

Compiled June 1973 by Vera E. (Harper) LOWE, Born 28 April 1901

William Harper was born in Cambridgeshire, England in 1829. He sailed for South Australia in the "Mary Green" with his wife and first born son David then aged 3 months, arriving at Holdfast Bay (now Glenelg) on June 19th 1853.

David Harper grew up in Prospect Hill where his parents settled, and married Hannah Spencer in Clarendon 26 January 1878. They lived for a short time in Clarendon where their eldest child Russell was born. From there they moved to Hurtle Vale where five more children were born.

David with his wife and six children with all their worldly possessions on a wagon drawn by horses left Hurtle Vale S.A. sometime during 1891. His reason for leaving I should say was that he felt land was too dear to provide farms for four boys, and it would be so much cheaper in the Victorian "mallee" country. He traveled by road to the edge of the ninety-mile desert where he put everything on the train to take them through that area, again taking to the road and travelling on to a property of 2000 acres of mallee country situated half way between Wycheproof and Birchip. Mother said she drove in 56 tent pegs every night to help pitch the tent. David had to clear a spot of mallee before he could pitch the tent on arrival at this block. At this stage his eldest son Russell was about 12 years of age, and the youngest eighteen months. ~ lived in the tent for many months, cooking on an open fire until such time as he could build a home.

I don't know how long they were in the tent but Albion was only 10¼ months old when he arrived there, was old enough to remember the pig getting out of its pen and coming into the tent, so it must have been quite awhile before the sleeping~ Quarters were built. The first thing to do was to fence off a place to keep a cow and some fowls and a pig. There he built a kitchen of mud bricks at least twenty feet square with open fire and stove, general kitchen, dining and living area. Some time later he moved a four roomed weatherboard house onto the land which gave a roof over head for all to live and sleep. It was during 1890 the family landed on this block which later was called "Sunshine Farm" because of the sunshine machinery which was used on the farm. the next thing to build was an underground dairy and an underground tank.

Mallee then had to be cleared in order to grow crops for a living. the 1905 drought was a big setback. David took cattle down to the Gippsland area for food as there was nothing at home Norman and his intended brother-in-law Alf Hosking, took sheep by road to Camperdown, camped with them, and traveled- down towards Melbourne through Ringwood and out north east of Melbourne. Norman was only fifteen then, Alf a little older. What an experience for boys: Norman said how pleased he was that his mother had taught him the art of lighting a camp fire, as they traveled with a horse and cart and camped at night wherever they landed.

Apparently they had their worries, Norman was the fire lighter and Alf the damper cook. Years later they often reminisced about the drought, their travels. While the boys were away with the animals the time came when mother took last piece of boiling bacon out of the pickle and cooked it one hot Sunday. She took it out of the pot, put it on plate on the table and walked outside to get fresh air. Alby's pet kangaroo dog came in and ran off with the meat. Mother said she remembered crying out "What shall I give my children to eat". When Alby heard the story he simply said "Mother, the poor dog must have been hungry too".

Clara, the eldest girl, went out to service in the township of Wycheproof. As far as I know the rest of the family stayed home on the farm. Will, Ethel, Albion, Reta, and of course mother.

We were left with one horse, old nugget, who was brought from South Australia. He took all the children except Vera to school, and pulled a spring cart to town when necessary. We were left a cow and some fowls, a keg full of pickled meat, hams and bacon hanging from the kitchen rafters, and faith to believe that that would keep the family alive until the others returned. Weeks went by arid with so little feed the cow went dry but was kept alive until the others returned. Old nugget got very week, and to keep him alive Mother took the mattress Off her bed and fed him the straw. he was a faithful old horse and did almost everything but talk, he was like a second man on the farm, used to take the seed arid fertilizer in the cart to the boys in the paddock, passing through several open gateways on his way. They would unload him and re-load with empty bags and send him off home again. When dinner time came he would return to the paddock in the same manner with a hot dinner for the boys. He worked & shuttle service all day in busy times, taking in and out whatever the boys needed, and never once hit a gate post. Nugget was idolized in his old age by the youngest girl, Vera, who used to groom and brush him, feed him, and see that he was stabled in the cold weather, and even sewed bags to make him a rug. he died of old age about 1917 at the age of 40.

The day came when rain fell, and it was amazing how quickly the grass grew. Father returned with the cattle by train, and when he arrived at sunshine he said 'Well Mother, I've let the cows out of the trucks but I'm afraid they are too weak to get home, you'd never recognize them they got thinner and thinner on the rank "Gippsland "grass. After a few days the first one arrived, she'd come ten miles to sunshine, one by one they straggled home and with the very short green picking they recovered very quickly.

