Helen Springs Station

Hilda Tuxworth

Historical Society of the Northern Territory in association with the Faculty of Arts, Northern Territory University, 1992
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By the same author:


Hilda Tuxworth, M.B.E.
DEDICATED TO DES AND ELIZABETH STENHOUSE
Mrs. Tuxworth is to be congratulated on having written this most interesting history of the establishment and subsequent development of Helen Springs Station. Books of this nature are particularly important in that it is the story of the difficulties and problems encountered by those who chose to live and work in the challenging environment of the Northern Territory cattle country.

Life on the Barkly Tablelands is not easy for either man or beast, the extremes of temperature are great, droughts are frequent and severe. In the good years there are few more productive areas in the North. The hardships endured by the original settlers of Helen Springs can only be imagined, the total lack of any of the amenities taken for granted today must have made life very difficult indeed. Cattle markets are still far afield today, but certainly more accessible than those offered in the early days.

Helen Springs has been a very important part of the Vestey organisation in the Northern Territory over the years, initially staging the many thousands of cattle walking through to Queensland from the Company stations in the west and north. With the addition of more fencing and waters the station became a very important fattening centre and now a breeding and fattening property. As well as turning off good cattle, Helen Springs has long been well known for the quality of the camp-horses bred there. It was here that one of the first successful road train operations were pioneered in the Northern Territory.

My association with Helen Springs was spread over some forty years during the 1940's - 1960's I took a hand in the mustering and delivery of many mobs of store cattle destined for 'Helen' from the Kimberley stations, in latter years I was able to make some contribution to the further development of the property.

To paraphrase part of a poem carved into a Boebah tree on the Ord Rover 'May every cow on 'Helen' have twins!'

CEC WATTS
Rockhampton
3rd February 1989
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Following a discussion concerning the lack of written history of Northern Territory Stations with Des Stenhouse, Manager of Helen Springs Station, Northern Territory and his wife Elisabeth, I agreed to research material on the history of the Station and people who had lived on the Station and contributed to this history, which could, perhaps, one day be printed.

Learning that the Australian Bicentennial Authority would encourage this work for its "People on the Move" project, I applied for and received a seeding grant to begin research. Unlike many Stations in the Northern Territory, owned by men of letters and education, Helen Springs Station, except for the original absentee landlords who never sighted the property, had battler owners, some unable to keep records, diaries or letters. This leaves the early history shrouded in the mists of time.

Not until Vestey's acquired the property in 1943 were records, letters, particularly personal ones, telling of the human efforts, incidents and achievements and suffering, kept and preserved. It does not seem to be the policy of the company to make these records available, though every other avenue was pursued.

Government records, necessarily sparse in early years, were available and with the help of Mr. Vern O'Brien of the Lands Branch for many years and a researcher of history for the Northern Territory Government, I was helped through those early years, with generous use of the maps and papers acquired during his years of research.

It is interesting to note that Vern O'Brien, as a young government surveyor on a trip from Wave Hill Road to Powell Creek Overland Telegraph Station in 1961, discovered the remains of the "kookaburra" Westland Widgeon, the crashed plane of Hitchcock and Anderson, who perished in the Tanami in 1929.

Mr. Bob Hutchinson, of Department of Lands, Darwin, has also been of great help.

Mrs. Dawn Stevenson of Tennant Creek, was officially my typist for this project. She was in fact mentor and general factotum.

Des and Elisabeth Stenhouse hosted my stay at the Station on familiarisation visits and were tireless in their efforts to furnish material, especially on the many excursions to isolated areas of the property. Their eldest son Christian, had an avid interest in this project and was helpful with photocopying.

In 1959 I was fortunate to have had a lengthy interview with Mrs. Edith MacDonald (nee Bohning), whilst researching material on Tennant Creek. The detailed description of the Station and
enterprise shown during the Bohning tenure have been most rewarding.

Mr. Reg. Harris, son of Elsie Bohning, "Little Bush Maid", was generous with early photographs and information.

Librarians and officers of the Northern Territory Government departments answered many letters and queries.

I wish to acknowledge the help received from people who have been involved in the Station over the years:

Mr. Des Stenhouse, who was Head Stockman 1965 during Vestey's tenure and is now the present Manager.

Mr. C. Watts, Managing Director for Kimberley and Barkly Stations.

Mr. Jack Chambers, late of Eva Downs, an adjoining Station, now owner of Renner Springs Station.

Mr. George Man Fong, former employee of Helen Springs Station, now of Katherine.

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Mr. Michael Carpenter, Department of Primary Production, Tennant Creek, who kindly arranged with the Department of Lands, Alice Springs, for me to have access to its files on Helen Springs and surrounding areas. It was with the co-operation of the Department of Lands and Housing, Tennant Creek, that I spent some hours browsing through those interesting documents. Michael also arranged with Mr. W. Low of Alice Springs, for me to have access to and the use of his 1986 report on Helen Springs Station.

Photographs, especially of the latter years are new, whilst those of earlier years have been generously loaned.

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When most of this draft was ready for the final printout, Mr. Ron Marshall, using his own processor, gave generously of his time, interest and expertise to produce the finished manuscript.

In the final "tidying" Mrs Jeannie Huck gave of her time and expertise.

To these people and other too numerous to mention, I give my grateful thanks, for without them this book would not have been composed.

HILDA TUXWORTH
AUTHOR'S NOTE

On perusal of the last draft, I thought it propitious to make a few comments on the foregoing work.

Because of the sketchy official documents and reports available to me, it was necessary to turn to people actually involved with the station. Relatives of original owners, later managers, other employees and some owners or workers of surrounding properties. Some were very young when first on the Helen Springs Station, others now aging; thus memories had to be depended upon. I was, incidentally, most fortunate to have recourse to these sources of information.

Both old and young readily admit that their memories could falter, so perhaps some readers may disagree with parts of this story. It is, however, written in good faith.

Having had some discussion on the "Last Great Cattle Drive", with members of the original Bicentennial Authority N.T. Committee, I mentioned that I thought the word "Drive" should read "Drove".

I print this extract from a letter from Mr. Cec. Watts, written in September 1988, as a matter of interest:

"Most of the drovers mentioned during the Droving '88 Celebrations, would have at some time or other, drove cattle onto or from Helen Springs. I was somewhat amused to hear the droving trip from Newcastle Waters, to Longreach, being described, as 'the last great cattle drive'. When I was out on the stations, we used to divide the fellows who took the cattle to the meatworks or to the store depots, into two classifications, 'Drovers' and 'Drivers'. The latter class not being too popular, as irresponsible handling of the stock during the droving trip would undo all the work put in by the station people. However, I guess that the 'Great Cattle Drive', had a ring about it".

I would like to point out that opinions expressed and terms used in reference to Aboriginal people, were opinions and usage of earlier periods.

As some of the material in this book was written in the early part of this century, I quote the Reverend Father Flynn, MSC, from his book, The Living Heart.

"The word 'native' is avoided entirely in the United Nations literature, frowned upon in Africa and many parts of the Pacific, but it would be artificial to avoid it when writing of the Northern Territory, where the word is in common usage, with no derogatory implication whatsoever".

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INTRODUCTION

In October 1987, I visited Helen Springs Station. I was amazed at the spread of the buildings, large and small. During my 37 years in Tennant Creek I had visited other stations and had always thought of Helen Springs as being small, but not so. I was to learn of homestead residences, visitors quarters, mens quarters, office, store, garage, kitchen, meat house and of all sorts of sheds and buildings in the station complex. The old manager's residence, was to have been pulled down, but the present manager has fought for its very survival. It is showing much sign of age, but is structurally sound and has been converted into a television and video room, with adjacent rooms for casual visitor's accommodation. Ned and Kathy live in the mechanic's house, another three bedroom cottage. In all, 20 buildings are in evidence; virtually a small village.

There is a feeling of space and light in these buildings. The guest house has three centre bedrooms with louvres and ceiling fans, providing a pleasant atmosphere. A spacious lounge contains an old hand carved side board, mahogany I think, that is of considerable beauty. One wonders how such valuable furniture would be sitting in the centre of Australia. There is also a large brass fire screen with tongs to match and a big copper wood box.

Although the country is generally looking dry, the station surrounds are amazingly green with altogether well kept lawns, there are lots of trees of many varieties, including Poinciana, Pink Frangipani, Crotons, all shades of Oleander, Eucalypts, Athol Pines, small gardens and a rockery, mostly of cacti and succulents.

Between the guest house and the kitchen complex, is a covered sitting area, overgrown with Manbulloo creeper and shaded by towering trees. Colourful hanging baskets abound and, wonder of wonders, many old type folding wood and canvas deck chairs. The huge Poinciana in front on the guest quarters, possibly a twelve foot bole, is the biggest tree of its kind I have seen in this area. Approximately 60 years old, it is said to have been planted by Elsie Bohning in the 1920s.

Although bores supply abundant water, rainwater tanks are dotted here and there. Rainwater is still preferred by country women for special occasions, such as making tea and especially for washing their hair.

The kitchen is spacious and well equipped with an archway to the dining room, furnished with three tables, each with six settings. Annexed to the kitchen is the cold room, deep freezers and a pantry.

The office/storeroom, had been changed and renovated internally over the years, having housed the bookkeeper, office and all
stores. Barbara, my grand-daughter, commented on the fact that 15 inches of the lower wall was on hinges. It appears that this was an early form of air conditioning, with flywire on the opening, making an airway on hot oppressive days and nights.

Des, the present Manager produced an Improvements Ledger; most valuable this; to show what had been and gone before, in the history of the station, since 1946. This shows photos and an early map, not dated, also creeks, bores and yards. (I shall endeavour to research the origin of this map, refurbish and frame it for the office).

One loses track of time, refreshments and later lunch, a rest and then all aboard the Toyota Land Cruiser 4WD for a 46 mile trip to the Stock Camp at No. 8 bore. My age assured me a seat in the front with Des, the driver, Christian and Barbara standing in the back holding on to a firm crossbar, more comfortable it seems that sitting, as the road has many rough patches and time seems to be the essence of all station activities.

We experienced a hot sun, fair wind and at times a little cloud cover. The journeys are spaced by bores after leaving Station Creek. Firstly number 19, then 11 miles to number 1 bore, 8 miles to number 11 bore, 7 miles to Bluebush Bore, so named after the type of shrub surrounding it, that is very good cattle fodder, high in protein content. From here we passed number 6 bore and a further 8 miles on we arrived at number 8 bore, where the stockcamp was then located.

I had noticed with great interest, the most unusual photo of a two storey building in the Station Improvements Ledger. Being two storey, was unusual for this country, but the photograph taken in 1952, showed it to be rather narrow with a high pitched gable roof standing stark and alone in the downs, where one could look to the horizon across the country from left to right, without even a tree to break the line. In January, 1985, a wild, mad storm blew the top section completely to destruction, leaving the bottom section intact.

As we approached over the cattle grid, we saw the now one storey flat roof building, surrounded by several smaller ones. One room was for Melissa Powell, a woman stockman, who had been working in the stockcamp for the past six seasons. The other rooms are for the balance of the stockmen.

All welcomed us as we arrived and Mark the cook, a huge man with bushy beard, emerged from the cookhouse and offered me tea or coffee, which I am assured, camouflaged the taste of the water. It is reputed to be the worst bore on the station. This is disappointing, as number eight is one of the main camps on the station. By contrast, the water at the main homestead is almost pure. Several months each year are spent in this camp and many cattle are handled and trucked to Queensland. This is the original site of handing over the big mobs of store and fat cattle, that used to be driven into Queensland, when all cattle were walked into that state. The reason why such a good building
was erected in the early years, is that a boundary rider and his family lived there on a permanent basis.

Des and Bill, the head stockman, departed on a tour of inspection of cattle and machinery. I chatted with Melissa, after the mail has been read. Mail is so important to isolated people and so impatiently awaited, that all else is suspended temporarily. Barbara took this opportunity to relax her muscles after what was to her a rugged ride.

I noticed the much used and read, dog eared "Yippies", and I silently decided to send out some reading material on my return to Tennant Creek. Money was not the impediment, simply the expediency.

On completion of the inspection, a sudden decision by Bill and David, to return to the Station and Christian, to remain at the camp. There was a rush whilst Melissa sorted out the clothes which were to be sent in for washing. Elisabeth does all the camp washing for the men; something of a favour to them.

Des had taken some snaps to be used in the manuscript that I am preparing, with a view to publication of the Helen Springs Station history. I asked for a shot of the incredible hot water system outside of the galvanised iron bathroom. I hoped the piece of green hose, that carries water from the tank through a hole in the wall into the bathroom and the narrow pipe rising above the building, which is the "safety" valve, would show up in the print. This contraption is known to isolated people as a Hot Water Donkey.

On the outward part of the trip at number 6 bore, we had driven through a mob of cattle, with many young calves in for watering. On our return, we sighted one lonely and forlorn calf wandering around bleating piteously. The mob had watered and left and I hoped the little fellow would eventually find its mother.

I visited the south west corner of the property to see the remains of an old building called "The Old Burkes Homestead", built adjacent to Burke Creek. This was a block taken up by a Mr. Lobelly in the late 30's, on a grazing licence. It was a hard existence, not really a viable enterprise, but was worked until about 1952 as a family show and eventually abandoned; possibly dry times had forced the decision.

The journey out took us twice across the gas pipeline. This really wonderful project, the brain child of the ex Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, Ian Tuxworth, is now carrying gas from Central Australia to Darwin, to power the new power house there. The Amadeus Basin to Darwin Pipeline, was conceived by Mr. Tuxworth, the Member for Barkly, when he was the Minister for Mines and Energy.

Mr. Tuxworth always believed that a coal fired power station in Darwin would be the ruination of the Territory's economy and, against a lot of opposition, managed to establish the Centralian
Gas Reserves and the private enterprise construction of the pipeline, which would ultimately bring power to Darwin. This would save Territorians' money in the long term.

The pipeline cost $280 million and took fifteen months to construct. It supplies gas to the Channel Island Power Station for at least forty years with existing reserves. This is one of the biggest projects ever undertaken in the Northern Territory and it is the longest pipeline ever built in the southern hemisphere.

Nothing seems so lonely as a deserted homestead, and this one really appeared desolate in the extreme. A broken cement block, was the foundation of the homestead, scraps of metal and iron, the remains of the old windmill tower, remains of an old well, built no doubt as a security against the creek water drying up was located some distance from the creek. A twisted and rusted iron toilet building stands some distance from the old hole. All sorts of rusted and ancient memorabilia was lying around; mute testimony of a family's battle against the odds of making a go of it in this marginal and dry country.

