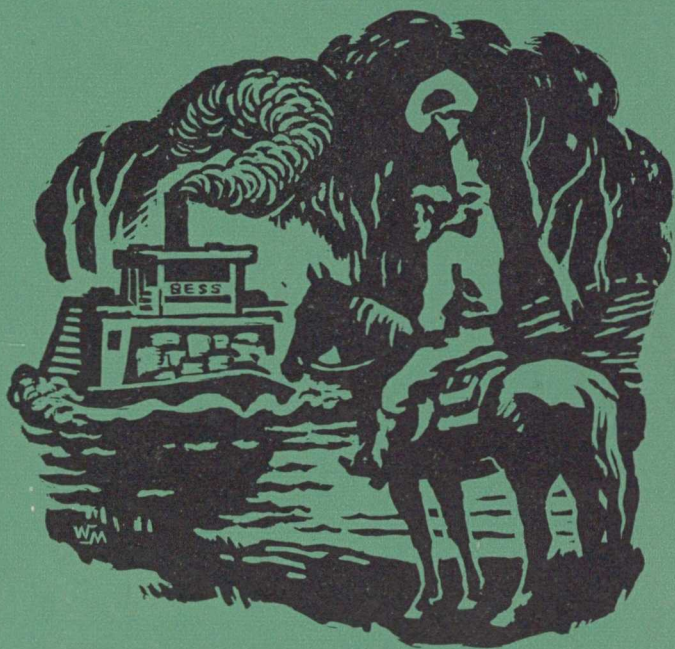


L O N G M A N S

*Squatter  
and Selector  
at Tongala*



AUSTRALIAN LANDMARKS

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# SQUATTER AND SELECTOR

## AT TONGALA

HARLEY W. FORSTER

Revised by  
LESLIE STACK



LONGMANS

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SQUATTER AND SELECTOR  
AT TONGALA

by

HARLEY W. FORSTER

*Illustrated by*

LESLIE STACK



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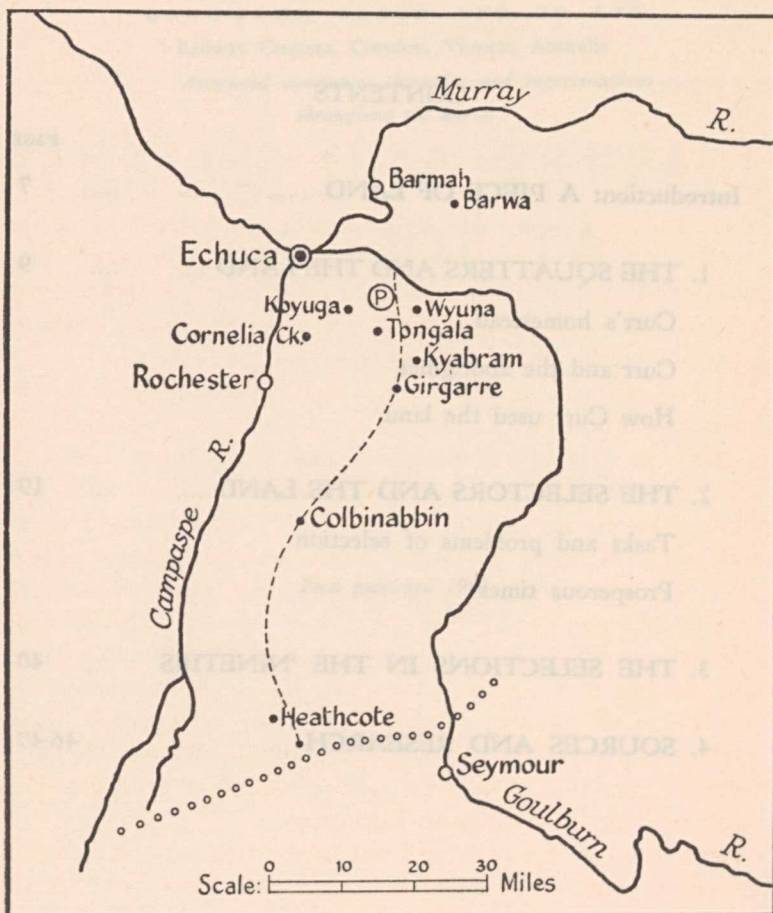
# A PIECE OF LAND

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## A PIECE OF LAND



----- Curr's journey with his sheep from Major's Line to Tongala, July, 1841.

oooooo The 'Major's Line'—Major Mitchell's wagon tracks made on his return journey from Portland in 1836.



The original Pankhurst selection.

## A PIECE OF LAND

THIS is the story of a piece of land, and of the Australians who made use of it from 1841 to the close of the nineteenth century.

On the map of Australia, the piece of land would appear as a dot in the South-East corner. On a more detailed map it would be discovered some twenty miles from Echuca, on the New South Wales-Victorian border. The old border town of Echuca has an aboriginal name meaning "The Meeting of the Waters," and, about five miles apart, the thin flow of the Campaspe River, and the more impressive flow of the Goulburn River empty into the Murray River. Between these two tributaries of the Murray lies the land of which this story is told—flat land, lightly timbered, dry land, with an annual average rainfall of under seventeen inches.

For thousands of years this land was included in the hunting grounds of a few hundred aborigines. The 'black-fellow ovens' at their camping spots are almost the only trace that now remains of these primitive hunters. The first white men in the area were *squatters*\* who brought sheep and some cattle to the river banks and dry plains. Then, after the gold rushes, the squatters' 'runs' were broken up. From 1865 onwards, but especially in the 1870's, land *selectors* obtained land and began growing wheat and barley and sending their crops to the ports by goods trains over the newly-opened railway lines. In the 1880's irrigation water started to come to the land, and it gradually became the well-watered area that it is today, and a centre of fruit-growing, dairy-farming and fat-lamb raising.

The story of this piece of land in the time of the squatters is told through the experience of E. M. Curr, and in the time of the selectors through the lives and difficulties of the pioneering Pankhurst family, who came from the gold-fields of Castlemaine to the area in 1874. The facts have been gathered from letters, diaries, accounts, newspapers, official records and some published writings of people living in the period of the story. There is a list of these sources on page 46.

\* The story of why and how 'squatting' began in Australia is told in the Landmark booklet *Enter the Squatter*, by Jill Ker.



## THE SQUATTERS AND THE LAND

### How Edward Curr came to Tongala

**I**T was by accident that Edward Micklethwaite Curr came to this land between the Goulburn and Campaspe Rivers as a squatter in 1841.

Edward Curr came from Tasmania with his father in 1839, at a time when Melbourne was only five years old. Their boat crossed Bass Strait in twenty-two hours and was tied to a convenient stump on the Yarra bank at the foot of William Street. Curr, a lad of nineteen, had a look at this young man's town, where people over the age of thirty were referred to as 'old So-and-so'. He saw the land speculators buying and selling town blocks with champagne luncheons a necessary part of the business. Young squatters galloped around the town hurdling the creek in Elizabeth Street. These gentry wore whiskers, beards or moustaches, blue serge shirts, cabbage tree hats, belts supporting leather pouches, and, to complete the picture, breeches, Hessian boots and spurs. In the 'grog-houses' of Melbourne they hired their bullock-drivers, shepherds and watchmen, often expiring convicts from Tasmania.

