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ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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24 Duff Street,
Arncliffe. 2205.
November, 1981.

Dear Friend and Member,

The November meeting will be held as follows :-

Date. Friday evening, November, 20th, 1981, at 8.00 p.m.
Place. Council Chamber, Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale.
Business. General.
Syllabus Item. "Peter Sage presents - "A trip to the Phillipines".
An evening you are sure to enjoy.
Supper Roster. Captain: Miss Dunsmore, together with Mesdames Lee,
Loring and Teychenne.

Ladies, please bring a plate

Mr. R. Lee,
President
Phone 570 1244

Mrs. B. Perkins,
Publicity Officer
Phone 587 9164

Mrs. E. Eardley,
Sec. & Bulletin Ed.
Phone 59 8078

Mrs. E. Wright,
Treasurer
Phone 599 4884

Miss D. Row,
Social Secretary
Phone 50 9300

Mr. A. Ellis,
Research Officer
Phone 587 1159

One who claims that he knows about it, tells me the earth is a vale of sin;
But I and the bees, and the birds, we doubt it, and think it a world worth
living in.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Many of our Members have been and still are, ill. We are sorry
to hear this, and hope they will be well again soon. It is nice to see
Mr. Kell back again, after an extended illness.

Heritage Week 1981 was an outstanding success. Put your thinking caps on -
we need suggestions for Heritage Week 1982.

SPECIAL NOTICE

The St. George Historical Society is pleased to announce that the following books, written and illustrated by the late Gifford E. Eardley, for the Society, have been reprinted and are now available. No. 8 Book was compiled by Mrs. Bronwyn Perkins.

- No. 1 "The Wolli Creek Valley"
- No. 2 "Kogarah to Sans Souci Tramway"
- No. 3 "Saywells Tramway - Rockdale to Lady Robinson's Beach"
- No. 4 "Arncliffe to Bexley Tramway"
- No. 5 "Our Heritage in Stone" (temporarily out of stock)
- No. 6 "All Stations to Como"
- No. 7 "Tempe and the Black Creek Valley" (temporarily out of stock)
- No. 8 "Early Churches of the St. George District"

All books now available at \$1.25 per copy - plus current rate of postage.

For your copy of the above books, please contact one of the following :-

Mrs. E. Wright - Phone 599 4884, Miss B. Otton - Phone 59 4259 (after 8pm)

Mrs. E. Eardley - Secretary - Phone 59 8078, Mr. A. Ellis - Phone 587 1159.

The Research Project - "Early Pioneers of the St. George District" - undertaken by some of our members is progressing. Much information has been gathered. However, there is still a long way to go. Help from interested members would be greatly appreciated. Can you help towards "Book No. 9" in our series of books on history?

Members please note: Due to circumstances, it has been found necessary to increase the Annual Subscription as follows :-

<u>Per Member</u>	...	\$3.00)	<u>Due July, 1981.</u>
<u>Per Family</u>	...	\$5.00)	

HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN TO PAY YOURS?

JAMES & WILLIAM BEEHAG.

- Mrs M.L.Troughton - Bexley North
- Mrs L.M.Thompson - Kingsgrove
- October 1981.

The two brothers James and William were yeoman farmers from Essex, England. They emigrated to Australia in 1836.

James purchased 79 acres of land adjoining Chandler's grant. One boundary of it was later to become Bay Street Rockdale. The land ran back in a triangle almost to Botany Bay, meeting Patrick Moore's land to the south.

In 1840, James married Mary Burnett, a Scotch lass. They had 6 children - Isaac, Margaret, Robert, Gideon, Elizabeth and James. When James was 2 years old and Isaac 12 years, their mother died and the father married again, to Maria Hamilton. Of this marriage there were 5 children - William, Samuel, Arthur, George and Mary.

William, brother of James, set up as a grocer in Newtown and also bought land adjoining his brother's land at Rockdale. He married Elizabeth Hamilton. When he retired from his grocery business, he built a two-storied house between what is now Spring & Tabrett Streets. In 1886, he had 4 surviving children - William Alexander, Samuel Alfred, Hanna and Albert.

