

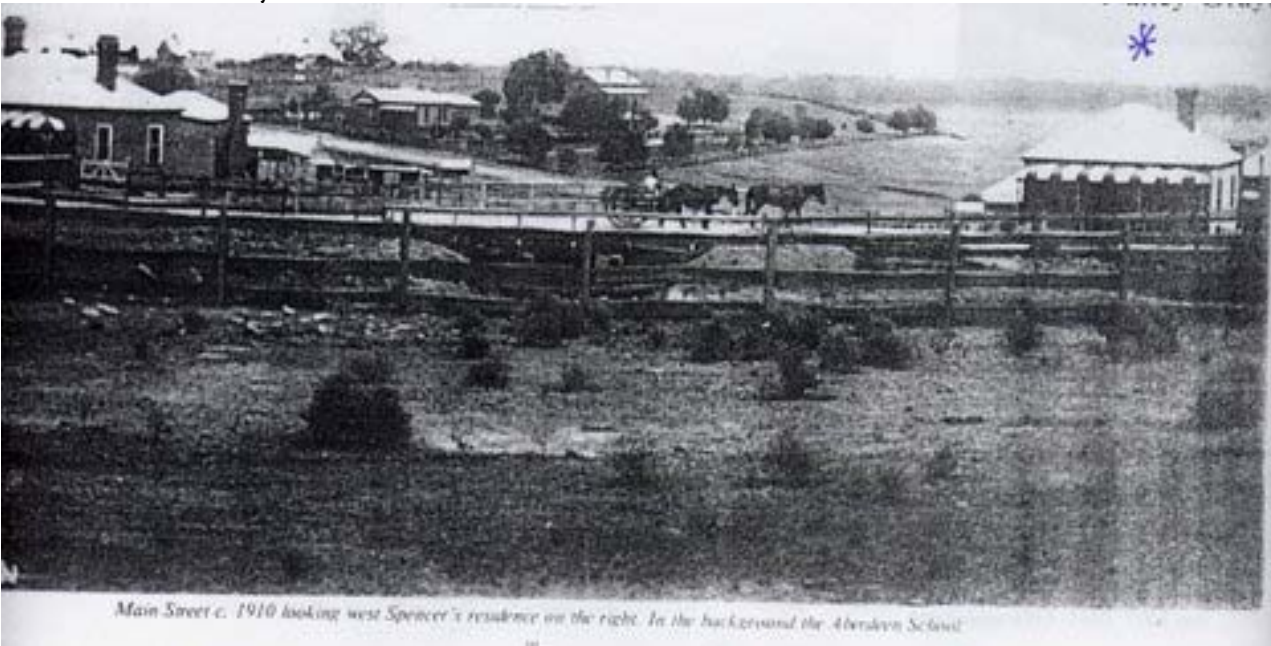
Aunty Mary's Story



Written by Edna Mary Adam (Spencer) Known as Mary.
Born 1/7/1914.
Died 21/9/2002

(She was My father's eldest sister) I asked her some years back shortly before she died to please write something about her times...she did and I was posted this after she passed away. - Therese Spencer Mackay)

“Aberdeen was a small town between Muswellbrook and Scone, eight miles from Scone and seven from Muswellbrook. The Hunter River flowed on the outskirts of the town, and flooding was severe. I remember Dad (and myself) going down to the bridge at night to check the height of the water, as our house was in flood-reach. The highest it came was into the bottom of the yard.



Main Street c. 1910 looking west Spencer's residence on the right. In the background the Aberdeen School

The population, when I was a child, was 1,100 and the town depended on jobs at the A.C. & F. Co (Aberdeen Chilling & Freezing Company) for its survival. The Manager then was Mr McAdam, and during the influenza outbreak in 1919 his wife used to make endless quantities of soup, which were deposited on peoples' doorsteps where there was a flu case. (in glass jars).

The baker in the town was Mr Albert Schroter whose bakery was in the old mill, the Mill Morrison, and my greatest delight was going with Dad when he visited Albert. They were both keen members of the Aberdeen Rifle Club. I loved watching the loaves being taken from the large fuel (wood) ovens on a very long handled wooden spade-like implement. When the tank loaves were cooked I was allowed to break off crusty pieces that had oozed out of the tins. They were super and the large tin loaves were beautifully crusty. The bread was delivered daily in a horse drawn cart. Bread was 5d (five pence) for a large loaf.

Albert lived with two sisters, Clare and Lil in a house attached to the mill. It was while I was going to school that Margery Schroter (daughter of "Lou" S. died - sister of Carl). I remember the gloom it cast over the whole school for it was quite sudden. Carl was

devastated for he had looked after her and was so very kind. It was my first encounter of how death could affect family and community.

My Mother had attended a Dame School in Muswellbrook but attended Aberdeen School when the family moved to Aberdeen. It was the custom then, that if a girl pupil died, the sixth class girls carried the coffin on the long trek from the church to the cemetery. If it was a boy the boys took over. Eventually, the parents objected after a few fainting episodes in the heat, and the scheme was abandoned.

Mum also recalls, as did several of the older residents, an outbreak of typhoid fever. To isolate the patients a tent "town" was erected on an area where the cemetery now is and this is where they were nursed.

The school was a brick building on a large sloping block of land and I remember the 'end' room was built with each row of desks on a step. There were two seats (stools with no backs), one seated three, the other seven. There were inkwells for each pupil in the desks. The 'wall' between the middle room and fifth and sixth class folded back when we practiced for Empire Day etc. It was the boys' task (two each Monday) to make the ink in a large container - ink powder and water. Many and varied were the colours of our ink, depending on the quantity of water. The ceiling was very high and covered with a multitude of pens, which the older boys had used as darts. They were too high up to retrieve. Pen nibs were issued sparingly.

