



TJ Waters On and Off the Track

"I often thought, when I was President here, what terrific foresight the original committee had when they placed the course the way they did."

Tom Waters, 1985

Thomas John Waters, born in 1905, was probably well qualified to comment on the early Committeemen of the Towong Turf Club. Four of his antecedents were on the Committee of 1900, of which a photo survives. They were Tom's grandfather, Thomas Beaumont Waters, his father, Thomas Beaumont Waters (Mont), his great uncle, Alexander Dixie Waters, and his uncle, John Waters. Another uncle, Charlie, would also become a staunch supporter of the Turf Club in subsequent years, and when the Centenary Gold Cup meeting was held in 1971 the feature race was named in his memory and sponsored by the three daughters of CH Waters, with Mr E Facer.



Image 1. TJ Waters. Source: The Age Newspaper 30 December 1985



Charlie and Tom were always close, and on Charlie's death his racing colours of brown and pink were passed on to Tom. These are still used by Tom's family today.

Image 2. Towong Turf Club Committee of 1900: L to R Back Row: K Pierce, J Pierce, A Acocks, W Wheeler, J Waters, W Mitchell, Dr Stackpole, C Findlay, Mont Waters, E Brown. Middle Row: TB Waters, C Wheeler, J Dobinson, J Mitchell, J McMeekin, W Scammell Front Row: E Scammell, W Phillips, A D Waters. Reproduced in the Border Morning Mail.



In the first hundred years of the Towong Turf Club's history there were only four presidents, testament to the commitment and resilience of these early enthusiasts. Tom Waters was the fourth president, serving from 1959 to 1976 and retiring with Life Membership at the age of 71.

Tom could remember the Turf Club struggling to survive during the Depression and World War 2. One meeting attracted only eight runners and the club faced possible closure. However, in the early 1960's the TAB provided a lifesaving boost to Towong. The photo finish, electric starting stalls and new jockey scales were installed soon after this and the Centenary Gold Cup meeting in 1971 was a huge success, with a crowd of nearly 3000 people.

Tom Waters inherited horsemanship from both his grandfathers. His father's father, TB Waters, raced a horse called Mohican ("Old Baldy") which in 1887 won the Geelong Steeplechase after being led behind a buggy from Corryong.

Tom's mother's father was Tom Nugent, who made a name for himself at the age of nine when riding a bolting horse at an early race meeting on the Towong flats. Onlookers feared the worst when the runaway approached a parked buggy, but Tom and his mount cleared it easily.

Born at "Parc Glas", Tom Waters was the eldest of seven sons and one daughter. "Parc Glas" (Welsh for "green field") is roughly opposite Gravels Plains and was so named because both TB Waters and his brother, Alexander Dixie Waters, had emigrated from Wales in 1852. TB Waters took up Gravels Plains in 1880.

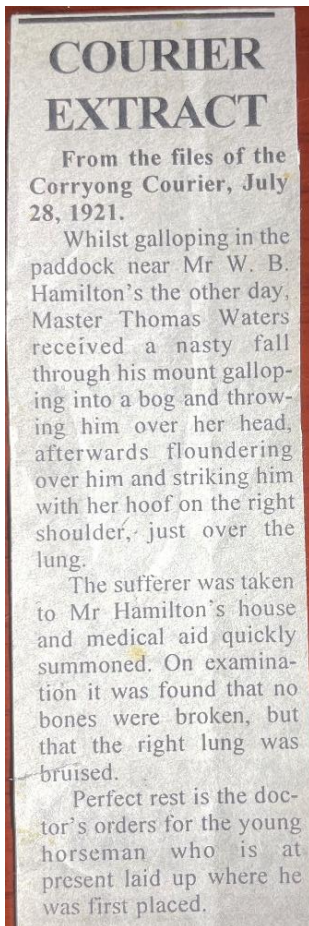
The Waters boys, led by Tom, seem to have taken particular pleasure in racing their ponies across the flats between home and Corryong, to and from school and at other times, occasionally with dire consequences.



Image 3. TJ Waters and the Centenary presentation.



