

WALKER, I. D. 1988.

Transcript of Interview
with Mr. R. L. Ford of
Clarence Town.

Early Settlement and Shipping

Taped interview recorded at Clarence Town
on 25th August 88.

Interviewer: Walker, I. D.
Raymond Terrace

Local History.

Open Foundation Course 1988.

Lecturer: Margaret Henry.

R.L. FORD: "The time or life of Henry and Maria Ford as settlers at William's River is an example of the life-style of all other settlers on the William River. If I can start with the beginning of Henry Ford, they came to the colony of New South Wales in 1849 from England. They sailed in May that year from Liverpool via Victoria with four children. They were originally from Somerset south of England and arrived in Australia in September 1849."

"Three months after their arrival their son James was born, so therefore Maria was pregnant for six months of the journey from England - in a 500 ton sailing ship. They were bounty immigrants and were domiciled in Sydney for a while until they were allocated to settlers who had work for them. Henry and Maria came to Fullerton Cove to a farmer and land owner John Smith (known as "gentleman Smith"). Their wage at that time was £10 per year plus provisions and Maria was employed as a house servant for John Smith.

"When they were there for ten months Henry Ford went to John Smith and said that he wanted an increase in wages, as he could not keep his family on the wages he was getting - and Smith said to him "listen what the hell can you do better than any other man" So Henry Ford and Maria within eight months from then had left and become tenant farmers on the property of William Lowe at St. Leonards and they resided there paying £1 an acre per annum and they had between 60-100 acres, the price varying from area to area for these tenant farmers on these properties. This was in the area of Glen Williams; it was near the land of William Miller and purchased by

Thomas Holmes who was also available for tenant farms.

Ford occupied the land there, they had a slab hut there with a dirt floor and they raised cattle mainly for dairy farming - milch cows, and the main crops were potatoes wheat or maize. They had all the problems relating to floods and drought. They survived and in 1869 Ford had the opportunity to buy the 1600 acres adjoining Glen Williams and St. Leonards. I would say that at the time he was at St Leonards that he had rambled about the district where he was a tenant farmer and found this land that had not been farmed so he bought it in 1869.

He moved there and called it Holbrook; it can be identified on the Dungog road and there he built a slab house with a dirt floor. This seemed at these times the cheapest way to provide a house for the family. So that is where he resided for the rest of his life from 1869 to 1905. At this time during that period the main crops were maize potato and some tobacco - maize, barley, wheat were the main crops which gave the settlers an income to pay off their property. The values of these properties were between £1 and £3 per acre.

It was a difficult time for most tenant farmers in many of the areas particularly the Dungog, Glen Williams and Clarence Town areas, where the crops ready for harvesting and then torrential rain would wash away not only the crops but the land. It did not give them much opportunity to survive and to make a living; most of the settlers having large families. These families were up to eleven children and some more. Henry Ford had eleven sons and four daughters and they survived. But there were others who found it difficult especially those on poorer class of land. The tenant farmer would

have been the back bone of the early settlements of the Williams River, more so than on the Hunter or Paterson.

I suppose the most important aspect to consider is that as Clarence Town developed shipping facilities were available and this allowed them to market their crops in Newcastle and Sydney and to get their produce to those markets in a short time. It was not until the end of the 19th century that dairy produce was sent to the markets."

WALKER: "Were the 'cream boats' used to come and pick up the cream?"

FORD: "That was not till later, that was after 1900. The settlers made their own butter on the farm. They milked the cows and set the milk out on dishes called 'settling trays' and let it stand over night, letting the cream rise to the top, which was then skimmed off into bowls and store it until they had a quantity of it, then make it into butter.

The way of keeping it was to dig a hole in the ground, lining it with cloth - a hessian bag and the cream in jars into the holes & keeping the bags wet. It helped the cream to butter more easily - it was their refrigeration. Then when they had churned the cream into butter it was shipped to Newcastle. This comes closer to 1900 than earlier. Because earlier the settlers main crops were grain and their main income was from grain. I don't know if Ford grew tobacco; I don't know if he smoked. [laughing]."

WALKER: "How did they get their produce down to Newcastle?"