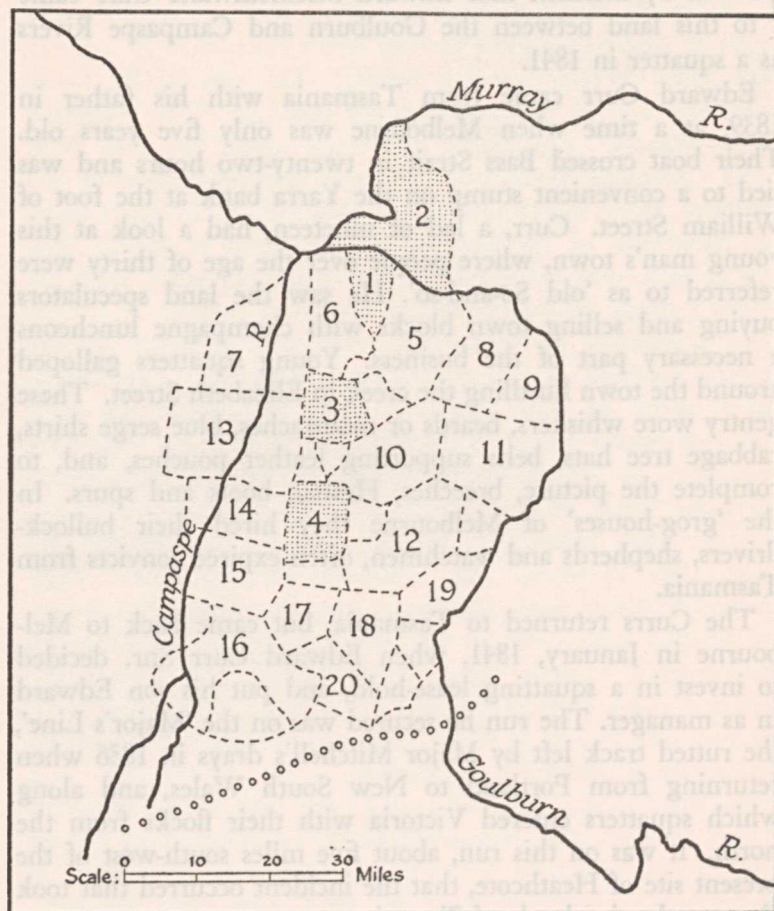
The Currens returned to Tasmania, but came back to Melbourne in January, 1841, when Edward Curr Snr. decided to invest in a squatting lease-hold, and put his son Edward in as manager. The run he secured was on the 'Major's Line', the rutted track left by Major Mitchell's drays in 1836 when returning from Portland to New South Wales, and along which squatters entered Victoria with their flocks from the north. It was on this run, about five miles south-west of the present site of Heathcote, that the incident occurred that took Curr to the dry lands of Tongala.

Young Edward Curr had great trouble on his 'Major's Line' run. He was inexperienced 'never having, in fact, seen a station, or counted a flock of sheep'. The sheep were scabby and in poor condition, and the run was neither well-grassed nor well-watered. To add to his troubles his team of bullocks strayed, still wearing the yokes on their necks,

## SQUATTER AND SELECTOR AT TONGALA

and he was left without transport for supplies. A passing trooper reported having seen them on Wyuna, a cattle station on the Goulburn, and Curr rode up there with his bullock driver.

### THE SQUATTERS' RUNS IN THE 1840's.



EDWARD CURR'S RUNS     
  THE 'MAJOR'S LINE'

#### THE RUNS:

- |                     |                    |                     |
|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Tongala          | 2. Lower Moira     | 3. Coragorag        |
| 4. Colbinabbin      | 5. Wyuna           | 6. Cornelia Creek   |
| 7. Restdown Plains  | 8. St. Germain's   | 9. Ardpatrick       |
| 10. Wanalta         | 11. Toolamba       | 12. Waranga         |
| 13. Burnewang       | 14. Campaspe River | 15. Mount Pleasant  |
| 16. Campaspe Plains | 17. Mount Campbell | 18. Compton's Creek |
| 19. Baillieston     | 20. Major's Line   |                     |

—After A. S. Kenyon 1932.

Curr's misfortune in losing his bullocks proved to be a blessing. A Wyuna stockman told him that there was good unoccupied land nearby. Liking the country, Curr decided to apply for a squatter's run there.

In the 1840's, the method of obtaining a squatter's run on unoccupied land was a simple one. He had first to find such land, and then make application to a Commissioner of Crown Lands for a 'licence to depasture' his flocks. This was granted on the payment of a yearly fee of £10, and a half-penny a head each half year for the sheep he had on the run. Edward Curr applied for an area of fifty square miles to the north-west of M. J. Scobie's run at Wyuna. He gave the name of Tongala to his new run.

Curr arrived at Tongala after a journey of ten days in July, 1841, and 'pitched his tarpaulin' on a little plain near the Goulburn, and watered his sheep for the first time at that stream. His Tongala run occupied 26,000 acres, a little less than the fifty square miles that he had originally applied for. It was bounded on the south-east by Scobie's Wyuna cattle run of 102,000 acres, and on the west by Patrick O'Dea's Cornelia Creek run of 58,000 acres, and on the north by the Goulburn River, on the banks of which were the homesteads of both the Tongala and Wyuna runs.

During the following years, with brothers returning from school in England, Edward Curr added to his original Tongala run those of Colbinabbin, Coragorag and Moira, using the four runs as seasons dictated for the pasturing of his flocks.

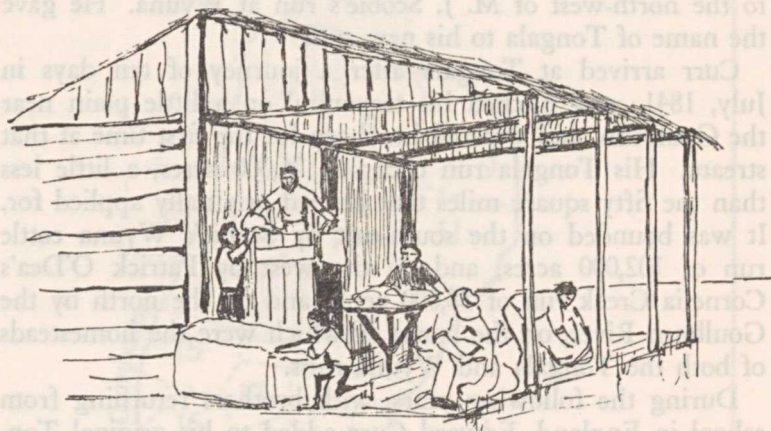
### Curr's Homestead

THE first homestead erected by Curr and his men at Tongala was simple. Three log huts were built for master and men, and a post and rail fence\* was thrown round a bend in the river to enclose the horses and bullocks. A primitive sheep-wash was constructed, and a shearing shed of bark about twenty-five feet by twelve, with a wool-press of split stuff outside it.

\* The Landmark booklet *Fencing Australia*, by Helen Palmer, describes a 'post and rail fence' and the 'folding of sheep'.

As time went by, another paddock away from the river was fenced as a home paddock. No other fence was erected on the Tongala run, the sheep being herded by shepherds in flocks of some hundreds and folded at night in folds of hurdles, to be watched over by a watchman.

With the addition of new runs, a second head-station was established at Colbinabbin, and another on the Moira run, managed by Edward Curr's brothers. As well they built a comfortable hut at Gargarro (Girgarre) where they could live when busy on the Coragorag run.



One thing that distinguished Curr's home was the presence of books. Edward Curr had been educated in England and France, and was a great reader and writer, keenly interested in nature, wild-life and the aborigines. Curr loved the Goulburn, as anyone who is familiar with it in these parts, as a contrast to the hot, dry neighbourhood, is likely to do. His recreations were canoeing, shooting and swimming on the river. If he were able to take a holiday he did not, in the usual fashion of his day, go to Melbourne but, with a stockman, or a visiting brother, as companion, into the unsettled country towards Swan Hill. These areas, still teeming with bird life, interested Curr both as a hunter and a lover of nature.

