

## Old generation happy to see new settlers.

People and families who figured in the history of the Gungahlin area are recalled by Judy Kenny.

**Margaret kennett (nee Cavanagh)** is 82. and does not get around much these days. But her mind is brim full of affectionate memories of a country childhood spent in the area where Canberra's newest town centre is gouging its identity out of the hills and valleys. The meaning of "Goongarline" or "Gungahleen" is lost in the mists of history and hearsay. It has been variously described as the name of a local Aboriginal woman, "white man's house" and "little rocky hill". In Margaret Kennett's memory "Gungahlin" has always been spelt and pronounced as it is today. As with other Australian localities, this form of the name probably evolved through white settlers hearing the Aboriginal word, attempting to write it phonetically, sometimes dropping a syllable or two, and using various forms of the name in dispatches and documents until the most frequently used version was settled on as the official one.

Local historian **Lyall Gillespie** has detailed the early history of the area. **George Thomas Palmer** set up a station at Ginninderra Creek about 1826. The property was originally known as Palmerville, but the Aboriginal name, "Gininderry" or "Ginninderra" lingered and became the common one for the area. , Originally it was "Ginnin-ginnin-derry", meaning, according to one old-timer, "rushing or moving water". Gillespie attributes to it the more poetic meaning of "sparkling or throwing out little rays of light".

After Palmer's death in 1854, the property passed to his daughter, **Susan Adrianna**, who had married the station manager, **William Davis**. About 1862, Davis secured additional land on which he built his new home, "Goongarline" [Gungahlin], at the corner of what is now the Barton Highway and Bellenden Road. Information provided by the present occupants of the building, the CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology, indicates, that the original Gungahlin homestead had three main rooms on the ground floor, including the kitchen and dining room, and three bedrooms upstairs. There were several small ground floor rooms on the eastern side.

Gillespie recounts the reason for Davis' sudden sale of his Ginninderra and Gungahlin estates in 1877. Ernest Palmer, a nephew whom Davis had virtually adopted, was riding Davis's horse, Gungahline, at Queanbeyan. Palmer tried to get the horse to jump, but was thrown and killed instantly when the horse fell on him. Davis, in his grief, immediately arranged to dispose of his property.

The purchaser, at first in partnership and later outright ownership, was **Edward Kendall Crace**. At both the beginning and end of his Australian ventures, Crace was destined to be a victim of the watery elements. The ship on which he traveled to Australia in 1865, the ***Duncan Dunbar***, ran aground on Rocas, 260 miles north of Pernambuco. The passengers spent 10 days on a sandbank, one furlong in width and two furlongs long. After six days, the captain, a passenger and six crew set out for Pernambuco to seek help. Crace and the other passengers were rescued, his luggage being reduced to the rather quaint collection of a pair of field glasses, a Colt rifle, six canaries and an umbrella. In a romantic twist, 13-year-old Kate Mort was also travelling on the *Duncan Dunbar* with her parents. Edward Kendall Crace and Kate Mort were married six years later. In the 1880s.

Crace extended the Gungahlin homestead to meet the needs of his growing family of six daughters and two sons. When completed, the house had eight bedrooms, three bathrooms, a kitchen and offices. There were also several outbuildings and two cottages. This is where Margaret Kennett's family history mingles with that of Gungahlin's owners. Margaret's father, **Clarence Cavanagh**, was the Graces' stud groom and her mother (Esther Smith) worked for Mrs Crace. Margaret cannot recall her mother's duties at the Crace homestead, but they are not hard to imagine, given the size of

the house and the needs of a family of eight young children and the children of the ensuing generation. She remembers her amazement at the variety of toys which the Crace children possessed, and her even greater wonder at the fact that the children had a separate toy room to keep them in. The Cavanagh children — Mary, Anne, Margaret, Clarice, Pat and Jack — were born in a weatherboard house close to the Gundaroo Road about three and a half miles from the present Barton Highway roundabout. Clarence Cavanagh had purchased some land at **Mulligans Flat** from E. K. Crace, a holding he eventually extended to 1000 acres.

The Cavanagh house is still standing, but without its original veranda and without the orchards, vegetable and flower gardens of earlier times. The Cavanagh children did their bit on the farm, helping with the shearing, the milking and feeding the animals. Indoors, there were the usual chores of bread to be baked, kerosene lamps to be filled, the copper to be boiled and butter to be churned. Water had to be fetched from the nearest tank. School was a half-mile walk up the road towards Gundaroo.

The school building has long since gone — Margaret Kennett thinks it may have been removed to the Cotter — but a stand of pine trees planted by young Cavanaghs, Ryans, Tickners, Shumacks, Gozzards and Winters clearly marks the spot. An environmentally minded Miss Harris from Bemboka, who later married Margaret's Uncle Mick, obtained the pine seedlings and encouraged the whole school (27 children in all) to nurture the young trees in the school grounds. In its early days the Mulligans Flat School was a half-time school, the teacher spending three days one week and two days the next at the Tallagandra School and the remaining time at Mulligans Flat. Schooling finished at 6th class, but students could continue up to Intermediate doing lessons sent by correspondence and supervised by the teacher. Some older children went to boarding school at Yass.

