**Ercildoune, Lyndhurst**

Adapted from article by Heather Arnold
(Local History Librarian, Casey Cardinia Libraries)

**Frederick Hall**

Frederick Hall was born around 1830 to William and Grace (nee Tucker) Hall. In an interview published in *The Australasian* newspaper on July 1, 1893, it says that Fred arrived in Victoria in 1833, which seems extremely early given that John Batman, considered the ‘founder’ of Melbourne didn’t arrive until 1835.

Fred married Elizabeth Hunt in 1849 in Brighton and they had the following children:

1. Louisa (birth registered at Brighton, 1850. Married James Close in 1867; died 1923)
2. Frederick (birth registered at Western Port, 1857; died in 1857, aged 5 months)
3. George (b. c. 1859. Married Anna Mary Anderson in 1881; died in 1929 aged 70)
4. William (birth registered at Lyndhurst, 1859; died 1942)
5. Frederick (birth registered at Lyndhurst, 1861. Married Emma Carol Gaunt in 1896; died 1942)
6. Elizabeth (birth registered at Lyndhurst, 1864. Married Percy Teychenne in 1886; died 1892)
7. Emma (birth registered at Cranbourne, 1866. Married Christopher John James in 1888; died 1941)
8. Susannah (birth registered at Cranbourne, 1868. Married Daniel Tierney in 1907; died 1955)
9. Fannie (birth registered at Cranbourne, 1870. Married Thomas James Stephenson in 1891; died 1940)
10. Walter Henry (birth registered at Cranbourne, 1873; died1922)
11. Florence (birth registered at Cranbourne, 1875. Married Richard Ernest Einsiedel in 1899; died 1962)
12. Alfred (birth registered at Cranbourne, 1878; died 1929.)

The same article said that Fred had been on his farm at Lyndhurst, for 33 years, which is 1860; however as one child was registered at Western Port in 1857 they were obviously in the area earlier.

Frederick Hall died in 1896 and Elizabeth died in 1916. They are both buried at Cranbourne Cemetery.

**Interview with Frederick Hall**

So what did Fred Hall say in his interview to *The Australasian* newspaper on July 1, 1893? Read it here [https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/138656960?#](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/138656960)

**Ercildoune - The Model Farm**

Given that they were living there from at least 1860 according to Fred Hall’s interview there must have been a house there from that time. The Victorian Heritage Database says c. 1888 <https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/63135>.

Fred’s farm was described by Niel Gunson in *The Good Country: Cranbourne Shire* as a ‘Model Farm’.

DAIRYING IN GIPPSLAND.

(BY OUR AGRICULTURAL REPORTER.)

A CRANBOURNE FARM.

*‘One of the most advanced and successful dairymen in Gippsland is Mr. F. H. Hall, of Ercildoune, whose farm is situated a few miles from Cranbourne, on the Frankston road. Mr. Hall has been engaged in dairying for probably a longer period than any other farmer in the colony, and on that account his experiences and the system he adopts in managing his herd are of exceptional interest and value. He arrived in Victoria when quite a young lad in 1833, and has, therefore, had sixty years of colonial experience. What a long time to look back, and what changes he must have witnessed in the development of the country. For the last thirty-three years Mr. Hall has been engaged in dairying on the farm where he now resides.*

*SOME EARLY REMINISCENCES*

*Although close upon seventy years of age Mr. Hall is still a robust, healthy man of fine physique, and a typical specimen of a jovial, burly yeoman. He performs some light work every day, either among the cows or in the paddocks, for he says he was accustomed to active employment in his early life, and complete idleness would soon kill him. His "yarns" about the digging days and the troubles of early settlement in the colony would interest many of those desirous of going on to the land to-day, and would prove to them that the present depression and difficulties are trivial compared to what they were before the discovery of gold in the fifties. "Times are considered bad enough now," said Mr. Hall, in our conversation, "but I have seen them very much worse." "I remember" he went on, "when quite a big, strong fellow, and able and willing to undertake any kind of labour, that wages*

