# Land, Enterprise and Infrastructure – the 1880s and 1890s

# **POPULATING RURAL VICTORIA**

As a means of encouraging the populating of rural areas and providing an outlet for the unemployed labour of Victoria, government initiatives in the form of Settlement on Lands Acts were passed in 1893 and 1898. Further Acts were passed in the early 1900s, but all were found to be seriously flawed.

Much of the land was hard and rough, being of poor quality and allotments too small. Many settlers were inexperienced and lacking in cash and equipment. Blocks of land were often virgin bush and required clearing before any living could be made. Clearing was done by hand or with the help of horses. It was hard to make a living and many people left. In addition, infrastructure services failed to be developed. Those who stayed would eventually qualify to hold the title to the land once they had fulfilled certain conditions, such as fencing or building a dwelling. A nominal rental would also be paid.

# The New Land Act

▲ meeting was held at the Upper Plenty State School on A Saturday evening last to consider the classification of the land taken up under the 42nd section and held under license in the Parish of Wallan.

Mr J Breen, who occupied the chair, in stating the object of the meeting, said the land officers could not have duly considered the classification of the land. The Land Act 1898 states that second-class land would consist of agricultural and grazing allotments, but there was no suitable cultivation land in the area mentioned, and it should not be termed second class. The greater part of it was not even good grazing land, and the people should object to it.

Mr Mahady, senior, moved that a deputation be appointed to bring the matter under notice of the Minister of Lands, and Mr Duckworth, in seconding the motion, said the land should be rated as third class, as it was only poor grazing allotments. The motion was carried.

Mr Breen moved that the deputation consist of Messrs Mahady, Duckworth, Robinson and Breen; seconded by Mr Mahady.

Mr Robinson said he would like to see every man who had selected to go to Melbourne on the deputation. They were all personally interested and should go in a body.

The chairman said he would be pleased to see them all go, but sometimes it was difficult to get people to go on deputations. The motion was carried.

Mr Robinson moved that the member for the district, Mr Gair, be written to requesting him to introduce the deputation to the Minister of Lands; seconded by the chairman, and carried.

It was agreed that Mr Duffy be invited to accompany the deputation.

A vote of thanks to the chairman terminated the meeting.

Kilmore Free Press, Thursday 13 July 1899.

### The Mahady family

Christopher Mahady married Mary O'Brian in 1860, probably in Melbourne. Both were Irish immigrants. Their children, Eliza, James, Christopher and John, were all born in Upper Plenty between 1861 and 1872. The youngest, John Joseph, married Sara Ann Smith in 1911.

At the time of Christopher's arrival in Upper Plenty, Aborigines were still plentiful in the district. Family members have passed on his stories of Aborigines being buried standing up (a practice unusual among Victorian Aboriginals). He grew tobacco on Bruces Creek, obtaining the price of 2 shillings/6 pence (2/6d) per pound, and at one time his wool topped the Melbourne market at 14d per pound.

The Mahady family acquired, by selection, multiple properties in the district, most of which have now passed into other hands. Their descendant, John Mahady, still lives in the district today.



Christopher and Mary Mahady, circa 1870.



The marriage of Sara Ann Smith to John Joseph (Jack) Mahady, St Josephs Catholic Church, South Morang, 1911. Photograph courtesy: Owen Laffan.

The Cleve family

Charles Cleve was born in Germany. He married Jane Somerville in 1874 at Port Melbourne. Charles selected farming land at Upper Plenty in 1877 in the area known today as Cleves Road. They had six children.

The McArthur–Cleve Wedding, 1907. From left to right: John M McArthur Miss Wilson, Maggie McArthur (seated), Fred Cleve, Mary Cleve (née McArthur), George McArthur, Jack Cleve (seated), Harold Adams, lady unknown.



