SAMUEL McCaughey - REVISITED

A BIOGRAPHY BY
Patricia McCaughey

A TRANSCRIPTION
by Ian Itter

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FOREWORD

This ought to be a fascinating book, for it is written about a great man and is written by a gracious and talented woman.

There are conflicting, or at least alternative, views of history. There was a time when all the emphasis was on Kings and Wars. There was another time when the emphasis was on great men—'Heroes and Hero-worship'. Today the emphasis is on social development; the conditions, the aspirations, the character of the people as a whole. The danger of today's philosophy, which is otherwise so humanly sound, is to be found in a tendency to distrust or fear great men, as if suddenly a Churchill might turn out to be a Hitler. It is an unjustified fear, in the sense that democracy should always keep its faith that it can encourage greatness without creating tyranny.

That is why I like the stories of great men in the modern world. They are not something undemocratic, unless we believe that democracy aims at a dead level of secured mediocrity. They are, on the contrary, the proof and justification of democracy. In Australia, no man was a great man by privilege; his greatness must have come from courage and effort and self-reliance.

In our own life-times we have seen a social revolution. High taxes, the vast spread of social services, the new status of labour, have combined to produce a society in which the extremes of both wealth and poverty are tending to disappear. But it would be a misfortune if we came to regard the acquisition of wealth as something intrinsically evil, or to look back upon some of its past possessors as selfish exploiters. Envy of riches is a mean thing; admiration of them is puerile. I feel neither envy nor malice in the contemplation of the sudden riches of a gambler or a speculator. But when a man becomes rich by creating a new industry, or pioneering a great productive rural industry, his wealth is a great social contribution.

Samuel McCaughey was a great Australian builder. His deeds and outlook live in the splendid tradition of his family. He was of the old school in his energy and drive. He was of the new school in his passion for the encouragement of research and education. It is therefore a privilege to commend this notable record to what I hope will be a wide and proud Australian audience.

ROBERT GORDON MENZIES
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INTRODUCTION

Until I came to Australia in 1942 I had never heard of Sir Samuel McCaughey. In fact, I knew of Australia only by hearsay, and very little at that. Certainly it had never entered my head that I might come to live in this country—until on one never-forgotten day the captain of the ship which I thought was taking me to England announced to his astounded passengers: 'In one hour's time we'll be in Fremantle!'

I had been living in Singapore with my husband, Harold North-Hunt, a senior Malayan Civil Servant who held the posts of Registrar-General of Statistics, Births, Marriages and Deaths, Controller of Restricted Imports and Exports, Controller of Rubber and Director-General of Supplies. When the Japanese advance on Singapore suddenly became a hideous certainty, I was hurriedly evacuated with a group of other women on February 5th 1942, ten days before the fall of Singapore, in an Old Dutch cattle ship, the **Rochussen**. Our orders were that each of us was to take a mattress and four days' supply of tinned food; luggage was out of the question.

I tied my jewellery and papers in a bag round my waist. There was no time to get my passport, so my husband hastily wrote out and signed a form for me which he hoped would serve in lieu of this, and we said good-bye to each other on the wharf, with no idea of when, if ever, we would be reunited. We knew that the ship was to make for Batavia, and then, we hoped, I could get a passage from there to England.

The **Rochussen** had just unloaded a cargo of pigs at Singapore, there was no time to clean the ship, and we women huddled on deck in conditions that were unimaginably filthy.

Soon after leaving Singapore we were bombed for fifty minutes by Japanese planes, but somehow we escaped being hit, and six days later, after a horror-voyage which I prefer to forget, we reached Batavia.

Here we were transferred to the **Glenartney**, a British ship which had been on its way to Singapore carrying ammunition and big guns for the **Prince of Wales** and the **Repulse**; on the news of the sinking of these warships she had been halted at Batavia. We refugees set out on her for England—as we believed; most of us came from the Old Country.

Just after leaving Batavia seven Japanese bombers circled overhead, and knowing the cargo we carried (the guns and ammunition had not been unloaded), we were convinced that our journeys end had come almost before we had started. However, by the mercy of God the planes did not attack us, and we continued on our way, believing that each day of this black-out voyage was bringing us nearer to our people in Britain.

The captain's announcement, after we had been some four weeks at sea, that we would reach an Australian port in an hour's time seemed too incredible for us to take in,

Nevertheless the outline of the coast gradually took shape, and I saw Australia for the first time. But I was not to set foot on it until we reached its far eastern seaboard, the spy-conscious authorities refused to accept my makeshift passport, and would not allow me to land. Although the thought of stepping ashore on dry land seemed inviting, I was too ill and apathetic to care very much when I was told that I would have to go on to Sydney, where they hoped to be able to clear up my position.

One part of Australia did not mean anymore to me than another at that time. So it was Sydney where I first set foot in Australia, and as it turned out it is New South Wales where I have made my home. I passed through times of acute anxiety and suspense about the fate of my husband before I finally learnt, in 1943, that he had died while a prisoner in Japanese hands in Singapore. But from the day of my arrival
in Sydney I met with such kindness and understanding and generosity that I have come to love the country and its people.

In 1944 I married an Australian, David Roy McCaughey, and the nightmare years of wartime grief and strain are passing from my mind. Although I must always love Northern Ireland, the land of my birth, I have adopted my husband's country, and have come to consider myself an Australian, as concerned in her welfare and as proud of her achievements as if I were native-born. To my mind, the greatest achievement in Australia is the taming of this wild continent, in many parts so harsh and unfriendly to man; a churlish, hostile land, resisting settlement, withholding the bounty she possesses, and needing to be coaxed to fertility. Yet this is a land which has shown she can respond magnificently to men of courage and vision, to pioneers who cherish a faith in her potentialities and who have the energy for sustained hard work.

As time went on I began to hear more and more about that great Irish-born pastoralist, Sir Samuel McCaughey, my husband's uncle. Although he had died twenty three years before I arrived here, his name seemed to crop up whenever anyone mentioned Australia's pastoral development. I came to realize that he had possessed all the fine pioneering qualities in abundance. He gave them generously to Australia, and his adopted country responded a hundredfold to his efforts. I learnt that Sir Samuel McCaughey was indeed one of the makers of Australia, and one of the greatest forces in the development of the sheep-breeding and wool-producing industry of the country. It was largely due to his experiments (carried out regardless of cost) and sound judgment that the average yield of wool from a single sheep was increased during his lifetime from about five to nine pounds—and much superior wool at that. His labours in irrigation and in opening up the outback, added to his princely benefactions, greater than those of Cecil Rhodes, have increased the debt Australia owes to him.

I feel that the example of this doughty Ulsterman can be an inspiration to coming generations; that is why I have wanted to publish this book. I first began to visualize Samuel McCaughey as a person when, just after our marriage, my husband drove me to his home at Coonong in the Riverina district of New South Wales.

This was the first property which Samuel McCaughey had owned in Australia. The solid homestead of concrete-faced brick had been built by him and here he had made his home for nearly forty years.

As we motored from Sydney towards the west the miles seemed endless and unvarying. It was the end of a droughty summer and the paddocks were brown and bare as the road we travelled on. I thought of the young Samuel McCaughey journeying through these areas by horse transport some ninety years earlier. What an undertaking it must have been to travel inland at that period, over ill-made roads! Yet I realized that the first pioneers, making their way through trackless bush, knowing nothing of what lay beyond, experienced a far greater ordeal. They were assuredly men of stout hearts and confident faith to venture so far from civilization into the unknown.

As we motored on through what seemed to me immense distances, there stretched limitlessly around us the great Australian loneliness, as Ernestine Hill has so truly called it. Kangaroos bounded away through the paddocks at our approach and emus stalked disdainfully among the distant trees. Flocks of galahs streaked the air with their lovely grey and pink plumage; occasionally a mirage gave promise of a nonexistent lake, but for scores of miles at a stretch the only signs of human habitation were the fences beside the never-ending road. I felt infinitely remote from anything I had ever known. Yet my husband assured me that this was considered a settled district. ‘Wait till you see the real outback,’ he said. But
like so many newcomers to Australia my imagination refused to take it in. At length we came onto Coonong property and at intervals we passed through gates which divided the paddocks. Now and then I glimpsed some sheep, dusty forms scarcely discernible against the brown paddocks. Then suddenly we entered a long drive leading to the homestead which we could not yet see. Unbelievably it was lined with magnificent poplars and willows, all well-watered by a system of irrigation. It formed an incongruous belt of green in the midst of the arid country stretching away on every side.

Then the homestead came in sight—a kindly, green oasis of lawns and lakes, trees and flowers, encircling a gracious white house surrounded by deep verandahs. Although ever since it was built it had been a bachelor establishment, it had the air of a well-loved home, and I took to it immediately,

At Coonong the sense of Sir Samuel's personality possessed me powerfully; I was continually conscious of him. As I walked through the garden or sat by the lake, as I moved about the house, it was almost as if he were beside me in person. It might have been because he and I had both been born in Northern Ireland that I felt this sense of his continued presence so intensely.

I pictured him planning and building the homestead; it seemed to express the man so adequately. Well-built, of good proportions, it was spacious and solid, in harmony with its setting; no outward show, and, as one would expect from a man so seized with the importance of water in this dry land, there was a lake in front of the house and another one at the side. (This latter was designed by my husband, who is also a firm believer in the value of plenty of water, and is a keen gardener.) How I wished I could have actually known this remarkable man who had done so much for the pastoral development of Australia. I eagerly pored over photographs and old diaries, newspaper cuttings and pamphlets which I found in the library, trying to gain some clue as to why he had been able to achieve so much more than the average person; but the explanation eluded me.

Here and there nature throws up an exceptional character created by a happy combination of the place, the time and the man. One such was Samuel McCaughey, nation-builder and philanthropist. During his lifetime he made an immense contribution to the development of his adopted country, and his bequests to education, the church and other worthwhile objects were the greatest ever made by any individual in Australia.

I wanted to learn all I could about him. When my husband took me on a visit to England in 1948 we went across to Ulster and visited the scenes of Samuel McCaughey's early life. I interviewed everyone who could give me further facts. Then on my return to Australia I asked the Rev. Archibald Crowley, of Urana, to do some research for me. Most of the material in this book is due to his enthusiastic and comprehensive investigations into the life and activities of Samuel McCaughey. Without his help this book could never have been completed.

Patricia McCaughey
Sir Samuel McCaughey, Knight.
1835 - 1919.
CHAPTER 1

Samuel McCaughey was born at Tullyneuh, near Ballymena, County Antrim, Northern Ireland, on July 1st 1835. He was the eldest son of Francis and Eliza McCaughey.

The name McCaughey is Irish Celtic; in that language Eochaidh (meaning Horseman) is the equivalent of Caughey. Sometime after the Norman Conquest the family of Eochaidh, in the north of Ireland, migrated to the highlands of Scotland (Aberdeen) to escape from feudal persecution. It was then that the prefix Mac (meaning son of) began to be used in their name to distinguish the family as being of Celtic origin rather than Norse or Viking. Their tartan is McDonald of the Isles; according to the Book of Rights (edited by O'Donovan) the McDonalds are descended from one of the nobles of the name of McCaughey. About the fifteenth century many members of the McCaughey family returned to Northern Ireland, where a number of their DESCENDANTS still live.

Ulster has long been famous for its linen industry, and Francis McCaughey was a linen merchant and farmer. Flax was introduced to the country in 1633 by the Lord Deputy of Ireland, Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Stafford; a regulation issued by Charles II stipulated that all holders of thirty acres of Ulster land must sow three bushels of flax seed annually. Premiums were awarded to the most successful grower and it became the staple industry of the province.

In Francis McCaughey’s business the spinning and weaving of the flax was a cottage industry, often carried on in the dwellings on the farm growing the flax. In many cases the complete process was accomplished on the farm—from the ploughing, the sowing of the seed, to the mowing and gathering, the soaking in special dams, the separation of the fibre and its preparation for spinning and weaving. The finished product was handled by Francis McCaughey in his Ballymena warehouse, from where he dispatched it to various countries. We get some idea of the size of his undertakings when we learn that one cargo alone was worth £50,000. This particular shipment, consigned to America, was lost when the ship sank on the voyage. Even in present-day currency £50,000 is a large sum; taking into account the comparative value of the pound in those days, it is clear that Francis McCaughey's business was a solid and substantial one.

In addition to his merchant's business, Francis McCaughey owned a farm at Tullyneuh, which he managed with great efficiency, using intensive cultivation. The farm and the linen merchant's office were the background of Samuel McCaughey’s early training.

When he left school his father put him into the office in Ballymena to learn accounting and the whole routine of the business, while at the same time he helped in the management of the farm. Francis McCaughey hoped that, as the eldest son, Samuel would succeed him in carrying on the family concerns.

But there were other forces at work which were to defeat the father's plans. They stemmed from the family of Samuel McCaughey's mother, the Wilsons, and are described in the next chapter.

The home life of Samuel McCaughey was a full and pleasant one. He was the eldest in a close-knit family of three sons and seven daughters. All of them had strong personalities and were vital and interesting characters. It was a stimulating household, rich in affection and family jokes, comfortable in a material sense, and with plenty of contacts, especially through the Wilson connection, to bring the outside world into their orbit, and to prevent it from ever becoming narrow or provincial.

The father, who was known as 'Big Frank', had a big heart also. When owing to a death in another branch of the family there was a question of adopting two young orphaned kinsfolk, 'Big Frank' willingly
undertook their upbringing. 'One or two more don't matter,' he remarked with typical generosity. He could count on the co-operation of his wife in this large-hearted action; she was a woman of great qualities of heart and mind. There is a charming description of her when she was a widow and a grandmother ‘She was a wise, quiet little woman with silvered hair and the bright blue eyes and the fine clear skin of her family'.

Francis McCaughey had the reputation of being a somewhat strict father—but, after all, that was expected of a parent of that period. For example, he banned certain dances in the neighbourhood for his eldest son, then in his teens. He used to lock up the downstairs part of the house himself at bedtime. But any young man of spirit can find a way round such a prohibition, and Samuel managed to attend the dances. Years later it was revealed that the farm hands used to set up a ladder between Samuel's bedroom and an adjacent haystack.

He escaped from the house in that way and regained his bedroom in the same manner when he returned after the dance. The farm hands took care to remove the ladder before the household was astir next morning.

In the long winter evenings Samuel McCaughey used to enjoy reading, especially the classics. His knowledge of classical literature and of poetry often surprised his friends in Australia. He owed this appreciation to his home background, where love of literature was encouraged. His particular favourites were Dickens and George Eliot; to the end of his life he could recite pages of Dickens. He carried this habit of reading with him to Australia, and when he was in his eighties he told a friend: 'In the olden days when I would be watching sheep I'd have my Shakespeare, Byron and others with me, (This was a reference to the time before runs were divided into paddocks with fences and sheep had to be watched and shepherded.)

There is plenty of evidence of the close family feeling among the McCaughey’s. Sisters and brothers named their children after each other, and later on Samuel McCaughey brought out to Australia not only his two brothers, but other near relatives also. The bond of family affection was not weakened by distance.

Eliza McCaughey, Samuel's mother, came from a family with a colourful history; as so often happens, the mother's influence and heredity worked powerfully in her sons.

Her great-grandfather, John Wilson, was born in Scotland in 1666; he and his family were Covenanters, a religious body which refused to accept the Royal sovereignty for the Church, holding that Christ alone was the head. The Earl (afterwards Duke) of Lauderdale, and Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee, as agents for Charles II and James II, took stern reprisals on those who would not abjure their Covenanter beliefs.

John Wilson, with many other adherents of his faith, escaped to Ulster in 1684. His family remained in Scotland, and the story of the fate of his heroic sister Margaret, martyred at the age of eighteen, is a very moving one, treasured in the family records.

Margaret Wilson, refusing to recant her religion, in 1685 was condemned to a terrible death. She and a fellow-martyr, Margaret McLachlan, a woman of sixty-three, were fastened to stakes in the Bladnoch, a deep channel in the sand flats in Solway Firth, and were drowned by the advancing tide. With a refinement of cruelty the older woman was placed farther out, so that her death struggles might frighten the younger; but Margaret Wilson remained steadfast to the end. In Stirling cemetery there is a beautiful
monument to Margaret Wilson and her younger sister, whom her father succeeded in redeeming by payment of £100. Part of the inscription reads

*MARGARET
VIRGIN MARTYR OF THE OCEAN WAVE
WITH HER LIKE-MINDED SISTER AGNES*

John Wilson, the brother of this heroine, established himself in Northern Ireland. This vigorous ancestor of Samuel McCaughey married four times, and from his union with Janet Brown, was born in 1719, his son John, who became the grandfather of Eliza McCaughey, and Samuel McCaughey's great-grandfather. This John Wilson owned a farm at Birney Hill, County Antrim; in 1767 he married Elizabeth Kirkpatrick, of Closeburn Castle, Scotland, whose forbears, like his own, had escaped from Scotland in an open boat in 1684 from the religious persecutions.

When John Wilson died at the age of seventy in 1789 he left four young sons. The eldest, Samuel, was only thirteen, but in spite of his youth he took on the management of the Birney Hill farm. He conducted it so successfully that by the time his younger brothers grew up the whole family was prosperous—indeed wealthy.

Eliza McCaughey was the eldest daughter of the stout-hearted and capable Samuel Wilson; she named her eldest son after him. Samuel McCaughey proved to have inherited more than a name; the courage and ability of his grandfather was clearly evident in him.

Samuel Wilson not only followed farming all his life, but he brought up his six sons to the same calling. He believed, and proved, that there was plenty of scope for intelligence in running a farm, and that a farmer could be a man of education and learning. He encouraged his large family—he had six daughters as well as his sons—to study and to appreciate literature.

The sons all made outstanding successes in life. Four of them came to Australia, where by their unusual gifts of intelligence and energy they amassed very considerable fortunes, as well as playing important parts in the public life of their adopted country.

Samuel Wilson's farm, Ballycloughan was not far from Francis McCaughey's property, Tullyneuh, the links between the two families were close and affectionate.

Samuel McCaughey was only three years old when two of his Wilson uncles went to settle in Australia. Thus from his earliest years he grew accustomed to hearing his elders talk of Australia, where his uncles were succeeding so spectacularly. The joint and powerful influences of heredity and circumstances were at work on the growing boy.
CHAPTER 2

Since it was directly due to Samuel McCaughey's uncles, the Wilsons, that he emigrated, the story of their activities in Australia is interesting and apposite. As the six sons of Samuel Wilson, of Ballycloughan grew up it is not surprising that their thoughts turned to a land of wider opportunities than existed in Ulster. They were enterprising and ambitious, self-reliant and energetic, and by the time four of them had come of age they had many consultations among themselves about the prospects of settlement in one of the British colonies.

David, the fourth brother, later wrote Sketches of the Wilson Family; in this he gives many particulars about this period in the life of the Wilsons.

In 1838 the young men were much interested in a series of articles on Australia in Chambers' Journal. They learnt that the climate was healthy—a point which carried considerable weight with them—and that the place offered good opportunities for settlers with capital. The idea of emigrating to such a country made a strong appeal to their imaginations.

William, the eldest, was then 29, John 25, David 23 and Charles 21. Alexander was 19, and Samuel, the youngest, was only 7 years old. They resolved that the four eldest sons should seek their fortunes in Australia. However, they met with unexpectedly strong opposition. Their father and mother were both opposed to the project, and Dr. Stewart, the minister, a close friend of the family, not only remonstrated with their father against allowing his sons to emigrate, but he also frequently preached from the pulpit against it, declaring that the desire for emigration was 'an inordinate ambition that was not by any means recommendable.' Lord Mount-Cashel’s agent also urged Samuel Wilson to dissuade the young men from their intention.

It is easy to understand how strenuously the Ulster people objected to some of their finest young men leaving the country; but nothing availed to put the Wilson brothers off the scheme. They somehow overcame their parents' objections, compromising to the extent that only two of them should go for a start. David and Charles were chosen as the first pioneers, but in his 'Sketches of the Wilson Family' David tells us: Preparations were partly made when my father and mother came to me and urged me to remain at home, in which request they were joined by my uncle David, of Ballycastle who, being rich and unmarried, exercised some influence. He had on one occasion, a good many years previously, been at the point of death with a bad fever, and in his will had left me £1000, so I was prevailed upon to remain at home, Alexander, my younger brother, taking my place.

Charles and Alexander, therefore, at the ages of 21 and 19, became the first of the Wilson brothers to emigrate to Australia. They sailed from Liverpool on 22nd October 1838 and reached Sydney after a pleasant voyage seventeen weeks later, on February 18th 1839.

They had set off under the best auspices. Their father gave them £1000, which he had been advised was an adequate sum to start them, and they had letters of introduction to influential people in the Colony. Better still, they had a letter of advice from a man in an ideal position to know the actual situation in Australia—Major Sir Thomas Mitchell, Surveyor-General of New South Wales, who had just landed in England on a visit.

Two years earlier Major Mitchell had pioneered an overland route from Sydney to the west and south, traversing vast areas of almost unknown country in New South Wales and what is now the State of Victoria. His track led him to the junction of the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers, to the Loddon,
Avoca and Avon Rivers, and on to the Wimmera River. Turning south, he reached Portland, on the coast, where the brothers Henty had made a settlement. He then went north-east past Mount Napier, through some of the richest lands to the west of Port Phillip, now known as the Western District of Victoria.

He was so impressed with this region that he named it Australia Felix. No better adviser for the young migrants could have been found than this man with his unique first-hand knowledge of the country. The value of his notable journey had been recognized by a gift of £1000 from the Government and a knighthood. This helpful letter was obtained by Samuel Wilson's nephew. General Chesney, who, in the spirit of clannishness that existed among the Wilsons, had interested himself in his cousins' project. (General Chesney was the son of Samuel Wilson's eldest sister, Jane.

Charles and Alexander had sailed shortly before the letter arrived at Ballycloughan their father promptly forwarded it by another vessel, and they received it a few days after they landed in Sydney.

October 20th, 1838.
General Chesney to Samuel Wilson.
My dear uncle, the enclosed note from Major Mitchell, the Surveyor-General, may be important to my cousins.