My first impression of school was when I was aged six. I went to school one cold, foggy morning and was waiting in the playground when a huge figure appeared before me. All I was aware of was a huge (to me) pair of feet encased in a large pair of very shiny black boots. A voice queried, "What are you doing?" My obvious answer was "Coming to school".

I loved school and with a pencil and paper I was happy. At the ripe old age of six I decided I was going to be a teacher and come back and teach in that very room. (Actually, it did happen).

The school boasted three rooms, first and second, third and fourth, and fifth and sixth; and a headmaster with two female assistants. Many of the children lived on the surrounding dairy farms and would have a long walk to school after having helped with the milking in the mornings. It wasn't unusual to see one asleep in school and a kind teacher would let him sleep on. They were allowed to leave school at 3pm (instead of 3.30pm) to again help with the milking. It was pathetic to see these children arrive on a cold frosty morning without shoes and cracked feet. They were mostly boys.

Below the school near the river was a huge mulberry tree. It was well patronised when the fruit was ripe.

Just below the school, on what was then known as 'Prickly Pear Hill' (it was covered with them), seats were carved out of the side of the hill above the river. There was quite a deep

swimming hole there and swimming carnivals were held. Admission was 2/- (two shillings). The rows of seats were well filled and the entertainment quite good.

McKenzies owned a shop where the former M Campbell and Co. shop now stands. They occupied a house on the opposite side of the road - a long house with an exotic garden planted with plants they'd brought home from overseas trips. They also had a very large mulberry tree. After they left 'Ikey' Walsh purchased the house and he and his Mother lived there. They were frequently visited by Mrs Corney (said to be a sister). She would get children to pick the mulberries for her with promises of payment that did not eventuate. On one occasion she recruited Ruth with the promise of 1/- (one shilling - a fortune) if she filled a large container. Ruth spent the morning picking and was rewarded with a bunch of violets! (if she picked them!)

This was the era of the flat iron and Mrs Potts iron; the copper sat in the open, tubs on a bench and fuel stoves and kerosene lamps. It was accepted that everyone washed on a Monday and ironed on a Tuesday. The tubs were large round vessels made of 'cast iron' with two handles. We had them in three sizes. White washing was mostly boiled in a copper set up out in the open, and heated over a wood fire. The washing was beautifully white after boiling and carefully prodded down with a pot-stick. Homemade soap was commonly used and Hudson's Soap Powder was 1½d (a penny-halfpenny) per packet. The clothes were then drained and blued (Reckitts Knob of Blue) and tablecloths, clothes etc. were starched and damped down. After the drying process the items were damped down and carefully ironed. Irons were heated on the fuel stove then rubbed on bee's wax and a cloth to ensure a smooth iron and remove any black marks which could be picked up from the stove and passed on the items ironed. It was a mighty job ironing in the summer with a fire burning in the background. I was delighted when I was able to buy a petrol iron, but my delight didn't last for long. The fumes were suffocating and the iron abandoned.

Sitting on the side of the stove was a large fountain (ours held 5 gallons and had belonged to Dad's people when they lived at 'The Vale'). We always had a supply of hot water.

When I went to live at Davis Creek things were fairly primitive. To cool, we had a large drip safe but not much could be kept in it because of the holes punched to let the air circulate. Water was poured on the top and filtered down through charcoal to provide the cooling. The holes offered 'welcome' to flies. Later we had an ice chest and the ice came on the mail lorry from Aberdeen Meat Works. By the time we received it half had melted away but it lasted a while.

Aberdeen had its share of 'oddities'. On one occasion Mum was most upset to see a man called Reuben Taylor lying under a pepper tree on the footpath (in the shade). He was the owner of a very small sulky and a smart horse and had tied the horse up to the tree in front of the house we lived in. Each time through the day that she looked out to check up on him he was still lying in the same spot. This went on until 3pm from early in the day.

It was usual for the train to go through Aberdeen and drop the daily papers at 20 minutes to four each afternoon. Most people converged on the paper shop about four o'clock and on this occasion a man called George McKnight was passing when Mum was doing one of her checking up excursions. He was a very nice person so Mum decided to ask him to inspect the 'body'. George willingly complied, but wasn't well received. The 'body' exploded into some very lurid language and poor George bolted. "Mrs Spencer, when you want someone to examine a dead 'body' please get someone else to do it."

Percy Storey was another strange person. He was a gifted artist and supposed to be related to a very important family in Sydney. Many times the police tried to have Percy put into a home, but he was wise enough to keep on his person enough money to prevent him from being declared destitute. He had no permanent home but wandered around scrounging food etc. His main apparel for a long time was a long army overcoat (people vowed that was all he wore!). He used to go up to the blacksmiths shop, which a Mr Hazell had, where Jack Taylor's garage was later built. He cooked his meal there over the fire. I don't know what happened to him. He just seemed to vanish but quite a few parents with children began to query their safety.

Billy Clifton worked for Crabbes on the Blairmore side of the river and on one occasion Dad was fishing on the town side. Old Billy had only one eye. The story went that he'd set a plug of dynamite in a rock and when it didn't explode he looked into the hole and it obliged - Billy lost an eye! He was doing 'washing' this day. His method was to stay fully clothed and he'd hose himself. The trousers would have easily stood without him! "They'll smell all the sweeter now, won't they Granville" he declared as the water rolled off.

Dad's people had settled at Rouchel and had gradually acquired a large amount of land extending from Lower Rouchel to the store at Rouchel brook. This was known as 'The Vale'. Four brothers were involved, Thomas, John and Matthew. They then decided to purchase land at Brewarrina. The property of 45,000 acres was known as 'Cuttabunda'. Each year one family would travel by bullock wagon and stay the year. Each took it in turn to travel there. Dad many times told us of the lack of trees - only one on the vast plain in sight and the necessity to make leather shoes for the dogs when working with the cattle.

