When Woolloongabba was Wattle-Scented.

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(Read at a Meeting of the Historical Society of Queensland, on 26th April, 1918.

I have headed this paper "When Woolloongabba was Wattle-scented," because it is the title I have made use of on several occasions when writing to the Courier a few rambling remarks on East Brisbane; indeed this paper reduces to a summarised form several letters which have already been printed, with a few later particulars added. The perfume of wattle was not confined to Woolloongabba alone. It pervaded the whole suburban area. By taking an early morning walk anywhere within two or three miles of the present Post Office, one could surround himself with the perfume of wattle and tea-tree, and fill his lungs with the tonic breath of the eucalyptus. The invigorating air of the wide open forest stirred one's blood like a draught of good wine, and produced a feeling of exhilaration and gladness which sometimes found expression in shout and song. While, if one wanted to get into the silerit scrubs, he had only to walk to the Three-Mile scrub, on the Newmarket Road, to West End, to Toowong, or to St. Lucia. Beyond the present South Brisbane cemetery, both banks of the river were for many miles covered with dense scrub. These scrubs had a magnetic charm for the unbearded youth of the period, who with tent and rod and gun spent many happy week-ends at Oxley Creek and elsewhere. One loved to get deep into the dense and tangled growth, where orchids and staghorn ferns abounded. His senses were charmed with the scent of beautiful flowers, and with the wild luxuriance which everywhere presented itself. To him the scrub was Nature's Art Gallery. The wealth of the clouds had fallen on these jungles for centuries, and moisture and warmth had combined to provide the visitor with a "feast of fat things."

I may here be permitted to make a slight personal explanation, because if it had not been for some blundering in the Emigration Office in England in 1852, I probably
should not be here to-night. My father and mother arrived in Brisbane in March, 1853. They had originally intended to go to Adelaide, where they had relations, but, owing to a mistake made by an emigration official, they never got there. My mother's brother went to South Australia in 1847. He subsequently took up land on the Bremer River near Strathalbyn, and subsequently engaged in wheat growing and cattle raising. When he had been there a couple of years he sent for his two brothers—two young married men—who arrived in South Australia in 1850 and in 1851. We were to have followed in a ship which, we had been informed, was to leave for Adelaide at the end of October, 1852. But when we reached Gravesend from Bury St. Edmunds about the middle of that month, my father was told by a young man in the Emigration Office that a ship bound for Adelaide had left a week before, and that there would not be another vessel for probably six months. My father expressed his disappointment at this unexpected turn in his enterprise, particularly as passages had been paid to Adelaide, and the word Adelaide had been painted on all the boxes containing his effects. He told the young man that he could not possibly stay there six months, and asked for advice. The youth said that a ship would be sailing for Moreton Bay in about a week's time, and advised him to go by that vessel. "How far is Moreton Bay from Adelaide?" asked my father. The official mind of those days seemed to have had a somewhat hazy idea of geographical distances in Australia, and, of course, the unofficial mind was no better informed. The young man thoughtfully rubbed his bald chin for a moment, and said "I don't know; but I will enquire." He went into an adjoining room for a few minutes, and when he returned, he said to my father: "The chief has looked at the map and finds that Moreton Bay is no great distance from Adelaide. In fact, he says, that if you have an early breakfast, and start from Moreton Bay not later than 7 o'clock, you can, by walking quickly, reach Adelaide by dinner time." This was splendid and the situation looked much better than it did a few minutes before. The result was that the word "Adelaide" was erased from our boxes and the words "Moreton Bay" took its place.

