

East of Shepparton Historical Review



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CONVERSIONS

Area

1 acre = 0.405 ha

1 square mile = 2.59 km

Measures

1 inch (in) = 2.54 cm

1 foot (ft) = 0.30 m

1 yard (yd) = 0.91 m

1 chain (ch) = 20.11 m

1 mile = 1.61 km

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

We, Greater Shepparton City Council, acknowledge the Yorta Yorta Peoples of the land which now comprises Greater Shepparton, we pay our respect to their tribal elders, we celebrate their continuing culture and we acknowledge the memory of their ancestors.

INTRODUCTION

The East of Shepparton Historical Review has been prepared as background to the historical development of Shepparton East in general, with particular reference to the area designated as the Shepparton South East Growth Corridor area. The History forms part of the background report for the proposed Victorian Planning Authority (VPA) Amendment and is intended to provide information as to the settlement patterns found at Shepparton East, and to provide evidence for the proposed inclusion of five new Heritage Overlays into the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay.

The Shepparton South East Growth Corridor is located within the City of Greater Shepparton Council area and is approximately 195km north-east of Melbourne. The aim of this project is to facilitate the growth of the Shepparton South East Growth Corridor as one of four key residential growth corridors in the Shepparton-Mooroopna urban area.

ABORIGINAL CULTURAL HERITAGE

A report was commissioned by Hansen Partnership Pty Ltd on behalf of the Greater Shepparton City Council to review the Aboriginal and historic cultural heritage of the area and the potential impact the proposed activity may have on known and potential cultural heritage values. This was undertaken by Tardis Enterprises Pty Ltd (August 2009) and this report¹ provides a background and preliminary management recommendations regarding the mitigation of possible impact to heritage values and obligations under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* and *The Heritage Act 2017*.

¹ Tardis Enterprises, *Shepparton south east growth corridor framework plan background reports, working paper 4, cultural heritage* (August 2009)

EXPLORATION

Unlike areas such as the Western District, European settlement in the Shepparton area received little direct impetus from early European exploration of the Port Phillip District, as Victoria was known. Early settlers in Port Phillip, particularly overlanders from north of the Murray River, tended to follow the documented routes of the early explorers Major Mitchell or Hume and Hovell. Most early European explorers of the district travelled wide of the Shepparton area, in fact wide of the Goulburn Valley.

Early overlanders Hamilton Hume and William Hovell, commissioned by the New South Wales Governor to locate grazing land south of the areas known to the Sydney colony, had passed to the east of Benalla on both outward and return journeys in 1824-25. Surveyor-General Major Mitchell, returning from the Western District and Portland in his third expedition, had crossed the Goulburn River on 8 October 1836 at the Deegay Ponds (the area later named Mitchellstown), then moved north to Nagambie from where his expedition travelled north-east to the Violet Town, Benalla, Wangaratta and Rutherglen areas. However, when near Benalla, Mitchell had noted a low group of hills to the north, and some have conjectured that these were the Dookie hills, and that the rise he named Mt Darwin on his map of 1838 may have been Mt Major near Dookie.²

Closer to the Shepparton area, Joseph Hawdon and Charles Bonney, pioneering the overlanding of stock to Adelaide, had travelled along the west side of the Goulburn River from Mitchellstown (the negotiable crossing place at that location known from Mitchell's journey) to the junction of the Murray in January 1838. Driving a mob of 300-400 cattle which Hawdon had brought from Howlong near Albury via the Ovens River, along with around 1200 sheep Bonney had waiting at Mitchellstown, the party crossed the Goulburn River on 17 January, and on 20 January, on the west of the river, they 'commenced the most serious part of our journey, entering upon entirely new country, hitherto untrodden by the foot of civilised man'.³ Generally following a course due north, often close to lagoons associated with the river, sometimes in plains country away from the river, they reached the Murray on 29 January 1838 and followed that river to South Australia. It is unclear whether any of this route was ever utilised by pastoralists as the 'Major's Line' had been. Did the impressions of the drays remain imprinted in the lagoon lands, for example? Did the earliest pastoralists on the lower Goulburn, the elusive Manton brothers, find or follow any of Hawdon and Bonney's tracks? There is no mention of such in the writings of Edward Curr, who came to the Tongala run three years later and who generally travelled from his Tongala pastoral station to Melbourne from station to station on the west side of the Goulburn River.

² Dookie Centenary Committee Inc, *Dookie: the Years to 1988*, Shepparton, p 14

³ Joseph Hawdon, 'The journal of a journey from New South Wales to Adelaide, the capital of South Australia, performed in 1838', 1952 edition, online, p 13

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015068604050&view=1up&seq=11>
accessed 15/5/2023

SQUATTERS

The first change in the appearance and land use of the area east of Shepparton and the wider Goulburn Valley came with the European would-be pastoralists. As in the wider area, there are few extant sites associated with pastoralism in the area east of Shepparton.

Pastoralism was conducted, particularly in the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s, in a spirit of free-wheeling, untrammelled free enterprise, with the development of a powerful class of squatters who with their parliamentary representatives ensured that land alienation to other groups in society was limited for a considerable period. It was only when, after a series of largely unsuccessful attempts were made to open up land for goldminers and their sons and for farmers and farm labourers wanting fresh lands (the succession of Land Acts of 1860, 1862 and 1865), that this domination was broken by the Land Act of 1869.

The history of pastoralism in the lower Goulburn Valley, particularly that of the Tallygaroopna run, along with some details of the establishment of the township of Shepparton, is currently (2023) being re-appraised and re-written due to ground-breaking and painstaking research conducted over the past decade by Morris Bowey. In his as yet unpublished manuscript,⁴ Bowey upends much of the accepted history of the squatting period in the Goulburn Valley including the area east of Shepparton, and provides a new narrative of pastoralism. Much of the following derives from Bowey's work.

⁴ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' unpublished manuscript, 2019.

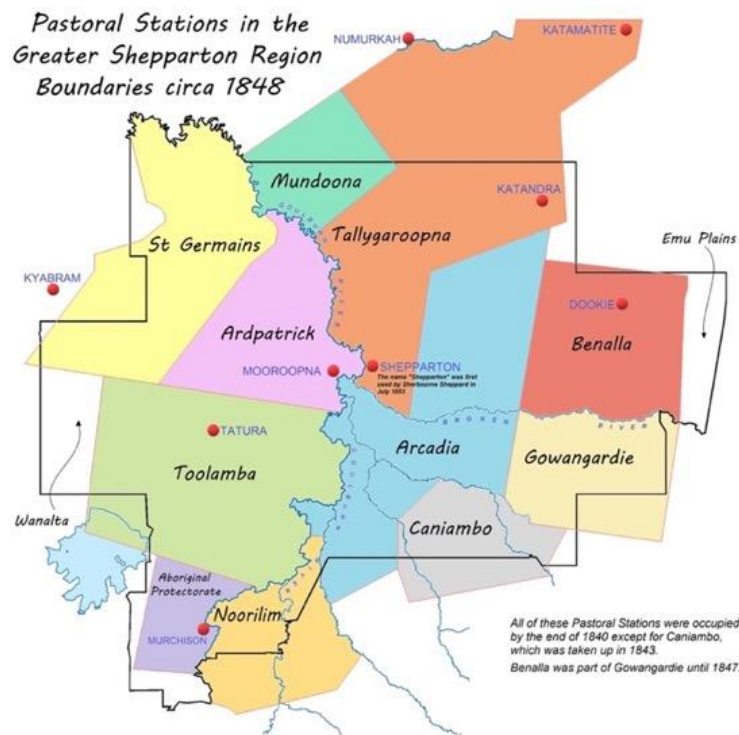


Figure 1. Pastoral stations of the lower Goulburn c1848.

Important later changes include the division of Arcadia at the Broken River into Arcadia on the south and Pine Lodge on the north in 1858. The continuous black line denotes the boundary of Greater Shepparton 1994.

Map provided by Morris Bowey, personal correspondence, to be included in later update of Bowey's manuscript 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' 2019, unpublished.

Tallygaroopna Pastoral Run

Shepparton, including some of the area east of the city, is located in what were the southern reaches of the huge Tallygaroopna pastoral station; to the east, covering Pine Lodge and part of Shepparton East, was the Pine Lodge run, which had been separated out from the section of the Arcadia run south of the Broken River in 1858. Boundaries of the pastoral runs, which as one historian has noted were often larger than English counties, were generally inexact unless defined by a watercourse or other natural feature. Tallygaroopna extended east to its boundary with the Pine Lodge station at around Orrvale Road (see Figure 2).

Many squatters were little involved in their station or the districts it covered, relying on an overseer for local administration of the activities of the pastoral year and of the employees, the shepherds and hutkeepers. Two of the Tallygaroopna run holders had a closer relationship with the settlement of the region: Sherbourne Sheppard, who was intimately associated with the foundations of the settlement of Shepparton at McGuire's punt in the late 1840s and the 1850s, and whose remaining hut is a celebrated icon of local history and heritage, and William Fraser, the last lessee of the station, an important player in the development of the town from the 1870s.

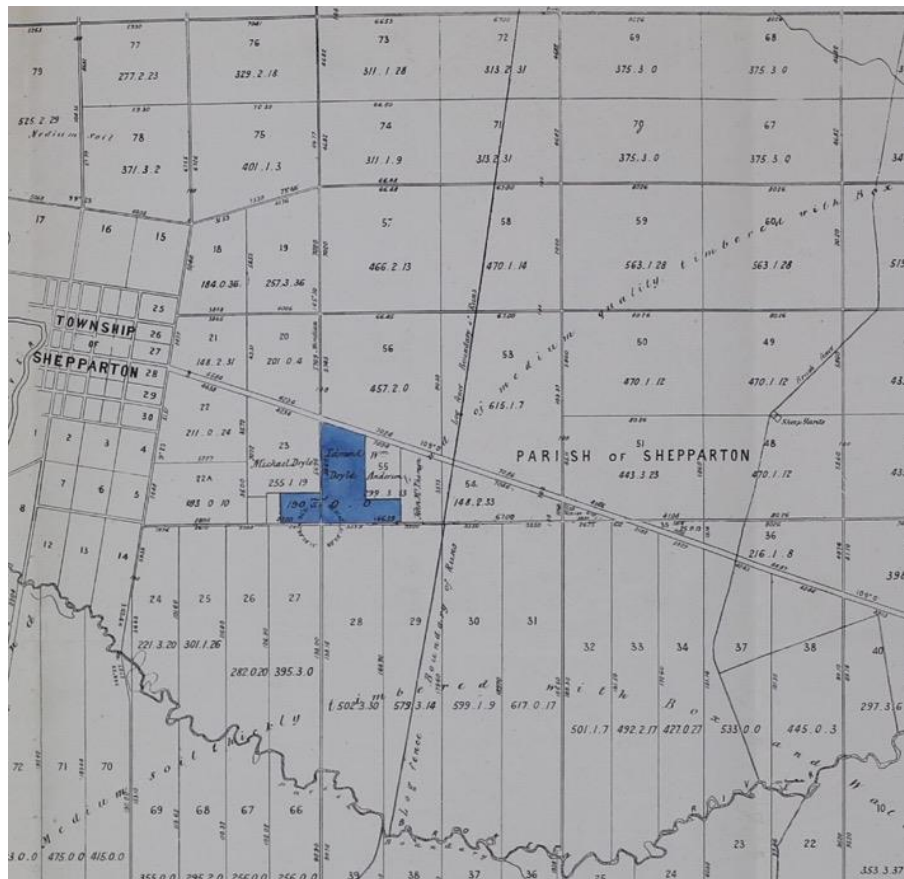


Figure 2. Boundary of Tallygaroopna and Arcadia pastoral runs

Plan showing the boundary of the adjoining Tallygaroopna and Arcadia/Pine Lodge pastoral stations centrally angling NNE from the Broken River. The log boundary fence noted on the plan crosses the current Orrvale Road just south of the Benalla Road (Midland Highway) at Poplar Avenue. A brush fence is shown within the Pine Lodge run to the east. The north-south road bisecting the selection of Edmund Doyle (blue) is Doyle's Road.⁵

Local historians have almost unanimously claimed that Edward Khull was the initial squatter on the Tallygaroopna run, dating his occupation from 1841;⁶ this accorded with the indexes of stations and occupiers in the two accepted foundation accounts of squatting in Victoria, *Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip* (R V Billis and A S Kenyon, 1974) and *Victorian Squatters* (R Spreadborough and H Anderson, 1983).

⁵ Detail from map 'Country Lands, Parishes of Kialla and Shepparton, County Unnamed', surveyed by District Surveyor Thomas Nixon, lithographed 20 September 1872. Contained in file VPRS 625/P0000/353.

⁶ Including Raymond West, *Those were the Days*, Shepparton, 1962; Sue, Wallace, *Shepparton Shire Reflections 1879-1979*, Shepparton, 1979; Ron Michael, *On McGuire's Punt 1838-1888*, 1988; Department of Employment Work for the Dole Project, *Fruits of our labour : an anecdotal history of the Goulburn Valley fruit industry*, 2003; DM McLennan, *History of Mooroopna, Ardmona and District* (facsimile of 1936 edition), Mooroopna, 1984; Historical Society of Mooroopna, *Mooroopna to 1888: an Account of Mooroopna and its immediate District*, Shepparton, 1989; Pine Lodge District Centenary Committee, *Pine Lodge District Centenary 1877-1977*, 1977; Elsie Brady, *Tallygaroopna and District: Times and Tales*, Shepparton, 1990.

Bowey's research, however, has revealed that prior to the arrival of any of the pastoralists named in the local histories as original occupiers of the group of lower Goulburn runs, an entrepreneurial family group, the Manton brothers, had loose informal control of the lands both sides of the Goulburn River from Mitchellstown to the Murray River from at least 1839.⁷ Evidence for this is derived from a letter by pastoralist and politician Peter Snodgrass, in which he notes that

*The first occupants of the Goulburn below Seymour were Colonel Anderson, who took the country immediately adjoining; Messrs Mantons, who occupied both sides of the river, including almost the whole from thence to the Murray; and Mr MacGregor, who located himself near the junction of the Broken River and Seven Creeks ... It is beyond my power to state precisely at what time each station was taken up, but the whole of the above parties were in occupation of them in the year 1840.*⁸

Snodgrass' testimony is highly credible. He had overlanded stock from Sydney in May 1837 with five other pastoralists and selected runs in the upper Goulburn River region, the first being Murrindindi on the Goulburn south of Yea, in 1838. Snodgrass was acquainted with the lands along the Goulburn River, and also closely connected with the affairs of the squatters whose interests he advanced in Parliament.⁹ His information is supported by Billis and Kenyon in their 1930s series on pastoral pioneers in the *Australasian* newspaper: in the article devoted to the Mantons they noted that Frederick Manton had overlanded from Yass in 1839 'and promptly took up pastoral runs on the Goulburn embracing all the country from Nagambie to the Murray.'¹⁰

It is clear from correspondence relating to the Aboriginal Protectorate station at Murchison that Frederick Manton held the Noorilim station from November 1840 to mid 1841, and the Toolamba station was in the hands of the Mantons in 1841.¹¹ A sequence of maps from a survey of the Goulburn River from Old Crossing Place (Mitchellstown) to the Murray conducted from around October 1842 to March 1843 by Assistant Surveyor William Pickering also shows Charles Manton as occupying Wyuna station in this period.¹² Bowey has noted that of eleven stations downstream of Mitchellstown on the Goulburn River, only two were clearly in other hands at any time in the early 1840s, Gregor McGregor's Arcadia Station and Edward Curr's Tongala Station, adding weight to the notion of the Mantons' early control of the whole lower Goulburn.¹³ The enterprising Manton brothers, Frederick, Henry, Charles and John, had come to Melbourne determined to take

⁷ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 46, 51 and passim

⁸ Peter Snodgrass, Letter no 42 of the 58 letters from early settlers responding to a request in 1853 by Lieutenant-Governor La Trobe as to the time and circumstances of the first occupation of various parts of the colony: this was collected as *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*. In Bowey, op cit, p 46.

⁹ Snodgrass entry in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/snodgrass-peter-2676> accessed 9/5/2023.

¹⁰ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 46 (*Australasian*, 29/2/1936, p 4).

¹¹ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 45

¹² William Pickering, Map 'Survey of the Goulburn River from the Deegay Ponds to its junction with the Murray', Goulburn V; sent to Hoddle, 26 August 1843.

¹³ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 51

advantage of every opportunity for business and trade the fledgling colony offered. They dealt in sheep and cattle, wine, town and suburban allotments, houses and pastoral stations, highly visible with their sporadically intensive advertising; they let premises, developed shops, and launched various ambitious schemes, with varying success. However, the Manton name had disappeared from Melbourne newspapers by April 1843, doubtless affected by the downturn of the early 1840s.

On 27 June 1840 Manton and Co of Collins Lane had advertised for sale 'four complete Sheep Establishments, each consisting from four to ten thousand sheep with the Runs, Hurdles, Huts, Drays, Ploughs and Working Bullocks &c &c'.¹⁴ These may have been some of the lower Goulburn stations, although the brothers also held runs in the Mornington area. The next year, in early April, the Messrs Manton advertised 'a mixed herd of three hundred and twenty prime cattle ... also the cattle station, on the banks of a beautiful river, where there is an abundance of water all the year round; distant about one hundred and thirty miles from Melbourne...'¹⁵ (Refer to Figure 3) The station described so lyrically is likely to have been be one of the Mantons' Goulburn River stations.

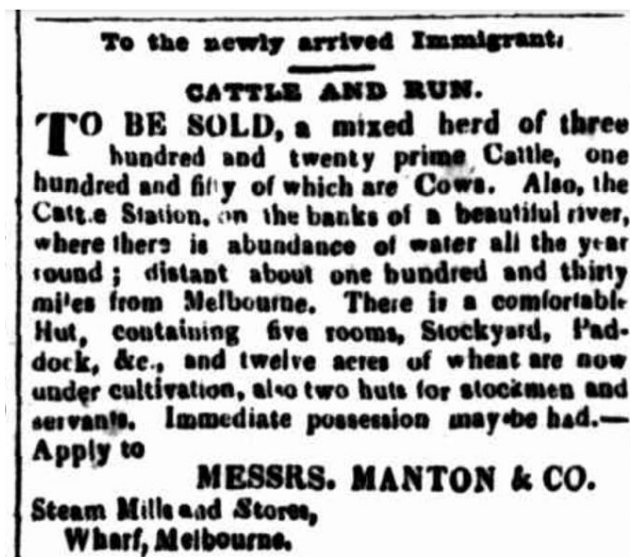


Figure 3. Manton and Co advertisement 1841 for cattle and a cattle station, probably on the lower Goulburn River.

Port Phillip Gazette, 31/3/1841, p 2

It may never be known if the Mantons developed the Tallygaroonna pastoral station. From early 1843 the firm H G Ashhurst and Co was in control of the Tallygaroonna Run; this is corroborated by a number of maps.¹⁶ The first recorded license taken out by the company appeared in the *Government Gazette* of September 1842, and the company's tenure may have begun even earlier

¹⁴ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 48

¹⁵ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 48 (*Port Phillip Gazette*, 31/3/1841, p 2)

¹⁶ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' unpublished manuscript, 2019, p 38

given that Henry George Ashhurst arrived in Australia in early 1841.¹⁷ On Tallygaroopna run a single head station with Ashhurst and Co (incorrectly spelled as Ashurst) as the licensee is shown on the banks of the Goulburn River about half a mile south of where Sherbourne Sheppard's head station would eventually be.¹⁸ Henry Ashhurst was, in Bowey's words, 'a 20 year old would-be merchant with financial resources in a strange land,' who had arrived in the colony with two cargo-loads of in-demand items to sell. The company he co-established, H G Ashhurst and Co was a firm of general merchants, who acted as agents for overseas and coastal shipping, and branched out into pastoral stations to fill their returning ships, as had other Melbourne agents like the well-known Heape and Grice.¹⁹

Ashhurst and Co also held the Old Crossing Place run near Mitchellstown; with three hut locations along 21 miles of river, including one wool shed, Bowey conjectures that this was likely to have been Ashhurst's more important station, that Tallygaroopna and Old Crossing Place run were worked conjointly, and that Tallygaroopna sheep may have been shorn on the southern run.²⁰ The firm's tenure was short-lived. By April 1845 Henry George Ashhurst was declaring insolvency.²¹

Sherbourne Sheppard

Sherbourne Sheppard, after whom Shepparton is named and who is thus often seen as the founding father of the city, then held the run from May 1844. This date, new to the historiography of the Goulburn Valley (the date of Sheppard's arrival on the run has been contested among local historians) is supported by a number of pieces of evidence located by Bowey. A deposition on behalf of Sheppard himself which was presented in one of the court cases arising from the so-called Siege of Tallygaroopna (see later) stated that 'in the year 1844, he had obtained from (Governor) Sir George Gipps a licence to enter on the 'Tallagaroopna' station and having obtained it took possession the month of May in the same year' ('Tallagaroopna' was Sheppard's consistent spelling). A 'licence to depasture' for Sheppard which was among a list licences taken out from 1 May to 31 May 1844 published in the *Melbourne Weekly Courier* on 29 June 1844, and a receipt dated 29 May 1844 from William Piper of Pastoria for the 1000 sheep with which Sheppard stocked Tallygaroopna, both also support this date.²² The 20 year old Sheppard had arrived at Port Phillip on 8 June 1841.

Further, new information located by Bowey shows that the run was not initially titled Tallygaroopna, but Broken River Run, Sheppard listing his run under this name in his Stock Return of 1st July 1845, and earlier elsewhere.²³ He used this name until the second half of 1845.

¹⁷ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' pp 38, 50

¹⁸ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 38

¹⁹ William Pickering, Maps 'Survey of the Goulburn River from the Deegay Ponds to its junction with the Murray', Goulburn 1, to Hoddle, 26 August 1843.

²⁰ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 38

²¹ *Port Phillip Gazette*, 15/3/1845, p 3

²² Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 80

²³ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 81

Also, among Bowey's seminal discoveries is that the first reference to the name Shepparton is by Sheppard himself, on 6 July 1853 in a letter to William Piper, the Commissioner of Crown Lands at Benalla. It was the name he was giving to a new squatting run he wished to carve out of the south-west extremities of his Tallygaroopna run in July 1853, including the tiny cluster of buildings at the McGuire's punt crossing place.²⁴ Although this and a second attempt proved abortive, it seems that the authorities swiftly took up the name from Sheppard's usage, probably via Commissioner Piper. A month after Sheppard's letter, the name was being used in an order made on 2 August 1853 by the Justices of Peace at Wangaratta acting 'in and for the Police District of Wangaratta' and appointing a place near the Police Station 'at Shepparton, late Maguire's Punt' for the erection and maintenance of a public pound; this appeared in the *Victorian Government Gazette* of 17 August 1853 the earliest recorded use of the name Shepparton in official Government records or newspapers.²⁵ Local historians had believed that the first recording of the name had been in *Government Gazettes* from 12 October 1853,²⁶ but it seems clear that three months earlier, Sheppard himself had given Shepparton its name, and had spelt it in the current form, not in some of the fanciful variations that have appeared in local histories.

One event at Tallygaroopna during Sheppard's tenure, the so-called 'Siege of Tallygaroopna,' has assumed the proportions of a local legend. Visiting the UK from early 1846 to January 1850, Sheppard had devolved his power of attorney on Henry Arthur Smith, with his friend and fellow-Irishman Brabazon Purcell to run the station. In 1849 Smith, owed large sums by the absent Sheppard for his service, gained court approval to sell 6200 of Sheppard's sheep to Edward Khull, and the Khulls took over control of the station in September 1849.²⁷ After a dramatic physical confrontation on 19-20 January 1851 in a shepherd's hut on the run, Sheppard re-occupied the run and was clearly back in control, although the issue dragged out with a number of subsequent court cases brought by Khull. Khull's tenure was thus a short-lived fifteen months.²⁸ In 1841, the date local histories claim he took the run, Bowey has shown that Khull was not yet in Australia but managing the family's printing business in Glasgow: he arrived back in the colony in 1848.²⁹

It was during Sheppard's tenure of Tallygaroopna that the genesis of the town of Shepparton was taking place in the south-west corner of the run close to the confluence of the Goulburn and Broken Rivers: the establishment of the punt and Emu Inn on the Goulburn, at what is now High Street. Even before the north-eastern goldfields from 1852 attracted miners from the central Victorian fields, the crossing place existed. From a letter to the Commissioner of Crown Lands at Benalla dated 10 November 1853 from Sheppard himself at Tallygaroopna, Bowey has carefully plotted

²⁴ Letter from Sherbourne Sheppard, Tallygaroopna, to William Piper, Commissioner of Crown Lands, Benalla, 6 July 1853, in Bowey, p 129.

²⁵ *Victorian Government Gazette*, 17/8/1853, p 1206.

²⁶ See, for example, Raymond West, *Those were the Days*, Shepparton, 1962, p 39.

²⁷ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 101.

²⁸ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' pp 113-118, 126

²⁹ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 77

and refined the timeline of early Shepparton, and puts the building of the Emu Inn, and likely the punt and punt house as well, to the period between early 1846 to mid-1849 (contrary to the belief of many earlier local historians). Sheppard himself later recorded that it was his overseer (Brabizon Purcell) who in Sheppard's absence had given McGuire permission to erect 'certain buildings' upon a portion of the Tallygaroopna Station about seven miles from Sheppard's home station. Bowey showed that a *new* inn and punt were in construction by McGuire in August 1850, presuming an earlier construction:

*A Mr McGuire is erecting a new house of entertainment between Messrs. Clayton and Khull's Station, about 4 miles down the river. A small punt capable of carrying over the river a loaded dray and two bullocks, already works there, and a larger one is in the course of erection.*³⁰

This latter was in the period when Khull was in possession of the station, although McGuire was dealing with Sheppard, not Khull.³¹ Thus the first building in Shepparton was erected at least as early as 1850, and probably in the 1840s.