My dear General,

I have much pleasure in answering your questions relative to Australia, to the best of my judgment, although, where there are other Colonies than that I am acquainted with on that Continent, my opinion and advice may perhaps be more in favour of what I know best, than a general knowledge of all might warrant. I should say, let your friend proceed to Sydney with a view to finding his way to Port Phillip—the present nucleus of colonization, on the shore of what I consider the best portion of Australia for sheep farming. He will then begin at the beginning of a Colony, and the advantages are that any land he may acquire will increase rapidly in value, any sheep he may have will find pasturage on unoccupied lands, until they may have increased very much, while he will have gained a knowledge of the country, to be in time located; that is, divided into measured allotments and sold. But advise your friend not to be in a haste to buy sheep, unless he is well acquainted with the kind of stock. It is better to join the establishment of some colonist already there, and in aiding in the superintendence of his flocks for a time to acquire some knowledge of the system of management. £1000 is enough to begin with, and any number of sheep, however small, increase so rapidly that a year or two suffices to make a man independent, I hope these few hints may be useful to your friend.
I am,
Very sincerely yours,
T. I. MITCHELL

The brothers naturally acted on Sir Thomas Mitchell’s admirable advice, and their thoughts veered to Port Phillip rather than New South Wales. On their arrival in Sydney, Charles and Alexander were most cordially received by those to whom they had letters of introduction. Sydney was at that time a pleasant town with an agreeable social life, but the Wilsons were too eager to begin their new careers to be tempted to prolong their stay in that port.

They got their bills cashed, and with Ulster canniness they lodged their money in the bank at ten per cent. Interest until they could learn more about the country. In David Wilson's account of their arrival
he tells us that Charles was offered a partnership with a young gentleman, a nephew of the Governor, Sir George Gipps, and had an interview with Sir George and Lady Gipps on the subject, but he finally declined, owing to a fear that the young man's habits would not suit his tastes.

That illuminating yet guarded paragraph throws light on the steadiness of Charles's character and judgment. His upbringing and the high principles of his home background had given him a sound sense of values. While Alexander accepted an engagement for twelve months on a property on the Hunter River to gain experience, Charles laid his plans for investigating prospects in the Port Phillip area. His first step was to obtain letters of introduction to influential men in Port Phillip.

Then he proceeded to set off on foot to cover the 600 miles to the new township of Melbourne. His companions were two Scotsmen who had been fellow-passengers. The seventeen weeks' voyage had provided opportunities for summing up a man's desirability as a companion on such a trip. The three men armed themselves with muskets; there were hazards known and unknown to be encountered on that 600-mile walk.

Their first impression of the country was not at all favourable. There had been a very severe drought and many cattle were lying dead of starvation on their route. Nevertheless they saw conditions for themselves and learnt many valuable lessons about the country during the four weeks of their journey.

They started on 15th March, less than a month after their arrival in Sydney, travelling from 20 to 25 miles a day. On leaving Sydney they passed through the settlements of Liverpool, Campbelltown, Berrima and Yass. They crossed the Murrumbidgee and Hume Rivers and afterwards the Goulburn. Here they stopped for a night at the hut of a man named Hume, who, to Charles's surprise, turned out to be from County Antrim. As one would expect, he and Charles sat up most of the night talking.

About the middle of April 1839 they reached Melbourne, a thriving town with some 3,500 inhabitants, and were much pleased with the climate and country altogether, although everything was so different when compared with the Old Country.

It is a tribute to Charles's personality that on presenting his letters of introduction in Melbourne he was immediately 'invited by a gentleman to stay in his house till something suitable might offer'. This was not long in turning up; he very soon accepted an engagement with a squatter for twelve months' experience in sheep farming, with the superintendence of a sheep and cattle station. At the end of that time Alexander joined him making the voyage from Sydney by sea to Melbourne.

The two brothers felt they were now in a position to acquire their own property; both had had the twelve months' experience recommended by Sir Thomas Mitchell.

They bought a small station at Woodlands, eighty miles from Melbourne, which they stocked with cattle and sheep; they also built a homestead. Everything was working out according to their hopes, and they sent an invitation to their brother John to come and join them. He arrived in the Colony in December 1841, and the three then entered into partnership, naming the firm 'Wilson Brothers'.

Although Australia is a land of great resources in coal and iron, zinc, copper, gold, uranium, and many other minerals, little was known of this mineral wealth in 1839 when Charles and Alexander Wilson arrived. The emphasis was on the potential riches of the surface; the pastures and the products of the farms.

However, much exploration had been carried out. The early explorers had crossed mountains, traced rivers, hewed their way through scrub, penetrated forests, trekked across plains and braved the often
fatal hazards of the arid wastes. By 1839 the main features of New South Wales were known, and the region as far north as Moreton Bay and the Brisbane River had been explored. The overland route to Port Phillip had been pioneered and Melbourne was a thriving town.
CHAPTER 3

David Wilson in his 'Sketches' supplies further details of the development of 'Wilson Brothers' ventures at this stage; his account gives such a vivid picture of the conditions of pioneering at that time that it is worth quoting.

Orders were sent home to Ireland for implements of various kinds, also clothing for their own requirements and for disposal. Their run was soon inadequate to keep their increasing stock of sheep and cattle. Having heard of a good country for grazing purposes some distance in the interior, John and Alexander started with 2,000 sheep, a team of eight bullocks, wagons and supplies with three men.

The party set off on 26th November 1844. They travelled north-west and in a week got over the Pyrenees, a distance of 100 miles, and came upon the head of the Wimmera.

Hearing of good country having been discovered on the Avoca they determined to have a look to examine it in passing. Alexander provided himself with some provisions and started at daylight. The day was dark and showery. He was obliged to steer by compass the whole way through wild ranges and in some part dense scrub, through which he could scarce see fifty yards. At last he emerged from the timber and found himself upon a plain striking away to the northward as far as the eye could reach. After some miles riding he discovered the Avoca. It was totally unoccupied except by the natives, who were rather wilder than any they had yet seen. He astonished his neighbours by having discovered in a day what none of them had been able to find. They then started with the sheep, got over the ranges, and crossed Major Mitchell's track from the Murray to Portland.

They stopped four days at the Avoca and liked the country very much. Having explored in every direction, they found that the Avoca totally disappeared in a swamp. Having great fears about the permanence of the water, they left the Avoca and crossed a place about twenty miles in extent. Steering west and south-west, they met with no water till they made the Wimmera and came upon the north end of the Grampians, a few miles below where Major Mitchell had crossed it. They travelled thirty miles down and liked the country very much, and found themselves outside all settlers.

The only indication of white men having been there were a few horse tracks—the Major's track, which passed Mount Arapiles, and Eyre's track, who had gone down the river about seven years ago with cattle, expecting that it would lead him to the Murray, which he intended to follow down towards Adelaide.

They found the Wimmera terminated in a large lake, Hindmarsh, about fifty miles below this, and the country beyond a barren scrub. (It is thought that the place described here must have been Vectis station, founded by the Wilson Brothers in 1844.)

The soil along the banks of the river was exceedingly rich with abundance of grass, great quantities of wild flax, in some places three feet in length. There was no fear of the water failing, as the bed of the river is well provided with large holes, which in the driest season must provide a supply. They thought sometimes that their followers might have rebelled against them, as was done to Moses and Aaron, for leading them into the wilderness, but as the leaders never seemed to be at a loss, the men placed implicit confidence in their guidance.

In the meantime the sheep were pastured, a wooden house was erected, and no other settler could take up ground within ten miles of the homestead. Alexander had the direction of a certain watering place pointed out, which lay at a distance of thirty miles in uninhabited country. He started from the dray in the morning, taking the bearing of the different mountains as he went along, making an outline sketch.
of a range of hills occasionally to guide him on his return. He found the place and came back to the dray the same evening, although it had advanced a few miles during the day, at right angles with his line of route. (This was probably Kewell station, founded by the Wilson Brothers in 1845.)

David Wilson continues his account:-

‘Alexander started on horseback and rode 280 miles in three-and-a-half days, looking for the best run, and got a licence from the land commissioners to occupy the same. (This was probably Polkemmet station, founded by the Wilson Brothers in 1845.)

Several other stations to a large extent were taken up in a similar manner, the operations of the firm being every year expanding. Dams were erected across the Wimmera at a large cost, and part of the stream diverted to a distance of seventy miles where there was no supply, thus making the back country available for grazing purposes. After some time immense ponds were erected, which the sheep were made to pass through in thousands just before being shorn, by which means the wool was cleaned on the sheep's backs. By this time the firm of Wilson Brothers was well established; they had a number of holdings, which they were constantly improving, and they had the wisdom to make ample provision for watering the runs’.

However, their progress had its setbacks. During the early 1840's there was a depression in the Colony and sheep and wool fell in value so disastrously that for a time sheep were almost worthless. One of the historians of this period says that great relief was obtained by graziers by the practise of boiling down, introduced in 1843 by Henry O'Brien, a settler in the southern district. By boiling down a full-grown sheep the value of the products in tallow, hides, mutton hams, etc., was 14/- This meant that sheep, formerly unsaleable, soon were worth 5/- to 8/- per head.

In 1847 Alexander married Miss Marion McKinnon, a Scottish girl, and withdrew from the brothers' firm on the most amicable terms; he started in business on his own account as a pastoralist. John Wilson paid a visit to Ulster in 1851 to get married. While he was there came the momentous news of the discovery of gold in Victoria. Nearly all the men on the stations left to seek their fortunes at the diggings, and Charles, almost deserted by his shepherds, had to turn shepherd himself. He managed to keep 10,000 sheep together for two months until he could succeed in getting help. John had to cut his visit short, and in May 1852, a couple of weeks after his marriage to Miss Anna McNeill, of Ballycastle, he returned to help his brother. He found a great change in the Colony; men hardly to be got at any price, living four times as dear, sheep up greatly in value, and migrants pouring into the country in thousands.

It was at this time that Samuel Wilson, the youngest brother, now twenty years of age, decided to emigrate to Australia. He had had a good education at the Ballymena Academy where he was a consistent prizewinner; his favourite subject was mathematics, for which he won a silver medal. On leaving school he had entered the linen merchant's office of his brother-in-law, Francis McCaughey, and gained a valuable business training.

He came out on the ship with his brother John, and on arriving in Australia his first venture was a business one. Fortunes were to be made on the goldfields with more certainty in trading than in prospecting for gold. Samuel, having some capital, bought goods and bullock wagons and took loads of supplies to Ballarat. He sold the goods at high prices and made a substantial profit. But he did not like the rough life of a mining town, and soon joined his brothers, John and Charles, on the Wimmera, investing his capital in station property.
With some help from his brothers he bought *Longerenong*, for £40,000, with 4,000 sheep and a considerable quantity of land in fee. This property was at the 'parting of the Yarriambiack Creek and the Wimmera River; the name *Longerenong* means 'parting of the waters'. From here the Yarriambiack Creek travels north to *Kewell* station. Samuel managed to clear the cost of *Longerenong* in about three years, and was then admitted as a partner in the firm of John and Charles Wilson. The firm bought several large stations, including *Woodlands*, for £60,000, with 60,000 sheep and 9,000 acres of land in fee. This became John's home. He built a house on it and surrounded it with a beautiful garden.

The *Yanko* station, across the border in New South Wales, was bought for £30,000, with about 200,000 acres. In a few years it was worth six times as much. This property remained in the possession of Sir Samuel Wilson's heirs until 1952.

John bought *Trawalla* in the Western District of Victoria, and also became sole owner of *Woodlands*. Alexander bought *Vectis* station, on the Wimmera, for £40,000, and made it his home for many years. Samuel owned *Ercildoune*, in Victoria (for which he paid £236,000, at that time a record price for an Australian station); he also owned *Toorale* and *Dunlop* on the Darling in New South Wales.

Charles visited Ireland in 1859, accompanied by his brother Samuel. While on this trip Charles married Miss Elizabeth Leece, of *Woodlands*, near Preston, Scotland. Ten years later he withdrew from the firm and went to live in Cheltenham, in England. He sold most of his interest in the firm to his brother Samuel and retired in 1869 with a very large fortune amassed during his thirty years' residence in Australia.

Samuel married in 1861, Jeannie, daughter of the Hon. William Campbell, of Victoria. He continued to purchase station properties in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, his holdings being on a vast scale. In 1875 he was knighted and also appointed to the Legislative Council of Victoria as member for the Western Province. He donated to the Melbourne University for the erection of a building, Wilson Hall. He later retired to England to live, and was elected member in the House of Commons. He died in 1895.
Francis McCaughey daughter wife of Samuel Wilson and mother of Sir Samuel McCaughey
CHAPTER 4

WHILE the Wilson brothers were establishing themselves in Australia Samuel McCaughey was growing to manhood in Ulster. On their various visits home during the years the Wilsons observed the development of their young nephew with approval. Not only had he an excellent brain for business, but he showed keen intelligence and insight into the rural problems of his own country. He was healthy and energetic, and possessed the high principles of his family. They made up their minds that he would be an asset to the clan in Australia when he was old enough to join them.

With the departure in 1852 of his youngest uncle, Samuel Wilson—only three years older than himself and a close friend—Samuel McCaughey began to grow restless. He took an eager interest in all the letters from Australia and his resolve to emigrate developed steadily. I was interested to find in the library at Coonong an old volume on surveying with Samuel McCaughey's name in it, and the date 1850. It is significant that when he was only fifteen he was already studying surveying—no doubt with the thought of its future usefulness to him in Australia.

When in 1856, Charles Wilson came home on a visit, he invited the twenty-year-old Samuel McCaughey to return with him to Victoria. Samuel's hour had struck; there was no thought in his mind of refusing. Naturally enough his father was very reluctant to let his eldest son settle on the other side of the world; apart from his natural affection he found Samuel invaluable to him in the office and on the farm. However, his opposition could not withstand the arguments of Charles Wilson, reinforced by his son's strong inclination—or, it maybe, his determination. The invitation was accepted.

The fact that Samuel McCaughey was still under age at this time proves that his father's permission had been granted, even though reluctantly. There is a story that when he was chaffing his son about his tendency to fall asleep at odd times he asked good-humouredly,

'What's the use of your going to Australia? You'll go to sleep under a shady tree and the snakes will come and bite you!' Which indicates that he had given in with a good grace.

Eager though he was to make a start in the new land, Samuel McCaughey found it hard to leave his home when the time came for departure. His mother felt her eldest son's going very deeply, but she did not seek to prevent his setting out on the trail her own brothers had blazed. In a family as large as hers, one does not often find a selfish mother who clings unfairly to any one of her children. She recognized that Samuel had inherited the determination and ability of his forbears, and she was understanding enough to realize that his destiny lay in the new and undeveloped land. She sent him forth with her blessing.

I wonder if she guessed that his younger brothers, David and John would follow him, leaving her without any sons at home? However that may be, she had seven daughters left to her; they all married Ulster men, and most of them remained in Northern Ireland. I like to think that their children filled the heart and the house of their grandmother.
Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wilson of Walmer. Mr. Wilson, with his brother David, was the first of Sir Samuel's uncles to migrate to Australia.

Francis McCaughey, of Tullynew, near Ballymena, County Antrim, Northern Ireland, Father of Sir Samuel McCaughey.
Sir Samuel’s Mother and Sisters
Left:
St. John’s Presbyterian Church, Narrandera, where Sir Samuel was buried on July 26th, 1919

Right:
Sir Samuel’s Grave at Narrandera

Left:
The Martyrs Monument, Stirling Cemetery, Scotland, in memory of Margaret Wilson, an ancestress of Sir Samuel.
The great decision made, Samuel McCaughey set off as his uncles had done for the new world—so
much farther off in those days than it is now. He travelled in the Chamira with Charles Wilson; accompanying them was a young man named Constantine Dougherty, who had also been invited by the Wilsons to emigrate. I cannot find any record of whether Dougherty was a relation or merely a friend.

They arrived in Melbourne in April 1856, after a voyage of eighty-eight days—a much quicker passage than that of Charles and Alexander Wilson seventeen years earlier.

The landing facilities had been greatly improved since then. In 1853 a railway had been built from Port Melbourne to the town; before that there was merely a rough bush track, a mile and a half long, leading from the landing place at Hobson's Bay to a punt which ferried the passengers across the Yarra.

Samuel and Constantine found Melbourne a straggling city of some 300,000 inhabitants. Collins Street had a good sprinkling of offices, banks, stores and hotels; but there were still some vacant blocks, and the whole settlement was half-paved, unsanitary and ill-lit.

The first frenzy of the gold discoveries of 1851 had been succeeded by a depression in 1854, but a year later this had been surmounted and the Colony was in a prosperous condition. Work was abundant, food was cheap and the population of the Colony had reached 400,000. In 1856 the first Parliament was elected, and Sir Henry Barkley arrived from England to take up his position as the first Governor of Victoria under the new constitution. It was a year of tremendous advancement and the beginning of a period of swift and sustained development and prosperity in Victoria. The prospects were rosy for new settlers. There were some 56,000,000 acres of freehold land, only about 4,000,000 of which had been taken up.

Samuel and Constantine had been invited to stay first with Charles Wilson at Walmer station, in the Wimmera, so they did not waste any time in Melbourne. They were anxious to be off as soon as possible to the stations where they were to work. Walmer was five miles west of Horsham, and although the rail journey nowadays from Melbourne to Horsham is only 203 miles, there was no railway in the Colony at that time apart from the short line from Melbourne to Hobson's Bay. The following year the line from Melbourne to Geelong was built, and in 1862 a rail service was started from Melbourne to Ballarat.

The two young men decided to travel on foot. After all, that is what Charles Wilson had done in 1839, when he walked the 600 miles from Sydney to Melbourne. Instead of paying for transport by sea, or buying a horse, Charles had left his £1000 capital snugly in the bank earning ten per cent. interest while he thriftily tramped across country. As a matter of fact it was not only thrifty but good common sense, because that trek gave him an invaluable view of the country, teaching him lessons he could not have learned otherwise. So naturally enough Samuel and Constantine travelled in the same manner—especially as they had no snug nest-egg of capital behind them.

It was a long route, far longer than the present road to Horsham. They had to travel by Moonee Ponds, Sunbury, Mount Macedon, Castlemaine, across the Loddon River to Carisbrooke. Their track crossed the Pyrenees near Avoca and led to plains and the Wimmera River, which it followed; it passed Glenorcy and Longerenong, which had lately been bought by Samuel Wilson, and went on to Horsham.

In later years Samuel McCaughey liked to recall that it was on this journey that he earned his first money in Australia. At a station on the Wimmera he chopped firewood at so much a cord.

I was not long ‘off the ship’, when he told his friend Harry H. Peck (author of Memoirs of a Stockman) and my hands were very soft and soon blistered badly, but I went on, determined to master my first job,
until my hands could no longer hold the axe.’

The country through which they passed ranged from mountains to plains; when they reached the Wimmera they were impressed by the fertility of the black and red soil. It was first-class country, extending for many miles to the majestic and rugged Grampians on the horizon.

The fertile plains were varied at intervals by river gums, thick box and groves of casuarinas (Buloke). All the time Samuel McCaughey was accustoming his eye to the vegetation and the outlines of a country utterly different from his native Ulster. The only familiar link was the wild flax growing along the rivers—a plant very similar to the flax of Ireland.

The town of Horsham had been established seven years before by George Langlands, who opened a store and a post office on a site which had been marked out by the Government for a town. It stood at the boundary of Longerenong and Walmer stations, and has since become an important centre in the Wimmera district. But in those days it consisted only of a few scattered buildings.

Passing through Horsham the travellers reached their journey’s end at the hospitable Walmer station, where they were warmly welcomed by the four Wilson brothers, Charles, John, Alexander and Samuel.

After spending a few days at Walmer, where there were so many new features to absorb, Samuel McCaughey plunged into work. His uncle Charles gave him the job of jackeroo on Kewell station, a property of 120,000 acres which the Wilson Brothers had acquired in 1845. There was no question of a generous salary for the nephew of the owners; he was put on the pay sheet at £30 a year. In the true family tradition he would have to prove his worth. He proved it quickly. In three months he had shown his quality so unmistakably that he was appointed overseer. Constantine Dougherty was working with him at this time, though he was later transferred to Walmer.

Dougherty made good in Australia, although he did not continue long at station work. The squatters of the district had made repeated applications to the Government for a mail service, but without result. They decided to initiate their own service, and Dougherty was selected for the job of mailman—an arduous and responsible post.

The first stage of the service was from Walmer to Nhill, thence to Lorquon, and then on to the place where Jeparit now stands. The mails were carried in an unsealed valise, and at each station the valise was handed in. Patrons extracted the letters and packets addressed to them and put in those to be forwarded.

Dougherty opened up all the mail routes in the Wimmera district, his duties including journeys to Warracknabeal and Lake Corong (now Hopetoun). He rendered valuable service to residents of a large area in all weathers and often in severe conditions. During all the years of his service not one letter went astray.

He later became a prominent citizen of Horsham; the formation of the Horsham Fire Brigade was due to his efforts, and he was one of the founders of the Horsham District Hospital.

Kewell was watered by the Yarriambiac Creek, which ran northward through the station. West of this creek the country was of the predominating black soil with areas of red-brown. There were black box trees and groves of buloke, and open spaces, especially of the black soil. Black box trees, which indicate areas of occasional flooding, grew along the creek and in the depressions. The country near Kewell homestead was somewhat sandy, making a loam with the black soil. The Yarriambiac Creek flows in a shallow vale, approached by a long and gentle gradient. The homestead was picturesquely situated; the
Grampians, with their precipitous tops, were visible to the south-west.

Samuel revelled in the various tasks on Kewel, his gift for mechanics and his skill with tools were of great value, but he soon found that his chief interest was in sheep.

This interest had started when he was a lad. A traveller left a sick ewe at the McCaughey farm at Tullyneuh; Samuel took charge of it and nursed it to health. In course of time it produced two lambs, and by degrees they increased until he had quite a little flock. His sister Louisa shared his interest and loved to help him with the sheep. A relative recalls seeing the two youngsters taking the flock across a stream, Louisa crossing on stepping stones carrying a lamb in her arms, and Samuel walking in the water and steadying her. But the farm at Tullyneuh was not equipped to carry sheep, and before long they had to be given up. Nevertheless, Samuel retained his ambition to own sheep, and in Australia he certainly found full scope for satisfying this desire.

McCaughey seemed born to the life on a sheep station. He had a robust constitution and a mind that was alert and keen to learn every detail of station work and management. In later life he told a friend that he never had any doubt that he would make a big success in life. This confidence, which never wavered, was confirmed when at the end of two years his uncle made him manager of Kewell. A year later, in 1859, Charles Wilson made another trip to the Old Country and left his nephew in complete charge of the property.