Fred and Jack Cleve farmed in the district for much of their lives. Fred Cleve's family occupied the Walnarring property for a period of time. Other family members owned several pieces of property at different times. The last piece of Cleve property to change hands (2005) was situated on the corner of Cleves Road South and the Wallan-Whittlesea Road, its last occupants being Tricia Best (née Cleve) and her family.

**RD McKay Auctioneer, Kilmore** 104 ACRES OF LAND, UPPER PLENTY, FRIDAY 2 NOVEMBER 1877

learing out sale of 104 acres of land and 45 head of cattle and sundries. RD McKAY, AUCTIONEER, has received instructions from Mrs Rowe [sic Roe] (who is leaving the district), to sell by public auction, on the ground, on Friday 2nd November.

All that valuable farm of 104 acres. Parish of Wallan Wallan. known as Prospect Farm, Upper Plenty, and only three miles from Wallan Wallan railway station, adjoining the properties of Messrs Marshall and McDonald. About 50 acres of the property is fronting the River Plenty [sic] ... comfortable dwelling house built with stone ...

# **LEGISLATION FOR ACQUIRING LAND**

Charles Gavin Duffy's Land Act 1862 was an attempt to broker a compromise between the conflicting interests of squatters, gold-seekers and small-scale farmers over control of vast areas of land. More land was released by the Crown in 1862 for 'selection' under what became known as the 'Duffy Land Act'. 'Selection' allowed a great number of people who would not otherwise have been able to afford to buy land the opportunity to lease and eventually gain title if they met certain requirements. The Mahadys, Tom Duckworth, the Cleves and many others took advantage of these opportunities as they arose.

Over the next fifty years a number of Acts were passed to encourage rural settlement and the development of towns in rural areas, including the Settlement on Lands Acts of 1893 and 1898. The incentives provided by these Acts were also a government response to unemployment resulting from periods of economic downturn.

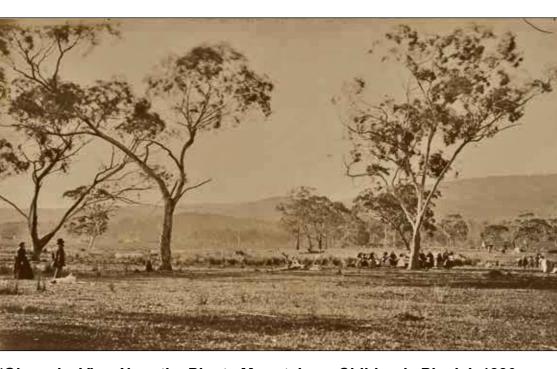
The Returned Soldiers Settlements Acts post-World War I were another response to employment pressures. These Acts had many flaws, including poor quality of land and inadequate allocation of acreage sufficient to make a living.

The Land Act 1898 gave the government power to acquire land from private persons for the purpose of closer settlement. Conditional leases were granted to applicants to lease these lands, and they were required to make significant improvements, such as erecting a dwelling, clearing forest for agricultural purposes and setting up fencing for stock. An annual fee was paid and title would be granted after a designated period, for example, twenty years. The lease could be transferred to another person after a number of years. The Becks, Eastons, O'Briens, Flemings and Dickens appear to have taken up land during this period of opportunity.



Sheep and Cattle Stations', Merriang, near Woodstock, circa 1880. Photographer: Fred Kruger, 1831–88.

The subdivision of the Glenvale estate, much of which was leased to others, began to progressively occur after the Duffy Village Settlement Act was passed in the 1860s. A major auction was held on 4 January 1888 to dispose of the various lots comprising the estate. Included were the lots leased by John Rice, the Clements, Battens, Butchers and also Heffernan's Hotel. Some of the lessees purchased their land while others chose to vacate. (Source: *Kilmore Free Press*, 24 December 1887.)



