

## Happy Valley rises from the Depression

*This FIDO Backgrounder (No 64 September 2013 by John Sinclair) traces the background and development of Happy Valley. It was the earliest tourist development on Fraser Island and can trace its history back to the 1930s. Although the first tourist resort soon failed, it established the foundations of a settlement that has lived on since. Happy Valley land was surveyed, subdivided and sold in 1963. Now most of the houses are occupied by visitors rather than residents providing the basis of an industry.*

**Name:** There are a number of Happy Valleys around Australia. The name was probably coined as a marketing name for the resort that operated on Fraser Island briefly during 1930s but it has remained as a place name ever since. There have been two eras to this community.

**Warry's Resort:** Thomas Symes Warry established himself as a "Produce Merchant and General Importer" in Maryborough, Queensland in 1880. Warry set himself up in direct opposition to Brennan & Geraghty competing for some of their customers. Later Warry's became a manufacturing company producing and packaging over 89 products including jams and sauces under their own name selling their goods through General Stores around Queensland under the "Auburn" brand. Warrys grew into a large wholesaling and retailing business extending through the whole Wide Bay and Burnett Region operating from the base in March Street.

The Warrys business gradually declined during the Depression and in the post-war years but before the Depression really started to bite Stan Warry decided to invest in a tourism venture on Fraser Island. He established the Happy Valley resort in 1934. It was nothing like contemporary resorts. It consisted of a group of huts each with their own stove and cooking galley. Each had a raised wooden floor and relied on water from rainwater tanks, but there was no covered deck. It seems that the main attraction in selecting the site was the freshwater stream that provided an outdoor shower, and its central location along the Ocean Beach.



Warrys Happy Valley resort in the mid 1930s. It failed within a few years due to the Great Depression

In 1975 Butchulla elder, Ike Owens recalled the Happy Valley resort where his older brother Banjo Owens was a guide: *I can remember a tourist resort at Happy Valley being built about 1934, by Mr. Ken Miller for Warrys. A road was constructed from Yidney Creek, towards Happy Valley, but this was never completed. I reckon there were about four, five or six cottages built at Happy Valley, but they let the place go and then started to pull the place*

*down, and sold it to people at Scarness. They were very nice cottages. One of the developments of the tourist resort was to put a road in from the beach to Wabby Lake. It used to be possible to drive a T Model Ford through from the beach to Wabby Lake, but that road is now overgrown. It doesn't take much for a road to become overgrown on Fraser Island.*

**Banjo Owens** was a very colourful character and there are a plethora of stories about the man and his adventures and exploits. It was even said that he could catch surf worms between his toes and with a kick get them out of the sand. However he was a guide to guests at Warrys Happy Valley Resort and became a friend to everyone who stayed there from the Queensland Governor down

**The Governor:** Sir Lelie Orme Wilson was then the Governor of Queensland. He had formed a close friendship with the Warry family particularly Stan Warry. This resulted the resort soon having regular vice-regal patronage while it was operating. Because there was no running water in the resort cabins (huts), like all guests Sir Leslie had to take his ablutions at the small falls that still run from the small stream and drop over the coffee rock to the beach. In his honour the insignificant drop was known as "The Governor's Falls".

**Honeymoon Haven:** Because Beryl and Charlie Sinclair had their honeymoon at Warry's Resort in September 1935 the Sinclair family grew up with many romantic stories of Happy Valley and the excursions made from there. The kids though seem to have destroyed all of the photos in their parents' collection except for the surviving photo of Charlie bathing under the Governor's Falls.



**The Depression:** The lack of financial security accompanying the Depression saw the patronage of the

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infant resort wither until it was soon closed down. On his last visit to the resort Sir Leslie reciprocated the hospitality he received on Fraser Island by inviting principal figures to a dinner party on the Government launch anchored off McKenzie's Jetty. This event had some repercussions but that's another story. Following the demise of the resort many of the buildings were removed but the location had been established and Happy Valley became the main centre for people visiting Fraser Island's Back Beach.

