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OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE

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Signed Jack Duggan

Date 17th September, 1989

Interviewer C. Creasey

Open Foundation
Australian History
Tuesday Afternoon
Lecturer - M. Henry

A proclamation from the Department of Lands, Sydney on the 26th January, 1966 officially acknowledged the demise of the farming communities of the Hunter River delta region with its "expanse of marshy banks, islands, channels, and mangroves, the source of clouds of mosquitoes" (1) and the development of an industrial area brought about by the amalgamation of the islands through reclamation.

CARMEL CREASEY

"The Geographical Names Board of New South Wales has this day discontinued the recorded names Ash Island, Mosquito Island, Dempsey Island, Wales Island, Spectacle Islands, Table Island, Fig Island, and Goat Island, which islands have been reclaimed and amalgamated to form one island, and named such island "Kooragang Island". (2)

"Kooragang" is of aboriginal origin and was taken from the language of the Wiradjari and Kattang tribes of the coastal areas from Lake Macquarie to Port Stephens. (3) Kooragang was also the name of the estate, of fourteen acres on Mosquito Island held in 1848 by the Rev. Charles Phydell Neale Wilton, M.A., B.M., Chaplain of Christ Church, Newcastle. (4)

MOSQUITO ISLAND

The delta-like series of islands upstream from the mouth of the Hunter River lying between its north and south arms was originally charted by Ensign Barrallier in 1801. Ensign Barrallier was a member of a survey party including Lieutenant Grant, Lieutenant-Colonel William Paterson and Dr. John Harris, sent by Governor King to report on the advisability of establishing a settlement on the Coal River. (5) On June 17, Lieutenant-

- (1) J.C. Docherty, Newcastle, The Making of an Australian City, Sydney, 1933, p 1. Open Foundation
- (2) New South Wales Government Gazette, Sydney Australian History
- (3) Letter from D.C. Miller Secretary, Geographical Names Board, New South Wales, Sydney, 26.5.1970. Tuesday Afternoon
- (4) Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate, 16 June, 1972. Lecturer - M. Henry.
- (5) W.J. Gould, The "Birth of Newcastle", Newcastle, 1961, p 6.

A proclamation from the Department of Lands, Sydney on the 26th January, 1968 officially acknowledged the demise of the farming communities of the Hunter River delta region with its "expanse of marshy banks, islands, channels, and mangroves, the source of clouds of mosquitoes" (1) and the development of an industrial area brought about by the amalgamation of the islands through reclamation.

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"Kooragang" is of aboriginal origin and was taken from the language of the Awabakal and Kattang tribes who frequented the coastal areas from Lake Macquarie to Port Stephens. (3) Kooragang was also the name of the estate of fourteen acres on Mosquito Island held in 1844 by the Rev. Charles Pleydell Neale Wilton, M.A., H.M., Chaplain of Christ Church, Newcastle. (4)

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(1) J.C. Docherty, Newcastle, The Making of an Australian City, Sydney, 1983, p 1.

(2) New South Wales Government Gazette, Sydney, 1968, p373.

(3) Letter from D.C. Miller Secretary, Geographical Names Board of New South Wales, Sydney, 26.5.1970.

(4) Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate, 16 June, 1972.

(5) W.J. Goold, The "Birth of Newcastle", Newcastle, 1981, p 8.

Colonel Paterson recorded in his journal "went up the river about 5 miles to the N-West to an island called Ash Island, which takes its name from a very excellent wood, similar in quality to ash." (6)

The names given to the delta islands by Paterson and Grant did not survive. The islands known as Ash and Dempsey Islands appear in Barrallier's chart as Greville Island. The present Moscheto Island appears as two islands, McKellar and Ash Islands. The changes in the names were made about twenty years after the expedition had returned to Sydney, when surveyors commenced operations with a view of dividing the island for grants. (7) With the settlement of the Newcastle district in 1804, the islands became known in the colony and in 1829 the Sydney Gazette described the area as "superior to Sydney Harbour for sailing and abounding in fish, duck, kangaroos and pigeons." (8)

