THE PYRENEES SHIRE

AVOCA SHIRE HERITAGE STUDY
1864 - 1994

VOLUME 1

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The Shire of Avoca Heritage Study was commissioned by the National Estate Committee (Victoria) and the Shire of Avoca in 1993. The study was carried out with the assistance of funds made available by the Commonwealth of Australia under the National Estate Grants Program. The consultants reported to a steering committee comprised of representatives of the Shire, National Estate and the local community.

STUDY TEAM

The Avoca Heritage Study has been researched and compiled by the following consultants:

Wendy Jacobs - Architect and Planner
Karen Twigg - Historian

sub consultants

Nigel Lewis/Richard Aitken Pty. Ltd.
Architects and Heritage Consultants

VOLUMES

The Avoca Heritage Study is divided into three volumes.

Volume One - contains the Environmental History of the former Shire of Avoca. This is structured around key themes that provide an historical explanation for the present appearance of the Study area.

Volume Two - contains planning and other heritage recommendations for individual sites and areas of special significance.

Volume Three - contains documentation on individual sites which reflect themes outlined in the Environmental History. These sites are recommended for protection under the Local Planning Scheme or the provisions of the Historic Buildings Act. The sites are arranged by geographical location alphabetically and within these locations, again, alphabetically by road name.

INTRODUCTION

The Shire of Avoca Heritage Study was commissioned by the National Estate Committee (Victoria) and the Shire of Avoca in 1993. The report was prepared by consultants Karen Twigg, Historian and Wendy Jacobs, Architect; sub consultants Nigel Lewis, Architect and Richard Aitken, Architect.

The study is in three volumes. The first volume contains an environmental history. The second volume contains planning and other heritage recommendations. The final volume contains information on individual sites. This volume is organised by geographical location alphabetically and within these locations, again, alphabetically by road name.

The former Shire of Avoca occupies an area of 1,127 square kilometres on the outskirts of the central Victorian goldfields, 180 kilometres north-west of Melbourne. The most dramatic landscape feature is the Pyrenees range which occupies the entire centre and northern section of the former Shire clearly dividing it into east and west and forms the backbone of the Shire. A major river, the Avoca, runs through the former Shire from south to north not only giving its name to the municipality but forming the boundary between the Loddon and Wimmera districts of the state.

Forests cover the centre of the Study area including the gullies and slopes of the Pyrenees ranges and extending to the boundaries of the townships of Landsborough and Moonambel. The remainder of the Study area has been extensively cleared for cultivation and paddocks divide the landscape into neat units. The flat stretches of land in the north east of the former Shire around Natte Yallock and Rathscar contrast with the hills of Moonambel, Barkly and Redbank in the north or the undulating plains of Crowlands and Landsborough in the south-west.

The buildings and street design of townships throughout the Study area give indications of a more prosperous past and the explanation can be quickly found in the piles of earth and collapsed shafts, the huge white shapes of mullock heaps and the banks of dredged earth that suggest the extent of mining activity in the Study area in the nineteenth century. At the same time old farm sheds, displaying a wide variety of early construction techniques, dot the landscape leaving the visitor in little doubt of the district's strong farming heritage.

These observations suggest the key role played by both miners and farmers in shaping the history and physical fabric of the Study area and many of the themes explored in the following pages will relate to the influence of these two activities. Ultimately farming superseded mining as the primary economic force in the Study area in the twentieth century; yet much of the present character of the former Shire continues to have its origin in the mining and farming activities which took place in the Study area in the nineteenth century.

Although wine making occurred in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century there has been a resurgence since the nineteen sixties with increasing acreage devoted to viticulture and winemaking is becoming a major industry and tourist attraction in the study area

The following study is confined to the boundaries of the former Shire of Avoca as they were in 1993. It was commenced prior to local government restructure. The entire study area is now part of The Pyrenees Shire. The boundaries which formed the limits of the Avoca Shire until 1994 were first determined on the 2 December 1861 when the Avoca Road District was proclaimed. This initially excluded Moonambel and Avoca which at this time were municipalities in their own right. However on 28 December 1863 all areas were united to form the new Shire of Avoca and with the exception of a small area in the south which became part of the Lexton Shire in the 1940s.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Location of Shire of Avoca, Victoria
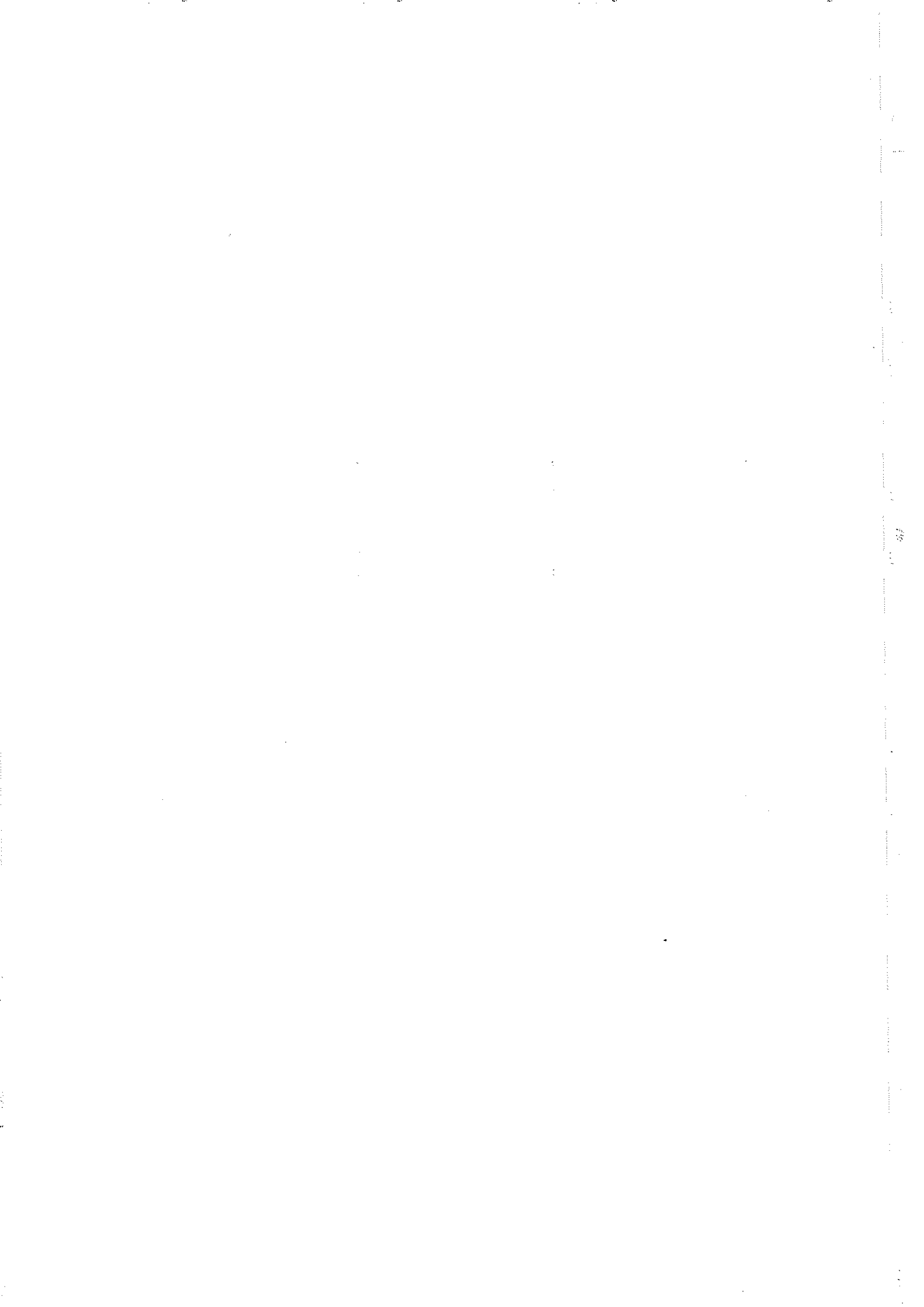
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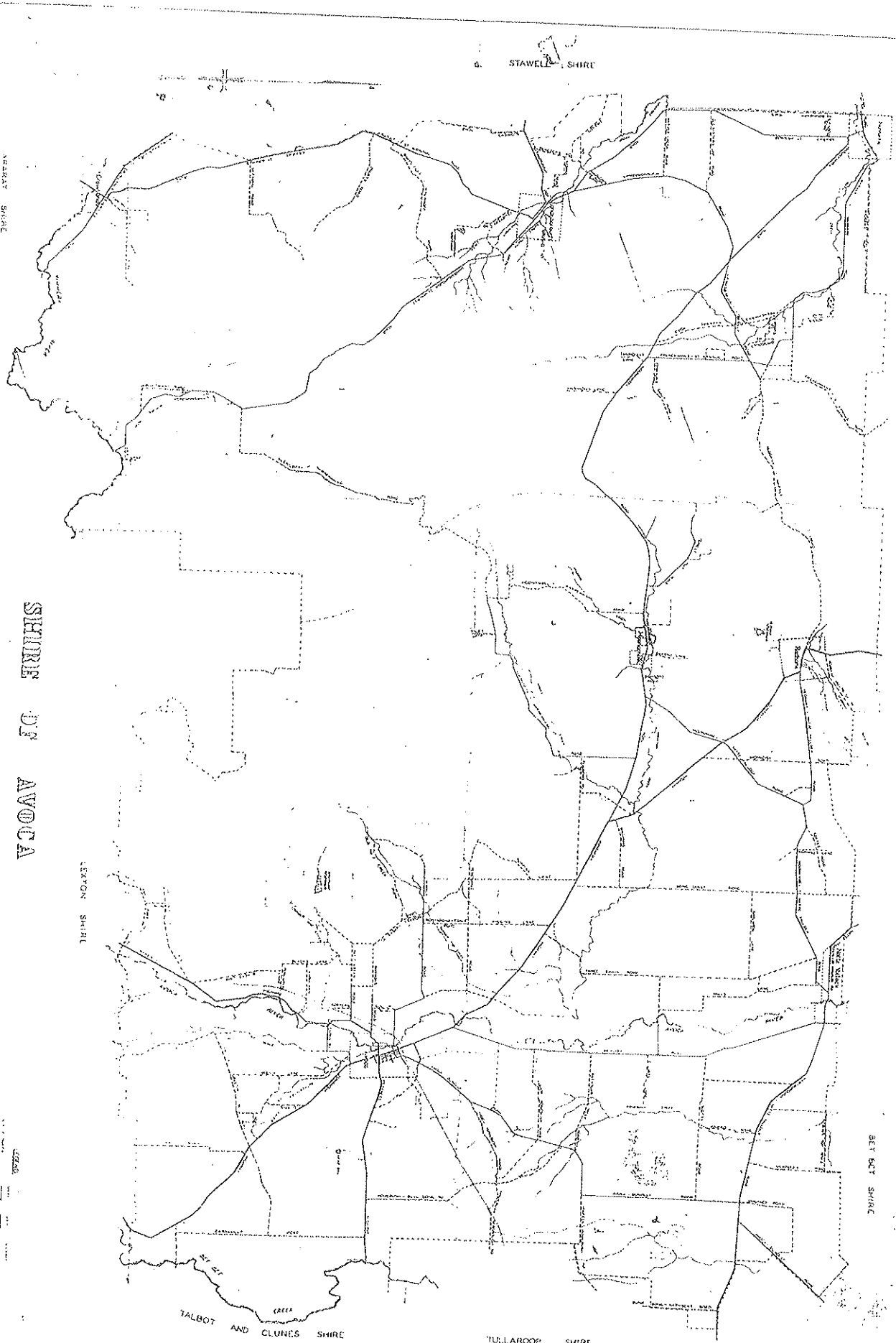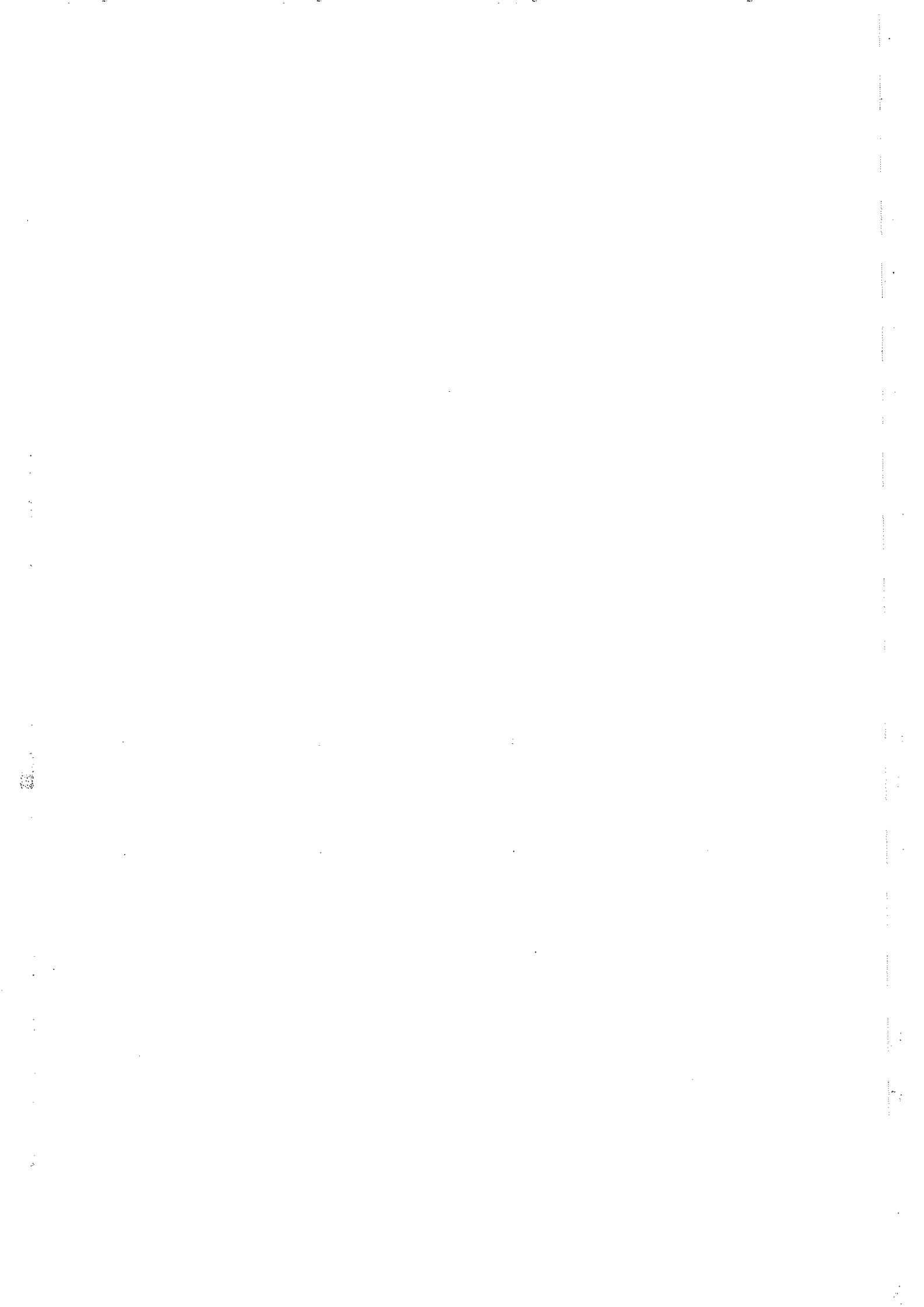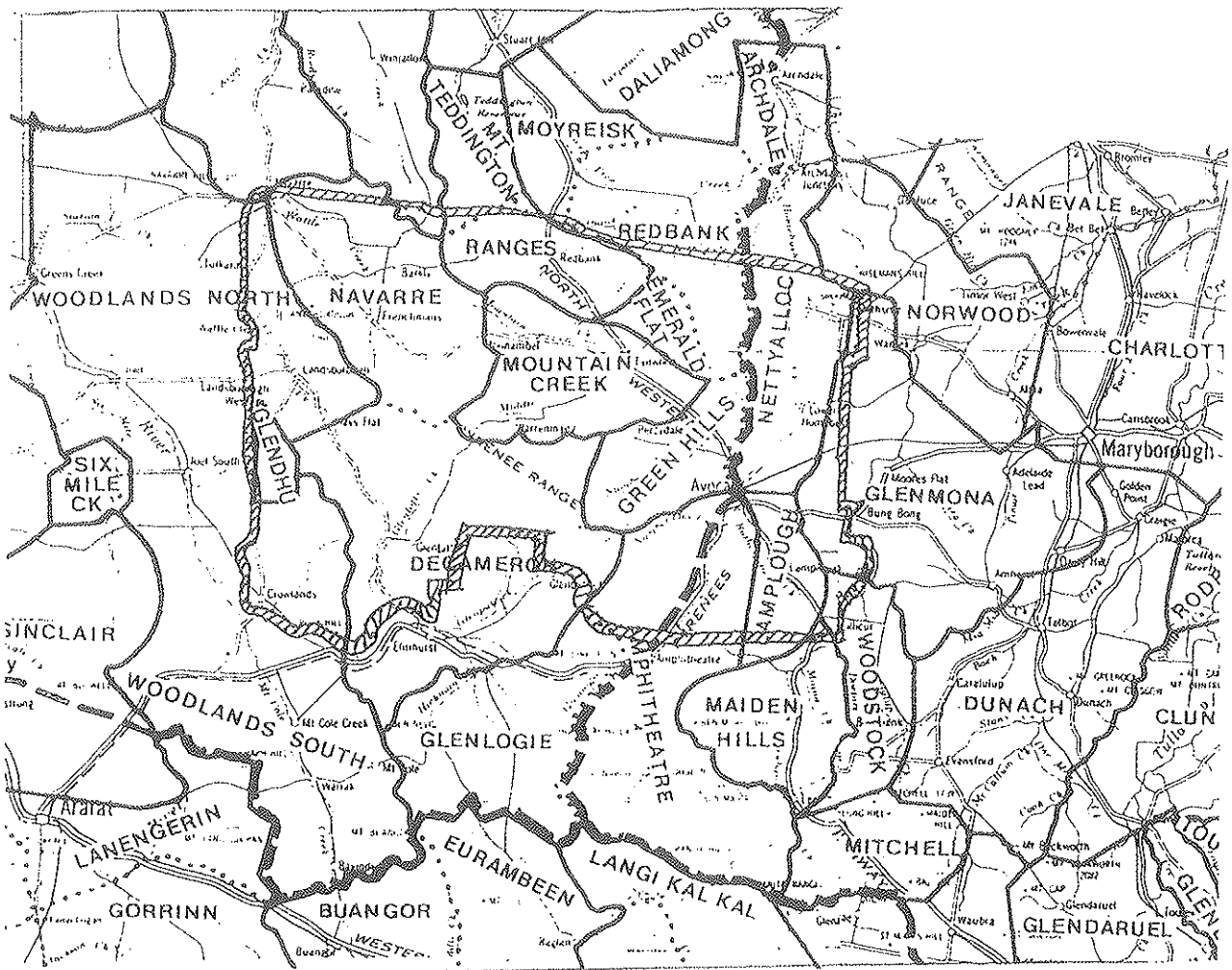
Squatting Runs, 1840s.
The hatched section indicates the area later covered by the Shire of Avoca.
(Source: Anderson, Hugh and Spreadborough, Robert, *Victorian Squatters*,
Red Rooster Press, Ascot Vale, 1983)

EXPLORATION AND PASTORALISM

Sweet vale of Avoca! How calm could I rest
In they bosom of shade, with the friends I love
best,
Where the storms that we feel in this cold world
should cease,
And our hearts, like thy waters, be mingled in
peace

                              Thomas Moore

Major Mitchell

Although many central goldfield towns
have erected cairns to mark the route
through their locality of Major Thomas
Mitchell, during his famous 1836
expedition into the Port Phillip district,
there are no such markers in the Shire of
Avoca. The Surveyor-General of New
South Wales skirted the present day Shire
altogether, passing close to the future site
of St Arnaud to the north but then
continuing west before doubling back and
eventually passing through Lexton to the
south of the Shire on his journey to the
Murray River.[1] He was responsible
however, for naming the Avoca River,
which is said to have reminded him of a
valley and river of the same name in
Ireland, immortalised in a poem by
Thomas Moore. He first encountered the
river not far from St Arnaud and noted
that the banks of the stream consisted of
'rounded acclivities...covered with
excellent grass'.[2]

The first pastoralists

It was this 'excellent grass' frequently
noted by Major Mitchell in his reports
that quickly attracted pastoralists to the
Shire, driving flocks of sheep before them
to occupy huge swathes of land on
payment of an annual £10 licence fee and
stock assessment. The earliest squatters to
take up land in the Shire were Isaac
Moorson and Edmund McNeill in 1839.
Their Scarborough run covered land in
the far east of the Shire (in 1842 this
became part of the Glenmona run). The
future sites of Crowlands and
Landsborough in the far west were
encompassed by William 'Big' Clark's
Woodlands run in 1841 while an arc of
land in the south became part of the
Glenlogie run established as the 'Junction'
in 1840. In 1841 John Brooksbank's
Lamplough run enveloped the south-
eastern corner of the Shire and a year
later the future site of Moonambel was
occupied by Colin McKinnon's Mountain
Creek station. Further north the Ranges
run, taken up by William Rutherford in
1845, encompassed the Redbank area.[3]

The greatest proportion of the
municipality was dominated by just two
groups of pastoralists - James Cameron
who occupied much of the land west of
the Pyrenees ranges, and William Stawell
and his cousin Leslie Foster who held
sway over the country in the east. James
Cameron was owner of the Decameron
run, initially known as Glen Imlay, which
he had purchased from Dr Imlay in 1842.
The run comprised 102,400 acres and
covered the present localities of Glenlofty,
Barkly, Navarre and Frenchmans.

On the other side of the Pyrenees, William
Stawell and Leslie Foster's Nettyalloc run
occupied 43,040 acres along the eastern
side of the Avoca River. Although Leslie

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[1] Eccleston. *Major Mitchell's 1836 Australia
Felix Expedition*, 1985. appendices: maps
[2] Ironically, he initially named the river the
Loddon due to its resemblance to the 'little stream
in England' and bestowed the name Avoca on a
deep creek they came across the following day
which is now known as Sandy Creek, a main
tributary of the Avon River. Eccleston. *Major
Mitchell's 1836 Australia Felix Expedition*, pp
33-4

[3] Anderson and Spreadborough, *Victorian
Squatters*, 1983, Billis and Kenyon, *Pastoral
Pioneers of Port Phillip*, second edition,
Melbourne. 1974

Foster recorded, 'I went with sheep to the River Avoca in February 1842...There was no settler on the Avoca before me',[4] the historian A. S. Kenyon indicates that the land he occupied was in fact part of the much larger Rathscar run (100,000 acres) taken up by Mervyn Archdale in 1841. At any event Mervyn Archdale officially sold the Nettyalloc subdivision of his run to William Stawell in 1847. By March 1848 the partners also occupied two runs west of the Avoca River - Green Hills (14,080 acres) and Moyreisk (43,200 acres) - bringing their total acreage to 100,000 acres. This encompassed the present settlements of Natte Yallock, Homebush, Percydale and the northern portion of the Avoca township.[5]

Aboriginal contact

Just as two major pastoral runs developed on either side of the Pyrenees, the range also marked the border between two Aboriginal language groups, each consisting of a number of clans. Stretching to the east of the Pyrenees as far as Bendigo and Kyneton was the Djadja Wurrung language group, while extending on the other side to the south-west as far as Hamilton, was the language group of the Djab Wurrung.[6] Before white settlement, the fertile land around the Pyrenees probably supported a large population. In the early pastoral years, in December 1840, George Robinson, the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Port Phillip, recorded thirty to forty Aborigines in the Natteyallock area (Burung Balug clan group)[7], while the Assistant Protector, Edward Parker, listed ten in

the Avoca locality (Dereck Balug clan group) in 1843.[8]

For the Djab Wurrung and Djadja Wurrung, white settlement proved destructive. The pastoralists' sheep ate the grasses and murnong (yams) the Aborigines were accustomed to harvesting, and disrupted traditional hunting patterns. Moreover, as the Assistant Protector of Aborigines commented 'It is a common opinion among the settlers that the possession of a squatting licence entitles them to the exclusion of the aborigines from their runs.'[9] As miners flooded into the area following the discovery of gold, Aborigines were exposed to disease and alcohol abuse. When a Select Committee was formed to investigate the condition of Aborigines in 1858, they interviewed the resident warden at Avoca, William Templeton. He spoke of extremely high mortality during the last seven years (induced, he claimed, mainly from intemperance and venereal disorders) and estimated that there was now no more than one hundred Aborigines in the entire Maryborough Mining District although he had been told that there were once ten times as many.[10]

In March 1863, Coranderrk Reserve was established at present day Healesville and some Aborigines from the Avoca Shire were transferred there. For instance Tommy Avoca from Natte Yallock was brought to Coranderrk in 1865.[11] However Aborigines continued to reside in the Shire, and in 1870 Charles Carr from Avoca and W. R. Cole Baker from

[4] Sayers (ed), *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, 1969. p. 339
[5] Rye. *Natte Yallock Centenary 1841-1941*, 1941 (second revision), pp. 1-2
[6] Clark. *Aboriginal Languages and Clans: An Historical Atlas of Western and Central Victoria, 1800-1900*, 1990
[7] Clark. *Aboriginal Languages and Clans*, p. 155

[8] Clark. *Aboriginal Languages and Clans*, pp. 164-5
[9] Morrison. (ed.), *Early Days in the Loddon Valley: Memoirs of E. S. Parker*, 1965
[10] Clark. *Aboriginal Languages and Clans*, p. 146
[11] Clark. *Aboriginal Languages and Clans*, p. 155
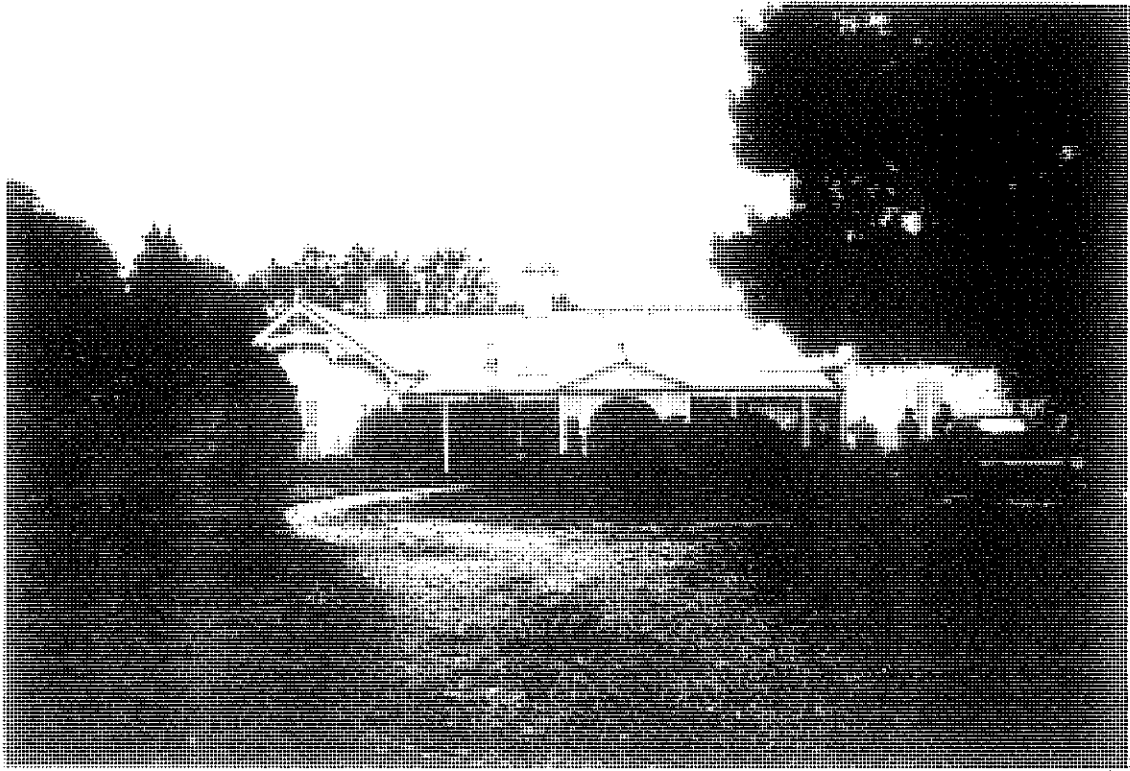
Navarre Station, 1994
(Wendy Jacobs)

Morton Plains were appointed the Local Guardians of Aborigines.[12]

The pastoral environment

By 1848 the pastoral occupation of the Shire was complete. Vast flocks of sheep had been overlanded from New South Wales - on the Decameron run alone 20,000 sheep were stocked while William Stawell's flock numbered 22,000. The life of the run revolved around the station homestead, which was almost invariably sited to allow easy access to water. Around the main dwelling a host of secondary buildings sprung up - sheds, stables, holding yards, accommodation for station workers - and the whole complex quickly assumed the appearance of a small village. A crucial building was the wool shed where thousands of sheep were shorn each year. The Decameron wool shed can still be seen in the far south-west corner of the shire - its huge size reflecting the number of sheep for which it catered. [C15]

In 1847 the squatters campaign for secure tenure was bolstered when a proposal to allow a fourteen year lease appeared to be officially accepted. Homesteads which had been hurriedly built in the early 1840s were now refurbished and extended in the 1850s, or in some cases totally rebuilt Parts of the Glenmona homestead in the east of the Shire [B1] and Navarre station in the north [NB 20],[13] probably date from this period. At the same time many of the original pastoral runs were sub-divided and there were several changes of ownership. In 1852 Cameron divided his run in half to form Decameron and Navarre (Heifer Creek Station) which he sold to Charles Williamson in 1853. In the same year William Stawell sold Netteyalloc to Hugh Glass who split the run to form Archdale in the north and

Nettyalloc in the south.[14] In 1858 Woodlands was divided into Woodlands North and Woodlands South by the new owner William Degreaves, a wealthy Melbourne merchant and flour-miller.

