown and built boats. Thomas remained for a time in Ladysmith, marrying Elizabeth. The family moved into West Wallsend, and then continued to move east to Blacksmiths. There are few photos because people could not afford them.



1. Thomas Rees Nott in front of his home at Ladysmith.
 2. John Bulimba and wife Bessie Louisa would visit Thomas from their farm in Clarendetown. Standing in front of their model T Ford is Annie Belle Nott, daughter of Thomas Rees and Isabella.
 These photos are from Thomas Rees’ granddaughter’s collection – Dorothy Tooth. *Source: Anne Andrews*

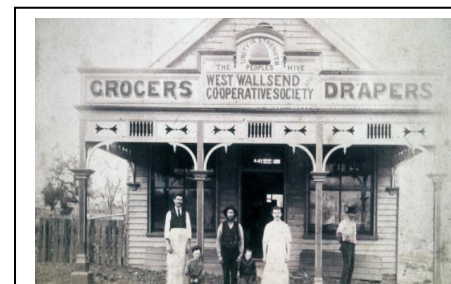
WEST WALLSEND

West Wallsend township was founded on coal mining. Early settlement had been scattered over a large area. The town really began to develop and expand as the first colliery was being developed in the 1880s. Land was subdivided for housing and businesses. Then came a private coal company railway to Cockle Creek to freight coal. Roads were developed. A double



deck, open top bus drawn by 4 horses took passengers to Wallsend. This mode of transport was replaced by a steam tram in 1910, which stopped at Edgeworth and Speers Point junctions. In a short space of time, the population had exploded from c. 40 people to 6,000 in 1905. Town water had arrived in 1902, however, roads weren’t sealed until the 1960s; the sewer system was installed in 1963. The opening of the mine, brought hotels, churches, Post Office, school, and police station.

Central to this thriving community was the Co-operative, established in 1891. The Co-op supported the community, advancing credit for food and clothing in bad times in exchange for their loyalty in good times. The Co-op expanded under the emblem of the beehive, with the motto “Unity is strength: the people’s hive”. Soon they could supply groceries, shoes, drapery, crockery; followed by hosiery, produce, timber, hardware; then a bakery. More buildings were added for tailoring, materials, hats, home and furnishings, butcher, blacksmith, tearoom, refreshments, The community was self-contained, even insurance, dentist, optometrist. As many from Westy moved to or holidayed east, it made sense to set up a sub-branch in Belmont, and Swansea, opposite the pool. Trade declined as mines closed; and disposable income, cars and supermarkets grew. Westy merged with the Newcastle Co-op “The Store” in 1964; and in 1980 The Store was wound up.



Early Westy Co-op; Bread tokens; Co-op brand Tea; Swansea branch.
Source: LMCC; Flickr; WW Museum



BLACKSMITHS

Going back to 1865 the area was originally noted as “Kahibah”. When the building of the first Swansea Bridge began in 1877 it became known as “The Depot” for the building of the northern breakwall for Swansea Channel. When W. McPherson set up his blacksmith’s shop on Ungala Rd, the phrase of “to the Blacksmiths” was shortened after a while to “Blacksmiths”. In 1933 the coal loading gantry was built on the Blacksmiths side of the Channel and was a hive of activity. Loading ceased in 1943 due to WWII; it was dismantled in 1968.

Up to the 1950s it was an ideal location for holiday makers from the coalfields, setting up tent city on “The Green” near the surf club. Trucks, utes and trailers arrived with camping gear – beds,



fridges (ice chests), sofas, tents in late November to set up. The families would then follow and enjoy swimming, boating, fishing



and relaxing to music provided by saxophones, violins and ukeleles. The holiday atmosphere was enhanced by a night Fair, Housie, an open-air dance hall at the surf club, and the arrival of Santa. Bert Chant was in charge of “hygiene” at the camp site and “Chantys” pool area, now known as Grannies Pool.

There were only a few scattered shops. 1929 Sault’s shop in Mankilli St advertised “Laurel Kerosene”, cleaning, cooking, lighting, and heating supplies. Mrs Arthur’s Beach Store offered lemonade tea, coffee, and tobacco and cigarettes. Mr. Meaker opened a shop in Gommera St, opposite the “Butterbox”. Petrol had to be obtained from Belmont using a hand pump bowser. Deliveries were made of ice, bread, greengroceries, fish. The milko from Cain’s dairy around the Blue Pacific motel would measure out milk into billy cans. The current shopping centre in Turea St began to develop in the 1950s.



A recurring phenomenon, “The Big Wet”, in 1946 and 1949 for Blacksmiths and Pelican Flats was not as drastic as at Maitland. “ The night the rain stopped the water was lapping our floorboards. From Gommera St and north to the school and Soldiers Rd there was just a sheet of water with the sand dunes on the ocean side and the Pacific Highway acting as a levee bank on the left side. The culverts under the Pacific Highway which were supposed to drain the excess water from Blacksmiths to the Channel were inadequate. The water lay c. 45 cm above the road and some gutters ran 60 cm deep. Row boats were the mode of transport in that year.....” *W. Drane* [Pelican Flats school at the time was on the corner of Soldiers Rd and the eastern side of the Pacific Highway.]



Boikon St 1946. 3rd from left Joan Nott.

The Community Hall was on land set aside for popular sports – soccer, tennis, basketball, cricket, rugby league, hockey and vigero. A highlight was the “debutante ball” organised by the sporting groups in the hall. Young “Debs” 16-18 years were presented to society celebrating that they could go out and date. Usually held late in the year, they wore white dresses like a wedding dress. It was customary for the debs to ask the males to partner them for dinner, formal dances and speeches.



4th from the left: Joan Nott. *W. Drane*