

The McNamara Family

Clarrie Neal

The McNamara story in Riverstone commenced when Henry (Harry) McNamara, working as a rabbit inspector with the Pasture Protection Board in Nyngan, decided to come to Sydney in 1918. Shortly after he arrived he married Olive Roper, a girl who had come to Sydney from Barmedman, NSW. A few years later when Harry got a job at the Meatworks as a stockman and buyer, they came to live in Riverstone with their two eldest children, Molly and Jack.

They moved into the end house at 49 Richards Avenue and it was here their other four children were born, Tommy, Bill, Monica and Brian. Harry in the meantime had invested in 200 acres of land on Carnarvon Road where he had intended to farm and raise stock. In 1935 the family left Butchers Row and bought a house and another 40 acres on Carnarvon Road where they set up a poultry farm. This land was on the opposite side of the road to their previously bought acres.

In 1938 tragedy was to strike the family when Harry was killed in a car accident at Bowral while returning home from the sale yards at Moss Vale. His wife Olive was left with six children to rear, and in the days when there were no social security payments. Realising the house was not suitable for her growing family and having no forms of transport to get into town, Olive decided to sell the farm and move into Riverstone, buying a house and 10 acres of land at 57 Riverstone Road.

With the help of sons Jack, Tommy, Bill and several neighbours she set up a poultry farm, selling the eggs to support the family. Olive was known to all in the community as Mrs Mac, and during the war became a strong supporter of the local Red Cross branch. She passed away in the mid 1990s aged 94 years and was buried alongside her husband in the cemetery at Riverstone.

Their six children attended Riverstone Public School and all became well known and respected members of the Riverstone community.

1. Molly. Her first job was as the cashier in the Meatworks butchers shop opposite the Royal hotel and later she became the telephonist in the main office at the Meatworks. During the war she met Joe Loos, an American sailor serving on their Corvettes, the U.S. navy's submarine chasers. After the war they married and lived for several years in the USA where their son Jack was born. Returning to Australia they moved into the family home in Riverstone Road, enabling Molly to help her mother. Molly also returned to her telephonist job at the Meatworks, a position she was to hold till she retired.

2. Jack (1922 - 1944). The outbreak of war saw Jack enlist in the RAAF to become a pilot, his initial training was done at Bradfield Park, Sydney, and he completed his training in Canada. From Canada he was seconded to the RAF in England as a Captain, flying many missions in the Sterling, the largest of the British bombers. In 1943 Jack was awarded the Croix de Guerre by the French Government. The press report read –

“It has been officially announced that Pilot Officer J. H. McNamara, RAAF, of Riverstone has been awarded the Croix de Guerre. News has been received by his widowed mother, telling how on the field of battle, General Koenig, of the Free French Forces, pinned the decoration on the breast of her eldest son, who had accomplished notable work in dropping supplies to the Marquis (the French Underground), before the liberation of France.”

On the 28th November 1944, on a mission over Norway dropping supplies to the Norwegian Resistance, a Lancaster bomber piloted by Jack was brought down by German gunfire. The plane crashed in a field near Sande (pronounced Sonda) but nothing more was known of the fate of the six crew members. At the time the McNamara family was notified that he was missing; but it was not until some time after the war ended that it was confirmed that all six crew members had been killed instantly. Bill recalled this period as being very stressful for his mother and the family, knowing Jack was missing, all the time fearing the worst, and clinging to the hope that he may have survived and had been taken as a POW.

In 1959 Bill had the opportunity to visit Norway and wanting to visit his brother's grave, hired a car and an interpreter. Driving some 30 miles out of Oslo they came to Sande and eventually located the church and the cemetery, Bill recalling that though it was spring-time, the fields were still covered with snow.

As they got out of the car they were approached by a group of children on their bikes, curious to know what Bill and the interpreter were doing there. When Bill's mission was explained to them they put down their bikes, then trampled the snow down to make a trail leading to the area of the war graves site. As they led them along the trail, they were proudly telling the story of how these men were their heroes, how they had helped the Norwegian Resistance during the War.

Later the Pastor of the Lutheran Church related to Bill the events of that day in 1944. The plane had completed its mission that night when it was hit and crashed in a nearby field. Aware that the Germans would only bury the men in a mass grave, the Norwegian Resistance were anxious to recover the bodies first and give them a proper Christian burial. Following a skirmish at the crash site at daylight next morning, the Germans retreated and left the bodies to the Resistance and the victims were given a proper burial. Today, each grave is marked with a proper War Service headstone. The Pastor went on to explain that the village of Sande hold their Remembrance Day (similar to our Anzac Day) at this cemetery site each year.