In October 1850 Sheppard entered into an agreement with Patrick McGuire to allow the latter's use of 50 acres of land at the inn site in addition to his continued occupation of the buildings he had erected on the Tallygaroopna run.³² Sheppard's letter told how McGuire obtained a publican's licence and continued to occupy the premises until January 1853. In January 1853, after failing to receive renewal of his licence, McGuire sold the inn for £600 to Charles McDonell, who briefly occupied the premises before selling to Sheppard himself on 16th May 1853 for £900 and a further £100 to another partner.

On 4 July 1853 Sherbourne Sheppard sold the inn premises to John Kennedy Hill together with 1000 sheep and the right to depasture over a certain portion of the Tallygaroopna Station, subject to the approval of the Crown Lands Commissioner.³³ In his notification to the Crown Lands Commissioner at Benalla, Sheppard also requested the right to create a new run, to be called Shepparton (the first reference), by subdividing off the south-west 9000 acres, including the site of the river crossing and the tiny cluster of buildings (the Emu Inn, police station and pound). This did not meet the regulation size for subdivision, and Sheppard resubmitted with an application for a 15,000 acre run; although seemingly approved, this never eventuated. In November he followed with an application to transfer to Hill the land on which the Emu Inn was situated.³⁴ In October a mail contract had been announced for deliveries to McGuire's Punt,³⁵ and possibly Sheppard may have been anticipating a survey for the layout of a town.

³⁰ *Argus*, 29/8/1850, p4 in Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' pp 96-97

³¹ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 97

³² Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 112

³³ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 97

³⁴ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 97

³⁵ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 97

By this time McGuire's punt had become an important river crossing for miners travelling from the central goldfields to the Ovens; traffic from Mt Alexander (Castlemaine) and Bendigo at the crossing was extensive, miners and others travelling on through this corner of the Tallygaroopna run on to the Benalla road (a primitive track) necessitating the presence at times of a police constable. Bowey cites a description of a party of Chinese miners crossing from the central goldfields, which indicates the volume of traffic:

*a party of about 80 Chinese appeared with two drays at the opposite bank (coming from Bendigo direction). In the ensuing mayhem whereby the whole party tried to pile aboard for a single trip across and at the opposite bank one dray loaded with heavy iron implements capsized and sank in deep water. Most items were salvaged but some heavier items sank beyond recovery. The Chinese became very excited and not only refused to pay the toll but sought to extort damages for their loss.*³⁶



Figure 4. Punt at Shepparton, after McGuire's time.

Eugene von Guerard 'Goulbourn River near Shepparton', 1866³⁷

The Benalla road, from the punt through Tallygaroopna and subsequently the Pine Lodge run, was described by William Howitt, who crossed the punt ('small and rickety') on 27 November 1853:

*Our road from the Goulburn to Benalla has run all the way near the Broken River. Ever and anon it has wound away and left us; but in a while, again, we have found ourselves at one of its bends.*³⁸

³⁶ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' pp 98-99

³⁷ Flickr Creative Commons <https://www.flickr.com/photos/bibliodyssey/5977163831/sizes/l/>

³⁸ William Howitt, *Land, Labour and Gold*, 1856, p 67

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc2.ark:/13960/t70v8gp9g&view=1up&seq=395&q1=broken%20river> Accessed 16/5/2023

An excellent insight into the appearance of the Tallygaroopna run in 1853 is conveyed in an advertisement inserted in the *Argus* for over a month in February and March of that year in which Sheppard, facing financial difficulties, offered his stock and the run for sale, although no sale eventuated:

*The improvements are complete in every way, ten out-station huts, woolshed, and press, permanent yards. Three good paddocks, and excellent cottage, well stocked garden, and vinery.*³⁹

The influential (and notorious) pastoralist and land speculator, Hugh Glass, Victoria's greatest squatter, appears as licensee of Tallygaroopna from October 1852 until July 1854. Sheppard had entered this arrangement with Glass, to whom he was in debt, as security on the loan.⁴⁰

Sheppard subdivided his run a number of times. In 1846 or 1848, the Mundoona (also Mondoona) station was created, hived off the western reaches of Tallygaroopna, with Goulburn River frontage facing Ardpatrik and St Germain's stations across the river, and in December 1854 the Katandra run was separated out from the northern section of Tallygaroopna.⁴¹

In July 1854, prior to travelling to England to marry the daughter of stockbroker and politician J B Were, Sheppard changed the ownership of Tallygaroopna to a partnership consisting of Sheppard himself and his friends A A C Le Souef and W H Atkins. From July 1857 the run was in the charge of stock and station dealers Charles Ryan and Robert Hammond as sales agents for the partnership, and was sold in May 1859 to Alexander Brock and William Brookman. After leaving Tallygaroopna, Sheppard joined Were's stock broking business in Melbourne.⁴²

In February 1866 William Fraser took over the run.⁴³

William Fraser

William Fraser gained Tallygaroopna at a time when Victoria's squatters were faced with increasing pressure on their holdings. Three Land Acts (1860, 1862, 1865) had attempted to wrest land, largely unsuccessfully, from the control of the pastoralists.

On taking up the run, Fraser had been immediately affected by the 1865 Land Act. In the eighth series of agricultural areas proclaimed under the Act, 1268 acres were made available on 14 March 1866 at Shepparton 'On the east side of the Goulburn River, at its junction with the Broken River

³⁹ *Argus*, 11/2/1853, et al, Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 128

⁴⁰ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 127

⁴¹ Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' pp 86-87

⁴² These dates from Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 143

⁴³ These dates from Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' p 143

around Shepparton.⁴⁴ This was land taken from Frasers' Tallygaroopna run both on the northern edge of the growing town of Shepparton (including the 240-acre Allotment 16, bordered by Balaclava Road, Hawdon Street—formerly Verney Road—and Knight and Wyndham Streets), and the 300-acre area bounded by Hayes and Archer Streets, Wilmot Road and Wyndham Street (Allotments 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4a, 4b, 5a, 5b, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b) immediately south of the centre of the township.⁴⁵ By early December that year, however, those allotments were forfeited.⁴⁶

Under the Land Act 1869 Act, the legislation which finally broke the grip of the squatters, almost all the unalienated land in the Colony was thrown open for selection in holdings of up to 320 acres. Land could only be selected once; squatters were able to purchase up to 640 acres around their homesteads (a Pre-Emptive right), if they had not already done so, and like others, select up to 320 acres under the conditions of the Act.

The 1869 Act left Fraser with the 480 acres of the Pre-emptive Right of the Tallygaroopna run and a rapidly shrinking pastoral run; by May 1874, 17,000 acres had been taken up by selectors.⁴⁷ Unlike those pastoralists who retreated to their city mansions and businesses or took their pastoral interests to the Riverina, far western NSW or Queensland, after the Land Act 1869 Fraser continued to live on the homestead block of Tallygaroopna in the weatherboard house he had built sometime after 1872.⁴⁸ While attempting, like many squatters, to thwart the Act in order to retain and further accrue land, he also availed himself of the opportunities presented by the increasing population resulting from selection, becoming a force in the rapidly growing town, particularly active in the first half of the 1870s.

In late 1874 he constructed and placed into service a large new punt, sixty feet in length, leased to James Hay.⁴⁹ Fraser or his son William established a new saw mill at Wyuna to provide timber to the growing town and the new farmers.⁵⁰ Securing a number of town allotments at auction in May 1873,⁵¹ he developed many sites in the growing town,⁵² which in the early 1870s was already on its way to becoming the regional centre that its geographic position had ensured. In 1873 he built the town's first public hall, located in Welsford Street around the corner from the punt, which opened by late November. Managed for Fraser by Hay and at that period sometimes described as Hay's Assembly Rooms⁵³, among its subsequent and varied uses it housed Shepparton's first court

⁴⁴ *Leader*, 10/3/1866, p 20

⁴⁵ *Kyneton Observer*, 22/8/1867, p 2

⁴⁶ *Kyneton Observer*, 22/8/1867, p 2

⁴⁷ Parish Plan: Tallygaroopna, County of Moira; *Weekly Times*, 2/5/1874, p 12

⁴⁸ W Foster, droving stock from Tocumwal to Kilmore in 1872, passed 'Fraser's hut', one of only four buildings he saw in the Shepparton area, the others being the punt house, the police station and the hotel. In JC W S James,

⁴⁹ *North Eastern Ensign*, 18/12/1874, p 2

⁵⁰ *Riverine Herald*, 18/3/1873, p 4

⁵¹ *North Eastern Ensign*, 9/5/1873, p 2

⁵² *North Eastern Ensign*, 14/11/1873, p 2

⁵³ *North Eastern Ensign*, 27/11/1874, p 2

sessions from 1876, later becoming a newspaper printing works, and was known from 1934 as Forester's Hall when purchased by the lodge of that name. The oldest building in the city of Shepparton, now appropriately the headquarters of the Shepparton Heritage Centre, it remains one of the few tangible examples of built heritage related to the squatters of the region. In 1874 he also built a large 17-room brick hotel, 'a fine brick structure', on the north-east corner of High and Welsford Streets.⁵⁴ The extent of his development of commercial premises is revealed when in 1878 he advertised all his town centre properties for sale: they comprised 'hotel/stores, Public Hall, Blacksmith's and Wheelwright's Premises, Offices, Private Residences, and Building Allotments in various parts of the township.'⁵⁵ It seems this sale did not go ahead, and thus he was able in February 1882 to donate to the Crown around one and a half acres of land between Wyndham and Maude Streets to enable the creation of Fraser Street to make available the desired corner site for the erection of the new Shepparton Post, a gesture which has entered the local historical memory.

Fraser was also involved in the new community bodies and organisations. In June 1874 he was the inaugural chairman of the 'progressive committee' which was concerned with the state of the roads and the establishment of the much needed cemetery; he was also a member of the cemetery committee.⁵⁶

Fraser ensured he built up a considerable holding of land from his former pastoral run around the township; this was by a variety of means. In October 1871 he selected the 219-acre block west of the Melbourne Road (Wyndham Street) and north of the Broken River (Parish Of Shepparton Allots 8a, 8b, 9a, 9b, and 10).⁵⁷ He resisted selectors taking up land close to the Tallygaroopna homestead block (the Pre-Emptive Right), somehow gained the adjacent 319 acres,⁵⁸ and fought for and gained compensation for selections taken up opposite to and south of the homestead block, selections which he claimed were impinging on what he termed 'a reserve for improvements'.⁵⁹

Moreover, like many squatters he employed the technique of dummyming (using a paid proxy) to gain more land than allowed under the Act, in this case via selections close to the homestead block which were granted to five of his children and his prospective daughter-in-law.⁶⁰ In the more rigorous regime of the Land Act 1869, this was carefully investigated by a Special Land Board sitting at Benalla in February 1874. It was a clear case of dummyming. None of the Fraser 'selectors' had lived on the blocks (a requirement of the Act); on none of the blocks were there improvements to the level required by the Act. The survey of each block had been paid for by William Fraser,

⁵⁴ *North Eastern Ensign*, 18/12/1874, p 2; *Riverine Herald*, 26/1/1878, p 3

⁵⁵ *Riverine Herald*, 26/1/1878, p 3

⁵⁶ *North Eastern Ensign*, 12/6/1874, p 2

⁵⁷ Title: Vol 152 Fol 30324

⁵⁸ Tallygaroopna Parish Plan, lithographed by J Noone, 9 January 1883

⁵⁹ *North Eastern Ensign*, 28/10/1873, p 2

⁶⁰ *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 22/8/1874, p 5; Affidavit by Thomas Fraser in Probate Papers of William Fraser https://www.ancestry.com.au/discoveryui-content/view/1002579:61315?tid=&pid=&queryId=4de529196e6590de10c8ef4a94f40ccf&_phsrc=ZKV212&_phstart=successSource accessed 7 May 2023

Fraser's son John admitted forging a document, and William junior acknowledged dispatching to New South Wales three station hands who had dummied for the family, accompanying them to the border and seeing them across the Murray, clearly with the aim of preventing the possibility of them giving evidence. A two-roomed hut had been erected straddling the boundary of two of the selections, a ruse employed during the earlier Land Acts to claim construction of a dwelling on each selection.

Fraser appealed the Land Board's decision that he forfeit the run, and that all six of the selections also be forfeited.⁶¹ The decision of the Lands Department was that of the six selections, three were absolutely forfeited, to be auctioned with any improvements, the remaining three to be auctioned but with the cost of improvements reimbursed to the Frasers. The licence for the Tallygaroopna run (at this time held by the National Bank) was to be forfeited, but the authorities admitted that this was 'merely nominal', as there was actually no licence at the time, and a fresh licence was to be issued to 'the present licensee and mortgagee' (Fraser and the National Bank), dating from 1 June 1874 on the payment of back rents on the run, and a penalty of £50: total penalties amounted to £1000.⁶² The six forfeited selections were subsequently put up for auction; ironically, at least two were purchased by the Fraser offspring who had forfeited them. Interestingly, it seems local communities were not averse to the children of squatters selecting on their fathers' runs: the Benalla correspondent for the *Argus* noted 'Public opinion here is strongly in favour of the children of squatters having the right to select on their fathers' runs, especially so in this case.'⁶³

Most of the land Fraser obtained, however, was by auction. On 24 April 1872 at the Benalla Land Board, Fraser purchased a large parcel of approximately 1614 acres of prime land south-east of Shepparton down to the Broken River, allots 24-28, Parish of Shepparton. This extended into what became the Orrvale area.⁶⁴ More land was purchased at auction in May 1873, and he also had secured a range of town allotments.⁶⁵ In 1878, when Fraser advertised his 'Tallagaroopna Estate' for sale, a sale that never eventuated, his holdings were 'about 6000 acres' ('Tallagaroopna' was Fraser's preferred spelling for the name of run).⁶⁶

⁶¹ *Argus*, 7/2/1874, p 5

⁶² *Leader*, 6/6/1874, p 9

⁶³ *Argus*, 6/2/1874, p 5

⁶⁴ *North Eastern Ensign*, 26/4/1872, p 2

⁶⁵ *North Eastern Ensign*, 9/5/1873, p 2

⁶⁶ *Argus*, 23/11/1878, p 10.

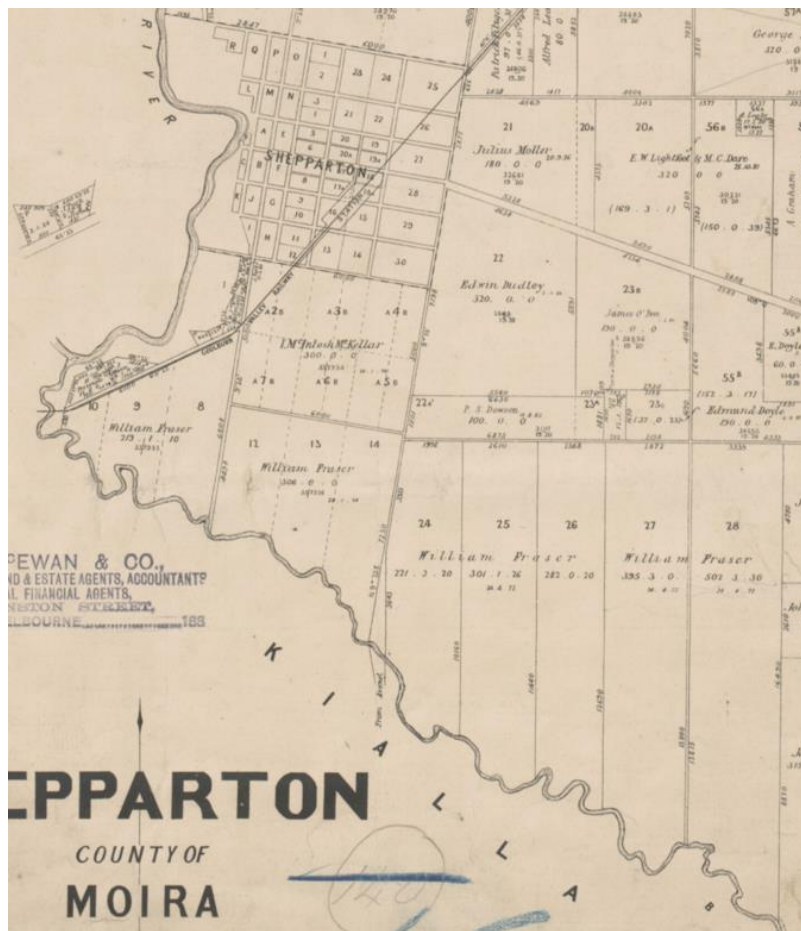


Figure 5. William Fraser's Broken River holdings amassed following the Land Act 1869.
From map 'Shepparton: County of Moira', 1887⁶⁷

Fraser continued to run his holdings as a successful sheep and cattle property. Then in early 1886 he leased out the whole property in ten lots, prior to revisiting Scotland,⁶⁸ and in a clearing sale offered the whole of the machinery and implements, along with furniture and effects.⁶⁹ The sale of furniture probably implied that Fraser, like many successful squatters, intended to buy new furniture when visiting the mother country. Fraser died at Tallygaroopna on 16 October 1892. His estate was valued at £43,332, and his land amounted to 5400 acres: the homestead section comprising 3,200 acres, and east of Shepparton 'the Broken River Paddocks, containing 2200 acres of rich agricultural land.... for orchards, vineyards and irrigation purposes the finest block of land ever offered for public competition in this great agricultural district.'⁷⁰ The advertisement presaged the changes that would take place within twenty years.

The Frasers had established a small private cemetery at the homestead, the burial place of Fraser's wife, daughter and daughter in law, and after Fraser's death on 16 October 1892, his own burial

⁶⁷ <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-232063942/view>, accessed 12/12/2022

⁶⁸ *Leader*, 27/2/1886, p 2

⁶⁹ *Camperdown Chronicle*, 17/4/1886, p 3

⁷⁰ *Leader*, 4/3/1893, p 3

there was announced in the *Argus*: ‘...his remains will be interred in their last resting place, the Homestead, Shepparton’.⁷¹ However regulations had changed, the authorities stepped in, and Laird Fraser of Tallygaroopna, as the Vagabond had referred to him,⁷² was buried in the Shepparton cemetery.

With Sherbourne Sheppard’s hut at the homestead, the Fraser cemetery is one of the few physical remnants of pastoralism in the Shepparton region.

Pine Lodge Pastoral Run

The area which in 1858 became the Pine Lodge pastoral station was originally the northern section of the Arcadia pastoral station.

The first squatter in control of Arcadia was Gregor McGregor. He may have taken up the run in 1839; he is listed in the NSW *Government Gazette* of 30 September 1840 as having taken out a license. McGregor was clearly on his station by May of 1841, as evidenced by a letter to Assistant Protector William Le Souef at the Aboriginal Protectorate, now at Murchison. He wrote his name as Gregor MacGregor and addressed it to ‘MacGregor’s Station’, not Arcadia. McGregor was reporting problems the squatters were having with the local Aboriginals.⁷³ One of Assistant Surveyor Pickering’s maps, surveyed in late 1842 or early 1843, shows ‘Sheep Station McGregor’ nestled in the riverbank on a wide loop of the Goulburn.⁷⁴ Morris Bowey has calculated this would be directly west of the southern end of Shepparton Airport (2023).⁷⁵ Four buildings are shown by the river, and a fence across a sharp double loop in the river has created a paddock.

William Snow Clifton took out a depasture licence for a station, presumed to be Arcadia, in July 1843, working the run with his brother Henry. The earliest record of the name Arcadia is in a Half Yearly Return dated 1 July 1845, with both brothers listed as proprietors: residing at this time were three shepherds, a hut keeper and a bullock driver.⁷⁶ In July 1850, a stock return by William Snow Clifton and Henry Clifton listed Arcadia at 80,000 acres with 20 horses, 35 cattle and 7326 sheep; at January 1851 it was 11 horses, 45 cattle and 9600 sheep.⁷⁷

In 1858, after the death of his brother in 1853 and a protracted administration of the estate, W S Clifton subdivided the Arcadia run into two separate stations, separated by the Broken River. The

⁷¹ *Argus*, 18/10/1892, p 1

⁷² *Australasian*, 4/10/1884, p 15

⁷³ This summary is from Morris Bowey, ‘Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,’ p 56

⁷⁴ William Pickering, Map ‘Survey of the Goulburn River from the Deegay Ponds to its junction with the Murray’, Goulburn III; sent to Hoddle, 26 August 1843. VPRS 8168/P0002, GOULBURN RIVER 2

⁷⁵ Morris Bowey, ‘Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,’ p 56

⁷⁶ Morris Bowey, ‘Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,’ pp 56-57

⁷⁷ Morris Bowey, ‘Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,’ p 57

northern section, of 34,000 acres, he called Pine Lodge. The new run took in all the territory which includes the current Pine Lodge and Pine Lodge South, Shepparton East, part of Orrvale, and part of Grahamvale. The boundary with the Tallygaroopna run was approximately the current Orrvale Road. It is unclear when Clifton sold the northern run, but by September 1859 John Burkitt was in control of the Pine Lodge station, and a letter from Burkitt to the Commissioner of Crown Lands indicates that he was probably in possession of the run in late 1858.⁷⁸ Burkitt was succeeded by William Hay, a university-educated Scot who had conducted a school in Tasmania for a number of years, then held Glenlyon, a pastoral run near Seymour.⁷⁹ After returning from Scotland in late 1859 Hay had purchased Pine Lodge in 1860, aged 43.⁸⁰ Hay's obituary describes, possibly with some poetic licence, how he worked the station:

*Here his pioneering work had practically to be repeated as the place was unfenced and unimproved. His first work was to get rid as far as he could of the shepherds, and let his sheep run at large. (It should be mentioned that he also did this when he first went into the Glenlyon property.) He was too impatient to wait for the completion of his fences, and kept men walking the boundaries and following up and returning any stragglers to their own pasture.*⁸¹

By September 1862, Hay had departed Pine Lodge and William Hearne Lewis was the licensee.⁸² It seems that at his time Lewis, with his brother John Alfred Lewis, held a total of three Goulburn Valley runs, the others being two runs on the west of the Goulburn, Ardpatrik and the smaller Merrigum run. The last holder of the Pine Lodge run, from April 1872, was the mercantile company Holmes, White and Co, then a partnership between the brothers Andrew Bridges White and James White;⁸³ this occupation began in April 1872. The run was managed by James Collie. The White brothers also had earlier taken over the Ardpatrik and Merrigum runs⁸⁴.

In November 1878 the Pine Lodge Station licence lapsed.⁸⁵ The homestead holding was purchased by the Gawne family.

⁷⁸ This summary also from Morris Bowey, 'Playing for Sheep Stations: Shepparton, before it was Shepparton,' pp 56-58

⁷⁹ The only research that has been carried out on the Pine Lodge pastoral run has been by prolific local historian John Dainton, who has proffered the dates for the run and much of the evidence used here. Obituary for William Howe, Australian Dictionary of Biography online <https://oa.anu.edu.au/obituary/hay-william-477> accessed 15/5/2023

⁸⁰ Victoria, Australia, Assisted and Unassisted Passenger Lists, 1839-1923, William Hay https://www.ancestry.com.au/discoveryui-content/view/2781803:1635?tid=&pid=&queryId=2fc3ba33b04f7aa8fe6fee2cfa77e555&_phsrc=ZKV232&_phstart=succesSource. Accessed 15/5/2023

⁸¹ Obituary for William Howe, Australian Dictionary of Biography online <https://oa.anu.edu.au/obituary/hay-william-477> accessed 15/5/2023

⁸² Age, 10/9/1862, in John Dainton, 'History of Pine Lodge Run', unpublished paper

⁸³ Herald, 5/3/1863, p 1

⁸⁴ John Dainton, 'History of Pine Lodge Run', unpublished paper

⁸⁵ Riverine Herald, 25/11/1878, p 2

THE SELECTION ERA

The first re-drawing of the land surface of the area east of Shepparton had been the arrival of squatters. Their habitations were spaced, the environmental damage to soil and waterways not immediately obvious, and the small amount of clearing was around the few built structures.

It was the selection period, the opening up of the squatters' estates by means of the 1860s Land Acts, which redrew the land surface of the area east of Shepparton, as elsewhere, in the first major way, with the wholesale tree clearance ('tree-murder on a gigantic scale' the distinguished historian Keith Hancock called the destruction of forests and woodlands during this period),⁸⁶ with roads and fences marshalling the surface of the land into 320 or 160 acre blocks.

The extensive squatting runs had been taken up in the rush to the Port Phillip district between 1834 and 1850. The evocative descriptor 'sheepwalk' hints at the characteristics of this monopolistic form of exploitation of the land: it was non-intensive, supported a very low density of population and tied up arable land. It was also heavily state-subsidised through the token rents paid by the squatters. Land, the prime resource of settler societies, was serving the interests of the few, and this was increasingly resented by a range of interests in Victorian society as it was being redrawn by the effect of the gold rushes.

