South Coast History Society Inc.
RecollectionS
Issue 37

The Kameruka Estate

The Kameruka Estate was one man's dream, one man's vision.

That man was Robert Lucas Lucas-Tooth.

He was born in Sydney in 1844 to parents who ran a farm in Tasmania. He was initially schooled by his mother but was taken to England to attend Eton College when his mother felt that "*Robert will begin to require something beyond my instruction and I feel he cannot mix with our Colonial youths without contamination*".

He returned to Australia in 1863, joining his two brothers in the management team of Tooth's Kent Brewery in Sydney. In 1868 he became a partner in that business – so he had money to invest!

In 1864 he purchased the leasehold of the 75,000 acre Kameruka Estate from his uncle. By 1871 the Estate had reduced in size to 22,000 acres, but Robert Lucas-Tooth now owned that area freehold.

Robert's objective was to develop the farm in a way that would implement his own humanitarian social ideals and become a "transplanted segment of the English countryside; a largely self-contained community based on the English agricultural estate system", "providing his tenant farmers with six-roomed cottages, a school, a church, a meeting hall, store and post office. He planted English trees on a large-scale, built an ornamental lake, kept an aviary of golden pheasants and liberated all kinds of game: pheasants, quails, hares and foxes" … and, naturally, provided the Estate with a full-size cricket oval!!

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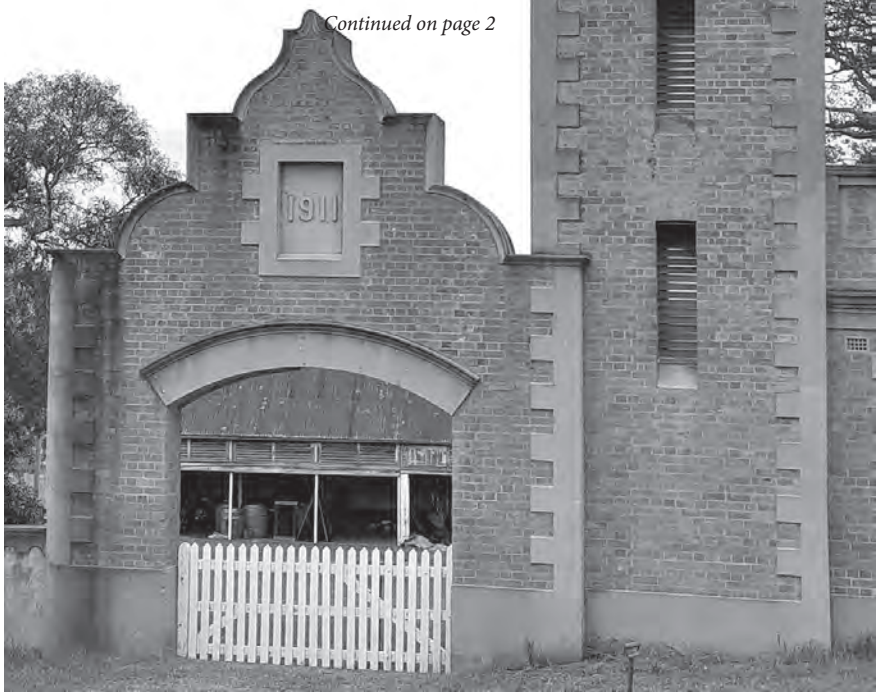


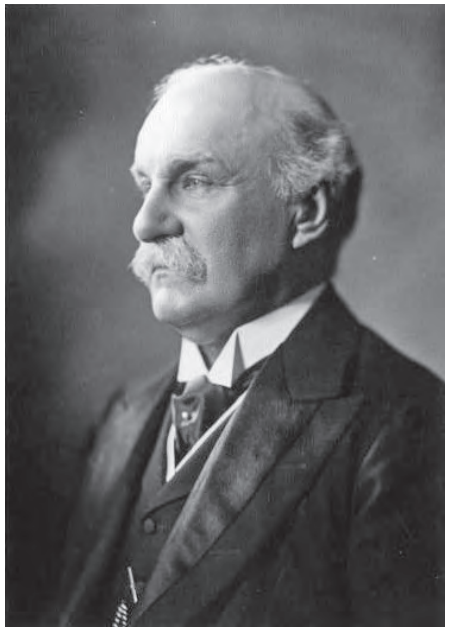
The Kameruka Estate was a farm, a self-contained village, and a tourist attraction. An impressive clocktower and entrance to stables (above right) was built – and still survives. Promotional material for the 'historic Kameruka Estate' included matchbooks (at left) highlighting some of the Estate's attractions that would be visited on guided tours (regrettably, these are no longer offered).

Fantastic Reads

The Kameruka Estate

Continued from page 1

Robert never lived at the Estate, although he visited it on a number of occasions. (In the late 1870s he also developed the 820-acre Eridge Park estate at Burradoo near Bowral into a 'model park', and 'in 1882 he built a castellated Gothic mansion at Darling Point, with a ballroom larger than that at Government House, and named it Swifts after the family home in Kent' – so he also had significant interests elsewhere in NSW as well as in England.) Instead, he employed outstanding managers at Kameruka who would send detailed reports to him on a monthly basis.



He died in England in February 1915, reputedly of a 'broken heart' following the deaths of two of his three sons who were killed on active service during World War I. His other son, Archibald Leonard Lucas-Tooth, took over responsibility for the Kameruka Estate, but died shortly afterwards, in September 1918, when he contracted influenza whilst serving in the British army in France.

The period in which the Estate was at its most successful was when Robert Lucas-Tooth was its owner. He established a core business on the Estate (dairying), but he was innovative and was not afraid to trial new things.

When necessary, he imported skilled labour to the area to ensure that every one of his ventures was given a maximum chance of succeeding.

Vicky Small's '*Kameruka*' provides many details of life on the Estate and describes some of the innovations that occurred at the time it was owned by Robert Lucas-Tooth:

"Hog raising' was introduced and James Manning [one of Robert Lucas-Tooth's partners in the Twofold Bay Pastoral Company which owned the Kameruka land before it was purchased by Robert] developed a successful formula for preserving hams and bacon … Mr Manning's efforts were greatly acclaimed in Sydney and it was noted 'the bacons and hams of Kameruka will be well known and as highly appreciated as the rich delicacies of York and Westphalia'.

Business activities were extended by operating a flour mill with the assistance of a Mr Kirkwood. Unfortunately it was found that wheat would not grow satisfactorily and eventually it was converted into a cornflour mill [in Merimbula] by Mathew Munn in 1865.

At the dairies on the Estate the milking families were provided with a well built cottage of six large sized rooms protected from the hot Australian summers by a verandah. At the back was a detached kitchen sixteen feet square, and outside a brick oven. These homes were described as a 'comfortable and convenient homestead, that many a pioneer of civilisation on the far interior would envy or covet.'