Mosquito Island, with an estimated area of 1650 acres, extended five miles north from the southern mud flats, with its greatest width being about fifty chains. (9) This island saw the start of Newcastle as an industrial region in 1836, when a salt works was established by Alexander Scott of Ash Island. A sulphuric acid plant commenced later, but failed in 1870, and a second salt works began operations in 1871. (10) In 1890 a syndicate sank a shaft on the island and proved the existence of a workable seam of coal. This, however, was not exploited. (11)

- (6) F.M. Bladen, Historical Records of N.S.W., Sydney, 1896, p 449.
- (7) The Newcastle and Hunter District Historical Society 50th Anniversary Bulletin, Volume 14, No. 1., 1986, p 12.
- (8) Department of Public Works Kooragang: Industrial Island, 1971, p 15.
- (9) Newcastle Morning, 2 August, 1893.
- (10) Department of, p 15.
- (11) Newcastle Morning, 14 June, 1930.

In 1877, with a revival of ship-building on the banks of the Hunter River, a ketch-rigged yacht to run between Newcastle, Port Macquarie and Port Stephens was built on Mosquito Island by the Chilvers Brothers for Messrs. Anderson and Thompson, who resided on the island. The yacht was described as able to "carry 60 tons, and her dimensions are 55 feet keel, 60 feet overhaul, 5 feet 6in in depth of hold, and 14 feet deep. She is copper fastened throughout, and substantially built of colonial hardwood." (12)

It is uncertain how Mosquito Island acquired the name it bears. To most of the people of the area it is "Mosquito Island" because of the special size, shape and characteristics of the mosquitoes which must have caused the early settlers in the locality much inconvenience and annoyance. Another version is that "Moscheto" and "Mosquito" are interchangeable, the former being a Spanish corruption of the name. (13) Another story is that it was given the name after Tony Moscheto, who fished there for a living. (14) On Government maps the name is spelt "Moscheto" although the name of the school and the place of residence on electoral rolls are shown as "Mosquito Island".

Activities in the early stages of Mosquito Island's history were fruit and vegetable culture and fishing. Early settlers were attracted by the rich alluvial soil on the island making it an ideal location for farming and grazing, although farming in many sections was a rather hazardous occupation due to periodic flooding or inundation by high tides. In order to encourage

(12) Ibid., 4 December, 1877.

(13) Ibid., 2 July, 1918.

(14) Ibid., 2 June, 1950.

(17) Ibid., 2 July, 1918.

(18) Ibid.

(19) Ibid., 27 January, 1917.

(20) Ibid., 11 April, 1911.

settlement, grants were made to people who desired a career on the land. The soil and temperate climate were ideal for fruit culture and oranges, apples and peaches were grown with much success. (15)

For fifty years Newcastle drew from Mosquito Island much of the fruit, vegetables and dairy products that were required for its daily needs. The first locally grown fruit was marketed from the island. Within four years of the purchase of land offered for sale by proclamation on the 18th October, 1844 Mr. Wilton's estate on the island was described in Well's Gazette of 1848, "This may well be called the kidney of the island, several acres now being cultivated with oranges, vines, bananas and other fruits". (16) The fruit was "shipped" across to Newcastle in open boats which were drawn up near the bank of the river, and the fruit loaded into them in bulk. Fruit growing as an industry ceased when sulphur fumes from a copper-smelting works at Port Waratah destroyed the trees which afforded a natural wind screen for the orchards. As a result, the fruit trees gradually died. (17)

Oystering and fishing were taken up by the settlers. A succession of floods destroyed the oyster beds for a time, and the younger men who were following that occupation moved north to the Bellinger and Macleay Rivers. Those who remained behind turned their attention to dairying and for a great many years this was the only industry pursued on Mosquito Island. (18) Dairying as an industry commenced about 1866 and for a long time the island was the principal source of Newcastle's milk supply. (19) In 1913, the Minister for Works (Mr. Arthur Griffith) resumed 500 acres of the island for the purpose of building worker's homes there. (20) This did not proceed and

(15) Ibid., 2 July, 1918.

