

Mike Heal presented his talk Tuesday 1 August 2017. Below is his summary.



“Hoddle Timber Yards” Charles and Amy Hall – Alfred (Alf) Hall

Charles and Amy Hall (nee Standfield), grew up in Daylesford, and were married in 1897. They had several moves before moving to Hoddle in 1899. Charles and his brother, Alfred (Alf) were in the timber business, and started a Wood Splitting business called, “Hoddle Timber Yards” situated close to the Hoddle Railway Station, mainly supplying mine timber which was sent by train to many parts of Victoria.

Hoddle at the time was mainly a forest with huge areas of timber, there were no roads as such and all timber was brought in by bullock teams and horse. Some 40 odd men worked for Charles and Alf, and a settlement was built up the east side of the station, on blocks leased by Charlie Hall. Charlie took advantage of the timber on these blocks and the wood splitters were put to good use. All timber was split on contract bases and as with all work at that time, it was hard to make a living.

When timber became scarce around the station, a tram line was built up the Bald Hill, starting close to the old bridge (near the station), heading up the north side, now Nicoll road, when close to the top, it then headed west along the side of the hill, passing through an allotment leased by Charlie, finally ending close to Battery Creek.

This tramway would take the wood splitters deep into the forest, and at the end of the day return with the timber, and men. This lasted up to the start of World War One when labour became scarce, and the mining industry was in a

decline. Charles then looked to new horizons, and entered into contracts in Victoria, doing road works, and building bridges. He won a local contract in 1909 to build a Vermin Proof fence at the National Park, Wilson's Promontory. This fence started at the South West Corner of Corner Inlet, (Miller's Landing) and followed a line running south west passing the Vereker Ranges, and finishing at the Darby River near the Chalet. It was 7-foot-high and around 7 miles long, costing approximately £1144.00

In 1906 Charles and Amy built a new home on their farm 2 miles east of Hoddle, towards Foster, and it was known as St Leonard, after the town where they once lived, and over the years their family had grown to 7 children, five born in Foster.

In 2014 the Foster R.S.L. lost their Secretary, with the passing of Alan Steele. Alan's mother, Elsie was the eldest child of Charlie and Amy Hall, and when his house was sold a box of negatives were found in the back shed. The new owners recognised the historical value attached to these and passed them on to the Foster Historical Society.

The Society decided to invest their money into getting some developed, and now for the first time we have a pictorial social history of the Hoddle area including the timber splitters from 1904 to 1909.

With the help of the descendants of Charles, Amy and Alf Hall we were able to put this brief history together.

Summary of Mike McCarthy's Talk, Tuesday 5 September 2017
by Rosemary Francis, based on notes taken at the talk.

'In the Shadow of the Prom: Tramways at Sealers Cove.'

In a meticulously researched talk supplemented with detailed maps, Mike related the story of the timber cutting industry on Wilsons Promontory on the Sealers Cove run from 1849-1858 and in the Franklin river and Muddy Creek area from 1853- 1873, (later to become the town of Toora).

It is the story of the Turnbull brothers, John, Robert, George and Patrick, William Buchanan and others, who identified an opportunity to supply blue gum logs to the Melbourne market for railway sleepers. With the introduction of railways, the colony required greater supplies of timber for railway sleepers. He explained that in 1850 Victoria with a population of approximately 250,000, had no sawmill, so had to import its timber. In 1853 the first steam railway was under construction in Melbourne, from Melbourne to Port Melbourne.

Mike traced the efforts of these men to keep their business ventures viable when they did not always have the necessary capital to keep them afloat and were declared bankrupt. He described the workings of the Sealer's Cove sawmill, which had been imported from Scotland in 1852 and assembled by Scottish engineer Peter McMillan and McMillan's son-in-law, William Buchanan. As a result of fluctuations in demand, after June 1855, the Sealers Cove output decreased markedly and it was put up for sale, but no buyer was forthcoming. In 1856 Buchanan leased the mill from Turnbull and tendered for the Melbourne to Geelong railway, which lasted from July 1856 to December 1857. In March 1858 the mill ceased regular operation. Earlier, Buchanan had leased the sawmill plant on the Franklin River, which had arrived in September 1853 on the *Sagittarius* on the initiative of James Dobson and Septimus Martin of Port Albert. It proved to be a shortlived project. It was erected by September 1854 and by 2 October the first lot of timber was despatched. Its last major shipment was in January 1855, resulting in the mill ceasing operation and Dobson declared bankrupt.

It was a challenge to follow the see-sawing of ownership and bankruptcy. In August 1856, Captain Thomas from Williamstown took the leases from Martin and Dobson, but by May 1857 Thomas

was bankrupt, and Martin and Dobson resumed the mill. In June 1857 the mill was again leased to Buchanan, but by May 1858 it was sold to George and Patrick Turnbull. They also purchased the Sealers Cove mill, which was moved to the Muddy Creek location, and was in operation from June 1858.

The Geelong to Ballarat railway was a huge job, with the government investing in the area by providing mooring buoys. The Turnbills also acquired 640 acres of land east of Muddy Creek and continued their timber cutting business there. They extended the Agnes River Tramway to access the Blue Gum, but their debts increased. The Mill re-opened in 1861 when Buchanan returned after a stint in gaol because of bankruptcy. Various disasters occurred, which left Buchanan destitute. The mill was offered for sale in 1873, but there were no buyers and it just decayed. The Mangrove Pre-emptive Right was sold to Stanley Sheppard in 1884. This became the town of Toora.