3. Tommy b.1923. Attended Riverstone Public School, then Westmead Technical College for a few months before leaving when he was aged 14 years. He recalls while still at school doing the odd jobs such as cutting firewood, ploughing the paddock, growing crops, feeding stock, etc. Another of his jobs was to milk the Meatworks manager's cow when he was away buying stock.

His first job was at the Meatworks as a drover and one of the first items he bought was a sulky from Charlie Fisher to enable his mother to get to Jack Abell's place in South Street, Marsden Park where she worked one day a week to help support her young family. He paid two pounds for it and Charlie gave him the sulky, and also all the harness and gear that went with it. Tommy said it was a beautiful hickory sulky and the pony used to pull it was the one the McNamara children had learnt to ride on.

He enlisted in the AIF in January 1942, along with his mates, Cliff Conway and Harry Groves. Their initial training was done at Bathurst, then in Queensland at Charters Towers, Hughenden, and Canungra where they completed their jungle training. They were then shipped to Bougainville.

Tom was discharged from the Army in 1946 and returned to his employment at the Meatworks. He married Mary Doolan in 1949, eventually moving into a house they built adjacent to his mother's in Riverstone Road. It was here they raised their four children - Christine, John, Michael and Marie.

He was now a member of the staff at the works, working for varying periods in the Beef House, Laboratory, Margarine, Packing Room, Boning Room, Local Sales and as a stock buyer. In later years he was in charge of the stockmen, the dairies, the paddocks and was responsible for the Company putting 135 acres under irrigation and growing their own stock feed.

4. Bill (see below).

5. Monica. Worked as a secretary in the Sydney office of the movie makers Metro Goldwyn Mayer. At the age of 21 she applied to become a Sister of the Order of St Josephs of Orange of California. Completing her training she came back to Australia and taught Kindergarten at Gynea for several years, before returning to America to study to become a teacher of the intellectually disabled. Successful, she returned to Australia and was posted to Toowoomba where she taught the disabled for a period of 17 years.

6. Brian. The youngest in the family, left school and served a four year apprenticeship as a hairdresser with Dick Alliband in his Windsor shop. When illness forced Ossie Robbins to retire in 1954, Brian took over the hairdressing business in Conway's shop. From 1964 to 1968, he operated his business in the old Commercial Bank building in Garfield Road. Brian was a keen sportsman, played Rugby League with Riverstone and with the Parramatta District Club. Though Brian liked to discuss all the sporting events of the day, Rugby League was the favourite topic in his saloons.

4. Bill (William). Was born on the 19th October 1927 and attended Riverstone Public School from 1934 to 1940, then completed his secondary schooling with three years at Auburn High School gaining his Intermediate Certificate. With Jack and Tommy both away at the war, it was left to Bill to do most of the work on the farm.

He recalls during these schooldays how he always wanted to become a builder. He remembers fixing structures and nailing iron on to fowl sheds that had blown off in the wind, then the next storm would blow it off again. It made him more determined than ever to become a builder, so that he could help his mother by fixing these things properly.

With his schooling completed he became an apprentice carpenter at the Meatworks, signing up for five years with the Riverstone Meat Company and attending Granville Technical College. At the end of World War 2 and with agreement from the manager Ned Leeson, Bill transferred the final two years of his apprenticeship to home builders Jim Hanney and Athol Rankin.

At the completion of his apprenticeship and with the two years' experience he gained with the home builders, he was able to branch out on his own as a builder. He recalled while building a house at Wentworthville, he would ride his bike to the station and catch the 5.40 a.m. train. Returning of an evening a young lad named Peter Rosa would often run out and ask Bill "did he have a job for him". One day Peter came out and as he was running alongside, he was told to be on the 5.40 a.m. train the next morning. So from an interview conducted on a push bike began the career of a man who worked with Bill for 40 years, coming through the ranks to become the McNamara Group's General Manager.

Bill married Pat Hynds in 1950 and they built a home at 22 Hunter Street, Riverstone. It was a fibro house with a tiled roof. Bill well remembers the board floors, the brown paper blinds, and the kitchen table he built himself, an old door attached to the wall at one end and supported on two legs at the

other. Here they commenced raising their six children - Anthony, Carol, Alan, Sharon, Christopher and Maureen. The family lived there until the 1960s. Needing a larger home they built on a three acre block overlooking the golf course at Kellyville. Ray Brookes was the carpenter to build this home. Following several smaller jobs, the first home Bill built in Riverstone was in West Parade for George and Una Drayton. After building several homes in the district he commenced construction work and many of his earliest jobs were at the Richmond Air Force base.

In 1953 he built his office and joinery factory in Riverstone Parade, Riverstone, being one of the first factories to be built in that industrial area. A fire in 1960 destroyed much of this factory, including the offices.