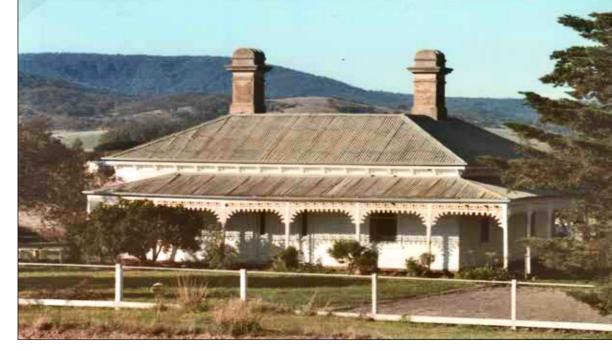
'Glenvale, View Near the Plenty Mountains – Children's Picnic', 1880 Photographer: Fred Kruger, 1831–88.

### The Andrew family

James Andrew was born in East Palford, Devon, in 1827 and arrived in Australia in 1850. After arriving in Adelaide he soon after sailed to Melbourne. After some years he moved to the Glenvale area, taking up almost 400 acres. 'Wolserey' is believed to have been built in 1870 and is named after a town in his native Devon. Wolserey remained in the hands of the Andrew family until 1983, when it was purchased by Dr Ian Reynolds. The property has subsequently changed hands.

Kilmore Free Press, Thursday 1 November 1877.

James Andrew had a large family and a number of his descendants owned property in the district, although none remain today, possibly due to the large numbers of girl children and men who did not marry. Other early families in the Glenvale area included Rice, Batten, Patton, Hughes, Gibbs, Heffernan, Sassella, Auty, Blair, Jenkins, Downie, Aurish and Hillier.



1985. Built by James Andrew, circa 1870. Photographer John Waghorn.

# **THE 1880s AND 1890s**

By 1880, gold, agriculture and manufacturing had made Melbourne the centre of the Australian colonies. Property development and speculation were rife. International exhibitions were held in 1880 and 1888 at the newly constructed Exhibition Building. Meetings between colonial governments discussed the benefits of forming a nation of federated states.

# **Mining News**

THE WHITTLESEA TRIBUTE GOLD MINING COMPANY

his company has been working away very quietly, but most energetically, and in the most determined fashion for the past six months. The ground, some seven acres, has been leased from Mr Gibb for a term of ten years on most favourable conditions. It is not by any means an untried mine as a good quantity of gold was obtained some years ago by a party of tributors [a miner who was paid a percentage of the value of whatever ore he mined]; the terrain on which they were working proved too heavy, and they were reluctantly compelled to give it up.

Some eighteen months ago it was again started and a new shaft sunk, but this was done in so slovenly and unworkmanlike a manner that, after obtaining a trial crushing - which gave excellent results - this shaft was condemned as unsafe, and abandoned.

The previous manager, who had not by any means given satisfaction, was got rid of, and a new man – a good practical mining manager – obtained. He immediately commenced to sink a new engine shaft, about 70 feet from the old one. The ground has proved harder than expected, but the shaft is down 150 feet, with a really abundant supply of water.

The men are now engaged in driving and expect to cut the main reef within a fortnight. It would be a difficult matter to induce any of the shareholders to sell now at a reasonable price for they seem sanguine as to the ultimate result.

The indications are most favourable and should the expectations be borne out we may confidently predict that other claims will immediately be pegged out and operations commenced forthwith.

If the prospect obtained on striking the reef be favourable, it is proposed to erect machinery at once. It will be a grand thing for the district should gold in payable quantities be obtained, and we have no reason to doubt the possibility of such discovery.

The present shareholders have persevered splendidly, and we wish them and their mine every success. No one will begrudge them the little fortunes they seem to have every prospect of making out of their venture. We can recommend this speculation to the notice of those in search of a mining investment.

Evelyn Observer, and South and East Bourke Record, Friday 23 October 1885.

Footnote: Little seems to have come of this mining venture as no further reports can be found. The Government Gazette, No. 74, 2 September 1964, noted the dissolution of the company under the Companies Act 1961. Margaret Patton, wife of James, owned 1,000 shares valued at five shillings

## **Beginnings of** multiculturalism

The first simultaneous census in Australia in 1881 showed a non-Aboriginal population of 2.25 million (by 1901 the population had increased to 3,773,248). However, by the 1890s, economic depression had hit hard and Melbourne





ABOVE: An anti-federation and migration poster. The Daily

identify it as such.