One piece Des collected for the Tennant Creek Branch of the National Trust, was a heavy metal meat mincer, engraved with the date 1898. Unfortunately it was not fully intact.

About three miles west of the old homestead site, there were a series of waterholes all along our track; mainly dry ones. The main hole is called "Burkes", and this water is highly discoloured by the many gum leaves being blown into it, giving a rather brackish appearance. Nevertheless the water tasted really good and pure, not at all brackish as its appearance would suggest. We got down to the main water by descending a series of steep ledges, the banks being rather high along the major length of the water holding section of the creek. There are a lot of wild horses living out here along with other wild life.

A noticeable feature was the number of high and completely dead trees, holding deserted bird nests. There were hundreds of tiny finches darting in and out of the branches of these same trees. The birds which built the nests would have been large and it was suggested they could have been black cockatoos, a rare breed, that usually build in very secret places.

We visited Maryville, an old depot for road trains when Vestey's were trucking their fat bullocks to Queensland and used their own transport trucks. This venture had followed on after the demise of the drover, but eventually it was found to be a lot cheaper to hire trucks from the larger trucking companies and let them carry all the cattle on a contract basis. This venture was set up in about 1958 and carried on until 1975, when the whole complex was pulled down. Much of the equipment went down to the station and the balance was sold off to the highest bidder.

The present manager's residence was located at Maryville and was shifted to its present site in two parts on the back of a truck
in 1977, then set on blocks and renovated to some extent.

Over the station creek stands the airstrip. The airstrip is 1,000 metres long, of the red desert type and is graded annually. It is well marked with white markers and has a new windsock.

We met Mr. Jack Chambers, who with his parents and later in partnership with his brothers, lived on the adjoining property of Eva Downs on the eastern boundary of Helen Springs. Jack and his family grew up on this property and thus had a lot to impart on his knowledge of the early days of Helen Springs. He was very helpful in being able to pin point a few facts about Helen Springs for me - the site of the first homestead, built by the Bohnings, was where the guest house now stands. The old floor may still be seen under the present guest house. The tree shown in a picture of the old homestead taken in 1925, is the huge tree now in front of the guest house. The cattle yard Edith refers to in her notes as being "about a mile from the house", is marked on one of the very old maps and was built approximately 1919. The original spring is a dried water hole on the west side of the homestead, and was once a permanent water hole. It is now silted up and only lasts a few months at best after a good wet.

Des remembers that in 1965, the Aborigines used to bathe and play in this hole and even then, though, it would dry up before the next wet, it used to last until about September, or thereabouts. According to Jack, this water was named Helen Springs by Mrs. Esther Bohning, but this is as questionable point, as there are quite a few stories around as to how the station was named.
HELEN SPRINGS STATION
NORTHERN TERRITORY
1885 - 1987

Helen Springs is located on the Barkly Tablelands, a vast area named by William Landsborough, during his pilgrimage in search of Burke and Wills in 1861. Landsborough considered the rolling downs of Mitchell and Flinders grass to be good cattle grazing country.

The area of the Helen Springs lease has varied over the years. Subdivisions and excisions have eaten away the original holding and today the official title is of 2080 square miles. Carrying capacity is 23,000 head of stock by lease requirements.

The naming of Helen Springs Station seems shrouded in the mist of time and can but best be a matter of conjecture; however some facts did emerge. John McDouall Stuart, on his journey of exploration from south to north of the continent in 1861, passed through the heavily grassed downs country naming amongst others, North Tomkinson, Burke and Hunter Creeks and the Ashburton Range with its high peak of Mt. Wilieray.

It was not until the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line in 1872 that Renner Springs and Powell Creek Overland Telegraph Stations, were named. There were large tracts of land taken up by Walter Douglas and others. A spring on the headwater of North Tomkinson Creek, was noted in Goyder's compilation in 1885 as Helen Springs.

Following reports by explorer-cattlemen Landsborough and Buchanan, of rolling downs of the Mitchell and Flinders grass, land hungry cattlemen of South Australia, looking for grazing land for their herds, reasoned that there must be greener lush land north of the stony arid land than they found over their own northern border. This was confirmed by McDouall Stuart and when the South Australian Government auctioned blocks of land unseen, a Mr. Arthur M. Hardy, made an application for a pastoral lease in 1879. One statement states that Mr. Hardy intended establishing a station and naming it Helen Springs. The spring with its name Helen Spring appears first on the 1879 pastoral blocks in South Australia.

Prior to 1885, there was much land speculation. One early claimant was Nat Buchanan, who had a large tract of country which he called Buchanan Downs. Other claimants, like Buchanan, had a "passing interest" in Helen Springs, such as Tom Nugent (Tom Holmes of the Ragged 13), A.L. (Bundy) Prentice and the Bank of New South Wales showed interest in 1894, which continued well into the 20th century.

Although early stocking of the Helen Springs area commenced in
1894, this centred on Renner Springs. After the turn of the century, there were many changes of tenure, but the station of Helen Springs seems to have been confirmed by John Bohning who took a small lease of 300 square miles in the area of Helen Springs in 1917.

Unlike many stations in the Northern Territory, the letters and personal or station diaries seem not to have been kept or were destroyed in store room fires. It seems to have been the custom to keep station records in station store rooms and as flammable liquids were also kept there, much valuable material has been lost in ensuing fires.

Autobiographies of the owners which are a great source of information, which record on-going stocking, rebuilding, droves, fencing of paddocks land activities of the station personnel, are rare and until Vestey's acquired the property in 1943, memoranda of this nature does appear to be non-existant. Local story has it that the cattle station was named by Mrs. Esther Bohning, after her daughter Helen, who died at Camooweal in 1898. Records do not confirm this.

The size of the lease varied with acquisitions and excisions of land, the last being by Alan Hagan of Muckaty Station, of 133 square miles in 1972. The original lease of Helen Springs, was part of Buchanan Downs, with an interest held by the Bank of New South Wales, from 1894 to 1917. The next longest tenure was John Bohning 1917 to 1943, then Vestey Brothers, from 1943 to 1988. Transfers on the early South Australian lease include those to A.L. Prentice 1902, T. Nugent 1905, W.C. Weldon 1907, D.R. Strahley 1911 and John Guthrie Bthern 1912.

In 1915, a grazing block of 100 square miles to the south of Helen Springs was held by Alfred Turner of Alice Springs. Turner applied for the block and Administrator Gilruth finally approved it, though it was "too small for a man to make a living". John Bohning, who with his family had led a roving existence as dam and tank sinker, fencer etcetera left Rocklands Station, Queensland, after his marriage in 1901 to Esther Bennett, in the company of her two sons. Their travels ranged from the top end around the Gulf area, where Mr. Bohning had a grazing lease from 1909/1910. This was later cancelled. While on the station, Mrs. Bohning had her first experience of managing the station, while her husband took contracts to augment their income. At one stage John was a teamster between Burketown and the Barkly Tablelands - 16 horses in his team.

Bohning found himself with family, plant, cattle, goats, pigs, dogs etcetera, at Renner Springs in 1912, where there was water and stock yards. He was unsuccessful in applying for a lease as the government had declared the area a public reserve, so he decided to move to Helen Springs 10 miles south. He had been running some stock and using old cattle yards left there by former owner Prentice, who, after a few bad years, had joined Ambrose at Banka Banka Station, in which he is said to have had an interest. Prentice was reported to have built the usual iron
shanty with abutting lean-to, but did provide some cattle yards in reasonable condition. His base camp was at Renner Springs. Both Helen Springs and Banka Banka are shown on early maps of 1883-85. Records, however, do not clearly define the connections of the three leases and owners.

From 1917, Bohning held a licence over Helen Springs and Renner Springs and two of his sons held a brief licence of the Monmoona area. This was relinquished when the Bohning boys refused to pay the unreasonable sum demanded for a bore on the property. Helen Springs and Monmoona were advertised for leasing in 1941. The Bohning application was successful and in 1943 Vestey's were also successful in their bid for this area. At this time John Bohning, decided to sell and it is said that Vestey's purchased Helen Springs for 9,000 pounds. The properties were later consolidated under the Helen Springs title.

Although Edith Bohning, in her notes states that the family moved to Helen Springs in 1914, the old South Australian Pastoral Lease No. 2282 was not issued until 1917, so it may be assumed that the family may have squatted and occupied the old shanty lean-to which had been at the Springs for some years. This shanty had been left by Prentice, who was stationed in the Renner area, and free-ranged some cattle in the Helen Springs area. The original two room dwelling was added to over the years, but a distant view of the station seen in a photograph taken in 1925, shows extra out-houses and sheds. Improvements or station records of any kind of the Bohning era, if kept, do not seem to have survived.

At the time the Pastoral Lease Inspection Committee inspected the property in 1933, the homestead consisted of two large rooms enclosed by a 12 foot verandah. The outside walls were ant bed rubble and mud. Originally the floors were of ant bed with cattle and goat skin mats which were tanned by Mrs. Bohning and her native helpers. This floor was later flagged and bush timber and iron were used for the roof. The two large rooms were 36 feet by 15 feet. These were divided into four small rooms by the ingenious use of kerosene tins. These tins were used for the many and varied needs of the early pioneering days, for example, boiling clothes on the rough stone fireplaces in the open and later on the fuel stoves (when stoves could be brought to the isolated areas); also for making soap and Bovril and for storing everything from clothes to nails and bolts.

The walls in the residence were made by removing one end of the tin and standing them sideways, one upon the other, with half the openings facing into one room and half into the other. This created many small shelves and cupboards for storing clothes etcetera, in bedrooms and other essential articles in the other rooms.

There was also a cattle yard "about a mile from the house" which was erected about 1920. Two paddocks built, presumably in 1918, a house well in 1928, a stock well in 1923 and No. 2 well in 1928. No. 3 stock well, Ullablia Well, Wingarie Well and Koonana Well, were all built in 1930, at which time the herd was 2,000
cattle with 100 horses and 200 goats. All this within 13 years confirms the fact that the whole Bohning family were toilers with a determination to make the project a success. This eventuated with the help of Jim Scharber, an old cattleman and aboriginal workers. The aboriginal men worked with the stock and women the house, garden and goat herding.

In 1918, a camel train going through to Newcastle Waters with building materials left behind a new foal dropped by one of the camels. There is a photograph of this camel having grown to some size being suckled by a surrogate mother, a nanny goat. The station was run for some time at "subsistence level" by Bohning only, with the help of his sons and (Bull) Jim Bennett, a son of Mrs. Bohning from her first marriage.

Mrs. Bohning had been excellent with stock work and as useful as a man with all station work. Her three sons and two daughters, Jim Scharber, an old station hand and a few casual aboriginal workers coped with all station and cattle work. Hard work and careful husbandry (Mr. Bohning was described as the "Battler" type), resulted in the cattle that had been in hand at Renner Springs, plus 300 head brought from Wickham, Western Australia. Bulls and calves were left behind by drovers using the north-south government stock routes that intersected the west of the property and the east-west route across the Barkly to Mt. Isa, which ran through the north east area. Mr. Bohning also imported good bulls from Mr. William J. Schultz of Humbert River to improve the herds. Mr. Schultz died at Victoria River Downs in 1927. In 1925, Buffalo Fly was introduced in this manner, but did not prove troublesome. Des Stenhouse says, "To this date, 1988, we have no real problem with Buffalo Fly".

A letter was written by a Mr. Williams, to the government in Adelaide in 1880, requesting information on the most suitable land on the Barkly Tablelands for sheep. Although the rearing of sheep was tried on Muckaty Station, without success, and on Avon Downs with great success, there is no record of sheep being reared on Helen Springs.

In 1877, Alfred Giles took cattle and sheep through the area to a property south of Darwin. In 1935, Mr. Charles Wright moved his family, his stock of cattle and flock of 300 sheep from Singleton Station, south of Tennant Creek, north and stopped to water at the then Government Bore at Muckaty. He liked the area and took up land, naming the station after the bore. His widow Daphne, stated in 1976 that "The heat was too much for the sheep and grass seeds worked into the wool and caused sores". On the other hand, in 1882 Mr. Thomas Guthrie stocked his new property Avon Downs, with 14,500 sheep, which increased to a flock of 70,000. On one occasion his wool topped the London market.

The only sheep in this area in 1987 were a small "hobby" flock of black sheep owned by Mrs. Coral Beebe, of Ucharonidge Station and Jack Chambers at Renner Springs Station runs a small flock of sheep to this day. Small mobs of calves were lifted on two occasions to Oodnadatta, and trucked south for sale prior to the
historic drove of 1929, when the railway from Oodnadatta to the station of Stuart was completed.

This drove of 247 fat bullocks from Helen Springs to Alice Springs, will be written in history as the first cattle to be trucked from Alice Springs to Adelaide. Mr. Bohning left Helen Springs with the cattle and plant, accompanied by his wife, his two daughters Elsie and Edie, his youngest son Bill who was born at Renner Springs in 1915, and Jim Scharber. Jim, an old station hand drove the dray, relieved the women as drovers and was also part time cook. Mrs. Bohning and Elsie travelled with the stock from Alice Springs (Stuart) to Adelaide. Much to the consternation of the crew and passengers who dubbed the women "The Petticoat Drovers", no cattle were lost. Subsequent drafts railed to Adelaide, were 244 bullocks in 1930 and 493 bullocks and cows in 1932, which shows a doubling of turnoff in two years. On the 1929 drove, the only white women met on the 475 mile trip were Mrs. Crook and her daughters, Kathleen and Doreen, who, with Mr. Crook and son, lived in a tent-dray "home" at Wycliffe Wells, permanent waters which are approximately 100 miles south of Tennant Creek.

This family travelled from Alice Springs by dray with goats and horses to the struggling wolfram field at Hatches Creek to find an acute water shortage. On being informed that water was available only for the family and not for stock, they retraced their steps to Wycliffe Wells. Daughter Doreen was later to marry William Braitling, who took up Mt. Doreen Station, outside of Alice Springs. Mrs. Braitling was later to become one of our famous pioneer women.
Helen Springs Station's climate has been described as semi-arid and monsoonal with the wet extending from November to April, and the mean annual rainfall being approximately 400mm. The high temperature before the wet may reach humid conditions giving way to drier conditions during winter and spring. Altogether, surface water is fair.

Inadequate summer rains limits foliage growth and reports tell of bad seasons earlier this century, with 1927 being an exceptionally bad year of drought. All this prompted Mr. Bohning to sink a bore in 1921. This was not successful and a second effort was abandoned in 1923. Although 37 bores had been sunk by Vestey to June 1988, 1985 and 1986 were the worst recorded years, 1987 was good, but again in 1988, only 4 inches of rain meant another really bad year, with 50 per cent of the herd numbers being sent off to other company stations. With few bullocks being sent to the sale yards, the property was declared drought afflicted in 1986.