12 Beavis. *Avoca: The Early Years*. p. 3
13 *Pyrenees Pioneers*. Avoca and District Historical Society. September 1992
14 Coates. *Natte Yallock - 150 Years*. p. 3

GOLD

First Discoveries

In 1847-8 William Richfould, a shepherd employed at Heifer Station, Navarre stumbled across flakes of waterworn gold in the bed and sides of Heifer Station Creek.[15] Only twelve months later, in 1849, another shepherd, Tommy Chapman also found gold on the Glenmona run.[16] However neither find was widely publicised and it was left to the discoverers of gold at Buninyong in July 1851 to trigger Victoria's first gold rush.

In 1852 the South Australian gold escort was established between Adelaide and the phenomenally rich alluvial goldfields of Mount Alexander. The escort route passed through the Shire of Avoca, and brought a stream of hopeful South Australian diggers in its train. Mining parties were reported at work on a branch of the Avoca River, at a place known as Four Mile Flat (later Homebush) as early as February 1853, and their number had grown to fifty by May. However members of this group failed to win recognition as the official discoverers of the Avoca goldfields. Instead the honour went to several relative latecomers to the area who were on their way from Adelaide to the Bendigo goldfields and found gold in the area between Four Mile Flat and a place called Donkey Woman's Gully in September 1853.[17]

Avoca

The Main Lead at Avoca was opened up in October 1853 and in the next two months the numbers on the field grew from 100 to 2,200. By June 1854 the population had sky rocketed to 14,000 making the Avoca diggings the first major goldfield opened up in north-western Victoria.[18] The lead was traced for many kilometres, and in shallow sinking the dirt was said to be marvellously rich with one pound nuggets being expected in every claim.[19] But such giddy heights were short-lived. The alluvial gold in shallow ground was soon exhausted and the technology and capital needed to follow the leads into deeper - and wetter - ground was not yet available.

However the Avoca locality still offered mining opportunities and many miners and their families chose to settle in the Avoca township while continuing to prospect the surrounding country. Some Avoca miners travelled west into the foothills of the Pyrenees and discovered gold at Sardine Gully near Warrenmang, Fiddlers Creek (later Percydale) and No. 1 Creek. In 1856 there were fresh discoveries at Four Mile Flat, and a new goldfield was opened up in the Simpson Ranges (Maryborough).[20] To the south of Avoca, the Amphitheatre diggings were being worked between 1854 and 1857 and there was a small rush to nearby Mountain Hut early in 1859. [MIN H13]

Lamplough

In 1859 mining activity throughout the area was subdued. Therefore when gold was found at Lamplough (originally known as Claire Castle), about seven kilometres south of Avoca, it galvanised the entire local mining community and sparked a rush of tremendous proportions. Sinking was easy and initial results pointed to a rich field. On 30 November, a newspaper correspondent on the *Back Creek Advertiser* wrote:
> *people are not entering, they are literally pouring in. Every*

[15] Flett, *The History of Gold Discovery in Victoria*, p. 442
[16] Dunstan, *Wine and Winemakers of the Pyrenees*, p. 7
[17] Flett, *The History of Gold Discovery in Victoria*, p. 454

[18] Flett, *The History of Gold Discovery in Victoria*, p. 454
[19] *Monthly Progress Report*, November and December 1899, Geological Survey of Victoria
[20] Flett, *The History of Gold Discovery in Victoria*, p. 455

conceivable avenue leading to the flat swarms with people Tents are going up as if by magic...along the roads leading to our El Dorado, streams of wagons, dray, equestrians and pedestrians, travel along in one continuous line.[21]

In mid-December the local surveyor Mr English estimated a total population of 12,000[22] but on the 17 January 1860 the Age estimated that the numbers on the field had swelled to between 20,000 and 30,000,[23] fulfilling prophesies that the Lamplough rush would prove one of the largest rushes ever known in Victoria.

By March 1860, numbers on the Lamplough gold field had consolidated and stood at an estimated 12,000 of which 7,000 were miners. In June 1860 the Mining Surveyor wrote:

At Lamplough the Deep Lead offers sufficient inducements yet to a large number of miners to remain...It has already been found payable more than two miles in length from the original prospectors' claim.[24]

Two main leads were defined, which for a time gave good returns, but they rapidly became narrow and hard to follow. Difficulties were compounded by the fact that the leads branched onto freehold land, forcing miners to negotiate mining rights with the land holder.[25] At the end of the year a rush to Mountain Creek (Moonambel) and Redbank drained Lamplough of its mining inhabitants, and by 1864 the population of Lamplough had been reduced to 120.[26]

The reserve at Lamplough remains pitted with shafts and mullock heaps, a visible reminder of the rush of 1859-60. [MIN H15]

Moonambel

Miners were at work at Moonambel, originally known as Mountain Creek, as early as September 1860 although the Prospecting Board accepted an official discovery date of November 1860 Alluvial gold was found in shallow sinkings and by 21 December 1860 it was estimated there was between 10,000 to 12,000 miners on the field, the main street had been surveyed and scores of substantial buildings were in the course of erection.[27]

Business at the Mountain Creek township is now very good. All the large wholesale houses have removed from Lamplough. The High Street now presents a very substantial and compact appearance.[28]

Gold was found within a radius of two miles from the township but it proved notoriously patchy, with one load yielding excellent returns while the next load from the same sinking offered nothing. Moreover, although the diggings continued to extend, the sinkings remained shallow and there was little indication of deeper and richer ground.[29]

Redbank

Miners attracted to the Moonambel diggings began to prospect further afield, and in December 1860, gold was discovered about three miles north of Moonambel in an area known as Redbank or Hines. Miners rushed from Moonambel to the new diggings which within two weeks boasted a population of 4,000. The

21 Strangman, 'The Rush to Lamplough', thesis (draft), 1987, p. 20
22 *Mining Surveyors' Reports*, December 1859
23 *Age*, 17 January 1860, quoted in Strangman, p. 22
24 *Mining Surveyors' Reports*, March 1860
25 *Mining Surveyors' Reports*, Jan 1860
26 *Mining Surveyors' Reports*, September 1864

27 *Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser*, 21 December 1860
28 *Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser*, 4 January 1861
29 *Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser*, 21 December 1860

Moonambel newspaper correspondent commented with some chagrin, 'No sooner have our business people and miners located themselves here, at great expense, and loss of time in removing from other districts, than fresh discoveries present their attractions to our migratory population'.

The gullies and flats of the country surrounding Redbank were thoroughly prospected and the diggings eventually spread out over a wide area. The field was described in a letter written by Thomas Benson, a young Englishman, who had also tried his luck at the Lamplough gold diggings the previous year. He wrote:

> This goldfield is in the heart of the Pyrenees and is very extensive. The gold is more equally distributed than I have known on any diggings, and...a greater number of men have got gold than is usual on a new field, the claims paying from half an ounce to three ounces to the car load of washed stuff.[30]

Barkly

In March 1861 a new rush to Barkly (known as the Navarre diggings) drew miners away from both Moonambel and Redbank. A party of miners headed by James Law had prospected the Barkly area as early as August 1858. When they finally found payable gold in June 1859, they sparked a small rush of between 500 to 700 people, centring on the Barkly Lead - which extended for a distance of five miles from McKinnons Gap to Heifer Station Creek.

The second rush to Barkly in 1861 was much larger than the first due to the large number of miners now in the locality. At Moonambel it was reported:

> A daily line of coaches has been laid on between Mountain Creek and the New Rush. The number of drays passing through is enormous. This being the only available road to Navarre [Barkly] parties from Redbank, Hinds and the neighbourhood are compelled to pass through Mountain Creek.[31]

Miners also flocked to Barkly from the west of the state, and Ararat businesses experienced brisk trade generated by travellers en route to the new goldfields. In June 1861, the population of the Barkly goldfield was further swelled by the discovery of gold a short distance to the south of Frenchman's diggings.

At the height of the Barkly rush, in November 1861 there were an estimated 10,000 miners on the field.[32]

Landsborough

In February 1856 the Age wrote that there had been a 'rush to new ground from Fiery Creek to what is likely to be an important diggings, four miles from Crowlands'. The new ground was named the Malakoff Lead, presumably after the battle of the Malakoff in the Crimea in 1855. After the initial rush the lead was traced north down the valley and another rich patch was opened in 1858, and called the Glasgow Lead. In 1862 this lead to the discovery of the rich Landsborough and Dunphail Leads, and the establishment of the township of Landsborough.[33]

By September 1862, Landsborough was occupied by a population numbering between 8,000 and 9,000 people. The Ararat Advertiser claimed, 'for an alluvial field it transcends any rush that has taken place for the last three years within the belts of the Pyrenees'.[34]
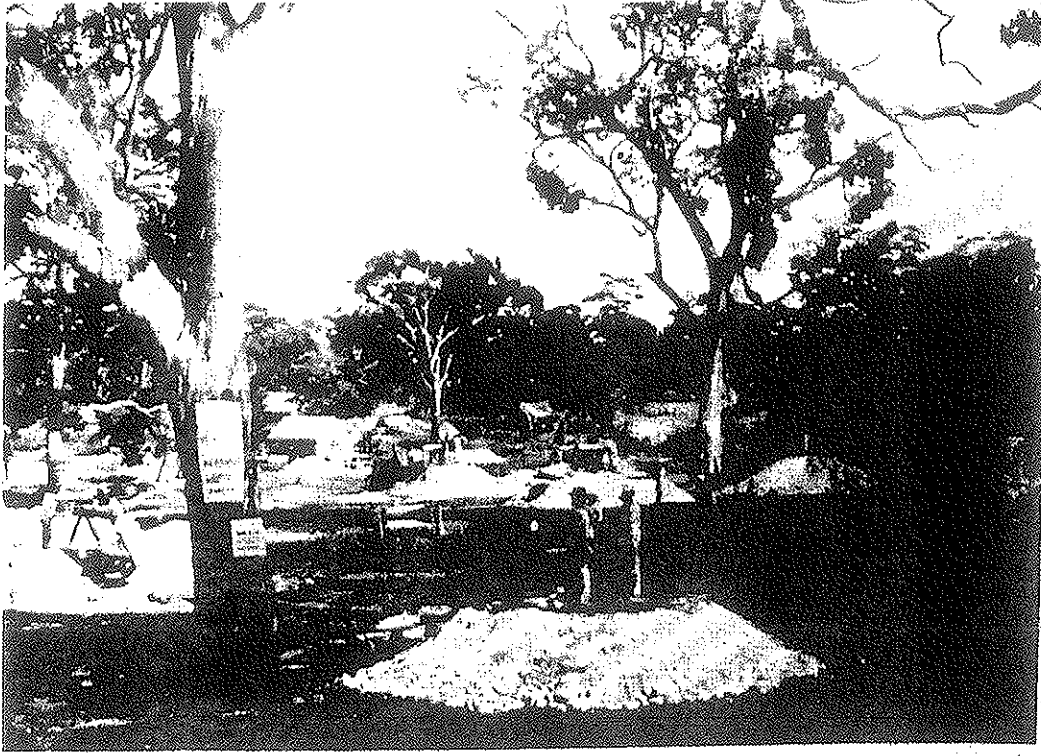
30 Palmer, Track of the Years, p. 222

31 Ararat Advertiser, 28 March 1861, quoted in Pioneers of the Pyrenees, p. 51
32 Flett, The History of Gold Discovery in Victoria, p. 444
33 Flett, The History of Gold Discovery in Victoria, p. 447
34 Ararat Advertiser, 26 September 1862

Barkly Goldfield (Photographer - Richard Daintree, 1 November 1861)
(Eulalie Driscoll)

Mining in the area was described as 'cooked' in 1863 but such pessimism was misplaced. Between 1864 and 1869 an entirely new series of leads were discovered north of the township, the most important being the Cambrian Lead:

> *From all quarters numbers of diggers are flocking in to the great rush, the Cambrian lead, which never looked better than at the present moment, the bottoming of golden holes being of daily occurrence it is estimated that there are upwards of one thousand miners engaged in sinking and shepherding.*[35]

The Cambrian Lead was traced in a south-westerly direction for a distance of about three kilometres before dropping suddenly to a deep floor which made it impossible to follow on account of the water. The course of the Cambrian lead can still be partially traced via the mullock heaps and shafts in a paddock north of Landsborough.[MIN L1]

Other leads were discovered in the area, and although none were of great richness they were sufficient to stem a mass exodus of miners away from the area, and to secure the town's future.

Mining Population

Between 1859 and 1862, the mining population within the Avoca Shire could be characterised as moving from rush to rush in an anti-clockwise direction beginning at Lamplough then moving to Moonambel, followed by Redbank and Barkly and finally ending in Landsborough in 1862, with each rush acting as a launching pad for the next. Indeed, the goldfields correspondent at Landsborough commented that he met old faces everywhere.[36]

Percydale

The last big rush in the Shire occurred in June 1869 when a new lead was struck at Percydale (originally known as Fiddlers Creek). Fiddlers Creek had been worked for alluvial gold at least as early as December 1854 when it was prospected by Avoca miners, and in September 1864, the Mining Surveyor reported that it maintained a population of a 'settled description'.[37]

However, the 1869 rush boosted the population of the area to 2,400 in a matter of weeks and the new lead was quickly traced for a distance of five kilometres. Shafts were bottomed at around 130 feet deep and the yields averaged between 4 dwts to 1 oz. During this period the Mining Surveyor counted thirty-five puddling machines, three whims and thirty horse whips, and he reported that a substantial township was in the course of erection.[38] The rush caused the surrounding country to be prospected more thoroughly and led to the opening of a number of alluvial diggings including No 2 Gully in December 1869, Donkey Hill Lead in September 1870 and Raggedy Gully rush in September 1871.[39]

Chinese

The gold-fields attracted people of many different nationalities but the Avoca area became noted for its high concentration of Chinese. Most were involved in reworking ground abandoned after the initial rush. In 1857 a Chinese protectorate was established at Avoca under the charge of William Templeton and the Chinese were directed into a specific part of the township known as the Chinese Camp.[40] In 1865, *Balliere's Victorian Gazetteer* listed the population of the Avoca township as about 1600

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35   *Ararat Advertiser*, 27 November 1866
36   *Ararat Advertiser*, 26 September 1862
37   *Mining Surveyor's Reports*, September 1864
38   *Mining Surveyors' Reports*, June 1869
39   Bannear, *Historic Mining Sites in the Maryborough and Avoca Mining Divisions*, June 1994, p. 10
40   Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 48

Europeans and 570 Chinese.[41] During the same period Avoca's Church of England appointed a Chinese catechist, Matthew Ah Get, to help the vicar in his efforts to convert members of the Chinese community.[42]

A large community of Chinese also resided in Percydale and the rush to the area in 1869 saw Chinese outnumbering Europeans miners by more than four to one. The Chinese monopolised one section of the township and boasted thirty stores, a joss-house and 'several places of amusement'.[43] One such place was a Chinese theatre reputed to be unrivalled in Victoria.[44] So large was the Chinese population that Percydale was chosen as the centre of one of the Anglican Church's five main missions to the central goldfields. The mission was established in 1870 and remained at Percydale until 1873 when it was transferred to Maryborough.[45]

The later rush to Raggedy Gully attracted about 900 Chinese and 300 Europeans. Of the two groups, the Chinese proved far more successful, to the immense irritation of the Europeans. The mining registrar attributed this to their untiring energy, 'No sooner is a hole, say seventy feet sunk, which proves profitless, than they set to work at another and are, in the end apparently successful.'[46] The Raggedy Gully field is one of the most intact alluvial goldfields in the Shire and gains in significance through its strong association with the Chinese community. [MIN P12]

Despite the large numbers of Chinese who once resided in the Shire, very few signs remain of their presence. A notable exception is a brick funeral oven and several slate head stones located a little apart from the other graves at the Avoca cemetery.[A27]

Alluvial Mining

Miners initially focused on obtaining easily won alluvial gold. Millions of years earlier the continual erosion of gold bearing quartz had swept flakes of gold into the water courses. Now shafts were sunk to find the wash dirt of these old river beds (or leads) so that they could be plundered for gold. The site of a goldfield quickly became characterised by muddy piles of mullock encircling a central sinking and these often following a discernible route as a lead was struck and traced forward.

During the 1860s many miners established homes in the Shire, and rather than continuing to chase new discoveries, re-worked the shallow sections of the old leads. A process known as puddling was widely used. This involved the use of horse power and a circular earthen trough to mix wash dirt and water to a slurry and then separate the gold. In 1859 the mining registrar reported that there were 311 puddling machines at work in the Maryborough and Avoca divisions.[47] The remains of many of these old puddling machines can still be seen, particularly in the bush around Percydale. One relatively intact example on the Fiddlers Creek Lead has a diameter of 22 feet and retains its inner mound and pivot post in addition to a deep puddling trench. [MIN P8]

Puddling machines had their own effect on the environment: a network of races was built to feed them with water and the sludge they produced frequently choked up surrounding streams and creeks. Early maps of Landsborough show a wide

[41] *Balliere's Victorian Gazateer*, 1865, quoted in Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 43
[42] *Back to Avoca, 1950*, p. 45
[43] *Mining Surveyors' Reports*, June 1869
[44] Dunlop, 'Recollections of Mining at Percydale in the Avoca district', *Victorian Historical Magazine*, February 1971, p. 524
[45] Keith Cole, *The Anglican Mission to the Chinese in Bendigo and Central Victoria 1854-1918*
[46] *Mining Surveyors' Reports*, September 1871

[47] *Mining Registrars' Reports*, 1859
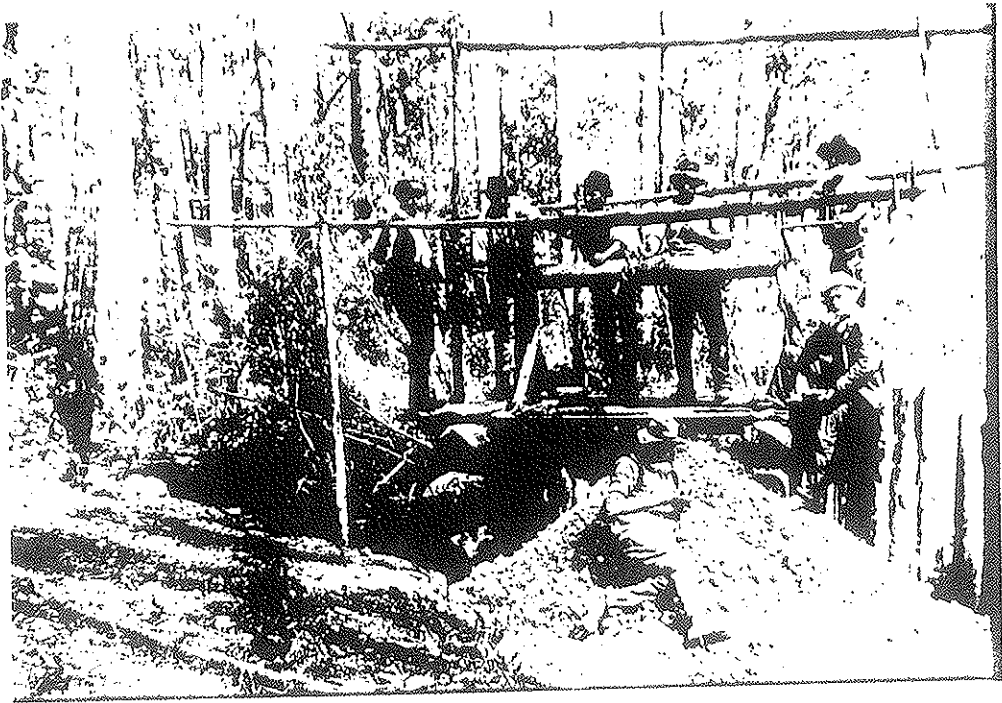
Ironbark Mine, Upper Homebush, 1870s
(Avoca and District Historical Society)
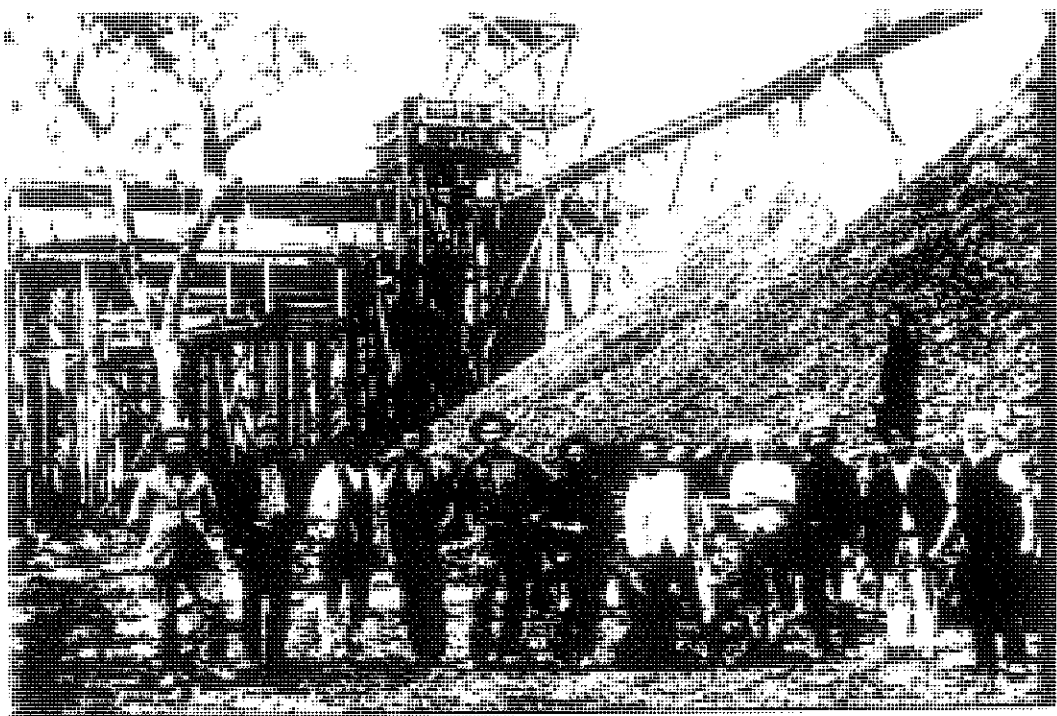
Homebush Deep Lead Mine, 1880s
(Avoca and District Historical Society)
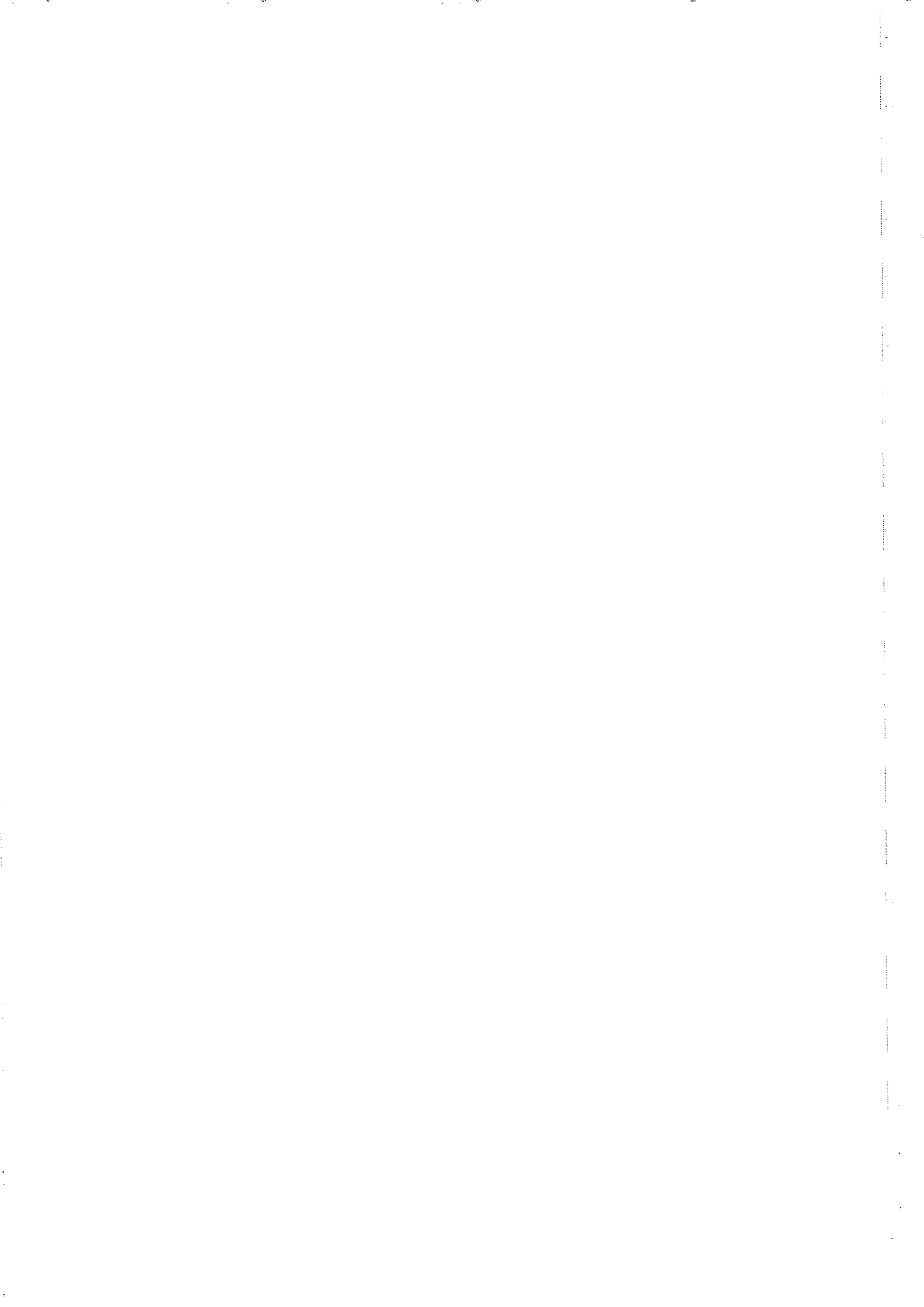
sludge channel crossing the main street. The puddling process also led to the wholesale removal of soil. In 1859, Chinese puddlers at the old Avoca Main Lead processed the entire alluvium, from the surface to the bedrock, leaving behind a denuded landscape.[48]

Deep leads

The easily won alluvial gold in shallow ground was soon exhausted and although alluvial mining continued in various forms, the future was increasingly seen to rest with the development of deep lead mining on large amalgamated mining leases. By the 1860s most payable mines in the Shire had been worked to water level. In some cases horse whims were still used to bale water from the shafts, and in 1860 a party of 150 Chinese miners on the Avoca Main Lead operated eight horse whims and also some hand machines in their efforts to keep the water at bay.[49] However, there was little question that powerful steam driven pumping machinery and winding equipment was required if a mine was to be successfully worked below the water level. As a result miners began to join together in co-operative parties, and companies were formed. At the same time there was shift from small claims to large amalgamated leases.