(16) Ibid., 16 June, 1972.

(17) Ibid., 2 July, 1918.

(18) Ibid.,

(19) Ibid., 27 January, 1917.

(20) Ibid., 11 April, 1931.

the island was leased to Mr. Garnham, who sub-let parts of the land, and dairy farming was carried on to a limited extent.

A public school opened on the island in October, 1858, (21) its first principal being Mr. Robinson, followed by Mr. Phillips. Other principals were Mr. William Coombes in 1893, Mr. Lester Bedford, Mr. Eric Smith and Mr. Folkard. In 1868 eighteen boys and twenty one girls were enrolled, with the Inspector of Schools, Mr. J.W. Allpass describing the school as "suitably furnished, and supplied with working materials. The organisation is satisfactory, the discipline is excellent, the instruction is methodically regulated and carefully imparted, and the results are good; the teacher's heart is in the work, and the tone of the school is very satisfactory." (22) The school closed in October, 1932.

In 1865 the residents of Mosquito Island banded together and built a little church on an allotment of land, which was a gift to them from, Captain Tonkins, an early land owner on the island. The Sunday of the opening of the Church of England was a memorable occasion, the ceremony being performed by Mr. J.D. Langley, a lay minister who later became Bishop Langley. The church eventually joined up with the parish of Wickham, under the control of the Rev. John Dixon, assisted by the Rev. W.F. James. Services continued until most of the residents left the island in 1914. A church was built at Tighes Hill by Rev, James with most of the furniture in the new church brought from the Mosquito Island church. (23)

For years the settlers had no means, other than small rowing boats for communicating with the mainland. After a lot of agitation and effort a hand-worked punt began service on the island, with the christening

(21) Id., 30 January, 1924.

(22) Newcastle Sun., 28 July, 1868.

(21) J. Fletcher and J. Burswoods, Government Schools of New South Wales 1848-1983, Sydney, 1983.

(22) Newcastle Chronicle and Hunter River District News 16 July, 1868.

(23) Newcastle Morning....., 23 January, 1932.

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ceremony held on Saturday 6 May, 1894. The punt connected the island with the mainland at Port Waratah and the boat was christened by Mrs. Melville, wife of Mr. Melville, M.P., who had assisted the residents in their cause. (24) The punt service was discontinued on 9 February, 1924, because the Tarro shire could not meet the cost of the service alone and the State Government had withdrawn its subsidy. (25)

Exworthy, J. Newcastle, The Making of an Australian City, Sydney, 1983.

The original proposal for the development of the islands as an industrial area came in 1947 from the Newcastle Chamber of Manufacturers. The Kooragang Island reclamation project began in 1951, when the Department of Public Works was authorised by legislation to begin reclamation of the islands and establish the services necessary for industrial development. The first silt was pumped ashore to Mosquito Island on 28 May, 1951 and by January, 1958 Mosquito Island and Walsh Island had been linked. (26)

New South Wales Government Gazette, Sydney, 1968.

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(24) Ibid., 8 May, 1894.

(25) Ibid., 30 January, 1924.

(26) Newcastle Sun, 28 July, 1975.

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A search of

The Royal Australian Historical Society Journal and Proceedings

Raymond Terrace and District Historical Society Journal

Journal of Hunter Valley History

revealed no entries on Mosquito Island.

CARMEL CREASEY

Interviewer: I am interviewing John Duggan who lived on Mosquito Island from 1916 until 1923. Mr. Duggan was five years of age when his family moved to Mosquito Island. Mr. Duggan's family moved to Mosquito Island because his father was unemployed due to the 1916 strike.

Could you describe how your family travelled to Mosquito Island?

Interviewee: Yes, we had two boats. We pulled them up to the backyard in the creek at Carrington and loaded them up and at that time the creek ran right through to the BP and came out at what is now the loading wharf and we had to travel then across to the island. We had our boats and set up home on the island.

MOSQUITO ISLAND

1916 - 1923

Interviewer: Could you describe your home on the island?

