

OPEN FOUNDATION

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

Thursday Evening 7-9 p.m.

Lecturer:

Margaret Henry.

INTERVIEW WITH:

MR. CLAUDE MANN

SUBJECT:

SHIP BUILDING INDUSTRY
IN THE MANNING DISTRICT
(INCLUDING OTHER
REMINISCENCES)

INTERVIEWED BY:

COLLENE BRAYE.

SUMMARY OF TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

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Subject: Mr. Claude Mann - The Ship Building Industry in the Manning District (including other reminiscences)

Interviewed by: Collene Braye

Mr. Mann was born in the Nabiac-Faildord area and lived in the Taree district for most of his life.

Before going on to discuss his recollections of the ships built in the area, he talked about the wreck of the Catterthun, which took place on the coast at Seal Rocks in 1895. Mr. Mann's mother was first on hand to greet the survivors when they pulled into Forster in the long boat. She was only a girl at the time and she was given brass buttons from the officer's uniform and an insignia from the side of the long boat. This story was the highlight of her life at the time, and it has been told in the family ever since.

Claude Mann's father, William Mann was a shipwright by trade and we spoke of the importance of shipping to the district before the advent of the Railway. Shipbuilding was a thriving industry in the district for a long time and took place at Forster-Tuncurry, Failford, Tinonee, Cooperook and Langley-Vale. Some of the well known boats of the district were mentioned.

The ship building industry thrived up until the end of the first world war, and revived a little during the second world war.

It is mentioned that it was cheaper to transport per tonne from Sydney to Taree than from Sydney to Gloucester because the Government Railway directly competed with the shipping industry for business.

Mr. Mann spoke about details of his father's work and some of the boats he built. He then went on to show me photographs of some of the boats wrecked in the area, and to speak about the causes for this and the dangers of crossing

the bars.

We digressed at this point and spoke of the Cedar getters and the bullockys that brought the cedar out of the mountains.

We then moved back to shipbuilding and discussed the origins of the shipwrights from Scandinavia.

Mr. Mann then outlined his thoughts about what he calls the feudal system. How the company which employed a man became responsible for all areas of spending and virtually owned the people who worked for them. Everything was purchased from the company store and management also dictated the way people had to vote in an election. This prompted a recollection about a politician called Dick Price.

He then recalled his schooling and the lack of opportunity in his district for taking his schooling any further then sixth class.

We then went on to discuss his life in the bush with his older brother. This was in the depression years of the early thirties. They lived in the bush and cleared brush for a living or did anything else in the way of work that could be obtained.

As Mr. Mann said, times were hard and there was no need to build ships at this time. Erosion had left little clearance in the rivers but the need for this particular industry in the Manning had passed on.

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HISTORY PAPER:

HISTORY OF THE MANNING DISTRICT IN
RELATION TO SHIPPING AND SHIP BUILDING.

Collene Braye.

About two hours drive north of the city of Newcastle lies the fertile area known as the Manning Valley. The natural beauty of the region would have been most evident on 19th December, 1854 when Taree was founded. 1. The settled areas consisted of small settlements along the Manning River with Taree being the head of navigation for steamers at this time.

The rivers were the highways until the spread of motor vehicles in the 1920s changed the transport scene. For a long time when it came to moving large numbers of people, nothing could match the capacity of the steam powered river boats that were normally used carting stores and produce, particularly cream to the butter factories. The paddle-wheel steamer "Manning" was one of the noted river craft servicing settlements in the pioneering days. Her career spanned a remarkable 59 years.

The local population turned to timber getting and, as the land was cleared, to farming, then ship building to take their produce to market. Isolation, however, was to be a feature of Manning River life for many years to come.

By the early 1870s the Manning Bar was only crossable by daylight at high tide. Many sailing craft and four steamers had already been lost on the bar by this time. 2.

Of all the bad river entrances, the Manning was considered the worst, bad at the best of seasons, with a list of wrecks really formidable. Coasting vessels were often delayed for weeks in a bend of the stream near the mouth, waiting for a favourable wind to cross the outlet into the open sea. The Manning trade had developed a reputation amongst sailors as being extremely dangerous and it was considered that any vessels involved in this area would eventually be lost and there was some truth in this belief.