We embarked on the ship Agricola, Captain Bell, and left Gravesend late in October, 1852, and arrived off Cape Moreton on the 5th March, 1853. Captain Bell was a stranger to the Port and did not care to enter without the assistance of a pilot. While lying off the Cape, the captain every day fired a number of guns to attract the
pilot’s attention. On the third day the pilot came alongside in a whaleboat, and brought the ship into the Bay. There were in those days no nice comfortable river steamers to carry immigrants from the Bay to Brisbane. But two or three days afterwards a small cutter, owned by John Williams, of South Brisbane, came alongside with fresh provisions, and we had bread, meat and potatoes for the first time for nearly six months. Next day the whole of the passengers and their belongings were transferred to the smaller vessel, and about 2 in the afternoon we left for Brisbane. After a very tedious and unpleasant trip, owing to insufficient accommodation for such a large number of passengers, we arrived at Raff’s wharf (near present site of Thomas Brown and Son’s store), about 1 p.m. next day, and we all walked to the Immigration Depot (formerly the military barracks) which then stood in the square block of land bounded by Queen, George, Elizabeth and William streets, and now occupied by the Treasury Buildings.

Brisbane was a very small place in 1853. According to the census taken two years before—March, 1851, the population of the future metropolis was distributed as follows:—Township of North Brisbane, 1,240 persons; suburbs of North Brisbane, 380 persons; township of South Brisbane, 425; suburbs of South Brisbane, 127 (Woolloongabba and West End as residential areas were not then thought of); Kangaroo Point, 269 persons; suburbs of Kangaroo Point, 89. According to these returns, which were published in the Courier late in 1851, the whole of Brisbane sixty-six years ago contained 2,530 persons. By March, 1853, the population might perhaps have received an additional 1,500 persons, in which case the town would have contained about 4,000 persons when we arrived in Brisbane.

The wide, open spaces around the little town appealed to my father, and the suggestion of the English Emigration Agent—that he should stroll over to Adelaide after breakfast some morning—was not entertained. Our first place of residence was a little cottage situated in Boundary Street, just above the site upon which now stands the building known as the West End Brewery. This locality was probably one of the suburbs of South Brisbane, as the bulk of the population lived within the area bounded by the river, on one side, and Melbourne, Hope and Stanley streets on the other three sides. James and William Orr had a butcher’s shop on the site of Baynes Bros.’ present establishment. In those days the Orrs were able to obtain 800 and 900 lb. bullocks from Jimbour Station.
for £2 per head, and sold beautiful rump steak for 2d. and 2\textfrac{1}{2}d. per lb. Just below Orr's a large salt water creek entered the river, after following a serpentine course between Stanley and Grey streets. A little further on was the Union wharf and store belonging to William Connolly (present site of Birt's). The next residence was that of John Cockerill, a carpenter by trade, who had a small dairy. The river front at Ernest street was the home of a solicitor named, John Ocock, who was the uncle of Ratcliffe Pring, an able lawyer who afterwards occupied Cabinet rank in several Queensland ministries. The river front between Ernest Street and Sidon Street was vacant land in the mid-fifties, but the late Mr. George Appel, father of the present member, who was then Inspector of Stock for New South Wales, had a home near the present Dry Dock.

I have spoken of the wide, open spaces that existed around the little town. Take New Farm as one instance. The area between the Merthyr Road and the river, from the spot where this road touches the stream in the Shafston Reach, to the point of its junction with the river in the Bulimba Reach, near the wharves, contains about 220 acres of land.

On referring to a map of the Brisbane district, published by the New South Wales Government in the early fifties, I find that the whole 220 acres was then in the names of five persons—namely: J. McConnel, T. Adams, R. Little, D. C. McConnel and W. Kent. The area held by each person ranged from about 16 acres owned respectively by W. Kent and D. C. McConnel, to 104 acres held by Mr. T. Adams. The land on the north-east side of James Street, from Annie Street, New Farm, to Ann Street, Valley, and along that street to the Commercial Road, thence to the river at Bulimba Ferry, contained, according to the same map, about 210 acres, and was also taken up in the names of five persons—J. C. Wickham, then Government Resident and Police Magistrate, J. Gibbon, T. Shannon, M. O'Neill, and R. C. Gore. The original area held by each person ranged from 13 acres, owned by Mr. Shannon, to 119 acres, held by Mr. Gibbon. The 220 acres between the Merthyr Road and the river, added to the 210 acres on the north-east side of James Street, make a total of 430 acres. The houses on this large area could probably in the middle fifties have been counted on the fingers of one's hands.