Interviewee: The home we rented at the time was a Government home and it was just built of really weatherboard, iron roof and the old time front verandah. It had a big underground well as a catchment for our fresh water when it rained and to get the water out of the well we had to pull it up with a rope and a bucket.

Interviewer: How did your mother do the cooking?

Interviewee: Mother done the cooking on an old time wood stove, done a good job for those days. The stove was an open fire that you could stand a couple of other pots hanging over a good job in those days.

Open Foundation

Australian History

Tuesday Afternoon

Lecturer - M. Henry.

Interviewer: So did your mother actually cook the meal on an open fire?

Interviewee: She could cook the meal on an open fire if she wanted to or she could cook some of it in a hanging pot that hung on a chain alongside the kettle for the hot water.

Interviewer: I am interviewing John Duggan who lived on Mosquito Island from 1916 until 1923. Mr. Duggan was five years of age when his family moved to the island. Mr. Duggan's family moved to Mosquito Island because his father was unemployed due to the 1916 strike.

Interviewer: Could you describe how your family travelled to Mosquito Island ?

Interviewee: Yes, we had two boats. We pulled them up to the backyard in the creek at Carrington and loaded them up and at that time the creek run right through to the BHP and come out at what is now the loading wharf and we had to travel then across to the point and unload our boats and set up home on the island.

Interviewer: Could you describe your home on the island ?

Interviewee: The home we rented at the time was a Government home and it was just built of really weatherboard, iron roof and the old time front verandah. It had a big underground well as a catchment for our fresh water when it rained and to get the water out of the well we had to pull it up with a rope and a bucket.

Interviewer: How did your mother do the cooking ?

Interviewee: Mother done the cooking on an old time wood stove, done a good job for those days but alongside the stove was an open fire that you could stand a log up in and the kettle and a couple of other pots hung on chains with a hook and really done a good job in those days.

Interviewer: So did your mother actually cook the meal on an open fire ?

Interviewee: She could cook the meal on an open fire if she wanted to or she could cook some of it in a hanging pan that hung on a chain alongside the kettle for the hot water.

Interviewer: Did you use the open fire for heating for the home ?

Interviewee: The open fire was the main source of our heating through the winter months and it was a big one. We could all sit 'round it and you could stand a big log in it and it burnt all night. It really warmed the whole home up.

Interviewer: Where did your mother wash the clothes ?

Interviewee: The laundry was on the back verandah. It was a primitive set-up like all the homes in those times on those islands where you had very little such as, well, washing machines weren't thought of, ice chests weren't thought of, but the women carried a set of tubs which were three or four different sizes and a scrubbing board. They had a big wooden bench to put them on and an old time copper they'd boil up, boil the clothes. To get water for that copper they had a bucket on a rope and pulled the water up out of the underground well as they wanted it.

Interviewer: What did you use for lighting in the home ?

Interviewee: The lighting consisted of mainly the old time oil lamp and if we didn't have enough oil lamps then we always had a couple of what they called hurricane lamps fuelled with kerosene.

Interviewer: Were the inside walls of the home lined ?

Interviewee: The inside was lined with the old time cyprus pine lining and also the ceiling and the floor was hardwood tongue-and-groove boards.

Interviewer: Did you grow your own vegetables ?

Interviewee: We had quite a big paddock and we had one part fenced off to grow vegetables such as tomatoes, potatoes, pumpkins, bit of corn for the stock and that done the job. We lost quite a bit of stock there in the bad winter months because with the big tides and the strong westerly wind the banks couldn't hold the water back and they died mainly because there was no grass.

Interviewer: Did you obtain seafood from the river ?

Interviewee: It was a very good river, the Hunter River, for seafoods. There was an abundance of fish, oysters and prawns which most of the families just about lived on and later on, as the Steel Works grew, they poisoned a lot of the fish and oysters through their waste benzol that they were pouring into the river. Finally you couldn't use any of it so then they depended on right up the bay in the Hunter River for their prawns, oysters and fish.