Each family was responsible for the care and milking of one hundred cows and were paid at the rate of a penny a gallon. The milk received in the morning had to be delivered at one of the three cheese factories by 7am, and in the afternoon milking commenced at 3pm so it could be in the cheese vats before dusk.

A 'Manipulator', the head cheesemaker, was in charge of each cheese factory … The 'Manipulators' were recruited from America [where more scientific methods of cheese making were in use] on a two year contract basis and were paid a monthly wage. While employed a four room cottage with kitchen was provided in close proximity to the cheese factory they operated. The Estate covered the cost of their passage to Australia and when their two years had been completed a return fare was provided.

The Hostel, Kameruka.

Early Religious Instruction was provided by Ministers calling at private homes, but in 1865 a Church of England

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Committee was formed and the now famous Architect, Edmund Blacket, was called upon to design the 'Holy Trinity' Church. As with schools, the land for the Church was provided by the Estate, and the construction was undertaken by Charles Galli at a cost of £565 … A stipend to pay the Minister was collected quarterly at ten shillings per family.

The first school built on the Estate, Kameruka Public School, was opened in August 1879 with an enrolment of 32 pupils. A second school was provided five years later and 27 students attended Toothdale Public School which was far more convenient for those children living further afield.

Fruit drying at Kameruka Estate

A store was built for the convenience of the tenants providing a large and varied amount of household items and a Post Office was opened where all postal requirements were available. Mail was delivered weekly when the 'Postmans Track' was established from Cooma down Brown Mountain but when creeks became swollen with flood waters much of the mail arrived in a saturated state.

Due to the distance from the townships of Bega, Merimbula and Pambula the residents of Kameruka were a close-knit family and much of the entertainment was provided by picnics beside the creeks, or parties which were held in homes, enticing many to walk or ride for miles bringing their musical instruments and talents. A very memorable highlight was when Alfred Shaw brought the Eighth English Cricket Team to Australia. Whilst on tour Kameruka played host to a match between an English Eleven and Candelo Twenty-Two on the 'hay paddock'. Held over two days on 12th and 13th January 1885, the interest the occasion generated is best described by Alfred Shaw who was astounded by the attendance:

'The most astonishing part of the matter was the attendance – where they came from is a mystery. At least 150 buggies and 600 horsemen and horsewomen, besides foot people, were on the ground – in all at least 2,000, and certainly almost everyone within an area of 15 miles must have been there, some coming much further, and a few so many as 100 miles, one of the players riding 100 miles through the bush, and another, with his wife, driving 90 miles.' (The English won the match by an innings and 12 runs.)

In 1880, Robert laid down the foundations of the Jersey Herd in the Colonies by importing the bull 'Lucius', and the cows 'Majestic', 'Princess Royal' and 'Pretty Queen' from England. They made their home at Eridge Park … In 1888, the herd was transferred to Kameruka and they became the nucleus of the breeding program. The herd at one time included more imported animals than any other in Australia. £90 annually was allocated to enclose land for planting shade and shelter trees and an area was set aside for the use of employees wishing to form sporting clubs, and £22 was to be used for this purpose. The Deer Park was to be kept for game purposes only …

Mr James Moody, who had received his training under the Californian experts at Mildura, was engaged as an orchardist at a salary of £125 per annum, with a new cottage to be erected for his use. His first duty was to establish a new orchard of 50 acres … Mr Moody's only request was that the new orchard not be situated near Candelo 'owing to the ill fame of the township for pilfering'.

All the dairies were to be upgraded to satisfy the requirements of the officials under the Dairy Supervision Act and these premises, complete with milk cooling arrangements, were built at a cost of £120 each. The dairymen were also to receive new cottages as white ants had destroyed a great many of the buildings on the Estate. The new seven room homes were built of brick with a verandah out front and back, and the added luxury of a kitchen inside. There were further concessions of milk, firewood, and land for growing vegetables and housing farm animals.

To help assist in adverse weather conditions, Robert asked that irrigation be looked into and an experimental system set up. This job was handed to the Orchardist, who attacked the work eagerly. Five acres of land was ploughed, subsoiled,

Fruit Dryer, Kameruka Estate

and sown with lucerne whilst still wet. In addition, a quarter of an acre of paspalum grass and two acres of paspalum planted on the hills amongst the natural grass were selected. These areas were to be irrigated with a pump day and night.

In addition to the irrigation experiment Mr Moody had requested another fifty acres of land for orchard, which was granted … After much discussion, it was decided to invest in prune trees as at the time no one in the State was growing them in any large numbers. Five thousand were planted, along with four hundred pear trees. Apples, peaches, and apricots were already being grown.

To handle the crops a Central Fruit Barn, eighty feet by fifty feet, was built of brick with a large loft and cement floor.

In 1903 1,400 cows were being milked. By 1904 Kameruka was making Derby, Stilton, Dutch and Leicester cheese. When the NSW Butter Company went into liquidation the Estate Manager attended the sale and was very pleased with the purchase of a complete plant for Gouda and Edam cheese. Imported by the Butter Company at a cost of £100, Mr Wren had been able to purchase it for £25.

The dairy farmers had their cultivation areas increased another five acres for the purpose of growing pumpkins, and a competition was held for the prize pumpkin which was grown at Copley, turning the scales at 136 lbs. The farms were also fitted with manure pits, for the purpose of fertilizer, and the dairymen were paid a bonus for every pit filled and emptied.

Accommodation for single men was beginning to become a problem so management decided to build a Bachelors' Quarters, instead of erecting individual cottages. Two storey and constructed in brick, it could comfortably house sixteen men, making it more convenient for the labour to be living at their place of employment.

1911 brought some improvements for the employees. All factory hands were to have three weeks leave of absence and sick pay was to be made available at a half rate of pay for one month. A pension pay was also introduced for the older men who were eligible for the Government Old Age Pension. Sam Williams and John Doyle, two men who had spent close to a lifetime on Kameruka, were to receive ten shillings each week for light duties, which usually involved raking up leaves or keeping the premises around the offices tidy.

The foundations for The Hostel [providing tourist and visitor accommodation] had been laid down by Thatcher and Son at the end of 1914, with two bricklayers working for twelve shillings a day. Situated in front of The Lodge,

near the entrance to the Estate, The Hostel contained eight bedrooms and six sleepouts, with added accommodation for three Chauffeurs. In addition, there were four bathrooms and a shower, a dining room and a library, and it also sported a billiard table for the entertainment of guests … a daily Tariff of fifteen shillings included bed and three meals, and morning tea was provided for sixpence while afternoon tea was one shilling. [The Hostel became a temporary hospital in 1919 when the Spanish Flu epidemic swept across the area; it was demolished in 1927, by then having become unprofitable, and its bricks were used to construct corn silos on the Estate.]

