

TIMELINES

The Quarterly Newsletter of Murwillumbah Historical Society Inc.

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Welcome

Welcome to the October 2020 edition of *Timelines*, the newsletter of Murwillumbah Historical Society.

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Samuel Farrant, Tweed Banana Farming Pioneer

Di Millar shares the interesting story of Samuel Farrant, a pioneer of the Tweed banana industry from the 1880s.

Tweed banana industry pioneer, Samuel Farrant, had farming in his blood. He was born 20 Apr 1858 in the small village of Farringdon, the centre of a rural parish in East Devonshire where his father Thomas and mother Mary Ann raised a large family of five boys and three girls on their holdings.

Fortunately, Thomas was a successful farmer and

well able to support his family. He farmed 147 leases of land and employed 42 boys and three men to help him. Mary Ann was a hard working farmer's wife in charge of farm and house servants. A nursemaid was employed to help care for the children.

All was well with the family until 28 Jul 1870 when Thomas died. At this time Samuel, the fifth child, was only 12 and his youngest sibling Mary was just three years of age. Mary Ann Farrant returned to Stockland, a rural village in Devonshire close to the border with Somerset where she was born.

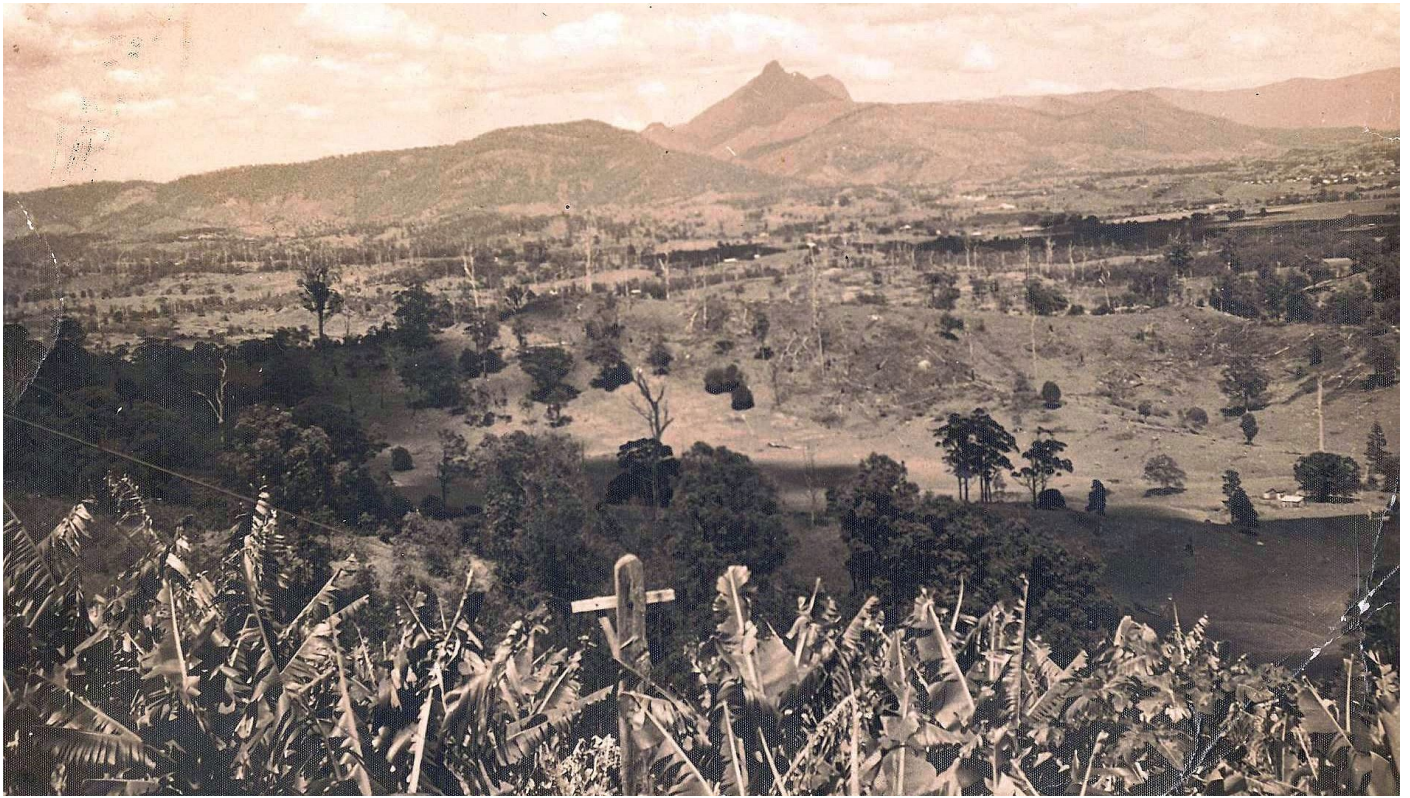


Samuel Farrant pictured driving his buggy on his Condong Range property (photograph from the collection of Dianne Millar)



WE WANT TO COPY YOUR OLD PHOTOS!

