



LORAINÉ HAYWOOD  
AUSTRALIAN HISTORY  
THURSDAY: 10am - 12 noon.

MARGRET HENRY  
500 WORD SUMMARY AND TRANSCRIPT OF  
INTERVIEW  
WITH ROSEMARY SIMPSON.

Rosemary Simpson was born at Hillgrove on 30th June, 1905. Her parents were Herbert Richardson, and Gertrude, Elizabeth, Harriet Smith. Rosemary had 2 brothers, 5 sisters, 8 aunts and uncles. She also has special memories of her Grandmother who was a bush nurse or midwife. Rose had a very large family but politics was not discussed in the home, probably to exclude the women.

Hillgrove was a gold mining town not far from Armidale. The miners generally lived in small cottages of about 4 rooms.

While Rose and her family lived there the flu epidemic hit the area and many died. Soup waggons were a commonplace sight at the settlement. Every family was affected by the flu so those who were well enough went and worked in the soup kitchens to provide food for the others. During the epidemic when Rose would go out into the street, there would be 2 or 3 dead. A lot of pregnant women died during this time.

Leisure time was minimal, however, there were occasional picnics and general reading. Organized sport seemed limited to the men, who played football. Although she played rounders as a

child.

Rose's parents were also born at Hillgrove, but were on a sheep station at Walcha for a time. They later returned to Hillgrove, where her father worked at Baker's Creek mine as a gold miner. As gold became a scarce commodity, they moved to Armidale. It was during this time that World War I began and she remember's an honour roll at the Church they attended.

Rose did not attend school in Armidale as she had done in Hillgrove, instead, she was given a position as a housemaid on a sheep station. Kentucky sheep station was just outside of Armidale. She had many duties which were spread out between the hours of 5am and 9pm. These included, liting the fires, making beds, cleaning the silver, setting and waiting on tables, and serving meals at various times. Rose was only 14 years old at the time.

From there Rosemary Richardson returned to Armidale, where she worked as a shop assistant, her wages were 5 shillings a

week. Here she met her future husband, Edward Simpson, who was here boss. They were married at Armidale on 3rd October, 1923. Rosemary was 18 years old.

Rosemary and her husband moved to Cessnock and from there to Newcastle. She had three children when her husband went to World War II. While he was serving in Tobruk and later New Guinea, Rose supported her children alone.

When he returned they opened a self-service store at Newcastle which did very well. There was a building boom at the time and this helped their business. Rose and her husband

successfully ran there business for 20 years.

Rose Simpson survived a lifetime of trials, the flu epidemic, two world wars and two depressions.

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

This interview will be given by Loraine Haywood,  
The interviewee is Rosemary Simpson.

Oral History Assignment for Margaret Henry.

The date of this interview is 1st August, 1988.

At Newcastle.

O.K. What is your full maiden name?

Rosemary Simpson.

O.K. What is your married name?

Rosemary Simpson.

Where were you born?

aHillgrove.

And what date were you born?

30th June, 1905.

When did your family move to that area, your parents?

Do you know when they moved there?

Well, I think they lived there, my Grandparents lived  
there for years before that.

But you don't know exactly.

No.

Right.

What were your Grandparents' names? Do you know their  
surname?

My Father's Grandparents or my Mother's Grandparents?

Your Father's?

Richardson.

Their's was Richardson. O.K.

What About on your Mother's side?

Smith.

Right, Smith.

Do you know what your Grandparents did for a living?

Coal mining. (Should be gold mining)

They were coal mining.

What were your parents full names?

Gertrude, Elizabeth, Harriet.

Yes, What was her maiden name?

Smith.

What about your Father?

My Father?

Yes, his name.

Herbert Richardson.

Where did they live before they came to Hillgrove?

I'm not too sure, Walcha I think They had a sheep station at Walcha.

They had a sheep station.

Can you remember your parents or Grandparents describing the early days?

I can remember my Grandmother, she was a bush nurse.

What did she used to do as a bush nurse?

Deliver all the babies around the place.

O.K. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Ah.. two brothers and six sisters, counting myself of course.

O.K. Why did your family decide to come to the area of Hillgrove?

Well, they lived there before I was born, they still lived

there and my Father was a coalminer. That's why he was there.

What about- was it gold mining too?

Gold mining.

Gold mining and coal mining both?

Not coal, gold mining.

Gold mining, right.

What was it like to live there?

As I remember very nice, very cold, very cold.

O.K. What were the houses like?

Just like the ordinary cottages, like miners cottages,  
just 4 rooms as a rule and a verandah.

Right.

How many years did you remain a school?

Til I was 13 1/2.

O.K. Who cared for you when you were sick

My Mother or Grandmother.

So it was an extended family was it?

Yes.

What about Aunts?

Yes we had about 8 aunts and uncles and plenty of cousins.

So we were, it was a big family.

Right.

Do you remember the flu epidemic?

Yes, I Do remember it very well.

