

Timed Summary

Interview with James Barclay Watts

OH TP No 747 (NT)

Interviewer: Margaret Kowald

Date: 21.6.1990

Note: Key words shown in bold.

START TIME	SUMMARY
Disc 1	
0.00	James Barclay Watts was born in Darwin on 15.1.1913. His grandfather was Fairfax Ingram (Hazzard) Finniss and he came from Mauritius in 1882 to SA where his uncle was surveying with Colonel Light , he went to Darwin in 1883. He did survey work for the railways then set up his own business with Customs, mainly as an agent with the Chinese ; he also hunted a lot in the bush; he was a good friend of the Koolpinyah people .
2.48	James provides an overview of his family history. His mother was the daughter of Fairfax and she was Alice Mona Watts (nee Finniss) and was born in Darwin on 6.12.1892. She died on 12.8.1940. His father was Douglas Crombie Watts and he was born in Brisbane in 1885, he died in Toowoomba in 1930. They had five children. James' father went to Darwin in 1910 as an accountant and teller in the Commercial Bank . His parents met and married in Darwin. His father left the bank and became an agent and helped the Chinese merchants import goods from overseas; he was in charge of the wharves and worked with agencies and the unions. He was Mayor of Darwin at various times from 1917 to 1930 and he received an allowance of about £20 a year. He held a lot of civic receptions at the old town hall.
6.20	James' father was involved with the union delegation in the Gilruth affair and was sherrif at the same time and tried to keep peace between everybody.
7.40	There were only about 1,000 people in Darwin at the time and his father was associated with most of them. The Goose Club was formed by Judge Mallam ; Freddy Thompson ran the Northern Territory Times . His mother did a lot of entertaining at home, including having Kingsford Smith at home for a meal when he landed in Darwin.
9.12	The family home had two big bedrooms and was surrounded by a 10-foot verandah, and they often slept on the verandah using mosquito nets.
11.00	James went to Darwin primary and high school. The headmaster was Vic Lampe and Joe King was the assistant. He was friendly with the Lampe boys. He played a lot of sport.
13.55	James describes the large Chinese community in Darwin and recalls that the boys were very smart. Only three boys ever went to boarding school as a result of winning scholarships.
15.02	James recalls that he was 16 when he first left Darwin. His father was ill and he took him to Toowoomba where he died. They travelled by boat to Brisbane and by train to Toowoomba. He then visited his aunt in Adelaide. Later when he worked for the NT Administration and Commonwealth government he had four boat trips from Darwin.

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17.02	He describes the way the family used an ice chest to keep food cool as there was no electricity. Felix Holmes ran the ice works as well as the butcher shop, bakery, soft drink cordial place, the slaughter house. Later when there was electricity – they paid 1/6 for a unit of electricity. It was all direct current.
18.38	He describes his life after he left school at 12 years. He started as a messenger in the post office and worked there for six months in 1926. He then worked at the NT Administration as a clerk until 1930 working in sub-treasury. His next job was in the works department in the Commonwealth Government until 1938. Other employment included working on the road from Darwin to Mataranka with two engineers, and then on the construction of the Manton Dam before going into the army in 1939.
21.17	James recalls the beginnings of the water supply in Darwin. In 1933 Dr. Woolnough the Commonwealth Government geologist was tasked with putting in a water supply to Darwin as it only had well water. He chose the Manton catchment area . It was constructed as a miniature Boulder Dam . He explains the method which did not include reinforcing in the actual dam wall, it was done with cyclopiian concrete . They rushed to finish it before the war broke out.
25.50	James describes his social life. He played a lot of sport, and enjoyed shooting, catching crocodiles and buffaloes. He fished with the Aboriginal boys and they caught barramundi with spears. He hunted buffalo at Humpty Doo with George Goodman . Their hides were valuable and used for leather.
29.28	He got leave every three years and received a first class fare to go down south, but a lot of people stayed in Darwin for their holidays. Most other workers came from South Australia.
30.17	James talks about Australian Rules Football and the various teams. IT was very big in Darwin and was played in the wet season. They played in all conditions.
33.44	He talks about his brothers and sisters and their social life. They went to a lot of dances including the annual Bachelor's Ball which was a very dressy affair, held in the old Soldier's Hall . There was one picture show in the Don Theatre , run by George Wedd . The pictures were shown in the open air. It was segregated seated with Aboriginals sitting in a separate area.
37.40	They had picnics at the mouth of Rapid Creek , a swimming hole, they also went to Howard Springs and Koolpinyah station . There was a problem with stingers in the sea. They usually swam at Fort Hill and then baths were built at Lameroo Beach .
40.06	James recalls memories of Aboriginal people. They used to camp at Lameroo Beach. There was a police tracker called Big Foot Charlie . There was an Aboriginal compound at Kahlin and Bob McDonald was in charge of it and used to crack a stock whip when the workers were lazy. The compound was at Myilly Point . James explains that he always believed that Aboriginals were as good as anybody and he had never had an argument with any of them.
43.51	The Aboriginals had corroborees every two or three weeks on Mindil Beach ; it was ceremonial and the white people used to watch them. It was a sacred burial ground – the casino is there now.
44.56	He was there when the guns landed off the boats in Darwin and were taken to East Point , Point Emery and Larrakeyah .

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47.12	James speaks about Chinatown and the people and the shops there, and celebrations for Chinese New Year
49.11	He explains that his family never wanted for anything but they were not well off. His father died when he was 16 and it was a bit of a struggle after that. There was no welfare during the Depression but he always had a job as he worked for the government. The Chinese were well off but did not show it and were quite generous, especially at New Year.
51.19	James talks about the hotels in Darwin – the Terminus in Cavenagh Street , along side the tree of knowledge, the Victoria in Smith Street , and the Club in Mitchell Street ; all were originally owned by the government. Other hotels were the Don and the Pine Creek.
55.02	He describes that the Administrator's House was Government House and he used to go there for afternoon tea and to play tennis with the children who lived there. There was a class division in Darwin – the silvertails were the government office people and those from British Australian Telegraph , the Post Office and the banks. The other class was comprised of the wharfies and labourers. The Chinese owned most of the stores, including food and clothing.
58.42	James explains what people did on Christmas Day . It was very hot and they wandered from house to house for food and drink and then they had a big Christmas dinner at home at night. They went to the midnight service at the Church of England .
	End of Tape 1.