

QUANBUN DOWNS STATION – SOME HISTORY & ANECDOTES

On 2 November 2016, Brennan J Rose treated the Kimberley Society to a PowerPoint presentation that included approximately 50 slides related to Quanbun Station, which is situated on the Fitzroy River about 47 kilometres west of Fitzroy Crossing. His talk, woven around the sequences of slides, was mostly about growing up on the station in the 1950-60's. [In his](#) summary below, a little additional context has been provided.

My family owned and ran Quanban. The earliest records for the station show that Rose Bros. took up 50,000 acres on 21 May 1888 as pastoral lease 721/134. The brothers were [Edwin](#), George Canler and John Charles (known as Charles). Their father Robert Henry Rose (1833-1909) arrived in Australia in 1852.

The Roses' connection with the West Kimberley was quite extensive. George was the first on the scene, arriving in 1882 as the manager for James A Game's Yeeda Station. In 1885, while still at Yeeda, George purchased the adjacent Mt Anderson Station. By that time Edwin and Charles had arrived. They gained experience on Mt Anderson and other stations. Their brother James and three younger half-brothers – Arnold Jeffes, Augustus (Gus) Frederick and Percival – followed them into the Kimberley pastoral industry.

In 1891, after George withdrew from their partnership, Edwin and Charles stocked Quanbun with sheep. They also had cattle. Edwin did the initial droving, taking 2000 sheep from Roebourne to Quanbun, about 1300 kilometres, in seven months. I think they lost about 3-400 as conditions were harsh on the trip due to it being a drought year with little feed or water. Edwin ran the station while Charles worked elsewhere and in 1903 they sold to Arnold Jeffes Rose. He went into partnership with Percival in 1912 but became the sole owner again following Percival's death in 1935.



A series of photos taken in or before the 1920s showed early homesteads, hay and shearing sheds, donkey teams pulling wagons of wool and wood, and wool being washed in the Cunningham River. The wool washing was done to remove the yoke from the wool to maximise the sale price.

Taking wool to the port

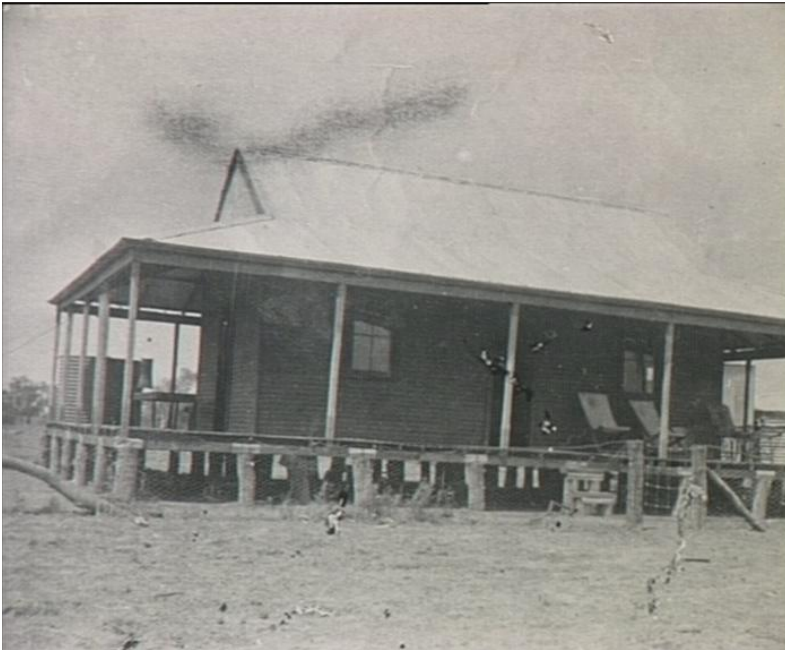
The shearing had to be done after the Wet before the grass seeds set, especially the corkscrew which damaged the wool and also made mustering very difficult. Yoke builds up in the hot and humid wet season.

A photo depicting blade shearing on canvas sheets was the norm in the beginning as the shepherded mobs were shorn where they were. The wagon would load the wool and move to the next mob. In my early twenties I still had to shear the stragglers by blade.

Another photo showed a horse team scooping out Alligator (later Jubilee) Dam. This photo is significant in that it is the site of the oldest mammalian remains in WA. [Pliocene bones](#) were uncovered whilst digging this dam in early 1920 or so and reported by [Ludwig Glauert](#) in 1921. A review of the 1921 diary doesn't mention this find so further examination of older diaries may date the actual digging of the dam.

The first generation of Roses were among those who opened up the land and then went south to get married and live. Some of the next generation remained in the West Kimberley and raised families there. The Rose children (Mt Anderson, Liveringa, Quanbun) and the Henwood children (Noonkanbah, Calwynyardah) were the first generation to be raised on the Fitzroy sheep stations. Mrs Grace Henwood was the sister of Canny & Kim Rose.

As was the custom, my mother travelled to Bunbury where I was born in 1946, then home to the station. Schooling was by correspondence till I turned ten. Then it was off to Guildford Grammar boarding school. We did not have School of the Air but had to complete two weeks of lessons before the next plane where we sent them off to Perth and picked up the next lot.



One of the succession of Quanbun homesteads

Photos of the homestead and sheds were shown with explanations as to their uses. Our stores were ordered twice a year from J. & W. Bateman in Fremantle and sent by state ship to Derby, then by truck. An office in front of the store had the Traeger Radio which was the only communication we had with Derby, twice a day. Communication was by telegram and if you wanted things to be private you had to do it in writing and send it on the fortnightly DC3.

In the photos, a dingo in a trap was an example of one of the major reasons for the demise of the sheep industry. As the stations on the Fitzroy gradually turned to full time cattle production, the poisoning and aerial bating of dingos by the APB stopped, leaving Quanbun isolated to look after itself. I made the mistake of buying the last 4000 sheep from Noonkanbah, leaving Quanbun the only sheep station on the Fitzroy. I had to accept defeat when full time dogging and two men riding shotgun around the lambing ewes resulted in hardly a lamb.

Recreation growing up on a sheep property consisted of tennis, shooting, fishing and swimming. Because we had two large rivers running through the station there was an abundance of fish and cherumbas. Please note that everyone in my years on the Fitzroy called the fresh water prawn CHERUMBAS and not what is now wrongfully named cherumbim. The Aborigines called them cherumbas. Barramundi, bream, catfish, sawfish, stingray, shark, eels, turtles, mussels and Johnson crocodiles were all caught in the local pools.

Some photos showed the Aborigine house girls who worked in the homestead, kitchen and gardens with their children, our playmates. In the time before I went away to school, we need to remember that the older people in our tribe were born before the white settlers had arrived in the West Kimberley. In their generation they had to adapt to a whole new way of life where things were now owned individually and you had to work to be fed and clothed. Everyone on the property could speak and understand English and the children my age were going to the mission school in Fitzroy Crossing. My memories are of the tribe singing with sticks most nights (seldom heard a didgeridoo) and of a happy people.

Among the other photos were some of the Fitzroy Crossing Race week. All the stations would camp on the river with their horses for a week of parties and catch ups.

I also had one of the original Fitzroy Crossing Inn and one of the AIM Hospital. My mother was an AIM sister and I also married an AIM sister which proves what a marvellous organisation it was.

Other photos commented on were of the present homestead and buildings, dust storms, the wet moving in from the east, off to school down south, shearing and the rivers.