1. M. Richards, North Coast Run. Killara. 1977 P. 16.
2. J. Ramsland, The Struggle Against Isolation. North Sydney. 1987 P. 65.

History of the Manning District in Relation to Shipping and Ship Building.

One memorable disaster at the Manning Bar was the wreck of the "Minimbah" on the 13th April, 1910. This was the third vessel owned by the North Coast Steamship Navigation Company to come to grief on the bar within 12 months.

From the various accounts of passengers and others it appeared that the sea outside was moderate but there was a heavy break on the bar. When entering, the "Minimbah" struck the south spit, and slewed towards the end of the breakwater. The two following rollers lifted her up onto the end of the breakwater where she was hung up. 3.

Some children who were fishing on the breakwater at the time assisted in getting a line attached to the shore and soon many other spectators were involved in helping the seamen unload the passengers and cargo.

The "Minimbah" was lost in the same spot at the "Kincumber" two years previously in 1908. Also owned by the North Coast Steamship Navigation Company, she lay a total wreck, full of water, with her back broken.

Photographs of these wrecks frequently show a range of spectators watching or assisting which is indicative of the local interest in the shipping trade at the time, as well as the awful excitement that these disasters engender. Many of the older people today still mourn the passing of the trading vessels on their river.

Apart from the serious business of trading, the steamers were also employed as pleasure craft to carry groups of people on recreational trips along the river to Manning Heads. Some of these trips became an annual event and were

History of the Manning District in Relation to Shipping and Ship Building.

Greatly anticipated by the locals at the time. 4.

With such an abundant supply of good timber, including cedar, being readily available it was a natural development that settlers to the area would turn to ship building as a means of developing new industry and enterprise in an area which offered few other opportunities. As a result ship building enterprises were established at a number of strategic places in and around Taree.

Wright's shipyard at Tuncurry began in 1877 with John Wright building a steam drogher "Never Despair" and over the years established Tuncurry's development into a town. The family continued ship building until after World War Two, when the industry collapsed due to the inroads of rail and motor transport. 5.

The "Comboyne" was built at Wright's shipyard in 1911. A twin-screw, ketch-rigged steamship of 281 tons, she foundered off Bass Point, N.S.W. in 1921.

Other boats were built by William Piper at Wallis Lake. One of these, the "Shannon" was a fine looking schooner and was a regular visitor to the Great Lakes Ports and the Manning. Other Boat builders in the district included John Nicholson at Taree shipyard, Captain Alexander Newton at Pelican and the Ryan Brothers who built boats at their Taree shipyard for many years. 6.

Mr. William Mann, the father of Interview Subject Claude Mann, served his apprenticeship at Wright's shipyard at Forster. He later worked at the Breckenridge shipyard at Failford. The Breckenridge family were initially involved

4. J. Ramsland, The Struggle Against Isolation. North Sydney. 1987 P. 77.
5. J. Revitt, The Good Old Days. Wamberil. 1982. P. 50.
6. Ibid. P. 52.

- 1 -

History of the Manning District in Relation to Shipping and Ship Building.

with Timber Mills, and their entrance into ship building began as a necessity to build boats more suitable to the trading in which the family was involved.

William Mann was one of the district's most respected shipwrights, working on the "Commonwealth", "King" and "Jap". 7. Mr. Mann and Tom Lowrey built the speed boat "Miss Breck" which won an Australian Championship in Victoria in 1925.

The Trawler "Pacific Star" was launched on the Wallamba River at Nahiack in 1947. This boat was built almost single handedly by William Mann but it marked the ending of an era of ship building as a thriving industry in the region.

The section of Railway to Taree was opened on 4th February, 1913. This marked one of the most significant events in the history of the district for bringing change to the area. The treacherous Manning Bar was no longer a barrier to the outside world and the people of the district embraced the changes the Railway would bring.

Friday the 17th May, 1940 marked the opening of the Manning River Bridge, later renamed the Martin Bridge. 8.