The movement to 'unlock the lands' contained many different threads. A great mass of discontented miners looked to the land for the self-employment afforded by a smallholding. Declining soil fertility and the small size of holdings in the older farming areas meant that many farmers and farm labourers were ready to set up on the new agricultural frontier. Radicals and middle class reformers argued opportunity for the working class. A growing mercantile class hoped for increased business opportunities. All were united in their opposition to the privileged position of the squatters; land reform was tightly intertwined with the demand for political and social reform, as historical geographer J M Powell notes.⁸⁷ A tenet common to all was the notion of a sturdy rural yeomanry to be established on the land, a race of independent and industrious farmers, each dwelling with his family on his own small holding, which he cultivated assiduously, resided on contentedly his whole life, and which was passed on to the next generation as a precious heritage.

The image was drawn seductively:

Cottage farming, if pursued only with spade, fork, pick axe and long iron punch power, would make any country great. It requires not such herds of cattle and horse....A few acres of land, well-drained and well

⁸⁶ W H Hancock, *Australia*, 1945 (1930), p 31

⁸⁷ J M Powell, *Mirrors of the New World*, 1978, p. 75

*cultivated, may be made to produce enormously; and if the owner cannot have his cow, goat, poultry or horse, he may still produce wine, oil, vegetables and bread...*⁸⁸

This 'yeoman myth' was to recur again and again.

1860s Land Acts

The first three of the four Victorian Land Acts of the 1860s intended to 'put the small man on the land' had little effect on Shepparton and the area to the east of the then fledgling town.

The Nicholson Act of 1860 made available pastoral lands in the Western District, the Loddon valley, and around the goldfields, in pre-surveyed blocks of 80 to 640 acres. Half the holding was required to be purchased immediately at £1 per acre, the other half rented for up to seven years then freehold obtained at the same cost. The immediate financial outlay was beyond the class of would be 'yeoman farmers' which the Act and its successors were supposedly serving; most of this land fell into the hands of squatters by use of dummies and other evasive techniques.⁸⁹

The Nicholson Act had been irrelevant to the northern plains, then still considered remote. The second attempt to open up the pastoral lands to yeoman farmers, the Duffy Act of 1862, now included areas of the northern plains. The Act looked to make available one million acres of pre-surveyed land in blocks of 40-640 acres at £1 per acre. In the Goulburn Valley these pre-surveyed areas included large areas south of Echuca and south-east from Murchison to Violet Town, and land around Benalla and Stanhope-Girgarre. However land south-east of Shepparton, including parts of Orrvale and Shepparton East, along with large areas in the County of Rodney across the Goulburn River, was within in the second *unsurveyed* tranche of the projected 10 million acres, which was superseded by the next Land Act. Most of the land of the Tallygaroopna and Pine Lodge runs, and all the runs to the north, were not even considered to be thrown open at this time.

⁸⁸ *Victorian Agricultural and Horticultural Gazette*, 21 May 1857, p. 33, quoted in J M Powell, *The Public Lands of Australia Felix*, op. cit., p 73

⁸⁹ Don Garden, *Victoria: A History*, 1984, p 155

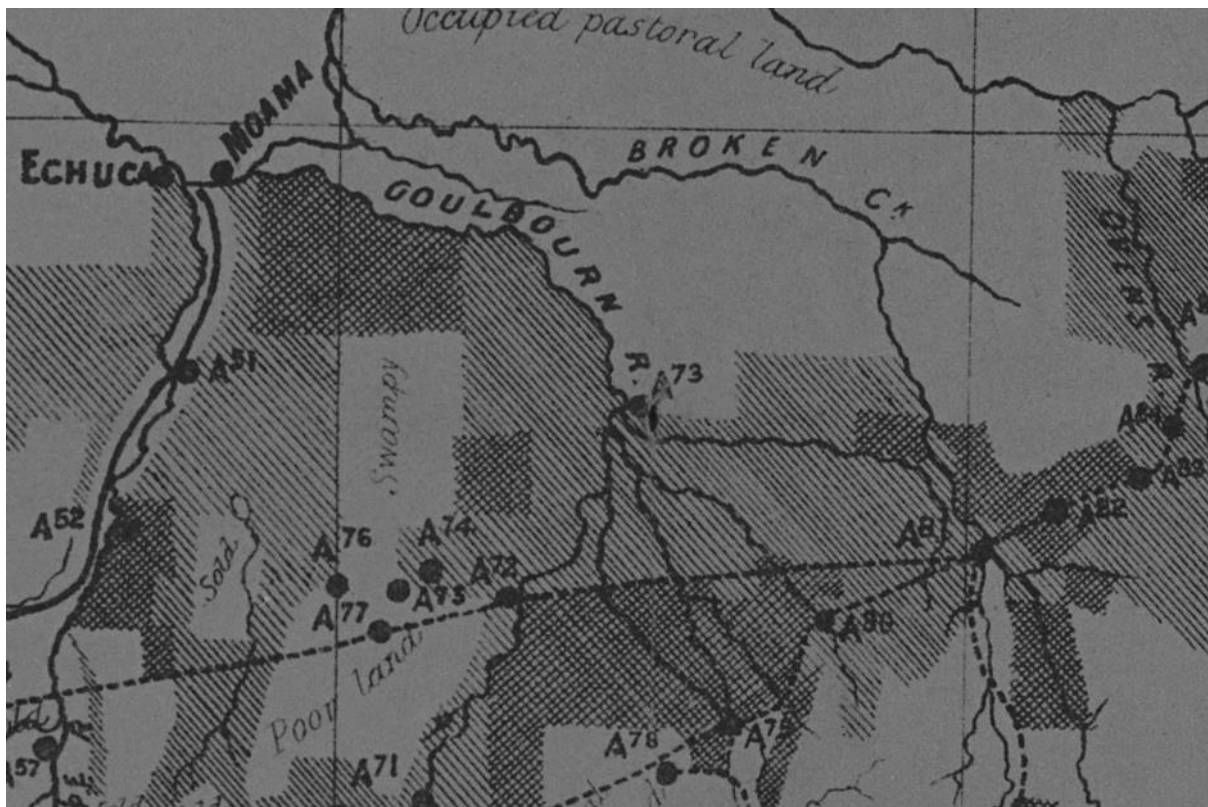


Figure 6. Detail 'Victoria, Map of the 10 Millions of Acres reserved under the Land Act 1862' [issued by] the President of the Board of Land and Work and the Surveyor-General', 1862.⁹⁰

Shepparton is designated as A73. The southern flanks of the Tallygaroopna and Pine Lodge runs, and the whole of the Arcadia run, were to be included in the second tranche of blocks to be offered under the Land Act 1862, but this did not eventuate; most of these areas were subsumed into Land Act 1865.

The Duffy Act was an even greater failure than the 1860 Act. Numerous loopholes (cynically intentional on the part of squatter-parliamentarians and their allies) led to huge land rushes at Departmental country offices, particularly in the Western District. Dummying was rampant; historian Tony Dingle claims that the two Acts had led to the bulk of the land in the rich Western District passing into the ownership of a few wealthy pastoralists.⁹¹

Selection finally arrived in the Shepparton area, albeit at this stage largely unsuccessfully and on a minute scale, via the Amending Land Act 1865, the third Victorian attempt at land reform legislation, and the first of two by parliamentarian and land reformer James Macpherson Grant, President of the Board of Land and Works and Commissioner of Crown Lands and Survey.

This Act attempted to preclude squatters monopolising the land the Act offered by not allowing immediate sale of blocks, and by requiring continuous residence for three years. Surveyed allotments of 40-640 acres, in 157 Agricultural Areas, were to be leased for a period of from three to seven years at two shillings per acre (twenty per cent cheaper than under the 1862 Act) with

⁹¹ Tony Dingle, *Settling*, 1984, p 61

purchase at £1 per acre available after three years of residence and compliance with improvement conditions. This Act was only marginally more successful than its predecessors; in the Western District particularly, squatters again succeeded in obtaining extensive areas of land, largely in the far west, although now at a higher price and with greater difficulty. Three and a half million acres were selected under the Act, but only 230,000 acres were added to the area under cultivation for the period 1865 to 1869.

Locally, under this Act, in the eighth series of proclaimed agricultural areas, 1268 acres were made available on 14 March 1866 at Shepparton 'On the east side of the Goulburn River, at its junction with the Broken River around Shepparton.'⁹² This was the land taken from Fraser's Tallygaroopna run both on the northern and southern edges of the growing town; these were taken up and then forfeited, as previously noted.⁹³ In contrast, at this time, 197,034 acres of land on the west of the Goulburn River, were advertised at Waranga, Girgarre, Kyabram and Murchison, all from the extensive pastoral holdings of the Winter family.⁹⁴

The first three Land Acts of the 1860s, aimed at breaking the hold of the squatters and putting the small farmer on the land, had resulted in squatters monopolising the best land in the state.

The Goulburn Valley, including the Counties of Moira and Rodney, as with most of the northern plains, was wrested from the hands of the local squatters by the second Grant Act, the Land Act 1869; these were among the last areas to be opened up to selection.

In February 1870 when the Land Act 1869 came into effect, the Goulburn Valley was sparsely inhabited. The township of 'Shepparton, at McGuire's Punt, Goulburn River' had been surveyed at the site of the punt and Emu Inn by W G Wilmot in July 1855, but the census of 1871 showed Shepparton as having a population of only thirty-three persons, residing in six dwellings. W Foster, driving stock from Tocumwal to Kilmore the next year, saw only three buildings: the punt house, the police station and the hotel.⁹⁵ In 1872, Edwin Carton Booth, in his encyclopaedic publication aimed at enumerating the achievements of every district in Australia, described Shepparton as 'considerably smaller' than Murchison, and as 'gaining its chief importance from the fact of the pound of the district being within its borders'.⁹⁶

Under the Act, which came into effect the start of February 1870, almost all the unalienated land in the state was thrown open to selection, unsurveyed, the 'selection before survey' for which the Act is known. A selector now rented up to a maximum of 320 acres for three probationary years, under licence, at 2 shillings per acre per annum. During this time he or she was required to reside on the selection for two and a half of the three years, enclose it, cultivate one in every ten acres and

⁹² *Leader*, 10/3/1866, p 20

⁹³ *Leader*, 10/3/1866, p 20

⁹⁴ *McIvor Times and Rodney Advertiser*, 23/2/1866, p 2

⁹⁵ C W S James, *History of Shepparton 1838 to 1938*, 1938, p 17

⁹⁶ Edwin Carton Booth, *Australia Illustrated*, 1979 (1873), p 70

effect substantial improvements to the value of £1 per acre. In contrast to the provisions of earlier Acts, rents paid were now credited to the selector as part payment for the holding. At the end of the three year licence period, if the conditions had been complied with, the selector could either purchase the holding by paying the balance owing (fourteen shillings per acre), or convert the licence to a lease extending for up to seven years, at a continued annual rental of 2 shillings per acre, which was also credited towards payment. On expiry of the lease and full payment of rents owed, the land became the freehold property of the selector.

The Shepparton area was largely selected in 1873, as was much of Rodney to the west of the Goulburn River. Selectors moved up from the south, along and outwards from the river.

The Goulburn Valley, selected largely under the 1869 Act, did not see the level of dummying and other ploys on the part of squatters which other areas experienced. The notorious Hugh Glass, possibly the richest man in Victoria on the back of his corrupt business practices (he who had provided security for Sheppard) had been found guilty of dummying to an extreme level on his Warring run following the 1865 Act, and on others of his 20 stations; he had received a prison sentence, immediately overturned by the pro-squatter Supreme Court, to public approval. James MacBain, later Sir James and President of the Legislative Assembly, was consistently charged with dummying on the Wyuna and St Germain's runs; MacBain held a number of blocks around the St. Germain's Pre-emptive Right, acquired by dummying using station hands.⁹⁷ Echuca MLA Simon Fraser (unrelated to William Fraser) was stripped of his licence following the 1874 inquiry into dummying. William Fraser's foray into dummying, although blatant, was not in this league.

The more liberal terms of selection and the innovative crediting of rents as payment towards the cost of the freehold, along with evasion of the Act being made a felony and greater Ministerial powers, contributed to the greater success of this Act. Around eleven million acres were alienated from the Crown under the Act between 1869 and 1878, and there was a doubling in cultivation from 700,000 acres to 1,400,000 acres.⁹⁸ The reduction in the maximum size of a selection from 640 to 320 acres, at a time when experience was demonstrating that in many areas holdings of 320 acres were not viable, was both a strong reassertion of the yeoman myth, and a response to the financial circumstances of the selectors, who often over-reached themselves and were forced to mortgage their holdings.

The 'selection before survey' element is seen by historians as the defining aspect of the 1869 Land Act, but for selectors from 1 February when the Act came into force the significant aspect was probably the crediting of the rents as payment towards the cost of the freehold. A Lands Department report, looking back over the first years of operation of the Act, alluded to this:

⁹⁷ Anne Tyson, *The log buildings of Merrigum and the context of their construction*, Research Project, Masters of Arts, (Public History), 2001, p 26

⁹⁸ Don Garden, *Victoria: A History*, 1984, p 159

*Selectors throughout the colony eagerly availed themselves of the additional advantages afforded, of the facilities placed in their way...such being the feeling of the people evinced by results, the tide of selection from this date flowed with increasing rapidity...*⁹⁹

Selection in the Shepparton area

The parish boundaries formed the basis for the surveying of allotments selected under the 1869 Land Act, which was undertaken by private surveyors hired by the intending selector who had 'pegged out' his (or, in a minority of cases, her) chosen holding; the 1869 'selection before survey' Act allowed selectors to choose their own piece of land, within the size parameters of the Act. This was in contrast to the situation in districts settled earlier under the 1860, 1862 and 1865 Land Acts

Thomas Nixon, Benalla District Surveyor but permitted to carry out private work, was engaged by selectors to survey their chosen selection; in early 1873 he was joined by Alfred Leahy, appointed Government Contract Surveyor for the Goulburn District in 1872.¹⁰⁰

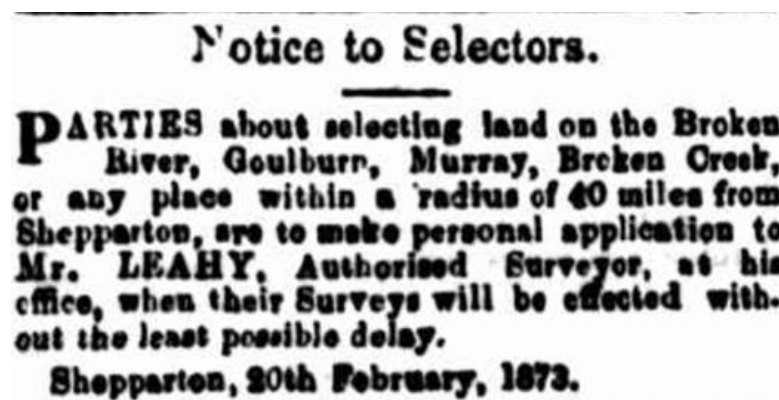


Figure 7. Advertisement to selectors by Alfred Leahy, Government Contract Surveyor, offering his services for the compulsory survey of their intended selection.

Land seekers would peg out the block they desired, and apply to a sitting of the Land Board at the local Land Office, which was located at Benalla. The Benalla Land Board only been created, like the Benalla Land District which it covered, in October 1869, two months before the Land Act 1869 was passed: previously the few Shepparton region selectors under the earlier Acts had been forced to travel to the Rushworth office to attend a hearing. The first sitting of the Benalla Land Board was on 27 April 1870¹⁰¹. Land Boards met to examine selectors' applications and determine outcomes, also to impose forfeiture when the conditions of licence or lease were not met.

⁹⁹ Article referring to Report of Proceedings taken under the Land Act 1869 during the year ending 31st December 1873 in *Argus*, 7/10/1874, p 1

¹⁰⁰ *Geelong Advertiser*, 12/2/1873, in Philip Leahy, *Our Leahy Family History*, 2020, pp 41-43

¹⁰¹ *Argus*, 19/3/1870, p 5

Settlement moved up the Goulburn from the south. In early March 1873, John Johnson, 'Free Selector' of Bradford Farm, Mooroopna is writing: *'We are informed that it would be difficult to procure a piece of land of any description, so rapid is the progress of settlement...'*¹⁰²

Often selectors would travel in groups, brothers selecting land close together to enable joint working of the properties. The selection of adjoining blocks by family members, with the resultant advantages of a larger total acreage, co-operative labour and joint capital, often meant the difference between success and failure,¹⁰³ particularly here in the dry north where selections of 320 acres were often to prove inadequate. Commonly a father and son selected together, or a pair of brothers, each person farming both individually and co-operatively; single women selectors were generally selectors in name only.

The privations and difficulties faced by the selectors have been well chronicled in a range of local histories. After providing a dwelling, generally a tent, or log, slab or bark hut (few could immediately build in weatherboard) came the clearing, without which the important first crop could not be sown and harvested and income gained to pay for six-monthly rent instalments, or the conditions of the licence complied with. Clearing—felling trees, ringbarking the giants, grubbing out roots, stacking or burning felled timber, creating fences from the brush or logs—was also necessary for the establishment of dwellings and farmyards, grazing paddocks and dams; it was 'hard, back-aching toil', the child of a selector later wrote.¹⁰⁴ Life on a selection was a family enterprise. Men tackled the physical work, women the child rearing, food production, home-making, garden and orchard, fowls and milking cow: children also had to contribute.

Better than average rainfall during the first four years of the operation of the 1869 Act encouraged the selectors; 1870 had been the wettest season since Mitchell had passed through to the south of the Goulburn Valley, and the countryside was at its most inviting. The lush growth of native grasses and the presence of surface water brought about by the higher than average rainfalls of the early 1870s were misleading: drought and low rainfall were to be regular experiences. Water understandably attracted the selectors, but selecting near the Broken or Goulburn Rivers or some of the creeks held as yet unknown dangers of flooding, as some selectors discovered in August 1875:

*Some selectors in this district, having pegged in the summer, anxious to have water frontage can see their error now, for several of these have been flooded.*¹⁰⁵

John Johnson, the Mooroopna selector, criticized what he believed was misleading climatic information from the Secretary for Agriculture:

¹⁰² *Australasian*, 1/3/1873, p 24

¹⁰³ J M Powell, *The Public Lands of Australia Felix*, pp 160-61

¹⁰⁴ J K Andrews, manuscript known as 'History of Merrigum' and 'Memories of an Old-Timer', published, 1954, p 26. In the possession of Anne Tyson, Merrigum.

¹⁰⁵ *Leader*, 14/8/1875, p 7

*The Mooroopna area is subjected to the most severe droughts for fully four seasons out of seven; and consequently incurs upon the agriculturist very heavy losses in the failure of crops and the death of livestock. For proof of this Mr. Wallis may be referred to the Toolamba farmers, who are longer established than their Mooroopna neighbours. But for the kindness of Mr. James Winter in granting free access to his water-tanks, constructed at a great outlay, many of the farmers must have succumbed in that quarter, and that within the last three seasons. Again it must be noticed that the present, as well as the past two seasons, have been unusually favourable, and cannot be expected to continue so.*¹⁰⁶

Local historian John Dainton has written that a great concern for the selectors was the lack of bridges over the Goulburn and Broken Rivers at Shepparton, as the only means to markets in Melbourne or Bendigo for the newly opened up land east of Shepparton was over the Broken River by ford to the railway at Violet Town or Euroa, or by paddle steamer to Echuca and then rail to Bendigo (for the short time paddle steamers were in operation between Shepparton and Echuca). He noted that this was due to the complexity of local government, Shepparton being in the Echuca Shire, Pine Lodge in Benalla Shire and Mooroopna within Waranga.¹⁰⁷

From 1874 onwards there was a constant plea to the Benalla and Echuca Shires for bridges, but to no avail.¹⁰⁸ In the absence of any Council activity, sawmiller George Tanner constructed bridges over both the Broken (1874) and the Goulburn (1877), on which he extracted tolls. Dainton has suggested that this was the catalyst for Council's construction of a Goulburn River bridge, completed in November 1878, noting that Alfred Leahy was of the opinion that a bridge would have been built earlier had not Council consisted of a squatting clique.

Roads were another problem, particularly those to Melbourne and Benalla. In October 1875, after one cropping season, one selector was observing that 'the chief drawback is the 'want of roads to carry the produce to the railway, the average distance being thirty five miles.'¹⁰⁹ What had hitherto been tracks needed to be straightened out, stumps cleared, and new roads delineated. A road between Shepparton and Benalla had been surveyed in 1856 by John Chester Wilmot, who had been the Benalla District surveyor since 1855, and who had conducted the first survey for a township of Shepparton that year. When the selectors arrived in 1873 Wilmot's Benalla road was doubtless little improved from the winding track by the Broken River that Howitt had described.¹¹⁰ Leahy undertook improvements: in April 1873 it was reported that Leahy 'showing himself very anxious to promote the interests of that place [Shepparton], ... got his men to clear about ten miles of a road in the neighbourhood of Pine Lodge, and a distance of about four miles can thus be saved

¹⁰⁶ *Australasian*, 1/3/1873, p 24

¹⁰⁷ John Dainton, 'Monash Park', Presentation to Greater Shepparton Cultural Heritage Awards ceremony, 22/4/2023

¹⁰⁸ John Dainton, 'Monash Park', Presentation to Greater Shepparton Cultural Heritage Awards ceremony, 22/4/2023, p 6

¹⁰⁹ *Leader*, 16/10/1875, p 7

¹¹⁰ JG Wilmot, New Roads Plan Shepparton to Benalla, dated 9 April 1856. VPRS 8168/P0004, Plan: 721

by people who may be travelling from Shepparton in that direction.¹¹¹ Two years later, again attending to the Benalla Road, Leahy 'caused his men to cut a clear track five and a half miles long, saving four miles to Benalla.'¹¹² He may have attended similarly to the Melbourne road. A further problem for road building was that material for roadmaking was in short supply in the Shepparton region: this continued to be problematic. The road to Violet Town was surveyed in 1872.¹¹³

The Benalla road became the Midland Highway, central east-west spine of the area east of Shepparton.

As elsewhere in Victoria on the northern selection frontier following the 1869 Land Act, when villages straggled into existence, the first community institutions to be established were schools and churches, the latter often on an acre or so of land donated by a selector of that denomination; a public hall followed. In an age in which religion was a part of everyday life, faith often preceded education, resulting in the earliest government school in a locality sometimes being temporarily housed in a (generally weatherboard) church. This was the situation in Shepparton itself, where State School No 1469 opened on 22 January 1874 in the United Free Methodist Church situated on land donated by John Furphy at the rear of his flour mill in Welsford Street.

The development of Shepparton in the early selection era is brought alive in newspaper articles, particularly in a series appearing in the *Leader* (the 'companion weekly' to the daily *Age*) which was very popular in rural areas. These regular articles, which amounted to progress reports, were headed 'Shepparton and Pine Lodge (from our own correspondent)'.

In March 1873:

A rural newspaper from another area, the *Kyneton Guardian*, reported on selection in the north of the state:

*We are informed that south of Shepparton it would be difficult to procure a piece of land of any description, so rapid is the progress of settlement.*¹¹⁴

From 6 August 1873:

*Further east, the country lying between the Broken River and the Goulburn has been taken up for several miles north of Shepparton into the area of Mundoona, but the areas of Ulupna and Kotupna, on the east of the Goulburn, and immediately south of the Murray, have been, as yet, scarcely touched by the selector, only one selection having as yet been made in Kotupna, the selectors being possibly deterred by the flatness of the banks of the Goulburn in this locality.*¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ *North Eastern Ensign*, 29/4/1873, p 2

¹¹² *North Eastern Ensign*, 13/6/1875, p 2

¹¹³ SK Vickery, New Roads Plan Violet Town to Shepparton, dated 10 February 1874. VPRS 8168/P0004, Plan: 602

¹¹⁴ *Australasian*, 1/3/1873, p 24

¹¹⁵ *Kyneton Guardian*, 16/8/1873, p 3

In September 1874:

Within the past twelve months this land has been selected...the majority of the selectors are from the older agricultural districts. The area already under culture with cereals exceed three thousand acres, and at the present time the crops are looking exceedingly well. A nurseryman has taken up his quarters here [William Oram at Pine Lodge] combining with this business the culture of cereals and tobacco...he has been mainly instrumental in instigating what is called here the Shepparton and District Progressive Committee.....

Twelve months since when your correspondent arrived in Shepparton, it boasted of a slab post office, police barracks, a hotel, a brick building (then closed), and a bark hut; it now consists of substantial buildings, chiefly wood and iron, and used for business places as follows, viz, two smithies, four hotels, five stores, a butchery, a saddlery, a church, a timber yard, a bakery in course of erection, and a few good substantial dwelling houses...The next thing, I believe, will be the erection of a flour mill. Shepparton, situated as it is, commands the junction or terminus of several main roads, and must ultimately become of importance.¹¹⁶

In January 1875:

Harvesting operations have proceeded ...The result so far is very satisfactory, considering that the land was not broken up till last winter...Selection still continues northwards towards the Murray. Very little, if any, good land remains open in either of the above districts [Shepparton and Pine Lodge].

From 16 October 1875:

With reference to the operations of selectors, in most cases a hut is erected with logs, bark, slab or sawn timber; afterwards all timber under a foot in diameter is grubbed and hauled off or burnt. The land is then ploughed if soft enough, and while this is going on, if the selector has men he has other parties fencing with log and chock, or post and rail. The price per mile for the latter is, for three-rail, from £80 to £90, and for the former £40 per mile. If the selection is on a back block, dam sinking is proceeded with... Usually when a selection of 320 acres is surrounded with a good fence, cattle or sheep are placed on the land, but there cannot be said to be much feed the first year, owing to the way the land has been stocked by the squatter... I believe there is not a newly-settled district in the colony that exceeds this for the number of inhabitants on the same area of land. I found in five families within two miles with 49 children, which with the parents make 59 souls.

