



Plaque on the Dickabram Bridge cairn commemorates the pioneers of the Miva District.

Pioneering Days in the Miva District 1859

When Sir George Bowen was installed as first Governor of the new State of Queensland, there was no white men living in what is now known as the Miva district. The area was leased by the owners of Gigoomgan Station but it was completely undeveloped. Mount Bauple, Kanyan Mountain and the Urah Range stood sentinel over virgin land, scrub and forest. Tribes of aboriginals roamed the district living off the land as their ancestors had done for centuries, unaware of the existence of the white man who would soon put their hunting grounds to uses of which the black man had never dream. Some of these men were already in Queensland. Others had still to make the long journey from the British Isles or Europe.

The First Settler

The first to arrive was Mr. John Townsend Atherton. Born in Wiltshire, England in 1837, Mr. Atherton was a son of Nathan Atherton, who was appointed Inspector for the Bank of Australasia in 1847. He held this post in Sydney for four years and then returned to England. Three years later his son, an adventurous lad of seventeen decided to try his luck in the new country. Arriving in Sydney in 1854 he went first to "Runnymede" station in New South Wales to gain experience. Later he managed Miriam Vale Station for a time while the owner was absent. Having acquitted himself well at this task, he then felt competent to strike out for himself, so he purchased the lease of a large block of land from Mr. MANT and Partners of Gigoomgan. To this block he gave the name "Miva". It was bounded on the North and East by the Mary River, extended to Woolooga in the South and Gigoomgan Station in the West and took in the country across Munna Creek as far as Tanyalba Creek. Practically the whole area now known as the Miva District was at that time part of the Miva Cattle Station.

The year was 1861. Mr. Atherton, a young man of twenty-four, faced a task to make a strong man quail, but it was a familiar one to those who sought to carve a living from virgin country. He owned a splendid well-watered tract of country. He had his first cattle brought overland from the south, and he was young, strong and ambitious. These were his assets. But his land was unfenced. Dense scrub

separated him from his markets and the source of his supplies. The nearest white man was many miles away and he had to face the fact that the tribes of natives in the area might prove hostile.

One of the first tasks to which he set his hand was the clearing of a track from Miva Station to Gootchie, a distance of nine miles. This necessitated making a crossing of the Mary River. When this work was completed Mr. Atherton was able to make periodical journeys to Maryborough for rations and other necessary supplies. To this end he purchased a two-wheeled dray and a few bullocks. With the same dray and bullocks he carted all the slabs for his first dwelling and the outbuildings he needed.

With the aboriginals Mr. Atherton was soon on good terms. He (and his son after him) always treated them well and some of them became excellent stockmen on the Station. Wise handling of the natives paid dividends as it usually does. Mr. Atherton had no serious trouble with them. On one occasion they did spear one of his bullocks but when he reproached them for doing so they assured him that they had not known it was a Miva bullock, but thought it 'belong Widgee'. More will be written of the Miva aborigines later.

To utilise different parts of the holding before they were fenced, a mob of cows with young calves would be sent to one section in charge of a stockman – sometimes a native stockman and his gin. The calves would grow up there and that area would be 'home' to them and they would not stray.

Thus did Mr. Atherton cope with his disabilities in those early days. With the present day boom in beef it is hard to realize that at that time cattle were scarcely marketed for meat at all. They were sold to 'boiling-down' establishments, for hides and tallow. The first of these works was at Yengarie (that is in the Wide Bay area) and Mr. Atherton disposed of cattle there.

Some years later he married a Miss Homer. It was literally a case of 'Sydney or the bush' for her as she belonged to that city. Mrs. Atherton was one of the earliest of the gallant band of pioneer women in the district and was very highly regarded by all who knew her.

One day Mrs. Atherton was alone at the homestead except for the head stockman's wife, Mrs. Scheinpflug. A mob of blacks suddenly gathered quite close to the homestead. The two women were understandably nervous as the natives made no move to depart. Mrs. Scheinpflug who could shoot, took an old muzzle-loader, walked out to an iron-bark tree still standing today, and shot a bird which had conveniently chosen to rest there. She picked up the dead bird and walked inside. The station men, of course, regarded her marksmanship as a lucky 'fluke'.

The first homestead on Miva Station was built entirely of fine cedar grown on the property. The timber was pit-sawn and tongued and grooved by hand. One room in the present homestead is lined and ceiled with this same cedar.

In October, 1867, the Gympie gold rush occurred and thousands passed the station on the way to those world famous diggings. As will be seen later the discovery of gold at Gympie brought other settlers to the Miva district. In May, 1868, gold was discovered near Kilkivan. A company was formed to work the mines and the Duke of Manchester once visited Miva Station while out here inspecting the mines. The present owner of "Miva" remembers his visit, which took place when he was a small boy. "Real live dukes" were a rarity then, as now.

John Townsend Atherton and his wife reared a family of two sons and two daughters. The elder son, John Homer Atherton, is the present owner of the station, and with the help of his son Colin, rears fine beef cattle as his father did before him, all branded with the same distinctive 1AA brand. A small addition has lately been added to the manage – a great-grandson of the first settler, born in Queensland's Centenary Year.

**From the small book titled "A Century of Settlement in the Miva District".
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