# **BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE**

as Seymour.

With the coming of the railway a small township developed at East Wallan. Housing was required for railway workers, hotels for recreation and accommodation, blacksmiths to repair or make wheels for conveyances, railway repairs and so on. A baker was present for many years. A sawmill was also in operation for many years. Yards were required to hold sheep, cattle and pigs, which were conveyed to Melbourne markets on certain days of the week, as well as a paddock for holding the horses that pulled jigs, carts and drays and their passengers to and from the railway station.

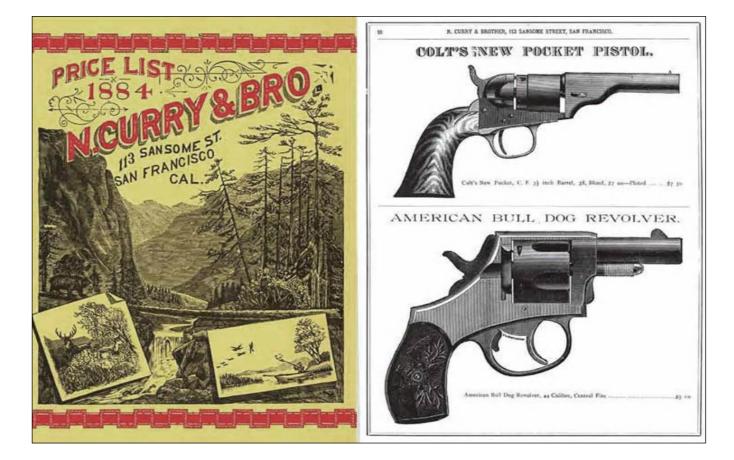




Mr Bill McCarthy, who has lived in Wallan East for most of his life, described the township in the 1920s as having seven houses, the railway station, a hotel, a store, a small butcher shop and St Mark's Church of England church and vicarage. The church operated from 1882 until it burned down in 1960, the site now being under the Hume Freeway. The Whittlesea railway line began operations much later in 1889. Its passenger service closed in 1959.

'Going to town' was an all-day event. Train travellers would need to travel to the station by horse and jig/dray, place their horses in the station paddock and, on return, catch their horses, harness them and then journey to their homes.





floundered in debt. Immigration came to a standstill as there appeared to be few prospects for immigrants. As well, restrictions were placed on some groups: laws restricting Chinese immigration were reintroduced and by 1888 Chinese immigration was virtually banned.

The phrase 'White Australia Policy' appeared for the first time. In the 1890s the restrictions on the Chinese were extended to all non-Europeans. Workplaces employing Chinese workers became subject to inspection, and the Victorian Factories and Shops Act 1896 required that all furniture made by Chinese labour must be stamped to

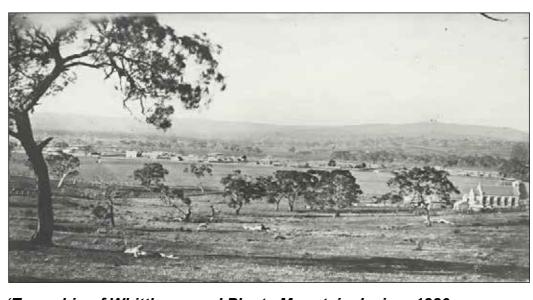
# The railways

In 1870 the rail line from Melbourne to Craigieburn was completed and by 1872 it extended through Wallan, Kilmore and Broadford as far

The Melbourne Argus reported, on 12 April 1872, that, "Clause selectors rushed the place on both sides of the line as fast as they could once they knew which direction the railway would take".

ABOVE and BELOW: Wallan East railway station, circa 1930.