It was usual for his Aunt Sarah (Dad's sister) to visit his family while Matthew was there. On this occasion they were having trouble with a neighbours' bull crossing the boundary (a creek) into their property. Dad and his elder brother, both aged about ten and twelve, decided that something should be done about it. Aunt Sarah had brought a pretty umbrella with her and alas, its fate was decided. They removed the metal spokes and made darts of them. Where to dispose of the remainder of the umbrella remained a problem but was soon solved. The only water they had was bore water but where better to dispose of the remains! Down the bore it went.

When the bull next mounted the track up the bank from the creek, it was peppered with arrows. The trouble was they couldn't be removed. The animal turned tail and went roaring back home. An angry owner fronted their father. Their father was a very calm, kindly man

and they found him sitting on the verandah reading a paper. He just glanced up and remarked to no one at all "We'll be in trouble soon - something's blocking the bore".

Aunt Sarah wasn't convinced she'd come without her brolly.

His father had a beautiful Arab pony that he often rode to Melbourne and back. On one occasion they had been droving cattle and had camped for the night. A stranger appeared and naturally shared their meal. In the morning he was ready to leave, but informed them he was Captain Moonlight (a well known bush ranger). He had at one time been going to rustle some cattle but "Cuttabunda" (45,000 acres) was too small - they'd be missed too soon.

While at the 'Vale' they also had a visitor one day who requested the loan of a horse and sulky. It was given and he drove off over the paddock returning later with a pickle bottle, which he'd evidently dug up. Dad's grandmother who lived with them asked what Fred Ward was doing there. They denied it but she insisted for she'd known him in his younger days. Fred Ward was the bushranger Captain Thunderbolt.

On one occasion when riding around the paddocks one of the brothers rode in under an overhanging rock, a large one, and discovered several mailbags ripped open and mail opened - probably the spoils of a hold-up.

The houses, and later one built when Dad's father married, were lined entirely with cedar that was hauled by bullock teams from the head of Davis Creek. Both still stand but have been altered. Beautiful cedar furniture was made for the houses. Dad's Grandfather Thomas Spencer was instrumental in having the Rouchel Church built. He gave the land and had most of the work done on the little wooden church. Thomas went over the last evening. The builder said it was complete but he had one more job to do and that was to put the lock on the door. Next morning they couldn't see any movement at his camp and decided to go the short distance to the church. The job was done, the lock in place, but the builder must have died immediately after.

The little church stood for many years but in 1964 the people built a church made of large grey cement bricks made by the people on the spot. It has been closed and sold by the Newcastle diocese for \$53,000.00 dollars to people from New Zealand named Walker (this is 2001).

I was born on 1st July 1914 at Orwell Private Hospital in Muswellbrook. Nurse Lader was in charge. Apparently I was born in the middle of a severe storm and it was a difficult birth. Mum was in hospital for over a month and each evening Dad would finish work, get ready, and walk the seven miles to Muswellbrook to see her. There was no other way, but he was able to catch a train back to Aberdeen at 11pm.

While Mum was in hospital a German Captain, who had known nurse Lader, came to see her. He left it too late to return to his ship and war was declared. He and his whole crew were interned for the duration of World War 1.

One of my first recollections was of a large golden coloured dog that followed me everywhere. I asked Dad about it and he told me it was true. The dog had guarded my pram as a baby and wouldn't let anyone near me.

When I was quite small I had been taken in my pram to the Orangeman's Ball as Mum was helping. It was a very strong organisation then and held a ball every year.

She carefully placed the pram on the back of the stage - I was sound asleep. As time went on the hall (School of Arts) became packed and more and more people moved on to the stage. It wasn't long before it collapsed with the weight and movement. Down went Mary, pram and all, under bodies (live ones) and broken timber. The pram was frantically raised from the mess and believe it or not - Mary calmly slept on.

On one occasion when the ladies went out to make the tea and coffee for supper, they discovered the large copper in which the water was boiled, bubbling away merrily. Someone (and I guess you know who got the blame) had shoved a large quantity of soap into the copper. Enough said.

I worshipped my Dad - all my life, until he died at 53 years of age. When I was very small I can remember sitting on a large post and it was very dark. The post acted as a gatepost at the entrance to the recreation ground. Dad used to go each morning to catch his horse very early, feed it and he'd be ready for the day's work. Of course I insisted on going too and he used to carry me down to the "Rec", sit me on the post, the sawn off trunk of a huge old gum tree, and go looking for the horse. I'd then get a ride home on the horse. Nobody had told me this but many years later I asked if it really did happen or if I had dreamt it. He assured me it was quite true. He used to cart wood in those days.

There were great numbers of rabbits burrowed around the river then and quite a few people used to go in the evening and shoot a rabbit or hook a fish for the next days meal. I'm sorry to say he didn't have much success, as each time he aimed at an animal I made a big noise and scared it off. It goes without saying that I used to be left at home after that.

I think I must have been born with a distinct tendency to roam. I didn't have any problem settling into new places, schools etc and even when young was always wandering off.

On one occasion Mum was busy doing the weekly wash. Mary was playing quietly and all seemed well. It wasn't long though until she noticed her missing. Something told her to search for me in the direction of the river, which she did, and hauled me home - none too gently I'm told and unceremoniously tied me to the clothes line post with a length of rope until she had finished. My next adventure was to go up on to the railway line waiting for a train.

By this time Dad and Mum had had enough and he netted in the complete yard. The only place he hadn't put netting was in a corner where a huge old rose bush thrived. He was quite sure I wouldn't go under that bush with its large thorns. Wishful thinking! I found the gap and departed once again to be found sitting in St Marks Church. I guess that corner was netted too.

We were so fortunate with our parents. Dad was a gentle, quietly spoken person. I don't think there were many men like him. He was home each night with his family playing cricket or rounders in the summer. He was a great storyteller and we learned so much. He was never known to raise his voice and we tried so hard to do the right thing just to please him. He loved poetry and in his younger days he always had a book under the cart seat to read in any spare moments. I never heard him laugh aloud but he chuckled and his eyes fairly twinkled. He was an excellent range shooter and won endless trophies. Each year in October he attended the King's Shoot at Anzac Range and did well.

