

Subject: James (Jim) Summers
Interviewer: Andrew Allen
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Precis: Jim Summers recalling his memories of Campbelltown

Oral history interview at Campbelltown Library Friday 17 February 2010. Can I get your full name please?

My full name is James Robertson Summers.

What were your parent's names?

My father was Walter Summers and my mother's maiden name was Ellen Fearnley Robertson.

How long have you lived in Campbelltown for?

Eighty one years next May.

How many were in your family?

There was only my sister and I. When we came here, it was during the Depression and they wanted two more children, but they couldn't afford it. Dad used to get on the road with a bag picking up any scraps – bottles, metal, anything he could get money for. I remember those days.

What houses in Campbelltown did you live in?

I was born in Scotland, in Fyfehire. The Presbyterian Church brought us out here. I don't know who picked us up at the wharf as I was only two, but we went straight to Hayes and Pearce's house in Lithgow Street. There is a block of units on the corner of Lithgow and Lindsay Streets. It was just past that. It used to be a private hospital in the early days. As a matter of fact Margaret Hayes was born here and still lives here. We had one room. Everybody sat at the table together to have their meals. Mum didn't like that; she wanted to have a place of her own. So they hunted around and got this house in the main street opposite Phil Solomon's grocery shop. Fred Wilkinson owned it, right where the old Commonwealth Bank is now. We lived there for quite a while. We moved to Lindsay Street then when I was about 16.

You lived in Lindsay Street for a fair while after that.

We lived in Lindsay Street for 43 years.

Was that between Allman and Dumaresq Streets?

Yes. We bought it off Rita and Harry Wilkinson, who were born here. All the Wilkinsons were born here. There was a block of land beside the old cottage. We finished up doing it up and buying it. Doug Evans from Evans Jewellery in Macarthur Square lived next door. I bought the block of land next door and built the house that I just sold a while ago. Mum and I lived there for a while and then she died.

Can you describe the sort of food that you ate as a child?

Anything that you would eat. When we were kids, we were poor. We used to eat bread and dripping.

That would have been in the depression years.

Yes. Mum and Dad gave a lot away to feed my sister and I. That's how it was. In the house, there was an old galvanised tub and my sister and I used to both get washed together in the same water. We had a big copper built inside a cement block with a fire underneath it and that's how we boiled all the water. I chopped all the wood. In the kitchen there was an old cast iron fuel stove and all the cast iron utensils.

Can you tell me a little bit about what sort of games and sport that you played as a child?

Everyone used to go to the Public School in Lithgow Street. There was Doug Evans, Dave Brown, Des Rudland, Bruce Reeve and Des Ruttle. There is only Doug Evans and myself left I think. Des Ruttle married a girl from Lack's Pub and moved to Launceston and ended up the Superintendent of Police over there. We played marbles, football and cricket in the paddocks beside the school. Mr Taylor was the Headmaster then. Norm Chipman used to be my Headmaster. We had tops and tried to ping them on top of one another.

Whereabouts were the sporting fields. Where did you play football and cricket?

Well, where the School is now is built on them. They went from where that double storey house is on the corner of Lithgow and Lindesay Streets, right up to the house which was all open paddocks. It's all built on now.

What sort of things did your family celebrate? For example were they into Christmas?

Yes. Everyone was into Christmas the same as we are now. In those days there wasn't any money to buy presents like there are now. We were lucky to get a Christmas card or something like that. We used to hang up our stockings over the fireplace like they did in the early days and hope that there would be something in it. If you lost a tooth, you would put it under the pillow for the tooth fairy to come around.

Were your parents strict?

Oh yes, there was no mucking around like the kids do now. I got the strap around me a few times. But they were good parents and looked after us well. They went without a lot for us to eat. When we lived in the house in the main street, Friday night was late shopping night and everyone was out. We knew everybody. My sister and I used to watch out our bedroom window and watch them walking past.

Tell me about your school years. Where did you go to school?

I started in the Infants in Lithgow Street. That went up to sixth class and then I went to Liverpool High.

How did you get to school in Liverpool?