An added attraction was a nine hole golf course designed by Laurie Auchterlonie, who had been responsible for designing the distinguished St Andrews golf course in England … a charge for the use of the links was set at two shillings a day each player or ten shillings a week, with the rule that 'no golf was to be played on Sunday during the hours of the Church service at Kameruka' … Maintenance of the course was solved when 149 wethers and ewes were purchased at twenty-five shillings and nine pence a head to keep down the grass.

Further building was undertaken on Kameruka when a Social Hall was completed, 'a splendid addition to the equipment of the Estate and should be greatly appreciated by all those who are privileged to use it.'

The real importance of the Kameruka Estate to the NSW South Coast was that it provided the district with a large-scale commercial enterprise at a time when there was no other large industry in the area. This provided employment opportunities, which in turn attracted a significant population to the area.

The Cheese Room, Kameruka Estate, early 1890s

The solid foundations that had been laid whilst Robert Lucas Tooth owned the Kameruka Estate paid dividends for some years thereafter. Kameruka Alberta peaches and apples were much sought-after in Sydney and, during the 1920s for example, the Gold Medal for Cheesemaking at the Royal Sydney Show was won on six occasions by the Estate.

At its height the Estate milked 2,000 cows and was home to the largest Jersey herd in Australia. It operated 15 sharefarmed dairies named after villages in Kent, as well as a home dairy which for a time supplied a 'Home Farm' butter factory. Three schools were sited on the Estate to educate the children from the large families that were resident there.

When Leonard Lucas-Tooth died, ownership of

Kameruka Estate passed to his two infant daughters, Rosmarie and Christine, and the Estate was run by Managers reporting to Trustees for these girls. These Trustees, however, proved unwilling to invest in the Estate at the levels that Robert had done, and were reluctant to innovate.

A series of unfavourable natural conditions, including floods, bushfires, fires in a number of Estate buildings, droughts, rabbit plagues, hail and strong winds which affected the orchards – and the Depression of 1929! – also significantly affected the Estate and its profitability over the years since World War I.

The enormous changes to transportation that occurred after World War II also had a significant impact on the Estate, virtually consigning the concept of, and any need for, 'a largely self-contained community based on the English agricultural estate system' in Australia to history.

From late 1958, when suppliers to the Candelo (Bimbaya) and Bemboka Co-operatives started redirecting their outputs to Kameruka, the Kameruka cheese factory started processing milk for the first time from producers outside of the Estate.

Three separate cheese factories once operated on the Kameruka Estate –Niagara, Wolumla (both of which were closed in the 1950s) and The Island. The Island factory ceased cheese production in June 1971 (although packaging of cheese on the Estate continued for a further six months) after legislation rationalising the NSW dairy industry meant that Kameruka could no longer be assured of receiving reliable milk supplies, and the Estate found that significant capital expenditure would be needed to modernise its factory to ensure it remained commercially competitive. Milk from the 14 Kameruka dairies then functioning was diverted to the Bega Co-operative and the Bega Co-Operative took over the processing of Kameruka brand cheese.

Cheese Factory, Kameruka Estate

Over time, however, the focus of the Kameruka Estate gradually shifted from milk-production to the raising of beef cattle and sheep – although

The Office, Kameruka, on milk pay day. Photo: The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser, 25.03.1903

The Troy family milking on their Kameruka Estate dairy. The cows' tails were attached to a nail to prevent them from flicking the milkers.

in 1983 eight of its share dairies were still supplying an impressive 3.67 million litres of milk, and until 2008 the Kameruka Jersey Stud had the distinction of being Australia's oldest continuously-running dairy stud.

The Estate remained in the Tooth family for 150 years until, in 2007, it was sold to an English shipping magnate, Giles Pritchard-Gordon. At the time of its sale it covered 3,337 acres.

After the death of Pritchard-Gordon in 2014, his widow put the property up for sale. It was purchased in recent years in two separate tranches by a neighbouring family of dairy farmers who also own the historic Oaklands farm in Pambula.

They have set to work restoring the numerous homes at Kameruka as well as the historic seven-bedroom homestead, and are running beef cattle and sheep on the property. Unfortunately, they have no current plans to re-open the Estate to visitors, although the historic Church can still be accessed from the Candelo-Bega Road.

Sources: '*Gold from Gold*' by Stephen B. Codrington, 1979; '*Kameruka*' by Vicky Small, 1989; *Australian Dictionary of Biography*; *Jersey Journal*, December 2008/January 2009.

(This article was included in Recollections 10. It has been reprinted at the request of several readers of the article in Recollections 36 about the Kameruka Golf Course, who asked that we provide more information about the Estate, and at the request of several local tourist information centres that indicated to us that they would value more information about the Kameruka Estate so they can provide detailed information when asked about the Estate.)

Photographs, unless otherwise stated, courtesy Bega Pioneers' Museum
Left: The Hay Shed, Kameruka Estate

Where Does 'Good History' Come From?

Local history, as championed by community history societies, has long been looked down-upon by academics and professional historians.

Lenore Coltheart alluded to this in her piece in the last issue of 'Recollections' when she noted that, when applying for a position in any university History Department, '***any*** *interest in those lower reaches of local history or worse - family history! - must be discarded, or at least completely concealed*'.

I wondered why this was the case…did a little digging… and discovered there are some interesting histories associated with this.

From the 1950s, local history societies were established in almost every Australian town (there are now more than 1,000 history societies scattered across Australia – illustrating just how widespread they became - including 14 community-based history societies that have survived or have since been set up on the NSW South Coast in the area from Batemans Bay to the Victorian border), mirroring what was then also happening in the United States.

Almost every one of these societies also set up a 'historical' (sic) museum.

[Incidentally, the more recently-established South Coast History Society, unusually, does not have a museum or library; its primary focus is to share histories of the South Coast area with anyone who might be interested in the history of the area, many of whom would certainly never consider themselves to be 'historians' or normally be interested in joining a 'historical society' or working in a museum.]

The mentality within many of these history societies thereby shifted from history to collecting and preservation. Typically, many hundreds of - or many thousands of - objects were collected by each of these local history societies. These were then placed in their museums, frequently without being 'rigorously interrogated', and were 'saved intact for future generations' simply because they were considered to be 'precious links to our past'.

Interestingly, the little public funding that flows to local history societies has reinforced this collecting and preservation mentality. For example, the support priorities of Museum and Galleries NSW (the main funding source for many local history societies) for the next three years are for local societies *'to develop a new or updated disaster plan, a preservation needs assessment, to fully catalogue their collection, to develop a Committee accession plan, to produce a volunteer handbook, to develop an annual business plan, to develop a deaccession policy, to have an exhibition and interpretation plan, and to have an education policy and plan*'. So, not a single dollar of their public funding is likely to flow to research into or interpretation of local history or historical objects held in museums!

History staff at universities and other academic institutions, in contrast, have little interest in collecting and are trained to 'rigorously interrogate' whatever they are studying. Attempting to deal with the past without interpretation or context is simply a source of frustration to them.