**The Maheno:** Another of the casualties of the Great Depression of the 1930 was that the Luxury liner SS Maheno could not attract passengers and so in 1935 it was sold "as is – where is". The Japanese acquired it for scrap metal and proceeded to tow it back to Japan. To make it easier to tow, the propeller was removed to reduce drag. Thus when it encountered a fierce storm off Fraser Island in July, when the tow rope broke it wasn't able to power its way out of trouble and it washed ashore just north of Happy Valley. To stop "foreign goods" (Japanese) being brought off the ship and into Australia without customs duty being paid, the Australian Government sent a Customs Officer to collect revenue for anything removed. The Customs Officer was due to be married but couldn't leave his post. Rather than cancel the wedding the guests and the parson were flown in and landed on the beach. The wedding and reception were held in the stateroom aboard the ship although the decks well off the horizontal. However the ship had a grand piano for the wedding march and was fully equipped to cater for a grand reception.

**After the resort:** Fishers and others wanted to recreate on Fraser Island's Back Beach as the locals then knew it. Many local people from Maryborough and Hervey Bay and some workers in the timber industry wanted to erect their own shacks where the resort had been. They sought and obtained occupational leases from the Forestry Department to erect shacks. These areas were never surveyed and were very vaguely described. occupational leases were nominally for 12 months but were invariably renewed on an annual basis. The greatest concentration occupational leases and fishing shacks on the island in 1960 was in the Happy Valley area including Yidney Rocks and the Oaks

**Forestry and Forestry occupational leases:** Until 1960, the Queensland Forestry Department controlled virtually all of Fraser Island in what was then State Forest 3 (SF3) except for the Lighthouse reserves at Sandy Cape and Hook Point and three freehold blocks. All of the ocean beach and foredunes were part of the State Forest. However dealing with tenants was not really the Forestry Department's core business.

**New land tenure:** In 1962 the Queensland Government made a decision to excise a coastal strip half a mile wide between Sandy Cape and Eurong to create a corridor of vacant Crown Land to be thereafter managed by the Lands Department. It also resolved that all future land releases should be concentrated in two nodes, Eurong and Happy Valley each of approximately 300 hectares stretching one mile from the coast. In 1962-63 Lands Department surveyor, Geoff Andrews carried out the survey and pegged out a number of subdivision lots. The strip excised from SF3 ran parallel to the coast except that it avoided the Indian Head-Waddy Point Beauty Spot that remained part of the State Forest.



Happy Valley after excision from State Forest 3 in 1963



Happy Valley store 1980 (Photo from Joe Mills)

**The Happy Valley store:** With secure land tenure it wasn't long before one of the blocks owned by Joe and Anna Mills was developed into a small store. It quickly expanded to incorporate a fuel stop post office and liquor outlet. It was on an awkward and inappropriate site but for a decade it was Fraser Island's only retail outlet so it was always busy and Happy Valley was the main urban hub on the island built around the store. The hub was so busy that the Council was forced to provide a public toilet (then the only public toilet along the entire eastern coast of the island). That helped draw even more visitors to this busy hub.

Following the sale of the retail business by Joe Mills after the death of Anna the shop was transformed, the adjacent block acquired and the business morphed into the grand new Happy Valley Retreat with a restaurant and cabin accommodation.

### 1963-2013 — Happy Valley II's Golden Anniversary

Happy Valley II began with the release of the first formal subdivisions in May 1963. While the landscape has changed due to the buildings, roads and the deliberate anthropogenic modifications of the vegetation, some changes are due to Nature. Over the last 20 years the active sandblows within the village have been colonized by vegetation and have almost been stopped in their tracks. Many innocent looking garden plants introduced to provide colour around the houses have escaped. This now poses a challenge to help regain that Happy Valleys wild natural character that marked its early decades.

*FIDO welcomes contributions of text and photos to help expand on this short history of Happy Valley. Contact: [john@fido.org.au](mailto:john@fido.org.au)*