Permit me to further digress for a moment. There is no capital city in the Commonwealth of Australia so ill provided with parks and recreation reserves as Brisbane.
The Governments of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia have been unusually liberal in this respect, and Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide have obtained, by purchase or gift, large areas of land for park purposes. Successive Queensland Governments have been niggardly in such matters, and instead of adding to the areas of our parks, have, in some instances, shown a desire to reduce them.

In 1870, seeing that several blocks in James Street were being built on, and that there were a few scattered houses in intersecting streets, I wrote two or three letters to the Press, suggesting the purchase by the Municipal Council for recreation purposes of one or more river frontages. Land was then—to use a colonialism—dirt cheap, and acres could then have been obtained for the price which is now asked for perches. Later on, when Mr. Gibbon's estate of 119 acres was about to be sub-divided into smaller areas, I again wrote to the press, suggesting that the whole paddock should be purchased by and for the citizens. But the suggestion was unheeded.

The hill portion of the estate, which overlooks the river just above the wool stores at Teneriffe, is 190 feet above sea level, with splendid views towards the south, east, west and north. Indeed, the whole block, with its wealth of grand old bush trees—ironbark, box, bloodwood, stringybark, and gum—was one of the most charming sites of forest scenery to be found anywhere near Brisbane! Just below the knoll on which Mr. Gibbon built his house is a natural amphitheatre, four or five acres in extent, open on the river side to the north-east breezes, and semi-circled on three sides by sloping hill-sides. This oval was only a little above high-water mark, and would have made an ideal sports ground. The hill-sides would have accommodated thousands of persons, everyone of whom would have been able to see the sports in the arena below.

On the southern portion of the hill was Kingsholme, the residence, in the fifties, of Mr. Benjamin Cribb, who was afterwards joined by the late Mr. J. C. Foote. The firm was then, and has been since, known as Cribb and Foote, with extensive warehouses in the City of Ipswich.

A few years ago I had an interview with the late Mr. James Hexton, whose father was the first pilot at Amity Point. Mr. Hexton was born in Brisbane on September 25, 1832, in a little cottage then occupied by his father and mother on the site of the present post office. He was the first white boy born in Brisbane, but not the first white
child, as Sarah McCann, whose father was a Colour-Sergeant in the 17th Regiment, was born a few months before him, and the late Mr. Tom Petrie some time afterwards.

At the time of the interview (August, 1909), Mr. Hexton told me that his memory went back to the time when there were no streets in Brisbane—all big paddocks. The block now bounded by George, Queen, Albert, and Elizabeth Streets, was then called the “Soldier’s Garden.” This, he said, was cultivated by the prisoners, who were chained in gangs. The area within the boundaries of George, Mary, Albert and Elizabeth Streets was known as the “Commissary’s Garden,” and was cultivated in the same way. At the corner of Mary and George Streets were the stockyards, where the cows were milked, and butter was made for the military officials. The Government slaughteryard was at the corner of what is now Elizabeth and Albert Streets. The site between George, Mary, Albert and Margaret Streets was a vacant paddock, in which the military officers kept their horses. Between Albert Street and Creek Street were several paddocks, in which maize was grown and cultivated by the chain gang. The corn was converted into meal for hominy at the old windmill (now the Observatory). Mr. Hexton said that all the prisoners worked in chains, and when a small boy he was often asked by some poor wretch to procure from his mother a piece of rag to bind round his ankles to prevent the iron rings from cutting into the flesh.