FORD: By the boats, because everything

went by boats. They did not have a regular service until 1845-1850. The first regular service was by the "Tamar" and that was from Clarence Town direct to Sydney. A lot of boats came to Clarence Town from Morpeth picked up the produce and took it to Raymond Terrace where it was transhipped to a boat travelling to Newcastle or Sydney. Then when the direct service started it allowed the settlers produce to be in the markets within 24 hours; which was a big advantage.

The settlers would have experienced greater difficulties if they did not have the shipping service at Clarence Town. The shipping service also brought in household goods and food stuffs - sugar being brought in a 60lb bag and also flour in a bag. Mail came twice a week, it was delivered to Clarence Town so the settlers had to come in from the surrounding countryside to Clarence Town by horse or boat.

WALKER: "Did the mail come up by river?"

FORD: "No, the mail came by horseback from Raymond Terrace which was the more direct service and they crossed the Williams River down where the bridge is today. The big problem was at that time that the Williams was a tidal river and had up to a 4 foot rise in tide and if the mail person arrived there at the rivers peak, they had to wait until the tide went out before they could get across the river. They [the mail driver] had to travel at no less than 6 miles per hour, having only a given time to deliver the mail from Raymond Terrace. Leaving the mail at Clarence Town they continued on to Dungool; that was twice a week.

Ford's main mode of transport

was by either a dray, bullock waggon, a wagon or a spring car. He used these to bring his produce to Clarence Town which was mainly hides also cattle and pigs. They [the Fords] reared pigs, sometimes driving the pigs into town. I have heard of the settlers driving pigs from Dungog to Clarence Town to load on to the boats. This is towards the 1900's or late 1890's, so you can imagine what it was like driving a herd of pigs through the bush. People do not realize that in those early days to about 1865 that there were no roads. They were just bush tracks, the waggons themselves would just cut through the bush making the tracks and when the tracks got untrafficable the settlers would just move over a little bit further

Therefore in the worst condition with heavy rain because of the nature of the ground, it would become impassable. I know of the time there when ten waggons on the part of the Dungog road were unable to get through because of the bogged conditions it became untrafficable. The road conditions were non-existent, they would come along with a load of gravel and fill in the ruts, hoping they would get by for another twelve months. It was not until 1855-1860 that there was some improvement by the allocation of government money to provide for roading from Dungog to Clarence Town and then on to Hinton.

One of the incidents that I remember of Henry Fords time was when the bush rangers the Governor Brothers were in the area at Dungog. All the settlers had to be "on their toes" and it meant that one of the family, one of the sons, would have to stay behind at the home [to protect it] while the other members of the family were attending to their cattle.

WALKER: "Was the river the mainstay of the community?"

Ford: Yes, the river was most important to the livelihood of the settlers; not only around Clarence Town but also around Bungoog. It was vital for them to get their produce to market on time as it was very competitive at that time. The main crops around the Hunter, Paterson and even Sydney was particularly grain! It was not until 1835-1850 that sheep and wool became the major product, there was a demand for sheep and wool which I think which brought about the financial crisis of that period. A lot of settlers had gone to producing wool, so there was a reduction in the production of grain, therefore there was a demand for grain, so the settlers had to import grain.

I think you will find wherever settlement sprung up, the river and boats were their great advantage. It happened on the Paterson, Hunter and the upper reaches of the Hunter. The settlers brought their produce to Morpeth for shipment to the markets in Newcastle.

Walker: "Were the larger ships at Morpeth?"

Ford: Well, they were similar vessels as in Clarence Town. A lot of the agents were established at Morpeth and they would send their ships to Clarence Town to pick up the produce which was taken to Raymond Terrace where it was transhipped to Newcastle or Sydney in bigger boats. It was the reverse process when provisions and stores were being sent from Sydney to the upper Hunter. The stores were transferred from the larger ships at Raymond Terrace to smaller vessels. Some of the locals [at Clarence Town], the shopkeepers had their own rowing boats and would row to Raymond Terrace to pick up their own provisions.

