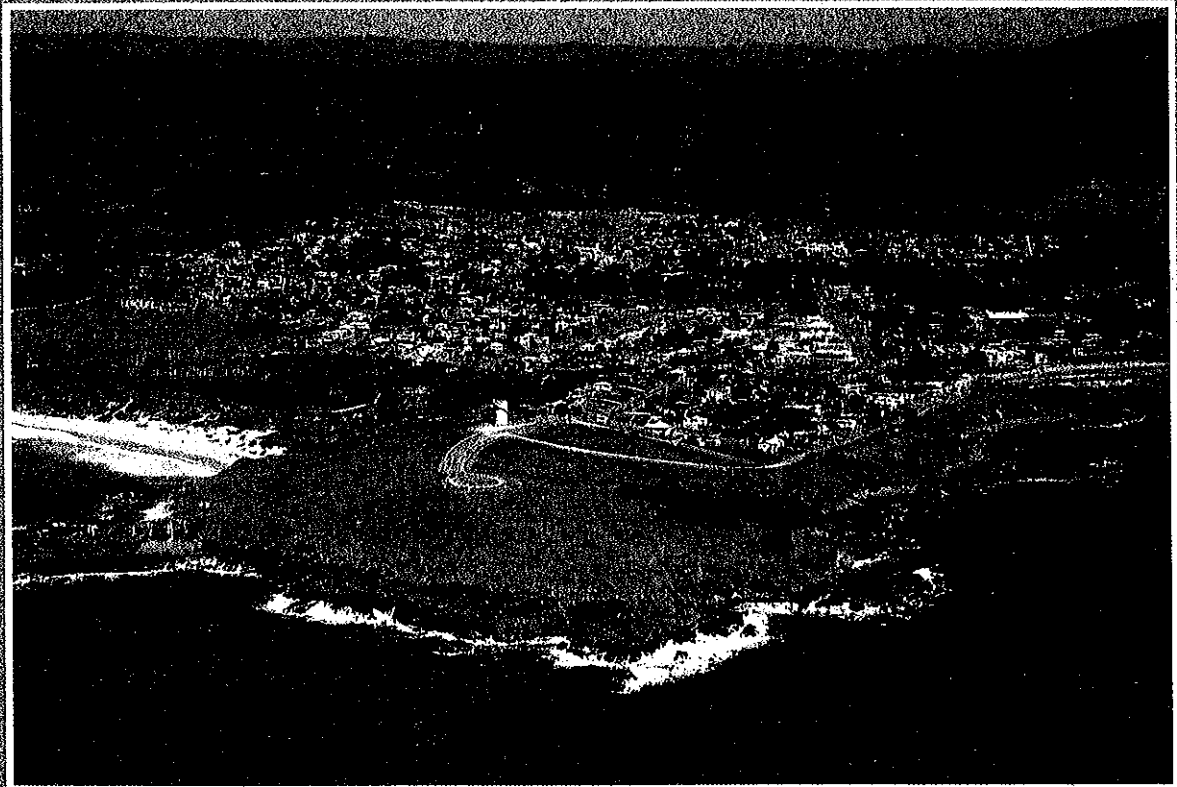


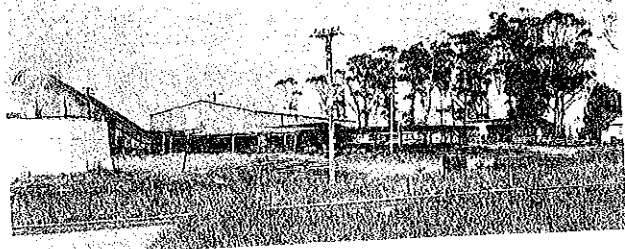
# WOOLGOOLGA

THE HISTORY OF A VILLAGE  
MID-NORTH COAST N.S.W.