Interviewer: Were there any churches on the island ?

Interviewee: The only church on the island was a little weatherboard church stood on the river bank, was the Church of England, and at that time old Parson James used to drive up in his horse and sulky on a Sunday and he held the church service.

Interviewer: Was there a general store on the island ?

Interviewee: There was a general store on the island run for a number of years by people by the name of Widderson and you just about got anything you wanted there but most of the people, when they folded up through old age, had their groceries delivered from a shop in Tighes Hill by the name of Hennessy and he'd deliver them across the river on the old arm strong driven punt and he done that for quite a long time.

Interviewer: Was there a Post Office on the island ?

Interviewee: The Post Office was on the island and it was run by farmers by the name of Garnham and you had to go there and collect your own mail and they also used to throw the paper out over the fence every day if you ordered it.

Interviewer: Was there a telephone on the island ?

Interviewee: The telephone was a separate telephone on its own on the public road and that was put there for everyone's use.

Interviewer: How were the mail and the papers delivered from Newcastle to the island ?

Interviewee: Well, when this particular farmer, Garnham was coming back after taking his milk to the depot he picked up the mail at Tighes Hill picked up the papers, he threw the paper over the fence 'cause he passed your premises but your mail you went up to their house and collected it.

Interviewer: Where did you purchase your meat and bread from ?

Interviewee: The bread was delivered by a baker named Shoemith from Tighes Hill three times a week, and the meat was delivered up there by a fellow named O'Brien from Tighes Hill.

Interviewer: Where did the family shop for their clothes ?

Interviewee: The main shopping centre most families used was right in Hunter Street Newcastle at either Scotts or Winns which were the two big main shops of that time.

Interviewer: How did you get to Newcastle from the island ?

Interviewee: For years, there was an arm strong driven punt across the river which took all the milk carts, butcher carts, general public and as the Steel Works grew they closed our road and the punt was taken away so therefore everyone then had to find their own outlet to get off the island which inconvenienced a lot and gradually most people moved off the island altogether.

Interviewer: When you couldn't travel across by punt did families row themselves into Newcastle ?

Interviewee: Some were lucky enough to have a launch; others only had to depend on their pulling boats which still got them to and fro.

Interviewer: Where would you anchor the boat in Newcastle ?

Interviewee: We went down to what they called the Newcastle Boat Dock (which used to be opposite Scotts but is now filled in) was the general dock for all the small boats.

Interviewer: What did you do if anyone in the family was sick ? Did a Doctor visit the island ?

Interviewee: The closest Doctor was a Doctor Petherbridge. He was in Islington and he seemed to attend to everyone that became ill on the island.

Interviewer: Would he travel to the island ?

Interviewee: You had to go to his surgery if possible. If you were too ill he'd come up to the island.

Interviewer: Any of the ladies expecting babies on the island - did they travel across to a hospital or were they confined at home ?

Interviewee: All confinements to pregnant women at that time were served by what they called the midwife and her name was Nurse Mary Hughes that lived on Carrington what was brought up by the husband of the wife who was pregnant and that carried on that way for years.

Interviewer: School begin ?

Interviewee: School began at 9.00 a.m. and close up at 3.30 p.m.

Interviewer: Mr. Duggan, you attended the school on Mosquito Island could you describe the school building ?

Interviewee: Yes it was a big Public School. It had one big room for all the classes. It also had a separate room for carpentry which we had every Friday afternoon and the school teacher's wife learnt all the girls sewing in her own private home which was alongside the school. It also had a lot of ground to it for sports and two big weather sheds in case of rain or bad weather and two lots of toilets, one for the girls, one for the boys and they worked by a big cesspit underneath.

Interviewer: Your lunch consisted of perhaps some kind a couple of kind

Interviewee: Could you describe the inside of the classroom ?

Interviewee: Inside the classrooms was very good all lined out with cypress pine. All the desks and the stools were made of cedar. The teacher's big table was all cedar and at that time cedar grew wild on the riverbanks of the Hunter River.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little about the lessons you had at school ?