Image 4. Old Baldy. Source: Private collection



Tom rode in his first race at Towong when he was fourteen. In those days pony races were on the program at the Towong races, and Tom trained and rode his first pony, Rhyme, to be beaten by a head by a professional rider who “just knew too much for me.” He would go on to become a leading amateur rider of his day, winning 232 races around the district and also winning over jumps in Melbourne. A highlight of his career was victory in the Yarra Glen and Lilydale Hunt Club Steeplechase at Moonee Valley in 1932. The following year he won the Hunters’ Steeplechase, also at Moonee Valley, on a horse called Tongalla, which had won The First Maiden Plate in Corryong several months earlier. Tom leased and trained Tongalla himself and the horse remained one of his favourite mounts.

However, he considered that his best horse was Sole and the two were well known around picnic meetings in North Eastern Victoria and Southern New South Wales. A big, rangy chestnut with a baldy face, Sole had been something of an outlaw when Tom first acquired him, but he became a very classy galloper with 22.5 wins to his credit. Tom rode him for ten of those.

Image 5. Corryong Courier excerpt from 1921.



Tom’s race riding career was interrupted in 1928 when he seized the opportunity for travel with one of the last shipments of Australian horses to Calcutta as part of the Indian remount scheme. Demand for Australian horses had been strong since the previous century when it was found that these hardy Walers could withstand the arduous conditions in India much more successfully than horses imported from countries such as North America, Argentina and Hungary.

Image 6. Tom Waters atop Sole the racehorse Source: Private



Tom travelled with 430 horses, most unbroken, aged up to five years, drawn from all over the country but mostly the Northern Territory.

As well as caring for the horses on board the ship, Tom was required to ride some of them on arrival at Calcutta, for about 70 of those on his shipment were destined for the private market. Thus, after a rudimentary "breaking in" they were then to be paraded in front of prospective buyers, a sometimes tricky operation involving buckjumping displays. He would afterwards describe these incidents with relish.

In riding parlance there is an old adage that you have to fall off nine times before you become a good rider, though the number varies. Tom certainly had his share of falls and in the interests of family history one day when he was nearing 90 years of age, he decided to describe his falls in races as he remembered them. His account filled four pages of entertaining reading. Here is the first:



Image 7. T J Waters in India. Private collection

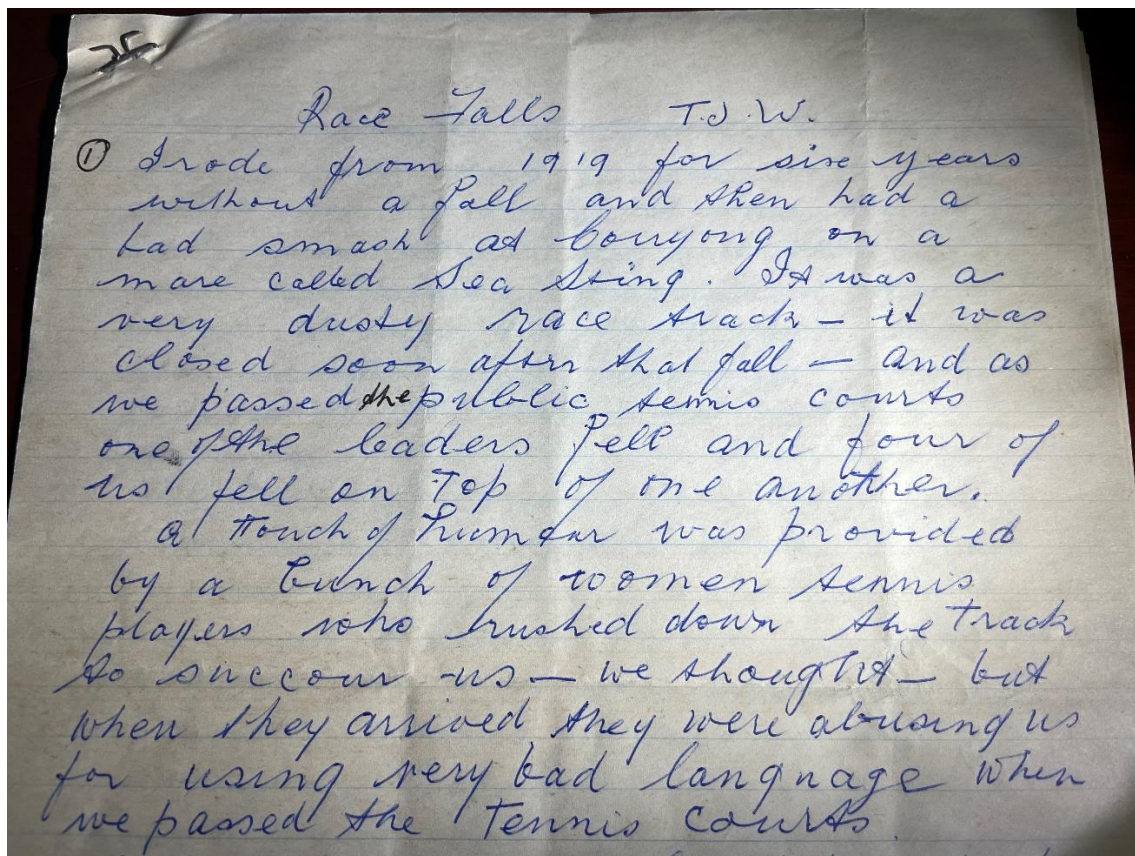


Image 8. Diary entry by TJ Waters. Source: Private collection.

Another hair raiser from Cootamundra reads:

“My next fall was at Cootamundra from a one-eyed horse called Rod La Rue, which fell for no obvious reason when leading about four furlongs from the finish. Result – concussion, broken jaw, a few teeth missing and a fortnight in Coota Hospital.”

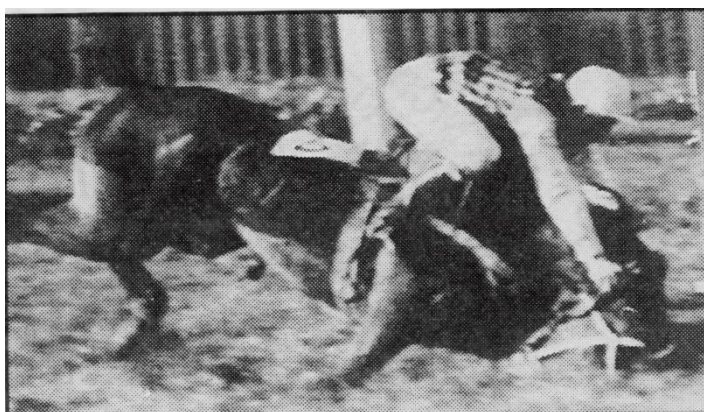
The second last involves a Bacchus Marsh hurdle race and a horse called Radiant Crow, which had a nasty habit of galloping straight through “little brush hurdles” and would “duck his shoulder away as he landed.” Tom writes:

“I stayed with him till the very last jump where he was leading by half a furlong and blundered through it and we parted company very slowly because I clung to him for about a hundred yards, slipping slowly down his shoulder to the ground to be trodden on by both his feet as he went on. I still believe if he had had one wisp of mane I could have stayed with him.”

And finally:

“Charm Ore. No story there. He was going well, presented to the fence well – but fell. Broken arm.”