If you have come into possession of any old family or historic photos, please lend them to us to copy! Please contact the museum on (02) 6670 2493 by email at trm@tweed.nsw.gov.au



A view from what is now known as Farrant's Hill taken in 1949. (photograph from the collection of Dianne Millar)

Here as head of the household she took up the familiar farming life and raised her family.

Ten years later 54 year old Mary Ann still had her eldest child Elizabeth (29) at home to help on the farm as well as William (24), Robert (20) and the two youngest girls Edith (19) and Mary (13). Mary Ann also employed a 15 year old boy to work as a farm servant. In time Mary Ann retired from farming and both William and Robert became farmers in their own right. Gone from the family home by 1880 were the two eldest boys John (27), Henry (26) and 22 year old Samuel.

Samuel Farrant sensibly realised that there had to be better farming opportunities for him elsewhere and in 1883 booked a passage on the Duke of Buckingham bound for Australia. Samuel arrived in Cooktown on 27 Jan 1884 and stayed on the ship until it reached Mackay on February 2. Twelve days later he arrived on the Tweed and by July had obtained employment with the Colonial Sugar Refining Company operating a boat towing cane punts to the mill at Condong.

Around 1889 the mill manager Mr W R Isaacs put Samuel in charge of the company's agricultural activities on the Tweed and with his introduction of new ploughing methods increased the production per acre of green cane.

Ten years after arriving on the Tweed, Samuel Farrant purchased a large property at Condong Range that initially became known as Farrant's Mountain and devoted himself to its development.

There was no road nearer than that from Condong to Tumbulgun and everything had to be transported to the remote property by pack horse.

Samuel Farrant fenced in a few acres of land and planted a half acre with bananas including Cavendish, Lady Finger, Sugar, Pear and Plantation varieties. During the hard work carried out over this time and being a bachelor (he remained so all his life) he lived on a diet of corned beef and damper eked out with a few vegetables he grew.

When a road came closer to his property Samuel Farrant grew some sugar cane with his biggest year yielding 610 tons. He stopped growing cane after recalling that as a nine year old Devonshire schoolboy he had learnt that one acre of bananas would produce more food than 40 acres of wheat. By now he had acquired ten years experience in growing bananas and decided to establish himself in the banana industry on an economic basis. He planted 20 acres of bananas as fast as he could procure the plants.

In late March 1910 a severe cyclone devastated New Caledonia and Fiji with huge waves sweeping over the land destroying trees, native villages, plantation houses and plantation crops. In the wake of the loss of the Fijian banana plantations, Australian banana growers, who had been unable to compete against the cheaper imported product, came together to organise an efficient banana growers association.

On the Tweed, Samuel Farrant quickly took advantage of the banana shortage in southern markets and consigned the first shipment to Sydney on Corrigan Brothers' SS Friendship with a freight cost of six pence a bunch. Bananas Samuel sold from his farm earned one shilling and six pence per bunch but he received seven shillings and six pence per bunch for his first consignment sold on the Sydney market on 13 Jun 1910. After commission was subtracted Samuel Farrant realized a healthy profit.

Samuel Farrant's continuing success encouraged others on the Tweed to commence growing bananas. By October 1910 bananas were a profitable crop with good returns made on the Sydney markets.

Samuel Farrant lived quietly in retirement in his home perched on top of his Condong Range property and enjoyed the sweeping views of the surrounding countryside. In 1924 he had made a trip to England to see his family and had planned one last visit but failing health prevented him making another sea voyage.

On Thursday 16 Dec 1937 Samuel Farrant died aged 79 at the home of neighbours Mr and Mrs E Tate who had cared for the ailing old man. He was survived by a brother and nieces and nephews in England.

