

Group Settlement: one house stolen please save what we can

Grandad John

My senses sharpen as I head towards consciousness. I feel the cold all the way to the tiny bones of my toes. I scream inside my head at the bitterness of the cold icy wind creeping in through the windows and doors, into my bed and bones.

I feel my thin blanket being snatched away from me; I lose all the remaining heat from my body. A gruff voice with a heavy highlander accent shouts at me to get up and do my chores before I go to school or else I'll have a beating that temporarily puts fear in my heart, but not long enough to prevent the next beating.

I force myself to get up, every limb aching with cold; I follow my grandfather Jock out to the paddock where my brother Dick was waiting for me. Together we set out for the cow paddock with our small pails. We had to milk each individual cow by hand. We lean on the cow's warm flanks trying to gain as much heat as possible while the cold milk squirts into the pails. After at least two hours we headed back to the house. We cleaned out the pails and daringly pinched fruit from the orchard. We dream lazily of sitting inside the house in front of the small black fire place with a mug of hot chocolate in our hands- if we could ever be so lucky as to achieve that luxury.

After finishing our chores we headed on our way to school. It is a 5km walk to school, through bushes and thorns and the ground covered with thick, pointy and sharp sticks. No more is our main problem a lack of heat even though we are still chilled to the bone but the scratches up and down our arms and legs, the blood oozing from cuts and black bruises forming. By the time we reach the school we have gained little heat if any at all and gained cuts, scratches and bruises.

About two hours into school my brother Dick and I become very bored, there isn't anything exciting about learning in a small group with a large range of ages. We scribble and doodle on our books and send silly, nonsense notes to each other. Unfortunately the teacher notices us exchanging notes and surprisingly enough wasn't very happy about it. She raved on about how we smart kids who were wasting away our education and how we were lucky to even be in school in these times with the depression. Luckily we had some ice in our bag (nicked from the cooler) as we had thought something like this might happen, and boy did she give us a beating. My hand changed colour from red to purple to black. I don't how I managed to write the rest of the day with the addition of several other beatings. Just because Dick and I get bored easily is no reason to deserve a beating as far as I'm concerned.

Dick and I rush outside the second school ends to avoid any further punishment. The day is slightly warmer than it was on our way to school. Even that extra bit of warmth made a difference we weren't worried about lack of heat anymore only about acquiring more wounds that the forest raked across our limbs. After around ten minutes later trudging through the wood, I lose my shoe. I groan to myself as I think of the punishment that

punishment my feet would not be the same again. Dick still has blisters the size of footballs on his feet from last time he lost his shoes.

Reading the Journal

I pause in reading the notes from my grandfather's journal. I never knew the half of what I just read. The Alexander Bridge area is very close to my heart as it is the place where my late grandfather grew up. It also represents the lifestyle of the early settlers. However I don't ever remember seeing Augusta the way my grandfather described it.

Grandad John

Dick and I snuck out of class and slid around the front of the building. The building in front of us was the old community hall. This particular hall was small but sometimes 120 people are in there at once. The school hall is the oldest building near the school. The Jarrah panelling gives off an almost burnished effect when the sun strikes through the windows in the late afternoon.

Dick pulls a box of matches from his pocket (stolen from grandfather Jock). I rush over to him and we stare dumbstruck at the box, but only for a few seconds. We grab a match and start messing around with it. We move further away over to the other side of the hall near the hay bales. We light another match but as fighting to hold the match ourselves drop it. We stare unbelievably down at the match, which continues to burn. Suddenly the hay bales are alight and the old hall. The fire creeps steadily up becoming stronger in power and might. We run full pelt to our classroom and skid to a halt so fast I swear I should have fallen over, I had never run so fast in my life. Without thinking I suddenly blurted out that the hall was on fire and that it was only an accident and that we hadn't meant any harm.

The beating we got for that was so horrible I don't want to remember. I think it was first and last time I actually felt I deserved it. We stood there gloomily and guiltily wincing every now and then at a particularly hard slap. The walk home was the most miserable time I have had for longer than I can remember. One of the most miserable times I have ever experienced.

The next however I was running around jumping off the bridge into the cold, icy Blackwood River and riding the ponies over the river. I remember chasing the Kangaroos on the ponies when Dick ran into a tree; it wasn't very pleasant to watch.

Reading the Journal

So now you and I know the life of the early settlers and grandparents or maybe parents. The houses and communities they lived in and the hardships they had to deal with. Until last year I had not seen the property my grandfather grew up in. To this day I have not seen the house in which he, his brother Dick, his grandfather Jock and his grandmother Jessie lived in. The reason why;

One day my family and I go down to the farm where my grandfather lived in because it is for sale and we were considering buying it. Unfortunately though when we arrived there was no house. All that remained was a concrete slab and a toilet a few metres away. We had not be informed of this and as far as we know nothing had been done too fix it or call to justice the people who did this terrible act which has been devastating to all my family as it was one of the only memories we had of my grandfather; the naughty school boy who lived with his brutal grandfather and his semi-kind grandmother. The boy who had burnt down the old hall with his brother.

The perfect scene of the two boys chasing the Kangaroos through the forest and splashing across the river on their ponies. Jumping off the Alexander Bridge into the Blackwood River, is there no more because of the damage done to this wonderful sacred land of our ancestors the early settlers; we must pay the due respect to the Alexander Bridge area and the people who once lived there. For I cannot imagine that scene anymore, it has disappeared forever. For what I have lost I would like to think that something close to what I remember can be saved. I have provided a picture of the timber mill houses at Davies Road. This is the closest thing I can relate to the house that my grandfather grew up in, but what I imagine I know is far from accurate.



