

Pat and Marie Ahearn

Mt Walker West district

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Interviewer: Robyn Buchanan

Interview available on CD

Track 01

When did your family first come to Australia?

In 1863; they settled at Lower Mt Walker - that was my Great-grandfather. My Grandfather came to where we are now, at Mt Walker West about 1870. He selected land here, he was only a young man then. Later on, he got married and went out west sheep shearing to get enough money to pay for the land.

Who looked after the farm while he was out west?

Well, they didn't really farm. They ran a few cattle until they got enough money to farm, because they had to buy ploughs and things like that to be able to farm. The wife generally lived on the place and looked after things. That was a long time ago. And then they gradually got things together when they could afford it. They had it hard but they seemed to enjoy doing it, I think.

As they went along, if they could, they selected more land. This place here - my Grandfather had three sons and they had a property each in Mt Walker West - three farms, and when he died, they had a farm each. He had property at Rosevale as well, at the top of Rosevale back in the mountains, he had about 400 acres of grazing land up there. He mostly bred blood horses at Rosevale.

What did he do here at Mt Walker West?

Mostly cattle until they got cultivation, then they went into dairying when they got money. Every farmer in this district would have been a dairy farmer years ago. It was hand milking - mum and dad and the kids in those days. Nearly every farmer would have been using dairying to

make money. And produce - they would have a certain amount of produce. But dairying was the main thing.

The cream would be carted about three times a week by horse and cart to Rosewood Railway Station and put on the train and sent to Booval Butter Factory.

What year was this approximately?

This was about the 1920s. Once these old people got everything into shape, dairying was the first thing they thought of, they went into dairying.

There were very few people selling milk in those days, only those close to the railway so it could go straight to Ipswich. The milk wouldn't keep, it was impossible to sell it out here in those days. There were no refrigerated trucks or anything like that.

The cream would keep longer than milk. You had to look after it. You'd have an old washtub of water and stand the pan of cream in that to keep it fresh. The collection was three times a week, but in summer time, when there was a fair amount of cream and the weather was hot, it used to go four times a week. But then it had to go by horse and wagon from here to Rosewood which would be about 2-3 hours in the sun before it got to the railway.

How many cows did you milk?

It depended, we used to milk about 60 here, and then smaller places might milk 20. In a drought, people didn't have the hay or grain stored for a dry time like they would today. Every day in a dry time, when I came home from school, I would have to go along the Bremer and see there

were no cows in a bog in the Bremer. But you don't see that today at all, people are able to look after things a lot better today.

Track 02

When you were young, was it your grandfather or father who was working the property?

It was Dad by then. I was born in 1915 and I don't remember my grandfather. He died in 1915 and Dad [James Ahearn] took over after he died.

After a while, Dad milked a couple of hundred of cows and he had share farmers here and that didn't seem to work out, and he just left everything go, cultivation and everything, he was an easy-going sort of a man. He used to say "We'll be right".

I left school during the Depression, I was to go to secondary school but I suppose they couldn't afford it, so they asked me what I'd do and I said "I want to stay home and farm".

I started off with two horses and an old single-furrow plough. Dad fixed all the fences. That would be about 1930, just the start of the Depression. We worked along from there and then we bought two properties at Mt Mort about 15 years ago. We sold that and bought Murray's Merryvale about 10 years ago, about 559 acres in that.

We had sheep too, about 300 sheep at one time. I remember Dad taking a load of wool with two horses and an old spring wagon from here to North Ipswich Woollen Mills, driving down there. He pulled into Big White's - Jack White's - they had second-hand goods and they were just starting to go into a little bit of new stuff. Dad bought two new saddles, one for himself and one for me. The small saddle of mine was 4 guineas and the man's saddle was 6 guineas.

Nearly everyone had a few sheep, but Dad liked them. If anyone came, they had to go out and look at the sheep, he just loved the bloody sheep. He looked after those sheep.

A lot of people, Ryans, O'Neills, Murrays, they all had a few sheep.

Did they shear them themselves?

No, you got a shearer, when I was a little fellow, a bloke named Ross Rafter used to do our shearing. Then there was Tom Baker, and his nephew Larry Baker, and we had several other shearers. They would be here about a week shearing. That was a time I looked forward to, shearing time.

I shored for a year or two, there were about 150 then, but it was hard work for me, so Dad decided he would buy a little shearing plant. One man would turn it and you would use the shears, but I could not manage them. I could shear with the old hand shears but I couldn't handle the machine, so we got a shearer in again for a while. There were a few sheep here when Dad died but I got

sick of the sheep and I got rid of them. They were a real nuisance. In dry times, they would go way up the Bremer, up into other people's paddocks and it would be "Go and see where the sheep are".