One of the first deep lead companies at Avoca was the Hit-or-Miss Company, established in 1864 by twelve men.[50] It was followed by others, including the Avoca Gold Mining Association which became the Avoca Division's first successful deep lead mine - its returns amounted to more than 1,476 oz in the

1866 March quarter.[51] During the same period, deep lead mines were established by the Golden Lake and Phoenix companies at Homebush, while at Redbank, several small mining parties tried without success to locate deeply buried leads in Slaughteryard and Grumbler's gullies[52] and the Homeward Bound Company failed to discover a deep lead at Moonambel.

Deep lead mining fell into recession during the 1870s but the end of the decade saw a revival. In 1877 the Working Miners Company began sinking shafts on the Homebush Lead and in the December quarter of 1879, boasted a result of 3,424 ounces (including several nuggets).[53] This trend of rich yields continued over the next few years, prompting the establishment of several other large companies on the Homebush Lead. The excavations of the Working Miners Company, and other companies along the lead, threw up huge mullock heaps and these remain landscape features at Homebush, providing a graphic illustration of the sheer quantity of earth that was moved in the search for gold. [MIN H2-6]

At the Avoca Lead, the Golden Stream Company erected powerful machinery, and during 1884 and 1885, it was one of the district's premier gold producers.[54] A large, white mullock heap on the northern approaches to Avoca stands witness to its operations. [MIN H9]. At Landsborough enormous effort was directed toward deep lead mining. In 1875 the Kara Kara Company unsuccessful bottomed a shaft at Landsborough Flat,[55] and during the 1880s companies such as the Norah, Nil Desperandum and Sampson's attempted

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48 Bannear. *Historic Mining Sites in the Maryborough and Avoca Mining Divisions*. June 1994. p. 6; *Mining Surveyors' Reports*. September 1859
49 *Mining Surveyors' Reports*. September 1860
50 *Mining Surveyors' Reports*. September 1864. quoted in Bannear, *Historic Mining Sites in the Maryborough and Avoca Mining Divisions*, p. 10

51 *Mining Surveyors' Reports*. June 1866
52 *Mining Surveyors' Reports*. March 1865
53 Bannear. *Historic Mining Sites in the Maryborough and Avoca Mining Divisions*, p. 13
54 Bannear. *Historic Mining Sites in the Maryborough and Avoca Mining Divisions*, p. 13
55 *Mining Surveyors' Reports*. March 1875

to work deeper ground about five kilometres to the north-west of Landsborough.[56]

Shareholders in these companies were mainly local residents with a predominance of miners and local business proprietors, although there was also Melbourne and Ballarat shareholders.

Quartz mining
Avoca
Gold could be found entrapped in quartz reefs but an effective means of recovering the gold did not exist until crushing batteries powered by steam were introduced into the Shire in the mid-1850s. When Vales Reef, between Avoca and Homebush, was opened in 1855 it was one of the first quartz reefs mined in the Shire. Yields from 25 oz to the ton were obtained on the surface but subsequently dwindled until the reef was temporarily abandoned in 1859 at a depth of 210 feet. [MIN H 7][57] Another reef - Hogg's Reef - was opened near Avoca in 1856. It initially yielded up to four oz to the ton but like Vales Reef the quartz became poorer as the shaft went deeper.[58] In later years attempts were made to work both mines again, but with limited success. On the other side of the Shire the Glen Dhu Reef near Crowlands had also been extensively mined by 1860 and the Mining Surveyor reported that eight claims were being worked on the reef.[59] Later, in the 1880s, a company was formed on the Wimmera Reef and other reefs near Landsborough such as the Naracoorte, and Powys were mined. The shafts and adit of the Naracoorte mine can still be seen in the foothills of the Pyrenees. [MIN L2]

Redbank
Although quartz mining continued in places throughout the Shire, the localities of Redbank and Percydale emerged as the two major quartz mining areas. It was estimated that twenty-eight reefs existed in the Redbank area, extending south to Moonambel.[60] Chief among these was the Pyrenees Reef which was discovered near Redbank in the first days of January 1861, and in sections proved phenomenally rich. By 1865 the reef had its own crushing plant known as the Pyrenees Quartz Crushing Battery.[61] Other major quartz reefs opened up at this time were the Slaughteryard Reef at Moonambel and the Richmond Reef at Redbank. In 1869 and 1872 respectively, attempts were made to work both reefs by tunnelling. The adits were later re-worked and the gaping tunnels they created can still be seen. [MIN R7 and R3] In 1884 the Cambrian Reef Company was formed at Redbank but it met with only limited success.[62]

Percydale
At Percydale, miners had long been tantalised by gold gleaming from quartz outcrops and some of the richest stone had been carted to the public crushing works at Avoca and Redbank. The results were promising and in 1866 Percydale's first battery was erected:

> The engine now at work was erected for the purpose of testing, on a large scale, the numerous gold bearing quartz veins that exist in the vicinity. Some of these are of great thickness and a few trial crushings of stone from one reef were very good indeed.[63]

During the 1870s and to a lesser extent the 1880s, small scale quartz mining

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[56] Bannear, *Historic Mining Sites in the Ararat Mining Division, Barkly or Landsborough Goldfield*, November 1994

[57] *Monthly Progress Report*, November and December 1899, Geological Survey of Victoria

[58] Bannear, *Historic Mining Sites in the Maryborough and Avoca Mining Divisions*, p. 8

[59] *Mining Surveyors' Reports*, March 1860

[60] 1881 American postal directory, quoted in Beavis, *Pioneers of the Pyrenees*, p. 93

[61] *Mining Surveyors' Reports*, June 1865

[62] *Mining Surveyors' Reports*, December 1884, June 1885, September 1885, December 1885

[63] *Avoca Mail*, 6 October 1866

Hog's Reef Mine, Avoca, c. 1939
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

Chinese miner, Amphitheatre, c. 1890
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

continued on the reefs surrounding Percydale, and many mines erected their own crushing plant. The remains of batteries can still be observed at Fiddlers Reef [MIN P3], Union Jack Reef [MIN P5], West of England Reef [MIN P6], Halls and Rodwells Reef [MIN P7], Hampshire Reef and Barnes Reef [MIN P13], reflecting the number of reefs in the area that were seriously mined. Two of the main operators in the early 1870s were the Perseverance Company and the No. 2 United Barnes Reef Company. The Perseverance Company drove a tunnel, through hard rock in order to intercept the Perseverance Reef, which eventually reached an estimated 920 feet in length. [MIN P2] The No. 2 United Barnes Reef Company was one of the few companies to erect the necessary steam pumping and winding plant to sink a deep shaft, and at a depth of over 300 feet, it became the deepest shaft ever sunk in the Avoca Mining Division. [MIN P13]

Twentieth Century

Throughout the depression of the 1890s there had been very little mining activity in the Shire but in the years leading up to the First World War there was a revival of sorts. Some miners tried cyaniding as a cheap and effective means of retrieving fine gold from quartz tailings and the slum ponds of deep lead mines.

Redbank area experienced a resurgence of quartz mining in the late 1890s and early twentieth century, fuelled primarily by increased activity on the St Arnaud field. This led to renewed operations at the Pyrenees, Surprise and Cambrian Reefs at Redbank, and the Slaughteryard Reef and Garden/Tormey's Reef at Moonambel. In 1899 the first government battery in the region was constructed at Moonambel.[64] At Homebush, the new Madame Hopkins Company was formed to work an untried

deep lead to the east of the township in 1899, but despite erecting substantial plant, it was not successful.[65] The Excelsior Company opened in 1909 at Homebush and reputedly yielded rich returns from relatively small quantities of quartz. However all these operations were brought to an end by the outbreak of the First World War.[66]

Dredging

The price of gold almost doubled during the depression years of the 1930s, stimulating a short-lived mining revival. In 1936 the Lamplough Gold Mining Company operated two deep lead mines on the Avoca Lead, but despite the installation of sophisticated electric winding, pumping and ventilation equipment, both mines proved unprofitable. At Landsborough the Point Addis Company sunk shafts north of the township[67] and for a period provided employment for a large number of local residents. However it too was ultimately unsuccessful.

In July 1937 the *Mining and Geological Journal* reported that dredging lease applications had been inspected in the Avoca, Alma, Amphitheatre, Redbank and Landsborough districts. Dredges had been used in Victorian mining districts since the turn of the century scooping up gravel and clay along water courses or swampy gullies and processing it for gold before discarding the waste in huge piles. At Avoca, the Avoca Lead Dredging Company was formed and constructed four large dredge dams [MIN H11] while at Landsborough the Malakoff Alluvial Company (originally the Avoca Development Company) began sluicing gold from the Malakoff Lead. It also

64 Bannear. *Historic Mining Sites in the Inglewood, Wedderburn and St Arnaud Mining Divisions.* p. 19

65 Bannear. *Historic Mining Sites in the Inglewood, Wedderburn and St Arnaud Mining Divisions.* p. 17
66 Bannear. *Historic Mining Sites in the Inglewood, Wedderburn and St Arnaud Mining Divisions.* p. 16
67 *Avoca Mail*, 18 October 1935

sluiced the upper and shallower parts of the Landsborough Lead, and a dredge dam was constructed west of the Malakoff Lead. [MIN L3 and 4]

The Redbank Dredging Company commenced operations in German Gully, north of Redbank in 1938. It's electric powered dredge was capable of digging to a depth of 33 feet and removing 25,000 cubic yards of wash a week,[68] and the dredged landscape of low embankments and rectangular ponds it left behind is still clearly visible north of Redbank. [MIN R9] One of the Shire's most successful dredging operations was the Central Victorian Dredging Company, which established a dredge on the Avoca River near Amphitheatre in 1951. It obtained good yields for some years, but in June 1957, the dredge sank suddenly under mysterious circumstances[69] and operations were never recommenced. Huge tailings banks still bear witness to the scale of the company's operations and the huge quantity of earth it processed. [MIN H14]

A few mines continue to operate in the Shire of Avoca. At Fiddlers Creek Reef, new winding and treatment plant has been installed and the old mine is being worked. At Moonambel the alluvial diggings of the old Moonambel Lead, west of Green's Lane, has recently been re-mined and is now subject to rehabilitation. Of course the traditional pastime of prospecting continues - aided by the introduction of metal detectors.

[68]   *Mining and Geological Journal*, July 1939, pp. 26-31
[69]   Bannear, *Historic Mining Sites in the Inglewood, Wedderburn and St Arnaud Mining Divisions*, p. 18

WATER

Water has proved crucial to the Shire of Avoca, influencing settlement patterns and the character of gold mining and agricultural activity All the major towns within the Shire are located on a creek or river The east of the Shire is dominated by the Avoca River, and parts of the southern and eastern boundaries of the municipality are formed by the Wimmera River and Bet Bet Creek respectively Even the name of Shire has been taken from the Avoca River.

Water on the goldfields

Despite the Shire's numerous water courses, water was not always available when and where it was needed. The pressure of human population and the demands of mining operations meant that there was often severe water shortages and water carters on the goldfields did a roaring trade. During the summer of 1861 water was selling for five shillings a load on the Redbank goldfield, and in the absence of rain the price increased to fifteen shillings by March 1861 [70] Even when there was water available it was often rendered unfit for human consumption. A newspaper correspondent at the Moonambel goldfield wrote.

> the water near the first diggings has already, from the great number of toms and cradles discharging their refuse tailings, assumed the consistency of pea soup and unless some steps are speedily taken to obviate this evil we may expect to suffer from a want of good drinking water during the summer months. [71]

In 1860, the district mining surveyor conducted a complete survey of possible sites for government dams on the goldfields. However work was slow to begin and in the meantime miners banded together to build their own dams for operating puddling machines. In 1860 the *Avoca Mail* newspaper correspondent reported an 'immense number of dams erected all over the district'. Unfortunately, due to their hasty construction and the inexperience of their builders, most were completely swept away by an outburst of heavy rain in the same year. [72] Moreover they were frequently not large enough to provide water during the entire summer. In 1864 Landsborough miners complained, 'If we had water there is still plenty of old ground left of which something could be made but at present there is but one or two machines that have water left in their dams'. [73]

The popularity of puddling machines on the goldfields during the 1860s created a new demand for water. Races were constructed in order to transport water from a water course or existing dam to the alluvial gold workings. Surviving water races are still visible at both Barkly [MIN L5] and Landsborough [MIN L3]. Their construction demonstrates the care and skill of its builders in following the gradient enabling the water to continue to flow even around steep slopes. In 1868 over twenty-two miles of water races had been constructed in the Avoca mining subdivision. [74]

The first government dam was finally built near Redbank in 1861 with a capacity of twenty-seven million gallons. [75] This was followed by dams at both Lamplough and Landsborough. By the time they were constructed the pressing demand for water created by the gold rushes had almost passed Nevertheless they continued to be used for a mixture of

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[70] *Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser*, 13 March 1861

[71] *Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser*, 8 January 1861

[72] Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 86

[73] *Ararat Advertiser*, 8 March 1864

[74] Brough Smythe, *The Goldfields and Mineral Districts of Victoria*, 1869, p. 548

[75] Beavis, *Pioneers of the Pyrenees*, p. 87

domestic and mining purposes over the ensuing decades. In June 1869 the Avoca Shire Council obtained a 99 year lease on both the Redbank and Lamplough reservoir for the nominal sum of one pound.[76]

Town water supply

Early township residents also had to contend with the difficulties of securing a clean and reliable supply of water. After mining operations rendered the water in Mountain Creek unfit for domestic purposes, Moonambel obtained a public water supply by sinking wells into the side of the creek.[77] Likewise, one of the first acts of the new Avoca Municipal Council in 1859 was to reserve a site for a town water pump and although the first site to be selected proved totally devoid of water,[78] the second site was more successful. In 1861 the District Health Inspector reported that, 'the supply of water at the public well is found to furnish ample quantity of good quality for every demand made upon it'.[79]

The pump quickly became a community meeting place as people queued to get water for drinking and cooking. Water for other purposes was carted from the Avoca River or Rutherford Creek. These water courses were also popular recreation spots, and frequently used by men and boys for bathing. However even swimming had its hazards as James Perverell, who was camped at Avoca in 1854, recalled:

> I had a severe attack of dysentery brought on from bathing in the river above the township where the Tonkin boys and myself spent a lot of time especially on

> Sundays when scores of lads were having a high old time.[80]

Partly for these reasons, land for municipal baths was granted in Avoca in 1859 after the rush to Lamplough interfered with the water flowing downstream to Avoca.[81]

In the early twentieth century, Avoca possessed two town pumps on the river flat, one south of Duke Street and the other south of Cambridge Street. Each was housed in a square brick building and was operated by hand. A local resident, Ivan Redpath, remembers that these were still in use during the Second World War.[82]

Avoca did not have a secure town water supply until 1910 when a reservoir known as the Sugarloaf was constructed about five miles from the township at the foot of Sugar Loaf Mountain in the Pyrenees Ranges. In 1948 its capacity was doubled and in 1950 a decision was made to connect Avoca's reticulation with the old Avoca Lead dam three miles to the east of the township.[83]

Wells, springs and bores

Early settlers who were not fortunate enough to acquire land with a water frontage, often relied instead on springs or wells or entered into the laborious process of building a dam with a horse and scoop. Springs occurred naturally throughout the Shire and were frequently enlarged to provide a dam for livestock. In the north of the Shire householders frequently dug a well in close proximity to their dwelling since it was claimed that good water could almost invariably be struck at about ten feet.[84] On the

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[76] Victorian Governement Gazette, 9 July 1869, quoted in Beavis, Avoca: The Early Years, p. 45
[77] Health Report - Moonambel, 22 September 1862, Superintending Inspector, J N Hassall (Avoca and District Historical Society)
[78] Beavis, Avoca: The Early Years, pp. 33, 35
[79] Health Inspector's Report, 18 October 1861, (Avoca and District Historical Society)

[80] Peverell, James, Memoirs of James Perverell, 1909, Royal Historical Society of Victoria, Box 152/8
[81] Beavis, Avoca: The Early Years, p. 35
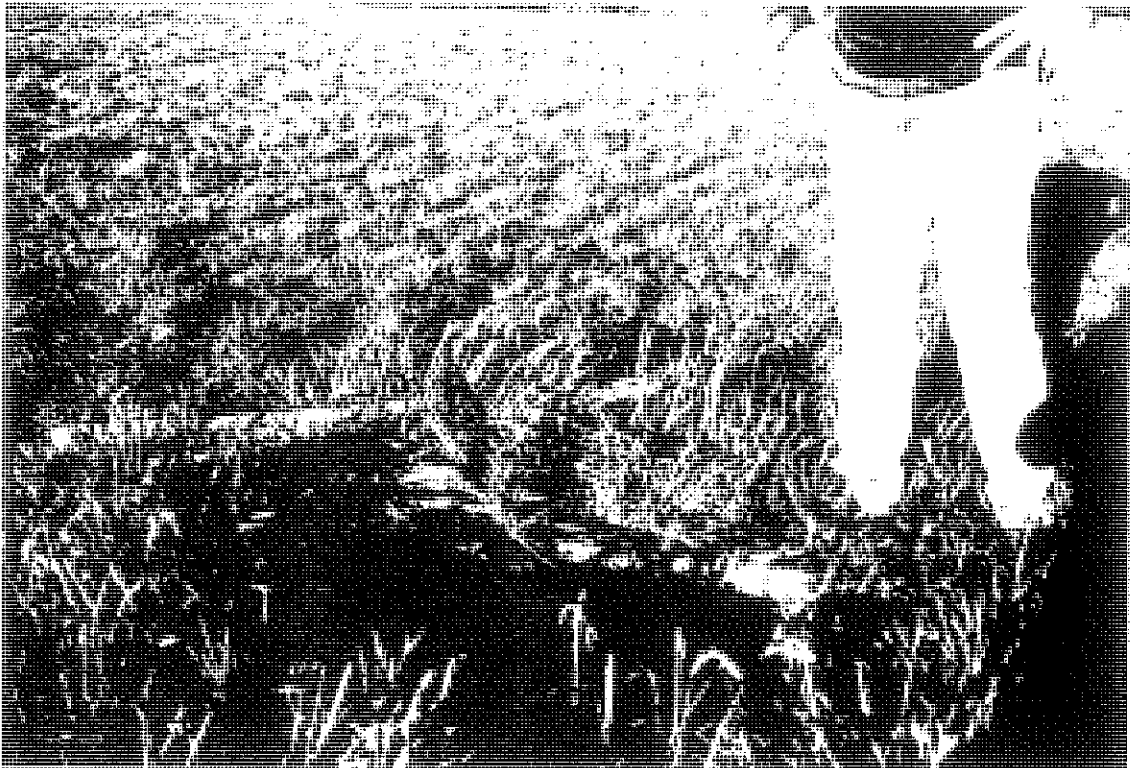[82] Information from Ivan Redpath
[83] Back to Avoca, 1950
[84] Du Bourg, Big Water - Little Plain: A History of Natte Yallock, 1974, p. 32

Dredge dam, Landsborough, 1994
(Wendy Jacobs)

Mashado's Well, Barkly, 1994
(Karen Twigg)

FARMING

Transformation

In 1860 the Shire of Avoca still had the appearance of a wilderness. The gold diggings presented pockets of intense human activity characterised by raw timber buildings, mounds of mullock and bare expanses of earth but the visitor travelling between them would only have encountered mile after mile of scrub and timber, uninterrupted by fences or human habitation. In the next decade the Shire experienced a radical transformation. Gold discovery had created an urgent demand for farming land where food for the diggings could be produced and the miners themselves embraced the idea of land ownership as a reward for their exertions on the goldfields. A campaign to 'unlock the land' resulted in a series of land acts during the 1860s which broke the pastoralists stranglehold over large tracts of fertile country and made land freely available for selection.

Land sales

Even before the introduction of the land acts in the 1860s, blocks of land were surveyed and released for sale at Avoca, Crowlands and Natte Yallock. Such sales posed a direct threat to pastoralists and many mustered their resources to purchase not only the pre-emptive right of 320 acres to which they were entitled, but an assortment of freehold blocks designed to give them control over the best sections of the run. A journalist visiting Crowlands early in 1860 asked a local resident whether there were many farmers in the area. His informant replied, 'Lor, bless you, what's the good of farming? Blackwood's bought all the best land and got all the water frontages'.[87]

At Natte Yallock, Hugh Glass also secured prime sections of his run by purchasing an assemblage of freehold blocks along the Avoca River between 1859 and 1862 Glass was one of Victoria's wealthiest men and he is reputed to have established a secret fund for pastoralists, with the aim of bribing politicians to withhold certain areas from selection.[88] In 1865, Hugh Glass still retained 13,500 acres of leased pastoral land in the Avoca Shire.[89] Nevertheless, by 1867 this had been reduced to just 3,500 acres.[90]

One of the largest areas opened up for settlement during this period was on the Avoca River near Natte Yallock where 50,000 acres was surveyed for sale in 1860.[91] It was ideally suited to selection; there was access to a permanent water supply (the Avoca River), the soil was fertile and clearly not auriferous and it was in convenient proximity to the gold diggings. Settlers who purchased blocks in this year included James Cain and John and Josiah Coates, whose descendants still remain in the district.[92]

Commons

The first Land Act of 1860, although widely considered a failure, did provide for the creation of Goldfields and Farmers Commons - large areas of Crown land on which local residents were permitted to pasture up to fifty head of stock for an annual licence fee. This allowed those with few resources to keep sheep and cattle, and gave many miners their first taste of animal husbandry. It also meant that large tracts of land were removed from the control of pastoralists and paved the way for the land to be opened up for settlement. In the Shire of Avoca, Goldfields Commons were proclaimed at Avoca, Glendhu Reef (near Landsborough), Crowlands, Homebush, Lamplough and Barkly The largest of

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[87] *Ararat Advertiser*, 11 May 1860

[88] Dingle, *Settling*, p. 62
[89] *Shire of Avoca rate books*, 1865
[90] Du Bourg, *Big Water - Little Plain*, p. 18.
[91] Beavis, *Avoca The Early Years*, p. 35
[92] Rye, *Natte Yallock Centenary 1841-1941*, p.
16

Mashado property in the Frenchmans-
Barkly area, one of these wells still
survives with its internal brick work
largely intact.[NB 20A]

By the twentieth century, most farm
houses boasted large water tanks - either
above ground (in the form of galvanised
iron roof-fed tanks) or underground.
Windmills were erected to pump water
for stock or for domestic use and their
spindly silhouettes became familiar across
the Shire. The introduction of tractors
made the construction of dams easier and
the increased availability of water led to
the expansion of farm gardens to include
ornamental flower beds and expanses of
lawn. During the 1940s and 1950s, boring
plants also began to operate throughout
the district, tapping subterranean streams
to make water available for irrigation.[85] In
1978 the Mines Department successfully
placed a bore where a party of Barkly
miners had been forced to abandon a
water-sodden mine in 1937, and the water
helped the local community weather the
1982 drought.[86]

85 Du Bourg. *Big Water - Little Plain: A
History of Natte Yallock.* p. 32
86 Driscoll. Eulalie. *The Barkly Story.* 1986. p.
11
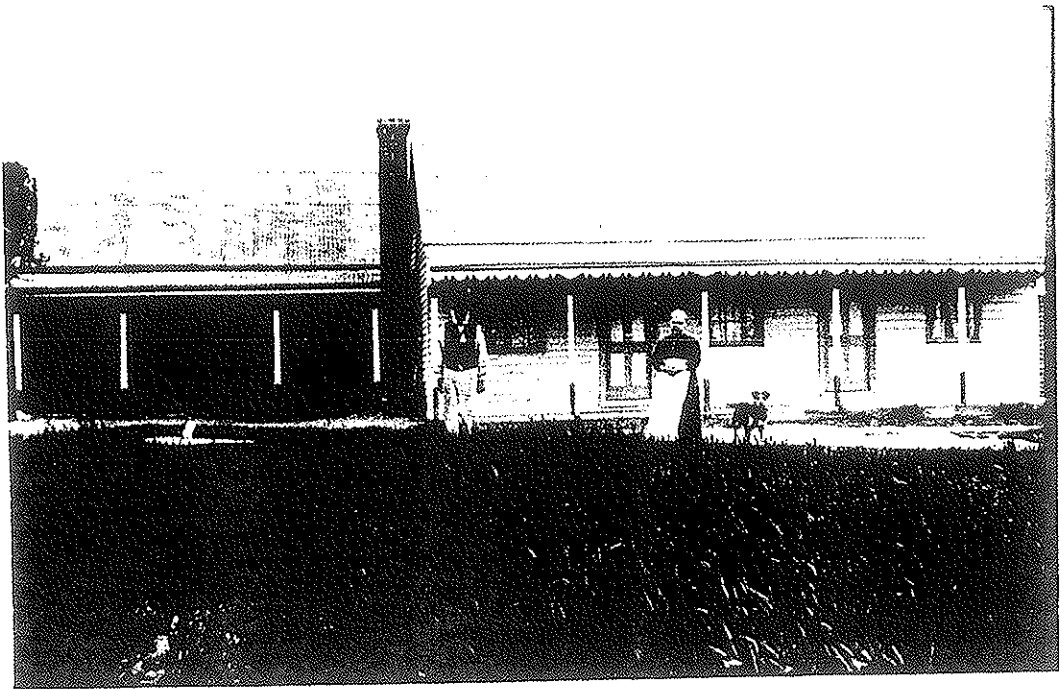
Hunter's Home, Moonambel, c. 1890
(Avoca and District Historical Society)
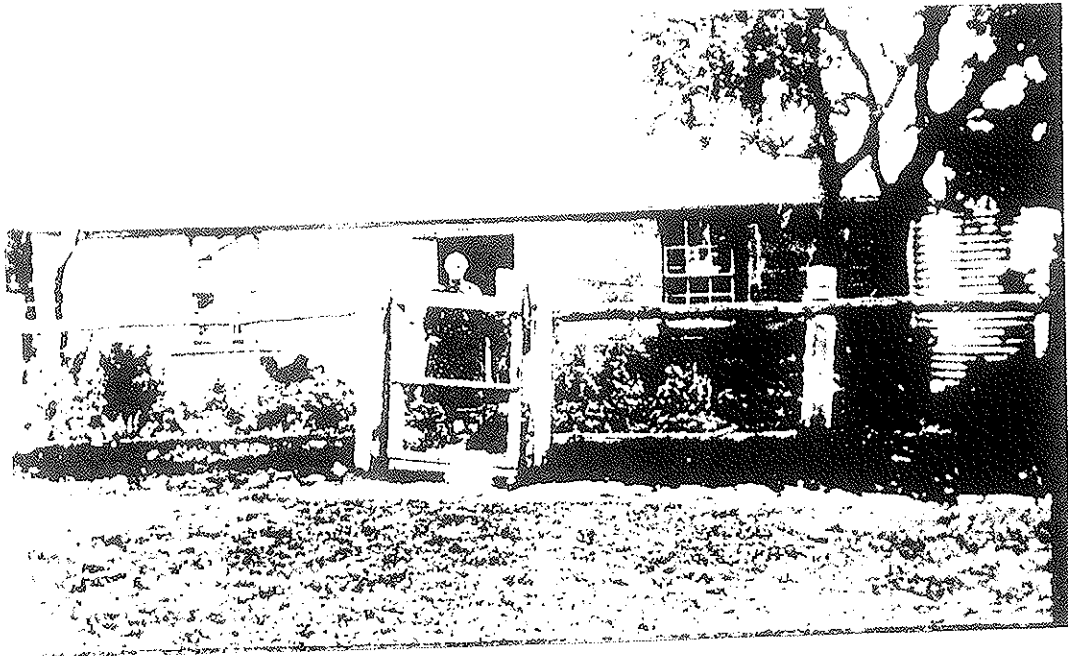
Mrs Ellen Allan (senior), Lamplough
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

these was at Lamplough comprising 13,000 acres and encompassing all but 300 acres of the original Lamplough run. Three separate commons were later amalgamated at Avoca to form the United Farmers, Gold Field and Town Common (with an area of 18,800 acres by 1869). In 1864 a Farmers Common was proclaimed at Natte Yallock.