He knew that Samuel at the age of twenty-three was well fitted to take responsibility. Young though he was, he had authority over the men. He worked hard and expected others to do the same, never tolerating slackness. His genial Irish humour and kindly disposition enabled him to get the best out of his workers and yet keep their goodwill.

The training in his father’s office had given him the necessary knowledge for keeping station accounts and supervising all the office work of a large property. Charles Wilson could leave everything in his hands with complete confidence. He sailed for England with his mind at rest, and he was able to give a good account of Samuel to his parents in Antrim. For Samuel McCaughey this was a chance to prove that he could not only carry on in the established routine but could initiate and achieve improvements.

He started with the fencing. In accordance with the practice at that time, only the boundaries of the property had been fenced, and shepherds were needed to watch and tend the various flocks. McCaughey subdivided the place into 4,000-acre paddocks, an innovation which cut down running expenses and greatly simplified management. Neighbouring station owners observed the results and followed his example; it was he who started the era of fencing in the Wimmera district and probably in Victoria. Not content with this, Samuel made a number of other improvements, knowing that he had full authority and confident that his uncle would approve of all he did.
Samuel McCaughey had now reached a stage where managing other peoples properties was insufficient to satisfy him. He was fully competent to run his own place.

The Wilson brothers recognized this, and on the return of Charles from abroad in 1860 McCaughey progressed to the next development in his career. His uncles John and Samuel financed him in the purchase of a third share of Coonong, in the Riverina district of New South Wales, twelve miles from Urana. His other partners were his cousin David Wilson and John Cochrane.

Coonong, a property of 42,000 acres of freehold, was for sale at £26,000, and the partners paid a deposit of £12,000, each contributing £4,000. At that time it carried about 3,400 head of cattle; owing to inadequate watering it was considered unsuitable for sheep.

McCaughey, always a man of vision where irrigation was concerned, saw possibilities of improvements and wanted to get rid of the cattle and put in sheep. However, he could not get his partners to agree to this.

The start was most inauspicious. The first mob of cattle was sold on a three-month promissory note, which was never honoured. Then the partners secured an interest in Singorimba, a property of 40,000 acres south of the Murrumbidgee, adjoining Goolgumbla, it carried 4,000 sheep, which David Wilson bought for 16/- a head. He sold 2,000 of them at 20/- each, but the money was never paid. The firm was living on the payments received from Samuel Wilson, who bought ten head of cattle each week at £2/10/ each. Soon the position was so acute that McCaughey and his partners approached the vendor of Coonong and offered to forfeit the amount paid and to cancel the contract.

This offer was refused—fortunately, as it turned out, because just at that time conditions in the pastoral industry began to improve and increased prices put a different aspect on the situation.

Meantime David Wilson had lost confidence in the place and he sold his share in the partnership to John Cochrane for £1,000. Soon afterwards Cochrane also wanted to withdraw, and he offered his two-thirds share in the concern to McCaughey for £7,000.

Although things were improving, McCaughey did not consider it prudent to accept the offer. There was still much leeway to be made up before the property could be fully paying. At this time Cochrane left on a visit to England and McCaughey was in sole charge of Coonong.

Here was the opportunity he needed to put his ideas into practice. His first step was to improve the water supply, and he then stocked up with sheep. When Cochrane returned the following year the property was in such a promising condition that McCaughey wanted the sole ownership. He offered Cochrane £15,000 for the two-thirds share for which he had declined to pay £7,000 a year before. Cochrane accepted the offer, and thus in 1864 Samuel McCaughey, having weathered the un-propitious beginning, became owner of Coonong, just eight years after his arrival in Australia.

There was still much to be done to make the property fully profitable, but unhampered by partners and their divergent views, he went ahead, spending money wisely on improving the flow of water and making other improvements.

From this time onward McCaughey began purchasing further properties, in every case showing sound judgment. In the early 1860’s he became sole owner of Singorimba, with 30,000 acres freehold, and in 1872 he purchased the adjoining property, Goolgumbla.
This increased his freehold to 137,000 acres. He was now well on the way to becoming the owner of the huge multiple holdings he administered so capably. He had boundless confidence and the courage to borrow to finance these undertakings; the banks had such a high opinion of his integrity and judgment that they readily advanced the necessary funds.

His success was due in part to his instinctive knowledge of what could be done with a piece of country in a given time—an instinct that amounted to genius. He also eliminated as far as possible the element of gambling that entered into so much of the pastoral enterprise of the early days. He knew good seasons could not last, and invariably made provision for droughty and difficult times.

A further factor in his success was his ability to choose the right men. He attracted his principal men by paying them well and treating them better. None of them left him except to take up their own properties, and McCaughey was always ready to finance anyone deserving who wanted to buy a place for himself.

His mother, with whom he kept up a constant correspondence, induced a great number of young men to emigrate. She used to give them letters of introduction to her son and would advise them to get experience with him for a start. She must have been a very good judge of character, because everyone she sent out made a success in life, and several became owners of their own properties.

Naturally word got about that McCaughey was partial to men of his homeland and was always ready to give them a job. One day a Chinese came to ask him for work, but was told there were no jobs available. ‘Lingen bargen?’ he asked, hopefully. No, there’s no ring-barking for you, Charley,’ answered the boss.’ Me cuttem burr?’ suggested Charley. No was the answer. Charley tried one or two more suggestions, but he was out of luck. He decided to bring out a trump card. ’Me come Ballymena he urged, and McCaughey was so tickled by this claim that he gave the man a job.

With his ownership of Coonong one might have expected that McCaughey would have embarked on marriage. He was a vigorous young man of twenty-eight, well established with a fine property, a homestead and brilliant prospects. No doubt it would have been easy for him to find a wife; there are stories of ambitious mammas anxious to secure this eligible bachelor for a son-in-law. But he was too absorbed with his work to have time for seeking or courting a bride. He himself said in later years, when he came to regret never having married: ‘When I was young I was too busy making money to get married; now no one would marry me except for my money’.

It is sad that this human and likeable man went through life a bachelor; it seems to me he would have made an excellent husband. He had an innate goodness, a cultivated mind, and he never lost the nice qualities of his gentle upbringing. His niece, Mrs. Matthew Robinson, who often stayed in his house, told me that although he could be stern and sharp at times with the men on the place, he was always courteous and considerate to the women servants. He was particular about his appearance when the occasion called for it, and mixed easily in society, where he was appreciated for his sound sense and genial wit. Yet the years passed and he failed to find the wife who could have added so much to his happiness, especially in his later years.

There is a story that at one time he was attracted to the governess of children of a friend of his in Melbourne, but she refused him because she was in love with another man.
Mrs. Matthew Robinson remembers that on one occasion when Sir Samuel McCaughey was eighty years old she was staying with him at the Oriental Hotel in Melbourne.

She returned one afternoon to find the old man sitting in the hotel lounge hand in hand with a dear old lady of about seventy-five. Introducing her, he said tenderly, “we were sweethearts once, you know, but she wouldn't have me. She married someone else—and it didn't turn out too well either,” he added. “She'd have done better to marry me.”

Possibly this was the former governess he had once wished to marry. I have not heard of any other definite romance in his life. Probably his own explanation of his failure to marry was the true one.

He was certainly no woman hater. He enjoyed entertaining house parties of his friends with their wives and daughters at Coonong and at North Yanko, and was always popular with his women guests. On one occasion he fell asleep after dinner, and on waking one of the ladies present teasingly said that she could have won a pair of gloves by kissing him while he slept. Whereupon he gallantly kissed all the ladies present, to the great hilarity of the company.

A few years before he died, when Mr. Kenneth Thorburn, stock and station agent of Jerilderie, was visiting him, Sir Samuel said, are you married now. Have you any family? ‘I have two children’ answered Mr. Thorburn.

The old man said wistfully, ‘well, you know I've made a lot of money. You might have all the money I've made if I had what you have. I know now the mistake I made was not to have married in my young days. I have no one of my own now to care for me.’

But the sadness of those future years was far from Samuel McCaughey's mind as he plunged with zest into the improvements he planned at Coonong and his other stations. Work was all-sufficient to him at that time.
UNION CLUB
SYDNEY

12th March 1905

Mr. Caley & Co.


Dear Sir

Do not try

Come to see me.

Come to see you.

See me again.

Now in my pay.

One 15/- for the

last part. When ready

balance to dear you.

S. McCaughey
The improvements which Samuel McCaughey began to make on Coonong were so far-reaching that they startled the neighbouring landowners. He had no hesitation in spending largely when he considered the results would justify it. A big bank overdraft never worried him.

There was one fact at Coonong that was very evident—the creeks were frequently dry and water was the first and most essential need. Although other owners might have been content to leave this situation as it was and carry on with the cattle, McCaughey recognized from the start that the property was a potential sheep station, needing only an assured supply of water to make it successful.

One of his first moves was to increase the available water supply by making a cutting from the Murrumbidgee to the Yanco Creek bed. This led the water into the Colombo Creek, which flows through Coonong,

Then he began the draining of numerous polygonum swamps on the property and starting an irrigation plant on Coonong Creek. There was soon no question about the suitability of Coonong for sheep; it was assured beyond doubt. A fine woolshed built towards the end of the 1860’s is proof of its rapid development as a sheep-carrying property.

McCaughey's first flock there consisted of old ewes, purchased from James Cochrane, of Widgiewa. Their fleeces were good and their wool excellent. The sheep had been bred to the Camden strain. It was from the progeny of these, mated with rams bred by N. P. Bayly, of Havilah, Mudgee, and R. C. Kermode, of Mono Vale, Tasmania, that he made a selection for a stud flock.

After using rams from the Havilah and Rawden studs, he bought two Ercildoune rams in 1866. This was in the nature of an experiment and he watched the results closely.
He was always keenly interested in experiments in sheep-breeding—it was one of the reasons why he was so successful. Although the progeny of these Ercildoune rams yielded soft, lustrous wool, their fleeces were too open for the severity of the Riverina.

Accordingly McCaughey bought two rams bred by James Gibson, of Bellevue, Tasmania. Their heaviest fleece weighed 8½ lbs. Watching the outcome with close and knowledgeable attention, he decided to return to the Havilah stud, and in 1873 he bought 200 of these rams. He meticulously recorded the particulars of every stud sheep on the place. I can imagine him poring over his entries in the evenings and making fresh decisions as the facts warranted from season to season. I found an old book in the Coonong library in which he had entered detailed particulars of his stud sheep under seventeen separate headings: Breeder; Number; Form; Constitution; Weight; Wrinkle; Yolk; Density; Quality; Head; Neck; Back; Belly; Legs; Length; Size; Remarks.

In those days there were no professional sheep classifiers such as we have today. The first sheep classifier Samuel McCaughey engaged was Jonathan Shaw. Later he employed J. C. Darke for this highly skilled work. The present sheep classifier for Coonong is the son of the late H. G. Pennefather, Wilfred Pennefather.

Every year McCaughey added fresh improvements to Coonong, all so solid that they are still in use. He built a huge stable, two storeys high, which allowed the largest horse teams to come in and out. His workshops were among his favourite haunts; when he had time he would occupy himself for hours in the blacksmith’s shop, experimenting with improvements, from ploughs to gate latches. Waggons, carts and buggies for his Riverina stations were nearly all built in the Coonong workshops.

He brought water to the homestead through reticulated channels; set trees round the house (now in their magnificent maturities); planted the lovely avenue of poplars and made a large lake of charmingly irregular design in front of the house. A spacious garden was designed with lawns, shrubs and flower beds, a vegetable garden laid out, and the homestead took on the appearance of a well-cared-for home of a man of taste.

And all the time he was absorbed in the problems of sheep-breeding, continually striving after better results and overcoming the innumerable difficulties that arose. He was steadily building up the Coonong stud to the position it has maintained for over eighty years.

His other properties also claimed his time and thought, but it was Coonong which held the principal place in his care and affections. His holdings of Singorimba and Goolgumbla were improved on a similar scale to that of Coonong. Since these properties adjoined each other it was possible to combine them under one management, which made for economy and efficiency.

During his early years at Coonong McCaughey had an encounter, fortunately peaceful, with a bushranger, the notorious Morgan, who was later shot at Peechelba.

Colombo Creek was in flood in the early 1860’s and McCaughey was riding along the bank to make a crossing when he saw a stranger on horseback who was obviously proposing to cross the creek at a dangerous spot. McCaughey called out to him that if he entered the water there it would be the end of him and his horse too. He showed the man a safe crossing place, took him over, and they rode together for some time.

When they were about to separate the stranger revealed that he was the bushranger Morgan and rode off swiftly. It was significant that although during the career of this bushranger most of the stations in the
Urana district were stuck up, *Coonong* was never molested by the outlaw.

By 1871 McCaughey had his Australian interests so well organized that he was in a position to re-visit his own country. He was now a man of wealth and assured position he had more than justified his resolve to emigrate.

His father had died some years before, but to his mother, then sixty years of age it brought profound happiness to have her eldest son with her again. While she was proud of his success, she could never realize just how wealthy he had become, and she continued to chide him for sending her more money than she required. It gave him immense satisfaction to be able to provide her, after her widowhood, with every material comfort she could wish for.

Soon after his return from abroad McCaughey began the building of the present *Coonong* homestead, which was completed in the mid-1870's. Over the wide entrance door is a fanlight with the word 'Vici' (I have conquered) engraved on the glass. The phrase reflects the satisfaction which the owner so justly felt in his achievements; at the same time it reveals a naive and boyish side to his character.

Opening off the long, spacious hall are wide doors leading to well-proportioned rooms. At the far end of the hall a door opens on a courtyard; the fanlight over it is embellished with the rose, the shamrock, and the thistle. All the furniture he chose was solid and dignified; he had it made in England from Australian timber.

The library was lined with tall glass-fronted bookcases, and he sent to Melbourne for a ‘set of the best poets’. He used to enjoy reading these volumes when he had leisure from the multitudinous duties connected with his properties. He knew many poems by heart and loved to quote lines with friends who were equally familiar with them. Perhaps it seems incongruous that a man who appreciated gracious living and literature should also be so much at home in a workshop.

But McCaughey had a gift for mechanics, he could have become a first-class engineer, and was a born inventor. In addition to his practical devices for gates, drafting yards and wool sheds he designed a double-furrow row plough capable of loosening the subsoil.

He also invented an earth scoop which reduced the cost of tank-sinking by 60 to 70 per cent. It had ingenious mechanical equipment and was carried on four wheels. He patented it and named it “Tumbling Tommy.” Three blacksmiths were employed in building 'Tumbling Tommies', which were in great demand at £105 each.

With a device like a water wheel (Pelton Wheel) equipped with little buckets he generated electricity from the energy of water raised from the river by pumps and discharged from two twelve-inch pipes. For these pumps two bullock teams carted wood continuously.

McCaughey could become absolutely absorbed in his experiments and in trying out his ideas with forge, hammer and anvil. When it was no longer possible to ignore a summons to meals he would emerge reluctantly from his workshop, 'the only thing white about him being the whites of his eyes', as a friend described it. People with inventions used to consult him, and he was always ready to help those who had good ideas.

*Transcribers Note:*

It is recorded in *Fred Wolseley - A Man of Many Parts* .... Samuel McCaughey, was the first to adopt the Wolsey machines on a big scale when he installed forty odd machines in the Dunlop shed .... I am
certain that we have to thank the squatters for the liberal support they gave to Mr. Wolseley when he most needed it. Samuel McCaughey is listed.

He scoured his own wool at Coonong, his plant being the first in New South Wales outside the metropolis. With five traction engines, purchased in England, and ploughs of seven furrows imported from America, each set weighing several tons, he levelled all the crab-holey country on Coonong, tearing up the soil to a depth of a foot or more.

On this land he grew sorghum ten feet and oats six feet high; the oats were merely for the
Samuel McCaughey - Revisited

Coonong Homestead – 2015
overlooking the huge concrete lined lake and surrounding gardens
Note: the rear portion of this homestead was destroyed by fire in 1991 and was fully restored to its original state by the Holt family
(Courtesy Tom Holt)

The attractive tree lined driveway leading to the Coonong Homestead- 2015
(Courtesy Tom Holt)
Coonong Homestead, in March, 2015. A gracious homestead of simple colonial design, built by Sir Samuel in 1877. Note; the rear portion of this homestead was destroyed by fire in 1991 and was fully restored to its original state by the Holt family.

The Old Dutch mill at Coonong. By irrigating this property, Sir Samuel changed its nature from a cattle to a sheep Station. This Mill was completely gone in 2015. Only the foundations were visible (Courtesy Tom Holt)
The stables at Coornong circa 1900s

The stables at Coonong – 2015
(Courtesy Tom Holt)
Fire lookout, store, offices and garages at Coonong – circa 1930s

Remains of the fire lookout tower, store, and offices at Coonong – 2015 (Courtesy Tom Holt)
Samuel McCaughey - Revisited

Carpenters shop, men’s recreation room and Blacksmith’s shop at Coonong

Carpenters shop, men’s recreation room and Blacksmiths shop at Coonong - 2015
(Courtesy Tom Holt)
The Woolshed at Coonong. On this property Sir Samuel carried out his main Sheep breeding activities The shed was burnt down in 1975

Bridge at Coonong, built by Mr. D. R. McCaughey
Yards at Coonong, typical of the improvements on the property

Group of pure Merino Rams. In 1883, Sir Samuel introduced this strain from California, U.S.A.
Typical Vermont Stud Ewes, Sir Samuel, through his experiments in sheep-breeding, established one of the foremost studs of the country.

The yards at Coonong added by David Roy McCaughey
Tumbling Tommy, the earth Scoop on four wheels.
Designed and Patented by Sir Samuel McCaughey

Double-Furrowed plough designed by Sir Samuel
Shearers Quarters at Coonong, an example of the improvements on the property

Irrigation channel at Coonong, evidence of Sir Samuel’s eagerness to supply water to fertile soil
An Earth Scoop manufactured for or by Samuel McCaughey on display at Urana township Park, NSW
(Ian Itter collection)

Remains of massive water pump used to lift water from the Columbo creek to higher ground at Coonong Station. Manufactured by Eastons and Anderson, London. It was called A Patent Appold Pump
(Courtesy Tom Holt)
One of the first three diversion dams constructed by Samuel McCaughey on the Colombo Creek at Coonong

Another view of the Coonong Dam wall showing the method of construction. Rocks cemented together with 1.5 metre slotted vertical posts on top of the wall which allowed boards to be inserted to adjust the height of the water that flowed out through a diversion channel (Courtesy Tom Holt)
One of the 34 kilometres of irrigation channels excavated by Chinese labourers using shovels and scoops (Courtesy Tom Holt)

purpose of seeding the ground. He was possibly the first man in New South Wales to use the multiple-furrow plough

He was the first to make tank excavations with traction engines; these pulled the McCaughey square scoop (not, of course, the Tumbling Tommy).

With Coonong, Singorimbah and Goolgumbla all greatly improved and well stocked with first-class merino sheep, the Coonong stud achieving greater and greater prominence at the sheep shows, the situation was ripe for the crucial move of McCaughey's career. It entailed much greater responsibilities, but he had the energy to meet the challenge.

His uncle, Sir Samuel Wilson, having made a very large fortune, decided to live in England, and he suggested that Samuel McCaughey should take over his huge leasehold stations, Toorale and Dunlop, on the River Darling. Sir Samuel had complete confidence in his nephew's capacity to carry on these properties, whose combined area was about 2,500,000 acres. This confidence was stressed in the terms which Sir Samuel Wilson proposed: the price was £400,000, to be paid in ten yearly installments of £40,000, without interest, the first payment to be made in twelve months.

Ownership of Toorale Station:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Company</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1865 – 1870</td>
<td>Bogong River Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871 – 1885</td>
<td>Australian Pastoral Investment Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885 – 1880</td>
<td>Sir Samuel Wilson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880 – 1912</td>
<td>Samuel McCaughey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912 – 1924</td>
<td>Robinson and Vincent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

McCaughey did not hesitate to accept this generous offer, although it meant mortgaging other properties
Samuel McCaughey - Revisited

to carry out improvements and to meet the first payment. The improvements were primarily in regard to water. He first had surface tanks excavated on Toorale and Dunlop, but since in dry periods these became filled with drifting sand other means had to be investigated. One of these was an ambitious scheme for irrigating pastures on Toorale by flood waters from the Warrego.

This river meandered through Toorale territory in almost level red soil from a point about sixty miles north of the homestead to its junction with the Darling. There could be no objection from any neighbouring owners to the construction of a dam south of the boundary.

McCaughey inspected the region and found that flood waters could be retained at a site some thirty miles north of the homestead. From such a dam the surplus water could be spilled over on the western side to irrigate an extensive area of pasture. It was a big undertaking to dam a river carrying such a volume of water as the Warrego was capable of, but the owner was not daunted. He planned the scheme with good judgment and with the help of well-trained men, teams of good horses, earth-moving devices and timber-hauling equipment the whole thing was successfully carried out.

Trees were felled and heavy logs placed as reinforcement, which was then covered with earth. This bank was about three-quarters of a mile long and up to twelve feet high, containing over 20,000 cubic yards of earthwork which completely blocked the main channel, discharging water westward from a point some distance upstream. A line of flood banks, having an average height of about three feet and containing about 35,000 cubic yards of earthwork, extended along the western side of the Warrego and prevented the water from re-entering the main channel except as provided for by chutes, which could be opened or closed as required. Thus the floodwaters of the Warrego were diverted to the flat country to irrigate a large area of valuable pasture. The Boera dam and the Toorale floodwaters scheme were so highly appreciated by the present owners, the Berawinna Pastoral Company, that they have erected a further bank of about 25,000 cubic yards, spreading water more widely.

At this time experiments were being made in boring for artesian water, characteristic of McCaughey that he should follow these experiments with lively interest.

He was always alert to examine new ideas. It was on a station adjoining Toorale on the north that the first demonstration of successful artesian boring on an extensive scale was made. Mr. W. W. Davis, part owner and manager of Kerribee, was one of the earliest pioneers of this form of water supply in Australia. The first bore put down by him (in 1888) was 1,073 feet in depth, and yielded 350,000 gallons per day. The second was still more successful, for at a depth of 1,340 feet a flow of 1,750,000 gallons per day was obtained.

