Frank Hanrahan



All the Hanrahans at Black Springs and the surrounding area, are directly related to Irish convict Patrick Hanrahan who arrived in Australia in 1802 and settled in Black Springs in the 1830s. Patrick was one of the convicts who helped build Cox's Road to Bathurst in 1814. So we've been around for a while.

Mark Hanrahan was my father, and my mother was Mary Stapleton. She grew up at Isabella, and my father grew up at Black Springs. They were both descended from the Irish. My mother was not a part of my day to day life after I was about five and my Dad died when I was 12, and from then I was my own boss.

My father, grandfather and great grandfather James all lived on the property Flower Dale, that we live on today. Even though I'm the sixth generation of Hanrahans to walk on this property, I had to buy it, but at least it stayed in the family. So I grew up on Flower Dale. There were three houses there before ours. The first house was down near the poplars right near the well, then the next one was basically in the same spot as where our house is now.

I feel quite a responsibility for a property that's been in the family for so long. The early Hanrahan family did not really farm the land much, enough to keep themselves going while they cleared the heavy timber, which was all cut with an axe. It was not necessarily good burning wood, but it was very fertile soil. Getting wood was a lot of hard yakka. They had big old fireplaces to keep going and needed to clear the land.

I went to school at Swatchfield School, which was up where Hanrahan's Lane turns onto the Abercrombie Road. The school before that, where my Dad went, was down Steels Lane about a kilometre. My very first day at school was a rather exciting day. It was the day before my birthday. There was a lady from in town, Jean Davies. She was a schoolteacher, journalist and a pretty cranky lady. But I liked her. She said to me, "How old are you?" I said, "I'm four today and five tomorrow." I smiled. I think she thought I was a smart-arse so she hit me with a ruler. In those days you had to be able to touch your ear (over your head) before you went into school, usually around the age of five and that's why I started school in May.

Once we got to high school, we still carried on at Swatchfield School. The teacher had correspondence set up for us. They really earned their money in those days. You know, there might be 20 kids with three kids in every different class. I did a bit of maintenance work on their motor cars too!

The Swatchfield School got closed for a while when it got burned. We saw all this smoke coming up from the school from home. We were dancing around happy. Next day, a car pulled up outside, and these two big tall fellas with little bloody hats on them, detectives, you know. And they were there to question us. We were pretty bloody quiet then, I can tell you. Not that we had anything to do with it. But we were happy they believed our story. After that, for a while, I went to the school at Daisybank. And we rode our horses over there, down through the paddock.

I left school at age 15. I went working. My first job was fencing with Leo Grady, who was my first cousin. He was a real hard worker. We'd go to work with the headlights on and come home

with the headlights on. I tried a few other things. Me and my brother grew some peas and did a bit of farming, and a bit of piecework around. I actually did a little bit of work for Cortney Brothers from Lithgow. They were cutting logs up in the forest. I was hooking on for them to snig the logs out with a bulldozer. I did that for a few months.

I started working with the Forestry Commission as a casual in the autumn of 1956. I was a fraction under 18 but they didn't seem to mind. We low pruned pine at Gurnang for a few months with foreman Keith Stacy, camping in the men's camp near Gurnang Road. In those days there were no secateurs and we used short handled pruning saws to remove the branches. We didn't have to camp, but most of us did because it made a big difference to our take-home pay. In that first winter I camped in a tent with a wooden floor and it was a snowy and wet winter but we seemed to survive.

I was made a permanent employee by Len Mors the next year and I had the job of blazing lines for fire trails and logging roads in Kanangra State Forest on the Boyd Plateau. The area was being harvested for hardwood at the time, and was designated for conversion to softwood plantation. Clearing of the timber never eventuated as the area was the centre of a debate which eventually saw it converted to National Park.

That year saw a major fire in this area. It went on for ages and we only had knapsacks and rake hoes, and it kept getting away from us. It burned most of the Boyd Plateau including some of Casey's logging equipment and nearly got into the Jenolan Caves. Len Mors came out and I learned a lot about firefighting at that fire. Returning to Black Springs, I was an acting planting foreman, before joining the roading gang putting in subdivision roads and doing some broadcast clearing work. The D7 dozer I operated had 'FC 1', an early model tree pusher, fitted to it, which greatly assisted pushing larger trees. Not too long after becoming a Tractor Operator I became the Roading Foreman.

With Len Mors suggesting that the future of the district was going to be in marketing, it wasn't long before I took the hint and became a Marketing Foreman. This was early days in harvesting of the pine and chainsaws had just started to be used by fallers. Horses were being used to snig logs to road-side for measuring and the Forestry Commission had a Clydesdale breeding stud at Gurnang Afforestation Camp to supply horses for the industry. The stud was run by a warder at the prison called Wally Lund, and Jack Carrol was the forester supervising finances and reporting. Each faller with a horse needed a horse paddock with access to water.

The start-up of the Fibron MDF plant, as it was known, was significant for us in marketing. Much planning of the areas to be harvested was undertaken and the potential new contractors all had to be shown the resource. Then virtually overnight the selected contractors using mechanical harvesting equipment started. One contractor (Finemores) worked the machines 24 hours a day, and although this didn't last more than about a year, there was a huge amount of tracking and tree marking required to keep up. This meant importing new recruits into the marketing gang and training them. The contractors also needed a bit of training too!