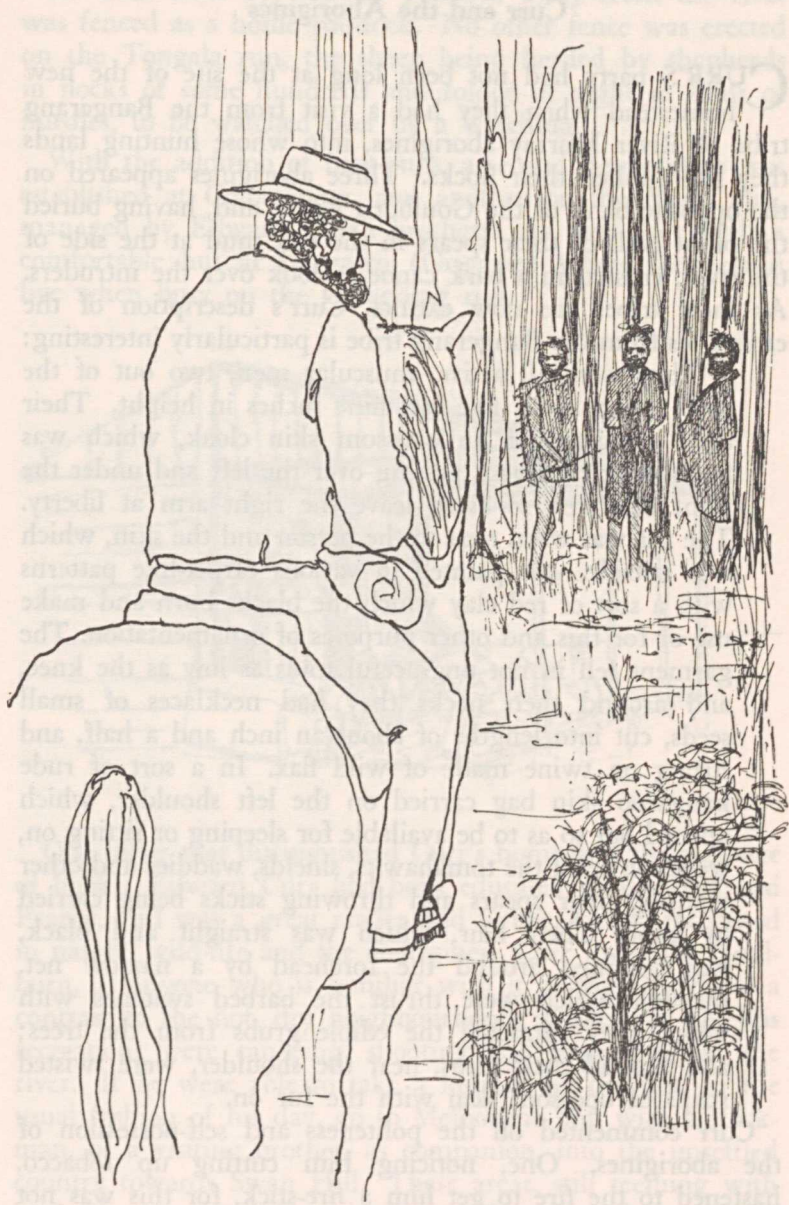
## Curr and the Aborigines

CURR'S party had not been long at the site of the new homestead when they had a visit from the Bangerang tribe of River Murray aborigines, into whose hunting lands they had pushed their flocks. Three aborigines appeared on the opposite bank of the Goulburn River, and, having buried the blunt ends of their spears in the soft mud at the side of the river, crossed in a bark canoe to look over the intruders. As these tribes are now extinct, Curr's description of the emissaries from the Bangerang tribe is particularly interesting:

'They were all active, muscular men, two out of the three being about five feet nine inches in height. Their dress consisted of an opossum skin cloak, which was fastened at the chest, passing over the left and under the right shoulder, so as to leave the right arm at liberty. The fur was worn next to the person and the skin, which was outside, was painted in various carpet-like patterns with a sort of red clay which the blacks burn and make use of for this and other purposes of ornamentation. The garment fell in not ungraceful folds as low as the knee, and around their necks they had necklaces of small seeds, cut into lengths of about an inch and a half, and strung on twine made of wild flax. In a sort of rude kangaroo skin bag carried on the left shoulder, which opened out so as to be available for sleeping or sitting on, were conveyed the tomahawks, shields, waddies and other utensils; their spears and throwing sticks being carried by hand. Their hair, which was straight and black, was confined around the forehead by a narrow net, through which were thrust the barbed switches with which they extracted the edible grubs from the trees; and around their arms, near the shoulder, were twisted strips of opossum skin with the fur on.'

Curr commented on the politeness and self-possession of the aborigines. One, noticing him cutting up tobacco, hastened to the fire to get him a fire-stick, for this was not their first contact with the white man. Curr, unlike many squatters and station-hands, generally championed the natives.

SQUATTER AND SELECTOR AT TONGALA



In all parts of Australia where the natives resisted the occupation of their tribal lands, the squatters, more from self-interest than the enjoyment of hurting, carried out wanton slayings and 'black drives' of which there are many published accounts. In an unpublished diary of a Murrumbidgee squatter friend of Sir Charles Nicholson, and later pioneer Queensland squatter and Parliamentarian is the following entry. The year is 1846, the locality the Riverina.

'Took my wool to Melbourne via Deniliquin or the 'Wool Shed' for the first time about the end of the year. Lost my only two horses and had my first experience after blacks who had robbed Moss' drays down the Murray. Thought it great fun.'

The difference of Edward Curr's feeling towards the aborigines is shown by his anger against a Wyuna stockman who, caught on his own by a native and not being able to make him understand an order to go away, fired two shots, one passing through the aborigine's beard, and the other wounding him in the arm.

Edward Curr's aborigines were often near his homestead, particularly while they had the run of the Moira area, rich in fish and game. They made themselves useful about the homestead. In the early days their bark canoes, cut from massive red-gums, were used to move Curr's flocks across the Goulburn, legs tied, six to a load, with an aborigine pilot paddling the craft.

Curr's Moira run, while still only lightly grazed, was a stronghold of the blacks. But, in addition to animal life and huge forests of reeds and red-gum, it had couch grass and young reeds in the clearings suitable for sheep fodder. Thirty-five years later, Curr was to lament the passing of the old Moira that he knew in the Summer of early 1843:

'Since that day, blacks, reeds and bell-birds are gone. Of the first, scarce one remains; his cooey is heard no more in these parts; whilst the old forest itself is fast being converted by steam saw-mills into railway sleepers.'

## How Curr used the Land

THIS piece of land between the Campaspe and Goulburn Rivers in northern Victoria had only a few occupiers in the squatting period. These squatters seldom engaged in any cultivation, and their sole aim was to make the best use of the land for grazing sheep and cattle, aided by shepherds and other station hands. The land itself was unkind to the squatters, and was not in a good grazing area. It was subject to drought and flood. Curr was burdened with the additional difficulty of occupying rather straggling runs, as can be seen from Kenyon's map, and it was necessary at some part of the year to have sheep on all parts of it to prove occupancy, for if a squatter were not using the land for which he held a squatting licence he could lose it.

The system worked out by the Currs to overcome natural difficulties and at the same time to prove occupancy was described by Edward:

'During the Winter months our sheep were fed principally on the undulating plains at and near Coragorag; when the water had dried up in that country, which, in an average year would be in September, they were driven to Tongala, shorn, swum over the Goulburn, and placed at Madowla, Wolola, Parma and other places. In November or December, they would again be moved to the Moira country, where they remained until the first frost withered the couch grass, which was generally in April, after which they returned to Wolola, Tongala, Bunderi, etc., in expectancy of the rain which was to make the Coragorag, Namerong and Ullumbubil country fit for that Winter's run. In this way, a constant change was going on. As regards Colbinabbin, we generally kept the weaners there the year round, as they were more easily shepherded, and did best on the plains.'

Despite careful organization of land use, and economies with shepherds, and in the running of the homesteads, the Currs did not find their runs highly profitable and when Edward Curr Snr. died in 1850 his widow sold up the runs,

and E. M. Curr left in 1851 for a visit to Europe and the Middle East. He returned to Victoria in 1862 as an inspector of sheep.

