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SEPTIMUS BOYD WILSON KIRK

(1914 - 2001)

Septimus Kirk, always known as Tom, was born at Mount Wilson in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney in the snowstorm of 1914 which was so severe that his mother could not get to hospital.

He was the youngest and seventh child (hence the name Septimus) of a family who were descendants from pioneer settlers at the mountain.

He was educated in the one-teacher Mount Wilson school and he grew up watching his father and older brothers operate the Kirk family timber mill.

As a young man, Tom worked for his three older brothers, each of whom had returned safely from the First World War.

Prior to the Second World War, Tom was working as a leading benchman responsible for milling logs in a timber mill in Lithgow.

In 1942, even though he was working in a protected industry, Tom joined the Royal Australian Air Force as a fitter and he later served in many parts of Australia as a Leading Aircraftman.

He had always had an interest in machinery and how things worked and it was said that he could strip down and repair anything from a hose to a helicopter.

After the war, he returned home to open his own timber mill to supply the Lithgow coal mines.

Tom Kirk was a large man with the combination of a magnificent physique and agility. He was 183 cm (6 feet) tall, weighed in at 102 kg (16 stone) and had a 135 cm (53 inch) chest.

This, together with his knowledge of timber, led him into woodchopping contests.

The ring of the axe had been heard on the Australian continent from the time of the arrival of the first Europeans and, quite possibly, from Asians before that.

One of the first tasks of the First Fleeters after dropping anchor in Sydney Cove, was the felling of trees to clear the land for settlement and provide timber for firewood and construction purposes.

Eventually, timber felling became both an industry and a sport.

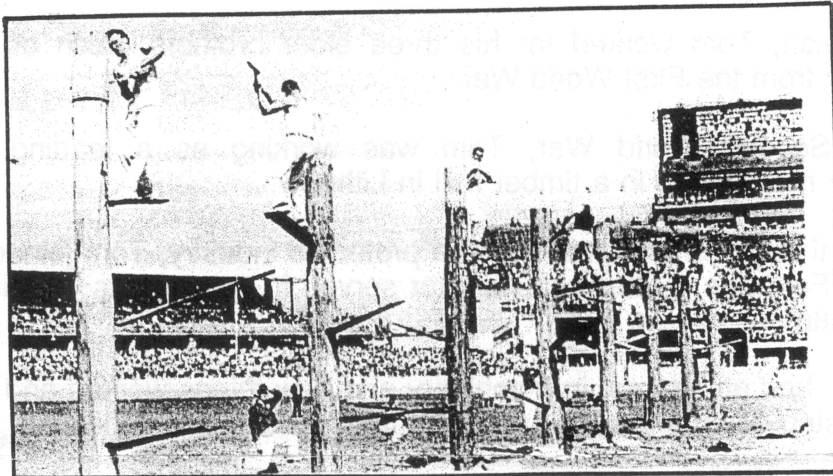
The first recorded tree-felling competition was held at Ulverstone, Tasmania in 1874 when a match was held between Joe Smith and Jack Biggs to cut 120 cm (4 feet) diameter trees for a prize of 5,000 palings.

In 1891, Jim Marshall organised a two-day woodchopping carnival at Latrobe in Tasmania for prize-money totalling £1,000 (\$2,000).

During the carnival, on 18 June, 1891, the United Australasian Axemen's Association was formed and rules and a handicapping system were introduced. A heats system and championships were introduced and, from a small beginning at Tasmania's country shows, the sport quickly spread to all the capital cities, where the sport was introduced in 1899.

The Sydney Royal Easter Show became the 'Wimbledon' of woodchopping but it wasn't always so. In 1908, for instance, at the first Commonwealth championships, many of the competitors, who had a fancy for rum, were too drunk to even stand on the log. It didn't take long however, for the sport to be taken seriously.

Tom Kirk, who took to the sport like a duck to water, was just 14 years of age when he won his first woodchopping competition in 1929.