This bridge symbolised the passing of the old era of River trading in the area and the beginning of more effective road transport. Ironically the little boats on the river which greeted its opening were also celebrating their own farewell. The steam punt previously used for river crossing had its final run on the same day.

Every generation will contain a proportion of people who lament the passing of the old ways. Mr. Claude Mann has a collection of books and photographs which mainly centre around the ships which either traded in the Manning area or were built there as part of local industry. It is a great pity that some effort was not made to preserve some of these vessels for future generations, in an area which owes its existence to the gallant craft and the seamen who worked them.

7. D. Morgan, *The History of Tailford and the Warrumbah River District*.
SYDNEY, 1987. P. 75.
8. J. Ramsland, *The Struggle Against Isolation, North Sydney, 1907*. P. 268.

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River Boat Mitchell Island



THE TRAWLER, "PACIFIC STAR",
BUILT BY WILLIAM MANN, LAUNCHED ON
THE WALLAMBA, AT NABIAK 1947.

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INTERVIEWED BY

COLLENE BRAYE.

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

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Subject: Mr. Claude Mann - The Ship Building Industry
In the Manning District and ors.

Interviewed by: COLLENE BRAYE
OPEN FOUNDATION - AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

This is an interview with Mr. Claude Mann recording some of Mr. Mann's reminiscences of the ship building industry, predominantly in the Manning area.

C.M. Well, it would be about 1880, or in the 1880s. The Catterthun Catathan was a Chinese Ship, passenger, and she was taking some of the Chinamen home from Sydney who had more or less been kicked out after the goldrush days. Some were pretty wealthy and they think quite a lot of gold was in her and uh one night she hit Seal Rocks. There was a bit of a panic on and there was one boat got away with twenty-two survivors. They landed very early in the morning at Forster. My mother was then only a girl. She happened to be up on the hill at her uncle's residence, Captain Ned. Kendall. He was the Pilot Master at Forster. When mum saw this strange looking boat coming in and then turn in to the river and pulled up on the bank just under the Pilot Hill up on the beach, she run down to see what it was. And there was three Englishmen, I understand, and uh the rest was known then as Coolies, possibly Chinese. They were the crew and they pulled from, the long boat, from where she sunk at Seal Rocks up to Forster. When my mother found out the story she went back up the hill and told her uncle Captain Kendall. They organised breakfast for them and they got back to Sydney. I don't know how but they got back to Sydney where they'd have to face a Court of enquiry. I don't know the outcome of that but uh we were always interested in boats. My father was a shipwright and uh boats were the normal

Subject: Mr. Claude Mann - The Ship Building Industry
In the Manning District

Interviewed by: Collene Braye

means of transport prior to the railway.

C.B. What about those buttons that you told my about?

C.M. The officer of the watch took his buttons off his cap and his tunic and gave them to mum. He said "I'll have to face a court of enquiry. I'll lose my buttons but they have got no chance of ever getting them." He gave them to mum for her help in organizing the breakfast for them. They were since knocked off by a visitor to our house. They just disappeared with the visitor.

C.B. You've still got the insignia from the long boat haven't you? The plaque.?

C.M. Yes, I've still got the wooden insignia off the long boat. The long boat was just dragged up above high water mark and stayed there till it fell to pieces, and mum souvenired the insignia off it.

C.B. And there were no survivors?

C.M. The story goes at that time that when she hit the passengers panicked and they locked them in the cabins and no bodies ever come ashore. But that's not told in official history anyway. You don't read about it but that was the story I remember as a child.

C.B. I see. Now you say you were always interested in the shipbuilding industry because there was a family connection with that. A family connection.

C.M. Yes, well, my dad was a shipwright. That was his trade and mum's uncle was pilot master and there was no. In the earlier days there was no railroad, and practically no roads and everything come by shipping.