Despite the good intentions of the policy makers, the Commons system remained open to abuse. In 1868 settlers near Avoca complained that the commons had been 'greedily appropriated by the owner of a large flock of sheep', which had starved out the settlers cattle,[93] and a Landsborough resident observed in 1864.

> Some of the dairymen are I think making themselves more like large stock holders than was intended by the Government. It seems very improbable that the Commons was meant for one man to keep from sixty to two hundred head of cattle upon but such is supposed to be the case.[94]

The location of Commons exerted a strong influence on settlement patterns throughout the Shire. In subsequent years, Commons land was progressively sold as freehold land although often in the face of strong local opposition.[95]

The 1865 Land Act

A map survey of Navarre shows a broad stretch of country to the south of the township divided into a neat grid of twenty to forty acres blocks. This was a result of the Grants Land Act of 1865 which allowed occupation licences to be taken up for small allotments within ten miles of a goldfield. Such allotments became characteristic and led to the emergence of a class of settlers who combined farming with mining and other pursuits. Typically, they relied on the land

for subsistence, planting a vegetable garden and fruit trees, raising several sheep or pigs for meat, keeping a milking cow for butter and cream, and 'chooks' for a regular egg supply. Any surplus produce was sold. Several houses on the outskirts of the mining townships of Avoca, Moonambel and Landsborough appear to date from this period - for instance a mud brick house in Boyce Street, Avoca. [A18]

The Grant Act also offered the opportunity to purchase larger properties. In October 1866, the *Avoca Mail* wrote, 'the number of the population has, owing to the operation of the Act [Grants Act], much increased, farms springing up in all directions where only a few years ago the land was bare and desolate.'

A giant land sale for 20,000 acres held in Landsborough in March 1866, attracted a huge crowd, illustrating the pent up demand for land. Such was the demand that names had to be drawn from a ballot box, and although there were many speculators in the crowd who had travelled from as far away as Melbourne and Geelong, and there were others acting as 'dummies' for pastoralists, there were also genuine settlers:

> Had the Hon. J. M. Grant been present, it would have delighted his heart to see those hardy sons of toil showing the thrift of their lives as well as their bona fide intention of settling on the lands, by being able to come forward each with a 320 acre certificate and the one year's rent required by the act. A goodly number of these honest fellows, by the way, could only sign their marks.

As the ballot box was spun and name after name was drawn out, unsuccessful settlers constantly urged the trooper in charge of the box, 'to give that merry-go-round another turn for the love of the saints'; nevertheless only a small percentage of

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93 *Avoca Mail*, 29 August 1868
94 *Ararat Advertiser*, 10 June 1864
95 *Avoca Mail*, 18 January 1879

those present obtained land.[96] Indeed it was only after the passage of the 1869 Land Act, which finally permitted free selection before survey under a scheme of deferred payment, that land finally became widely available. Seven years after the introduction of the 1869 Land Act, the Shire was able to boast a total of 603,947 acres of freehold land.[97]

Livestock and cropping

Upon acquiring land, settlers lost little time in bringing it into production. Livestock was purchased - sheep, cattle, goats, pigs and poultry - and allotments were cleared for cultivation. The early establishment of Avoca as a goldfield and the demand this created for agricultural produce meant that farming activity in the Avoca area was initially more intensive than anywhere else in the Shire. Municipal cattle yards were erected at Avoca toward the end of 1859 [A21] and by 1862 weekly fat cattle sales were being advertised.[98] Two years later an Avoca Agricultural Society was formed with the intention of holding the Shire's first agricultural show in 1865.[99]

At Natte Yallock, two of its earliest settlers, Cain and Crutchet, purchased eighty acre blocks on the river in 1860. Using nothing more than a shovel to turn the soil, they planted rows of onions for sale to the gold diggings. The soil proved exceptionally fertile and the onions flourished.[100] At Crowlands, some settlers also obtained land on the river flats and began growing fine crops of hay and vegetables. As early as 1857, the Crowlands district produced five tons of potatoes, 1190 bushels of grain and 241

tons of oaten hay.[101] The soil in other parts of the district also proved suited to potatoes and by 1870, forty-seven acres of potatoes were being grown within the Shire.[102]

Flour milling

By 1866 there was so much land under cultivation that Edward Sheehan erected a flour mill on the banks of the Avoca River to provide farmers with, 'every inducement to convert their grain into the more marketable commodity of flour'.[103] The *Avoca Mail* commented:

> *In the year 1859 the whole of the lands to the westward of Avoca (Landsborough, Moonambel, Redbank, Crowlands, Barkly) were devoted to pastoral purposes. The aspect of the whole is now changed, the fences of settlers enclosing many thousand acres of land under crop having supplanted the lonely deserts of that period.[104]*

Cultivation was a requirement of the 1869 land act, and 3,314 acres of wheat and 1,032 acres of oats had been planted in the Shire by 1870.[105] The virgin soil produced some excellent yields; in 1876 for instance Mr Sproston, a local Avoca resident, harvested a wheat crop which yielded forty bushels to the acre and the heads of the grain were described as six to seven inches long - the biggest holding eighty-two grains.[106] In 1872 a steam powered flour mill was also built at Landsborough, and after it was taken over by William Hodgetts in 1878, a crushing mill for oats was added.[107] A flour mill constructed in 1868 recommenced

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96 *Ararat Advertiser*, 27 March 1866
97 Quinlan and Webb, *Greater than Gold*, p. 134
98 Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 37
99 Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 43
100 Rye, *Natte Yallock Centenary 1841-1941*, 1941 (second revision), pp. 1-2

101 Agricultural Statistics of Victoria, Wimmera district, 1857
102 Agricultural Statistics of Victoria, 1870
103 *Avoca Mail*, 6 October 1866
104 *Avoca Mail*, 6 October 1866
105 Agricultural Statistics of Victoria, 1870
106 Quinlan and Webb, *Greater than Gold*, p. 134
107 Sutherland, *Victoria and its Metropolis: Past and Present*, Melbourne, 1888, p. 221
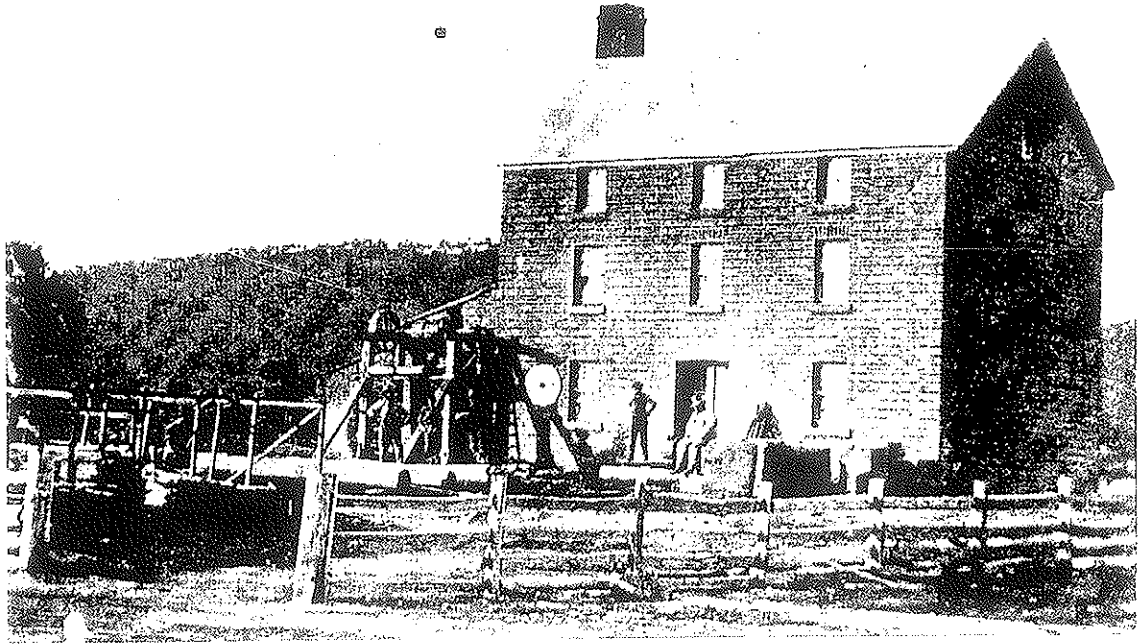
Flour mill, Moonambel, c. 1880
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

Harkins Farm, Bung Bong, c. 1900
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

Ralph Miller building a haystack, Rathscar, c. 1910
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

Bill and Bert Milne winnowing peas.
A large log was dragged around in a circular area by a horse accross the pea straw. This
partially separated the peas and straw before the winnowing stage. The peas were bagged
and the straw stacked and used to feed livestock.(Avoca and District Historical Society)

operations at Moonambel in 1874[108] and three brothers by the name of Green are said to have operated a second flour mill in Avoca until the mill was destroyed by fire in the early 1880s.[109]

Other industries reflect the numbers of sheep and cattle within the Shire. In 1868, Donald and Gazzard opened a boiling down works in Avoca for the production of tallow[110] and a tannery operated in the township in 1870.[111] In the Natte Yallock area the remains of one farmers sheep dip and yards are still in evidence. [N27]

Dairying

Most settlers kept milking cows and churned their own butter, both for their own use and for sale. On the gold diggings butter could be sold for as much as one shilling a pound[112] In order to keep dairy produce cool, many farmers built small dairies from stone. The best known example in the Shire is the solidly built slate dairy at Percydale,[P1].

During the 1880s the introduction of refrigerated shipping, which made it possible to export perishable goods in large quantities, created an increased demand for butter. At the same time the invention of the centrifugal cream separator led to the formation of local creameries where farmers could bring their milk to be separated and then sold for butter production. In 1894, creameries were erected at Landsborough, Natte Yallock and Navarre. The Landsborough Creamery supplied the Ararat Butter Factory while the Navarre Creamery was erected by the Stawell District Butter Company.[113] The Avoca District Butter Cheese and Freezing Company was formed in 1894 by fourteen local business people, and it was here that the Natte

Yallock Creamery sent its produce.[114] In October 1894, the new company reported that it had separated 5,895 gallons of milk for the month and had churned 3,960 pounds of butter.[115]

The construction of the new creameries made a dramatic difference to the peace and quiet the township usually enjoyed in the early hours of the morning. A Landsborough resident wrote, 'there is quite a stir here every morning between seven and nine o'clock, milk carts coming in from all directions'.[116]

The creameries were eventually phased out in the early twentieth century as the introduction of hand separators allowed cream to be separated on farms and then transported direct to the butter factory.

'Improvements'

The land acts required improvements in the shape of fences and buildings. A visitor to Natte Yallock in 1876 commented, 'the new selectors have latterly made great progress with their improvements which include buildings, fences, and clearing with the addition in some cases of from ten to thirty acres laid fallow, broken up etc'.[117] Timber was the most readily available building material and was used widely in the construction of buildings and fences. Alternately stone was sometimes used in the east of the Shire where outcrops of slate occurred. A wide variety of stock or storage sheds were constructed of bush poles and slabs of timber and roofed with bark, sods of earth or wheaten straw. These are still very much in evidence at the Elliott farm in Rathscar - a typical farm complex of the nineteenth century. [AD18]

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108 *Avoca Mail*, 15 September 1874
109 Hellings, *Avoca Mail*, 13 November 1923
110 *Avoca Mail*, 14 November, 1858
111 *Avoca Mail*, 5 March 1870
112 *Ararat Advertiser*, 10 June 1864
113 *Age*, 24 April 1894

114 List of shareholders in the Avoca District Butter Cheese and Freezing Company, Avoca and District Historical Society file
115 *Avoca Mail*, 1894
116 *Ararat Advertiser*, 12 October 1894
117 *Dunolly and Bet Bet Shire Express*, 27 October 1876, quoted in Beavis, *Pioneers of the Pyrenees*, p.19

By the turn of the century the easy availability of corrugated iron and milled weatherboards changed the nature of farm buildings. Early timber dwellings were replaced by much more commodious farm houses with wide verandahs and painted exteriors, and farm sheds were increasingly constructed of corrugated iron. In many cases, the original farm house was not abandoned but simply extended so that early rooms gradually became encased in later additions.

Twentieth century changes

By the twentieth century most farmers in the Shire were primarily involved in wheat and sheep (wool/mutton) production although dairy produce and eggs remained important sidelines. As early as 1864 the *Avoca Mail* reported sampling a cigar made from locally grown tobacco. Later, several families in the Shire, including the Ebelings and Kayes, cultivated tobacco. The remains of what appear to be tobacco kilns can still be seen to the rear of the Lamplough School. Potatoes were widely grown in the Crowlands area and it was reported in 1913:

> *Potato digging is now in full swing in the Crowlands and Glendhu districts and some excellent crops are being obtained. At Mr Moore's farm there are sixteen men engaged in digging, and it is expected that an average of ten tons per acre will be obtained. Each year sees an increased area being put down in potatoes and the landowners are well satisfied with the results obtained.*[118]

Fertilisers and Pasture

A minor revolution took place in farming practice in the 1930s with the wide spread introduction of super phosphate followed by a dramatic increase in soil fertility. The Natte Yallock Farmers Cooperative Association ordered its first instalment of artificial fertiliser (40 tons) in 1904[119] but it was not until the 1930s that 'super' - known locally as 'manure' was widely and cheaply available enabling many farmers to increase their cropping returns. At the same time, farmers who had relied largely on native grasses for stock feed throughout the nineteenth century, accepted the benefits of pasture improvement and began sowing grasses such as subterranean clover and lucerne. By the 1950s, lucerne was grown extensively around Natte Yallock, primarily for hay production, and the area is reputed to have once supplied the majority of Victoria's dry land seed production.[120] Since lucerne required rotational grazing, blocks of land were often fenced into smaller paddocks in close proximity to each other to allow easy transfer of stock.

Pasture improvement allowed an increase in stocking ratios and encouraged involvement in fat lamb production. The increased numbers of livestock demanded new facilities and across the Shire such structures as shearing sheds, stock yards, drafting races were extended or rebuilt. An incidental benefit of pasture improvement was the control of saffron thistles which had been a noxious weed in the Shire since the nineteenth century. Greater recognition was given to the importance of careful breeding in establishing profitable flocks and herds, and several studs were formed.[121] Intensive farming systems were also developed, a notable example being Rossmoyne's poultry farm, established outside Avoca in the mid-1940s and boasting 5,000 laying hens.[122]

Mechanisation

During the period immediately after the Second World War, farming rapidly

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[118] *Ararat Advertiser*, 1913

[119] Du Bourg, *Big Water - Little Plain*, p. 30
[120] *Natte Yallock Landcare Group Report*
[121] Du Bourg, *Big Water - Little Plain*, p. 36
[122] *Back to Avoca, 1950*, p. 27
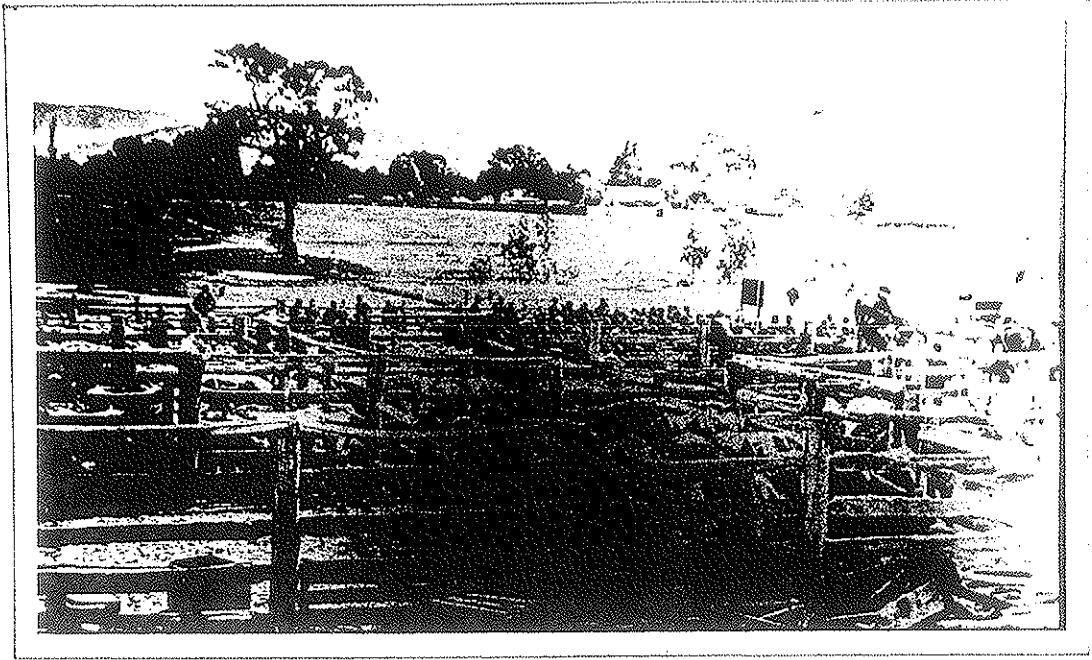
First sale yards, Avoca (located on western side of the Avoca River), c. 1900
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

became more mechanised. Tractors revolutionised cropping while milking machines took some of the hard labour out of dairying. In 1872, a farmer employed thirteen extra men to assist at harvest time[123] – a hundred years later the introduction of the header and hay press had rendered the employment of extra labour almost unnecessary.

Mechanisation also increased the acreages a property owner could farm, and the ensuing decades saw many small holders bought out by their larger, more successful neighbours. As a result, blocks which had once provided a livelihood for an entire family became just one paddock in a larger property. Such abandoned farm sites can still be discerned throughout the Shire, frequently marked by garden plantings, a rusting water tank or a crumbling chimney.

Land Care

The land acts of the 1860s required that settlers clear timber from their allotments. Since then land throughout the Shire has been progressively cleared to pave the way for cropping and pasture improvement. Only in the last few decades has a new awareness grown of the problems caused by deforestation – problems which have become only too apparent in the form of erosion and soil salinity. As a result. Land Care groups have formed in parts of the Shire with the aim of developing improved farming practice.

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123 Du Bourg, *Big Water - Little Plain*, p. 28

WINE AND FRUIT

Gardens

When the itinerant writer, William Kelly, visited the Avoca area during the 1850s, he was prepared to ignore the devastation caused by mining and was instead full of praise for the fertile beauty of the environment. In his *Life of Victoria* in 1859 he wrote:

> *There is no more fertile land in Victoria than in the Avoca district, with its fine river of the same name, and the numerous rivulets and brooks running down from the flanks of the Pyrenees to water it. Several squatting stations are distributed throughout, most of them with gardens, abounding in the finest and most luscious fruits of Australia, the warmth and shelter of the many sunny nooks and valleys producing those peculiar, in a general way, to the higher latitudes of the Sydney neighbourhood. So far as I have seen, I cannot help regarding it as the natural garden of Victoria.*[124]

Certainly, the more settled nature of the population in the 1860s and 1870s was accompanied by the establishment of many small gardens. In 1863 a visitor to Avoca observed, 'the appearance of the pretty borough of Avoca has much improved this season. The numerous gardens, particularly that of Potton's Avoca Hotel, are blooming with roses and fragrant flowers'.[125] Aiming for self sufficiency, most households also planted fruit trees, vines and vegetables. In 1864, Mr Kelly was selling an assortment of vines, gooseberry and currant roots from his garden near Avoca, and William

Goodshaw, the local chemist, had established a sideline in the sale of seeds.[126] In March 1867, a fruit and flower show was held in Avoca and provided home grown displays of grapes, apples, pears, pumpkins and water melon. One giant apple exhibited by Mr Mackereth weighed in at thirteen ounces.[127]

One exhibitor at the show, Mr W. Forde, had a property on No. 1 Creek, where a ready supply of water enabled him to grow all manner of flowers and fruits. In 1871, he was growing Hamburg grapes, and three years later he was expecting a harvest of four tons of strawberries.[128] He created a garden oasis on his small property and Annie Mitchell, in her short history of Avoca in 1921, describes how Avoca residents travelled out to Mr Forde's garden to enjoy strawberries and cream under a huge willow tree surrounded by a hundred varieties of roses.[129] During the 1860s a number of Chinese market gardens were also located along the flats of rivers and creeks. Eulalie Driscoll relates the story of a well-known identity, known by children as 'Too Chewy' (*sic*) who tended a market garden beside the government dam at Frenchmans.[130] The statistical returns of 1866 and 1867 show that both Landsborough[131] and Crowlands possessed five acres of gardens while Natte Yallock had seven acres and Avoca boasted over twenty-nine acres.[132]

Orchards

The growth of an Australian fruit export industry through the introduction of

124 Kelly. *Life in Victoria*, 1859, quoted in Dunstan. *Wine and Winemakers of the Pyrenees*, 1992, p. 13

125 *Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser*, 6 November 1863, quoted in Beavis. *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 38