We went in for more cattle, we gave dairying away about 10 years ago. I didn't want to do it but it was the best thing we ever did. Milk was all right but we were on cream and we were getting practically nothing out of it.

When you were young, were you milking by hand?

Yes, we got machines in the 1940s.

Track 03

The Depression years were hard, everyone was short of money. I remember chaps coming along here asking "Did you have a right boot? Did you have a left boot?" They were people on the dole, they wouldn't be able to buy boots. Suppose they went to Rosewood police station, they would get a ration ticket there and they would have to go to the next police station to get their rations, walking in those days mostly.

We had a bloke working here, he was a very nice, capable sort of a man, he was a flash swagman, he had a port with him. He was a German I think so I don't know what he was doing out here, he wanted work and Dad said he couldn't afford it. He put over a story, he wanted work to get money and said he would do anything, so Dad wanted some posts split. Poor old Charlie, his hands were all blistered next day. He just couldn't do it. He was willing to work, but he just couldn't. So he got a ride in the morning - we used to go a different way to Rosewood in those days, you would come up to Lanefield. We had a Model A car and I went to Rosewood about 12 o'clock and I met Charlie sitting beside the road. He had gone to Rosewood to get his ration ticket and he had to go to Laidley to get his rations, that's how hard it was.

Talking about the Model A, a new car was £210 for a new Model A car. In 1922 I think a Model T cost £145. I had a licence since I left school. The Model T was all foot work and the Model A had gear levers and Dad couldn't manage that, so I used to play with a school mate's old Overland and I got the gears, so Dad never drove the car after that. I got a licence just after I left school.

Not many people had cars then, there were a few about. The Model A was the new Ford, with the different gear box. I drove that everywhere. I had an Uncle who didn't like driving and didn't like traffic, so he would get me to drive him. I was happy, I got out of a bit of work.

Did the farms have tractors?

No, odd ones had them, but very few. It was about 1949 or 1950 when we got our first tractor, that was a Fordson with steel wheels. It was £515 and that £500 took a lot of getting in those days. I remember I paid cash for it, Dad said you can get a tractor when you can pay for it and not before. We have had quite a few tractors over the years.

When did the farm get electricity?

It would have been about 1970, between 1960 and 1970. Before that, we used wood stove, kerosene lamps. If there was a bit of a breeze, you had to put the windows down or it would blow the lights out. Old candle sticks.

Mrs Ahearn: We had triplets when we still just had the wood stove. It was difficult, specially with six children including the triplets.

I remember when Fred Daley came around and told us about it. I thought "I'll never see it." but it was here about 1970.

We didn't get a phone until about 10 years before that. Odd ones had it, I remember Miss Ryan had a phone and all our messages went there. They used to get on the old horse to deliver the messages to us.

Having electricity was a real help, with milking and everything. before that, you had an old engine and you cranked it up, pulled the switch and away you went.

Mrs Ahearn: before that, we had to milk by hand, milking about 60 cows after we were married.

It didn't hurt us but they were hard times. We had a good time too, you had sport and dances.

Was it a real community in this Mount Walker West area?

I'd says so. Everyone was friends, it was a great thing. There was no changing like there is today, the people were there, no selling property, they stayed there. You were friendly with everyone and you knew everyone. If you heard of anyone being sick, you would go over and do something for them. It still is a good district.

Mrs Ahearn: We played a lot of sport in those days, we played tennis every weekend, tennis fixtures on a Saturday and social tennis on Sundays.

In 1956 Brian was at College and we didn't have the telephone here then.

Mr Ahearn: When the triplets were born, the cream carrier brought me the message - "Marie has got three boys" - that is how I got the message."

Where was the closest doctor?

Rosewood, although we always went to Ipswich. There was an old Doctor Wallace there for years, and there was a private hospital, a Matron Stubbs (she was a Fullekrue) had a hospital, the building is still there, just below the top garage, a big old house all closed in.

Mrs Ahearn: A lot of babies were born there, in Rosewood. Her daughter became a nurse.

Track 04

Were most of the people around here Irish?

Years ago, there were a big percentage of Irish. Ahearns,

Ryans, O'Neills. Rosevale was where the Irish were. Callighans, Dwyers, Tierneys, Kinnane, O'Reilly, Ahearns, Goughs, Enrights, Rosevale was a real Irish turnout and even here in Mt Walker - Murphy, Collins .

Any reason why many people here were Irish?

No, I suppose one came and then others, they helped one another. There were a lot of arguments too.

In Rosevale, there were Christensens and Jensens too, Danes I think. But Rosevale was mostly Irish.

Mrs Ahearn: But not many of the Irish stayed on the farms, a lot of Irish girls were educated and went away, some were school teachers and some entered the convent.

They all mixed well there at Rosevale, in the local hotel there. I remember the hotel a long time ago, I have been going there since I could walk. Flossy Driscoll, Mrs Driscoll ran it.