On the western side of Adelaide Street the land was uncleared forest. The land on each side of Albert Street, from Margaret Street up to Elizabeth Street—afterwards called “Frog’s Hollow”—was, Mr. Hexton said, then called “The Swamp.” Here wild ducks were numerous, and afforded good sport with the gun for the officials. A creek joined the swamp near Margaret Street and followed a tortuous course to the river near the present Port Office. The track of the first racecourse in Brisbane circled this swamp. The horses started from a spot near the Residential Hotel in Mary Street, raced down the hill and over the swamp to near the present Metropolitan Hotel, and thence across to where St. Stephen’s Cathedral now stands. Here they turned and came along into what is now Elizabeth Street, recrossed the swamp at its upper end, and thence home to the starting point. Fences were of course removed where necessary, and afterwards re-erected by the convicts. Dr. Ballow, who was then Government Medical Officer, introduced the first thoroughbreds into Brisbane, a stallion named Minto, and a mare named Fanny. Mr. Hexton...
informed me that in addition to a fairly large area under maize in North Brisbane, about 200 acres were under cultivation in South Brisbane, mostly on the western side of Melbourne Street. Certainly when we came here in 1853, there were scattered about on flat and hillside, a large number of hillocks in which corn had been formerly sown. Up till quite recently similar hillocks could be seen scattered over the New Farm flats. Mr. Hexton said that when the military authorities started culture operations lower down the river, they called the locality "The New Farm," to distinguish it from the older plantations in North and South Brisbane. A large area of the flats was, he said, covered with dense pine scrub, which was cleared by prison labour. When I first visited the spot, as a lad, about 1855, the bank of the river here and there was fringed with scrub, which was fairly dense along the little water course which entered the river at Norris's Point.

Let us now cross the river from this point, and land at the mouth of Norman Creek. This creek in the mid-fifties was a pure salt water stream, and fish could be caught in any of the reaches from its mouth to the upper branches, which serpented their way to Burnett Swamp, and penetrated the alluvial flats of Coorparoo; or in the branch that concealed its head in a tea-tree swamp near what is now the junction of the Logan and Wellington Roads. Here and there in the pockets of the creek the wild convolvulus hung in gay festoons from over-hanging branches of the trees, and trailed its blooms in the tide. In the pocket of the creek, near the residence of Mr. W. F. Cameron, the writer has seen a score or so of blacks procure by means of their tow-nows, a couple of hundred fish in a few minutes.

This pocket was a favourite camping place in the early days, and quite recently a stone tomahawk was picked up on the site of an old camp by a gentleman who lives in the neighbourhood. In the early fifties a dense pine scrub occupied the eastern bank of the stream at its mouth, and filled the entire pocket of the creek nearly up to the foot of Galloway's Hill. After Captain Taylor Winship had completed for the New South Wales Government the first bridge over the mouth of the creek, a narrow road was cut through this scrub, in order, it was said, to shorten the mail route to Cleveland. Before this bridge was built, the road to Cleveland was round by Coorparoo, junctioning with the Cleveland Road near the present Morningside railway station. Or, alternatively, round by Belmont, and striking the Cleveland road near Capalaba.
The land on both sides of the new road, through the scrub, was the property of the late Hon. L. Hope, who was the pioneer of the sugar industry in Queensland, and whose plantation was at Ormiston, near Cleveland. The whole of the scrub was afterwards felled, and the land was farmed for several years by a man named Thompson.

In the early days East Brisbane, Coorparoo, Norman Park, Stone's Corner, and other places were heavily timbered areas, where bush tracks have since been converted into the solid permanency of suburban streets and side-walks. Both sides of Main Street, Kangaroo Point, from St. Mary's Church to the Fiveways, were well timbered with ironbark, bloodwood, gum and stringybark, and here and there could be seen a little cottage tucked away in a corner of the forest. Wellington Road was undefined, and there was not a dwelling house on any portion of the street, from one end to the other. But about 1855 or 6 a man named Charles Eastwood had a small slab hut, with a bark roof and an earthen floor, on the western side of the road, near the intersection of Mowbray Terrace. About this time a man named Salston built a cottage in the tea-tree forest on Shafston Road, hence the name Salston Street, not far from its junction with Wellington Road. It was about this time, too, that the Truemans, the Nicholls, and others began to build on the Shafston Road frontages, opposite Shafston House. Open spaces and large paddocks were the rule, and one could walk long distances without seeing a house or a fence. The late Mr. Joseph Darragh, butcher, of Kangaroo Point, had on Norman Creek a 66-acre paddock, which was enclosed with a four-rail fence about 1856.