Interviewer: Did you use slate boards for writing ?

Interviewee: Our main source of writing material was the old time slates and a slate pencil and they seemed to do the job.

Interviewer: Up till when I left school the highest I could qualify was the G.C. which was known as the Qualifying Certificate.

Interviewer: Who were the teachers on the island when you were there?

Interviewee: The teacher that was there for quite a number of years his name was Bedford and he was relieved later by a teacher named Folkard and the last teacher to serve on the island before they closed it up and demolished it was Smith.

Interviewer: What time did school begin ?

Interviewee: School began at 9.00 a.m. and come out at 3.30 p.m.

Interviewer: Did you have morning tea and a lunch break ?

Interviewee: No morning tea. We had a full hour's lunch break and that was all till we come out at 3.30 p.m. in the afternoon.

Interviewee: Had quite a bit of sport in the school in those days especially

Interviewer: Was lunch provided by the school or did each pupil take his own ?

Interviewee: Each one took his lunch to school in his tuckerbag.

Interviewer: What would you have taken for lunch ?

Interviewee: Your lunch consisted of perhaps some liked a couple of hard boiled eggs and a couple of rounds of bread and butter others would just have a couple of sandwiches whatever their mother packed up, perhaps cheese or meat and a couple of pieces of fruit.

Interviewer: Did you have a tennis court at the school ?

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little about the lessons you had at school ?

Interviewee: We had all kinds of lessons as we went along, I think they were pretty well the same as today as far as long division sums etc. Government magazines were sent to the school and up till when I left school the highest I could qualify was the Q.C. which was known as the Qualifying Certificate.

Interviewer: The Government supplied everything including the magazines
Interviewee: they come every month and anything else was needed ink the
old time ink bottles they were all along the desks and we
seemed to get by by that.

Interviewer: In the Summertime when we went to school and it was going to
be a red hot day the teacher would suggest that the boys all
carry the forms down under what was known as a big palm tree

Interviewee: and a big Morton Bay tree right on the river bank and we
liked it because if there was a high tide in the dinner hour
we could all have a splodge in the river.

Interviewer: Did the children play sport at school ?

Interviewee: Had quite a bit of sport in the school in those days especially
when the school inspector attended the school he and the
teacher would line us up outside and we'd have all kinds of
sports that day.

Interviewer: What was the main sport the boys played ?

Interviewee: Football.

Interviewer: What about the girls ?

Interviewee: The girls they mostly played tennis.

Interviewer: Did you have a tennis court at the school ?

Interviewee: There was a good tennis court at the school and at the weekend
when the school children weren't using it the older people
that had went to that school but had left and some married
played tennis on the same courts.

Interviewer: What did the children do for recreation on the weekend ?

Interviewee: A lot of them had to work and help milk the cows some of them helped in the house helped their mother because in those days it was nothing for twelve and fourteen children in the one family.

Interviewer: Did they ever go fishing or swimming in the river on the weekend ?

Interviewee: Nearly everyone went swimming at the weekend if it was hot because there were plenty of creeks around and they were pretty safe from sharks and all sandy bottom.

Interviewer: Was there entertainment on the island for adults or family groups ?

Interviewee: The usual entertainment on the island at that time was a euchre party and dance in the public school every Saturday night and most turned up and when the euchre was finished they'd have a dance and the main music was violin and piano and failing that a chap named McLean used to come down from Ash Island and play the piano accordion and everyone thoroughly enjoyed their self.

Interviewer: Could you name some of the families living of Mosquito Island ?

Interviewee: Yes I think I knew the lot, there was the Turners, Croeses, Rosses, Joneses, Dempseys, Jordans, ourselves, Widdersons and on the very top of the island was another lot of families

Interviewer: they were nearly cut off except for a bridge was put across.

Interviewee: Their name was Penfolds, Woodbridges, Morrises and Rosses again.

Interviewer: On Dempsey Island lived a well known family by the name of Towns could you share your memories of them ?