NEIL YEATES

Fig 11.4: Parbury, Henty & Co's mill on the highway, 1-2 km south of Woolgoolga in 1981. This was started by Herb Clouten as a case mill in the 1940s and later operated by Sid Moller who sold out to the present owners.<sup>15</sup>



Flooded Gum (*Eucalyptus grandis*) has always been the favoured species for case timber. At the height of demand for cases the supply of these beautiful trees fell short of demand. To meet the shortage some Blackbutt (*E. pilularis*) and Blue Gum (*E. saligna*) were used, especially for the thick end-pieces of cases; but supplies (thinnings) of Flooded Gum from planted areas are now sufficient to meet demand.<sup>112</sup>

### Start of the banana industry

Prior to 1930 only occasional attempts had been made to grow bananas at Woolgoolga. Established settlers such as Denys Younger grew small plots; but no plantations had been established on a commercial scale.

Starting in 1929-30, however, new-comers arrived to set up banana farms. Among these were J.H. Malley, Ralph Warby from the Richmond, and C.O.R. (Charles) Newman. Numerous local families were quick to join in this new venture, and some of the early ones (who obtained their land from Billy Firth) were Walter Burke, Alf Woldseth, Adam Woolfe and George Rogers.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile more new arrivals joined the rush: William Unwin (Snr) at Double Crossing and the Holloway brothers south of Double Crossing in 1932, to name but two families. As the depression was at its height, the Forestry Commission also encouraged the settlement of banana farmers by offering blocks of forest land for rental under what were termed occupation permits.<sup>116</sup> These were renewable annually, and among those who participated in the scheme were Ockie Featherstone (Woolgoolga born), Albert Younger and Francis Hofmeier (Woolgoolga pioneer families), and Ewart O'Donnell (a new-comer). Ted Toovey also had a Crown lease.<sup>15</sup> Occupation Permit No 4235 issued to A.V. Younger and F.W. Hofmeier on 1 September 1932 is now in the possession of the Morcom family.<sup>65</sup> The tattered and much amended document shows the changed conditions and various transfers which occurred down the years until Jeffrey Morcom took over from Charles James Lee in 1962.

In quick time, nearly everyone in Woolgoolga who could gain access to land was, it seemed, growing bananas! To illustrate the point, nobody is listed as a banana grower in the 1926 Directory, yet by 1938 (the next issue available to the writer) far more persons are listed as banana growers than for any other calling, including all other types of farming. Still more impressive, perhaps, is the fact that in 1935, a mere five years after the first commercial plantings, 37,000 cases of bananas were shipped from Woolgoolga jetty (see page 179).

The depression has been mentioned as contributing to this phenomenal rush into banana growing; but the decimation of plantations further north (Richmond-Tweed and S-E Qld) by bunchy-top disease also exercised some influence.

Bunchy-top first struck in 1922. Its cause was then unknown but its effect was devastating. Within three years, 90% of the areas to the north producing bananas had gone out of production, and at least 800 plantations had been deserted.<sup>114</sup> The disease was eventually proved to be a virus, transmitted by the banana aphid. Control called for the drastic measure of killing off every plant in the deserted plantations as well as every diseased plant on the farms which continued in operation. Recovery was therefore a lengthy and disheartening process, so it is little wonder that the move to "clean" land, such as at Woolgoolga and Coffs Harbour, occurred. Nor is it surprising that the Department of Agriculture has, ever since, maintained strict quarantine regulations to protect growers.

Typical of those who came to Woolgoolga as a consequence of bunchy-top were the Newmans. Charles Newman had been growing bananas between Ballina and Lismore from about 1910. Then came bunchy-top which wiped him out in the late 1920s.<sup>115</sup> He tried dairying at Alstonville for a time, but moved to Woolgoolga in 1930 and planted bananas on land which he bought from Jack Wilkinson. The farm was just below (east of) Knobby's, at the far end of what is now Newman's Road. Charles and his wife Nellie lived with their eldest son Gilbert on the S-E corner of Scarborough and Hastings Streets. In 1932, when the plantation was coming into production, they were joined by sons Peter and Harold who had been running the dairy. (Bob, the youngest, was still of school age.)