126 Beavis. *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 123

127 *Avoca Mail*, 16 March 1867

128 Quinlan and Webb. *Greater Than Gold*, p. 133

129 Mitchell. *Back to Avoca, 1921*, p. 22

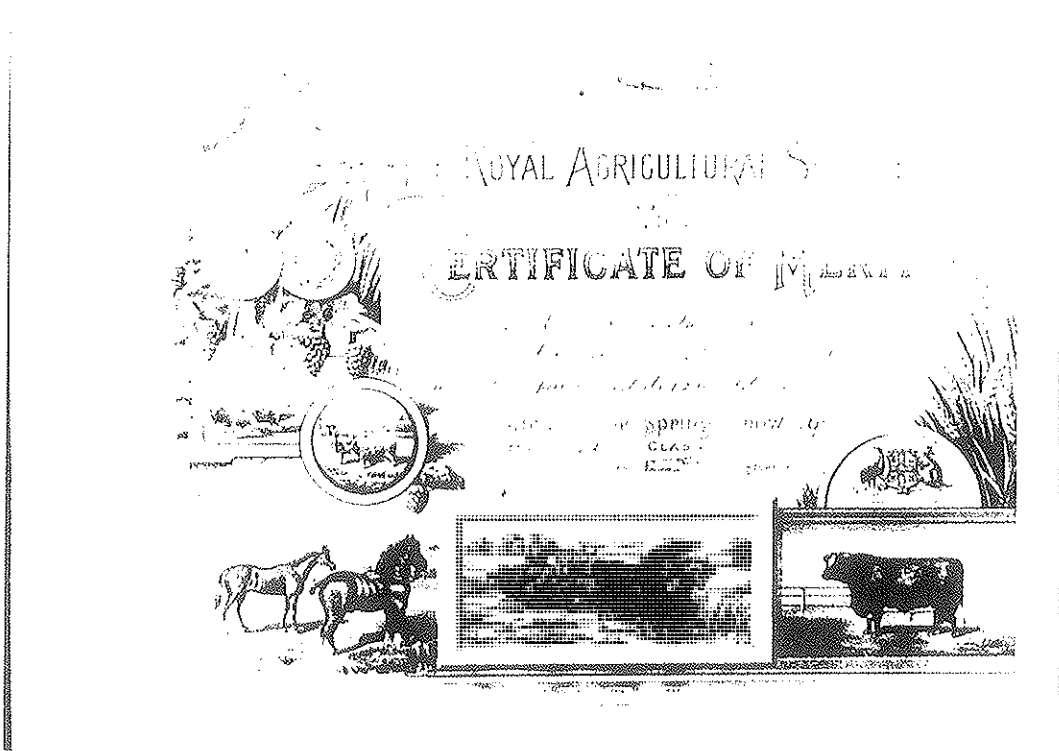130 Driscoll. *The Barkly Story*, p. 8

131 Agricultural Statistics of Victoria. Wimmera district. 1866-7

132 Agricultural Statistics of Victoria. Wimmera district. Loddon district, 1865-6

Mackereth and Sons, Third Prize, The Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria, 1901
(Avoca and District Historical Society)
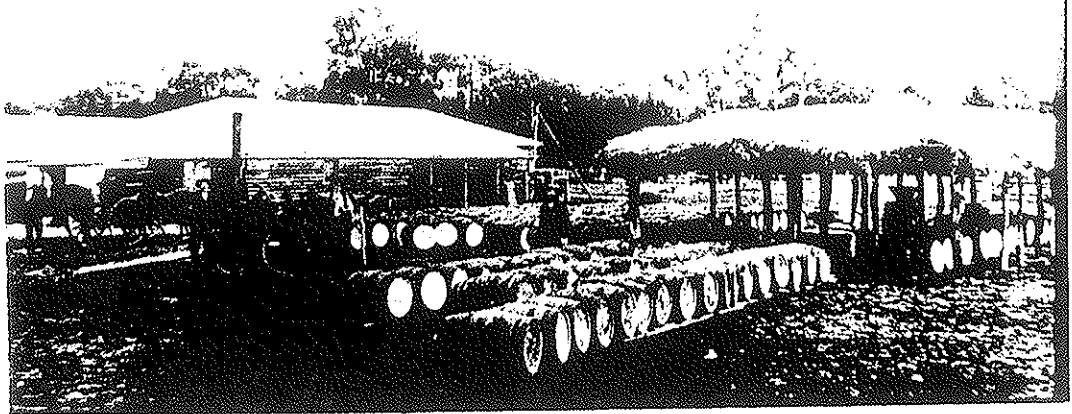
Mackereth's Vineyard, c. 1900
(Avoca and District Historical Society)
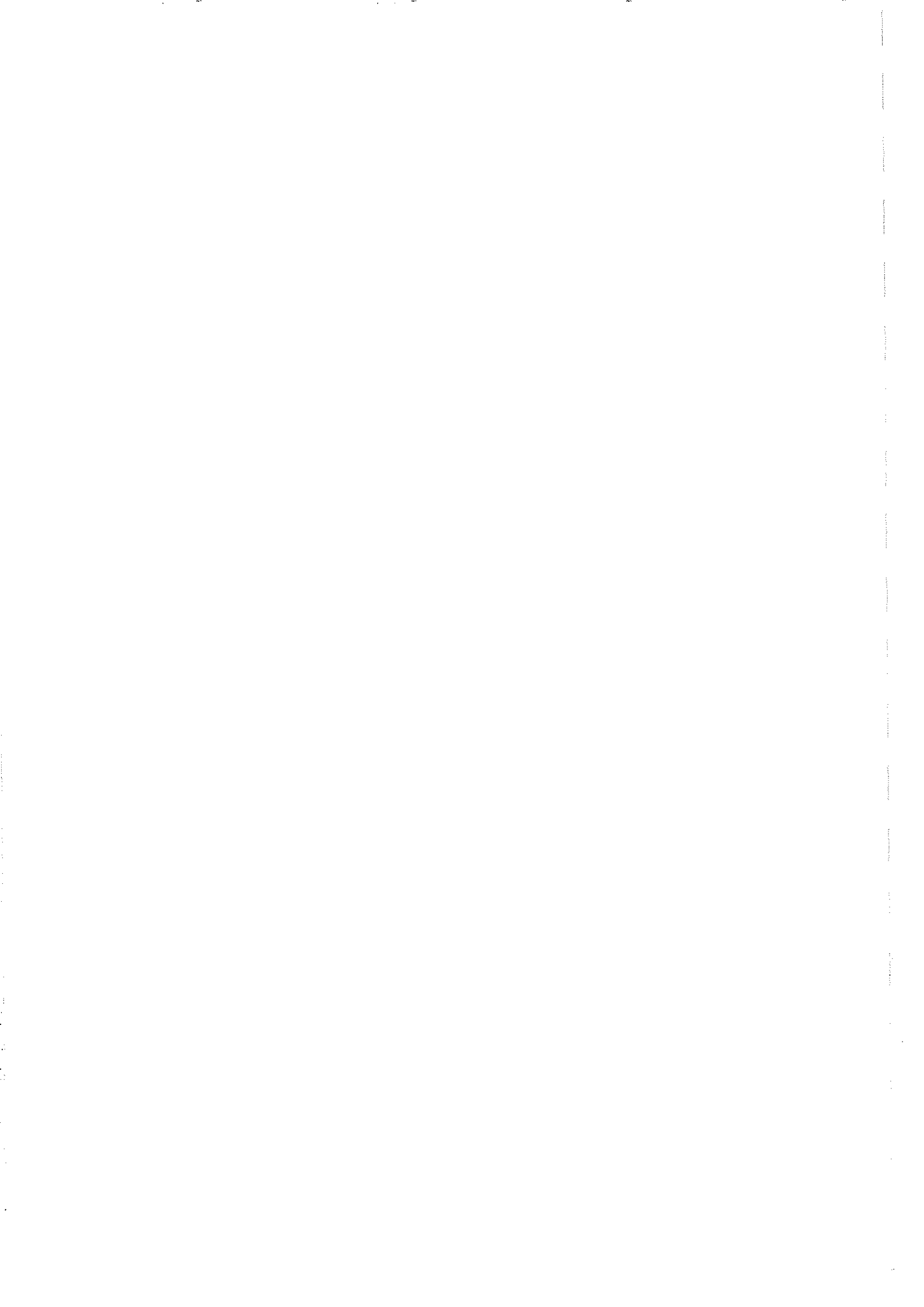
refrigerated shipping in the 1880s, encouraged fruit production in some parts of the Shire. Orchards sprang up along the Avoca to Ararat railway line and in 1895 the Boatman brothers at Crowlands sent one hundred cases of apples to England, receiving excellent prices of between nine and fifteen shillings a box.[133] Other orchardists concentrated on the local market. In the Barkly-Frenchmans area. James Herd had an orchard and vineyard on his property alongside Heifer Station Creek. In 1898 the vineyard produced forty hundred weight of grapes which was made into wine and sold locally, and in 1902 the orchard boasted 200 gooseberry bushes and 150 apple trees in addition to pears, plums, quinces, cherries, peaches, apricots, almonds and strawberries.[134] Another well known orchardist in the area was Joseph Fernandes, the son of a settler of Portugese descent. Eulalie Driscoll relates that in the 1930s and 1940s:

> Any amount of fruit could be bought in season, and each fortnight, one of his sons drove a horse-covered van from door to door, covering up to 100 kilometres, selling fruit to the farmers.[135]

Fruit was still being grown in the Shire on a commercial basis in 1931 when Mitchell Brothers and White of Avoca combined with C. H. Townsend of Amphitheatre to send away 35,000 cases of apples for export.[136]

Viticulture

In recent years, the Avoca Shire has become famous for its vineyards. Although none can trace a history back to the nineteenth century, there were nevertheless many grape growers in the Shire during last century. As early as 1862, a settler by the name of Patrick

Murnane applied for ten acres to establish a vineyard at Redbank[137] and by 1866 there were 12,614 vines in the area surrounding Avoca. However the grapes were used primarily for eating and the district produced only 95 gallons of wine.[138] In an attempt to remedy this situation the *Avoca Mail* wrote in 1866:

> the grape crop in Avoca and its neighbourhood is so plentiful this season, that the price offered for this fine fruit by the wholesale purchaser is from 2d to 2½d per pound. Surely under these circumstances good encouragement is offered for wine making in this district.[139]

By the late 1880s the Government was introducing measures to boost Victoria's fledgling wine industry and in 1889 the *Journal of Viticulture* listed nine wine growers in the Shire of Avoca. Most owned no more than half an acre of vines, with the notable exception of William Adams of Moonambel who possessed thirty acres.[140] In this year William Adams produced 4,000 gallons of wine described as 'good sound delicate dry wine' and was in the process of expanding his vineyard and building a new cellar to take an expected 10,000 gallons.

Edwin Mackereth, the man who became one of the Shires best know vignerons, began with only half an acre of vines but planted another fourteen acres under a government bonus scheme in the early 1890s. Eager to learn, he invited the government viticultural expert, Romeo Bragato, to visit Avoca, and as a result Bragato toured the area in 1889 and 1890, tasting wine from several vineyards

133 *Avoca Mail*, 25 October, 1895
134 Driscoll, *The Barkly Story*, p. 98
135 Driscoll, *The Barkly Story*, p. 17
136 *Weekly Times*, 1931

137 Dunstan, *Wine and Winemakers of the Pyrenees*, 1992, p. 13
138 Agricultural Statistics of Victoria, 1865-6
139 *Avoca Mail*, 17 March 1866
140 List of Winegrowers of Victoria, June 1889, *Journal of Viticulture Board*, quoted by Russell Brown in 'Wine making in the Pyrenees', *Pyrenees Pioneers*, Avoca and District Historical Society.

and providing advice. He tried experimental wines produced by Mackereth and J. Magee and described them as 'good and clear, with a nice delicate perfume, and harmonious in their components'. On his last visit he proclaimed the Avoca area better adapted for wine growing than most districts in the colony.[141]

Twentieth century viticulture

Over the next three decades, Edwin Mackereth planted more vineyards and specialised increasingly in wine making. Four large cellars were built, and Mackereth's wine began to regularly win prizes at local shows. The wine was sold in bulk to wine merchants in Ballarat, Melbourne and Sydney including the noted Melbourne wine merchant, T. C. Seabrook. It was also retailed through a 'wine cafe' which was run by Edwin Mackereth's daughter, Alethea, in the main street of Avoca.[142] [A46] Edwin Mackereth died in 1916 but the family wine making business was carried on by his son, John. By 1920 the Mackereth family owned forty acres of vineyard, and also purchased grapes from other vineyards in the area.[143]

At Moonambel, John Costello took over W. A. Adams thirty acres of vineyard which was in turn taken over by J. T. Kofoed who had previously worked at the Great Western winery. Kofoed also sold some of his wine through a wine shop in Avoca.[144]

During the 1920s the wine market fell into depression. Alfred Mackereth recalled that costs were rising and income was falling, and in order to produce wine

efficiently expensive technology was required.[145] Despite his reluctance to end the family's tradition of wine making, John Mackereth could no longer view the vineyards as a profitable enterprise and in 1929 he sold the property to a dairy farmer. Cows were subsequently turned onto the vineyard and the vines grubbed out; only the homestead and the homestead cellars now survive to indicate the scale of the Mackereth's operations. [AD27] J. T. Kofoed's Mountain Creek winery continued until after the Second World War but was closed following his death in 1948.[146]

Wine making did not return again to the Shire until 1963, when Chateau Remy established a vineyard on the Old No.1 Creek Road at the foothills of the Pyrenees, after searching for two years to find a suitable site. The quality of the wine produced attracted other vignerons and there are now eight major vineyards and several smaller operations in the Shire, forming one of the area's major tourist attractions.

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[141] Dunstan, *Wine and Winemakers of the Pyrenees*, p. 15
[142] Dunstan, *Wine and Winemakers of the Pyrenees*, p. 17
[143] Dunstan, *Wine and Winemakers of the Pyrenees*, p. 17
[144] Dunstan, *Wine and Winemakers of the Pyrenees*, p. 18

[145] Benwell, *Journey to Wine in Victoria*, quoted in Dunstan, *Wine and Winemakers of the Pyrenees*, p. 18.
[146] *Avoca Mail*, 3 December 1957

TOWNS AND SETTLEMENTS

During the nineteenth century settlements
sprung up over night on the site of a rich
run of gold, or grew up more slowly
around a hotel or school in the midst of a
farming area. Many of these only
flourished briefly, leaving little trace
behind except perhaps the name they
bestowed on a locality - areas such as
Warrenmang, Tanwood, Bung Bong,
Wattle Creek and Malakoff. Others
townships have survived into the
twentieth century primarily through their
ability to service their surrounding
community.

Crowlands

The earliest town in the Shire of Avoca
predates the first gold rush to Avoca by
four years. During the late 1840s
Matthew Harland opened an inn and store
along the main stock route from South
Australia to the Wimmera, in order to
attract the custom of drovers and
teamsters. This became the future site of
Crowlands. In 1849 the township was
surveyed by Thomas de Little and
officially named by Governor Latrobe in
August 1850. Crowlands was not
immediately lifted from obscurity since
the Argus wrote:

> There is a new township called
> Crowlands advertised by the
> Government, but no man can tell
> where it may be found. It is certainly
> very ridiculous conduct on the part
> of His Excellency, the Governor, to
> announce that he has been pleased to
> approve a township bearing the
> fanciful name of Crowlands without
> accompanying the notice with any
> intimation [of its location].[147]

The first sale of Crowlands allotments
was held in Melbourne in September 1850

and despite its location on what promised
to be one of Victoria's major roads, it
attracted only ten buyers. One was Daniel
Noonan who subsequently built the
Traveller's Rest Hotel which still fronts
the main road in Crowlands although it is
now a private residence. [C12] A police
depot and court of petty sessions was
established in the town but the discovery
of gold throughout the surrounding area
during the 1850s and 1860s put an end to
Crowlands development as an
administrative centre. The town was
outside the orbit of the major gold
diggings and trade and government
business was increasingly attracted to the
flourishing gold towns of Stawell and
Ararat. By 1860, Crowlands consisted of
just twenty houses and sixty inhabitants,
and a visiting journalist argued that the
town's three policemen and clerk of petty
sessions were a waste of the tax-payers
money.[148]

Instead, Crowlands became the centre of
a farming district and by 1868 the
businesses operating in the town included
a fellmonger and two blacksmiths in
addition to a boot maker's shop, a general
store and a hotel. The township received a
boost in 1914 when a branch line of the
Avoca-Ararat railway was constructed
through Crowlands to Navarre in the
north. At this time there were thirty-three
families listed in the Crowlands area and
two long standing families, the Noonans
and Howletts respectively, continued to
operate the store/post office and
blacksmith's shop.[149]

Avoca

In 1866 several miners, reflecting on a
period twelve years earlier, recalled:

> In 1854, with the exception of a few
> tents pitched near the Avoca River
> for the sake of water supply and the
> Police Camp buildings, the present
> site of Avoca was covered with

147 Banfield, *Green Pastures and Gold: The Story of Ararat*, 1974

148 *Ararat Advertiser*, 11 May 1860
149 *Sands and McDougall's Directory*, 1915

timber and the only place of business was that of Mr Henry Knott, whose calico tent occupied the centre of what now forms the High Street.[150]

This scenario was soon to change. In October 1854 town lots were laid out and Avoca's first land sales took place. By the end of 1854 a visitor to the town observed a number of substantial buildings including a Bank of Victoria, a Wesleyan chapel, a National school, the Avoca Hotel and two neat gold offices.[151]

In 1858, 166 Avoca residents successfully petitioned the government to proclaim Avoca a municipal district and the Avoca municipality came into existence in March 1859. The municipality directed most of its energies toward road and street improvement and the provision of facilities such as the erection of a powder magazine (approved in October 1860) and the construction of a town hall (completed in 1861). In December 1863, when the Avoca Shire was officially proclaimed, Avoca became the administrative centre for an area encompassing 453 square miles incorporating the previous municipalities of Avoca and Moonambel in addition to the Avoca Road District.

In 1868 Avoca boasted a bewildering variety of businesses ranging from a ginger beer brewer to a billiard maker with no less than sixty-five premises located in High Street.[152] The township even had its own paper, the *Avoca Mail*, and a second newspaper, the *Avoca Free Press*, was established in 1873. The police camp was located some distance from the commercial centre where it was distinguished by a number of prominent buildings including a solid lock up [A152], powder magazine and two

official police residences.[A151 and A155] Eight people gave the Camp as their address – five police officers, the clerk-of-courts, the sub-treasurer and the warden. Religious and educational buildings focused on Barnett Street and by 1872 the Presbyterian church, the Church of England, [A6] the Roman Catholic church and the National school [A178] were located here. Most buildings in the town were still constructed of timber although Green brothers were engaged as local brick makers.

By 1915 the population of Avoca had stabilised and the township increasingly serviced a farming rather than a mining community. High Street remained the commercial centre and businesses included two bakers, three blacksmiths, three butchers, three drapers, four hotels and five general stores. The Brown family operated a cordial factory.[153] The population of the township in 1918 was 800.[154]

Landsborough

In 1862 a great deal of publicity surrounded William Landsborough, who had been sent by the Government to search for the missing explorers Burke and Wills. Therefore when gold was discovered north of the Malakoff in September 1862,[155] the new township gained the name of Landsborough and all the major streets bore the names of the Burke and Will expeditionary party.[156] In October 1862, a newspaper correspondent observed, 'The carpenters are still actively engaged erecting buildings and from present appearances I think that our Burke Street will be one of the finest and longest streets in the Pyrenees'.[157]

150 *Avoca Mail*, 6 October 1866
151 *Port Phillip and Melbourne Herald*, 8 September 1854, November 1854, quoted in Beavis. *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 30
152 *Ballieres Postal Directory*, 1868

153 *Sands and McDougall's Directory*, 1915
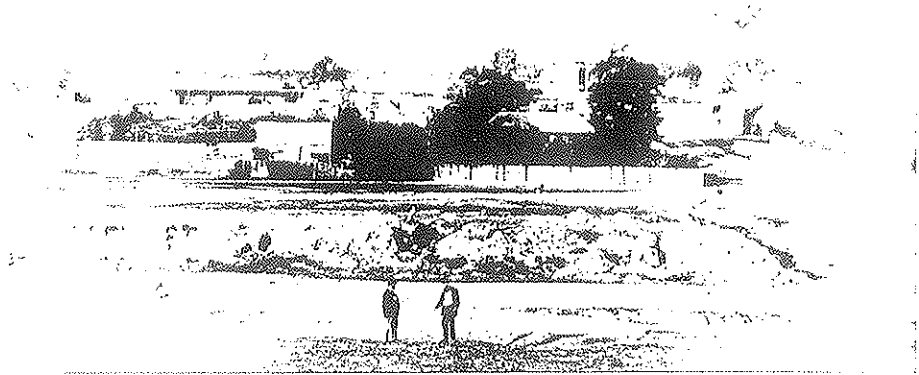154 *Victorian Municipal Directory*, 1918, p. 366
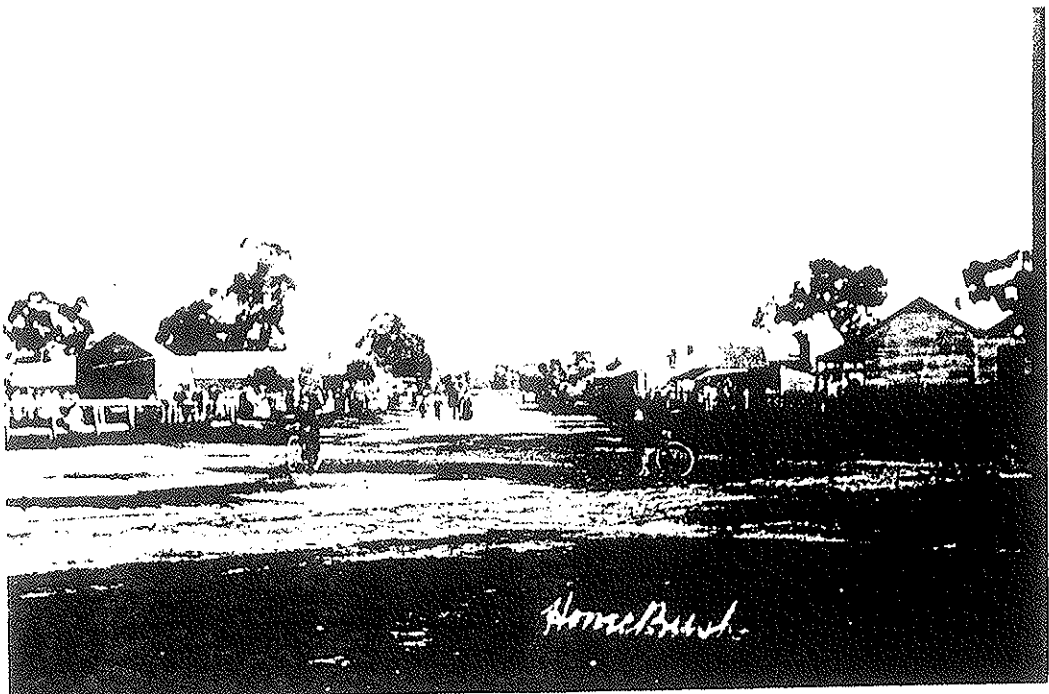155 *Ararat Advertiser*, 26 September 1862
156 Norman Fittock, *Golden Days, Landsborough Centenary 1862-1962*, p. 2
157 *Ararat Advertiser*, 7 October 1862

View of Avoca from the west looking across the Avoca River, 1872
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

View of Lower Homebush, 1910
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

By 1868 Landsborough had emerged as a major township in the Shire of Avoca, its population second only to Avoca. It boasted a strong farming hinterland partly due to the efforts of the energetic Landsborough Progress Committee which was instrumental in persuading the government to release 20,000 acres for sale or selection in the Landsborough area under the 1865 Land Act.[158] Burke Street became the commercial centre of the township while the police station/residence [L59], the state school and the Roman Catholic church [L61] in McKinley Street formed a compact precinct overlooking the township.

By 1918 Landsborough had a population of 250 with 1,000 in the surrounding district, compared to Avoca's population of 800.[159] Its attractions included a bank, coffee palace, hotel, court house, three churches and a school. The growing prosperity enjoyed by the local farming community, generated a spate of building activity in the 1920s. Buildings were constructed by the Ballarat builder, Brayshaw, and included the public hall [L47], the general store [L30] and two Hodgett residences. Burke Street became closely lined with shops and long-time Landsborough resident, Nancy Friend, remembers the carnival atmosphere on a Saturday evening when the shops stayed open until midnight and farming families travelled to town to shop and socialise:

> Fittocks had a big old gramophone and they would have it going right out on the street when the farmers came in. They had one of the first soda fountains and we would buy a drink for one penny. And it was a great day if the Fittocks had made ice cream. They would make it in a wooden churn with cream and ice and salt and everyone would know

when the Fittocks were making ice cream.[160]

Moonambel

On a mission to discover the most direct route between Adelaide and the Mount Alexander diggings for the South Australian gold escort, Alexander Tolmer, described passing through a gap in the Pyrenees and camping the night in the valley beyond, 'in the heart of the mountains'.[161] When gold was discovered here in November 1860 Tolmer's camping place became the site of the new township of Moonambel, said to be an Aboriginal word for 'hollow in the hills'.

The township was surveyed less than a month after the discovery of gold in November 1860, and in January 1861 it was reported, 'The Main or High Street is already progressing and scores of substantial buildings are being erected regardless of expense, every one in business seems to feel a confidence in this place'. In September 1861 a successful petition in support of a municipality was arranged by residents concerned to safeguard the townships pre-eminence in the face of rushes to Redbank and Barkly, and in October 1861 the Municipal District of Moonambel was proclaimed. Over the next three years elected councillors vigorously sought improvements for the area before the municipality finally amalgamated with the Avoca Shire in 1864.

By 1865 Moonambel had consolidated into a modest mining township with a population of about three hundred. It still acted as an administrative centre for the surrounding locality with a court of petty session and wardens court.[162] One of the three hotels from this period - the Commercial, described as 'the first-class

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158 Ararat Advertiser, 2 June 1865

159 Victorian Municipal Directory, 1918, p. 366

160 Information from Nancy Friend

161 L. J. Blake, The Gold Escort, 1971, p. 49-50

162 Ballieres' Victorian Gazetteer, 1865

hotel of the district' - still fronts Moonambel's main street. [M10] A large soap manufactory was also established near the cemetery and until at least 1910 continued to produce both candles and soap (using the brand name Yankee Magic Soap) under the charge of the Mergatroyd family.[163]

By the turn of the century Moonambel's businesses were spread out in a long line along Brooke Street and included a baker, a butcher, a blacksmith, a drapery, a hotel, a bootmaker, a tinsmith and three stores.[164] The police camp occupied a central section of the commercial precinct and was comprised of a police residence/station, a weatherboard lock up [M3] and a courthouse. In Humffray Street, parallel to Brooke Street, a self contained religious and educational precinct developed with the State School [M22], Methodist church [M23], Church of England [M24], and Roman Catholic church [M25] all occupying adjacent sites.

Redbank

The township of Redbank was surveyed in January 1861 and all frontages were greedily taken up. The local newspaper reported, 'great progress is being made by the business people here; substantial buildings are in the course of erection, many are erected, and three theatres are promised'.[165] However within eight months, these same stores were dismantled as the population followed a large rush to Dunolly. In typical goldfields fashion Redbank lost two-thirds of its business people overnight.[166]

By 1868, Redbank like its rival Moonambel, had become a small settled mining community, catering to both alluvial and quartz miners. One of the

only buildings to survive from the rush period was the Shamrock Hotel.[167] [R11] A range of businesses had established premises along Navarre Street including two bootmakers, two wheelwrights, three bakers and seven store keepers.[168]

In 1915 the postal directory lists fifty-six households in the vicinity of Redbank, with the majority engaged in farming, and the town's business community comprised a grocer, a produce merchant, a store and a hotel.[169] In High Street the State school, Church of England building and Methodist church ormed a cluster while the Roman Catholic church stood some distance away in Barkly Street.

Barkly

Groups of miners had been at work in the Barkly area (originally known as the Navarre diggings) since 1858 but it was only in October 1861, some months after the monster rush to the area, that the township was surveyed. It was reported that business proprietors were so eager to secure prime sites that they relentlessly followed the surveyor around for five or six days.[170] However, Barkly soon developed the reputation of a 'poor man's goldfield', and since it did not offer the potential for reef or deep lead mining - unlike nearby Redbank - the township remained small. By 1869 there were eighty-two miners listed in the Barkly-Frenchman's area but the Barkly township consisted of little more than a school, post office, shoe shop, butcher's shop and two general stores. The nearby settlement of Frenchman's possessed a butcher's shop and four general stores.

