

NL 20/7/71

Henderson's own Robin Hood

Australia boasts the legend of Ned Kelly, and the lawless deeds performed in his era, but in many ways Henderson in the past was not such a quiet area itself.

The story of Furlley's Hotel, where drinks were passed through a sliding hatch at pistol point, more than adequately illustrates this.

Don Buck's Rd, off Swanson Rd, is a memorial to one of the most remarkable and probably one of the most lawless men in Henderson's history — Rando Sanfrisco Figuero, known in his time as Don Buck.

The Don has been described as a man who would not be tolerated in our present society; a man who ruled an outlaw camp with an iron fist; a scrupulously honest man in his legitimate dealings; to whom the police of the time would consign newly released prisoners; a man who spread his own wealth to keep some of the poor alive during the depression of the 1890s.

Certainly there seems to be little doubt the man was as ruthless as any, but it also seems he won the affection of the people among whom he lived. Perhaps

he was more worthy of comparison with the legendary Robin Hood — certainly he was as great an enigma, as he was a criminal.

The Don had his camp to the west of the Whau Creek, near Birdwood, an area Henderson and Swanson. He was described as a barrel chested Portuguese, quietly spoken, and retiring by nature.

TRUSTED

One man who bought gum from Don Buck, recalled he was a man in whom the dealer could place absolute trust. His bags of gum were true to the stated mea-

sure, and never once, as was the practise with more dishonest diggers, did he weight the bags with stones.

It was a pleasure to do business with the Don, he said. He remembered also the Don coming to his store with bags of peaches to distribute to the clerks in the office, and how embarrassed he was when thanked for his good neighbourliness.

An elderly couple who lived through the depression of the 1890s stated they could not have survived if it had not been for Don Buck.

They claimed they did not know how they would have met their mortgage repayments, or for that matter even earned a living, without his help.

It was said of Don Buck, in the book "Once the Wilderness", by John T. Diamond: His help with money, and a recommendation to apply for a job with a certain firm, not only chased the wolf from the door, but kept it away for good".

Another old timer who benefited from the good office of the Don, recalls a heart-to-heart talk they once had.

The Don followed the philosophy if a man wanted to go straight, then he would help him make a decent honest living. However, if the man chose a criminal life, then who was better suited to help him than Don Buck himself?

He would say: Look around you son, and make up your own mind. I will help you either way".

Then there is the other side of the Don's character. There are the stories of life at his outlaw camp, of the criminals male and female, and the sometimes almost Satyricon way of life there.

BEELINE

Many a criminal who had until sundown to get out of Auckland, or who was newly released from Mt Eden prison, would make a beeline for this haven from the law.

In fact not only did these people choose to take refuge at the notorious camp, the police of the day appeared to regard it as a convenient dumping ground for newly released prisoners.

It was their practise to take the prisoner to Mt Eden station, give him a ticket, and put him on the Henderson train.

The police never raided the camp, or it seems, interfered with Don Buck at all.

They apparently realized the benefit of having criminals both conveniently out of the way, and at the same time, in one place, under a man who laid down and enforced strict rules.

It is known that despite his generous nature, the Don would not tolerate any person flouting his laws, or defying his authority. It was apparently accepted among the criminals in the camp, to go against the Don, was inviting assistance in drinking themselves to death.

It is also known the Don always carried a pistol with which to protect himself. But such was the respect for his laws and retributions, he, by all accounts had little to fear, and consequently had only infrequent need of his side arm.

On the other side of the ledger for the criminals, was the massive assistance they could get from the Don, apart from the 'comforts' of drunken orgies and a haven from the police.

Don Buck would equip any man who wanted to work with lunch, a spear, a spade and a bag, and send them off to dig for gum.

In return he demanded that all gum dug during a day's work was sold direct to him. Mr Diamond says in his book, "such was the dread of his vengeance, that few men failed to return to the camp in the evening with their gum".

Don Buck Likandott Sanfrisco Figuero

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