

Norman A Hunter of Yodalla, Emu Plains

By Sam Ellis

The suburb of Emu Plains was shaped by the agricultural families who moved to the area, beginning not long after the landing of the First Fleet. Located next to the Nepean River, the area was a prime location for farming and, by the twentieth century, the town was home to a number of fruit orchards. One of the biggest was the citrus orchard located on Norman Augustus Hunter's property, named Yodalla.



Norman A Hunter, c1900
Source: Penrith Library Archives

Norman was the son of James Hunter, an immigrant who arrived in Melbourne on the ship the "Red Jacket" in 1856 at 19 years of age. He was employed as a Cobb & Co wagon driver, and as the company expanded its operations he moved to Emu Plains to work on the run over the Blue Mountains. At 29 years old, James married his wife Sara. On the 28th of August, 1879, Sara gave birth to Norman Augustus Hunter at their home "Mortimers", which had formerly been the Arms of Australia Inn at Emu Plains.

Norman A Hunter grew up in Emu Plains, but eventually married his wife, Eliza "Ellie" McLean in Casino. They then moved to Wauchope and bought a bakery there in May of 1904. In 1910 he handed off the management of the bakery to his brother Hilton Sydney Hunter. After this, he was free to return to Emu Plains, which is where his story really begins.



The House Yodalla and Orchard

Source: Penrith Library Archives

"The largest of its kind in NSW" - The Orchard at Yodalla

Upon arriving in Emu Plains in 1910, Norman bought the property Yodalla, which still stands today in Emu Plains, along with a citrus orchard beside the Nepean River. The orchard was said to be one of the largest, if not the largest, in New South Wales. The region of Emu Plains was well renowned for its citrus production for the greater Sydney area, with existing orchards dating back up to fifty years before Norman and his wife arrived. However, due to its size and the variety of fruits grown, Norman A's orchard quickly became one of the more important orchards of the area. In the orchard he grew a variety of lemons called Eureka, as well as Washington navel, Valencia and Siletta oranges along with Mandarins.

The management of the orchard represents many of the modern farming and growing techniques of the era. For example, the closeness of the orchard to the Nepean River allowed for extensive irrigation to be used. The irrigation system used, known as the Nunan system, raised water 50 feet up from the river and a third of a mile horizontally to a concrete sump. From there the water was used to irrigate the orchard. This technology was considered cutting edge for its time, and the Hunters were praised for their use of "labour saving machinery" in a may 1937 issue of the Farmer and Settler publication.

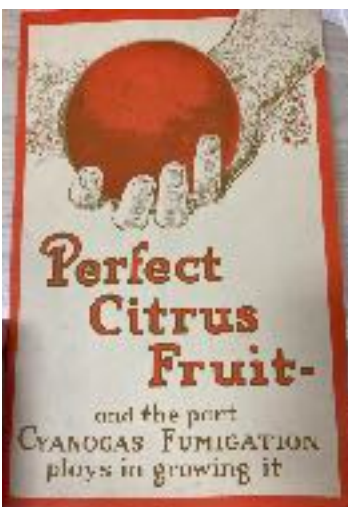


Images from the NSW Dept of Agriculture Leaflet 11: Insects and Pests

Source: Norman Hunter Collection, Penrith Library

The management of pests was also a labour intensive task that relied upon the use of modern agricultural techniques. At the time that Norman purchased the orchard, pests were a significant problem to orchards in Emu Plains. A 1917 report by the Town and Country Journal included statements from farmers explaining the spread of "Indian wax", a scale pest which had been attacking many orchards in Emu Plains. Because of their potential to ruin crops, pests were at the forefront of most growers' minds. Because of this the New South Wales government would issue leaflets which outlined methods for controlling pests, and generally maintaining plant health.

Despite telling the Town and Country Journal that his orchard had been unaffected by pests, there is evidence that Norman and his employees took precautions against pests to prevent their spread. In their home film collection, for example, there are a number of films of the process of spraying the orchard for pests. The pesticide spray in question is Shell Oil White Spray, a petroleum based pesticide, which was mixed with water in barrels and sprayed onto the trees from the back of a tractor. During this process there is a notable lack of safety equipment used by the employees, and they mix the pesticide spray with their bare hands. This is a far cry from what we would consider modern farming techniques today, considering the known carcinogenic effects of petroleum based products.



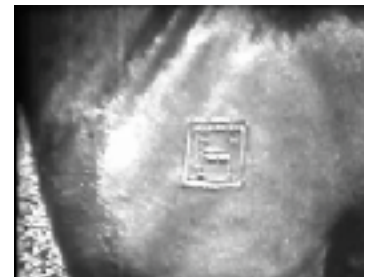
Cover of Perfect Citrus Fruit leaflet
Source: Norman Hunter Collection, Penrith Library

As well as the above mentioned Indian wax, the pests that orchardists in Emu Plains could have expected to encounter included fruit flies, slugs, and snails. To control these pests a number of different methods were used. For fruit flies, orchard owners were required by state regulation to destroy fallen fruit in order to kill any fruit flies which may be living within them. These same regulations also required regular spraying of trees and the use of traps to control fruit fly populations. For slugs and snails a similar spray was used,

containing arsenate of lead, which is toxic to humans, or, alternatively, poisoned baits could be set. Fungus and, generally, plant diseases were also a worry for orchardists. For controlling scale, fumigation with a product called cyanogas could be used, which is a powder that, over time, gives off a gas, killing scale. In the Hunter film collection there is also films of employees at the orchard spreading dust at the base of the trees, and it is likely that it was cyanogas or something similar.