The need for a settled and suitable place of worship was apparent to all and a choice of locality became possible when each of the Beehag brothers offered an acre of their respective lands on which to erect a permanent church. The portion offered by James Beehag, being closer to the temporary church then in operation, was accepted on 18th August, 1958. Within 4 months, a stone chapel, 30 ft. long and 20 ft. wide, was completed at the cost of pounds 220.0.0. It was dedicated on Boxing Day by the Rev. Richard Amos, a missionary from Tonga. By 1871 the church became too small and a new building was erected at a cost of pounds 600.0.0. The primitive chapel was set aside as a school. This graceful Methodist Church with its subsequent extensive additions and parsonage, still stands in Bay Street, Rockdale.

In its early years, the church was included in the Newtown circuit under the Superintendence of the Rev.W.A.Quick. The school conducted at the church during the week was in the capable hands of Mr John Andrews, a Methodist lay-preacher, who moved to Rockdale in 1862. The school fee was 6d. per pupil, per week. This school flourished for years, until a school was opened at Kogarah and later at Arncliffe.

About 1862, a "new line of Rocky Point Road" was built. To assist the upkeep of the newly constructed roads, Trustees were appointed and were permitted under the Parish Roads Act, to

charge a rate not exceeding 6d. per acre on all lands within three miles of the road. The Rocky Point Trust, comprising John B Carroll, (Chairman), Patrick Moore, J. Moore, James Beehag and William Beehag, was granted permission to establish the first toll bar south of Cook's River, at a point 150 yards from the bathing house at Tempe.

In 1871, James Beehag was elected an Alderman on the first Rockdale Municipal Council. He was Mayor of Rockdale twice in 1872 and 1875.

HENRY KINSELLA.

- Mrs M.L. Troughton - Bexley North
- Mrs L.M. Thompson - Kingsgrove.
- October 1981.

Henry Kinsella was born at Liverpool, NSW, in 1846. He was the second son of Charles Kinsella of the firm of Funeral Directors, founded in 1830.

On 25th March 1880, he purchased from George Preddey Jnr., 27 acres of land at the junction of Forest & Stoney Creek Roads. On this land he erected a large two-storey mansion which he called "Kinsel Grove" & had the grounds beautifully landscaped. He was a man of many interests who gave liberally to the St. George Church Hurstville and Christ Church, Bexley, & took a very keen interest in the St. George District Band.

He also led the move for the building of a school at Bexley and was a candidate for election to the first Hurstville Council. Well known as a man of kindness & sensitivity, he was often called "The Squire of Kinsel Grove".

In 1871, he married Mary Halliday of Kingsgrove. There were 9 children of the marriage, 3 of whom died in infancy & were buried in St. George Churchyard at Hurstville. Mary Elizabeth, died aged 1 month on 14th December 1871, Amy died 27th December 1878 aged 14 months and Charles George died 28th August 1889, aged 14 months.

The stained-glass window above the altar in St. George Church Hurstville, was erected in 1889 in memory of the son, Charles George.

Henry Kinsella died 2nd March 1915, aged 67 years and his wife died 10th June 1918, aged 73 years. Both were buried in St. George Church, Hurstville.

WEST OF THE RIVER ROAD.

- Jacqueline Davies
- Dorothy Mulholland
- Nora Pipe - 1979.

These excerpts from "West of the River Road" are published with the express permission of the Publication Committee of the Ladies' Auxiliary of the Panania Public School.

The book itself includes fascinating and interesting historical information of what is now known as Panania, Picnic Point and East Hills areas. Copies of the book are available from Mr. J.B. Gregory, Principal, Panania Public School, Lawler Street, Panania.

DEVELOPMENT WEST OF THE RIVER ROAD. 1788 - 1892.

The land extending from The River Road to the Georges River is today divided into the suburbs of Panania, Picnic Point, East Hills and part of Revesby. The thousands of residents living within these suburbs share a pride in their district, which is justified by looking back over the long, colourful history of the development of this area west of The River Road.

Tribes of nomadic Aborigines were the first residents of our district. Here they lived, sheltering from the elements in the many caves still to be found in the Hawkesbury Sandstone terrain, in areas close to the Georges River. Aborigines hunted, fished and collected food in the dense forests, creeks and the river, in complete harmony with the environment. In secret places, the tribal elders celebrated age-old religious rites and retold in song, dance and art forms, the mythological legends of the Dreamtime, enriching and preserving their unique culture.