McCaughey lost no time in following this example, which was destined to introduce a new era in Australia. He promptly sank No. 1 and No. 2 bore on Toorale, and completed No. 2 bore on Dunlop in April 1889.

Altogether some thirty-nine bores were sunk on these two great properties, adding enormously to their safety and carrying capacity. In one year 500,000 sheep were shorn. In later years Sir Samuel McCaughey, referring to these huge stations, remarked, 'It was there I made my money’. He certainly spent it on these properties.

Never at a loss for a good man, he appointed his brother John as manager of Toorale, and
An interesting photograph taken in 1888 at Toorale Station
(Note the Tumbling Tommy earth scoop on the right)
(Internet Image)

Right:
No. 2 Bore, Toorale. The sinking of artesian bores on this property altered its whole aspect in farming
Unoccupied, dilapidated Toorale Homestead - built 1896
Toorale Station was purchased by Sir Samuel from his uncle, Sir Samuel Wilson
(Courtesy NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service)

Wool Pressers at Toorale Station
(Courtesy NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service)
Interior of Toorale woolshed, the first shearing shed in Australia to be installed with electric light.

Interior of Dunlop Woolshed taken in 2015
(Courtesy Gerard O’Donoghue)
Dunlop Woolshed now contains only three Wolseley stands. These are later versions than those used at the first initial shearing of a complete flock (photo taken 2015)

Dunlop Homestead (2015) under restoration by the new owners
Copy of an original map found at Dunlop Homestead by the new owners (2015) It shows the Dunlop Station as held by Sir Samuel Wilson prior to 1880
gave him an interest in the station. He appointed James Wilson (no relation) as manager of *Dunlop*. Both these stations made history in different ways: *Toorale* was the first shearing shed in Australia to be installed with electric light, and *Dunlop* has the distinction of being the first place to undertake a complete shearing with machines.

In 1887 John McCaughey, finding that the insurance companies objected to the use of gasoline in the shearing shed, investigated the possibilities of lighting it by electricity. In July of that year the installation was completed, and a new chapter was begun in Australian pastoral history. *Toorale* woolshed, solidly built in 1869, with rafters of wrought iron, is about eight miles from the homestead and a mile-and-a-half from the River Darling.

James Wilson, the efficient manager of *Dunlop*, became interested in an invention for shearing by machinery. The inventor was Frederick York Wolseley, owner of Euroka, on the Barwon (Darling); he was a brother of General Lord Wolseley. James Wilson attended a demonstration of the new process in Melbourne in 1887, and was so much impressed that he resolved to install the plant at *Dunlop*. He knew that he could rely on McCaughey's hearty co-operation in such a venture.

The order was given, and in July 1888 the equipment was ready for the shearers. The stage was set for a historic occasion. But the shearers did not see it in any such romantic light; they were by no means willing to become pioneers of untried methods. *Dunlop* was a popular shed of over forty stands with 184,000 sheep.

Early in July nearly double the number of shearers required assembled at the station, but when those selected found they were expected to shear with machines, they refused to sign on, and withdrew to a stock reserve across the river. Here they remained for nearly three weeks before they could be prevailed upon to give the machines a trial. Eventually they were persuaded to 'give it a go', and at length the starting whistle was blown. As each man drew a sheep from his pen the whirr of forty stands of machines startled the echoes of the *Dunlop* shed.

Very few shearers showed any desire to acquire skill, and all were at a disadvantage in using an unfamiliar device. John Howard, the collaborator of Frederick York Wolseley in the invention, was present, supervising the new method. A large steam engine supplied power which transmitted it to the machines by an endless hemp rope.

Most of the shearers hoped the experiment would be a failure, and the rope was surreptitiously nicked from time to time; a sailor was employed to repair the breaks. Owing to these repeated acts of sabotage a wire rope was substituted, but as this began to wear it flung fusillades of needles at the stooping shearers. Naturally this evoked vigorous protests, and a man was put on watch, who, at the first complaint, fitted a fresh rope.

Shearing went slowly at first. For some days 43 was the highest tally; after a week or two one man reached 75. When a couple of weeks later the 100 mark was reached Mr. Howard offered a bonus of 2/6 a sheep for every one shorn over 150 a day. On 11th October three of the shearers gained the bonus by reaching tallies of :-

\[
173 \text{ (Jim Davidson)}, \\
168 \text{ (George Davidson, brother of Jim)}, \\
167 \text{ (Alec Hutchinson)}. \\
\]

However, the shearing did not progress without further stoppages. The men had agreed to provide their own combs and cutters, but after about three weeks they demanded that these be supplied. They went
on strike for seventeen days until this was conceded.

In the meantime nine of the less adaptable men gave up their stands, reducing the board to thirty-one. No attempt was made to fill their places and the shearing was completed in about twelve weeks, 200,000 sheep being shorn.

The historic *Dunlop* shearing aroused widespread interest. Lord Carrington, then Governor of New South Wales, in the course of a tour of the west, stayed a few days there and was intensely interested in the progress of the new shearing experiment, he even tried his hand with the machines, putting up a creditable performance, he later had a meal in the men's huts and addressed them, pointing out that they were taking part in an experiment of great importance to Australia, which would introduce a new era in the wool industry.

Reluctant though they might have been to try their hand at the new-fangled method, once they had left the station they were very ready to boast to other shearers about their pioneering achievement. No one can take from those men the credit of having been members of the first shed in the world to undertake a complete shearing with machines.

*Signage at Toorale Homestead entrance*
Two computer enhanced views of the famous Dunlop Shearing Shed where history was made by being the first shed to shear a complete flock of sheep. Over 200,000 sheep were shorn using Fred Wolseley’s new mechanical shearing machines.
Two computer enhanced views of the famous Toorale Shearing Shed where history was made by being the first shed to have electric light installed.
CHAPTER 7

COOREE

Samuel McCaughey had barely completed his preliminary arrangements for the development of Toorale and Dunlop when his uncle, John Wilson, who had helped him in the purchase of Coonong in 1860, suggested that he should buy Coree.

This Riverina property of 150,000 acres freehold was owned by John Wilson, whose nephew, Alexander Wilson, was managing it at that time. Alexander, a son of William Wilson, had been brought to Australia by McCaughey some years before. Coree had a fine homestead; the Duke of Manchester, a keen student of commercial botany, had stayed there in 1880. Alexander was then a bachelor and his two sisters kept house for him.

The terms proposed by John Wilson were easy, and in 1881 Coree was added to the already impressive list of properties controlled by Samuel McCaughey. He was very pleased with this newest purchase, and made his brother David manager, with an interest in it. At the end of 1885 David McCaughey became sole owner of Coree.

Samuel had brought David, his second brother (though considerably his junior), to Australia in 1874; there was a very close affection between the two men. Soon after David’s arrival his brother gave him the task of helping to drive a large consignment of sheep to Queensland.

Another young man, named Carse (later manager of Yanko station, Jerilderie), who had come to Australia at the same time as David, was also in the droving party. When they had been some weeks on the way David became ill, due to the rough conditions and the bad water. His symptoms were very serious and Carse wired to Samuel McCaughey, who set out instantly. He drove his own horses as far as they could go, then, since there were no railways there in those days, he hired vehicles from point to point, picked up a doctor en route and raced with him along bush tracks for another hundred and fifty miles, and was in time to save his brother’s life.

‘It was a colossal feat Carse recalled later; ‘but then’, he added, ‘David was the apple of his brother’s eye.’ David married Miss Lucilla Louisa Blanche Gell, daughter of the Hon. Philip Hoskins Gell; they had two sons, Samuel (named after his uncle) and David Roy, and two daughters, Dorothy and Maude. David McCaughey (my husband’s father died at Coree in 1899; his widow married Mr. John Inglis Fisk, of Victoria, in 1903).

After David's death Coree was managed by his brother-in-law, Alfred Gell, and my husband and his brother used to spend their school holidays on the station.

Despite his ownership of all these other stations, Coonong remained the chosen home of Samuel McCaughey until he left it for North Yanko in 1900. However, he built a commodious homestead of twenty-two rooms at Dunlop in 1886, using hard reddish sandstone cut from a quarry about a mile south of the house. The same sandstone was used for the Dunlop store, a large building which carried a stock almost as varied and extensive as a department store in a country town.
Sometime after 1888 a fire completely destroyed the woodwork, roof and fittings of the Dunlop residence, but could not damage the walls, which were used unaltered in the re-building.

In 1896 he built a homestead of similar size on Toorale; his brother John who had been manager of Toorale since 1880, left in 1897 to manage another of Samuel McCaughey's properties, Yarrabee. He later became owner of this station. Matthew Robinson succeeded John McCaughey as manager of Toorale.

Robinson was an Ulsterman, son of the Reverend Professor Robinson, of Belfast, and had married a niece of Samuel McCaughey—Louisa McCay (her mother was McCaughey's sister Mary, wife of the Reverend William McCay, of County Deny, Northern Ireland).

When Matthew Robinson first came to Australia he spent three years with David McCaughey on Coree; then Samuel McCaughey appointed him manager of Goolgumba a property carrying 100,000 sheep. From the time he went to Goolgumba he became the right-hand man of his uncle-by-marriage, who had a warm friendship for him. He was also greatly attached to his niece Louisa, Matthew's wife.

Although McCaughey was a man of very strong family feeling, the relatives whom he placed in positions of responsibility were not chosen merely because they were relatives.

His shrewd judgment of character guided him to select men of ability and integrity who were worth his confidence. Robinson was one of these—which was fortunate, since McCaughey was surely going to need a first-class chief of staff during the coming years, as his holdings continued to increase until their proportions were almost fabulous.

About 1909 Robinson became manager of all his properties. One of the marks of a successful man is his knowledge of how to pick his assistants and when and how to delegate responsibility to them.

McCaughey's shrewd brain and penetrating scrutiny enabled him to see far below the surface and to assess character and capability. He would never have been able to carry out his vast enterprises if he had not possessed this gift; his undertakings were too huge to control without efficient helpers.

At various times Samuel McCaughey was owner or part owner of twelve stations in New South Wales and three in Queensland.

**Those in New South Wales were:-**

Coonong, acquired in 1860.
Singorimbah, acquired in the early 1860's
Goolgumba, acquired in 1872.
Dunlop, acquired in 1880.
Toorale, acquired in 1880.(Pronounced To-ral-ee or Tooral)
Coree, acquired in 1881.
Yarrabee, acquired in 1897.
North Yanco, acquired in 1899.
Nariah, acquired in 1904.
Fort Bourke, acquired in 1905.
Oakhurst, acquired in 1906.
Nocoleche, acquired in 1909. (Pronounced nock a leesh ee)
The Queensland stations were:

- Rockwood, acquired in 1889.
- Barenya, acquired in 1897.
- Bonus Downs, acquired in 1909

When McCaughey was on a trip abroad in 1905 he had an interview with the great French bacteriologist, Louis Pasteur, to seek his advice on the destruction of rabbits.

Always eager to experiment with new ideas, he thought that science might have some fresh approach which would prove effective against this pest, since it had defied all existing means of extermination.

McCaughey had fought rabbits ceaselessly on his great properties. Fences, trapping, poisoning and drowning were the weapons of the time, and he used them all. So when he was in Paris in 1905 he went to see the famous scientist (accompanied by Mr. Watt, of Cocketgedong station) and asked him if he could do anything to kill the rabbits on his properties in Australia. Pasteur was hopeful. 'I think I can’ he replied; 'I have killed all the rabbits on a certain vineyard in France. How large is your property?’ When he was told he raised his hands in consternation.

‘Oh, it is beyond me!’ he exclaimed. 'It's as big as the whole of France. He was probably not far out in his estimate of the size. McCaughey himself said that if his stations were cut into strips half a mile wide and joined end to end they would reach from Australia to England.

Yet in invoking the help of science he was on the right track, although he did not live to see the work of later bacteriologists in the development of myxomatosis for rabbit extermination. These latter-day scientists would not have been daunted by the vastness of the area to be dealt with.

It is easy to understand how hard it would be for a Frenchman to conceive of such huge holdings in the hands of one man. Apart from the hundreds of square miles in his Queensland stations, four of his runs in New South Wales which adjoined each other, making practically one enormous property, amounted to three and a quarter million acres.

These were Dunlop, Toorale and Fort Bourke on the Darling, and Nocoleche at the back of Dunlop on the Paroo River. They extended along the winding bank of the Darling for 280 miles; Wanaaring Road ran through them for 127 miles. There was one fence on Dunlop which extended for 43 miles in the same direction, or, if Nocoleche was counted in with Dunlop, the fence ran for about 90 miles. No wonder the Frenchman was aghast at areas such as these being only a part of the property of one individual.
Old Coree Homestead - 2014

Old Coree Nursery – 2014
(Courtesy Russell and Emily Ford)
(Rice Research Australia Pty. Ltd.)
The Red Brick Dam wall at Coree - 2014

The diversion Channel leading away from the Dam wall at Coree – 2014
(Courtesy Russell and Emily Ford)
Windmill at Coree Institute. Dams built by Sir Samuel at Coree occasioned the Equity suit against him in 1886

Woolshed at Coree, part of the McCaughey Institute
Original Coach House at Coree – 2014

Original Stables at Coree – 2014
(Ian Itter collection)
Keogh’s dam, Yanko creek, part of the irrigation scheme at Coree

McCaughey Institute, Coree landscape
Dated Red Brick in the wall of the staff sleeping quarters

McCaughey Institute, Dam at Coree, part of Sir Samuels huge irrigation scheme on this property
(Showing a British Field Master Crawler Tractor)
C. E. W. Bean, in his book, *On the Wool Track*, gives some striking particulars of these four stations. Writing in 1909 he declared that it was doubtful if any similar area in New South Wales had been improved as had these four big properties. About £100,000 had been spent on Dunlop alone.

'On this station on five acres of irrigated lucerne, which was levelled at a cost of £15 per acre, they fed 240 stud sheep for three months, turning them first on to one half of the irrigation paddocks and then on the other. They got seven crops yearly off that paddock and had just doubled the size of it. Every sort of fruit, from strawberries to bananas, grew about the house.

There was another paddock irrigated by water from the woolscour, then about to be planted with Rhodes grass from Africa. But as a crowning piece of enterprise, twelve miles and thirty miles beyond the Darling respectively, far out on the red soil, irrigated only by the rain which falls around them, were two paddocks of 200 acres each, waist-high with wheat! No one but an owner whose immense wealth matched his confidence in the country would have spent such a fortune on improvements. C. E. W. Bean uses this case as an argument in favour of large-sized holdings in areas of low rainfall. He points out that the small settler cannot withstand the droughts, and gives an instance of what Dunlop had to face:

In 1889 and the two following years the rainfall was successively 22, 20 and 22 inches. The river came down flooding far beyond its banks, thirty to fifty miles wide in parts.

There were four floods in four years. In 1893 the rainy years were ended as with a knife stroke. Up to the time of our visit (1909) there had never been a flood since. Instead there had been a series of years with an average rainfall of perhaps twelve inches, and at least one stretch of seventeen months during which there fell less than an inch—eighty-eight points altogether. But Dunlop weathered the blow—precious few did. There is much to be said for a large holding run like a "wool village"; it is economical for working, provides a much-needed social life and can see out a pinch which would floor the small selector.'

In 1889 McCaughey extended his interests to Queensland with the leasing of Rockwood, near Muttaburra, a holding of 442 square miles. In this venture he was joined by two partners, James Stuart and Henry Irwin Stuart, Ulstermen who had come to Australia with an introduction to McCaughey. Barenya, another Queensland leasehold (300 square miles), was taken up by these three partners in 1897. On the death of H. I. Stuart the leases were transferred to the two remaining partners. In 1905 both leases were renewed: Rockwood for 22½ years and Barenya for 24 years.

This latter lease was held by Samuel McCaughey and James Stuart as administrators of the estate of Henry Irwin Stuart. A third Queensland property, Bonus Downs (295 square miles), was leased by Sir Samuel McCaughey alone in 1909.

It was in 1899 that McCaughey purchased North Yanko, New South Wales, from Sir Charles Douglas. On this property of about 100,000 acres freehold he carried out his most spectacular experiments in irrigation. They are described in Chapter eleven.
In the above group, Sir Samuel McCaughey is seated first from the left and Mr. David McCaughey, his brother, is standing fourth from the left.

A reconstruction of Major Mitchell’s original Fort after which the Fort Bourke Station is named (Ian Itter collection)
CHAPTER 8

Although McCaughey's interests were manifold, as those of any intelligent man on the land must be, his chief pre-occupation was always with sheep. He was one of the greatest forces in the development of the sheep-breeding and wool-producing industry in Australia. No expense was too great, no labour too arduous when it was a question of improving his flocks. Naturally enough, merinos were his original choice, since the Wilson brothers flocks were of this breed, and therefore his first contact with sheep in Australia was with them.

As he grew experienced enough to form his own judgment he continued with the same breed; he continually tried out variations of strain to discover exactly the types best suited to the conditions on his stations. His most costly experiment was with the Vermont merinos which he imported from America in 1886, thereby rousing intense controversy.

The merinos are the most important fine-wool sheep in the world. For centuries they were exclusive to Spain, and for many years their export was stringently prohibited. In the latter part of the eighteenth century this ban was partly relaxed. The King of Spain presented some merinos to his cousin, the Elector of Hanover, in 1765. These were the Negretti variety, and they soon increased in Saxony. They are distinguished by the fineness of their wool, and it is this strain that has contributed very greatly to the characteristics of the extra fine wool merinos flourishing on the Australian highlands.

In 1767 France succeeded in importing some Spanish merinos, and from these was developed the Rambouillet strain. These supplied the dominant characteristics of the famous Peppin sheep of Wanganella, New South Wales, which McCaughey later used so largely in his flocks.

King George III—'the farmer King'—became interested in the Spanish merinos, and in 1791 he managed to acquire four rams and thirty-six ewes of the Negretti variety from Spain, and founded a small flock at Kew. It was six years later, in 1797, that merinos were first introduced into Australia. This crucial event for Australia came about in a rather curious way.

Colonel Gordon, an officer in the Dutch East Indies Company, stationed at the Cape of Good Hope, acquired some Spanish merinos which had been sent to the Governor of that Colony. This Colonel Gordon, a noted naturalist and explorer, who had discovered and named the Orange River, unfortunately committed suicide. When his widow was returning to England in 1797 she did not want to leave anything at the Cape which had belonged to her husband.

At this juncture two ships on their way to Australia—the Supply (Captain Kent) and the Reliance (Captain Waterhouse)—put in at Capetown.

Mrs. Gordon sold twenty-six merinos from the little flock of thirty-two to these two captains at prices ranging from £4 to £4/4/- per head. She divided the remaining six between Governor King and Colonel Paterson, of New South Wales, both of whom were on their way to England in the Britannia, which had also put in at the Cape at that time. Governor King arranged with Captain Waterhouse to take his three sheep back to Australia in the Reliance, but they died on the voyage. Altogether only about half the original flock survived the trip, though the actual number had increased owing to the ewes having produced lambs (pure-bred merinos) during the voyage.

When they reached Sydney, Captain John Macarthur, who is ranked as the father of the wool industry in Australia, wanted to buy them all at fifteen guineas a head, but his offer was declined; it was thought better to distribute them to a number of the pioneer sheep breeders of the Colony, including John
Macarthur, Captain Rowley, Mr. Marsden, Mr. Laycock, Mr. Williamson, Mr. Moore and others. As it turned out, the only successful breeder from these first importations was John Macarthur, whose flocks on his Camden estate were to become famous throughout Australia.

The Americans seem to have lagged a little behind in their appreciation of the Spanish merinos. The first shipment imported into America was sent direct from Spain by Mr. W. Foster in 1793. He gave them to a friend, Mr. Cargie, who, not realizing their value, killed them for mutton. In 1802 Colonel Humphries, the American Minister to the Court of Spain, sent a further small shipment of merinos to America, of which twenty-one rams and seventy ewes were landed alive.

This shipment was quickly followed by larger ones, until in the years 1810 and 1811 there were nearly 16,000 merinos imported to America from Spain. By this time, owing to the Peninsular War the Spanish flocks had been broken up and the export embargo had lapsed.

From descendants of some of these American importations was developed the Vermont strain which was to have such a strong influence on McCaughey's flocks over a long period.

The Van Diemen's Land Company was responsible for substantial importation of Saxon merinos to Van Diemen's Land (later Tasmania) from the year 1828. By 1830 this enterprising and wealthy company had spent £30,000 on the purchase of these merinos from Saxony. Gibson and Son, James Gibson and Sir Samuel Wilson were among the breeders whose studs derived from these first-class merinos of the Van Diemen's Land Company. Samuel McCaughey was later to purchase sheep from these breeders.

Further importations of merinos to Australia were carried out by the Henty's. Thomas Henty, of Sussex, had founded a stud of pure merinos from the flock of George III, which had won prizes all over the United Kingdom. In fact he was so regularly successful at shows that he was finally debarred from competing for prizes. In 1829 three of his sons, James, Stephen and John, came in the chartered ship Caroline to Western Australia, thence to Tasmania, in the Cornwallis in 1831. They were accompanied by forty people from Henty's parish and carried a considerable flock of merino sheep bred by their father and several thoroughbred horses.
The following year, Thomas Henty, his wife and daughter and three other sons, reached Launceston in the barque *Forth*, bringing thirty merinos and other stock. One of the sons, Francis Henty, left Tasmania to found a settlement at Portland, Victoria, in 1834, and after the death of his father the whole of his pure merinos were brought to Portland. These sheep quickly spread over the Western District as settlement developed. The reputation of the merino in Australia became assured.

As has been mentioned earlier, when Samuel McCaughey started on his own property at *Coonong* his first flock consisted of sheep that had been bred to Macarthur's Camden strain. He built up his stud during the following years with rams from *Havilah* (N.S.W.), *Rawden* (N.S.W), *Mono Vale* (Tasmania), *Ercildoune* (Victoria), and *Bellewe* (Tasmania). An important addition to the stud in 1879 was a very high-class ram bred by George Rouse, of Biraganbil (N.S.W.). His fleece weighed 20 lbs., which was considered heavy at that time. His stock proved excellent, carrying heavy fleeces. Three hundred very old ewes of the *Havilah* strain were purchased in 1881.

