

OH 1/21 - Interview with Jessie Merle Hall

TAPE 2, SIDE B - Mechanical workings of the steamer and washing

Were you allowed to swim in the River?

Oh yes. My father used to put a strap around our waist and tie a rope on it and walk up and down the deck, giving us swimming lessons. He was rather disgusted with me because I couldn't swim until I was nearly eleven. My brother and sister were only about five when they swam – like ducks. I was more nervous.

Were you afraid of the water?

I was a bit nervous of it, yes.

You've mentioned that both your parents read quite a lot, did they?

Yes.

Did you have many books on the boat?

Quite a few. And they used to take papers and journals. I remember Dad was very interested in the Scientific America and got some ideas for his machinery out of those. So that when the last lot of machinery that was installed was a particular type from America.

Was that in the 'Kookaburra'?

Yes. It had been in the 'Merle'. May Brothers at Gawler had made it, but it was designs they got from America. He and Mr. May put their heads together over it and decided that was the best kind to have.

You were telling me the name has always stuck in your memory.

Oh, the tandem compound condensing engine? Yes. (laughs)

Earlier when we were looking at the photographs, you were saying your brother knew more about the mechanical side of things.

Oh yes, of course he would. He was very interested always.

Did you have any interest yourself in that side of it?

No, just would fascinate me to watch the engine – the pistons – working. That's all.

I'm of course, not particularly familiar with the workings of paddle steamers. How was the wheel propelled? Was there a belt or an arm to turn the wheel?

The paddle wheels?

Yes.

Shafts, they called them paddle shafts.

So it'd be a rotating shaft and a cog turning the wheel. I see.

Another interesting thing was that we used to boil the clothes for the laundry when the machinery was in action. We had sterilised water, of course always, in the laundry.

How did you manage that?

That came through the engine. To boil the clothes, we had a big square copper specially made, and you simply put a pipe that came from the boiler into this copper and it boiled your clothes. And the laundry was just above the boiler room.

You've said that the general help did the laundry, did she?

Yes, when we had one, always. Otherwise we did. I can't remember how we boiled the clothes when we didn't have steam up. Perhaps we didn't.

I can see on one of the photographs some clothes hanging from a line.

Yes. Yes, the lines had to be up on the top deck of course.

Would that be to keep out of the way of the crew and the shop?

I expect so. Oh yes, it wouldn't have been very practicable to have had them down there. I remember my brother had a pair of pants he didn't like at all, and once they got hooked on a --- A gum tree came in under the - I suppose you'd call them eaves on the boat - and hooked his pants off the line and took them away. (laughs) As we steamed away his pants were

hanging on this gum tree and he was clapping his hands. (laughs) Oh, he was so glad to lose them. I can't remember why he didn't like them.