Water was always a problem in the Mallee. The rainfall was very low and even though we caught every drop from the roofs of house and sheds we would still be short. Father (David Harper) had to travel miles with wagon and horses and tanks. It was a full day's work to there and back.

1904 brought the tragedy of losing our home by fire, all except the mud kitchen was lost arid there was father, mother, and eight children with nothing but what they stood in.

'The Home was hessian and paper lined so there was just no hope of saving anything. That night mother and the girls bedded down at a neighbor's place four miles away whilst father and the boys slept in the shed. In a few days we had things organized with pillows, blankets etc., and slept in the sheds and cooked in the kitchen. We did this for many months until father got a man to build a new house. All the material had to be brought ten miles by horses.

Clara was about to be married to Alf Hoskings who, with Norman, shepherded the sheep during the drought. Her glory box was burnt in the fire including the curtains she had knitted in fine cotton. It was a terrible blow to her.

After this there were some better years, and father needed them. Sand drifts had buried his fences and it was too big a contract to unearth them, so he built a new fence on top. The year after the drought was a good one--crops feet high. Father came home one day and said: Mother come out and look at it, It's wonderful.

There were four more children born on this property, three girls and a boy. Two died in infancy leaving eight living, 4 BOYS 4 GIRLS. Clara and Russell married from here and settled nearby, but felt it wasn't the right place for them so decided to move to N.S.W. and settled at Aria Park, and a little later Clara and Alf and one son moved nearer Temora. David too became unsettled and frustrated with drought and sand storms and lack of water supply.

In 1909 David went over to N.S.W. to investigate, and came back with the idea that it

would be better to move over as the prospect for buying farms for the three boys was better. In 1910 he sold out and moved to Temora on a farm three miles out which he bought for himself, mother, the three girls and one boy. He bought land in the iron bark forest 15 miles from Temora for Will and Norman to settle as they were to be married in the near future. Will, Norman and Albion left the farm at Wycheproof in March 1910 by road to Temora, with the three wagons, horses, a spring cart, a few fowls and food for them on the way. Father, Mother and three girls came around by train, spending a few days in Melbourne.

We stayed one night in an hotel. Next day the boys came with the wagon and we headed for the farm three miles out. It was again called sunshine after the machinery used there. There was a good deal of action that night to unload wagons, set up beds and food organized. Mother was always capable with the meals and had girls to help. 'the old story goes that you had only to give mother a shank bone, an onion and a jug of water to make a meal. One disappointment was that on one of the wagons from Victoria was a box containing a ham and a side of bacon for a standby on our arrival in i.U.4.. Apparently it fell off and wasn't missed until they stopped for a meal. Alby rode several miles back to look for it but no luck. Alby was very fond of his old cat so decided to take it with him in the wagon, but one night some stray dogs came and frightened it away and pussy was never seen by Alby again.~ just hoped he found a good home somewhere.

Iron-bark timber had to be cleared from the blocks Will and Norman had. 'here was an old three roomed house on the side of the block where the boys lived and Ethel went out periodically and had a cook-up' for them and cleaned and washed for them until they were married. Father went out to help build two rooms and a bathroom on to the old place which Norman and his bride took over. A new four roomed place was built on the other side of the block for Will and his bride. This place was called 'Cadell', and now one of Will's granddaughters and her husband and family are living there and working the place. Norman moved across the road to another block several years later as the iron-bark block was not big eno³/₄h to keep two families. The place Norman moved on to is called 'Wave-hill' and his elder son took over when his father retired and now owns it. his name is Arnold.

I remember that several years after we moved to Temora 'sunshine, someone left our boundary gate open on to the road and in the morning three horses were missing. Alby was quickly sent off on a horse to trace them but he could see they were heading back to Victoria, so he came home and got his motor bike and eventually found them heading for their old home.

"Sunshine" at 'Temora' is owned now by David junior and his sister Jean. David Harper never retired and worked until he died on, 26th ~

m sure if the rest of the family were living they would agree with me in saying we had wonderful parents in David Harper and Hannah Spencer. We were not rich in worldly goods but it was a home of love and understanding, and although the last three girls married and moved far away we never lost touch with each other. Now I am the only one left to tell this story and I trust I've done it justice. Fresh stories keep coming back to me

--how kind the Indian hawkers were to us when they came and found our house burnt down. They always called on us and camped on our farm over night. One poor old chap cried when he saw it and opened up his bundle of goods and left several pieces of clothing for us. Another who traveled with horses and van and a big stock of goods left a garment for each of us, and that meant ten garments.

he night our house was burnt Norman said "What will I do mother, I'm to preach tomorrow at Nullawill .' A neighbor standing by immediately offered him a suit he'd worn only once.