I don't think we realize about Lowe as a shipbuilder. You need more than timber to build a ship. Lowe was here at Clarence Town and built the

"William the Fourth" between February 1831 and November 1831. Now, he had to get all his nails, sails and hardware (which could not be got at Clarence Town) so this hardware had to be brought by land. There were no boats traveling to Clarence Town that there is any record of in 1831.

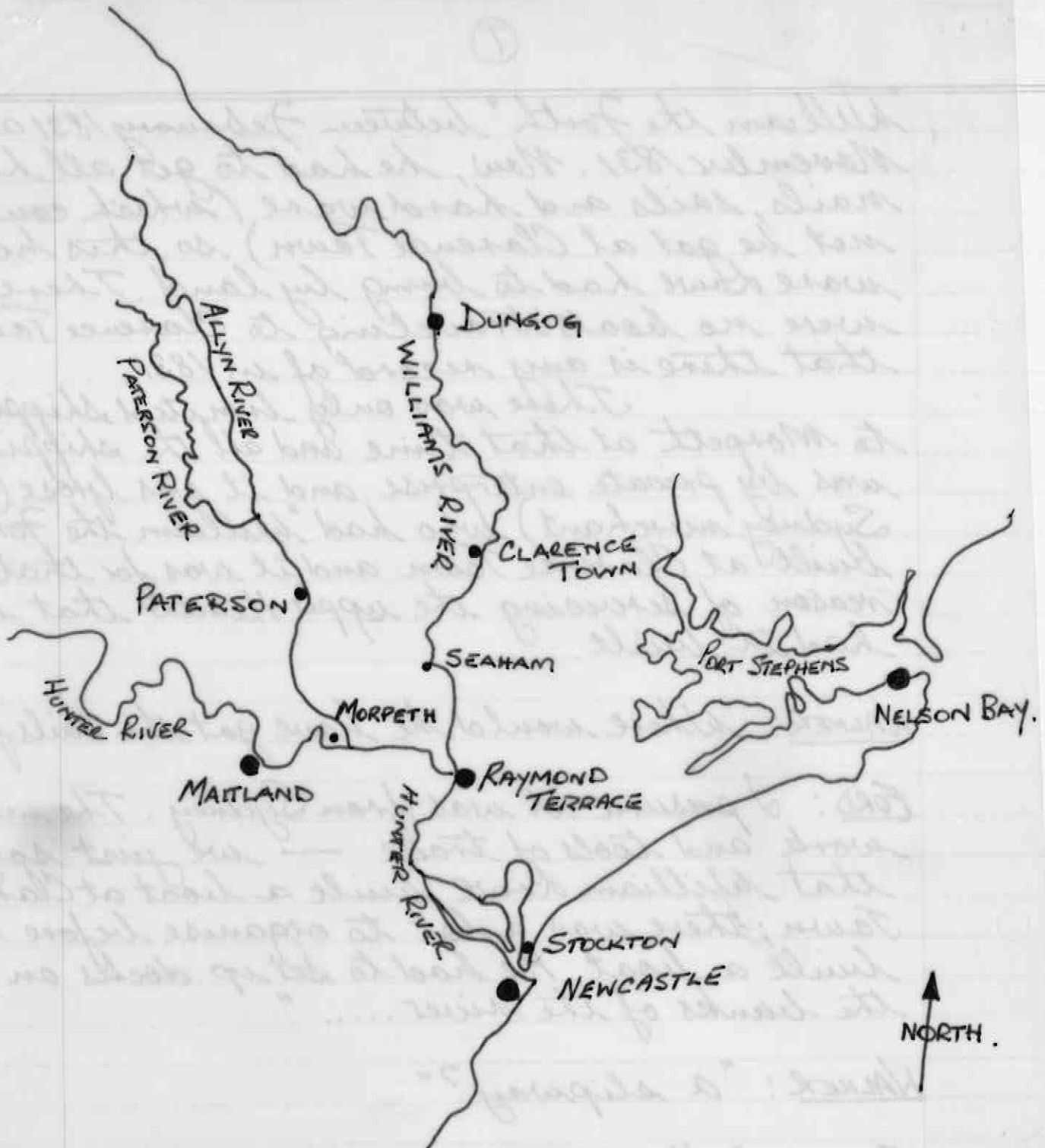
There was only limited shipping to Mospeth at that time and all the shipping was by private enterprise and it was those (a Sydney merchant) who had "William the Fourth" built at Clarence Town and it was for that reason of servicing the upper Hunter that he had it built.