Fig 11.21: Governor's Mounted Escort, Grafton, 1946 or 1947: (l to r) Snr Const Ward, Lawrence; Sgt Freebody, South Grafton; Const 1/c Fulwood, Ulmarra; and Snr Const Marsh, Woolgoolga (photo<sup>13</sup>).

claim two records: the most senior Senior Constable in the Police Force; and the Police Officer to have served longest in any one location. On his retirement he was awarded the Queen's medal "for exemplary Police Service".

If further proof were required of Cec Marsh's liking for Woolgoolga — and that he made no serious enemies — his continuing presence, after 21 years of retirement should be sufficient! Cec still knows all but a very few newcomers, and he still helps people who grew accustomed to seeking his advice on problems, or filling in complicated government forms.

As a member of the local community, Cec also played a part in local government and he served for a three-year term on the Shire Council. He also became involved in planting trees, building shelter sheds, and raising funds with fellow members of the Beach Trust.



Fig 11.22: C.W. Marsh (left) receiving a presentation from Stan Holloway, chairman of Woolgoolga Urban Committee, as a token of public appreciation of Cec's long service to Woolgoolga, on his retirement in 1960 (photo<sup>130</sup>).

## Country Directory: (Woolgoolga)

1938: 257 miles north, steamer or rail Coffs Harbour, thence motor 17 miles. Telephone and Money Order Office. Population 1,500.

Allen Harry, banana grwr  
Alverson Fdk, banana grwr  
Alverson Jas, banana grwr  
Bain Stan, banana grwr  
Cave Miss, schl tchr  
Cavey A J, mtr gar  
Davey Harry, banana grwr  
Douglas Stan, selector  
Edwards Jos, forest ovrsr  
Eggert A E, Sea View Htl  
Eggins Edwin, farmer  
Elvy Arth C, farmer  
Ely Wm, milk vendor & dry farmer  
Firth Wm, banana grwr  
Furphy Wm, mtr gar  
Gentle O C, carrier  
Gordon Wm, grazier  
Graham Con, whfng  
Gray Andw, farmer  
Hannel Miss, schl tchr  
Hofmeier Harry, banana grwr  
Hofmeier Jno, farmer  
Hofmeier Mrs E, frtr  
Holloway Edwd, banana grwr  
Hughes Wm  
Johnson Bros, sawmill  
Jones Jas, banana grwr  
Malley Jno, banana grwr  
Marsh C W Pol Const i-c  
Morgan W, banana grwr  
Murphy Mrs Jane, grwr  
Newman Chas O, frtgrwr  
Newman Geo, postmstr  
North Coast S N Co Ltd  
Northern Timber Co  
O'Sullivan Patk, farmer  
Parbery Duncan C, shpg agt  
Redpath Wm, farmer

Richards Cecil, banana grwr  
Richards W, store  
Robertson Benj J, teamster  
Robertson Ernst J, sawyer  
Rogers Ern E, asst whrfng  
Saxton & Sons Ltd A C, sawmills & timber mchts  
Schofield Robt C, farmer  
Simms -, tchr  
Skinner Jas & A, farmers  
Skinner Gabriel, farmer  
Skinner J H, dairy farmer  
Slater Herbt, banana grwr  
Salter Thos M, teamster  
Small Mrs Ada J, mus tchr  
Stone Oscar L  
Thomspson Har, banana grwr  
Thompson J C  
Thompson Jas, banana grwr  
Turner A, apiarist  
Turner Edwd, farmer  
Turner Geo, banana grwr  
Turner Jno, banana grwr  
Walters Bert, saw mill  
Warby Robt, banana grwr  
Waterhouse John H, storekeeper  
Whitton Mrs A, milk vendor  
Whitton Mrs E, asst pstmstrs  
Whitton Vivian, tmstr  
Wilkinson V, bana grwr  
Wilson Chas W, carptr & farmer  
Woldseth Alfd  
Woolf Adam, banana grwr  
Woolf Clarence, ban grwr  
Woolgoolga Butchery  
Young Ern, dairy farmer  
Young Geo, timber getter  
Younger Dennis, farmer

1944-45: Fitzroy Co. 257 miles north, steamer or rail Coffs Harbour, thence motor 17 miles. Population 1,500. Half-holiday Wednesday.

