

## MRS. JANE POKE.

### THE GRAND OLD LADY OF CIRCULAR HEAD.

By L. Norman.

Mrs. Jane Poke, widow of the late Mr. W. J. Poke, who also lived to a ripe age, was the first white child to be born in what is now the municipality of Circular Head, and still enjoys good health at Smithton, although 94 years of age. She was born on the 9th January, 1844, at Stanley, and moved to what afterwards became Smithton with her parents when she was 14 years of age, and has lived there ever since, having over 100 grandchildren, many great-grandchildren and five great-great-grandchildren.

Still happy and contented and highly intelligent, her busy fingers ever ply the crochet needles, and many articles made by her are exhibited, some being of the most minute texture, showing that her sight is to be envied even by those who are seventy years her junior. She reads the papers and follows the news of the day keenly, especially all that relates to Mr. Lyons, who calls upon her whenever he is in the district, and with Dame Enid Lyons sends her a Christmas card each year.

As the oldest resident, she planted one of the two acorns sent to the municipality from the Royal Oak at Windsor Park, and is pleased that it not only germinated but its roots have grown through the bottom of the pot into the ground. What promises to be a sturdy oak is now ready to be transplanted, and it is hoped that with it may be preserved its history and that of the dear old lady whose loving fingers first placed the soil around the seed in the pot, the date of the planting of the acorn and of the transplanting of the tree.

Jane Poke (nee Ollington) has an excellent memory, and can recall the names of the vessels of that shipmaster of Stanley, Henry J. Emmett, father of the late Herbert J. Emmett, who was a produce merchant, in particular the Mary Stewart, a schooner of 70 tons built at Balmain, Sydney, and purchased by Mr. Emmett in 1856. She also vividly remembers the doings of the notorious bushrangers, Bradley and Connor, and her first school teacher, Miss Walsh of Stanley; her first Sunday school mistress, Miss Archer, and the parson, Mr. Atkinson, the father of the Archdeacon and Mr. H. Atkinson.

She has clear recollections of two aborigines, Black Harry and Black Johnnie, because the only scar on her body came from one of them. As a

little girl she was standing close to them, and looking up into their faces when a live coal from the pipe of one of them fell down her neck and burnt her.

She recollects also the Fanny, a small vessel with a cargo of potatoes from Montagu to Stanley, which came to grief on the Seven-mile Beach, and her captain, Harry Smith, and his 19-year-old daughter, Mary, were drowned and their bodies never recovered.

When Mrs. Poke came to the site of Smithton it was all natural forest. She and her family went to live three miles up the river, and her father was the first to use a train of bullocks for bringing logs to the ship's side for export to Melbourne. The vessels used were little ketches. So uncivilized was the place in those days that her brother was 16 years of age before he heard a clergyman preach. However, she and her two brothers with axe and hoe took turn and turn about in helping to make the place civilized, and to this, no doubt, she owes her present health and vigor.

Her children are Mrs. Malley at Trowutta, Mrs. Ed. Wells at Scotchtown, Messrs. Albert Poke of Melbourne, W. J. Poke of Scotchtown, Edwin Poke of Nalageena, Mrs. Nicol, who lives next door to her at Smithton, Mrs. Billelt, with whom she resides, and Mrs. A. Grey of Reclpa.

She remembers Montagu when the only means of communication by land was a bridle track, and she and her brother used to ride there for dances in a barn.