The property has many creeks and streams flowing east from the Ashurton Range into a depression in the downs country of Helen Springs property. This water prolongs the supply of green fodder available to stock. Burke Creek, on the west of the property is seldom completely dry, but when running a banker during the wet is a swift flowing stream some 20 feet deep at the "hole". It is a paradox that cattle are not run on this area as it is too arid.

Helen Springs, at the head of Tomkinson Creek, has been known for its permanent water. Des Stenhouse was head stockman in 1965 and says that in that year the springs "was only a pond in which aboriginal women stood knee deep to wash clothes". In 1987, the springs are virtually a mud puddle, having silted up. On the other hand, No. 19 Bore, 4 miles down the creek from Helen Springs, a semi permanent rock hole, has been cut through the sandstone. This is used by station staff for recreational purposes.

Burke Creek runs through the western corner of the property. It rises in the Ashburton Range and floods on the desert country west of the station. About 100 head of feral horses run there. A drive from the homestead takes one on to the main road, to then travel half a mile north to the site of the old Maryville Trucking Depot. Turning west along the Muckaty Station boundary, one crosses the gas pipeline from Amadeus Basin outside of Alice Springs to Darwin. The pipeline supplies gas to the Channel Island Electricity Power Station; a wonderful feat.

The Conservation Commission followed the laying of the pipeline by replacing trees etc. until now, not twelve months after completion, the "Line" is merging into the surrounding scenery. There is a line of trees marking the Burke Creek, named by McDouall Stuart after Robert O'Hara Burke, a fellow explorer in 1861.
A feature of this area is the number of big trees, quite dead, stark against the sky. It shows clearly the large deserted bird nests, strangely quite thick around the deserted homestead site of the small block taken up by Mr. A. Lobelly in 1938 and through the war years, who ran a few cattle, but relinquished the block in 1947. The concrete block of the homestead floor, together with some rusted metal iron, are pathetic reminders of an attempt to establish a home in inhospitable, desolate country. The old twisted toilet building lies a distance from the trench, so do the rusted remains of a tank and stand, some old household items and a pump jack, the seals of which are still holding grease after 35 years. Five aborigines were employed by Lobelly, for part of each year, and payment was by clothes, rations and tobacco.

The house was built some distance from the creek, which is a series of interlocking pools in the dry creek bed, except for Burke's Hole itself which is a body of water of an inky black glassy appearance. Its colour comes from the grey black sands of the bank and dead rotting leaves from the huge overhanging gums. The banks descend to the water and are layered showing use by horses, donkeys and a few stray cattle as the water level drops. This waterhole is considered one of the near permanent waters on the property.

No country in the semi arid zone can depend on surface water alone to sustain water and feed for stock, either cattle or sheep. Once a station is established, serious attention is given to augmenting the natural surface water supply. Early battlers saw their stock perish in the dry to drought seasons. Because of lack of fencing, cattle were free-ranging and would be moved to better areas where water and grass were available, which helped the cattlemen in early years to survive but not to grow and prosper.

After five years of struggle, Jack Bohning had to face the cost of installing a bore. This venture was an off and on experimental effort, which started in 1921 and was abandoned in 1923, due to lack of finance. In 1941-42, it was again abandoned for lack of finance and lack of labour. Labour during the war years became a serious problem. Between these periods, loss of stock reputedly occurred because of breakdowns on government bores, which sometimes were not known, much less rectified. On P.L.'s 2334-5, the condition of the bores was such that Mr. Henry Marsh wrote in a letter to the Secretary of Home Territories, in September 1925, "The trouble is that no one is caring what happens to plant and they (the bores) will go to rack and ruin on a road where people so seldom travel, unless oiled systematically and cared for".

Eight bores were sunk between 1945-50, six in 1952, two in 1953 and one in 1957, to supply the proposed Maryville Trucking Depot. In 1958, No. 19 bore was sunk. These operations were possible for the big companies with sound financial backing. They were continued by Vesteys at intervals over the years until by 1986, Helen Springs was considered well supplied by some 37 bores.
Bore water is generally available from the calcareous Anthony Lagoon beds at 100 metres and is stored in Turkey Nest Tanks, so with creeks, wells and residual flood waters, the country supplies grazing fodder which keeps the stock in remarkably good condition.
Following World War II, when the "Battler" owners of cattle stations in the Northern Territory sold to company owners, big changes took place. Availability of finance provided more water, enabling increase of herds of cattle and fencing for paddock, yards, buildings etc., but most importantly was the employment of managers of wide experience and expertise and increased staff.

When Jack Bohning sold Helen Springs in 1943, his sons who had been his main staff over the years, had left to follow their own pursuits. The powerful English Company of Vestey Brothers, took over Helen Springs, and a new era began.

There were several reasons which prompted Jack and Esther Bohning to leave the home where they had spent 26 years of their life, raised a family and saw a well stocked property grow out of virgin country.

Because of lack of finance to supply bores and other measures to improve the water supply, they could not increase their herds further. Since 1937, Mr. Bohning had accepted government contracts from the Department of Works; sometimes working between Powell Creek, Newcastle Waters and Katherine to augment his money supply.

With activities of troops and road construction, lack of labour, difficulty with supplies and the failing health of Mrs. Bohning and himself, he finally posted the property of Helen Springs for sale. For personal reasons, Mr. Bohning decided on a quick sale and is reported to have sold to the grand English Company of Vestey's for 9,000 pounds.

Vestey's had maintained interests in the Territory from 1917, when they built the meatworks in Darwin, but this closed in 1925, after a chequered career. During the war, Vestey's was given the contract by the Federal Government to supply the army with meat. Vestey's acquired the big run of Wave Hill in 1914, and later Nutwood Downs. The company had employed drovers to move its stock to Queensland and to Larrimah for the small Darwin market - only rarely to Alice Springs.

Selling the cattle was a problem, as stock routes with government bores crossed private properties. Owners did not take kindly to mobs resting and depleting their usually poor pastures, as with Helen Springs, where the north east stock route to Queensland crossed the northern section of the station. Mr. Bohning had been talking of selling as early as 1938 and, being unable to sell his fat cattle, had taken government contracts for fire ploughing. He worked as far as Newcastle Waters and Katherine, until the deal was closed in 1943, to sell to Vestey Brothers, Willeroo and Manbulloo Company for approximately 9,000 pounds.
The managers who carried out the new program over the years were men of wide experience. A government inspector's report says of Mr. Wally Atkinson, manager from 1961 to 1972, "Mr. Atkinson is an experienced practical manager, who had previously managed properties for Kidman's interests". The managers were Mr. Bradley from 1945 to 1946; Mr. Joe Walker and his wife Muriel from 1946 to 1952; Mr. Nicholson from 1952 to 1956; Mr. Andrew Geddes from 1956 to 1960; Mr. W. Atkinson and wife Ivy from 1960 to 1968; Mr. Tim Doran and his wife Joclyn from 1968 to 1981; and Mr. D. Stenhouse and his wife Elisabeth from 1981 to 1989.

During Mr. Nicholson's tenure in 1959, the original Bohning homestead was demolished and new guest quarters were built on site. This building was elevated and the old flagged floor can be seen underneath. A report gives the staffing during Atkinson's tenure as: Manager, W. Atkinson; cook, Mrs. Atkinson; a bookkeeper; a bore mechanic; a storeman/jackaroo/head stockman; 10 native women and 10 native men. This shows the amazing increase of staff since the days of the Bohnings.

After the new take over, bores were sunk, paddocks fenced, herds increased and mobs of cattle mustered, branded and moved. The numbers of hands had to be increased, more so when the Aborigines moved off the station in 1975, and were replaced by European labour. In 1987, Mr. Stenhouse, quotes the following: "Stock to take over consisted of 21,000 cattle and 250 horses".

Mr. Cecil Watts a long time employee of Vestey's from Jackaroo in 1949, graduated through the ranks to Manager of Ord River Station, then to Darwin in 1965, as Pastoral Inspector and to serve as Manager in 1980. In a letter in 1988, he states; "I understand the improvements were very basic on Helen Springs, when it was purchased by Vestey's and it took some time to have sufficient fencing and water put on the station to allow a lot of cattle to be depastured there".

Increased staff required increased housing and by 1954 when the former P.L. 419 and P.L. 438 was consolidated in 1954 to P.L. 524. Inspector G.A. Buchannan outlined the major changes in and improvements in the homestead complex: the two roomed original homestead of mud and brick walls and verandahs were sealed, lined with fibro, fly wired and electric light laid and a large dining room had been added. A Manager's Residence of fibro and sawn timber, was elevated on three foot blocks and with wooden floors, and electric light and water installed. The builder was James Parnell.

Government regulations included the provision that natives previously living in their camps some distance from the homestead, should be housed. The dining room, native quarters, water closet, bathroom and huts were built by J. Parnell, S. Stanford and station labour.

An interesting building in 1952 was a two-storey building built by Kelly on P.L. 438 at No. eight bore. The bore was sunk in 1950. This building stood stark against the sky on the seemingly
treeless downs, was 40 miles from the homestead and known as No. 8 Outstation Cottage. It covered an area of 32 feet with a 24 feet concrete lower floor, an wooden upper floor of two bedrooms 16 feet x 12 feet. The ground floor was the kitchen and dining room, each 12 feet x 16 feet, a Metters No. two Fuel Stove, water connected and it was wired for electricity. There was a pan toilet a distance from the house.

Over the years, because of the strong winds and exposed conditions, the upper floor leaned slightly and in a strong blow in 1984, the top section was blown away in a "mad storm". This illustrated the dangers of a lack of maintenance. The lower section was extended and is as now, the stock camp for No. eight bore (seen in the photos). Huts for native stockmen were also provided for in this complex.

Altogether, 14 stockyards were identified. All the yards were of wire and wooden post (Coolibah) construction, which have now been replaced by three centralised steel and cable drafting yards. Kelly, Rogan, Hagan and Martin were the builders.
Helen Springs Station was enclosed by four boundary fences; Banka Banka, Eva Downs, Ucharonidge and Newcastle Waters. The timbers used were Coolibah, Supplejack, Boodwood and Snappygum. The homestead well was sunk around 1920 by John Bohning and water was drawn by horse and bucket. It is now well equipped with a Comet Windmill, a Southern Cross pump jack and a diesel engine. The garden well was sunk around the same time as the homestead well. Although the quality of water was good, the supply was poor.

Wide experience over the years made bores an important early project for station owners. The two bores left by Jack Bohning, one abandoned, had grown yearly under Vestey's and by 1945 seven bores were in operation. By the end of 1958, there were 19 bores and by 1980, this had grown to 26, some emptying into Turkey Nest dams. These large watering holes, sometimes holding a million gallons of water, three thousand head of cattle could be seen watering at a tank at one time. Des Stenhouse reports that because of the 1988 drought year, a further three bores were sunk and equipped on the Monomoona block, north of the Barkly stock route.

Although there is no early evidence of minerals having been found on Helen Springs, there is evidence that some minerals were found by gougers later.

The Mines Branch, Tennant Creek, have supplied the following information:

"In December, 1969, 4 men, Stanislav Samarin, Mato Jukic, Michael John Pollard and Michael Bernard Pollard, applied for a lease to work for copper. This lease was gazetted on 17th December, 1969, ML441E and ML442E. These leases did not prove to be viable, as no production has been documented."

As stock increased on the Vestey's properties, requiring more droves to move cattle to southern and western sales, consideration was given to increasing the use of road trains for this purpose.

Mr. Cecil Watts says;

"Mr. John Vestey, who was actively involved in the company during the 50's and 60's, was very interested in the possibilities of moving large numbers of cattle by road transport.

Road transport was in its infancy in the 50's with only small lots of cattle being carried in trucks, mainly butcher's cattle. I went up to Banka Banka in the sleeper cab of a small unit operated by Kittle Brothers. They used to take regular small lots of cattle to Alice Springs, from Maryville Road Train Base, in 1957/58, adjacent to the Stuart Highway, several miles to the west of the Helen
Springs Homestead.

A house, men's quarters, garage, power house and trucking yard were erected and two large road trains were based there. The prime movers were designed in the U.K. and powered by Rolls Royce engines. The full unit, prime mover and two trailers were capable of hauling up to 90 or so store steers.

The concept was a good one and was one of the first serious attempts to set large scale movement of cattle on a regular basis. The units operated for a number of years, taking cattle from Helen Springs to Cammoweal, from whence the cattle were walked either to Morestone or Nowranie Stations. In 1965 it was decided to close down the operation due principally to the inability of the road train units to operate off the bitumen roads".

Vesteys purchased two army vehicles which were converted into cattle trucks and a few private carriers were trucking. This practice grew and in 1953, the school children in Tennant Creek lined the school fence to watch the last cattle drove south pass through Paterson Street, travelling to Alice Springs. The ringers worked hard to stop the beasts from breaking away into side streets.

Heavy losses also occurred on the stock route to Mt. Isa, during some bad seasons. In 1955, the North Australian Monthly, stated: "Seventeen thousand Territory cattle crossed the border at Lake Nash and fifteen thousand at Camooweal. This was about average for a good year, but the number would have been greater but for the disastrous 1952 drought. Last year only thirty thousand head crossed at Lake Nash and nineteen thousand at Camooweal".

A quote from Cecil Watts;

"During the very severe droughts to which the Barkly Tablelands are prone, cattle numbers would be cut to a few thousand to spread thinly over the run. After the company disposed of its road train units, the transport of cattle to and from the station was carried out by various contractors; Buntine/Lynch, Wright Brothers, Buntine Roadways and later Dennis Buntine. Droving onto the station ceased in 1966".

In 1955 Vesteys road train delivered two loads of cattle at Larrimah, from Newcastle Waters. These were the first cattle brought to the railway by road train. The driver was Bill Walker who was in charge of this massive vehicle, 138 feet long and 42 tyres.

Plans for a trucking depot had been evidently on the board for some years, as in 1953, No. 18 bore was sunk near a rise east of the North South Highway, approximately two miles north of the homestead, as one cattleman remarked, "On land of no use for running cattle". Mr. Harold Jolliffe of Alice Springs, at that
time in charge of road construction for the Northern Territory Department of Works, was asked what he thought of the two sites, one north and one south of this ridge as a likely spot for a depot. His opinion was, "Neither, too low lying", and he suggested the Stoney Ridge, on which the base was eventually built.