Interviewee: Yes I knew all the Towns family. There was only a creek really separated us from the Towns family and they were renowned for their good knowledge of boat building. They operated for years that family and they built all their boats out of cedar that grew wild on the riverbanks of the Hunter River and to get all our cedar for our carpentry lessons on the island at school two of us used to go across the creek

Interviewer: to Towns and they'd give us all these cedar strips and we made all different models of everything out of the cedar which today is just about unobtainable.

Interviewer: Are there any other memories you would like to share of your time on Mosquito Island ?

Interviewee: Yes one in particular was when we were marched out of school to see the very first of six ships that was launched at the old government dockyard at Walsh Island and that year was 1919 the first ship being the Delungra and they done quite a lot of work carrying wheat and flour after the First World War to England. Later I was surprised to know that in making

Interviewer: my first trip to sea which I became a merchant seaman later on was the S.S. Delungra but renamed the S.S. Corio and I served on that ship for quite a while and from then on I kept following the sea as my livelihood.

Interviewer: Any other memories you would like to share Mr. Duggan ?

Interviewee: Yes, there was one instance there when our father's brother died on the island at our home, had a river funeral up to the cemetery at Sandgate and it was the only known time ever I have known a funeral to travel by water to the cemetery. The

boat that carried the coffin belonged to an old chap named Paddy Ross and was named the "Bernie Aden" and it was a big boat. They just laid the coffin across the bow and travelled up the river and it was quite a long way to the cemetery. They landed at the old Ash Island punt landing on the Sandgate side of the river and the pall bearers had carried the coffin from there right down nearly to the Sandgate cemetery railway station.

Interviewer: Mr. Duggan, why did your family eventually leave the island ?

Interviewee: Well all the island was resumed and two men took over all the farms and we really had no interest left on the island seeing that we had to find our own conveyance off there, so our parents finished up moving down to Carrington and that was more convenient because our father worked on the wharf. In those days the usual thing was for our mothers to cook a hot meal for our fathers 'cause they worked hard on the wharf on the coal ships and she tied it in a tea towel and we'd all go down when they were due to knock off for their lunch break and that helped them work through the night.

Interviewer: Mr. Duggan thankyou for sharing your memories of Mosquito Island with me.

Mr. John Duggan and his family moved to Mosquito Island in 1916 when Mr. Duggan was five years of age and they remained there until 1923 when Mr. Duggan at the age of twelve had completed his schooling. The family moved from Carrington to Mosquito Island because Mr. Duggan's father was unemployed as a result of the 1916 strike for a shorter working week.

CARMEL CREASEY

The family moved their possessions to Mosquito Island by loading them into boats pulled up on a high tide to the backyard of their residence in Carrington. The boats proceeded along Carrington Creek to the Steel Works and then across to Mosquito Point where they unloaded their belongings and carried them to their new home.

MOSQUITO ISLAND

The old style weatherboard house with its iron roof and front verandah was rented from the Government. The interior of the house consisted of cypress pine walls and ceiling with a tongue-and-groove hardwood floor. Lighting in the house consisted of oil lamps or hurricane lamps filled with kerosene. The house was warmed by standing a log in a large open fireplace around which the family could sit. The log would burn through the night continuing to warm the home.

Mr. Duggan's mother cooked either on a wood burning stove or in pots suspended from a rafter over the open fire. Water was heated in a bottle which hung on a chain over the fire. Clothes were washed either in a tub on a bench on the back verandah or boiled in a wood fuelled copper which stood in the backyard. Water for drinking was drawn from an underground well in the yard by lowering a bucket.

Open Foundation
Australian History
Tuesday Afternoon
Lecturer - M. Henry.

Mr. John Duggan and his family moved to Mosquito Island in 1916 when Mr. Duggan was five years of age and they remained there until 1923 when Mr. Duggan at the age of twelve had completed his schooling. The family moved from Carrington to Mosquito Island because Mr. Duggan's father was unemployed as a coal trimmer due to the 1916 strike for a shorter working week.

