

# PLOD ESSAY:

## Getting Connected by Barbara Moyle

In the late 1940s signatures were collected from households in the Lance Creek district desiring the connection of electricity. The petition, fruitless as it turned out, was presented to the State Electricity Commission at Traralgon.

Nearby districts were holding 'Lighting-Up' Balls and Gala Dances to celebrate their connection to electric power one after the other but years passed before it came to our district. Barely a day went by that it wasn't wished for by someone in our house.

After visiting friends in north-eastern Victoria who had used a home-lighting plant for many years, Dad decided that was the way to go. We were very pleased when about 1952, he purchased a home lighting plant with a 32 volt generator and a bank of six large batteries. From time to time the batteries were 'topped-up' with (distilled) rain water collected in an earthen-ware mixing bowl on the back lawn.

This lighting plant did not supply power to the cowshed, but what a great day it was when we had our own 'Lighting-Up Ceremony' and Dad, with a fair amount of chiacking and formal procedure, switched on the electric light in our kitchen. We had power, at last! We kept the old 'kero' fridge, but out went the candles and Aladdin lamp, Mum got an electric iron and we could see to read in bed now.

The new power plant was driven by an up-to-date Petter engine with a ratchet crank handle that allowed its safe removal from the spinning crank shaft. It started easily and didn't have a recoil kick. It was a big improvement on the motor at the cowshed that ran the milking machines; that motor had a recoil kick that my father declared could 'break your arm'!

The home lighting plant was a stopgap measure while Dad continued his efforts to get S.E.C. power. He was advised that the best thing

to do was 'go straight to the top' and present his case at Traralgon. *Traralgon!!!* Over those rough, windy, narrow roads; they might as well have said 'go to the moon'.

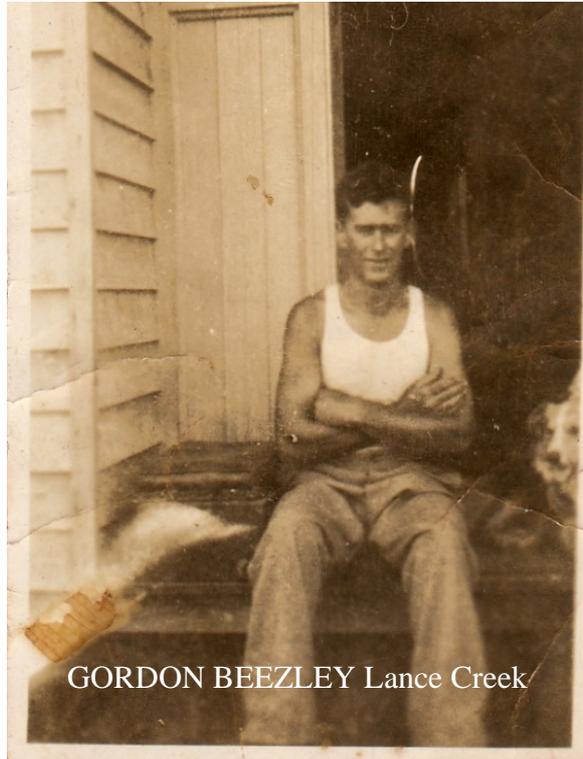
Despite the difficulties Dad decided to give it a try. We made an early start with the milking that day and ran the herd through as quickly as we could. Mum and I cleaned the cowshed, washed the separator and fed the pigs while Dad dashed to the house and had breakfast. He took a carload of petitioners from our district and intended to be home about four o'clock; in time for the milking that night.

It was a long day waiting hopefully at home. Five o'clock came and there was still no sign of Dad. I brought the cows home and Mum who never wasted time, started milking them by hand. The progress was so slow that against her wishes I decided to start the milking machines.

It was the first time that I had attempted to start that engine - Dad had cautioned me never to touch it. I knew that the hardest part would be turning the motor over without coming to harm. I could do the rest; put the separator together, grease and oil points, connect belts, move the fast and loose pulleys across for the milk pump and of course, feed the pigs.

Anyway, it was achieved without mishap, and we were almost finished when Dad got home. He had had a long, tiring day with nothing positive to report and was very pleased to find the milking finished. He put his gumboots on and by the weak rays of the kerosene lamp hanging on its nail in the separator room helped wash-up and clean the cowyard.

My father died two years later. Mum continued to support other residents in their quest for S.E.C. power. Eventually the district learned that they could have electric power connected if each householder paid eleven hundred pounds



GORDON BEEZLEY Lance Creek

(\$2,200). It was a lot of money! Especially on top of probate duties, but Mum paid her share and power from the La Trobe Valley was connected to the farm at Lance Creek in 1958-59.

Nowadays, an electric motor at the cowshed starts at the press of a button, a stainless steel refrigerated bulk milk vat replaces the cream separator and pigs. The house has lighting and modern electrical appliances, but one old kerosene table lamp still stands on the sideboard ready for those times when there is a blackout.

While the power for Lance Creek came from the La Trobe Valley, the township of Wonthaggi only five miles away, was connected to a reliable source of power generated by the Wonthaggi State Coal Mine.

At this time farmers living within the boundaries of the Borough of Wonthaggi were given permission to connect to the power from the mine - at their own expense. The mine electricians instructed the farmers, Bill Honey, Bert Moyle and Les and 'Jacko' Davidson on what to do.

To start with Bill Honey drove his ex-army bren-gun carrier in a straight line from his farm at the end of Honey's Road to the mine, clearing everything in his path for about two plus miles. The power line was to follow this cleared track.

The men purchased second-hand railway irons to use for power poles and dug the post-holes by hand to a depth of four feet. They attached cross-bars and then raised the poles. After passing inspection the State Coal Mine electricians attached the wires and insulators and connected the power.

To raise the power poles, heavy lengths of timber overhanging the tray by four feet were securely bolted on Bert Moyle's ex-army four wheel-drive truck. Two lengths of crossed timber were attached higher than the cabin; a railway iron was then placed in this timber cradle. The railway iron (power pole) sloped downwards and was securely held to prevent it from slipping.

A solid upright plank of timber was placed in each post-hole and the truck was carefully reversed until the railway iron touched the timber. From there the railway iron was manually manoeuvred downwards into the posthole. As the truck continued to slowly reverse it elevated the other end of the pole to an upright position. Each of the power poles were raised this way. These farmers in the Borough of Wonthaggi had

electricity connected to their dairies and households by the early 1950s.

They brought water from the mine to their farms by the same DIY method. Bert Moyle located water pipes which were still in short supply after the second war at the Kongwak Butter Factory. Once the pipes were loaded on his truck he attempted to return to Wonthaggi up the winding road past the Lance Creek reservoir but the front wheels of his truck started lifting. He turned the truck and returned to Wonthaggi along the Kongwak-Inverloch Road instead. Some years later when the main water-line was laid to Cape Paterson the farmers were permitted to connect to it.

Barbara Moyle

two miles = 3.22 kms  
five miles = 8 kms  
four feet = ab't 1.25 m



BERT MOYLE – Cape Paterson