The subdivision of *Coonong* into small paddocks facilitated experiments in breeding. McCaughey spent about £3,000 on rams from Mount Fyans and Jellalabad studs of Victoria, and a pure Tasmanian-blood ram from the Queensland East Talga stud. The result of this experiment was that the Victorian rams were discarded the next year, though the Queensland ram was retained for several years.

In 1862 McCaughey bought an interesting ram, ‘Little Wonder’, from Austin and Millear, of Wanganella (N.S.W.). For several years his fleece turned the scales at from 16 to 16½ lbs. Low set and squarely formed, he indicated having thrown back to 'Old Grimes', the Vermont ram used in the Wanganella stud many years before. McCaughey was so favourably impressed with the stock of 'Little Wonder’ as hoggets at the Deniliquin Show that he bought (for 4,000 guineas) the ten two-tooth rams in pens of five which had been awarded first and second prizes. They showed Rambouillet characteristics being large and standing high, but they did not prove very suitable for the *Coonong* sheep.
However, McCaughey never tired of trying out various crosses; he was always keenly interested in the results and did not hesitate to discard any crosses that proved unsatisfactory.

An experiment that was to have very far-reaching consequences was begun in 1883 by his purchase at Sydney of ten imported Californian rams at prices ranging from £52/10/- to £400. Three of these rams were of the large Rambouillet type and the others were of Vermont breed. The Vermont’s greatly excelled the large-framed Rambouillet in density and covering of fleece. Two years later a Vermont-Australian first-cross ram from the Coonong stud was grand champion at the Deniliquin Show.

McCaughey was so deeply impressed with the qualities of the Vermont’s that he made two journeys to America to obtain sheep of this breed for his stud. There was no doubt about the purity of their descent from the Spanish merino, for ever since their introduction into America, records had been kept with meticulous care. In fact the breeding of the Vermont merinos is better authenticated than that of any other merinos in the world. On his first visit McCaughey chose 120 ewes and 40 rams from the most noted Vermont flocks. On the second visit, six months afterwards, he bought 210 ewes and 92 rams. The cost of these two shipments, delivered at Coonong, was about £25,000. These rams cut very heavy weights of greasy wool—36 lbs., 37 lbs., and 43 lbs. are recorded. After about eight years the result was an increase by 1 lb. to 11 lb. of scoured wool per sheep in average seasons.

Since Vermont’s appeared to be coming up to his expectations McCaughey determined to develop this strain still further. From other importers he bought about 100 registered Vermont ewes and rams at prices up to 450 guineas. He considered the highest priced ram worth £10,000 to the Coonong stud; ’Eclipse’ and ’Eureka’ were especially noteworthy. ’Eclipse’ was more than once champion of the Sydney Sheep Show. McCaughey was exceedingly proud of this stately wrinkled sheep. It forms the centrepiece of the stained glass window on the staircase at North Yanko.

The loss of one of these valuable rams was naturally a serious matter; if they needed medical care they were given better treatment than many human beings!

There was a young sportsman in the district who used to make regular Saturday morning visits to Coonong to seek McCaughey's permission for a day's shooting on the place. One morning he found a ram caught in a wire fence; it was obvious that the poor animal had been in this predicament for some days. With his companion's help the sportsman lifted him into the sulky and took him to the homestead, where he found the owner, as usual, working on some gadget in the blacksmith's shop. McCaughey thanked the young man warmly.

‘He's a valuable ram,’ he said, 'he's worth £500, and he may have pneumonia. Now will you drive to Urana and ask Dr. McKnight to come out and treat him?'

Dr. McKnight, who was McCaughey's own doctor, protested that he was not a veterinary surgeon, but nevertheless he went to Coonong, and found that the ram, from his struggles in the fence, was suffering from hernia. The doctor followed the same procedure as on humans, carefully sewing the peritoneum and the muscles, and the ram made a good recovery. When the young sportsman next came for a day's shooting, McCaughey said cordially, ‘Don't come any more to ask my permission, but go where you like. You're the best unpaid boundary rider I have on the station.’

Many other sheep-breeders followed McCaughey's lead in regard to Vermont sheep. They felt that the country's biggest grazier must know what he was doing. For a number of years from the late 1890's to about 1906 there was a tremendous boom in Vermont’s, which won all the major prizes at the shows.
Folds and wrinkles became the rage. On one occasion when McCaughey was showing one of his wrinkled Vermont’s to a lady she exclaimed, 'Oh, isn't his back like a concertina!' ‘That’s the concertina I get my notes out of ' responded the owner with a twinkle in his blue eyes,

But although show judges admired them, the shearsers held other views; they heartily disliked the corrugations. One day at the Coonong sheds when a shearer was struggling with one of these creatures, removing clumsily-cut patches and strips (bootlaces), he exclaimed in heartfelt tones, ‘I wish the bloody dingoys had eaten this bloody sheep!’ Unnoticed, McCaughey was standing by. He remarked dryly, 'I think one of them is at him now.'

In the course of time McCaughey came to the conclusion that the Vermont’s tended to degenerate on the hot Australian plains. During the severe drought of 1902 his flocks suffered severe losses on the Riverina plains and in other hot regions.

Watching the results closely he became convinced that excellent though these fine woollen sheep might be in the highlands, they did not stand up well enough over years to the conditions on his properties.

All his stations were in hot country, which is now recognised as unsuitable for fine woollen sheep. Merino wool now produced in the Riverina is invariably strong or medium; the finer wool is grown in the highlands in such localities as Yass and New England.

Once he had made up his mind on that point, he resolved to discard the Vermont strain. There was never a trace of pettiness or obstinacy about McCaughey. Although he had been a leader of the Vermont craze, he was a big enough man to change his mind when the facts warranted it.

Accordingly he prepared to stock up with other sheep which had demonstrated their suitability to the conditions on his properties. He turned to the large-framed, fleeced sheep of Rambouillet ancestry from the stud founded by the Peppin brothers, These sheep had been successfully used in the studs and flocks of Wanganella, Haddon Rig and Cobran, all New South Wales stations.

The founders of the Peppin stud, George and Frederick Peppin, were Englishmen whose father had owned merinos from the flock of King George IV. They came to Australia and settled at Mansfield, Victoria, but not satisfied with the conditions there, they bought Wanganella, in the Riverina, bringing with them fine-wool merinos, blood horses and stud cattle. They set about breeding a type of sheep suitable to the Riverina plains, and after some early setbacks they achieved, by judicious in-breeding, fixation of a type which has proved of first-rate importance to the wool industry of Australia.

Their first object was not to start a stud, but merely to develop a stock suitable for conditions on their property. However, in 1869 they formed a stud flock with 200 ewes of their own breeding and 100 from Canally, near Balranald, said to have a large infusion of Rambouillet blood. They paid 80 to 150 guineas each for rams. Their purchases to begin with included one Rambouillet ram and two Negretti’s. Later 'Emperor,' a Rambouillet ram, and two of the best of a consignment of Vermont rams imported in 1866 were brought to Wanganella. 'Grimes' was a ram of outstanding quality; his influence was of major importance to the Peppin stud. The Peppin’s were thorough and careful breeders. George Peppin would spend hours observing the preferences of sheep for the various kinds of fodder growing on the property. It was about 1904 when McCaughey made his first purchases of sheep of the Peppin strain.

He bought about 3,000 ewes owned by the New Zealand and Australia Land Company on their Bundure Estate (N.S.W.), then managed by D. S. McLarty. From the Haddon Rig Estate, near Warren (N.S.W.), he bought 500 merino ewes. About 1909, at the dispersal of the Cobran stud, near Deniliquin (formerly
owned by Sir William Clarke), McCaughey made one of the largest purchases of breeding ewes recorded for many years—17,000, at an average of nearly £2 each, which at that time was a phenomenal price. These purchases were the origin of the present Goolgumbla and Coonong stud flocks. This major change of policy might have been embarrassing to some men, but McCaughey took it in his stride. He had no reluctance in buying from those who had been his rivals and opponents when he was the advocate of Vermont’s. His only concern was to breed the best possible sheep for his conditions. He was determined to maintain the best stud in the country.

It is not possible to give a detailed list of the prizes won by McCaughey's sheep, but those gained in one year indicate their success at shows. I came across a copy of 'Dalgety's Monthly Review' of October 1896, containing an article on Coonong, which mentions the prizes won by this stud during 1895. The sheep were shown in Bourke, Sydney, Melbourne and Wagga, and gained the following awards: 8 Grand Champions, 14 Champions, 42 First Prizes.

This copy of the magazine also mentions that "Samuel McCaughey achieved the unique honour of breeding and exhibiting the grand champion ewe of the show in Melbourne for the past three successive years’. Another note in the same issue gives particulars of the weight of fleeces cut by this breeder's sheep in 1894-5:

The average weight of fleece taken from 13,213 grown sheep on Coonong in 1894 was 11 lb. 5¾ oz., and in the following year the average weight was increased to 12 lb. 2 oz. from 12,853 sheep.' The writer goes on to mention: ‘For individual weight of fleeces, Coonong has some wonderful examples on record:-

'One pure Vermont Ewe, five years old, cut 31 ¾ lb. and has transmitted to her progeny similar heavy-cutting qualities. 'One 15/16 Vermont Ram sold to Mr. Thomas Fitzpatrick, M.L.A., at the recent Sydney sales, cut 35 lb. 'One pure Vermont Ram, 14 months old, sold to Mr. J. S. Horsfall, with 8 months' growth of wool, cut 25 lb. of beautiful quality wool, his lamb's fleece being 7 lb., or 32 oz. for 14½ month’s growth. This fleece probably establishes a record weight in Australia from a merino sheep of the same age.

‘Five rams, also recently purchased by Mr. J. S. Horsfall, of Widgiewa, cut an average fleece of 28 lbs. each.’

A typical application form dated 1917 for water taken from the Colombo Creek
CHAPTER 9

The year 1886 was an important one for irrigation in Australia. In that year Alfred Deakin, as Minister for Water Supply in the Victorian Government, carried through his Irrigation Act—the measure that made the whole country conscious of the potential value of water conservation. He declared: 'The people are but the nominal and not the real owners of the continent until they can settle the water problem'.

From his first arrival in Australia Samuel McCaughey had realized the vital importance of irrigation and improved water supply. Ever since his purchase of Coonong in 1860 he had developed schemes for conserving water. No one saw more clearly than he that in this country, with immense arid areas and enormous regions subject to intermittent droughts, some method of conserving and distributing water was a vital need. Deakin and McCaughey were in close agreement that the main problem of Australian development was that of water.

Early in the 1880's Deakin had visited America and examined the irrigation systems of all the States in which irrigation is actively practised. These included California, New Mexico, Colorado, Kansas and Nevada. He returned an enthusiastic believer in irrigation, and he set in motion the Mildura irrigation scheme.

Deakin had to meet plenty of opposition in Victoria. Pioneers of new ideas must expect that. And Samuel McCaughey also encountered conflict in his schemes in New South Wales. In that same year of 1886, when the Victorian Irrigation Bill was passed, owners of some of the properties to the west of Coree combined in a complaint that the damming of the Billabong Creek on Coree was seriously affecting the flow of water past their properties.

They brought a suit at Equity against Samuel McCaughey, the builder of the dams (although in 1885 his brother David had become the owner of Coree). Judgment was given against him, with damages of £6,500, together with an injunction limiting the height of water in the dams to seven feet from the bed of the creek, and stipulating that the dams must be overshot. This judgment seemed harsh, since but for Samuel McCaughey's efforts there would have been scarcely any flow at all in the Billabong.

It was not until he had made the cutting from the Murrumbidgee to the dry bed of the Yanco Creek that there was any assured flow in the Yanco and thence to the Colombo and the Billabong Creeks. This work, known as the Wilson, was carried out jointly by Sir Samuel Wilson and Samuel McCaughey when the latter bought Coonong in 1860.

None of the landholders along the creeks mentioned made any contribution to the expense. McCaughey contended that the Yanco and the Colombo were not natural watercourses, since before this cutting was
made the Yanco was only a series of dry depressions, except on extraordinary occasions when the Murray was in full flood—a height of twenty feet of water. In effect, he considered that the Yanco Creek was created by the Wilson Cutting, which enabled the waters of the Murray to flow into the Yanco Creek when the Murray was four feet above summer level. The provision of dams was necessary to prevent the water from running to waste.

The success of the Wilson Cutting encouraged Samuel McCaughey to plan a larger cutting, and due to his efforts the McKinney Cutting was constructed in 1896. It was a mile and a quarter above the Wilson intake, which it superseded.

The Government paid £7,000 towards the cost, and landholders who would benefit paid sums of from £500 to £3,400. McCaughey contributed the lion's share, said to be £7,000.

By this cutting, water flowed into the Yanco Creek when the Murray reached two feet above summer level—that is to say, a height of twelve feet six inches. It increased the flow ten or fifteen fold.

Although the McKinney Cutting was a joint enterprise, the other landholders made no effort to keep it in repair, and it was left to McCaughey to carry out regular inspections and to maintain it. Three times—in 1892, 1894 and 1896—he incurred considerable expense in repairing it (the costs borne solely by himself).

In 1896 there was a large breach in the cutting, and he set a working overseer and seven men with thirty-seven horses, five scoops and two ploughs to work on it. The task of repairing and strengthening the bank took about a month. He considered that such expense justly entitled him and his brother David to retain more water at their dams—the Chesney and the Sheepwash on the Colombo at Coonong, the Eighteen-Mile on the Yanco, and the Five-Mile on the Billabong at Coree.

Accordingly in 1897 he applied to the Urana Land Board under the Water Rights Act of 1896 for a licence to retain the water at a height considerably greater than seven feet at the Chesney Dam on Coonong. The decision would also apply to the Sheepwash Dam at Coonong and David McCaughey’s rights regarding the Five-Mile Dam and the Eighteen-Mile Dam at Coree.

Eight landholders on the Billabong Creek below Coree lodged an objection, and evidence was taken at Urana and Narrandera. H. G. McKinney, Chief Engineer for Water Conservation in N.S.W., after having inspected the dams in question, reported that the McCaughey's had shown good judgment in selecting sites with good natural by-washes, and that they had incurred considerable expense in building overflow weirs of brick or concrete on the by-wash channels. He added; “These dams are without exception less open to objection than two at least of the dams owned by petitioners”.

In October 1897 the Urana Land Board recommended that licenses for the dams be granted, subject to certain conditions regarding the Chesney and Sheepwash Dams.

The objectors decided to appeal, and one of them, J. H. Blackwood, of Boabula Station, on the Billabong, began the action by suing David McCaughey for £10,000 damages regarding the Five-Mile Dam and the Eighteen-Mile Dam.

Although Samuel McCaughey was not mentioned in this action, he was regarded as the real defendant, and he backed the whole defence financially.

The case was brought in the Supreme Court in March 1898 before the Chief Justice, Sir Frederick Darley, and a special jury of twelve. An exceedingly strong Bar was retained; the senior counsel for the
plaintiff was Sir Julian Salomans, Q.C., the recognized leader of the New South Wales Bar. Leading the defence for the McCaughey’s was the Attorney General, J. H. Want, D. C. The plaintiff had engaged as consulting engineer, John Monash, later the commander of the Anzacs, General Sir John Monash.

The case aroused intense interest during its lengthy hearing, since the men concerned were so well known. It continued for ten days in March 1898; then it was adjourned until May 30th, when it occupied a further two days. On June 1st, after the Chief Justice’s summing up, the jury returned a verdict for the plaintiff.

Damages were assessed at £2,000—not the £10,000 asked for. Similar cases against the McCaughey brothers by six other landowners were listed for trial, but, acting on the suggestion of the Chief Justice that the parties might try to reach a settlement amongst themselves, an agreement was drawn up between them on the 13th June 1898 and the defendants paid a lump sum of £10,000 in settlement of all the claims. Accordingly the Full Court by consent set the earlier verdict aside on July 25th.

The agreement was made between:

Robert Officer Blackwood
George Officer Blackwood
Harry Officer Blackwood, Hartwood Station
Robert Landale, Quiamong Station
David Aitken
Thomas Millear & Lyle, Melbourne
The Executors Millear, late of Wanganella East
Albert Austin, Wanganella Station
John Hutchinson Blackwood, Boabula Station
William Officer, Zara Station
John Dickson and James Dickson, Caroonboon Station
David Moore, Bundyolumblah Station, of the first part
Samuel McCaughey, Coonong Station, Urana, of the second part; and
David McCaughey Coree Station, Jerilderie, of the third part.

This was a very expensive case for Samuel McCaughey. The costs were about £17,000, in addition to the £10,000 agreed upon in settlement of the claims. One might have expected a certain resentment in his mind, but such an attitude was quite foreign to him.

He was a good loser. The day after the case ended he said with complete good humour to Mr. Harry Broe (managing clerk to his solicitors, Messrs. MacNamara and Smith), 'If a jury of twelve men, after hearing the evidence, arrive at the conclusion that I am in the wrong, I am not going to persist that I am right'.

He gave a lavish picnic at Port Hacking to his witnesses and supporters, chartering a launch for the day. Then he entertained the plaintiffs and their witnesses to a dinner at the Australia Hotel, treating them all with the utmost geniality. He also co-operated with them in the most cordial manner in carrying out the agreement that had been drawn up. As a result of this case an association was formed, known as the Riverina Creeks Committee, of which Samuel McCaughey was a valued member. This body later became the Riverina Creeks Preservation League, and was acknowledged by the Government of New
South Wales as the proper authority for negotiation.
Despite the fact that he had done more than anyone else to increase the flow from the Murrumbidgee to the creeks, thus earning a moral right to the water, McCaughey was always loyal to the committee and ready to help them with his influence and advice.
Although he lost the case, he did not lose any friends—in fact he gained them by his large-minded attitude.
One of the North Yanko Hay sheds, Sir Samuel constructed about 22 miles of irrigation channels on this property.

The teams at North Yanko, Sir Samuel’s success with irrigation here induced the Government to decide on the Burrinjuck reservoir and the northern Murrumbidgee Canal scheme.
CHAPTER 10

The famous Australian politician, George Houston Reid (later Sir George,) was one of Samuel McCaughey's greatest friends; he was a frequent guest at Coonong. The two men had much in common. Each of them had a keen sense of humour and they enjoyed many jokes together. Both had the habit of falling asleep without warning, and on several occasions when McCaughey was driving his friend across country they would sit side by side in the buggy both fast asleep, while the trusty horses jogged along until a gate brought them to a standstill. Usually the stopping of the buggy would wake the sleepers, but there was one occasion, still laughed over in the district, when it failed to do so.

On his return from attending Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee in London as Premier of New South Wales, G. H. Reid went to stay at Coonong. While he was in London he had been made a Privy Councillor, and the township of Urana, twelve miles from Coonong, planned a public reception for the great man. McCaughey arranged to drive him in his buggy to Urana, but when the hour of the reception arrived there was no sign of the guest of honour or his host. After the large gathering of country people had waited for some considerable time a man set off on horseback to see if there had been an accident. He found the two men sound asleep in the buggy at the boundary gate of the town common, the horses patiently waiting for the driver to wake. The belated arrival of the guest of honour at the Urana Hall—and the explanation—certainly started the reception off on a hilarious note.

This habit of slumber had its risks, however, and they did not always escape so lightly. On another occasion, when the two were driving together with the faithful horse, O'Shea, in the shafts, they narrowly missed a nasty accident. Both men fell asleep, and O'Shea, a tall and docile chestnut, decided he wanted a drink. He swerved into a channel and pitched them both out. Reid suffered slight concussion, and McCaughey got off with a temporarily paralysed little finger. Meals at Coonong when G. H. Reid was a guest were enlivened with plenty of humour, but both the host and the Premier were liable to fall asleep at the table after the last course, which greatly disconcerted guests who had not been warned of this habit.

It used to be said that Reid was not always asleep when he appeared to be and during parliamentary sittings he could often surprise opponents by suddenly revealing a clear knowledge of remarks that had been made while they thought him sound asleep. In the same way, McCaughey could be to all appearances wrapped in slumber in church, yet could afterwards give the points of the sermon more lucidly than many in the congregation who, while not closing an eye, had let their attention wander from the discourse.

In 1899, G. H. Reid, as Premier, recommended to the Governor an increase of members of the Upper House so as to ensure the passage of a Bill for the referendum on Federation. He persuaded his friend McCaughey to accept nomination for one of the additional twelve seats which were then created, and on April 11th 1899 Samuel McCaughey was sworn in as a member of the New South Wales Legislative Council.

No doubt it was his regard for his friend the Premier that led him to accept an honour that was rather burdensome to a man so busy with other matters. But although he was never a politician at heart, he proved a useful member, and his practical advice on measures connected with the land and its problems was greatly valued. When the Land and Income Tax Bill was before the House he got the Attorney-General, the Hon. B. R. Wise, to agree to many suggestions he put forward with regard to it.

I have been through volumes of Hansard of that period, and I found that though McCaughey did not
often make speeches in the House, when he did they were well worth listening to and always brief. At
the opening of a session on June 13th 1905 he seconded the Address-in-reply to the speech of the
Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Frederick Darley (the Governor, Sir Harry Rawson, was in England at the
time). This speech, short though it is, is characteristic of the man—very much to the point, practical and
straightforward. It reveals his love of Australia and his faith in the future of the country, and is worth
quoting:-

'Hon. Samuel McCaughey: I have very much pleasure in seconding the Address-in-reply. It has been
very gratifying to me to find in the speech today the progressive policy indicated for the present session.
No one in this country more appreciates its resources than I do. I consider that we can carry a very big
population here, but what we want is pretty well indicated in the address—we want immigration,
railways and water conservation'. If these things can be brought about in an economical way, without
any squandering of money, and in such a way as will secure interest upon the return, then I think this
country must become second to none in the world.

We all know what Immigration has done for Canada. Anyone who has visited the country—I visited it
twenty years ago—will admit that Canada cannot for one moment be compared with Australia. They
have seven months, or at least five months of snow, when they can do practically nothing. Here we have
a climate which permits of outdoor work all the year round. This country offers a man a much better
home than Canada both for man and beast, because we can grow almost everything we require.

