History of the Tesch Brothers Family Business

The firm of **Tesch Brothers** was established with the commencement of a sawmill by **Norman and Arthur Tesch** on their father, **Ludwig Gottfried Tesch's** property at Witta, a district north west of Maleny, Queensland, the property description now being:- Lot 1 R.P. 121272. Parish of Maleny. County of March.

When the partnership was first established the brothers were pit sawing timber. They cut up beech logs for fence posts. Residents of the community, namely George Sommer's father and the Oehmichen Brothers, Hughie and Billy, then asked them to cut up some logs for them. They were the first Tesch Brothers customers.

In approximately **1917** a 5h.p. Emu Oil Engine was purchased from Queensland Machinery Company, the money for the purchase of this engine being guaranteed by their father, Ludwig Gottfried Tesch, and that marked the establishment of a sawmill (power driven saws etc.)

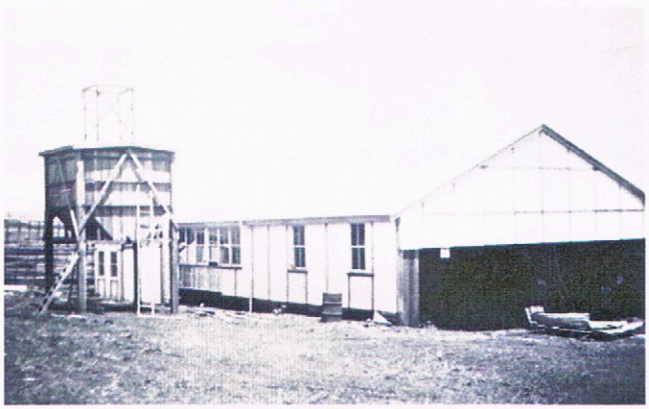
Over the next few years the business grew and the original engine was replaced and additional machinery installed, and by **1923** the Witta Sawmill employed the two working partners and a staff of three.

Witta Sawmill. Circa 1923

In the **late 1920's** power for the mill was converted to a boiler and steam engines, fuelled by sawdust and other timber waste from the mill.

They bought a vertical frame saw from a sawmill on Fraser Island. It had to be loaded by bullock wagons for the journey across the island and then loaded on to a barge for the trip to the mainland.

Electricity came to Tesch Brothers Sawmill in **1942.** The line was extended to the mill, as it was regarded as an essential industry during the war years (Second World War 1939-1945).



Witta Sawmill Planing Shed and partly constructed Shaving Hopper. Circa 1949

In **1947** Council approval was granted to erect a separate building at the Witta Sawmill for the timber dressing operation. Planing machines previously had been located inside the western end of the mill building. The big change came when electric power was installed, hence the new building for the planing machines which no longer depended on steam power.

Later, Holmes Sawmill at Landsborough was purchased and this operated in conjunction with the Witta Sawmill until its licence was amalgamated with the Witta operation in **September 1971.**

On the **26th November 1971** the hardwood capacity of Doyles Sawmill at Kenilworth was also purchased and amalgamated with the Witta Sawmill.

Throughout the establishment period of the sawmill a lack of capital was a continuing problem, but a credit rating established by their father stood the brothers in good stead and was continued throughout the whole operation of the business.

In **1925** the brothers took a major step which was to prove, in hindsight, an almost clairvoyant look into the future. The market for sawn timber had been almost entirely in Brisbane but they saw the

coastal area beginning to grow, and decided to buy property in Caloundra with a view to opening an outlet there for the sawn product.
Land was cheap in those days and Arthur Tesch remembered paying £25 each for five blocks of land facing Ormuz Avenue, and another facing Bulcock Street. He described the blocks then as "**a bullfrog swamp with a creek and tea trees**". The property description of these blocks was – Ormuz Avenue – 5/9 5424 RB52 Portion 12, and Bulcock Street – 10 RP. 120196 Bribie.

The families were still living at Witta, but as Caloundra was the nearest seaside town it was logical that they would go there for holidays, and in the late **1920's** a house was built by their brother Ben in what is now known as the Turner Estate. It seems that this dwelling served as a joint holiday home until Ben and his family moved from Maleny to reside in Caloundra in **1935.** Arthur Tesch remembered that in those days there was a dairy farm on the site where the Catholic Church stands.
In **1935** Arthur and Norman built a house at No.36 Canberra Terrace, Caloundra and both families enjoyed holidays in this house over the years. During the 1939-1945 War this house was occupied by the Australian Military Forces – Northern Command – a Compensation Agreement being signed in **1942.**
In **1941** a house at 32 Maloja Avenue, Caloundra was purchased in Arthur's name and subsequently the Canberra Terrace house was transferred to Norman.