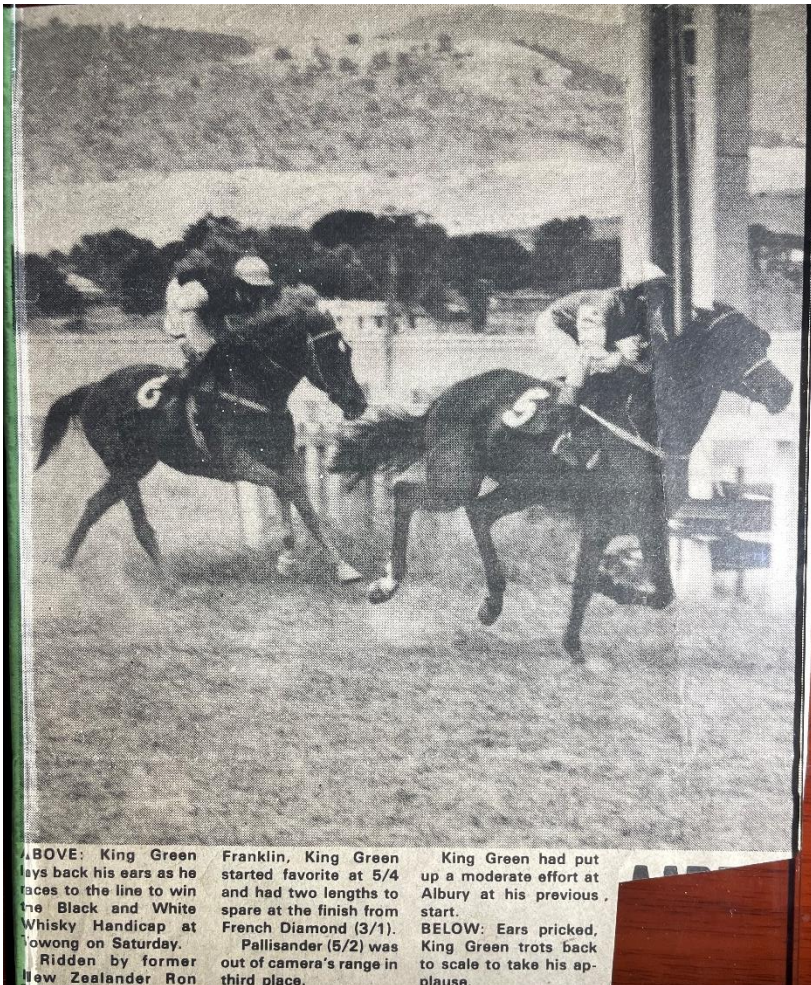
Tom’s last ride in a race was in 1948, the year his daughter, Wendy, was born. However, his enthusiasm for racing and for The Towong Turf Club continued unabated. He had joined the Committee in 1929 and continued as a member and strong supporter until his death in 1997.



● Tom and Charmore crash at Moonee Valley.

Image 9. Charmore crashing at Moonee Valley. Source: The Border Mail, reproduced from private collection

Tom also continued to try to win the elusive Towong Cup, and up until the last years of his life almost always had a runner at the Towong races. He acquired a well-bred foundation mare from a friend in the early fifties, and when this mare produced a filly foal by the local stallion, Amazed, she was named Sweet Surprise. Amazed was owned by Tom’s lifelong friend, Steve Paton, and after Amazed came three highly successful district sires, Kintail, French Kingdom and Aqua d’Oro. Tom joined his mares every year to Steve’s horses and some of their progeny he raced in partnership with Steve, or they took foal about. It was an enjoyable and mutually satisfactory arrangement and they met with considerable success on the track. One of the daughters of French Kingdom was Tom’s mare, French Diamond, trained by Mac Blair at Cudgewa, and she ran second in the Towong Cup in 1980 and went on to win good distance races at Albury. The last of that line of mares was still on Tom’s farm, Boonderoo, at the time of his death in 1997.



ABOVE: King Green lays back his ears as he races to the line to win the Black and White Whisky Handicap at Towong on Saturday. Ridden by former New Zealander Ron Franklin, King Green started favorite at 5/4 and had two lengths to spare at the finish from French Diamond (3/1). Pallisander (5/2) was out of camera's range in third place. King Green had put up a moderate effort at Albury at his previous start. BELOW: Ears pricked, King Green trots back to scale to take his applause.

Image 10. French Diamond runs second to King Green. Source: Border Mail, March 1980.

The Towong Turf Club celebrated 150 years of racing at Towong in 2021. Because of COVID conditions the crowd was limited to 1500 (there were 3000 at the Centenary Cup of 1971) but there was no less enthusiasm, and the fields were mostly strong. Presenting the TJ Waters Memorial trophy, on behalf of her sister, Wendy, Tom's daughter Dixie said their father would have been delighted to see Towong still flourishing after 150 years. He would have been even more delighted later in the day when the Towong Cup was won by a horse raced and trained by Rodger Waters, Tom's nephew, and the second feature race, the Chisholm Plate, was won by Wendy's mare, Euphemia. Victory was sweet, if late.



Image 11. Euphemia wins the 2021 Chisholm Plate at Towong. Source: Private collection.