By the old reliable steam train. Not like the trains that we've got now. Everybody who lived in Campbelltown, the girls went to Liverpool Girls High and we went to the Boys. Some of them went to Granville and some of them went to Parramatta, all by train. It was the only way to get there.

Do you remember how many children there were in the classroom in the primary school?

Miss Dennet was the Headmistress in the Infants and she was very strict. If you were mucking up she used to use the edge of the ruler right across the knuckles and it hurt. I suppose there would have been about a dozen in the first class.

Were there any teachers that you liked?

The other teachers were all right. We used to call Miss Dennet some funny names. She was a real witch but she taught us well. We had to recite the alphabet frontwards and backwards. Other teachers were Mr Norm Chipman and Miss Crago a blonde lady, they ended up getting married, they are both dead now. They were both good teachers, he was about six foot six, a bean pole he was. We went to sixth class and met Mr Taylor the Headmaster. He was very strict. He had two daughters and a son I think. I went to the centenary anniversary of the school and they came from everywhere. There was Shirley Longhurst of the Longhursts of Campbelltown, she was born here. She's up the coast somewhere now and breeds Arabian horses.

How old were you when you left school?

The first job that I had was at Anthony Horderns in Sydney in the school holidays, in the Menswear Department. I was more or less a messenger boy. I didn't know anything about Sydney then. They used to give me free tram tickets. I eventually found my way around in places like Waterloo and Sussex Streets. The next year I went back and I was in the kitchen wear department.

Do you remember how much you got paid in that first job that you had?

I didn't get much then. I was only 15 when I worked at Anthony Horderns and I don't really remember, but it would have been about ten bob, it wasn't much.

Where did you work after Anthony Horderns?

I used to work for Phil Solomon. He had the grocery shop and was the Mayor at one time. I used to go around on Saturday mornings and chop up all their firewood for them, clean up the yard and that sort of thing for a few bob every Saturday morning. Then Dad took me down to Clyde Engineering and I served an apprenticeship as a boilermaker. I served six years apprenticeship and then I worked around different places.

How did you feel about that job? Did you like working as a boilermaker?

No, I really didn't. If I had my time over again I would rather have had a job as an electrician, plumber or in the TV or something like that. That's how I got industrial deafness. They made those 3801 locos which they have in the Museum at Thirlmere. When I left there I went over the road to Conwell's Engineering which was straight opposite across the line. When I think about it, I wasn't happy there, but I stayed there.

What about after that? Did you work in the timber yard after that?

I was doing odd jobs. I was working with Cec Matthews as a labourer and brickie for quite a while. We did jobs all over town; one was a job for my brother in law in real estate somewhere around David Wilson's Chemist shop. He had big jobs in Camden building houses. I used to go in the Camden tram in the morning. In the winter time it was freezing. You have no idea of the frost that we used to get as it was all open space then, we don't get them now. In the winter time, we would get half way up the hill and they would be pouring sand on the wheels, and we would go right back down the hill and everyone had to get out to help to get it up the hill. I used to have to be in Camden at 6am working with Cec Matthews who was a good bloke.

Then I heard about the job at Harris Timber yard and having gone to school with Doug Evans, he's in that photo in the main street with me; I got a job there and stayed there for 25 years. It was where the Mall is now. He owned all that land right down to the railway line, him and his two brothers. In Dumaresq Street, which we used to call Sewer Lane, there was a big shed and gate and you could come in that way as well as the front. Longhurst had a transport business down there. Bill Irlam had a plumbing business and Jeff Eves had a big electrician business there. At one time all the timber used to come by rail and there was a depot down there and he had a big crane on a concrete block, manually operated. He used to take a truck down and load the timber onto that and bring it back to the yard. He was going to get a branch line down the back, but it never eventuated.

When you were a child, what sort of things did you do in your spare time?