Allen Harry, banana grwr  
Allen R, picture thtr ppr  
Alverson Fredk, banana grwr  
Anderson Mrs P, milk vendor  
Avery Wm, ref rms  
Bullen Percy, saddler  
Carey A J, mtr gar  
Davey Harry, banana grwr  
Douglas Stan, selector  
Eggins Saml, frmr  
Elvey Arth C, farmer  
Firth Wm, banana grwr  
Furphy Wm, mtr garage  
Ganderton Thos, frtgrwr  
Gentle O C, carrier  
Gordon Wm, grazier  
Gray Thos C, frtgrwr  
Grey Andw, farmer  
Hofmeier Jno, farmer  
Holloway Edwd, banana grwr  
Johnson Bros, sawmill  
Laugher P, baker

McConnon Jno, carrier  
McHugh Mrs E, restnt  
McPherson C, hrdsr  
Morgan W, box & case mkr  
(wooden) & banana grwr  
Morrow A E, frtgrwr  
Murphy Mrs Jane, grwr  
Newman Chas O, frtgrwr  
Newman G N, bldr & pstmstr  
Parbery Duncan C, shpg agt  
Potts Chas M, mtr gar  
Police Station  
Redpath Wm, farmer  
Richards W, store  
Robinson Arth L, frtgrwr  
Schofield Robt C, farmer  
Sea View Hotel (Hilda M Morris)  
Seccomb Ray, frtgrwr  
Skinner Jas & A, farmers  
Skinner Gabriel, farmer  
Skinner J H, dairy farmer  
Slater Herbt, banana grwr

In addition, Trustees of the Public Recreation Reserves and Resting Places were routinely appointed by the Government to administer relevant local areas on behalf of the Lands Department. The duties of the Trustees were not too arduous in the pre-World War II years, hence little was heard of their activities.

Following the war, however, the drive to attract tourists demanded a greatly increased public effort. So urgent was this call for Woolgoolga, following the cessation of shipping, that the traditional committees, associations and trusts were resurrected, strengthened or renamed. A few new ones were even instituted. Unfortunately, however, keenness to make progress led to some overlapping of interest, some rivalry, perhaps a little jealousy and certainly plenty of criticism — the latter not only between working groups but between workers and on-lookers. This, of course, is not unusual in community affairs . . . and in Woolgoolga's case may have been a sign of its "coming of age"!

In 1947 new citizens were Gazetted as Trustees of the several Recreation Reserves: on 17 January, for the public land between Ganderton and Boundary Streets (R71819), Messrs Henry Ellem, Reginald Creighton and Stanley Holloway; and on 13 June for R63076 and 70416, E.E. Rogers, C.M. Pollack, S.E. Bultitude, C.O.R. Newman, S.F. Holloway and Dr N.Mulhearn. The last named group was charged with managing the Beach and Lake Reserves, and two Grafton representatives were included to safeguard the interests of visitors, who in 1947 mostly came from that centre.