WALKER: Where would he have got the sails from?

FORD: I presume it was from Sydney. The metal-work and tools of trade — we just say that William Dowle built a boat at Clarence Town; there was a lot to organize before he built a boat. He had to set up docks on the banks of the river..... "

WALKER: "a slipway?"

FORD: "Yes a slipway. I think he used the tides to launch his boats without any difficulty. I also believe that a few of the early shipbuilders did have some difficulty in launching their boats due to the tidal flow of the river. It was not easy to build boats or get materials to the site of construction. The same thing applies to the settlers with their homes; they had to be self-sufficient, they had to have that particular gift of initiative and apply themselves to earn a living in the circumstances that existed at the time. When you realize that all they had was trees and bush and had to cut their livelihood out of it, it shows their dedication, their ability and the will to survive."



IAN WALKER

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

WEEK BEGINNING 5TH SEPTEMBER 1988, TUES. 1pm-3pm

TOPIC: REGIONAL HISTORY

EARLY SHIPPING AND SHIPBUILDING
IN THE HUNTER VALLEY.

PRESENTED 6TH SEPT. 1988.

Summary of a taped interview with Mr. R. L. Ford.
of Clarence Town on the Williams River

Mr. R. L. Ford's great-grandparents Henry and Maria Ford left Liverpool England in May 1849 for Australia on the small ship "Victoria". Arriving in Sydney in September 1849 with their four children, Maria Ford gave birth to another child only three months later. She would therefore have been pregnant for six months while at sea in the small ship "Victoria".

They were bounty immigrants, that is they were allotted to work for already established settlers, who in turn would receive a bounty for employing them. Before being allotted, all bounty immigrants had to be satisfactorily passed by a board. This duly completed the Fords were sent to work for Mr "Gentleman" John Smith a farmer of Fullerton Cove near Stockton, on the Hunter River.

Henry Ford worked on Mr Smith's land and Maria as a servant in his house. Their yearly wage was £10, plus provisions. Eight months later, dissatisfied with the conditions of employment, Henry Ford asked for an increase in wages. This being refused he was obliged to leave and look for better prospects.

The Fords moved to the Williams River valley where they became tenant farmers on the land of Mr. William Howe; the renowned shipbuilder. They built a slab hut with a dirt floor which was to become their home. Henry Ford reared cattle and grew potatoes, wheat and maize; Maria milked the cows and made butter. The rental for this land was £1 per acre per annum.

By 1869 the Fords had accumulated enough money to buy the 1600 acre property adjoining their rented property. Calling this property Holbrook, they had to set about building another slab home. They settled and farmed this land from 1869 until 1905. Maria Ford had given birth to eleven sons and

four daughters, all of whom survived childhood.

The Fords managed to progress from tenant farming to owning their own land, though many others were not so fortunate. The Hunter Valley and in particular the Williams River districts were prone to severe flooding, which not only washed away the crops but also the soil. Many tenant farmers having large families could not afford to buy their own land, indeed they had great difficulty in just surviving.

The tenant farmer was the backbone of the early settlements along the Hunter Valley. However, they did depend to a great extent on the river for survival. Until 1865 there were no roads as such, only tracks which quickly became impassable in wet conditions. Understandably, the farmer therefore had to rely heavily on river transportation of his produce to the markets in Sydney and Newcastle.

It was people like William Lowe who created this transport. By establishing the first shipyard on the Williams River, building the first ocean going steam ship, he turned the Williams River into the first life line for the early settlers. The birth place of Australian shipbuilding, Clarence Town, became the major port and distribution point for the early farmer's produce.

EARLY SHIPPING AND SHIPBUILDING IN THE HUNTER VALLEY.

From early pioneering days the rivers have been the life line of the settlers and immigrants; they were the highways of today. The settlers depended on the rivers for nourishment and as a means of transportation. In the early days of settlement the rivers teemed with life, with steamers and punts that carried passengers provisions and produce to and from the many tiny settlements scattered throughout the Hunter Valley, and along the rivers.

