

Margaret McDougall

Mt Crosby

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Interviewer: Robyn Buchanan

Interview available on CD

Track 01

I'm Margaret McDougal, I'm now 87. I was born in Ipswich and I came to Mt Crosby when I was a fortnight old and I've lived here ever since, in five different places.

Dad bought land from John Marstaellar. I went to school at Mt Crosby School. When I was five, I was milking four cows.

Did the family run a dairy here?

No, we just had a few cows. I used to carry a billy of milk up to Mrs Collingwood's (Mr Collingwood was an engineer). It was a house on the corner, just along from the shop. That and the school house were the only houses there at that time, they built other houses afterwards.

I used to get 1/9 a week for my billy of milk. When another house was built, I got another customer. I hated going up Saturday and Sunday. Mum got one 1/9 and I got the other and I saved that money up and that's how I started my first cows. I saved £4 and I bought two heifer and two calves.

I was about 10, Dad and I rode into Tivoli, a man had two heifers and two calves and we brought them home on our horses. That's how I started.

So you had your own business when you were 10?

Yes, that's right. I was always careful with my money, I never spent everything.

We walked to Mt Crosby school, there was no horse and sulky. We could have ridden a horse but we always walked. No one took us to school.

We went to Eighth Grade. We did fancy work, physiology - things they don't do now. When I was 10, Andy Loftgren used to live out at Coalfalls, and he used to have a one-man farm exhibit. They took a sampler of mine and I got the first prize in the exhibition with my sampler. Children are not taught to sew like that now, stitching and embroidery.

Were there many children at Mt Crosby School?

There were 29 in my class, but there were only two teachers. There were some wild boys amongst them. It was bad with old Mr Perrett - they used to sing out and call him "Old Fish". His wife was a Catholic and they used to say:

My mother came from Ireland
My father came from Wales
My grandad was a mullet
Covered all over in scales.

He just got beyond it, then they sent a really strict man and that did the world of good. There were a lot of children because the pipe tracks were being built, and the filtration plant and the weir. There are only two of us left from that class now.

I think were taught better. We had mental arithmetic you know, "you bought so many apples in a case at so much and you sold so many, how much was left" - I was always very good at that, I loved mental arithmetic. Today, if you go into shops, they can't add up. I don't think schooling is half as good.

Track 02

What did most people do for a living around here?

It was all farms. They grew corn, pumpkins, **sackling** for the cattle and they used to chaff it up.

When I was a child, Devons was all prickly pear and when the drought was on, I and my sister and my brother - we'd get a slide and horse and come over and cut prickly pear. Dad made us a big long fork with fencing wire. My sister would cut it and we'd put it in the drum and take it home. Mum would have a fire going and we'd boil that for the cows.

Then when it was cool, you'd rub the prickles off on the ground with a bit of chaff and feed the cows. That's when we used to see sharks - the dog went down to the river and went across and a shark went after him - nearly got him too.

Was that in the drought or all the time?

No. there was drought time. My sister used to cut she-oak trees down to feed horses. We used to have to lift the cows, lift the horses.

My father was a butcher by trade. He gave that up and became a bullock driver. He used to go away driving bullocks and Mum and I and Jock and Glad, we used to look after the farm and we grew our own potatoes and pumpkin. We had a vegetable garden - we used to go down and carry the water up from the creek, lift it over the fence to someone and they'd water it like that.

Everybody did the same. Then we had a few pigs and killed a pig in the winter time. That's what they all did, general farming.

Was it hard work farming in this area?

Yes it was. It was all horse and plough. There was no irrigation, nothing. Devons grew grapes down the front, but their ground was better over on the river. It was a lot better than our place.

Then they used to grow cotton on the riverbank, the people from Stanton Cross (that's where Mr Todd is living now, Rohans lived there), they used to come over and pick their cotton and then when theirs was ready to pick, they'd go over and pick their cotton. And they grew sugar cane over here and had a mill. This was before my time, Dad told me about it.

It was hard work. There wasn't any fencing and the cattle used to run everywhere and we had to go after them - they had bells on them, they used to go down near the rocks. I used to be out sometimes at half past eight - no one would bother because no one would harm you then. We never thought of anything like that.

We always had enough food but we never had any luxuries. Only at Christmas time, we got some dates and a tin of preserved fruit and some pickles (other than those Mum made). Today, it's not like that. But I think we were better off then. We used to go to one another's places on

Saturday night. They used to have surprise parties and have singing around the piano.

And picnic days - all the people used to come and we'd have picnics on Boxing Day. I can remember we had a picnic over near the big trees where Marstaellars used to have their first home. The bull got out of the yard down here and everyone crawled up a tree except Mum, she couldn't get up so I stayed down to help her - and the dog got away with the ham.

My uncle, (Mum's brother and his wife) used to live down near the Junction. They would row up in the boat and spend some Sundays with us. I have a photo of us all walking with Uncle Ted, Aunty Ethel and Eva. Dad is all dressed up in a waistcoat, Mum is all dressed up in her Sunday dress, hats on us and all. They don't that today, but we always got dressed up for Sunday as if we were going to town. People laugh when they see it.

Track 03

Did you go into town very often?

About once a fortnight in a horse and sulky. Mum used to have to grease the wheels of the sulky and then sometimes you'd catch the horse and sometimes you couldn't. There were several rails to get through. When Dad went, somebody - generally me - used to have to go with him. I had to open all the rails. Then when we got to the last ones at Devons, he drove off in the sulky and I had to run home. He was an old trimmer! You had to do everything for him. You were told to do it and you did it, you didn't answer back.