The North Australian Monthly, in 1957 said, "Vestey's was making big improvements on Helen Springs Station. A part of their program was to establish a depot for several of these road trains to transport cattle, the 500 miles from the Kimberley properties to Mt. Isa. This program was completed by 1958 at the cost of twenty eight thousand pounds, with accommodation, yards and ramps. The vehicles would pull into the base, unload cattle into the yards where they could be watered, bringing into use the No. eighteen bore". Other buildings on site were: the Manager's new residence, office, ringers and drovers quarters, mess, mechanics shop and all buildings necessary to house large numbers of staff.

Two massive vehicles with Rolls Royce engines, self tracking, known affectionately as Jackie and Julie, were brought from England, which moved 20 to 30 thousand head of cattle going mostly east. Quoting the North Australian Monthly 1959, "Cattle are overlanded to Helen Springs, where they are rested and watered and then taken the remaining four hundred and fifty miles by road train. Each road train made several trips a fortnight during the season, so in just over a year, each vehicle has travelled over fifty eight thousand miles, which indicates the vast distances cattle had to be transported in the Northern Territory". The cattle were mostly shorthorns and were quite docile and easy to handle.

As better vehicles moved cattle faster, the necessity for resting and watering became less and the road train base was dismantled in 1976.

The Manager's residence was moved to the homestead site and with restoration and additions, became the modern comfortable residence now housing the present manager, Des Stenhouse and his wife Elisabeth.

Other buildings were dismantled and materials were used to upgrade existing buildings at the homestead site. No. 18 bore was brought back into operation during the drought years of 1985/86, was then dismantled and used as spare parts for other station bores. Only cattle yards and ramps and a few odds and ends are left on the site to remind one of the once bustling, busy depot.
Des Stenhouse reports on the life of the Stock Inspector;

"Without constant supervision and presence of the government 'Stocky', one could be readily assured that all sorts of chicanery and malpractice would occur. The Tuberculosis and Brucellosis Programme, an on-going programme for the past 10 years, is to be completed in 1990 and the country to be declared free of this disease in the year 1992. This is a testimony to their skill and dedication out in the field.

Helen Springs has been working in with the programme for the past nine years and is only now on the verge of being declared free of tuberculosis, it was declared free of brucellosis in 1986. Many past dry seasons have prevented the full scale testing required to eradicate these diseases. The odd breakdown puts one back to square one in many cases, as occurred at Helen through the 1985-86 drought years.

Tick control also is one of the major problems faced by all northern pastoralists. Stock Inspectors must examine all cattle coming off 'dirty' properties if they are proceeding to 'clean' properties. Generally they must have one dip and within three days have the clean dip to be able to load onto trucks. Usually this is monitored by the Stock Inspector having the cattle go through the crush and meticulously examining the first five or six crush loads to determine that they are free of ticks. He will then, at random, pull up the flow of cattle through the crush and examine them. This procedure is followed throughout the duration of testing onto the trucks. To examine the whole herd on an individual basis would be, in most cases, far too slow and would not in the final analysis prove to be of any real benefit.

Noogoora Burr is one of the major worries of pastoralists and it is within the powers of the 'Stocky' to impound a mob which has problems of this nature. The responsibility of the clean up to the satisfaction of the Stock Inspector belongs to the owner or his agent. Usually this task entails laborious cutting off of all individual burrs, a very tedious activity and one in which the beast is anything but co-operative.

During the season, the Stock Inspector travels almost continuously from station to station, as the call on his services is never ending throughout the stock season. Due to the nature of the climate and country, the cattle season generally runs from the beginning of April to the end of October and in that period all the cattle work is to be completed. Each Stock Inspector has a base within a region and will work from that base covering an allotted area and all the stations within that area. They quite often camp at the station or out in the stock camp, enabling them to get the early start that is paramount when handling large mobs of cattle. Cattle will run through the yards and crush much easier when they are cool and not under stress from the heat of the sun as the day progresses.
After ten years I have found without exception the N.T. Stocky to be a pretty genuine fellow, self reliant, practical and certainly well versed in his job. Most Stock Inspectors of my acquaintance were stockmen themselves in their earlier years and know their way around the big mobs they encounter. I suspect that the voluminous amount of paperwork frustrates these outdoor men, record keeping, issuing permits, being aware of ear tags and buttons that are required over the years. These and all the other things that go to make the whole exercise a success, keeping everyone in the district both happy and of course on top of their job. Without the complete co-operation of the Station Manager and the Stock Inspector, I suspect things would get very hard and most certainly very inefficient. There must be a complete trust between the two men for the satisfactory conclusion of each and all jobs. These chaps are generally family men who make a career in the service and they, like everyone else who has real ability, will advance in the service. One such chap was Cammy White, he was the resident Stocky in Elliot during the 1960's and went on to become the head of the Quarantine Section in Darwin."
Aborigines on Helen Springs Station, were comprised mainly of six linguistic groups. McDouall Stuart, as early as 1861 noted contact with Aborigines, and their altercation at Attack Creek, which was one reason for his party to turn back on his first journey to the Centre. Alfred Giles, taking stock through to Darwin in 1878, stated that, "Natives followed us in mobs, a few miles behind". The Lobelly family, who took up a small block of land on Burke Creek prior to World War II, employed some natives.

The Bohning family employed natives from 1917. Edith Bohning, in her notes tells of her mother teaching the native women to scrape, clean and dry the hides of cows and goats to cover the antbed floors of the first homestead, also to make Bovril and soap, among many other "household" duties, hence adding to her comments, "They were quick to learn". From early years, the ever increasing herd of goats were tended by especially trained girls, who also looked after fowls and the flourishing vegetable gardens. Although the Australian Aborigines are nomadic, they were careful gardeners and produced very good crops.

The Aboriginal women's loyalty to their white employers was never in doubt, as witnessed in the story of Mrs. Bohning being stranded down the homestead well for three days, clad only in her bloomers. The men as usual were away on cattle work and Mrs. Bohning, was lowered in the bucket by girls working the winch when Mrs. Bohning gave the signal to be hauled up. It was discovered the connection on the handle was broken and the girls had no idea how to mend it. During the three days and nights, the helpers maintained a 24 hour watch, lowering food and clothing when necessary. Passing travellers eventually came to the rescue.

Although some reports say station owners paid their Aboriginal workers only in kind; clothes, supplies and tobacco, in many cases great care was bestowed upon them. Workers virtually became part of the families and their relatives housed and supplied also on the stations, the very isolation being a contributing factor to this. The story of Mrs. Bohning, on one occasion during the war protecting her family and staff, was one example.

The men were once again away on droving and camps and the children and staff left in the capable hands of Mrs. Bohning. The only negro unit of United States troops to camp at Banka Banka Staging Camp, on their way to Darwin, camped overnight at Banka Banka, then proceeded at sunrise next day travelling north. However, having heard of the native girls at Helen Springs, the men detoured to the homestead and demanded of Mrs. Bohning that she hand the girls over to them. This lone women, small in stature, strong in character, instructed her children and staff to go into the house and close the doors. She then faced the troops with a shotgun in her hands and told them, if they took one step forward she would "blast them". The troops retreated and left the station, later to face a court-martial.
Three old timers have stated that, at the time of this incident, there was a strong rumour that the U.S. Army held a "Kangaroo Court", in an attempt to prevent a further similar incident. Two G.I.s, were rumoured to have faced a firing squad. This rumour could tie in with a report on "Isolated Graves", by Allan Clarke, of Tennant Creek. Allan, a member of the Tennant Creek Branch of the National Trust, said a story persists amongst Aborigines on outstations, north of Banka Banka Station (adjoining Helen Springs Station), that two soldiers were "buried round about".

"Two graves at the old Morphett Creek Army Camp, they were lined out, but no writing on tombs..... The 1982 photographs show two graves, but the one on the right has since been obliterated. Contact with the army, indicated that the occupants, 'May have been reburied in a war cemetery'."

Aboriginal men have a record of being excellent horsemen and stockmen. Those on Helen Springs Station were no exception. Their skills at working cattle placed them in demand by drovers and during long trips which traversed their tribal lands, they had, if only briefly, contact with their families and friends. This again demonstrates the adaptability of these original Australians, as horses and cattle were introduced species.

This situation pertained until 1966, when the first strike of Aboriginal workers on Vestey's stations, from Wave Hill to Helen Springs, scattered the Aboriginal men with their families to other stations or fringe camps around towns. Quite a number returned in 1967/68 and settled in again until they left en-masse and never returned settling mostly in Tennant Creek, leaving behind many names such as Bundara, Monmoona, Carmilly and Koonana, mostly water holes and creeks. The many buildings at the station, mens and womens quarters, bathrooms, dining rooms, were either demolished or used for other purposes.

Robert Renner was born on Helen Springs in 1932 and was there only five short years. He was one of the children taken by the government to The Bungalow, Alice Springs in 1937 and then all points south and east. Unofficially adopted by the senior Bohnings, he spent much of his early years around the homestead and native camp a short distance away.

Bob says the number of Aboriginals on Helen Springs at that time was about 20 to 25. He recalls an underground meat house not far from the house to the south west, where mostly salted meat was kept. The springs he recalls, was a body of water about the size of a basketball court, that "never dried up". Close by was a flourishing vegetable garden, also lime and lemon trees and a large stand of bamboo. The watering system for the garden, was water drawn from a well by a "horse or donkey walking around". He recalls a windmill near the homestead (seen in early photographs) and a big Poinciana tree, probably the tree reportedly planted outside the original homestead in the early 20's, by Elsie Bohning. The homestead was two big houses of mud brick and joined by a verandah, but he does not recall the
verandah around three sides, so this could have been a later addition. The car in the photograph of Mr. and Mrs. Bohning with Bob at Powell Creek Overland Telegraph Station in 1937, is thought to be a Chevrolet Tourer. After the war, Bob Renner was taken back to the Northern Territory by the Federal government.

Over the centuries the native women delivered their babies on the track and rejoined the travelling numbers of their tribe as a matter of course. It was natural therefore that they should become compassionate midwives to lonely white women in their times of trial.

The following incident occurred before the Bohnings settled in Helen Springs, in 1907 on Anthony's Lagoon Station, Mrs. Bohning gave premature birth to daughter Edith. Constable Gordon Stott, then stationed at the Newcastle Waters Police Station, took the wife of the Aboriginal police tracker out to help Mrs. Bohning. Edith said later, her mother often stressed that she owed her life to the devotion of that Aboriginal woman.
The heavy work of handling cattle, building, droving big mobs of cattle for long distances and returning with perhaps six months of supplies and stores for every facet of station life, travelling long distances with sick or injured people for medical assistance, usually fell to the men in the early days of the settlement in the Northern Territory. Most histories or written works focus on the part of men in the development of the country. Because of the circumstances keeping the men away from the stations for long periods, our pioneer women, no matter how gently cared for, learned through necessity how to cope and become strong self sufficient women such as Mrs. Bohning. These women were rarely central figures in stories or histories.

Because houses were small, sometimes only a shack, housekeeping was often a hit and miss affair, the furnishings generally being home-made and of a utilitarian nature. The wife and mother and indeed the children, from an early age became competent "station-hands". In the early years of correspondence lessons for the children, the chore of overseeing lessons fell to the mother. If mother's formal education was sketchy, as was often the case, the children were lucky if father could help in his spare time, or sometimes a station employee might be engaged to help out.

In the case of the Bohnings of Helen Springs, the younger daughter Elsie, quick to learn and absorb, reached a fair standard of education and as a result "The Little Bush Maid" articles, which were published in newspapers of the period, supply us with some idea of station life at that time.

Most stories of the great outback extol the role of men, as their work was seen, both written about and spoken of, but apart from an occasional work such as Mrs. Gunn's *We of the Never Never*, little was heard of the woman's role.

The following pages attempt to redress this state of affairs, with stories of women from the first residents of Helen Springs, the Bohning family. This is followed by stories from managers' wives, after Vesteyes purchased the property in 1943.

It will be seen that the role of the women was house-keeper, mother, teacher and stockwoman. As the number of buildings increased, more staff were needed including a constant hostess to private and company visitors occupying the added quarters, to visitors and staff school teachers etc. So too did the role of the women change. They gradually withdrew from the outside work to become station chatelaine.

The gardens too changed from flourishing vegetable gardens, producing all the melons and vegetables needed. Fruit trees including citrus, mulberries, banana, paw-paw were all grown with
a heavy emphasis on preserving to fill pantry shelves for a leaner period.

In later years, all stores have been flown in from the nearest towns, once again meaning less time in the kitchen, but still a lot of time and work in maintaining beautiful lawns and formal gardens.

At the turn of the century, a young couple met in Camooweal, a small isolated town in Queensland, near the eastern boundary of the Northern Territory. John Bohning of Fraucop, Alterland, Germany and Esther Bennet of Gingy Station, New South Wales.

John's parents were Andreus Bohning, a carpenter by trade and Eliza Sharp. Esther's father Thomas Henry Jenkins, a carrier by trade. Her mother's maiden name was Myer.

Esther had earlier married Harry Bennett, by whom she had two sons, James (Bull) and Patrick in 1902, at Rockland Station, Queensland, approximately ten miles from Camooweal. They were married both aged 23 years.

John, or Jack as he was known, was used to general station work and decided to strike out for himself. Installing Esther, her two sons and their meagre belongings "onto a dray", he began a nomadic life, travelling from station to station as a contractor, sinking dams, building fences, stockyards and other improvements, mostly in the Territory.

Esther, thus began life that was to establish her as a Northern Territory pioneer. Although small in build, she was physically strong, having excelled in sport in her younger days, especially running and later she became a magnificent horsewoman. She had the basic qualities to withstand the physical tests in her life ahead.

The couple headed for Katherine, and the newly opened meatworks, where Jack built stockyards. They travelled south and at Anthony's Lagoon, in 1907, their daughter Edith was born. Constable Gordon Stott travelled from Newcastle Waters Station, to bring a native woman to act as midwife.

The couple always had plans to eventually have their own holding and when they reached Renner Springs, decided to apply for a block of land. They had horses, goats, cattle, fowls, the inevitable cattle dogs and basic furniture.

The Bohnings were to have five children, three sons and two daughters, Jack, Edith, Elsie, Alex and the youngest, William born on Helen Springs in 1915. Jim (Bull) Bennett, Mrs. Bohning's eldest son, became 'man of the house', when the station was being established and Mr. Bohning away in stock camps or droving for weeks, sometimes months. During these times Esther bore the burdens of running the homestead, teaching and directing the native help, caring for the children and worst of all fighting the loneliness. In the early years, the nearest white
woman was 100 miles away.

They turned their stock into cattle yards at Renner and found to their dismay that the land has been declared a reserve, so they turned their attention to permanent waters at Helen Springs ten miles south. Bundy Prentice had run cattle there, but disheartened by dry seasons, he had moved away. Cattle yards were there, with no residence.