It was at one of these meetings that he contracted 'sleeping sickness'. He was sick for many months. Fred had been born in the October and Mum would give him the baby to hold thinking it would keep him awake but Fred ended up on the floor. Dad was also unfortunate enough to catch the influenza that swept the world in 1919 and he was never really 100% fit again. He was very clever with his hands and made many things for us - windmills that turned as we ran, bats for a game called 'Purple Devil'. Everything was beautifully finished.

I had determined to teach when I grew up. We had a teacher in first class, Miss Drennet, who really sealed the deal. Grandma Spencer had given me a beautiful book for my birthday. Of course I had to take it to school. I loaned it to Jae Jeans who was caught looking at it in class and for letting him have it earned myself a whack across the back with a pepper tree switch. I made up my mind then and there that I'd be kind to children!

I loved school with all its ups and downs. I loved the 1d (penny) pencils, especially the triangular ones and the 2d books and developed my love of reading. I loved the school magazine. The first one I got in third class had 'Goblin Greenleaf' on the front and didn't I cherish it - until it fell to pieces. In fifth and sixth Mr Timmins was our teacher and headmaster. Each day at recess he disappeared with his little Gladstone bag. I learned later he used to go up to the Aberdeen Hotel on the corner and bring his supply back and what he had consumed. He wasn't a great teacher.

Each year Dad would go out to Limestone by horse and sulky to Buddin's and get a great chaff bag of huge quinces that grew along the bank of the creek. I used to go with him and take a quince to each of my friends at school. On one occasion Jean Ogle (later Wearn), was caught eating the quince. She was told to take it outside and come back when she had finished it. As it was early in the day she spent a pleasant day in the shade of one of the pepper trees munching on the large quince. Better still, she wasn't missed until about 3 o'clock and hauled in still with quite a large portion left.

On another occasion Jean, Audrey Cotton and myself sat in the back seat of three. Jean had decided she'd eat her lunch early and placed her case beside her. All went well until Audrey and I jumped up together to answer a question. Up went her end of the seat and down went Jean - suitcase and all. Sandwiches (tomato) flew in all directions and she had to clean up the mess.

Another great stunt was for one of us to ask to 'leave the room' about 3 o'clock. The train used to arrive about twenty to three and in we'd dash and inform Mr Timmins that Mr Clements, the school inspector had got off the train. There'd be a frantic clean up of the room - books neatly stacked etc. It's a wonder he didn't wake up but maybe the little leather bags contents had some effect.

Image the impact of a new headmaster! Mr Earne arrived and sparks began to fly. It was 'work' from the beginning to the end of the day. He was only a little man, with a very large nose and a scarcity of hair on top of his head and he made great use of the cane. He did greatly improve our learning. I passed my Primary Final (used to be the QC) and gained my entrance to High School at eleven and went on to Maitland Girls High at eleven and a half.

Jean Ogle and I went to board with Mrs Falkiner in Church Street, West Maitland. In all, she had twelve high school girls in a small two-storey house opposite a small shop. Jean and I were given a bed on the upstairs landing right beside 'Mrs Falk's' bedroom, which she shared with her sister, Auntie Al to us all (Miss Alice Pilgrim). We had hoped to go to the hostel but there were no vacancies. She was fairly strict but the meals were very good. Board was 17/6 a week if we went home for weekends or £1 (pound) if we stayed. The 2/6 over was our pocket money.

While there we became acquainted with Ruth Waters. She was the daughter of the Verger the Church (St Marys in Church Street). When he got to know us well he invited us to go with he and Ruth (her Mother had died) and watch the bells being set. They chimed every quarter hour. We had to climb up a spiral stone staircase and balance on rafters beneath the huge brass bells. They made an almighty noise and its fortunate we still had our hearing after. Of course, we each had a piece of white chalk and wrote our name on a bell amidst dozens of others. I'm not particularly proud that escapade and hope my name, over time has disappeared. Naturally Mrs F. wasn't aware of the visit - we did have permission to see Ruth so we did keep her in sight.

School was good and I managed to get the 'Grassman Bursary' for a few years which all helped. It was difficult to settle and work knowing how much they were doing without at home.

The depression was approaching and jobs were scarce. Of the forty girls who passed the final exam (fifth year) only one was awarded a Teachers College Scholarship. I repeated - got a much better pass, but no scholarship. Leaving school with nothing in sight was a huge worry to me and was hence delighted when Rev B. C. Wilson informed me that they were in

need of a new teacher (subsidised) at Davis Creek. I was nineteen at the time and on November 19th, 1933, I took on my first teaching job. I loved every minute of it.

The first year I managed to get Marian through her primary final. She had tried previously and failed and Mr Folkard (the Rouchel teacher) vowed she'd never pass. It was to his school to which she had to travel to take the exam and he had the marking of the papers. Great was the jubilation when she passed and greater still when it was revealed that she had beaten most of his pupils. From that time on my ability as a teacher was acknowledged (it still took a bit of convincing).

I spent many happy times there. There was tennis and each year we'd journey to Carrowbrook via horseback, and they'd return to Davis Creek for a return match. I was elated when Keith Atkins loaned me a quiet old horse named Toby. I became mobile after purchasing a pig-skin saddle (second hand of course) for £5.00 (five pounds). I think the bridle was thrown in.

I'd have to teach an extra hour a day the week we were going. We'd leave at lunch time on Friday and arrive there generally just on dark. The trip over was rugged. We were billeted at various homes and the hospitality marvellous. We'd arrive with our racquets and clothes rolled up on the saddle. On Saturday we'd play tennis all day and end up with a dance in the woolshed (?) at night. The music was supplied by one Harry Adzed (spelling) who, with his violin, played till midnight. He couldn't start before being well primed up. He was supposed to (and probably did) have a metal plate in his head that moved. It was from a war injury. That plate moved many times and he had to have another little drink to keep him going.

