

# GRAPEVINE CUTTINGS (May 2004)

By Rob Upson

## THE GOLD RUSH (Part 1)

When the cry of 'GOLD' echoed across the Sacramento hills in 1848, the California gold rush had begun. 'Go west, young man' wrote Horace Greeley, a US journalist, as thousands of fortune seekers headed across the North American continent. The cry carried across the oceans and soon reached the eastern coast of Australia. By the end of 1849 the population of San Francisco had quadrupled to an estimated 100,000

Among those who headed across the Pacific from Australia's shores was one Edward Hammond Hargraves.<sup>1</sup> He returned to Australia early in 1851, convinced that the gold bearing country he saw in California was similar to the country around Bathurst, NSW. He was proved correct, as on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1851 he found payable gold near Bathurst at what was to be known as the Ophir<sup>2</sup> Diggings. Although Hargraves is officially credited as being the first to find gold in Australia there appears to be little doubt that others had been successful around the same time and at other locations. Hargraves received £10,000 reward from the Government for his gold discovery - under false pretences according to some historians.

Even up to ten years previously small samples of gold had been found in various places, such as the Australian Alps (by Paul de Strzelecki), Strathlodden Run (Campbells Creek, Vic.), Hartley (south of Lithgow, NSW) and Glenmona Station (in the Pyrenees, Vic.). In most of these instances the finders were told to keep their discoveries secret as (i) the authorities were fearful of the consequences of a restless convict population becoming aware of gold in the colonies, or (ii) squatters didn't want shepherds abandoning their flocks and having their sheep runs invaded by undesirables.

However, when news of the Ophir find became known via the Sydney Morning Herald on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 1851, thousands headed for these goldfields from all over the colonies. To stop the depopulation of the newly independent colony of Victoria, Governor LaTrobe posted a reward for the discovery of gold in Victoria. It had the desired effect. In June 1851 gold was discovered at Clunes, closely followed by Warrandyte (July 1851), Buninyong and Ballarat (August 1851), Mt. Alexander (September 1851) and Bendigo (October 1851). Then came Beechworth (February 1852), Yackandandah and Eaglehawk (May 1852), Walhalla (February 1853), Maldon (June 1853) and Ararat (October 1854).

The exodus was soon reversed as gold seekers from all over the globe arrived by the thousands to the Victorian gold fields. In three years from March 1851 the population of Victoria had tripled to 237,000 and by March 1857 it had reached 411,000. In the decade to 1861 the population had increased nearly seven-fold to 540,000. The pastoral generation was numerically swamped and became increasingly challenged in their privileged position as holders of land and political power. The first gold discovery on what was to become the Mt. Alexander and Forest Creek diggings was at Specimen Gully by three shepherds and a bullock driver on Dr. Barker's sheep run. News of their find was published in the Argus newspaper on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1851 and sparked the huge rush to central Victoria. A month later the rush extended further north when gold was discovered on Bendigo's Creek.

(To be continued)

Reference: 'To the Diggings' by Geoff Hocking

<sup>1</sup> Hargraves was born in Hampshire in 1816. He went to sea at age 14 and arrived in Australia in 1832. Over the next 17 years he worked as a fisherman, farmhand, hotelier, storeman and an agent for the General Steamship Co. In 1851 he became Commissioner for Crown Lands for the gold districts in NSW. He died in Sydney in 1891.

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## THE GOLD RUSH (Part 2)

After the 1840s, Victoria<sup>1</sup> had become a prosperous pastoral community as squatters and their families extended their grazing runs. From Melbourne, the squatters were moving into central Victoria, passed Mt. Alexander and into the northern plains to the Murray River. Sheep runs included Campaspe, Kimbolton and Barnedown. By 1850 the population of Victoria was 76,000 people and 6 million sheep. Melbourne (pop. 23,000), Geelong and Portland were its main urban areas.

In 1839 Richard Grice and his friend Benjamin Heape arrived at Port Phillip. Wanting to be a successful sheep farmer, Grice went to Launceston and returned with 2000 sheep as they were cheaper over there. Grice and Heape then headed inland and eventually set up the Mt. Alexander North Run, later to be known as the Ravenswood Run. After being attacked and injured by aborigines in 1841 Grice handed the management of the Run to Charles Sherratt. Grice and Heape still had an interest in the Run until 1847 when it was disposed of to the brothers Stewart and Robert Gibson from Van Diemen's Land. It was during the occupancy of the Gibsons that the name of the Run was changed to Ravenswood<sup>2</sup>.

Robert Gibson married Louisa, the daughter of Captain Thomas Fenton. His stay at Ravenswood was brief, as ill health forced him to retire and his place was taken by Frederick Fenton, the younger son of the aforementioned Thomas Fenton. It was while Stewart Gibson and Frederick Fenton held Ravenswood that gold was discovered at the northern end of the Run in the valley of Bendigo's Creek. By September 1851, gold was already being uncovered on the Mount Alexander diggings.

John Kennedy, a Ravenswood overseer, and Patrick Farrell, a cooper, and their wives together with all the station hands on the Run would have heard of the riches of the Mount Alexander diggings. Mrs Kennedy and Mrs Farrell were given permission by Gibson and Fenton to go to these diggings at Forest Creek to see how this gold was being won. On their return they prepared a dray with provisions, but instead of going to the Mount Alexander diggings they headed north and set up a camp on Bendigo's Creek at a sandstone bar, later to be known as 'The Rocks'. It was here, in late October 1851, they found gold. Within days of their find, the Bendigo Valley was teeming with diggers.

By supplying vast quantities of mutton to the diggers, Frederick Fenton made a lot of money with which, in 1857, he built a splendid two story Georgian style mansion surrounded by formal English gardens. A coach house and servant's quarters were added in the 1890s. Classified by the National Trust, the Ravenswood Homestead is, today, an idyllic country retreat.

<sup>1</sup> Strictly speaking, Victoria was not called as such until 1851 when the Port Phillip District was granted independence from NSW.

<sup>2</sup> The House of Ravenswood featured in some of Sir Walter Scott's novels, including 'The Bride of Lammermoor'.

Reference – 'Bendigo, a history' by Frank Cusack

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