These were interesting times and I particularly enjoyed the challenges presented. Within a period of five years, we had tripled harvesting activity and I looked forward to the day harvesting in the district would reach one million tonnes per annum.



Frank and Jack Hill examining the benefits of slashing the outrow tracks in winter

In my time in the Forestry in Oberon one of the things I have enjoyed most is my relationship with the foresters and office staff. Early in my career Len Mors was a great help and mentor to me, and later I was able to repay this by helping a number of junior foresters learn field skills. One student forester I took under my wing was Hans Drielsma, who went on to become Commissioner of Forests.



I particularly enjoyed the friendship, loyalty and good morale that seemed to accompany the staff and employees in the Oberon District. However, when, after a series of restructures the Government decided to close the Oberon Office, it was obvious to me the system was undoing a good thing. I had spent 40 years helping to shape and maintain so, to go out on a good note and call it a day, I left the Forestry.

The first District Forester Len Mors, who employed and mentored me, the last District Forester Col Roberts, and myself, who had been there the whole time in between.

There was quite a lot of private pine that had been planted by 2000 and more land is still getting planted. Private growers mostly considered they were not getting a real good deal. So, I got approached a few times to do some work for them, and I never really took too much interest in it until I heard some of the things that were going on. I thought this could be very interesting. Bruce Sheppard was a surgeon and the president of the AMA at the time. He rang me up one night and he said, “I want you to do some work for me.” I heard him out and visited his plantation and found that someone had harvested (thinned) it without his knowledge. There were some crooked things that went on. And so I got doing a bit of work for some of those guys. It worked out very well. They needed advice from someone in the industry. They should have had advice years before.

It went very well after that for a number of years. All good people, no problems at all. But I haven't done much recently. I'm absolutely not fit enough to do that sort of work and the walking it needs now.

I had met Aileen Ryan when she and her brothers moved from the Mozart School after it closed and came to Swatchfield School for a while. There was a bit of a meeting amongst us kids, to see if we could have a bit of fun with these new kids. There's a TSR (travelling stock reserve) below the school where kids would leave their horses. So, this morning, Terry Hanrahan got down in the scrub and as they come through the gate he frightened the horses. It was a great

show, you know, as they all fell off their horse. At the tender age of 10 years I sort of fell in love with Aileen. I got this tin box of paints from the circus I'd been to in Bathurst, to give to Aileen. When the time came to give them to her, I got a bit shy and I threw them at her instead and all the paints came out and I wouldn't pick them up. But the other kids picked them up and put them in the tin. And she kept those paints for years and years.

In our late teens we got married, it was 1957 and we were both 19. We lived in the house that had been my father and mother's home. We lived there for 18 years before building a new house nearby. And now we've been married 68 years. For many of those years Aileen drove the school bus for the Black Springs Progress Association. We started with a parent car pool and then a few of us petitioned to get a school bus run set up. It started with one 14-seat bus and she drove all the roads around Black Springs picking up kids. Then the buses got bigger and it became a good money spinner for the Progress Association. Aileen drove the bus for nearly 30 years.

We have four children. Grant went to uni and became a PE teacher, he's now retired. He had four children, two boys and two girls. He's the only one to get daughters. Shane is an electrician and worked at a couple of power houses and then the factory at Oberon. He has four sons and is now retired too. Gavin was the footballer. He went to Sydney studying and got playing a bit of football with Balmain. And as a result of football, he ended up at Newcastle. He was studying law part time and he ended up getting a job up there with Turnbull Hill. And he's still there. He's a senior partner in the business and not retired. He's got four sons. Karla was a mistake, the best one I ever made. Karla went to uni and got a degree in secondary maths teaching. She works at Telstra and has been there for 31 years. She has a son. I'm very happy because they're all good and healthy, and their kids are too. We are Frank and Grandma, and have 11 grandsons and two granddaughters. We're very boy-heavy, but the next generation is a little more even. We already have 13 great-grandchildren.

I had a fair interest in trotting horses pretty early on. I really liked the game, you know. The excitement or the disappointments or whatever, or both. We had a horse or two and weren't doing too bad. Then Tom Stapleton and I got an opportunity to get a foal from a really good mare. The foal was a gelding called "Frosty Jim" and over the years he won 57 races for us before we sold him to an American for $100,000. We had other horses, but he was by far the best. So, we spent a lot of time driving down to Harold Park.

I have been very lucky in my job. I had good bosses and good people to work with. I went to work whistling every morning. I fought a lot of fires over the years too. Oddly enough, I didn't mind the fire situation. It was good to see some of the planning that went on. You could see where some went wrong. It wasn't necessarily the forestry people either. When I left the Forestry, Eddie Gibbons asked me would I be a group captain, because I was the only one who knew anything about the other side of Gurnang. I found the RFS to be a very different organisation to work with than with the Forestry.

Since COVID we don't socialise near as much as we did. We don't go to many places. It's more about family these days. The fact that we live fairly close together helps too.

I think I have lived in the best time. Life was simple and not too much crime. You knew all your neighbours and the whole community. I don't really have any regrets, I enjoyed my work and loved farming. It's the lifestyle I've loved and I've loved living at Black Springs. People comment on it being cold, and it is, but I think it's God's gift. My favourite saying has always been "What place could be better than Black Springs … it's all downhill from here".

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