On another occasion he had something to say on a Bill for protecting native animals. His approach was
not that of a town-dweller, which is often full of theory and sentiment, with no practical experience to
back it up. McCaughey quotes from actual facts, and his arguments are unanswerable. Here is Hansard
again, in July 1903:-

The Hon. Samuel McCaughey: ‘On one station alone it cost me about £1000 to destroy kangaroos.
Some ten years ago we killed 18,000 kangaroos which were eating the grass that would support 30,000
sheep. Since then we have had to keep them down every year. I understand that by this Bill it is intended
to preserve opossums, but that is very undesirable. We have to set traps to destroy them. They are not
only a nuisance about gardens, but they get underneath the iron roof and over the ceilings. At Coonong
station I had a man employed for a fortnight nailing up every place where they could possibly get in,
and yet they have succeeded in making a hole. I think the framers of this Bill scarcely understand the
nuisance which they are going to perpetuate.’

These speeches, practical and forthright and based on first-hand knowledge, give some indication of the
value of McCaughey's contribution to the debates of the Upper House. He spoke seldom, but when he
did he had something of importance to contribute.
When the Duke and Duchess of York (later King George V and Queen Mary) visited Australia in 1901 for the opening of the first Federal Parliament, McCaughey as a member of the Legislative Council of New South Wales, took part in official functions for the Royal pair in Sydney. In that year Frederick McGubbin painted a portrait of him in the court uniform which he wore at some of the receptions to Royalty. He looks a very distinguished and important figure in this formal dress, with its black velvet coat and knee breeches, the shoes with cut steel buckles and the ceremonial sword with black scabbard and hilt of cut steel. This portrait hangs in the entrance hall of the North Yanko homestead (now the Agricultural High School) and is always an object of interest to the numerous visitors there.

McCaughey had no objection to ‘dressing up’ when the occasion called for it, and could wear the appropriate clothes with unselfconscious ease. He was always a noticeable figure in any gathering. His massive dome-shaped head crowned with a thick thatch of hair, his penetrating blue eyes, clear complexion and impressive size (for many years he weighed eighteen stone) inevitably attracted attention wherever he might be.

During this Royal visit of 1901 the Duke of York, one of the best shots in England, was anxious to have some shooting on a country station. The Hon. F. B. Suttor, M.L.C. (later Sir Francis), was in charge of these arrangements, and he asked Samuel McCaughey if he would organize a shoot for the Royal party on Coonong. He readily agreed. However, when the time came there was such a scarcity of game in the district that he felt obliged to advise Mr. Suttor that there was no prospect of a good day’s sport, and it was therefore useless for the party to come.

It was a very dry season (sheep had been hand-fed for months), but game was said to be abundant on Boramhily near Condobolin (managed by Mr. R. Whitehead), and Mr. Suttor arranged for the party to go there. Unfortunately, the reports proved to be misleading, and the day was a complete fiasco. Ducks, which had been hoped for, were scarcely to be seen, and the bag consisted of a couple of parrots and a number of rabbits. There were rumours of emus, but these did not materialize. Next day the party moved on to Derriwong station, but the drought chose that inopportune moment to break, and a cold rain set in. The Duke of York shot a black swan and a few ducks. They then moved on to Burrawong station (owned by Mr. Frank Edols), but the rain became a downpour, and they found no game. Mr. Suttor was most apologetic for the unfortunate result; both hosts and guests were keenly disappointed.

Much though he would have enjoyed the honour of entertaining the Royal party with true Coonong hospitality, McCaughey was thankful to be spared the chagrin of his more optimistic neighbours!
Plans of the Blue Gate dam and regulator, North Yanko
Page from Sir Samuel’s diary of 1864. Thoroughness with records was one of his characteristics
It was at North Yanko, purchased in 1899, that Samuel McCaughey made his most important contribution to irrigation in New South Wales. His work was so strikingly successful that it was largely responsible for the Government undertaking the Burrinjuck Reservoir and the Northern Murrumbidgee Canal Scheme.

When he bought the property he determined to make it an object lesson of what could be achieved with water conservation in this country. It was a demonstration of the possibilities of closer settlement and intensive cultivation in dry areas; the irrigation was also used to increase the station's capacity to carry sheep. He intended to subdivide North Yanko in due time and to settle employees and others on irrigated farms. It was an ambitious, long-range plan that this man of sixty-four embarked upon. He knew that he could not live to see its full fruition, but future generations of Australians would reap the benefit.

After living for forty years at Coonong he decided to make North Yanko his home. There was so much of importance to be done there, and he wanted to be on the spot to supervise it. He plunged into it with all the zest of a young man.

He first developed a scheme to supply water for the garden and grounds of the mansion he proposed to build. He installed a powerful pump on the Murrumbidgee some 400 yards from the site he had chosen for the house, and removed the soil in the homestead area to a depth of eighteen inches. Gravel was spread in the excavation and the removed soil was placed over it. The water was applied by soakage, providing subterranean irrigation. The effectiveness of this method is vividly shown by the beautiful garden and grounds which surround the house. After the irrigation system was installed some grape vines planted against a trellis threw out laterals eighteen feet long in eight months—an average growth of a foot a month.

The building of a homestead went ahead while all the irrigation schemes were going forward. A Melbourne architect designed an imposing house, but though the place is more grandiose than Coonong it lacks the charm and character of the latter; 1899 was a bad period for architecture in Australia. Built of red brick and stone, with deep verandahs and balconies supported by massive brick and stone pillars, its two billiard rooms, lofty reception rooms and ornate stained glass window on the staircase, the mansion is a typical example of the expensive architecture of that time, and it was a show place of the district. But whereas the Coonong homestead, of simple Early Colonial design, retains its appeal through all the changing phases of architectural taste, North Yanko has become definitely dated in appearance. Nevertheless it was a fine house for entertaining, and many pleasant gatherings took place under its hospitable roof.

His irrigation plans for North Yanko absorbed the owner's time and attention to a very considerable degree. As soon as he had made provision for the water supply to the garden and grounds of the homestead, he embarked on his main scheme. This was a comprehensive project extending from the intake of the Bundigerry Greek, just above the Berembed Weir, thirty-one miles east of Narrandera, almost to Murrami, which is twenty-nine miles north-west of that town. This Bundigerry Creek intake is about fifty miles east of the homestead at North Yanko.
The second intake was that of Oak Creek, eighteen miles downriver by road from the Berembed Weir and thirteen miles east of Narrandera by road. The third intake, independent of the river, was by Cowabbie Creek, junctioning with Bundigerry Creek on the north side and draining about 200 square miles of country, including Grong Grange on which two inches of rain could replenish the system.

In the Bundigerry Creek, six miles east of Narrandera, McCaughey placed two concrete structures—one on each side, equipped with grooves receiving heavy planks to retain the water. To avoid undue flooding of the pastures in the vicinity he provided a wide escape channel. He fully recognized the fact that in any irrigation system the drainage of water is as important as its supply. He then excavated a cutting a mile long to facilitate the flow from Oak Creek to Middle Creek, which passed it on to Bundigerry Creek. The water retained in Bundigerry Creek flowed to the west end of Narrandera, thence by a cutting which he excavated to Cudgell Creek and the Blue Gate Dam and Regulator—an elaborate concrete structure equipped with four gates.

This work, which was the main point of the system, was completed and functioning by 1903. Excess water was carried to the river by a continuation of Cudgell Creek, known as Cudgell Escape. By means of the regulator the water could either be held in the storage system or passed on a few miles to the Pump Hole.

Here a steam engine, operating a large rotary pump, lifted water about eight feet to flow by gravitation in the wide canal excavated by McCaughey.

This canal is still functioning and can be seen parallel with and just west of the Narrandera-Yanco road, crossing the railway at Yanco, and continuing south and west of the site at Leeton, to irrigate hundreds of acres of lucerne on land which is now occupied by farms. Two miles from Leeton, between the Griffiths Road and the Hay Canal, lucerne from McCaughey's sowing is still growing luxuriantly.

Two of the engineers who played important parts in this project were nephews of McCaughey whom he had brought out from Ulster. One of them, Francis McCay, was a brother of Mrs. Matthew Robinson. He was a brilliant civil engineer who for a year took most of the levels for irrigation on North Yanko. Before coming to Australia he had been responsible for important engineering projects in Ireland and Scotland.

The other nephew was Alexander Stewart, son of McCaughey's sister Jane; his father, Hugh Stewart, was an engineer in Ulster, and Alexander had inherited his father's ability. He did a great deal of work for his uncle on the irrigation scheme.

Already in 1902, the year of a disastrous drought, McCaughey had sixty miles of supply channels, and he was irrigating 750 acres of lucerne and 250 acres of sorghum, the latter six to ten feet high, feeding 16,000 sheep for three months. Fifteen hundred acres of lucerne, which was not watered for twelve months, grazed fifteen sheep to the acre for two months. McCaughey was also able to send truck loads of lucerne by rail and thence by road to feed his sheep travelling to the hills.

The years immediately following the purchase of North Yanko have been described as the thirstiest years New South Wales has ever known. In an article in 'Smith's Weekly' H. M. Somers wrote:-

'Any man who owned a bit of favoured country in those lean years which saw the decimation of our flocks by the million could stock up with the best of McCaughey's merinos. He had only to feed the ewes, keep all the mothers that survived and return the lambs to Samuel McCaughey. His agents arranged
In that year of very severe drought (1902) every man who came along got a job at North Yanko, 200 were employed on channels and the farm. The place became a real haven in those lean times. The men were, of course, expected to do a fair days work, but they were comfortably housed or encamped, and were supplied with good meals dispensed by efficient cooks. Many a man had reason to be thankful for this employment, which carried him through a very difficult time.

Work went on apace and eventually over 200 miles of channels were constructed on North Yanko and 40,000 acres could be irrigated. McCaughey flooded 10,000 acres of grass land and grew 5,000 acres of lucerne and watered it, making five or six cuts a year.

Wheat was sown. Oats and potatoes soon followed. All this provided an object lesson from which developed the Murrumbidgee irrigation area. North Yanko was so advanced by 1903 that when the Farmers and Settlers' annual conference was held in Narrandera that year the delegates were invited to spend a day inspecting it. Mr. H. M. Somers has described the occasion: -

‘The Wool Lord of North Yanco invited the delegates to this conference to see his useful irrigation schemes, irrigation at that time being more in the air than on dry land. Accompanied by Ministers of the Crown and some members of Parliament, they arrived at the North Yanco homestead at 12.30 and sat down to enormous fat bronze turkeys, champagne and accessories at 1 o'clock; viewed the pumping plant at the river, the channels and the lucerne, and all the great buildings, finished with something from a distillery in the North of Ireland, and returned to Narrandera for a good sleep before the conference resumed at 7.30.’

Although he was so abstemious himself, Samuel McCAughey was always a cordial and generous host. That 'sleep before the conference resumed' was probably needed by the delegates after partaking of North Yanco hospitality, added to a strenuous tour of the estate. But McCaughey, with his immense physical strength, which he retained almost to the end of his life, finished the day as fresh as when he started. He could outdo men half his age when it came to physical effort and staying power. His lifelong moderation in food and drink no doubt helped to account for this.

Some of the ‘great buildings’ mentioned by Mr. Somers would have been the engineering shops, equipped with lathes and having blacksmiths' and carpenters’ departments. These were more like big machinery works of the cities than workshops on a station. Vehicles were built there and implements made for the properties. The owner always retained his particular interest in the workshops. One day when he was showing Mr. C. H. McCulloch through the extensive engineering shop at North Yanko a man was repairing the wheels of a poison cart. His keenly observant glance never missed anything. He looked at the wedge the workman had prepared and as he remarked, 'A bit soft, isn't it? Get a piece of the old spoke'.

North Yanko’s immense irrigation scheme could only have been achieved by a man of vast financial resources, but it furnished a proof that expenditure on irrigation could justify itself on economic grounds if it were carried out with wisdom and boldness.

Already at this time McCaughey had in mind an even vaster project for storing the Murrumbidgee waters.

In July 1903 Robert Gibson, of Hay, applied to the New South Wales Parliament for leave to bring in a Bill to establish a system of irrigation and water supply, which among other things, would entail the
construction of a storage reservoir at Burrinjuck.

Although it was not publicly stated, it was known that McCaughey was behind the Bill; the scheme would cost at least £300,000 and there was only one man who combined the necessary zeal for irrigation with the financial strength.

In the *Riverina Grazier*, Hay, of July 24th 1903, the following notice appeared:-

‘Notice is hereby given that it is the intention of Robert Gibson, of Hay, to apply to the Parliament of New South Wales in the present session thereof for leave to bring in a Bill to authorize and enable the said Robert Gibson to establish a system of irrigation and water supply in the district which lies between the Murrumbidgee and the Lachlan Rivers, to construct a storage reservoir by means of a dam near Barren Jack (BurrenJuck) Mountain, in the parishes of West Goodradigbee and Ghildowla, in the counties of Buccleuch and Harden respectively, to construct a weir across the Murrumbidgee River near Narrandera, to construct a canal and subsidiary works on the northern side of the Murrumbidgee River at a point of stream from the said weir for the purpose of diverting and utilizing water from the said river and for above purposes to enter upon adjoining lands and to acquire lands for and in connection with such several purposes, to sell, let and supply the water thereby diverted for irrigation and other purposes, and to do all other things connected with and incidental to the beneficial use of the water to be supplied by means of the said canal and proposed works. And for the other purposes and with the powers and authorities in the Bill more particularly set out.

Bowman and Mackenzie, Solicitors for the Bill
279 George Street, Sydney.

The Government investigated the matter and decided that the construction of the Burrinjuck Dam was too vast a scheme for private enterprise, and that it must be undertaken by the State. This decision suited McCaughey excellently; he had succeeded in forcing the Government's hand, and all he wanted was an assured supply of water for his schemes.

Robert Gibson, however, was deeply disappointed at the decision. He had devoted much energy and zeal to preparing the plans; he was a man of outstanding capacity and character whose businesslike efficiency would have furnished an object lesson on the merits of private enterprise in the construction and management of a great public utility. McCaughey himself was subsequently very critical of Government methods, which he considered wasteful.

Although the Burrinjuck Dam was not completed until 1928 (delays in construction were partly due to World War I), work was begun on the reservoir in 1907, and water was available from the dam to farms on the Murrumbidgee irrigation areas in 1917.

McCaughey was able to see some of the results of the vision he had had of the storage and use of the waters of the Murrumbidgee. The total storage capacity of the Burrinjuck Dam is greater than that of Sydney Harbour
An old building on Nocoleche Station
Nocoleche is now a Nature Reserve, once a McCaughey cattle and sheep station

Woolshed and shearer's quarters at Nocoleche Nature Reserve. Believed to be erected after the ownership of Samuel McCaughey. (Internet Image)
CHAPTER 12

In the birthday honours of June 1905 King Edward VII conferred a knighthood on the Hon. Samuel McCaughey, M.L.C., in recognition of his work for the wool industry in Australia and of his many philanthropic and patriotic gifts. He was then a man of seventy, vigorous and active, and this unsought honour gave great pleasure to him and his many friends.

When the list of honours was published McCaughey was in Sydney for the Sheep Show. Among the many awards he won on this occasion were the Grand Champion merino ewe, the strong wool Champion, and second prize in the fine-wooled ram class. These results were announced on June 29th, and on the following day the newspapers published the news of his knighthood. His friends decided that a celebration was called for.

A group of them, headed by his neighbours, Mr. and Mrs. F. E. Whitehead, of Butherwah, Urana, chartered the Orient Company's launch Barrella and held a water picnic, cruising up the lovely reaches of Middle Harbour. Luncheon was served on board, with Mr. Thomas Newton, formerly of South Urana station, presiding. The toast of their guest, according to the account in the Sydney Morning Herald, was drunk 'in bumpers of champagne'. A number of speeches were made, to which the guest of honour responded with 'much humour and geniality'.

It was a heart-warming occasion for the veteran country man, and he was in great form, enjoying every moment of the festivities among so many old friends. Mrs. Whitehead recalled in later years that when Mr. Stanley O'Keefe, of Tammn, was taking snapshots of the party without warning, Sir Samuel exclaimed, 'You shouldn't do that, Stan, because I might have had my arm round Mrs. Whitehead!'

The list of those present included many of the old residents of the Riverina, in addition to friends from other places. The Sydney Morning Herald of that date records the following names:

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Newton, Urana station, Urana;
Mr. and Mrs. F. B. Falkiner, Tuppal, Murrumbidgee;
Mr. and Mrs. Tyson Donnelly, Toowooroba;
J. S. Horsfall, Widgiewa, Narrandra;
A. H. Prince, Secretary N.S.W. Sheepbreeders' Association;
Mr. and Mrs. F. E. Whitehead, Butherwah, Urana;
J. R. Clayton, Barellan;
A. D. Wigan, Goolgumba, Jerilderie;
A. H. Gell, Coree, Jerilderie;
James Rochfort;
W. H. Webb, Haythorp, Bathurst;
L. C. Hall, Yeumbwra, Yass;
S. P. Wilson, Big Springs, Wagga;
Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Morrison, Widgiewa, Narrandra;
C. E. Webb, Hazeldean, Blayney;
J. Bridges, Trawalla, Victoria;
A. S. O'Keefe Yamma, Morundah;
Vincent Brown, Sydney;
Neil McCullum, Junee;
Mr. Olivett, Sydney;  
G. W. Watt, Orange;  
Miss Kendall;  
Miss Howatt, Melbourne;  
Miss Brown;  
Mr. Sydney Donnelly, Toowoomba.

But though he greatly appreciated the honour of knighthood, it made no difference whatever to the essential simplicity of the man. "When he returned from a trip to England after his investiture he went to the farm at North Yanko, one of his old station hands, Mick O'Flaherty, an outsize Irishman, was working there with some other men.

They paused in their work to greet the boss, and Mick said in his cheery Irish way: 'Well, Sor, you'll be wanting a coat of arms now' 'Well now, Mick, perhaps I shall', responded the boss with a twinkle in his eyes. 'What would you suggest?' Mick, mindful that his boss usually carried a shovel in the buggy to deal with any emergencies in the channels, had his answer ready. Well, Sor, I suggest a sheep and a shovel came the reply in a rich Irish brogue.

McCaughey always enjoyed being with his men. He could joke with them and take jokes, yet keep perfect control. C. E. W. Bean might have had Samuel McCaughey in mind when he wrote of 'the boss' in 'On the Wool Track'. He says:-

'The boss is authority on a sheep station, unquestioned authority among men who do not readily recognize authority at all. They are incomparably more difficult to command than any class of European. They do not pull their forelocks or touch their hats, or even, if may be, remove their pipes. . . But they would do what he told them, and often a good deal more, with a quiet resource which few Europeans could compass. The station boss is about the only human being who exercises unquestioned personal authority in Australia. And this has given him qualities distinct from those of other men. . . . He has no immemorial feudal traditions to prop him up; the people have no respect for any "claims of birth". If he depended on the arm of the law to help him he would be in a pretty bad way; for the nearest finger of that arm was one trooper forty miles distant. The boss knew from the first that if he was to make anything at all of his life he had to depend on his common sense, his courage and the sheer ability to lead which generally exists somewhere deep down in people of British birth.'

McCaughey's sense of humour was a great asset in dealing with his employees.

Another useful quality was his readiness to lend a hand with any job. One day he and a party of men were working at a windmill when something needed on the job dropped to the bottom of the well. He stripped and went down to recover it—taking it as a matter of course that he should do this disagreeable task. On another occasion when he was nearing seventy, he drove up in a buggy and pair to inspect some pumping from a well to surface tanks. A new engine driver was on the job and the pump would not work.

McCaughey told the engine-driver to take the shovel and go down the well and clear away the sand from the valve of the pump. The engine-driver objected that he could not do that as he had never been down a well. With complete good humour, McCaughey said, 'I suppose poor old Sam will have to go down'. He stripped, and the engine-driver, handling the windlass, lowered him in a bucket. Nearly all the wells were 120 feet deep. He cleared away the sand—a lengthy process—and when the pump responded freely to the engine he signalled to be drawn up again, dressed and drove off. Next morning the engine-driver
came to him and asked to be paid off.

‘Why do you wish to leave?’ asked McCaughey. ‘Because I disobeyed your order to go down the well’, was the somewhat shamefaced answer. ‘Oh, there’s no need to leave on that account’, said the boss amiably, and the engine-driver remained in his service.

Yet he could be stern at times. Himself a man of decorous speech, he disliked bad language. On one occasion he overheard a blasphemous and filthy outburst from one of the men on the place. ‘Have you finished?’ he asked, as the man stopped. 'Yea, muttered the speaker, uncomfortably. 'Well go and wash your mouth out', he ordered, curtly.

McCaughey had no pretence and no ostentation. His tastes and his outlook on life were marked with extreme simplicity, and his modesty was one of his endearing characteristics. In later years he sometimes remarked to his friends, 'You know it's a wonderful thing that I should have made so much money. There's so-and-so, who is a cleverer man than I am who hasn’t done very much, I often wonder why I have been so successful.

Though he may have lacked intellectual training his intuition, almost amounted to genius. Mr. Harry Broe said of him “he was a man of quick mind.” Some of his deals ran into big figures – up to a quarter of a million at times- and he would close the business with a snap, at the right stage, and that would be the end of it. He was a man of prompt decision and a man of his word – once he had passed that, he never went back on any undertaking”.

*Workshop at North Yanko, where Sir Samuel enjoyed trying out some of his inventions*
The Late Mr. Samuel McCaughey, nephew of Sir Samuel and brother of Mr. D. R. McCaughey.
Mr. Samuel McCaughey died on the 29th January, 1955.
This photograph shows him in Officer’s uniform
During the Great War, 1914-18.

Lieut. Samuel, McCaughey who was killed at Shaggy Ridge in December 1943

Air Gunner David Leslie Macpherson, Died WW2

Taken from portraits held at Coree Homestead – 2014
Although Samuel McCaughey had always enjoyed magnificent health (he once claimed that he had never had an ache or a pain), by the time he had reached the middle seventies there was a normal slowing-down of his vigour. He began to feel less inclined to continue the control of his numerous properties. He had worked hard all his life and had earned some respite from his exacting tasks. Yet work had always been his principal, he gained tremendous satisfaction from it. He did not play any sports except an occasional game of billiards; he was not a racing man; boxing was the only sport he took any interest in. He enjoyed watching a good contest, and when he was well over seventy he attended the Wells-Stone match at the Sydney Stadium; friends who were with him said that his interest and enthusiasm were as keen as that of any young man.