Esther Bohning, concerned that her children were living a roaming existence, showed the determination and strength that were to see her through a life of trials and tribulations. This would have daunted a lesser woman. A rough shack and lean-to were built and with their truck and rough furniture, their first "homestead" came into being. Cooking was done in the open on a rough stone fireplace, until a fuel stove was brought from Renner Springs.

A fowl yard was built, a garden planted and a native "girl" taught to care for the large herd of goats.

It was time too, to start teaching their children lessons, a formidable task. Mrs. Bohning had had little formal schooling and Mr. Bohning, better equipped for this task, was away from the home for long periods. Necessary materials, books, paper and pencils, may or may not arrive with the mail man on horseback. At one stage, the "Fizzer" of We of the Never Never came.

Elsie, the youngest daughter, seems to have shown a marked aptitude, as she later wrote articles for magazines and periodicals under the pen-name "Little Bush Maid". Elsie married Fred Harris, of McLaren Creek Station, south of Tennant Creek. Unfortunately all her papers were lost in a fire in the station storeroom.

As the years passed, the station prospered and another homestead was built, of mud brick walls, with flagstone floors and a verandah, involving more work for Mrs. Bohning. She taught the native girls to treat the bullock and goat hides, some dyed for mats; also to weave wool from the angora goats. She also made preserves of all vegetables and fruits, and jams from melons and berries. Edie and Elsie, as well as native women, joined in this work also making Bovril and homemade soap.

Mrs. Bohning's talents seemed endless. Working with a "hand" sewing machine, she made all the family clothes in earlier years before hawkers' vans appeared, as well as buying canvas in rolls and making water bags for the men in camp and long "verandah" water bags. In later years, she acquired a treadle machine and the girls became competent seamstresses.

The tyranny of distance and lack of supplies taught Mrs. Bohning, to become the family bootmaker, indeed she also mended the ringers' boots, sole and heels. A neighbour remembers seeing Mrs. Bohning, having worn out her shoes and unable to get any to replace them, helping with the cattle muster, her feet in the stirrups clad in shoes fashioned out of four or five laps of
hessian and sewn with packing needle and string.

Dry years added to problems, with the men away in camp or droving cattle to Alice Springs, for local sale. During these times, Mrs. Bohning shouldered all station duties. The boys accompanied their father from the time they could ride and the girls helped with building cattle yards, fence mending, attending goats, fowls and gardens. It was then Mrs. Bohning learned the value of the faithful and unstinting help of her native companions.

Loneliness was one of the greatest crosses early pioneer women had to bear: Mrs. Bohning was no exception. Until Tennant Creek Overland Telegraph Station became a little colony and Mrs. Rabbit came with her telegraphist son in approximately 1925/28, visits from white women were rare indeed. Christmas time was a time for gathering at the Overland Telegraph Station, Banka Banka, Helen Springs and if women were present, they had a wonderful time talking, exchanging recipes, "cures", especially for sandy blight (Trachoma), which was forever present among stockmen and the children.

Mrs. Bohning's medicine chest contained rum, brandy, gin, aspros and sheets for bandages. The treatment for eyes was cold tea leaf pads on eyes, Clarke's Lotion Drops and three weeks confined in a dark room. Even so, one of the boys lost the sight of one eye - "White Eye".

In the early 30's, Charlie and Ethel Wright, with their two sons and a native couple, drove their small mob of cattle and sheep north from Single Station, looking for likely land and stopped to water at Muckaty bore (a government bore north of Banka Banka). They settled there and built a hut and lean-to. When the heat, flies and loneliness overcame Mrs. Wright, Charlie would load her and the boys onto the dray and drive to Helen Springs, where Mrs. Bohning opened her arms, heart and medicine chest. A few days later Mrs. Wright would return to Muckaty, refreshed.

Edith had met and married Bill McDonald, a bore sinker, in 1929 and moved to Katherine. Prior to this, she had accompanied her parents and the boys on the famous drove of Helen Springs cattle to the newly completed railhead of Stuart (later Alice Springs).

During this trip, Mrs. Bohning with Bill, travelled on the dray with an old station hand with Jim Sharber as driver. Mrs. Bohning cooked on the stove on the dray. This included making bread. The girls acted as ringers, as did Mrs. Bohning, when necessary. They were known as the "Petticoat Drovers". During the trip from Helen Springs to Alice Springs, the only white women met with were, Mrs. Crook's two daughters, Kathleen and Doreen (later Mrs. Braitling, of Mt. Doreen Station, out from Alice Springs), whose family lived in a tent home on Wycliffe Well.

This intrepid pioneer, Mrs. Bohning, worked through illnesses on many occasions. In approximately 1940, she became so ill that
Jack Ford drove her to Alice Springs, on a mattress in the back of a car 350 miles, over a rough track with no complaints from the patient.

As the family grew and left home, Mr. and Mrs. Bohning felt their work on the station was finished. They sold the property, reportedly for nine thousand pounds, moved into Tennant Creek for two years and then retired to Alice Springs. Living on the east side and widowed, Mrs. Bohning's frail figure became a familiar sight, until her death in 1952.

As her own family gradually left home, the couple "adopted" a little native boy, Bobbie. He is seen in the photo of Mr. and Mrs. Bohning at Powell Creek Overland Telegraph Station.
1. Mr Cec Watts with 1973/74 Beechcraft Baron.

2. Mrs Hilda Tuxworth, M.B.E. (with girls)
John Bohning Katherine.
5  Bohning Family (Station in background).

6.  First Homestead, c. 1925.
7. "Humpy" the camel 1918.
8. Mrs Bohning, Esther and Bill, 1925.
9. Showing Bore pipe into turkey nest.

11. Cottage at No. 8 Bore before "BLOW".

12. Cottage after "BLOW".
13. Road Train Base Maryville built in 1950s.
14. Jack & Esther Bohning with Bob Renner on trip to Powell Creek Telegraph Station 1932.
15. Doll owned by Edie McDonald 1917.

16. Using "Spanish Windlass" to pull Lizzie out of Sandy Crossing Station Creek 1935.
17. Elsie Bohning aged 15 years 1925.
18. Bohning Family with visitors 1925.

19. Four generations of Bohnings.
20. Untrucking the cattle.

22. Tim Doran drafting brood mares.

23. Andrew on "Wattle" aged 6.
24. Sophie on "Two Bob" aged 5.

25. Paddy Ambrose with home grown cauliflower.
26. Dinner camp on the Milla Milla Muster.

27. Bathtime at the races.
28. Family group.

29. The twins in "school wireless session" with governess.

31. Elisabeth Stenhouse standing in front of tree.
32. Stock camp at No. 8 Bore Helen Springs.

33. General view of No. 8 Bore Stock camp with extensions.
34. Hot water donkey.

35. Den Stenhouse on remains of Lobellys cottage.
36. Semi permanent water that dried up in 1986 drought.

37. Example of birds nests in old Mimosa bush.
38. Author and granddaughter Barbara at No. 8 Bore, 1987.

39. Wolf Cubs of Tennant Creek.
40. Helen Springs Stenhouse twins Darrel and Shane.

41. Esther Bohning.
42. Author and Sally Warriner.
Edith Behning, was born in a tent at Anthony's Lagoon in 1907, to Jack and Esther Behning. She was born two months prematurely with the aid of the police station lubra as midwife. Constable Stott, the Officer-in-Charge, always referred to her as the "Quart-Pot baby", as she was so small.

Her father used wagons for dam sinking on local stations, with the object of saving enough money to take up a station. In 1917 Bohning purchased the lease of Helen Springs, on advice from Tom Nugent, owner of Banka Banka. Helen Springs, had been owned by "Bundy" Prentice, who gave up the land after disheartening seasons. There was no homestead, only two old stockyards, one at Renner Springs and one a mile from the present station. A tent and bough shed became home at Helen Springs.

The family kept goats, fowls, pips and horses and they had plenty of grocery supplies. Flour, tea, sugar, dried rice, beans and peas were bought in quantity also fruits, all dried, but nothing in tins. They created a good vegetable garden and with goats milk and butter had a well balanced diet.

Helen Springs was started with 300 mixed herd from Wickham in Western Australia. The young family, Jack (now in Alice Springs), Edie (now Mrs. W. McDonald of Tennant Creek), Elsie (Mrs. Fred Harris, late of McLaren Station and now Adelaide), Alex (now in Queensland), were all healthy. Their step-brother, Jim Bennett, Mrs. Bohning's child of her first marriage, was the mainstay of the station when Mr. Bohning was away. Jim did station work in the Territory until 1940, when he became a linesman for the government, until his death in 1962.

When a little girl of ten, Edie remembers Jack Noble and Kennedy, passing through Camooweal:

"I remember so well, Jack was noticeable to me as a child, because his left eye had apparently been injured, thin, as now. He and his three companions came to the house each night for a quiet chat. These nights I so well remember, because of the cattle dog with the visitors, who continually fought with the family cat, who was protecting her new kittens. The travellers stayed two nights then travelled on to Ambrose, at Banka Banka".

Two years before, Mr. Bohning and the boys cut bush timber and selected a site ten miles from Renner on Helen Springs. The reason for the move was that the government made Renner a reserve for public use. The walls of the new home were of stone, the floors of antbed, painted with lime from the countryside, bare antbed flagged with local stones and bound with lime. The nucleus of the furniture came from the camp home. Goat and bullock skins were used as coverings on the floor, the best skins being chosen were cleaned, pegged, dried and sometimes dyed. Gins wove wool from angora goats.
For sickness, the family medicine chest contained brandy, rum, gin, aspros and sheeting for bandages. For eyes (the boys had bad eyes - cattle blight), their mother put hot tea leaf packs and Clarke's Lotion on their eyes and they were kept in a darkened room for about three weeks.

Bill was born in 1915 at Renner Springs, with an old lubra named Sarah acting as midwife and doing the chores. There were no complications. For clothing, mother bought cloth by bolts and made all clothes using first a hand machine and later a treadle. Meat and flour bags did duty for tea towels and meat and bread bags for the men. For cooking, an open fire was used at Renner, then an old fuel stove was installed in the house at Helen. Big pots and boilers were needed to cope with large pieces of meat.

For religious instruction, mother instructed. A highlight was a visit by the Bishop who drove a model T Ford. He christened Bill. The family Bible was much used. Mother taught schooling, with father who had a higher education, superintending. Dad was away for long periods and mother would teach the children at night after her many chores were finished. During the "wet", men with time to spare used greenhide (bullock hide, pegged, dried, scraped of hire, soaked in water). When wet, this was cut in sizes and worked for use in making hobbles, ropes and large and small plaited neck straps.

Mr. Bohning was experienced in making kangaroo hide whips, beautifully plaited, with bush timber handles, usually conkaberry bush. This time was used to renew harness, saddles and pack saddles. Oil for leather work was obtained by boiling down the hoof and first joint of bullocks. When boiled to shreds, oil would float to the top and this was skimmed into another vessel and boiled until the water evaporated, then bottled and stored.

Bovril, or meat extract, was made by putting neck and leg meat into a vessel and standing the vessel in a drum of boiling water, boiled until the gravy settled to the bottom. It was then strained into another container and boiled until it became the needed consistency. After setting, the fat was removed and the extract bottled. Jams were made from the garden produce of cape gooseberries, melons and lemons. Good tomato yields were made into tomato sauce and also into pickles with cucumber and red cabbage.

Mrs. Bohning was an accomplished house woman. Among her many chores was the mending of all family shoes, both sole and heel, making of all water bags for the station, buying the canvas in bulk. "In their spare time", Mrs. Bohning and the girls helped the men build stockyards, brand, muster and yard.

As the years passed, the sale of cattle to drovers and others did not clear the beef, so a mob left Helen Springs in 1926. First stop was the Telegraph Station at Tennant Creek, where Bill Rabbitt was postmaster, Wauchope Telegraph Station, Barrow Creek Cattle Station, Stirling Station, then to Alice, where there were only about six houses, a police station and post office but no
Next drove there was a railway at Alice Springs and the cattle were railed through to the south for sale. In 1929, a big mob from Helen Springs, of 500 cattle started for Alice Springs, with Mr. Bohning as boss, Edie and Elsie as hands, taking alternate night watch with the other hand, Jim Sharber. Mrs. Bohning followed with baby Bill in a covered dray which was also the cookhouse. Bread was baked on this dray. The old road was a stock and cattle route and cattle were watered at Government wells along the route. Word was sent ahead either by telegraph or by rider that a mob was coming through and water would be drawn ready by whip and bucket system.

On this trip the cattle ate poison bush (Gastrolobium): many became sick and six died. This held the drove up for a week. However the Bohning's fared better than a drove from Newcastle Waters the previous year, when Mr. Huddeleston lost 599 out of 800 through poison weed. This weed seemed to be confined to a dry stage of 33 miles between Wycliffe and Taylor Wells.

At Wycliffe Well, the party met with the only women on the route, the wife of the station owner, Mr. Crook and their two daughters, Doreen and Kathleen. This meeting of women was exciting and news, recipes and fashions were exchanged. The food supplies lasted well on this trip. Goats which were driven with the cattle, supplied milk. The goats were sold at Alice Springs and the cattle were entrained to Adelaide. These were the first cattle sent by rail from Alice Springs (then Stuart), to Adelaide.

Back home the trees had grown, especially the large spreading nut tree, with heavy rains, streams were full and the greenery a picture. Wild duck were plentiful, turkeys and birds abounding, with numerous kangaroos, snakes and emus. Emu eggs were used for cake making and the children made ornaments of the shells. General station work, mustering, branding, droving and housework covered the years to 1928 when Edie went to Katherine, where she met and later married Bill McDonald.

During the first year at Helen Springs, a Christmas present sent from Adelaide and brought by the mailman in his own sway for safety, was given to Edie. This was a rag doll which Mrs. McDonald still has, with its original dress and a little bead necklace. Of such staunch material were toys made that the original dress has patches of the finest darning that can only be seen upon close examination.

Edie recalls the Shadforth family buying Springvale in approximately 1931. On the occasion during a trip through the Tennant and visiting Helen Springs Station, the Shadforth family had their Ford truck bogged in Station Creek and it was only by the concerted pushing effort of the Bohning family, that got them through.

When Edie was about 12 years of age, she rose with the sun,
milked the goats and put them to feed, fed the chicks, then attended to the breadmaking, housework and vegetable garden. The girls raised the garden water by horse whip and bucket. Later a well was sunk near the house and a windmill built.