Before the Second World War, woodchopping was a bushman's sport and Tom Kirk first entered the Sydney Show competition in 1931 where he won the under 21 championship.

His main senior competitor, and in 1924, Australia's first world champion, was Mannie McCarthy.

During the Second World War, two Australian Forestry Companies served in England producing sawn timber for wartime use as well as pit props. Inevitably, there were competitions at which the Australians regularly defeated the Canadian and New Zealand Companies whose axemen were used to cutting softer timber.

After the war, Kirk competed at the Sydney and Brisbane Shows and he set a record of 39 seconds to cut a 15 inch standing block.

He travelled to the United States of America in 1963 where he won a total of 18 events.

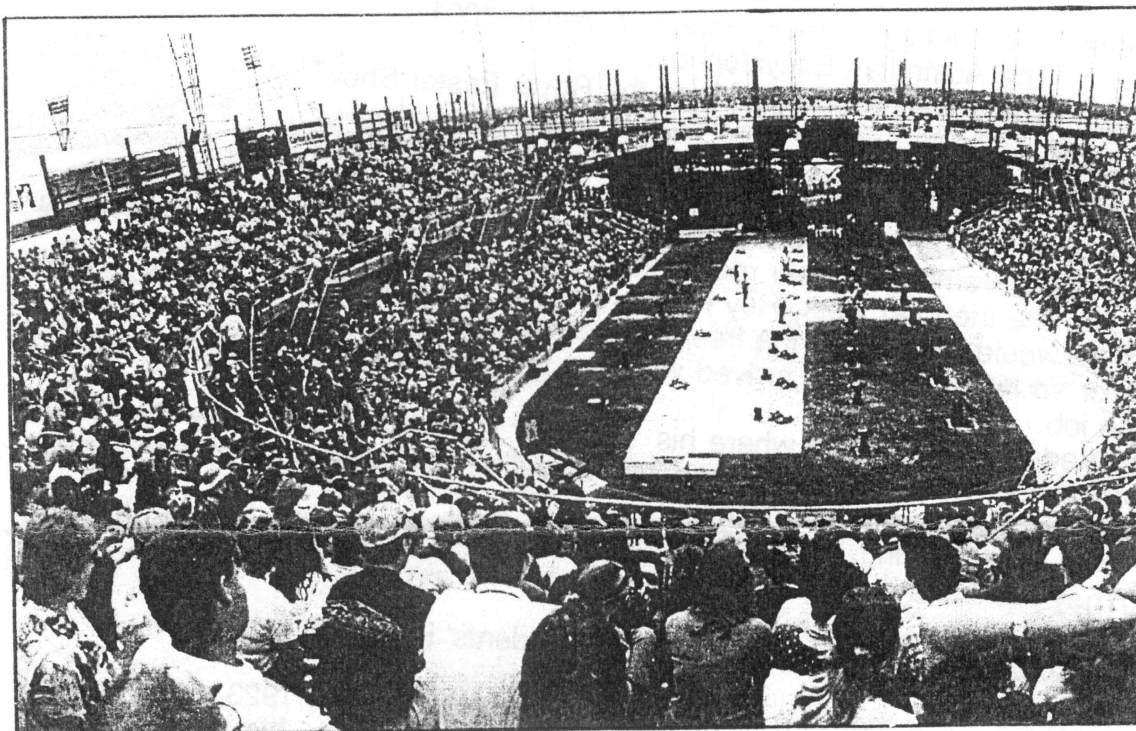
His main competition in Australia in those years was Jack O'Toole who, unlike Tom Kirk, was an aggressive man with or without an axe.

One of the great sights of Sydney's Royal Easter Show, and easily the most exciting, was to cheer Tom Kirk to victory as the anchor man for the New South Wales team in the State woodshop relay.

When his competition days were over, Kirk became a Judge, starter and assistant handicapper for the Royal Agricultural Society.

Kirk was passionate about 'his' forest at Mount Wilson. It is only a trained eye that can tell that the Kirk family logged the forest for over 60 years and he was proud of the World Heritage classification for his beloved Blue Mountains that had provided his livelihood.

