



Mr. and Mrs. H. Penny of Greenhills

Henry and Matilda Penny in Western Australia

Two Old Colonists

Mr. and Mrs. Penny, of Greenhills, left their native village, near Salisbury, Wilts, England, on November 16, 1854 and at Southampton joined the immigrant ship Berkshire. After a protracted voyage of four months, they arrived at the Swan River on March 15, 1855. Landing at Perth, Mr. Penny could not find employment so he left for York three days after with his bundle on his back, leaving his wife in Perth until he could send for her. Upon reaching York Mr. Penny saw Mr. Samuel Burges of Tipperary, and made an engagement with him for 12 months at a wage of £1 per week without board. The price of rations was flour 3½d. per lb. mutton 7d. brown sugar, 6d., and tea 3s., Mr. Penny remained there two years, and then rented a small farm (about 40 acres) from Mr. Burges, at £1 per acre. This was little better than weekly wages. The crop had to be taken off with scythe and sickle, as there was no machinery in those days, and then thrashed with the flail. Later he embarked in a small way in the sandalwood trade, paying 30s. per month as license. He carted the wood to Perth and sold it to Messrs. Padbury, Loton and Co., to the father of the late Sir George Shenton, who kept a store in St. George's Terrace, and to a Mr. Carr, at from £6 to £6 10s. per ton. After occupying the farm at Tipperary for 10 years Mr. Penny selected land at what is now known as Greenhills, of which he was almost the first pioneer, and which he named. The native name is Warawaring. Mr. Penny as a farmer has been successful beyond his expectations. He has 36 grandchildren and three great grand-children. The old couple were both 21 years of age when they left England, and are now 81. They have taken prominent parts in all functions in their district. Their three sons have large farms around Greenhills.

Western Mail (Perth, Western Australia), Friday, 22 May 1914

The Greenhills Estate By Bucolic.

Greenhills farm, the property of Mr. H. Penny, is situated to the eastward of York, distant sixteen miles from that town. This farm contains 700 acres, and the land has been purchased from the Crown from time to time by the present proprietor, who holds that it is better to purchase outright than to be hampered with special occupation regulations. The arable land, some 200 acres, is composed of undulating slopes and valleys, and consists principally of rich chocolate soil of more than average depth, from which the whole of the timber has been cleared. No stumps or obstacles to the plough are to be found in Mr. Penny's fields. The cultivated land is subdivided into 7 paddocks, ranging from 20 to 50 acres, and all fences substantial post, rail, and jam stakes. The remaining portion, 500 acres, also securely fenced and subdivided, is used for grazing only. When Mr. Penny first selected this farm, sixteen years ago, he was told that he would never get water upon it, and his first attempt at well-sinking certainly proved a failure, as the water was as salt as the sea. At that time the working horses had to be taken seven miles to water. Shortly afterwards another well was tried a short distance from the first, and a splendid supply obtained at a moderate depth, and there are now five other wells of good water on the farm. In one of these wells surrounded by growing wheat the water was lowered six inches whilst the wheat was in bloom, but as the grain ripened and the straw withered the water again rose to its accustomed level. This will clearly indicate what an amount of moisture is drawn from the soil by timber or scrub growing upon it, and is a further argument in favor of ring barking. Mr. Penny is an agriculturist in the proper sense of the term. He has never depended upon sandalwood, sheep, or matters outside his farm, but to the farm he devotes his whole attention. The system adopted is to cultivate 100 acres each year, the remaining 100 being fallowed and cropped alternate years. When land is first broken up it is ploughed 4½ inches deep, the next ploughing turns up 6 inches, and the third is about 9 inches deep, after which back to the shallow ploughing, thus ensuring a good bed for the seed. Mr. Penny informs me that for the last 10 years his wheat crop has never averaged under 20 bushels to the acre. This year about 65 acres of wheat were harvested, estimated to average 25 bushels. A small patch of 2 acres gave 63 bushels of clean wheat. A heavy crop of English barley was cut off ten acres. The yield was 45 bushels per acre, and about 20 acres of wheat cut for hay, which is now put up in two of the neatest and best finished stacks I have seen in the colony, one of 20 tons and the other about 10 tons. The grain is harvested by a stripper, after which the roller is put over the stubble to break it down; then such as is required for fodder or litter is raked up and carted together, a portion being strewn in the stockyard and converted into manure. In all the hay that I handled there was not a straw of wild oats to be seen, and the wheat now in process of being cleaned up is also free from wild oats and drake. Upon enquiry I learned that from the time the crop commences to head until ripening it is continually watched, and every stalk of wild oats pulled up by hand. Of course in an old field that had been allowed to run waste for a few years this would be a costly undertaking, but if attended to from the first is not so difficult. A small field of what is known as Salmon gum country is cultivated, and from this good crops are taken in a good season, but Mr. Penny says that this land requires more rain than the stiff alluvial, the soil being of a drier nature. There is a large extent of this description of country lying waste to the eastward which will no doubt be utilised before many years have passed. The land is heavily timbered, but clearing the Salmon gum is a simple matter, as the trees when killed by ring-barking will burn out to the very root. The homestead and farm buildings are placed on rising ground, from which a good view of the fields can be obtained. The dwelling house and kitchen are neat and substantially built of brick, as is also a barn with iron roof. The stable and cart shed are also good buildings and well arranged. These latter buildings were erected by Mr. Penny himself, and are very creditable to the builder. There is also an iron building, used as a barley store. The proprietor likes to keep separate kinds of grain in different compartments. At the back of the house is a neat well-kept garden stocked with a choice collection of fruit trees from South Australia, and all looking healthy. There are also a few vines in flourishing condition, from which a little wine is made for home consumption. In fact I must pronounce this as one of the neatest little homes in the eastern districts. Everything about the place denotes comfort and prosperity. I think Mr. Penny has fairly demonstrated that an industrious man can save money upon a small farm in this colony, for not only has he made a comfortable home, but last year was enabled to take his wife to England, where they enjoyed a well-earned holiday. Upon his return from England Mr. Penny tried a variety of grass seeds which he brought out with him, but all failed. This ground and climate is apparently not suitable for English grasses. Whilst in England Mr. Penny selected a nice collection of farming implements, amongst which are Ransome and Sims R.N.F. ploughs with patent shares 13/42, made especially for stony ground. Those shares he strongly recommends. The machinery in use