With the purchase of the Caloundra sites in **1925** the firm of Tesch Brothers began an expansion programme which was to continue throughout the time the business was operating.
In approximately **1935** the first building on the Caloundra property was erected in the form of a small office on the rear boundary of the Bulcock Street property. This office was there for many years until it was demolished when Council resumed a strip of land to establish a service laneway for all the properties in that block of Bulcock Street.
Before the 1939-1945 War the first building proper was established adjacent to the office, a large timber framed, weatherboard and fibro sheeted shed with added extensions to north and west and corrugated iron roof. It was used for the storage of timber mouldings, sheeting materials and other basic building products. During the war it was closed down as no manpower was available and all timber was commandeered for war purposes. This meant that there was no timber available for private projects during that time.
After the war the yard was reopened and altered and divided into separate sections for various functions in the business.

In **1946** Arthur's son, Barrie, commenced working at the Witta Sawmill in the Garage and Workshop, and after working at various other jobs in the sawmill at Witta was employed in the Office Section for many years. Gwen, Norma and Barbara Tesch, daughters of Norman Tesch, also worked in the mill office at various times.
In **1948** the first two storeyed brick structure to be built on the block of land in Bulcock Street was planned by Paul Tesch, a brother of Norman and Arthur Tesch, and Council records show that approval was given for the construction of that building on the **28th August 1952**. This allowed the business to extend to include Hardware Retailing.

Two storied brick shop. Bulcock Street, Caloundra.
Note: No signage yet on the awning. Circa 1952.

About the same time the land for a Builder's Centre at Caloundra Road, Little Mountain was purchased. The property description of this new land was S8 9 & 11 R6 S8 Portion 39 Bribie.

On the **15th February 1955** Council Approval was given to extend the Bulcock Street premises to the rear, and in **1958** the company bought out an adjacent shop on the western side of the original block. Property description of this block was Lot 9 R.P. 120196 Bribie. This cafe had been run as "Embassy Cafe" or "Pete's Cafe" by Mr. Peter Tsigounis from 1946-1957. This section became the Paint Retailing Department, but in **May 1972** the old cafe building was removed when modern extensions were made to the existing brick building.
One of the highlights in the history of the Tesch Brothers business occurred on the **28th May 1963.** This was the granting of the Mitre 10 Franchise to the store, making it the most northerly Mitre 10 store in Australia at that time.

In **1961** Margaret Tesch, daughter of Arthur Tesch, commenced working in the Kitchen Hardware Section of the Store, and continued working in this section until **1977.**
In **1964** Barrie Tesch was appointed to the position of Manager of the Hardware Store in Caloundra, and within the next few years Lindsay Gillies, husband of Norma Tesch and John Neil, husband of Barbara Tesch had joined the business.

In **1976** a large building was erected on the land owned by the business at Little Mountain, Caloundra, and this was known as the Builders Centre. It was the first of two buildings planned for this site, and the material used for its construction was originally part of the Drysdale and Ridgeway Complex at Breakfast Creek Road, Herston, Brisbane. The building was dismantled in Brisbane, all parts identified and brought to Caloundra for re-erection. Sufficient steel was purchased to construct both buildings. As the buildings were previously used by Drysdale and Ridgeway for their steel fabrication industry they were massively constructed in steel with corrugated iron cladding and roofing.

Builders Centre at Little Mountain, Caloundra. Circa 1981.

The first building erected was equipped with two overhead travelling cranes which were also purchased from Drysdale and Ridgeway. This building was set up to supply timber and all heavy hardware, hence it was known as the Builders Centre.
By 1979 there were 14 employees on the staff at the Builders Centre and 29 employees in the Retail Departments and Central Office in Caloundra. Barrie Tesch was Managing Director, while John Neil was Company Accountant and Finance Manager.

Between 1971 and 1979 the Witta Sawmill had been almost entirely rebuilt, and produced 20 cubic metres of sawn timber per day. It used all locally grown hardwood and softwood on a quota basis under licence from the State Forest Reserves, and the saw mill sold to wholesale and retail markets. **By 1979** the mill was the second largest sawmill in operation on the Sunshine Coast, employing 17 people with Lindsay Gillies, a director of the Company, in charge of this section of the business.