As well as the orchard, Norman Hunter grew vegetables and kept animals on his property at Yodalla. Notably, he kept horses and cows which were branded with a capital letter "H". Within the collection of Hunter family films there exists films of the branding process. The animal would be tied up to a post and a metal stick with the flaming hot brand at the end would then be pushed into the animal's flank. Norman's grandchildren, who spent a lot of their time at Yodalla, would often watch the process and they would also often play with the animals.

Norman was also renowned for his vegetable growing, and he would frequently enter his vegetables into the local Penrith Show. He often took home prizes for his vegetables, especially his corn, testament to his skill as a farmer and vegetable cultivator. He also worked as a judge for the bread section of the Nepean Show.



Hunter Family "H" brand on a horse
Source: Hunter Family Film Archive

Overall, then, to manage an orchard of this size Norman A had to use modern agricultural techniques of his time. Looking at these techniques, we get an interesting window into the operation of an orchard in early twentieth century Australia.

ABC - The Aerated Bread Company

Aside from his orchard, Norman was a man of many skills, being involved with the catering business in New South Wales. In 1915 he was in charge of catering for banquet at the opening of the Wauchope to Taree railway. On the menu was ox tongue along with a variety of alcoholic drinks, including Champagne and Claret, marking the banquet as relatively extravagant.

Menu for the opening of the Wauchope-Taree railway
Source: Norman Hunter Collection, Penrith Library



After this, Norman became heavily involved with the Aerated Bread Company, also known as Miss Bishop's Catering, or just by its initials, ABC. In 1922 he was brought on as the temporary managing director of the company to oversee its liquidation, but instead remained as the director for the next 25 years. At the time of his appointment the company owed 33,383 pounds to its creditors. By 1927, Norman had transformed the company "from a sluggish failure to a live dividend paying institution", according to a 1927 issue of the Australian Caterer, and the company had managed to pay off its creditors.

Thanks to Norman's management of the company, some of the events they went on to cater for included the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, races at Randwick, lunches for the Governor of New South Wales and more. Miss Bishop's also aided in during World War Two, donating cakes to be sent to soldiers.



Miss Bishop's Catering at Sydney Cricket Ground for a match between England and Australia (Norman A Hunter pictured right)

Source: Norman Hunter Collection, Penrith Library

The catering of Miss Bishop's was not always without fault, however. In 1944, the Daily telegraph published a scathing review of the catering at Randwick, which had attendees stating that "the catering was the worst I have known at Randwick".



Cover of the Australian Caterer, May 1932
Source: Norman Hunter Collection, Penrith Library

To maintain a standard of operation, and, perhaps, avoid situations like the one at Randwick, The Australian Caterer publication issued recommendations of how business should be managed, along with descriptions of current market conditions. Eggs, butter, potatoes and onions were all reviewed in the publication to analyse trends in price and demand. There were also discussions of which foods should be served at which meals, and one issue concludes that "ordinary beer and the universal and democratic sausage" were suitable foods for breakfast. As the managing director of Miss Bishop's and the president of the Master Pastry Cooks' Association of New South Wales, Norman was often featured in the publication, especially in regards to his turning around of the finances of Miss Bishop's.

In all, Norman A Hunter took his involvement with the catering business very serious. He saw his role as vital for feeding the

rapidly growing city of Sydney. Even during the war years when rationing put a strain on his business he persevered.

Mr Cricket - Norman Hunter and Sport

Norman A Hunter was also well known for his skills playing cricket and his involvement with the Emu Plains local cricket club. He was captain of his school cricket team, and at 15 he became scorer for the Emu Plains club and treasurer at 16. When he moved to Wauchope, he was captain of the district team there. Between 1932 and 1947, he was the president of the Emu Plains cricket club and after stepping down he continued to be a patron. For all these contributions to local cricket clubs, in Penrith and elsewhere, Norman earned the nickname "Mr Cricket".



Norman Hunter bowling to open the first turf wicket at Howell Oval, Penrith, 1956
Source: Penrith Library Archives

Aside from his involvement with the managing of the club, Norman was a skilled cricketer in his own right. At age 17 he broke the bowling average for the Emu Plains cricket club. One of his most praised games was against the Glenbrook A Grade in 1926 when he managed to take all 10 wickets in a single innings and achieved 114 runs in the same match. He was often featured in the local Nepean Times Newspaper for his feats against the neighbouring clubs in Castlereagh and elsewhere on the Hawkesbury. To honour his legacy the Nepean District Cricket Association introduced the N A Hunter trophy.

He had a similar role in the tennis clubs of the area, being the tennis champion at his high school. He also went on to be the founder and the secretary of the Emu Plains tennis club.