From Tjolling and Chillington

Our Librarian Betty Hamill has reviewed this recent addition to our stock of local history books for sale - From Tjolling and Chillington, the Holston and Garrett families from Norway and England to Australia and beyond, printed by Bytes 'n Colours. Copies are available through Murwillumbah Historical Society) at \$63.80 (printing cost plus postage) (librarian@murwillumbahhistoricalsociety.org.au)

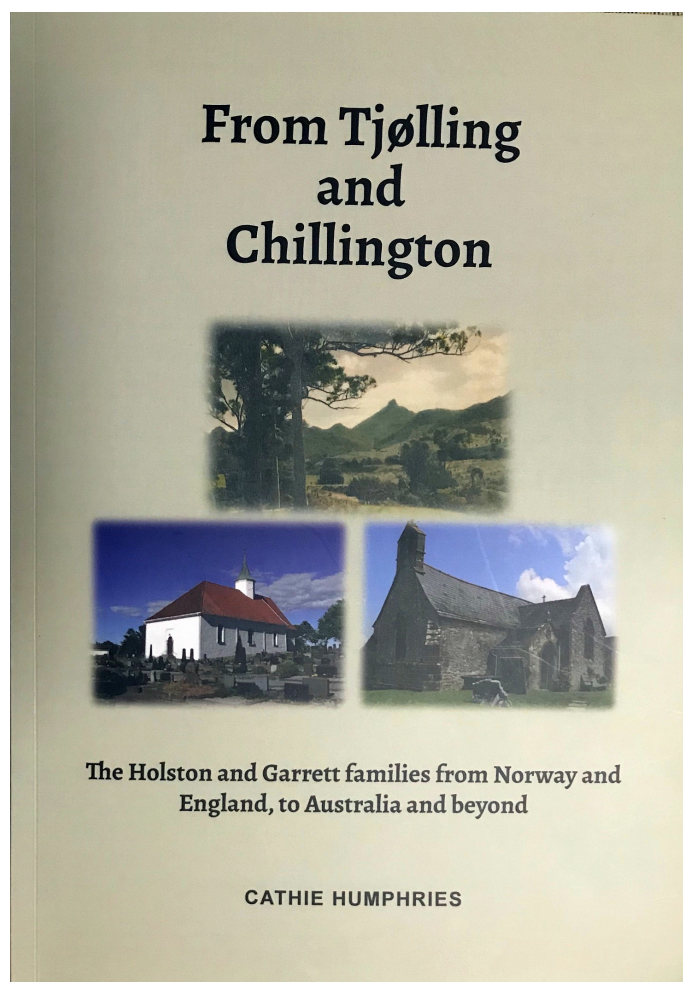
Cathie Humphries née Gregor has done an excellent job in uncovering details of her forbears in her recent book "From Tjolling and Chillington".

The Holston line originated in Tjolling, Norway, while the Garrett Family came from Chillington in England. Cathie has traced the lineage of some of the family back to the 16th generation.

The section on the history and culture of Norway, including Vikings, is quite comprehensive and a really good read.

We follow the early Holstons through southern Australia to Murwillumbah where they become leading citizens in business, community and the arts and music scene.

The Garrett line came from the Somerset and Dorset areas. Again the author gives an interesting overview and history of the villages. These pioneers also started further south and ended up in the Northern Rivers.



This book has a wealth of interesting information and its thorough research is able to either confirm or deny some family stories. The whole is liberally sprinkled with good quality pictures, many of them coloured. I would certainly recommend this book to anyone with an interest in the families or the history of Murwillumbah and the Tweed.

Tweed Hockey

Murwillumbah and the Tweed have a proud history of producing sports people who go on to excel in their chosen field. Thanks to proud mother Jillian Wotherspoon for sharing the impressive hockey representational resumes for her sons Dylan and Blake, two more outstanding Murwillumbah sporting stars continuing a proud tradition.

Along with football, hockey is the sport of choice in Murwillumbah and the Tweed Valley. Its international profile may have been raised in 1914 by the English women's team tour of Australia, but the female students of Murwillumbah Superior Public School were vying with those of Lismore in hockey year after year while the boys were chasing the pigskin over a muddy pitch.

Women reigned supreme in hockey, the men's club only being established in 1935. It's only of late that men have left their mark on the sport.



Dylan and Blake Wotherspoon (photograph courtesy of the Wotherspoon family)

Local players who have played their junior and/or senior hockey in the Tweed Border Hockey Association who have been valuable players in the Kookaburras Australian Men's Hockey Team include Nathan Eglington, Jason Wilson and Matthew Butturini. On the women's side, Gabrielle Nance and Savannah and Madison Fitzpatrick have recently broken into the National Hockeyroos team and all of these ladies are pushing for regular selection.

