

HUON PIONEER FAMILY

THE WALTON'S CENTENARY, 1823-1923

On February 10th, 1823, the Walton family arrived in Hobart Town from England. The family consisted of Mrs. Walton, three daughters and two sons. Thomas, the eldest son, was then 12 years of age, and William 10. Mr. Walton, their father, with his two brothers, came several years before to prepare for the wife and children, but it is the life work of the two lads that we trace, and whose centenary is celebrated.

The boys started work in the timber industry (in which their father was also engaged), and when the elder was only 13 years they attracted the attention of Governor Arthur as they were pit-sawing in what is now known as Collins Street in Hobart. The Governor appears to have been very much astonished that lads so small were able to do such arduous work, and stopped to converse with the two boys. He was so pleased that he gave them a grant of 10 acres of land at Summerleas, near Brown's River. They took possession and started to farm their land in 1832. When they had made enough money farming and sawing, they erected a water power mill at the Cascades, and divided their time between sawing and farming on their gift farm. A little later, when the fame of the Huon pine-getting in the upper reaches of the Huon Valley attracted their attention, they journeyed down the Channel and up Huon River to a place called Mosquito Point, near the present Ranelagh. Here they had to leave their boat and pass the night. Thomas in after days sometimes spoke of the way their dogs crouched near them by the fire, with their eyes fixed on other firey eyes that glared at them from the bush. Needless to say, they did not investigate too closely, as they knew the eyes belonged to the Tasmanian tiger. From Mosquito Point they continued their journey by land; got across the smaller tributaries on logs, and across the larger on rafts, till they got to the pine beds from 30 to 40 miles higher up. Here they cut a number of logs and got them down to where they had left their boat, and under what difficulties only those who have been at the game can realise. Then they proceeded to make their logs into a raft, and started to tow them down the Huon River and up to Hobart Town with their whaleboat.

up to Hobart Town with their whaleboat. After labouring for about 25 miles (and near Huon Island) they got into some rough water, which broke up their raft, and some of the logs were lost, being swept out to sea. However, after a series of mishaps, they eventually reached Hobart Town with the remnant of their logs.

It was while engaged in Pine-getting that rather a curious incident occurred. It was arranged that Thomas and some companions were to take the boat from Hobart Town to the Huon, and his brother William was to go overland and meet the boat at Mosquito Point. Some time after the boat had left, William started. Going over the shoulder of Mount Wellington, he at length got into the Huon Valley, but the weather had changed, and snow began to fall. The poorly-defined track led to Mountain River, where a big log spanned the stream, somewhere near where Oates' Bridge spans the stream now. This log had to be crossed to get to Mosquito Point, but the snow had obliterated the track and changed the whole aspect of the country. The sun was obscured, and William wandered on without knowing in the least where he was going—down through the scrub on the wrong side of Mountain River. He passed through some very rich river flats, covered with peartree scrub, and eventually came to the Huon River about a mile above where the Huonville bridge now stands, and, as luck would have it, just as his brother was passing in the whaleboat. William told his brother about the very fine land he had passed through, and together they went to investigate. They were so pleased with the rich bottom soil that they applied for a square mile of it at the Lands Department. The upset price at that time was 5s. per acre, but someone got wind of this fine land, and bid against them, the price reached 12s. per acre before it was knocked down to them. They immediately gave up sawmilling and pine-getting, concentrating all their energy to clearing and developing their land, which came to be known, and is still known, as "Inlet Farm." They were the first farmers in this part of the Huon Valley (Huonville), and for the first few years the only way of getting supplies from Hobart Town was by a track which led down through gullies and over the spurs of Mount Wellington; but these hardy pioneers carried all their supplies along this track until their farm began to produce, and a barge to come up the river and take their produce to Hobart Town and bring supplies back

Town and bring supplies back

About this time other settlers began to select land in the neighbourhood, and on one occasion Thomas Walton carried a child from Hobart Town on his back in a knapsack to the Grove. This happened over 80 years ago, and the child was Charles Parsons, whose death occurred this week.

Soon after this the brothers Walton began to find that potato-growing was not always lucrative, and discovering that there was a market for lightwood staves, they again turned their attention to timber-getting. They were informed that a quantity of this wood was growing in a valley 15 miles south of their farm, so they took a pair of bullocks down the eastern side of the river to a point opposite the valley containing the lightwood, and swam the animals across the river. The point is still known as "Bullock Point," and the valley was for years after known as Lightwood Bottom, and is where Geeveston now stands. They spent some time at this place splitting staves and taking them to a shipping place with the bullocks, and in the meantime produce having advanced in price, they again went back to their farm.

On the 29th April, 1852, Thomas Walton was married to Miss Sophia Smith in the Melville Street Wesleyan Church, Hobart. Miss Smith was the daughter of a well-known Hobart Town builder. For several years they continued farming, but the timber industry seems to have had a great fascination for the brothers, for again they decided to build a sawmill. They leased the farm to Mr. Samuel Page, and for a time changed houses with him. They built the sawmill on a piece of bush land near a good shipping place on the farm, and carried on the milling for some years, but the timber trade becoming poor and the term for which their farm was leased having expired, they once more went back to agricultural pursuits.

In the year 1855 Thomas headed a party to mark out a better line of road from Hobart Town to the Huon. The present road is nearly on the line then marked out. A stone bearing an inscription erected to commemorate the event is still to be seen at Huonville, at the corner of Wilmot Road and the main Huon road.

In the year 1859 William died, much regretted by relatives and friends. He never married.

Thomas continued to reside at his farm with his wife and family until his death, which took place in 1893, he being then 82 years of age.

Among his many generous acts was the

gift to the public of the Wilmot Road, and the gifts of the Congregational Church site and cemetery. In the early days the blacks often visited the farm, and the Waltons found them to be very inoffensive people, and friendly to those

who treated them kindly. On many occasions when they called at the farm and were told that Thomas and William Walton had walked to Hobart for supplies they hurried away to meet them on the return journey and helped the settlers along with their burdens. Every few months the aboriginals visited Inlet Farm, where they were given a feast of bread and milk, a delicacy of which they were very fond, and gifts of many other kinds. Once when Mrs. Walton was visiting Hobart she was recognised by a number of her dusky friends in Liverpool Street. The crowded round her with shouts of "Mammy 's come to town, Mammy 's come to town," in such a way as to be rather embarrassing, and to make it quite impossible for her to do any business. At length she had to take refuge in a draper's shop, and ask to be shown out some back way.

Thomas Walton left a family of ten children, and there are 25 grandchildren and 23 great-grandchildren. A number of the grandsons served in the late war, one of whom did not return. One also served in the Boer war.

Mrs. Thomas Walton is still alive and well and is in her 90th year. Often she is seen walking about the township, and taking a keen interest in the place she has seen grow from forest land. Until quite recently, in cases of distress in the district Mrs. Walton would be found nursing the sick and comforting those who were in trouble. When younger, to do these kind acts, she would very often walk many miles over very bad roads to bush huts out of the reach of roads among the hills. That she may continue to enjoy good health is the sincere wish of her numerous friends and descendants, and should she be spared to celebrate her centenary, as there seems every prospect of, the Huon will engage in such festivities and rejoicings that the event will be remembered as gladdest for many years to come.