Subject: Mr. Claude Mann - The ship Building Industry
In the Manning District

Interviewed by: Collene Braye

- A lot of ships were built at Forster and Tuncurry. Miles was building at Forster. Breckenridge's built some up the river at Failford and Wright's were big builders at Tuncurry. If you cross the bridge now at Tuncurry Forster and look to your right going from the Tuncurry side over, depending on the said you will often see some big baulks of timber sitting up in the sand. That's the wreck of the old Jap. The old steamship the Jap. She was launched within a hundred yards of where she finished.
- C.B. Now you have also mentioned here Gollan's of Tinonee. That was another one.
- C.M. Gollan's was very good boat builders of Tinonee and although they never seemed to get much publicity. They built I think the greatest little tug that ever operated on the Manning Bar. The Manning Bar was one of the bad ones. The tug boat was the John Gollan and she was known from the length and breadth of the east coast of Australia by seamen. It was a great little boat. They also built the Fanny Gollan, the Christina Gollan, the Maggie Gollan but I don't know much about them.
- C.B. And Langley. Langley?
- C.M. Langley built at Lansdowne on the Lansdowne River.
- C.B. At Langley Vale.
- C.M. At Langley Vale, yes. and Danny O'Sullivan or Danny Sullivan, they built at Cooperook. Very successful builders at Cooperook.
- C.B. At Cooperook, oh?
- C.M. YES. They uh had a shipyard there. Bill Ryan's

Subject: Mr. Claude Mann - The Ship Building Industry
In the Manning District

Interviewed by: Collene Braye

father, the old Bill Ryan that's where he did his time, with Langley's. He was a very successful builder.

C.B. You said it would have been a trade you'd have been interested in going into had it still been available but it finished. Now that was around about when?

C.M. After the first world war.

C.B. Right.

C.M. It faded out after the first world war. It was revived a bit during the second world war but I was in the Air Force at that stage. I never ever got the opportunity.

C.B. I'd like to hear about the subsidy that the Government gave to the Railway which placed the ship trade in jeopardy also.

C.M. When I was truck driving pre-war we used to pick up freight at the Taree Railway station or the reeving wharf of the North Coast Steamship Company. It was cheaper to get freight from Sydney to Taree than it was from Sydney to Gloucester and it was a far shorter distance from Sydney to Gloucester than it was from Sydney to Taree. The reason was that there was no competition at Gloucester, from shipping. You couldn't get a canoe up there, and that was the reason. You could salt them down a bit and lifted it at Taree. It was cheaper per tonne from Sydney to Taree than from Sydney to Gloucester.

Subject: Mr. Claude Mann - The Ship Building Industry
In the Manning District.

Interviewed by: Collene Braye

and it was a fifty mile shorter journey.

C.B. This was because of the Government subsidy
on the Railway?

The boats that your father was actually involved
in building, they were at Breckenridge's boat
yard at Failford weren't they?

C.M. He served his time at the Wright's at Tuncurry.

C.B. Oh yes, right.

C.M. As an apprentice, and he worked there for some
years and then later, oh I forget the time. I
can remember one skeleton on the slip at the
Failford wharf that they were building and I have
an idea it was the Commonwealth but I'm not sure
about that. I would be very young then. I'd only
be about four or five and the frame was up and I
remember Dad having a look at it.

C.B. Now I've got that photograph of your father.
They were launching a boat that went down to
Victoria. What was that one, it was built by
Bill Mann?

C.M. That was the Miss Breck. Breckenridges owned
the store and the sawmill and the Blacksmiths's
shop and whathaveyou at Failford. They were pretty
well off and they got dad to build, well dad was
working for them and he built the speedboat the
Miss Breck. She won the Australian championship
in her class at Geelong and I'm not sure whether
it was the year before or the year after she won
it in Sydney, the Australian Championship. She
was made of quarter inch red cedar.

Subject: Mr. Claude Mann - The Ship Building Industry
In the Manning District

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C.B. That was in the 1920s?

C.M. Yes, that would be in the 20s.

C.B. She was 16-18 ft. you said?

C.M. She was about that length, yes. She was very fast on the buoy. She could turn in a tight circle on the buoy without seeming to lose too much speed.

C.B. Do you remember what happened to her?

C.M. No, but she was here on Lake Macquarie for years after. He also built one that went to New Zealand, a racing boat the Slim Jim. I have the model of the Slim Jim here. And no wonder they call it Slim Jim, it's very long, it wouldn't even resemble a speed boat to-day.