When two boys from the same family each start playing the same sport at the age of five for a small club in a small town and go on to represent Australia in that sport, well that has to be really special. But that is just what the Wotherspoon brothers - Dylan (27) and Blake (23) achieved in 2020. They both started playing for the Murwillumbah Redbacks Hockey Club in the local competition at the age of five and continue to win representative honours at state, national and international levels.

For a New South Welshman to get into a Queensland team in any sport is quite extraordinary, but both played in the under 13's Queensland hockey team soon after they began playing hockey for the Murwillumbah Redback Hockey Club and then went on to become members of teams playing for Australia.

Blake was picked in the Australian Under 21s team that won the Gold Medal in the Sultan of Johor Cup and is now a member of the Australian Development Squad in 2019/2020. His older brother Dylan has matched that record and has been selected on 6 occasions, commencing in 2015 as a member of the Australian National Hockey team, the Kookaburras right up to 2020. And he has played this sport at elite levels in India, Malaysia and Africa.

100 Years Ago

My thanks to our contributors for joining in to launch the first of what we hope will be a new regular segment for Timelines. "100 Years Ago" will showcase some of the stories which made the news way back then and, we hope, bring some of that fascinating past back to life.

Drogher Cudgen capsizes in Mur'bah

MARCH 19: On Saturday night last the North Coast Steam Navigation Company's drogher Cudgen capsized at her moorings at the company's wharf, South Murwillumbah.

It is stated that at nine o'clock on the night in question.

The Cudgen was secure and everything was in order for the trip to Tweed Heads today.

It is concluded, by some, that the nose of the ship caught under the wharf, and on the tide rising she was placed in her present position.

The cargo which was to have been forwarded to Brisbane, included some 300 bags of maize.

Men worked throughout yesterday extracting the cargo from the hold.

Daily News (Murwillumbah, NSW) 19 March 1920

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BERGER AVRO.

Lieut. Love and "Ambassador" McMillan (representing Lewis Berger and Son, the well-known paint people) arrived in Murwillumbah last night—per train. The visitors, who were expected to arrive yesterday per 'plane, were obliged to make a forced landing at Moolball, which, it is pleasing to say, they accomplished without mishap. However, the gentlemen in question expect to bring the 'plane in to-day shortly before lunch, and as has been promised will make a few flights during the afternoon.

[Apologies for the quality of the old copy] This initial account of the plane's unexpected diversion enroute to Murwillumbah was short on details (Tweed Daily (Murwillumbah, NSW : 1914 - 1949), Saturday 9 October 1920, page 4)



Photo of the Avro and Berger crew on the cover of the Aviation Historical Society of Australia Journal, Volume XII No. 1, March-April 1971. Original caption: Nigel Love (centre) with two Berger Paint representatives, believed to be Mr. A. McMillan (left) and Mr. J. Young (right), with the "Berger Paint Avro".

Maris Bruzgulis has done some detective work on the interesting 1920 visit to the Tweed during a promotional tour by the "Berger" Avro aircraft. The story illustrates the "seat of the pants" approach to flying needed just 100 years ago!

Maris tracked down the full story of the incident in the *Aviation Historical Society of Australia Journal*, Volume XII No. 1, March-April 1971. It contains the following paragraph, being the reminiscences of Nigel Borland Love, the pilot of the Berger Avro that visited Murwillumbah in 1920:

'On the trip across to Murwillumbah, unfortunately, I had a forced landing.

Those rotary engines had an annular crank case filled with an explosive mixture and it was sucked up from the crank case into the cylinders by manifolds: the inlet and exhaust being on the top. What happened was this: on this occasion the inlet valve in one of the cylinders stuck and the result was the exhaust from the cylinder went down into this annular crank case and exploded the mixture in the crank case, and it came out the two sides of the induction. That destroyed all the mixture and the engine cut out. She used to build up after

about ten or fifteen seconds and then she would go again.

At this stage the engine had been running in the aircraft for thirty-seven or thirty-eight days and had not had any proper overhaul — we had such a tight itinerary we did not have time to give it one. I felt it was essential for me to land, and believe me, I could not have picked a worse bit of country. This was the MacPherson Ranges, south of the Edward River. I looked around and saw a little scar alongside the railway station and this was the only spot. I told old Mac [the Berger Paint representative Mr. A. McMillan?] behind me that it was the only spot available. We were gliding at the time and you could hear one another speak. I did the ordinary approved procedure of a forced landing and finished up doing a steep side-slip over the trees, stopping about 20 or 30 yards before the opposite fence. There were a lot of melon holes in this paddock and I did a few bumps.