A combination of agriculture with sheep or cattle farming is the practice aimed at generally, and with this object many of the selectors have rung all their green timber... The cost for grubbing, clearing, ringing, ploughing and sowing is about £3 acre.¹¹⁷

On 27 May 1876:

The country for miles around Shepparton is all occupied: as an instance, two years ago most of the Pine Lodge run was open for selection, and now I find it almost wholly in occupation by farmers and their

¹¹⁶ *Leader*, 5/9/1874, p 9

¹¹⁷ *Leader*, 16/10/1875, p 7

families, and the latter must vie in number with any place in the colony so newly settled. The new school at Pine Lodge has an attendance of forty scholars, and has only been opened a few weeks, while at Shepparton, five miles further west, the number should be even greater. The area that will be under tillage within a radius of fifteen miles in a month must be some thirty or forty thousand acres. Shepparton should decidedly be included by the Government in their scheme of railway construction.

There is a great scarcity of men hereabouts, so much so that our farmers and new selectors are in great straits for hands. The work to be got is grubbing, fencing and other jobs...I notice that Mr. Eraser, of Tallagoroopna Station, evidently has faith in the stability of the township and district, for he is adding to his property — this time by erecting a large and commodious store which will be for the host of the Shepparton Hotel, Mr. M'Kinney. When completed it will add much to this pretty and increasing township, and the Government are, I understand, about calling for tenders for a court-house. Mr. Swallow, of Shepparton, is also about erecting a flour mill, which is much required.

From what I know myself there is not a district in the colony where a railway is more needed than this one, for scores of miles. Material for road making does not exist, and the state of the roads here in the winter season cannot be easily described.¹¹⁸

By June 1878, over 250,000 acres had been selected in the Shepparton sub-district of the Benalla Survey District.¹¹⁹ The huge Shires of Echuca (of which Shepparton and surrounds east of the Goulburn were then still part) and Waranga (west of the Goulburn) were among the eighteen northern shires which, it was clear by 1875, were coming to constitute the new wheat belt,¹²⁰ as the cultivation requirements of the 1869 Act coincided with a nutritional decline in over-farmed soils in the south, and the discovery in the new areas of soils better suited to wheat-growing.

In the Shire of Echuca the number of holdings increased from 75 to 808 in the four years from March 1871.¹²¹ The acreage under cultivation increased seven-fold, from 3,712 to 26,585 acres, and just over half of this was devoted to wheat-growing, nine times the area under wheat in 1871.¹²²

Wheat and oats were the principle crops grown, with some mixed farming of cereals and grazing. After the initial wetter years it became clear that the climate was drier and more variable than expected. Lack of water was often a problem, soils were becoming depleted, the European varieties of cereals were not ideally suited to the northern Victorian conditions, and diseases, particularly

¹¹⁸ *Leader*, 27/5/1876, p 7

¹¹⁹ Evidence of William F. Tait, Officer in Charge, Echuca Survey District, in Minutes of Evidence taken before the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the progress of settlement under the Land Act of 1869, *Victorian Parliamentary Papers* 1879-80, Vol. 3, p 62

¹²⁰ Report of Proceedings taken under the Land Act 1869 during the year ending 31st December 1875, Table XV1, pp. 30-31, in *Victorian Parliamentary Papers* 1875-76, Vol. 3.

¹²¹ Report of Proceedings taken under the Land Act 1869 during the year ending 31st December 1875, Table XV1, pp. 30-31, in *Victorian Parliamentary Papers* 1875-76, Vol. 3.

¹²² Report of Proceedings taken under the Land Act 1869 during the year ending 31st December 1875, Table XV1, pp. 30-31, in *Victorian Parliamentary Papers* 1875-76, Vol. 3.

rust, which caused the almost total failure of the wheat crop in 1878-79, could be devastating. Although increased mechanisation of harvesting and cultivation, along with the coming of the railway to Shepparton in 1880, eased pressures on farmers, by the 1880s it had become clear that larger farms were needed to produce wheat profitably.¹²³ Many selectors struggled with their half yearly payments, and numbers walked off their properties; often this allowed the amalgamation that was becoming necessary for successful grain farming.

¹²³ B R Davidson, *European Farming in Australia*, Amsterdam, 1981, pp 181-3

IRRIGATION

Selectors on the northern plains of Victoria began experiencing the true variability and extremity of the climate in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Squatters had had the advantage of river frontages; selectors had to hope that each year's rainfall might be sufficient to permit them to harvest a crop, and had scooped out dams for their stock.¹²⁴ Dry years saw crop failures and emaciated and dying cattle.

Addressing the problem

Irrigation on a large scale was not considered until a series of severe droughts in southern Australia lasting from 1877 to 1884 (and which continued sporadically over the next period) 'brought hardship and privation to the settlers in the northern plains'.¹²⁵ In previous droughts only a small number of squatters had been affected, but now across northern Victoria, including in the Goulburn Valley, dams, creeks and ephemeral streams were dry, stock were dying, and hundreds of small farmers and their families were in distress. Rainfall in Shepparton in the years 1881, 1882 and 1883 was barely over 15 inches [381mm], the average for the town being 19.51 inches [496mm], and in 1884 it measured only 13.90 inches [353mm].¹²⁶ In some summers stock were being driven up to twenty miles for water,¹²⁷ and water trains were necessary to supply Shepparton and other Goulburn Valley towns in 1884.¹²⁸

Some in the Shepparton region were attempting irrigation. East of Shepparton on the south bank of the Broken River in Kialla, selectors Joseph Hillier and Joseph Knight had established orchards, probably irrigated. North of the township, Edward Lightfoot and the Mason brothers had instigated irrigation systems from the Goulburn River. From late 1883 or early 1884 Edward Lightfoot had been piping water from the river 14,000 feet (4.3km) to his property 'The Pines' through a three-inch (7.6cm) diameter pipe: it was lifted from the river 'by the engine which supplies the town, Mr. Lightfoot paying a certain sum to the Shire council for filling his pipes'.¹²⁹ A C Mason had irrigated a substantial orchard by pump and gravitation from 1889 at his property 'Shepparton Park'. His orchard consisted of 143 acres, including peaches, nectarines, apples, oranges, pears and lemons, with 10 acres of table grapes. He also had a nursery with 40,000 vine cuttings and large quantities of young fruit trees.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ Arlene Cook, 'The Garden of Australia: an analysis of resource use and environmental change in the Goulburn Valley', thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of New England, 2001, p 114

¹²⁵ J M Powell, *Mirrors of the New World*, 1978, p 98.

¹²⁶ CS Martin, *Irrigation and Closer Settlement in the Shepparton District 1836-1906*, 1955, p 55

¹²⁷ *Argus*, 20 September 1884, p 4.

¹²⁸ *Goulburn Valley Yeoman*, 14 November 1884, np

¹²⁹ *Australasian*, 2/2/1885, p 10

¹³⁰ *Leader*, 7/7/1888, p 10

Small private irrigation schemes had in fact been set up in Victoria since the 1850s, with uneven results, and ambitious, even grandiose, schemes, mooted. In 1880 the Victorian Government appointed a Water Conservancy Board with two members, George Gordon, formerly Chief Engineer of Water Supply, and Alexander Black, Assistant Surveyor-General, to report on water supply and irrigation on the northern plains. This led to the Water Conservation Act of 1881 which established state-subsidised Waterworks Trusts linked to local Councils. These trusts were primarily concerned with the supply of water for domestic and stock purposes.¹³¹ Following recommendations in their reports of 1880-81, a number of weirs were constructed on major waterways in North-Central Victoria, including the Broken River, the Loddon River, and the Avoca River.

The scheme for the Broken River was outlined on Gordon and Black's Twelfth Report of September 1881, and the Shepparton Shire Waterworks Trust was established in October 1882, the shire then covering both Shepparton and Numurkah regions. In 1883 the Trust constructed the Pine Lodge Weir on the Broken River following Gordon and Black's recommendation for supply of stock and domestic water to the northern section of the County of Moira between the Goulburn and Ovens Rivers. Water from this weir was to be pumped through watercourses and small diversion channels to raise the level of Broken Creek, a northern offshoot of the Broken River originating north of Benalla. Constructed on an unsuitable government-mandated site, the weir periodically suffered flood damage, and when problems continued in spite of rebuilding, the Trust refused to strike a rate for water for the unsatisfactory weir. After years of disputation, the Government finally wrote off the Trust's debt for the weir, authorised a loan for a new weir, and approved a new site five kilometers upstream. The Gowangardie Weir was constructed in 1897, and was opened in early July that year by Alfred Deakin. It provided for diversion to the East Shepparton Stock and Domestic System for over a century, the original structure undergoing several additions, alterations and repairs. The weir was decommissioned around 2016, the scheme replaced by the Cosgrove Stock and Domestic Pipeline, a wholly piped scheme from Tungamah, rendering the Gowangardie Weir and its open channel system obsolete.

Casey's Weir, located fifteen kilometers downstream from Benalla, was constructed jointly in 1885 by the Shepparton and Yarrawonga Waterworks Trusts to also divert water from the Broken River to the Broken Creek for stock and domestic purposes, later (and currently) providing irrigation, and town supply to Devenish, St James and Tungamah. The 1900 Amending Water Act declared both the Gowangardie Weir and Casey's Weir to be national works, and placed them under the control of the Board of Land and Works, along with other local waterways such as the Broken and Boosey Creeks, lifting a great burden from the Shires of Shepparton and Tungamah Water Trusts, to the chagrin of many other cash-strapped Trusts.

No Irrigation Trust was established in the Shire of Shepparton. In August 1886 an Eastern Goulburn Irrigation League had been launched with a view to forming an Irrigation Trust to cover

¹³¹ L R East, 'Pioneers of Irrigation in Victoria', 1961, p 3

an area of 228,000 acres north of the Broken River, and the suggested territory for such a trust appeared on Water Supply Department maps.¹³² Further, the East Goulburn Main Channel from the Goulburn Weir, 33 miles in length, was to be commenced as a National Work. However the Trust never eventuated. A number of factors contributed to the situation, C S Martin contends: the projected Trust did not include the entire Shire of Shepparton, and apart from some 'keen-visioned' men, the townspeople with their reticulated water were indifferent to the scheme. The example of the financial problems of the Shepparton Shire Waterworks Trust were a disincentive, and, quoting Stuart Murray's observations in *The Goulburn Weir and its Dependent Works*, Martin noted also that those growing fruit trees on the east of the Goulburn without irrigation believed that with careful husbandry, their fruit was of equal quality, and that the advantages of watering did not pay for the cost entailed.¹³³

In contrast to the Shire of Shepparton Waterworks schemes which were limited to stock and domestic supply, west of the Goulburn River the United Echuca and Waranga Waterworks Trust (UEWWT), also constituted in 1882, had proceeded boldly into irrigation although no official approval had been gained for it to provide irrigation water.¹³⁴ The UEWWT built a widespread infrastructure of channels, many later found to be poorly situated, along with an elevated channel across the Waranga Swamp, all served by a pumping station on the Goulburn River south of Murchison while awaiting the construction of the projected Goulburn Weir. By 1888, channels carried water as far as Cornella Creek near Echuca. Initially providing only stock and domestic supply from the pumping station from 1885, the first, limited, irrigation water flowed from the pump in May 1886, to established pioneering Ardmona orchardists, a number of whom were members of the Trust.¹³⁵ Thus large-scale irrigation in the Goulburn Valley was pioneered enthusiastically west of the Goulburn River and saw the development and growth of the Ardmona 'irrigation colony'. The take-up of irrigation water by farmers in the UEWWT area was low, however, and the Trust became increasingly indebted from its large governmental loans; the channels leaked and deteriorated, and in 1889 the Rodney Irrigation Trust, covering the 1886-inaugurated Shire of Rodney, was excised from the parent Trust, the new trust again largely controlled by the progressive (and demanding) orchardists of Ardmona.

The pent-up pressure for irrigation, the inability of local trusts to reimburse their governmental loans, and the scale of expenditure needed to establish state-run irrigation (the costly damming of the Goulburn River, for example, necessary to allow gravitational irrigation in the Goulburn Valley) had led to a Royal Commission into irrigation. It commenced in 1884 under the chairmanship of Victorian Solicitor-General and Minister for Public Works, Alfred Deakin. Research was undertaken on irrigation in other countries, and looking to the success of the

¹³² C S Martin, *Irrigation and Closer Settlement in the Shepparton District 1836-1906*, 1955, p 71

¹³³ C S Martin, *Irrigation and Closer Settlement in the Shepparton District 1836-1906*, 1955, pp 70-73

¹³⁴ C S Martin, *Irrigation and Closer Settlement in the Shepparton District 1836-1906*, 1955, p 46

¹³⁵ *Goulburn Valley Yeoman*, 20/5/1886 np, and Martin Delaney, *Mooroopna North West 'Ram Dam' No. 2002, School and District Settlement*, Shepparton, 1978, p 23

American irrigation schemes, particularly those in California, Deakin undertook a tour of important irrigation schemes in the United States of America.

The resulting report *Irrigation in Western America* and Deakin's further reports on irrigation in India, Italy and Egypt exhibited his conviction that a new large-scale effort in irrigation-based land settlement could be justified, minimising the effect of drought, and was 'the best possible insurance for the agriculturist'.¹³⁶ Deakin emphasised the need for state ownership of all water resources (contrary to English riparian law), and efficient distribution and application of water, with irrigation employed in cultivating fruit and vegetables intensively on small plots rather than being utilised simply to boost yields of grain and milk on large properties. Property values would increase with irrigation, and for new settlers, it offered 'the prospect of regular employment and a regular income, which with frugality and industry, would enable him to rear his family and make a home for himself, the value of which should rise steadily...'.¹³⁷ Invoking the yeoman myth, Deakin under-estimated the difficulties that might arise, and the frugality and industry required.

The far-reaching Irrigation Act of 1886 which followed vested in the Crown ownership of all water resources in the State, authorised the construction of 'national works' by the State to make provision for large-scale storage and diversion structures on rivers, as well as off-river storages,¹³⁸ and enabled the establishment of Irrigation Trusts to carry out water supply projects with monies advanced by the Government. The next year a start was made on the first 'national' storage, the Goulburn Weir, which allowed gravity supply and was the vital basis for Goulburn Valley irrigation. The Weir came into operation in 1891.

In the years 1887 to 1889, to encourage best practice, irrigation enthusiast Deakin, as Minister for Water Supply, offered a first and second prize of £50 and £25 respectively for the best irrigated farm, garden, orchard or vineyard, with similar prizes given for the best variety of irrigated crop.

John West, local expert

A central but under-acknowledged figure in Goulburn Valley irrigation is John West, one of the leaders in the establishment of the Ardmona irrigation colony, who was active at this time. Trained initially as a horticulturist then as a teacher, on becoming agricultural editor of the *Shepparton News* West had from the late 1870s and through the drought years been lobbying in a concerted way on irrigation and closer settlement, airing his views on the necessity for intensive, irrigated agriculture as a replacement for the growing of wheat and other cereals on those areas of the northern plains which could be irrigated.

¹³⁶ Alfred Deakin, *First Progress Report, Royal Commission on Water Supply*, 1885, p 48, cited in J M Powell, *Watering the Garden State*, 1989, pp 110-111

¹³⁷ Alfred Deakin, *First Progress Report, Royal Commission on Water Supply*, 1885, p 48, cited in J M Powell, *Watering the Garden State*, 1989, pp 110-111

¹³⁸ Bruce A Campbell, 'History of Irrigation in the Goulburn-Murray Irrigation District', 1990, p 16

In 1883, with irrigation 'in the air', West purchased Mooroopna's local paper, the *Mooroopna and Toolamba Telegraph*, with his brother William Payne West (later to become a leading orchardist in Shepparton Estate No 1, Grahamvale). The brothers renamed it the *Goulburn Valley Yeoman*, and this became the crusading mouthpiece for West's views, which accorded with those of Deakin; 'too often', West wrote, 'after a year of toil, anxiety and discomfort', selectors growing wheat were yet again reduced to 'holding out for the mirage of the next harvest.'

*The fruit canning and drying which is such a source of wealth in many districts in California will by and by find a firm footing in our own fertile valley.*¹³⁹

In the *Yeoman*, West set out to persuade his readers of the necessity of intensive irrigated agriculture, and to educate them on how to undertake it. In article after article, cultivation methods—planting, management and varieties—of a wide range of fruits and vines were explained in great detail. By September 1887 West was establishing the first smallholding in the new 'irrigation colony' of Ardmona which he and his friends were inaugurating by subdividing a number of selections on the Three Chain Road (Midland Highway) west of Mooroopna. West's companions in the development of Ardmona included Martin Kavanagh who had been growing grapes from 1884. West's yeoman holding of twenty-one acres, with a nursery, was in effect an experimental and model farm on which he set out to demonstrate the principles of intensive irrigated agriculture. He provided fruit trees, vine stock and seeds for the intending orchardists of Ardmona (the main plantings at Ardmona took place in 1892), dispensed advice on the 'new industries' to the novice fruit and grape-growers, and while developing the orchard and vineyard, also instructed students in horticulture.¹⁴⁰ In 1888 his practical achievements were acknowledged when he received the £50 first prize in Deakin's 'best irrigated crops' category. The Wests opened a shopfront nursery in Shepparton in June 1890.¹⁴¹

In 1890 also West's knowledge and practical experience, together with his zeal and commitment to intensive irrigated agriculture, led Deakin to appoint him as Victoria's irrigation expert and to invite him to immediately undertake a six month fact-finding mission to the irrigation states of western USA.¹⁴² Pioneering fruit grower Joseph Knight of Kialla had at the same time been appointed as Victoria's expert on fruit culture.¹⁴³ On his return West lectured on the American experience and its lessons for local irrigation at a wide range of pioneering irrigation localities across northern Victoria, including Mooroopna, Kyabram, Merrigum, Avenel, Nathalia,

¹³⁹ *Goulburn Valley Yeoman*, 23/11/1883, np

¹⁴⁰ *Australasian*, 2/2/1885, p 10

¹⁴¹ Anne Tyson, 'John West in the Goulburn Valley', Masters of Arts Research Project (Public History), Monash University, 2003.

¹⁴² *Australasian*, 15 September 1894, p. 469, and *Table Talk*, 15 September 1894, p 16

¹⁴³ *Advocate*, 10/5/1890, p 21. Knight, like Joseph Hillier, had early developed an orchard on the south bank of the Broken River (these were allotments 37A and 9, Parish of Kialla, respectively, selected under the Land Act of 1869), and in the mid-1880s as a member of Victoria's Council of Agricultural Education along with West, Knight had been associated with the early development of Dookie College.

Numurkah, Horsham, Nhill and Sandhurst, illustrating his talks with limelight views. It is unclear whether West lectured in Shepparton (surely he did so).

Water Act 1905 and the SRWSC

By the start of the new century it was obvious that the ninety or so Irrigation Trusts had failed; they were unable to repay their governmental loans, and the take-up of irrigation water was poor (only 10 per cent of the land in Trust areas was under irrigation around 1903).¹⁴⁴ The Water Act of 1905 abolished the failed Trusts, and control of rural water supplies was centralized under the control of a new body, the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission (SRWSC), generally referred to locally as the Water Commission or simply 'the Commission', to be headed by an expert. This was to continue as an extremely powerful semi-government authority for eighty years. The SRWSC would determine a compulsory charge for the water available to each farm; once the Commission had decided on the appropriate amount or 'water right' to be allocated to each holding, that quantity was deemed a charge on the property even if the landholder chose not to use the facility. The Act also finally tightened the limits of riparian rights, restricting landholder use of rivers and streams to stock and domestic use, and further clarified public ownership of the bank and beds of streams, rivers and other watercourses.

Stuart Murray, Chief Engineer of the Water Supply Department, who had been intimately involved in water supply and conservancy in the state for a quarter of a century, became the founding, if interim, Chairman of the Commission.

Elwood Mead

In 1907, Elwood Mead, Director of Irrigation Investigations with the USA Department of Agriculture, was invited to take on the role of Chairman of the SRWSC. An internationally-reputed irrigation engineer and advocate of planned irrigation settlements, with a wide knowledge and experience of irrigation at state and federal level in the United States of America, Mead brought a new ethos of technocratic efficiency to water management, allied with American entrepreneurship.

With George Swinburne, Minister for Water Supply and driving force behind the 1905 Act, he was committed to the belief that only intensive settlement could justify irrigation, that compulsory water charges should be applied to all properties to which irrigation could be provided whether the landholder chose to use it or not, and that the charge should cover the cost of provision.

With Swinburne also he saw irrigation and planned closer settlement inextricably linked: Swinburne referred to the 1905 Water Act as 'the handmaid of Closer Settlement'.¹⁴⁵ The previous year the 1904 Closer Settlement Act had been passed building on the foundation Act of 1898.

¹⁴⁴ J M Powell, *Watering the Garden State*, 1989, p 144

¹⁴⁵ J M Powell, *Watering the Garden State*, 1989, p 153

SRWSC Chairman Mead and his Commission were to be at loggerheads with the Closer Settlement Board at times, and in 1913 the SRWSC gained control of all Closer Settlement in the irrigated areas, a logical move, but probably brought about as much by Mead's desire to be in control as by the need for efficiency.

To attract the numbers of Australian and overseas settlers he believed were needed to make the intensive irrigation settlements viable, Mead conducted intense publicity campaigns, publishing a range of persuasive brochures, presenting lectures and talks, and keeping irrigation and Closer Settlement in the public eye. In 1910, with Hugh McKenzie, Minister for Lands, he undertook a tour of the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Denmark and the USA to examine irrigation and small farming methods: this was also a publicity tour to attract the influx of settlers Mead believed was crucial to populate the intensive irrigation settlements he was envisaging. Alfred Prater, a settler initially on the Bamawn estate who transferred to a block in Orrvale in 1920, heard Mead in Manchester. His son Tom later wrote about it:

Dad happened to hear of a deputation from Victoria which was in England trying to induce migrants to take up irrigation farming in northern Victoria...he attended one of their meetings and was so impressed by what he heard he got in touch with them. Mr Mead was the leader of the deputation. He was an American...his offsider was Hugh MacKenzie [sic] an MP. They left a big impression with Dad although quite a lot of their statements proved to be misleading, exaggerating and deliberate untruths...our new life was planned. A great deal of literature arrived at the house and was read to Dad. It dealt with the land itself and the conditions ...prices for stock and wages, what a house would cost. It was all presented in glowing terms.¹⁴⁶

In comparison to the enthusiastic if patchy and costly irrigation being undertaken west of the Goulburn, on the east, as C S Martin wrote, 'stagnation seemed to have set in'.¹⁴⁷ Construction of the East Goulburn Main Channel, part of the 'national works' related to the Weir, seemed to be perpetually stalled. In the yearly updates of costings for the Weir the Eastern Channel was often subsumed within a heterogeneous group of irrigation budget items, rarely as a stand-alone costing, and seemingly easily ignored. The Bent government failed to produce funding, possibly influenced by grain growers and dairy farmers east of Shepparton who saw themselves as making a fair living from their selection-era dryland properties, by now often enlarged by amalgamation to create a viable size.

Demand for the construction of the Channel was intermittent. In June 1901 a body titled the Eastern Goulburn Irrigators' League had been formed in Shepparton by would-be irrigators and other interested individuals¹⁴⁸, and a branch in Numurkah followed the next month: a central complaint was that the bulk of funds were going to the western channels.¹⁴⁹ In September 1902 a deputation including the local member George Graham demanded that the East channel be

¹⁴⁶ B E Prater, *The apple doesn't fall far from the tree*, 2020, pp 6-7

¹⁴⁷ C S Martin, *Irrigation and Closer Settlement in the Shepparton District 1836-1906*, 1955, p 71

¹⁴⁸ *Numurkah Leader*, 21/6/1901, p 4

¹⁴⁹ *Numurkah Leader*, 5/7/1901, p 2

constructed concurrently with the western channel.¹⁵⁰ In 1903, in response to a demands made at a meeting of Katunga farmers, Premier Thomas Bent made a promise that the Channel would soon be built,¹⁵¹ but nothing then eventuated. However, somehow, by September 1906 construction of the first lengths of the long-proposed Channel had commenced from the outlet at the northern tip of the Goulburn Weir a little east of the Weir structure,¹⁵² and a clear £68,000 voted through Parliament on 5 December 1906 for the eastern channel.¹⁵³ By June 1908 the Channel had reached Seven Creeks,¹⁵⁴ in early 1909 it had been taken across the Broken River, and on 1 April 1909 tenders were called for construction of the four miles of channel to the projected Closer Settlement estate which was in preparation (see Closer Settlement below).¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ *Numurkah Leader*, 26/9/1902, p 6

¹⁵¹ *Numurkah Leader*, 10/7/1903, p 5

¹⁵² *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 1/9/1906, p 4

¹⁵³ *Bendigo Independent*, 6/12/1906, p 4

¹⁵⁴ *Age*, 2/6/1908, p 6

¹⁵⁵ *Herald*, 7/4/1909, p 7

CLOSER SETTLEMENT

Irrigation, in tandem with Closer Settlement, created the intensive land use and settlement pattern which was characteristic of Orrvale, Shepparton East and the general area east of Shepparton for most of the twentieth century.

Closer settlement had taken a number of forms in Victoria before the Closer Settlement Act of 1904 under which the two major Shepparton Closer Settlement estates were created. Selection was one manifestation, as were the Village Settlements of 1893 which attempted to deal with the effects of the 1890s Depression (and of which Shepparton had two relatively successful examples).

