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Morongo—The Homestead

The early history of Geelong is also the early history of Morongo, the homestead, as the following extracts show.

The story of the settlement of Geelong, the Moorabool, and the Upper Werribee is woven around the names of Stieglitz, Cowie, Stead, Belcher and Atkinson. John Cowie married Charlotte von Stieglitz, and his cousin, Francis Atkinson, married Elizabeth. Cowie's sister, Emma, became the wife of John von Stieglitz whose brother, Robert, married Marcella Belcher, while the other brother, Charles, married Sofia Belcher. There was another Miss Belcher, Mary, who became the wife of David Stead.

These people were known to each other before the first Batman landing at the site of Melbourne, but most of the marriages took place subsequently.

Towards the end of 1835, all Van Diemen's Land was agog about the magnificent pastures and well-watered plains of Port Phillip. Cowie, Stead, Atkinson and the von Stieglitzes decided to put the new country to the test. In November 1835 they took stock over to Williamstown in the *Nouval* with John Batman on his second trip across the strait. They hired horses from Fawkner, who, with his men, assisted in disembarking the stock. Later, the pioneering party moved on to the Geelong country and occupied the site known as Bell Post Hill. The party stayed in the Geelong locality till 1837. Meanwhile, several other settlers, including the Manifolds, arrived, so it was decided to look for new pastures. Robert von Stieglitz, Cowie, Stead and the Manifolds then set out to follow up the Moorabool. They found good grass. Lots were drawn. Cowie and Stead were successful and stayed there for many years. They named their run Bunjeeltap. The Manifolds pushed on. A little later, Cowie, Stead and Robert von Stieglitz, renewed their explorations and camped on the banks of a stream which turned out to be the Werribee. There Robert settled and called the run Ballan. He occupied a second run adjoining for his brother, John, and it was named Ballanee. Both were native names meaning 'camp'. Ballan was passed on to J. H. Belcher, a brother-in-law, in 1853, and Ballanee was sold to Thomas Pyke in 1852. One by one the von Stieglitzes returned to Ireland well-to-do men.

Cowie and Stead left Australia in 1853 and did not return. In 1875, the following death notice was published: "Cowie. On 7th January, at Rostrevor, Ireland, in his 68th year, James Anthony Cowie, Esq., one of the early settlers of Port Phillip."

In 1886, the death of Cowie's former partner was recorded as follows: 'Stead. On 4th October, at Kildare Terrace, Bayswater, London, David Stead (of Cowie and Stead) formerly of the Bell Post and Bungeeltap Stations, Victoria.

Those girls and old girls who remember many journeys to and from Melbourne at the beginning and end of term may be interested in this account of one of the first journeys to Morongo. This extract is from a letter written by Robert von

Stieglitz. The original is owned by the Robb family. Robert's sister, Elizabeth, married Francis Atkinson and was the great grandmother of H. M. Robb who farmed the land adjacent to Morongo, near Ballarat Road.

I was born in Cookstown, County Tyrone, Ireland, on the 4th August, 1816. My mother, Charlotte Atkinson, of English and Scotch extraction was left a widow when I was eight years old.

About the year 1829, she permitted Frederick and Francis to emigrate to Van Diemen's Land. On their arrival, they got grants of land and, in the following year, Henry also followed suit. In 1833, John and I arrived but too late to get grants as the system had been changed. Eventually, all the family arrived in Van Diemen's Land.

In 1835, the south eastern part of New Holland was explored and found to be a fine well-watered country, named Port Phillip. John and I decided on going over (the distance from Georgetown to Port Phillip Heads is 90 miles). He, however, got married and did not go for some years. I got £200 from Francis, £300 from Frederick and a loan of £300, afterwards given to Charles. With this £800 I purchased some sheep at 25/- and lambs at 15/- a head. I made arrangements to join in partnership (as far as expenses were concerned, but not in livestock) with John Cowie and David Stead.

I left Van Diemen's Land in June 1836 in the schooner *Champion* with 360 sheep and 2 horses of my own, and 140 sheep and 1 horse of John's and the others. I had a slow but favourable passage of 6 days and lost only one sheep. I arrived at Gellibrand's Point [now Williamstown] and then commenced my career as a sheep farmer in a country so new that there was no power whatever to uphold the law. Melbourne had not one brick nor one stone on another; there was only one wooden hut and about half-a-dozen sod ones. I took with me as shepherd and hut keeper, David Christmas and Patrick Foley.

They say a bad beginning makes a good ending. I hope so, as my first night on the continent was one of the most trying I ever spent.

We put the sheep into a brush enclosure at night fall. My men went under a tarpaulin tent and I went into a tent of a Mr. Armytage who had arrived a few days before with sheep.

