

CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES AT MURRIN BRIDGE

. . . A LATE REPORT

The hall was almost deserted. The bells on Santa's "sleigh" had jingled into the swamp gums. The last tumultuous cheer had echoed along the billabong. The last, by now, grubby little boy, clutching his new treasure, had disappeared.

We sat amongst the debris, surrounded by shreds of gay paper, stray balloons, and empty bottles. To think that such a short time before, this community hall had vibrated with the enthusiasm that only Christmas could incite. It had held seemingly innumerable, little writhing bodies with eager faces upturned to the jolliest of all, Father Christmas.



We needed no convincing that it had been all worth while. The eagerness and pure delight reflected in the children's faces compensated for those hours of planning and organising; those anxious moments when we debated whether there were presents for all or would the rolls spin out? Even those shins near charred over the barbecue were forgotten. We had given of ourselves and the reward was ours.

It all happened like this. A generous donation of £38 15s. from the Aborigines Welfare Board for toys for the Mission children sparked off the first flames of enthusiasm in the Manager's Office. In no time, Mr. Butcher's energetic little wife was aflame. For the next few days the telephone wires fairly burned too. Like in a bushfire, when flames dance from one tree top to another with seemingly no contact, others were sparked off.

Mr. Innes Graham, a grazier in the Lake Cargelligo district, donated six sheep. Booberri Station's Manager, Mr. Harold Miller, kindly loaned his giant sized barbecue and gear. Mr. Les Feely, of magnasite fame, filled Santa's bag with £5 worth of sweets. The local butchery offered to prepare the meat. Mrs. A. Jones and Mrs. M. McMahan came out to lend a hand to Mrs. Butcher whose responsibility it was to serve a hearty tea to 150 children. So much for outside interest. How about the local community support? This was evidenced in the monetary donation to purchase ice-blocks, soft drinks, bread rolls, butter, tomato sauce, and sweets.

Again it was shown in the willingness to collect the sheep in the station truck and subsequently barbecue them over the coals. Mention must be made of such stalwarts as Lillian May Kirby, Norma Dutton, Roy Harris, William Webster and Thomas Clarke, who stayed by till the last of the sizzling chops had been handed over.

Santa's approach was heralded by screams of delight, intensifying as the "sleigh" came to a halt outside the

gaily decorated hall. His patient "reindeer"—a local nag prettied up for the occasion—gave the nonchalant air that this was a daily occurrence, as the children clamoured around to greet Santa and inspect his gay attire.



Appropriately, Sergeant Sam Dunn, who through his years of office in Lake Cargelligo has shown a practical interest in the football team, filled the role of Santa.

After the first exchange of jollities and carol singing, Santa quietly turned our attention to the true meaning of Christmas—a time of goodwill which should remain with us throughout the year.

Watching the children's expressions at present giving time never fails to fascinate, but one particular incident really delighted everyone. When Santa insisted that one little chap offered his right hand for a handshake, he was rewarded by having a greasy chop bone thrust into his hand!

Reluctantly the children waved Santa off on the next stage of his journey. Unfortunately that was only as far as the Treatment Rooms. This time Santa had been overwhelmed by real flames, when he had settled back for a relaxing smoke as he jogged down the track.

Even so, he reflected a few days later, that this had been the greatest Christmas ever, and I am sure that the children of Murrin Bridge would agree.

Editor's Note . . .

This was a very late news item but such a happy one we just had to include it.



A dramatic black and white sketch by Patsy Nolan of Dubbo