Alluvial miners were supplanted by farmers and by 1915 Barkly was at the heart of a farming community numbering

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[163] *Shire of Avoca rate books*, 1910

[164] *Wises Post Office Directory*, 1900

[165] *The Pioneer and Mountain Creek Advertiser*, 16 February 1861

[166] *Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser*, 11 September 1861

[167] *The Pioneer and Mountain Creek Advertiser*, 16 February 1861
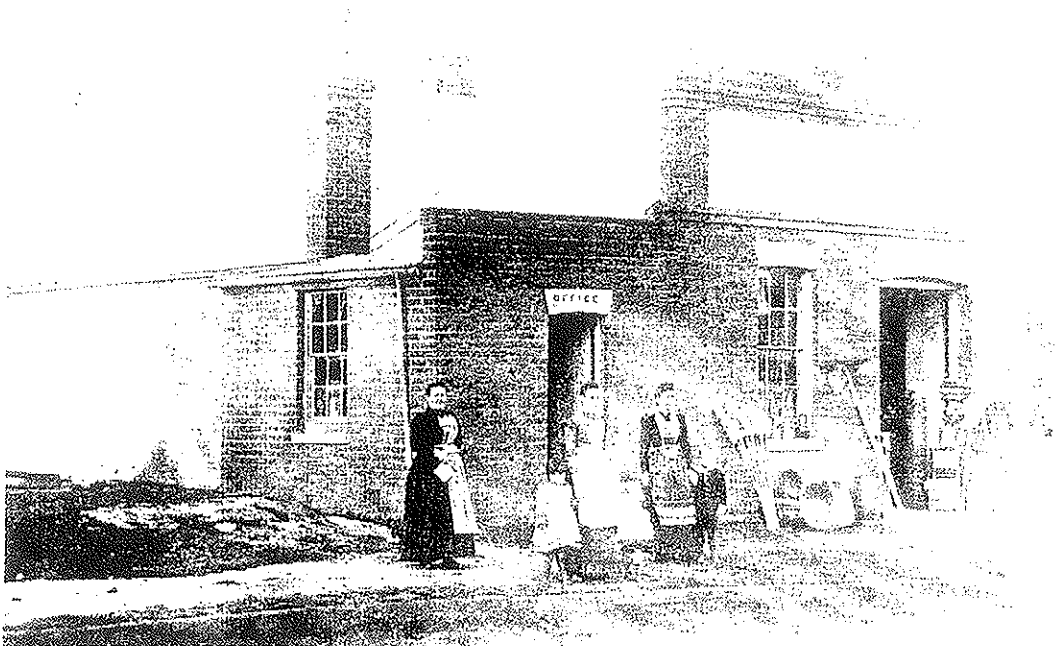
[168] *Ballieres Postal Directory*, 1868

[169] *Sands and McDougall's Directory*, 1915

[170] Driscoll, *The Barkly Story*, p. 2

Hodgett's Store, Burke Street, Landsborough, 1924
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

Produce Store, Brooke Street, Moonambel, c. 1900
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

about twenty-five households. The combined post office and general store operated by the Cheesman family, comprised the only shop in the township. The school continued to function and church services were held in the local hall until a small private chapel was transferred to Barkly from Woodlands station in 1935. [NB 28].

Natte Yallock

Like Crowlands, the township of Natte Yallock (said to be an Aboriginal word for 'big water - little plain'), grew up around the site of a small hotel, known as Fenton's Inn on the eastern side of the Avoca River. The Avoca River was particularly deep at this point and in times of drought, drovers and teamsters knew it as a series of water holes that never completely ran dry. When the river was full Mr Fenton offered a ferry service across to the other side. By 1862, a well known local character, Louisa Streeter, had opened a second hotel - known variously as the Commercial, Natte Yallock or Bridge hotel - on the same side of the river.[171]

Since it was clearly not auriferous, the area was one of the first localities in the Shire to be opened up for settlement - the first land sales occurring in 1859 - and from its inception the township of Natte Yallock developed as a service centre for farmers. Its future was cemented in 1864 when a bridge was finally built across the Avoca River. In later years all the bullock drays from St Arnaud and beyond travelled through Natte Yallock where they could be guaranteed of water, good pasture and a safe passage over the river.[172]

In 1865 the population of the Natte Yallock district was estimated at 250. In 1868 two stores were in business, there was a postal service, a Wesleyan chapel

was proposed [N11] and a school had been operating since 1862. Almost the entire population was listed as farmers or as shepherds under the employ of pastoralists.[173] By 1878 the town consisted of the Commercial Hotel, a store and blacksmith's shop and a saw mill near the river.[174] A creamery was constructed in the centre of the township in 1894.

By 1915 Natte Yallock had the appearance of many small farming settlements. Sixty-three families lived in the area but the township itself remained sparsely populated. Commercial activities centred around a store, hotel and post office while the most prominent buildings in the town were the weatherboard state school [N17] and the recently constructed (1905) Methodist church.[N14]

Homebush

In September 1853 a party of South Australian diggers found gold on the Homebush lead at Four Mile Flat. By the time a second rush took place to the area in 1860-1, the diggings were more commonly known as Homebush and in June 1860 the Mining Surveyor surveyed and laid out streets for a township of the same name.[175] After the exhaustion of alluvial gold, Homebush was saved from extinction by the establishment of two of the district's earliest deep lead mines, the Golden Lake and Phoenix. By 1867 the centre of the township had moved closer to these two mines and the *Avoca Mail* reported,

> *the new township of Homebush is rapidly increasing in importance. The ground in the vicinity of the Phoenix and Golden Lake Company's leases has been pegged out for building purposes...The old*

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171   Coates. *Natte Yallock - 150 Years*, p. 17
172   *Avoca Mail*, 7 March 1878

173   *Ballieres Postal Directory*, 1868
174   Beavis, *Pioneers of the Pyrenees*, p. 18-19
175   *Mining Surveyors' Reports*, June 1860

town is showing evident signs of
collapse.[176]

The centre of population at Homebush moved again in 1877 following the rich yields achieved by the Workers Miners Company mine [MIN H8] and the success of this mine and others in the vicinity ultimately led to the development of a new settlement north of the original Homebush township. This became known as Lower Homebush. Although the fortunes of Homebush were given a fillip when it became the site of a railway station on the Maryborough to Avoca railway line in 1876, the success of the deep lead mines at Lower Homebush meant that the population of the new township rapidly eclipsed its older sister, and the main street of Lower Homebush became lined with shops.

Both townships declined with the cessation of deep lead mining in the early twentieth century. By 1915 Homebush Lower retained only a hotel, school and store/ post office while Homebush provided business for a hotel, railway station, store/post office. In 1918 the combined population of Homebush and Homebush Lower was estimated at 150.[177]

Percydale

Gold was found at Percydale (originally known as Fiddlers Creek or Fiddlers Green) as early as 1854 and over the next fifteen years the area was occupied by a mixture of both miners and farmers. However it was not until the large alluvial rush of 1869 followed by the establishment of quartz mines in the area, that anything like a township emerged. In June 1869 the mining surveyor reported twenty-five stores and two hotels on the diggings in addition to thirty stores in the 'Chinese quarter'. Both a police camp and a school were in the course of

construction and the entire place was, 'assuming an air of permanency'.[178]

In December 1871 forty-five village lots were advertised for sale at Percydale.[179] Due to the predominance of Chinese miners on the field (there were a reported 2,000 Chinese compared to 400 Europeans in 1869) the township developed in two parts – one frequented by Europeans and the other patronised by the Chinese. However by 1880 the Chinese population had declined and the population of Percydale and district was given as 530 Europeans and 190 Chinese. Businesses included a blacksmith's shop, a hotel, three butcher's shops and five general stores.

By the early twentieth century mining had declined and of the fifteen families listed in the area in 1915, most were farmers. One family, the Daly's, lived in a timber house widely known throughout the Shire now as 'Daly's cottage' [P2]. Another well known building, a skilfully constructed slate dairy [P1], may date from this period or even as far back as the 1860s when residents of the Percydale area included two dairymen.

Lamplough
The huge population of between 20,000 and 30,000 that flooded the Lamplough diggings in December 1859 soon dissipated, leaving only a small mining community behind. By 1868 there were thirty-four families resident in the area and the small township offered the services of a boot maker, a cooper, a dressmaker and two brewers. There was one hotel, two general stores and P. McFogarty operated a post office. In 1872 school was held in a old wooden store but this was replaced in 1875 by a new building [AD10].

[176] *Avoca Mail,* 6 April 1867
[177] *Victorian Municipal Directory,* 1918, p. 366

[178] *Mining Surveyors' Reports,* June 1869
[179] *Victorian Government Gazette,* 22 December 1871
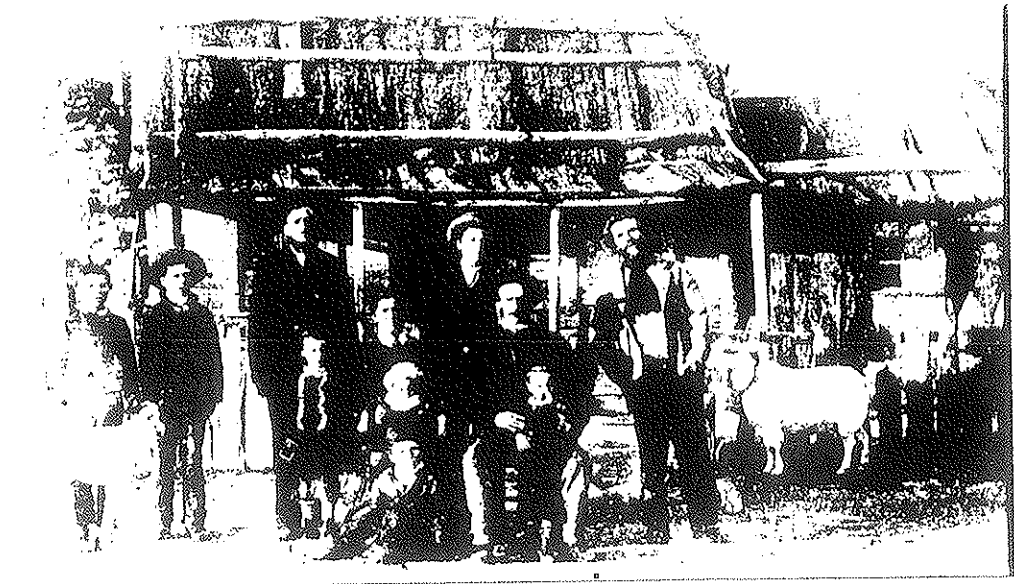
David Rodwell and family, Percydale, c. 1880
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

By 1915 only thirteen households continued to give their address as Lamplough and only the post office and school survived in the township.[180]

Navarre

On 20 February 1848, Robert Bazely made application for a licence to occupy an inn on the boundary between the pastoral runs of Woodlands and Decameron, on what appears to have been an early stock route and later became the site of the Navarre township.[181] He presumably intended to cater to pastoral workers and drovers. Two years later Robert Mackay made another application to open an inn, and in 1853 his premises were described as Mackay's Inn, Wattle Creek [Navarre].[182]

In 1852 the South Australian gold escort route passed through Navarre and it became a popular wayside stop on the road between Adelaide and the Forest Creek diggings (Castlemaine). By 1855 the township had been surveyed and included a Government Camp Reserve, which supplied police protection.[183] It was officially proclaimed a township on 13 September 1861.[184] Navarre had a population of seventy in 1865,[185] and in 1868 the township consisted of a store, hotel, postal service and school (established in 1864). A police constable was still stationed at Navarre although the surrounding population consisted

primarily of farmers or pastoral station employees.[186]

The district received a fillip in 1914 with the arrival of the Ben Nevis-Crowlands-Navarre railway extension in 1914. Farmers from throughout the surrounding district travelled to Navarre to consign their produce to market by rail. Timber cutters also converged on the township with wagon loads of firewood.[187] The branch line finally closed in 1952.

Decline

From the 1920s the new mobility supplied by motor transport triggered an era of decline and an exodus of young people from the Shire. In 1921 the municipality had a total population of 3,307; in the 1947 census this had fallen by almost one-third to 2,402.[188] Some of the Shire's smaller settlements like Lamplough, Percydale and Homebush disappeared almost without a trace, victims of their close proximity to the services and facilities of Avoca. Others like Moonambel, Redbank, Natte Yallock, Crowlands and Landsborough maintained locally important buildings - the church, the school, the hall, the post office or store - and continued to offer the farming communities that surrounded them a social centre.

Avoca's situation was slightly different from the other townships. As the Shire's largest town it was often the magnet that drew people away from the smaller centres and over the period it actually experienced a population increase; in 1933 Avoca's population stood at 949, in 1954 it was 1025.[189] However many of the people moving to Avoca were retirees and the township faced the same exodus of young people - often to Maryborough

180 *Sands and McDougall's Directory*, 1915
181 Summary of information on Run Registers, Station Licences and Pastoral Maps between 1848 and the end of the century, P.R.O., Microfiche No. 632
182 Summary of information on Run Registers, Station Licences and Pastoral Maps between 1848 and the end of the century, P.R.O., Microfiche No. 632, 28 February 1850, 26 May 1853
183 Plan of the Township of Navarre at Wattle Creek, March 1855
184 Hewitt, *Navarre...1841 and afterwards*, 1964
185 *Balliere's Victorian Gazetteer*, 1865

186 *Balliere's Postal Directory*, 1868
187 Driscoll, *The Barkly Story*, p. 52
188 *Resources Survey - Central Highlands Region*, 1956
189 *Resources Survey - Central Highlands Region*, 1956, pp. 90-1

or Ballarat - experienced elsewhere.
Businesses were also leaving for larger
towns and by 1954 Avoca retained only
thirty-three retail establishments.[190] In
1957, one of the towns most important
transport links, the railway, closed
between Avoca and Ararat.

Avoca residents vigorously resisted this
decline. In 1946 a freezing works was
opened and used for rabbit and poultry
storage and later for producing ice
[A176].[191] The following year
Maryborough Knitting Mills was
persuaded to open an annexe in Avoca
providing employment for thirty-two
women, and in 1950 twenty local
residents readily subscribed £3,000
toward the construction of a large textile
factory on the outskirts of Avoca. The
Avoca Town Improvement Fund
Committee arranged a Back-to-Avoca in
1950, with the specific aim of
encouraging ex-residents 'who had to
leave Avoca in the past to get
employment in Melbourne, to return
permanently to their old home town'.[192] In
1958 the Shire Council initiated a factory
manufacturing reinforced concrete pipes
and later pre-cast box culverts.

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[190] *Resources Survey - Central Highlands Region*, 1956, p. 124

[191] *Back to Avoca, 1950*, p. 61

[192] *Back-to-Avoca, 1950*, p. 67

LIVING IN COMMUNITY

Schools

In 1854 a National School Board inspector toured the Victorian gold fields and noted that although gold diggers continued to travel widely in the search for gold, there were some places to which they constantly returned and chose to settle their family and he recommended that permanent school buildings be built in these areas.[193] One such place was Avoca. The first schools in the township were privately conducted 'church' schools under the auspices of the Denominational Board. In 1855-6 Avoca's Church of England was conducting lessons in a wood and canvas school while the Wesleyans' brick chapel also doubled as a school house. By 1857, when the Avoca National school was finally built, it was estimated that there were a remarkable 11,392 children residing in the Avoca area.[194]

In other areas of the Shire the opening of schools followed the discovery of gold or, in the case of Natte Yallock and Crowlands, the extensive settlement of the land. By the end of the 1860s schools were in existence in all the Shire's major settlements although many were makeshift structures built of canvas, iron or timber slabs. In 1860 the Roman Catholic church's foresight in erecting a portable school building (made of corrugated iron with a calico roof) at Lamplough was soon proven when the field was suddenly deserted in favour of new diggings at Moonambel. The school followed the rushes to Moonambel and then to Barkly before finally coming to rest at Landsborough in 1863.[195]

The Education Act of 1872 made education, 'secular, compulsory and free' and transferred responsibility for school funding to the newly created Education Department. The abolition of fees meant that school attendances increased dramatically and over the next fifteen years the Shire experienced a spate of building activity with the earlier, temporary school structures being replaced by more substantial buildings of brick or weatherboard, until only the Avoca National school [A178] and the Landsborough Common School [L29] survived from the period before the 1872 Education Act. Schools were built at Lamplough, Homebush and Moonambel in 1875, Landsborough in 1877, Avoca and Natte Yallock in 1878, Barkly in 1880 and Lower Homebush in 1887.

In addition to these larger centres, schools also sprang up wherever there was a concentration of population, often providing a community meeting place for small rural communities that boasted no other public or commercial building. For instance school buildings at one time gave an identity to places such as Avoca Lead, Glenlofty, Malakoff, Glendhu, Wattle Creek, Frenchmans, Tanwood, Warrenmang, Rathscar West and Rathscar North. Of these only the Wattle Creek school [L15] now remains.

Most of the new school buildings were simple, weatherboard buildings of which the school at Lamplough [AD10]is a typical example. However the large number of children concentrated in the Avoca township - an estimated 324 in 1877 - created a need for something more commodious. In 1878 a new brick school was built at Avoca to the design of Henry Bastow, and its distinctive tent-like form with wide verandahs integrated into the overall design, quickly became a local

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193 Blake (ed.), *Vision and Realisation - a Centenary History of State Education in Victoria*, 1973, p. 36.
194 Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 145.
195 Ebsworth, *Pioneer Catholic Victoria*, Melbourne, 1973

landmark.[196] [A9] In 1887 a very similar building was built to accommodate an estimated 200 children at Lower Homebush when deep lead mining was at its height in the area . It now stands in lonely isolation in a paddock - one of the only indications of the huge population that once resided here.

Schools also created their own environment. The playground was often planted with pepper trees to provide shade and ward off flies. Pavilions were built for shelter in rainy weather and at Landsborough the pavilions were segregated, one for boys and one for girls. Somewhere in the vicinity of the school a teacher's residence was usually built. A typical school teacher's residence survives at Redbank [R25].

During the twentieth century many of the Shire's smaller schools closed as population declined and motor transport allowed children to travel further to school. By the 1950s the Shire was left with only eight schools - Avoca, Barkly, Crowlands, Landsborough, Moonambel, Natte Yallock, Navarre and Redbank. A wave of closures in the last decade has seen this number reduced to five. Although at one period there was movement to establish a consolidated school at Avoca, it never eventuated and in the absence of a high school children from the Shire have been forced to travel by bus to Maryborough, Stawell or Ararat to gain secondary education.

Churches

The gold rushes brought a flood of people with different religious beliefs into the Shire although most expressed their allegiance to one of four major denominational groups - Church of England, Wesleyan (later Methodists), Presbyterian and Roman Catholic. Early

church services were often celebrated under whatever shelter was available. In 1854 the first Methodist lay preacher in Avoca held a service in a canvas tent,[197] while at Moonambel, Church of England services were initially celebrated in a galvanised iron building. The first building in the Shire specifically built for religious purposes was a brick Wesleyan chapel in Avoca in 1855-6.[198] It was followed in 1857 by a Church of England building.[199]

As the population of the Shire stabilised, churches became symbols of permanence and respectability, and from the late 1860s to the 1880s there was a wave of church construction. At Avoca, in 1868 and 1871 respectively, both the early Wesleyan church and the Church of England building were abandoned and replaced by far more substantial buildings (although the original Wesleyan church still survives in High Street [A48]). Since non-conformism was strong in the goldfields in the north and east of the Shire, Wesleyan churches were often the first to be built. A Wesleyan church was built at Homebush (c. 1862), Redbank (1866), Natte Yallock (1867), Percydale (1873) and Rathscar. A Presbyterian church was erected at Avoca in 1864 [A197], and at Rathscar too Presbyterians banded together to establish a church. Presbyterian preachers also visited both Natte Yallock and Crowlands.

St Kevin's Catholic Church was built in Avoca in 1872 but Landsborough's pre-eminent position as the centre of Catholicism within the Shire was reflected in its church of St Francis established in 1887. The church's imposing design and its location on a rise overlooking Landsborough, dwarfed all other religious buildings in the township. Church of England adherents were numerous throughout the Shire, and a Church of

[196] Burchell, *Victorian Schools: A Study in Colonial Government Architecture 1837-1900*, 1980, pp. 165, 175.

[197] Benson (ed). *A Century of Victorian Methodism*, 1935 p. 450.
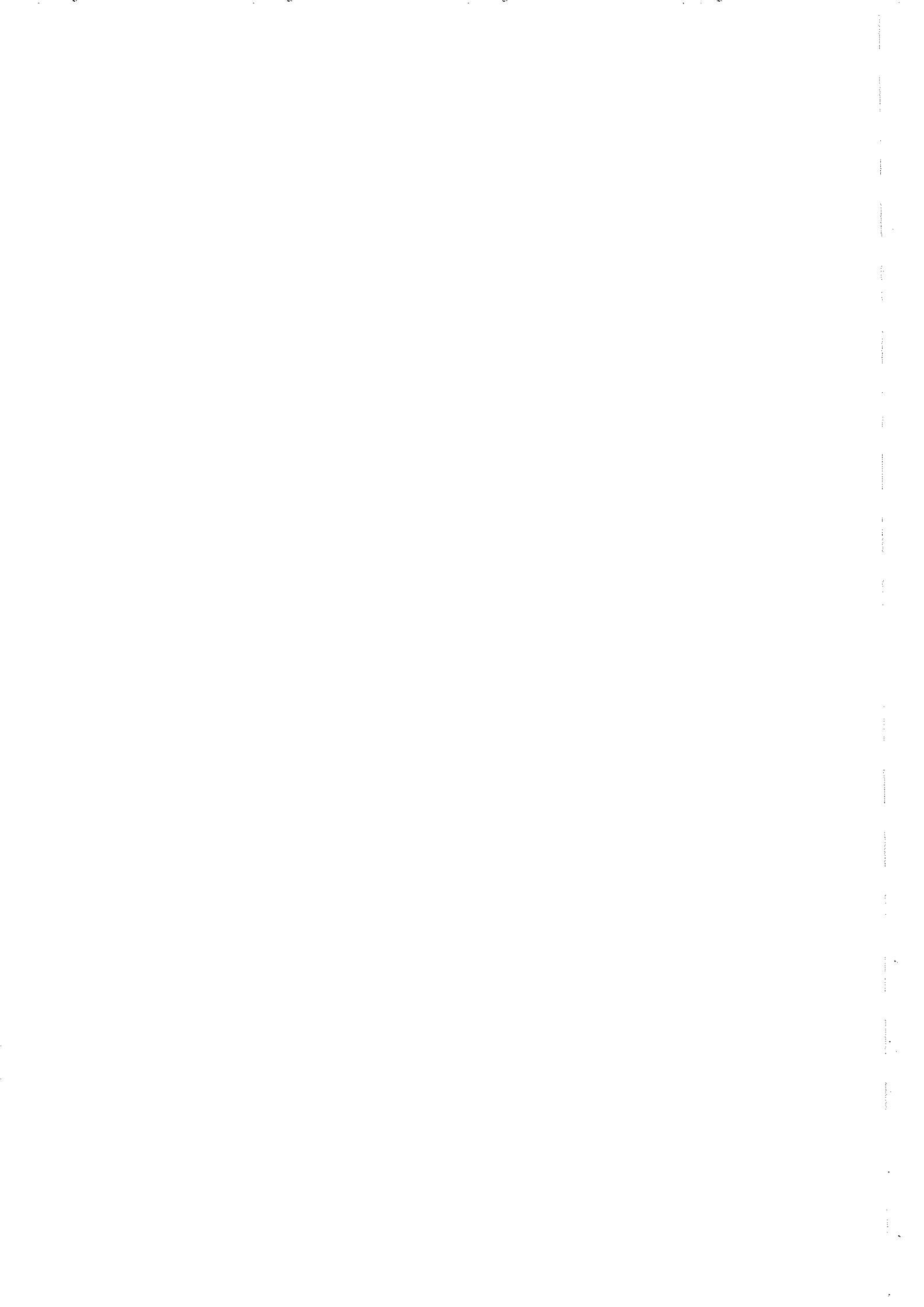[198] Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 138.
[199] Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 143.

Natte Yallock Methodist Church under construction, 1905
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

Avoca State School, c. 1878
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

England building was eventually constructed in almost all the Shire's major settlements.

At Avoca and Landsborough, a cluster of auxiliary buildings grew up around the churches. For instance, the construction of a Wesleyan church in Avoca in 1867 was followed by a Sunday School hall in 1870 and a parsonage in 1871. [A186] These buildings quickly formed a well defined church precinct, clearly demonstrating the strength of Methodism in the township during this period. The Church of England and Presbyterian church at Avoca also erected accommodation for their resident minister while at Landsborough a presbytery was constructed in 1917.

The increased prosperity the Shire enjoyed in the early decades of the twentieth century prompted a renewed interested in the construction or replacement of religious buildings. In 1904, a Church of England and a Presbyterian church were built at Landsborough, followed by a new Methodist church at Natte Yallock in 1905 and a Church of England at Redbank in 1908. At Crowlands, where church services had been conducted in the school throughout the nineteenth century, the community suddenly mustered all its resources and built two churches in the space of two years - a Roman Catholic church (1934) and a Methodist church.(1936).[200] Likewise at Barkly, Church of England services had been held in the public hall for decades but in 1935 a local resident, Judith Cheesman, purchased McCulloch's private chapel from Woodlands station and the tiny building became Barkly's new church.[201]

Cemeteries
On the goldfields it took some time for cemeteries to be surveyed and gazetted

and in the meantime a variety of places were used as burial grounds. Most of these sites are no longer identifiable although in recent years a granite cairn has been erected to mark a burial ground connected to the old Lamplough gold diggings. Trustees were appointed to the first officially designated cemetery in the Shire, the Avoca cemetery, [A75] in 1857 and the first burial took place in the same year. In later years another seven cemeteries were set aside throughout the Shire.

The cemeteries were laid out in denominational sections. At grave yards such as Redbank [R4] and Moonambel [M30], the divisions were accentuated by tree planting which divided the land into four with a central avenue. Inscriptions on the gravestones survive as poignant reminders of the prevalence of disease in the nineteenth century and in particular the high incidence of infant mortality. A chilling inscription on a head stone in the Avoca cemetery shows that in 1864 James and Eliza Kilpatrick lost six children [from diphtheria] in the space of three weeks.[202] In more recent years, the cemeteries of the Shire have proved of interest for entirely different reasons since they represent one of the few areas which have not been subject to stock grazing. The Natte Yallock cemetery for instance has been found to harbour rare native vegetation.

Wars
Residents from the Shire of Avoca served in the Boer War and the two World Wars although it was the First World War that attracted the most enlistments. In the Avoca area 137 men volunteered for the armed services and of this number 29 were killed. Memorials of different types were erected throughout the Shire. The most imposing was a large octagonal memorial [A105] built in the plantation in

200 *The Crowlands Connection 1849-1988*, 1988
201 Driscoll, *The Barkly Story*, p. 48.

202 Davidson and Doxford, *Grave Reflections*, 1982 p. 8.

the centre of Avoca's main street and inscribed with the names of all those who served in the war. The cost of £1,600 was almost entirely met by public subscription.[203] At Moonambel an Avenue of Honour [M28] was planted - a tree for each local man who had enlisted. Likewise an avenue of pines [N22] was planted at Natte Yallock representing every local serviceman, and when two residents were killed in the Second World War, two trees were planted near the river in their memory.