Norman was then only sixteen. Another incident I feel I must tell - we were so often short of water at Wycheproof and Father had to go many miles with tanks on a wagon. It took from early morn until night to get there and back. One day mother was left with six children and only two quarts of water, so there were only short drinks and not too many dirty hands washed that day. Mother always was a good manager and with such a shortage of money as well as the right food she reared a very healthy family. When she was still in S..A. she didn't know what to have for green vegetables for the children. She went for a walk around the sheds and found a lovely green patch of stinging nettles, so she picked the tops and cooked them. They were quite nice and no one turned them down. Another week she was stuck for meat. Father said there was a nest of young crows being fed on eggs from the fowls, so he went and got them and mother made a pie that was just like chicken.

Money was short in those days, and many a time she said she could afford to buy half a candle. Father did a lot of contract work. He drove a team of bullocks to take firewood into Adllaide which was a whole days work. Mother would sit up by the fire and sew by candlelight or do other work to keep awake so she could wake Father at 2am, 3~ive him some breakfast, then hold the lantern while he yoked the bullocks, put the slip-rails u~ after he left, then %O back home to bed. Father didn't get home until night. He used to walk by the bullocks to keep awake, and even then he often went to sleep and fell over. Mother said she was waiting for 2am one morning and had to singing to keep awake, when Father awoke of his own accord. He Said" Well mother, that is the sweetest music I have ever heard?."

I haven't said much about our church and I feel I should do that. My earliest memories were in the Wycheproof Circuit We attended Tyrell Creek Church seven miles from home. Father, mother and I (Vera) went in a single seated covered buggy and one horse. The rest of the family plus anyone else on the farm went in a three seated covered buggy and a pair of staunch horses. After church I would go home with Father and mother, the others remaining for a picnic lunch on the bank of the creek and stay for Sunday When I was old enough I stayed too. Alby and Ethel were both organists and took it turn about. Norman was the preacher and started to take services when he was fifteen with his brother Will and a friend to help. The friend had a splendid solo voice, and the three of them often sang a trio. Norman received a certificate for 50 years service as a local preacher. The family also drove that seven miles to choir practice once a week. Once when the Avoca weir gave way it flooded the country including the creek. The horses stopped when nearing the creek and refused to go any further. One of the boys walked ahead to see what was making the horses refuse to go. He found the creek in flood and impossible to cross. The horses of course could smell the flood waters - amazing the instinct of a dumb animal, they have a much better idea of safety in some things than man. There was three feet of water in our church which needed & lot of cleaning to clear the mud. Books which were on low shelves were ruined. Mother always made her own bread, cheese, cured her own hams and bacon. She sewed and made Garments for all her family, for many years by hand. The memory of godly parents and a happy home life are very precious to me now I shall never forget that after I had been married a few months mother came to live with us. When she saw a tap over the laundry tub, over the kitchen sink and in the bathroom, with plugs to pull and let the dirty water go, she said to me: "My dear girl, "You should live to be 100 with all these conveniences. She had never had any of these. She spent four years with us before she died and I'm pleased she was able to spend that time in a modern home with real luxury as it appeared to her. They were four very happy years which I feel privileged to have had. On reading over these

reminiscences I've led you to believe that our life was all work and hardship, but we were a happy family, and as they grew up to be helpful. They could spare time in the slack season for sport - for instance, after midday dinner whilst waiting for the horses to rest a bit and finish their dinner (boys always eat faster than horses) they would have a kick of the football] or hit of cricket or try a hiL4'h jump, and after tea in the winter they would play in one end of the big mud kitchen at table tennis or Bobs and Darts. The neighboring boys would walk down and join in with our family - always a crowd at our home.

There were four cousins from ~ at different times to work on Father's farm to gain experience and to earn a little extra money. Of course they joined in the fun as well as the work Sunday night and many other nights were spent around the organ singing.. Alby used to ride a push bike ten miles a week for music lessons, and Ethel drove a horse and cart for hers and brought home provisions. I feel I'll close with this Motto which hung on the wall of my parents living room from earliest memories

**CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THIS HOUSE, THE UNSEEN GUEST AT EVERY MEAL
THE UNSEEN GUEST AT EVERY MEAL. THE SILENT LISTENER TO EVERY
CONVERSATION.**