

INNISVALE

— the story of the property by Noel McDonald

Place as published in 1985 & 1995

From "The History of Ewen & Rachel McLean & Descendants" by Jill McDonald (p 169 & 170) which was initially published in 1985 and then republished in 1995 as part of "The History of Donald & Christina McLean & Their Descendants".

Noel McDonald wrote the Innisvale story in the 1970s. Since then there have been changes in rail and other services.

Innisvale is on the Horsham to Balmoral road five miles south of Noradjuha and twenty-two miles from Horsham. The road cuts the property in half north to south, and a side road bisects *Innisvale* from east to west. Its history started when Ewen McDonald brought his wife Rachel and nine of the family from Strathalbyn in South Australia to settle.

The Victorian Government had passed a land settlement Act in 1869, surveyed roads and blocks of approximately 320 acres, and had opened up the country for selection. Ewen and five of the family selected blocks in the district at various stages. Ewen and Charles' application for a licence was dated April 6, 1874. A married woman could not select a block at that time. The members of the family who did select were Donald William, Margaret, Vlary, Charles and Flora. Three years later Margaret forfeited her title, possibly to marry, and Christina Cameron, William's future wife, reselected it. At first the address was Natimuck, with a 'c', unlike today's Natimuk. A few years later the postal department left a loose bag at the homestead and the address changed to Carchap Loose Bag. Ewen, Flora and James' blocks were in Carchap parish, Charles' in Lowan and the others in Nurrabiel. At this stage the farm was worked as a family unit.

Eventually the girls married and the boys took over or bought their blocks. William acquired Flora's, and Christina's by marriage. Charles acquired Mary's and James' blocks. Each selector had to do a certain amount of improvements on their block each year to hold it, and after about three years, could apply to lease it. Eventually they could purchase it outright. They also had to, where possible, build a dwelling and live on their block or show why they did not live there. Reasons might be that the land was not tenable or 'living with my father'. All the blocks the family selected, except William's and Flora's, had a house of some sort at one stage.

Some years later the dwelling on Charles' block was converted for a while to a part-time school, Lowan South. Some of his family attended, alternating with Carchap school. The block is still known as 'the school paddock.' The area was once densely covered with buloke and gum trees, doubtless with a blazed trail of cuts from tree bark, to Noradjuha. The nearest railhead was Stawell, sixty miles away. The railway line was extended to Horsham in 1879 and then to Noradjuha in 1887. In 1912 it was extended to Jallumba and eventually through to Hamilton and Portland. The line followed the road. The road was not wide enough so authorities acquired parts of the paddocks; so now each block adjoining the railway is a little smaller than when first selected.

The blocks adjoining the McDonald farm were selected at various stages by Cooks and Sinclairs on the east; 'Jallumba' Jack McDonald and Donald McDonald, neither related to Ewen's family, to the south; Hobbses and Walters; and to the west. Andersons and Tuckers, brothers of W.I. Tucker.

William and his family lived in the house on Christina's block and called it *Blackwood*, perhaps choosing the name because of the blackwood wattle trees around it. The trees were probably planted, because they do not seem natural to the area. Some time later William acquired a farm in the Little Mallee area on the main road between Noradjuha and Horsham. He worked at clearing it while still living at *Blackwood*. Eventually he sold his blocks to

Charles and shifted his house to the Mallee farm which he still called Blackwood. The original house block was known for years after as D.W's.

By this time Charles owned the whole farm and was living in the house on James' block. Ewen and Rachel were still living in the original house which was eventually demolished, it is believed by burning. Charles built them a two-roomed house on the same site. Charles demolished James' house and built a new one in 1910. The woolshed stayed in its position on Ewen's block.

The farm to the north of Charles' block, two blocks amounting to 640 acres selected by Andersons, was bought at some stage; also the block which George Tucker selected on the west of Andersons. This block has always been known as *Gillicks*. Apparently Gillick bought it from Tucker. After Charles' son Charlie, Charles William Stanley McDonald, had married and taken over the farm, he purchased the farm on the east side selected by Cooks, about 800 acres.

In the early 1940s, D.W's block was sold to N.W. McDonald, no relation, and a few years later he also bought Cooks' and lived in the house there. His son Neil built a two-storey house on the site of the original *Blackwood*. This farm has been sold since to a neighbour on the west of *Innisvale*, Max Jackman. This sale reduced the farm to 2,880 acres.