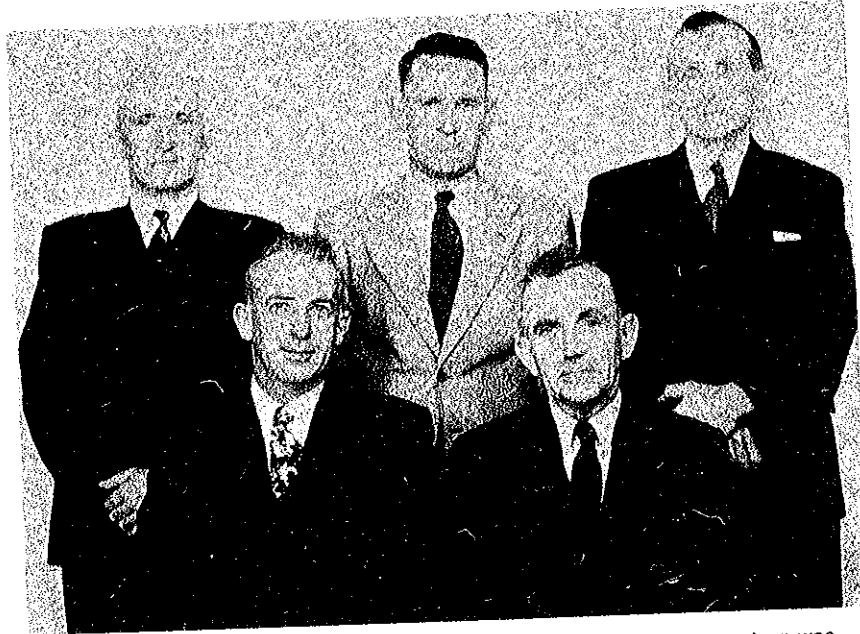


Fig 12.18: The Woolgoolga Urban Area Committee, whose first meeting was held on 16 Dec 1947. Standing (l to r): T.C. Ganderton, J Newman, S.E. Bultitude. Sitting: S.F. Holloway (chairman), H.G. Ellem (photo<sup>100</sup>).

On 16 December of the same year the Woolgoolga Urban Area Committee (UAC) was also formed, under the auspices of the Dorrigo Shire Council. Its members, like the Beach Trust, could only be appointed with Government approval. The purpose of the UAC was to channel ideas and information to the Council, and to exercise influence in obtaining a "fair slice of the cake" for the area which it represented; it was like another tier of local government. The first Committee members were S.F. Holloway (Chairman), H.G. Ellem, T.C. Ganderton, J. Newman and S.E. Bultitude.

The list of UAC interests tabled at its first meeting was as follows:

Street formation; Beach Street declared a main road; tar sealing; sand removal; street lighting; straying stock; new sub-divisions grant — High St and South St; automatic telephone; water scheme; direct telephone line — Grafton and Coffs; cottage hospital; low voltage electricity; net fishing — closure of lakes; bread delivery and price; Pound Yard Creek bridge; Recreation Reserve grant; subsidised doctor; Cemetery Trust; tree planting; anti TB mobile visit; mobile optical unit visits; bus time-tables — daylight express, school bus; census of township; street stall allocations; fire fighting equipment; airstrip; donations — CWA and Surf Life Saving Assn; traffic signs; beach mining; house numbering; footpath at Memorial Hall; block of land — Urban Committee; local industries — investigation of whaling and clothing; parking area — Hastings St; noxious weed eradication; provision of public seats; increased Police establishment; wireless reception — station; re-opening of port with timber shipments; postal pillar boxes; reduction of rates for Aged and Invalid Pensioners; public phone at jetty — not sufficient revenue.

The Progress Assn would traditionally be expected to have embraced many of the aims listed above for the UAC . . . but (fortunately?) the two bodies seem not to have been operating contemporaneously. The Progress Assn was functioning before the war — and met in the disused billiard room behind Avery's store.<sup>15</sup> After the war, however, when civic committees and organisations were formed or re-formed, the Progress Assn was replaced by the Chamber of Commerce,<sup>15</sup> and as the latter's main thrust was into the promotion field, some conflict of interest was avoided. It is probable that the existence of the UAC from 1947 inhibited re-formation of the Progress Assn along traditional lines, and that potential members of the latter joined the Chamber of Commerce instead. (Support for this belief is provided by the fact that following the disbanding of the UAC by Government decree in September 1960, the Progress Assn was formed anew, in 1963 — see later).

