



# THE PIONEER

RURAL & RESIDENTIAL  
PROPERTY

## The Masonite House



This story explores the history and memories of a property with a connection to Simsville: 6 Bridge St Stroud. The property was also known as 'The Stroud town block'<sup>1</sup> and the Masonite House<sup>2</sup>. The house was built in April 1913.

The property that would become 6 Bridge Street was described by Ian McNeil:

*Millars also purchased three acres of land in Stroud near the intersection of the present day Simsville Road and the Bucketts Way. This was its timber depot and the terminus of its outlet tramway from Simsville. In 1913 it built a fine town house there for the mill manager. As befitting the largest industry and biggest employer in Stroud, Jarrah Mill managers enjoyed a high social standing. They presided over numerous sporting and charitable committees, and played a leading role in the town's many social activities<sup>3</sup>.*

The Melmeth family's connection to the property goes back to the days of the Simsville and Jarrah Mills. Val's uncle, Wallace Bowden, with wife Doris, was a leading hand for the Masonite Company and reared most of his family in the house. Wallace and his family later moved to Newcastle.

The Masonite Company had gangs of men working in and around Stroud and the house was used by them as a camp for quite a few years. And then the cattle moved in and camped in and around the house!

Following this period, Wallace and Doris' son, Vince, purchased the house from the Masonite Company with his wife, Alma. Vince is Val's first cousin.

Val and John Melmeth purchased the house in 1969, and another parcel of land connected to this block in 1980.

When the Melmeth's purchased the house there was evidence of the mill's tramway on the property due to the tramway stop on the property. Other evidence from the mill days was the old boiler that was in front of the house.

The Melmeths purchased the home in original condition. For example, fret work around the house, just under the roof; a copper was used in the wash house; a chip heater bath was used by the family; and the children played on a wooden see-saw. There was a well outside, on the bathroom side of the house.

They had beautiful French doors in all rooms opening onto the verandahs. The two front bedrooms and living room had double French doors. All rooms, except the two front bedrooms, had fireplaces. The house had tongue-and-groove pine lining. It is believed that the house was built from wood from the Jarrah Mill. John Melmeth remembers that nothing was square in the house, making restoration difficult. They had electricity but not many other utilities that we take for granted today. For example, no telephone, and no septic or sewerage. They had to use the pan system until daughter Jennifer was a teenager. Floors were either bare boards or linoleum.

The lounge room was thought to be approximately 20ft by 16ft. It is believed that they held dances in this room during the time of Mr McDaniell, the mill manager. Val also has fond memories of Aunty Doris entertaining in this room, especially her jelly cakes.

Val and the family remember the kitchen during the time of Wallace and Doris. There was a fuel stove for cooking, a tin chimney where the rain came in! There was no sink. They washed up in a dish.

Bridge Street was not formed at the time of the Melmeth's purchase. There was a gate across the dirt track where it joined the main road. In the early to mid-seventies Bridge Street was formed and the gate was removed.

Special thanks to the Melmeth family for sharing their memories, and to Ian McNeil for allowing me to use his publication.

Sharon Burke © 2016

<sup>1</sup> McNeil, Ian, *Simsville and The Jarrah Mill: Myall River State Forest New South Wales, 2nd Edition*, p.13.

<sup>2</sup> The Melmeth family in conversation on 11 September 2016.

<sup>3</sup> McNeil, Ian, *Simsville and The Jarrah Mill: Myall River State Forest New South Wales, 2nd Edition*, p.13.