C.B. That one went to Breckenridge relatives?

C.M. In New Zealand, yes.

C.B. And the other photograph was of the Pacific Star.

C.M. Yes, the Pacific Star was a fishing trawler that worked. She was fitted up with a refrigerator of her own driven off the motor and she used to go out on the Barrier Reef a week at a time with tourists and they could put their fish in the refrigerator on the boat. She'd be, oh she'd be from memory about a 50,60 footer perhaps or more.

C.B. And what was the boat that your father built on the beach at Forster?

C.M. On the beach?

C.B. Or at Nabiac was it, at Nabiac.

C.M. He built the Pacific Star at Nabiac.

C.B. Oh, that's the one he built at Nabiac?

C.M. Yeah. The Pacific Star. He built that on the side

Subject Mr. Claude Mann - The Ship Building Industry
In the Manning District

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of the river at Nabiac.

C.B. Well, you've got a lot of photographs of boats that have been wrecked. Could you tell me why there were so many wrecks? Uh, it must have been a pretty hazardous occupation in those days?

C.M. Yes, I don't think anybody would insure a seaman. Well, they went out in, overloaded half the time with no rules and regulations, no safety devices, no workers' compensations and what have you and it was a very hazardous life and some of the bars where they went across the bar to come into the river were very dangerous. They, you see there on the Eastern coast your run in tide in faster than your run out tide and if you get anywhere from a black nor-easter to a south-easter it puts a bar up and they occasionally hit that bar and there has been a lot of them wrecked. One of the big wrecks was on the maiden voyage of the Minimbah. She was new. She was built in Scotland, steel and she was landed on the end of the breakwater at Harrington and it broke her back and there she is there.

C.B. She's been split in two.

C.M. She snapped across. There's the one that replaced her, the Mainbah. That's at the wharf at Taree. This one replaced that.

C.B. And do you remember how successful this one was, did she have a long life?

C.M. Yes, pretty well, she did all right, but sometimes they didn't. They had a pretty rough life.

Subject: Mr. Claude Mann - The Ship Building Industry
In the Manning District

Interviewed by: Collene Braye

There's the Burrawong, that wrecked at the Harrington Bar. She was towed out to sea by the John Gollan. No the John Gollan is towing the Wanderer out, and that's the Burrawong on the rocks there.

C.B. What was the most dangerous area. Which area of the coast had the most casualties?

C.M. It would be either the Richmond Bar, the Richmond River Bar or the Harrington Bar. They were both very bad.

C.B. Richmond River.

C.M. Yes, Lismore.

C.B. Oh, right, yes.

C.M. They were two very bad bars.

C.B. There's the S.S. Kincumber that was wrecked at Harrington in 1908. You were talking about that one too.

C.M. Yes, there she is, that 's the photo of the..

C.B. With the cargo spread all over the beach.

C.M. Yeah, yeah that's her.

C.B. Did you ever see one of the bullock drays? I saw a photograph of one of the bullock drays bringing the produce down to the wharf at Wingham. Do you remember that?

C.M. I've seen hundreds of them. That was the only way of getting anything there to the wharf.

C.B. Yes.

C.M. By bullock teams.

C.B. They'd bring the timber down from the mountains, down to the wharf at Wingham.

Subject: Mr. Claude Mann - The Ship Building Industry
In the Manning District

Interviewed by: Collene Braye.

relied on their Norwegians or Swedes or what have you. They were born shipwrights for generations.

C.B. No it was really the Norwegian or Swedish expertise that started it off.

C.M. Yes. Yes.

C.B. By the look of the vessels they were pretty good?

C.M. Oh, they were skilled tradesmen.

C.M. Well, I don't suppose that's a nice thing to say of the feudal system but that's what it was. You lived in a Company house and paid the rent. You worked for the Company. They had the general store, they had the post office. They had the savings bank accounts so if you ever had ten bob in the bank they knew all about it and uh, it was a pretty rugged type of life but then what was the option. There was none.

C.B. Well, they were rugged times.