*were far lower than they are now." He had worked as hard as any farm hand has to do now for 3s. per week and his keep, and he even ventured to marry on a salary of 15s. a week. Young men turn up their nose at such a wage nowadays, but Mr. Hall not only made progress but reared a family on it. Of course, the comparative value of 15s. now and fifty years ago are two very different things, yet it is refreshing to hear an old pioneer like Mr. Hall speak of the present dull times with a lightness of heart which indicates the great confidence he has in the future prosperity of the country.*

*THE SYSTEM OF FARMING*

*The area of the farm is 250 acres. The land is all first-class, however, and above the average in quality of the soil in the Cranbourne district. It was originally pretty heavily timbered, but nothing like to the country further south about Korumburra or Leongatha. Similar land could be cleared to-day for about £6 an acre. The system of farming pursued is simple, but methodical. Nearly everything grown on the place is converted into milk and batter. A number of pigs and poultry are kept, but the chief pursuit is dairying. About 80 acres for hay are cultivated each season for the sole use and benefit of the cows, which are all fed liberally in their stalls throughout the winter, or whenever the grass becomes scarcer. Mr. Hall grows, also, a large quantity of green crops for mixing with the hay. At the present time there are about 10 acres of green fodder, consisting chiefly of barley and rye, ready for cutting, and which would, have been ready before now but for the dry autumn experienced. A continuous supply of this green feed is provided by sowing at different periods. A quantity of maize is generally grown for summer and early autumn feed, but the maize failed last season on account of the dry weather. When the maize crops are finished, a rotation of green barley, oats, or rye is available, and they are severally used for mixing with the chaff and bran ration. Mr. Hall has been farming on this system for years, and he finds it to be much more profitable than the usual plan of allowing the cows to dry off in their milk for want of feed.*

*HOW THE COWS ARE TREATED*

*As already indicated, the cows are exceptionally well provided for at Ercildoune in the shape of food. Unless in the season when the grass is flush and verdant, they are liberally hand fed in the byre or shed at very considerable expense. Mr. Hall says that feeding the cows well is the only way—and he speaks from a long experience—to make dairying profitable. Yet the majority of farmers who make butter do not feed their cattle in winter. The question is whether they or Mr. Hall is right. I venture to assert that the latter makes most money at the business, and that surely is the main object, without discussing the relative cost or trouble attached to the two systems of feeding v. starvation. Mr. Hall also believes in providing shelter for his cattle. His milch cows are stabled every night all through the winter—a practice too seldom adopted in Gippsland, or any other part of the country. It involves a deal of extra Iabour and expense in cleaning out the stalls daily and in providing bedding; but Mr. Hall has proved that the system pays better than allowing the cows to sleep out on the cold wet ground. He considers it is of little avail feeding a cow well, unless shelter is provided at the same time. Shelter, of course, is the equivalent of food, and the greatest abundance of fodder is wasted on any animal that is exposed to severe cold. Our own personal feelings tell us that in order to be well and healthy we must put on extra clothes in winter, and, further, that we will gain more benefit by the shelter and warmth obtained therefrom than by taking an extra quantity of food. Either man or beast is to be pitied who cannot secure sufficient clothing or shelter from the cold, and if we only consider how tender and sensitive an animal a milch cow is, the folly of expecting her to yield a large quantity of milk under such conditions is at once apparent.*

*THE RESULTS OBTAINED*

*The first immediate result of feeding and stabling the cows is the much larger quantity of milk they yield. Mr. Hall was at one time in the milk trade, but he now makes butter exclusively. Since he procured a cream separator he finds butter-making quite as profitable and easy as selling the whole milk. On an average his cows yield 8lb of butter per week throughout the year. The farmers who do not feed and shelter their cows obtain less than half of that return. If the cost incurred in the better treatment of the cows amounted to the value of the extra produce there would be no profit gained; but this extra expenditure Mr. Hall declares is all returned in the benefits resulting from the manure which is collected and applied to the land. The manure is the medium which enables him to produce heavy crops of hay, green fodder, and grass, and these in turn enable him to keep nearly double the number of cattle he could do otherwise. He, therefore, gets all the extra butter produced for*

