

The Enterprising Pioneer Mr Freeman Cobb and His "Cobb & Co" Coaches

Most American migrants who came to Australia, (although only numbering around 6000 in the 1850s), had already lived through the gold-rushes in California, (which had commenced in 1848). In particular, the Americans quickly seized on the significant business potential of the fast-growing "market" in Victoria. This small, but enterprising group of migrants, went on to have a considerable effect on the social and cultural life on the goldfields. Their previous mining experiences, knowledge and products, quickly influenced mining practices, with innovations such as hydraulic mining, steam-driven crushing, and advance separation of the ore.

Examples of valuable American products introduced into everyday life in Australia included alarm clocks, rocking chairs, iceboxes, and an "Australian" icon - kerosene.

A few other notable American contributions were: the introduction of the Boston Water Cart to "lay the dust" in Melbourne streets. American settlers also brought new ideas and improvements to rural industries, including orchard irrigation, windmill water pumps, (now another Australian icon), and barbed wire. The ring-barking of trees was also an American innovation.

However, arguably the most recognised American to migrate to Australia was Freeman Cobb, a Californian who arrived in 1852. By 1853, Mr Cobb and three other young Americans had established "Melbourne's Cobb & Co." public transport company. For a brief time they confined their services to cartage between Melbourne and the ports, but soon discontinued that service, for a more lucrative service, carrying people from Melbourne to the goldfields.

"Cobb had brought some capital to Australia with him, so he purchased the best of horses, then imported American coaches of the smartest model, and with them, imported even still smarter, "Yankee" drivers."

In 1853 the first passenger coach left Melbourne for Forest Creek, some seventy-four miles away. By the end of the same year, and into early 1854, Cobb & Co had already developed a highly successful, daily service to the gold-diggings at Bendigo and Ballarat.



The cost of a one-way journey to either of the gold-diggings was £4. By late 1854, Cobb and Co's venture was so successful that they needed two Melbourne Booking Offices. The first of the American Concord coaches, pulled by four or six horses, were able to carry up to fifteen people.