The coming of the First Fleet brought a swift end to this era. From the moment the British flag was raised in the Colony, all land ceased to be Tribal Land and became Crown Land and aborigines slowly disappeared, leaving little to remind us of their existence. King Bungerry, his wife Betsy, and tribal members stayed in the district for some years after the European Colonisation, but today, grooves worn in rocks near Little Salt Pan Creek where stone axe-heads, spear-heads and cutting blades were sharpened are the only real reminders of the presence of these people. A stone axe-head was unearthed by Mr. W. Vivian in his garden in Lucas Road, East Hills, in recent years.

The first Europeans to venture into this district were George Bass and Matthew Flinders with a boy servant, Martin. In the year 1795 they explored the Georges River in the tiny 8 ft. (2.5m) dinghy "the Tom Thumb". During their nine day expedition they explored

some 20 miles (32 km) past any previous exploration of the river. They discovered land which they described to Governor John Hunter as being suitable for farming along the banks of the upper reaches of the river. Bass & Flinders were later rewarded for their effort by being granted adjoining land grants near Prospect Creek (today Georges Hall).

Fifteen months after the voyage by Bass and Flinders, Governor Hunter & a small party made an overland trip into the district, travelling as far as the present site of Lansdowne Bridge. Within a short time settlers were established on small farm lots by Prospect Creek.

This was the first step towards the formation of "Banks Town" & soon land grants in the area were being made to eligible citizens of the colony.

The first grant of Crown Land in the district west of The River Road was made by Governor King to George Johnston Junior, son of Major George Johnston, in 1804. The grant of 500 acres (200 ha) became known as "New Jerusalem". George Johnston Junior did not live on this grant; however, he later had a tenant farmer, Robert Gardiner, who managed the farm "East Hills" on the property. The grant would today be bounded by The River Road, Bransgrove Road, Tompson Road and extend west almost to the present Panania shopping Centre.

In 1813, Esther Julian, mother of George Johnston Junior, was granted 570 acres of land by Governor Macquarie. The grant adjoined her son's land, both properties sharing a common boundary which today would be Bransgrove Road, the other boundaries being The River Road, Milperra Road and the approximate position of Marigold Street. Esther Julian did not live on her land.

Fifteen years passed before there were any notable changes in the district, then in 1828 Thomas Graham was promised 640 acres of land by Governor Major General Richard Bourke. The grant was bounded by The River Road, Tompson Road, Malvern Street and George's River. Thomas Graham was the first grantee west of The River Road to take up residence on his land, if only for a short time. Seven months after he was granted the deed to his land in 1835, he sold out to Mr Charles Tompson, a farmer from South Creek in the Windsor District.

In 1834, David Lennox was commissioned to design and supervise the building of Lansdowne Bridge, which was to span Prospect Creek at Lansdowne. The bridge was to be constructed from stone quarried from a site approximately opposite the present site of East Hills Park. A stockade was built to house the convict labourers working the quarry. Working hours were set according to the tides and the cut stone was floated on barges upstream to the construction site.

David Lennox obtained good conditions for his convicts. They were well-clothed and fed double rations, because of their hard physical labours. The usual iron manacles worn by the convicts were removed to allow them more freedom of movement. Unfortunately the convicts

took advantage of the kindness shown to them by Lennox. One afternoon, they left the stockade and raided the stock of rum from the still of a nearby landowner. After the rum had been suitably dealt with, they returned to the stockade, no doubt in a jovial, though somewhat unsteady condition! When threatened with punishment for the bad conduct, the convicts rebelled and attempted to kill the overseer and burn the stockade. They were finally subdued and the following day were punished severely.

The Lansdowne Bridge was not built without loss of life. Following an accidental explosion at the quarry, one man was killed and another seriously injured. On the 18th September, 1835 Private Alexander McCulloch, aged 20 years, was mortally wounded by a musket ball at the Smith's forge, at the Georges River. A memorial stone stands over his grave in the Pioneer Cemetery at Liverpool. The Landsdowne Bridge was completed & opened on 26th January, 1836. The section of the Georges River at East Hills near the site of the old stockade is today known suitably as "Stockade Reach".