He was essentially constructive in his outlook on life and was never happier than when he was wrestling with and solving business and pastoral problems, or devising and carrying out his schemes for development of the land. His mind was consistently fixed on achieving something useful—something that would be of benefit to the community. Sport failed to satisfy that urge, but he found plenty of hazards and excitements in his own pursuits.

He told a friend with considerable relish the story of one business deal. One of the members of a big squatting syndicate had a disagreement with his partners, and withdrew from the syndicate. After he had spent the bulk of his capital in buying one big station for cash he wanted to buy another, for which he needed £100,000. He asked his friend McCaughey to lend him the money for twelve months, but McCaughey told him that though he would like to oblige him he had not that amount free at the time. However, he added, if he could wait for a fortnight he might be able to raise it.

When the visitor left, McCaughey wrote to the syndicate referred to and asked them to lend him £100,000 for a year; he would give them fair interest for it, but without security. The syndicate had a large amount of capital uninvested at the time, and knowing that McCaughey was as safe as any bank, they readily agreed.

The transaction was put through to the satisfaction of everyone concerned, without the borrower knowing the source, nor the lenders the purpose of the loan. The whimsical side of the affair appealed to McCaughey’s Irish sense of humour. It also helps to explain why he did not need any organised sport to keep him amused; it was far more fun to perpetrate a £100,000 joke such as that than to attend any race meeting!

Since the onset of age cannot be resisted, even by the strongest, McCaughey began selling some of his properties in 1911, when he was in his seventy-seventh year. He continued this process until at the end of his life, eight years later, he did not own a single acre of land. When he died all his money was in government bonds of easily assessable value, which could readily be converted into cash.

He was not only concerned with lessening his responsibilities; there were also his bequests to consider. He had planned to leave large sums to universities, churches, schools and other objects, and there was no question that it would be simpler to bequeath government bonds rather than properties whose value might fluctuate.

Another point was that just as he had bought his stations with sound judgment, so he could dispose of them to better advantage than possibly anyone else. He had a flair for knowing when it was a good time.
to sell each particular station. If the sale were on terms, his instinct was invaluable for finding the right men as purchasers—men who could be trusted to keep up the value of the properties.

One of the first of his properties to be sold was *North Yanko*. The last station he parted with was *Coonong* the very first property he had owned, and the one on which he has left the strongest imprint of his personality. He sold it in 1919, a month before his death, to his nephew, David Roy McCaughey, who had just then returned from serving overseas with the British Army in World War I. It gave the old man great satisfaction to know that *Coonong*, which had been his home during the years of his struggles and eventual success, should pass into the possession of the son of his favourite brother, David.

David Roy, who later became my husband was only twenty one when he acquired *Coonong* but his uncle knew that he could be relied on to carry on the tradition of the famous stud which he had established over the previous sixty years. Roy (as he has always been known) had already shown his interest in pastoral affairs. He always planned to go on the land; it was in his blood, and even as a schoolboy he revealed his bent for a country career. Samuel McCaughey had observed his development, and once again his judgment of men has been vindicated, since Roy McCaughey has, in many ways, stepped into his uncle's shoes.

Early in 1911 McCaughey sold approximately 2,300 acres of *North Yanko* to a syndicate and about 6,000 acres to individual owners. All these properties were subsequently resumed for the irrigation area.

In June 1911 he sold the rest of *North Yanko* about 68,000 acres, to the Government for £3/10/- per acre, reserving about 28,000 acres of this property, including the homestead, for his own use during his lifetime and for the use of his trustees for twelve months after his death. He paid a rental to the Government of four per cent. per annum based on the figure of £3/10/- per acre.

The memorandum of agreement for this sale had a number of conditions, McCaughey was not a man to leave things in any ambiguity, but was explicit in all his legal arrangements. He stipulated that the purchaser should fill the dams on Cudgel Creek and Pump Hole twice annually with £1,000 worth of water, if practicable, free of charge, and for eighteen months after the death of the vendor until seven years from the date of the contract, the price of the water to be calculated on charges to settlers.

There were other stipulations regarding water supply, and a further condition that he was to retain the sole use of and right of access to the woolshed and yards, together with employees' quarters, to carry out sheavings. He enjoyed planning the sale of his properties with as much care and forethought as he had put into their acquisition.

In that same year of 1911 he transferred the lease of *Barenya*, in Queensland, to Alexander Hay, and the following year he transferred another of his Queensland properties, *Rockwood*” Rockwood Station”, to the *Rockwood* Pastoral Company.

His biggest deal, of course, was the sale of *Toorale, Dunlop* and *Nocoleche*. He was anxious that Matthew Robinson and Thomas Vincent, who had managed these places so long and so successfully, should buy them. He offered them the three properties for the very moderate price of £250,000, but the two men decided that the proposition was too great for their resources.

McCaughey, mindful of the generosity of his uncle Samuel Wilson to him in the matter of these same properties, set about finding a way to enable Robinson and Vincent to make the purchase. He evolved a plan of such generous terms that they were gladly accepted, since in effect McCaughey made his own bank account available to the partners.
The arrangement was that until the purchase money was paid, Robinson and Vincent would pay to him the proceeds of all sales of stock or wool from the stations and all rents and profits. The balance of the purchase money would bear interest at four per cent. Each of the purchasers would draw £1,000 a year from the working account for subsistence allowance.

McCaughey would find all necessary funds (at four per cent. per annum) for paying rents and effectually working and carrying on the properties; the purchasers would personally manage and superintend them. In the event of drought or losses of stock the vendor would find all necessary sums for re-stocking the stations.

This agreement was signed in March 1912, and it worked admirably in practice. The fact that these partners were able to take over from McCaughey his lease of Bonus Downs (Queensland) in 1918 is evidence that they had made a success of the transaction.

It is interesting to learn that when he sold Toorale and Dunlop after his ownership of thirty-three years, the covering of trees and shrubs was undamaged and as effective in protecting the soil as when he got possession. He fully realized the necessity of maintaining the natural growth to preserve the soil. Even in years of severe drought he refrained from drastic cutting of the edible trees and shrubs. His men had strict orders to lop the branches so that the trees could recover. If such a practice had been more generally followed by land owners, Australia would not have experienced the terrible soil erosion which has destroyed so much of the outback country.

Nariah, north of Barellan, N.S.W., was the next place to be disposed of. W.W. Killen was the purchaser. Then in 1913 he sold his three-quarters interest in Fort Bourke to T. Waddell, who already held a one-quarter interest in it.

He sold Goolgumbla and Singorimba to George Ernest Stuart in 1913.

The price for the freehold and conditionally leased lands was £146,916, and for the sheep, cattle and horses £33,821. The purchaser paid a large deposit and the balance carried interest at four per cent. per annum. These dealings are an example of McCaughey's methods in regard to interest charges.

He never forgot his own borrowing days, when he had been charged high rates of interest—sometimes ten per cent. There is no record of his ever having charged more than four and one-half per cent. on money that he lent.
Most of his operations in finance were philanthropic—he was constantly helping men who had served him well to acquire their own properties. He also assisted others whom he considered deserving—he believed in helping people who had the will and the ability to help themselves but lacked the money for a start.

He was only once known to foreclose on a man, and then he started him again on another property, where he was successful. He often waived debts of up to £3000 especially towards the end of his career.

All McCaughey's financial ventures were connected with the land. He never invested money in mines or any undertaking outside the pastoral industry, although he might have done so profitably, since the Bank of Belfast, which had implicit confidence in him gave him opportunity to borrow funds, it is said, at as low as three per cent.

His method of financing a man in the purchase of a property was as follows:-

The purchaser paid over the whole of his assets—in some instances these would not be more than ten per cent. of the purchase price. Working expenses and outgoings were financed at the rate of four and one-eighth per cent. The proceeds of all sales of stock and wool were paid to the credit of Samuel McCaughey, and interest on these amounts at the rate of four and one-eighth per cent. was credited to the purchaser.

At the end of the financial year the account was adjusted and the outstanding balance carried the same rate of interest for the succeeding year.

Many people used to approach McCaughey for advances on properties, and he invariably based his
lending on the character of the applicant. In such transactions his shrewd judgment of a man was a great asset.

Although he dealt in sums of great magnitude and was one of the most generous of men, he always retained the thrifty habits of his upbringing. He hated waste of any kind. A man who was driving with him one day, after opening a gate, asked him to wait for a few minutes while he retrieved his pipe, which he had dropped. As they started off again McCaughey remarked:

'I've saved £10,000 through not smoking. The man looked astonished. I'd have to live a long time for it to cost me £10,000 he answered. 'It's not the cost of the tobacco, but the time wasted in filling and lighting your pipe, rejoined the boss.'

At one time he would not employ a man who smoked. He relaxed this rule before long, but he always considered it a time-wasting habit.

To the end of his life he disliked to see a woman smoking. A cigarette in the mouth of a woman is worse than a curse in the mouth of a man was a remark he sometimes used as a rebuke to a feminine cigarette addict.

He was shrewd and just, and expected people to deal fairly with him. If they failed to do so, he had his own methods of coping with the situation. One day he noticed that a carter who was bringing loads of wood to Coonong had covered the bottom of his wagon with four-inch planks. 'How many loads of wood have you brought?' he asked. On being told, he had the cubic content of the four-inch planks deducted from the payment.

On another occasion an employee had carved his name on a table at the men’s quarters. McCaughey had the portion of board with the name removed and deducted 15/- from the man's wages. When he complained of the shortage, McCaughey handed him the carved board and explained that the removal and insertion of a new piece had cost 15/-.

But for every story of his care for economy there are dozens of his generosity to people in need. He never made a parade of his giving, but if he knew a friend was in difficulties, or if a clergyman came to him with some story of want, he was quick to relieve the case.

In 1906 the Presbyterian Church celebrated its centenary in Australia. The Very Rev. Dr. John Walker asked McCaughey for a contribution to the Centenary Fund which was being raised, and was rewarded with a gift of 3,000 guineas. The donor made a stipulation that half of it should be used for the erection of a Presbyterian Church in Narrandera, on condition that a similar amount should be raised by others. This was done, and in April 1907 Sir Samuel laid the foundation stone. Ten months later he was asked to declare St. John's Church open for public worship. His brief speech on that occasion revealed the sincerity of his outlook on religion and of his conviction of the value of its influence on life and character. His concluding words were:

'I trust this Church will long be filled with devout worshippers who will give attentive hearing to the word preached. If so, they will be found better citizens, better neighbours, better husbands and wives, better fathers and mothers; and at last, when their worship and labour here have ended, they will enter into the rest and reward promised by our Divine Master.'

A little later his friend, the Very Rev. Dr. G. R. S. Reid, took Dr. Andrew Harper, Principal of St. Andrew's College, Sydney University, to stay at North Yanko; he left with a cheque for £1,000 for the enlargement of the College. Another well-known Presbyterian divine, the Rev. Kemp Bruce, approached
him on behalf of the Burnside Homes for Children. He was presented with £2,000 for the building of the McCaughey Home in this little colony.

At the time of the South African War he subscribed £5,000 towards the cost of sending the Bushmen's Contingent to South Africa, and also made generous contributions to the Red Cross. In 1912 he gave £10,000 to the Dreadnought Fund.

When World War I broke out in 1914 there were innumerable appeals to him for contributions to various causes, which he met with characteristic generosity.

Through a gift of £10,000 in 1917 he insured the lives of 500 soldiers for £200 each; this was at a time when voluntary recruiting was lagging. With his brother John he presented a battle plane costing £2,700 to the Australian Air Force. He also made large gifts to the Red Cross and other war charities. Many of his benefactions were made anonymously, or as personal gifts to people in need. When Sir George Reid was in London as High Commissioner for Australia McCaughey sent him £10,000, asking him to give it to any charity he liked to name. Reid gave it to Dr. Banardo's Homes, and it was used to bring out a number of children to Australia.
CHAPTER 14

With the passing of the years, life at North Yanko gradually took on a slower rhythm for the veteran pastoralist. One indication of this was that instead of driving himself, he had a groom drive him in the buggy round the property and into Narrandera. He had always been a horse-lover, and even after the advent of motor cars he preferred to journey behind horses whenever possible.

One of his keenest enjoyments was to drive a spirited pair across country at a speed that terrified even the experienced bushmen who accompanied him. He was completely fearless and would think nothing of racing along with one wheel of the vehicle on the bottom of an irrigation ditch and the other on the embankment.

When he was about seventy-three he went to Queensland to inspect some country. It was strewn with fallen timber, the result of recent bush fires, but in order to see the country better he abandoned the roads and drove as the crow flies. The buggy bounced over logs, first one wheel in the air and then the other, to the undisguised alarm of his companion, a station manager used to rough country.

But such adventures as these were not for a man in his eighties, however keen a lover of horses. McCaughey always kept good draught horses and liked to see them well-proportioned and well fed and fit for their work. One year he gave seventy guineas each for ten young New Zealand mares; after keeping them at work for two years he mated them with a stallion that cost him nearly £1,000. He considered it money well spent.

At North Yanko he had a beautiful pair of perfectly matched brown geldings called Jimmy and John. He arranged to drive over the station one day, accompanied by the assistant book-keeper. The groom brought the buggy and pair to the office side of the house and the housekeeper called him in to pick up the luncheon basket. He wound the reins round the foot brake, but something startled the horses and they bolted down the drive. Crossing the bridge about 100 yards from the house, they smashed the buggy and Jimmy's off-hind leg was broken. The beautiful animal had to be shot. Sir Samuel grieved over the death of this horse for months, but did not reproach the groom, who was similarly distressed.

His daily routine at North Yanko was adjusted to his advancing years. He kept about on the property during the day, but no longer on foot. As he grew older his feet gave him a good deal of trouble and this restricted his movements very much. He would return to the homestead towards the dinner hour, and after dinner he would have a long talk with his station manager and consider the day’s correspondence. His book-keeper-cum-secretary, Charles Herbert Brown, would be instructed how to deal with the innumerable letters that the mails brought so regularly to the big house.

When the occasion called for it he could write a vigorous letter himself, as this example, written when he was nearly eighty, amply proves:-
North Yanco,  
Yanco.  
14th December, 1914.  
F. B. Brett, Esq.,  
120 William Street, Melbourne.  

Dear Sir,  
I was in Sydney for a fortnight lately and saw the Premier, Mr. Holman, and several times saw Mr. Wade, whom I urged to commence the widening and deepening of the Yanco Creek. Estimates have been taken of the quantity of earth that would require to be shifted to make a fifteen-feet wide bottom with a fall of six Inches to the mile for about 12 miles. The estimate was about 200,000 yards of earth at 1/- per yard, which is £10,000. I offered to put £10,000 over the counter at 4% Inscribed Stock if they would start the work at once, and the Premier was keen on the suggestion, as he was anxious to keep the men who are keeping his party in power employed.  

Mr. Wade said that he would interview the Minister for Lands and let me know what they intended doing in the matter, but he had not seen the Minister before I left. He (Mr. Wade) came down here three or four weeks ago and I again tackled him about starting of the work of widening and deepening of the Yanco, when he said that before he could start he would have to make out plans etc, for a weir below the intake of the Yanco Creek, which would be sufficiently high enough to give a supply of water to all the lower holders. I wrote to him the day after his visit suggesting the commencement of the cutting at once, so that it would be finished by this summer, which would enable them to determine on what height to build the weir in order to give a supply of water to all the lower holders, but up to the present I have had no reply to the letter. If we had the usual rainfall I think the cutting would give sufficient water for several years.  

My reason for writing you on this matter is that I would like you to write to the lower holders along the Yanco, stirring them up and urging them to write to the Minister and Mr. Wade, asking them to push the work along, as the Department had no excuse on the score of not having funds to carry out the work.  

If you were to get in touch with Mr. Handfield, the Secretary of the Riverina Creeks Preservation League, he would be able to assist you in worrying the Minister and Mr. Wade to commence this cutting at once.  

Yours truly,  
SAMUEL McCaughey.  

One can almost hear the tones of his voice in this letter, so forthright and practical, so intolerant of unnecessary delays!  

McCaughey would often invite stock buyers and agents to stay the night at North Yanko after their business was done. He would open champagne for dinner and then entertain them far into the night with tales of his early days. Even though his activities became restricted with advancing years, he had far too many interests ever to find life dull. His nature was an essentially happy one, and his only regret in life as he grew old was that he had not married when he was a young man. On the occasion of his eightieth birthday newspaper reporters swarmed round the grand old man, eagerly recording his reminiscences.
They found him in great form, genial and witty as ever, ready with his rich laughter, and promising to give them even better stories on his ninetieth birthday. Cables of congratulation poured in, not only from friends throughout Australia, but also from friends in England; these included Sir George Reid, the Marquis of Linlithgow (a former Governor-General of Australia, when Lord Hopetoun), the Marquis of Lincolnshire (formerly Lord Carrington, Governor of New South Wales), and the Australian Agents-General in London.

After he reached eighty Sir Samuel went less often to Sydney or Melbourne. His seat in the Legislative Council was usually vacant, and the Union Club in Sydney, where he was a very popular member, seldom saw him. His health continued good until the last two years of his life, when he began at last to feel the burden of his age.

On the morning of July 25th 1919 Samuel passed peacefully away at North Yanko from heart failure; a friend who was with him at the last said that he looked like a big healthy boy who had fallen asleep.

He was buried at St. John’s Church, Narrandera, on July 26th, but since many of his friends were unable to be present at the funeral a memorial service was held at St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church in Sydney on August 3rd 1919. The crowded congregation included the Governor-General and Lady Helen Munro Ferguson; the Governor of New South Wales; the Chancellor of the University and a number of the Professors; representatives of the Government and members of Parliament, together with friends from all over the State.

The Lessons were read by the Rev. F. T. Perkins, Headmaster of Cranbrook Church of England School, and the Rev. G. J. Prescott, Head of Newington Methodist College. In his address the Rev. Professor R. G. Macintyre said:-

‘Great wealth came to him, but not the most radical socialist could begrudge it, for it was not gained by unholy profiteering, nor won at the cost of the community. What prosperity came to him was not a tithe of the prosperity his labours of body and mind brought to the Commonwealth. This man added to the wealth of the State infinitely more than to his own account.’

Sir Samuel McCaughey had given a great deal of thought to the matter of drawing up his will. His bequests to universities, churches, schools and hospitals were princely, and his great benefaction to Soldiers and their dependants' has become world-famous.

**The distribution of his money under his will was as follows:**

*Private bequests* ........................................................... £227,750

*The University of Sydney* .................................................. 458,000

*The University of Queensland* ........................................... 228,000

*Soldiers and their dependants* ........................................... 458,000

*The Presbyterian Church of N.S.W. for general purposes* ........... 38,670

*The Presbyterian Church of Queensland for general purposes* ...... 69,333

*For the augmentation of stipends of the Presbyterian clergymen at Bourke Urana, Jerilderie and Narrandera and for General Stipend Fund* ... 10,000

*The Presbyterian Church at Cloughwater (Ireland)* ..................... 2,000

*The Presbyterian Church at Broughshane (Ireland)* ..................... 2,000

*The Presbyterian Church at Clough (Ireland)* .......................... 2,000

*Burnside Presbyterian Orphan Homes, N.S.W* ......................... 20,000
The trustees and executors of his Will were his brother John, Mr. Matthew Robinson and the Hon. James Ashton, M.L.C. A clause in the will provided that with regard to the bequest for soldiers and their dependants, the trustees might either administer it themselves or hand it to a properly constituted body to be applied for the purposes named.

The trustees decided that the latter was the better course, and they approached the trustees of the A.I.F. Canteens Fund (Sir Nicholas Lockyer, Chairman, Mrs. Alfred Deakin and Sir Brudenell White) and asked them to administer the bequest. They accepted the trust and discussed with the Sir Samuel McCaughey trustees how the intentions of the donor could best be carried out. They mutually agreed that this could best be done by providing facilities for the technical training of children of deceased or seriously incapacitated soldiers of World War I.

Since 1921 the trustees of the A.I.F. Canteens Fund have presented an annual report to Parliament on the operations of the Sir Samuel McCaughey Bequest for the education of soldiers' children. The latest report mentions that already some 21,500 soldiers' and sailors' children have been helped with their schooling or professional or trade training.

The trustees anticipate that by 1960, in which year the work should come to an end, the number of children to benefit will be about 22,250, and that the total yield of the Bequest will be about £880,000.

By far the greatest number of those helped have been trained as technicians in some 130 distinct trades and crafts; especial encouragement is provided for technical training to fit the children for pastoral and agricultural pursuits.

A number of them have graduated at Universities; five of them are Rhodes Scholars, thirty-four have qualified as doctors (eight of them women); twenty-three as lawyers and a number as engineers and accountants.

Some examples of the help which this fund has provided for soldiers' children are given in the latest annual report. These human stories bring vividly to mind the value of the fund in assisting cases that are really worth a helping hand. I quote a few of them.

1. William ————, aged seventeen. The son of a soldier killed in action. The mother was left with
eight children, the eldest, William, being only twelve at the time of his father's death. The widow endeavoured to carry on the small farm upon which, aided by a pension, she relied on to support herself and children. Before he was sixteen, William had cleared twenty-five acres.

He then, aided by the Repatriation Education Scheme, joined an Agricultural High School, and his examination papers at end of the first term indicated a successful scholarship. But, meanwhile, drought and the high cost of labour imperilled the future of the farm. He returned home to the help of his mother. As a side line he raised vegetables, and by their sale was able to purchase a number of fruit trees to add a small orchard to the family resources. A returned soldier relative helped him to plant the land he had cleared and good neighbours gave him sufficient seed to plant a crop.

The Bequest has arranged for him a Correspondence Course in Agriculture, and in view of his splendid record is allowing him £1 per week for two years. Notwithstanding his farm work he is regularly submitting his lessons, and the instructors report he is making good progress.

2. Sydney ———, aged sixteen. The son of a soldier killed in action. The home of this lad is sixty miles from the school at which he was awarded a tuition scholarship, but the allowances were not sufficient to pay his board and lodging. Taking advantage of a liberal concession in fares, he travelled by rail 120 miles a day to and from school for over four months. The principal and staff of the school, seeing that his health was suffering then, for a time personally contributed a sum sufficient to enable him to reside in the town in which the school is located. The Repatriation Commission, in co-operation with the trustees of the Bequest, has made this generous assistance no longer necessary. He is a bright lad, full of promise for a successful career. There are now no hindrances to his further education.