I was very tired and wet from heavy rain and soon fell asleep on some sheep netting. In about an hour, I was aroused by my men calling me to assist in getting in the sheep as they had broken out of the pen. The night was pitch black and very wet. I put on my wet clothes and ran out, and with great exertion got the sheep penned up and the fence, I hoped secure. I returned to the tent, pulled off my dripping clothes and rolled into my blankets. I soon fell asleep, but was called out again shortly after. After securing the sheep, we made a good fire and so spent the remainder of the night.

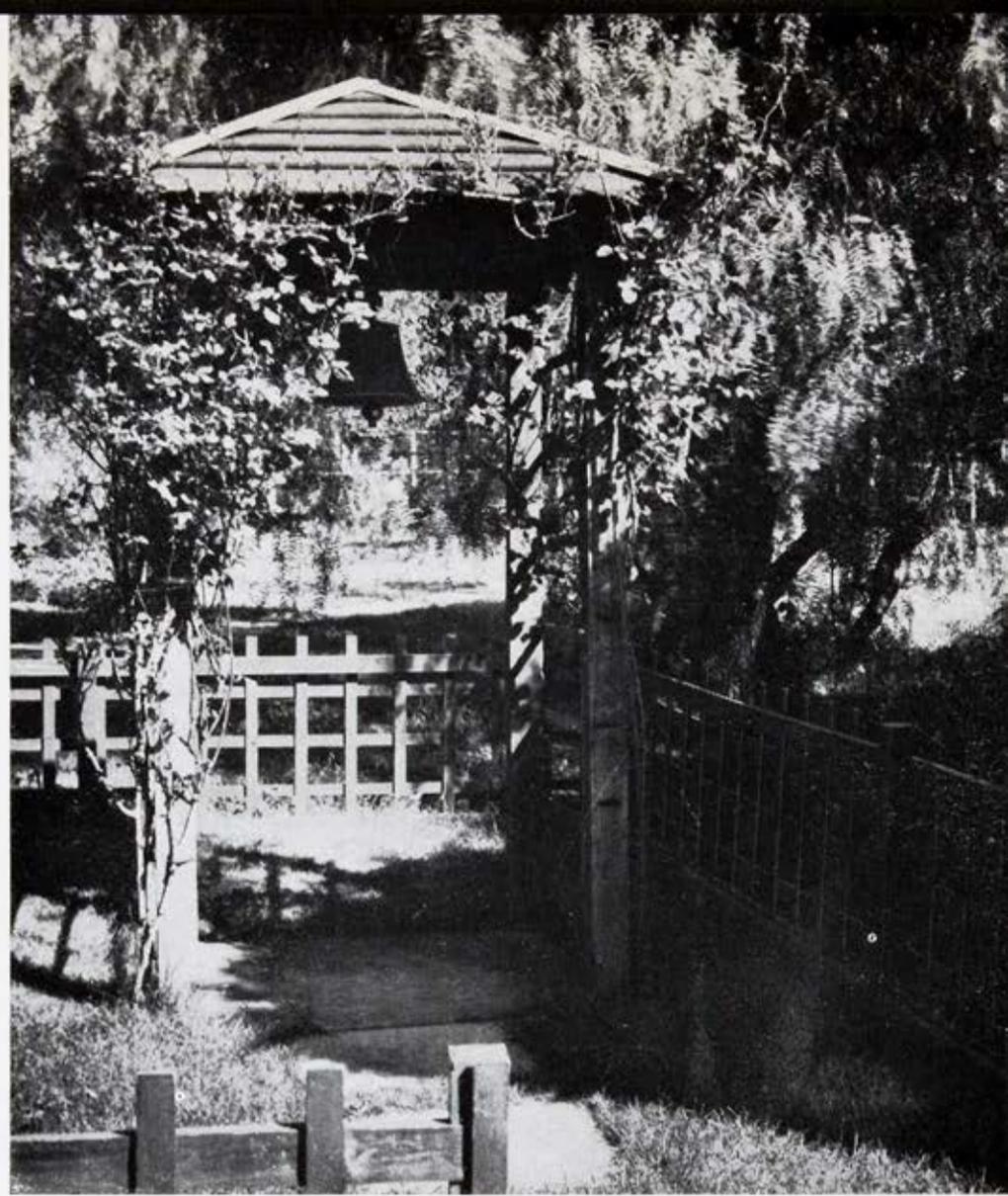
I expected one of my partners to meet me to assist me to the place they had just settled on, which is now called The Bell Post (which I assisted in putting up) about two miles from Geelong. After waiting three weeks, I decided on trying to get to the station without help, so I packed my things on my cart, started the men with the sheep and put two horses tandem to the cart with the other behind. I started off going as nearly as I thought right by compass.

Unfortunately for me, my good-natured skipper, Captain Hill, gave me some whisky and brandy. Why I took it I cannot say, as I never cared for it. We rested at



Lodge and Drive

RIGHT: The School Bell



BELOW: Roslyn House





The Official Opening 1920

The First Assembly





The Official Opening of Morongo

An early Sports Day at Morongo



midday and on starting, the box of drink fell off and some bottles were broken. One I found half-full of whisky, and not thinking of the consequences I gave it to the men telling them to follow the tracks of the cart. When I had driven a few miles, I found water and brushwood so I halted for the night, tethered out the horses and set to work felling trees for a sheep yard and had already a good fire burning when the sheep hove in sight. I went to meet them and to my horror, found Christmas drunk. Foley said the other had threatened to shoot him and left to return to the ship. These men had both been convicts and not good characters.

