

## Working – the Old-fashioned Way

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**Ned Adler was a brother to my great-grandfather, Fred Adler, and I wrote this article for the *Warracknabeal Herald* after a photograph of Ned's threshing plant had been published in the paper. My father told me that Ned's old traction engine had been left for years on a farm in the Ailsa district, and I had always been intrigued by the image of it rusting away, its significant role in the development of agriculture in the Wimmera all but forgotten. I was disappointed after Dad made inquiries and discovered that it had been sold for scrap years before.**

Ned Adler whose nineteenth century threshing plant was pictured in a recent *Herald*, was a man with a very real Warracknabeal connection.

For some years he farmed at Kellalac, and two of his brothers lived in the Warracknabeal district. In a wider sense, however, Adler also played a significant part in the mechanization of farming in the Wimmera. Apart from his thresher, which worked all over the district, he was for many years a machinery agent at Murtoa, and was responsible for promoting McCormick reaper and binders in the Wimmera.

Ned (Edward) Adler was born at Woodford near Warrnambool in 1855. His parents, Johann Gottlieb Adler and Johanne Christiane (nee Uebergang) had migrated to Victoria in 1849 from the Prussian province of Silesia. Together with members of the Uebergang family the Adlers settled near Warrnambool, renting land firstly at Woodford, then in 1855 selecting land at nearby Winslow. Here Adler senior farmed successfully and made money by carting goods to the Victorian goldfields – until the prospect of establishing his sons on the land attracted him to the newly-opened Wimmera plains. In 1873 the family moved to the Murtoa district, where Ned Adler selected land at Ashens (this property, now known as *Union Farm*, is still in the Adler family today) and carried out farming and grazing.

An enterprising person, Ned developed a great interest in farm machinery and was the first farmer in the Murtoa district to purchase a McCormick reaper and binder. In 1883 he was appointed an agent for the company and became an expert at starting their machines. It is believed that he also took on other agencies. In the early 1880's Ned established several threshing plants and began travelling throughout the Murtoa, Horsham and Warracknabeal districts. In 1889 (by then in partnership with one D. Beaton) Ned had purchased a traction engine and the well-known threshing plant began to rumble its way into Wimmera history.

Adler's team travelled from farm to farm, arriving after the crop had been harvested and stacked. The thresher separated (or beat) the straw from the wheat which would then be bagged. The loose straw would subsequently be stacked. Conditions were rough for the 20 or more members of the threshing team. As no accommodation could normally be provided on the farms the men often slept outside, a necessity aided by the warm weather during harvest time. Meals would be provided by farmers' wives. Many of the men working on the team would have been farmer's sons who took the job after taking off their own harvests.

Several photographs survive of Adler's thresher. One, showing the plant at Robinson's Kellalac property, was reproduced in Susan Priestley's *Warracknabeal, A Wimmera Centenary* (1967); this same photograph appears in the recently published *Wimmera Story*. Another, taken on Adler's own property *Waruda* at Kellalac (1896) is to be found in the Museum at *Wheatlands Warracknabeal*.

Adler married Louise Auguste Hering of Geelong in 1881. The eldest of their five children, Albertina, married Reinhold Hausler and farmed at Ailsa before moving to New South Wales. Two of Reinhold's brothers, Bill and Ernie, both worked at different times on the thresher.

Adler bought his Kellalac farm from Andrew Scott of the Warracknabeal squatting family in 1892 (letters from Adler to Scott, held in the Melbourne University Archives were quoted in Priestley's book). Ned sold his Ashens property to his brother August Adler, and continued to operate his

threshing plant from Kellalac. It is not known when the threshing business disbanded and the machinery was sold. It probably occurred when Ned sold the Kellalac farm in 1903 and moved to a dairy property at Moolap, Geelong. In 1912 the family moved once more, this time to Gidgingbung near Temora, NSW. Ned and Louise retired to West Wyalong in 1920 and Louise died in 1931. In his old age Ned remarried and moved to Caulfield, Melbourne, where he died in 1941. He was buried with his first wife at West Wyalong.

Ned Adler was a man of many parts. Early in his life he obtained a certificate to operate steam engines. On one occasion, during a railway strike, he found himself (and some valuable cattle) stranded on a train with no driver prepared to work. Not to be outdone, Ned entered the cab and drove the train from Murtoa to Stawell, getting both passengers and goods to their destination.

In 1933 Ned wrote an account of his family's arrival in Murtoa for the *Warracknabeal Herald*. This was printed as part of a review of a Back-to Warracknabeal and District held in March that year.

Ned's father, Gottlieb Adler, had purchased land at Bangerang in 1883, and this was farmed by his son James until he left for Queensland in 1897. James was a pioneer member of the Friedheim Lutheran Church, Areegra. Another son, John, also farmed in the Ailsa district from 1894 to 1901, before also moving to Queensland.

By the time of Ned Adler's death, some 60 years after he had helped pioneer the mechanization of farming, the face of the Wimmera had changed forever. The tractor and its mechanised implements were there to stay, and the age-old sway of the draught horse had faltered once and for all. Like their former owner, the remains of the famous threshing plant survived to see the changes. The old traction engine stood rusting on an Ailsa farm until after the war years. Then, ignominiously, it was sold for scrap.

John Schubert, Montrose

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**This article was originally published in the *Warracknabeal Herald*, 17 January, 1984, and later reprinted in *The Warracknabeal Plough*, magazine of Wheatlands Warracknabeal Agricultural Machinery Museum, Vol. 3, No. 1, February 1989. By way of clarification, Ashens is a farming district near Murtoa, while Ailsa, Kellalac, Bangerang and Areegra are all districts near Warracknabeal.**