In **1981** the second large building was being erected at the Little Mountain site, in conjunction with the established Builders Centre already successfully operating there. This second building also incorporated a Solar Operated Kiln, and the whole of the Timber Drying and Dressing Operation from the Witta Sawmill was to be transferred to this building.

By this time members of the third generation of the family, namely Fiona and Jillian Tesch, (daughters of Barrie Tesch, grand-daughters of Arthur Tesch), Helen Gillies (daughter of Norma nee Tesch and Lindsay Gillies, grand-daughter of Norman Tesch) and Susan Neil (daughter of Barbara nee Tesch and John Neil, grand-daughter of Norman Tesch) while completing their school studies, were working part time in the Hardware Section of the business.

However, in **1981** the business which now consisted of Tesch Bros. Pty. Ltd, Mitre 10 Hardware operation in Bulcock Street, Caloundra, Heavy Hardware and Timber Sales Centre at Little Mountain, Caloundra, Tesch Bros. Hardwood Sawmill and Milling Rights at Witta in the Sunshine Coast hinterland, and the company, Caloundra Properties Pty. Ltd. which owned the land and buildings from which Tesch Brothers operated, was sold to Wilkinson, Day & Grimes Pty. Ltd. At the time of the sale of the business the Company had a staff of 70 employees.

Margaret Tesch nee Wells
2007.

Family Group at Christmas Party. John Neil, Barbara Neil (nee Tesch), Lindsay Gillies, Norma Gillies (nee Tesch) Margaret Tesch (nee Wells), Barrie Tesch, Kevin Oakhill, Gwen Poole (nee Tesch), Norman Tesch, Arthur Tesch, Margaret Oakhill (nee Tesch).

THE TESCH BROTHERS PROPERTIES AT THE TIME OF THE SALE - 1981.

1981 . Tesch Brothers Witta Sawmill and Timber Yard.

1981. Tesch Brothers Bulcock Street Shop.

1981. Tesch Brothers Little Mountain Builders Centre.

1981. Western end of second building at Little Mountain – not completed.
Note: Solar powered kiln on side of building.

Wilkinson expand with acquisitions

Wilkinson Day & Grimes said yesterday it had taken over two private companies on the Sunshine Coast.

Chairman, Mr David Wilkinson, said the group had bought the Tesch Bros Pty. Ltd. Mitre 10 hardware operation in Caloundra and the heavy hardware and timber sales centre at nearby Little Mountain.

The company also bought Tesch Bros hardwood sawmill and milling rights at Maleny in the Sunshine Coast hinterland.

A related company, Caloundra Properties Pty Ltd, which owns land and buildings on which Tesch Bros operates, was also purchased.

Mr Wilkinson said the hardware outlets would complement the Sunshine Coast hardware operation of the Day & Grimes division at Maroochydore, Nambour and Noosa.

Wilkinson Day & Grimes is involved in timber, hardware, and travel and real estate agencies, particularly on the Sunshine Coast.

Witta Sawmill Pictures

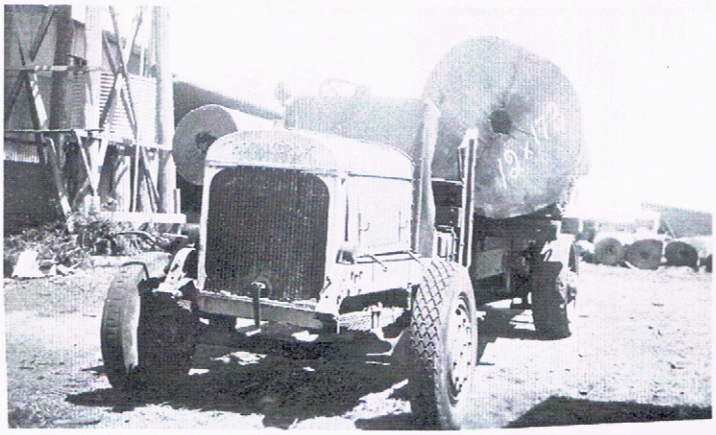
Circa late 1920's. Sallway Brothers hauling sawn timber from Witta Mill. Bamboo clump was at the entrance from the road to Ludwig Gottfried Tesch's house which is in the background.
Note: the dogleg in old Maleny/Kenilworth Road – since straightened.

Circa 1920's. Logs on Bullock wagon at Witta Sawmill.

Circa 1923. Bullock Team with Hoop Pine logs.