At noon, lunch was prepared for four men and the afternoon was reserved for correspondence lessons and sewing. This was followed by a scramble game of football with her brothers, or a walk to collect wild flowers, or to swim in Helen Springs Creek. There was always water from the spring on which wild duck congregated and the shooting of these and turkeys in the wet made a varied change to the heavy meat diet. The only white employee at this time was elderly Jim Sharber. Natives were given seasonal work.

When she was 18 years of age, Edie visited Banka Banka station, where Bill McDonald was off siding for Peacock, at water drilling for the Ambrose brothers. At this time the young couple were just friends and Bill visited Helen Springs at Christmas, 1926. A few years later, in 1929, they again met in Katherine, where Bill had his own garage and they were married the same year at Helen Springs. Mary and Elsie of Banka Banka, both women of the Warramungu tribe, were visitors to Helen Springs in Edie's childhood.

In 1915 she remembered Powell Creek Repeater Station and the Post Office being opened, with three resident postmasters, Ward, Sheehan and Wallaby Holtze. There were two large brick buildings, quarters and post office being in one and the other quarters for the linesman, store and kitchen.

Edie liked the trips there by horseback when she accompanied her father on business, because the buildings were surrounded by lovely trees and foliage, especially one huge mango tree which shaded the garden on the edge of the creek. The children raided this mango tree with zealous enthusiasm. There was permanent water from a spring which kept the creek supplied, attracting an abundance of poultry and wildfowl. At Helen Springs, bread was baked every second day as huge quantities of luscious cakes, scones and tarts were needed to feed the family and hands.

Mrs. Bohning rendered fat from slaughtered beasts and, adding caustic soda and resin, boiled it all in a large copper for an hour, to be poured into a large tub and stood overnight. In the morning, soap would be set. This was then turned out onto a cloth, cut into reasonable size pieces and stored.

In February 1965 Mrs. Doreen Braitling wrote in a letter:

"... First - I remember the drove quite well. My sister and I rode out to meet the mob coming in and met the Bohning family for the first time, the first white woman we had been able to talk to for years. It would be difficult to give my impression of the living conditions of the droving camp as it was then, because it was exactly as we lived. We did not notice any hardships as we had grown up
among cattle, horses, camping and what we now find irritating, dust, flies etc. I thought it was in the year that the railway reached Alice Springs (1929) and that theirs were the first cattle to be trucked away, but I am not sure of that. Mrs. McDonald may remember if the railway was there then. If it was, then what I have written above would be right.

My father, William Crook and his family settled in Wycliffe Well, which was then a Government well, the water being drawn up by a 'whip' arrangement. To say he had a house there would not be true because like many pioneer families, a house came by very slow stages. We first made camp there with our wagon and horse team (see Powman's 'Man from Oodnadatta'), and herd of goats. Then a bough shelter and hut followed. But he never did build a house there. Later we moved about eight miles up the Wycliffe Creek and built a modest home. This homestead was later moved to a new site by new owners. The first camp was named of course, Wycliffe Well. The new home my father called Singleton, after the Singleton estate, home of a noble family near where my father was born in Wales.

I did once have a couple of articles in Smith's Weekly. These were the result of a travelling journalist coming to our home and asking us to let him have some material for his paper. They were not at all like what we have given him. When published, we found he had 'blown up' our material into a dramatic sort of thing. I wasn't very pleased about it, but I did keep a copy and would have been only too pleased to have let you read it, only that it and lots of other things, that I did value were destroyed by fire when our station home burnt down, soon after my husband died.

I do still write a few magazine articles.

I cannot recall that we talked much at all when we met the Bohning girls. We were very shy, probably the other girls were also, but I remember we did enjoy just being with them."

P.S. I have just recalled something rather amusing. My husband was droving cattle from Newcastle [Waters] to Alice Springs. I went too and drove the vehicle. When we passed the old Tennant Telegraph Station, he had gone ahead with the cattle. I followed in the truck, but at some point his mob left the road in search of better feed and it wasn't long before I noticed the absence of tracks.

About where the township is now, or near it, I plunged through the spinifex here and there to pick up the tracks. I was wearing thick stockings (it was cold) and those jazzy garters ladies wore in those days. Somewhere among the spinifex I lost one. Shortly after the gold was found and a settlement formed.
I have often pictured the puzzled face of a miner, if anyone ever came across my garter among the spinifex!"
The younger daughter Elsie, who was born in 1912, wrote poems and articles for newspapers of the time, which are still remembered.

Elsie not only joined her mother in droving expeditions and station management, but made a name for herself as journalist and writer, using the pseudonym of "The Little Bush Maid". Starting at the tender age of 11-12, she wrote for Territory papers, the Times and the Northern Standard and contributed regularly to eastern and southern papers. Her articles paint in vivid language, life on a station and in droving camps.

The following is a collection of her writing which provides some insight into life in the bush:

Helen Springs, December 25, 1921. To Mr. and Mrs. Cranston.

"Dear Mum and Dad,—Did you see my letter in the Sydney Mail's Cinderella's Page. It was in the honour place. I will soon be a full-blown author, won't I? I don't think I felt as proud as a peacock when I say it—I have never seen a peacock—but I felt just like one anyway.

We have had no rain to speak of; just a few small showers. We have not had to put up the mosquito net so far and the nights have been nice and cool and we have to get under the blankets before morning. There are banks of clouds about and we expect rain soon. All stock are in good condition, so we are not worrying. I have 11 little kids. We made a little butter yesterday for Christmas and a pudding as big as a cartwheel and a seven decker cake and mum shot a turkey and we killed some roosters and made jellies and toffee and baked sweet potatoes and onions, but I'll make you hungry if I tell you any more about it ..."

February 1, 1924

"From the land of lonely places,
Tall gum trees and open spaces,
Comes a letter from Little Bush Maid,
To the editor in town.
Perhaps he thinks it cruel,
That she never went to school,
But good dame Mother Nature,
Has educated her just the same.
In the hut and cattle camp,
Among the drovers in the tent,
With my good old pony Anzac,
For a comrade and a friend.
Did you hear my stockwhip ringing?
Did it set your wireless singing?
As we raced across the clearing,
Helter skelter after that we's steer.
He had broken from the mob,
Just across that stony nob,
But good old Anzac saw him,
Took the bit and chased him back.
Over boulders large and small,
Through the melon holes and all.
Always running very wide,
Never faltering in his stride,
And the Bush Maid firm and neat,
Never shifted in her seat,
For both the horse and she are mountain bred.
For they hail from up the country,
Far beyond the O.T. line.
Where the range is rough and high,
And the black soil plains are wide,
And the bush men of our land,
With quart pot in their hand,
Drink in honour of our Bush Maid,
From the Never Never Land."

February 19, 1924

"The country is dry and bailing water all day and sometimes into the middle of the night out of wells and soaks is not all kid stakes. The dry thunderstorms have been a nuisance this year. Cattle go out storm hunting and not finding any they go looking for water on their old paddocks and stand round the dry waterholes.

On November 30, Jack, Edith and I took a fresh team of horses to pull old J. McCarthy through the sand. We heard his horses were in poor condition and there are about eight miles of heavy sand near Renner Springs. We met him at Ringwood.

'Hello girls,' he said, 'Where are you going?'

We have come to escort you and have some fresh horses to pull you through the sand."

'I am glad to meet you. Cripes I feel highly honoured. I don't like travelling by myself. I left the old lady at Newcastle and I have no meat, all went bad.'

That night we camped at Renner Springs and Old Mac told us tales of long ago, of the old pioneers that have passed, of floods and droughts and bush fires and it must have been midnight before we went to roost.
The old mud spring misnamed Renner Springs is just about dry. It needs fencing in and a few lengths of troughing would enable the mailman and travellers with small plants to water their horses. This is urgently needed and the cost would be very small. A five pound note would fence it in.

I don't know why the government have not taken this in hand. Perhaps they go about with their eyes in their pockets when out joy riding in the interior or maybe we are too far away from the seat of government. It is a well known saying that the further you go outback the worse the government.

Today is a day of jubilation for the rain god has opened his sprinkler for the first time.

May 13th, 1924

The following is a story by Elsie Bohning, who accompanied her father mustering.

"We left the old homestead at Helen Springs Station on March sixteenth with a mob of fat cattle and flock of goats. Arrived at Tennant Creek on the twenty-eighth and took delivery of two hundred mixed cattle, destination Blood's Creek.

They were an illbred, inbred lot of things and low in condition. All hands, nerves jumping. It's a nerve shaking job droving cattle through a poison patch.

We watered about eleven in the morning and started on the thirty-three mile stage. We kept moving them along all day and camped about eight miles out. We had a good moon and intended pushing them through the following night.

Mr. Hayes, a pastoralist, remarked that our bullocks were the best he had seen for years. In the evening we pushed on about one half miles, then came the smash.

The first one was a poor heifer, she just stopped, her ears dropped, a little froth at the mouth, then she fell to the ground. Dad was off his horse at once, butcher knife in hand. He killed and bled her. Then opened her up. First he examined the spleen, then the kidneys and liver, next the lungs. Then he spoke.

'Red water be hanged! I have never opened a healthier beast! Girls, we are up against it! It's poison all right.'

The smash began just before sundown, cows, calves, weaners and steers, started tumbling over like so many fallen soldiers on a battlefield. Some of them died peacefully,
some groaning with pain, some racing round and staggering like drunken men, others bellowing as if a pack of dogs had hold of them. The bullocks went mad, they raced around their fallen comrades seeking the invisible foe. It took all hands to hold them, the sturdy night horses sticking manfully to their tasks until daylight before the infuriated mob settled down. We had seventy dead out of four hundred.

It's a sickening sight to see your cattle dying all around you and unable to do anything for them. We lost no fat bullocks that night, but the whole mob was affected.

We had to travel six miles to water and it took all day to push the poor sick beggars along, a good many dropping by the wayside, never to rise again.

We reached Woodford Well, where we sold our bullocks at a fair price and our worry and strenuous labours were at an end. So what's the use of whining? Things will soon come right, for every cloud that sails the sky has a silvery lining."

October 28th, 1924

"The time flies when people are busy. When every day and almost every hour there is work to do, and you can never feel lonesome or ever want a friend with plenty of pleasant work to do and lots of pets to tend.

P.S. The Governor of Victoria and the Countess Stradbrooke and party, passed here en route for Darwin, per four cars. They are a very charming couple and speak to people just like one human being to another. There is no frill about them and they don't even speak with a marble in their mouth, like most English aristocrats."

Late 1924

"I regret to hear that splendid little woman, Miss Elsie Bohning, of Helen Springs, recently met with a painful accident. She was helping the men in a drafting yard when an exceptionally wild bullock charged her. Elsie hopped up lively onto the fence, but lost her balance on top and fell to the ground on the other side, dislocating her shoulder. On arriving at Maranboy Hospital, an anaesthetic was administered and the dislocated bone pushed back in its place again. Miss Bohning is now quite well. What a God send to suffering humanity is that Maranboy Hospital, with the self denying ladies in charge."
December 22nd, 1925

"We saddled up to have a race,
On Helen Springs one day,
And all the jockeys on their mounts gathered to the fray.
Jack, who was on Anzac, yelled 'You jokers all look slow!,'
Line up here now, you turtles and I'll show you how to go.'
They started and the lead was quickly took by Mum and Dad,
And Jack, who was the judge, clapped his hands and yelled,
'That's not too bad.'
Bill, was on the donkey's back, he looked quite flash that day,
Especially when the donkey stopped and started forth to bray.
Mick, was on the camel's back and treating "Humpy" kind,
Caught the lead, held them a while then left them lengths behind.
Elsie, on Flash Desert Gold, raced by the gum trees tall,
But Edith, scorching on the bike, set sail and beat them all."

August 6th, 1930

"We went into Alice Springs with our truck and had six days in town. It is a budding city now. Cars and trucks and people everywhere and some beautiful homes. It has improved beyond all recognition since we were here in 1924. The town folk are splendid, I couldn't possibly find words to express my opinion of those big hearted generous and very hospitable townsfolk and I fell in love with the town itself over and over again.

Now we are on our way to Adelaide and expect to have a few weeks in that fair city when our long long trail is traversed and our bullocks sold and delivered. I have never visited a city yet. We went to Darwin in 1920, and it was the isle of my young dreams for a week. Then I longed for the bush and my animal pets and play things again. Now I guess Adelaide will be full of thrill, drama, laughter and fun for a week or so and then the lure of the open spaces will ring in our hearts and ears. Dad says I'll never want to leave the city when I get there, but leave that to me.

Dear old N.T., my country of birth, I pledge to thee love and toil and years to be. Yes, dear friends of the north, be ye sad or happy, old or young, mark my words, I will come back, back to the dear sunny bushland and where the open spaces and the big hearts are. And now dear friends and readers, I must boil the billy so goodbye one and all - Nay, Au Revoir, for I will come back."
May 1st, 1931

"I can scarcely hold my pen so excuse the wavers. I have just realised it is almost a year since I penned you a few lines, have become a real rolling stone of late so haven't had much time.

We are only home a few weeks from another trip to Centralia, with another load of beasties for the market. Had a good trip down in spite of numerous grass seeds and long stages. Yours truly, who was cook for the camp as per usual, was not perched up with the swags on the dray this time, but in charge of our Dodge tourer. It was a greater responsibility, but so much more comfortable and cannot be equalled on the long dry stages, I don't know how we managed without it previously.

Dad went as far as Quorn, with the cattle to attend them on the journey, while Alex, Mother and yours truly, enjoyed the social life of Alice Springs.

Miss Maggie Bloomfield was crowned Queen. She look gorgeous her lovely white train and pretty shining crown. The race ball was wonderful. We were in town eleven days and almost every night there was a dance, so you can imagine your bush friend quite a modern young flapper, now partaking in the latest jazzes from town.

Market down to zero and cannot possibly rise with so many cattle going in. Pa has just purchased 600 head of beasties from Roper Valley Station, off John Warrington Rogers. The boys took delivery at Banka Banka and brought them home and cross branded here. Had some great fun, as some of them were very lively. They are a fine mob and should be okay for the Adelaide market, after the season breaks"....

On 5 October 1931, Elsie Bohning, married Fred Harris of McLaren Creek Station, at the home of her parents, where they stayed for a few days before going to live at McLaren Creek Station.
In 1933, the Maloney women left Wyndham, Western Australia, to join Mr. James Maloney, who was already in Tennant Creek, following the discovery of gold.

Having reached Katherine, Mrs. Maloney, daughters Betty, Shirley (now Mrs. Harold Jolliffe of Alice Springs, and grand-daughter Patricia, daughter of the only son James known in Tennant Creek, as Jerry), reached Helen Springs. They took advantage of "lifts" from rare transport. The only member of the Bohning family there was Bill, who told them to stay and mounting his horse, rode away.