I played football with the Kangaroos League for a while in the lower grades. I didn't play full time, that's why I wasn't registered. Any time that they would want me, they would ring up and I would fill in. I would hop on the bike and ride down. The field was where that new outlet has been built opposite Clintons. It was called Duguid Oval. I played a lot of tennis. I played for the Southern District Tennis Club and we played all over the Southern Districts area. Anywhere down to Liverpool to Green Valley. I played in the night competition here at Kentlyn, St Johns, St Peters, and The Showground which is named after Jim Vernon. I played all sports, hockey for a while, and baseball for a while. John and Don Murray had a bike shop with Jack Hopher and they started badminton in the Old Masonic Hall in Browne Street and we played that for quite a while. They started a baseball club too. Eric Henson who just died a little while ago who was a foundation member on the board was still a director. I was a bit of an all round sportsman.

Did you go to the movies much?

Yes, we went to the old Macquarie Cinema corner of Browne and Queen Streets. When we were kids we would go on Saturday afternoons. They even had space movies then. There would be a dozen of us all sitting together. I used to go three times a week. I would go during the week too with my mother. Norm Campbell worked there as the projectionist. Then it closed down with the TV coming on. Jack Hopher started roller skating in there which faded after a while. I think Harry Wilkinson had something to do with it too. Harry Wilkinson took up the Old Town Hall but they stopped it as it was ruining the floor.

Did you do anything in the evenings apart from going to the movies? What sort of thing was a good night out?

I didn't get out much at night until I was probably about 17 I suppose and started going to dances up in the Old Town Hall. I would go to the dance and be watching and they would say "Come on Jim, come and have a dance". But I didn't want to make a fool of myself. I eventually did and went to the dance up there every Saturday night. They were at Menangle and Menangle Park. Five nights a week I went out dancing to Liverpool, Cabramatta, Parramatta and I even went to the Trocadero.

Did you stick with the same group of friends?

Yes, we all stuck together. Everybody knew everybody. If you would see a strange face there, we would be saying I wonder where they came from, who are they. They came from all over to the dances in Campbelltown because they were so good. A lot of soldiers used to camp in the old Showground and they used to come to the dances too, that's how a lot of them met their wives. Later on Roy Cisco and his wife used to be on the Tivoli stage and it closed down. He heard about it and came up and he started off again and they were magnificent. He and his wife used to sing and it used to be packed every Saturday night. That went on for a long, long time until he retired.

When you were quite young, did you do anything that your parents disapproved of?

Yes. If you were naughty you got chastised about it. If you were real naughty you got the strap around your legs from your father. Things you weren't supposed to do, there were only little things, nothing serious, but we got reprimanded.

Did your parents have a car when you were younger?

No, we had no car, we walked everywhere. Dad got a job with Harry Wilkinson who lived on the corner of Lindesay and Lithgow Street where that big block of units is. He owned all that land in that block. He owned a lot of land in Condamine Street on the hill. He used to have it full of vegetable gardens. He had land in the main street which was full of vegetable gardens and flowers. He had this old Morris Minor Ute, and Dad learnt to drive that and he would drive all round town with no licence, you didn't worry about it then. That was the only time that he drove a car, he didn't have one of his own. He couldn't afford it.

I suppose there would have been a fair few families in a similar situation. They couldn't afford a car.

If you could afford one it would only be a second hand one. The only people that could buy a car would be people with a bit of money like when Dr Jones was here. He had this old Ford tourer; it wouldn't have been worth much, probably a couple of hundred pounds. My mate Bill Vardy's father owned a modern car. You could see horses going up and down the main street and drays with the milk cans on them, but you wouldn't see many cars.

You must have seen some enormous changes in the main street.

Yes. When we were kids we used to crawl through all the stormwater pipes down Dumaresq Street, which we used to call Sewer Lane. There was a big gutter running down to the railway line and we used to make little boats out of paper and sail them down there from Queen Street to the railway line. They called it Sewer Lane as it was a big open drain all the way to a creek at the railway line.

What are your experiences of the War years?

During the War years I was an SES warden. I wore a red band and delivered messages. Percy Marlow was the Chief Warden and lived right opposite the Church of England Church. He was the Mayor quite a few times. One night they had a blackout for a test. Everybody had to have all their windows covered up. I didn't cover mine up properly and they came around all the street inspecting and knocked on my door. They said, there is a blackout on and there is light coming through that window and it was my room. There was a tiny bit not covered.