Rowing on the Nepean River
Source: Hunter Family Film Archive

Other than cricket and tennis, Norman was involved in the sport of rowing. With his property so close to the Nepean river, the Yodalla property was occasionally used for parking during races on the river. He was also a foundational and life member of the Nepean Rowing club, which had opened in 1927 amidst a resurgence in interest for the sport. The club itself was well known and respected within the Penrith community and, despite its relatively large operational costs compared to other sports, it gained support and funds from the council as it had the potential to draw large crowds to the area. And indeed it did, as the Nepean River was the location for the rowing competition during the 1938 Empire (later

Commonwealth) Games. The club also contributed floats to the 1951 Jubilee parade alongside other businesses and groups of the area, showing how significant it was in terms of community identity in Penrith.

Overall, the sports that Norman Hunter involved himself with were important to the self-identification of the communities of Emu Plains and Penrith. They helped to foster friendly rivalries with neighbouring communities, and large sporting events such as the 1927 Australian

Universities Boat Race helped to attract large crowds to watch. Rowing particularly has remained relevant to the present day, with Penrith being the location for the Sydney International Regatta Centre. Norman's legacy also lives on not only through the N A Hunter trophy, but also the N A Hunter pavilion at Howell Oval in Penrith, and the Hunter Fields in Emu Plains.

Giving Back to the Community - Ellie Hunter and the CWA

While Norman A Hunter had an undoubtedly impressive resume, his wife Ellie was also heavily involved with her local community. Especially during the years of World War Two, her involvement in the Country Women's Association (CWA) and the Women's Volunteer Services (WVS) were highly important for the community.

In 1932 Ellie was elected as the President of the Penrith CWA. During her time as president, the CWA would raise funds for many projects around the community. In 1938, after extensive agitating and fund raising the CWA succeeded in opening a baby health centre in Penrith. This was one of their proudest achievements, as they had faced considerable difficulty in obtaining enough funds for it, along with considerable opposition. Some of the other projects they funded include gardens around Penrith, and projects for the Nepean Hospital and for the local ambulance service. The CWA was also responsible for organising a number of fairs, including a Japanese Fair, and balls around the area, which were used for fundraising. Overall, the CWA was praised for its furthering of community health and for being an "active and public-spirited organisation". Ellie was president for 14 years, and only retired from the position in December 1945.



Norman and Ellie Hunter, 1953
Source: Penrith Library Archives

During the years of World War Two Ellie's work in arranging community events helped to keep spirits high. She would host parties to raise funds and to "help win the war". There was a game known as "wog" which would often be played at these parties. It involved rolling a dice and constructing a beetle. Ellie was also the vice president for the WVS, and her daughter Mavis Lamrock was treasurer, during the war. The WVS, along with the Women's Loyalty League, offered their services to aid in the war effort, putting together food packages, making camouflage nets and more. On the part of the CWA, they organised balls to fund War Savings Certificates.

Hence, Ellie Hunter's contributions to the communities of Emu Plains and Penrith should not be overlooked. While Norman's achievements usually take the spotlight, especially with his namesake being used for the N A Hunter Pavilion in Penrith, Ellie's work as president of the CWA and as a member of various wartime organisations left a significant impact on the community. She was responsible for many of the social events and community projects that occurred in Penrith and Emu Plains during her lifetime.

Avoca Beach

The Hunter family frequently visited Avoca Beach for their holidays. They would often spend their Christmases there, for example. The Hunter family, with all the children and grandchildren included, would make the trip to the beach. As in Penrith, the Hunters would organise community events while they were in Avoca. In 1949, for example, they organised a garden party, raising funds for a local orphanage. The Hunter family was also known for their involvement with the surf life saving club at Avoca Beach.



Christmas Day at Avoca Beach
Source: Hunter Family Film Archive

The Hunter family member who had the strongest ties to Avoca was Norman A's first son, Norman McLean Hunter. Like the rest of his siblings he was born in Wauchope, in 1904, and moved back to Emu Plains with his father and worked on the Orchard. In 1928 he married Dulcie Marie "Billie" Atkinson. Dulcie struggled with illness for most of the time they were married and because of the cold weather in Emu Plains they moved to Avoca Beach to live there permanently from 1948. While in Avoca, Norman M contributed to the building of many community buildings, including the theatre, the bakery, a caravan park and a service station. The theatre is considered one of the most important historical buildings in Avoca Beach and there has been recent controversy surrounding proposed redevelopment of it. Norman and Dulcie were also involved with the local St David's Church, being organisers of the Church Fellowship and the Sunday school.

In 1951 Dulcie died of pneumonia as a result of her struggles with illness. Norman M would eventually remarry in 1955, to Sheila McDonald. They remained in Avoca, and Norman M was eventually awarded the Gosford City NSW Community Service Award in the year 2000 for his contributions to the community. Sheila was herself awarded the "Senior Citizen of the Year" for NSW in 1999.

Overall, Norman M's contributions to the community of Avoca Beach echo the contributions of his mother and father to the communities of Emu Plains and Penrith.

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