Mrs. Maloney, always a good organiser, set about finding food for the children. Betty, aged 16 years, remembers the old four roomed homestead, rough walls and floors and what seemed hundreds of goats and fowls, the fowls were free-roaming. Betty wandered along the banks of the Station Creek looking for eggs. She assumed that the women were away on a drove, as none were at the homestead for the time she was there, approximately a week.

One incident she remembers, was washing her silk pyjamas and hanging them on the line and in the morning, finding that the goats had chewed the legs off as far as they could reach, the first shortie pyjamas ever.

Mrs. Maloney, found it difficult finding suitable food for the baby Patricia, who presumably was not used to goats milk.

Another traveller carried them as far as Banka Banka Station, where Mr. Maloney Snr., awaited to take them to Tennant Creek. There they made their home.

In a letter written in June, 1988, from Atherton, Queensland, where Mrs. Richards lives with her husband Archie, she states:

"Within two months of this episode, both Shirley (her sister, Mrs. Harold Jolliffe of Alice Springs), and I were in a Church of England boarding school, in Melbourne and so suffered culture shock."

Betty Richards recalls waiting at Helen Springs on January 1934.

"My father, Jim Maloney, had taken up a lease, mining in Tennant Creek, with George Boland. The mine was called 'Lone Star Mine' and now my mother, sister Shirley, niece Pat and I were on our way to join him. We had come by the ship 'The Koolinda', to Darwin from Wyndham, in W.A., then travelled to Birdum Hotel. After waiting a few days there, we accepted the offer of a lift in a truck. There was no main road at the time and very little traffic from north to south. The truck took goods to Helen Springs Station, then returned north, so our group had to unload and wait another truck."
The Station homestead, was made of mud bricks I think. The floors were of termite mounds which had been watered and pounded to a hard surface. There were huge chunks of dry corned beef hanging from the hooks on the verandah. The only white person there was a very shy bushman. I think it was Mick Bohning, the owner's son. There were numerous fowls and goats. All were very friendly in their own way. The native girl's took a great fancy to Pat. who was about two years old. The fowls visited the bedroom and investigated our suitcases and ran freely anywhere they liked. The goats ate the legs off our Milanese long pyjamas, which Mum had washed and hung on the line. She later claimed that our family created the first shortie pyjama fashion.

Mick rode off to see his cattle soon after our arrival, he told us we were welcome to stop and asked the Aboriginal girls to look after us. We did not see him again.

We went walking in the cool evenings and found pools in the creek bed where kangaroos and goats drank side by side. We also found several nests of eggs where the "free-ranging" fowls had laid their eggs. The eggs were a change from corn beef and a lot more nourishing for Pat. and all of us, I guess. After a few days, a man came by who had room in his truck for us and we moved on to Banka Banka, where our father awaited to take us to Tennant Creek. I do not know the names of the drivers."
The following is an account of life on Helen Springs station as told by Jocelyn Doran, wife of Tim Doran, Station Manager from 1972 to 1981.

"Early in March, 1972, my husband, Tim, received a telegram from the Company Pastoral Inspector, Cec Watts, summoning him to Darwin. Such requests were unusual and naturally we were very excited to know the outcome. At the time we were living on Spring Creek Station, a small Vestey place in the East Kimberley. Left at the station with our children, Andrew and Sophie, I found the suspense of those few days almost too much.

Tim's news on return brought great joy and excitement to us. He had been offered the management of Helen Springs with a grand salary of $8,000, much more than his present rate of pay. We were particularly happy at the prospect of this move for, although we loved Spring Creek and the life there, we knew that Helen Springs, was a top grazing property with many improvements and beautiful horses, a fact that pleased us both. We had spent our first year of marriage, 1966 at Helen, so were familiar with our prospective new home.

A truck was sent over from Helen Springs, to help move our gear, this included my horse, that we had brought up from Sydney and our dog. It was not without some concern that we faced our new position, as Helen Springs, had a large staff of about 20 whites and some 10 to 15 blacks. The station had been run by the same manager for the past ten years.

The first couple of years for both of us involved a lot of hard work and some trying times, until we gathered around us, employees who suited our style and who did not keep referring to, 'the way we used to do things'. At that time, Helen Springs, had 35 bores mainly hooked up to windmills, but a few connected with Mono pumps, two major drafting and trucking yards, plus a small set of yards at the station that were generally used for horses. The 2082 square mile (5391 square kilometres), lease was divided into 17 main paddocks, being a bullock depot for the Company's western stations.

These facts make interesting comparisons to those of Mrs. Bohning's, day. They relied on one well and the springs, that were not too numerous, at least not in our time. The Helen Springs, themselves, were not permanent water, but I think they may have been in Mrs. Bohning's period. It is also interesting to note that the well, equipped with a windmill as mentioned by Mrs. Bohning, still stands and until around 1979, pumped water that was not used, just continually recycled.

During our first few years at Helen, I rarely saw Tim home from the run before eight o'clock at night and weekends, time spent as a family was rare, almost non-existent. I would always collect our dinner from the station kitchen and keep it in the oven, then we would eat together no matter what time he arrived
home. There were occasions when waiting became very trying. I overcame this tedium when, after one of our annual holidays to Sydney, we returned with a piano. Although not a pianist of acclaim, playing is so relaxing and rewarding for both Tim and myself. However, as Tim organised the station and got things running smoothly it was not necessary for him to be away so much and meals became less of a dried up rendering of the original.

I tackled the garden which had the potential to be somewhat of a parkland, with a few modifications to the water supply and a bit of digging here and planting there. When we arrived at Helen Springs, there was an excellent bore at the station, equipped with a Mono pump, but the storage tank, though elevated, was very small and leaked. There used to be a joke told by the mechanic, whose house was at the end of the pipe, that if he turned his bath on in the morning, it would be ready for him by the time he knocked off at five in the afternoon.

The first thing I did was to order fifty trees from Darwin and set about planting them around all the station buildings and quarters, which, apart from the homestead area, were devoid of any trees or garden. Keeping the water up to them was a major task, but was overcome with a few improvements to the plumbing. I am sure the mechanic now has only to turn on his bath around lunch time!

One day in 1974, we were visited by a delightful old couple, whom we called Pop and Nanna (Fracer), friends of our bookkeeper. 'Old Pop', was such a blessing, although 72 at the time, would work like a Trojan out in the sun, no matter how the mercury soared and always in a woollen shirt, he said this kept him cool. He had worked on the infamous Sandy Hollow Railway Line and could tell a tale or two about that.

He and Nanna would visit regularly in the dry season and we would put them on the books, doing odd jobs for a few weeks. His first task at Helen was to re-erect a 17,000 gallon squatters tank, sheet by sheet and bolt by bolt, on top of a hill about a half kilometre from the station. It was hot, tedious and difficult work, but Pop was made of the tough stuff. He persevered until every last bolt was in place, there would have been thousands of them. After this was completed, Tim installed a two inch poly pipe from the bore to the tank and from that day we have had unlimited supplies of water at Helen, all at high pressure.

We removed the rather untidy fence around the homestead and fenced off the entire station area, which put paid to the milking herds indulgence of our garden once and for all. The green oasis was appreciated by all who worked out on the hot treeless Barkly Tableland. Later, lawns were planted around the men's quarters and the trees that were planted a little earlier in the area grew very fast, giving the entire expanse a fertile and much cooler atmosphere. Warrie, a brave and cheerful man who had lost an arm in a car accident and suffered constant pain from phantom nerves until his death a few years later, was a great worker and never let the absence of his arm deter him from performing a task. He
was employed as a handyman and the only concession we made to his
disability, was to buy him a Ladylite wheelbarrow, which could
be pulled with one hand. Most of the sandstone paths and
rockeries at Helen, are a tribute to this man. Unaided, he
collected the rock slabs from the masses of beautiful sandstone
just behind the station and cemented them all into place.

Tim made many improvements around the run, installing Mono pumps
at most of the bores instead of the unreliable windmills and
cumbersome pumpjacks. Building holding paddocks at all the
bores, so that numbers in the stock camp could be fine tuned and
installed lights and sprinkler systems at the major trucking
yards.

One of his first jobs was to install eight grids, replacing all
the gates along the major trucking road, their introduction was
greatly appreciated by the road train drivers. In truth, it was
not just out of consideration for the truckies that these grids
were installed, an occasional gate left open or knocked down
would cause major inconvenience if cattle were boxed.

Helen Springs, was also a staging place for herd bulls, en route
from Queensland to the West and at one time we looked after 200
head of Brahman bulls, when the Company first changed over to
that breed. I remember well, a mob of 80 Shorthorn bulls that
arrived at Helen, covered in Noogoora Burr, despite the permit
stating that they were free of this burr. Tim and I did not like
to think that this pest had spread over the western stations, so
we got to work with a pair of scissors each and cut every burr
off the bulls, using the crush at the Station yards.

When we first arrived at Helen, non perishable groceries and all
other station requirements such as beds, kitchenware, bore
casing, saddlery etc., were delivered to the station every six
months by road train. This had been ordered months previously
via the Sydney office.

Perishables were delivered to Banka Banka Station, by Co-Ord, who
collected goods from the Ghan in Alice Springs and took them to
delivery points all the way to Darwin. In this manner we were
able to maintain a reliable supply of fresh fruit and vegetables.
Considering our location we were more fortunate than most
stations in the Territory, where such items can be in very short
supply due to their geographical factor. In later years we were
able to purchase our groceries from 'Peter's Place', in Tennant
Creek, as well as most other station requirements that could be
bought locally, the balance still being ordered from Sydney.

The Barkly Stock Route runs through Helen Springs, just before
it joins the Stuart Highway, but many miles would be cut off if
travelling south, by taking the station road through Helen and
re-joining the Highway, not far from the homestead. Trucks were
starting to use this station-graded road more frequently and Tim
considered it not unreasonable that the Works Department should
maintain this section. After putting it to them, negotiations
to this end were quite unsuccessful and it was suggested by the
Department, that Tim should contact the Lands Branch, requesting that they put a load limit on the road, as dust from the road trains was causing problems at the station. Actually the road passed a couple of kilometres from the station, but a sign was erected and now the truckies have ceased to use it.

The Isolated Children's Allowance, in its present form, was introduced around 1975, at the time we employed Shone, our first and very capable governess. I think it would be hard to find a better governess than this young lady who stayed with us for three years before leaving to go overseas. We had three more governesses to take us up to the time Andrew went to boarding school in Brisbane and I taught Sophie to grade IV, before she also attended boarding school.

Travelling to school was an epic adventure for the children. As there were no flights from Tennant Creek direct to Mt. Isa, they had to travel from Tennant to Alice Springs, then Mt. Isa, Cairns, Townsville and finally Brisbane.

In 1975, a series of incidents culminated in a major change in the running of the station; the departure of the blacks. It was a busy time of the year with much activity on the run and the men away most of the time, except for the bookkeeper, who was married and the single mechanic. The head stockman's wife, the overseer's wife, the governess and myself were all alone at night in our various residences at such times. Following the dismissal of an Aboriginal worker, the whole camp threatened to leave. Tim said, "Well, go!"

In less than two minutes, our entire domestic labour force was a cloud of dust disappearing up the road toward the Stuart Highway, they owned a couple of old cars. When the few black stockmen we had returned to the station (great old fellows), they too with reluctance, rolled their swags and departed. George was definitely the head boy.

The others came back during the night and collected all their gear, except for a few emaciated cats, hence the exodus of the black labour force of Helen Springs. Some tried to return as most did not want to leave, but it was a hopeless situation. We even had a visit from the Welfare, who advised us that we were trying to make them return against their will. This was absolute nonsense.

In subsequent years, we used to see our blacks occasionally in the streets of Tennant Creek, sullen, often drunk and unemployed. It made me very sad as I have much respect and a genuine liking for them. On the stations they laughed and joked a lot and were always well fed and clothed. We immediately applied to Mt. Isa Commonwealth Employment Service, for two white domestics, a cowboy/gardener and some jackeroos. It was the start of a new era on Helen Springs Station.

When first we arrived at Helen Springs, I was not very happy with the homestead we were to live in. It was the worst, I considered
of all the Vestey Stations. It was attached by a walkway to the Visitors' Quarters, a lovely building that at times we were tempted to move into, but stayed where we were, for reasons of privacy.

However, there was a very nice homestead at the Company's Road Train Base, a few miles away on the Stuart Highway, and we put it to the Company to relocate this residence at Helen Springs, for us, being as it was unoccupied. This they agreed to do, but the man in Darwin contracted to move the building just never did so and we waited many frustrating years before he was eventually goaded into action. It was moved in two sections while we were on leave.

A few accidents occurred during our ten year tenure at Helen Springs, although surprisingly few considering the nature of the work. One incident that occurred during a wet, is when one of the colts dropped its head, causing the station overseer Jim, to 'put the boots in' and mutter to the horse something like 'I'll give you buck'. This the horse did with great gusto, too much in fact, bucking right off its feet and landed on its side with Jim, underneath.

Unfortunately, Jim's foot had come out of the stirrup and this piece of iron had been sandwiched between the horse and Jim's leg, breaking it in a very nasty way. Jim was in much pain and we gave him morphia that could only be administered by either Tim or myself and had to be accounted for. We transferred Jim to a station wagon and met the ambulance half way into Tennant Creek, a total distance of 150 kilometres. It was a dreadful break and he was not able to use his leg properly for some years after that.

Although we had a good airstrip at the station, the Flying Doctor aircraft was not permitted to land. It fell a few hundred feet short of the requirement because of a creek at one end and a small hill at the other. The landings seen in the present 'Flying Doctors' series on television are definitely 'fairytales'.

Tim employed a few jillaroos in later years, until one had a nasty accident and vowed he would not have girls in the camp again, he felt so distressed when they were hurt. On this particular day, Leanne, was working on the face of the camp while some bullocks were being drafted. She suddenly took off at a full gallop after a bullock on her supposedly trustworthy horse, 'High Tot'. The horse dropped his head and Leanne, was thrown, unfortunately landing on her head. She was in a coma and had to be transported the 80 kilometres to the station in the back of a rough little utility, well padded with foam rubber mattresses.

When they arrived at the station, she was delirious and nauseous, I was saddened that she had to be transported in this manner. Once again the ambulance met us along the Stuart Highway and Leanne, was taken to Tennant Creek Hospital, where she stayed for some weeks, unable to even feed herself for a long time. She
suffered slight brain damage that resulted in a minor personality change, it was a long time before she could work again, obviously not on a horse.