Did your family do it hard in the Depression?

My sister and I had a lot of bread and dripping. Dad was a miner in Scotland. When he came out here he had all sorts of jobs. Things were getting that hard that we couldn't buy shoes, we were in bare feet all the time. He taught himself to be a cobbler, bought the leather and soaked it in water so that it was soft and pliable. We used to watch him sitting up in front of the shed with his cobbler's knife and make our shoes. Dad never knew anything about it, he taught himself. He could buy the leather cheap and couldn't afford to buy new shoes. As a matter of fact, the Darlings who lived in Kentlyn used to deliver ice. We finished up getting an ice chest. That was a miracle, the ice chest. They used to come around delivering the ice in winter, when there would be ice on the ground, in bare feet with no shoes because they couldn't afford them. That's how they made their money. All the kids were like that, lots of kids went to school in bare feet even in the middle of winter. They would sometimes manage to get a second-hand pair of shoes from somewhere, or they made them like my father did.

What are your early memories of Campbelltown when you were a child? Does anything stand out from the 40's, 50's and 60's?

We lived in the main street which had no electricity. We had lanterns for lights. We got electricity later. There was a laneway between our house and the one next door and there was a tin shed and the neighbour would make all the big water tanks. It finished up Dad got a job helping him. He used to get inside and hold the tank up while he riveted it. There is a photo up in the Hospital in Allman Street, of Queen Street a dirt track with a water tank. A few of the boys from Bowls said that there is a photo up there of your father with a tank.

I worked for Phil Solomon and also Bob Siddenam down Patrick Street. We would do anything we could to amuse ourselves. We would go across all the paddocks to the Woolwash either walking or riding our bikes.

Do you remember the Doctors and Dentists in the town, who they were and whereabouts they were?

Dr Jones was the first one I can remember. He was the only Doctor that we had. We had Milby Hospital then. Most of the people went to Camden Hospital. You got over there the best way you could. If someone had a car, they would take you over. Dr Jones was all over the place, he was the only doctor here. He had bronchitis badly and one day got a bad attack and someone ran into Church whilst a service was on and said that Dr Jones had died. We had a big reunion a while ago over at the Arts Centre. I knew a lot of them. Dr Jones son gave a talk on Dr Jones.

After Dr Jones, Doc Thomas came here and was in the same building in Cordeaux Street opposite St Peters Church. As a matter of fact they may have been working together for a while before Dr Jones died. Doc Thomas smoked like a chimney always had a cigarette hanging out his mouth and the ash would be as long as your finger. Everyone would wonder when it was going to drop off. He got pulled up by the Police one time for speeding and he said to the copper if it bloody could have gone faster I would have been going faster. Day or night you would just ring up the Doctor and he would come and see you. Then he died. Then there was John Sivwright and Bob Prim who used to be in the Old Post Office. First of all there was Walt Clissold a barber and Des Churnich who was a dentist in one of the rooms. Then two doctors came upstairs.

What about the Hotels. Do you remember where all the Hotels were?

Lacks was on the corner of Railway and Queen Streets. There was the Railway Hotel at the station which used to have 6am opening and anybody who was thirsty before going to work could have a beer. It was open all hours. If it was all closed up you could go up and knock on the door, the coppers would be in their drinking too. The old Police Station was opposite in Railway Street. Lacks was different, you could get a drink there if you lived a certain distance from it and signed a book, you could get a drink on Sunday. The Club Hotel which was opposite the park in Cordeaux Street was the same. The other pub which is gone now at the bottom end of Queen Street, had facilities out the back for horses and carts. I can't remember it's name. I knew old Mrs Bugden, she lived opposite us and she was born there, her father was the blacksmith. It was where the old Advertiser used to be which was a warehouse in the early days. We used to watch Richardson from Camden lower the kegs into the cellar on a rope down a ramp. That was one of the real early pubs in Campbelltown.

Do you remember any colourful characters from when you were younger?