ABOVE and BELOW: Mail order catalogues were popular in the late-19th century as it was difficult to source many items locally. Magazines, dress patterns, undergarments and seeds were popular items and took many months to arrive by sea.



'Township of Whittlesea and Plenty Mountains', circa 1880 Photographer: Fred Kruger, 1831–88.

# **Postal services**

The first overland mail service between Melbourne and Sydney began in 1838. Shipping was also a vital part of communications when Victoria was in its infancy. For example, there was no overland service to Portland, a then-thriving regional town, until 1844. Country post offices made up and dispatched ship mails, as did the Melbourne Post Office.

In 1851, mail volume measured in the thousands; however, by 1852, due to the huge influx of immigrants seeking gold, it was one and a half million. Town letters cost one penny per half ounce; inland letters 2d; ship letters 3d.

A loose bag mail service to Upper Plenty was established in July 1899. Loose bag meant that the mail would need to be picked up from the East Wallan railway station and taken back to a central location in Upper Plenty for collection. While it is not recorded who the Postmaster was until 1908, it is likely that it was Thomas Duckworth, a local resident, who held the position until his death in 1944.

In 1907 the Upper Plenty Postmaster was paid a salary of six pounds. Some 2,046 letters were mailed from Upper Plenty in that year. In 1908 the Postmaster was paid three pounds, and 1,168 letters were mailed that year. The Commonwealth Gazette reported the particulars of services accepted for 'conveyance of mail' -'TJ Duckworth, Upper Plenty, to and from Wallan Wallan railway station and Upper Plenty, three and a half miles, three times a week, horseback, 36 pounds [per annum]'.

## Thomas Duckworth

Thomas was the son of Thomas and Ellen Duckworth, who died in 1903 and 1904 respectively. It is not known when they emigrated or where Tom and his sister, Margaret (Lennon), were born. Tom Duckworth probably settled in Upper Plenty in the late-1800s. He is listed as the Upper Plenty Postmaster from 1908, but possibly held that position from 1899, as he was already resident in the area.



circa 1882.



Thomas Duckworth, circa 1910.

Mavis Patton remembers the first home of Thomas and Mary Ann. It was one large room made of timber slabs with a dirt floor. The kitchen was at one end and a bedroom at the other. The three-metrewide open fireplace occupied one wall and held a swinging gantry on which pots and kettles were hung for cooking. It had a smaller room attached, possibly where post office business was carried out. The present-day former post office building was built around 1920 and was always referred to as 'the new house'. Stephen and Margaret Patton have owned this building since around 2000.

aged 62

# I remember ...

"...Mr Duckworth's dog. Mr Duckworth had a squeeze-box that he used to play in the barn. The dog used to really howl when he played it but Mr Duckworth always said his dog was just singing. He was a dear old man."

"... Going to the post office to pick up the mail. The kids all used to call Mr Duckworth 'Mr Duckcurl' because he had long curls hanging down from under his hat."

# **Serious Driving Accident**

young man named Thomas Duckworth met with a A serious accident last week when coming down a gap in the Plenty Mountains. He was driving a two-horse dray down a steep part of the range when the horse bolted. Failing to stop them, Duckworth jumped out of the dray and, in doing so, missed his footing and fell in front, the wheels going over both legs below the knee.

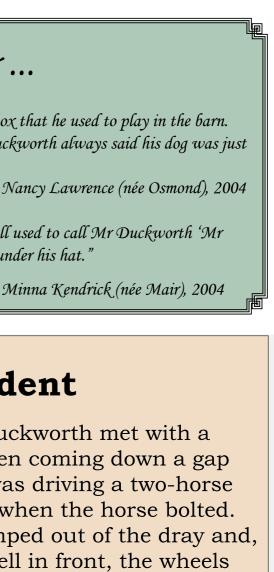
It was some time before the poor fellow was found, and he was afterwards conveyed to the Kilmore Hospital, where Drs Semple and Brook attended him. The left leg was found to be broken, whilst the right was reduced to a pulp near the ankle, and will probably have to be amputated.