The family moved their possessions to Mosquito Island by loading them into boats pulled up on a high tide to the backyard of their residence in Carrington. The boats proceeded along Carrington Creek to the Steel Works and then across to Mosquito Point where they unloaded their belongings and carried them to their new home.

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Mr. Duggan's mother cooked either on a wood burning stove or in pots suspended from a rafter over the open fire. Water was heated in a kettle which hung on a chain over the fire. Clothes were washed either in a tub on a bench on the back verandah or boiled in a wood fuelled copper which stood in the backyard. Water for drinking and washing was drawn from an underground well in the yard by lowering a bucket on a rope.

Mr. Duggan's family like most families on the island kept a milking cow and grew vegetables in their paddock. They obtained an abundance of fish, oysters and prawns from the river which provided a large part of their food supplies. General groceries were purchased from a store on the island run by the Widderson family. After this store closed people would place their orders at Tighes Hill and the storekeeper, Mr. Hennessy would deliver the orders to Mosquito Island. The bread was delivered three times per week by Mr. Shoemith from Tighes Hill and the meat was delivered by Mr. O'Brien from Tighes Hill.

The Post Office on Mosquito Island was conducted by the Garnham family who were dairy farmers. Mr. Garnham would collect the mail from the Tighes Hill Post Office and the daily papers each morning as he returned from delivering his milk to the depot. He would throw the paper over the fence but the mail was collected from the Post Office. The telephone on Mosquito Island stood on a public road and was for the use of all the residents.

Mr. Duggan's family travelled to Scotts or Winns in Newcastle to shop for clothes. Families travelled by punt from the island to the Steel Works and then caught a tram to Newcastle. After the access through the Steel Works was discontinued the residents of Mosquito Island travelled to Newcastle either by launch or rowing boat. They anchored their craft at the Newcastle Boat Dock which was opposite Scotts (now David Jones).

In times of illness the residents travelled to Tighes Hill to Doctor Petherbridge but in cases of extreme sickness the Doctor would travel to the island. Pregnant women were confined at home by Nurse Mary Hughes from Carrington who would be brought to the island by the husband of the expectant mother.

Mr. Duggan attended the Public School on Mosquito Island. The school was a large weatherboard building consisting of the classroom and a carpentry room which were lined with cypress pine. Separate from the classrooms were a large weathershed and toilets. The teacher's desk and the pupils' desks and stools were made from cedar. School began at 9.00 a.m. with a lunch break between 12.00 p.m. and 1.00 p.m. and finished at 3.30 p.m. Lessons were written on a slate board using a slate pencil. The Government supplied the school with the necessary supplies including the monthly magazine. On a Friday afternoon when the boys were having carpentry lessons the girls would go across to the school teacher's home and his wife would teach them sewing.

A highlight of school life was a hot day when the pupils would carry the blackboard and forms from the classroom to the river bank and place them under shady trees. In the dinner hour the children would cool off in the river. Sport was included in the curriculum with the boys playing football and the girls playing tennis.

The school buildings and tennis court were used by the community. On a Saturday evening families would gather in the school for a game of euchre followed by a dance with the music being provided by a pianist, William Ross and a violinist, his daughter Evelyn who were residents of the island or a Mr. Kenny McLean from Ash Island who played the piano accordion. The children when not helping their parents at home would fish and swim in the many creeks on the island.

Mr. Duggan recalled the Towns family from Dempsey Island who were well known cedar boat builders. The scraps of cedar from their boat building were given to the school to be used during the carpentry lessons. Other families on the island when Mr. Duggan resided there included Ross, Turner, Croese, Jones, Dempsey, Widderson, Penfold, Woodbridge and Morris.

Mr. Duggan shared his memories of the school children taken to see the launching of the S.S. Delungra in 1919, a ship on which Mr. Duggan sailed when he joined the Merchant Navy, and of the riverboat funeral of his uncle who had died on the island.

Mr. Duggan's family moved to Carrington from the island because of the lack of transport to and from the island. Carrington was closer to his father's work which necessitated the provision of a hot daily meal which had to be prepared at home and delivered by a member of the family to the coal ship on which his father was working.