There were a few of them. There was Mick who had a place out in the bush who had about 20 dogs and the place was like a rabbit warren, there were kids everywhere. If anyone got lost anywhere they would go and see Mick and he would help find them, if it was the Woolwash or Kentlyn or Wedderburn. He was about the biggest character around here, the only one I

would say. The other one would have been Dan Longhurst. There was a house on the top of Convent Hill we called it, which is Sturt Street. Right on the top there was a big old weatherboard house and he lived in that. He owned all the land around there and had horses. You used to see him getting around town in a horse and sulky, a big tall thin man. Shirley Longhurst was his daughter. After he died, Harry Wilkinson whose house we had in Lindesay Street, bought it and turned it into a boarding house and that's gone now too.

Did you go rabbiting around here where the Library stands today?

Yes. It was all paddocks and we used to go rabbiting. We would build a fire and smoke them out and they would come out the other end and we would have a trap. The Pines we used to call the creek and we would go swimming there. We would get a sheet of galvanised iron and bend the front up and use it as a toboggan. We would go up to the top of the hill and go straight down to the bottom. We were mad, we could have had an arm or a leg chopped off. Bill Vardy had ferrets and would go rabbiting. Boardmans owned the place then and had the big house up there and she came down on her horse and told us to get off. She was the only one. We used to go all over the place.

Were you fascinated by Fisher's Ghost when you were a kid?

Yes. As a matter of fact I was in Apex and Ross Fitzpatrick, he's still alive he is 90, he was our first President, Ron McMillan and me were invited up to the opening of the new Ambulance Station as special guests, the Minister for Health was there, and there was a woman there from the indigenous people who owned the land originally who made a speech and was part of the opening. The Apex Club raised about thirty thousand pounds with raffles and Queen Contests. Shirley Clarke was our candidate; she lives down in Wollongong now. The Clarkes are still here, they owned a big dairy in Minto. We started to raise funds for the old Ambulance Station in Broughton Street which is why they invited us to the new opening. We had our photos taken with all the dignitaries.

You were going to tell me about the old cattle tanks.

The cattle tanks were up in Allman Street. We used to swim in those and when I was a kid they were always full of water. We used to catch fish and eels in the smaller one on the bottom side. The tanks would dry up and you could walk in them. Then they would fill up and the fish and eels would be back, they must stay under the mud. The big one on the other side was where they got their water supply in the early days and we used to swim in that too. The steps down one side are still there.

There used to be a creek running down from the tanks in Allman Street. It used to run down to Oxley Street and come out in Dumaresq Street again into the stormwater drains that Council built and would finish up going underneath the road.

Bill Bursill built houses on that land right on top of the creek and the piers were an earthenware pipe full of concrete and that was a pier for the house. He built those houses there, no linings inside the walls, no lining in the ceiling. It was freezing in the winter and stinking hot in the summer. Then they knocked them down and built brick units. There was one there a while back which was starting to sink because it was built over an old creek. They had to dig out underneath, jack it all up and put reinforcing underneath to stabilise it.

Do you remember Austin Park where James Bocking had a house? The driveway was on the corner of George and Allman Streets. It was demolished in the 1950's.

I don't remember the house. On one side was Hurley Park and the other side was Kings dairy and all paddocks. Up on top of the hill was a driveway and the foundations of an old house and maybe that was it.

If you go down the bottom of Allman Street where the bypass is now, were there many houses knocked down to make way for the bypass.

Knotts lived in one. The Congregational Church was there. When they were excavating, they found huge sandstone blocks under the foundations which would have been made by the convicts and must have been worth a fortune. On this side of the bypass Des Churnich lived there. He was the only dentist in Campbelltown. Where I live now, there was a ramshackle weatherboard house with all glass doors in the front. When the house was demolished they found all these old bottles buried in the dirt. Bill Vardy's uncle was the only house the second block from the corner of Lindesay Street. All the Vardy's were born in Campbelltown.

Do you remember Bradbury Park House?

That was Kings Dairy, they lived in that. I'm sorry they knocked that down, unless it wasn't worth keeping. The BP garage was on one corner of Bradbury Avenue and the Ampol garage was on the other side where the lights are now.