This paddock was then well stocked with timber, and nearly all the material required for the fence was obtained on the ground. Additional supplies were procured from the slopes and ridges in the neighbourhood of the present Ipswich Road tram terminus. The fence was started on the creek bank at the foot of what is now Vulture Street, and continued through the forest until what is now Withington Street was reached, thence through the forest to the creek at the foot of that street. The creek, therefore, formed the boundary line on one side of this 66-acre paddock, the other two sides being bounded by the fence on the streets named. Mr. Darragh arrived in Brisbane in 1850, and five years later opened a butcher's shop in the lower portion of Main Street, Kangaroo Point, where he carried on a successful business for many years. He was born in the village of Cookstown, Ireland, and his name is commemorated in Darragh's Buildings, Queen Street.
The whole of the land having Vulture Street for its northern boundary, with Wellington Road for its western side, then down Kingfisher and Norman Creeks to the foot of Vulture Street, was, in the middle fifties, held by four persons, all of whom were personally known to myself. Mr. Darragh, as stated, held 66 acres; next came Mr. D. F. Longland, with 31 acres, having frontages to Vulture Street and Kingfisher Creek. Adjoining this was the Rev. Thos. Mowbray's 24 acres, also with frontages to Vulture Street and Kingfisher Creek. Mr. Thomas Grenier also had 24 acres, with a frontage to Vulture Street, and to Wellington Road, down to its junction with the Logan Road. These four properties made a total of 145 acres, at present a thickly populated portion of East Brisbane.

Mr. Longland was at that time Superintendent of Works in Brisbane for the New South Wales Government. Members of his family are still living in Brisbane. Mr. Grenier arrived in Brisbane in 1845. He had previously been burned out and ruined at a Maori raid at the Bay of Islands (now called Russell), in New Zealand, and came to Brisbane with his wife and family to make a fresh start. He afterwards became the licensee of the Brisbane Hotel, Russell Street, South Brisbane, the site of a portion of the present Melbourne Street railway yards. While Mr. Grenier was at the Bay of Islands, there arrived from America a ship whose captain was named Peterson, between whom and Grenier a warm friendship sprang up. Peterson returned to America, got married, and subsequently brought his wife to Brisbane. Shortly after arrival he started business in premises next door to Orr Brothers, in Stanley Street (now Baynes), and only two or three hundred yards distant from the man whose friendship he had won in New Zealand. One of Mr. Peterson's sons (Daniel) was, for many years, a valued officer in the postal service of this State. Mr. Grenier's eldest son (George) died at his home, Cooper's Plains, a year or two ago, aged 74 years.

If we now cross over to the northern side of Vulture Street (of course there were no fences in those early days), we find that the land bounded on the south by Vulture Street, on the west by Wellington Road, on the north by Lytton Road, and on the east by the winding creek, was, according to the map already referred to, held by seven persons, namely: Rev. T. Mowbray, 46 acres; W. Wilson, 34 acres; A. H. Hutchinson, 33 acres; D. F. Roberts, 20 acres; J. Warner, 16 acres; A. Knowles, 13 acres; T. Greer, 12 acres; omitting roods and perches, approximately 174 acres.
The 46 acres mentioned above as belonging to Mr. Mowbray were situated between Vulture Street and Lytton Road. Mr. Mowbray also had eleven acres fronting the Lytton Road and the river, and if those are added to the above 46, we find that the total area held by that gentleman was equal to 57 acres. If the 174 acres on the northern side of Vulture Street be added to the 145 on the southern side, the total area is equal to 319 acres. It may be said; I think, that East Brisbane is on the eastern side of Wellington Road; and when it is remembered that in the mid-fifties there were not more than one or two houses on the area under notice, it will be admitted that the growth of that portion of the city of South Brisbane has been rapid.