After using his home in Hunter Street as a temporary office for a short time, he decided to move his office to a renovated house in Church Street, Parramatta. As the company expanded he moved to larger offices in Parramatta CBD, ultimately being located in his own building, the McNamara Centre.

The original RSL Club at Riverstone was a converted Army hut. Bill gained the contract for the first extensions, and then many other extensions that followed. Bill recalled his dealings with the committee members of the day, Charlie Fisher, Steve Simmons, Bert Clinkie, Harry Dobson and Dave Justice.

When the Riverstone Bowling Club first formed in the 1950s they had the old clubhouse from the Windsor Club transported to their site on the corner of Mill and Pitt Streets. So successful was the club that within a few years they had Bill McNamara design and build the clubhouse that stands today.

The construction jobs continued to grow at Richmond Base, with Bill winning contracts to build new mess halls, sleeping quarters, and the control tower. He also gained contracts to build Lithgow Workers Club, extensions at Lithgow Small Arms Factory and Ingleburn Army Camp.

As a 29 year old he spent six weeks touring America, a trip he described as most enlightening, enabling him to recognise the many opportunities for growth and development that existed in Australia at that time.

Following his return from the States and with his confidence of the future, the McNamara Group became involved with large scale developments and built such places as the WestPoint Shopping Mall at Blacktown, Marketown Malls at Riverstone, Leichhardt, Newcastle, and Gosford. Numerous high schools were also built, including Dundas, Mt. Druitt, Glenfield, Macquarie Fields, and Fairfield.

He also built numerous churches and retirement villages throughout New South Wales and Queensland, including the Willows Retirement Village at Northmead. Some of his landmarks in the Parramatta district include the McNamara Centre, the Octagon, the United Permanent Building, the Parramatta Cultural Centre, the J.A. Fleming Stand at Rosehill, the Hunter Street car park, and the Riverside Theatres.

Other big projects were the Country Comfort Inn at Pennant Hills, the Penrith Panthers Motor Inn, Penrith Park Grandstand, Knightsbridge shopping centre, Blacktown RSL Club, Parklea Prison, Century Radison Hotel at Kings Cross and the hotel opposite the Sydney Entertainment Centre.

He built and owns the 450 acre Del Rio Tourist Resort at Wisemans Ferry and has never missed an opportunity to promote tourism in the Western areas of Sydney. At its peak the McNamara Group employed some 300 people.

He is intensely proud of his staff from Riverstone and cannot speak highly enough of what their efforts meant to the success of the McNamara Group. He said any story on McNamara must mention such people as Peter Rosa, the Watton brothers John, Alan and Colin, his secretary for 34 years Jan Goddard, Neville Vaughan and his son Garth, Donny Moulds, Ray Brookes, Alwyn Mills, Jim Hanney, Bluey Buchan, Warren Cook, Laurie and Barry Greenacre, Brian Watts, Ronnie Watts, Warren Wiggins, Mark Stacey, Charlie Wallace, Robert Dobson, Barry Crouch, Jimmy Wolffe, Trish Doolan, Reg & Barry Woods, Herbie Reiser, Graham & Les Britton, Neville Biddle, John & Robert Abell, 'Poppy' Cameron, (with sincere apologies to all those people we have failed to mention).

With all his success in the building industry, Bill has never forgotten his links with Riverstone, often referring to it as the 'Golden Town of the West' and is proud to recall his childhood memories there.

As a young man Bill played Rugby League with Riverstone for several years and later worked on the committee. Throughout his life he continued this interest in football, became the club's Patron, and gave up much of his valuable time to coach the junior teams for many years.

He was the man responsible for building the Footballers' Hall at the corner of Creek Street and Garfield Road. He organised the removal of the two army huts from Ingleburn and then provided much of the labour to help the volunteers assemble it. The hall was opened in 1957 and was used for Balls, dances, wedding receptions, parties, club meetings etc. for the 30 years it existed.

He has always maintained a strong interest in the community, with such activities as -

- Chairman of St. Gabriel's School for deaf children for 30 years.
- Trustee for the Parramatta Stadium for 10 years.
- Chairman of the Economic Development Board of Greater Western Sydney for 4 years.
- Patron and Life Member of Riverstone Bowling Club, almost from its inception.
- Patron and Life Member of Riverstone RSL Club.

Bill McNamara's efforts to the community were rewarded on Australia Day 1985, when he was awarded the Order of Australia Medal. I am sure that every resident of Riverstone will agree with me, this was an honour richly deserved by a person who has done so much for the community.

Compiled by Clarrie Neal from information provided by Bill and Tommy McNamara in May 2000.