I climbed out of the aircraft and had a look around. Everything was perfectly alright except that the

axle had a bend in it. The mechanic finally came along and fixed it up, then I had to fly it out. That was the second forced landing of the trip which I didn't think was too bad considering the conditions we were flying under.'

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Betty Hamill presents a fascinating account of a 1920 visit to the Tweed by Lieutenant Miss Flores Sandes. Her story not only recounts her amazing bravery and determination but also illustrates the incredible changes in depictions and expectations of women since those times.

Many interesting visitors have made their way to the Tweed Valley. Not the least of these was the "Joan of Arc of the Serbian Army", Lieutenant Miss Flora Sandes.

In 1914 Miss Sandes had volunteered as a VAD to the British Medical Services and been refused, because "the war would only last six months and they had more nurses than required". Undaunted she applied to the Serbian Minister for Foreign Affairs. In that year she joined a small unit comprising twelve nurses and two doctors under the guidance of Mme Gruvitch, the American wife of the then Serbian Minister for Foreign Affairs. They worked through the spotted typhus epidemic, Flora contracting it herself.

Following the end of her three-month contract at Kraugujeuatz Hospital, she returned to England and raised £2000. On returning, she delivered Red Cross stores to Serbia.

The Bulgarians entered the conflict and rail communications were cut. Retreat was inevitable. Flora joined the regimental ambulance. She was issued a cart for the wounded, sick and exhausted, when they dropped into the snow, short of food,



Flora Sandes, Joan of Arc of the Serbian Army (Australian War Memorial H10054)



Serbian commemorative stamp. Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=49353427>

warmth, and clothing.

Repeatedly the British consul tried to get Flora to return to England when they began to retreat towards Corfu. She overheard some orderlies discussing her. "Miss Sandes stands to us, as England's promise, that someday England will come and help us." She stayed. When the commandant of the second division told her "Your people in England need you, but Serbia needs you most. If you become a soldier we can take you." This wonderful woman, "with all the physical disabilities of womanhood, enlisted and went across the Albanian Mountains in that awful retreat."

In all Flora was wounded twenty four times. She fought every battle until Nov. 1916 when she was wounded and left for dead on the field. Rescued by an officer and two men she was hospitalised. In six months she was recovered enough to re-join trench warfare.

Invalided to England for some weeks, she raised money, then lectured to Australians in France until returning to the battlefield in May 1918. When she was awarded her lieutenant's commission, it was necessary for an act to be passed by the Serbian Parliament. Col. Ostoyitch, Military Attaché to the Serbian Legation said Miss Sandes was adored by

the Serbian Army and that the men had eagerly followed her "over the top."

Flora was awarded decorations up to the Serbian equivalent of the British Victoria Cross. Instead of demobilising her, the Crown Prince continued her commission with a six month's leave. Lieutenant Sandes was to tour the Commonwealth on a lecture tour which would hopefully raise more money than she did in England. They also hoped to have agricultural equipment, raw materials, wool, tallow etc sent to Serbia on some long-term credit basis. The plan was that the lectures would cover this.

The press was quite enthusiastic about this "woman-soldier". "It is expected that she will be met by representatives of the Returned Soldiers Association and patriotic ladies" of Murwillumbah. According to the report the lecture did not disappoint. "Lieut. Sandes' recital is intensely interesting, intellectual, educational and humorous and is illustrated with official pictures."

"Lieut. Sandes won decorations and promotion, not because she happened to be a woman, but because the deeds would be deserving of recognition in any man."

After her lecture at Mullumbimby the RSL member moving a vote of thanks wished their "Digger Cobber a good time in the district."

Sources: *Tweed Daily Murwillumbah* 1920: 19 May, 8 June, 3, 20 & 23 August, 6, 7 & 9 September

Murwillumbah Rowing Club Pt 1 - Previous Rowing Clubs

Our thanks to Rob Blanch for his comprehensive history of the Murwillumbah Rowing Club, full of interesting historical detail. We'll serialise the story so that we can present the club's journey in detail. For this edition, we whet readers' appetite with the story of previous attempts to establish a rowing club in Murwillumbah.