The runs in the dry country were occupied by various squatters before being thrown open for selection. The story of pastoral occupancy of Curr's and neighbouring runs is told in the records held in the archives of the Victorian Lands and Survey Department, Melbourne, from which the following extracts were taken:

**Tongala** 26,000 acres E. Curr  
 Dec 1852 Murphy and Looker  
 Feb 1855 Jas Murphy  
 May 1857 Patrick O'Dea  
 Oct 1869 Colonial Bank  
 Oct 1873 Simmie, Fraser and Craig  
 1878 FORFEITED

**Cornelia Creek** 58,000 acres Patrick O'Dea  
 1869 Colonial Bank  
 1873 Simmie, Fraser and Craig  
 Jan 1875 FORFEITED

**Coragorag** Ed. Curr  
 Dec 1852 Murphy and Looker  
 Feb 1855 Jas Murphy  
 May 1857 John Winter  
 Sep 1872 The Aust. Mortgage Land and Finance Coy.  
 Oct 1873 Bank of N.S.W.  
 Jul 1875 FORFEITED  
 (Govt. Gazette p. 1385 28/7/75)

**Wyuna** 102,000 acres M. J. Scobie  
 Scobie and Mathieson  
 James Mathieson  
 Aug 1855 Wm Naunton Waller  
 Apr 1862 Wm Sinclair  
 Jul 1869 Wilson, McBain and Crosbie  
 Jul 1871 Wm Wilson, J. McBain  
 Jan 1872 Jas McBain  
 May 1883 John Finlay  
 (grazing licence)

SQUATTER AND SELECTOR AT TONGALA

Colbinabbin Ed. Curr  
 Dec 1852 Murphy and Looker  
 Feb 1855 Jas Murphy  
 May 1857 John Winter  
 Dec 1872 FORFEITED  
 (Govt. Gazette 27 Dec. 1872)

Moira Lower Ed. Curr  
 Dec 1852 Murphy and Looker  
 Feb 1855 Jas Murphy  
 Jul 1859 Bury and Cheyne  
 Oct 1862 Robt Hill Kinnear  
 Sep 1882 H. T. Littlewood  
 (Grazing licence 11958)

## THE SELECTORS AND THE LAND

### How Edward and James Pankhurst, the Selectors, came to Tongala

FOR the first time, this land was to feel the plough when the squatters' runs were thrown open for selection. Land Acts were passed in New South Wales and Victoria enabling farmers, as distinct from sheep or cattle graziers, to 'select' small areas of land to use for intensive farming like crop-growing or dairying. To get land under the 1869 Victorian Act, a would-be selector had to make application to a Local Land Board for an area not greater than 320 acres. He had to prove to the Board that he was not disqualified by previous selection of land elsewhere, and had to undertake to live on his selection and improve it by fencing and farming. He bought the selection on rent terms, paying so much each three months until the selection was paid for.

'Dummying' or 'boss-cockyism' was a trick used by the squatters to hold their land. It was the practice of putting employees of the run, or even people living at a distance, on the land as 'selectors'. The squatter would fence these 'selections' to meet the requirements of the law, and then would graze his sheep on them. One of the Cornelia Creek 'dummies' was a carpenter living in Melbourne, who had never resided on his 'selection'. Of the others, two were employees of the squatter, one was a relative. Yet another, a former partner of one of the joint occupiers of the run 'wanted a shooting area'.

The refusal of rents by the Commissioner of Lands and Survey automatically threw the runs open for selection by selectors who would farm the land, except for the homestead area which the squatter could obtain.

The Land Acts of 1865 and 1869 transformed the land between the Goulburn and the Campaspe from wide fenceless runs to small fenced farms which first grew wheat and barley, and later were used for other purposes like dairy farming, fruit growing, vineyards, and lamb raising.

Several events in the history of the Colony of Victoria made this development possible. The gold rushes had greatly increased Victoria's population so the need for foods like bread and flour increased. The gold rushes caused many people who could not find gold to seek other occupations and farming and farm labouring were two of these. Many people who did not have land, particularly in worked-out gold fields, wanted land. The Victorian Government wanted wheat to be exported to Britain and railways to inland Victoria enabled wheat to be hauled over the Dividing Range at lowered transport costs. Selection of land within reach of railways like those to Horsham, Echuca and Benalla proceeded quickly when the Government made land available.

The Government of the Colony of Victoria was held up in making land available before the 1860's and 1870's for two main reasons. One was that the squatters were very prominent in Parliament and wanted to keep their land. Secondly, a New South Wales Order-in-Council in 1847, before the gold rushes, and when Victoria was part of New South Wales, gave squatters the right to apply for a fourteen-year lease on their land and hold it for grazing for that period. Edward Curr made such an application on March 20, 1848, for all his runs. Though no actual leases were issued under this Order, the Victorian Government after separation from New South Wales largely observed the spirit of the Order.

If we look back to the table showing the story of the pastoral occupancy of Curr's and neighbouring runs, and glance through the names of the various occupiers we come in most cases to the word FORFEITED, sometimes with a reference to the entry in the Government Gazette. The word FORFEITED means one of three things. The squatter may have abandoned his run, or he may not have paid his rent, or the Government may have thrown his land open for selection by farmers.

By 1873, a good deal of land had been selected for farming along the Bendigo-Echuca railway line and along the Goulburn River, as can be seen by the map opposite.

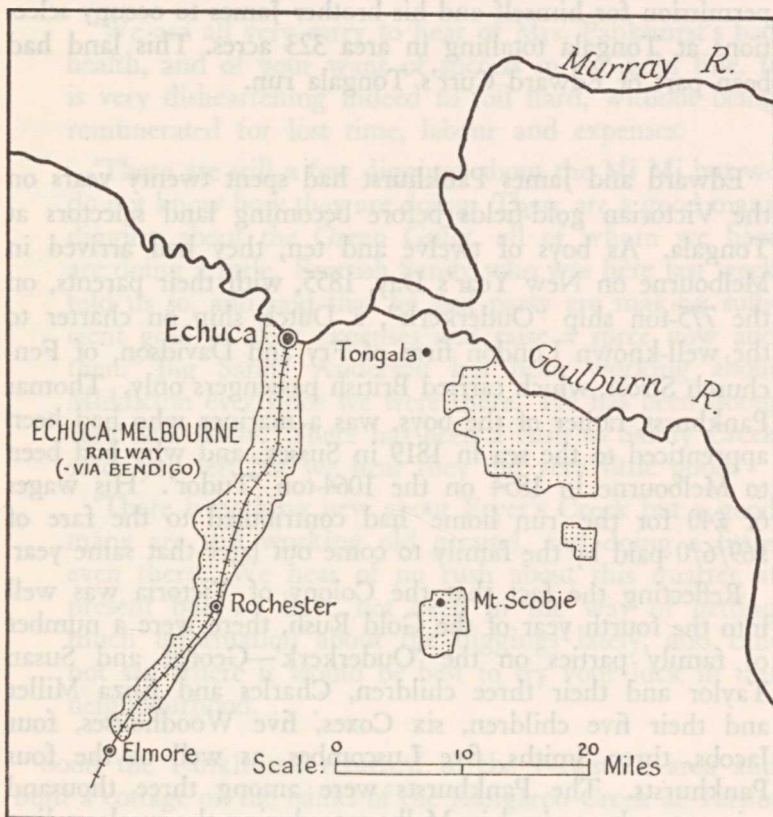
Early in 1874, the Commissioner of Lands and Survey

THE SELECTORS AND THE LAND

refused to renew the pastoral licences of the Cornelia Creek and Tongala runs. The Assistant Surveyor-General wrote:

‘The rents of Cornelia Creek and Tongala runs were refused on my recommendation in consequence of information received whilst inspecting in the Echuca district last December.’

LAND SOLD TO SELECTORS AT SEPTEMBER 1, 1873.



Land sold is close to the Echuca-Bendigo-Melbourne railway and the Campaspe River, and close to the Goulburn River.

After Dept. of Lands and Survey,  
Melbourne, May, 1874.

His confidential report was not included in the papers, but as the next year a Special Court of Investigation under Judge Bindon found extensive ‘dummying’ being practised at

Cornelia Creek, as well as by bank managers holding mortgages on other Echuca Shire runs, it is evident that this practice caused the refusal of rents. News of the refusal to accept rents triggered off a land rush to Echuca Shire in 1874, and among those who applied for land was Edward Thomas Pankhurst, a single man, who appeared before the Local Land Board at Echuca on August 5, 1874, and received permission for himself and his brother James to occupy selections at Tongala totalling in area 323 acres. This land had been part of Edward Curr's Tongala run.