After Tom Kirk's retirement, the world championship returned to Tasmania where it had all begun when Bro. David Foster ASM claimed the title.

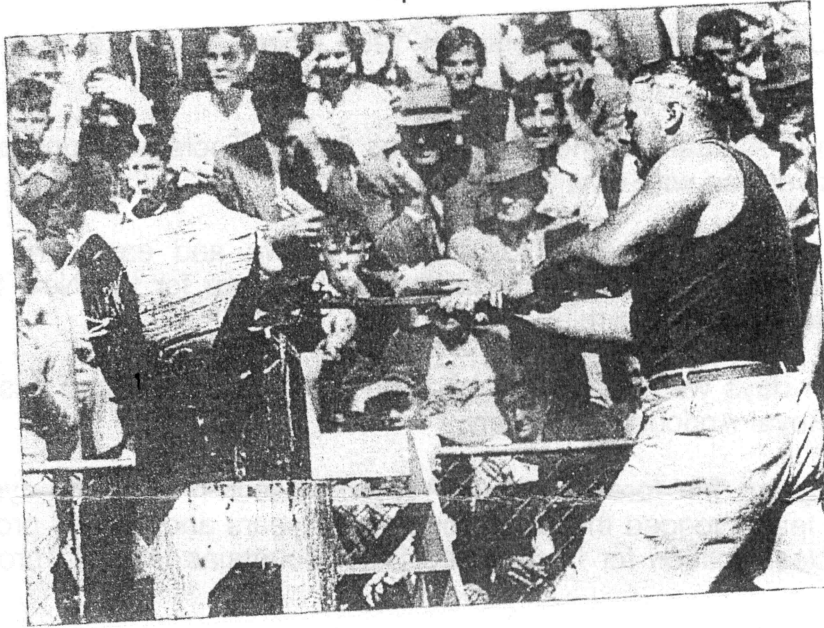


The New Woodchopping Stadium - Homebush Bay, Sydney

Tom Kirk died on 25 February, 2001 aged 84.

Bro. Septimus Boyd Wilson Kirk was made a Mason on 13 November, 1948 in Lodge Lithgow Kilwinning No 314 United Grand Lodge of New South Wales. He was passed to the Second Degree on 12 February, 1949 and raised a Master Mason on 27 May, 1949. He remained a member until his death.

His first wife, Joy, died in 1962 and Tom was survived by their three children and his second wife, Dulcie.



Tom Kirk in action

References: The Sydney Morning Herald, 7 March, 2001
The Australian Encyclopedia
The 1999 Preview Guide to the Royal Easter Show

FOOTNOTE 1.

When Jill and Don Davis moved into their first home at St Ives in 1954, they had a large gum tree overhanging their roof which they decided to have taken down. Don spoke to a friend at work, Roy Henderson, an amateur champion axeman who told him he would arrange for the tree to be cut down. A week or so later, Tom Kirk arrived with two young axemen in a 'beat-up' old ute to do the job. Tom marked out the position where his 'students' were to cut and away they went. The tree came down perfectly along the fenceline and then the young learners proceeded to chop up the main trunk. When they were leaving, Don asked Tom how much for the job. "Nothing," said Tom, "They needed the practise."

FOOTNOTE 2. Has woodchop seen any 'axe-i-dents' in its 100 years?

YES. Records show that in a chopping event held in Valla in 1923, Stan Appleby came to blows with his own axe. As he turned on his block, his trouser-leg was caught in the log clamp. When he took a swing he completely cut his right leg off.

He was later fitted with an artificial limb and became a competition dancer and a champion club golfer. From the time of his accident he worked in the editorial department of *The Sun* newspaper becoming a notable sportswriter.

Wor. Bro. Stan Appleby was initiated in Lodge Literature No. 500 and became the foundation inner guard in Lodge Brotherhood No. 872 when it was consecrated at Chatswood in November 1953. He was installed as Wor. Master in November 1958 and remained a member until his death.