To an academic, there is much more (or potentially much

more) to, for example, an old photograph in the collection of the Bega Pioneers' Museum that is simply identified as 'Carp Street': they would also be asking when was it taken? Why was it taken? Who took it? What's the story behind each of those buildings and businesses? Who are the people captured in the photograph? What is their story? What does it tell us about Bega and Bega's society back then? What does it tell us about Bega today or how Bega has developed in the years since the photograph was taken?

And if this photograph is a 'precious link to our past' that deserves to be 'saved intact for future generations', why is such (basic) information not also being preserved, as a matter of routine, alongside the photograph itself?

[The answer, of course, is that local history societies are totally dependent upon amateur (in the sense of unpaid, as opposed to paid 'professionals') volunteers to undertake the necessary research and to document their findings, and that volunteers will give only so much of their time… and, tragically, are a dwindling breed…the result being that much of that desirable research and documentation is just not being undertaken.]

The sorts of histories being produced by professional historians are also quite different to those emanating from local history societies.

Australian academic historians have been able to focus on 'a big picture' (especially during the twentieth century, when the first major histories about Australia were able to be compiled – replacing the predominating interest in British history of previous times); local historians have (perhaps because they see themselves as *local* historians) concentrated on very much less of 'a big picture' with, as Professor Frank Bongiorno noting in his '*Brief History of Local History in Australia*', their histories typically '*presented the history of a locality as a series of firsts: the first explorers, the first white settler, the first white child born in the district, the first pastoral run, the construction of roads, bridges and buildings, the establishment of local government, the coming of the railway, of electricity, and so on. They were full of local worthies - typically, bearded men – and were heavily slanted towards the early years of settlement.*'

Academic histories also tend to be very much more detailed, are expected to contain more that is 'new' (reflecting in-depth, questioning, original research that has been undertaken by the author), and are subject to critical peer-review.

Local histories are rarely, if ever, peer-reviewed and often can be fairly criticised for being little more than 'cut and paste' rehashes from older local histories and from other now-easily accessible sources (for example, via Trove, the National Library of Australia's fabulously-useful online search facility) such as old newspapers. (To which I plead guilty on both counts, in relation to many of the articles I have compiled for '*Recollections*'!! The Moruya & District Historical Society's weekly 'History' column in *The Beagle Weekly* on-line newspaper is a classic example of an [uninterrogated] 'cut and paste' local history produced by a local history society.)

So, it's probably unsurprising that, as Ian Willis an Honorary Fellow at the University of Wollongong recently put it, '*there is a yawning gap between the enthusiastic amateur* [local historian] *and the academic historian*' in Australia.

Other worthwhile 'academic' activities once organized by local historical societies have also largely disappeared. In the 1960s local history conferences organized by local history societies were common, as were excursions and visits to other local history societies. These are rarely organized now because of declining numbers of volunteers willing to arrange them and because of a belief (which South Coast History Society's experience over recent years does not support) that there is now insufficient interest in such activities from the local community. As a result, organization of remaining history conferences has largely defaulted to 'academic' organisations such as universities, the Royal Australian Historical Society and the Professional Historians Association.

The study of local history at a community level, in spite of whatever criticism it (justifiably or unjustifiably) may receive, IS important and deserves to be more widely promoted. After all, local histories contain a wealth of detail and stories that 'big picture' histories cannot include (for example, 'big picture' histories of Australia's involvement in World War I do not [and cannot be expected to] examine the impact of the war on our local families and businesses – something that had enormous implications at the time and for generations to come)…the reality is that our lives are shaped by where we live and work, so it's important to understand how and why our area has developed into what it is today…and, if nothing else, it's just interesting to know why Eden's streets are named Calle Calle, Cocora, Flinders, Bass, Imlay, Albert and Victoria.

Currently it's popular for historians to look at history as being a study of 'place'. And, surely, nothing provides more detail about 'place' than do local histories. So maybe we're seeing, or about to see, a significant uplift in interest in and respect for our local history!

Peter Lacey

Sources: 'Parallels on the periphery' by Louse Prowse in 'History Australia' Volume 12, No 3; 'Academic snobbery: local historians need more support' by Ian Willis in The Conversation, 4th April 2012; 'From Local History to the History of Place: A Brief History of Local History in Australia' by Frank Bongiorno in www.academia.edu

The History I Reveal

It's not just a photograph, it's a valuable mine of information about our past! Here are just a few of the things we noticed:

- The photograph was taken (judging by the vehicles and the presence of Lawsons' Store) in the late 1920s;
- This was a time when the streets were shared by motor vehicles and horses (there is a horse and buggy on the left side of the street…and a service car [an early form of bus] outside the Post Office on the opposite side of the street; the service car may well have belonged to Balmain Bros of Bega, one that conveyed passengers between Bega and the railway station in Nimmitybelle;
- The photograph was probably (because of the 'Carp Street, Bega' type) a postcard, or one of a series of photographs depicting scenes in and around Bega;
- It was probably taken from the upper level of the Club Hotel building at the corner of Carp and Church Streets. The Club Hotel was known locally as the Rose Hotel because it had an enormous rose climbing up the side of the building in Church Street. It had closed in 1907, following a vote (initiated by an influential Temperance movement – see story at www.bit.ly/Recollections30) by residents to reduce the number of hotels in the town from nine to five;
- The road was unsealed but probably surfaced with coal tar that was an unwanted by-product from Bega's Municipal Gas Works. This had opened in 1884 and was the first municipal gas works in NSW. Bitumen sealing of Carp Street did not occur until 1933. The road, however, is kerbed and guttered;

CARP STREET, BEGA

- The alignment of Carp Street has not changed. The street trees and pedestrian safety measures that now break up the street flow are of relatively recent origin and detract from the 'clean' streetscape evident in this photograph;
- Many of the buildings had post-supported awnings overhanging the footpath. The posts were removed at the direction of Council in the late 1930s/early 1940s. This resulted in the façades of many buildings being changed – in some cases the awnings were simply removed, in others they became cantilever-supported, and in at least one case a second story was added to an existing building to enable its awning to be cantilevered. Good examples of original post-supported verandahs have survived in Church Street;
- The awning immediately behind the telegraph pole belongs to Rosenthal and Son's store (it has a sign indicating this), one of a number of 'department stores' operating in Bega at the time;
- In the far distance are York House (still standing) and the Metropolitan Hotel (still standing, but greatly modified);
- The visible nearer more substantial buildings are the Government Savings Bank of NSW building on the corner of Gipps Street; the two-storey Post Office with its verandah over the footpath (built in 1877 with a 4-bedroom residence for the Post Master upstairs; it was replaced by the less impressive current Post Office building in 1971), with the verandah posts of the next-door Court House (set back from the footpath) just visible between the posts supporting the verandah of the Post Office; the Bega School of Arts (which was sold by Council to Coles Country Stores and was demolished in 1965 to be replaced by the unremarkable box of a building now occupied by Plevey's Pharmacy); then William Rixon's produce store (with, visible when the photograph is enlarged, several of Bega's 'Bags Men' sitting on the verandah); then a building that became, shortly after this photograph was taken, Teddy Whalan's garage with fuel pumps on the roadside; then Teddy Lawson's 'The Fashion Centre' with its cantilevered awning (built in 1928 by R W Thatcher, probably Bega's most well-known builder).