Old Ned Ambrose, whose relatives once owned Banka Banka Station, became our gardener in about 1979. He lived, talked and breathed vegetables and grew them very ably. We were obliged to develop more and more gardens to satisfy Ned's never ending 'craving' to grow things and although I had always maintained a vegie garden, we had melons and vegies coming out of our ears during this period. He was much appreciated and a real old character, however, like many old characters in the north, he had a bit of a problem - alcohol.

We employed Noel, who similarly had an alcohol problem, at Eaglenest, an outstation 95 km. from the station. After a year or two living in complete isolation with just occasional visits to the homestead for stores, Noel, acquired a lubra, Margaret, who had been once part of the domestic labour force. One day Tim was doing his rounds and called in to Eaglenest and whilst talking to Noel, he noticed Margaret hovering shyly in the background carrying a cardboard carton. Curious, he asked her what she had in the box. Her face broke into a huge, proud grin as she answered 'Me gottim piccaninny, boss!' We had not even known that she was pregnant.

Another character we employed from time to time was Tommy, the Contractor. A lot of the new improvements on Helen Springs are a monument to Tommy, who would have to be one of the hardest workers I have ever met. Tommy, would build fences on his own, doing all the sighting, alone and unaided. He got his fences so straight that Tim said, you could look through the holes in the pickets and see right along the line. This actually was not an exaggeration.

Unfortunately, Tommy also had a problem, he was an addicted gambler and would sometimes leave the station with $30-40,000 (fifteen years ago a lot of money), from his contract work and return a couple of months later penniless. He was a great fellow and lots of fun and kept everyone entertained on the tennis court, where he became the 'leaping gazelle', flying across the back line to get a ball.

One day our bore mechanic, a reliable and hard-working employee, came into the station and announced to Tim, 'I'll have to give me notice'. Tim, quite taken aback, said, 'Oh, what's the trouble?'. 'I pulled the mill over at Buffalo' he replied, very agitated and unhappy, (a windmill on the Barkly Tableland is a huge affair and we considered this no small feat). Spider (proper name Wayne), was expecting Tim to really blow a fuse, but instead, he calmly asked him how it happened and when Spider, explained that he had hooked the pulley up the wrong way whilst pulling the bore, Tim still remained calm and said, 'Don't worry, we'll go out and have a look at it tomorrow. You don't have to resign though'.
After Spider had gone I asked Tim why he had taken it so mildly and he broke into a big smile, pointing out that Spider had just done him a big favour. He had been waiting to put a Mono pump at Buffalo, for ages and now the Company had no choice but to approve the expenditure.

My days were not all spent organising the domestic side of things and gardening. I have always had a great interest in horses and cattle and have been able to attend musters and campdrafts from time to time, cutting out a few bullocks now and then. This occupation I thoroughly enjoyed and did competitively at the various events held in the Territory. I often accompanied Tim on his rounds, thus was always up to date with the goings on around the run.

Leisure time on the station involved picnics at the Gorge, a beautiful and almost permanent water eight kilometres from the station; tennis (we had installed lights which made the court very popular); drinks on the lawn after work; race meetings and rodeos. These were attended by all the staff and quite often ten or fifteen horses would be taken for competition. A movie projector was supplied and feature films screened once a fortnight. This was a very popular event in the district as people from all the neighbouring stations were invited to attend.

After the changeover to white staff, one of the highlights of the year was the 'Milla Milla Muster'. This muster attracted an enormous attendance, domestics, governesses, cooks etc. who could ride or just wanted a spell in the bush, would be there.

Milla Milla, is one of the very scenic areas of Helen Springs, where a few scrub bulls and piker bullocks ran, but never large number of cattle. Although we tried hard to get what cattle could, it was always a fun time with plenty excitement throwing bulls and chasing the piker bullocks through the scrub, some of them would be at least fifteen year olds."
Elisabeth, wife of Des Stenhouse, recalls her experiences on Helen Springs.

"When Des was offered the job of overseer at Helen Springs, in March, 1976, it meant packing up and moving from Sunday Creek, 20 miles west of Daly Waters, where we, Des, myself, Christian and the twins, Darrel and Shane, had lived for the last 30 months.

It was not lightly that we left Sunday Creek, as we had just made some inroads in establishing the homestead area. Des was yard building and then contractor. Yet to further his career in the cattle industry and bring out his full potential and knowledge in this field, we packed up and moved to Helen Springs, where we were welcomed by the manager Tim Doran and his wife Jocelyn. Financially it also helped, as I was able to take the paid position of Station Cook.

We stayed at Helen Springs for eighteen months, then moved to Waterloo Station, in the East Kimberleys which Des managed for four and a half years for the company. When Waterloo and other company properties were put on the market and Tim and Jocelyn Doran were leaving the company, Des was offered the manager's position on Helen Springs, which he accepted in October 1981.

We have been here now for just over seven years. For Des, returning to Helen Springs was like coming home, having been here as head stockman in the 60's! The 70's saw him as overseer and now in 1981, he took the reins as manager. For myself, it was quite different. I did not have the closeness with the Springs as Des and I faced the move with apprehension. It was destined to be a different situation to that at Waterloo where, although I was kept busy at all times, a more relaxed atmosphere prevailed.

Being the 'Missus' on a station necessitates taking charge of the domestic front, while the men did mustering, T.B. testing, borerun, fencing and the like. I did the cooking and still do, arranged for stores, taught the children and supervised the domestic staff. At Waterloo, I had two to five native girls assisting me most of the time. They were a cheerful and honest lot and we all seemed to get through the daily chores quite happily. I have a high regard for these girls.

At Helen Springs, the situation is quite different. The homestead is set up on a much larger scale with a variety of outbuildings, two married couple cottages, a guest house and more men's quarters. Extensive lawns, gardens and a vegetable garden, all demanding constant attention. The requirement for this is a good and conscientious staff, which are not readily available.

School of the Air (S.O.T.A.), is an excellent utility and with the right supervision, children in isolation should do very well. The support from 'SOTA', through daily 'on air' lessons, home
visits, camps, supervisor's conferences, not forgetting 'in-school' classes is exceptional, but alas, home supervision is still the most important in the long run. Therefore, a dedicated person in the 'daily' classroom, is an essential requirement.

In 1982 I was most fortunate in securing the services of Miss Carragher, a former school teacher, for this position. With her guidance, wisdom and patience, not only did our boys comprehend their 'class' education, but also the general disciplines of courtesy, manners, responsibility and respect. We all stood somewhat in awe for Miss Carragher as nobody was immune to her stern look if the correct thing was not done or said. Miss Carragher, we thank you.

Christian was getting ready to attend boarding school the following year and Darrel and Shane were in year five. Miss Carragher had the twins enrol in the 'Cubs on Air', thus a new field of education was introduced to them. During the following two or three years, the Tennant Creek Cubs and Scouts came and spent a weekend on the station, under the leadership of Mike and Lorraine Baker. In 1982, the Education Department provided a T.V. and video recorder, thus new dimensions of learning and entertainment were introduced.

Many people call in at the station during the 'dry season', mostly somehow connected with the pastoral industry, but the odd tourist also makes his way to the homestead. The General Manager, Mr. Zahnleiter flies on a regular basis and once or twice a year, members of the Vestey family. Other business managers from Head Office in London also do the rounds of visiting and inspecting the company properties.

This usually entails an overnight stay and when these visitors are expected, the station becomes a real hive of activity. Although kept generally clean and tidy we polish, rake and wash as if our lives depend upon it. Des will drive the visitors all over the run. They are keen to look at the cattle, pastures and all improvements, new bores, fencing and yards.

A change in our annual weather pattern became a matter of great concern. The good rains that we usually experienced had become patchy and inconsistent and this worsened over the next two to three years. Cattle had to be unloaded either through agistment, sale or slaughter. Even now, it is still very uncertain what the next wet will bring, all we can hope for is a better 'next wet'. Perhaps the discovery of the hole in our ozone layer, is having a greater effect sooner than anticipated and the answer is this phenomena, if there be one, must lie in the future.

Des is fully occupied with the B.T.E.C. programme, learning new methods of management and looking after the existing station, improvements, bores, fences and machinery.

Located as we are, just 150 kilometres north of the mining town of Tennant Creek, helps us with our immediate needs in regard to medical and dental care. Shopping is also well established at
Tennant, there are few things one can't purchase in the Territory. Isolation has receded with the advent of Aussat and it is good to be able to 'watch' the news in the evenings as well as all the other entertaining T.V. programs.

We receive three mail deliveries by coach each week, a definite improvement on the fortnightly 'maildrops' by plane over in the west and that is a far cry from the pack-horse mails delivered in the early years, by such men as 'The Fizzer' of 'We of the Never Never' fame. STD telephone is keeping us in immediate touch with business and family, although I do miss the 'galah-sessions' on the Royal Flying Doctor Service wireless. There were regular time calls from the various R.F.D.S. base operators, in our case Wyndham W.A., to relay to and fro our messages and telegrams. Between 12 noon and 1 pm. it used to be our 'free for all, Galah session', when we would really hit the air waves, exchanging friendly gossip, invitations and recipes, some quite hilarious conversation used to radiate over the air.

I seemed to talk to more people over hundreds of miles than I do now. Many warm memories were created in that galah session. Even our boys enjoyed 'meeting' their school mates over the air, and then to eventually meet and get to know them in person, at some of the SOTA functions mentioned earlier.

The Rural Sisters and the Royal Flying Doctor Service, with their regular visits to the Station, brought some excitement to the routine of our daily lives. The Sisters in their quiet, efficient and capable way, administered to all our smaller or larger ailments. When attending to the natives, they always had a large and interested audience in the Station Camp, and children and adults alike enjoyed their presence.

Sister Eileen Jones travelled all over the Territory in her car to visit Stations, Settlements and Communities, checking upon patients with Hansen's Disease (leprosy) and picking up new ones. Her only companion on those lonely, long and far trips was 'Tessa', her three legged Corgi. Sister Dawn Hayes (later married and living in Katherine), accompanied the Flying Doctors on their visits. She must have been a tremendous help to the young doctors, who, in many cases looked as if they had just graduated from Medical School. The commitment and cheerfulness of these ladies is to be highly commended.

I am still the Station Cook, although I hoped to realise many private and personal concerns once the boys were away at school, this is still in the realms of hope, due to domestic and staff uncertainties."
In December 1988, Lorraine Baker of Tennant Creek, Accompanied a party of scouts and cub to Helen Springs. She recalls her visit.

"In late September of 1982, 25 excited members of the Tennant Creek Scouts and Cubs gathered at Scouting and Guiding Hall, prior to leaving on a road journey to Helen Springs Station: 50 miles north of Tennant Creek.

Under the guidance of Mike (my husband) as Scout Master and myself as Cub Mistress, we piled into three vehicles. A utility carrying two passengers, luggage and food, a medium sedan and a small commuter bus with passengers and overflow luggage from the ute.

The journey seemed longer than one and a half hours, as much of the road was under reconstruction with long detours rough and heavy going. At times I had 'tongue in cheek' that we were on a detour or exploring new territory. However the continuous line of cans, stubbies, tyres and other discarded paraphernalia by careless people, settled me down.

As the welfare of my charges was on my mind all the time and not being used to travelling long distances without stops, I had time to reflect that it one had to take a sick child to hospital from an isolated station, one would need to be a very competent driver. For the average women driving under these conditions could be somewhat hazardous, changing a tyre, effecting some minor repair (assuming you knew how) in the middle of nowhere, is rather frightening.

On our arrival at the Homestead, a warm greeting from Elisabeth Stenhouse awaited us. We were all glad to stretch our legs and enjoy the refreshments provided before being taken to our billets, which for the occasion were to be the stockmans quarters, a few hundred yards away.

The boys slept dormitory fashion in what appeared to be a rumpus room as it contained a billiard table. With my small son of 2 years I occupied one of the men's bedrooms, which had basic furniture of a bed, wardrobe, table and an electric fan. The men themselves were away doing stockwork which gave our troop the run of the quarters.

After setting up the sleeping arrangements, a quick wash and change into jeans, T-shirt and sneakers, lunch was the order of the day. If my memory serves me correctly, we had hot dogs or stew. Mrs Stenhouse had served her full bodied stew on other occasions.

Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning was spent on the important business of test passing for badges. The Stenhouses twins Darrel and Shane taking part. One important test, especially for boys becoming lost in this dry region, is the finding of water. With
no surface water available, the following method was to be used:

**THE SOLAR STILL**

Dig a hole approximately 40 centimetres deep, the first 20 to be wider than the bottom 20 and the bottom wide enough to hold a container. The hole to be covered by a sheet of plastic with a stone in its centre, the stone of such weight that the plastic sheet forms an inverted cone. Gum leaves are to be packed firmly but not tightly around the container at the bottom of the hole.

The sun beating down on the plastic will heat the air gap beneath, that will condense forming moisture on the underside of the plastic and droplets of water will drop from the apex of the cone into the container. (Refer diagram)

Another test involved tracking. A Chalk Chase:

The 'Marker' with chalk, departs 20 minutes before the field leaving behind him a trail of arrows indicating his direction for the field to follow. The object is to batch the Marker and return safely to camp. Should chalk not be practical, then twigs, stones, strips of paper etcetera can be securely arranged in such a pattern to define direction and or instruction.

A B.B.Q. attended by Mr. and Mrs. Stenhouse and all station staff was also arranged. This delightful get together, with a shared meal (the usual little disasters) and good movie was enjoyed by all. Everyone joined in the festivities, sharing jokes, news from home, describing fun happenings whilst at work; a noisy conglomerate of laughter, chatter, merriment and a little buffoonery thrown in for good measure.

By 10.30 pm. our tired, happy boys were delving into a late supper prepared by Mr. and Mrs. Stenhouse, before hitting the sack for the night.

Sunday morning, the tests mentioned earlier were successfully completed by lunch time and again, Mrs. Stenhouse with three sons of her own, was well aware of the incredible food capacity of young boys who relished her culinary genius, arranged lunch.

Before returning home, the flag was run up and the 'Grand Howl' performed, a ceremony usually employed to begin and end formal meetings, but on this occasion however, it was to honour our Host and Hostess. Thank you indeed Mr. and Mrs. Stenhouse.

Happy and sleepy the boys piled into our vehicles for the return trip home to Tennant Creek, to be met by parents at our headquarters in Noble Street.

The impression we have of Helen Springs Station in hospitality, friendliness, the hand-in-hand sharing of facilities and
ensurance of comfort with the crowning compliment to be asked to "come again and bring the lads."

The Reverend Patrick Speed was the Church of England Minister at Tennant Creek from 1980 to 1982. His interest in the scouting movement was as Group Leader."