In traditional country style, there was a network of family and friends in the area. Margaret's grandparents, uncle and aunt lived on a farm almost opposite. Her grandmother was the district midwife and there were the usual neighbourly interactions. Margaret recalls the hundred and one farm services rendered — never for money. There was assistance in fighting bushfires, with the women providing sandwiches and tea. Many times her father had to take his horse to the nearby creek — the bridge was built later — to extricate people stranded in their early motors. The Cavanaghs could all tell who was passing their farm by the sound of those early motors going up the hill. These sounds were of particular interest to Clarence Cavanagh, who owned a T-model Ford and, later, an Essex.

The first post office and store in the district were established in 1859 [at Ginninderra], both later being conducted by George Harcourt. Mail was delivered twice a week from Ginninderra, for many years by the **Boreham** family. The routine was a leisurely one with the mailman stopping off at Cavanagh's farm for a cup of tea before continuing his deliveries along the Gundaroo Road. Letters were often replied to immediately, so that the mailman could pick them up on his return journey. On the days when mail was not delivered, the family would go down to Ginninderra village to collect it. Groceries were delivered once a week from Hall, which was a lively little village. Margaret remembers playing tennis there with the **Curran**s, the wife and daughter of the local blacksmith.

There were many Catholics of Irish descent working on the Gungahlin property. The Catholics did not mix socially with the Anglicans. Margaret remembers seeing the Crace family leaving for worship at St John's Church, Reid. Once a month Margaret and her family would get up at 4am to travel to Mass at Queanbeyan. They would drive past St Ninian's at Lyneham and go on to Queanbeyan, a 20-mile journey in the family phaeton. On other Sundays Mass was said at Hall or Acton. Twice a year Monsignor Haydon would come out to **Ryans** at **Tea Gardens** (near the

present lake) and the local Catholics would gather there for Mass in the lounge room. After Mass a substantial breakfast was provided for up to 20 worshippers, with no-one ever being asked by the Ryans, or even expected, to contribute to the meal in any way.

Canberra in those days was "somewhere to drive through" by sulky on the way to Queanbeyan. Sometimes the Creek at Lyneham was flooded and impassable. Queanbeyan provided good shopping, and later when the Cavanaghs acquired a car they would make the 60-mile trip to Goulburn for that occasional special purchase, or for medical procedures such as x-rays. It was in Goulburn that Clarence Cavanagh discovered he had hydatids on the lung, a common enough disease at the time. He had done his share of veterinary work and his comment when he saw the x-ray was, "With a sharp knife I could do this lot myself." Clarence Cavanagh was to die, aged 59, from septicemia associated with his lung disease.

After his death, his wife continued to work the farm at Mulligans Flat. Cavanagh's first employer, E. K. Crace, was a flamboyant farmer. In 1885 he had started a cattle stud on Gungahlin, purchasing cattle from the Queen's farm at Windsor and from the herds of Lord Falmouth. His stock also included horses, pigs, merino sheep and imported ewes. In 1892 he sent 200 cases of Gungahlin apples to the London market. In the 1880s Crace had been involved in some lively court proceedings on the matter of local roads and fences, the bitterness and destruction involved reflecting the territorial imperatives of the squatters and free selectors.

In the 1890s, with the colony in depression, Crace was also in serious financial trouble. He had survived the shipwreck of the *Duncan Dunbar*, but his luck ran out in the waters of Ginninderra Creek. In 1892 while attempting to cross the flooded creek both Crace and his attendant **George Kemp** were drowned. Their bodies were found almost in sight of Ginninderra village. On the base of the cross of E. K. Crace's tombstone in St John's Churchyard at Reid is the telling inscription: "When thou passest through the water I will be with thee". After her husband's death, Kate Crace continued to run the Gungahlin property. Although the land was resumed in 1915 for the Federal Capital Territory, a member of the Crace family lived at the Gungahlin homestead until 1927. Gungahlin later became the home of Dr Frederick Watson, then a hostel for cadet's in External Affairs, and from 1953, the administration centre for the CSIRO's Wildlife Division.

Margaret Kennett and her sister Clarice feel no regret at the present developments in Gungahlin. To see people finding good blocks of land for their homes is, to their minds, a sign of progress. It seems that it is part of their gentle, contented nature to be happy to share their beloved Gungahlin with a new, younger generation of settlers. They are happy also that the farmlands of north Gungahlin are to be preserved as a bushland park. Conservation groups have won this promise from the ACT Government, for Mulligans Flat is a rare and regenerating ecosystem, a refuge for countless bird species and for a host of smaller reptiles, a place Margaret Kennett and her family loved to call home.

[Lyll Gillespie's new book *Ginninderra: Foremner to Canberra* is to be launched in Canberra on December 4.

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