Edward and James Pankhurst had spent twenty years on the Victorian gold-fields before becoming land selectors at Tongala. As boys of twelve and ten, they had arrived in Melbourne on New Year's Day, 1855, with their parents, on the 775-ton ship "Ouderkerk", a Dutch ship on charter to the well-known London firm of Fry and Davidson, of Fenchurch Street, which carried British passengers only. Thomas Pankhurst, father of the boys, was a mariner who had been apprenticed to the sea in 1819 in Sussex, and who had been to Melbourne in 1854 on the 1064-ton 'Tudor'. His wages of £40 for the 'run home' had contributed to the fare of £69/6/0 paid by the family to come out later that same year.

Reflecting the fact that the Colony of Victoria was well into the fourth year of the Gold Rush, there were a number of family parties on the 'Ouderkerk'—George and Susan Taylor and their three children, Charles and Eliza Miller and their five children, six Coxes, five Woodhouses, four Jacobs, three Smiths, five Luscombes, as well as the four Pankhursts. The Pankhursts were among three thousand migrants who arrived in Melbourne during the week ending in the New Year of 1855. The family went almost immediately to the Fryerstown gold-fields near Castlemaine, where, in 1856, James, then twelve years old, was a fully-fledged 'digger' with a parchment Miner's Right which cost £1 each year, and was on an equal footing with his father, mother and brother Edward as a gold-miner.

During their first three years in Australia, the Pankhursts had no permanent headquarters. As well as 'digging' at Fryerstown, they made excursions to the Mia Mia (Daylesford) and Middleton's Creek. In December, 1857, they were at Ararat, and received a letter from their friends, Cameron and Smith, who were farmers at Mirambi Farm, Newstead, near Castlemaine.

'We are all very sorry to hear of Mrs. Pankhurst's bad health, and of your want of success in the gold line. It is very disheartening indeed to toil hard, without being remunerated for lost time, labour and expenses.

'There are still a few diggings about the Mi Mi but we do not know how they are doing. There are a good many digging about the Green Gully, all of whom we hear are doing a little. Scottish Sandy who was here last week told us so, and said that he and party are making sufficient gold to clear expenses and raise a spree now and then. Big Sandy Anderson has been working about Middleton ever since we were there. He has been doing very well lately. There has been a rush to Sandy Creek since you left but we hear they did very little good.

'There is nothing new about Fryer's Creek but a good many are still working old ground, and doing a little, even there. We hear of no rush about this quarter at present but we have not been in the way of getting much information about the diggings lately, and cannot say where it would be best to try your luck in this neighbourhood. . . .'

Soon the Pankhursts returned to the Newstead area and built a cottage on the banks of the Kangaroo Creek at Tarilta which was to be their headquarters until they left the gold-fields to become land selectors at Tongala in 1874. Here they built up a wide group of friends and neighbours, including the Flockharts, Kidmans, Tembys, Atkinsons, Mackies, Wardells, Laitys, Lilfords, Captain Innes and his family, and many more. Some were to be mates of Edward when he went to the New Zealand gold rush in 1861. Others were to be

partners in tunnelling enterprises in Bald Hill and thereabouts. Some were to join the Pankhursts in the great land rush to Echuca and Tongala in 1874.

By 1861 the gold industry was in a depressed condition. The gold-fields population tended their cottage gardens, ran a few animals on the gold-fields commons, meantime working over old ground in the hope of a lucky 'strike'. During these depressed times came the New Zealand gold rush of 1861, and Edward Pankhurst, then aged 19, went there to try his luck. His father, mother and brother James remained at Tarilta.

On December 5th, 1861, the S.S. 'Oscar' of 459 tons sailed from Melbourne for Otago with 216 passengers, practically all of whom were men giving their occupation as miners. Edward Pankhurst wrote in his diary:

'George Kidman and myself started from Kangaroo Flat Dec. 2nd, 1861, for New Zealand with a wet day for travelling. Arrived at Kyneton the same night and got into Melbourne on the 3rd of December. Went to the Booking Office and got a steerage passage on the S.S. 'Oscar'. Sailed on the Thursday following viz. 5th of December arriving at Dunedin on the 11th of December. Stopped that night there. Started for the digins on the 12th of December, arriving on the 14th of December.

January 23rd. Bought new wooden pump for £3/10/0. Do. 25th. Went to work with the said pump in the afternoon; we had the luck to get it smashed, half the side of the puddock falling in on it.

Feb. 14th. Finding that we had too large a party to do anything we split up. Mackie by self, Sandy and John Strachan by themselves; George and myself together . . . Each took a share of the tools . . .

Feb. 23rd. Sold the cradle for £2, £1 each, pick sold 4/- shovel 2/-. Started down from the digins.

The 'Eureka' passage money £4/10/0, from the digins till on board 10/6. Sailed on the 28th of February arrived on 18th March. Got to Kangaroo the 20th.'

The Mackie in the above account is James Mackie, of Newstead and Sandy is Andrew Strachan. Bill Kidman, recently

living in Castlemaine, stated that his grandfather went to New Zealand with twenty pounds and was lucky to get back with twenty pence. Edward Pankhurst's detailed accounts of the journey bear this out. His total expenses, including passage money, 'tucker' and tools, were £34/8/3. Total income from the sale of gold was £10/14/4. Once again the gold-fields had failed to yield a fortune to the Pankhursts.

It may be wondered how a family could support itself for twenty years on the gold-fields. After following earlier rushes to alluvial diggings where work was surface work with dish and tub and cradle, later mining was done in shallow shafts, with the 'spoil' washed for gold traces. The final stage for the miner without capital for deep sinking and quartz crushing was tunnelling horizontally into the hills, carting out and washing the contents of the tunnel.

The year 1864 opened with Ann Pankhurst and her two sons in the cottage at Tarilta, growing carrots, peas, potatoes and other vegetables, raising hens and ducks, and running some pigs. Planting times of the vegetables were noted, and accounts showed the amounts spent on crushed wheat, pollard and bran for fattening the pigs. All these activities were supplementary to the main business of gold, with Edward in charge, as his father had died and was buried at Vaughan the previous year.

The tunnel commenced in 1864 was the first of a number of like enterprises continued by the Pankhurst's until they left the gold-fields to become land selectors. Gold won ranged from two to six ounces a month, not a very big return.

In March, 1867, Edward wrote to William Innes in Melbourne:

'We are not doing much in the tunnel yet, but I think it will pay. We have had two law-suits over it since Christmas but we are working pretty steady now. We got three ozs. last week out of a washing, so, if it continues, it will pay . . .

'Things are very dull here. The Company don't pay and they can't pay their men their wages. The Eldorado Company has not paid their men during three weeks so it is not very bright and the water-works are as bad.

## SQUATTER AND SELECTOR AT TONGALA

They're only giving 5/- per day and plenty of men for that. . . .'

By the early 1870's, the most resolute stay-puts on the gold-fields were beginning to become concerned, and in the lodges and church communities, thoughts were turning to new spheres of activity. The opening of the North Victorian lands to selection provided one way of escape from the diggings. Ann Pankhurst, now sixty years old, went with her two sons, Edward and James to Tongala in 1874.



'The farmers are setting off and going to the lands of Goshen and selling all that they don't require. . . .'

The reference to the Biblical land of plenty was made in a letter from Thomas Mackie, on the gold-fields at Newstead, to the Pankhursts soon after they took up their selection, and showed the great interest of the diggers and land-hungry small farmers in the new area of land selection.

'You say you have plenty of neighbours,' Mackie wrote. A number of friends of the Pankhursts from the Castlemaine district like the Innes and Lilford families had joined in the land rush, and other selectors, like the Griffiths boys, had come to Tongala from already established wheat areas at Toolamba, bringing with them teams and ploughs and experience in growing wheat.

The Land Officer for Echuca Shire had reported to the Commissioner for Lands and Survey in 1872:

'With the Land Act 1869 a great improvement in the seasons took place, the rainfall increased, the grass became abundant (sic!), steady and increased settlement took place, which has now amounted to a rush, and the cry is still they come.