C.M. There was a big blacksmiths shop, at Failford. I remember that quite well, I had an uncle worked there. uh, there was four forges in that shop, and blacksmiths working, building bullock waggons, horse waggons and sulkies. Anything at all they had wheelwrights there. Farriers.

C.B. Those places that contained everything and virtually owned the people, lock stock and barrel.

C.M. They have disappeared. C.B. They've gone yes.

C.M. There is nothing at Failford to-day. Everything's gone and Millers Cove, everything's gone.

C.B. So there was nothing in that system to sustain any permanent growth.

C.M. Yes, and Tuncurry. The Wrights owned Tuncurry

Subject: Mr. Claude Mann - The Ship Building Industry
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there all day doing nothing. What are you doing there Claude? Nothing. Well, read Shakespeare. and I don't know anything worse.

C.B. Well, some would agree. And when you did leave school, you went to a property at Darrawank, No, Tipperary. with your brother. Would you tell me about the conditions that you lived under there and what you were put on that property to do.

C.M. Well, we had to fall the brush. They called it rain forest to-day but it was called brush. We milked cows or cut sleepers or did whatever we could do to get a crust. This was in the Depression days.

C.B. In the 1930s.

C.M. In the early 30s. yes, yes, it was just the two of us there. We were batching and that's what we were up to to try and get some money because it was scarcer than hen's teeth.

C.B. How far were you away from home?

C.M. Fourteen miles.

C.B. You cooked your own tucker. Cooked your own tucker?

C.M. Yeah, corned beef you lived on. and damper. Not bad either, damper. All cooked in a camp oven.

C.B. Well, you couldn't cook so it's just as well your brother could.

C.M. Well, I could boil corned meat, and I've made some dampers. We survived.

C.B. We heard about your first damper. So there wasn't much employment around?

C.M. There was nothing, Nothing at all, and it there was a bit of fencing or somebody wanted some brush falling done they worked one against the