Circa 1930's Witta Sawmill.

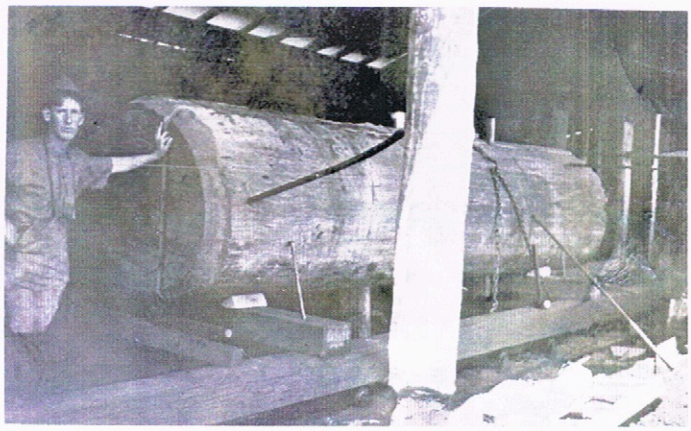
Circa 1930's. Thorneycroft. Log on left contains approx. 1850 super feet in Hoppus measurement.



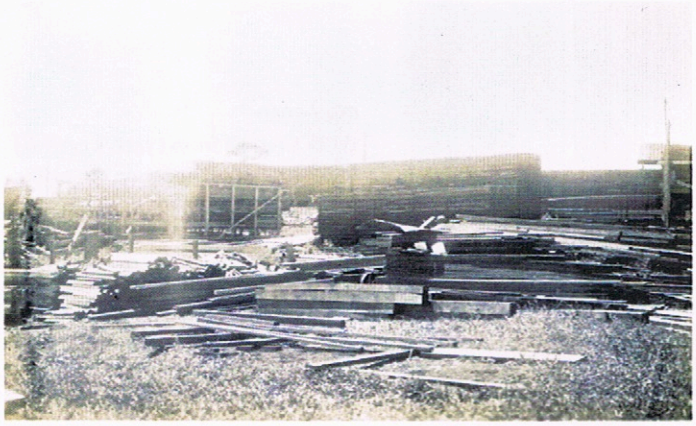
Circa 1930's.
Thornycroft at the Mill.
Log on right contains up to 1850 super feet of timber in Hoppus measurement and would probably produce approximately 1500 super feet in sawn timber.

Circa 1930's.
Thornycroft with large log.
Note: Winch on rear wheel for loading logs.
Driver: Henry Edward (Nugget) Vandreike).

Circa 1930's.
Thornycroft with log at the mill.
Note: Solid rear tyres.

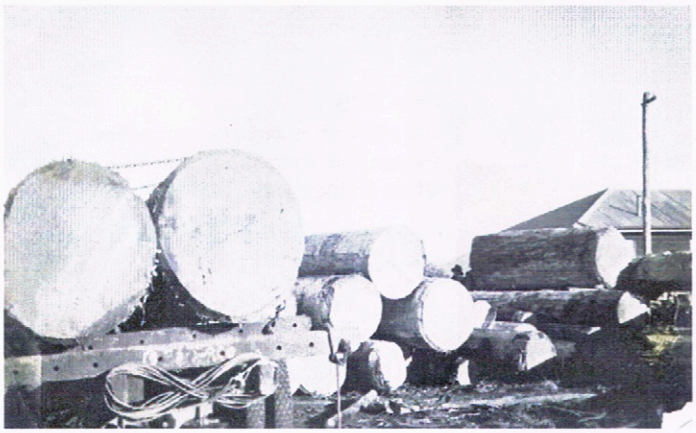


Circa 1930's.
Large pine log frame sawn at the Witta mill.



Circa 1930's.
Sawn timber at the Witta Mill.

Circa 1930's.
Witta Sawmill Timber Stacks.

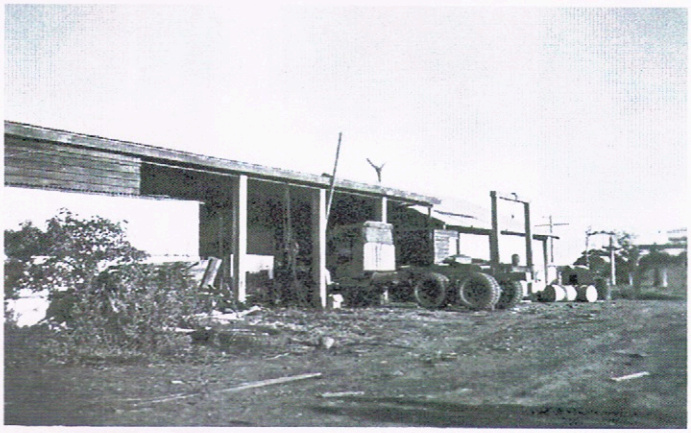


Circa 1940's.
Hoop pine logs.