In 1837 George Edward Nicholas Weston purchased 571 acres of land, which adjoined the western boundary of Thomas Graham's original grant, for the sum of pound 142.15.0. The land remained vacant for over 50 years & was never occupied by the Weston family. Today sections of the suburbs of Panania, East Hills and Picnic Point stand on former Weston land.

Two small grants were made in 1838, one to James Watson & the other to John Spencer. Both grants were situated almost entirely in the area known today as East Hills.

In 1840 Lewis Gordon was granted 436 acres of land, of which a large section is today under the control of the George's River Parkland Trust.

Most of the land West of The River Road had been disposed of by crown grant or purchase by 840; even so the district remained virtually unsettled. This situation was probably due to a combination of factors: one was the harsh nature of the terrain. Another was the dense forest which made farming and grazing impossible without a great deal of hard physical labour in clearing and preparing the land. The district also lacked a reliable fresh water supply and the many small creeks in the area rapidly dried up during drought periods.

Another major problem was the isolation of the district. Access was by only one road, The River Road, which was no more than a narrow dirt track through the bush.

These circumstances ideally suited a small group of men involved in cattle stealing, or cattle duffing as it was then called. Stock were stolen from private properties or government herds & brought secretly into the district where they could be kept

hidden for a few months. Sometimes the cattle duffers would swim the beasts across the George's River, then drive them to the Illawarra District where a safe sale could be made. Stolen thoroughbred horses were also held in an area at Picnic Point until the owners had given up searching for the valuable animals. Bushrangers frequently bought these horses as sure-footed, fast mounts were essential to them in their activities.

In the 1850's after gold discoveries at Bathurst, the population of N.S.W. increased rapidly as fortune hunters flocked into the country. With the increase in population there arose a greater need for many commodities, one of which was timber. As a result timber-getters began working in the district west of The River Road. They felled vast numbers of trees from which the timber was used for railway sleepers, fenceposts, building and bakers' wood. Turpentine trees felled near Tower Street were used in wharf construction at Circular Quay. (Timber from turpentine trees is resistant to rot when submerged). Hardwood posts were used for shoring up mine shafts in the Illawarra coal mines.

Huge logs were hauled through the district by teams of horses, and as a result tracks were formed, many of which remained in use over the years and are today well-known streets, Bransgrove Road & Weston Street both had large timber cutouts where timber-getters had been active.

A few hardy bushmen lived in isolated camps and worked as charcoal burners. Mounds of earth from charcoal-burning pits may still be seen in Yeramba Reserve at Picnic Point.

The district west of The River Road saw little more in the way of change until the commencement of the subdivision & sale of the large land holdings in the 1890's. It was then that the people came - our pioneers - to settle & farm the land. The district had reached a point in time from where true progress could be measured.

1893-1938.

In 1893 Mr Arthur Tower, an estate agent, was engaged to subdivide & offer for sale the land originally purchased by George Edward Nicholas Weston, & a portion of George Johnston Junior's grant of 1804. (The Weston & Johnston families were linked through marriage).

The first land offered for sale was in the vicinity of The River Road, Weston Street, Tower Street, Polo Street & Lambeth Street (called Lambert Street by early residents). It was divided into approximately 5 to 10 acre farm lots which sold for about pounds 20.0.0 an acre. These farm lots were advertised as being suitable for market gardening, pig raising or poultry farming. The district was described as being "away from the grime & congestion of the city" & the climate as being "bracing, invigorating & entirely different from that of any other coastal district". While these descriptions were probably true, in no way could the land at that time be described as one of the choice areas of Sydney.

The roads were little more than "three wheel cart tracks", so called because of the two ruts made by the wheels of carts & the third rut being attributed to the horse. In wet weather they became impassable bogs.

Even though countless numbers of the larger trees had been removed by early timber-getters, there was still a great deal of heavy work to be done before the land could be farmed. A secondary growth of tea tree (*Melaleuca*) of which there were two types - 1/2" paper bark, or 1/8" hard bark, grew profusely in areas previously cleared of heavy trees. In Tower Street, the tea tree was so thick that it prevented grass from growing. The young tea tree, with a small white flower was called "tick bush" by the early folk. (It is interesting to note that a tea tree was planted near the front entrance to the Primary Dept. of the Panania Public School in 1970, to commemorate the Bi-Centenary of Captain James Cook's landing at Kurnell, &, at the time of writing, is growing vigorously).