The Rev. Thomas Mowbray may almost be regarded as the father of the Presbyterian Church in Queensland. Although services were held in North Brisbane by the late Rev. Dr. Lang as early as 1845, in the little Evangelical Church which then stood on a portion of the site now occupied by the Executive Buildings, it was at a meeting held at Kangaroo Point in December, 1849, that a resolution was passed in favour of erecting a church on the southern side of the river. At this meeting there were present Messrs. McNaught, McAdam, Boyland, Stewart, Cairncross, Graham, McIntyre, McLean, Gray, Ingliss, and D. C. McConnel. A committee was formed for the purpose of furthering the movement, and the Rev. Mr. Mowbray was appointed secretary. A subsequent meeting was held—so the writer has been informed by that grand old pastoral pioneer, Mr. William Clark, now of Wynnum South—in the old convict barracks, Queen Street, under the chairmanship of Mr. D. C. McConnel, at which the Rev. Salmond, of Parramatta, Moderator of the Synod of Eastern Australia, was present. At this meeting it was finally decided to go on with the erection of a church in Grey Street, South Brisbane. The construction of the building—wood, with a shingled roof—was entrusted to Mr. John Graham, father of "Johnny" Graham, a well-known sport, for many years connected with the Queensland Turf Club. The pine shingles for the roof were obtained by Mr. Clark in the pine scrub which then existed in the neighbourhood of the present Fairfield railway station. The vestibule of the Melbourne street station is almost on the spot formerly occupied by this historic old church. Through the Scotch Presbytery it was decided to make a call to the Rev. James McLeod, who subsequently arrived, and took up ministerial duties in connection with the church. Messrs. J. Clark and D. C. McConnel were the first elders, and
Mr. Mowbray sometimes occupied the pulpit. Mr. Mowbray was a native of Hamilton, in Scotland, and entered the university of Glasgow in 1829, taking his degree of M.A. in 1834. In 1841 he emigrated to Australia, and was stationed in the Port Phillip district till 1844. In December of that year he came as far north as Sydney, where he ministered to large congregations for two years and a half. While here his health gave his friends some cause for uneasiness, and he was recommended by his medical adviser to come to Brisbane. Under the influence of our genial climate his health improved, and he soon widened the circle of his activities. He opened at his riverside residence a Grammar School, perhaps the first in Brisbane, in which were educated some of the men who afterwards became prominent in the social and commercial life of the little town. The site was an ideal one for a first-class educational establishment. The school grounds included an area of about eleven acres, having a frontage to both the Lytton Road and the river, while the residence and school buildings were situated in a grove of forest trees, the whole being open to the soft sea breezes that swung across from Humbug Reach. His name is perpetuated in Mowbray Park, a charming site, which was acquired some years ago by the South Brisbane Council for park purposes. Mr. Mowbray was a lover of all true men. His clear, manly intellect, his genial manners, and his generous sympathy drew towards him a large circle of friends and admirers. He was always ready to cheer and assist those who were engaged in any good work; and few men in any community were more sought for and prized for their work and their worth than was the Rev. Thomas Mowbray. His death took place on the 24th December, 1867, honoured and esteemed by those who were privileged to call him friend.

Two of Mr. Mowbray's sons, William and Thomas, occupied many important positions in the service of the State. William was, in turn, Clerk of Petty Sessions and Mining Registrar at Charters Towers, Warden and Police Magistrate at Thornborough and Georgetown, Mineral Lands Commissioner at Herberton, Police Magistrate at Cooktown, and Warden at Charters Towers and Gympie. He died in the latter town in 1898. Thomas was at various periods Police Magistrate at St. George, Mackay, Bundaberg, Warwick, Toowoomba, and Assistant Police Magistrate at Brisbane. While holding this latter position he died in May, 1914. A third son, John, is in business in Brisbane.