To the best of my knowledge there were several rowing clubs (at least two) in the town previously, but they didn't survive probably because they were all wiped out by major floods. The first rowing club formed in the town of Murwillumbah, called the Tweed River Rowing Club, was established in October 1902. (Note that there is a separate Tweed Heads/Coolangatta Rowing Club that was established at Tweed Heads.) They purchased a block of land in South Murwillumbah on the downstream side of the old bridge which was aligned with Prospero Street in January 1907. The first annual regatta was held in January 1908 which was attended by 200 people. We have recently acquired a photograph of a men's crew rowing a four at Murwillumbah c1910.

In those days rowing was a professional sport, at least for the more talented athletes, who rowed for prize money. In April 1913 fifty pounds was offered as prize money for the single scull event.



Murwillumbah Rowing Club showing the river frontage of the 1999 building (photo courtesy of Rob Blanch)

Fifty pounds represented small fortune in those days. The large spectator crowds that the sport attracted during this period were people who were willing to place bets on the results. This was illegal at the time, but it was widespread, and obviously tolerated by the authorities who conveniently turned a blind eye. Many regattas were organised by hoteliers who profited from the sale of alcohol to the large crowds, and I suspect, also from the bookmakers in attendance. I have been unable to find any evidence suggesting that local hoteliers were involved in the practice in Murwillumbah. There is no record of the local club having any members capable of entering World competition, but the clubs on the neighbouring Richmond and Clarence Rivers had a few. At this time, the club at Coraki appears to have been the dominant one in the region, but it has not survived, as the towns population declined when river transport was replaced by roads.

We have an old photograph showing a small rowing shed near the southern approach to the old bridge over the river at Murwillumbah at the end of Prospero Street. The shed was destroyed in 1921 by a major flood in the Tweed River and the building was not replaced until 1923. I suspect that this is the building in the old photograph mentioned above. There was an attempt to form a Water Brigade to operate in with the local rowing club when it was reformed. The main role of water brigades at the time, was to perform flood rescues. The Grafton Rowing Club had a long association with a water brigade. The flood rescue duties of the water brigades are now conducted by the State Emergency Services. I have been unable to find any evidence of an association between a water brigade and the local rowing club. The new

building appears to have been constructed on the same site but with a higher floor level, it had been raised by 4 feet, now beyond the level of the highest tides in the river. A newspaper article written in 1923 indicates that there was an annual meeting of the Tweed River Rowing Club. It reports that organised rowing on the Tweed had come to a standstill after the shed was washed away by a major flood in 1921, the construction of a new shed had been completed and money was allocated to purchase some new equipment. The minutes of the meeting record that 35 members were enrolled at the time.

There was another meeting in February 1934, held in the council chambers, to reform the club, which appears to have had a name change, as it was referred to as the Murwillumbah Rowing Club. I suspect that once again the club's premises in South Murwillumbah was destroyed by a major flood in the river. During March there were negotiations with the Murwillumbah Amateur Swimming and Life Saving Club in which they agreed to amalgamate. They applied to Council for consent to a permissive occupancy on the Public Reserve near the ferry slip at East Murwillumbah. In April they dismantled the shed in South Murwillumbah and relocated it on "flood free" land in East Murwillumbah. In 1938 the Woodburn Club was negotiating with Murwillumbah about the purchase of three serviceable boats, thought to be located there, which suggests that the move had been unsuccessful. In 1940 there is a report which suggests that a reformed club was struggling again as they were using two old practice fours formerly owned by the Lismore Club. All later reports about rowing on the Tweed River seem to refer to the Tweed Heads /Coolangatta Club.

ABOUT THE SOCIETY: Formed on 16 March 1959, the Society's aim is to research, preserve and promote the rich and unique history of our town of Murwillumbah and its surrounds in the picturesque Tweed River Valley of far northern New South Wales. The Society operates out of our Research Centre in the Tweed Regional Museum's historic Murwillumbah facility. The Society is proudly supported by the Tweed Regional Museum, a community facility of Tweed Shire Council.

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ABOUT THE MUSEUM: The Tweed Regional Museum is a Tweed Shire Council community facility, established in 2004, with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Tweed Shire Council and the Murwillumbah, Tweed Heads and Uki and South Arm Historical Societies. It is one museum that operates across three branch locations; Murwillumbah, Tweed Heads and Uki, and in association with these three local Historical Societies. The three locations connect the Tweed Shire from the coast to the mountains, providing a unique journey into the history, people and places of the majestic Tweed Valley.

For information about the Tweed Regional Museum please visit: <http://museum.tweed.nsw.gov.au/> or phone on (02) 6670 2493.