It was on one visit to Carrowbrook when I met Dick Ward. He was at least six feet tall and a very big man with snowy white hair. I was a very shy, timid girl and this figure loomed up before me. The dance was a square dance. "Come along" he invited. I nearly collapsed, but he grabbed me and away we went whirling and twirling frantically. He assured me it was a "Thank you dance". He, in his younger days, had apparently been working, or looking for work at Brewarrina where Dad's people lived. The depression of 18?? hit and he had nowhere to go so they took him in and kept him for a year.

Next day we set out after breakfast for the long hike home. It was usual for a group of us to go to the Balls at Rouchel on horseback. Our frocks would be carried in boxes on the pommel of the saddle and we'd change when we arrived. I've ridden home at daylight after some dances. We didn't go by road; we went over the mountains so that we wouldn't be seen.

I was able to go over to Rouchel and spend weekends with Doris Adam at 'Willowburn' and spent many at 'Carlgarra' where Mrs Duncan Cumming lived. I became very friendly with Helen, her daughter and about my age. She was to many a very hard woman but I found her a kind, hospitable person.

It was on one visit to 'Willowburn' that the rain pelted down. The creeks began to rise and I decided I'd better make tracks back to Davis Creek. I set off on my trusty steed hoping to cross firstly, Davis Creek about half a mile from 'Willowburn', and then again five miles farther on. I managed the first crossing but could see that it was rising fairly quickly. I continued on and when I arrived at the second crossing it was much deeper and running more swiftly. I could see the family where I boarded all watching as I began to cross. Fortunately, I went below the cement crossing for the water was much deeper on the top side. Old Toby floundered on. My shoes were full of water and all I hoped was that he wouldn't stumble. Thankfully he stumbled up the bank and we were safe. There was one very relieved sub teacher.

Living away up Kean's Creek was an ex-soldier who would walk down the creek to 'Bonnie Doon' where Ben Cumming and his daughters ran the Post Office. If she saw him going down she'd have a cake or pie made for him to take back to his camp. His behaviour began to deteriorate and on one occasion walked down and lit fires around 'Carlgarra' one night. He said the voices had told him to do it, to save Mrs Cumming. She was alone at the time. On another occasion the voices told him to jump into the creek on a freezing night in winter. He ended up with pneumonia.

Eventually I heard he had been put into a home.

While with Helen at 'Carlgarra' and when staying there we all went to church. There were five crossings over the creek and we set off. After the final crossing over Davis Creek we were almost there. Our next stop was to change our wet shoes for our Sunday best, which we had carried. We put our old shoes in the fork of a large Willow tree in a gully to be retrieved for the long walk back.

It was in 1935 that the youngest (Arthur) brother died. He had Tetanus and the chances then were slender. It was on 24th July and a severe shock for us all. He was a lovely little boy and clever.

It was not uncommon to see men passing down the street (or main road as it was then called) with bags tied to their feet - they had no boots: they were allowed to stay one night, camping over under the bridge at the Hunter River, then moved on the next day.

It was during the depression, too, that more men were carrying their swags looking for work. There was a constant stream travelling the main road. Each had his billycan (mostly a jam tin with a wire handle and a blanket rolled and carried on his back), most had very little else.

I remember on one occasion one very apologetic gentleman (and I mean gentleman) asking Mum for an onion. It was then, too, that three young men arrived and took up residence in a large shed near our place. They had no work and to gain the dole had to be in residence for one month before any assistance was given. Somehow Mum found out that they were literally starving.

We didn't have a great deal but were taught to share. We'd be able to go to the meatworks and get 6d (six pence) worth of pie pieces. That meant half a 25lb flour bag of off cuts of meat from the shop. Many a good slice was slipped in too. We might have lived on stews but they were mighty good stews. Each night those boys had the evening meal passed over the fence and if scones were made or a cake baked they got their share. Years later, at separate time, two of those men returned to thank my Mother for her kindness.

It was also during the depression that we had a drought. There was a bakehouse next door to the Commercial Hotel (later burnt down). Mr Frank Collins was the baker and his wife had the cake shop. For a time the family lived in the building but later rented a house. While in residence there they were able to use the Hotel clotheslines and washhouse on days the Hotel didn't need them. The eldest girl, Olga, had been given a present of a pair of pyjamas - a beautiful Milanese pair, to the envy of all.

We could see the lines from our place. We could see the hotel cow too, searching for a blade of grass. The pyjamas were a lovely green and first one leg disappeared and quickly the lot was consumed. Everyone but the cow got the blame!

In those days meat pies were 3d each and when they went up to 4d people were outraged. Iced small cakes were 1½d (a penny half-penny each or 1/6 a dozen). Of course the basic wage was £4.4.0 per week - \$8.40.

It was a very happy time and we had lots of fun. Mr Hughie Cumming (Vincent's father) took Helen and me out fox watching one Saturday. We went miles on horseback and Hughie called up the foxes on his homemade fox whistle.

The Depression hit as I began teaching at Davis Creek. It had gradually built up and work became scarce. It was a very terrible few years.

Mum managed finances at home we were very fortunate. We didn't have a great deal but owned our own house - be it ever so small - and were never hungry. She didn't owe a penny after. She was an excellent manager and an excellent cook who could create a meal out of "nothing". She and dad must have gone without a lot to give to us (five of us). She'd go to choir practice at the church every Thursday night and as a treat would buy and bring some apples. Dad and mum would have theirs' at night - we'd dash into their bedroom in the morning and there'd be five apples in a row on the dressing table.

