

George Ernest Locke 1860-1941

George Locke was a timber worker (paler) and gold miner on the Yarra Track who partnered with (William) Edward Chester from the late 1890s as they worked the Golden Secret Mine. George had been in the area for some time whilst William had grown up with his mother and stepfather on the Cumberland Goldfield and would have absorbed much about gold mining. After schooling in Healesville Edward returned often to fossick around and found the Golden Secret Reef which he kept a secret until he had funds to mine it. Edward partnered with George and together for thirty years they worked the mine on and off.

Bendigo Advertiser, 24 May 1898

A RICH DISCOVERY. Our Melbourne correspondent writes :—Two prospectors and miners named—Wm. Chester and George Locke called on the Minister of Mines yesterday and showed him a nice cake of gold weighing 122oz., the result of a recent crushing from six tons of stone from a reef which they found on the Yarra track, 70 miles from Melbourne and about 15 miles from Marysville. They had been induced to start a claim three months ago by the rich specimens in the locality. They had gone to a depth of 36ft. and the reef was from 3in. to 9in. thick and looks promising. A lease is being issued to Messrs. Chester and Locke, and several parties are in the locality. The discovery is one of the results of the track cutting, which the Minister says will be continued.

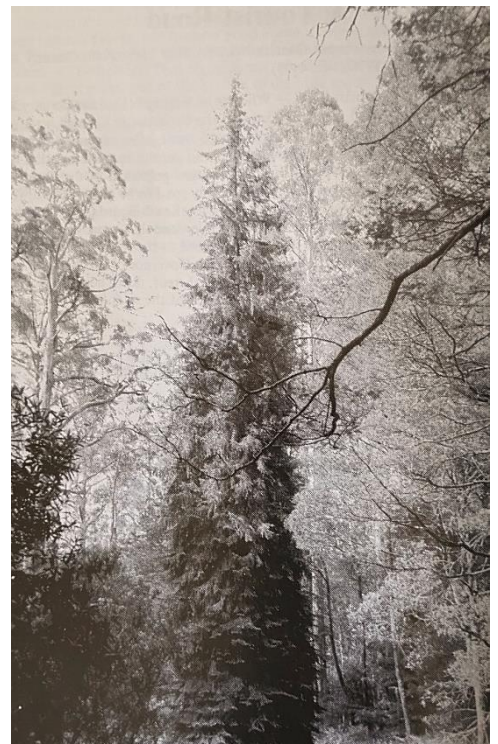
With this announcement there was a small rush to the area which was briefly known as Chesterville before returning to Cumberland. A section of this area on the north side of the Woods Point Road, originally the Yarra Track, is known as Cambarville after the Sawmill which was located there from the 1940s.

George Ernest Locke (1860, Emerald Hill-1941, Marysville) was born into a forward thinking family. Along with his three brothers he was educated in a private school. As a young man he went prospecting and settled on the Cumberland Goldfield where he fossicked and cut palings until (William) Edward Chester asked him to join him in his new find the Golden Secret vein on the Cumberland Goldfield in the late 1890s.

They mined the Golden Secret Mine on and off until 1938.

George lived in the area in of the Tall Trees in his log cabin, splitting timber when not gold mining. On one of his visits in the 1930s Jackie Lewis, the bushman planted a blue spruce, *Picea sitchensis exotica*, by Locke's hut. In 2025 it is a huge tree and all that remains to locate George's hut site.

He was known to be a character and in the late 1920s when the Governor of Victoria, Baron Somers visited, George showed him the 'Big Tree'. The Governor remarked, "Magnificent! I wonder how long it's been here." George's reply. "Buggered if I know Mr Somers. It was already here when I came along."



George was a loner, but wise with his gold and his money. He didn't have a bank account in Marysville where the locals could find out about his financial status¹. George's bank was the ES&A at Fitzroy. Edward Nichols, in his role of postman, speaks of being trusted to organise registered parcels of gold for the miners at the Cumberland to be sent to the Mint. When George died in 1941, aged 81, he had £360 in his account. He had never married but had family in Melbourne and is buried at Box Hill Cemetery. His brother John Edward Locke and his wife Annie Caroline Locke were added to the grave in the 1950s.

The Age, 23 May 1941

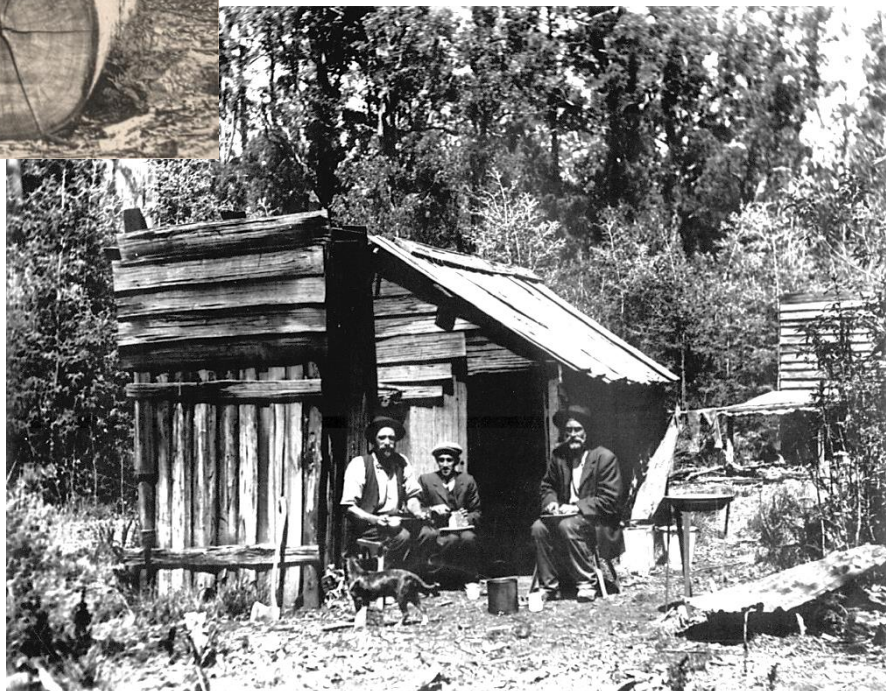
Obituary - "The Hermit of Cumberland Valley"

The death is announced of Mr George Locke, known to many thousands of tourists as "the Hermit of Cumberland Valley". He lived in a humpy near the famous plantation (sic) of mountain ash, which is believed to contain the tallest hardwood trees in the world. Mr Locke would not leave Cumberland, even during the bushfires of two years ago, and had not been in Marysville for over 14 years. A keen prospector at the Cumberland Valley until his health began to fail a few years ago he was in the earlier years actively interested in the Golden Secret mine at Cumberland and the Wolfram Mine near Marysville. Aged 81 years, he was the lone inhabitant of Cumberland Valley, and spent his last days in a Forest Commission patrol hut, which was built next to his old humpy when it started to fall to pieces.



George Locke preparing a log to cut palings from "Wooden Rails & Green Gold", Peter Evans

*George's Hut
left to right² George Locke,
Andrew Kirwan and
Edward Chester*



At

Endnote:

¹ The nearest banks would have been in Alexandra or Healesville and later a sub-branch, through the Post Office in Marysville.

² Identification of the 3 men reviewed in 2025 by Chester descendants and Judith Vimpani. Believer correct order is as here.