As Victoria recovered from the effects of the 1890s Depression, the demand for farming land had increased. However, most land suitable for agriculture had already been selected or was part of a large pastoral estate. The Victorian Government became concerned about the loss of farmers to other colonies and attempted to stem the flood of farmers from Victoria and increase the numbers of those working the land by acquiring large estates and breaking them into small farms.

In the northern counties, including Moira, it had become clear that 320 acres was inadequate to be viable in semi-arid districts. Wheat and other grain farmers were now prospering only by increasing the size of their holdings and using land-extensive methods, the reverse of the closer settlement ideal; by 1910, the average farm size in these counties had jumped to over five hundred acres.¹⁵⁶ There were also many large estates centred around the Pre-Emptive Rights of former squatting runs, built up by the former run-holder or a successor. That is, in a parallel with the squatting era, a small number of owners were occupying relatively large tracts of land.

The Land Act 1898 made provision for the Board of Land and Works to purchase land for the purpose of Closer Settlement to create intensely settled agricultural communities. The purchased land was made available as farm allotments, agricultural labourers' allotments and workmen's home allotments to suitable applicants under the terms of conditional purchase leases. Certain residence and improvements conditions applied, initially for the first six years, after which time lessees were at liberty to mortgage, transfer or sub-let with consent and, on payment of the balance of the purchase money, to obtain a Crown Grant. Subsequently lessees were also eligible to apply for advances to assist them to erect dwellings and outbuildings and for other approved purposes.¹⁵⁷

The Closer Settlement Act 1904 enabled the Lands Purchase and Management Board on behalf of the Board of Land and Works to acquire land for the Crown either compulsorily or by agreement, and irrigation was seen as an essential accompaniment. The potential of this Act may have been a factor in the attraction for Mead of the SRWSC post.

¹⁵⁶ Dingle, A.E. (Tony), *Settling*, 1984, p. 125

¹⁵⁷ <https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/VA2266>, accessed 12/11/2022

A number of Closer Settlement estates had been established throughout the state before the Shepparton estates were commenced. West of the Goulburn River, the 23,000 acre estate of the Finlay family, the bulk of the former Wyuna pastoral run, had been purchased in March 1905 and parcelled into 141 lots ranging from 20 to 700 acres, and the 19,000 acre Colbinabbin Estate, part of the extensive western Goulburn Valley holdings of the Winter family, had been purchased in November 1906, creating 84 farm allotments. A 20,000 acre section of the Chirnsides huge Werribee Park estate was already under Closer Settlement. Estates such as these, derived from a single large property, were simple to institute, particularly if they were located where irrigation had become available or was easily initiated.

The challenge of knitting together properties from a number of farmers into one viable Closer Settlement estate may be one of the factors accounting for Shepparton's slow start with Closer Settlement; opposition or disinterest from farmers (some of whom were Councillors) contented with dryland farming on the larger amalgamated holdings, and the delays in construction of the East Goulburn Main Channel are some of the other possible inter-related reasons for the delay.

Land had been offered under the 1904 Closer Settlement Act in the Shepparton area prior to the inception of Estates No 1 and 2. The old racecourse area at Shepparton Park (at the Village Settlement north of the town) and the Benevolent Society's land were offered in March 1906,¹⁵⁸ and a Land Board sat in the Star Theatre in Shepparton on 25 November 1907 to determine allocation of a small number of local allotments on recently purchased properties.¹⁵⁹ At Numurkah 2,360 acres had been divided into fourteen farms in 1907.¹⁶⁰

Mead, Irrigation and Closer Settlement

In 1908 Mead set about creating a 'best practice' intensely settled irrigation colony at Shepparton. In March he introduced himself to the town. In a speech of almost evangelistic fervour he expounded the potential of irrigation and gave notice that for those in irrigation areas, participation in irrigation, and payment of the water fees, would be mandatory. Irrigation would triple the value of farms, bringing a large population to the Goulburn Valley. He ridiculed the precarious financial situation created in the Shire of Rodney, where hundreds of miles of channels had been created at great cost but where most farmers had not taken up irrigation, and the fees on the 23,000 acres under irrigation were inadequate to maintain the system or pay off loans. More water would be made available (at this time the Victorian Government was contemplating construction of a dam at Trawool instead of the storage which finally built in 1915, the Sugarloaf Reservoir at Eildon, later enlarged to become Lake Eildon). And he promised to have the Eastern Main Channel completed as far as the Broken River during the year.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ *Argus*, 8/3/1906, p 5

¹⁵⁹ *Age*, 11/11/1907, p 6

¹⁶⁰ Victoria Year Book 1909-1910, p 568; *Argus*, 9/2/1907, p 23

¹⁶¹ *Mildura Cultivator*, 4/3/1908, p 5; *Moiria Shire Stage Two Heritage Study 2007*, Volume Two, Environmental History, p 107

Mead was in Shepparton again in June that year with Dr Thomas Cherry, Director of Agriculture, at a dinner given for them by convinced irrigationist, erstwhile mining entrepreneur and former politician William Orr of Wanganui homestead. Mead was again persuasively promoting intensive irrigated agriculture, urging the local community to rise to the challenge.

Local dissent arose as it was becoming clearer, stemming from Mead's public statements, that landowners in the irrigated areas would be forced to pay for the right to use water (the 'water right') whether they wished to use it or not. Many, possibly most, around Shepparton were in favour of the long-awaited irrigation, but against the mandatory charges for all those in a supplied area.

It is clear also that Mead himself was adjusting his ideas as he became better informed. Local landowners had been incensed at the report of an address in early May 1909 in which Mead suggested that at Shepparton a settler could exist on a holding of 12 to 20 acres with irrigation: 'twelve acres would be a good block', with 2 to 3 acres under fruit and vegetables, and the rest devoted to dairying. He claimed that 'with three cows per acre and the fruit, a settler would be alright', and if lucerne were planted under the growing trees, a family could be supported in two years.¹⁶²

Mead's vision for the East Goulburn irrigation area was delivered afresh to an audience of a hundred in Shepparton on 3 July 1909. He again criticised the farmers west of the Goulburn, and claimed absence of a compulsory charge for water had removed the most potent influence to make men learn how to use water properly.¹⁶³ The East Goulburn Channel, now reaching completion, would have the capacity to divert 20,000 cubic feet of water per minute, providing one six-inch watering a month for 40,000 acres 'if losses in transit are ignored'(!). The East Goulburn irrigation district would therefore consist of forty thousand acres; 2300 acres of this had already been purchased, and the Ministry had fixed the range of holding size at from 20 to 200 acres.¹⁶⁴

However, he now had slightly different figures on the sizes of holdings: he posited orchards and vineyards of 10 acres, dairying on 5-20 acres, and the production of lucerne, his favoured crop ('the world over, no farmers were prospering like the lucerne growers'), on 30-40 acres. Forty irrigated acres should support a family of five, he claimed, and at an income level above the average wage of the worker in the cities.¹⁶⁵ A 20 acre block could be handled by a family with very little capital, and he felt sure that these small farms would be a boon to many deserving citizens and struggling families.¹⁶⁶ He outlined the benefits to local businesses: 'beyond anything which has occurred since the discovery of gold.'¹⁶⁷ Farming practices would need to be comprehensively

¹⁶² *Argus* 7/5/1909, p 9

¹⁶³ *Age*, 5/7/1909, p 4

¹⁶⁴ *Age*, 5/7/1909, p 4

¹⁶⁵ *Age*, 5/7/1909, p 4

¹⁶⁶ *Bendigo Independent*, 5/7/1909, p 3

¹⁶⁷ *Bendigo Independent*, 5/7/1909, p 3

changed and become intensive, due to the cost of water and supplying it the holdings. Soils needed improvement, via stable manure or the growing and ploughing in of green crops, and lucerne production was to be encouraged.

As to charges, they would be based on the expense of supplying the water. For the first year only half the cost would be charged, five shillings an acre. Subsequently, when full supply was available, ten shillings per acre would be the charge, Mead arguing that this was lower than that irrigation water elsewhere, the USA price being 11 shillings an acre, that of NSW 10/- to 12/6 an acre, and that of Mildura being £1.10.0 an acre.¹⁶⁸

Mead had outlined a contemporary version of the pervasive yeoman myth. His Shepparton speech was widely reported around Victoria, seen as the blueprint for future irrigated agriculture in the state, with some local newspapers such as the *Bacchus Marsh Express* (located in an irrigation area) printing the text verbatim.¹⁶⁹ As with many of those with large visions, Mead's boosterism was overestimating potentialities and downplaying or ignoring problems and limitations: the calculations retain a 'back of an envelope' flavour, and there is an echo of the high hopes held for earlier land settlement schemes such as the Village Settlements.

The subdued response to Mead's Shepparton address at this meeting belied the feelings of many locals hearing the actual water charge for the first time. Three weeks later, on 26 July 1909, Shepparton Council moved a motion against Mead's proposals and called for protest meetings against the scheme and the water charge.¹⁷⁰

At Tallygaroopna on 30 July 1909, at a meeting attended by 100 local landholders, Commissioner James Coldwell of the Shepparton Waterworks Trust argued Mead's plans would wipe out the pioneer farmers. Landholder after landholder voiced dissent.¹⁷¹ The meeting carried a motion disapproving of the proposed irrigation scheme for the district as one which would force the present settlers out of the State and replace them 'with inexperienced people who could not, under the heavy charges proposed, be successful'. A further resolution was adopted that a petition be drawn up against the scheme, and the meeting demanded that their local member, George Graham, oppose the scheme in Parliament (Graham who, ironically, happened now to be the Minister for Water Supply and Agriculture, later re-joined that this was ignorance and lack of understanding on the part of the farmers).¹⁷²

A similar protest meeting was held in Shepparton in August 1909 with attendance of 200. The MLC for Northern Province, R S Abbott, supported them: 'It was nonsense for the Government to insist that a man whose land commanded water must go in for intensive agriculture.' Arguments put were that land values would decline, that the charges per acre foot were higher than in Rodney

¹⁶⁸ *Leader*, 10/7/1909, p 35

¹⁶⁹ *Bacchus Marsh Express*, 14/8/1909, p 3

¹⁷⁰ *Age* 31/7/1909, p 12

¹⁷¹ *Argus*, 31/7/1909, p 21

¹⁷² *Argus*, 2 August 1909, p 11

Shire west of the Goulburn, that good farmers would be driven away, and that the proposed scheme was currently driving prospective buyers away. At the Shepparton meeting there was also some discontent at handing over control to Mead who 'did not understand this country' and was 'a stranger', 'a foreigner', as described by two speakers.¹⁷³

Local feeling, however, was far from unanimous. In contrast to Council and many landholders, in early October 1909 Shepparton's business community via the Progress Association went public in strongly endorsing Mead's plan, perceiving advantages in denser settlement:

*That this association expresses its strong approval of the irrigation policy of the present Government believing that its adoption will be for the lasting benefit of the State; and that the federated Progress Association be asked to endorse this policy.*¹⁷⁴

Mead attempted to allay local fears in September, assuring locals (disingenuously) that an irrigation scheme would not be forced on them, and that it was only on irrigable land that a charge for water would be imposed.¹⁷⁵ Irrigation areas at this time were in train at Rochester, Bamawm, and White Cliffs, and Mead had his first contingent of assisted migrants, 132 English would-be settlers, about to arrive in Victoria, although they were destined for the Rochester irrigation area¹⁷⁶.

Shepparton Estate No 1 ('Settlement No 1', Grahamvale)

In August 1908 the Small Improved Holdings Board had purchased three properties, H R Gillett's 770 acre property 'Warenda', John Swindle's 'Ivanhoe' stud farm of 570 acres, and 108 acres from H W Brooks.¹⁷⁷ These were chosen from around a dozen properties by an officer of the Small Holdings Board and a Government valuer, after a tour of inspection on which they were accompanied by two men representing land owners, S W Martin and A Whitehead.¹⁷⁸ It was rumoured that Mead would take up residence in Gillett's house, two miles from Shepparton, and that Secretary for Lands Thomas Morkham would reside at one of the other homesteads: in relation to Mead, this was a local 'furphy'.¹⁷⁹ In April 1909 further farms were acquired, from John Findlay (around 500 acres), P Ross, and James Thorn (320 acres) under the Improved Small Holdings Act of 1906. The total acquired was 3221 acres.¹⁸⁰

By mid-January the subdivision plans for the first Closer Settlement in the Shepparton region were being drawn up, and subdivision works were proceeding on the ground.¹⁸¹ With continual publicity from Mead about the irrigation settlements, and analysis and opinion in local and state

¹⁷³ *Age*, 7/8/1909, p 14

¹⁷⁴ *Argus*, 22/10/1909, p 9

¹⁷⁵ *Age* 18/9/1909, p 11

¹⁷⁶ *Weekly Times*, 22/1/1910, p 44

¹⁷⁷ *Age*, 29/8/1910, p 11, 1/10/1908, p 10

¹⁷⁸ *Argus*, 14/8/1908, p 5

¹⁷⁹ *Age*, 1/10/1908, p 10

¹⁸⁰ Report of Lands Purchase and Management Board for the Year ended 30 June 1911, p 1023

¹⁸¹ *Bendigo Advertiser*, 15/1/1910, p 10; *Weekly Times*, 22/1/1910, p 44

papers, would-be settlers were already applying for blocks in January 1910, although they had not yet been advertised. Closer Settlement was the issue of the moment, so much so that a local clothing store inserted the following advertisement in the *Riverine Herald*:

*To be sold for closer settlement at once, D A McNally's stock of men's fashion shirts from 2s 11d. All good patterns.*¹⁸²



Figure 8 Horse teams forming a channel with scoops on Settlement No 1 at the property of H R Gillett in March 1910; this had been purchased for Closer Settlement two years earlier.¹⁸³

On 1 April 1910 details of the Closer Settlement Shepparton Estate were announced in the *Government Gazette*, with a call for applications, and advertisements were placed in the statewide dailies. The scheme comprised 110 allotments: 67 Farm Allotments ranging in size from 14 to 89 acres, and 43 agricultural labourers' allotments from 2 to 10 acres. Additionally, there were three existing homestead allotments and one reserve for an Experimental farm (the Shepparton Agricultural High School's farm). Plans and details became available in Shepparton in the second week of April; applications were open until 27 April, with a Land Board to be held in Shepparton on 4 May 1910.¹⁸⁴

When the estate was advertised, the surveying was unfinished, and Mead had warned that a few boundaries might be inexact; as it was, only two required adjusting.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² *Riverine Herald*, 8/12/1909, p 2

¹⁸³ *Weekly Times*, 12 March 1910, p 30

¹⁸⁴ *Argus*, 7/4/1910, p 9

¹⁸⁵ *Age*, 10/6/1910, p 8

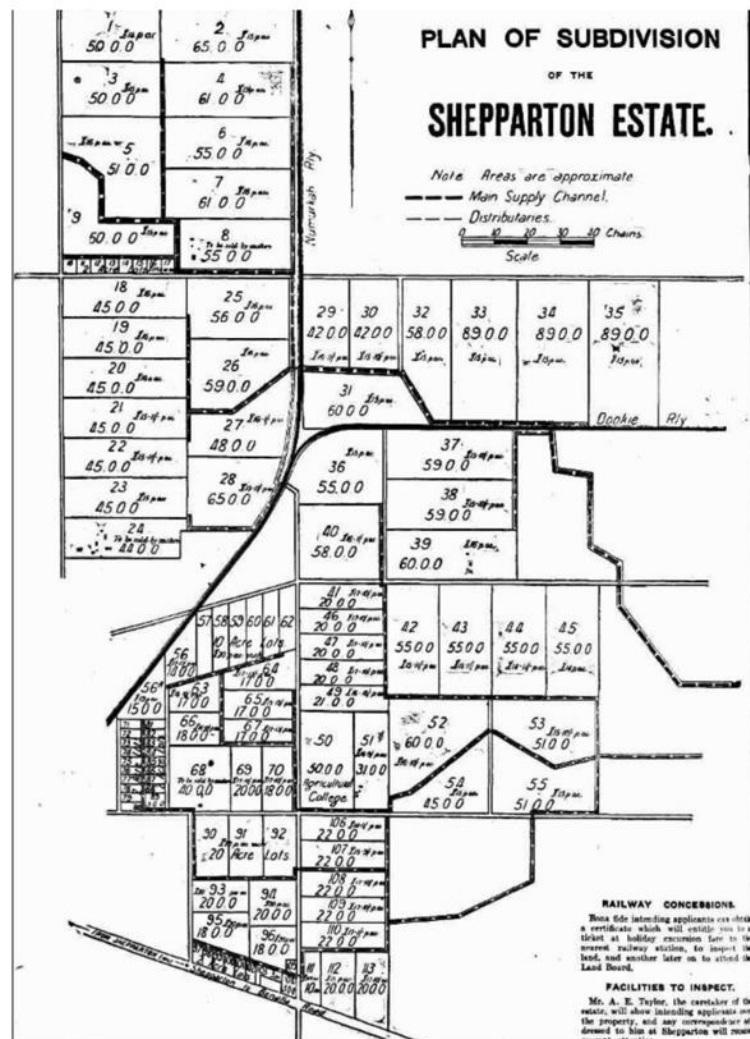


Figure 9. Plan of Shepparton Estate of 1910, referred to as Shepparton Estate No 1 after the second estate was established, but soon known locally as Settlement No 1 and, from 1911, Grahamvale. Published by the Closer Settlement Board with first advertisement for applications; placed in state-wide newspapers and further circulated.¹⁸⁶

The Closer Settlement Board and the SRWSC kept up the publicity, boosting the likely productivity of the irrigated blocks, refuting rumours of water charges of 25 shillings per acre, and offering incentives. A special reduced-fare excursion train brought forty 'land seekers' to Shepparton on 22 April 1910. The would-be irrigators were ferried around the properties being subdivided into the Closer Settlement allotments, and then at the Mechanics' Institute were shown a display of irrigated produce from Cohuna: 'maize (14 feet high), gigantic melons, pumpkins and vegetable marrows, rock and water melons and pomegranates, apples, pears, oranges, quinces, potatoes, onions, cucumbers and other edibles. Several applications were lodged henceforth'.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ *Age*, 6/4/1910, p 12

¹⁸⁷ *Age*, 22/4/1910, p 9; *Argus*, 12/4/1910, p 5

The Land Board, sitting at the Shepparton Court House and consisting of M Murphy and Thomas Hastie,¹⁸⁸ then of Murphy alone, met over three days from 4 May to hear from each of the 125 applicants. All holdings were allocated apart from eight blocks for which no-one had applied; for a number of blocks, there had been more than one applicant. The 'numerous' applications for Farm Labourers' blocks were referred to the Closer Settlement Board in Melbourne. Applicants, which included 'a sprinkling of women', were from many different parts of the state, 'representing almost every walk in life, the majority being young men in the prime of life', the *Benalla Standard* reported.¹⁸⁹ The paper believed that almost none had practical experience of irrigation. There was some discontent with the decisions: a few of the successful applicants were business men, seen as violation of the letter of the Act. Some felt that locals may have received priority and that 'the wrong class of settler has been encouraged.'¹⁹⁰

Reflecting the practical leadership Mead always attempted to provide, in early July all prospective settlers were invited to attend the Commission-organised demonstration of 'the approved methods for preparing the land for irrigated agriculture' to be held on Allotment 50, the site set aside for the Agricultural High School farm.¹⁹¹ Dairying and the production of Mead's favoured crop, lucerne (for hay for dairying, or as a cash crop), were promoted by the authorities: 'decidedly, they were told, dairying is the best way to go'.¹⁹² Water would be through by the end of September, the SRWSC promised.¹⁹³ It had been turned into the East Goulburn Main Channel from the Weir for the first time in mid-March.¹⁹⁴

The three properties containing the homesteads were sold at auction. They went to locals, Swindle's with 44 acres to J T Nankervis of Tallygaroopna for £1510, Gillett's homestead and 44 acres to A F Ford junior, owner of flour mills at Shepparton and Dookie, for £1400, and P Ross' homestead and 40 acres to J D McDonald for £1120. Ford also secured Allotment 40. These sales to established locals raised criticism for not being within the spirit of the Act, but influenced by the social position and financial status of the buyers.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁸ The Goulburn Valley now had a strong new Closer Settlement advocate, Thomas Hastie, appointed a member of the revamped three-person Closer Settlement Board in February 1910. Hastie resided on his farm at Toolamba; he had been manager of the Dhurringile Estate Company, which controlled the extensive properties of the estate of the late James Winter. Earlier he had managed the huge Chirnside Estate at Werribee, and then had watched the problems at the first Closer Settlement area established there in 1904. Hastie was well-known and respected on a broader stage than Werribee or the Goulburn Valley, and his presence on the Board, along with that of Thomas Kennedy, new Chair of the Board and former member for Moira, meant the Goulburn Valley was well-connected with the new Board.

¹⁸⁹ *Benalla Standard*, 6/5/1910, p 3

¹⁹⁰ *Argus*, 7/5/1910, p 20; *Euroa Advertiser*, 3/6.1901, p 4

¹⁹¹ *Age*, 1/7/1910, p 8

¹⁹² *Leader*, 10/6/1910, p 6

¹⁹³ *Argus*, 26/8/1910, p 8

¹⁹⁴ *Weekly Times*, 19/3/1910, p 54

¹⁹⁵ *Age*, 9/5/1910, p 6

Local member and Minister for Water Supply and Agriculture George Graham observed that many two-acre blocks, the Agricultural Labourers' blocks, had not been taken up, and would be amalgamated.¹⁹⁶ By early September some of the settlers on the two-acre Agricultural Labourers' allotments had given up, and ten such blocks were advertised by the Closer Settlement Board.¹⁹⁷

A question asked in State Parliament in early October 1911 revealed an arrangement that the Closer Settlement Board or Mead had made for the English immigrant settlers whom Mead had attracted. When asked if it were true that the Board was fencing, ploughing and grading land 'for the immigrants', and building houses for them, and whether it 'had offered to do similar work for our own settlers', the Acting Commissioner for Lands agreed that the Government was ploughing and grading portions not exceeding 20 acres for each immigrant and erecting 'small buildings', but that the Board had advanced a sum 'for carrying out work at the expense of the settlers'.¹⁹⁸ Settlers were able to request monetary advances from the Board, the sum repaid over time with the half-yearly payments, and it is unclear if there had been special treatment of the immigrants.

Settlers were fencing blocks and constructing houses. They were moving on to raw blocks, many as yet ungraded (the grading necessary to enable flood irrigation), and settlers initially housed themselves in tents or whatever shelter they could erect. Some contracted for the Board to erect their house. Houses of various sizes were available, to be paid off over 15 years with the half-yearly rental/purchase instalments. Under the terms of their Conditional Purchase Leases, lessees of Farm Allotments had to fence the holding, destroy vermin and noxious weeds and to make other improvements. The leases were also granted subject to a residence requirement of eight months per year.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ *Argus*, 2/6/1910, p 9

¹⁹⁷ *Weekly Times*, 3/9/1910, p 55

¹⁹⁸ *Bendigo Independent*, 6/10/1910, p 3

¹⁹⁹ Closer Settlement Act 1904 http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/hist_act/csa1904210/
Accessed 29/11/2022

HOW TO OBTAIN HOMES IN THE IRRIGATED AREAS.

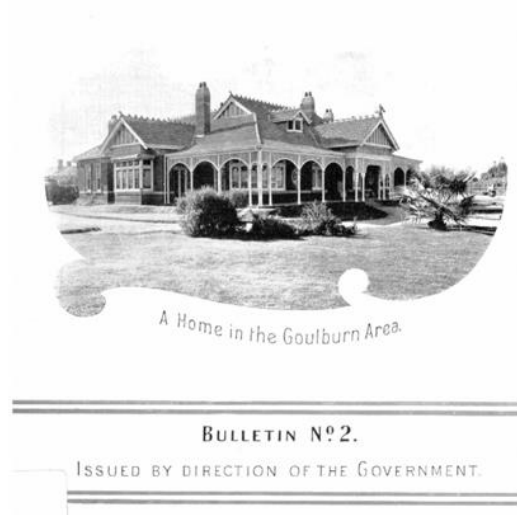


Figure 10
Brochure aimed at intending settlers c1910

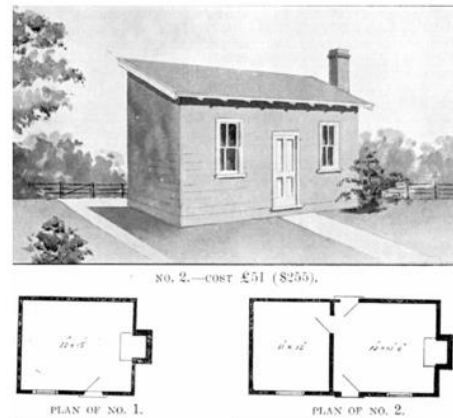


Figure 11
House designs offered to settlers

In an article syndicated around a number of Victorian newspapers (showing a widespread awareness of the importance of the Shepparton scheme as the first full-blown Mead-style irrigation estate) the scene at the estate in August was described:

Just now great activity is being shown by the settlers in fencing their blocks, house-building, and cultivating the land. The whole aspect of the country has been changed. Formerly one house was to be seen every two or three miles, but now houses are going up in all directions. The difference will be more readily grasped by the figures. On land which about half a dozen farmers formerly lived, 113 settlers and their families are being placed ... Altogether it may be said that Mr. Mead's scheme is fairly on its trial on the Shepparton smallholdings and its sponsors may be relied upon to spare no effort to make it a success. A late start will prevent much planting and sowing being done this season, but there is general hope, which amounts almost to a belief, even amongst those who are wedded to the old methods, that next year the Shepparton estate will be transformed into a smiling garden.²⁰⁰

The persistence of the yeoman myth is clearly seen here.

