

With the next PMI Press publication shortly due for release, Christine talks to the author ...

GWEN TRUSCOTT

'Before Thomas Sheppard created the township of Toora in South Gippsland, Victoria, Australia in the 1880s, nearby to the west a settlement had already been born, flourished and declined, along with the local timber industry that had created and sustained it.'

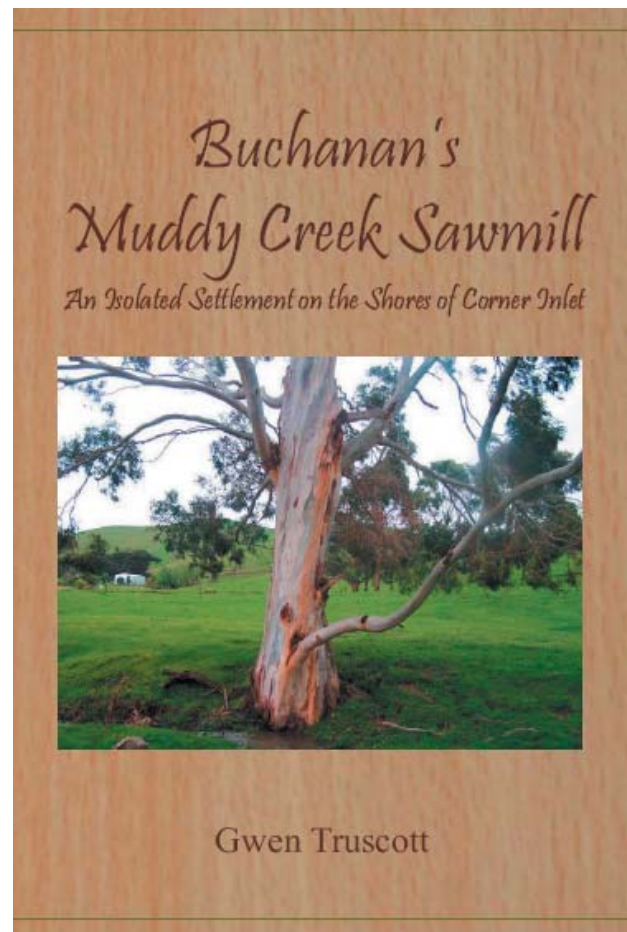
How did you first become interested in researching and writing the history of the Muddy Creek sawmill area?

I became interested in the area because of the close proximity of the former mill site to the farm where I have lived since my marriage nearly 60 years ago. Our farm is hilly and as my husband, Edgar and I worked the land, my eyes often surveyed the beautiful scene across Toora to the blue waters of Corner Inlet and the Wilsons Promontory mountains beyond.

Over the years details given by different authors of the names of those who died at Muddy Creek did not match up, and I thought something should be done about this anomaly. As I mention in the Preface to the book, it was when I became a founding member of the Toora & District Family History Group that I had the opportunity to start researching local history. The three deaths I found that were registered to have occurred at Buchanan's sawmill had not been mentioned before in local histories.

Did you go about your research with publication in mind, or did you think about publication later?

I was always hopeful of having the work published as I feel for the workers of that period, and for their wives and children who accompanied the menfolk seeking work in very isolated communities. The outline of my story had been written for years but it wasn't until I had a phone conversation with Librarian, Tim, at PMI who thanked me for the copy of the book, *Five Schools in the Toora District* which I had written jointly



with my friend Coleen Bower, that I thought publication was possible.

Did your experience as a co-author of the Toora schools book give you much in the way of confidence for taking on another project?

I studied history at school. My parents valued education and gave me the opportunity to attend Upwey High School during the War years. It was there that I passed well in the subject of history for my Leaving Certificate. The system in those days was to sit for a three hour examination in December for each Leaving Certificate subject, under the auspices of the University of Melbourne.

I learned a lot from my co-author, Coleen Bower when we were researching the history of the early schools in the Toora district which was of special interest as Coleen's grandmother and my mother attended schools in the area, and this certainly gave me the confidence to take up another project. My husband and our four

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daughters have supported me when I asked them for advice. Our son, Rob, has seen to computer difficulties.

What was it about the Muddy Creek sawmill settlement that captured your imagination and make you believe it needed to be preserved in print?

I am hoping that quotes from newspapers (eg *Toora and Welshpool Pioneer*, 8 December 1893), 'Many a cosy home was there surrounded by luxurious gardens' will stimulate the imagination of readers. I can imagine hollyhocks growing tall beside walls or the brick chimneys, and the vegetable garden filled with high maize plants and pumpkin vines growing over the potato and swede turnip plots. I have been told just lately that a fowl run went down the bank of the Muddy Creek from the Buchanan/Handbury home. The *Pioneer* article also mentions 80 heaps of bricks that were found after the huts were demolished, indicating there were two chimneys to every hut, quite a comfortable set up one would think.

Are you researching anything else at the moment – can you see another publishing project down the track?

My third story *From St Dennis to Euronga* has been written in the rough for a long while. As it starts with the birth of William Truscott in 1955 at St Dennis in Cornwall, it is not all Victorian history as I wanted to write about what I had found of the Truscott history in Cornwall. William died on the Truscott property 'Euronga' at Toora in 1920.

The three books, *Five Schools in the Toora District*, *Buchanan's Muddy Creek Sawmill* and my Truscott story, *From St Dennis to Euronga* all have links to each other through the Truscott, Ferres names and of the district of Toora.

I wish to thank the Prahran Mechanics' Institute personnel for choosing to print my story. I would like to extend special thanks to the Administrator of PMI Press, Christine Worthington, for the professional manner in which she has presented my book for printing.

Full details of this publication will be available soon on the PMI Press website www.pmi.net.au/press.htm and in the next PMI newsletter.

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