

THE STONEYS OF MANSFIELD

The Stoney family of 'Minto Park' Mansfield are regarded as 'locals' with the four Stoney children being 5th generation farmers and graziers in the district.

The interesting thing is that the family line comes partly through the female members of the family taking over earlier family properties.

Great, great Grandfather Ralph Tod arrived in Port Phillip on the 'Red Rover' in January 1864 with a new wife and a hand written testimonial from their Presbyterian Minister in Ireland. The couple were to found the ensuing Australian generations.

After a short time serving as a 'Man ploughman and his wife a general useful' in Mansfield, Ralph selected 600 acres on the fertile Goulburn River Flats at Darlingford some 16 miles from Mansfield.

His selection was the 'cream of the country' bounded on one side by the river, the other by densely scrubbed ranges presenting problems with dingoes, kangaroos and wombats.

He developed a successful mixed farming business – sheep, cattle, a dairy – producing butter, and an extensive garden and orchards producing vegetables and fruit including pears, apples, and plums. Careful attention to cool storage in cellars enabled him to store one and a half tons of apples and other fruit and a dairy with a double roof ensured sufficient insulation and ventilation for high quality butter preservation.

The pioneering Darlingford farm was inundated by the rising waters of Lake Eildon in the 1950s. Recent inspection (May 1999, by four generations of Tod ancestors – photo available) the property, exposed by low levels of the Eildon weir, revealed many of the farm buildings, the dairy and machinery as well as fences and remnants of the garden and orchards. An old wagon was half out of the water – a poignant reminder of the pioneer Ralph Tod.

In 1905 Ralph Tod died and one Tod child, Mary, had married John Gilmore. They took over the selection and the line continued.

Times were hard and fire, drought and pestilence was ever present.

John used to tell the story of how he drove a Binder non stop for 3 days and nights in the moonlight to get the oats, ahead of a plague of caterpillars which was taking all before it. 'I would eat and others would yoke up fresh horses' he used to tell (over and over) - John Gilmore's yarns were legendary, especially the fishing tales!

The farm was due to be flooded by the original Eildon Weir however the wall cracked and it was decided to lower the high water mark. The backwaters came into the garden and stopped.

This meant the Water Commission no longer needed the farm and John Gilmore had to bring back by wagon all the farm goods and machinery he had taken to their new farm at Thornton some 30 miles downstream. This Government backflip caused severe financial hardship to the family.

As the seven Gilmore children grew up, it was decided about 1940 that Flora Gilmore and her new Husband Eadley Stoney (from a pioneer Gippsland family) would buy out the other six Gilmore children and run the farm.

So the Stoney name came to Mansfield and Eadley began developing Darlingford and his line of Hereford Cattle which were to become famous for their fattening and temperament qualities.

Eadley was a 'doer', always looking for opportunities. He obtained a High Country Snow lease which is still run by his grandson Chris.

In 1950 construction of the new massive Eildon Lake meant the property was doomed after all and Eadley and Flora purchased one of the well known Hermiston properties 'Minto Park' close to Mansfield.

Again Government policies and valuations caused an unfair settlement for the Darlingford property.

Eadley was a hard worker and much loved and respected in the community. He completely rebuilt Minto Park and doubled the acreage. He was active as a Councillor and heavily involved in community issues. After his death in 1972, the Mansfield Council moved to have a Peak in the High Country named Mt Eadley Stoney in his honour.

In 1964 son, Graeme Stoney, married the girl next door Helen Hermiston from 'Minto Glen' and with their four children set out on an expansion program which saw the property size doubled again and an extensive pasture seed enterprise developed.

Daughter Beryl had also married into the local Howie Family who were also farmers and Hereford breeders. Christmas dinner was cattle/cattle/cattle.

The Stoney Herefords continued to run in the High Country and Graeme and Helen, with another well known local family the Tehans, purchased and developed the Mansfield Courier.

It is ironic that the original Tehan family property 'Wappan' was also flooded by the new Lake Eildon

Graeme and Helen also founded with partners, an Alpine Tour Company which son Chris still operates as a successful Trail Riding business.

Graeme was elected to State Parliament in 1992 and continues to hold the seat of Central Highlands.

Chris and Helen Stoney now run 'Minto Park' and 'Minto Glen' and the snow lease. New brooms sweep clean and the Herefords are going! These days the fertile Minto paddocks are dotted with fat, black Angus.

Graeme now lives with his partner Wendy at Howqua Hills, Merrijig, surrounded by Peppermint covered ranges reminiscent of the hills surrounding Darlingford.

He proudly displays Ralph Tod's original branding iron on the wall of his house which looks deep into the High Country.

'You must never forget your past and where you come from' he says quietly.

End..

2002.