*nothing, so to speak, and besides, from having so many more cows on the place, his aggregate returns and his profits are just about double of what they would be if the cattle were treated on the starvation system. It is easy to see from the good residence and steading, and the fine appearance of the farm generally, with everything in excellent condition, that Mr. Hall has prospered. He would assuredly have been a poor man still if he had not fed and sheltered his cows. Dairymen who follow his example will never, I feel sure, regret giving up the ruinous practice of starving their animals in winter.’*

When Fred died in 1896 his address in the death notice was Malvern Grove in Caulfield*.* According to Mrs Morrison’s book some family members took over the farm and in June 1905, George Hall advertised the farm for lease. The ad below is from *The Leader* June 3, 1905.

*LAND TO LET*

*TENDERS will be received until 5th June for the leasing of Farm known as "ERCILDOUNE." situated 2½ miles from Cranbourne Railway Station, containing 246 acres, well watered, and subdivided; good 8-roomed house, cow shed and large outbuildings, for a term of three or five years. This property is suitable for either dairying or agricultural purposes.*

*Tenders to be addressed to GEO. HALL, Cranbourne.*

*The highest or any tender not necessarily accepted.*

**William and Mary McNab**

In October 1917 the farm was put up for sale and it was purchased by William and Mary McNab. The family had previously been at Trafalgar, Molesworth and Cathkin areas. Mrs Morrison writes that ‘*the family travelled for two days by horse drawn wagon with their furniture and farm equipment’* to get to their new home in Lyndhurst.

William Henry Duncan McNab and Mary Elizabeth Maud Miller were married in 1896 and had six children:

1. Mary Ethel (birth registered at Trafalgar, 1896; died 1901)
2. Henrietta Robertson (birth registered at Trafalgar, 1898. Married Frank Knight in 1938; died 1997)
3. William Donald (known as Donald - birth registered at Trafalgar, 1900; died 1979)
4. Annie Alice (birth registered at Trafalgar, 1901, died 1995)
5. Charles Malcolm (birth registered at Trafalgar, 1904. Married Mabel Florence McLellan in 1938; died 1991)
6. Muriel Maud (birth registered at Alexandra, 1910. Married John Henry Thorburn in 1935; died 2002)

William died in 1930 and Mary died in 1957.

Mrs Morrison has this interesting anecdote about Donald – ‘*in 1910 he was badly bitten by bull ants and as a result of this his leg was amputated. Around 1920 he became an accountant after studying by correspondence.’*

The family were involved in the Presbyterian Church at Lyndhurst and Cranbourne – there are reports of Mrs McNab holding a ‘house party’ at Ercildoune to raise funds for the Church.

**Donald and Charles McNab**

Charles’ marriage to Mabel McLellan. Mable was the daughter of George and Margaret (nee Close) McLellan. The McLellan family had a dairy farm at Taylors Road in Skye. The McNab and the McLellan families were both of Scottish background.

Mrs Morrison also writes– after William died the farm was divided between the two sons, Donald and Charles. Donald had the *Ercildoune* homestead block and Charles had other land which he named *Strathlea*. Charles had a Guernsey stud on *Strahlea* and that was still in the McNab family until at least 2004.

In 1929, Donald and Charles were interviewed by the *Weekly Times* September 7, 1929 about the farm at Lyndhurst. You can read the full article here - <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article224402265> - the parts of the article relating to *Ercildoune* and Cranbourne are below

HEAVY FODDER CROPS GROWN FOR COWS

By "AGRESTIC"

*‘It is probably well within the mark to say that nowhere else in the State is dairying conducted with a larger measure of financial success than in the Cranbourne district, which lies about 30 miles from Melbourne on the South Gippsland line.*

*Silage Essential*

*In that centre not only is there a generous realisation of the value of silage but many, if not most, of the farmers deem it to be essential to make some each season, and they state unhesitatingly that without it they certainly would not be able to carry on so satisfactorily as they do. Various classes of fodder are utilised or the purpose, and all of them, apparently meet requirements.*

