

LOOKING BACK.....with Molly

The little district of Kent River, west of Denmark, owes its beginning to Harry Parker, born in Burra, South Australia, in 1875. Harry moved to West Australia in 1900 and spent some years in Kalgoorlie before moving south to take up a large parcel of land around Kent River in 1908. Here he built a house where he lived with his mother and started clearing his land.

In 1908-1909 he worked on the road from Denmark through Kent River and on the Kent River Bridge with Bert Saw, pioneer of Bow Bridge. He married in 1925 and in 1929, opened a small shop stocked with goods needed by the railway workers on the construction gang of the railway line from Denmark to Nornalup which was under way in 1929.

Group settlement began in 1924 when Groups 105 and 110 were opened up in the Kent River district. Some settlers could not cope with the isolation or the work involved to develop the land and simply walked off their blocks. Harry bought three deserted group houses and in 1930, with assistance from J. B. Thornton, a



Denmark builder, constructed Parkers Hall near his home. The building was opened in 1931 with a free night for everyone and a crowd of 300 attended this event. The hall became a centre for dances, weddings and other functions over the years and the building often echoed with music, laughter and dancing feet. Each group settlement area had a hall and this meant that most Saturday nights saw crowds of residents enjoying a social night out.

Harry also operated the telephone exchange for twenty six years and kept rainfall records from 1912. He and his wife lived a long and happy life in Kent River. He died in 1964 just one week before his 90th birthday, and his wife sold the property and moved into Denmark.

In 1981, a "Back to Kentdale" celebration drew a crowd of some 200 people to the Kentdale Hall which was once the school and is situated in Parker Road.

Parkers Hall is now the Old Kent River Winery and Cafe where owners Mark and Debbie Noack specialise in meals of marron and lamb (both reared on the property) to enjoy with the wine.

- Molly Smith



Harry Parker on a refurbished Kent River bridge in the 1950 -1960's - no doubt remembering how he worked on the building of the original bridge. (Picture courtesy Don Burton)