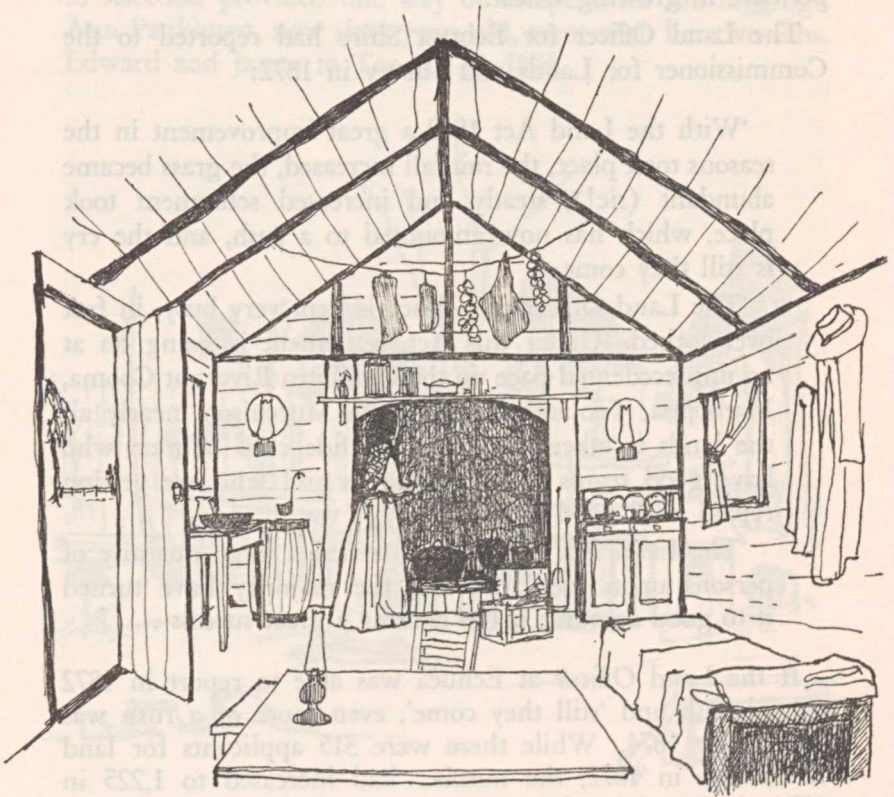
'The Land Officer in Echuca is kept very busy, in fact overworked. Under this Act, settlement is going on at an unprecedented pace up the Goulburn River; at Cooma, Maroopna, Toolambro and North Murchison, nearly all the lands is taken up by a bona-fide class of men who have good teams and implements and who are getting repaid with good crops.

'The Land Act of 1869 has settled a large quantity of persons upon the land, and the majority have turned it to good account; it has become a great success . . .'

If the Land Officer at Echuca was able to report in 1872 a land rush and 'still they come', even more of a rush was evident by 1874. While there were 315 applicants for land at Echuca in 1872, the number had increased to 1,225 in 1874, the Local Land Board was compelled to sit fortnightly instead of monthly, and the land surveyors were unable to keep up with the demands made on them. Not all these applications were recommended, but those who obtained land represented a considerable number and hundreds of thousands of acres of land. In the whole of Victoria in 1874, nearly two million acres of land were selected, the biggest acreage in any year of selection.

## SQUATTER AND SELECTOR AT TONGALA

Despite some malpractices under the Land Acts, a great number of genuine farmers had been enabled to settle. They were to start out on dry farms, but later stock and domestic water, and then full irrigation were to give the Goulburn Valley area the importance that it has today.



## Tasks and Problems of Selection

‘I THINK you and the boys are working too hard. Why! What a lot of work you have done! Two log huts, cleared thirty acres of ground, besides logs for fencing, and Edward away carting wheat! My word, you have been smart!’

So wrote Thomas Mackie to Ann Pankhurst, only eight months after the selection had been officially obtained.

The early jobs on the selection were of this nature—clearing land, building log fences, building the log-and-daub home-stead, ploughing the land, planting grain, reaping, threshing and disposing of crops.

One of the first two log huts to be built on the Pankhurst selection was for some time to be a kitchen, food store and sleeping place for the Pankhurst men; the other was a sleeping place for their mother. In the kitchen, the cast-iron camp-oven which had stood in the cottage at Tarilta was installed in a wide open fire-place lined with clay and, with coals below it and coals above, Ann Pankhurst baked crisp loaves of bread and roasted meat to feed the hungry pioneers. Pots and kettle hung from hooks above the open fire. The walls of the huts were made of slim gum saplings, stripped of their bark and morticed into one another, then coated with mud. The floor for many years was of earth, as had been the floors of the huts of the dry-country squatters, and the roof was of unlined shingles and bark, with beams across from which hung bacon, cheeses and other food. Later the inner walls of the huts were to be lined with hessian fixed to vertical slats and covered with stiff wall-paper.

As the trees were cut down, a log fence was thrown round the home area. Massive logs lay atop each other. Unlike the area to the north, across the Murray, where the bullock was the main beast of burden, the Tongala area was a horse area, and the horse helped in pulling out stumps, drawing the plough, and in snigging logs to their place for use round the house or for fences. Feeding and watering the horses for heavy work was a regular daily task.

### SQUATTER AND SELECTOR AT TONGALA

It was the problem of water, noticed in this area in the time of Edward Curr, which taxed the patience and resources of the wheat-growing pioneers. An early necessity



was to excavate tanks, or dams as they are now known in the area, but in dry periods the tanks too were empty. There remained then two sources of water for the Pankhursts—the Goulburn River, distant some miles due north through the bush, or the Tissicka Dam, on the Wyuna grazing lease-hold.

This dam had been sunk some years earlier, and was an enlargement of an existing water-hole, which had been a camping spot for aborigines, as is borne out by the number of 'blackfellow ovens' in its neighbourhood. There was a time when the farmers went to Tissicka to find the dam had been fenced, supposedly to keep out kangaroos. The alternative then for the law-abiding farmer was to get water from the Goulburn.

Getting water for man and beast was a full-time job in time of drought. Containers were either the more common casks, or square iron tanks holding from eighty to two hundred gallons. They were usually sledged to the source of water, though wheeled carts, with wheels at times cut from the trunk of a tree, were also used. At the river, a bucket hung from a block and tackle fixed to an overhanging tree, with a tail-rope enabling the bucket to be landed for emptying into the cask. On return to the farm all the animals would be thirsty, and there would be need for water in the house. The cask would soon be empty, so the farmer would go back the next day to re-fill it.



## SQUATTER AND SELECTOR AT TONGALA

That the water shortage was not merely confined to the height of Summer in those early years is shown by an entry in Edward Pankhurst's note-book:

'September the 1st, 1879. Crops looking well. Weather very dry, tanks empty. Country anxious for rain.

Ditto. 10 o'clock a.m. Rain and looks as if it would continue.'

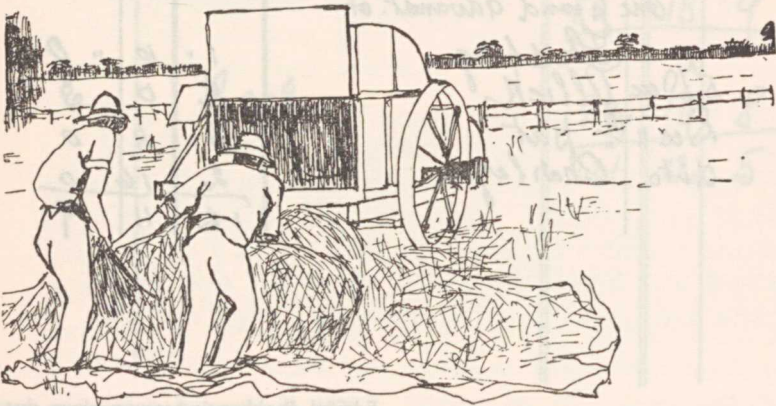
Another great difficulty of the area was transport. The railway from Bendigo to Echuca was completed in 1864, but the nearest railway stations for the Pankhursts were Rochester, distant twenty-three miles, and Echuca, distant nineteen miles, in both cases over primitive unformed tracks. The present railway from Toolamba to Echuca came then only as far as Tatura, and the continuation to Echuca was not opened until 1887.