The main task of the Beach and Lake Trust was to bring the camping and picnic area up to high standard and to provide within the reserve the type of amenities that would attract tourists. Some progress had been made in assistance to the Surf Club, improving the pavilion, installing showers and laundry facilities for campers, appointing a reserve caretaker (Mr P.H. Emery), ensuring adequate water supply, clearing sea weed from the beach, arranging a garbage service and so on. Money had also been collected for the construction of a rock swimming pool.

There was also criticism, however, and so hostile did some of this become that a public meeting was called in the first week of October 1954, seeking the dissolution of the Beach and Lake Trust.

The main areas of discontent seemed to be the "extortionate camping fees", the fact that "the residents of the Lake road, which was a part of the Beach and Lake Reserve, had been allowed to build permanent residences for a rental of £2.10.0 per annum" and concern about the availability of monies collected for specific purposes.<sup>191</sup> The belief was stated that more finance could be obtained, and a greater degree of confidence would prevail, if the present trust were dissolved and control vested in the Dorriggo Shire Council.

The Chairman of the meeting, Councillor W.H. Bailey, Dorriggo Shire President, informed those present that, if the Shire took over, more money might be provided by way of loan, but "the people of Woolgoolga would have to . . . repay the principal and interest. Otherwise, the rate-payers would have to be rated to pay for it". Mr C.M. Pollack, Trust Chairman, also spoke. He explained that if the trust were taken over by Council, there would be no voluntary assistance; everything would have to be paid for, and the present income of the reserve would not allow that. He said the rental for blocks along the Lake road was low because the residents were not permanent; one month's notice could be given for their removal. Mr Pollack also informed the meeting that about £100 was available for construction of the rock pool.

When the motion for dissolution of the trust was eventually put by Messrs I. Amos and R. Miller, it was defeated by 58 votes to 38, with 29 abstentions. Although this result could have been regarded as a vote of confidence, the Beach Reserve Trustees decided within the next month to resign.<sup>191</sup> They were Dr Mulhearn and Messrs J.C. Lane, C.M. Pollack, S.F. Holloway and F.C. Morgan. Two vacancies for local trustees had remained unfilled during the previous 12 months, and failure of citizens or groups to come forward with nominations was one reason for the Trustees' disenchantment. Mr L.J. Carroll, although not a trustee, also resigned as honorary treasurer.

Following the resignations, Woolgoolga Chamber of Commerce met to consider emergency arrangements for the coming Christmas holiday period. It was decided that the Minister for Lands and the Dorriggo Shire Council be informed of the willingness of the Chamber to provide an "interim committee of management of responsible citizens". The suggested names were: Messrs O. Hall, J. Duggan, F. Sare, A. Piddick, R. Atkins, P. Smith and D. Clinch. The Chairman, Mr L. Carrol, agreed to assist in an advisory capacity.<sup>191</sup>

The final outcome of that control of the Beach and Lake Reserves was vested in the Dorriggo Shire Council (Coffs Harbour Shire Council on and after 10 December 1956) and a management committee was appointed, under the chairmanship of Mr D.J. Clinch. This arrangement lasted for nine years, during which time the new committee also worked its heart out, received as much criticism as its predecessors and, like them, finally resigned! Trustees were then again appointed, responsible directly to the Lands Department, and that situation has continued to the present time. Good work continues to be done and, as though by tradition, little thanks is given; but more of that later.

The residences along the Lake road deserve further mention. Thirty blocks were surveyed and dedicated in 1931, with the aim of making temporary sites available for holiday-makers to rent. Only £2.10.0 per annum was charged, in the hope that visitors would thereby be encouraged to come to Woolgoolga. However, some permanent residents occupied blocks, and houses were erected which were far more substantial than the "temporary" ones envisaged.

Among residents on the west side of the road were Verdi Schwinghammer, Unwins, Wallaces, Wilkinsons, Tooveys, Mrs Chick . . . while on the ocean side, nearer the lake, were Colin Morgan, Leonards, Mrs Menzies and others . . . In fact practically all blocks were occupied.<sup>129</sup>