Settlers were initially involved in dairying, milking a small number of cows by hand, although most were totally inexperienced in farming of any type; cream was sold to the Shepparton Butter Factory. Dairying proved uneconomic, and most settlers turned to fruit-growing, amalgamating blocks to become more viable. Myrtle Ford, Grahamvale resident and foundation historian of Goulburn Valley towns and schools, wrote that the soil at Grahamvale, though fertile, was too shallow for the lucerne needed to support dairying, and 'with every family trying out vegetables,

²⁰⁰ *Camperdown Chronicle*, 6/9/1910, p 5

fruit, cattle raising and even sheep farming', fruit growing proved the most successful.²⁰¹ Some relied on dairying as a supplementary income, others dried prunes, grapes even tomatoes.²⁰² Many settlers found it necessary to take labouring and other work.

The difficulties and challenges faced by the settlers and their struggles are recounted in memoirs, family histories and local histories, particularly Myrtle Ford's *Grahamvale Re-Union, 1911-1986*, 1986, and in the publications of the Shepparton Family History Group, *Early Families of Shepparton and District*, Books 1-3.

The sanguine expectations of Mead and the Board for this estate, so highly invested in by the Chairman, were soon tested. In December, at the same time as Mead was appointing an agent for land settlement in London to attract more British immigrants,²⁰³ some of the settlers, members of the newly-established Shepparton Irrigators' Association, were asking the Closer Settlement Board to defer payments for twelve months, as success on the new blocks had been impeded by inadequately designed irrigation and poor grading: several complained of 'being asked to run water uphill' due to misplaced inlets, others were receiving four or five times the water needed, another could only irrigate five of his fifty-five acres.²⁰⁴

Six months later the agricultural reporter for the *Leader*, in writing about the projected second irrigation estate at Shepparton, noted with hindsight these same problems. Grading, he contended, is only successful when the soil is dry, but it had been undertaken at the estate during August and September 1910, when the earth was sodden after unusually heavy rain, and so was defective. Remediating this 'ineffective work' placed the settlers out of pocket. And the much vaunted 'expert guidance' promised from the Water Commission 'broke down from the beginning' in that the advice to plant lucerne 'on old wheat fields full of wild oats and rubbish' led to 'a more or less failure'.²⁰⁵

Local observers had foreseen such difficulties. 'FWM' of Shepparton, writing to the *Weekly Times* in May 1909, had predicted the heavy burden that establishing a farm on an unimproved block would place on the settlers, and suggested

*...no block of land should be submitted for settlement unless it was a 'going concern'...the Government must purchase the materials, build the house, and make it habitable before any measure of success can be hoped for. The land should be bought, irrigated and generally made ready for intense cultivation. Anything short of this must result in failure to all concerned.*²⁰⁶

The immensity of the task of establishing and profitably conducting the smallholding, including mastering irrigation techniques, defeated many, and reminiscent of the amalgamations of

²⁰¹ Myrtle Ford, *Grahamvale Re-Union, 1911-1986*, p 3

²⁰² Myrtle Ford, *Grahamvale Re-Union, 1911-1986*, p 3

²⁰³ *Weekly Times*, 31/12/1910, p 50

²⁰⁴ *Age*, 20/12/1910, p 7

²⁰⁵ *Leader*, 10/6/1911, p 6

²⁰⁶ *Weekly Times*, T 8/5/1909, p 45

properties in the selection period, it was often the acquisition of the block of a departing settler which allowed another to succeed.

The arrival of the crucial irrigation water had been promised by the end of September.²⁰⁷ By 11 November the channels at the Settlement were 'carrying a full body of water' and the 'irrigators were busy watering recently planted orchards and lucerne fields'.²⁰⁸ A week later the banks of the main channel connecting the estate to the East Goulburn Main Channel broke away and 'caused a premature flooding of the estate'.²⁰⁹ Broken banks were a regular occurrence: the outlet of the Estate No 1 channel ended on the east side of Verney Road (now Hawdon St), and the Mensforth family recalled that on occasions when a new flush of water came down the channel, it often burst open the bank and surrounded the family's house and sheds, on one occasion carrying the milking stool 'way up the paddock'.²¹⁰ The Shepparton Estate Irrigators' Association resolved in November to ask the government to fulfil its promise to send an experienced irrigator to give the block-holders the necessary instruction.²¹¹

Water supply was not always reliable. In September 1911 settlers were complaining that their trees were dying from lack of water, that there was none to drink or for any other purpose, and that water had been sent down the western channel to Ardmona but not down the eastern.²¹²

By February 1911 the inrush of immigrants from Mead's successful campaigning in Britain revealed that not enough Closer Settlement land was available: established farmers in the Shepparton area were charged with wanting to extract too high a price for land, thus limiting the available supply.²¹³ Further, regarding the farm labourers' blocks, by March 1911 at least fifteen, possibly up to twenty-five, of those who had taken up 2-acre blocks at Shepparton had left, and many of their replacements on these blocks had not been able to find the expected work.²¹⁴ There were intermittent departures from blocks.

Despite all the difficulties, the *Leader* described a generally positive scene at Estate No 1 in the very dry month of August 1912, two years into the settlement:²¹⁵

In the midst of this unprepossessing landscape the irrigation blocks stand out bright and welcome to the eye, with their mantles of vivid green. On all sides are visible encouraging manifestations of the prolificness begotten by the application of water to the bare, arid soil. There are many fine fields of lucerne, while in young orchards the growing trees bear the impress of vigor and fecundity. The increased density

²⁰⁷ *Argus*, 26/8/1910, p 8

²⁰⁸ *Argus*, 11/11/1910, p 8

²⁰⁹ *Leader*, 19/11/1910, p 5

²¹⁰ Myrtle Ford, *Grahamvale Reunion 1911-1986*, 1986, p 36

²¹¹ *Leader*, 19/11/1910, p 5

²¹² *Age*, 23/9/1911, p16

²¹³ *Benalla Standard*, 28/2/1911, p 2

²¹⁴ *Riverine Herald*, 6/3/1911, p 2

²¹⁵ *Leader*, 16/3/1912, p 6

of population which irrigation renders possible is forcibly demonstrated by the large number of houses which now occupy lands that but a few years ago were sparsely peopled. Standing at one irrigator's home it is possible to count a round dozen or two of similar houses that are within a radius of not more than a couple of miles. Generally speaking the settlers appear to have done a considerable amount of work, and if they can only hold out, permanent success should attend their efforts.

The article went on to discuss the role of Mead's favoured crop, lucerne, which was used primarily as hay, and was bringing in more from sale in that form than when utilised in dairying. As others had noted, it grew poorly on the exhausted soil of old wheat fields, and if used for grazing often caused bloat, '[thus] they hesitate to let the cows eat as much as they should, with the result that in an effort to avoid bloating they half starve the animals.

One can see the settlers struggling with animal husbandry and crop choice.

The community that developed had the school as a focal point. Initially known as the Shepparton Estate State School, it had opened on 1 May 1911; children up to then had attended the Shepparton school in Fryers Street. Churches followed the school—Methodist (opened in September 1915), Presbyterian (1917) and Anglican (1926)—and the locality of Grahamvale slowly defined itself as the orchards prospered.

The school and the locality became Grahamvale in September 1911 when the school instigated a competition amongst the pupils for a suitable replacement name for the school. Grahamvale, suggested by pupil Elsie Nankervis, was a reference to the local MLA, George Graham.²¹⁶ Before the settlement, Pine Lodge, from the Pine Lodge pastoral run, had been the foundational place name for the general area east of Shepparton, including the area where the estates developed.

Shepparton Estate No 2 ('Settlement No 2', Orrvale and Shepparton East)

Two months after the blocks on Shepparton Estate No 1 became available, local business people were campaigning for more land to be purchased 'within a short radius of Shepparton' for Closer Settlement. A meeting of 1 June 1910 demanded a further 3000 to 5000 acres.²¹⁷

Local member George Graham regretted that more local land had not been purchased, but that the prices demanded had been too high. Opposition to irrigated intensive settlement meant that the Board 'had been practically hunted out of the district'. He noted also that many two-acre blocks, the Farm Labourers' Blocks, had not been taken up and would be amalgamated.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Myrtle Ford, *Grahamvale Reunion 1911-1986*, 1986, p 5

²¹⁷ *Argus*, 2/6/1910, p 9

²¹⁸ *Argus*, 2/6/1910, p 9

The Board still did not wish to be criticised for paying too high a price for purchased land, although Mead had intimated he might invoke the compulsory acquisition powers;²¹⁹ it continued to believe that local farmers were asking excessive prices, and refused offers.²²⁰ The impasse on price was broken in February 1911 when the Minister directed the Board to purchase from the executors of the estate of James Morrow his 'Ascot Park' property, consisting of Allotments 37, 37a, 37b, 38 and 38b in the Parish of Shepparton, totalling 997 acres (it may have been easier for the Board to purchase land from the executors of an estate than from a haggling landowner), and also a further 442 acres in Kialla Parish (not ultimately utilised for CS).²²¹ The price paid for the Ascot Park purchase was later criticised at the 1915 Royal Commission into Closer Settlement.

During the first half of 1911 the Board and various landowners continued negotiations over land for the second estate, and rumours were flying in various newspapers as to which farmers with properties between the Benalla Road and the Broken River had committed to sell. Constant publicity from the Board about the exorbitant prices being demanded by Shepparton farmers indicates that negotiations were protracted.

In June 1911 the Board announced it had made final offers in negotiating for purchase of 4500 acres.²²² By early July the Dudley brothers on allotment 22, the Doyle family on allotments 55a and 55b, the McPherson family (allotments 29b and 56a) and A McKerna had signed up.²²³ The *Dookie and Katamatite Recorder* had already noted in February that the properties of Messrs Doyle, P F Nase, R Crawford 'and others' were under consideration for purchase, and had urged further offers to enable the creation of a compact estate, as 'only by doing so will the cost of the eastern channel, and the working expenses, be defrayed'.²²⁴

In January 1912 the connecting channel from the East Goulburn Main Channel to Estate No 2 was being constructed at a cost of £1000,²²⁵ and in April, tenders were announced by the Lands Department for fifty weatherboard houses for the new estate.²²⁶

In March 1912, with Estate No 2 soon to be advertised, the entrepreneurial Mead organised another cheap rail excursion to the Goulburn Valley to attract would-be yeoman farmers to the new irrigation settlement areas at Shepparton, a sales technique he was familiar with from his USA experience. Interest was so high that Shepparton, expecting 200 would-be settlers, unexpectedly received 700 on an eleven-carriage train; the land seekers were with difficulty billeted for the night. Next day they were taken by train to view the Waranga Basin, then to Estate No 1, and the

²¹⁹ *Leader*, 6/5/1911, p 10

²²⁰ *Age*, 1/9/1910, p 1; *Benalla Standard*, 28/2/1911, p 2; *Dookie and Katamatite Recorder*, 2/2/1911

²²¹ *Argus*, 6/3/1911, p 9

²²² *Geelong Advertiser*, 12 June 1911

²²³ *Age*, 6/7/1911, p 11

²²⁴ *Dookie and Katamatite Recorder*, 2/2/1911, p 2

²²⁵ *Age*, 9/1/1912, p 7

²²⁶ *Argus*, 22/4/1912, p 10

forthcoming estate. 'The invasion of 700 land-seekers from all parts of Victoria' was 'unique in the history of Victorian land settlement', one contemporary observed.²²⁷

Mead's boosterism outdid itself with a further publicity effort. On his trip to the USA, he had organised an American landseekers tour to visit Victoria's irrigation settlements. Early in May 1912 forty-five would-be irrigation farmers travelled from the USA, accompanied by an old friend of Mead, ex-Governor Richards of Wyoming. The group was shown irrigated orchards at Ardmona, Merrigum and Kyabram, and visited Settlement No 1 and the estate under construction. Feted wherever they were taken, it is unknown how many took up blocks at Estate No 2.²²⁸

The second subdivision of the Shepparton Estate was announced in the *Government Gazette* of 19 June 1912,²²⁹ and advertised in the state dailies and some local newspapers. Largely south of the Benalla Road (Midland Highway) and extending to the Broken River, the estate covered Orrvale and Shepparton East, extending to Pine Lodge. It covered 5,600 acres, with a total of 151 allotments available, in sizes ranging from the Agricultural Labourers' blocks of 2 acres to larger Farm Allotments. Applications were due by 22 July 1912.

The description read:

The estate, which embraces an area of 5600 acres, is situated between the thriving town of Shepparton and the Broken River.

The most distant allotments are within 6 miles of the railway station, with haulage along good roads...With the exception of 150 acres, the whole area is commanded for irrigation by gravitation supply. The soil, which for the most part consists of a free reddish loam overlying a permeable subsoil, is fairly uniform in quality, and lends itself well to the application of water. The farm allotments are of sufficient area to allow dairying, fruit growing, lucerne, and the culture of garden produce to be profitably carried on.

As shown on plan, the whole of allotments 103, 104, 105 and 106 are not irrigable by gravitation, and the area of such allotments which are not commanded by existing channels will not be subject to an irrigation charge. If the purchasers of such allotments make provision to pump water from the main channel the areas in question may be admitted into the irrigation area. Where grading and seeding have been done on any allotment the cost of same will be additional to the prices shown on schedule.

Stacks of hay and straw and all fencing posts split or stacked on any allotment are not sold with the allotments, but are the property of the board, which retains the right to remove same at any time.

The buildings on the property must be insured in the name of the Secretary, Lands Purchase Board.
J.E.JENKINS,

²²⁷ *Argus*, 29/3/1912, p 7

²²⁸ *Riverine Herald*, 8/5/1912, p 2

²²⁹ *Victoria Gazette*, 19 June 1912, pp 2354-55

*Public Offices, Melbourne, 26th June, 1912.*²³⁰

As with Settlement No 1 and all Closer Settlement estates, applications 'on the prescribed form' were to be posted to the Secretary of the Lands Purchase Board in Melbourne, with a bank draft or post office order covering the deposit, a registration fee of 5 shillings and a lease fee of £1. Applicants, if not residing locally, were then issued a concession rail pass to Shepparton station to inspect the land, and a second to attend the Land Board allocating the allotments, to be held in Shepparton on 31 July 1912.

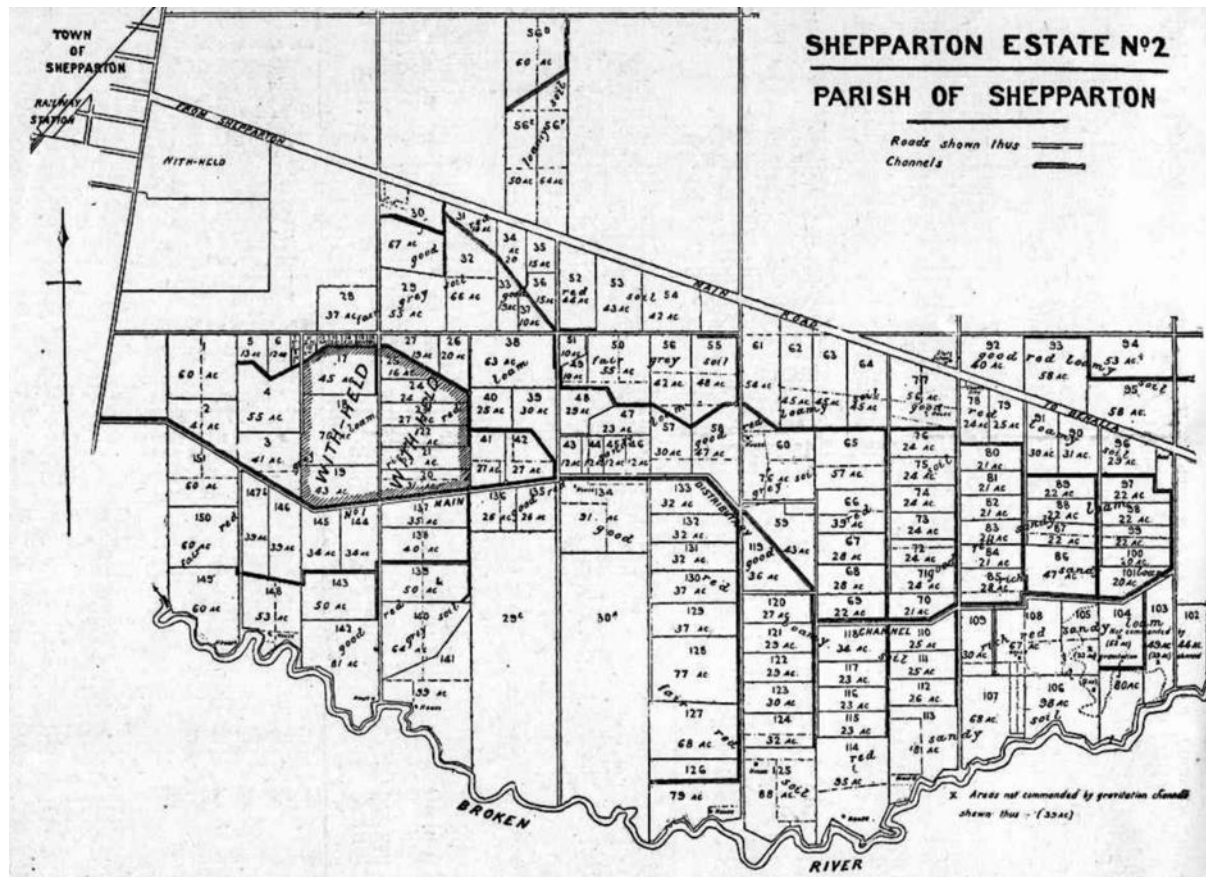


Figure 12. Closer Settlement allotments, Shepparton Estate No 2, 1912. Detail from first advertisement, June 1912.²³¹

Channels originating in the Goulburn East Main Channel (off-map) can be seen angling east-west through the settlement.

Leases were for a period not exceeding 31½ years with the possibility of freehold purchase after 12 years. Applicants were to be at least 18 years of age, reside on the allotment, could not already be holding land above the value of £2500, and could not transfer or sublet the block or a portion

²³⁰ Age, 29/6/1912, p 22

²³¹ Age, 29/6/1912, p 22

of it within the first six years. For a Farm Allotment, improvements to the value of at least two instalments of the purchase money had to be effected before the end of the first year.²³²

The Land Board sat at Shepparton on 31 July 1912 and successive days to deal with the applications. There were 187 applications for 133 of the 151 blocks; interestingly, despite Mead's publicity and entrepreneurship, the actual number of applicants was 72, many applying for more than one block, and only thirty-seven allotment were allocated at this time.

Among the settlers allocated blocks in the first sittings were a number who made notable contributions to both the settlement and to the wider Shepparton community. Zachariah Akers, on allotment 141, became a community leader in the settlement and beyond. A very successful orchardist, he was an early campaigner for a local school, and president of the Shepparton and District Irrigators' Association, which was instrumental in the establishment in 1917 of the Shepparton Preserving Company (SPC), of which he became founding Chairman. The family continued to run and extend their orchards.

Others who chose blocks at the outset were A S McPhee, W G Parker and E A Shelton, Miss A Murphy (who soon forfeited her block) and T H Saunders, whose block was soon taken over by neighbour A S McPhee.

Further allotments were allocated in August, September and November, including Allotments 83 and 84 to M Corboy. The Corboy family became successful long term orchardists in the area and elsewhere, John Corboy becoming Chair of SPC in the 1990s.²³³

Settlers faced the same problems experienced by those at Estate No 1. Isabel Pearce, child of English migrants, recalled the scene on arrival at their block in Channel Road:

*It was a wide expanse of wheat stubble with a few surveyor's pegs somewhere about...The irrigation channels were finished, roads marked out, and surveyors' pegs marked the boundaries of the blocks, a few of which had the original farmhouses on them.*²³⁴

The Pearce family, like many, initially lived in a tent. Unlike many others, they had, however, been able to commit to paying off a Commission-built house:

*It was built of weatherboard, walls and ceiling lined with tongue and groove pine, two large rooms, front and back doors opening into the kitchen-living room, with a wide verandah right along the front, which faced away from the road. Amenities consisted of a galvanised iron water tank, and the usual outhouse.*²³⁵

²³² *Age*, 29/6/1912, p 22

²³³ *Argus* 17/9/1912, p 4

²³⁴ Isabel Pearce, 'Early Days on Orrvale-Shepparton East Irrigation blocks', unpublished typescript, Shepparton Library, ST LH 994.545 EAR

²³⁵ Isabel Pearce, child of English settlers, 'Early Days on Orrvale-Shepparton East Irrigation Blocks', unpublished typescript, Shepparton Library: ST LH 994.545 EAR

As in Grahamvale, settlers had embarked on dairying but most moved to the fruit growing that was to define the area east of Shepparton with such success; the soils of the area were eminently suited to soft fruits (see below). Isabel Pearce cited the low prices for butterfat and the fact that the size of the allotments could not produce enough feed for the required number of stock as causes for the change, and other reasons have been put forward.²³⁶



Figure 13. Truck loaded with fruit, 'Dunaverty', the MacFadyen orchard, Orrvale, 1920s.

Photo courtesy of Jeanette Doherty, Shepparton.

Dairying did remain the farming of choice for some settlers, particularly those on larger blocks. For others it could be an important addition to the income from the orchard. At Grahamvale the Ducat family began supplying milk to the residents of Shepparton in 1916 and by 1920 they were milking forty cows. The family delivered the milk twice daily using a spring cart loaded with ten-gallon cans of milk. P J Ducat developed into an important Shepparton business²³⁷.

Two months after they arrived, settlers on Estate No 1 had established the Shepparton and District Irrigators' Association, which became a very powerful lobby group for the growers. Prominent in the organisation were a number of Estate No 2 settlers, leaders in the fruit industry, and six of the Estate No 2 settlers would become directors of SPC: Zachariah Akers, A Lees, David James, Charles Nash, D J O'Dea (whose father James had refused to sell most of his allotment 23B of over 200 acres for Closer Settlement), and E. G Simpson.

On Estate No 2, Orrvale and Shepparton East became increasingly differentiated. This began with the education of the estate's children. Initially those pupils living closer to Shepparton attended State School No 1469 in Shepparton, but most of the settlers' children attended Shepparton East

²³⁶ Isabel Pearce, 'Early Days on Orrvale-Shepparton East Irrigation Blocks', unpublished typescript, Shepparton Library: ST LH 994.545 EAR

²³⁷ John Dainton, personal communication, 5/2/2023

No 1713,²³⁸ which dated from the influx of selectors, having opened in 1876. Early arrivals A S McPhee and W G Parker had ridden around the settlers with a petition asking that the government build a school,²³⁹ and this lobbying resulted in Orrvale State School No 3805 commencing in July 1913 in the new area's one public building, the Presbyterian church on what became Orrvale Road. A permanent school building was erected in early 1916, and was first used on 4 February that year.²⁴⁰ The school has remained one of Orrvale's defining elements.

The differentiation of Orrvale and Shepparton East arising from the new population densities due to Closer Settlement was reflected in the location of the first post office, at the west end of the settlement, at the residence of A Lees on the south-west corner of Orrvale and Channel Roads, and that of the Presbyterian church constructed in 1913 at the north west corner of Orrvale Road and Poplar Avenue. A Methodist Church opened in August 1915, with prominent community leader Zachariah Akers heavily involved.²⁴¹

Orrvale received its new name in mid-1915. From 1912 the locality was known simply as part of Estate No 2 (earlier simply as part of Pine Lodge), until representations for the establishment of a local post office made to the Deputy Postmaster General by E A Shelton, secretary of the No 2 Estate Progress Association, were acceded to. The new post office was named Orrvale 'out of compliment to Mr William Orr', the *Shepparton News* reported, noting 'it is understood that this name will be the distinguishing appellation [sic] of the whole estate',²⁴² and the name derives from this time, although the reference to the whole estate in the *News* was not quite accurate, as part of the estate covered the area already known as Shepparton East, which continued to be called that. Orr was a successful mining entrepreneur and the local Upper House member, with a large showpiece property on the northern outskirts of Shepparton.

Immigrants at the Closer Settlement Estates

Estate No 2 was possibly more multicultural than Estate No 1. Isabel Pearce wrote of settlers from England, Scotland, Wales, Netherlands and Germany, with a small number from the United States of America (possibly having participated in the land seekers tour).²⁴³ Jewish immigrants from Palestine and elsewhere comprised a unique group. The diversity of ethnicities in the fruit-growing areas east of Shepparton increased with immigrants from European countries affected by pre-war and wartime hostilities, and by the 1950s the local population included Italians, Greeks, Albanians, Germans, Turks and others.

²³⁸ Shepparton East Primary School, *Centenary of Shepparton East Primary School No 1713*, 1976, p 23

²³⁹ Isabel Pearce, child of English settlers, 'Early Days on Orrvale-Shepparton East Irrigation Blocks', unpublished typescript, Shepparton Library: ST LH 994.545 EAR

²⁴⁰ Orrvale Primary School, *Orrvale Primary School: our first 100 years 1913-2013*, 2013, p 5

²⁴¹ Myrtle Ford, *The Methodist Church in the Goulburn Valley 1873-1977*, pp 80-81

²⁴² *Shepparton News*, 23/9/1915, p 4

²⁴³ Isabel Pearce, 'Early Days on Orrvale-Shepparton East Irrigation Blocks', unpublished typescript, Shepparton Library: ST LH 994.545 EAR

Many of those immigrants coming to the settlements worked part time or casually for some period on other orchards while establishing themselves, and thus learnt the best methods of irrigating, pruning, cultivating, manuring, and farm management. A number of the Jewish immigrants worked on the Ardmona orchards when they first arrived.