In the 1890s, the West Wimmera Waterworks Trust constructed a channel from the Grampians to Natimuk and Grass Flat. This channel runs through the property and all dams can be filled from it. The channel ran all the year until the 1920s but later ran only in the summer, for two or three months. The water is only for stock and domestic purposes now, but in the earlier years there were quite a few gardens and orchards irrigated from it. Most of the original dams were fenced with post and rail, probably to keep out kangaroos and emus. The blocks in Carchap west of the main road were higher than the channel and water had to be carted in dry years. In the early 1970s the supply was changed and all dams on the blocks could be filled from the channel.

When first selected, the land was in its natural state, densely covered with trees and grass, the trees being mainly buloke, grey box here and there, red gum around the odd swamp, as well as wattle and native cherry. The buloke was the main tree for fencing because the wood was very hard, yet easy to split. It has been told that one year 1,000 rails were split from Anderson's block for fencing. The box tree made good posts too but they were much harder to split. These trees have almost all died out, mainly because white ants attack them.

Horse feeding and watering troughs were made from box trees, the feeders being hollow logs cut into lengths, and troughs being hewn out of solid trees. The natural grass was mainly wallaby with spear grass, rushes, swamp grass and natural clovers. The land on *Innisvale* is fairly flat and consists of loamy rises with heavy black ground in patches; but flat clayey, crab-hole, crab-banky ground predominates. This flat ground becomes very wet in winter or wet years but grows clover and grass very well in spring. This land lends itself well to fine wool and cereal growing. Wool from *Innisvale* always sells well at Geelong and has often topped the district, and on occasions the sale.

Wheat has been grown since the land was cleared but crop areas have increased with the advent of tractors. Since the introduction of subterranean clover and topdressing of land with superphosphate, wheat yields have lifted considerably. The highest yield was in 1968 when 64.5 bushels an acre came off 150 acres in the school paddock. At the other extreme, the lowest was in 1967 when three bushels an acre came off the same paddock. In the same year, 1967, fifty acres of wheat won the Nalimuk wheat competition. It has been told that sometime before 1900 a crop of wheat in the school paddock cleaned up eight four-bushel bags to the acre.

Before the advent of the header-harvester the wheat was harvested by a stripper which removed only the heads and part of the stalk. This was gathered in a box behind the comb and emptied on to the ground at intervals. A winnower was then brought to the piles and then forked the mixture of grain and chaff into the winnower where it was separated. There are frequent references to winnowing in Ewen's diaries.

Children are taken to primary school at Noradjuha by car, and by school bus to the high and technical schools at Horsham. The railway line which follows the main road was continued from Noradjuha to Jallumba and Toolondo and beyond in 1912. Jallumba is the closest station to *Innisvale*. Wheat is carted to Noradjuha, and wool and oats to Jallumba. This line had a three-days-a-week passenger- goods train for years but gradually the service decreased to the one goods train a week of the 1970s. Some time after the line reached Toolondo a railway house was built at Jallumba for the man maintaining the tracks, his wife being station mistress. About this time the Postmaster-General's Department connected the local farms to a telephone exchange at Jallumba and established a post office with the station mistress in charge. It was only a small exchange and was open from 9 am to 6 pm. Sometimes the people would be shifted and folk would have to learn to operate the exchange. The mail service was by train three days a week but when the children started school we transferred the postal address to Noradjuha. With the exchange in the railway house, postal operation depended on having the house occupied. When the railways retrenched some of the workforce in the 1950s the railway position became vacant, and so of course did the telephone job. As a result subscribers were without a phone for over twelve months until they were included with a new automatic exchange at Nurrabiel.

In 1962, the State Electricity Commission connected mains power, replacing a 32-volt lighting plant which had replaced kerosene lamps and Tilley lights. Originally, Charles' house had a pressure gas light system, but because of faults in later years it was not used.

- SOURCE : This extract was from page 169 of "History of Ewen & Rachel McDonald & Descendants" by Jill McDonald which was originally published in 1985. It was republished as part of "The History of Donald & Christina McLean and Their Descendants" in 1995.
- COLONIALISTS : Christina and Donald McLean and their ten children migrated from Argyllshire to South Australia in 1837. This was in the earliest years of the colony. The McLeans initially settled near Adelaide where they grew the first wheat crop in SA. Then in about 1840 they pioneered the Strathalbyn area. There are now well over 20,000 descendants spread across Australia and elsewhere.
- CHANGES : Please contact us with additions, corrections or suggestions about any part of this family tree.
- CONTACT : Visit our website www.christinaanddonaldmclean.com or Strathalbyn Museum phone 08 8536 2656 to discover more about your family – and about privacy and copyright.