

The Oscar Range lease of 522,000 acres were first taken up by W.E. Collins in May, 1889.

In 1900 A.W. Edgar bought a share in the station and the partnership traded as Edgar and Collins. In 1903, at the foot of the range, a small homestead was built, the walls of which are still standing today.

A.W. Edgar started work as a young jackaroo on DeGrey Station in the Pilbara in 1878. He was associated with DeGrey for more than 20 years, eventually becoming a part-owner with Alex. Anderson and McKenzie Grant, and manager. Edgar had come from Victoria with his brother and like many pastoralists of his day, was a teetotaler. The Grant Range, Mt. Anderson and Edgar Range in lower Fitzroy region commemorate these three pioneer station people.

Lawrence Wells, leader of the Calvert Expedition, which had just crossed the Great Sandy Desert mentions in his journal that he met John Collins from Oscar Range in November, 1896, at a well north of the Fitzroy River. This Expedition was sponsored by Alfred Frederick Calvert, a wealthy London mining engineer. His party left Lake Way near Wiluna in April, 1896, aiming to find an inland route so that Kimberley cattle could be taken south for sale on the Eastern Goldfields where there was a big demand for beef. Two men with Wells, his cousin Charles and George Jones died of thirst near Joanna Springs in the Great Sandy Desert. In his report to Calvert, Lawrence Wells recommended against establishment of a Stock Route. Ten years later though A.W. Canning succeeded in establishing a route from Halls Creek to Wiluna for cattle from the Kimberley.

There is a grave near the old Oscar Range homestead of a John Collins who died in June, 1905, aged 46. He was probably the man whom Wells met in 1896.

Oscar Range was subsequently sold to Joseph and Charles Blythe. Notes in the Battye Library suggest that the station was transferred to the Blythes in April, 1912, however, Department of Lands and Surveys records show the transfer taking place in February, 1906.

Whatever the date was, Oscar Range became part of the Blythe family "Empire" in the West Kimberley. They already owned the adjoining Brooking Springs and Milliwindy stations and Fairfield and Mt. House further to the West. Joseph Blythe moved to the Kimberley with his family in 1885 from Bunbury. One of the sons, Charles Christopher, took up Brooking Springs 164,000 acres, in partnership with his father in 1889 and many improvements give evidence of the progressive spirit at the head of affairs. Two years later it was described as a splendid property divided into 7 large paddocks. Joseph Blythe bought Fairfield and Mt. House in 1898 and they were handed over to 3 other sons when Blythe, Senior, returned south to Bunbury in 1910. Milliwindy was originally taken up by J.G. Calder in 1906 and was transferred to the Blythes about 1911.

The family was also active in business in Derby, one son being a butcher and another running the only blacksmithing, wheelwright and coach building company in the Kimberleys.

Charles Christopher Blythe was described as one of the first judges of cattle in W.A. He was a founder of the Fitzroy Racing Club and served at different times as its President, Judge and Steward. He was a Patron of the Derby Race Club and was made a J.P. for the West Kimberley in 1908. Charles Blythe married Pauline, daughter of John Tyson.

Oscar Range was the scene of the fatal shooting of Pigeon a notorious Aboriginal who was responsible for the deaths of a number of white settlers, police and Aboriginal trackers and stockmen in the King Leopold Ranges. Pigeon's exploits and those of some of his partners are recorded in Ion Idriess' book "Outlaw of the Leopolds". After several years roaming the Ranges, in particular, the Windjana Gorge area east of Derby, Pigeon shot a native boy Jim Crōw who was working for old Joe Blythe. When Joe went to investigate he was shot in the hand and Pigeon was wounded. Blythe joined a police party which tracked down Pigeon who was finally killed by a bullet from police tracker Billy. Joe Blythe subsequently lost 3 fingers but received a Government reward of \$200 for assisting with the capture of Pigeon.

About 1914 most of the Brooking Springs and Oscar Ranges cattle were moved 65km north to Milliwindy. This station was in a valley formed by the King Leopold and Lady Forrest Ranges, both of which were natural boundaries. At the time it was reported that one of Milliwindy's great advantages was that "less than a dozen miles of fencing was required to make the run stockproof".

In late 1914 the leases were transferred to Ben Copley whose address was given in Lands Department records as C/- Emanuel Building, Perth.

By 1915, Brooking and Oscar Range stations had been devoted almost exclusively to sheep raising with a flock of 4,000. The owners were trying to build up a pure merino type. Wool was transported by mule and horse teams 350 km to Derby from where it was shipped to London. It was bringing "as high as 1 shilling and sixpence a pound".

In 1915 improvements included 44 miles of fencing and 6 wells fitted with wind-mills to augment natural waters. That year there were 7,000 shorthorn cattle (presumably at Milliwindy) 170 horses including 12 thoroughbreds and 70 mules. The mules had the reputation of being the best in the Kimberley. A.W. Edgar had imported a Jack Donkey for breeding mules from America at a cost of 200 guineas. Teams used the Fitzroy River road to Derby. It was much shorter following the telegraph line (along the foot of the ranges and through Kimberley Downs and Meda Stations) but that route was too dry for the horses, mules and donkeys.

By 1921, the idea of running sheep had been abandoned and Brooking had gone back to cattle.

The three leases, Milliwindy, Oscar Range and Brooking with a total area of 654,450 acres, carried 13,059 cattle. This represented 1 beast to 50 acres. Stock Inspector Robert Brockman who had worked at Brooking reported that this should be about an average carrying capacity for the property.

Cost of carting from Derby was \$25 per ton. Droving to the port was about \$1. per head and the total cost of shipping a bullock to Fremantle, \$18. Wastage in droving to Derby was 22kg, and a further 22 kg on the ship. In 1950 similar weight losses were estimated. At this time the stock route along the Fitzroy was good but the route to Broome from Langi Crossing was considered to be bad with a further loss of 22kg (50 pounds) by the time the cattle reached Broome. In 1921 the stone house at Oscar Range which was then being operated as an outstation, was valued at \$500, and the only other building, a shed, at \$200. The main homestead at Brooking Springs was worth \$800.

Ben Copley, Jnr. took over Pastoral Lease 396/554 (Milliwindy) in 1935. Then in 1948, together with Brooking and Oscar Range, they were transferred to Spring Pastoral Company.

A Lands Department report in 1950 stated:

"A good quality herd of shorthorn, bred up from cattle purchased with leases. Stud bulls, polled shorthorn sent up from Mungatarra, Mingenew.

About half this run is within grazing range of permanent or semi-permanent waters. The undeveloped larger areas are to westward of run, where many bores have been sunk without success".

In 1954 Spring Pastoral Company went into liquidation and the station was bought by William Skuthorp, with his son Bob as manager.

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