In 1770, it was Captain James Cook R.N., sailing in his ship the "Endeavour," who noted the "clump of an island." However, it was not until some twenty seven years later, that Lt. John Shortland, pursuing escaped convicts, discovered a wide river estuary behind the "clump of an island". He named it Hunter's River.

On the 29th July 1801 Colonel William Paterson of the N.S.W. Corps and Ensign Francis Barallier, surveyor and engineer, left the large sailing vessel "Lady Nelson", and using smaller boats explored the upper reaches of the now Hunter River and its tributaries. It was Barallier who first rowed up the now Williams River from where it branches from the Hunter River at Raymond Terrace. He rowed to north of present day Clarence Town, to where he was "stopped by the falls", presumably the falls just beyond the bridge at Clarence Town.

This area that Barallier travelled through, was called "Ervinghi" ("the place of the black duck") by the local Aborigines and the river named "Durabang" by the Worimi people was now the Williams River. Surrounded by vast areas of top grade hard woods, the area soon began to be settled by ex-convict wood-getters and immigrant farmers. Being noted for its wonderful timbers, and as transportation particularly by water, was essential to the development of any district, it was natural

that these timbers be used for shipbuilding.

The district Erringhi, surrounded by top grade woods soon became a Village Settlement resulting in the establishment of the town of Clarence - Clarence Town - the birth place of Australian shipbuilding. Although the first recorded ship to be built in the Hunter Valley was the brig "Princess Charlotte" at Newcastle in 1819 (1.), it was the upper Hunter River and its tributaries that were to predominate as the major areas of shipbuilding. From 1831, shipbuilding and ship repairing was carried out in the areas of "Dockyard and Raymond Terrace on the Hunter River, Wallalong on the Paterson River and Eagleton and Clarence Town on the Williams River.

The first land grant within the now Clarence Town, was to Kerryhyme in 1825, a soldier of the 102nd Regiment and a Government District Constable. (2) This was the beginning of the birth place of Australian shipbuilding. It was in 1828 that the Scottish shipbuilder William Lowe arrived in Australia from Valparaiso, Chile, on the ship "Tiger". It was on the "Tiger" that he first met another shipbuilder James Marshall. They formed a partnership and eventually established a shipyard site on the Williams River at Clarence Town in 1830. This site was chosen, no doubt for its abundance of excellent hardwoods, iron bark and flooded gum available on both sides of the river. There was also a convenient small creek flowing into the Williams River which was used as a "wet dock" for vessels under repair. (3.)

On February 1831, Lowe and Marshall were contracted to build a steam vessel for Sydney merchant and trader Mr. J. Grose. The vessel was

1. WINDROS, HISTORICAL RECORDS OF NEWCASTLE, P.17.
2. R. L. FORD, CLARENCE TOWN ERRING - 1 TO RIVER PORT, NEWCASTLE, 1987, P.7.
3. H. LOWE, WILLIAM LOWE - SHIPBUILDER, NEWCASTLE, 1947, P.25.

required for trading between Sydney and the Hunter Valley. The ship was the "William the Fourth" which was launched on November the 14th 1831 becoming known as the first ocean-going steamship built in Australia. However, this has been disputed by Mr. Harold Lowe, who in his speech to the Newcastle and Hunter District Historical Society on the 25th September 1947, stated that she was not the first steam ship to be built in Australia. That honour he said belonged to the Sydney built "Surprise" which was launched on the 31st March 1831. (4)

The "William the Fourth" never the less made her maiden voyage from Sydney (where she was fitted out with her engines) to Newcastle in the week of 31st February 1832, under the command of Captain Taggart; the cabin fare being twenty shillings. Affectionately known as the "Puffing Billy" the ship was a "beautiful specimen of colonial enterprise" (5), continuing to trade around the east coast of N.S.W. and the Hunter River until she was sold to the Chinese river trade in 1862.