The Pankhursts usually delivered their wheat to Echuca, but sometimes sought higher prices elsewhere. In 1878, Edward took some wheat to Rochester, making deliveries every second day. The deliveries were made by horse and dray, each load comprising thirty bags. The bags were bigger

than the present day three-bushel bags, as his loads were 133, 133½ and 130½ bushels respectively, an average of nearly four and a half bushels to the bag. The trip took over eight hours each way, including rests for the horses, and two days later the team moved off with another load. In that same year, the rest of the wheat sales were made to R. F. Scott in Echuca, and much the same demands were made on man and beast to get the wheat to that town to which a track passed quite close to the selection, along the present route of the Murray Valley Highway.

A third problem for the Pankhursts was that of harvesting. Man and beast worked long hours in planting and reaping the crops. In 1879, the Pankhursts sowed down sixteen and a half acres to English barley, and ninety acres to wheat. In that year sowing commenced on April 15 and was finished in the old paddock (wheat) on May 29, and in the new paddock by June 15. In 1880, sowing extended from April 12 to June 1. In 1879, barley reaping commenced on November 18, and threshing was completed by the end of December. The barley that year was sold in December and January, and wheat sales were made in January, February, March, August and September. Ten men, in addition to the two Pankhursts were employed in the reaping and threshing of the 1879 crop, though a primitive reaping machine had been bought in November, 1877.



SQUATTER AND SELECTOR AT TONGALA

Harvest Expenses		<del>1848</del>		
for 1848				
November	Commonst Cutting	22	17	6
18 <sup>th</sup>				
	Finisht 9 of December			
	Threshing	15	10	0
	& mens wages	36	12	6
1849				
November	18 <sup>th</sup> Commonst			
	Barley Cutting	1	19	6
	Threshing Barley			
	Mens Wages	1	12	0
	One pound advanst. on			
	Threshing	1	0	0
5 <sup>th</sup> Dec	Allick	2	0	0
Dec 11 <sup>th</sup>	pat	3	4	0
dito	Charley	2	16	0
		<u>12</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>9</u>

Edward Pankhurst's accounts show that many

THE SELECTORS AND THE LAND

1879

100m Mens wages

Brought for wages

Bill Atkin

Jim & John from Mchama

Jack Hewer

Jim

George Run

David Threshing  
Mens wages for

29 Dec

Peter Hart

ditto

Threshing

Bags

12	11	9
6	16	1
8	5	0
5	1	0
4	19	0
8	10	10
	15	0
10	10	0
1	10	0
22	16	0
80	15	9
20	16	8
161	12	5

men were employed in harvesting in 1879.

## SQUATTER AND SELECTOR AT TONGALA

Methods of both planting and harvesting were by hand, helped only a little by machines. In these years, when the demand for factory workers was still limited, and the demand for workers by the boom in rail construction was over, casual labour was available for employment on farms. McKay's labour-saving harvester was not yet invented. For over twenty years the method of harvesting was in three stages. First, the heads of grain were pulled from the stalks with a primitive machine. Then these heads were threshed, using a flail, on a large carpet made of bags sewn together. (Contract threshers with a machine later eliminated this work.) Finally, the grain and chaff were shovelled by large wooden shovels into a winnower, turned by hand, which separated the grain from the chaff, and led the grain into bags. James Pankhurst was the expert on the winnower.



The Pankhursts were not opposed to mechanical assistance. The accepted way of wheat farming at the time was the one they used. Their accounts between 1874 and 1880 show a gradual mechanization. Their purchases included a reaping machine, a bellows for their own smith's shop, a new plough, medium and heavy harrows, a winnower, new dray and harness, and repairs by a blacksmith to plough and rake.

## Prosperous Times

TONGALA country is dry country. In the days of the squatters, no fortunes were made by its use. Sheep produced only two to three pounds of wool annually. Squatters did not cling to their runs and establish great grazing families, as did many squatters in the Western District of Victoria, and in the Riverina and Central New South Wales. Yet, when the selectors came to the land, often with no money and few tools and implements, they were able to plough it, plant it, and reap profitable crops.

In the 1870's and 1880's the secret of the successes shown on this land was wheat, and to a lesser extent, English barley. The raw land, manured only by sheep and wild-life and the leaves and bark of trees, produced, except in the drought years of 1876, 1881 and 1888, a succession of good crops at a time when grain prices were highly profitable. Within Victoria and overseas, markets had grown. Between 1871 and 1881, the number of factory workers in Victoria increased from nearly twenty thousand to over forty-three thousand, and Melbourne and some country towns had developing industries. The factory workers, and thousands of others associated with the distribution of their products, swelled the home demand for wheaten flour and barley. In the export field, Australia was starting to become a competitor for Canada and America in the British wheat market.

The land selectors planted their crops, and from their earnings bought their selections from the Crown on rental terms.

The credit side of the Pankhurst accounts in those early years reflect the general prosperity of the times for the hard-working selectors. The 1877 yield of wheat was 364 bags from eighty acres, about  $21\frac{1}{2}$  bushels to the acre, which sold at 5/- to  $5\frac{1}{3}$  a bushel. In 1879, the wheat yield from ninety acres was over 24 bushels to the acre, while  $16\frac{1}{2}$  acres of barley yielded over 33 bushels to the acre which sold at 5/- to  $5\frac{1}{2}$  a bushel. Wheat varied from  $3\frac{1}{10\frac{1}{2}}$  to  $4\frac{1}{2\frac{1}{2}}$  a bushel, a lower, but economic price. Total income in 1879 from just over

SQUATTER AND SELECTOR AT TONGALA

one hundred acres of grain crops was £517/2/3, an extremely good return. Fifty acres of barley in 1880 yielded just over thirty bushels to the acre, though the price of barley was round 3/2 and that of wheat round 3/6. In February, 1882, £200 was able to be placed on interest-bearing fixed deposit, and with cheques for £464 in early 1884, and return of £220/9/6 fixed deposit with interest, £449/18/3 was able to be paid as balance of the purchase price of the selection, less than ten years after the Pankhursts had first occupied it.

Harvest 1877	Number of
from 86 acres	Bags
Small Wheat	36 1/2
	<u>20</u>
	56 1/2
Harvest 1878	
from 86 Acres	
of Wheat	142
Number the 20 <sup>th</sup> 1879	
English Barley	
from 16 1/2 acres	123
December 20 <sup>th</sup> first of 1880	
Amount of Wheat	
from 90 acres	480
	<u>611</u>

On March 7, 1883, Edward Pankhurst married Margaret Ann Harrington at Taripta, with his brother James as a witness. His mother Ann, after pioneering on both the gold-fields and the land selection, had died and was buried at Tongala. There were nine children of Edward's marriage and by 1914, with this large family, including six boys, he held free of encumbrances many hundreds of acres of land built from nothing. As well as the original selection, Tissicka, 'Connor's', 'Read's' and 'Vicker's' had been added. With a large family work-force, the Pankhursts had spread into dairying, fodders and sheep, as well as the original grain-growing.

Government interest in the area was being shown. In 1882 the United Echuca and Waranga Waterworks Trust was established to bring stock and domestic water to Tongala, and in 1908 work commenced on extending this limited water supply to full-scale irrigation.

## THE SELECTIONS IN THE 'NINETIES

THE 1890's throughout the world included several years of very depressed and very difficult conditions, with low prices for primary products, extensive unemployment, bank failures and failures of many farmers.

As a result of these conditions, and because stock and domestic water was gradually becoming available, the land between the Goulburn and Campaspe Rivers was being used by the farmers in ways different from those of the earlier years. The Waterworks Trusts provided water for many areas to fill tanks and dams for watering man and beast, but not to irrigate the land, though it was used for this purpose on a few thousand acres. Wheat and barley were still staple crops, but with the exhaustion of the minerals in the soil grazing was returning to areas which could no longer be successfully cultivated. Experiments were being made to find new crops and products suited to the area, and the Pankhursts were active experimenters on their land. Animals were being kept for wool, milk and meat.

