

THE RASPBERRY PATCH

An extract from the writings of George W. A'Vard (1890-1966) 1964.

"I would like to take you for a trip to the Dandenongs in the early part of the century when raspberry growing was the main industry. The land was very fertile and sheltered with timber. The raspberry patch would cover about from one to two acres. Most used hoes to cultivate them. The canes would grow about six to eight feet high. They looked a picture in spring when the leaves and flowers came. The main varieties grown were Fillbaskets, sold mostly in punnets for dessert, Common Red and Stickfast. The Common Red variety was the best for jam making. It was a beautiful light red colour. The only disease I remember was thrip in the flowering stage. The growers hoped for the best. They did not have the insecticides they have today. Picking started about December 20th and continued until January 13th. The glut as they would call it, would happen about Christmas time. The price paid to pickers was ½ pence per pound and your keep or 1 penny per pound and keep yourself. I have known some pickers to pick twelve buckets of twelve pounds (5.44kg) in a day.



George Walter A'Vard 1928

In 1907 I carted raspberries to Melbourne for my father, Walter Henry A'Vard, who used to buy them from the local growers. The price to the grower was 2½ pence per pound. He got 3 pence delivered to Melbourne. I used to do three trips to Melbourne a week with my horses. I'd leave home in the evening, stopping at Dandenong Creek to give the horse a feed and a spell, arriving at the Melbourne factory when it opened in the morning. James Dickson used to buy a lot of raspberries for vinegar. He always paid for my breakfast at a place in Victoria Street. The price was 4 pence. He said it was not because it was cheap but was a good meal and so it was.

The following is a list copied from my father's ledger book in 1907 of some of the growers and the quantities of raspberries sent into the factory. The price they received was 2½ pence. per pound.

Frenchie Anderson	1279 lbs
Hibgame, The Patch	1057 lbs
Crerar, The Patch	2588 lbs
Mrs Bayne, Monbulk	3541 lbs
David Hill, Monbulk	2424 lbs
Hughes, Monbulk	1679 lbs
Mr Stanton, Monbulk	885 lbs
Mr Scott, Monbulk	536 lbs
Dan Camm, Monbulk	120 lbs
Martin Quirk, Sth Sassafras	3007 lbs
Lew Lawson, The Patch	3492 lbs
McAllister, The Patch	600 lbs



Raspberry picking in Monbulk c.1910

After delivering the raspberries I would load up again with such things as raspberry buckets 15/- dozen, 200 lbs flour 15/-, 70 lb bag sugar 13/-, kerosene 6/6 (2 tins 8 gallons), pair boots 6/- shillings, pair pants 4/- for the farmers. After doing their shopping it was getting late so it would be early morning when I got home. Half a ton was a good load for one horse. It was only a good horse that would stand up to it. I have knocked at a blacksmith's door in the middle of the night to put a shoe on a horse. He never refused and all he charged was 9 pence if you had the shoe. What a fine lot of people they were. Nothing was a trouble to them to help if they could.

Homes in the hills were made of palings. Some slabs split from nearby timber, with wooden chimneys which often caught fire. On a windy night the password would be "have a look up the chimney". They always had a bucket of water and a ladder handy. The walls were bags covered with newspaper. They looked nice and clean and neat. For entertainment the settlers would visit each other to play cards and have supper. They used hurricane lamps to help guide them on their walk home, perhaps a couple of miles along a muddy track. They were quite happy. When I think back I don't think there could have been a more honest lot of people in the world.

The only tools they had were small wedges, crosscut saw, adze, pick, shovel and a hoe. Some were wealthy enough to buy a lifting jack and used to hire it out for 1/- (10 cents) a week when they were not using it. Their last resting place for quite a few of them is in the Ferntree Gully Cemetery.

It is hard to imagine now, the fight they put up - no roads, just a dense forest and no money. I take my hat off to them."



George A'Vard with his bullock team in Belgrave 1913. The load of timber was to build his house at South Sassafras (now Kallista).

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