We usually had; every morning we went around the homes,  
and there was always two or three dead in the street as a rule.  
It was very bad, very bad.

What did they do, did they bury them straight away?

I can't remember that, but I remember the carts coming out of a morning and going around all the homes. I suppose I was only, what would I only be about ten. I suppose then I wouldn't be any older. And a, they used to bring us soup, they had the soup waggons because almost everybody in the home was sick with it and a lot of pregnant women died because there was no aspirins or anything like that, you just got it and gone; it was a very bad flu.

How was your entertainment or leisure time spent then?

Well it was all mainly picnics; we went for picnics in bullock waggons, that, I remember that. And um we played games amongst ourselves mostly, there was no, only football I remember football, but, I don't think there was any other games that I can remember. We always played rounders, what else, oh we worked too hard to have too much play.[laugh]

O.K.

Was politics ever discussed at home? Did they ever talk about the Government?

No. I can't remember anything about the Government.

What transport was available in the area?

Our feet mostly. [laugh] Turn it off.

PAUSE

What Church did you attend at Hillgrove?

Church of England.

O.K.

What was your first job?



A housemaid, at a sheepstation, Kentucky sheep station.

And what were the duties there?

Ah... 5 o'clock in the morning we lit all the fires, then there was breakfast, then we made all the beds; it was a big family, and a all the cleaning had to be done, waiting on table, in the afternoons clean all the silver and we had half an hour off in the afternoon. Then we had to come back and get afternoon tea, then we had half an hour off and then it was tea time. Had to set the table then wash up then it was about half past six or seven o'clock, and you had an hour off and then you had to give them supper.

Was that all for the day then?

Yeah, it was 9 o'clock and you could go to bed then.

You were lucky.

Yes, we were lucky.

And how old were you when you had this job?

14

14

O.K. What other jobs did you have after that?

Ah.. I worked as a shop assistant until I was 17 1/2 and I married the boss.[laugh]

O.K. How did the First World War affect the area you lived in?

Ah.. I can't remember much about that. I know there was a war and I remember we had a big role of honour in the Church and a lot of our boys died and was killed in the war and a what else can I remember about it.

What about after the war?

After the war there was a very bad depression, can't remember, yes must have been after the war it was a very bad

depression. That was the first depression.

Right.

How much were your wages while you were working?

I started with 5 shillings a week then it went up to 7/ 6 after I had been there three months.

Can you remember any books or novels that were popular at the time?

Um, what was I reading I used to read a lot but I can't remember the name, the popular books of the time, just children's books you know.

Why did you leave the area of Hillgrove?

Um well the mine closed down, Baker's creek mine closed down, so we had to go, we went to Armidale then.

When did you marry?

Ah.. What do you want the date?

Yes?

3rd October ah.. what year was it.

How old were you?

18

18

So that was probably 24 or 27 wasn't it.

1923, it was, right.

Yes

And you were 18 years old

Yes

Did you ever hear of an organisation called the New Guard?

No.

No.

No, I Can't remember I probably did but I can't remember

O.K When you were married where did you live?

Armidale.

In Armidale.

And where did you go to from there?

Cessnock.

Cessnock.

O.K.

Did your husband go to the war?

Yeah.

The Second World War.

Yes.

Were you living at Cessnock then?

No, we were living in Newcastle.

You were in Newcastle by then.

How many children did you have at that time?

Three,

And how did you support them?

Went out to work

O.k. Where was your husband stationed during the war?

He was a rat of Tobruk, and also served in New Guinea.

O.K. So when he returned what did you do to make a living?

We opened up a self-service store in Newcastle.

Alright, and what year was that?

44 It I'd be the year the war ended.

1944. O.K.

And what sort of movie theatres were around then, was there a few around?

Movies?

Yeah, pictures.

Oh, yes all the big movies were coming in about that time, Gone With the Wind and of course a lot of Wayne films.

O.K.

PAUSE

How did your business do after the war?

We were lucky, a lot of housing commission flats went up around us so that we did very well.

How were things economically after the war?

Well it started to pick up and I think there was a boom really after the war.

What about?

A lot of buildings and everything went up in Newcastle.

Right, so Newcastle really went forward after that.

Yes.

What about the steelworks, what role did that play, Was there a lot of, was it good economically because of the steelworks?

Yes, I think so, yes.

PAUSE

How long were you in business for yourself?

20 years.

What have been some of the most important changes in your lifetime? From when you were a little girl until now?

Well, radio, T.V., and pictures really.

So we've lived through two world wars, two depressions.

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE

1988

I, ROSE SIMPSON give my  
permission to LORAINÉ HAYWOOD

to use this interview, or part of this interview, for  
research, publication and/or broadcasting (delete one of  
these if required) and for copies to be lodged in  
the UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

.....  
for the use of other bona fide researchers.

Signed R Simpson

Date 1/8/88

Interviewer Loraine Haywood

LORAINÉ HAYWOOD

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

Thursday 10am-12noon

MARGARET HENRY

TOPIC: THE EMANCIPATION AND RECOGNITION GAINED BY WOMEN IN THE  
TWENTIETH CENTURY.