Along with family migration, what might be termed village or district migration became a feature of southern European migration to the Shepparton region, numbers from the same village or district migrating together or sequentially. Many of the local Albanian families came from Korce, a city in the south of Albania, and a number of Greeks migrated from the town of Proti in Greek Macedonia.

Historian John Lack has claimed that the southern Europeans, as small farmers, market gardeners, grape growers, contractors and woodcutters, were the most successful of the state's immigrants:

*It was the unassisted and unwanted European migrants, mainly Italians, Greeks and Maltese who enjoyed most success. Southern European migration, a mere trickle in the late 1890s and early 1900s, strengthened in the 1920s.*²⁴⁴

To these groups could be added the Albanians of the Shepparton region. As local historian John Dainton noted, immigrant success in the early decades

*'came with frugal lifestyle and unremitting hard work, largely family labour; with the second and third generation orchards got larger'.*²⁴⁵

Immigrants from both settlement estates have made their mark on the wider community. The Copulos family arrived from Greek Macedonia in 1939 and initially shared an orchard in Shepparton East with the Zurcas family. Of the second generation, Peter Copulos became a major property developer and philanthropist in Shepparton, and Stan Zurcas a hotelier. Others such as the Radevski and Kalafati families have continued to be fruit growers but have expanded into a quasi-industrial scale of fruit storage and packing.

Many immigrants report having experienced racism. The *Shepparton Advertiser* heading of 21 August 1942 'Too many properties passing to aliens'²⁴⁶ might be somewhat understandable in wartime, but Peter Copulos wrote that in the late 1940s even the headmaster and teachers at Orrvale State School 'treated us as feral outsiders'.²⁴⁷ Discriminatory attitudes only slowly declined.

²⁴⁴ John Lack, *Oxford Companion to Australian History*, 1998, p 337

²⁴⁵ John Dainton, personal communication, 5/2/2023

²⁴⁶ *Shepparton News*, 21/8/1942, p 4

²⁴⁷ Orrvale Primary School, *Orrvale Primary School: our first 100 years 1913-2013*, 2013, p 83

Effects of Closer Settlement

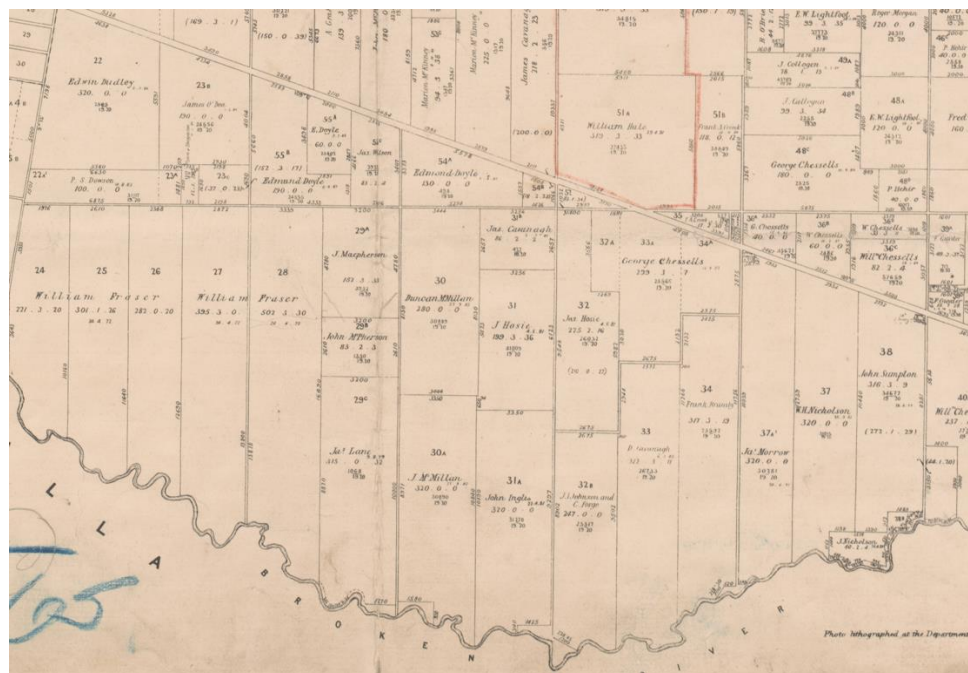


Figure 14. Map showing pattern of 1870s selections. The angled east-west road is the Midland Highway.²⁴⁸

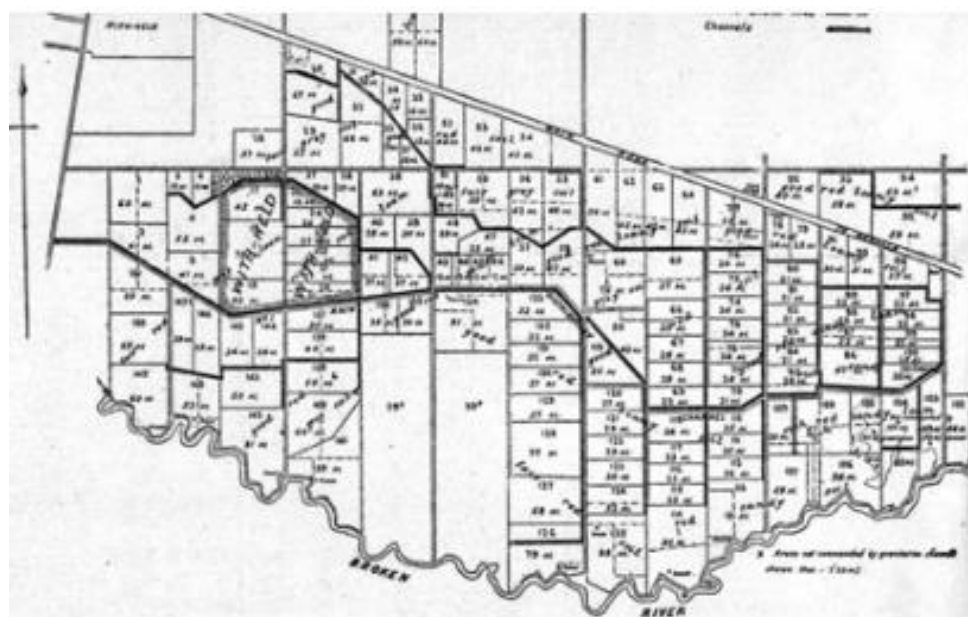


Figure 15. Closer Settlement allotments, Shepparton Estate No 2, June 1912.²⁴⁹

The intensification of the landholdings pattern is clear.

²⁴⁸ Map, 'Shepparton: County of Moira', 1887

<https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-232063942/view>, accessed 12/12/2022

²⁴⁹ Age, 29/6/1912, p 22, detail from first advertisement.

Other Closer Settlement Estates

Shepparton Estate No 3 (Dudley's estate)

Edwin Dudley evidently had not been ready to sell his 320 acre farm (Allotment 22, Parish of Shepparton, in Figure 14 above) to the Closer Settlement Board in 1911. His holding was in a prime location, just east of the town, at the south-east corner of the Midland Highway and Archer Street (allot 22, Parish of Shepparton).

By October 1916, however, the northern half of his property had been subdivided off, and 20 Closer Settlement allotments were available 'immediately adjoining the town of Shepparton ...splendid opportunities for men of small capital to invest in a profitable venture combined with social advantages unobtainable on isolated farms'. Houses could be erected for successful settlers on a small deposit.²⁵⁰ Details could be found at the SRWSC office in Shepparton, or the Lands Department in Melbourne. The relaxed tone of this SRWSC advertisement is markedly different from the business-like advertisements for Estates Nos 1 and 2.

The northern estates: Dennis, Harper and Gribben

The SRWSC saw these as a group of related settlements, largely for English immigrants who were offered assisted passages and settlement opportunities under such programs as the Empire Settlement Scheme.

Dennis Estate

The Dennis Estate was opened for Closer Settlement in 1924 six miles north of Shepparton, with a Land Board consisting of C Weir of the Lands Department and H B Lincoln, District Engineer for the SRWSC, sitting on 1 May 1924. Only 13 applications were received for the 38 blocks, with eight granted. Allotments ranged from 60 to 90 acres 'well fitted for lucerne growing.'²⁵¹ Drainage to the blocks on the Dennis and Thomas estates was proving problematic by mid 1925.²⁵²

Harper and Gribben Estates

In October 1920 Messrs Harper Brothers had purchased 3000 acres in Tallygaroopna built up by the original selector, community leader and Shire President Hamilton Coldwell. The Harper family offered all of Coldwell's former land for Closer Settlement subdivision in October 1921, but this was unsuccessful.

In March or April 1924, 960 acres of the Harpers' land were purchased by the Closer Settlement Board and sections temporarily leased for grazing while the new settlement, which came to be known as Harper's Estate, was being established. The area was subdivided into thirteen farms,

²⁵⁰ *Shepparton News*, 23/10/1916, p 3

²⁵¹ *Argus*, 2/5/1924, page 8; *Shepparton Advertiser*, 5/5/1924, p 3; *Age*, 30/5/1924, p 12

²⁵² *Argus*, 15/6/1925, p 18

from 65 to 87 acres. Channels to bring irrigation water to the blocks were under construction in late 1924.

At this small estate, the neighbouring Gribben estate, and at Harper's estate at Murchison North, the Closer Settlement Board constructed an experimental type of housing, probably due to financial constraints. These were the 'iron-panelled houses', or to the settlers, 'tin houses.' They were constructed of square galvanised sheet metal panels over a timber frame, and proved unsuitable for the climate.

By late November 1925 all thirteen blocks of Harper's at Tallygaroopna had been taken up, nine of the thirteen settlers being from overseas.

The Gribben estate, another small CS settlement, was located between two sections of Harper's estate. It comprised 747 acres previously owned by the Gribben family, and was divided into farms ranging from 61 to 85 acres.²⁵³

On these two estates, twenty-two families would replace three. A minority of these settlers were eventually successful by amalgamation of the small holdings.²⁵⁴

²⁵³ *Goulburn Valley Stock and Property Journal*, 18/5/1927, p 1

²⁵⁴ Greater Shepparton Heritage Study Stage II, pp 1599-1600

<https://greatershepparton.com.au/assets/files/documents/planning/heritage/heritage-study-ii-2020/Greater%20Shepparton%20Heritage%20Study%20Stage%20II%202020%20-%20Place%20Citation%20Reports%20-%20individually%20significant%20places.pdf>

SOLDIER SETTLEMENT

After World War One, it was felt that a debt of honour was owed to the nation's soldiers, which could be repaid most satisfactorily by placing returned men on the land. In 1917 the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act made provision for the reservation of areas for selection by discharged soldiers. Under the same legislation the SRWSC acquired control of soldier settlement on irrigable lands.²⁵⁵ The organisation of the scheme was similar to that of Closer Settlement but the terms were more generous, particularly in relation to financial advances that soldier settlers could request.

Local Councils, or committees established by Councils, aided the choice of properties suitable for purchase for this scheme by assessing and commenting on the value and suitability of land, which was then valued by two independent valuers. Large estates were no longer available, and those available were smaller and more scattered.

Soldier Settlement in Victoria can be seen as a parallel program to, or even an extension of, the existing Closer Settlement. Irrigated blocks were the focus and thus the Goulburn Valley was at the forefront.²⁵⁶ As the SRWSC administered the program in the irrigation areas, the same local officers were involved in both schemes: around Shepparton the soldier settlers were soon to come to know H B Lincoln, local District Engineer for the SRWSC.

In the Shepparton district, by 30 June 1919 14,444 acres had been acquired for Soldier Settlement: the properties were of very varying sizes, including three and a half thousand acres of the former Gowangardie pastoral run.²⁵⁷ A year later the figure was 19,705 acres.²⁵⁸

Lemnos

Soldier Settlement in the Shepparton region is generally equated with Lemnos. This concentrated 1919-1920 estate north of Shepparton (and east of Grahamvale), first known as the Thomas estate, was renamed Lemnos by the ex-serviceman settlers at a meeting called to decide on a name; presumably a reference to the Greek island to which many wounded Anzacs had been evacuated, it was reputedly suggested by community leader Col E P Hill, a Gallipoli veteran, who with his wife had selected the 21-acre Allotment 7. A much-quoted speech by Doris Hill encapsulates the

²⁵⁵ Australia Research Data Commons summary

<https://researchdata.edu.au/settlement-schemes-soldier-settlement/490128?source=undefined>

Accessed 1 /12/2022

²⁵⁶ Arlene Cook, 'The Garden of Australia: an analysis of resource use and environmental change in the Goulburn Valley', thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of New England, 2001, p 158

²⁵⁷ Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1921, Return of Lands Recommended for Purchase and Acquired, VPARL1921No4, p 24

²⁵⁸ ²⁵⁸ Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1921, Return of Lands Recommended for Purchase and Acquired, VPARL1921-2ndSessionNo26

experiences of the settlers, with an unmistakeable echo of the experiences of the Closer Settlers a decade earlier:

These orchard blocks of 22 to 30 acres, unfenced and not planted, were then allotted by the Soldier Settlement Commission and Closer Settlement Board to returned soldiers, some of them bachelors, some with brides from England, and some of them Englishmen who had enlisted in Victoria. You will realize the difficulties they had, building homes, fencing their blocks, and planting and maintaining their orchards until they bore fruit. Equipment had to be bought and families fed until the orchards became productive. The men had to take jobs on established orchards in the older Grahamvale district and look after their own orchards mornings, evenings and week-ends. Some of the new settlers also milked cows to add to their income during the early years before their orchards came into full production.²⁵⁹

East of Shepparton, 315 acres on the Broken River (allot 29C, Parish of Shepparton, between Orrvale and Prentice Roads) was purchased from the estate of Dr William Gaze and divided into eleven blocks of varying sizes.²⁶⁰ Other Soldier Settlement blocks were created from dispersed individual properties purchased for the purpose.

In the Shepparton Closer Settlement district, 306 soldiers were settled on horticultural blocks within the first four years of the Act, and by the mid-1920s the Goulburn Valley was supporting over 1000 new families.²⁶¹

As Arlene Cook has noted in her analysis of resource use and environmental change in the Goulburn Valley, many of the problems experienced with Closer Settlement manifested themselves again: inexperience on the part of the settlers, inadequately-sized blocks, high indebtedness. She also notes new factors of the mid-1920s: the decline in prices due a glut of fruit (in common with wheat and butter) and the high start-up costs due to inflated demand for equipment and stock following the war. Around 3000 of Victoria's soldier settlers were forced to abandon their blocks between 1917 and 1929, including 620 from the irrigated districts.²⁶²

The soldier settlers on the blocks north and east of Shepparton became a united force. The Lemnos soldier settlers established a sub-branch of the Returned Sailor's & Soldier's Imperial League (RSSILA, precursor to the RSL), and invited the East Shepparton and Orrvale returned soldiers to join in forming a Soldier Settlers' League or similar body to address soldier settlers' issues. At a meeting at the Shepparton East Hall (built by settlers in 1922 and the hub of the Shepparton East

²⁵⁹ The Story of Lemnos, https://websites.mygameday.app/club_info.cgi?c=0-6165-80586-0-0&sID=166100 Accessed 20/5/2023

²⁶⁰ *Age*, 10/6/1919, p 5; Parish of Shepparton parish plan, 1946

²⁶¹ Cook, *The Garden of Australia: an analysis of resource use and environmental change in the Goulburn Valley*, thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of New England, 2001, p 158

²⁶² Cook, *'The Garden of Australia: an analysis of resource use and environmental change in the Goulburn Valley'*, thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of New England, 2001, p 160

community) on 10 April 1923, after debating at length whether to establish a RSSILA body or a Soldier Settlers' Irrigators' League (the latter supported by those opposed to the RSSILA), it was decided to found the Shepparton Settlements' Branch of the RSSILA.²⁶³ E P Hill of Lemnos was the foundation President.

The Settlements branch met at the Shepparton East Hall to discuss problems associated with their new farms and their grievances with Government bodies overseeing the programs: the State Rivers and Water Supply, now under the powerful and pro-irrigation Chairman William Cattanach, and the Closer Settlement Board. For example, at the first Annual General Meeting in July 1924, branch members were concerned at 'white-anting' by the Closer Settlement Board: it was 'allowing civilians to buy settlers out', replacing ex-soldiers who were in arrears with civilians. The branch urged the Country Party to carry out its policy with regard to writing off the arrears of soldier settlers.²⁶⁴ A Ladies Committee was formed in 1947.²⁶⁵ The branch dealt with matters concerning the settlers, both agricultural such as the fruit fly infestation of 1924, and social. Also, like the RSL and Legacy today, the branch worked unobtrusively to support individual ex-soldiers, and widows and children of soldiers, through difficulties.²⁶⁶

²⁶³ Ibid, 16 April 1923, p. 5

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 21 July 1924, p. 3

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 15 July 1947, p. 12

²⁶⁶ Anne Tyson, unpublished notes, 2001

FRUIT GROWING

Fruit growing came to be the signature economic activity of the area east of Shepparton, shaping the landscape for a century.

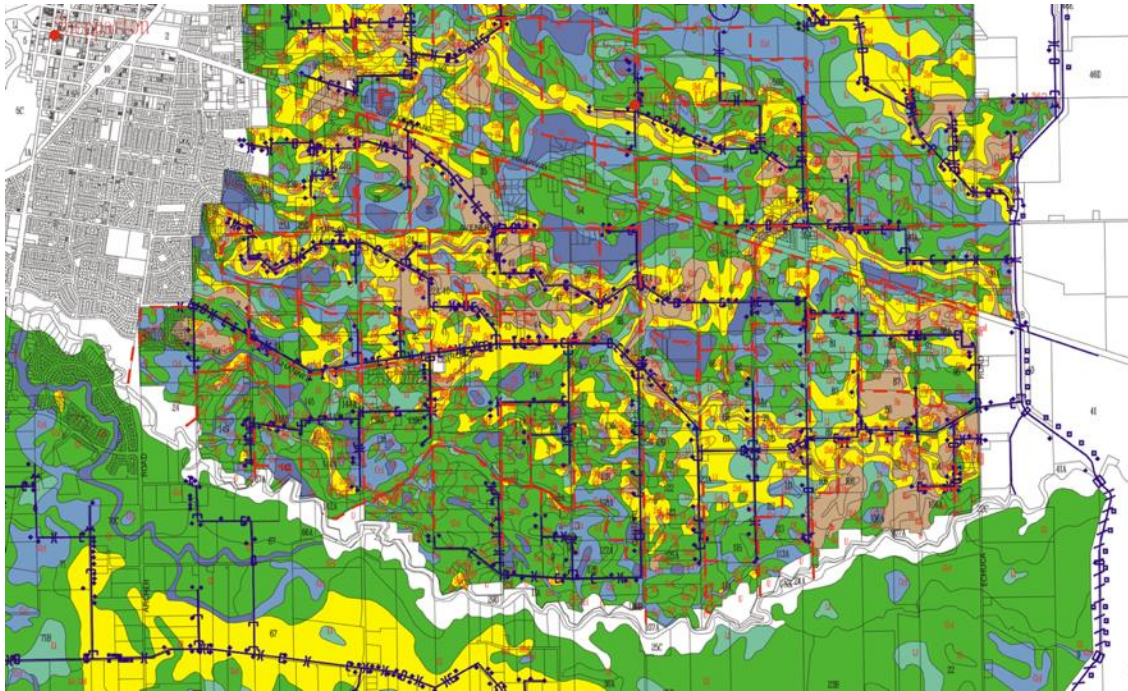


Figure 16. Map showing soil types of the Orrvale and Shepparton East area. Also shown are channels and individual property-owners' irrigation outlets as in 1962.

The areas shown in yellow, including Ssl (Shepparton sandy loam), Efsl (East Shepparton fine sandy loam), Sl (Shepparton loam) and Grsl (Grahamvale sandy loam) are the prime soils of the GV and will support a wide range of fruit and vegetable production including stone fruits, the most sensitive of which are peaches.

From 'Soils and Land Use in Part of the Goulburn Valley, Victoria,' report published by the Department of Agriculture in 1962 by J.K.M. Skene and T.J. Poutsma.

[https://vro.agriculture.vic.gov.au/dpi/vro/gbbimages.nsf/images/pdfmap72/\\$file/page72.pdf](https://vro.agriculture.vic.gov.au/dpi/vro/gbbimages.nsf/images/pdfmap72/$file/page72.pdf)

Accessed 21/1/2023.

The soils of the area east of Shepparton are of a high quality fine sandy loam, extremely well-suited for the production of a wide variety of fruit and vegetables.

Preceding irrigation, fruit trees and vines had been grown in the Goulburn Valley relying on the natural rainfall and careful husbandry, vines generally preceding fruit trees, and many selectors had probably planted a small orchard for household use. Possibly as early as the 1870s, selectors Joseph Hillier and Joseph Knight had established orchards on the south bank of the Broken River in Kialla (Parish of Kialla Allotment 9A and 37a respectively): these were probably irrigated at some time. Trojano Darveniza west of Mooroopna planted his first vines in 1871 or 1872, and close by Michael Kavanagh and Frederick J Young had planted vines in 1884.²⁶⁷ As noted, the Mason

²⁶⁷ T.G. Pearce, *Glimpses of Irrigation in Victoria*, Bairnsdale, 1888, p. 6

brothers north of Shepparton had planted an extensive orchard in 1886, initially not irrigated; it contained peaches, apricots, nectarines, apples, pears, oranges, lemons and grapes.²⁶⁸ Neighbour Edward Lightfoot had also developed an extensive orchard, ingeniously irrigated from 1884.

Intensive irrigated fruit growing in the Goulburn Valley had begun with the creation of the Ardmona irrigation 'colony' in 1887, with the majority of the plantings dating from 1892. The ambitious operations of the United Echuca and Waranga Waterworks Trust, with its pumping station on Goulburn River preceding the construction of the Goulburn Weir, had enabled the Ardmona growers to take the lead in fruit growing.

In September 1887 the Ardmona growers, in concert with Joseph Knight of Kialla, established the Goulburn Valley Vine, Fruit and Special Products Association,²⁶⁹ a short-lived organisation which campaigned successfully for bonuses to be paid on vine and fruit products, a form of government aid to the industry which commenced in 1888.²⁷⁰ Established in 1910 by settlers at the Closer Settlement estates at Grahamvale and Orrvale-East Shepparton, the Shepparton and District Irrigators' Association became a powerful force for the fruit growers.

By the first half of 1915, 1781 acres within the two Closer Settlements were devoted to fruit growing, in contrast to the rest of the Shepparton Irrigation District where only 175 acres were under fruit trees. Growers were able to learn from the experiences of the pioneering orchardists at Ardmona. Peaches were the predominant fruit, followed by pears and apricots.

Irrigation smoothed over the drought years of 1914 and 1915 but the heavy rains and extensive floods of 1916 led to the creation of a comprehensive drainage scheme to remove surplus water in the Shepparton area, with outfalls to the Nine Mile Creek west of Wunghu; this was substantially completed in 1919, although many spur drains were later added.²⁷¹

After the season 1916-17 in which new orchards were coming on line (with more to come as the East Goulburn Main Channel, completed in 1916, delivered irrigation to new orchard areas north-east of Shepparton), the question of over production and markets arose. Freight prices were prohibitive and the local press was running headlines such as 'Shepparton Fruitgrowers: their pitiable condition'. The need for a cannery was evident. Fruit had been canned for the season of 1916-1917 at the Shepparton Butter Factory, but this was not successful.²⁷² Pressure by the Irrigators' Association and public meetings led to government promises of a loan, and a co-operative, unlisted private company, the Shepparton Preserving Company, was formed, incorporated on 23 October 1917. Chairman of the SWRSC, William Cattanach, a strong supporter of the Closer Settlement estates, had been a useful advocate for the cannery. Processing began in

²⁶⁸ *Leader*, 7/7/1888, p 10

²⁶⁹ *Goulburn Valley Yeoman*, 29/9/1887, np

²⁷⁰ W H Bossence, 'History of the Western Goulburn Valley Fruit Industry', *Kyela*, Vol. 1, No. 5, 1971-73, Kyabram, 1973, p 100

²⁷¹ RA Horsfall, 'Land and Water in the Goulburn Valley', *Aqua*, December 1965, p 86

²⁷² John Tidey, *The Big Sheppartonian*, 2015, p 54

early February 1918. In 1921, financial troubles led to Shepparton businessman Andrew Fairley being invited on to the board of directors, pressed by the Irrigators' Association; within three years Fairley was both Chairman and Managing Director, bringing business acumen, and demanding fruit of high quality from the growers.²⁷³ Fairley headed the company for over forty years.

Irrigation contributed its own problems. Flood and furrow irrigation delivered large volumes of water indiscriminately and led to rising water tables in wet years.²⁷⁴ Further drainage works were carried out in the Shepparton and Katandra districts into the 1930s.²⁷⁵

In the 1920s the East Goulburn Main Channel was extended to the Nine Mile Creek with spurs serving the new North Shepparton and Katandra Districts. Further drainage works were also carried out in the Shepparton and Katandra districts into the 1930s.²⁷⁶

The wet years of the mid-1950s produced a crisis for the orchards of the Shepparton region. There were extreme losses of peach and apricot trees, particularly the former, which was most affected by the water-logged soil. SPC growers lost 150,000 peach trees and over 17,000 apricot trees.²⁷⁷ Waterlogging had occurred in 1931 and was also a problem in 1973.