 *Maize, however, appears to be most favored, not only because it produces a big bulk of fodder, but also because it has the capacity for maintaining the stock in excellent condition, thus enabling them to make the utmost use of whatever other materials may be supplied to them. Latterly a fodder which has aroused much interest and claimed considerable cultural attention is Imphee. This is one of the members of the useful family of Sorghums. It is a hardy fellow, thrives vigorously under the conditions which obtain in the neighborhood of Cranbourne, and furnishes a surprisingly large amount of stuff. Amongst those who have a high regard for Imphee are Mr Wm. H. A. McNab, of "Ercildoune," and his two enterprising, keen and capable sons, Donald and Charlie.*

*When I called at "Ercildoune" on a recent memorable Friday — a day of chilling wind and saturating rain — I found that Mr McNab was absent at Dandenong, convalescing after a serious Illness. His sons were at first somewhat chary about being interviewed on the subject of their operations, but an hour's earnest talk with them revealed that they had a complete grip of everything.*

*From Cathkin*

*Up to 11 years ago, when "Ercildoune," containing 246 acres, was purchased, the family had been established on the Goulburn at Cathkin. Mr McNab, sen., however, had long had his eyes on Gippsland, particularly the country of which Cranbourne may be said to be the centre, and when the Cathkin property was disposed of he transferred to the present holding, which has been augmented by the rental of an additional 166 acres.*

*The soil, for the most part, is of black loamy character, with a sprinkling of clay through it, and there is a clay subsoil throughout. This is fairly near to the surface, as is exemplified by the fact that there is scarcely a paddock in which each time it is used the plough does not turn up a certain amount of clay. The paddocks are of varying sizes, but average approximately 20 acres. A good deal more than half of the farm is under crop each year, and the crops grown include oats (about 100 acres), wheat (just a little for feed for the fowls), Maize and Imphee. Japanese millet was cultivated regularly at one time, but lately it has been replaced by Imphee, which occupied an area of 20 acres last season.*

*Messrs. McNab are dairy farmers, and they believe in feeding their cows on a liberal scale. In fact, they pointed out, that is the only way to ensure a maximum production of milk. They have a fine herd of highly developed Ayrshire-Jersey cross cattle numbering, roughly, 100 head, and the actual milkers average 75 head throughout the year. There are three pure-bred pedigree Ayrshire cows, and Ayrshire and Jersey bulls are used.*

*As the whole of the milk is marketed for consumption in the metropolitan area, it is found possible to rear only two or three of the most promising heifers each year. The milking is done by hand. It is an invariable practice to grow a substantial supply of early green feed, and an idea of the character of this season's stand is conveyed by the photograph reproduced on this page in which Messrs. Donald and Charles McNab appear.*

*The crop consists of a mixture of barley, oats and wheat, the first named predominating. The seeding was done in February, and at the same time from 80 to 1001b. of super and bone an acre was distributed. Cutting for feeding was begun about the middle of August, when the last of the Imphee silage had been used. The cutting, of course, could have been started earlier had there been any necessity to do so. This crop was the best I saw in the district, where the exceptionally heavy rains have proved more or less detrimental to the later sown stands, which, in numerous instances, are uneven and contain yellowish patches. Messrs McNab cannot speak too highly of Imphee as a cattle fodder and they are of the opinion that all round it is markedly superior to Japanese millet.*

*They made three sowings during November, the areas having been 9, 8 and 3 acres respectively. The ground was ploughed in September with the mould board to a depth of 6 inches. "Why the mould board?" I inquired, and was informed that "it turns the soil over more effectively, and tends to drain the land better than when the disc is used." A little later a stroke was given with the harrows. The next operation was to roll. That was followed by a second ploughing to a depth of 3 inches and another harrowing preceded the seeding. The seed allowance was 10lb. an acre and the manure applied was bone and super which was used at the rate of 80lb. an acre. The crop made excellent progress, and the harvesting operations were carried out toward the end of April. Had the weather not been so wet the work would have been done earlier.*

*The intention had been to place the great bulk of the produce in stack for ensilage, but owing to unfavorable conditions, it was possible to utilise only eight acres for that purpose, the remainder of the crop, which stood about 9ft. high, having been cut and fed to the cows in the form of green chaff in the bails. Altogether the 20 acres of Imphee provided sufficient greenstuff to permit of four months' continuous feeding.*