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comprises a Ramsay's stripper, Bentall's reversible chaff cutter with horse power, corn crusher, Howard's reaper and mower, Howard's horse rake, Ransome's winnower, and a set of neat iron harrows made on the premises by Mr. Penny himself, and as well finished as if turned out by a tradesman. That very useful institution, a blacksmith's forge, is kept, and saves many a journey to York. Eight working horses, home bred, are kept employed and well-cared for, as are four cows used for dairy purposes. Two hundred sheep are also kept all the year, as well as from forty to fifty pigs. The said stock is constantly kept inside the fences, and will compare favorably with stock grazed outside over three times the extent of country. All the work of the farm is carried out by the proprietor and his three sons, so that the labor question is easily solved. Like Mr. Lukin, Mr. Penny considers that without the stripper it would be impossible to grow wheat at the present price. He also considers that whilst grain is so low in price a heavier duty should be levied upon the foreign article, and in this I am quite of his opinion. York, 30th December, 1884.

The Western Australian (Perth, Western Australia), Saturday, 24 Jan 1885

The Decadence of the Farm Labourer

During the course of his examination by the Chairman of the Immigration Committee yesterday, Mr. Henry Penny, a Greenhills farmer, gave expression to pessimistic views with regard to England as a hunting-ground for desirable immigrants. When he was a lad - and Mr. Penny has grown grey in the calling - England was an agricultural country, and the farm labourer knew not when his day's work was done. Nowadays, said the witness, the young man worked easy hours, and enjoyed himself in his spare time. "The young fellows of my day," continued Mr. Penny, "came out to Australia to better themselves; but they think now that they can better themselves by staying at home. Do you know they work about nine hours a day, and go to a concert or for a walk in the evening. They have comfortable homes, and they enjoy themselves. No; I don't think you will induce many of them to come out to Australia. They won't live away in the bush. They want their easy hours, and the opportunity to run down to a seaside resort on a cheap excursion every now and then. Yes (contemplatively), things have changed since my young days."

Natural Increase

At yesterday's meeting of the Immigration Commission, Mr. H. Penny, a veteran Greenhills farmer, told a story of how a few grains of wheat stocked a farm in a few years. In 1883 Mr. Penny visited England. On a Wiltshire country farm he saw, he said, the finest field of wheat he had ever gazed upon. There was one clump of grain that stood ears above the remainder, and Mr. Penny plucked three heads from this clump and put them in his waistcoat pocket. On returning to his farm in Western Australia some months later he planted the grain from those three heads on his farm, and in the fourth year he reaped no less than 500 bushels of wheat from the imported seed. Mr. Penny said he asked the English farmer the name of the wheat, but he did not take much notice of the answer at the time. The grain, however, resembled the grain of Lots wheat, but was just a little earlier than that variety.

The Western Australian (Perth, W.A.) Thursday, 9 March 1905

... while Mr. Henry Penny, sen., of Greenhills, attained his four-score years on Saturday, the 22nd ult., Both gentlemen (says the "Eastern Districts Chronicle") have played very prominent part in the development of Western Australia, and there are none more sanguine of the State's future prosperity.

Sunday Times (Perth, W.A.), Sunday 6 July 1913

Death of an Old Colonist

An old pioneer settler of the Greenhills district recently passed away in the person of Mr. Henry Penny, sen., at the ripe age of 81 years. Mr. Penny was widely known and esteemed in the eastern districts, and was closely identified with the rise and progress of Greenhills. He was one of the sturdiest advocates of the York to Green hills railway, and indeed of all projects which appealed to him as likely to advance the interests of the settlers. For the past two years he had been in ill-health, and his death, after a painful illness, took place on the 16th inst. at St. Vincent's Hospital, York. The same day the body was removed to Greenhills and placed in the Anglican Church whence it was removed the following morning for burial. The body was placed in a silver-mounted coffin of polished jarrah and buried in the cemetery adjoining the church. The pall-bearers were Messrs. W. W. Chipper, E. G Whitfield, D. A. Bell and E. G. Parker and the Rev. S. S. Bullen, rector of York, officiated.

The Western Australian (Perth, W.A.), Thursday, 25 March 1915

OPC Note:

Henry Penny was born in Bowerchalke on 22 June 1833.

Henry Penny, 20, and Matilda Hawkins, 20, married 16 July 1854 at Bowerchalke.