

GRAPEVINE CUTTINGS (January 2004)

By Rob Upson

EXPLORATION & SETTLEMENT of VICTORIA (Part 1)

Over the next few episodes of Grapevine Cuttings I shall attempt to briefly outline the exploration and settlement of Victoria leading up to the discovery of gold in 1851. The Port Phillip District, as Victoria was then known, was part of the Colony of NSW and strangely enough was nearly the last of the Australian colonies to be permanently settled.

Exploration took place in several phases, by sea and by land. In 1788 Capt. Arthur Phillip and the First Fleet established a penal settlement at Sydney. The voyage from England to Sydney was via the southern tip of Van Diemen's Land as it wasn't known then that the latter was an island. Nearly ten years later George Bass set out from Sydney in a whaleboat to explore the southern coast. In January 1798 he entered a bay, which he named Western Port, and he and his crew spent a fortnight there until provisions ran low and he headed back to Sydney. It was called Western Port, as it was the furthest point west that exploration had reached to date. This was to subsequently cause a bit of confusion to later explorers. Later that same year Bass and Flinders proved the existence of a strait between Australia and Van Diemen's Land.

In 1801 Lt. John Murray continued the exploration of the southern coast in the *Lady Nelson*. After reaching Western Port he sailed into Port Phillip Bay that he named at the time as Port King. The modest Governor King changed it to Port Phillip. In 1802 Mathew Flinders, in the ship *Investigator*, cautiously passed through the Rip into Port Phillip Bay and spent a few days examining the shoreline in a small boat. He reported back to Governor King that the grassy areas around the bay were capable of supporting sheep and cattle but considered the apparent lack of water could be a problem.

In January 1803 another expedition, from Sydney, led by Lt. Charles Robbins in the schooner *Cumberland* was sent to assert a British presence on the south coast and the Bass Strait islands. They entered Port Phillip and a party led by Charles Grimes, the NSW Surveyor General, explored the waters of the Yarra and Maribyrnong Rivers. Grimes, reporting back to Governor King, said that the most suitable place for a settlement was on the banks of the Yarra.

When news of the possibility of Port Phillip being suitable for settlement reached England, a small fleet of two ships, *Ocean* and *Calcutta*, set sail from Spithead in April 1803. The fleet, led by Lt. Col. David Collins, consisting of male convicts and free settlers with wives and children (a total of about 550 people), arrived in Port Phillip 22 weeks later. They landed at present day Sorrento and set up camp. Collins didn't think much of this region but apparently ignored the recommendation to look at the Yarra area. By mid 1804 he had relocated everyone to the shores of the Derwent River in Van Diemen's Land and thus founded the settlement of Hobart Town.

After the failure of the Collins settlement at Sorrento it was to be another 20 years before a real interest would be taken in the agricultural potential of the Port Phillip District.

Footnote- A convict named William Buckley escaped from the Sorrento settlement and lived with a tribe of Aborigines for 30 years until discovered by John Batman.

(To be continued)

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EXPLORATION & SETTLEMENT of VICTORIA (Part 2)

After the failure of the Collins settlement at Sorrento, the next phase of the exploration of Victoria took place over land, some 20 years later. In October 1824 Hamilton Hume and William Hovell set out from Lake George, south west of Goulburn, to explore the country south to Bass Strait. Heading for Western Port, they crossed the Murrumbidgee and then another large river to which they gave the name Hume (later changed to Murray). Their journey took them roughly parallel to and east of the present Hume Highway until the Great Dividing Range forced them to move further west. Crossing the Werribee plains they sighted the waters of Corio Bay. Believing this to be their destination of Western Port they then retraced their steps back to Sydney and gave positive reports of the land in the region of the Werribee and Keilor plains.

In 1826 Governor Darling then gave instructions that a settlement be made at Western Port on the basis of the Hume and Hovell report. After all, these two gentlemen were landowners and their knowledge of good pastoral land would have been more credible than that of the previous explorers to the region, who were sailors. A founding party of about 50 people, including 20 convicts, commanded by Capt. Samuel Wright set sail on HMS *Fly* in November 1826. William Hovell also went along so that he could further explore the Western Port area. Sailing into the real Western Port they elected to establish their settlement near present day Corinella. Hovell was somewhat embarrassed to admit that this was not the Western Port he thought he had reached two years before. The surrounding land proved to be of little value and six months later the settlement was abandoned.

The next real attempt at settlement was to come, not from the north, but from the south. The title of founding settlers of the Port Phillip District is generally accorded to Edward Henty¹, his brothers and families. Sailing from Van Diemen's Land with some livestock, building materials and implements they established a permanent settlement at Portland Bay in November 1834. However they weren't the first to inhabit the Portland Bay area. Over the previous three to four decades whalers and sealers had used this bay and the Bass Strait islands as temporary bases for their trade. Lady Julia Percy Island, Cape Nelson and Cape Bridgewater were some areas near Portland where seal colonies were bountiful. However, by the time of the Henty settlement the seal colonies had been devastated and the whaling industry was in decline.

In May 1835 John Batman² arrived at Port Phillip Bay after sailing from a small settlement at George Town at the mouth of the Tamar River in northern Van Diemen's Land. He chose a site on the Yarra River, recorded in his diary that "*This will be the place for a village*" and returned to Van Diemen's Land. Three months later a party organised by John Pascoe Fawkner³ sailed from Launceston and founded the settlement on this site that was to become Melbourne⁴.

The next phase of the exploration of Victoria was to come from the north.

Reference: Victoria, a History by Don Garden

¹ Edward Henty, born 1809 in Sussex, came to Van Diemen's Land in 1832 with his father and brothers.

² Batman was born in NSW, the son of a convict, and had moved to Van Diemen's Land in 1821.

³ Fawkner, born in London in 1792, first came to Port Phillip as a child in 1803 when his convict father was part of the Collins expedition and the failed Sorrento settlement.

⁴ Melbourne was named in 1837 in honour of William Lamb, the second Viscount Melbourne, who was the British Prime Minister at the time.

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