Britain's entry into the European Economic Community ('Common Market') in 1973 was a major blow, with new markets needing to be found. The salinity problems emerging in the 1970s required a sustained multi-faceted effort.

Waterlogging has meant that peaches have declined as a focus of fruit growing to the east (and north) of Shepparton. Development will be a constant pressure on the area, and is currently impinging between the suburban fringe and Doyles Road.

²⁷³ John Tidey, *The Big Sheppartonian*, 2015, p 69

²⁷⁴ Hilary Howes, *The Spectre at the Feast: The Emergence of Salt in Victoria's Irrigated Districts*, ANU Open Research Library, https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/38808/2/01_Howes_The_spectre_at_the_feast:_The_2008.pdf Accessed 2/3/2023.

²⁷⁵ RA Horsfall, 'Land and Water in the Goulburn Valley', *Aqua*, December 1965, pp 87-88

²⁷⁶ RA Horsfall, 'Land and Water in the Goulburn Valley', *Aqua*, December 1965, pp 87-88

²⁷⁷ Jenny Mountstephen, *Worth Preserving - 100 Years of SPC*, 2018, p 102

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY AT ORRVALE

A unique feature of Estate No 2 was the presence from 1913 of a community of Jewish settlers. The first group, eight families, arrived on 14 April 1913, taking up their blocks on the usual conditional purchase leases. These were Orthodox, strongly observant Jews who wished to bring up their families in a rural environment perceived to be free from the malign influences of the city. The community stood out as distinct from the other settlers, their beliefs and daily religious practices setting them apart, although the sense of separateness declined with the coming of later arrivals who were less observant. The community was centred initially on Doyles Road, then known as Doyles Lane, although those who arrived later were more dispersed.

The first group consisted of the families of the brothers Moshe and Bere Feiglin, Raphael Beresinsky, Isaac Rubenstein, Nehemiah Rosenbaum, Samuel Gorr, B Bendel, and J Moritz.²⁷⁸ The group had been encouraged and aided by the Jewish Agricultural Settlement Fund, constituted in Melbourne just a month earlier by a group of prominent Jewish identities and philanthropists to aid Jewish immigrants who wished to settle on the land. Each of the eight families had received a loan of £200. David Feiglin notes that the aim of the Fund was to deflect Jewish immigrants from problematical and impoverished lives in the city onto land settlement.²⁷⁹ This is borne out by a plea from the new funding body to the international Jewish Colonisation Fund in early 1914 for assistance: regarding Jewish immigrants to Australia, the organisation felt it was not in 'the best interests of the Jewish community at large if their honourable desire were to be frustrated by the lack of aid and encouragement, and they consequently were compelled to congregate in the cities and fall back upon the undesirable occupations of huckstering and peddling, some of them perhaps being ultimately reduced to sacrifice their self-respect by the acceptance of eleemosynary [charitable] doles from our charitable institutions'.²⁸⁰

Moshe Feiglin, the extremely devout and high-minded patriarch of the Feiglin family, became the acknowledged and greatly respected leader of the Jewish community at Orrvale.

The hard work and dedication to success of these first settlers was immediately noticeable. An article in the *Jewish Herald* in late September 1913 captures the industry exhibited by these first families, some of whom, unlike many other Closer Settlers, brought agricultural experience, if not of the new conditions.²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ Age, 10/4/1913, p 7; Parish Plan Shepparton, Department of Lands and Survey, Sheet 1.

²⁷⁹ David Feiglin, the origins and development of the Jewish Agricultural Settlement at Orrvale, Shepparton, Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal, November 2004 Vol. XVII Part 3, p 341. <https://www.ajhs.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/AJHS-1-23-TOC-202-287.pdf> Accessed 28/11/2022.

²⁸⁰ *Jewish Herald*, 2/1/1914, p 8.

²⁸¹ *Jewish Herald*, 26/9/1913, p 7

In the five months, it was reported, Raphael Beresinsky and his brother in law Isaac Rubenstein had cleared the 41 acre block, erected a boundary fence, and twice ploughed fifteen acres, which was now showing 'a nice crop of oats'. Ten acres were ready to be sown with lucerne (the crop Elwood Mead encouraged settlers to plant), and five acres had been planted with peach, apricot, orange, cherry and pear trees, underplanted by a crop of peas; the fruit trees had been coated with a solution of lime and sulphur to discourage hares. A plot of land was ready for the planting of a summer crop, and well-built sheds and a cottage erected. A poultry run, a kitchen garden 'already well-stocked with vegetables', and a nursery to propagate vines had all been established.

In contrast Sam Gorr had chosen the dairying encouraged by Mead and the Closer Settlement Board and had constructed a redgum milking shed roofed with galvanised iron, along with pigsties and a fowl house. On his 53 acres, 10 were planted in flourishing lucerne, 15 in oats, 25 in late oats, 8 with millet and 10 with lucerne, and he had just harvested 30 tons of millet for fodder. He was milking nine cows, this alone earning £2.10 per week.

Moshe Feiglin, Bere Feiglin, Moritz, Bendel and Rubenstein, while all planting a range of crops including lucerne, had also hedged their bets with small acreages of the fruit trees soon to be the hallmark of the Orrvale/Shepparton East area.

More Jewish settlers took up holdings. Soon, however, in common with the other settlers, they found that the holdings were too small to support the dairying which had been recommendation of the authorities, particularly Elwood Mead. Mead, in reporting progress of the Jewish settlers to the Jewish Agricultural Settlement Fund, and as usual promoting dairying, noted the 'good cultivation record but politely pointed out the small numbers of cows in relation to the volume of crops, and wondered 'what they will do with their crops in order to get a revenue for them. They ought now to begin to get an income from something, and cows seem to be the most reliable stand-by.'²⁸² Most Jewish settlers in fact converted to fruit growing.

Other who chose holdings at Orrvale included Isaac Dabscheck and his sons Abe and Woolf, Robert Rothberg, Louis Rothberg, and Eli Wynn (a cousin of Samuel Wynn, founder of Wynn's Wines). The latter three took up holdings a few miles to the east of the original settlers, whilst Dabscheck purchased land in a central position in the growing Jewish settlement. It is of note that this group consisted mainly of established businessmen residing in Melbourne, who purchased their holdings as a business venture rather than as farmers. They retained their properties for varying but relatively short periods of time and eventually sold out to both Jewish and non-Jewish buyers who lived on their properties and successfully farmed them.

To gain income during the initial few years while their trees becoming established, the majority of the male Jewish settlers worked on the earlier-planted orchards at Ardmona, living on site at Ardmona during the week but returning to Orrvale for the Sabbath.

²⁸² *Jewish Herald*, 7/11/1913, p 12

The community, particularly in the early period, was tight-knit, living somewhat separately from the other settlers, and did not participate in local community life. Shirley Randles, who grew up in the settlement and knew it in the years 1930-1950, described it as 'a self-contained community that took responsibility for its members. It was united both by religion and as immigrants in a new land.'²⁸³

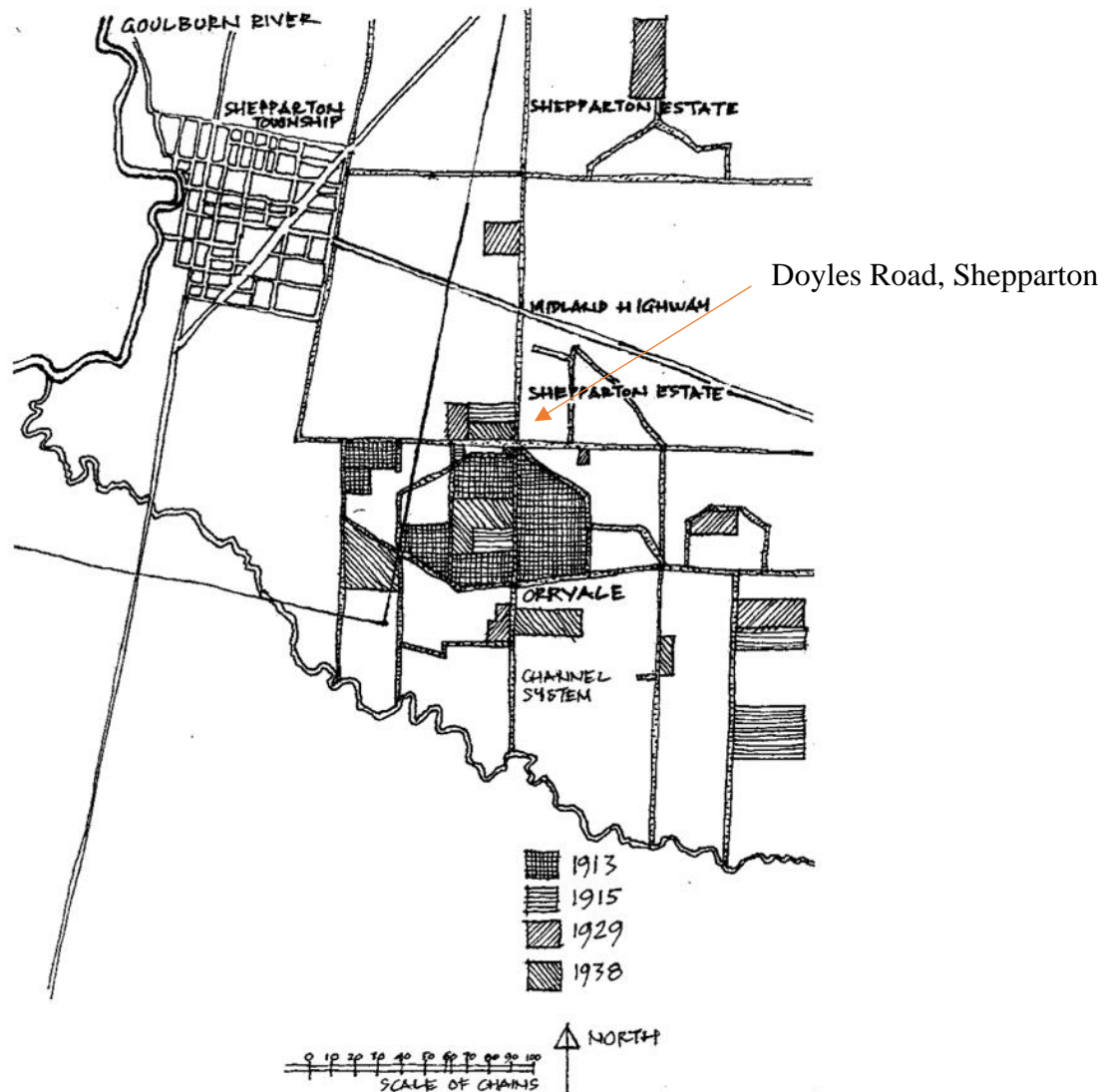


Figure 17. Diagram showing distribution of Jewish settlers' holdings at Orrvale with dates (generalized).²⁸⁴ Note initial cluster on Doyle's Road.

²⁸³ Shirley Randles, *No Looked Doors: Jewish Life in Shepparton*, 2004, p 6

²⁸⁴ Diagram abstracted by Jeffrey Turnbull from Yankel Rosenbaum, 'The Shepparton Jewish Community 1913-1939', unpublished MA thesis, Melbourne University, 1984, in *Fabrications*, 6 June 1995, p 40

The community was in touch with the movement to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine, and members of the community were consistent donors to Jewish causes such as the Jewish National Fund, Herzl Forest Fund, Young Zionist League, and the Judean Women's Committee. In the late 1930s, with anti-Semitism increasing in Europe, the community sponsored European Jews to emigrate to Australia.

Of the original settlers, brothers-in-law Bendel and Rubenstein returned to Melbourne within a couple of years and their holdings were taken over by the Sonkin family and Jacob Rosenbaum, son of N Rosenbaum. The Sonkin family remained on the settlement for a few years only.

Religious practice

The Feiglin family and the initial community were Chabad, an Orthodox branch of the Jewish faith led internationally by a dynasty of Rebbe (Rabbis) based by this time in the United States of America. At first, the community lacked a minyan, the quorum of ten males necessary to conduct public religious services, and Moshe Feiglin travelled to Melbourne and secured another settler, Isaac Cyprus, a cabinet maker, who took a block close to the other Jewish settlers.²⁸⁵

The Feiglin family, under Moshe Feiglin, adhered rigorously to their strong Orthodox beliefs. Some of the Jewish settlers at Orrvale were Orthodox, others more liberal.

Synagogue

It is unclear when the synagogue was established, but it seems from newspaper reports that a synagogue of some type was in operation by at least June 1920. Services were first held in the house of Isaac Cyprus, he who had arrived in 1913 to complete the minyan; one room in his house was set aside for worship. In November 1915 the community applied to the senior Jewish congregation in Victoria, the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation at the Bourke Street synagogue, for help in erecting a synagogue and school (at this time the construction of the synagogue in Carlton was also being mooted). The community was referred back to Laurence Harris, a Jewish tailor and Labour Party and community stalwart living in Shepparton, who was 'acting as a representative of the Jewish farmers'. The community had borrowed a Sefer Torah (a handwritten Torah) from the city synagogue a few months after their arrival.²⁸⁶

Harris' role is unclear, but on 19 April 1926, board members of the Jewish Agricultural Settlement Fund purchased the synagogue site, Allotment 16, a one-acre block at the south-western corner of Poplar Avenue and Doyles Road. This had been in the hands of settler F W Stagg, but was advertised for sale by tender by the SRWSC on 22 October 1925.²⁸⁷ Given that synagogue services were reported from June 1920, and that various accounts refer to Stagg's house as becoming the

²⁸⁵ *Australian Jewish News*, 25/7/1947, p 11 and passim

²⁸⁶ *Jewish Herald*, 19/11/1915, p 9; 11/9/1914, p 10

²⁸⁷ *Shepparton Advertiser*, 22/10/1925, p 10

synagogue, it seems likely that the congregation had already been utilizing the two-room dwelling by arrangement with Stagg.²⁸⁸

Shirley Randles, who grew up opposite the synagogue, described the building:

...a structure about thirty-five feet long and thirty feet wide. The large room contained the Ark. This room was reserved for the men. A narrow room on the north wall of the building, little more than an enclosed verandah, was the women's section. When the congregation dwindled, a curtain was drawn across part of the room. The area behind the curtain became the women's section.

It is possible the building was a SRWSC-built one-room Closer Settlement house with an added verandah, subsequently enclosed.



Figure 18. Synagogue (foreground) looking across to Hostel, summer 1952/3.

Services were held on Friday evenings, and on the morning of the Sabbath, Saturday. Celebrated also were the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) and the other festivals of the Jewish year: Uri Kaploun recalled the joyous dancing of Bere Feiglin in the synagogue at festivals. In addition, from time to time a weekday service would be held when a settler wished to commemorate an anniversary, such as that of the death of a family member: a minyan would have to be got together for these services also.²⁸⁹

For a short period the community attempted to maintain two Orthodox congregations, following different prayer observances, the Nussac HaAri and the Nussach Ashkenaz. The three families of

²⁸⁸ A short video of the dedication of a memorial at the synagogue site can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNGX1HvkMQE>

²⁸⁹ Uri Kaploun, *Abraham Avinu of Australia: The Life of Reb Moshe Feiglin*, 2016, p 115

the latter congregation found difficulty in getting together a minyan, and the two finally re-joined, removing the wall separating the groups.²⁹⁰

The community established a 'Hebrew School' for religious instruction at the end of 1917, with financial assistance from S Slutzkin. The teacher, S Rosner, had been located by the Jewish Education Board. The religious instruction was intense: the classes were held every evening except Friday, from 5pm to 7.30pm following attendance at the local Orrvale State School, and on the Sabbath from 2pm till 5pm. Fourteen students were attending in February 1918, three months or so after the classes commenced, and it was claimed there had not been a single absentee from any class. This rigorous regime, reflecting the intensity of the ardent Orthodox views of the Feiglins and others, was criticised as overly harsh by a number of writers to the *Jewish Herald*, and it is unclear how long it prevailed,²⁹¹

Shirley Randles remembered the coming of the group of strongly Lubavitch Jews in 1949:

Before they were there, Poplar Avenue had been a quiet road. The influx of Lubavich Jews changed it to a busy thoroughfare. Suddenly I saw youths and bearded men walking on what seemed endless journeys to and from the synagogue. Their heads were covered and they wore jackets, even in the hottest weather. Occasionally, I'd catch a glimpse of the fringe hanging from beneath their shirts.²⁹²

The last service at the synagogue was held in 1967 or 1968, with the Torah scrolls transferred to congregations in Melbourne.²⁹³ A memorial plaque was erected at the site in 2015.



Figure 19. Memorial plaque commemorating site of synagogue, south-west corner of Doyles Road and Poplar Avenue, Orrvale, unveiled 15 December 2015.

Text: 'JEWISH SYNAGOGUE AND COMMUNITY HOSTEL 1913-1966. CORNER DOYLES ROAD AND POPLAR AVENUE SHEPPARTON'

²⁹⁰ Uri Kaploun, *Abraham Avinu of Australia: The Life of Reb Moshe Feiglin*, 2016, p 112

²⁹¹ *Jewish Herald*, 8/2/1918, p 17

²⁹² Shirley Randles, *No Looked Doors: Jewish Life in Shepparton*, 2004, p 98

²⁹³ Uri Kaploun, *Abraham Avinu of Australia: The Life of Reb Moshe Feiglin*, 2016, p 121

Hostel

A hostel was built to provide accommodation for newly arrived single men to allow them to acquire some agricultural experience and to house Jewish men who were among the influx of seasonal fruit pickers:

*... the hostel was a large and rambling structure. It had a big hall and a stage. Behind the stage, several rooms and a kitchen were used for living quarters. On the west side of the hall a narrow room ran the length of the building. Its windows were covered with flywire, but no glass. This is where Jewish men stayed when they came to pick fruit during the summer season.*²⁹⁴

In the periods when the community had a shochet (a person qualified to kill cattle and poultry according to Jewish practice), he resided at the Hostel.

A Hachshara, or training farm, was formed in mid-1950 on the 81 acre Toolamba orchard previously held by Aaron Kaploun, son in law of Moshe and Leah Feiglin, who remained on the property for a year as an instructor. It provided experience for young Jewish men and women who wanted to emigrate to live on kibbutzim in Israel.

Late in 1947, the community numbered around 190,²⁹⁵ but by October 1953 the *Jewish News* reported that Shepparton had only a handful of Jewish families,²⁹⁶ and by the 1960s the community had largely dispersed.

The Feiglin family

The Feiglin family, with Moshe as patriarch, was central to the establishment and continuation of the Jewish community at Orrvale.

Moshe Feiglin had applied for a conditional purchase lease of a Farm or Agricultural Labourer's Allotment for Allotment 17, Parish of Shepparton, County of Moira on 31 March 1913. Feiglin was thirty-five years of age, and gave his address as Collingwood, where he had been working as a labourer. He had been in Victoria for five months, arriving in October 1912. Born in Gorky (now known as Nizhny Novgorod) in central Russia, Feiglin had fled the Russian pogroms with his parents and siblings to safety in Palestine. The family farmed there, unsuccessfully, and Moshe subsequently worked on the newly-establishing vineyards of Baron von Rothschild, but the family felt that emigration would give greater success.

Moshe Feiglin's application noted that he proposed to utilise the 44 acre allotment for dairying, although he presciently noted on the application that he understood fruit-growing. He desired the SRWSC to erect a house, Design 3, for him. The cost of the property was £787, to be paid off in instalments. He noted he had received a loan of £200 from the trustees of the Jewish Agricultural Settlement Fund on 10 April 1913, to be repaid at 4% interest.

²⁹⁴ Shirley Randles, *No Looked Doors: Jewish Life in Shepparton*, 2004, p 100

²⁹⁵ Uri Kaploun, *Abraham Avinu of Australia: The Life of Reb Moshe Feiglin*, 2016, p 127

²⁹⁶ *Australian Jewish News*, 30/10/1953, p 15

Feiglin was not forced to take up work on the Ardmona orchards. Having made contact with experienced agriculturist William West (brother of John West, the irrigation pioneer) in search of vine cuttings, he was given a job by West, later becoming farm manager for West's property at Estate No 1, Grahamvale, around 3 kilometres to the north-east of Feiglin's block.²⁹⁷

The family became hard-working, progressive orchardists, instituting many improvements in orchard practice, such as pioneering the use of ethylene to ripen pears and thus gaining an advantage on other orchardists at the markets, and further developing the orchard sprayer used at the time. Other ventures conducted by this entrepreneurial family included a successful fruit-drying venture for ten years (including producing dried fruit for the United States of America and Australian Armies during World War Two) and the harvesting of young palm fronds from palms on the banks of the Murray River and elsewhere around the district for use during the festival of Succoth (a Jewish pilgrimage festival).²⁹⁸

The Feiglin family also developed a very successful (fruit)case-making business under the name M Feiglin and Sons, establishing sawmills in the mountain ash areas of Powelltown and Millgrove, and providing a high quality kiln-dried product in which to convey fruit to market; these became very popular. Case-making factories were set up at Orrvale, Mooroopna, Tatura and Koondrook.

During World War Two, Moshe Feiglin, in collaboration with a number of visiting rabbis from Melbourne, was given permission to visit the Jewish internees at the internment and POW camps in the Tatura/Rushworth area, bringing observant internees religious texts, and kosher food prepared by his wife, daughter and daughter in law. It seems also that at times, when observant Jewish internees were ill, permission was granted for them to be taken to Orrvale to be cared for by Leah Feiglin.²⁹⁹

Moshe Feiglin and his family were part of the Misrachi Zionist movement, promoting Israel as a religious, non-secular state. The family was prominent in the Victorian arm of this organisation throughout the mid-twentieth century.³⁰⁰

Moshe Feiglin and his wife Leah were well-known for helping other orchardists, farmers and members of the wider community in times of need. The Feiglins also donated generously to local and broader causes, such as the Mooroopna Hospital, local radio 3SR's call for funds for the *Argus* Bushfire Appeal of 1944, the building of the Mooroopna War Memorial, and British victims of the 1940 bombing raids.³⁰¹

²⁹⁷ David Feiglin, op cit, p 345

²⁹⁸ Aaron Feiglin, *Growing up with the trees*, 2008, p 120-130.

²⁹⁹ Uri Kaploun, *Abraham Avinu of Australia: The Life of Reb Moshe Feiglin*, 2016, p 121

³⁰⁰ *Australian Jewish News*, 25/7/1947, p 11 and passim

³⁰¹ *Shepparton Advertiser*, 16/6/1950, p 12, 3/9/1940, p 4; *Argus*, 15/2/1944, p 5

The strongly Orthodox beliefs of the Feiglin family are reflected in the existence of a buried, sunken mikveh behind the former house of Moshe and Leah Feiglin at 27 Feiglin Road. A mikveh is a bath for immersion to attain ritual purity. Mikvehs are mainly used by observant married Jewish women, but observant men might sometimes use a mikvah before the Sabbath, and men and women may attend before Jewish holy days and festivals. Mikvahs can be used to make eating and cooking implements kosher (permitted) under Jewish dietary laws. A mikveh must be built into the ground or built as an essential part of a building, and water should be fed to it by gravity.

The sunken mikveh at the house of Moshe and Leah Feiglin was housed in a small brick structure and fed by rainwater from the roof. It replaced a simpler untiled mikveh located at the synagogue block on the site later occupied by the Hostel. Uri Kaploun, grandson of Moshe Feiglin, who had used the Feiglin mikveh as a boy, described it in 2016:

...a tiled mikveh in an outdoor brick bathroom...[built]...according to the detailed specifications forwarded to him from Eretz Yisreal [Israel] by the Chief Rabbi, R. Avraham Yitzchatk.³⁰²

Michael Belfour, another grandson, was familiar with the mikvah from his visits to his grandparents. He recalled that men and boys would use the mikvah at times, for example before the Sabbath service. At a boys' camp he attended on the synagogue block, all the boys 'trooped down the road' (Poplar Avenue) and were immersed in the mikvah: he had laid his clean white shirt and underclothing on the earth nearby, and city boy, was amazed at how dirty they had become.³⁰³



Figure 20. Original housing of the Mikveh at 27B Doyles Road

³⁰² Uri Kaploun, *Abraham Avinu of Australia: The Life of Reb Moshe Feiglin*, 2016, p 121

³⁰³ Michael Belfour, phone conversation with Anne Tyson, 2/11/2022

The mikveh was used by the Orrvale community, not solely the Feiglin family, and some observant Melbourne women, dissatisfied with the mikveh at the Melbourne City Baths, would travel to Shepparton by train to use the mikveh at the Feiglin household.

Four Feiglin houses still stand, clustered around Feiglin Road and Poplar Avenue. The group of three on Feiglin Road consists of two built in 1941, that on the south being the house built for Tziporah, daughter of Moshe and Leah Feiglin, and her husband Aharon Kaploun, and the adjoining, central house being the 'new' house of Moshe and Leah Feiglin. Behind this house is the sunken, buried mikveh. The small northern weatherboard cottage may date from Closer Settlement. The Poplar Avenue house is dated by the Closer Settlement file of Abraham Feiglin to 1942. All three 1940s houses, very similar, were constructed by the same Shepparton builder, Harry Grist.

The mikveh and the Feiglin houses are a tangible reminder of a unique period in the history of the area east of Shepparton.