Circa 1940's.
Hoop pine logs - probably from Walli Gorge.

Circa 1940.
Witta Sawmill from Lynch's cutting.
Mill boundary fence runs the other side of Lynch's cream shed.

Circa 1947.
Witta Sawmill Garage and Workshop.

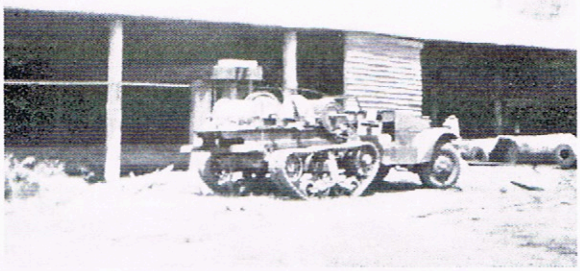


Circa 1949.
Log pile with Sawmill in background.
Garage and workshop to the left.
Office on the right.

Circa 1949.
Timber Stacks in Mill Yard.
Office to the left.
Lynch's house in the background .

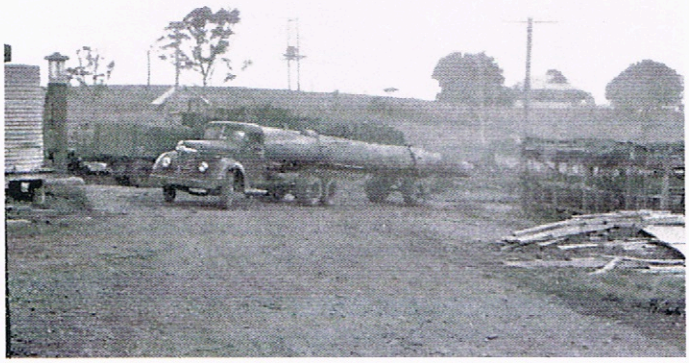
Circa 1950's.
Planing Shed and Shaving Bin looking south.
Witta Sawmill in left background.

Circa 1949.
White Half Track at Witta Mill.
Wartime conversion to Logging Winch.

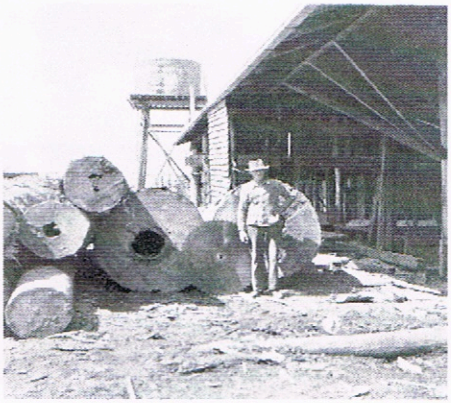


Circa 1950's.
White half track towing KB6F International Log Truck.
Arthur Tesch standing in front of the half track.

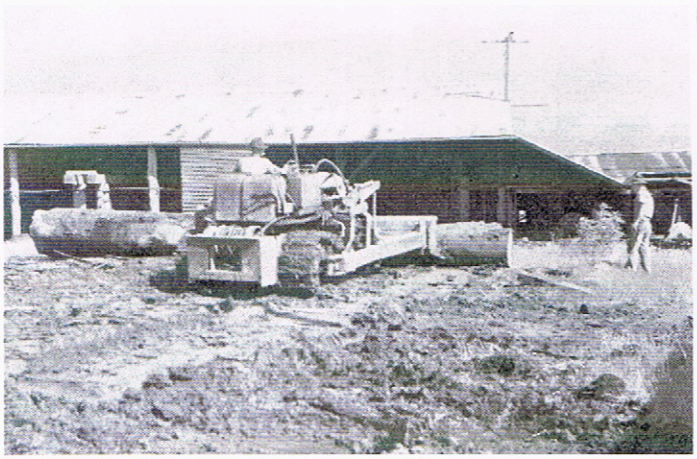
Circa early 1950's.
International K.B.6 F. Truck.
Photograph taken from the front of the Office in S.W. direction , before the kiln was built.
Lynch's house in the background.