Murphy's Club Hotel in the 1890s. This building was demolished in 1988. Next door in Church St is Cowdroy's Emporium. That building still stands. Image: State Library of NSW, FL8855833

Bega's Bags Men on Rixon's Verandah

Teddy Whalan's Garage

Here's a detailed 'insiders' description of the South Coast sleeper-cutting industry in 1917, replete with some particularly interesting personal observations by the author! Sleeper-cutting in the area was, as he suggests, an 'important industry' at that time, but his prediction that it would 'go on forever' proved to be quite far from the mark.

South Coast Forests and Sleeper Cutting Therein

BY A. M. CAMPBELL

The south coast sleeper cutting belt extends from Nowra to Eden, and embraces a wide stretch of magnificent forest country. Nearly every variety of the eucalypt family here attains perfection, while angophora, casuarina, and acacia are well represented. Fifty years ago this was a virgin bush, containing apparently an unlimited supply of our best known and most valuable hardwoods. Now every part easy of access has been tapped—only culls of the "has-beens" remain. The insatiable maw of the circular saw and the keen broad-axe of the squaring cracks have mown the harvest of the hills for many miles back.

About 30 years ago there was a big boom in sawn timber, consequent on large Melbourne orders and street blocks. Sawmills started wherever their products could be shipped from. Timber was abundant, and great was the waste thereof. The easiest getable logs were taken out of giants of the forest, and the bulk of the tree left. The best patches were rushed by opposing mill men, fallen out of a face, and a big percentage left. In the Clyde River district I have seen hundreds of magnificent redwood eucalyptus longafolia logs rotting in the gullies.

In those days Government surveillance was even more farcical than now. There was no royalty, and a few forest rangers, assisted by the police, collected the licenses. One ranger had the whole south coast under his supervision. Do his best, he could only occasionally patrol the main road of his parish. Contemporaneously with the saw-millers came the sleeper-cutters, who would gladly have worked up the waste, but ironbark (eucalyptus paniculata) sleepers and girders were then only used. Once established, the squaring industry soon spread.

"Cockies" and their sons watched the visiting experts and soon learned the trade. Impecunious, whistled-out mill-workers joined the ranks and gladly left 12 hours a day for 5s. Ever since a large number of Australian premier bushmen have found constant employment in this important industry. Mills may come and mills may go, but we go on forever.

No industry in the Commonwealth has been more neglected or less heard of than sleeper squaring. If you ask the man in the street where railway sleepers come from he will probably tell you they grow out back somewhere and are whittled into shape by a low class of bush workers called "sleeper choppers." Even those in high places who tinker with the timber and run our badly-managed, nearly-depleted,

magnificent forests, are practically lamentably ignorant of the modus operandi whereby giants of the forest are converted into girders, transoms, and sleepers.

Hence blunders of the past and messes of the present. All other branches of manual labour have been written up, sympathised with and agitated for, but those who go down to the bush in humpies, who do business in the great forest pursue their unvaried round from day to day unsought, unhonoured, and unknown. For them no poet has sung, no party legislated, no press advocated, no wages board sat. Earnings from all other sources have advanced proportionately to increased cost of living but the sleeper squarer today gets no more for the work of his hands than he did 20 years ago. In point of fact, he gets far less, having now to contend with the increased forest restrictions, extra haulage, and scarcity of timber. The thusness of this is easily solved. Our forests are certainly nationalised, but by a strange anomaly the products thereof are controlled by contractors, who make vast fortunes out of the cutters' industrial indigence. Quite recently the Works Department made an heroic plunge in the right direction by tentatively dealing directly with north coast cutters, but south coast and westward are still in the octopus grip of the contractor.

Apart from being important factors in the distribution of national wealth, sleeper-cutters are both pioneers and scavengers of the forest. They not only lead the way ahead, but clean up everything behind. When prospecting for timber nothing daunts them; no matter how rough the intervening country, they get there all the same. Roads are made, creeks bridged, and timber tapped in almost inaccessible places. Other bush workers follow in their wake, and new country is thus opened up. On old ground they utilise what others leave to waste—timber too hollow for sawmills or in too rough a place to be drawn out in the log is worked up. Many a fine tree, felled by log-choppers and left to feed the first bush fire on account of too much "pipe," is manufactured into first-class sleepers. Now and again a cutter comes on a "windfall" or strikes a stringy bark (eucalyptus capitellata) stripped of its bark but still sound in the bole. Much valuable timber is thus saved.

Sleeper-cutting is strenuous work, entailing the hardest phases and vicissitudes of bush life. At the same time it is a clean, healmanly, free and independent occupation. We work and spell as we like, live the natural life, and call no man master. Few who once take up the broadaxe ever put it down. In middle life I went from clerical life to squaring, lived in a tent and dined al fresco for eight years, and have never regretted it. There is a charm in the open-air life, the scent of freshly-hewn timber, the varied humour of the camp, the manliness of the work and thorough independence of position that seductively appeals.

Any young fellow who is at all handy with the axe at the wood-heap and has any grit in him and is not afraid of graft could soon learn squaring. It does not require much capital to start. The "kit" comprises a set of wedges, a pair of small rings, crosscut saw, American axe, broadaxe, canthook, rule, chalkline, marking-out board, pencil, and plumbob. To these must be added a tent and fly. The total cost of the lot is about £6. A new-chum generally starts "billeting" for a squarer, that is, he falls the trees and splits the log into billets for his mate to square. He thus gets duly initiated into every phase of the work, and is soon enabled to start on his own.

The method of operation is as follows: A suitable tree from two to six feet is fallen and crosscut into lengths as per required sleeper. The log is marked out and split into billets, which are rolled on skids, made as level as possible, sapside uppermost. The board, cut perfectly square out of the end of a kerosene case, and the exact size of the sleeper, is then put on each end of the billet, plumbed, and the pencil run round it. The billet is then lined out and squared off. If the log is too tough to burst or too windy to split straight the billets are grooved out; V shaped grooves about five inches deep are cut into the log longitudinally. When forced by wedges the cleavage follows the line of least resistance and easily-split straight billets result. Of course, this is a much slower process, but obtains the toughest and best of timber.