Following the "William the Fourth", Lowe and Marshall built the ship "Experiment" in 1832 for the miller Benjamin Singleton. It was rightly called the "Experiment", for her method of propulsion was by horses. Some difficulty was experienced at first with the horses, but afterwards they made the ship "move along at some six miles per hour." (6) The "Experiment" was followed by the "Earl Grey" in 1833, the "Ceres" (1835) and the "George" (1836). In 1836 they dissolved the partnership with William Lowe continuing to build ships at the Deptford yard at Clarence Town until it closed in 1860. (7)

One mile from Raymond Terrace near

4. H. LOWE, WILLIAM LOWE - SHIPBUILDER, NEWCASTLE, 1947, P.27.

5. SYDNEY GAZETTE, 31 FEBRUARY 1832.

6. H. LOWE, WILLIAM LOWE - SHIPBUILDER, NEWCASTLE, 1947, P.28-29.

7. IBID. P.31.

the junction of the Williams and Hunter Rivers another Scottish shipbuilder John Korff established the Dockyard in the late 1830's. The first steam ship built there was the "Victoria" launched in 1840, however his most renowned ship was the "Kangaroo" which was built of flooded gum and was so well built that it was still running after 60 years service.

On the Paterson River Edward King, a farmer with no shipbuilding experience, decided due to the high charges for freightage, to buy the ship "Dart" from the M'Pherson shipyard on the Williams River and soon began to monopolize a large share of the river trade. Unfortunately the ship was taken on an unauthorized journey by its captain, to the North of Queensland and the Coral Sea for "blackbirding" (selling natives) to Queensland. Edward King chartered another ship and found the captain of the "Dart" and a terrified cargo; he sold the tainted ship immediately. (8.)

King then established his own shipyard at Wallalong on the Paterson River and without any experience in shipbuilding constructed one of the biggest ships of her kind in the colony. He named it the "Australian Sovereign", a 353 ton hargue which was 134 feet long and launched her in February 1872. She made her maiden voyage to Hong Kong with King and his sons as part of the crew.

Bagleton on the Williams River approximately 6 miles north of Raymond Terrace became another major shipbuilding centre in the 1860's, when William M'Pherson established a shipyard there. He built the "Emma and Alfred" (1861), the "Flying Eagle" (1871), the "Clyde" (1874) and the "Favourite" in 1878. In 1880 with James Roderick they built the "Cairndhu", then Roderick took

over the yard, followed by Robert Whishead in 1884. More than thirty vessels were built in that period at Eagleton, all constructed from the local hard woods.

The Hunter River between Morpeth and Newcastle was unsuited for sailing vessels, hence the importance of the steaming vessels. Ships trading the river system were small, usually under 100 tons, and therefore could navigate the river as far as Morpeth, which then became the major port of the Hunter Valley. These small steam ships maintained a reliable service to Morpeth and other settlements prolonging the role of the rivers, as the principle transport arteries in the Hunter Valley. They provided an alternative to the costly and laborious efforts of the government, to build an adequate road across the swamps that separated Newcastle and the Upper Hunter districts. The town of Morpeth owes its existence to the steam paddle ship.

Captain Clague of Raymond Terrace told the Newcastle Herald on February 1973 in an article "46 years in Live Boats" that the small "puffers" like the "Matilda" and the "Kipple" carried passengers and produce back and forward to the river ports. The produce was then taken by bullocky to Dungog and surrounds. (9) The banks of the Hunter River and its tributaries were dotted with farms and mills. Ships like the large "Namoi" transported hay from the valley, however as her draught was so deep, she had to be serviced by smaller boats like the steamer "Allyn" which would pick up the hay along the river banks and load it onto the "Namoi" at the port of Morpeth. Cream boats were another stage in river transportation. These boats went to the creameries at Hinton and Raymond Terrace and were joined by the mail paddle steamers in 1832, running a regular service from Sydney to Newcastle to the Upper Hunter.

Shipbuilding and the commercial

9. NEWCASTLE MORNING HERALD, 14 FEBRUARY 1973.

(b)

use of ships has been continuous in the Hunter Valley for 157 years. While there have been many individual shipyards, none have been in continuous operation throughout that period, but there has always been at least, some ship-building activity taking place in the Hunter Valley.

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