*The portion of the crop converted into stack ensilage was cut with the reaper and binder. Before the stacking was begun a layer of straw was placed on the ground, with a view to minimise the wastage. I asked Messrs McNab for particulars of the method of building the stack, which they gave as follows : — The plan is to build first from the two sides. The sheaves are laid with the heads pointing toward the centre, and the butts outward, and they overlap one another to the length of the twine band. A second layer is then laid across the first, beginning at the ends, and again working toward the centre. The third tier is laid on the same lines as the first. The fourth layer resembles the second, and so until all the sheaves have been dealt with. Because of the greater shrinkage or pressure there, and so that there shall be slopes toward the ends and the sides, it is necessary to see that the centre is kept higher throughout than the sides and ends. When completed the stack is covered with a layer of straw a foot deep. Pieces of timber are then placed along the sides on top of the straw, and they are kept in position by fastening them to lengths of wire stretched across the stack.*

*The Final Task*

*Bags filled with sand are next laid along the timbers to prevent the 6-inch layer of sand, which is ultimately placed over the top of the straw covering, from slipping or washing off. By building the stack in this manner a good, even compression is secured, and the loss of fodder on the outside extends in to a depth of only about six inches. The feeding of the silage is usualIy begun toward the end of June. The sheaves, which come out in beautiful order, are put through the cutter, mixed with oaten chaff, and fed in the bails. The silage is relished by the cattle, which milk splendidly on it.*

*Maize is deemed to be practically indispensable, and an area of 9 or 1.0 acres was devoted to the crop last season. At one time Hickory King was grown almost exclusively, but lately it has been almost entirely replaced by Red Hogan. which has proved the more successful. Seeding is begun toward the end of October, and continued until about Christmas, three or four separate sowings being made. The maize has been used for ensilage as well as for feeding in the green state.*

*Last season, when only two lots were sown, the fodder was chaffed and fed night and morning with oaten chaff in the bails. The seed is distributed through a maize drill, which places the rows about 2ft. 3in. apart, so that the scuffler can be used to keep the weeds down and conserve the soil moisture. About 1 cwt. Of No. 2 complete manure an acre is applied. On occasions the crop has attained a height of 12ft., but the average is approximately 8ft. The maize is harvested with a cornbinder, which is a fine labor-saving machine. Before it was introduced three men took half a day to cut sufficient maize to meet the needs of a day. With the binder, Messrs. McNab's informed me enough fodder can be cut in an hour to suffice for two days.*

*Beautiful Oat Crop*

*Last season the oats on "Ercildoune" did remarkably well, and the crop in one paddock aroused wide spread interest in the district, because of its exceptional growth and admirable quality. The average height exceeded 5 feet, and the chaff has been going 110 lb. to the new-bag. The paddock of 24 acres on which it was grown, has produced eight crops in 10 years. The variety favored is Algerian, and the sowing for the main crop is done from toward the end of March and into April, 2¼ bushels of seed and 80 to 1001b. of manure an acre being distributed. Hay cutting takes place usually about mid-November. The only concentrate fed to the cows is bran, which is supplied during about nine months of the year. Its use in spring is not considered to be necessary. Each member of the herd in milk receives a couple of large handfuls of bran in each feed.’*

*All of the ploughing on "Ercildoune" is done with a tractor, which has no difficulty in hauling a four-furrow implement and gives a satisfactory service.*

In 1960 *Ercildoune* was sold to Harold Grieves and Donald and his sister Annie, who were both unmarried, moved to Cranbourne.

**Sources**

* *100 Years in Skye, 1850 – 1950* by Dot Morrison (Mornington Peninsula Family History Society, 2004)
* *The Good Country: Cranbourne Shire* by Niel Gunson (Shire of Cranbourne, 1968)
* Victoria Births, Deaths and Marriages<https://my.rio.bdm.vic.gov.au/efamily-history/5d267711ef010222f19330f9>
* Trove – I have created a list of newspaper articles on Ercildoune on Trove – you can access it here - <https://trove.nla.gov.au/list?id=132733>