Once cleared, it was found that only a section of the district had fertile soil suitable for market gardening, this fertile section being in the main Panania area of today. Around Kennedy Street, the soil contained a lot of gravel, whilst in Lambeth Street there was heavy clay. From Lucas Road, in a band following the contours of the Georges River, the soil was poor, sandy & rocky, with large outcrops of Hawkesbury Sandstone.

The district had previously been known as South Bankstown, a broad term which covered a large area anywhere south of the township of Bankstown, which at that time was situated on the Liverpool Road (Hume Highway). The new landowners west of The River Road, referred to their land as being on "Westons' East Hills" estate. A new name for the community was needed.

A meeting was held at the "Hog Sty" (today Armour Park), to decide on a suitable name for the district. Several names were discussed, "Westonville" being a popular suggestion; however, "East Hills" (the name of the farm on George Johnston Junior's grant) was finally accepted. East Hills in those days was a much larger district than the modern suburb of East Hills today. It took in the present suburbs of Panania, Revesby, East Hills & Picnic Point. (In 1913 the suburb of Revesby was named after Sir Joseph Banks' boyhood home, The Revesby Estate in England).

By 1894 nearly 30 houses had been built in the district, with an adult population of 70. Some of these early houses were slab huts, built as temporary dwellings from materials available on the land. When time and money allowed, a more substantial house was built. The huts were constructed from flat slabs of timber cut to size with a broadaxe, then smoothed & shaped with another hand tool known as an adze. (The adze had a razor sharp arc-shaped blade &, in the hands of an experienced man, the results gained were excellent.) The roof of the huts were of stringy bark, held in place by saplings. Each slab hut usually had only two or three rooms, with a separate kitchen sited a little distance from the main hut, to minimise the high fire risk.

from the open fireplace which served to cook the meals.

If a prize had been awarded for sheer ingenuity in building a house, it would, without a doubt, have gone to Mr & Mrs Johnson, who built their home on 8 acres of land on the site of the present Picnic Point High School. Mr Wilf Johnson (still a resident west of the River Road) clearly remembers his parent's first home. The walls of the two-room house were corn sacks, whitewashed on the outside with the plain bag on the inside. There was one window on the side of the house 2'6" x 18" in dimension. The corrugated iron roof was supported by upright pieces of timber set in the ground & the lower edges of the cornbags were held down by stones. It was a fine example of the "great Australian art of improvisation". The "Corn Sack" house stood for about 7 years, when it was replaced by a more substantial building.

Rustic weatherboard cottages with roofs of corrugated iron soon replaced the temporary dwellings. Corrugated iron water tanks or wells were installed on most properties to ensure a supply of fresh water for household use. The wells were hand-dug, anything from 13' to 30' deep, where subterranean springs gave an abundant supply of sweet water. Wells seems to bring out the very worst in some children. One boy, little Jack Bennett, had a wonderful time throwing all of his mother's spoons down one day. Another, young Wilf Johnson, who was watching his cousin Mary demonstrate her expertise at skipping, suggested that she should try to skip backwards. She did. He kept urging her to keep going, until she fell backwards down the well!!

A hand pump or bucket on a rope was used to draw the water from the wells. Dams were dug by hand by the pioneer farmers to hold water for stock & irrigation of crops & fruit trees. During drought years the tanks & wells often ran dry & dams became dried-up mud puddles. Water then had to be brought into the district, carried in wooden barrels which were hauled by horse-drawn dray from as far away as Belmore.

Before long, the countryside west of The River Road began to look very different. Along Weston & Tower Street, areas of dense scrub became neat cultivated paddocks, orchards were established & young trees flourished.

Mr & Mrs William Watson, better known as Ma & Pa Watson, developed their property in Tower Street as a dairy farm. Their fine herd of dairy cows grazed in paddocks surrounded by post & wire fences with slip rail gates. A brick home, built in the early 1900's for the Watson family, is still standing today in Eastern Avenue, Panania.

Not all of our early settlers were full-time farmers. Mr Walter Bennett, Snr., of Tower Street, worked in the city as a steam tram driver, &, because of the distance to be travelled, stayed in the city during the week & came home on week-ends. Every Monday his son used to drive him by horse & sulky to Petersham Station where he caught the train to work. His son then drove the horse & sulky back, returning on Friday to bring his father home for the week-end. Walter Bennett

worked his land on the week-ends.