Hotels

In early goldfields towns it was often said that every second building was a grog shanty but as the population of the Shire consolidated, these disappeared and only the more substantial hotels remained. These rarely functioned purely as drinking places. In the absence of halls they provided the venue for a wide variety of dances, balls, concerts and meetings, and publicans frequently added rooms specifically to cater for such purposes. In September 1858 William Trevena advertised that he had just added to his Victoria hotel, 'a splendid and spacious Ball Room, which, being fitted with a stage, is most suitable for concerts or theatrical purposes'.[204] Hotels also offered board and lodging and a place to socialise in comfortable surroundings. Fenton's Hotel at Natte Yallock even provided a ferry service.

Competition between hotels was intense, and publicans vied with each other to offer bigger and better attractions. In Avoca during the 1855 New Year Celebrations, the Bombay Serenaders at the Locomotive Hotel competed with a German Band playing at the Avoca Hotel, a Christmas marquee at Vinatt's hotel and

a 'pig with greasy tail' at the Union Inn.[205] During the height of the gold rushes at Moonambel the Court House Hotel put in its bid to win increased custom by displaying 'magnificent panoramic views depicting the late exciting incidents of the Italian War'. Other establishments prided themselves on their grandeur. A visitor to Avoca in 1869 wrote of the Victoria Hotel:

> One of the finest buildings in the town is a handsome hotel built of stone and brick, provided with a ball-room, billiard-rooms and such like. It is altogether the finest up-country place of the kind that I have seen.[206]

An article written in 1931 claims that there were thirty-three public houses in the Avoca district in the 1860s.[207] If this is true their number had been severely reduced by the turn of the century and they were further reduced in the decade after 1906 when the Licences Reduction Board undertook the task of reviewing the number of hotels in each Victorian town.[208] During this period many of the Shire's hotels closed, including the well-known Woolpack Hotel at Frenchman's near Barkly which was once served as a wayside stop for carters transporting wool from the north-western district.[209] Only the foundations of the Woolpack Hotel now remain.

The activities of the Licences Reduction Board and a decline in the population of the Shire from the 1930s, meant that only three hotels now survive outside Avoca - the Shamrock and Thistle at Redbank, the Commercial at Moonambel and the Commercial at Landsborough - while in

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[203] Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years,* p. 128.

[204] *Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser,* September 1858

[205] Flett, J., *Old Pubs, Inns, Taverns and Grog Houses on the Victorian Gold Diggings,* 1978, p. 36

[206] *Smiles Boy's Voyage,* 1880, quoted in Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years,* p. 70.
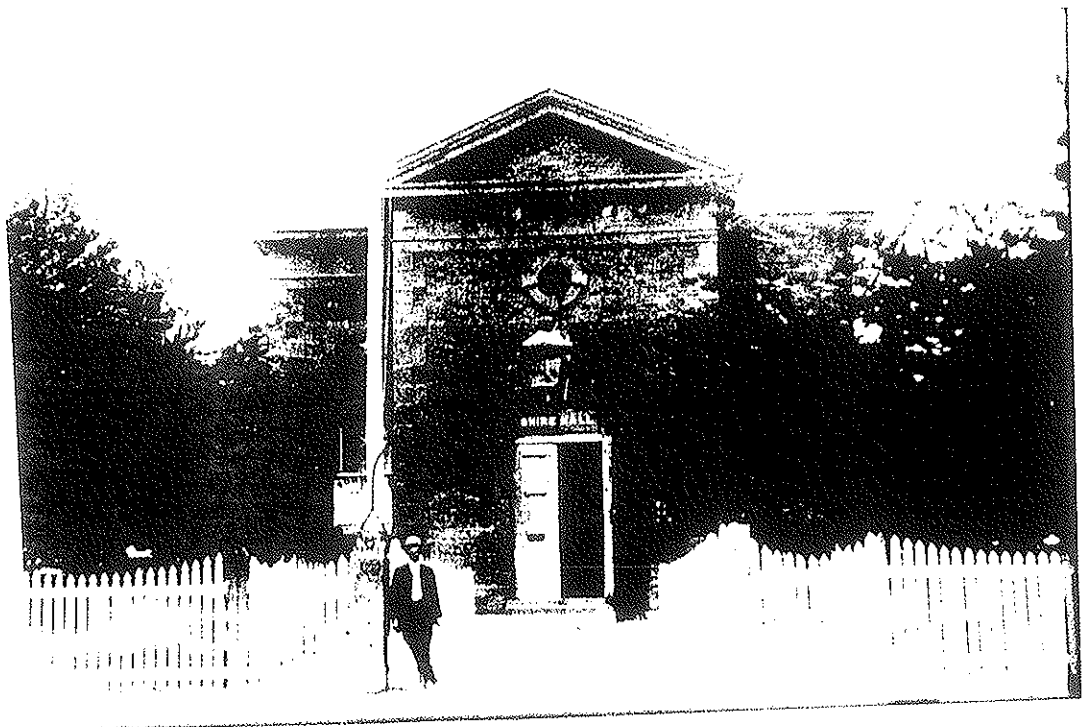
[207] *Weekly Times,* 1931.
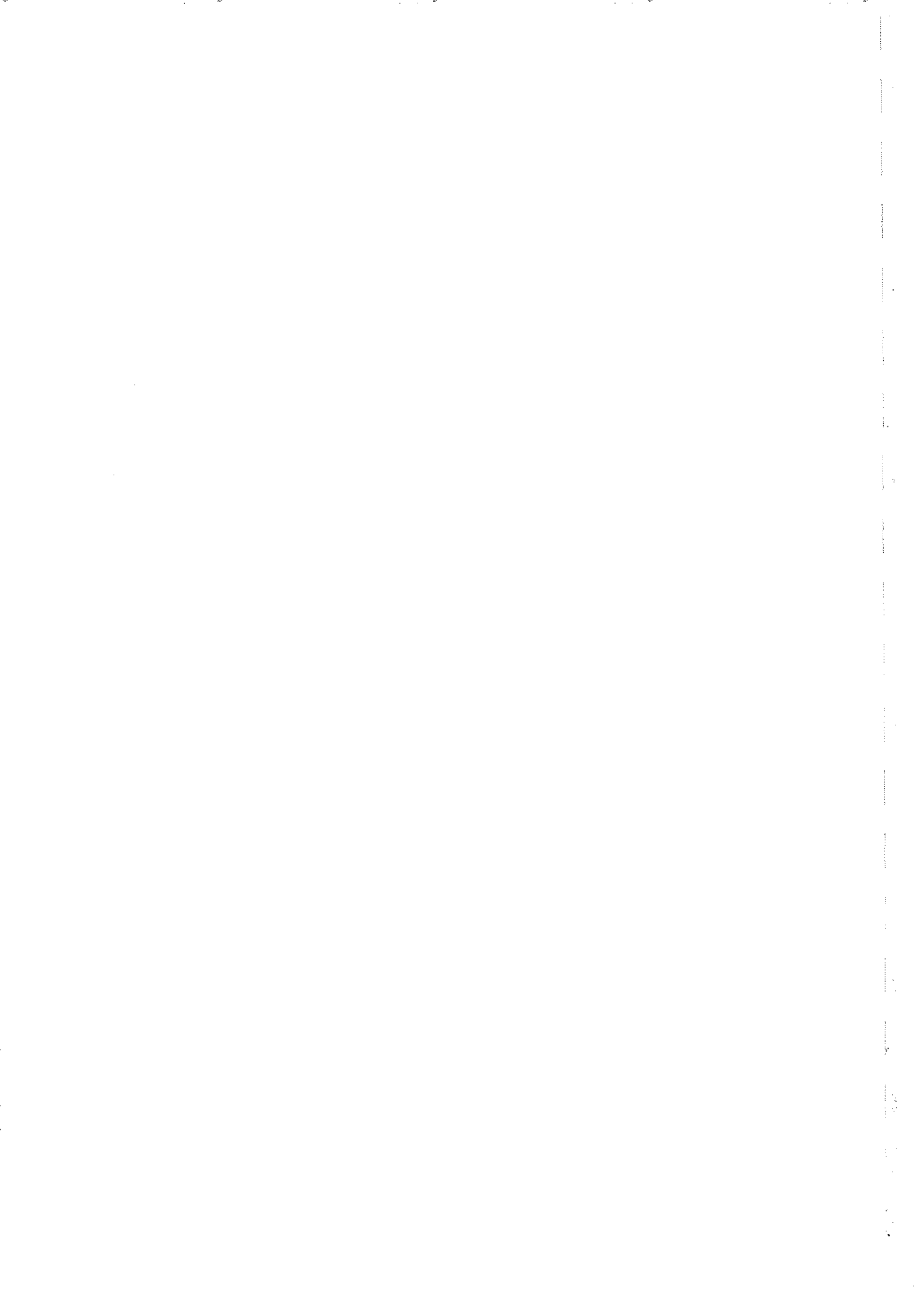
[208] *Priestly,* Making Their Mark, 1984, p. 184.

[209] Driscoll, *The Barkly Story,* p. 81.

Traveller's Rest hotel (now a private residence), Crowlands, 1994
(Wendy Jacobs)

Avoca Shire Hall, c. 1910
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

Avoca, only the Victoria and the Avoca hotels remain. These continue to provide an important gathering place for the local community while catering increasingly to the passing tourist trade. Several former hotel buildings also survive. These include the Avoca Roadhouse formerly the Bull and Mouth [A71] closed in c. 1956 and the Albion Hotel, Avoca [A123] closed in 1938 and now privately owned. The Travellers' Rest [C12] at Crowlands, ceased to function in 1908 but was one of the first hotels to operate in the Shire and possibly dates from the early 1850s.

Halls

Hotels served as a convenient meeting place for men, but functions in which women and children were involved frequently made use of the local school. The Avoca town hall was constructed in 1861[210] but Barkly appears to have been the only other town to boast its own hall in the nineteenth century. This was in existence by 1880 when it was the site of a performance by the 'Fitzroy Amateur Artists'. A month later it was the venue for a ball.[211]

In the early twentieth century, however, increased prosperity amongst the farming community combined with the new craze for dancing and the phenomena of the 'Saturday night dance', prompted the erection of community halls throughout the Shire. The first was built in Landsborough in 1922 followed by Natte Yallock (1935), Moonambel (1939) and Crowlands (1955). The Barkly hall was rebuilt in 1903 and then rebuilt for a third time in 1958.[212] A hall was also built at Redbank.

Money for the construction of the halls was raised by public subscription and fund raising activities, with the men of the district contributing their labour on a

voluntary basis. With the exception of the Landsborough hall, which was designed by a Ballarat builder, the halls were typically utilitarian in design with an eye to functionality rather than aesthetics. They incorporated a kitchen, supper room and large internal space suitable for dancing. The Natte Yallock hall is typical. [N12] Many local people remember with great pleasure the local dances of the 1930s, 40s and 50s when people of all age groups gathered in the community hall and there was music that 'set the feet a dancing'. Eulalie Driscoll relates:

> *A group of local boys formed an orchestra [at Barkly] with Bill Driscoll Jnr. on the piano, his brother, Les, who played the violin, and cousin Cyril who played the saxophone. Arthur Turner was an excellent cornetist and Noel Cheesman accompanied them on the drums.[213]*

However the halls were not just used for dancing. They also became the venue for a wide variety of community events and entertainment including church fetes, variety concerts, tin kettlings and travelling shows. Eulalie Driscoll remembers that silent movies were held at the Barkly hall using power generated from the engine of a Dodge motor car.[214] Servicemen were farewelled from the local hall and when they returned they were welcomed home at the same venue. At election time the halls acted as polling booths, and at the end of the year they provided a stage for the local school concert.

Sports

A variety of sports were played throughout the Shire. The high percentage of English-born inhabitants made cricket popular from the first days of settlement. Mention is made of a

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210 Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 36.
211 Driscoll, *The Barkly Story*, p. 21.
212 Driscoll, *The Barkly Story*, pp. 21-31

213 Driscoll, *The Barkly Story*, pp. 24-5.
214 Driscoll, *The Barkly Story*, p. 28.

cricket team in Avoca as early as 1859[215] and cricket clubs existed at Moonambel, Redbank and Landsborough by 1864. However the cricket matches were irregular affairs arranged on a casual basis between towns. Regular competition in the form of a cricket association did not start until decades later. One of the earliest references to a football game in the Shire is in 1874 when the Natte Yallock football team played Homebush.[216] Early in the twentieth century the Mountain Creek Football Association was formed providing regular competition between the towns in the north of the Shire. The Moonambel Tennis Association was established about the same time.

Toward the end of the century, rifle clubs were in vogue and a number were formed at places throughout the Shire including Landsborough, Avoca and Natte Yallock. The Avoca shooting range still exists although it is no longer in use. Lawn bowls, was introduced into the Shire in December 1934 when a green situated on the property of John Mackereth was opened for public use.[217] The sport grew in popularity in the twentieth century and bowling links now exist at both Avoca[218] and Landsborough.

An unusual sports clubs and another indication of the strong English influence that existed in the Avoca township in the early years, was the short lived Avoca Hunt Club. By all accounts its first meeting was taken very seriously, with the Master of Hounds dressed in a scarlet riding jacket and a full pack of beagles. A resident in 1923 recalled:

> *The local equestrians mustered in goodly numbers in the paddock adjoining the local park...To the*

huntsmen's hearty halloas of 'Yoicks, Ye Ho, Ye Ho', repeated several times, the company flew the fences in great style, traversing the country side for many miles.[219]

Horse racing

One of the most popular forms of entertainment in the Shire's early gold mining days, was horse racing. Two day race meetings were held at Avoca in 1860 and attracted 1,500 people, many tramping overland from the Lamplough diggings to attend. The Racing Committee had spent almost £300 on improvements and felt able to assert that the course was now 'scarcely inferior to any in the colony, with the exception of Creswick'.[220] The present Avoca Shire Turf Club is said to trace its establishment back to 1863, making it one of the oldest municipal racing clubs in the State. By 1869 a grandstand had been erected although this was demolished and replaced with a second grandstand in 1927. [AD26]

Racing was by no means confined to Avoca. An Easter racing meeting was held annually at Landsborough in the 1860s and in 1869 was reported to have attracted 'immense crowds'.[221] At both Redbank and Moonambel large race meetings were held and were so successful that at Redbank land was specifically set aside for use as a race course.[R3] At other race meetings in the Shire the race course was often little more than a flat cleared paddock. At Natte Yallock for instance, the Turf Club's first race meeting was held on land loaned by Mr McGregor known as the Woolshed paddock.[222] Race meetings have continued in the Shire and the races held at Avoca during the Wool and Wine

[215] Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 66.
[216] *Avoca Mail*, 6 October 1874.
[217] *Back to Avoca, 1950*, p. 37.
[218] Bowling links closer to the town were officially opened in 1948
[219] Hellings, *Avoca Mail*, 13 November 1923.
[220] Maryborough and Dunolly Advertiser, 10 April 1860
[221] *Ararat Advertiser*, 2 April 1869
[222] *Avoca Mail*, 27 May 1881.

A tennis match, c. 1910
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

Homebush Football team, c. 1910
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

festival are well-known throughout Victoria.

Sports days

Early race meetings developed out of the predominantly male, gold diggings environment. However as the composition of the Shire's population changed, the demand for family-style entertainment led to the emergence of sports days. From the 1860s, Avoca sports days were traditionally held on Boxing Day and included such events as foot races, pole vaulting, wrestling, sack races, 'blind' steeplechase and climbing the greasy pole. Families brought along a picnic lunch and there was often a dance in the evening. Sports continued at Avoca until the late 1940s, when they were organised by the Avoca Brass Band. During this period a local resident, Ivan Redpath, remembers a variety of side-shows including Jimmy Sharman's boxing troupe and Thorp McConville's rough riding.[223]

At Barkly, community picnics were held on a flat alongside Heifer Station Creek, but after 1902 a recreation reserve was designated in Barkly and this became the venue for St Patrick's Day Sports. Eulalie Driscoll relates:

> *a large galvanised shed was erected, which served as a publican's booth with office attached as well as a refreshment booth. Billy Sanderson and George Dobley were rivals for the right to sell fruit, lollies and vegetables...There were foot races...a wood chop as well as trotting events which later were replaced with bicycle races.[224]*

The Percydale Sports Day was also well known throughout the district. This was usually held mid week on the customary Wednesday half holiday, and the highlight was always the running of the 'Percydale Gift'. Sports days remained popular until

the 1940s when increased mobility allowed residents to travel further afield for their entertainment and sports days lapsed.

Societies

Among the first societies formed within the Shire of Avoca were progress associations aimed at improving local facilities. A progress association was in existence in Redbank in 1861[225] with the task of making Redbank 'a place to play first fiddle amongst the Pyrenees goldfields'. The following year a progress committee was formed at Landsborough and did much to ensure the town's future by obtaining a promise from the government that 20,000 acres of local land would be surveyed for sale or selection.[226] Such organisations were the forerunners of modern day progress associations.

The dangers of mining life in particular encouraged the establishment of friendly societies. In Avoca the Order of Oddfellows was established in 1864, followed by the Order of Foresters sometime prior to 1873 and then the Avoca branch of the Australian Natives Association (ANA) in 1885.[227] A desire for self-improvement prompted the formation of a Mechanics Institute in Avoca in 1873.[228] At Natte Yallock a debating society was formed and in 1908 boasted 52 members.[229] The strength of Protestantism in the Avoca area was reflected in the creation of a masonic lodge in 1911 and the erection of a masonic hall in 1923.[230]

Country Fire Authority

Large areas of state forest and broad sweeps of grasslands have always made

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223 Information from Ivan Redpath
224 Driscoll, *The Barkly Story*, p. 64.
225 *Ararat Advertiser*, 17 May 1861.
226 *Ararat Advertiser*, 2 June 1865.
227 *Pyrenees Pioneers*, Avoca and District Historical Society, March 1994.
228 *Avoca Mail*, 22 July 1873.
229 Du Bourg, *Big Water - Little Plain*, p. 52
230 *Back to Avoca 1950*, p. 55.

fire a threat in the Shire of Avoca and it
has certainly played a part in shaping the
local environment. Early in 1857 a
newspaper correspondent observed a bush
fire from Mount Ararat and wrote that the
Pyrenees were one continuous blaze for
many miles.[231] The wooden buildings that
made up the building stock of most of the
Shire's towns also represented a risk and
in 1895 a section of shops in High Street,
Avoca, near the Victoria Hotel, was burnt
to the ground.[232]

Local residents banded together to form
local fire fighting brigades but it was only
after the creation of the Country Fire
Authority in 1945 that training became
co-ordinated on a regional basis. A
number of Avoca men served Victoria's
fire fighting service outside the Shire, and
at one time both Metropolitan and
Country Fire Brigades had former Avoca
residents, John Wilkins and William
Chellew, as chief officers. In more recent
times in the 1960s, Alex Larkins, also a
past resident of Avoca, served as chief
officer of the Country Fire Authority.
Country Fire Authority sheds now dot the
Shire pointing to the existence of a
number of well trained, fire fighting units.
Nevertheless this was not sufficient to halt
a bush fire which began near Avoca in
January 1985 and swept through the
south-eastern corner of the Shire
destroying a sawmill and numerous
houses and sheds and leaving behind a
scorched landscape that even now has not
been entirely covered by regrowth.

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[231] *Warrnambool Examiner*, 5 January 1858,
quoted in Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 83.
[232] Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 85.

ROAD AND RAIL

Bush tracks

The location of the Shire of Avoca on a stock route running through the Wimmera to Melbourne, was to prove instrumental in its future development. A map of 1849 shows this route as a meandering bush track formed by the passage of bullock drays and following almost the same path as the present-day road from Avoca to Navarre. In 1853 the same route was taken by South Australians on their way to the diggings at Mount Alexander and Bendigo and led to the early discovery of gold in the Avoca area.

As miners flooded into the Shire in the 1850s and early 1860s they followed bush tracks formed by the pastoralists or created their own paths, forging the quickest and easiest route between diggings. Gold field roads were notoriously dusty in summer and slippery and boggy in winter. In 1861 Moonambel residents complained that the road through the town was almost impassable and heavy merchandise had to be carried through by hand[233] while the *Avoca Mail* complained that travellers could not, 'travel above a mile from Avoca in most any direction without falling in with holes big enough to upset almost any vehicle'.[234]

Avoca Road District Board

On 2 December 1861 the Avoca Road District was formed, giving an identity for the first time to the area now known as the Shire of Avoca. A Road Board, comprised of members from all parts of the district was formed with the primary purpose of making and improving the area's roads. At the same time the municipalities of Avoca (formed in 1859) and Moonambel (formed in 1861) were also directing their attention to the streets

and roads within their borders. Consequently this period saw a spate of new road building.

A road between Avoca and Dunolly had already been completed in March 1858 when residents from both towns met at the halfway point for a picnic to celebrate its opening.[235] During the early 1860s a road was constructed between Avoca and Homebush, the road to Lexton (later the Sunraysia Highway) was surveyed and repaired, and work commenced on the formation of the Avoca-Amphitheatre road.[236] In the west of the Shire a new road was surveyed from Ararat via Crowlands to Moonambel, and residents argued for a road between Redbank and Barkly:

> *Navarre [Barkly] is bounded by the Pyrenees earth walls on most sides and an open road from it to Redbank would much relieve the asthma under which it breathes.*[237]

Despite many strong arguments however, a road was not constructed through the forest of the Redbank hills until the late 1940s, when the present road was completed by the Forest Commission.[238]

By the time the Avoca Road District and the two municipalities were combined to form the Shire of Avoca in 1864, most of the roads that now ring the Shire were in existence. Although the steep slopes of the Pyrenees barred full-width road construction leaving a large almost 'road free' space in the centre of the Shire map, it could be traversed following narrow bridle tracks and many residents continued to use these 'short cuts' throughout the nineteenth century.

The main street

Attention was also directed toward street improvement. Avoca's main street was

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[233] Petition, September 1861, quoted in Beavis, *Pioneers of the Pyrenees*, p. 58

[234] *Avoca Mail*, 17 September 1863

[235] Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 105

[236] Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 34

[237] *Ararat Advertiser*, 10 May 1861, quoted in Beavis, *Pioneers of the Pyrenees*, p. 53

[238] Information from Ivan Redpath

already wide - a legacy, it is said, of its stock route days. Moreover, residents were hopeful that the town's location on an almost direct line between Adelaide and Melbourne might one day place it on a state highway. Subsequently a decision was made to make High Street 174 feet in width, more than three times as wide as the township's minor roads.[239] This became one of the town's defining features and an object of curiosity to travellers. As early as 1869 a young man visiting Avoca wrote:

> *What particularly impressed me was the enormous width of the main street - at least three chain wide. The houses on either side of the road were so remote from each other they might as well have belonged to different townships.*[240]

During the 1860s two major roads were proclaimed - one linking Ballarat to St Arnaud and the other linking Ararat and Castlemaine via Avoca. The township of Avoca found itself in the extremely fortunate position of being located at the junction of the two roads. In 1948, both roads were declared highways, the North-Western Highway (later extended to Mildura and known as the Sunraysia) and the Pyrenees Highway.

Cobb and Co

A number of coach companies offered transport on the Victorian gold diggings. However Cobb and Co set such standards of speed and reliability that they rapidly became the most popular. The first Cobb and Co service began operating to Avoca in February 1855[241] and were quick to provide services to other goldfields in the Shire as they were opened up. Barely two weeks after the first discovery of gold at Landsborough, an 'indefatigable' agent of Cobb and Co was on the scene,[242] and

after the large gold discoveries at Percydale, a regular coach service ran to Percydale via Avoca. A part of this road is still known as the 'Old Coach Road' (other sections are Vinoca Road and Susan's Road). Cobb and Co arranged staging posts throughout the locality, and in Avoca this was located at the Avoca hotel [A51] Cobb and Co were still running services to most towns within the Shire in 1886.[243]

Maryborough-Avoca Railway

Since 1874, when the railway had opened from Castlemaine to Maryborough, residents in the Shire had lived in keen expectation of the line's extension to Avoca. Finally, in 1876, Milne, Gartley and Toyt were awarded a contract to construct the fifteen miles of track between Maryborough and Avoca[244] and the new railway line was opened on the 20 October 1876. The celebrations that accompanied the opening were extravagant in the extreme, indicating the degree of economic importance attached to the railway. There were speeches at the flag-strewn platform, a grand procession, a Chinese pageant, a tree-planting and in the evening, three separate balls. The 1,700 school children in attendance regaled the crowd with a song especially composed for the occasion and sung to the tune of 'Click go the shears':

> *Here at the Railway, we State Scholars stand*
> *Schoolmates enclasping, with hand joined to hand,*
> *Eastward our young eyes we eagerly strain,*
> *Waiting for the welcome cry of Here comes the train'.*[245]

The new brick station building, goods shed and platform at Avoca [A204]

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[239] Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 37
[240] *Smiles Boy's Voyage*, 1880, quoted in Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 70
[241] Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 97
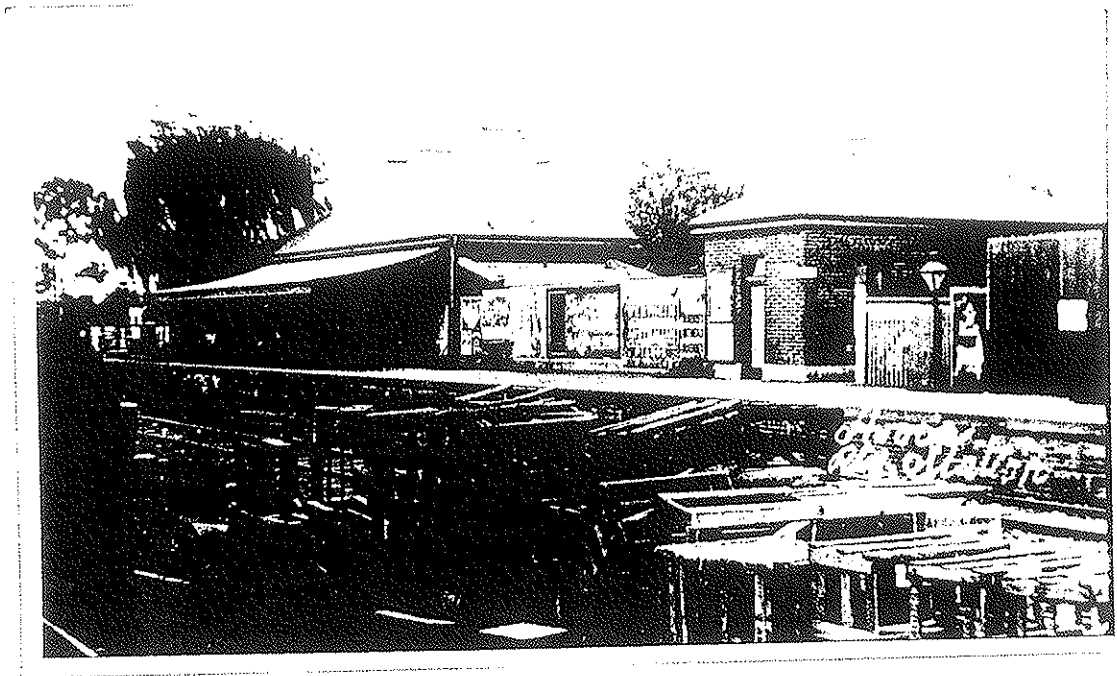[242] *Ararat Advertiser*, 26 September 1862