3. Stanley ———, aged eighteen. Father killed in action. This lad, whose home is in the country, received a free scholarship at a Public School, but the inevitable extras with fares and keep during vacations made it hard for his mother to meet the cost. During his school vacations, of his own accord, he engaged in farm work and handed his earnings to his mother. In her application she stated: 'He is not a strong lad, and I would be grateful if he could enjoy his holidays and be fresh when he goes back to school'. Her wish has been realized.

4. Vernon ———, aged eighteen. Son of a totally disabled soldier. This lad had a successful school career and desired training in agriculture. His father placed him at an Agricultural College. The fees are met by the Bequest, and an allowance of £1 a week is made for maintenance. His progress is indicated by the fact that he recently took first prize in the ‘open’ as well as the Students ‘Cream Testing’ Competition.

5. Cecil ———, aged nineteen. Father killed in action. This lad was assisted by the Repatriation Education Scheme in receiving special tuition in navigation with an allowance for maintenance and text books. He passed his examination within the exceptional period of two months, and was probably the youngest second mate in Australia. The Bequest provided him with a good sextant, of which he was in need.

6. Leslie ————, aged nineteen. Father killed in action. This lad, who had left school three years previously, was a jackeroo on a station in Queensland a few months ago. He was offered a course of training at an Agricultural College. Special tuition was provided to enable him to pass his entrance examination, in which he succeeded in three months from time of his arrival. He is now a college student and his work is already highly commended by the principal.
The report also includes some extracts from letters of appreciation for the help provided. These throw further light on the benefits of this Bequest.

The wife of a totally disabled soldier writes:

'My husband, at present in the Sanatorium, has improved materially since receipt of assistance for the education of our two sons. The doctor says it is due entirely to the relief from worry, his mind being now at rest.'

The widow of a soldier killed in action writes:

'I am deeply grateful for the help and would like to express to you my own and my daughter's thanks. In no way could a more beautiful tribute be paid to our brave soldiers.'

The Bequests to the Universities of Sydney and Queensland were left for general purposes, 'the income to be applied to such purposes as the respective Senates of the said Universities may from time to time determine'.

The Sydney University Bequest yields about £19,000 a year, and has provided for four McCaughey Professorships in: English Language, French, Surgery, Dentistry.

Also five McCaughey Associate Professorships in: German and Comparative Literature, Physiology, Geography, Psychology, Entomology.

In addition, there is a McCaughey Research Fund of £1,000 a year. In 1920 the Senate of the University of Sydney commissioned Sir John Longstaff, then the foremost portrait painter in Australia, to paint a portrait of Sir Samuel McCaughey to hang in the Great Hall of the University. Despite the fact that the artist had to carry out this commission from photographs, it is a fine and sensitive piece of work, conveying faithfully both the outward likeness of the man and his inner character.

The Bequest to the University of Queensland provides a yearly income of some £8,000. Three McCaughey Chairs have been established in: English Language and Literature, History and Economics, Biology. Money from the Bequest has also been used for the general purposes of the University.

In these and many other ways the name of the Irish-born Samuel McCaughey, honoured throughout his lifetime, keeps its lustre. Successive generations of Australians who have benefited by his work and his munificent gifts, continue to hold his name in appreciative remembrance. This great and generous nation-builder occupies a high place in the annals of his adopted country.
Old Signpost at the entrance to Old Coree Station (The McCaughey Memorial Institute)
(Ian Itter collection)
CHAPTER 15

Although Sir Samuel McCaughey left no direct descendants, the work he did for Australia will always be a memorial to this far-sighted pioneer. In addition, his example has inspired a national gift which will continue to carry on the hopes and ideals he had for his adopted country.

In April 1952 Sir Henry Manning, M.L.C., announced in Sydney that a property of considerable value had been given to the Commonwealth for the establishment of a Pastoral Research and Training Institute in Riverina. It would be known as the McCaughey Institute and the donors were David Roy McCaughey and his brother, Samuel McCaughey.

Sir Henry Manning went on to say:-

‘In establishing this Institute, the McCaughey brothers follow a great family tradition of generosity to education and research. Their uncle, Sir Samuel McCaughey, was one of Sydney's greatest benefactors. His bequest to the Sydney University has yielded more than £540,000, and a bequest to the University of Queensland yields £11,000 annually. No other Australian has left so much in public benefactions as Sir Samuel McCaughey’.

The gift Sir Henry referred to consisted of 24,000 acres of Coree, handed over as a going concern, including the homestead, station outbuildings and woolshed. The Institute is designed to be a memorial to the late Lieutenant Samuel Michael McCaughey and the late Air Gunner David Leslie Macpherson, who were killed in World War II; they were both great-nephews of Sir Samuel McCaughey.

It was in 1945 that this idea first began to take practical shape. In that year Sir Henry Manning, M.L.C., and Mr. Frank Young accepted an invitation to become co-trustees with David Roy McCaughey to administer the gift, Mr. F. Young acting as Chairman. On the death of Mr. Young in 1950, Sir Henry Manning was appointed Chairman and Mr. J. P. Abbott, M.H.R., became the third trustee.

An Advisory Committee has been appointed, consisting of Professors H. R. Carne, C. W. Emmens, and H. J. Geddes, representing the University of Sydney; the graziers' representatives are Messrs. J. H. Patterson, Hartwood station, Deniliquin; A. F. Crockett, Wononga estate, Jerilderie; George Crouch, Manager Coree station, Jerilderie.

The function of this committee is to make recommendations to the Trust on all technical matters, and in particular to advise on general development policy, research and teaching projects, and the inter-relationship and co-ordination between the three. The University of Sydney is co-operating enthusiastically. The Vice-Chancellor Professor Stephen Roberts, has said:-

'The University will benefit enormously from the new Institute, since it will be able to use the property for research and training of its agricultural and veterinary students. I have no doubt that the McCaughey Institute will soon count as much in veterinary science as the Waite Institute of South Australia counts in agriculture.'

The station will be run as a commercial enterprise and the income will be used for the development of the Institute's scientific activities. Since the inception of the scheme in 1954 funds for purchasing the initial stock have been obtained by leasing land to the Coree Pastoral Company,
which owns the remainder of Coree. A considerable number of breeding ewes were among the earliest purchases. The property is now fully stocked with carefully selected animals, and the results of last year's operations were most satisfactory.

Since the Institute is the first of its kind in Australia, the founders had no model to follow, and the whole scheme had to be created from the ground up, as it were. The plans which have been drafted are necessarily somewhat tentative and fluid at this stage, and they may be modified in some respects in practice. The Trustees have agreed on certain general principles for the running of the property. The main area of the estate will continue to be developed to carry first-class merino stock, with some beef cattle. The number of beef cattle will depend on seasonal conditions.

Suitable flats between Yanco Creek and its anabranch will be used for establishing permanent lucerne. In the southern portion of the property an area will be developed for irrigation. The experiments in this connection should be interesting and important, since the completion of the Snowy scheme will transform this part of the property into a potential irrigation area. Dairying may be possible as a consequence, and the whole subject of irrigated pastures would provide useful matter for research.

Certain genetic trials on the main merino flock which will not interfere with productivity will be undertaken and will supply useful data. There is a prospect that with the improvements in water supply and storage it will be possible to carry seven sheep to the acre. Experiments in this connection will be part of the research work undertaken at the Institute.

A manager of the station was appointed in 1954, and pending the development of the Institute as a research and training centre the property is being run on the lines of a commercial station. All the income so far received from the place has been spent on buying stock and equipment and on improvements to the estate. A costly item has been the erection of about fifteen miles of rabbit-proof boundary fencing. Equipment purchased has included farm vehicles, workshop items, a motor car—expenditure which will not, of course, be incurred annually. The rabbit-proof fence, for example, is estimated to last for about 30 years.

A modern house has been built for the station manager, thus freeing the homestead for the accommodation of the technical side of the Institute. This substantial dwelling will be used for residential quarters for the technical manager and his staff and for visiting University lecturers, as well as for lecture rooms. A separate brick dwelling has been built for the students, including the jackeroos.

Although most of the undergraduates can only be in residence at Coree during University vacations, groups of final year students studying advanced animal husbandry may visit Coree for short periods during their final year, accompanied by a member of the University teaching staff.

The Institute will also make provision for post-graduate students and honours students working on specific projects connected with animal husbandry, agrostology, soil science and related subjects. These students could be in residence continually for the greater part of the year. Jackeroos are included in the scheme, since there is a widely-felt need for a course of training for young pastoralists in modern methods of station management. A limited number of jackeroo-studentships will be offered to young men having a suitable general education. They will have the
usual practical training of station jackeroos, and, in addition, receive a course of instruction in the principles of animal breeding, feeding and disease-control, as well as in general station practices and management. These Jackeroo-students will receive the usual remuneration of a jackeroo in addition to their keep.

It is hoped that field days and extension schools for pastoralists can be run as annual events, which at a later stage could be expanded to resident summer schools of several weeks’ duration. Lecturers and demonstrators could be recruited from the staffs of universities, research institutes, the C.S.I.R.O. and Commonwealth and all State Departments. Further developments along these lines could be undertaken as the scheme advances.

The first research projects will consist of a well-balanced mixture of long-range and short-range Investigations. Foremost among these is a complete survey of the natural resources of the property—soils, water (including irrigation), pastures and forests. Fodder conservation and the general provision against drought is a wide field which will receive extensive investigation.

There are also many questions concerning irrigation pastures and the reaction of the merino to them that will be studied under excellent conditions. The trustees are at present negotiating for the services of a technical officer, who will be responsible for the successful development of the Institute in research and teaching. It is imperative that a man with outstanding qualifications be appointed to this vital position. It is expected that at a later date a research staff will be appointed.

The members of this staff will be responsible to the technical director for detailed work on research projects, and will assist with the training of undergraduates, post-graduate and jackeroo students.

A further development of the Institute's activities is envisaged in the possibility of attracting holders of University post-graduate Fellowships and Scholarships, such as the Walter and Eliza Hall Veterinary Research Fellows and the James Ramage Wright Research Fellows in Animal Husbandry. Further possibilities to be considered are support for research appointments from the George Aitken Pastoral Research Trust, the Burdekin Bequest, the Australian Wool Board, the Rural Bank and similar bodies.

There has probably never been a time when there was such scope for research into problems of animal husbandry and agriculture in Australia. Modern methods of pasture improvement, the conservation of water and of fodder have opened up new possibilities of the use of the land. The days have gone by when it was cheaper to allow the sheep to die in a drought than to keep them alive. It is now possible for a property to survive a year of severe drought without undue losses. As far as the Riverina n concerned, a severe drought seldom lasts longer than twelve months.

The mechanization of much of the work on a station is another factor which has changed the face of things for station owners. There is scope for experiment in this field also, in testing the various devices and inventions and keeping records of their performance. There is vastly more technical knowledge needed in running a property now than in any earlier period in Australia.

Although some of this can be taught in universities and colleges, there is still no substitute for field work and practical experience. At Coree Memorial Institute the student can put into practice the theoretical training he has received and can watch and test the actual results. He can also take
part in research and investigation which can only be undertaken under conditions of controlled experiment. The scientific knowledge, financial provision and goodwill which are combined in this project should result in a valuable contribution to Australia's problems of maximum productivity from the land.

Taken all in all, there is no doubt that the McCaughey Institute would have delighted the pioneer pastoralist, Sir Samuel McCaughey. It is a scheme entirely after his own heart, and one which owes its inspiration to his life and example.
SIR SAMUEL McCaughey
(1835 – 1919)
By Peter Hohren

This article was published in the Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 5, (MUP), 1974

Sir Samuel McCaughey (1835-1919), pastoralist and philanthropist, was born on 1 July 1835 at Tullyneuh, near Ballymena, County Antrim, Ireland, eldest son of Francis McCaughey, farmer and merchant, and his wife Eliza, née Wilson. After formal schooling he learnt accounting and office management in his father's linen business and worked on the farm. Strongly influenced by his strict Presbyterian upbringing, he was persuaded by his uncle, Charles Wilson, to try his luck in Australia and in April 1856 reached Melbourne in the "Chamira". To save money he walked 200 miles (322 km) to the Wilson property near Horsham. McCaughey started as a general station hand but soon became overseer. His genial Irish humour and kindness helped him to get the best from his men and maintain their goodwill.

In 1860, McCaughey’s relations backed his purchase of a third share of Coonong, 42,000 acres (16,997 ha) near Urana in the Riverina, in partnership with David Wilson and John Cochrane. Although they suffered such initial setbacks as the lack of water, McCaughey remained optimistic and in 1864 became sole owner. He brought water to Coonong by deepening Yanco Creek and building dams. In the 1860’s he acquired Singorimba and Goolgumbla and by 1872 held 137,000 acres (55,443 ha). In 1871 he visited his widowed mother in Ireland and in 1874 brought out his brother David (1848-1899) to help in managing his properties.

McCaughey founded his stud in 1860 by buying from James Cochrane of Widegewa old ewes descended from Tasmanian pure Saxon merinos. He later experimented with Silesian merinos from the flock of Prince Lichnowski and in 1866 with two Ercildoune rams from his uncle, McCaughey Wilson. In 1873-75 McCaughey bought over 3000 rams from N. P. Bayly of Havilah, and some from Ercildoune and other well-known studs. To improve quality he spared no expense in fencing and subdividing his paddocks. By 1883 the Coonong stud was one of the best in the Riverina. In that year, anxious to increase the weight of his wool, he bought ten Californian merinos and was so satisfied with the results that he visited America in 1886 and secured 120 ewes and 92 of the finest rams in the state of Vermont; six months later he selected 310 more Vermont’s. The weight of the wool increased dramatically and for years the greasy, wrinkled Vermont sheep were invincible in shows. In 1879 only one of his stud rams had cut 16 lbs. of wool but by 1891 200 of them averaged 30 lbs. After severe losses in the 1902 drought McCaughey returned to Peppin blood from Wanganella, but Australian sheep breeders have had great difficulty in eradicating the Vermont strain. For many years McCaughey was vice-president of the New South Wales Sheepbreeders' Association.

McCaughey had a flair for mechanical appliances and regretted that he had never taken an engineering course. Although he employed several blacksmiths, he did much of the experimental work himself and was responsible for the design and improvement of many farm implements. He pioneered in New South Wales the use of heavy machinery for ploughing and soil excavation. He acquired Coree in 1881, later owned by his brother David, and Toorale and Dunlop, 2,500,000...
acres (1,011,725 ha) on the Darling from Samuel Wilson. He lived at Coonong where in 1876 he had built a large homestead with a garden and lake. At various times he owned or shared in twelve stations in New South Wales and three in Queensland with a total area of about 3,250,000 acres (1,315,242 ha). From the mid-1880’s Dunlop, Toorale and the Queensland stations were watered by artesian bores. In 1888 at Dunlop the shearing was done completely with Wolseley machines for the first time in Australia.

One of the first to see the advantages of widespread irrigation, McCaughey brought out Irish labourers who did not mind wet and boggy conditions. McCaughey was frustrated in his efforts to get more water for Coonong from dams on Colombo Creek when in 1898 he and his brother were sued in the Supreme Court by six down-stream graziers. In Blackwood v. McCaughey the jury awarded £2000 damages to the plaintiff and limited the height of the dams. On 15 June the other plaintiffs were compensated with £10,000 while McCaughey paid £17,000 in legal costs.

In 1900 he bought North Yanco where he constructed a complex irrigation system with some 200 miles (322 km) of channels and used two steam engines to pump water from the Murrumbidgee; his success persuaded the government to build the Burrinjuck dam which was completed in 1927. He built a magnificent mansion at North Yanco and was famed for his hospitality.

In 1899 (Sir) George Reid appointed McCaughey and eleven others to the Legislative Council to secure the passage of the Federation enabling bill. He had no strong political leanings but his experience and knowledge of land were valued and he advocated large-scale immigration. He donated £10,000 to a fund for sending a bushmen's contingent to the Boer war. In 1905 he was knighted and visited Europe. He visited Louis Pasteur and tried in vain to obtain an efficient means of exterminating plagues of rabbits. After the federal Land Tax Act was passed in 1910 McCaughey started to dispose of his properties.

A great philanthropist, McCaughey was always ready to help people in trouble on the land. He contributed £10,000 to the Dreadnought Fund and another £10,000 to Dr Banardo's Homes. In World War I he gave liberally to the Red Cross and other war charities besides insuring 500 soldiers at £200 each. After long suffering from nephritis he died from heart failure on 25 July 1919. Unmarried he was buried in the churchyard of St John's Presbyterian Church, Narrandera. His estate was sworn for probate at over £1,600,000. Apart from bequests of £200,000 and all his motor vehicles to his brother John and legacies to his station managers and employees, he left £10,000 to increase the stipends of Presbyterian clergy, £20,000 to the Burnside Orphan Homes at Parramatta, £20,000 to Scots College in Sydney, £10,000 each to five other independent schools, £5000 to the Salvation Army and £5000 each to seven hospitals. Half the residue of his estate went to the Universities of Sydney and Queensland; the other half went to the relief of members of the Australian Military and Naval Expeditionary Forces and their widows and children. A portrait by Sir John Longstaff is in the University of Sydney.

Select Bibliography
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Samuel Mc Caughey - Revisited

- Australasian, 25 June 1898
- Family papers (privately held).

Statue of Sir Samuel at Yanco, January 2014
(Geoff Ward collection)
PROPERTIES HELD BY SAMUEL McCaughey

At various times Samuel McCaughey was lessee, owner or part owner of thirteen stations in New South Wales and three in Queensland.

**Those in New South Wales were:-**

- Coonong, acquired in 1860.
- Singorimbah, acquired in the early 1860's
- Goolgumba, acquired in 1872.
- Dunlop, acquired in 1880.
- Toorale, acquired in 1880.
- Coree, acquired in 1881.
- Buckingbong, acquired in 1881.
- Yarrabee, acquired in 1897.
- North Yanco, acquired in 1899.
- Nariah, acquired in 1904.
- Fort Bourke, acquired in 1905.
- Oakhurst, acquired in 1906.
- Nocoleche, acquired in 1909.

**The Queensland stations were:-**

- Rockwood, acquired in 1889.
- Barenya, acquired in 1897.
- Bonus Downs, acquired in 1909

Sir Samuel McCaughey also ventured into Alpine Summer Grazing activities by leasing part of “Currango Station” in the 1860’s to around 1875 then after 1915, parts of Farm Ridge and other Snow Lease properties located in the NSW High Country.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF YANCO AGRICULTURAL HIGH SCHOOL

(A portion of a brief history of Yanco Agricultural High School
prepared by W. H. Barwick Head Teacher, English and History.)

Offering public secondary education since 1922 and celebrating ninety years of residential and agricultural education in rural New South Wales.

The establishment of a residential State High School at Yanco in 1922 was the product of several important developments in N.S.W. education and agriculture.

In 1900, the pastoralist Samuel McCAughey purchased North Yanco station. He constructed a red brick homestead and some 200 miles (320 kilometres) of irrigation channels to irrigate some 40,000 acres (16,660 hectares) of property stretching northwest from the Murrumbidgee River. Some of these channels are still in use today.

After a nine year drought and much political argument, the N.S.W. government decided to create an irrigation area north of the Murrumbidgee River in 1906 which would have a regular water supply from Burrinjuck Dam.

The North Yanco property was resumed from McCaughey in 1910. McCaughey retained a small area of some 700 acres (290 hectares) for his personal use under a rental arrangement with the state government. His death in 1919 saw this last parcel of his former lands revert to government control in 1920 after a clearing sale had been held.

Leeton, a town barely a decade old, had limited educational facilities at the beginning of the 1920’s. Seeking a local high school that would serve to train future farmers, a group of Leeton citizens approached the N .S. W. government for such a facility.

At this time the concept of agricultural education was hardly new. It was an established fact in Europe. Even N.S.W. had its first specialist agricultural high school, Hurlstone, at Glenfield. The state government accepted the Leeton delegation’s request.

The residual McCaughey land had a cash book value of £28,200 ($56,400). It was transferred in 1921 from the Water Conservation and Irrigation Commission to the N.S.W. Department of Education, realising local hopes for the State's second agricultural high school at last. Under the active and personal interest of Tom Mutch, the Labor Minister for Education,

Yanco Agricultural High School opened in February 1922 after statewide advertising of available boarding places. Seventy residential and twelve day students were enrolled.

Tom Mutch would maintain a close involvement in Yanco's development during the formative period of the 1920s.

The school initially offered three years of junior high school in a residential setting, leading to the Intermediate Certificate. Thereafter, students could leave to work on the land or transfer to Hawkesbury Agricultural College to complete Leaving Certificate studies and then matriculate to the University of Sydney.
Staff and students were to find conditions difficult during the first few years. McCaughey's homestead provided accommodation, a kitchen and dining room and his shearer's quarters, some distance from the homestead, were converted into classrooms.

Hurricane lamps gave light and meals were cooked on an open fire in the yard during the first months. As farm equipment was limited, students cultivated the fields with spades and hoes.

Despite many limitations, Ernest Breakwell, the first Principal, oversaw the beginning of an ongoing building program at Yanco. A purpose-built dormitory block, Mutch House, a school hall and a Principal's residence were completed in 1927. Sporting areas were developed between the school and Euroley Road to the west.

The depression of the 1930's saw a fall in enrolments as parents chose to keep their sons at home on farms. Prosperity slowly returned and the school's size was increased with the introduction of senior students in 1934 under Principal, Oliver Gardiner. A sporting house system was introduced and an annual Beach Carnival inaugurated by Jack Woods, a teacher and former Sydney surf-lifesaver. The first Leaving Certificate group graduated in 1935.
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Old Pioneering Days  by Charles Mcallister 1907 SLT-919.44 M110
Page 126-127 (One Library)  1977

The Yanko – 1800’s
Was owned by
1800  Wentworth
1850 – Forlong
1858  Samuel Wilson
1870  Samuel Mccaughey  (Wilson ?)

Big Yanko and Flood Plain
Hugh and Heather Cameron (02-6956 1145
The Yanko

The Romance of the Stockman by Viking O’Neil
ISBN 0670901695

c. e. w. Bean
The Wool Land
Dreadnought of the Darling

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allynn@bigpond.net.au

Bonus Downs Homestead
GPS Location details of the Desailly cutting
34°42.359 S  146°42.957E

New straight line cutting and large flood bank was created in 1963 (Roy Baul)