Another of our very early settlers was Mr James R Spence, who established the first general store in East Hills, on his property in Weston Street. The store was in part of Mr Spence's home, set well back from the road, from where a track ran to Old Weston Street. In the early days Weston Street ran parallel to Tower Street for its entire length. This was changed with the construction of the railway line. The railway line cut diagonally across Weston Street near the position of the present traffic overpass at Carson Street. The direction of Weston Street was then altered to run along the southern side of the railway line to Anderson Avenue, as it does today. The remaining section of Weston Street, on the northern side became Marco Avenue. However, it was called "Old Weston Street", by the residents for many years. (The store would be situated today in Weston Street, approximately half-way between Hinemoa Street and Woodburn Avenue, Panania.)

On 16th May, 1894, the East Hills Receiving Post Office was established in a store in the charge of Mr Spence. He received a Postal Allowance of pounds 5.0.0. a year. Jimmy Spence's Post Office Store did more than just serve a necessary function within the district. It became a meeting place, a place where folk enjoyed a yarn, exchanged news, or made arrangements for a visit or picnic.

In Spence's Store, the customers had to be careful they did not go home with more money than when they started out. Mr Spence had some strange ways, one of which was that he "hid" money- Notes would turn up anywhere - under shop goods, or in one of his favourite places - between newspapers. Newspapers were carefully saved & passed from one family to another at Spence's Store, to be read. In the days before radio came to the district, these well-read papers were the main means of receiving news from distant places. Children were often sent to the store to pick up the mail or buy some item for Mum. One mother remembers giving her very young son a note, facing him in the direction of Spence's Store, & off he would go through the bush. He never got lost & always returned promptly with the goods needed.

Joseph Bell, a blacksmith, started a "Smith shop" on his property in Tower Street (between Picnic Point Road & Ellen Street, Panania). The blacksmith's shop became a favourite meeting place for the men of the district. It was there that the first meetings of the East Hills Progress Association were held. At the meetings the prime topic was usually a discussion of the market prices of eggs, vegetables & fruit by the farming citizens of this rural district.

In 1895 the Bankstown District was declared a Municipality, the first Mayor being Joseph James Cooper. East Hills, as part of the new municipality, now had official representation, to guide the progress of the district in the direction the citizens (now ratepayers) hoped for.

A great step forward came for the children of the area, when Miss Jessie Tompson became the pioneer schoolteacher in the district west of The River Road. She held classes in a school room on her parents' property, the Ferndale Estate, near the present Ferndale Road. Jessie Tompson initiated education & her small school was augmented in 1896 when the first Public School was opened. The East Hills Public School (today Revesby Public School) was situated on what is now the corner of Beaconsfield Street & the River Road, Revesby. Eighty children living within the district attended the school in its first year and a horse-drawn school bus service was provided for children living more than two miles away.

It was also in the year 1896 that Mr Samuel John Hale purchased the land on which he built his beautiful home, "The Pah". The house was the largest & most impressive building in the district, & remains today as a visual reminder of a past gracious era.

In 1899, the second general store was opened in Tower Street, East Hills, by Mr & Mrs William Neville. (The house & store is still standing today & is Blundells Automotive Electrical Workshop, Tower Street, Panania.)

Two of the Neville's daughters Emily & Florrie, helped in the store. Emily was known to have been very prim & proper always, but painfully slow when serving in the shop. Every item was carefully & slowly disted before being wrapped for the customer. If one arrived at the store early & found one or two customers waiting to be served, they could expect to be there until lunch time'!. Still, the waiting time was pleasant, for there was always plenty of news to exchange. Neville's store was, in fact, the centre of the very active "Bush Telegraph" of the East Hills District. Children loved going shopping with Mum at Neville's, especially when she paid the bill, as Miss Neville always gave them a bag of boild lollies. Florrie Neville delivered grocery orders around the district in a small dog cart.

In 1901, Mr Goode, a bricklayer, built a brick house on The River Road, Revesby, where the Y.M.C.A. stands today. That area was known then as "Frog Hollow" because of the heavy fog which often hung in the low flat area. The camphor laurel trees now growing in front of the Y.M.C.A. were planted when the house was built.

(to be continued).....