I never was easily deterred by difficulties, so boiled my tea, had my supper and put up my tarpaulin, small to fit myself, crept in and fell asleep, very tired. (Rather arrogant, eh what?) I woke in the morning and found David sitting at my feet, very miserable, as it had frozen and he had been lying out somewhere.

We got breakfast, and started for the river Werribee. There we found several tents pitched and a good many sheep. I got a sheep killed and made some broth (without salt). While drinking it Paddy Foley came up and begged me either to give him a discharge (without it no captain would take him back to Van Diemen's Land) or take him again into service.

Although right glad to see him, I received him very coolly, and at last consented to take him back.

Here I saw the famous Buckley. He was a most repulsive looking rascal, 6' 5½" in height. He was completely spoiled by flattery from Gellibrand and others who thought they could make him useful to them, but he was a man of no intelligence.

I remained a few days here, when I got a message from my partners to bring a keg of tobacco from a station 4 miles down river, so finding they were not coming to help me home, I decided to start and had to cross the river which was rapidly rising. The first sheep we got in were dashed down-stream and nearly drowned. I went in breast high and kept them up and all crossed safely in about two hours.

I then gave the men directions to steer for a high hill (Station Peak), while I picked up the tobacco. The country is a level plain. I got the tobacco from Mr Wedge's station where I had to stay overnight because of the softness of the ground and the refusal of the horses to pull. In the morning I started off again but would have lost my way but for a blackfellow who had left our station that morning who directed me, I being very watchful of him.

In the evening, I got to the hut at the Moorabul.

An eventful journey and, if calculation is correct, not a bad effort for a twenty-year old.

The following notes on tracing the title to Morongo were made by Mr E. E. Wilson, 13th April, 1922.

The Crown Grant to the land was issued to John McWhirter on the 20th of October, 1849, the consideration being £650 for a total area of 100 acres.

On October 22nd, 1859, Messrs John Fleming, Merton Reid, Samuel Ainslee and Patrick Dalmandy, as trustees of the Will of John McWhirter, sold and conveyed the property to John Calvert for the sum of £4,000. Presumably, McWhirter had improved the property by buildings or otherwise, as I cannot suppose the land had itself increased in value from £600 to £4,000.

John Calvert died in 1875 and left the property to his wife, and after her death, to such children as she should direct. On 22nd of April 1899, Leonard Murray Cal-

vert conveyed the land to Hedley K. Calvert, and in 1906 Hedley K. Calvert sold to Walter Worland.

In 1910 the National Trustees and Executors Agency Co., acting as the administrators of the estate of Walter Worland, deceased, sold to Henrietta Worland.

On 22nd January, 1915, title was issued to Alexander William McRorie, retired farmer, who bought from Worland. When McRorie died, he left the property to his wife, Elizabeth Jane. She sold to William McComb in May 1919, and McComb sold to Edwin Robson Bingley in February 1921. The next was Senator Guthrie.

An addendum in 1955 by P. L. Brown suggests the possibility that the house was started by McWhirter or his representatives. This would account for the price of £4,000 and the fact that Calvert took over the title in October 1859, yet was laying the foundation stone in the same year, as the following extract from *The Geelong Advertiser* shows.

The foundation stone of a large mansion about to be erected on the Bell Post Hill was, Saturday last, laid by the proprietor, J. Calvert, Esq.

After the ceremony of laying the stone, the workmen, to the number of forty, sat down to a sumptuous repast, with a sparkling accompaniment of champagne, which was liberally provided by Mr Calvert. The building is to be of two storeys and has a frontage of 100 feet by a depth of eighty-one feet.

There are two large tanks at the rear of the premises, capable of holding 25,000 gallons of water. The design is by J. L. Shaw, Esq., Architect; Foyle and Co., contractors. The material to be used is a mixture of bluestone and freestone, and the mansion, being situated on one of the best sites around Geelong, will be quite an ornament to the neighbourhood.

The sumptuous repast sounds excellent and there have been many since at Morongo, not least the forbidden ones at the end of the school year. Perhaps it is as well that the elders of the Presbyterian Church did not know of the sparkling accompaniment of champagne liberally provided by Mr Calvert at the beginning of Morongo, since it now wears the dignity of age so well.

The early history and the title showing the families that have lived there involved pioneering and settlement, and today 'The House' is still full of life, as is inevitable in a school full of girls. It is a good history so far and there seems little danger of the fate of other early mansions—30 cents for the Guide Book and a tour around carefully grouped furniture so accurately representative of the period. 'Morongo', 'the camp on the hill', continues to be full of purpose.