**Footnote:** Older residents of Upper Plenty who remember Tom Duckworth do not recall an abnormal gait or limp.



Mr and Mrs Duckworth Senior.

Thomas married Mary Ann Mahady, a cousin of the Upper Plenty Mahadys, in 1912. Mary Ann had emigrated from Ireland in 1903 at the age of 19. They had no children. Thomas and Mary Ann had significant land holdings in Upper Plenty. Their barn was located opposite the Upper Plenty hall site and was a popular place for dances before the hall was built. Following Thomas's death, aged 75, in 1944, Mary Ann took over the running of the post office until her death in 1946,



Kilmore Free Press, 6 June 1895.



Felling a large mountain ash

# THE TIMBER INDUSTRY

Melbourne's explosion in population following the discovery of gold massively increased the demand for timber for construction, furniture, shingles for roofs, palings for fences, as well as for firewood.

The forest provided a living for many from the beginning of settlement and it was not unknown for land purchasers to clear their land for timber and then move on. By the 1860s, over 100 timber splitters were working in the Bruces Creek area alone.

Tracks and tramways were constructed to penetrate further into the forest and to allow bullock teams and dravs to transport timber out.



Viaduct on the Bump haulage incline one of the many tram lines built and used by the Australian Seasoned Timber Company.



Picnic party on a tram line, circa 1910.

Timber workers set up many small sawmills from the 1860s in order to process timber prior to transportation.

In 1873 the small mills on Mt Disappointment were closed by a proclamation when the catchment of the Yan Yean Reservoir, opened in 1857, was extended from two to four miles beyond the crest of the Dividing Range. The Argus, 12 October 1869, from the City Council's Report, reported on the pollution of the Reservoir, citing, "defilement of Bruces Creek" was evidenced by, "the gathering of scum and filth upon its surface", and that the creek supplied, "a natural drain for the pastures and homesteads along its course".

Around 1880, Robert Affleck Robertson arrived in Wandong with apparently unlimited finance. Over the next few years he built up a small empire with the hugely successful Australian Seasoned Timber Company. In order to reach further and further into the forest, a vast network of tracks, tramways and bridges was built. The

company operated two mills - the Comet and Planet. The Comet was the largest and by the 1890s was processing 800 mountain ash logs each month. A small village was set up to house the 100 workers and their families and a school was also established, shown right.



The boom times of the 1880s were followed by a 'bust' in the 1890s, accompanied by decreased demand for timber. The Comet mill burned down in 1902 and financial difficulty caused the company to go into voluntary liquidation in 1903.

At its peak the timber industry employed 420 men. Logging and sawmilling continued at a reduced level until 1939 when all sawmilling ceased. Timber is still being logged from the Mt Disappointment area at a more sustainable level.

# **Bushfires in the Upper Plenty** District

aturday last and yesterday were two of the most oppressive days of the season here. The heat on the former was close and stifling, but on Sunday a terrific hot wind blew, raising clouds of dust, and until four o'clock it was almost impossible to remain even for a few moments in the open air. The sun shone with a steady glare and bushfires were raging in the Plenty Mountains. The air was thick and murky with smoke.

Beyond Glenvale the flames could be plainly seen leaping rapidly over the small spurs and devouring the forest of timber on the slopes of Mt Disappointment. The fire had been burning there and between Jacks Creek and Wallaby Creek for several days, and many of the tracks to the latter were blocked by fallen trees.

On Saturday we were obliged to ride a considerable distance through the burnt country, with the fire many a time at our horses' hoofs, and we experienced great difficulty in steering clear of the blackened trees and scrub, and in getting over the huge logs which barred our path at every few yards and made the route at once dangerous and circuitous.

After blowing fiercely up to four o'clock yesterday, the wind suddenly changed, and a thunderstorm came on. The lightening was extremely vivid and the thunder heavy ... nearly all the fires have been extinguished ...