One scene remains indelibly painted on my mind. It was Christmas Day in the Depression years. Mum had managed to save enough to make a Christmas cake and Christmas pudding. They weren't large, but the pudding was for lunch and the cake would be attacked at what was then "tea time". There were seven of us - mum, dad and five children.

After a baked dinner, we were all sitting on the verandah trying to find a cool spot, for the day was a "scorcher". Trudging down to main road was a swagman. It was early in the

afternoon and he looked so weary. Mum's immediate response to his plight was, "I haven't anything to give him".

Matt, a brother, was about eight and an angelic looking child (he wasn't, he only looked it!). He quietly said "we have a cake!" Silently the two of them disappeared and re-appeared shortly after, with half a fruit cake wrapped in Christmas paper. He tore after the man, his hair flying and his bare feet kicking up the dust as he sped after the lone walker. He thrust the cake into the fellow's hands and back he flew. We shared that cake that evening and I can tell you it tasted really great. We were taught to share, as children.

Sadly dad died as the depression ended, aged only 53 years. Things altered after that. I had received my first appointment to a school after finishing two years at Armidale Teachers College two days before.

I was fortunate in getting a full scholarship. Very few had been given during the Depression and it was decided to offer 24 women and 24 men scholarships to Armidale Teachers College. The Inspector had visited our little school and on leaving asked if I had thought of applying for a scholarship. I assured him it wasn't any use. He informed me it might happen, "you never know" he said, and it did.

In our session we had older people who had worked before. One man was almost knocked back, he didn't own a pair of shoes and had managed to borrow a pair a size too small. It was discovered that the shoes caused his odd style of walking - one was a Shearer and one had carried his swag.

To gain a scholarship it was necessary to attend a school for subsidised teachers held at Fort Street High School during the Christmas holidays. Those applying had to go to Glebe and give a lesson at their school for the partially blind. Mr Lennard was in charge. I managed to get one. The first year we received £52.00. First term we received £2.00 pocket money, the second £3.00 and third £2.00. The rest was taken for board. The next year it rose to £65.00 and our pocket money was £3.00, £2.00 and £3.00. Those admitted on half scholarships were paid in full but had to return half after starting teaching.

I had been appointed to Amosfield near Tenterfield but managed to get a transfer to Aberdeen. I was there only one term then moved to Kentucky, finished the year there and was appointed to Martin's Gully near Armidale. Martin's Gully had been made a demonstration school which meant each week demonstrations for lessons were given for small schools.

Martin's Gully was a two mile walk from Armidale. I boarded for about one month at a very nice place on the road out. Mrs Eichorn had other boarders too. I was then offered a place at Smith House as a Junior Warden. Smith House was the abode of 1st and 2nd year women students who attended the A.T.C (Armidale Teachers College). It meant living there and being available three nights a week for late duty (11 o'clock) and on call most of the time. Board would be free. I accepted.

I enjoyed my two years there, but the walk was tiring, especially in the winter months, but managed to get a seat on the mail car out in the mornings and walking home in the afternoons. I decided to buy a second hand bicycle. I managed to get one for £4.00 - some bike! I was lucky to get it for it was during the war years and everything was scarce. I rode to school on the bike and it was much easier.

I next applied for a transfer - to a small school and was appointed to Rockvale out of Armidale. The only method of transport was by taxi or mail sulky (or bicycle!) I chose the taxi but the bicycle came too.

It was 22 miles from Armidale and I boarded with a lady and her two little boys. It was pretty down to earth but also the building was next door to the local shop, run by an Indian. The previous teacher (a man) had done his accounts so he decided the present teacher could carry on. My reward each month would be a small bag of ancient chocolates. I think he must have got them in a store before the war!

He had a lot of fowls and each time he decided he'd have chicken for tea he performed the ritual of killing that chicken right opposite my bedroom window. It took a long time to kill it but I didn't stay around to watch. As a matter of fact I was scared of him.

He also had in his shop lots of beautiful lace and hard to purchase items. I was invited to buy any I liked and bought quite a lot. He also had a pair of shoes, a very good pair which he offered me at a reduced price. Those shoes I had for years.

World War II

Hard on the heels of the depression came World War II. For a time we didn't feel the effect of the War. Many young men were enlisting and as time passed it was hard to find workmen. Wages began to increase and there were more jobs for those left behind.

As the War progressed many things began to go scarce and disappear off the shelves and eventually rationing was introduced and lots of necessities disappeared overnight; sugar, butter, clothing were ????. Clothing coupons didn't buy much, 50 were issued, and pair of shoes was 3 coupons, 1 yd of material (if any available) was 3 and limited to 3 yards. Elastic was non-existent. For a pair of homemade panties I had a band round the waist and buttoned up (if you had a button). Most people were stocking less (2 coupons for 1 pair) and some went to the trouble of marking a seam on the back of the leg. It was make do. Dresses were made of curtain material - until that ran out.

The "Farmer and Settler" advertised parachutes for sale and I bought one of heavy white unbleached calico. Unpicked, many items could be made from them. It made splendid curtains with a band of floral material across the bottom. On one occasion I saw advertised a lemon milk (?) one so thought of some under-wear. When it arrived it was a very dark orange, not lemon by any stretch of the imagination.

Nothing daunted I went to the chemist and got purchased some dye remover - followed directions and it emerged as a beautiful cream colour. I did discover, by accidentally leaving a piece in the hot water, it became orange again. Thankfully I had ?? most of it out. Sewing cotton was also hard to come by. I tried to buy some at Campbell's in Muswellbrook. The only reels on sale were back wooden ones and quite small. The sales lady assured me she was unable to get any. Disappointed I left and remarked to my husband that cotton was unavailable. "Leave it to me" he said. In he went and approached the same lady and was saying how difficult it was to even get cotton to sew one's clothes.

"Do you need some?" she inquired, knowing he lived out of town. He said he'd be very grateful for just one reel. She arrived back with six small reels secreted in a paper bag! Mary was so happy.