The number of billets depends on the size of the log. Three is the minimum, and fourteen in the round somewhere about the maximum. From very large timber underneath billets, two and three deep, are obtained, which makes a big difference in the yield of the log. Over 200 sleepers have been taken out of one blackbutt. Such trees are exceptional. Plenty are worked up for half a dozen. A tree yielding 30 or 40 sleepers is the quickest and easiest worked. It is a difficult matter to determine average earnings of sleeper squarers. Much depends upon the nature of the timber and the energy and skill of the cutter. Experts knock out over £3 a week, but £2 10s may be taken as a fair average estimate. This is altogether too low a return for the labour expended. A comparison of the prices given for sawn and hewn timber shows that the squarer does not get a fair deal. [As a comparison, those who enlisted in the Australian army in World War I were paid 6/- per day – so £2 2s per week – and this was generally considered to be a generous wage; but then they didn't have food and other personal living expenses they needed to pay for.]

The principal sleepers now cut are for our own railways, and known as "commissioners." They are 8ft. long and 9x4½, containing 277 feet of superficial timber. This sleeper "must be smoothly hewn out of matured trees, die-square, free from wind, with clean arrises, straight, sound, clear of heart, sap, gum veins, ring shakes, spalls, or any other imperfection likely in the opinion of the inspecting officer to affect its usefulness."

For this work of art we are now paid by the contractor 2s 10d per sleeper delivered at the depot. This works out at 10s 5d per 100ft, superficial. If sawmills had to cut special orders at that price they would soon be nonexistent. Hewn

timber stands more strain and lasts much longer than sawn.

The broadaxe follows the grain of the wood, and its keen edge closes the pores. The royalty now charged on ironbark is 1s 6d per hundred; on all other hardwoods 8d per hundred (on the south coast ironbark sleepers are a thing of the past; stringybark is now the main). The average price for carting into the depot is 10d per sleeper. Besides this each cutter pays 2s 6d per month license. One of the best features of the squaring industry is short accounts and sure money.

Depots from whence timber can be shipped are established by the contractor at every centre to which the sleepers are hauled by carters (mostly ox-conductors) and stacked ready for inspection. Every six weeks there is a "pass." All cutters and carters roll up, for this is pay day. Three officials attend —the Government timber inspector, the forest Guard, and the contractor's agent. Each have their separate duties, and draw good salaries. (If the timber was nationalised one man could easily do the lot). The inspector stands on one side of the heap, hammer in hand, keenly on the alert, and brands each sleeper passed with the Government hall-marked hammer, which initialises the description of the timber and records an indicating numeral letter or rim mark for the purpose of identifying the officer who made the inspections.

If in his opinion a sleeper is not up to the specifications he says "Out," and out of the heap it goes accordingly. There is no appeal against his decision. Of course, a certain amount of dissatisfaction is at times engendered, and isolated instances have occurred where the cutters have given the inspector ten minutes to gather himself together and clear out. Conversely, I have even known a highly educated, gentlemanly "passer," when his work was done, to quietly take off his coat and quickly punch an illiterate, burly, contumacious cutter into submission.

In the main I have found inspectors courteous in manner and impartial in decision. Whether they all possess the necessary practical experience to warrant their appointment is, of course, another matter. The forest guard makes up and collects royalty due on the sleepers, and enters same in his field book. To the cutters the most important personage is the agent, who tallies up each man's sleepers, makes out the accounts, and pays for all passed by cheque on the spot.

As before remarked, ironbark sleepers are practically cut out on the south coast, and girders are few and far between. Years ago it was justly celebrated for the quantity and quality of this highly valuable, unequalled timber. Probably, the best ironbark (eucalyptus paniculata) produced in this State came from a belt that runs parallel with the coast from Moruya to Milton. Here giants of the forest 50ft through

and 90ft to the first limb, straight as an arrow and sound as a bell, studded the hills and propped the skies. Magnificent in aspect, Titanic in grandeur, colossal in rugged symmetry, beautiful in foliage, aromatic with mellifluous bloom, they appeared things of beauty that would last forever. Now it is hard to find a decent workable tree.

Millions of feet in sleepers, girders, transoms, stock blocks and logs have certainly been taken away, but owing to the short-sightedness and lack of practical knowledge evidenced by the controlling Department, which actually assisted its exportation, a large proportion, and that the very best, has gone to foreign countries. In a word, we have given away the best of our timber, and are now compelled to fall back on inferior descriptions for our own use. A short time ago the Department woke up to a realisation of the growing scarcity of ironbark, and a consensus of official opinion on the next best timber to use in lieu thereof resulted in a decree that for the future only white stringy-bark should be used for railway sleepers. Fortunately for the cutters in general and our forests in particular, there are several other varieties of eucalyptus very closely allied to that specified. When squared and stacked only expert, long-experienced timber cutters could differentiate.

A goodly percentage of this was sent in. As the timber is in every respect quite as good as white stringy-bark the pious fraud was not only pardonable but commendable, as thereby a suicidal drain on one particular species was averted. Subsequent cogitation led to a toning down of the decree. Clean blackbutt, i.e., free of gum, is now accepted.

With the exception of Eden, where on account of its comparatively new bush a large body of men are working, sleeper-cutting is carried on by scattered gangs, who have their regular attendant carters. The rudely picturesque camp is generally pitched in the sheltered curve of a creek close to water, and the gleam of the white tents through the dark gum foliage forms a delightfully Arcadian picture. The cutters work within a radius of four miles of camp.

Supplies of tucker are obtained from the nearest storekeeper, who runs a van out every six weeks. Butter and eggs come from contiguous cockies. As a rule, squarers work like bullocks, eat like horses, and live on the best obtainable. Frequently the best is bad enough. Tinned stuff stocks the larder, and bully beef is the main. The last-named has, if possible, been getting worse and worse, and suggests a lack of proper surveillance somewhere. Entirely destitute of semblance of fat, dark in colour, fibrous in texture, and

Sleeper-cutters (these photographs are not taken on the NSW South Coast)

tough in detail, it would make any thoughtful feeder wonder what the antique quadruped died of. For this luxury we are now paying 1s 5d per lb.

At all timber work, particularly squaring, it is not good for a man to be alone. Accidents occur through the nature of the work. When falling, if the tree is at all "hippy" at the butt the cutter "goes up on it," by means of pegs morticed in or a pole supported by three forks. Standing on this pole, sometimes 16ft. up, and balancing himself with the axe, the practised chopper works as neatly and quickly as if on the ground. If the peg works loose or the pole slips trouble results to fallen humanity.

Accidents sometimes occur through what are termed "floaters". In a thick bush you cannot fall one tree without knocking off many limbs from others. Some of these hang suspended by the bark. They may hang thus for months, and they may come down any minute, to the peril of the squarer below.

Again, rolling out and turning huge logs on a steep side hill is dangerous work. Of course, there is always a way of safeguarding, and practical knowledge at least minimises chance of accident. Still, they do occur, and are always on. In each camp every man knows where the other fellow is working, so if one is absent at the usual knock-off time the rest are quickly off to look for him. He may have cut himself with the broadaxe, got jammed by a log or crushed with a limb. Whatever happens, he has the consolation of knowing that after a certain time help will surely arrive. During working three heavy blows with the back of the axe on a sleeper is the S.O.S. distress signal. This makes a distinct sound, and can be heard at a great distance, and, if repeated, will quickly bring the nearest cutter.