Circa early 1950's. 6 x 6 G.M.C. Planing shed in left background. Taken in N.W. direction. Norm. Tesch's house to the right, in background.



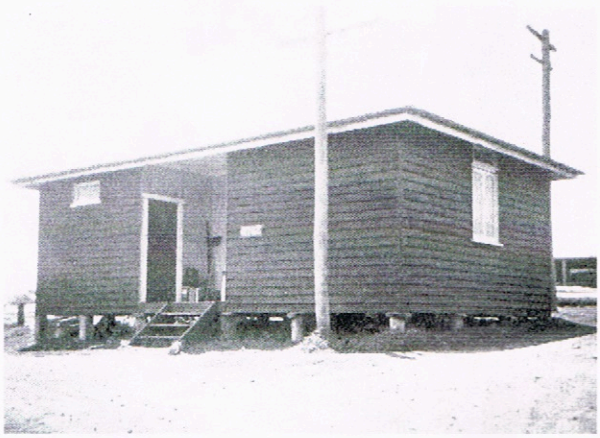
Circa 1950's. P. Holmes Saw Sharpener at Mill.



Wet season at Witta Sawmill. Arthur Tesch on the Bulldozer.

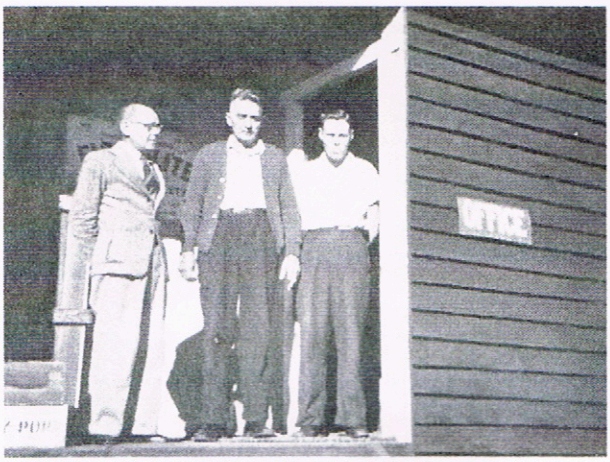
Circa 1950's. Fred Barker No.1 Sawyer at Mill.

Circa 1950's. Keith Riorden felling timber.



Circa 1949. Office building at Witta Sawmill.

Circa 1940's. Mavis Bergann (First office girl) at Witta Mill.



Circa 1950. Cyril McGuire, Norman and Barrie Tesch at Witta Mill office.

Circa 1950's. Barrie Tesch in office at Witta Sawmill.

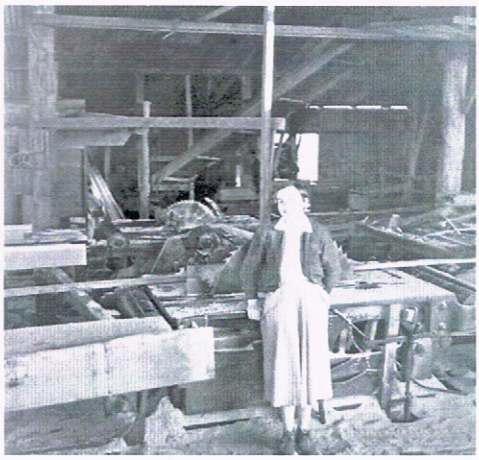
Circa 1946-1949. Gwen and Barrie Tesch at Witta Sawmill.

Cyril McGuire (Clerk), Norm and Norma Tesch at Witta Mill office.

Circa 1950's . Barbara and Barrie Tesch on steps at Sawmill office.

September 1954. Norman and Barbara Tesch in Sawmill office.

Circa Mid. 1950's Arthur and Barbara Tesch at Witta Sawmill.



Circa Early 1950's. Barbara Tesch in front of No.1 Sawbench at Witta Sawmill.

Circa 1978. Lindsay Gillies, John Neil and Barrie Tesch at Maleny.

Circa 1979. Aerial Photographs of Witta Sawmill.

Garage and Workshop.

Gantry.

Main Sawmill.

Maleny-Kenilworth Road.

Planing Shed and dressed timber storage.

Office .

Kiln.

Entrance to Sawmill.

Smoke from waste disposal burner.

Main Sawmill abuts East-West boundary with Lynch's farm.

Garage and Workshop.

Ludwig Tesch's Home

Gantry for handling logs.

Planing Shed and dressed timber storage.