A very strong black market emerged. There was a large army camp in Muswellbrook and one of the men in charge of stores lived in Aberdeen. He used to take orders when he came home, at inflated prices, for anything that might be scarce - tinned ham, soap, etc. He always had a surplus which he buried in his backyard, he was never caught.

I discovered that one could stew fruit with lemon jellies used as sugar and not rationed. I think I bought Campbell's supply until they ran out icing sugar was a forgotten luxury but on the shelves were still tins of 'Rapidice'. I purchased a fair number of those too.

Practically all basic necessities were very scarce and when the end of the war came it took many months to recover. So many of the men did not return. Things gradually improved but our entire way of life had altered.

I was teaching and women's pay was 2/3 of the male wage. After a battle we received the same amount. Married women were accepted as teachers. Previously if one married she had to resign. This began when teachers became scarce during the war when so many men had enlisted.

We still had kerosene lamps - no electricity until the '60s when the lines were expanded. It was great for lamp glasses had to be cleaned frequently and filled with kerosene. Our first investment was an electric iron slowly followed by other appliances - a fry pan, jug, etc.

After two terms at Rockdale I heard that there was a vacancy at Aberdeen. I applied and got it, and taught there until I left to get married in 1944. It was customary for women to resign once they married. It was before the time when married women were acceptable.

I had a friend in Armidale who invited me in for a weekend. I decided to ride in on, Saturday morning early and return on Sunday afternoon. I set out at 5am so that I wouldn't be seen. It was a gravel road with many hills and bends. I might add that the bike didn't have any brakes. On my return trip I viewed the road and don't know how I'd survived. I got half way in and a tyre blew out so I walked. Instead of arriving at 9am it was 1pm. The man at the bike shop had a tyre that fitted, thank goodness, and home I sailed. Part of the trip I

travelled down a steep hill at the bottom of which was a sharp bend. Going ahead meant going into the creek, taking the turn meant keeping to the road. How I managed that bend I'll never know but survive I did. Whatever we had, we shared with other who had less. It became a good 'habit'.

I was married to David Adam in Scone Church by Rev. B.C. Wilson who previously had been the Minister in St Marks Church in Aberdeen, on 30th Sept, 1944.

After a week in Sydney I went to live at "Glenholme" on Davis Creek, and there I stayed until 1986. It was a hard life but a good one. Judith was born on 12th February 1946 and Bill arrived five years later on 30th March, 1951. Two years later David (both Caesars) was born but only lived five days.

I was sure Bill had something wrong with him. He was 6lbs 4ozs at birth and was very small but our doctor assured me he was all right. I wasn't convinced and when Dr Rutherford was away I took him in to see his partner - a female doctor. That was on a Wednesday. The following Monday I was in Sydney to see Dr Lee, a specialist.

I had many trips to Sydney with Bill until he had a catheter test (heart) and it was discovered he had a large hole in the heart and the main blood vessels to the heart were on the right side. Then, nothing could be done for him and I was told he wouldn't live beyond 14 years. However he was 22 when he passed away on 16th August 1973.

Bill was a happy person and never complained. He had a disposition like Dad's and loved music. He was interested in electronics and was always designing something that always worked. Mr Campbell, at the music shop in Muswellbrook was a great help and assisted him with his ideas.

We had decided to take him in to Aberdeen School to let him experience other children. I have never seen such kind kiddies as those at Aberdeen and he was so happy. He left school when he was 12. It was becoming too much for him to cope with. We had rented a house opposite the school and I could see it from the school. I had stayed on teaching for Bill needed to be near a doctor. He was very happy with his music and tapes etc. It was nothing to step home at lunch time and find the lounge room a mass of wires and tapes but he was happy.

We'd had the house a few years when the owner needed it but had found us a flat close to the school. I used to run home in my half hour lunch break to make sure Bill was all right and fly back again. It suited him fine - he was so rapt in his music recording and designing and mum wasn't in the house to sigh at the mess.

He was gradually getting more tired and on 16th August 1973 he passed away in the afternoon. I was alone with him and that time was so precious. I was devastated but had to face up to reality and go on. I had a friend who was a great support and eventually decided to teach on until retiring age. Things weren't bright on the land.

Teaching I loved. It had its many ups and downs, lots of happy times and sad ones too. I'd taken Bill into town. It was while I was teaching in Aberdeen that Bill passed away. He was 22. One boy, Daryl Croft, a bit of a scallywag, surprised me. I was sitting at my table one day at school thinking then he came up and quietly patted me on the shoulder - no words were spoken but his face told it all.

Another time a very likeable little boy who spent a lot of time outside the Principals door was once more caught fighting. I happened to be passing and said "No Ben, not again!" "Can't help it" he replied. "Next time you go serving a punch, stop and count to 10" I advised "you won't do it". "Do you think so?" inquired Ben.

Things were quiet for a time but I found it necessary to lecture the class on being kind to others. Some of them had been nasty to one of the little girls. I noticed Ben sidling down the ??? near the wall and it wasn't long before I felt a little hand tapping me on the shoulder and a whisper "count to 10 Mrs A!". Complete collapse.

Judith had started teaching in Muswellbrook (Nelsons Bay?) and I thought that Dave and I would have a few years together. We had two when he was diagnosed as having cancer.

Again I had to take over. There were trips every second day to Muswellbrook plus looking after the properties. Then he was sent to Wallsend where he was in hospital for 3 months. This meant down to Shoal Bay - where Judith lived after visiting him and into Wallsend hospital on Saturday, Sunday and Monday, home Tuesday afternoon to see that things were all right there - Bill Hindmarsh and Basil Davis were working building a large shed.

Dave had presented me with the chequebook and said, "Whatever you do will be right". Not bad when I'd had nothing to do with "mans work". However I came out of it all with a very sound bank account and can pick cattle now. Dalgety's were an immense help to a new chum grazier.