Despite dangers, hardships, and low prices, squaring is a fine, healthy, manly occupation. After the war there is sure to be a boom in hewn timber, and many anaemic young fellows now dawdling away their time in city offices could not do better than get out into God's Country and earn a fair living with the broadaxe. This would give them a new lease of life, and create suitable vacancies for our returned soldiers. There is still plenty of timber further back that only needs Departmental assistance to get out.

—*The Braidwood Dispatch and Mining Journal*,
17th & 20th July 1917

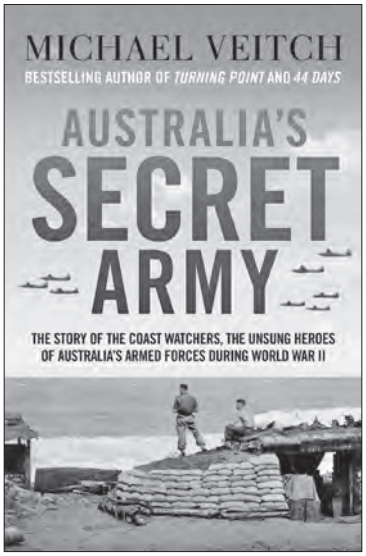
HISTORIES FOR SUMMER HOLIDAY READING

Australia's Secret Army

by Michael Veitch

The story of the World War II Coastwatchers – men (and at least one woman) who risked their lives by remaining behind enemy lines in Papua New Guinea, Bougainville and the Solomon Islands in World War II and who provided the Australian and American armed forces with extremely valuable reports about Japanese military activity in the area – is intriguing. Their exploits, and the extraordinary contributions these Coastwatchers made towards defeating the Japanese, deserve to be more widely known.

'*Australia's Secret Army: The story of the Coastwatchers, the unsung heroes of Australia's armed forces during World War II*' is therefore welcome.



But it's not a history; it's what I'd call a 'popular history' that documents some of the more dramatic contributions by Coastwatchers in the New Britain/New Ireland/Bougainville/Solomon Islands (the islands to the north-east and east of mainland Papua New Guinea) area. A much more comprehensive history of the organization (which was certainly not an 'army' – so the title of this new book really grates, as does the cover photo because none of the Coastwatchers operated from anything like sandbagged observation posts on a beach!!) was written shortly after the end of World War II by Eric Felt, a retired navy man who, at the start of World War II, was '*asked to set up and command a large and complex intelligence organization stretching thousands of miles across Papua, New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, through some of the most undeveloped areas on earth, in which there was no telegraph, not a single rail track and less than 500 miles of useable roads.*' Felt's book - simply titled '*The Coastwatchers*' - is (amazingly) still in print, is one of 'Australia's War Classics', and was one of the sources that Michael Veitch heavily relied upon when writing this new book.

The individuals who made up the Coastwatchers network had mostly lived and worked for many years in the coastal areas of the region. Many had been plantation owners or managers, some had been Australian patrol officers, others missionaries – so they had some familiarity with the area and had experience in working with the local native populations.

But, when the Japanese forces arrived, they simply became spies - well hidden in jungles and mountain ranges behind enemy lines, simply equipped with a cumbersome and often unreliable radios.

The challenges they faced, the risks that they took, the prices that some of them ultimately paid, are vividly outlined by Veitch.

And so are their '*results in stratospheric excess of their modest numbers*' which delivered '*intelligence that would directly influence military actions, save the lives of dozens of stranded airmen, sailors and civilians, and provide invaluable and otherwise unobtainable information regarding enemy plans, numbers and dispositions. And all this would be achieved under the noses of the enemy who, the entire war, remained utterly ignorant of the Coastwatchers' impact on their ambitions*' even though they were very aware of their

presence and actively tried to hunt them down.

For example, a Coastwatcher stationed near Salamaua (on the north coast of mainland New Guinea, just to the east of Lae) '*would report up to nine times a day, providing Port Moresby with vital 'eyes' on Papua's distant northern shore*' [sorry to be picky, but Papua at this point doesn't have a northern shore…New Guinea is the territory to its north]…'*In detail, he would announce the arrival of Japanese bombers from the north, then count them as they assembled in the humid sky before turning to strike Port Moresby across the other side of the Owen Stanley Ranges* [sorry again, it's actually the Owen Stanley Range]. *He would provide the enemy's direction, numbers, formations and altitudes, allowing the intelligence officers a twenty- to forty-minute window in which to act before the raiders appeared over the town and its airfields.*'

The eyes and ears of Australian Coastwatchers also contributed very significantly to the American success in the pivotal battle for Guadalcanal – something the Americans recognized and appreciated (even to the extent of sending in submarines during the war to rescue Coastwatchers when it was evident their lives were in imminent peril) but, strangely, the Australian military and government have never done.

Despite its annoying publishing errors (which should have been identified and corrected in the editorial process), this is a very enjoyable and very worthwhile read – '*the story of men gazing down onto what yesterday had been a lonely stretch of beach, witnessing it being invaded by a thousand ships of one of the greatest armed forces on earth.*

It is the story of a man looking up from a damp jungle floor to count a formation of enemy bombers heading south, then transmitting a four-word message that, 300 miles away, would spare scores of lives and turn the course of a battle…

Above all, it is the story of a small group of men who, in the hour of their country's greatest peril, chose not to flee but to turn and face the enemy.

To the nation they served, however, they remain – now as they did then - almost completely unknown.'

Of Personal Interest

I first became aware of the Coastwatchers and the valuable contribution they made to the war effort in the Pacific in early 1967 when I and several other university students from around Australia spent three weeks in a tiny, tiny village called Muliama about two-thirds the way down the eastern coast of New Ireland.

The manager of the local copra and cocoa plantation was 'Bello' (Cyril or Cecil Bell, I now can't remember which) who, generously, shared his supplies of VB with us on the numerous occasions we would walk over from the village to his incongruously-colonial homestead. He told us he had been a Coastwatcher in World War II in the extremely rugged, jungle-clad mountain range behind Muliama. He proudly indicated his role had been acknowledged in Eric Felt's 'The Coastwatchers'.

When I returned to Australia I bought a copy of that book and discovered that Bell's role was given a brief mention. So perhaps understandably, when I purchased 'Australia's Secret Army' the first thing I did was to turn to the index to see what mention was made of Bello. There was nothing. So, I checked for Muliama. Again, nothing. So, I looked for Namatanai (the local – about 60 miles distant – town that was the administrative centre for the area). Yet again, nothing…although Namatanai actually does get several mentions in the book. So, so much for the book's indexing!