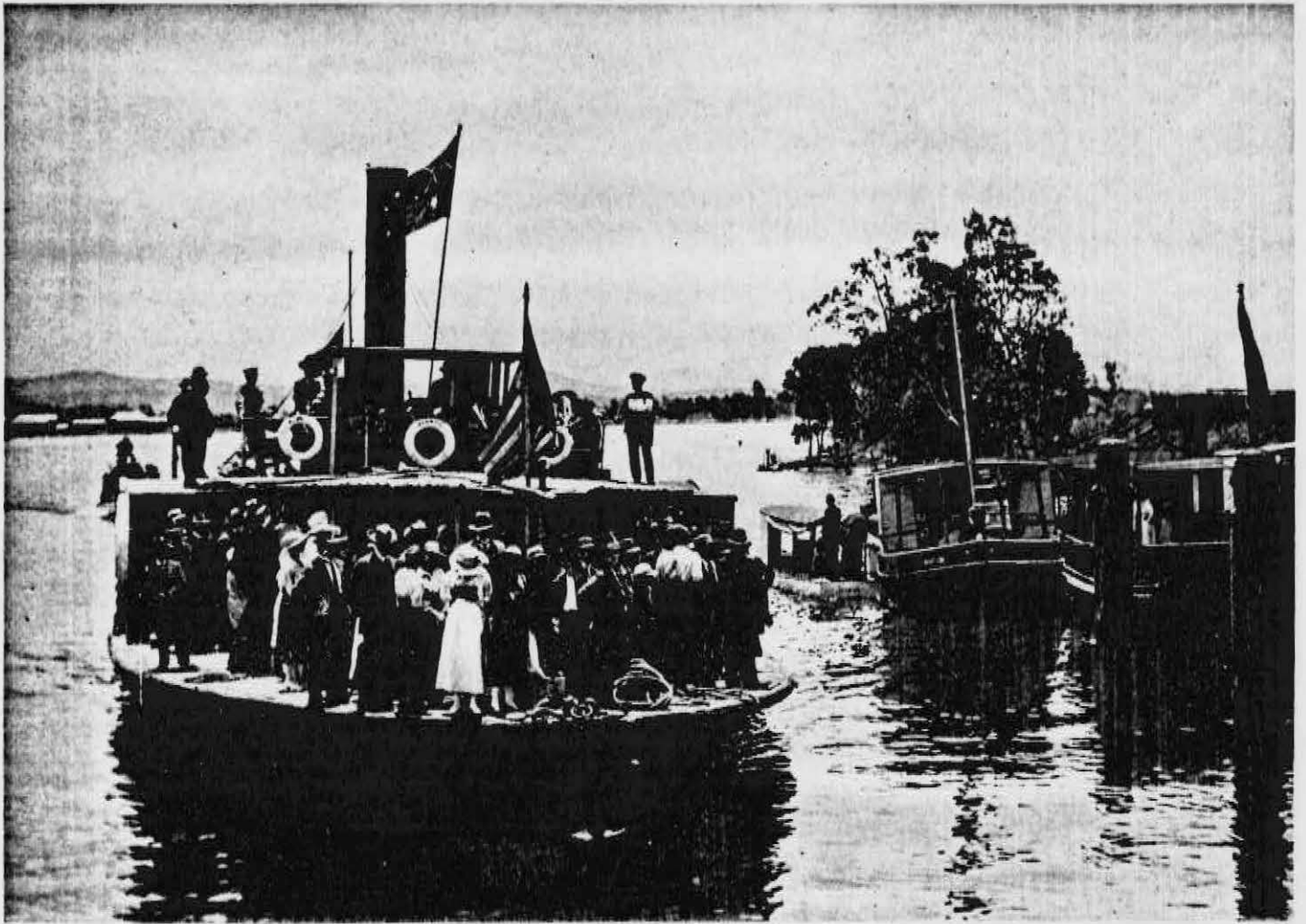
Subject: Mr. Claude Mann - The Ship Building Industry
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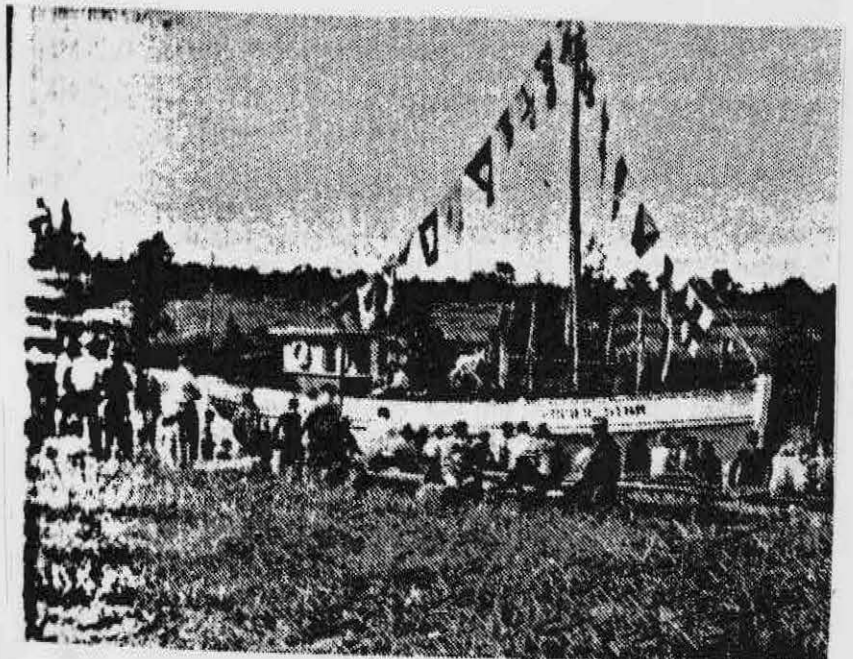
the war years, that plied on the bar, on the river at the Manning and Hastings and so on.

C.B. Right, that was an interview with Mr. Claude Mann of his reminiscences of the early days of shipbuilding in the Manning District.

Thanks Dad.



River Boat. Mitchell Island.



**THE TRAWLER, "PACIFIC STAR",
BUILT BY WILLIAM MANN, LAUNCHED ON
THE WALLAMBA, AT NABIAC 1947.**