[243] Cobb and Co. timetable, *Avoca Free Press*, 1886, Reprinted in Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 98
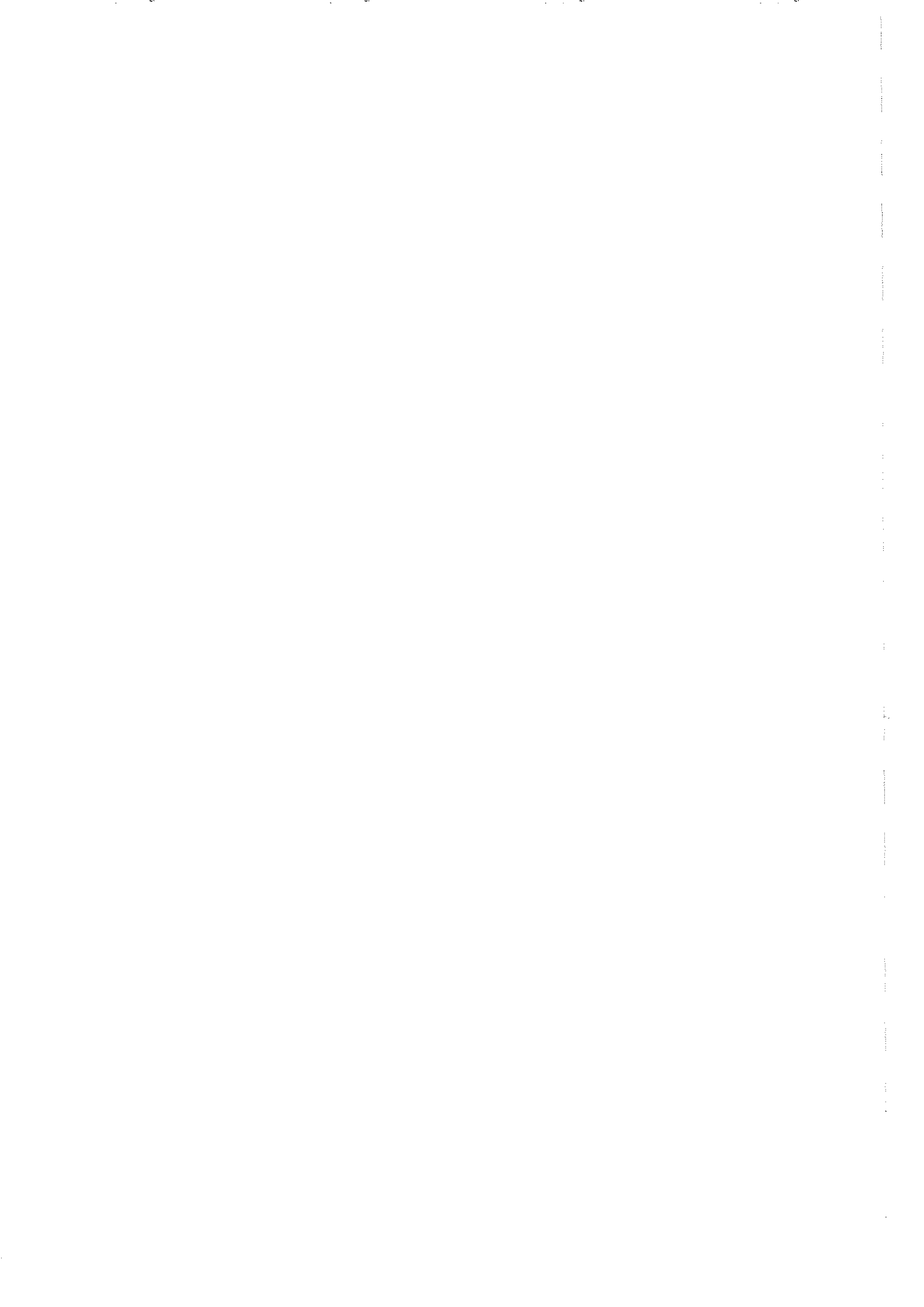[244] Historic Buildings Council File No. 602237V
[245] Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 100

Avoca streetscape showing wide main street, 1910
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

Avoca Railway Station, c. 1915
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

rapidly formed a new hub of activity in the township. The new railway line also passed through Homebush where a station and permanent siding was established. Its construction coincided with the development of deep lead mining to the north of the township at Lower Homebush and provided a transport link that did much to increase the area's prosperity over the next decade. During the twentieth century the railway lost the mail contract and the train was no longer scheduled to stop at Homebush. Those who wanted to board the train or dispatch parcels, now had to be prepared to flag the train down.[246]

As predicted the railway gave residents in the east of the Shire ready access to lucrative Melbourne markets and all manner of produce -- wool, grain, livestock, fruit, firewood - was now consigned by rail. It also gave people a new freedom to move outside the Shire, even making possible day trips to Melbourne which in the past had been unthinkable. Even greater developments were predicted in 1877 when it appeared likely that a new railway line to St Arnaud would be built from Avoca via Stuart Mill. In the event a Dunolly via Bealiba route was chosen, to the bitter disappointment of local residents. Some consolation was provided in 1890 when the Avoca line was finally extended to Ararat.

The railway was crucial to Avoca's development in the nineteenth century but by the mid twentieth century, road transport had eclipsed rail and the Avoca railway station was no longer the hive of industry it had once been. In 1952 only 168 sheep and eight cattle were consigned by rail and the station had catered for just 2,480 passengers in the course of the year.[247] In 1959 the line between Avoca and Ararat was closed although it was

reopened offering a limited service in 1966. Ivan Redpath, previous station master, recalls that the station was finally closed to passengers and no longer staffed on 5 May 1979.[248] A goods service continues to operate from Maryborough.

Ben Nevis-Crowlands-Navarre Railway

In 1914, a branch line from the Avoca-Ararat railway was constructed from Ben Nevis through Crowlands to Navarre. This provided a boon to local farmers and created an active firewood industry at Navarre where four mills were kept constantly busy cutting billets into firewood blocks for sale in Melbourne. However the area through which the line passed was not heavily populated, and even in its early years, it was questioned whether the length of track and the effort and expense involved in its construction could be justified. Nevertheless it continued to function until 1953 when it was closed amidst intense community opposition. The tracks were taken up, the goods sheds sold and only the earth sidings now survive as evidence of its existence.

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246 Information from Ivan Redpath
247 *North-central Resources Survey*, p. 146

248 Information from Ivan Redpath

EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES

Timber for the mines

It was said that during the rush to Avoca diggers 'spread through the scrub...felling the timber in every direction'.[249] However it was not the alluvial rushes but the era of company mining in the 1860s that created the first steady market for timber in the Shire. The steam powered machinery employed at the company mines required tons of firewood to fuel its boilers and hardwood was needed to shore up the walls of shafts as they plunged deeper and deeper underground.

The Shire was fortunate in possessing substantial timber reserves. Massive stands of red gum spread out along the Avoca River while the thick forest that blanketed the Pyrenees included blue gum and mess mate, two timbers particularly well-suited to saw log production. By the late 1860s there were at least two sawmills in operation in the Avoca district and one of the millers, Felix Barbat, constructed a tramway up the eastern slope of the Pyrenees in order to transport felled timber.[250] In the Avoca township Johnston's timber yard occupied a prominent position in the main street.[251] Red gum from Natte Yallock was much in demand, the mines at Homebush obtaining almost all their props and lathes from the area[252] and from 1876, Mr Castleman operated a sawmill on the river at Natte Yallock.[253] At the turn of the century Avoca was still supplying large quantities of sawn timber to the Maryborough mines.

Timber for farms and the railways

Timber was not just needed in district mines. The land acts required new settlers to fence their properties and mountains of timber was split to form post-and-rail or chock-and-log fences. During the period 1875-6, large quantities of red gum sleepers were sawn for the Maryborough-Avoca railway line and later many thousands more were supplied for the Ararat line. Sleepers continued to be cut in the twentieth century, and were stacked at the Avoca railway yards for local use or for transport to other parts of the State. Well known sleeper cutters in the Avoca area were Ike Holland and Ian Torney and his son Jack.[254]

A more unusual use for timber focused exclusively on the bark of wattle trees which provided an extract used in the tanning of animal skin and was much in demand both locally and for export. The small settlement of Tanwood derived its name from the large number of wattle in its vicinity, harvested for the tanneries.

Firewood

Timber cutting provided casual employment for a large class of general laborers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. When no other work was available, money could always be made splitting fencing timber for local farmers or cutting firewood. In fact, by the turn of the century the supply of firewood had become a lucrative industry. At least six firewood mills sprung up around the Avoca railway station and billets of timber were sawn into one foot blocks before being railed to Melbourne for sale. Local residents still remember the small mills operated by Lou Impey, Tom Ford, G. Beavis, J. Redpath and Beavis and Walker.[255] Fuel shortages during the Second World War created a demand for firewood to fuel the trains and Ivan

[249] *Avoca Mail*, 6 October 1866
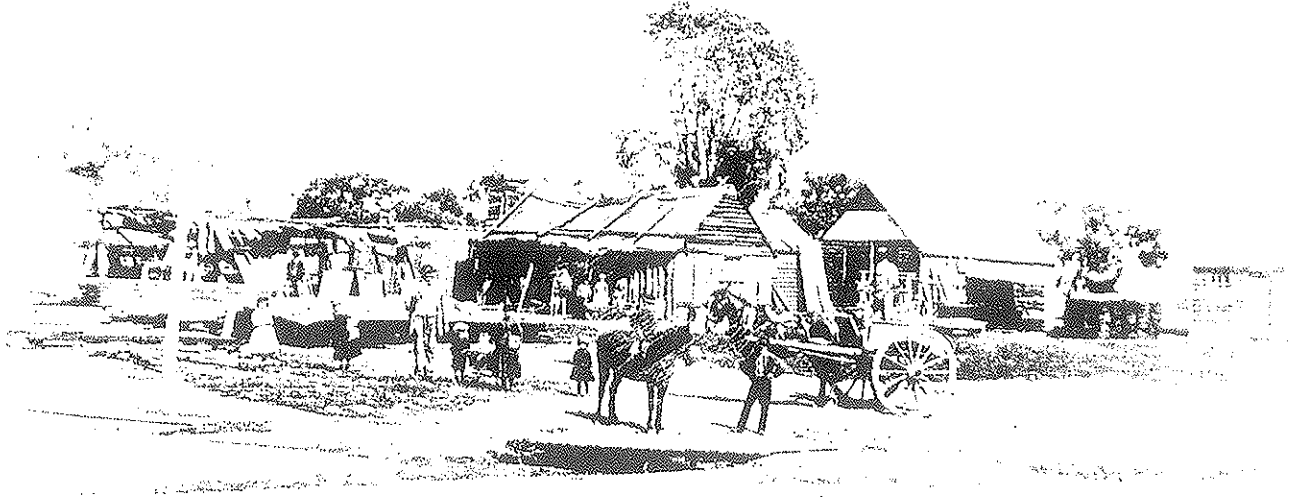[250] *Avoca Mail*, 12 January 1867
[251] Beavis, *Avoca: The Early Years*, p. 40
[252] *Avoca Mail*, 21 March 1878
[253] Beavis, *Pioneers of the Pyrenees*, p. 19

[254] Information from Ivan Redpath
[255] Information from Ivan Redpath

Johnston's Timber Yards,
Corner of Sunrasia and Pyrenees Highways, Avoca, 1872.
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

Firewood being taken to Navarre Station by Horse and Dray 1919
(Eulalie Driscoll)

Redpath remembers, 'Thousands of tons of two foot loco wood was stacked in the Avoca Station yard and was trucked to numerous loco depots all over the State'.

In the west of the Shire a firewood industry also developed at Navarre and a photograph in the possession of Eulalie Driscoll shows twenty-seven drays, heavily loaded with billets of wood, approaching the Navarre railway station.[256]

Throughout the nineteenth century timber could freely be obtained from all Crown land not set aside as a timber reserve, on payment of a 'twenty-five shilling a quarter' wood license (which was frequently evaded). Therefore much of the easily accessible timber in the Shire had already been exploited when a Victorian Forestry Department was finally created in 1907 with responsibility for co-ordinating the State's timber resources. Timber cutting was now placed under much greater restrictions, and those involved in the firewood trade were forced to obtain supplies increasingly from private property - in particular from farms where land was still being cleared.

Petrol rationing during the Second World War meant that many cars were converted to charcoal gas producers and hundreds of tons of charcoal was produced in the Shire.[257] The remains of charcoal burners can still be seen beside the road south of Landsborough. [L21]

Eucalyptus distilleries
From late in the nineteenth century several families in the Shire were engaged in the distillation of eucalyptus oil. This industry concentrated on stands of blue or green mallee which were cut by hand and boiled in a vat to release the oil. Since Australia was almost the only source of eucalyptus oil in the world until 1950, and

the oil was in demand for both pharmaceutical and industrial purposes, it found a lucrative export market.[258] A number of eucalyptus oil distillers operated around the Moonambel area, the most prominent being Jim Farnsworth. During the Second World War, when large quantities of eucalyptus oil was needed to store explosives, Jim employed thirty-three men.[259] At Barkly, the Marland family operated a distillery[260] while near Avoca, both Ned Gollop and Reg Harvey regularly sent forty-four gallon drums full of eucalyptus oil by rail freight to Melbourne.[261]

Eucalyptus harvesting had its own effects on the environment since regular cutting to ground level encouraged rapid, leafy growth of the mallee at the expense of other slow-growing species. Eventually the result was almost pure stands of green or blue mallee. There are no eucalyptus distilleries currently operating in the Shire.

The extensive forests of the Pyrenees also attracted apiarists. In 1915 both Frederick Faick of Avoca and I. J. Pimm of Redbank kept bees and marketed their honey.[262] Bee keeping became increasingly popular and between 1930 and 1950 there were at least ten different apiarists operating in the Shire including such family names as Robinson, Fraser, Rodwell, Pitcher, Shimmons, Holland, Robertson, Veitch, Wrights and Barker.[263] Several apiarists continue to collect honey in the Shire.

Slate quarries
Since the early days of white settlement, residents had used the slate outcrops occurring in the foothills of the Pyrenees

256 Driscoll, *The Barkly Story*, p. 17
257 Du Bourg, *Big Water - Little Plain*, p. 35
258 *Land Conservation Council of Victoria - North Central Study*, February, 1981, p. 44
259 *Avoca Mail*, 3 December 1957
260 Driscoll, *The Barkly Story*, p. 18
261 Information from Ivan Redpath
262 *Sands and McDougalls Directory*, 1915
263 Information from Ivan Redpath

as a building material. During the 1870s a large deposit of slate in the hills west of Percydale was discovered by Samuel Purdie and in 1884 he and his brother joined with several Melbourne businessmen and took out a mineral lease for eighty acres.[264] As a result a slate quarry was established known as the Kara Kara slate quarries. It began with a work force of five men, but by September there were sixteen men employed, exclusive of a blacksmith, cutters and polishers. A newspaper correspondent described the operations:

> *A tramway has been laid down, fully three quarters of a mile in length, for conveying slate to the shed; a six ton crane will, when erected, raise huge blocks of slate from the quarries and lower them into the trucks; a dam has been constructed which will contain sufficient water for the machinery in the dry season of the year and twelve horse power steam engine drives the sawing apparatus. A planing machine, combining the latest improvements, has been ordered in Glasgow and its arrival on the ground may be shortly expected.[265]*

The slate was suitable for roofing purposes, hearthstones and steps and, according to the *Avoca Mail*, had been pronounced, 'equal to the best Welsh and Western Highlands varieties'.[266]

However the market for slate which had been so strong in the early 1880s fell away with the economic depression of the 1890s and the Kara Kara quarries were closed.

The quarry was re-opened again after the First World War, under the management

of William Scott from Castlemaine. In September 1920 he had a staff of nine men including four experts from Wales.[267] The quarry produced slate for roofing, flagging, billiard table tops, electric switch boards and school purposes. It was still in operation in 1922 but closed soon afterwards.[268]
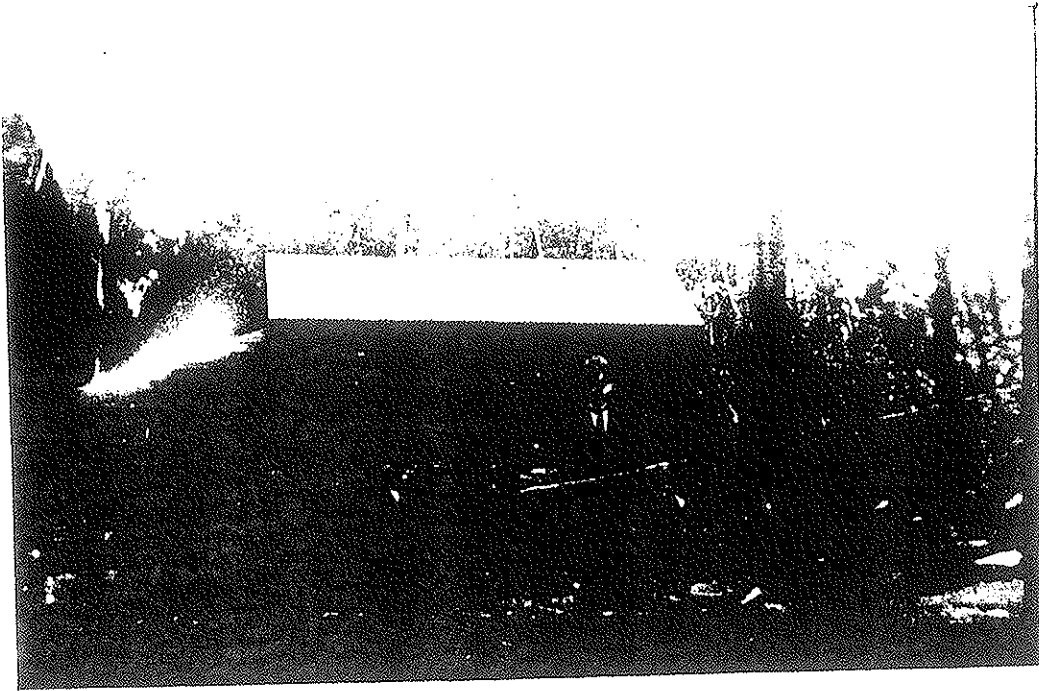
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[264] Notice of application for mining lease, March 1884, Avoca and District Historical Society

[265] *Avoca Free Press*, 13 September 1884, 21 February 1885
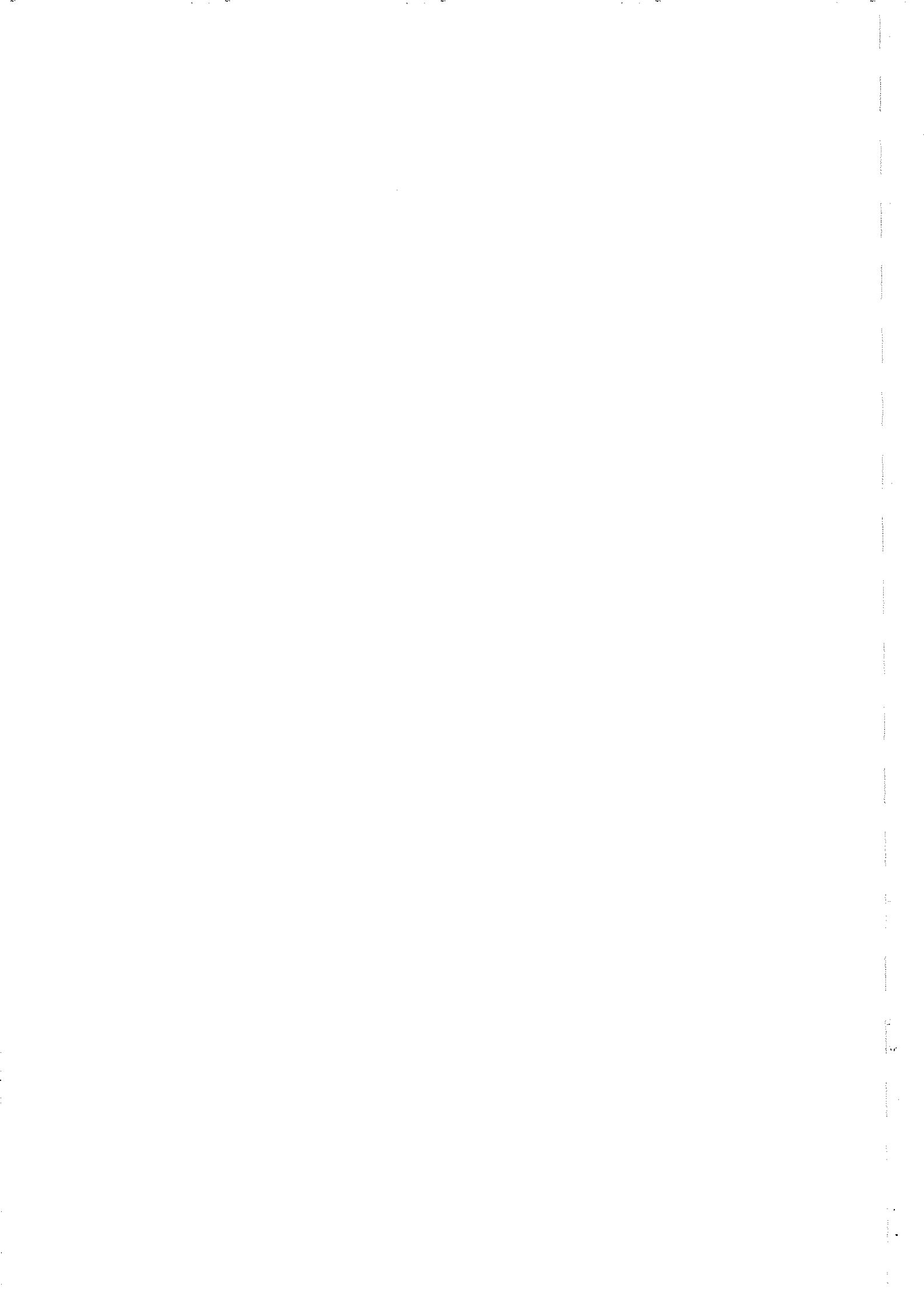
[266] *Avoca Free Press*, 13 September 1884, 21 February 1885

[267] *Avoca Mail*, 1 September 1920

[268] *Avoca Mail*, 6 October 1922

Engine Room at the Slate Quarries, Percydale 1880s
(Avoca and District Historical Society)

CONCLUSION

Despite concerted efforts to stimulate local growth, the Shire of Avoca was in depression during the 1960s. Its population continued to decline and economic activity reached an all-time low. However the 1970s heralded a change as property developers 'discovered' the Shire and purchased large numbers of allotments (surveyed in the nineteenth century) which they then sold to those seeking a country refuge. Predictably this created problems for local Council who was responsible for servicing the properties, but it also brought an influx of new residents into the Shire. In more recent years the promotion of tourism in the region, generated largely by the local wineries, has also acted as a stimulus to growth and activity in the Shire's towns.

Both changes have brought a growing recognition and appreciation of the Shire's historic character. Although the effect of the most recent and dramatic change to the area – the amalgamation of the Shire of Avoca with several surrounding municipalities to form the Pyrenees Shire – is yet to be measured, the community already seems to have grasped the enormous value of its heritage and the variety of elements which make up its historic environment. There is every indication that this awareness will continue to expand in the future.
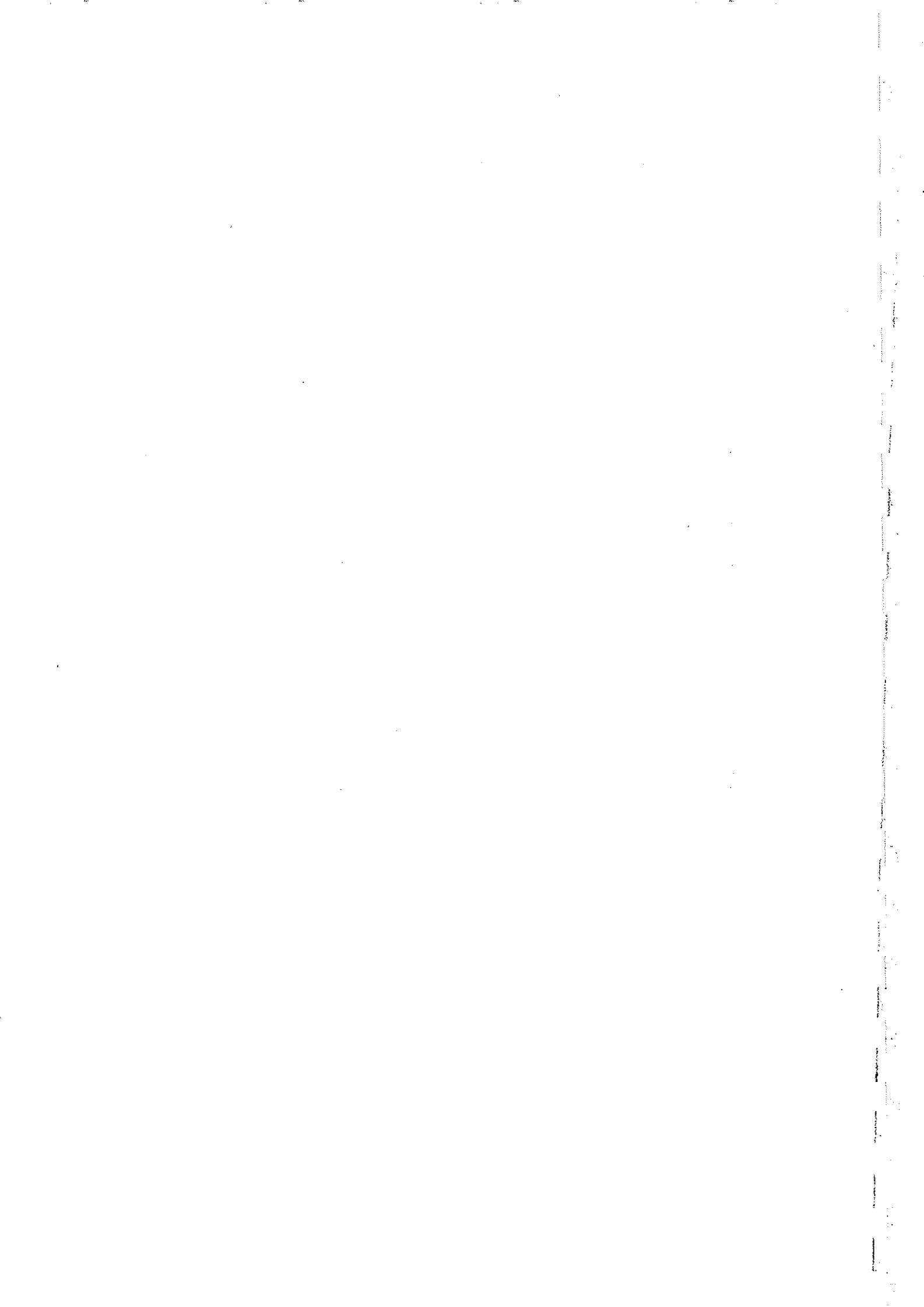
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