

Mona Vale

Robert Campbell was granted 700 acres at Bongin Bongin in 1814. Later he sold the land to Darcy Wentworth who leased it to Martin Burke in the 1820s and his friend David Foley farmed it. There were disagreements between Foley and other local farming family, the Collins. A series of robberies, cattle theft, accidental death and even murder occurred in the district between 1849 and 1870. The name Mona Vale first appears about 1858 and these events were referred to as the Mona Vale outrages.

This area is strategically situated at the convergence of routes north to Barrenjoey and Newport, Bayview and Church Point, south to Manly, and westwards inland to Lane Cove. It is also close to the shores of Pittwater. Water transport, particularly for goods was important during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The area became an important centre with the establishment of the coaching inn, the Rock Lily Hotel. In the 1890s Brock built an enormous mansion as a holiday resort. Subdivision plans were laid out for a village at Turrimetta, despite the swampy area known as the Black Swamp.

The Shaw family had a boat-building and blacksmith shop at the head of Winnererremy Bay. At Machons timber yard in Waratah Street enormous locally felled trees were milled.

Mona Vale became a residential and commercial suburb in the second part of the twentieth century.

Reading

... "Beautiful and interesting as the country is from Manly Beach to Broken Bay, one feature presents itself of an unpleasant character, and that is the apparent decay of the farms – it is evident that a large quantity of land was under cultivation at one time in this district, "ruthless ruin" seems, however, to have seized on what a few years ago must have been an animated scene. The land now lies fallow, and save for the feeding of a few cattle, and sustaining about fifty people, is of no use whatever in contributing its quota to the general welfare. No doubt, the comparative difficulty of communication with the city by land has something to do with this state of things, but it is impossible not to believe that the chief cause of this inertia is to be found in the bad reputation of the district for agrarian outrages. The history of the Mona Vale case reveals a condition of society, within a few miles of Sydney, that might well deter persons from settling there; and though the arm of the law fell on some of the evil-doers in that locality, there is now too much reason to fear that similar outrages will again disturb the district, as, only a few weeks ago, Mr Wilson found a valuable bull of his, and a heifer belonging to another person, grazing on his land, both dead, having been shot evidently by design. This is a serious matter to the owner, but it is still more serious to the community in the demoralisation likely to ensue from these villainous practices. It is the duty of the authorities at once to take steps as may ensure protection for honest and hard working men, who with the responsibilities of large families to support and educate, are striving hard to do so, and are willing cheerfully to contend with climatic variations, and other disadvantages, but cannot stand against the treachery of scoundrels who stealthily destroy the means by which they live. A reward for the discovery of the offenders and the presence of a well

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mounted policeman in the district would probably lead to good results; and above all, in case of conviction, a punishment that shall remove them from the district for some years."

Sydney Morning Herald, 22 March 1867.

Zoo Farm

"Sir Edward Hallstrom was a member of the Taronga Zoo Park Trust from 1941 to 1959, its president from 1948 to 1959 and honorary director until 1967. He believed that animals should have fresh food of the highest quality and to ensure this, in 1947 he purchased 40 acres of farm land at Mona Vale for which he paid 32,000 pounds. The land fronted Bassett Street, Mona Street and Darley Road.

Many of the previous owners – market gardeners – sold out because every time it rained their fields were flooded and in times of drought their crops dried up from lack of adequate irrigation. In a very short time Hallstrom had huge drainage ditches dug to quickly carry away the floodwaters, he added three new wells which never ran dry and installed thousands of feet of irrigation pipe to carry water to every part of the farm. Some of the Zoo Farm paddocks retained names linking them then with their former owners – for instance 'Blackman's Block' and 'Chinaman's Paddock'.

The farm each year produced tons of green feed, such as lucerne, corn, elephant grass, banana shoots, clover, oats, sweet potatoes and carrots, all to feed the zoo's herbivorous animals. Monkeys, tree kangaroos, elephants, giraffes, antelopes, deer, rhinos and apes were among the hundreds of animals fed. Many birds also ate the farm food and the seven gorillas at the zoo had their own banana plantation on the farm. Manure from the zoo was sent to Mona Vale to fertilize the farm. For most of the farm's life it was managed by Charlie Bishop with other workers including Stan Wenman and Brian Godwin.

Sir Edward had his personal sanctuary of animals and birds, the area with many koalas and at one time had nine white kangaroos, all albinos and two rare sets of white wallaby twins.

In the 1960s it became apparent that a daily diet of fresh green lucerne was too rich for many of the herbivorous animals. In addition, when the lucerne was analysed it was found to be seriously and inexplicably deficient in Vitamin E. Most of the hoofed animals and kangaroos would have been better off fed dried lucerne hay mixed with oaten hay but the situation was not resolved until the creation of the Western Plains Zoo and farms at Dubbo in the mid-1970s. Hay was made and stored there for both zoos and once this was accomplished there was no need for the farm at Mona Vale.

...Analysis of the production and transport costs had led to the conclusion that the operation of the farm was uneconomic and farming finally ceased at the end of 1976. The land was sold off in a series of subdivision sales until the final parcels were disposed of in 1984.

Reminders of the farm today are streets on the site named Taronga Place and Hallstrom Place and in Bassett Street near the bridge over the stormwater drain is a stone plinth with a plaque."

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