Where there any shops here then?

The first shop when I was going to school was up there opposite the filtration plant - there are some houses there and the first shop was there. We used to walk from school with a penny - and that wasn't very often either - we'd get a penny worth of broken biscuits or little bird cages with a bird in it, all made of lolly - they were a penny. That was Brown's Store.

Was it a proper shop?

Yes, they used to sell boots for men, and working clothes - it was all moleskins and flannel shirts then - and men's hats. They had a lot of stuff there.

That was the first shop, and my Uncle had a butcher shop next door. Later on, they started these shops up here and there was butcher shop - we have a photo of it - between where the shop is now and the school. That was the second butcher shop.

Then there was Herbert - he had a store - then Gunn started another store. It was a lot better store but he was a dirty old thing. He'd stab a rat or something and then he'd cut the cheese with the same knife! He used to come out with two horses and a wagon - he wouldn't until half past three and he was always drunk.

Then Gussy Linton - August Linton - ran a truck around and brought goods all around. He used to come down to Mums and Mum used to sit up until 12 o'clock at night because he was always drunk, but there was no other way to get things.

Wilson's had a store on Warwick Road and at one time, they used to drive a horse out and get the order one week and deliver it the next week.

There was a railway line out here and Cribb and Foote used to send goods. We used to get the grocery order or anything you wanted out there. Then my Uncle Charlie, he had a horse belonging to the Water board and a dray and he used to deliver all the goods around to people. That went for years and years.

These are all at different times. I think Browns Store was the first, because I can remember it as a kid. Then later on, the goods came out from Cribb and Foote, and I can remember Wilson's came out, and then Gussy Linton, he was later still. That's how we got our provisions.

Kerrs took on the shop after Gunns, they used to bring you anything. I can remember I used to order shoes for Glen from Cribbs and they'd send out half a dozen right shoes - just for one foot - and you chose the one you liked. You kept that one and sent the others back.

Then when we went to town in the "bus" later on - they had a cream truck and you sat in that - it was 6/- to go to town. Well 6/- was a lot of money. It was a cream truck, and the ones that got in first could sit in the front and then they had seats each side. It was pretty crude. I will never forget one day - we were going around the back road and it was a winter morning and I had a brown hat and dress I had gone to the Show in, and the wind was excessive and I had a bunch of brown feathers in my hat. As we were going along up past the Melon Hut, I could feel all the feathers tart to go. By the time we got to Tivoli, I didn't have a feather. We all laughed about it.

Times were pretty hard, money was pretty scarce I can tell you, not like today. The Karana Downs people, they wouldn't know they were alive.

Track 04

When you were young, was there still any timber getting at the Melon Hut?

Yes, they cut timber all here, and all through Lake Manchester - Dad used to cut timber and there were other timber cutters with him. They used to cut all the timber then, but now they don't cut it because the mills don't want it. My daughter was working there. When they put the big line through, they cut the big trees and the mills said if they liked to cut it and send it down to them for nothing, they'd take it. If not, they didn't want it - all those lovely logs. They burned the lot. Then they talk about there is no timber.

When your father cut the timber, what happened to it then?

He used to take it in in the truck and on the bullock wagon, into Hancock's at North Ipswich. I remember when I was a kid, we used to help him yoke up the bullocks and it was hard work too, because those yokes were very heavy.

Were they floating timber down the river then?

Oh no, long before that they used to float them down here, the Melon Hut, and they used to float them right around the river but that was before my time.

How I know, Miss Devon used to tell me. Mum used to send me over there with papers and food and that. She used to have orange trees and sell them - lovely big oranges for 4d a dozen. I always went there from when I was a little girl and she used to tell me all the tales of what happened and I was always interested in that. They never swore and they never told lies. What she said was always the truth. She always said "bes" [as in "we bes going"...] and her brother said "Damn it, jigger it" - he'd say "look at those horses, damn it, jigger it!"

[After I left school,] I worked as a servant. I forget how much I was getting. And then I got a job up at the shop here and I worked at Gunn's shop and helped him mind the children. Then I got married and was living over here.

We lived in a slab hut. It was a slab house, three rooms divided with hessian. Mum bought some wallpaper and she wallpapered all round the slabs and the hessian and it was very pretty. There was a slab kitchen with a dirt floor - that's all there was. Then Dad put a verandah on the front and the back and a kitchen. Then later on, he put another room on the front for my brother - he paid a man to put that on. We lived in that. We lived there until a tornado came up one night and took a strip from that pine tree - took the whole heart of the pine tree down - took all the trees out - that's why they have no tops much on them - and the tornado stripped right through Cabbage Tree and it took every tree there. The house down there - Margaret and I were in it, Glen was up working at the Pumping Station on shift work, and the roof went off first, then the whole house went off. We only had kerosene lamps. If I hadn't had the kerosene lamps lit, I wouldn't have got out because the doors jammed, it rained from 6 o'clock until half past 11 and when I came up, only that dairy down there was left. It flattened everything, the iron went down the river, all the tops of these trees went straight over in the Melon Hut. No-one helped us, we never got anything.

A lot of people used to camp along the river all Easter and Christmas - that was their holiday. Picnicking all along the river, tents all along the river. But they didn't steal or anything - they were just out for camping and it was very nice then. But the bad element came in and spoiled it, then they stopped camping down along the river.