Women at the turn of the century were expected to keep within what was considered to be a " woman's sphere ", but as the century progressed, woman began to broaden their interests and bring about changes to their advantage. As a result women's views and hardships were finally recognised. Women asserted their positions and formed various support groups and unions.<sup>1</sup>

Women at the turn of the century were not expected to have opinions on, or converse, nor were they ever consulted on Politics. One example of the exclusion of women can be noted in the mining communities, where women were expected to keep certain standards of behaviour and:

they [women] were not expected by the men or each other to take much interest in Politics or unionism; they were expected to accept the men's decisions about such matters.<sup>2</sup>

By 1908 although women, except for ~~Aboriginals~~, had won the vote; they were still largely excluded by men from political subjects and stating their own views. Men were dictating to wives for whom they should vote. They were excluded in that home was still deemed as the place for women.<sup>3</sup>

Along with the duties of the home came the duty of women to "populate or perish". This was seen as the woman's duty to her country to keep a white Australia. Any attempts by woman to limit children was viewed as selfish behaviour. The falling birth rate had been sensationalized which sparked off a Royal

1. M.M=Murchy, FOR LOVE OR MONEY, Ringwood, 1983. P.42

2. E.Windschuttle, WOMEN CLASS AND HISTORY, Melbourne, 1978. P.163.

3. M.M=Murchy, For... P.43.



Commission.<sup>4</sup>

Between 1904-1905 a Royal Commission, all male, was appointed to look into the falling birth rate, however, women had their own board of inquiry in the Woman's Political Education League. The bigoted and one-sided nature of this Royal Commission only published what would seem to enhance the populate or perish dogma. The Woman's Political Education League on the other hand, addressed other issues, which included: living standards and hardships faced by the women. This was balanced with the falling birth rate, although, the average family still had five children.<sup>5</sup>

The existence of organisations such as, the Woman's Political Education League, clearly demonstrates women's broadening interests and their need for a voice. Women openly conversed and challenged issues which had been for so long dominated by men.

Many organisations emerged from women's needs for support as there were no sympathies for women in a male dominated society, however, they both gained and lost in their pursuit for equality.

More women entered the workforce; they were used as cheap labour, but their conditions were appalling and so women formed their own unions. There were various struggles for better pay and conditions, until the war saw women doing men's work at just over half a man's wage.

With the coming of war came a new age for women, which

4. M.M. Murchy, For... P.P. 42-43

5. K. Daniels & M. Murnane, UPHILL ALL THE WAY, Brisbane, 1980.

opened the door to new fields and occupations, which before had been male-dominated. Women could now gain skills in all levels of industries. They were needed and accepted; limitations of gender subsided for a time. Women were hired to take over men jobs and so women were now able to work in Offices, but, they payed the price in low wages. This caused problems for the employer who hired women, then when the men returned after World War I, he could not afford to pay the higher wage.<sup>6</sup>

The depression saw a new depravation of women's rights to support themselves. Unemployed women and girls were not entitled to the dole and had to survive on rations. Those who did have work had their pay cut and had to make up for staff shortages. Aboriginal women with employment had to send part of their wage to the Department of Aborigines; what was left was not enough for self support.<sup>7</sup>

When World War II broke out women's groups were concerned that women should not be exploited. That some kind of employment should be guaranteed on the return of the men.<sup>8</sup>

The war also opened up the defense forces to women and new auxiliaries were formed to cater for their enlistment; this had finally broken the traditional barriers for so long held on a woman's place.<sup>9</sup>

Women were now involved in all major aspects of working life and so their role had changed whether men liked it or not

6. M.M=Murchy, ... P.66

7. K.Daniels ... P.P. 194-195.

8. IBID. P. 197.

9. M.M=Murchy, ... P.110.

Women are still branching out in all major fields, but, their will always be setbacks and resistance. Men still largely dominate Politics and until women can have a stronger voice in that area; there can never be equality.

The victories won by women in this century are inspiring and have benefited women today and no doubt women will continue to push for equality.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexander, Fred. AUSTRALIA SINCE FEDERATION, Melbourne. 1982.
- Alpin, Graeme. AUSTRALIAN EVENTS AND PLACES, Broadway. 1987.
- Clark, Manning. A SHORT HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA, Ringwood. 1986.
- Daniels, Kay & Murnane, Mary. UPHILL ALL THE WAY, Brisbane. 1980.
- Dixson, Miriam. THE REAL MATILDA, Ringwood. 1987.
- Grieve, Norma & Grimshaw, Patricia. AUSTRALIAN WOMEN FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES, Melbourne. 1981.
- McMurchy, Megan. FOR LOVE OR MONEY, Ringwood. 1983.
- Shaw, A.G.L. THE STORY OF AUSTRALIA, London. 1960
- Windshuttle, Elizabeth. WOMAN, CLASS AND HISTORY, Melbourne. 1980.