Dave's health continued to decline and while in hospital at Wallsend used to be taken to the Mater Hospital to consult a specialist who flew up regularly from Sydney for further treatment but Dave asked if the outcome would be the same. The answer was "yes". He declined. He was sent back to Muswellbrook having lost stones and his doctor said he wanted him to go home and asked if I could manage. Of course I agreed. He told me that it would only be for at the most a fortnight.

Despite the predictions he went into remission for four years and improved in appearance. Everything, showering, etc, had to be done for him. I must say he was a model patient and rarely complained.

Ruth suggested I do the 2 days casual teaching I had been doing since resigning and she'd come out and stay with Dave on those days. It was a great lp because I could more easily face the other five days.

I soon learned how to buy and sell cattle and gain the confidence of the workmen. The staff of Dalgety's in Scone were a tower of strength and I couldn't have managed so well without them.

On the days I had to go into town for solicitors, doctors, accountants, etc; I'd rise at about 4am. I would get Dave's meals ready for the day, sponge him (no time for a shower), feed the dogs, fowls, etc, and leave about 7.30am wondering if he'd have a fall or not. I couldn't wait for a "cuppa" in town but would ring to see if he was all right.

Home again, groceries to stow away, animals to feed and lock up, etc. It was a strenuous life but somehow I coped. It's amazing how many "discovered" Dave and visited him when he was so ill.

Gradually I guess I was wearing out. My left ankle became very painful and it was a misery to walk. I think folk thought it was a "put on" but Judith took me down to Dr Laird in Newcastle and I was booked in to Lingard Hospital for an arthrod (?) - of the ankle. It had become worse too as Dave was back in Muswellbrook Hospital once again.

When the operation was started it was discovered that it was to be not one break but a triple one. Under the anaesthetic it was also discovered that I had some heart defect. I walked up with a great heavy plaster on my leg, up to the knee. A week later back to the theatre and had a lighter one put on. As soon as I was a bit better I went via ambulance to Dr Mirrill's rooms for tests.

It was while I was in hospital that 58 of Dave's cattle were sold at some saleyards and made the highest price ever paid there for any bullocks. A large price had been paid for 1 but never for so many. I was really glad. I had to stay in 15 days and wasn't let home until Christmas when we went to Matt and Bettys. Dave had lunch there too but went back to the hospital soon after. He gradually got worse and passed away on 12th January 1986. I was able to stay with him at the hospital all the time.

It was home time then and time to clean up sheds etc for a sale. Dave and I had decided I couldn't carry on. I was too old and Judith was teaching so after 100 years "Glenholme" and "Hilldale" were sold. It was a strenuous time cleaning out the sheds that held an accumulation of rubbish we gathered over 80 years. The top place, "Hilldale", Judith and Nev came up from Shoal Bay to help clean up the ????. This had been the original selection.

We still had kerosene lamps - no electricity until the '60s when the lines were expanded. It was great for lamp glasses had to be cleaned frequently and filled with kerosene. Our first investment was an electric iron slowly followed by other appliances - a fry pan, jug, etc.

(parts of this are repeated unsure so will leave)

It was in 1963 that we decided to take Bill into town and he spent many happy years there. After Bill passed away I continued teaching until I received retirement at age 65 - things weren't very bright on the land. I thought Dave and I would have a few years together but after two years he got cancer and there were endless trips to hospital, firstly in Muswellbrook then to Wallsend. He was there on one occasion for three months. I'd drive down to Judith's on the Friday, calling in at the hospital on the way. Then Saturday, Sunday and Monday I'd visit and drive home on Tuesday morning to see that things were all right there. Bill Hindmarsh and Basil Davis were building the big shed. Then there'd be a repeat performance.

After three months Dave went back to Muswellbrook, a skeleton. He'd lost so much weight and he wanted to go home, so Dr Miller told me I should take him home, but he'd be back in two weeks. He proved him wrong. The cancer went into remission and he was home for four years. He had to be showered etc but seemed to improve.

It was then that I was handed the chequebook and told that whatever I did would be right. I coped looking after the two places 'Glenholme' and 'Hilldale'. I also did two days a week casual teaching. Ruth would go out for a day and stay with Dave but it meant I rose very early to leave the table set and lunch and morning tea ready for them plus feed the 'chooks' and the dogs etc.

By the end of the four years in Muswellbrook I was wearing out and had to go into the Lingard Hospital for a ?? of the ankle. Dave was in Muswellbrook and I wasn't allowed home for five weeks but we had Christmas together with Betty and Matt getting Dave from the hospital.

I was on crutches and went back one week before Dave passed away (on 12.1.86). That week I spend at the hospital, sitting with him night and day and then home. We had decided (Dave and I) that we should sell the two places and these had been left to Judith. Judith was teaching and didn't want to take on the responsibility of droughts, floods, rabbits and fluctuating prices and I was too old. The monumental task now began of cleaning up the various sheds. Some hadn't been touched since they had moved down from the top place in 1906, so you can imagine what had accumulated.

I started on the old car shed and progressed to the "kitchen at the Road", the old dairy, the hay shed on the flat, the hayshed near the house and two smaller ones.

Judith and Nev came up one weekend and we cleaned up at the hut at the top place. Matt and Greg came out with a lorry and spend a week clearing up the old calf pen, rolls of old wire etc that lay about. I paid them farm wages, which Matt didn't want to take but they did a splendid job and I couldn't have managed without their help.

Next I had to get in and clean the house, ready for a sale in April. I now don't know how I managed for there was such a lot in a 10 roomed house and so much to dispose of. But

somehow by the day of the sale all was shining and sorted. After the sale I remained in the house until Judith bought one down in Shoal Bay and on 16th July, I got in the car and drove to Shoal Bay where I started and new life.

I've had a happy 16years here - the people have been kind and friendly but I do miss the bush.

Mary Adam (Spencer) Born 1914 Died 2001