There would be a dance there about every three weeks or once a month and at every dance, there would be a fight! You could bet on it. They would have a fight tonight, and they would all be friends tomorrow. They would get drinking, specially those Irish blokes - when they had a few beers, they would fight themselves nearly! Then it would be all over and they would be friends again.

The band for the dance was a violin and an accordion. In later years, they would have a piano and violin.

It was Percy Spann and Augie Zahnow, they played for nearly every dance. Augie played violin and Percy played the accordion. Percy Spann would go to Mt Forbes from here carrying an accordion on horseback to play for a dance. They would get 30/- for playing for a night.

When they had dances, it would be 2/- to go in, 6d for a chocolate waltz or novelty waltz.

I used to ride from here to Rosewood every Sunday for music lessons. I was still going to school. It would be about two hours ride down, two hours back. Then I gave it away.

Was Driscolls Hall used for anything else?

Just for dances, and for meetings. The bank in Harrisville would come out there once a month and use it for banking. There was a grocery store in Rosevale, just opposite the hotel, with a Post Office.

The shop that is next to the hall now wasn't put there until later years, a chap named Walter Zahnow built that. The old fellow who built the first shop died, and there wasn't one for a few years, then Walter Zahnow opened this shop about 30 years ago.

The hotel wasn't always where it is now, it was more down towards where you go around towards the Church of Christ, down near the Bremer. It was shifted up there with a bullock team to where it is now. I'm 83 next birthday and it has been where it is now as long as I can remember.



The old Butcher's Shop, Mt Walker West in the 1980s, before it collapsed

Did anything special happen here during the war?

Yes, there was a big American camp at Lower Mt Walker, mostly coloured Americans. You still see where some of the old buildings were at Mt Walker. There were a lot of people in there during the war. We didn't see them here very often.

There seem to be a lot of churches in Rosevale.

There is a little old Catholic Church there, about 10 of us go there now once a month. And there is a Lutheran Church, they have gone back to where they were, and there is a Church of Christ, and just as you go past the hotel, if you turn to your left, there used to be a little Methodist Church near the Cemetery there. It had a fair congregation years ago, mostly Lawrences because there were a good few families, and McLaughlin. And there used to be a Congregational Church at Mt Walker at one time, just this side of the old butcher shop.

We both went to Mt Walker School. The school down here is Merryvale School. Brian [their son] was one of the first pupils at Merryvale.

Were there many children at Mt Walker School?

There were between 50 and 60 children, and one teacher and an assistant teacher. There were 10 or 12 in every grade.

Track 05

You said you were not dairying here now?

No, we haven't for quite a good while. We thought we would never live without dairying, but we are thankful we gave it away. We lost Brian [their son] two years ago and he was our mainstay.

We have soya beans and a bit of barley and sorghum and we sell that. I have a chap who helps me and we just poke



St Patrick's Catholic Church Rosevale in 1997

along now with cattle and grain for our own use.

Are there many people still dairying in this area?

No, very few. None at Mt Walker West. At Rosevale, they are on milk and they have some big suppliers. There are about two at Mt Walker and about four or five in Rosevale.

How do you get to choose whether you are on milk or cream?

The cream days are finished, that was the old days. Now they have the big refrigerated trucks to come and collect it from the dairies and that goes straight in. Anyone dairying today has a refrigerated vat and when they milk, all the milk goes into that and they come with a refrigerated truck and take it away. Most people now grow grain, and some vegetables.

All the places have been split up. People come here, not to work them but as somewhere to live. They run a few cattle.

It is impossible to make money out of it now. That has happened more in Lower Mt Walker than here, they are a lot of small acreages there, with people living there and going to town to work. They seem to want 80 to 100 acres and live there, with a few horses and a few cattle.



The Rosevale Retreat Hotel in the 1980s

Farming the way it is going now, in another 10 years or so, it will be out. There are not many farmers left - people putting their full effort into farming. The ones left are good managers and they grow a lot of produce.

None of the younger generation are staying on the farm, they can't afford it. The farm perhaps can keep the mother and father but it can't keep any of the young ones - they couldn't afford to give them the wages they get in town. They might stay at home but they are away working somewhere.

Back in the days when you were young, could a farm support several generations?

Yes, that's right. Today, you could make a living [on a farm] but you would be working hard. A lot of young people are still living at home, but they don't work on the farm, they have jobs.

Track 06

The hotel at Rosevale is very nice now, they serve nice meals.

I never drank until I was about 25, I used to go into the hotel and have soft drink, I was always sober and I saw everything that went on.