Some idea of the conditions of the times and the new ventures being tried by the Pankhursts can be gathered from many letters written by James Pankhurst in London to his brother in Tongala from 1893 till his death in 1897. Edward Pankhurst's younger brother and partner sailed for England on June 15, 1893, under his mother's maiden name of Chapman, following disagreement with his wife. In London, he lived with relatives, receiving regular cheques from his brother at Tongala. He did not seek employment, but studied the English and Australian papers regularly, made short tours, and wrote frequently to his brother and sister-in-law discussing problems of the farms. Extracts from these letters, leaving out personal matters, are reproduced below in chronological rather than subject order. They throw some light on farming and land use in the Goulburn Valley in the period covered.

1893

*September 22nd* The harvest will soon be on and I often think how you will manage without me at the winnower to look after the corn and sow up the bags.

*October 3rd* There has been large meetings of the unemployed and the mounted police is called out in readiness in case of an outbreak. Employment is scarce and provisions is dear here. Beef is from one shilling to fourteenpence and mutton tenpence to elevenpence a pound, coal two shillings an hundredweight and everything proportionately dear. I do not know what the starving poor will do this winter if it is severe . . . I am very pleased to hear the season has been so favourable and the crops are so good.

*November 3rd* I am truly sorry the price of wheat is so low at present . . . I am very pleased that the lambs are coming alright and I hope you will have a good crop of corn. You did not say how the peas were growing . . .

1894

*March 23rd* I am very pleased to hear that you got a good price for the barley and I am sorry to hear that the wheat is low in price at present, but hope it will take a rise shortly. The price is very low here at present. I hear of twenty-five shillings a quarter (grain measure of eight bushels—HWF) being offered, which is very low. Farmers here cannot make a living at the price, but we must hope for better times to come. I think it would be best to put in more barley this year if you can manage it. You did well in sowing the amber cane as it is nice to have some green feed for the cows. How was it you made up your mind to try it? Did you get a good lambing last season? I suppose you are short of feed for the sheep as you have had such hot weather. Do you think it would pay to grow some more rye for sale as they use it for distilling purposes?

*September 20th* I am pleased to hear the crops are doing so well and the dairy is giving so much satisfaction. I am so sorry to hear that farm produce is so low in price. It must be very disheartening to you but we must hope for better times to come. I have heard that wheat

has been sold as low as seventeen shillings a quarter. In the Midland counties of England there is great complaints among the farmers at ruling prices of agricultural products. There is one thing they ought not to complain of—the price of beef which the charges are from ninepence to one shilling a pound, and English mutton from tenpence to elevenpence a pound. If you could only get half that price you would be satisfied. Good butter, fourteenpence a pound and eggs twelve and fourteen a shilling; fowls 2/6 each, pork 8d. a pound, but the rents and taxes are so heavy here that they have enough to do to make a living through there being so much foreign competition. I hear there are a number of farms in Essex thrown up, the farmers ruined. I have no doubt the land is getting quite exhausted and the farmers too poor to manure the land at the present price of grain . . .

1895

*February 28th* I am pleased to hear that you have finished the harvest. I have no doubt that it has been a trying season for you although you have good men. I am sorry to hear the prices are so low at present. Hope there will soon be a change for the farmers in Australia for it is a ruinous price for grain even suppose you had moderate crops and labour given in for nothing. I should think that if a few farmers were to form themselves into a company and partly malt the grain and crush it and feed pigs there would be plenty of merchants willing to ship it or buy it for shipment. I should think the only difficulty would be the curing of it to satisfy the public taste.

*May 18th* So you have made up your mind to sow lucerne seed? Which paddock are you thinking of sowing on? Has any more been trying it near the Goulburn? It is very necessary to have a paddock of green feed for the stock in the dry weather as a standby . . . I suppose your garden is one of the wonders of the district. I suppose there is not much sorghum sown in the district, and I have no doubt it has been a great benefit to you. It is most distressing to hear of so much suffering amongst stock through starvation. I am very pleased that your stock are in good condition.

*May 23rd* I hope the pig breeding will be a success. There is nothing like trying to do your best with the times, for the man who stands back is lost. There is no doubt it will help swell the returns.

*July 3rd* I see by the newspapers that he (Edward) had been attending a meeting at Tongala and that he had spoken very favourably on the green fodder crops for his cattle, and also he seconded a motion for petition to be sent to members of parliament for the district to assist them in establishing a factory for extraction of sugar or syrup from the cane.

*November 8th* I see by the papers that Finlay Brothers are starting leasing their land on the same system as they do in New South Wales, that is, on halves to the farmers. I think they will have the best of the bargain when you take into account the expense of preparing the land for cultivation.

*December 18th* Pleased to hear you have a new reaper and binder. It will be a big saver in time though I cannot say that I think so profitable in a pecuniary sense. . . . I am not surprised at the low price of wheat as there has been abundant harvests all over the world. The supply has been greater than the demand so that prices had to recede.

1896

*January 1st* Very sorry to hear the harvest likely to be bad this season . . . So you have started breeding horses again.

*April 23rd* Glad to hear some of the neighbours made a good cheque of their grain. They deserve credit for their pluck, for wheat has long been too low in price for farmers to make a profit. In fact they have been giving their time and labour and capital away to the speculator who has got rich at their expense. Such is life.

*August 6th* I hope this lucerne will be a success. Are you intending to sow it all down to lucerne for grazing or are you going to still continue to grow grain?

*September 4th* I am very sorry to hear that the weather has been so dry out there. It is I know very bad for the crops and also for the grass. It is bad for the poor farmers—a year's labour lost never to be replaced. It is hard to hear of men whom we thought were in a good position, busy workers of the soil, being sold out of house and home to have to begin the world afresh in their old age . . .

*October 29th* Sorry to hear the season is turning out so dry. Hope you will be able to irrigate all your crop this year. The price of wheat has fetched as high as forty shillings a quarter, and with the bad season in India and the prospects of a bad season in Australia I think it will pay the extra expense to irrigate the crop if sufficient water is available for the purpose.

James William Pankhurst was too ill in early 1897 to write further to his family and he died in London on March 3.

It will be noticed that the Pankhursts no longer rely on grain crops alone, but are breeding animals (dairy cattle, sheep and pigs), and growing for their animals the green fodders that were to become the standby of the farmers of the Goulburn Valley. The Trust channel passed in front of 'Barnsbury', the original selection, and some water from that supply was used for some of the crops discussed in the letters. Lucerne was grown in a sixty-acre paddock, which is now the irrigated dairy farm of Maurice Watson. Much more land than the original selection was used for dairying and sheep raising, and some of the lands held by selectors unable to withstand the depression and drought of the 'nineties had passed into the hands of the Pankhurst family, making possible the wide variety of farming activities that they practised.

A son of Edward Pankhurst, and two of his grandsons today own, occupy and work irrigated grazing properties at Tongala within two miles of his original 1874 selection, which has passed into other hands. On these properties, with the aid of liberal irrigation water rights, they fatten sheep

THE SELECTIONS IN THE 'NINETIES

and cattle and grow pastures for their animals on land where the pioneer selectors had grown field peas, wheat and barley, and where Edward Curr's shepherds before that had tended his flocks.

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Documents, diaries, accounts and note-books of the Pankhurst family.

(Acknowledgment is made of the kindness of Mr. J. W. Pankhurst, of "Holmwood", Tongala, for permitting access to family documents)

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## RESEARCH AND PROJECT

1. Find out the ways the land on which your home or school is situated have been used since white men first came to it. See if you can use some or all of the kinds of sources of information used by the writer of this 'Landmark' booklet.
2. If you would like to, write the story of the piece of land on which you live or on which your school is situated.
3. In what other parts of Australia did land selectors take over squatters' land to grow wheat, or for other types of farming?





# AUSTRALIAN LANDMARKS

AUSTRALIAN LANDMARKS

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