



## ***Richmond River Historical Society Inc.***

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### ***The Amazing Jens Christian Frederiksen***

Most of us live a rather ordinary life. We follow the leader, do what we are supposed to do, have very few fresh ideas or cannot make others see how important these ideas are, and when we leave there is hardly a ripple to be seen on the water. Some others, however, are born to survive, adapt to new circumstances, and succeed in anything they undertake. Such a one was Jens Christian Frederiksen.

Jens Christian was born in Denmark in 1860. His father was a building contractor and so it was natural for the young son to become a carpenter. He learnt how to build both houses and ships and, when his apprenticeship was completed, in true Viking fashion, he boarded a sailing ship to see the world. His adventures took him first to the North Sea and the Baltic and he also tried his hand at deep sea fishing in the Icelandic waters.

Sometimes he signed off and travelled overland visiting Russia, most of Europe and later South Africa. He worked as a carpenter when he could but was very good at adapting to new challenges, and he was always happy to undertake the job of cook. By the time he was 21 he had decided to set sail for Australia. It is not clear why he came here rather than first seeing the sights of the Orient or the Americas. He arrived in Newcastle in 1881, liked what he saw, and decided to jump ship.

The 1880s in Australia were turbulent times, the country was going into a severe economic depression and immigration restrictions were being imposed. Jens Christian was an illegal immigrant and he had to find somewhere to hide. He was lucky enough to find a family willing to help and he soon made himself useful building small boats for local sawmillers.



Water pipe to hydro-electric plant

It was at this time that he became interested in farming. Perhaps this was partly because he had met Mary Mortimer whose family were farmers. Mary and Jens were married in 1884. By 1898, with money in their pocket and with a growing family, they decided to try their luck farming in the Richmond Valley. They initially went to Federal but eventually settled at Rous.

After a period of growing sugar cane the Frederiksen family changed to dairying. This proved successful but Jens was aware of two major problems faced by farmers in the area – lack of water which could be channelled into irrigation, and the absence of an electricity supply for the home and especially for the dairy. He knew about hydro-electric power plants from his native country and, while visiting his parents in Denmark in 1908 he studied how these systems were built and operated.

The family property at Rous had its own waterfall which fed into Youngman Creek. In 1914 Jens and his sons dammed the Creek and built a hydro-electric plant. This supplied both water and electricity for 40 years until it was destroyed by the 1948 flood.

Over the years many people visited the plant and saw results achieved through efficient methods of farming not only in the dairy but also in the fields. Irrigation was used to improve pastures and to grow a variety of commercial crops. Bananas and arrowroot were grown and the Frederiksen family had what was probably the first macadamia nut plantation. Jens even invented a machine powered by the hydro-electricity to de-husk the nuts. He was indeed an amazing man. He died in 1938.

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