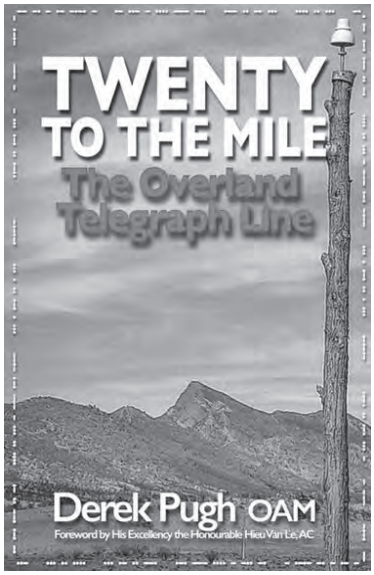
I now don't remember any detail from those conversations with Bello, except that he – as a Coastwatcher – was in constant fear that locals might reveal his position to the Japanese (a feeling that some other Coastwatchers shared, if Veitch's reporting accurately represents their thinking)…so perhaps, over the Christmas holiday season, it will be time for me to buy another copy of, and re-read, Eric Felt's 'The Coastwatchers'…whilst, of course, enjoying a VB 'purely in recognition of Coastwatcher Bello's valuable wartime contribution'!

Peter Lacey

'*Australia's Secret Army*' is available in paperback from around $26.

Twenty to the Mile: The Overland Telegraph Line

by Derek Pugh



The construction of the Overland Telegraph Line linking Palmerston (now Darwin) in the Northern Territory with Port Augusta in South Australia was an epic undertaking. Understandably, it is considered to be the greatest engineering undertaking of nineteenth century Australia.

The 3,200 km (2,000 mile) Overland Telegraph Line (OTL) spanned a largely inhospitable area that had been virtually unexplored. So, the task of surveying the line and then constructing the line (including, as the title of this book suggests, erecting twenty telegraph poles every mile – which meant sourcing and installing and then connecting a total of 36,000 poles, a job that was completed in under two years!) was certainly no mean feat.

The OTL connected to a Java-to-Darwin submarine telegraph cable and, overnight (in 1872), the time it took for Australians to be able to communicate with Europeans was reduced from months to hours. Effectively, Australia's isolation became a thing of the past…not that using the telegraph was cheap, a single word (transmitted by morse code) then costing the equivalent of a day's wage for a labourer.

The opening of the OTL was particularly important for Adelaide which then became the first major centre

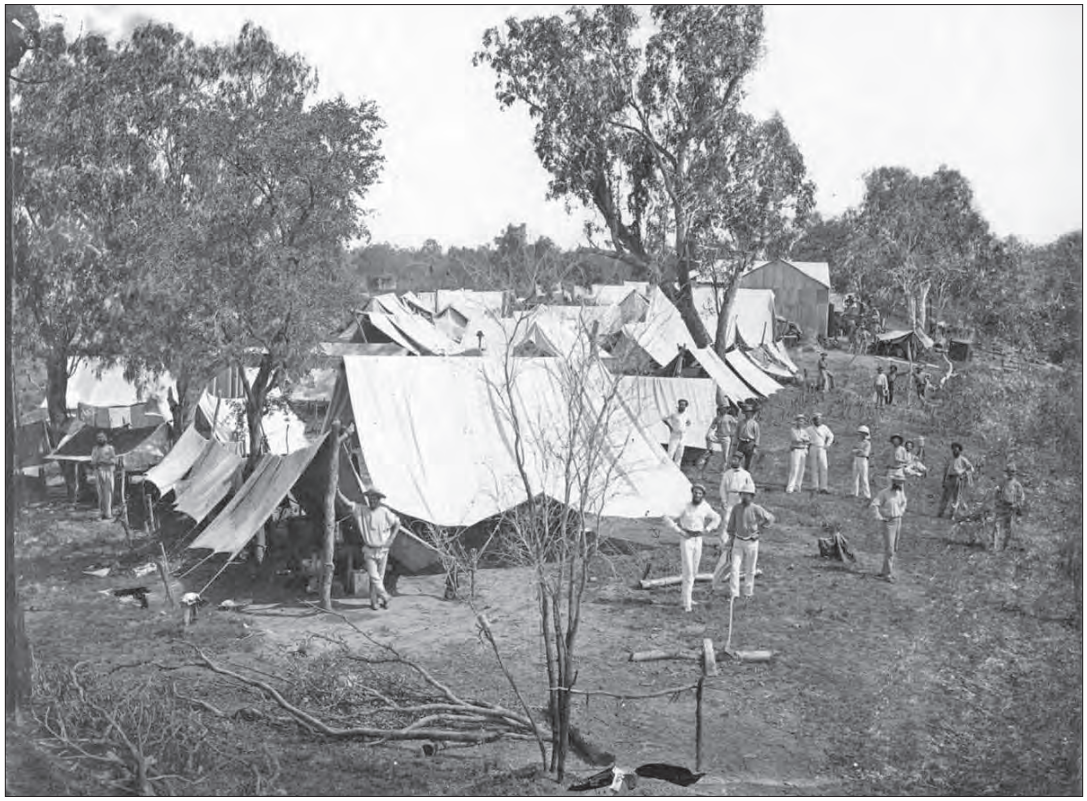
in Australia to receive overseas news, before it was retransmitted from Adelaide to other cities and towns throughout the country. And this was the very reason why the South Australian Government originally entered into, and ultimately won, a bidding war with Queensland that led to the OTL being built.

Even though the Line took seven months longer to build than had been anticipated and its cost was about double the original budget, the evening before it opened '*the city put on a 'jollification'. Bells, music, and fireworks from the top of the post office tower, and a dozen rockets from Montefiore Hill, announced to the entire population that something important was about to happen…(which) drew together an excited audience, chiefly consisting of juvenile ragamuffins.*' And '*to mark the importance of completing the line, Governor Fergusson declared Friday, 15th November 1872 to be a public holiday in South Australia! Such was the community pride in its success. The Governor also hosted a grand banquet at the Adelaide Town Hall, which was preceded by a grand procession from the Post Office to the Exhibition Hall on North Terrace, honouring the Superintendent of Telegraphs, the revered Charles Todd, and his officers and staff.*'

The completion of the OTL also helped open up the interior of the continent. There was now a route that could be followed by travellers…and by stockmen with their stock. And, at about 200 kilometer intervals, permanently manned repeater stations had been erected to enable the strength of the electrical signal along the line to be boosted. Those employed at these stations (many of whom remained for extraordinary long lengths of time) must have been remarkably resilient individuals, considering that most of these repeater stations were sited in extremely desolate locations.

'*Twenty to the Mile*' was written to celebrate this year's 150th anniversary of the opening of the OTL. It is a very comprehensive history and a very interesting record of the challenges – and the achievements – of those associated with this remarkable Australian undertaking. It is available in paperback from around $30.

Reviews by Peter Lacey



The Overland Telegraph Line camp at Roper River, Northern Territory, March 1872

and finally...

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