They used to have Rosevale Races here years ago, it was every 12 months. They were held in several different places. When you go past the hotel and turn to your right, the first paddock on the right was one of the racecourses. And over behind Jensens, before you get to the hotel,

there is a road going in to your right, across the creek, Hughie Ahearn and his sons had that and they held races there too.

That was a big day in Rosevale, race day. There were some sore heads after that next morning.

Who organised the races?

They had a committee. Enrights always had horses and they were interested in it. Hans Jensen, and Hughie Ahearns family.

Years ago, they also had races up at Mt Walker, but I don't remember them. And down at Collins place. But that was before our time.

I used to ride a horse for my Uncle, he had a mare and I was to ride her in a race. But there were two blokes there who were pretty rough men and they were just as likely to stop you. Dad said if they were riding, I wasn't to ride in the race. Dad and Uncle Jack had an argument about it, he wouldn't start his mare then.

A lot of funny things happened at Rosevale races. They had gambling turnouts - they would have a table about 6ft by 4ft and have "Under and Over". You put 2 bob or 10 bob on, I didn't have much to do with it. They would have them at the races. They were illegal, but the Police wouldn't interfere unless someone complained. The bookies might complain so the police had to close them up. So one bloke came to Rosevale and set up in front of the hotel. He had a table and a hurricane lamp and he said "Here it is, come on boys, make money here!" Two larrikins got a piece of fine wire, tied it to the leg of the table - it was half dark - and took it out to the road. One



The former Driscoll's Dance Hall and the Rosevale Retreat Hotel in 1997

bloke got on a horse and the other one said "When I give a yell, hit him with the hooks mate!" and off went lantern and money and cards and everything. I saw it happen, I was on the pub railing. They were larrikins, they just wanted to do something and get up to mischief, that was all.

What other sport was there?

Cricket and tennis. Every district was involved. Rosevale would have a tennis and cricket association, so would Harrisville. Every Saturday, there were fixtures arranged and Sunday, you would have your friendly matches.

Cricket was a lot of fun then, we would all go on a big truck. We went to Mutdapilly one time, and the old bloke got out and welcomed us all. Some of the lads had had a few beers, they didn't do anything wrong but they were up to mischief and they played up. "Well", he said "I've been having cricketers here for I don't know how many years, the wildest lot that has ever been here is those Merryvale boys!"

Times have changed, we've seen big changes.

It's hard to say what will happen to little places like this in 10 or 15 years. The numbers of people are building up, they have to have somewhere to live.

Down at Mt Walker, there lots of people working in Ipswich or Brisbane, and they are living down there on 100, 120 acres and going to work every day. A lot of people are moving out of the city.

Track 07

Years ago, I used to break in horses, saddle horses and draught horses. I had just left school and Dad had these horses and put me on them. They frightened me when they bucked with the saddle. Dad used to say "You

won't be thrown". I used to get on and think "I can't be thrown".

If you broke a saddle horse in, you got £1 or 30/- for it and they had to be really quiet when they went home. A draught horse, you had to use the horse for 12 months when you broke them in. After about six months, they would come and say "the old mare is lame" or something, and want the horse back, and "here is another one you can have". You were forever breaking horses in and getting very little out of it.

Were they horses you had bred yourself, or other people's horses?

We bred a lot, we always had a blood stallion here, but I broke horses in for other people. Not a lot, but I would do it. I just loved horses, I put in a lot of time with them. It wasn't like breaking horses in today, those horses were three years old and wouldn't have had a hand on them. Horses today, they play with them from foals. But those horses would be out in the paddock, you'd run them in. I remember one horse, Dad and Mum were milking and I went to handle him in the yard and the old fellow said "leave the horse alone Pat, he doesn't know what a yard is, he'll kill himself, leave him until the morning."

You really had to break them in. Today, you rub them and play with them before you break them in, but it was different in those days.

The draught horses don't have the fire in them that a young blood horse would. I always fed a horse too. Corn was the feed in those days, three double handfuls of feed. If Dad wasn't watching, I'd give the grey mare half a bucket of corn.

Track 08

My Father's name was James. A lot of the old people had nicknames. [Dad's father] was John Patrick Joseph

- most people called him JPJ or Sammy. The other Uncle over here was Chummy and the other fellow, Bevan, he was Gaffer. I think Gaffer means "boss" in Irish but I don't know how they got the other names, Sammy or Chummy.

Dad was five when his mother died and his father didn't get married for a while, he just looked after the three boys. When he did get married, I don't think he got on really well with the stepmother, They had things pretty hard.

I remember one of my Uncles talking about getting married. Aunty Maggie was talking about uncle Jack getting married. Aunty Maggie talked a bit old Irish style, and she said his trousers were too long. Brian said "You didn't get married like that did you Auntie" and he said "Good God, he got married with a black eye too, he had a fight the night before at the party." His best man most likely gave him a black eye. They were larrikins, those old blokes.